

General Election 2015: Prepayment Meters

Some people choose to have a prepayment meter installed to manage their payments and avoid massive bills. However, for others, this isn't a choice – instead, their energy providers have got a warrant to break into their homes to install a prepayment meter against their will. This has even happened when the customer is in hospital!

How can I engage with local candidates during the election?

At election time, politicians often make grand promises they have no intention of keeping. We can't believe what they say – but questioning them can let them know there are things we are not prepared to tolerate – now, or after the election. Fuel poverty is one of those things! There are a number of different ways you can make your voice heard during election time. You could:

- attend your local hustings and ask a question,
- ask a question when they are canvassing in your local area,
- write a letter to your local paper,
- write a letter or email to your local candidates.

Local hustings are one of the easiest ways to challenge your candidates and keep them on their toes. Please turn over for a suggested question about what they intend to do about high prices paid by households with prepayment meters, and for some extra background information in case you want to challenge their reply. If it's convenient, it can be good to gather some information about your local area or you might want to mention your own situation or a friend's!

QUESTION:

Given that energy paid for by a prepayment meter costs more than paying by direct debit, and these meters are usually imposed on people who have the least money, would you support the principles that no one should have a PPM forced on them? And do you agree that fuel prices must be brought into line so that people don't pay more if they are paying for their fuel in advance through a meter?

- 11 million people now pay for their energy through a prepayment meter with a key or a card in the UK. Typically people on prepayment meters have lower incomes, which means they are always vulnerable to not having enough money to keep their meter topped up.
- Households with prepayment meters often pay on average £140 extra for gas and £90 extra for electricity each year.
- In the UK, approximately 2278 prepayment meters are installed every working day, usually in households with low-income or vulnerable people.
- In 2013, 80% of new prepayment meter installations were due to debt recovery, many of them against the customer's will.
- Meters are often used to collect energy bill debts that have mounted up due to the outrageous price of fuel. The rates set for debt collection are often unmanageable and take up most of what you put in the meter, leaving nothing for you to use.
- 1 in every 6 households with a prepayment meter have self-disconnected. When people (including elderly, disabled people and young families) run out of money to top up their meters they are left without heating, lighting, and access to electricity to cook food.