

12. Getting help

Some of the information in this rights sheet comes from the **Fuel Rights Handbook**, published by **Child Poverty Action Group**, 18th edition. Much more detail is in this book. An updated edition is now available at www.shop.cpag.org.uk/fuel-rights-handbook-19th-edition. There is also a wealth of advice, in leaflets and videos, on the **National Energy Action** website, at www.nea.org.uk/advice.

Citizens Advice now has responsibility for helping people with energy bill problems. Go to your local centre or check out their information online (www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply). You can write to them, call 03454 04 05 06, or use their web-chat service (10–4 Monday–Friday), which will get back to you within three days (usually two). Average waiting times on the phone are 3 minutes, although it can be a lot longer. Their Extra Help Unit can help vulnerable people who are at risk of disconnection or inappropriate installation of a prepayment meter, or who have been disconnected; these calls are prioritised. Calls are charged at your normal phone rate (it's not a premium rate line).

If you have a **complaint against your energy supplier**, and have exhausted their complaints procedure, try the **Energy Ombudsman**, PO Box 966, Warrington, WA4 9DF, Email: osenuiries@os-energy.org, tel: 0330 440 1624.

Stepchange (tel. 0800 138 1111) are a **debt advice** charity. The **Money Advice Trust** have a self-help guide for dealing with multiple debts, available free from local advice centres.

For **benefits** advice and support to get your rights, **Turn2Us** have a benefits calculator, forms to see if you're entitled to grants, etc. Specific advice on fuel poverty is on their website here: www.goo.gl/qzzRAU. Or phone 0808 802 2000.

Especially but not only if you have a **disability**, see **Disabled People Against Cuts's** "Guides" webpage here: dpac.uk.net/guides/, or **WinVisible: Women with visible and invisible disabilities**, here: winvisibleblog.wordpress.com.

In London, **Zacchaeus 2000 Trust (Z2K)** can help with disability benefits, homelessness, council tax support and housing benefit.

For advice on housing matters or anything to do with your landlord, **London Renters Union** are developing mutual support for private renters, for secure homes for all. See www.londonrentersunion.org, Email hello@londonrentersunion.org.

Advice4Renters provide specific advice for private renters. Legal advice is on their website at www.goo.gl/bRJZYu. You can contact them via an online form at www.goo.gl/sbHBAv or call 020 7624 4327.

For social housing the **Radical Housing Network**, info@radicalhousingnetwork.org, may be able to put you in touch with local housing action groups.

Shelter housing and homelessness charity lay out **rights to adequate heating and repairs** on their website www.goo.gl/gr7p6y, and **debt advice** at www.goo.gl/32GVsd. You can contact their helpline (open every day) on 0808 800 4444 or chat online with a Shelter advisor.

You can go to your local MP for help.

You can find out who your local MP is at: www.theyworkforyou.com.

More official and specialist organisations are listed in Child Poverty Action Group's **Fuel Rights Handbook**.

Fuel Poverty Action are not experts on these rights, but we would like to hear from you about what you are facing and how, and will offer as much support as we are able. We can also put you in touch with others in the same situation so the energy companies and landlords (social or private) can't pick us off one by one. In the meantime we are doing all we can to confront the companies, to press for a switch to clean, sustainable, and cheaper renewable energy, and warm, dry homes, and to end the Great Fuel Robbery that is wrecking so many lives.

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As case law stands at the moment, a council cannot serve a notice on itself. And most Council Environmental Health Officers do not inspect Council homes. However **Council tenants and leaseholders are entitled to the same rights** under the law as anyone else. The 2004 Housing Act allows you to go to a magistrate, who can order an Environmental Health assessment. This can be a very useful tactic for a tenants association campaigning for improvements on estates. Again, if you want to know more, get advice!

“Repairs”

If it is “repairs” you need, there are a number of paths you could try, but for all of them, get support and advice!

Repairing obligations that the landlord will not respond to can be enforced through the county court against both public and private landlords. There are laws against negligence, and “statutory nuisance” (which can include severe damp or condensation). There is a right to do repairs yourself and withhold rent to cover the costs, if you have informed the landlord that you plan to do this. And for social landlords, and some private landlords, you can make a complaint to the Housing Ombudsman. Medical evidence of how your health has been affected can be a help, for these options. For further information on them, see the Child Poverty Action Group’s Fuel Rights Handbook, or get advice.

For sources of free legal help and advice see Appendix A **“Getting legal help with housing issues”** in NEA’s Fuel Poverty Action Guide (edition 14): www.goo.gl/SXTkig.

If you think the condition of your home is affecting your health (for example having lots of colds or flu or making you stressed or depressed) you could try to get help from your **Local Authority’s environmental health team**.

For some types of accommodation, private landlords have to get a licence from the Council. This applies for example to places where several households share things like kitchens and bathrooms, and some Councils have brought in “Additional” or “Selective” Licensing schemes which cover more types of housing. For details of the schemes in your area contact the Council or get advice. Two important points: If you live in a home which should have a licence you can claim back up to 12 months rent. And, without the licence some eviction notices can be invalid.