



# The Energy Brief:

## Evidence and insight from Citizens Advice Scotland

Volume 3, May 2025

### During the first 3 months of 2025

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) network in Scotland gave almost **9,900** people more than **34,000** pieces of energy advice. That means around one in five people (17%) who visited a CAB received advice about energy.

Our network gave advice on fuel vouchers and energy trust funds to more than **4,000** people.

People seeking advice from our network had an average energy debt of **£2,500**. The average energy debt in rural Scotland is more than **£3,100**.

### Persistently high energy prices are trapping people in crisis, with emergency support a necessity for thousands of households

Thousands of people turned to their local CABs for urgent assistance with energy costs as they were unable to afford heating or electricity. Energy remains vastly more expensive than a few years ago.



From January to March 2025, more than **4,000** people sought advice on fuel vouchers and energy trust funds.



An additional **1,100** people sought advice about getting discretionary credit for their prepayment meters.



**Two in five people** (41%) who came to a CAB for energy-related issues asked for advice on this kind of emergency support.

Our Extra Help Unit handled more than 3,700 self-disconnection cases across Great Britain, including 200 instances in Scotland. Self-disconnection means households are cut off from electricity or gas supply because people cannot afford to top up prepayment meters.



#### Fatima's experience

Fatima contacted her local CAB for a fuel voucher because she had only 40 pence left on her electricity prepayment meter. Delays in migrating from Employment and Support Allowance to Universal Credit, and Personal Independence Payment to Adult Disability Payment, meant Fatima was struggling financially. She needs medication that requires refrigeration; without electricity, Fatima would have been unable to store her medication safely.



#### The CAS solution:

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) has called consistently for a social tariff: a discount on energy bills based around household income and composition. A social tariff would provide targeted support for people living on low incomes and reshape a market that does not provide affordable energy. At a time when thousands of people rely on emergency support to afford energy costs, the case for a social tariff is especially pressing.

## Spiralling energy debt is a result of unaffordable prices and causes harm in communities across Scotland

Energy debt is out of control and evidence from our network shows that it is getting worse. The financial impact of energy debt undermines the benefits of any short-term price reductions in unit rates. Even with the price cap falling, demand for energy debt advice is rising.



The average energy debt brought to CABs is just above **£2,500**.

The average energy debt in rural Scotland is **£3,100**.



From January to March 2025, the CAB network gave energy debt advice to **1,500** people.



The proportion of people who received energy debt advice increased by **28%** compared with the same time last year.



### Elaine's experience

Elaine visited her CAB for debt advice. Due to difficult personal circumstances, Elaine had struggled to pay for energy and other essential bills for 3 years. She had £32,000 of debt, including £5,000 of energy debt, and needed advice about bankruptcy. The financial and emotional stress of living with so much debt had taken a serious toll on Elaine's mental health.



### The CAS solution:

There is an urgent need for energy debt relief. Ofgem's proposed one-off debt relief scheme must prioritise providing debt write-offs. Access to this support should not be dependent on people agreeing repayment plans first. This scheme will not wipe away all energy debt. The UK Government should commit to funding long-term support for people in energy debt to address the ongoing harm they are experiencing.

## Without swift and decisive action, the Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS) switch-off will leave thousands of households facing severe consequences

RTS meters, used in around **132,000** Scottish homes and businesses, will begin to stop working on **30 June 2025**. After this date, households that still have RTS meters could find their heating and hot water stuck on permanently or not working at all. Energy suppliers must replace RTS meters with smart meters to ensure that households retain control of heating and hot water after 30 June. **Energy suppliers must act urgently to prevent widespread disruption**. Each day of delay increases the number of households at risk.

Despite the looming deadline, suppliers are making alarmingly slow progress. The switch-off is having a noticeable impact in Scotland, especially its many rural and island communities. Suppliers are offering too few appointments in these areas. Poor smart meter connectivity, linked to the signal available in Scotland, is stalling the pace of replacements. There is a risk that households switching from RTS tariffs will become worse off financially, pushing vulnerable households into further hardship.



CABs advised almost **1,900** people about smart meters between January and March 2025.



That means just under **one in five people** (19%) who received energy advice asked about smart meter issues.



Our advisers have already identified **dozens of instances** across mainland and island communities where people have experienced problems with RTS meter replacements.



### Malcolm's experience

Malcolm had three failed appointments to replace his RTS meter. Disputes between his energy supplier and local authority landlord over relocating a 24-hour switch have caused these failures. Malcolm, who is in his nineties and lives alone, was extremely worried about what was going to happen to his heating and hot water without a meter replacement. He experienced disruption and unacceptably poor customer service from his supplier.



### The CAS solution:

Suppliers must act quickly to replace RTS meters. They should provide more appointments for RTS meter replacements. Ofgem should undertake enforcement action if engineers repeatedly fail to attend appointments. Some households may need remedial work like rewiring before RTS meters can be replaced. The UK Government should provide funding to help individuals, local authorities or social housing providers to cover the cost of this work. Suppliers should take all reasonable steps to find an appropriate tariff for anyone who moves from an RTS meter to a smart meter, ensuring no one is left worse off financially because of this process.

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## About Citizens Advice Scotland

The Citizens Advice network in Scotland is Scotland's largest independent advice provider. Advisers across our 59 Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) support communities across Scotland. Our Extra Help Unit (EHU), based in Glasgow, helps people resolve complex and time-sensitive energy problems. In 2023-24, our network supported over 188,000 people with almost 1.1 million pieces of advice. During this period, we unlocked over £158 million of financial gains for more than 42,000 people. Our advisers look at a person's complete circumstances and helping so many people provides an unparalleled insight into the scale and complexity what's happening in communities throughout Scotland.

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