



**Citizens Advice  
Heat Networks Billing  
Best Practice Guide**

Summary of Recommendations

# The bill is clear, timely and accessible

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**Consumers should be able to understand the language used in bills.** Bills should provide an explanation of any acronyms, by signposting to the supplier's or Ofgem's website, or if appropriate, within the bill itself.

**If a customer is on a repayment plan this should be clear on the bill.** This should be clearly separated from day to day usage and set out the amount of debt outstanding, the rate of collection, how and when it will be collected, and when the agreement is due to end.

**Services need to be simple and accessible to everyone.** For instance, suppliers should have non-digital alternatives available to those who might be digitally disadvantaged. This might include paper billing or the provision of a phone line.

**Suppliers should also take steps, where practically possible, to understand the preferences of their customer base and provide information in other formats if needed.** These could include video and audio content, websites, information pages, apps, webinars, braille, paper based and SMS, to increase accessibility.

**Suppliers should create, maintain and promote a priority services register.** This should be used to tailor bills and other communication to the needs of consumers, including but not limited to some of the alternative means described in the previous two points.

**Suppliers should provide explicit signposting for complaints and redress.** One way that suppliers can get this right is by proactively engaging with relevant consumer advice bodies to ensure that consumers receive the correct information to access advice.

**Suppliers should continually evaluate their communications with consumers.** Where practical this should involve testing with their consumers, and proactively identifying any gaps.

## Our data and insight

As the statutory consumer advocate for heat network consumers our recommendations are based on our unique data and insight.

This guide is accompanied by our [Heat Networks Data Pack](#) which provides a live evidence base for the standards we have set out. This pack is open access and automatically updates with our latest figures and trends. The data and insights are drawn directly from our Heat Networks Advice Service which went live in April 2025. Trends may change over time, but this provides a unique insight into the issues heat network consumers experience.



# Transparent usage and pricing

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**Suppliers should make sure consumers know whether they are being billed on actual usage or not, and what this means for their bills.** For instance they should inform consumers that if they are unmetered then their bill won't be reduced if they ration their energy usage.

**Where there isn't a meter suppliers should ensure that consumers are billed at least annually.**<sup>1</sup> It's essential that unmetered consumers aren't faced with long term catch up bills. This also ensures that consumers get regular access to the other information that bills provide, including information on advice and how to access redress.

**Suppliers should take steps to ensure that consumers have an understanding of how unmetered bills are calculated.** This could include costs and how they are broken down between consumers, potentially using border usage information. Suppliers should test and iterate how this information is communicated.

**Where there is a meter, suppliers should issue reminders to consumers to submit a reading at least quarterly, and attempt to take readings themselves if consumers don't provide them.** Regular bills are essential to help consumers link their usage to their bills, budget and ultimately mitigate the financial hardship caused by long term catch up bills.

**Suppliers should use various tools to help people understand what their usage might look like.** These will need to be carefully designed and tested to ensure that they aren't misinterpreted, especially where projections are used. Suppliers should let consumers know what type of meter they have, and provide information on what this means for them and their bills.

**Suppliers should include an explanation of tariffs.** Under Ofgem's new rules they will need to provide information on details like standing charges and unit rates. Suppliers should think carefully about how they explain what these mean. If there is a choice of tariffs and payment options, this should be made clear.

**Where heating and service charges are bundled, suppliers should ensure consumers have clarity on how their bills break down.** Service charge demand forms should include detailed bill breakdowns. This includes clearly breaking down individual heating and hot water costs and heating of communal areas. Any costs towards management and maintenance of heat network infrastructure in new service charge demand forms should also be included.



# Protection from retrospective billing / catch up bills

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**Avoid long, unexpected catch-up bills.** A good way to do this would be to bill consumers at least every 6 months. Suppliers should also request meter readings at least quarterly.

**Suppliers should commit to not backbilling consumers for longer than 12 months even where heating and housing costs are linked.** Bundled consumers should have the same protections as those who pay their heating and hot water bill separately.

**Consumers should understand why they have received a catch-up bill.** To do this suppliers should clearly explain any catch-up bill, including the period it covers, tariff details, and why the error occurred.



# Fair and managed payment and debt practices

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**Suppliers should carefully consider how they assess the ability of a consumer to pay.** As well as the new rules on staff training and incentives, suppliers should also use a Standard Financial Statement (SFS),<sup>2</sup> and accept debt assessments from debt advice providers, including Citizens Advice.

**Suppliers should ensure that consumers know how to access advice.** Suppliers should signpost on bills to the Citizens Advice Consumer Service and appropriate sources of free debt advice.<sup>3</sup> For Heat Networks in Scotland, suppliers should signpost to Advice Direct Scotland. Suppliers should engage with advice providers to ensure that the signposting they provide is up to date. Suppliers should have policies in place to support communication with third-party debt advisers acting on behalf of customers.<sup>4</sup>

**If the supplier provides different options for how the consumer can pay, these different methods should be highlighted and explained.** A good way to do this would be to include this on any statement of arrears, as well as in the separate section for repayment plans on bills that we recommend under 'Making bills clear, timely and accessible.'

**Suppliers should protect consumers in vulnerable situations from disconnection all year round.** Individuals in a vulnerable situation can see serious impacts from disconnection all year round, and need a reliable source of heat and hot water outside of the winter months. The creation and maintenance of a Priority Services Register is a good way to ensure that consumers in a vulnerable situation get the support they need year round.

**Suppliers should include assessment of whether a consumer is in a vulnerable situation when considering whether it would be safe to install a pre-payment meter.** A good way to do this would be to consult the priority services register that suppliers are now required to create and maintain.

**Suppliers shouldn't unreasonably refuse or delay switching to another payment method if requested.** For consumers in debt on a prepayment meter, suppliers should allow consumers to switch after the debt has reached an acceptable level, or if a PPM is found to be unsuitable.

**Suppliers should continually monitor and evaluate their debt collection and support processes and policies.** To do this they should assess against their achievement of positive consumer outcomes. Reassessment should also happen if any factors change, for instance if bills increase significantly, or the regularity and severity of consumer complaints increases.



# Notations

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1. Citizens Advice, [Citizens Advice response to Ofgem and DESNZ's joint consultation on implementing consumer protections for heat networks](#), 2025, page 33.
2. Money Advice and Pensions Service, [Standard Financial Statement](#)
3. Citizens Advice, [How a new Citizens Advice service will help tackle the mountain of energy debt](#), 2025
4. Citizens Advice, [Closing the Loop: Building strong creditor-adviser communications](#), 2026