



# Citizens Advice Preston - Energy Advice Project

## About Citizens Advice Preston

Citizens Advice Preston and District serves the communities in Preston and surrounding Lancashire region. The area contains both urban and rural neighbourhoods, with high levels of unemployment and deprivation across the region. The aim of their service is to provide free, independent and impartial advice to all.

## The Project

The project funded by British Gas Energy Trust Project provides help and assistance to individuals and households considered to be fuel poor across the Preston and Lancashire area; where required advice is delivered in community languages including Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarat and Polish.

The Energy Advisers support their clients to:

- Make applications to energy funds and trusts to assist with gas and electric arrears.
- Challenge fuel bills if they appear to be incorrectly calculated.
- Give advice on switching tariffs and reducing their energy usage.
- Apply for Warm Home Discount and the Priority Service Register.
- Apply to hardship funds for white goods and furniture.

## About the client

- The client is a 75-year-old lady who had been recently widowed and is in receipt of Pension Credit; she is deemed vulnerable due to her age and several long-term health issues. In 2019, she moved home, the relocation only added to her vulnerability as she lost her established support system.



## Case Study highlights

**Date Opened:** January 2020  
**Date Closed:** Sept 2020

**Time: 8 months (impacted by situation with COVID-19)**

**Caseworker: Energy Advisor at Citizens Advice Preston**

Interventions:

1. Liaised with energy provider to query arrears
2. Application made on behalf of client to Warm Home Discount Scheme.
3. Application made to Hardship Fund (reduction of £200)
4. Advised to switch to new energy providers with lower tariffs to improve long-term financial situation.

- Upon moving into the new property, the client received a large bill from her energy provider amounting to over £1,000 which caused her a great deal of stress and anxiety.
- The Client could not understand how this had accrued, as she had contacted the energy provider to inform them of the move and had set up a direct debit as payment.

### The Support

- After attempts to make manual payments to resolve the issue were unsuccessful and the payment letters piling up, the client then turned to the Citizens Advice team for assistance.
- The advisor contacted the energy provider to investigate, where it became apparent that neither the move, manual funds, nor direct debit had been actioned, explaining the substantial arrears.
- Realising this, the advisor liaised with the provider to ensure the account was correctly set up and payments allocated appropriately. Taking into consideration the client's circumstances, the Warm Home Discount was also applied.
- Having reduced the bill to £350, the advisor was also successful in applying to the Hardship Fund, taking the final bill to £150, which the client's family cleared in full.
- The client was also advised to switch to a new energy provider, whose cheaper tariffs significantly reduced her gas and electric bills, helping to create a more sustainable financial future for her and alleviate the burden on her mental health as well.

“I was so pleased  
Citizens Advice  
Preston resolved the  
issue with the arrears,  
as trying to deal with it  
myself was affecting  
my mental health.”

Client

### Project Outcomes

- The team liaised with energy provider to resolve the issues with the account set up and reduced the arrears by £510.
- Warm Home Discount was applied, reducing arrears by £140.
- The successful application to the Hardship Fund reduced the balance further by £200, with a final bill totaling £150.
- The change to another supplier for both gas and electricity will give an annual saving of over £30
- With the project's assistance, the client has advised she was feeling less stressed as she was no longer receiving letters demanding payment

**This is just one example of how the project assists clients who are in fuel poverty, many of whom are having to choose between 'eat or heat'.**