

The Newsletter for the Warm Hubs Network



COSY



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THE PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER IS FREE have you signed up yet?

The Priority Services Register is a free service provided by your gas and/or electric supplier and network operators.

Each energy supplier and network operator maintain its own register. To get on it, you need to contact your energy supplier, its easy and free with lots of benefits!

Who is eligible for the Priority Service Register

You are eligible if you:

- are of pensionable age
- are disabled or chronically sick
- have a long-term medical condition
- have a hearing or visual impairment or additional communication needs
- are in a vulnerable situation.

What does 'vulnerable situation' mean?

A wide range of circumstances could be deemed as a vulnerable situation. Examples include:

- people with certain mental health conditions which impact understanding of a bill.

- people who cannot top up their pre-payment meter due to injury.
- temporary circumstances, where you might need extra support for a limited amount of time.

Living with children under five years old

You may also be eligible for priority services from your supplier and/or network operator if you live with a child under five years old.

How to get on the register

You need to contact your energy supplier to get on the Priority Services Register. Each energy supplier and network operator maintain its own register.

You can ask your energy supplier to pass your details on to your network operator, especially if you are dependent on your supply for medical reasons or if you have children under five years old.

If you have a different supplier for your gas and electricity, you need to contact them both.

If you switch supplier, you'll need

to register for the service again with your new supplier.

You can find your supplier's contact details on your energy bill.

Steve Dacre, *Vulnerability Innovations Lead, Northern Gas Networks* says:

"Northern Gas Networks are committed to ensuring that all our customers are supported, we recognise that some of our customers may need a little extra help should they encounter a loss of supply or other energy issues. You are now able to register by completing the form on our website, or by contacting our customer services team on 0800 0407766 option 3, or by following this link <https://www.northerngasnetworks.co.uk/network-supply/priority-customers/>

You can still register with NGN if you are not on mains gas but do have mains electricity.

From the link above scroll to the bottom of the page and complete the simple online form, add Partner Code 001 to the box.

Help you can get by being on the register.

- Advance notice of planned power cuts. If you rely medically on your energy supply, you can arrange for the company that runs the local energy network (the network operator) to give you advance notice of planned power cuts. For example, when they plan to carry out engineering work.
- Priority support in an emergency. This could involve the local network operator providing alternative heating and cooking facilities in the event of a supply interruption.
- Identification scheme. This is to reassure you that callers, for example meter readers, are genuine. Suppliers must provide additional support to help you identify someone acting on behalf of their company. This could include arranging a password or showing an agreed picture card upon visit.
- Password protection. Network operators must offer to agree a password with you (or your representative) that can be used by any representative of the company to enable you to identify them.
- Nominee scheme. Customers can ask their supplier to send communications (such as account statements or bills) to someone you have nominated who agrees to receive them. For example, this could be a family member, carer, or someone you trust.
- Arrangements to ensure that it's safe and practical for you to use your prepayment meter. For example, moving a prepayment meter if you are unable to access it safely to top it up.

- Meter reading services at appropriate intervals. If nobody living at your property can read the meter and there isn't anyone else you can nominate to read the meter on your behalf, your supplier may be able to read it for you.
- Accessible information. Account and bill information in an accessible format, for example in larger print or braille.

Suppliers and network operators may also offer you other similar services relevant to your needs, where it is reasonable to do so. Ask them how they can support you.

Similar support services

Suppliers provide free gas safety checks (e.g. for appliances such as a gas boiler) for homeowners. These are available once every 12 months. You are eligible for this service if you get a means-tested benefit and meet one of the following criteria:

- live with a child under five.
- live alone and are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick and live alone.
- live with others who are of pensionable age, disabled, chronically sick or under 18 and you are also of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick.

Contact your supplier to request your free gas safety check if you are eligible and haven't had one in the last 12 months.

If you do not own your own home, your landlord is normally responsible for ensuring that your gas appliances are safe. For further information on what your landlord's obligations are, please see the Health and Safety Executive website.

Free services similar to the Priority Services Register are available through Northumbrian water and phone providers.

Information available on Ofgem's website

Ofcom requires communications providers (fixed and mobile) to provide a range of services designed to benefit disabled customers, including:

- Access to an approved text relay service for people who are hearing- or speech impaired, with rebates to compensate customers for the additional time taken by these calls
- Free directory enquiries for consumers who are unable to use a printed directory because of a disability, with through connection of calls
- Priority fault repair (fixed line only) for customers who depend on the telephone because of ill-health or disability
- Third party bill management, enabling a nominated friend or relative to act on behalf of someone who needs help to manage their affairs
- Bills and contracts in formats such as large print and Braille on request

Information available on Ofcom's website.



Northumbrian Water

Water without the worry

Many people across the country have experienced unexpected changes in their circumstances due to the coronavirus pandemic, and Northumbrian Water understands that some of their customers may need extra help during these challenging times.

Northumbrian Water is encouraging their customers who received a letter from your GP to shield, have a health problem or disability or have/look after children under the age of 5, to sign up for their free Priority Services.

Here are some of ways Northumbrian Water can support you if you register:

- If you have children under five, a disability or an illness which means you might struggle with water, they will make sure you're given priority and have the water you need in case your water goes off for a continued period.
- Have your bills read to you or receive your bills and leaflets in Braille, large print, audio or Easyread.
- Nominate someone you trust to send your bill to and talk to us on your behalf.
- Text relay if you are deaf or hard of hearing - dial 18001 before any of our listed numbers.
- An interpreter if English is not your first language.
- Register a password so you know it's Northumbrian Water visiting your home and not bogus callers.

If you'd like to register for these free services, please go to www.nwl.co.uk/priorityservices to complete a short form. You can also sign up someone you know with their permission or if you don't need these services, you might know someone who does - family, friends, neighbours, please spread the word, so we can help as many people as we can!

Northumbrian Water is also doing everything they can to ensure that customers receive the financial help and support that they need.

Here are some of the ways the utility company can support customers with their bills:

- Check you are on the cheapest tariff for your current circumstances - the company may be able to offer a discount of up to 50% on your current charges. These tariffs are perfect if: your total household income is less than £16,105, or a member of your household receives Pension Credit or your income is not enough to cover your essential bills.
- Switching to a water meter may save you money. Check out the instant, online calculator at www.nwl.co.uk to see if a meter would reduce your charges. A meter is free to install and you can track your water usage with an online account.



- If you've been made redundant or had a sudden change to your income and can't afford to make your payments, Northumbrian Water can offer you a payment break. There's no need to worry about the bill during this difficult time. So far this year, the utility company has helped over 7,000 of its customers with a payment break.
- There are many flexible payment plans to suit your household. If your income has reduced and you can't afford your normal payment arrangements, please do not worry as the company can help you with a flexible payment arrangement.
- Please talk to Northumbrian Water as they are always happy to help and work with independent debt charity, StepChange, who provide free, expert debt advice and solutions for anyone looking to reduce arrears and re-schedule payments to ease debt problems.

If you think you would benefit from a payment break, tariff or free debt advice, or know of a family member, friend or neighbour whose life would be made that little bit easier with some support, visit www.nwl.co.uk/bill-help or call 0800 121 4608.

The Government is now making Cold Weather Payments to some parts of Northumberland

Eligible households will get a cold weather payment if the average temperature in their area is recorded as, or forecast to be, zero degrees Celsius or below for seven days in a row. This is known as a trigger and households will receive £25 for each 7 day eligible period.

The Cold Weather Payment scheme runs from 1 November 2020 to 31 March 2021.

You may get Cold Weather Payments if you're getting:

- Pension Credit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance



- Universal Credit
- Support for Mortgage Interest

Some people will NOT automatically receive their payment, please contact your pension centre or Jobcentre Plus office if you think you should have

received a Cold Weather Payment but you have not.

You can check here to see if you live in an eligible area at Cold Weather Payments Checker - Gov UK ([dwp.gov.uk](https://www.dwp.gov.uk))

CONTACT US

If you would like any help or advice please contact CAN

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