

Tackling fuel poverty

Buckingham Town Council has been taking action to tackle fuel poverty. We are providing this information on the AVALC website to help people throughout the Aylesbury Vale Area manage their fuel bills.

We would first highlight the work of the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB) which does a huge amount for people who face bills that they are struggling to pay. If this is you and, whether or not you have sought help before, please go along to the CAB offices in Buckingham or Aylesbury where you will be able to get good, helpful and totally confidential advice. The CAB is there to help people and they do this rather well. If you are worrying about your coming bills in any way, the CAB will be able to assist you. See below for a short article from them.

We estimate that there are about 250 households who are in fuel poverty in Buckingham and many more around the whole Aylesbury Vale area. You are said to be in fuel poverty if all your bills for hot water, cooking and heating come to more than 10% of the money you have to spend. People often have to turn the heating down too low and many die as a result, have their school work damaged, teenagers suffer more mental health problems and older people are more likely to fall in cold homes. Fuel poverty is bad on so many levels!

Key info from the CAB:

Make sure you are getting all of the financial help and grants you can, including

- Cold Weather Payments of £25 a week, payable when the weather reaches a certain temperature, are available to people in receipt of certain benefits.
- A Warm Front grant of up to £3,500 is available to help the poorest households in England
- Winter Fuel Payments for winter 2012/13 are available to help with energy costs over the winter to people who were born on or before 5 July 1951, or live with someone of that age
- The Warm Home Discount Scheme will give an automatic rebate on electricity bills to people who qualify under the scheme.



There are simple things you can do to cut your energy bills:

- Insulate the walls and the loft of your home. All major gas and electricity as well as heating oil suppliers, are giving away free or discounted insulation.
- Contact your supplier to check you are on the best tariff and payment method for your needs.
- Simple things like turning off lights and switching appliances off at the wall all help to use less energy and could save you money. Turning your thermostat down 1°C alone could cut your heating bill by £60 on average
- If you use heating oil or liquid petroleum gas to heat your home you could save money by buying in bulk with your neighbours. Call into the bureau to check if there is an oil club you can join

Most Importantly - If your energy bills are spiralling out of control and you are worried you won't be able to pay them do get help early. There is help available from the CAB: 01280 816707 (Buckingham & Winslow) 0844 4111444 / 01296 425469 (Aylesbury & District).

Fuel suppliers

As part of their continuing work to assist townspeople who are experiencing fuel poverty, a few months ago Buckingham Town Council wrote to a range of gas and electricity providers. They asked each of them to submit a 100 word description of the service they offer to people and families on low incomes. They promised to publish what was sent to them. Two companies (only) responded:

Co-operative Energy supplies gas and electricity with one simple tariff which is consistently competitive. And we have promised not to increase our prices this winter (until 15 April 2013 at the earliest and possibly longer depending on market conditions at that time). We have won Which? awards in the last two years for our fair and transparent approach. We keep things very simple: a single unit rate for every kWh you consume and, unlike the big suppliers, we charge the same whether you pay by direct debit or quarterly credit. As you would expect from the Co-op, we are owned by our customers who share in our profits. **0800 093 7511** (www.cooperativeenergy.coop)

The **co-operative** energy

SSE offers help to vulnerable, low income customers. Customers who are chronically sick, disabled or of pensionable age can join our free Careline, which offers a range of services such as Knock and Wait (to let our staff know you need extra time to answer the door), gas safety checks and talking bills. SSE also offers the Warm Home Discount scheme to qualifying customers. Any SSE customer can request a tariff and payment plan check at any time, to ensure the customer is on the best tariff for them. If you'd like to contact SSE, please call on **0845 026 0654**. (www.sse.com/Home)



Help with oil costs

Many people in the Vale, use oil to heat their homes. You may well be interested in the county wide scheme to provide lower cost oil. Community Impact Bucks (www.communityimpactbucks.org.uk/index.php) is a charity which supports other charities, community groups and social enterprises in Buckinghamshire. They have organised an oil bulk buying scheme. You can access details here: <http://www.communityimpactbucks.org.uk/pages/work-with-commu-bulk-oil-buying-scheme-159.html> (shortcut: <http://tinyurl.com/buckbulkoil>)



Green Deal:



The **Green Deal** scheme allows people to have energy efficiency work done without paying upfront and then paying off the cost in instalments through the utility bill. The savings in energy bills will offset the payments for the works. If the property is sold, because the payment is taken from the utility bill it is transferred with the house to the new owner. At a cabinet meeting on 13 November 2012, district councillors gave the go ahead for AVDC to become a partner, along with other councils, in a Community Interest Company (CIC), that will provide the Green Deal locally. For more information on Green Deal, visit the Department of Energy and Climate Change website: www.decc.gov.uk

The Green Deal may or may not be right for you. The DECC website can help you decide. You may also find this 'myth buster' website from MoneySavingExpert.com of interest too. (Shortcut: <http://tinyurl.com/msegreenddeal>) You need to be sure that any Green Deal loan will save you more than it costs.

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