



DIGITAL & ENERGY GUIDANCE



UNLOCKING DIGITAL BARRIERS, KEEPING RESIDENTS SAFE AND WARM. SUPPORTED BY:



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Introduction

This information booklet is about how you can manage your energy costs and efficiency, along with how digital can help you do this. It gives practical things you can do and explains the support available to keep costs down.

About Digital Kent

Digital Kent is the digital inclusion and capabilities service of Kent County Council. Digital Kent works in partnership with a variety of organisations, including borough and district councils and the NHS. You can find out more about Digital Kent by visiting www.digitalkent.uk or calling 03000 410 950.

Working with utility network operators

Digital Kent has been granted funding from UK Power Networks (UKPN), the distribution network operator for electricity and SGN, the gas distribution operator. Together, we are unlocking digital barriers, keeping customers safe and warm.

This guide was written by Digital Kent, using guidance provided by Ofgem, the energy regulator in Great Britain. Information correct at February 2024.

Symbols used within this guide

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|-------------------|
| A purple square with a white lightbulb icon. | Digital Tip | A blue square with a white lightbulb icon. | Money Saving Tip |
| An orange square with a white lightbulb icon. | Energy Saving Tip | A green square with a white lightbulb icon. | Environmental Tip |

MAKE SURE YOU'RE ON THE BEST TARIFF

Tariffs are the rate you pay for your gas and electricity. Talk to your supplier or look at their website to see what tariffs they have available and if you can pay less. It's useful to have some meter readings, if possible, as well as your latest bill. This is so they know how much energy you're using, and how much it is costing you.

Asking to change your payment method from prepayment and standard credit to Direct Debit can also help reduce your tariff.



You can also use price comparison websites to see if another supplier can make you a better offer. Ofgem keep a list of accredited comparison services on their website at [ofgem.gov.uk/confidence-code](https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/confidence-code).



Your bill must include personalised information about your supplier's cheapest tariff and how much you could save. The bill will also give you estimated costs for the next year.

Ensuring you give your supplier regular meter readings of your usage will also mean you get accurate bills instead of estimates.



Winter Fuel Payment

An annual allowance of £100 to £300 paid by the UK government to help older people pay their heating bills.



Cold Weather Payment

A £25 payment for each week of very cold weather experienced between November and March.

TARIFF OR SUPPLIER SWITCHING

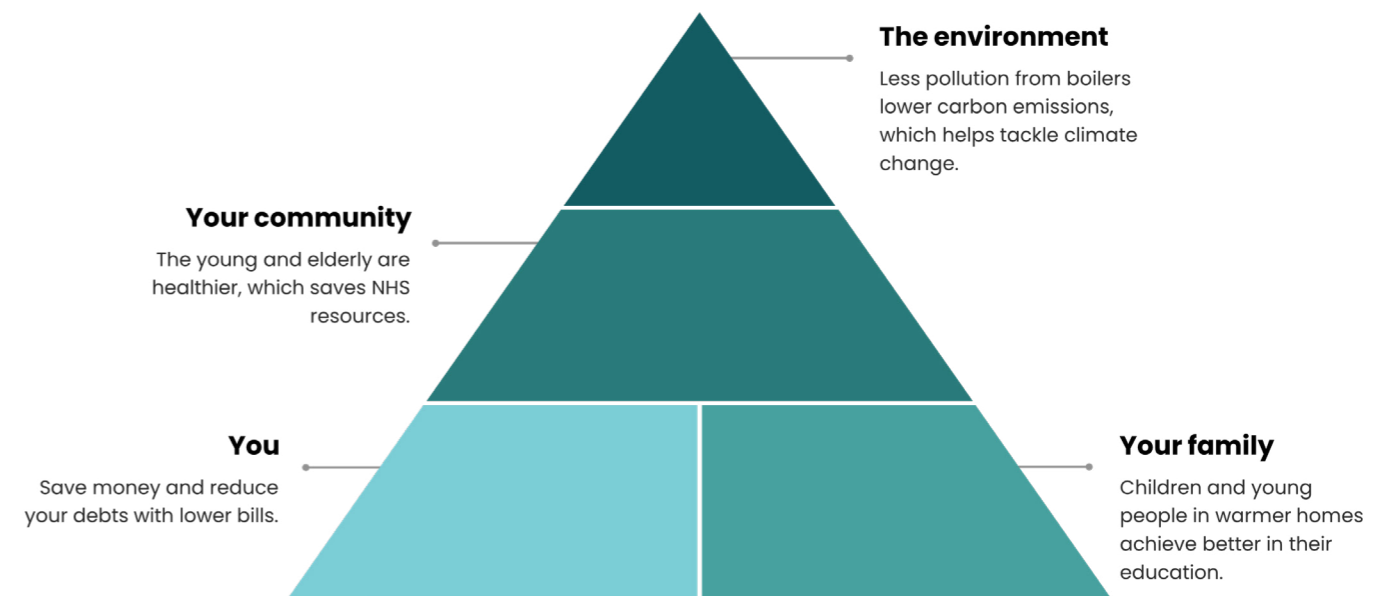
What is "switching"?

Different energy suppliers can supply gas and/or electricity to your home with different prices, terms and conditions and customer service.

The energy supplied to your home and the cables and pipes will be the same as before you switch. Faults and emergencies relating to your energy will be dealt in the same way as before.

You can switch if you use a prepayment meter.

Why switch tariffs and have an energy efficient home?



Before you switch...

There are a few points overleaf you need to consider before switching. You can also find more advice from Citizens Advice at [citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply).

HOW TO SWITCH SUPPLIERS

BEFORE THE SWITCH

1

If you have a landlord, check whether your tenancy agreement allows you to switch tariff and/or supplier. To check your legal rights, go to citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/getting-a-better-energy-deal/switching-energy-supplier-if-youre-a-tenant.

2

Are you in debt to your energy supplier/s or struggling to pay energy bills? Find out what your options and legal rights are by speaking to a Kent Advice Hub advisor kentmoneyadvicehub.com.

3

Check if your supplier will charge you to leave your current contract early. If you stay with your current supplier, ask if you can be put onto a better tariff.

DURING THE SWITCH

4

What internet energy switching should I use? Citizens Advice and other suppliers displaying the Ofgem Confidence Code logo offer impartial advice. You may wish to use the Citizens Advice energy switching link: citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/getting-a-better-energy-deal/switching-energy-supplier



5

Remember, having your recent energy bills to hand will help find a more suitable tariff.

6

Save money by managing your account online and buying your gas and electricity from the same supplier.

AFTER THE SWITCH

7

Remember you have a 14 day cooling-off period within which you can change your mind about switching.

Consider renewable energy suppliers



Octopus Energy (octopus.energy)

Fair and transparent, they provide easy, affordable energy. All tariffs use 100% green electricity and they offer an award-winning customer service.

IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING

If you're struggling to pay for your gas or electricity bills or if you get into debt, you should contact your supplier as soon as you can and find out what help they can give you. Your supplier will be able to:

- work with you to agree a regular payment plan (for example every week or month) to spread your bills so you can better budget for them.
- put your name on a list of customers who need extra help or support.
- suggest schemes and grants to help with money you may owe them.

Check your gas or electricity bill for your supplier's contact details. If you don't know who your supplier is see [ofgem.gov.uk/find-my-supplier](https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/find-my-supplier).

ENERGY SAVING TIPS & TRICKS

Follow these tips to avoid wasting energy. Doing so could help reduce your energy costs and help the environment.



Use a timer on your central heating system. Set heating and hot water to come on only when required.



Close your curtains at dusk to stop heat escaping through the windows. Check for draughts, too. Seal any gaps around doors with draft excluders.



If you have a hot water tank, set the cylinder thermostat to 60°C.

Don't leave appliances on standby or laptops and mobiles on charge unnecessarily.



When washing up and washing or drying by machine, try to fully load the appliance. One full load uses less energy than two half loads.



Use the kettle to boil water for cooking. Only boil enough water in the kettle for your needs.



Keep your fridge at around 3°C to 5°C and freezer at 0°C.

Defrost your fridge and freezer on a regular basis to help prevent a build-up of ice.



Use a smart meter to track and optimise your energy.



Use smart plugs to easily turn off when devices are not in use, or create schedules to turn devices on and off.



Smart lights and sensors can save you money, as well as time.



Always turn off the light when you leave the room.



Use energy-saving light bulbs.



Dry clothes outside during nice weather.

Turn taps off properly - in a single week, a dripping tap can waste enough water to fill half a bath.



You can use an air fryer, pressure cooker or microwave. Use the right size pan for your items and use a lid.



When replacing appliances, buy energy efficient appliances, which consume less energy.

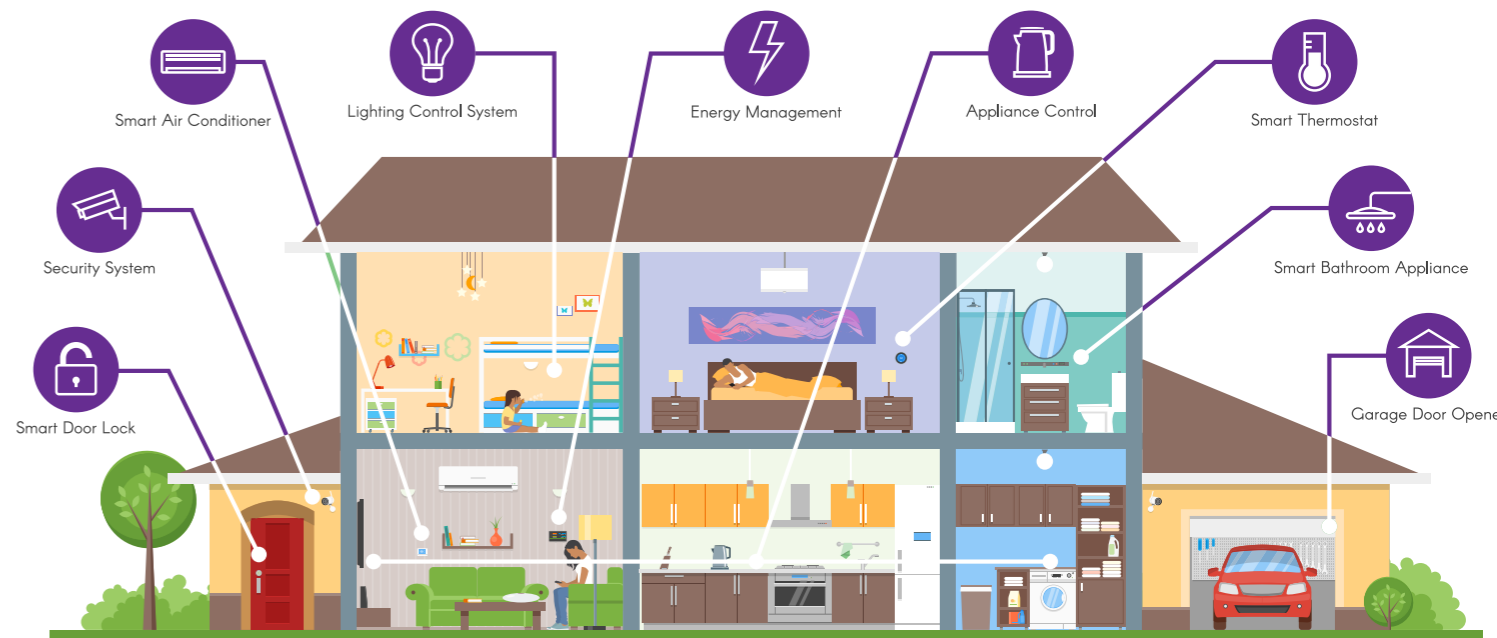


TOGETHER, IMPROVING
DIGITAL INCLUSION &
CAPABILITIES

GET DIGITAL SUPPORT

Kent County Council's Digital Inclusion & Capabilities service offers digital support across the county - unlocking digital barriers, to keep residents safe and warm.

Find out how by visiting www.digitalkent.uk or calling 03000 410 950.



Warm Home Discount

The Warm Home Discount scheme provides eligible households with a £150 reduction on their electricity bills annually, typically between October and March.

This discount can be applied to any tariff, giving you the freedom to choose the cheapest options on the market.

The eligibility criteria for the Warm Home Discount is regularly reviewed and updated. You can find the most up to date information at gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme or by calling the helpline on 0800 030 9322.

YOU'RE MORE LIKELY TO LIVE IN FUEL POVERTY IF...



You live in a vulnerable household.

For example, you live with children, the elderly and/or someone with a long-term illness and/or disability.



You use **prepayment meters or pay on credit.**

You are in a **low income household or have high-interest debts.** 



You live in an **energy inefficient household or do not use central heating.**

Fuel poverty can affect your mental health. As it can lead to depression and/or anxiety due to non-payment of other items, such as rent or shopping for healthy food.


If you're having financial problems, you can get help at Kent's Advice Hub (kentmoneyadvicehub.com), speaking to an advisor through video or at a kiosk location.


Smart meters are the new generation of gas and electricity meters which will replace the traditional meters in our homes. They:

- come with an in-home display which help you track how much energy you are using and the cost in pounds and pence.
- take regular readings and share these automatically with your energy supplier, meaning you can get accurate bills instead of estimates.

These features could help you save money on your bill. 

Every household is being offered a smart meter at no extra cost. For more information, contact your energy supplier.

In the future, having a smart meter will allow you to take advantage of advanced time of use tariffs - where it will cost you less to use energy at specific times or you might even get paid to use electricity (for example on a windy day, when there's a lot of energy generated by wind farms). We're already starting to see some of these tariffs, such as Agile Octopus from Octopus Energy. 

Smart meters also help energy network operators balance the grid by providing more information about our energy consumption patterns. This directly contributes to tackling the climate emergency, as it means energy suppliers can become far more efficient about how much energy they produce, as they understand more about when we will need it. 

PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER

The Priority Services Register is a free support service that makes sure extra help is available to people in vulnerable situations.

Help you can get

- Wherever possible, advanced notice of scheduled power cuts. If you rely on your energy supply for medical reasons your network operator can tell you about planned power cuts. For example, when they plan engineering work.
- Priority support in an emergency.
- Priority support when calling your network operator.
- Identification password scheme. This could include arranging a password or agreed on picture cards if callers need to visit or contact you. This way you can feel confident they're genuine.
- Nominee scheme. You can nominate someone to receive communications and bills from your supplier. For example, a family member, carer or someone you trust.
- Help with prepayment meter access. For example, moving a meter if you can't safely get to it to top up.
- Regular meter reading services. For example, if nobody can read your meter.

- Accessible information. For example, account information and bills in large print or braille.
- Help reconnecting your gas supply, if you need it.

In addition, UK Power Network (UKPN) can offer:

- A priority number that you can call 24 hours a day.
- A dedicated team who will contact you to keep you updated during a power cut.
- Tailored support if you need this such as home visits, hot meals, advice and keeping your friends and relatives updated.
- In certain scenarios we may also offer free hotel accommodation overnight and transport to the hotel if you need this.
- For complex power cuts our community welfare teams provide on-site support which includes hot drinks, hot meals, a wifi connection and charge points.

You may be eligible, if you:

- have reached your state pension age
- are disabled or have a long-term medical condition
- are recovering from an injury
- have a hearing or sight condition
- have a mental health condition
- are pregnant or have young children
- have extra communication needs
- need to use medical equipment that requires a power supply
- have poor or no sense of smell
- would struggle to answer the door or get help in an emergency.

To sign up, update or remove your details from the Priority Service Register, visit: <https://bit.ly/AboutPSRKent>.

TIPS FOR USING SMART DEVICES

We have pulled together some tips for using smart devices for your home.

Research before buying

Before purchasing any smart device, research different brands, features, compatibility, and user reviews to ensure you're investing in the right product for your needs.

Consider compatibility

Ensure that the smart devices you choose are compatible with your existing devices, home network, and preferred voice assistants (e.g. Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant, Apple HomeKit).

Security first

Secure your smart devices by changing your default passwords, updating firmware regularly, and enabling two-factor authentication whenever possible. Also, consider setting up a guest network for devices to keep your main network secure.

Create a centralised hub

Consider using a smart home hub or compatible app to control all your devices from one centralised location. This can streamline operations and make it easier to manage your smart home ecosystem.

Establish routines and automation

Take advantage of scheduling and automation features to create routines for your smart devices. For example, you can automate lights to turn on at sunset or set your thermostat to adjust temperatures based on your schedule.

Voice control

If your smart devices support voice control, enable this feature for hands-free operation. Voice assistants can help you control various aspects of your smart home, from adjusting lights and temperature to playing music and setting reminders.

Monitor energy usage

Some smart devices offer energy monitoring features that allow you to track energy usage and identify opportunities for energy savings. Use this information to optimise your energy consumption and reduce utility bills.

Customise notifications

Customise notifications to stay informed about important events, such as motion detection, doorbell rings, or changes in temperature. However, avoid overwhelming yourself with unnecessary alerts by fine-tuning notification settings.

Regularly review and update settings

Periodically review and update the settings of your smart devices to ensure they continue to meet your needs and preferences. This includes adjusting schedules, updating firmware, and recalibrating sensors if necessary.

Keep learning and exploring

The world of smart home technology is constantly evolving, so stay curious and open to learning about new devices, features, and integrations that can further enhance your smart home experience.

Digital Hubs and Digital Drop-ins

There are Digital Hubs across Kent for you to gain support in using digital. These are bookable appointments, visit [digitalkent.uk](https://www.digitalkent.uk) or call 03000 410 950.

In addition, we have Digital Drop-ins where you can learn about various topics. These are bookable, visit www.digitalkent.uk or call 03000 410 950.





GET IN TOUCH WITH US

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