



# Committee on Fuel Poverty

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Secretary of State

1 Victoria Street  
London, SW1H 0ET

10 February 2023

Dear Secretary of State

I am writing further to the recent shocking revelations in The Times about British Gas contractors breaking in to the homes of vulnerable people and forcibly installing prepayment meters.

Last September we wrote to the candidates to become Prime Minister and said that fair treatment of customers should be a key principle in responding to the energy price crisis and that energy companies should never take actions which make it harder for people to heat their homes.

The Committee is appalled that some of the poorest and most vulnerable have been forced on to prepayment meters, and likely into self-disconnecting, in contradiction of what is surely the most self-evident principle of treating customers fairly during an energy crisis.

We note that since this news broke, Ofgem has asked all suppliers to stop PPM installation under warrant until they have reviewed their own practises and provided an assurance and attestation from its Board that it is satisfied it is in compliance with all relevant regulations and obligations.<sup>1</sup> It has made an order imposing similar requirements on British Gas.<sup>2</sup>

We welcome the actions Ofgem has now taken. However, what has happened calls for more fundamental work to be conducted as a matter of urgency. It is important that there is a re-evaluation of whether allowing the installation of prepayment meters using court warrants should be allowed to continue at all, or whether other approaches to helping customers in debt should be further developed.

The system of how warrants are granted by the courts as a response to debt needs an overhaul – it is clear that the current system assumes suppliers have done all the due diligence needed to justify the granting of a warrant, whereas the evidence suggests this is not the case. As reported earlier this week, the Right Honourable Lord Justice Edis, Senior

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/letter-suppliers-treatment-domestic-customers-during-pre-payment-meter-installations?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=dotMailer&utm\\_campaign=Daily-Alert\\_03-02-2023&utm\\_content=Letter+to+suppliers+on+the+treatment+of+domestic+customers+during+pre-payment+meter+installations&dm\\_i=1QCB,872GH,4L2WL2,XLR70,1](https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/letter-suppliers-treatment-domestic-customers-during-pre-payment-meter-installations?utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotMailer&utm_campaign=Daily-Alert_03-02-2023&utm_content=Letter+to+suppliers+on+the+treatment+of+domestic+customers+during+pre-payment+meter+installations&dm_i=1QCB,872GH,4L2WL2,XLR70,1)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/british-gas-ppm-installations-provisional-order>

Presiding Judge of England and Wales, has now directed the magistrates' courts to cease listing warrants of entry and no further applications to be determined until further notice.

There need to be stronger safeguards to protect vulnerable consumers when companies acting on behalf of energy companies, for whatever reason, seek to gain entry to the homes of vulnerable people. There is, for example, good practise in video recording of sales calls by some suppliers that might be considered here.

Finally, we need to understand the scale of the failings to date – under safeguarding legislation it is the duty and role of government to understand the number and demographics of victims. Ofgem's announcements are aimed at preventing any further breaches of rules that apply to forced installation of prepayment meters. There needs to be urgent work to understand the extent of the failings, by British Gas and others, to date, to identify those affected, and to compensate them and return them to the payment method of their choice.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Flint', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**RT Hon Caroline Flint**

**Chair – Committee on Fuel Poverty**