

Smart Meter Q&A

Questions asked by Public Voice. Answers given by Smart Energy GB (May 2023)

PV: If I get a smart meter will it make it easier for the energy company to switch me over to a pre-pay meter?

SEGB: Regulatory protections are as strong for people with smart meters as they are for people with analogue meters.

For the hundreds of thousands of people who have chosen a smart meter in prepay mode, there are significant advantages compared with an analogue meter. These include the ability to see your energy use in pounds and pence and to top up online instead of at the shops. Emergency credit and additional support is also easier to access, for example, the Energy Bill Support Scheme payments which were automatically available to smart prepay customers, whereas customers with analogue meters were required to redeem a voucher.

Involuntary PPM (prepayment mode) includes both installation under warrant and remote switching smart meters to PPM for debt.

If a customer has an analogue meter which is being replaced, a warrant is required to enter the customer's property to install it. Energy suppliers must take all reasonable steps to install a smart meter, whenever a meter is being installed under warrant. Where a customer already has a smart meter installed in credit mode, switching to prepay mode can be done remotely, which does not require a warrant, as it does not require the supplier to enter the customer's property.

Ofgem has published a supplier Code of Practice for involuntary prepayment meter installations. It is an important step towards ensuring that suppliers only switch a meter – analogue or smart – involuntarily to prepay as a last resort, and only where it is safe and reasonably practicable to do so.

Is it true that for remote switching to a pre-pay, the company does not require a warrant?

Involuntary PPM (prepayment mode) includes both installation under warrant and remote switching smart meters to PPM for debt. This includes instances where a supplier installs a smart meter in credit mode, but later switches to PPM.

What law prevents the energy company from remotely switching me over to a pre-pay meter without my consent?

Suppliers should be following strict rules set by Ofgem, including offering ways to help customers repay money they owe, and they should only be switching any meter – analogue or smart – to prepay as a last resort, having gone through all due process, and only after pursuing all other reasonable measures. These rules apply whatever kind of meter you have.

Does the new Code of Practice prevent forced remote switching in any and all cases?

Ofgem has published a supplier Code of Practice for involuntary prepayment meter installations. It is an important step towards ensuring that suppliers only switch a meter – analogue or smart – involuntarily to prepay as a last resort, and only where it is safe and reasonably practicable to do so.

The Code sets out expectations on suppliers on when it is acceptable to move a customer involuntarily to a smart meter in prepay mode and the standards for how such customers are to be treated. It also

strengthens protections for the most vulnerable customers for whom prepayment meters may not be a safe option.

The Code works in tandem with existing licence rules and guidance. Suppliers should be following strict rules set by Ofgem, including offering ways to help customers repay money they owe, before forcibly switching them to a prepayment meter. These rules apply whatever kind of meter a customer has. If a customer has not been able to resolve an issue with their energy supplier, they can contact Citizens Advice for further support.

Is the Code of Practice legally enforceable?

Ofgem will be able to advise further detail on their Code of Practice.

If I am in debt to the energy company can they remote switch me over to a prepay without my consent?

This is a challenging time for many people dealing with increased energy bills. If you are struggling to pay your bills you might be able to get extra support from schemes or grants offered by the government or energy suppliers, so we would strongly encourage you to talk to your energy supplier about options that may be available to you.

If you are in debt to your supplier, speak to them as soon as possible. Energy suppliers are required to work with you to find a solution if they know there is a problem and you are facing financial difficulty. If someone has not been able to resolve an issue with their energy supplier, they can contact Citizens Advice for further support.

How many people have been remote switched to a pre-pay without their consent?

This is not data owned by Smart Energy GB - please contact Ofgem.

If I am remote switched to a pre-pay without my consent, how can I go back to a standard meter or a smart meter that is not pre-pay and what rights do I have?

A smart meter can operate in both prepay and credit mode and can be switched automatically between the two. You would need to speak to your supplier re: solutions to managing your debt and options to switch your smart meter back to credit mode.

SEGB recommend further information from these websites.

<https://www.smartenergygb.org/smart-meter-benefits/benefits-for-prepay-customers>

<https://www.smartenergygb.org/smart-meter-benefits/benefits-for-prepay-customers/an-introduction-to-smart-meters-and-prepay>