

# **FUTURE CLIMATE HMO TENANTS' GUIDE TO SMART METERS**

November 15, 2016

## **INTRODUCTION**

This is guidance produced on the smart meter roll-out for tenants living in houses of multiple occupation (shared houses).

## **SECTION 1: SMART METERS - BASICS AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR TENANTS**

### **What is a smart meter?**

A smart meter is a modern electricity or gas meter that sends automatic readings to the energy supplier – removing the need for estimated bills or for meter readers to visit the home regularly.

Every home in the country will be offered a smart meter to replace their existing gas and electricity meters, between now and 2020.

### **What is the in-home display?**

Every smart meter is issued with an in-home display device (one device per home for both electricity and gas use) which enables the household to track energy use and energy expenditure in their home.

### **What are the advantages of a smart meter?**

The main advantage of the smart meter is more accurate bills. The in-home display makes it easier to manage and control costs of energy in the home. In time, it will be possible to connect smart meters to different advanced (“smart”) energy services that can help reduce bills further (for example by offering discounts depending on the time of day that you use energy).

For pre-payment customers, smart meters can offer a wider range of pre-payment methods. When customers switch from paying their energy bills on a contract to pre-payment, there will also be no need to change the meter, as there is currently.

### **How much does a smart meter cost?**

There is no charge for having a smart meter fitted (though the costs of the overall roll-out will be borne by all energy customers).

## When will I get a smart meter?

The installation of smart meters is undertaken by energy suppliers with their own customers. Different households in the same neighbourhood will therefore be offered smart meters at different times between now and 2020.

## Who decides whether to get a smart meter installed in rented properties?

Gas and electricity meters in your properties belong to the energy supplier. It is the bill-payer's decision whether or not to replace the existing gas and electricity meters with smart meters. The bill payer can contact the energy supplier to ask for the smart meters to be fitted, or the supplier may contact the bill payer.

Therefore, if you are the energy bill payers, it is your decision whether or not to have smart meters installed. However, you may be in breach of tenancy agreements if this happens without your landlord's consent – it is important in all rented situations therefore that both tenants and landlords are happy to have the meter installed.

The energy company will need access to your property to install the meter.

## Can the landlord use the In-home display to monitor energy use in their rented properties?

As part of the installation process, the bill payer will be given an in-home display device to help them monitor energy use. This is wirelessly linked to – and locked to – the meters in that property. It only has a range to cover the house and its immediate vicinity. Accordingly, it is only useful for tenants to track their own energy use (it's range is not sufficient for it to be used by landlords to monitor energy use remotely).

## Can a meter be moved at the time of the smart meter installation?

Yes, you can ask for the meter to be moved, but you will need to make sure your landlord is happy to pay any costs resulting from this. If the smart meter installer says they need to move the meter to fit it correctly, then the energy supplier may consider bearing the cost (suppliers are obliged by their regulator to make reasonable efforts to install smart meters).

## What about if we lose the in-home display (IHD)? Can it be replaced? How much will this cost?

Different energy suppliers will make different arrangements (cost etc) for the replacement of lost IHDs. If you are a tenant paying the energy bills it is your responsibility to look after the IHD. If you are paying the energy bills then be sure to pass the IHD to the next tenants when they move in. Your IHD is locked to your home: it won't work in any future properties you move to.

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### **SECTION 2: GUIDANCE FOR HMOS WITH INDIVIDUAL PRE-PAYMENT METERS IN EACH UNIT**

#### **Important note**

Though every UK home will be fitted with smart meters, the home you live in may not be eligible for smart meters for some time. From the point of view of energy companies, fitting smart meters in properties with multiple meters is complicated. There are technical issues and it is harder to organise. So even if you want a smart meter in your room, bedsit or studio flat, it may be some time before these are available.

#### **What are the issues to bear in mind?**

As a rented tenant paying your own energy bill, it is your decision whether to have your existing pre-payment meter replaced with a smart meter installed in your room, bedsit or studio flat (unit).

You can contact your energy supplier, or may be contacted by them, to discuss having a smart meter fitted.

If you are paying the bill, you have the right to refuse if your landlord wants to replace your meter with a smart meter.

If you do decide to have a smart meter installed, you should also check that your landlord or building manager is happy – as it affects their property and you may be in breach of your tenancy agreement if you have the meter installed without their agreement. However, your landlord should not charge you anything for having the new meter installed.

You will need to allow the energy company access to your home to install the meter. You will need to be there when the smart meter is installed and you will get energy saving advice during the installation process.

During the smart meter visit you will be given a new in-home display and you can use this to understand better how you are using energy in your home. This only works in your home and you will need to pass it on to the next tenant in your unit when you move out.

#### **What are the benefits of installing smart meters?**

It enables you to take much better control of the energy you use and the money you pay. Using the in-home display you'll be able to see exactly how and when you are using electricity and how much it costs.

The in-home display will also give better information about how much credit you have left, and allow you to see clearly how the energy you are using affects how often you need to top-up.

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It's likely that energy companies will offer different and more flexible payment arrangements (eg by an app on your phone) for pre-payment customers with smart meters.

You can switch more easily between pre-payment and contract arrangements to pay your bills (but energy companies are not obliged to offer you a contract because you have a smart meter).

If you have additional questions that are not covered by this guidance, please email [andy@futureclimate.org.uk](mailto:andy@futureclimate.org.uk) with any suggestions