

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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FOR SHARED HOUSES WHERE THE TENANTS PAY ALL THE ENERGY BILLS

What are the issues to bear in mind?

As the bill payers, you will be contacted by your energy company to see if you want a smart meter installed. You can also contact the company to see when a smart meter may be available.

Even if your energy company offers you one, you have the right to refuse to have a smart meter installed. If you do decide to have one installed, you should check that your landlord 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. Your landlord should not charge you anything for agreeing to have the smart meter installed.

We also recommend that all the tenants in the house who share the costs of the energy bills confirm that they are happy to have the new meter installed, regardless of whether they are named on the energy bill.

You will need to allow the energy company access to your home to install the meter. The main bill payer will need to be there when the smart meter is installed, and you may want to ask if your landlord if he/she also wants to be there (but you are not obliged to do this).

During the smart meter installation you will be given a new in-home display device and you can use this to understand better how you are using energy in your home. We recommend that the lead bill payer keeps control of their in-home display. It only works in your home and you will need to pass it on to the next set of tenants when you move out.

What are the advantages of a smart meter?

- It enables you to take much better control of your energy bills. There will be no more estimated bills.
- You can switch more easily between pre-payment and contract arrangements to pay your bills.
- By using the In-home display you will be able to see much more clearly when and how you are using energy in your home. That will help minimise disputes about energy use between sharers.
- You won't have to let meter readers into your home on a regular basis.