



Changing Your Business's Energy Supplier

This information has been jointly produced by **energywatch** and the **Energy Retail Association** to help ensure that you have enough information about the change of supply process so that you know exactly what you have to do and how you can help yourself if something goes wrong.

Accurate data regarding your premises, energy consumption, and the type and length of contract you have are key to the success of the change of supply process. Broadly, it is based on:

- The amount of energy you use
- The terms of the contract you have with your existing supplier (and metering service provider)
- How many premises you own/occupy

Any additional information you require, or queries you may have, should be made to the supplier(s) you are dealing with.

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The Decision to Change Supplier

You may choose to change supplier because of price or customer service issues or because your existing contract period is coming to an end. It is advisable to allow some time to gather key information, and review the contract you have with your current supplier and compare alternative offers.

Obtaining Quotes

Before asking for quotes from suppliers, or issuing a formal tender document make sure you have as much of the following information as possible for all the premises you wish to transfer.

Note: Suppliers are *not* obliged to respond to your request to provide a quote for supply.

Information required for pricing and change of supplier

- ➔ Address and post code of the premises.
- ➔ The unique reference number for the meter point(s) as printed on the bill(s) from your current supplier (i.e. Meter Point Reference Number (MPRN) for gas and Meter Point Administration Number (MPAN) or Supply Number ('S') number for electricity). You may have more than one meter point number at your premises; you can check this with your existing supplier if you are unsure.
- ➔ Meter Serial Number(s) – the number printed on your meter(s). Give as much information as you can – including where the meter is located within your premises. If in doubt ask your supplier to arrange a meter reading visit.
- ➔ Your assessment of the annual amount of energy used, and the nature of your business/ consumption patterns since different prices may apply depending upon seasonal fluctuations or the time you need to use electricity. For larger electricity sites, the maximum demand (the largest amount of electricity consumption in any one half-hour period) and the Authorised Supply Capacity (the maximum demand you are contracted to take) may also be required. These will be available from your current supplier's bill or contained within your original supply contract. Larger gas sites may also be supplied on an interruptible basis (where your gas supply can be interrupted on pre-agreed notice).
- ➔ Your arrangements for metering and meter reading. Usually the supplier will arrange these services for the customer. However, some customers arrange for the meter to be installed and read themselves, and it is important that you notify suppliers if this is the case.
- ➔ Any VAT Climate Change Levy (CCL) exemptions – you will have to provide copies of these forms to your new supplier.
- ➔ A copy of your last bill, this can be extremely helpful.

Choosing Your Supplier

In order to compare the prices being offered, you will need to calculate how much you are currently paying for your fuel each year, and/or verify your annual consumption from previous meter readings or bills. Alternatively, you may wish to employ an energy broker or consultant to find the best deal for you.

Depending upon the amount of your energy consumption, you may already have, or may require additional metering arrangements. Meters that can record half-hourly electricity consumption or daily gas values, and are read remotely, are required above certain consumption levels or are available by choice to other customers. Suppliers providing a quote should be able to provide you with advice in this area.



The Process of Changing Supplier

The change of supplier process should take about four to six weeks. Your new supplier should advise you of the expected timescales and key elements of the process.

Your new and current supplier will be transferring important site and metering information between each other, and their metering service providers. If data mismatches do occur, this can lead to delays or errors in transfer and billing and either supplier may contact you during this period to clarify details or arrange a visit to the premises.

It is also advisable not to make changes in metering in the month prior to the transfer date, since this may delay the transfer or cause complications later.

Key Steps within the Change of Supply Process

Customer

- ➔ Check current supplier contract including all terms and conditions relating to cancelling the contract, termination charges and changing supplier
- ➔ Provide required premises and billing details
- ➔ Check and sign new supplier contract remembering to check all the details including price and conditions for cancelling BEFORE signing and only once you are satisfied
- ➔ Notify current supplier in writing (according to contractual terms, or out of courtesy)
- ➔ Contact current supplier, if new supplier notifies you of an objection
- ➔ Provide access for meter reading, or provide own meter reading and remember to keep a copy
- ➔ Check final and initial Bills from old and new suppliers respectively
- ➔ Pay final and first bills
- ➔ Continue to contact the new supplier over any customer service issues, premises changes, and provide access for meter reading

New Supplier

- ➔ Should check site and billing details provided and that all meter point numbers are included
- ➔ May contact you if they discover any discrepancies
- ➔ Initiate transfer process
- ➔ Appoint metering service providers
- ➔ Notify you if an objection occurs
- ➔ Notify you if a rejection occurs
- ➔ Confirm transfer dates(s) and keep you informed of progress
- ➔ Obtain meter readings (see below)
- ➔ Set up account in billing system
- ➔ Issue an Initial Bill in accordance with contractually agreed billing timeframes
- ➔ Should provide an initial bill which is consistent with the transfer date and meter reading used by the old supplier on their final bill

Current Supplier

- ➔ Receives notification from industry systems that another supplier intends to take over the supply of your premises
- ➔ Checks contractual terms and conditions for grounds for objection
- ➔ May raise an objection
- ➔ May write to you out of courtesy acknowledging your change of supplier
- ➔ Cancel the appointment of their metering service providers
- ➔ Receives change of supply meter reading from the new supplier/agent
- ➔ Prepares and issues final bill or statement of account
- ➔ Should provide you with a final bill which will be consistent with the transfer date and meter reading used by the new supplier on their initial bill
- ➔ Should reimburse you for any account credit



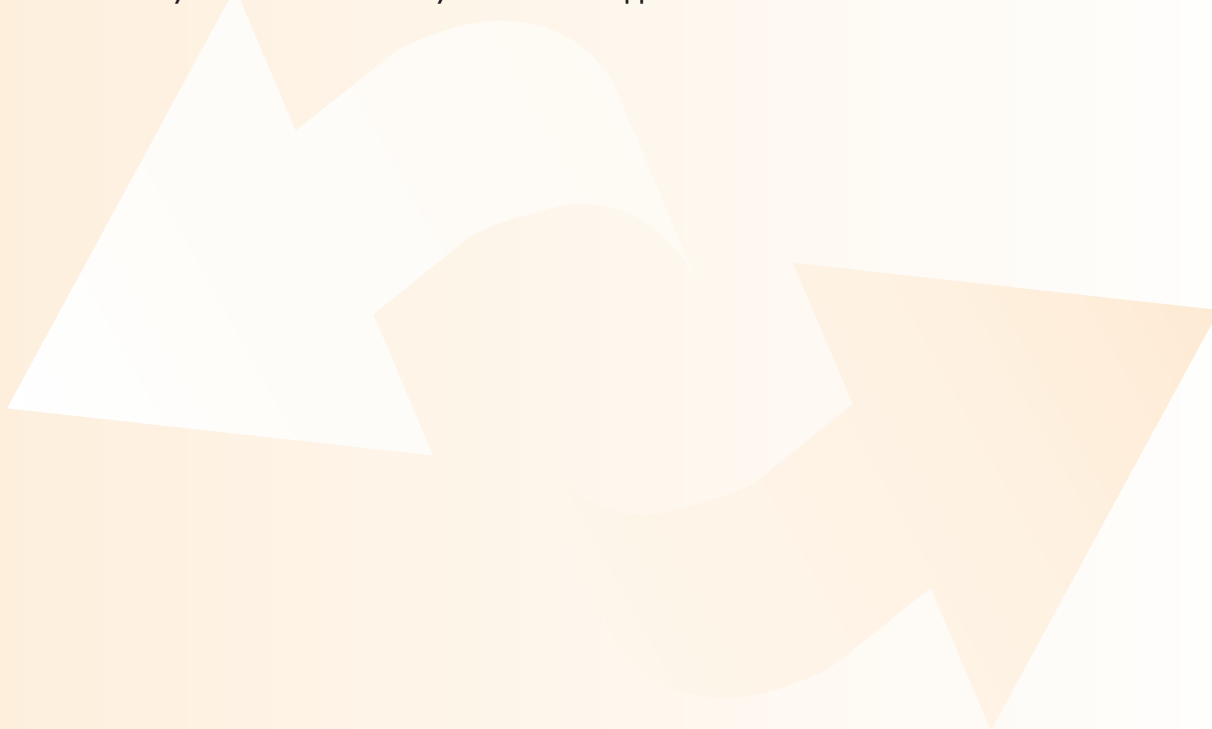
Obtaining a Meter Reading

Obtaining an acceptable meter reading is key to the change of supply process, as this will form the basis of your final bill from your current supplier, and the opening bill from your new supplier. If a reading cannot be obtained, an estimated reading will have to be used.

The new supplier may endeavour to obtain an actual reading by arranging a visit by their appointed meter reading agent. Alternatively, you, or the new supplier's sales agent may take a reading, and your new supplier will advise you how to pass the read onto them. However your meter or meters are read, remember to keep records of the readings yourself.

If there are any particular access issues with your premises, you should endeavour to provide as much information/accessibility as possible (location, passwords, accompanied visits, keys etc). This will also help to facilitate ongoing customer service.

If your metering is half hourly (electricity), or daily metered (gas), there will not be a need to provide a change of supplier meter read to your new supplier as the information can be forwarded to your current and new supplier electronically. If in doubt contact your current supplier.



Key Points to Consider

Key Steps to Minimising Possible Change of Supplier Issues

Minimising the likelihood of having to pay high prices for being “out of contract” with your current Supplier.

Your current supplier will have purchased energy for your contracted period of supply at agreed rates. Beyond this date energy prices may be more expensive and you will be charged accordingly.

- ➔ Tell your new supplier when you want to change supplier – make sure that the date you change supplier (“Transfer Date”) follows on immediately from the final date of your existing contract;
- ➔ Allow enough time from selecting a new supplier to your desired transfer date – up to 6 weeks or longer if you include the tendering period.

Avoiding your current supplier objecting to (& potentially delaying) the transfer; or avoiding any termination fees

- ➔ Review your contractual obligations with your current Supplier;
- ➔ Make sure you are entitled to change supplier without penalty and according to the terms and conditions of your contract, and that the supply to the premises is not part of a landlords contract (ie your energy supply is included in the rent you pay to your landlord);
- ➔ The contract will include the circumstances in which the current supplier can legitimately prevent your transfer to another supplier or when you may be liable for a termination fee, termination period, or the need to give notice in writing. If in doubt check with your current supplier.

Objection reasons may include:

- ➔ You are trying to change supplier before the end date of your current supplier’s contract;
- ➔ you are terminating the contract without giving the required notice period;
- ➔ your supply being based upon more than one related meter point at the one site, and not all of these are transferred over at the same time by your new supplier;
- ➔ The contract terms and conditions specify payment of outstanding debt prior to changing supplier.

If you have just moved into the property and are not aware who the supplier is

- ➔ Contact the MPAS Helpline of your local electricity distribution business (the number will be in the telephone directory); or the Transco MPR helpline for Gas (see “Useful Contacts” below) and request details of the supplier registered to that address; or
- ➔ Contact your preferred suppliers to provide a quote. With your permission they will be able to identify the current supplier;
- ➔ You will still be liable to the current supplier from the time you occupied the premises, to the time your preferred supplier takes over, and it is always in your interests to identify that supplier and notify them of your responsibility for those premises as soon as possible. Not having a contract with a supplier will mean that you are supplied on “deemed rates” which are nearly always more expensive.



Allowing suppliers to be able to accurately price and avoid subsequent delays or changes

- ➔ Provide as much of the information listed above;
- ➔ Give your permission for suppliers to access energy industry systems to check your data;
- ➔ Verify your own data with energy industry held systems (See “Useful Contacts” below).

Ensuring the right price and contractual arrangements

- ➔ Make sure you are comparing “like with like” – unit rates; fixed/standing charges; time of use rates; etc
- ➔ Are the terms & conditions of the contract acceptable (contract period; termination notice; penalty clauses etc)? Remember to read all the small print and that you understand all the implications;
- ➔ Once you have signed a contract it will be legally binding, unless there is a stipulated “cooling-off period” – which is uncommon for business customers;
- ➔ Are the services you require in respect of billing and consumption information clearly set out - for example in respect of billing frequency, energy management information, on-line services?
- ➔ Are VAT and the Climate Change Levy (CCL) included?
- ➔ Do you wish to have electricity generated from renewable sources? Some suppliers offer contracts for ‘green’ energy, and this can lead to a reduction in the CCL;
- ➔ Check the metering service arrangements – including reading and read access arrangements;
- ➔ Make sure you sign the contract within the stipulated expiry timescales.

What may be expected of you during the transfer process?

- ➔ Be ready to answer any queries the new supplier may have of you regarding your premises details
- ➔ Speak to your current supplier if there are any objections to the transfer of your supply
- ➔ In general, if you have any queries/doubts about the change of supply process, contact your new supplier.

What is the best way to ensure an accurate change of supply reading is obtained?

- ➔ Be ready to provide access to your premises – keep any appointments made; provide keys etc
- ➔ Provide a reading if necessary – it is useful to understand your metering installation to accurately provide this – ask for meter reading visit if you are unsure;
- ➔ If possible, take a meter reading on the date your change of supply occurs; give it to your new supplier but also make sure you keep a record of any readings yourself

Check your closing bill from your current supplier and opening bill from your new supplier.

- ➔ Check the details of your bill, and ensure that the amount you are being charged is accurate
- ➔ That your final and initial bills should both state the same transfer date (Supply End Date; Supply Start Date); and
- ➔ That the opening read from the new supplier, should be the same as the closing read from the old supplier.



What to do if things go wrong

Concerns that may arise, and what actions you can take.

The current supplier raises an objection to the transfer.

Your current supplier will notify you that they have raised an objection, and you will need to resolve the matter with them. The new supplier may also notify you of the objection. Check your existing contract.

You are concerned with the apparent lack of progress/ communication.

You should contact your new supplier.

Your supply is not transferred on the due date.

You should contact your new supplier.

Your supply is transferred later than you anticipated, and you incur “out of contract” or “deemed” charges.

You should contact your new supplier, who will attempt to resolve the issue with the old supplier.

Not all of your premises/supplies are transferred at all, or, later than you expected.

These situations may occur with individual premises within a portfolio of sites you are seeking to transfer. It may be the case that you no longer occupy some of the premises, and you should advise the new supplier. If the meters are “related” (ie all are linked to a single supply to one site), then the transfer may be delayed or rejected. If they are “associated” (ie form part of your portfolio but are not linked to one another at a single site or cover other sites) then some may be transferred and some not which can lead to confusion and possibly a financial disadvantage.

You do not receive a closing / final invoice from your old supplier within a reasonable timescale.

You should contact your old supplier.

It is reasonable to expect to receive a final invoice within 30 days of the transfer date. However, you are liable for final invoice demands for up to 6 years in England & Wales and 5 years in Scotland and to avoid any unexpected demands in the future it is in your interests to keep any records relating to the transfer (including meter reads and bills) and copies of the contract for at least 6 years.

You still receive bills from the old supplier

This should obviously not occur after the final account has been settled – hence the importance of making sure a final bill is received. Contact your new supplier to confirm the date of transfer and then contact your old supplier.

You do not receive an opening / initial bill from your new supplier after the anticipated timescales.

You should contact your new supplier.

There may have been a failure to set up your account. However, you remain liable to the new supplier for all energy consumed from the transfer date, and it is in your interests to ensure continuity of your billing and payment arrangements.

The opening billing details or tariff details are incorrect, or they are different to your expectations.

You should contact your new supplier to sort out the matter.

The signed contract should provide the basis for resolution. Do not simply pay the amount demanded but check it first. Pay a reasonable sum which you feel covers the amount due and put aside extra in case you are wrong.



The meter reading on the closing bill from your old supplier is not the same as the meter reading date on your initial/first bill from your new supplier.

Check that the MPAN (electricity) or MPRN (gas) on the bills from each supplier are the same. You need to ensure you do not overpay or that you face a demand for a retrospective amount due to underpayment.

The transfer date on the closing bill from your old supplier is not the same as the transfer date on your initial/first bill from your new supplier.

Check that the MPAN (electricity) or MPRN (gas) on the bills from each supplier are the same. There should be no overlap in, or gap between, the dates used by each supplier. Although the meter reading used for the change of supply may be the same, you should contact the new supplier to confirm the change of supply date and then contact your old supplier with this information. This will avoid any further billing issues.

You provided a meter reading of your own for the transfer that has not been used.

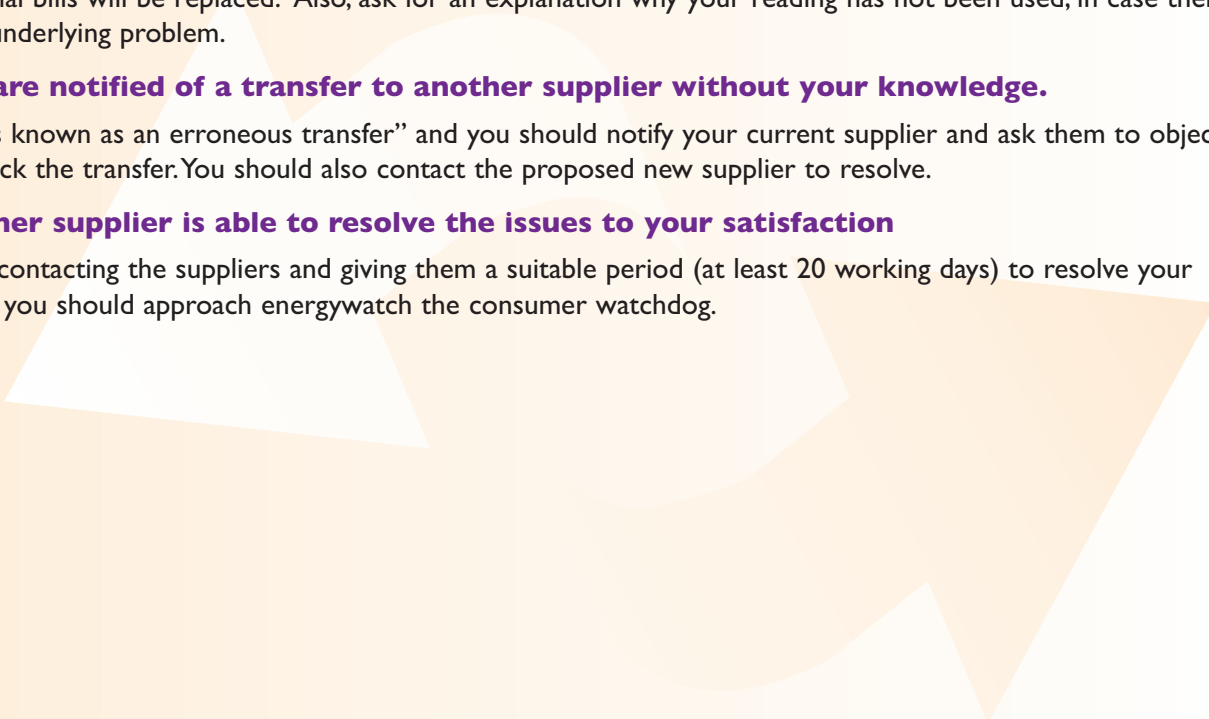
Contact your new supplier to query this. If the read is valid and significantly different from the read used, they may be able to contact the old supplier and agree that this read is used. If this is the case both the initial and final bills will be replaced. Also, ask for an explanation why your reading has not been used, in case there is an underlying problem.

You are notified of a transfer to another supplier without your knowledge.

This is known as an erroneous transfer” and you should notify your current supplier and ask them to object or block the transfer. You should also contact the proposed new supplier to resolve.

Neither supplier is able to resolve the issues to your satisfaction

After contacting the suppliers and giving them a suitable period (at least 20 working days) to resolve your query, you should approach energywatch the consumer watchdog.



Useful Contact Details

Supplier customer service contact details will be found on most forms of correspondence and bills or contact details will be available on sales literature. The energywatch website also provides a list of supplier contact details.

You can also directly ask the industry registration service providers (Transco or any other Gas Transporter and MPAS for electricity) to view data held for your premises.

energywatch

<http://www.energywatch.org.uk>

08459 06 07 08

NGT Transco (*Transco Meter Point Reference (MPR) Helpline*)

Will provide you with details of your current gas supplier.

<http://www.transco.uk.com>

0870 608 1524

Independent Gas Transporters (iGT)

If your Gas MPRN begins with a 74 or 75, you are supplied on an iGT network; you can contact energywatch for details of how to get in touch with your iGT.

Electricity Meter Point Administration Services (MPAS)

Will confirm the address, and supplier registered against that supply point, including which agents have been appointed to read and look after your meter.

Either ask your current supplier, or energywatch, for the MPAS helpdesk numbers or contact your local electricity distribution business – available in the telephone directory.

Energy Retail Association

<http://www.energy-retail.org.uk>

The Energy Retail Association represents suppliers in the competitive UK energy market. Their website contains details of the Customer Transfer Programme which was formed to review and improve the transfer process for all consumers and is made up of industry representatives, energywatch and Ofgem.

The Gas Forum

<http://www.gasforum.co.uk>

The Gas Forum comprises most significant UK gas shippers and gas suppliers ('gas shippers' own gas from import at the beach terminals to the point of delivery to customers premises where "gas suppliers" then sell the gas to the customer).

Their website contains details of their current activities in the gas industry.

OFGEM

<http://www.ofgem.gov.uk>

Ofgem is the regulator for Britain's gas and electricity industries. Its role is to protect and advance the interests of consumers by promoting competition where possible, and through regulation where necessary. It does not deal with individual complaints; these should be referred to energywatch.

The Association of Meter Operators

<http://www.meteroperators.org.uk>

The Association of Meter Operators is a trade association for meter operators.

A meter operator (MO) is a company that contracts with either a customer or a supplier to install and maintain meters for measuring the flow of energy in either the electricity or gas markets.

