



**Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau says thousands of people could be missing out on savings on their gas and electricity bills this winter because they don't know about social tariffs.**

Social tariffs are special low prices that gas and electricity companies should make available to vulnerable customers. The companies will decide who counts as vulnerable, but if a member of your family is a lone parent, sick or disabled, a pensioner or a young child, it is definitely worth contacting the company to see if you qualify. You don't have to change companies to get these special prices, and you can get them however you pay for your fuel – even if you use a prepayment meter.

The advice-giving charity, which deals with over 43,000 issues each year, has seen the number of clients contacting it about gas and electricity debts increase by almost 50%. Andy Brown, the organisation's Chief Executive, thinks this is not surprising when fuel prices have increased so quickly, with gas prices going by 45% in the last year alone.

He said, 'gas and electricity companies have many ways they can help their customers. These include giving energy efficiency advice, making sure people know about grants for insulation and helping customers who have got behind with their payments. But our research has found that customers often aren't told about social tariffs, and they don't know to ask for them.'

The easiest way to find out whether you can get a social tariff is to ring your gas and electricity companies. We have written a fact sheet which you can get by going to our website, <http://www.manchestercab.org/> and we have also set up a special email address that people can use to tell us about successes or problems that they have.'

Ofgem, which is the regulator for gas and electricity companies, says that the average household can save £250 a year by switching to a social tariff. People may be able to save even more by shopping around and changing companies to get cheaper fuel.

**ENDS**

**Notes for Editors:**

1. Manchester Citizens Advice service is a **charity**, and part of a **national network** of 426 Bureaux across England and Wales. The service started during the Second World War, and is celebrating its 70<sup>th</sup> birthday this year.
2. As well as giving advice, all Bureaux carry out **social policy and campaigning work** to make sure people know about their rights and

- responsibilities, and to campaign for positive changes to legislation and procedures that affect clients' lives.
3. Social Tariffs are part of a £225 million 'social programme' of activities that the gas and electricity companies agreed with Ofgem, the regulator, for 2008-2011
  4. In the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy, **the government committed to ending fuel poverty for all households by 2018**. Fuel Poverty is where a household has to spend more than 10 percent of its income on fuel for cooking, heating and lighting. Because of rapidly rising fuel prices, it is unlikely this target will be hit. There are currently around 4.5 million households living in fuel poverty in the UK.

For more information about Manchester Citizens Advice and its social tariffs campaign, contact Karen Dyson at Harpurhey Bureau on 0161 203 4153 (this number is **not** to be published.)