



There cannot be a single person who has not had a conversation about the cost of living crisis which seems to be escalating at an alarming rate and this month's question is typical of the thousands of requests we get each month asking for help and advice.

"The cost of energy and food is so high now. With the kids back to school, new uniform and all the other costs. I'm worried about how I'll put food on the table. I'm on a prepayment meter and I'm really scared we're going to be left without any gas or electric if I can't top up. What can I do?"

As a prepayment meter customer, your energy supplier will be able to give you temporary credit if you can't afford to top up your meter. They might add this to your meter automatically, but if they don't, you can call them and ask them to do this.

If you run out of temporary credit, speak to your supplier and explain your situation. They may give you extra temporary credit if you are struggling with living costs. If you're disabled, have a long term health condition or you have children under 5 you may also qualify to get extra credit. You'll have to pay back anything extra you get, but you can agree how to do this in a way you can afford.

CA TNMWD are working with Devon County Council to manage an Energy Relief Scheme and it could be that you qualify for fuel vouchers. We also have a specially trained Energy Advice Team who will provide free, confidential and informed advice. Either visit www.ruraldevoncab.org.uk click on 'Get Advice' then go to the Energy tab. Alternatively, ring our free, local AdviceLine on 0808 27 87 999. You may like to consider having a Smart Meter installed (at no cost to you) and this is something else our team can advise on.

There is more government support coming in October to help with energy bills including a £400 payment. With a prepayment meter you will be given vouchers in the first week of each month from October.

If you pay council tax and are in bands A-D you may have already received a payment of £150 which is being automatically credited by local councils. If you haven't and you qualify, check out your council's website and see how you go about making a claim.

You may find it useful to check out www.citizensadvice.org.uk where we have benefits calculators you can use online to assess whether you are eligible to claim anything and there is also advice on how to reduce living costs and other ways to increase your income.

School holidays put additional pressures on everyone's budget. Contact your local council to see if there is extra support available to help you. At CA TNMWD we can also help you get a referral for a food bank. You are by no means the only person in your situation so just reach out to us for help. www.ruraldevoncab.org.uk or 0808 27 87 999.

If you are reading this and thinking that you would like to be able to help people like this, email recruitment@ruraldevoncab.org.uk and find out about volunteering opportunities with us. We give ongoing training and support and you would be helping us to meet the ever increasing demands on our services!