

switch on

a series of guides for energy users

from the Consumer Council

Switching domestic electricity supplier



0800 121 6022
www.consumerCouncil.org.uk

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Switching domestic electricity supplier

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1. Finding the best deal



The domestic electricity market in Northern Ireland is now open to competition. This means you can shop around for your electricity. By switching, you may save money or receive a better service.

Now that you can switch you should:

Shop around to:

- Compare prices;
- Find out about the level and quality of service you will receive; and
- Consider additional services that can help you, for example online bills.

To make this easier for you, we have created a simple price comparison tool, visit: <http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/energy/price-comparison/>

Can I switch if I rent the premises?

You can switch your electricity supplier if you're renting, provided your property has a separate electricity meter and that the account is in your name. If in doubt you should contact your landlord first, as they'll be responsible for the account if you move out.

To find out more, here's what you can do:

1. Contact the supplier directly

Telephone the supplier and use these questions as a guide: **(it will help if you have your bills from the last 12 months or if you are a Pay As You Go customer some indication of your monthly/weekly expenditure).**



- What is the best tariff they can offer? It will help if you provide the name of your current tariff and how much you have spent on electricity over the past 12 months.
- Is there an introductory offer? How long will it last? What happens when it expires?
- Are there any extra costs involved for switching, for example, paying a security deposit?

- iv) How can I pay? Is there a discount for using certain types of payment, for example Direct Debit (DD)?
- v) Ask for a written quote and always read the small print.
- vi) What additional services can they offer, for example, large print bills?
- vii) If you switch to Pay As You Go ask how and where you can top up and if there are any charges.

2. Dealing with a sales agent

A sales person from an electricity supplier may call at your home or approach you in a public place, eg a shopping centre. He/she must abide by the Consumer Council's Marketing Code and supply information that is accurate and clear. Ask for a written quote based on your annual electricity usage and always read the small print.

The Consumer Council's Marketing Code is available for download at www.consumerCouncil.org.uk or you can request a copy by calling our freephone number 0800 121 6022.

3. Online information

You can also shop around online. For a full list of suppliers visit: www.consumerCouncil.org.uk/energy/electricity



4. If you are currently in debt to your electricity company

All suppliers have arrangements in place to allow you to switch even if you are in debt. Ask your supplier to tell you about the options available to you.

Remember - if you are in debt, contact your electricity supplier immediately to arrange a repayment plan that you can afford.

2. What will happen to my electricity supply?

If you switch there will not be any changes to:

- a) Your meter
- b) Your electrical wiring
- c) Your electricity supply
- d) How and when your meter is read

Northern Ireland Electricity, (NIE) which is the company that owns the wires and meters, will still be responsible for the electricity network and lines. This means that if your electricity goes off or you have a newly built property you want connected for electricity, you should still contact NIE on 08457 643 643.

Please note that Northern Ireland Electricity is not an electricity supplier. **Power NI, Airtricity** and **Budget Energy** are electricity suppliers, which means they sell electricity to customers and send them a bill. If you have a problem with your bill or your keypad top-up card, you should contact your supplier.

3. The switching timeline

Once you have contacted your new supplier, are happy with what they are offering and have signed up, here's what will happen:



Weeks 1-2:

1. Switching application is processed.

Credit meter customers

- a) Your new supplier notifies your current supplier, you do not have to contact your supplier.
- b) You send in a meter reading or the new supplier will read your meter and give the reading to your current supplier (in order for them to calculate your final bill).
- c) If paying by Direct Debit (DD): you will receive a letter confirming that your bank has been contacted and a new

DD set up. If paying by cash or cheque: some suppliers will send you an invoice requesting payment of a deposit.

Keypad meter customers

- a) Your new supplier will contact you at the end of the cooling off period with instructions on how to complete the switch.

Cooling off period - If you change your mind or are not happy with your new supplier you can cancel your agreement up to ten working days after registering. Just contact the new supplier advising that you wish to cancel.



Week 3-4:

Credit meter customers

1. You will receive a final bill from your supplier. If you owe money on your account you should pay this as normal. If your account is in credit your old supplier will reimburse the amount.
3. New supplier will send you a welcome letter with your account details confirming they are now supplying you with electricity. At this stage you have made the switch.

Keypad meter customers

1. You must contact NIE on 08457 643 643 on the dates provided by your new supplier to complete the switch. Make sure that you have access to your meter when you make the call. If you don't contact NIE you will have to start the switching process again.



Week 4-6

Credit meter customers

- a) You will receive your first bill from your new supplier for the amount of electricity you have used since you switched.

Keypad meter customers

- a) You will receive a welcome letter from your new supplier including a new keypad top-up card and your unique Premise Number.

Credit meter customers

Make sure to check that your bill is based on an accurate meter reading and NOT an estimated reading. Remember - read your meter regularly and give the reading to your supplier or to NIE. This will help you avoid building up credit or debt on your account.

4. How to complain

Follow our quick two-step guide on how to complain effectively:



Step 1 - If you have an electricity complaint contact the relevant company first, eg if you lose power you should contact Northern Ireland Electricity and if your complaint is about your bill contact your supplier (eg **Airtricity**, **Budget Energy** or **Power NI**). The company may be able to resolve the problem for you.

Details of electricity companies' Complaints Handling Codes of Practice are available from the electricity suppliers' websites, by telephone and by post. For contact details see the useful contacts section on page eight.



Step 2 - If you are not satisfied with their response, contact the Consumer Council. We have the legal power to act on your behalf and investigate your complaint.

0800 121 6022
complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk

The Consumer Council also handles complaints about natural gas, coal, water, buses, trains, planes and ferries.

5. Useful contacts




The Consumer Council


This leaflet is part of the 'Switch On' series, other leaflets in the series include:

Coal, Electricity, Energy Efficiency, Business, Students, Energy Performance Certificates, LPG, Home Heating Oil, Natural Gas, Older People, Renewables, and Switching Domestic Gas Supplier.

For more information or to receive other leaflets contact the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland.

Elizabeth House	Complaints line: 0800 121 6022
116 Hollywood Road	Tele/textphone: 028 9067 2488
Belfast	Fax: 028 9065 7701
BT4 1NY	E-mail: complaints@consumercouncil.org.uk
	Websites: www.consumercouncil.org.uk
	www.consumerline.org

 Consumer Council Northern Ireland

 ConsumerCouncil

Airtricity

Sales: 0845 601 4321

Customer Service: 0845 601 9093

Website: www.airtricity.com

Power NI

Tel: 08457 455 455

E-mail: home@powerni.co.uk

Website: home@powerni.co.uk

Budget Energy

Tel: 0800 012 1177

E-mail: info@budgetenergy.co.uk

or switch@budgetenergy.co.uk

Website: www.budgetenergy.co.uk

Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE)

Tel: 08457 643 643

Minicom: 08457 147 128

E-mail: customercontact@nie.co.uk

Website: www.nie.co.uk

New electricity suppliers can enter the market at any time. Visit our website at www.consumercouncil.org.uk for an up to date list of electricity suppliers.