

Heat Network Consumer Complaints

Summary

Heat networks supply heating and hot water from a central source to multiple properties or buildings. Around 30,000 households in Scotland are currently connected to heat networks ([Scottish Government, 2024](#)), and this number is expected to increase significantly over the next decade as part of efforts to decarbonise home heating and lower bills.

Until recently, the sector has been largely unregulated, and there is evidence to indicate significant consumer harm. Common issues include high and inconsistent pricing, poor communication from suppliers and third-party billing agents, unreliable service, and ineffective complaints handling ([Consumer Scotland, 2026](#)).

In January 2026, Ofgem became the regulator for heat networks across Great Britain. The new regulations set clear standards for billing, pricing and complaints handling, along with protections for people in vulnerable circumstances. However, this is a new and evolving market, so we expect regulation to continue developing over time and consumers may not see immediate improvements.

Since April 2025, Consumer Scotland has funded the Heat Network Advice Service in Scotland. First tier advice and support for heat network customers is provided through Advice Direct Scotland (ADS) with dedicated support also established for consumers in vulnerable circumstances through the Extra Help Unit (EHU) at Citizens Advice Scotland.

In this paper we present an overview of the work of the Heat Network Advice Service, provide case studies for three consumers who have received advice, and outline the actions that Consumer Scotland is taking to support heat network consumers.

Overview of Heat Network Consumer Issues

If heat network consumers experience issues, they are expected to raise complaints with their supplier in the first instance. Where issues remain unresolved, consumers can access free, independent advice from ADS via [energyadvice.scot](#). Advisers provide support across a range of issues, including billing disputes, affordability concerns, and energy efficiency. For more complex cases involving consumers in vulnerable circumstances, or that includes the threat of or actual disconnection, ADS can refer consumers to EHU for more specialist support.

Supporting Heat Network Consumers

Together, ADS and EHU have supported heat network consumers in Scotland with a range of issues during the past year. For affordability issues, they have supported consumers with eligibility checks to help them maximise their income, as well as supporting them to apply for local fuel vouchers to ensure that they do not lose access to heating and /or hot water.

In cases where there is uncertainty around the accuracy of billing, ADS and EHU have advocated for consumers to receive a revised, correct bill, and reviewed evidence such as bill breakdowns to investigate potential faulty meter systems. They have also reviewed concerns relating to meter readings to determine whether there is evidence of faults or inaccuracies. In addition, they supported consumers to arrange repayment plans where they have fallen behind on their bills, as well as challenging suppliers on back billing practices. While these issues are being investigated, they secure agreement from suppliers to hold off any debt recovery action or disconnections, so the consumer isn't further impacted.

ADS and EHU have worked with the suppliers to make sure responsibilities are clarified to the consumer, and advised consumers of the formal complaints process, providing details of the Energy Ombudsman. Their continued oversight of the challenges that consumer experience ensures that these issues remain on the supplier's agendas.

Below we present three case that provide real life examples of issues faced by heat network consumers in Scotland during the past 12 months that were resolved through the Heat Network Advice Service. While these case studies reflect some of the known issues that are faced by heat network consumers, at the moment we are not able to reflect on how frequently these issues are faced or how representative these examples are. Consumer Scotland is currently undertaking survey work with heat network consumers across Scotland that will provide further insight into how frequently consumers are experiencing the types of issues highlighted in the case studies.

Case study 1

A consumer's in-home display had stopped functioning, but they were told by both the supplier and the metering/billing provider that they were not authorised to upgrade the system. At the same time, the consumer expressed concerns around unexpected price increases, and were unclear about who was responsible for setting prices due to inconsistent communications they had received.

The consumer also had issues with the efficiency of their heating and hot water system, and had experienced a supply outage for several hours, during which their credit balance was continuing to reduce. After enquiring about what caused the outage, the consumer felt that they had been given three different explanations.

Due to the complexity of this case, it was escalated to the Extra Help Unit. They held a call with the supplier and the consumer, during which many concerns were addressed. This led to the supplier arranging to attend the property the following week. During the call, the supplier also confirmed that despite the changing contractual arrangement with their billing agent, they would prioritise carrying out this work for the consumer. The supplier also clarified the cause of the power outage, and, as part of the resolution, arranged for the consumer to be given a new in-home display. The supplier clarified that they are responsible for the price increases.

The Extra Help Unit has been in regular contact with the consumer, who was extremely grateful for their assistance as they had tried to raise many of these issues with the supplier over a period of several years without resolution.

Case study 2

A consumer was struggling financially and didn't have enough funds to top up their prepayment meter. Due to a fault with their immersion heater, they had accrued around £100 of debt. The financial assistance that the supplier had provided wasn't enough to clear the debt, which meant that their supply couldn't be restored.

The consumer was in especially vulnerable circumstances, and was significantly distressed when they got in touch with EHU, as they were unsure which organisation would be able to assist them with the issue.

EHU were able to successfully arrange for a fuel voucher application to be completed, which gave the consumer enough credit to restore their supply until the date of their next payment. EHU invited the consumer to contact them if any further support was needed.

Case study 3

The consumer's heating supply had been disconnected due to a system fault on the heat network, and no repair timescale was given. The consumer was vulnerable with a physical health condition and had experienced repeated outages.

Advice Direct Scotland advised the consumer on how to escalate their complaint, including details of how to contact the Energy Ombudsman if the issue was not resolved. In addition, they supported the consumer with a full benefits check to identify any other benefits they may be entitled to, as well as information about a local support fund.

The case was successfully transferred to an EHU adviser, to ensure the customer received specialist support with her heat network complaint. The EHU also identified that the consumer was at risk of self-disconnection on their mains electricity account, and so a separate case was raised with the electricity supplier to secure Additional Support Credit and maintain the supply.

What is Consumer Scotland doing about it?

Our partnerships enable Consumer Scotland to gather evidence on emerging issues within the heat network market. This evidence informs our engagement with Ofgem, the Scottish and UK Governments and other stakeholders as the new regulatory framework embeds.

We utilise this evidence and analysis to feed into the policy and regulatory process to advocate for improvements and better outcomes for consumers. It also allows us to escalate concerns to Ofgem in its role as regulator and better support them to regulate the market and take appropriate action if necessary.

We also share this information with our partners across the consumer landscape and the energy ombudsman.

To specifically support the work of the Heat Network Advice Service in delivering advice to support heat network consumers, Consumer Scotland has:

- Developed guidance to support advisers and caseworkers to understand what they need to know about recently introduced heat network regulation so that they can provide consumers with consistent, high quality advice.
- Developed a toolkit to highlight the resources available across the consumer and advice landscape to help caseworkers support heat network consumers.
- Funded the CAB network to update its existing energy advice and training to cover heat network issues.
- Developed a package of training and resources to upskill advisers and caseworkers that support heat network consumers.

Heat Network Advice Service in Scotland

- Consumers who need advice and information can contact Advice Direct Scotland via [energyadvice.scot](https://www.energyadvice.scot) or by calling 0808 196 8660.
- People in vulnerable circumstances can also be referred to the [Extra Help Unit](#) at Citizens Advice Scotland.

Contact: Heatnetworks@consumer.scot

