Energy crisis advice for parishes

On 21st September the Government released the Energy Bill Relief Scheme: help for businesses and other non-domestic customers

We encourage you to read through the full relief scheme (EBRS) for how you can get support this winter.

**The amount your bills will be reduced**

The government will provide a discount on your gas and electricity unit prices. To calculate your discount, the estimated wholesale portion of the unit price you would be paying this winter will be compared to a baseline ‘government supported price’ which is lower than currently expected wholesale prices this winter.

For all non-domestic energy users in Great Britain this government supported price has been set at:

 £211 per megawatt hour (MWh) for electricity

 £75 per MWh for gas

**How it works - Applying the reduction**

Suppliers will apply reductions to the bills of all eligible non-domestic customers.

The government will compensate suppliers for the reduction in wholesale gas and electricity unit prices that they are passing onto non-domestic customers.

The discount applied will be in pence per kilowatt hour (p/kWh). The p/kWh government support for comparable contracts will be the same across suppliers, but the absolute level of individual bills will continue to vary across different contracts and tariffs.

For fixed contracts the discount will reflect the difference between the government supported price and the relevant wholesale price for the day the contract was agreed. The government will publish the wholesale prices we will use for calculating this for each day from 1 April 2022.

For variable, deemed and all other contracts, the discount will reflect the difference between the government supported price and relevant wholesale price, but be subject to a ‘maximum discount’ that will determined at the beginning of the scheme.

Businesses on variable / flexible contracts will need to choose if they move to fixed contracts. This is likely to suit you if you don’t want to be exposed to price variation. You will be contacted by your supplier.

The p/kWh government support for comparable contracts will be the same across suppliers, but the absolute level of individual bills will of course continue to vary.

If the PCC is aware anticipated income is not likely to cover the cost of the rising bills, even with the above cap on prices, talk to your supplier as early as possible – it has to help if you're struggling.

Also, check to ensure your church is paying the reduced VAT rate. [www.gov.uk/vat-charities/what-qualifies-for-relief](http://www.gov.uk/vat-charities/what-qualifies-for-relief)

What qualifies for the reduced rate?

Your charity pays 5% VAT on fuel and power if they’re for:

* charitable non-business activities
* small-scale use (up to 1,000 kilowatt hours of electricity a month or a delivery of 2,300 litres of gas oil)

If less than 60% of the fuel and power is for something that qualifies, you’ll pay the reduced rate of VAT on the qualifying part and the standard rate (20%) on the rest.

Qualifying fuel and power include gases, electricity, oils and solid fuels (such as coal). It does not include vehicle fuel.

What do I do if my place of worship is overpaying VAT for electricity and gas?

Check a recent energy bill. If your church has charitable status and is paying 20% VAT, it is likely that you have been overcharged. It is possible to claim back money from the past few years overpayment. Contact your energy supplier or go to the [government website](https://www.gov.uk/vat-charities/registration) where you can access a VAT declaration form to apply for a refund.

Switching suppliers

Many suppliers are not accepting switches at this time, but if you are investigating and at the point of contract renewal, in line with national and diocesan Net Zero objectives, we would encourage you to explore switching to a 100% green electricity tariff. Ideally the choices would be Good Energy and Ecotricity or at a minimum SSE which may be more affordable. [Green Journey](https://greenjourney.org/churches_and_religious_buildings.html) can also help as they can offer a switching service.

If the parish/PCC has multiple churches or community buildings such as church halls, you may be able to consolidate your bills with a multi-site energy contract.

Other regular bills

The PCC should also consider all other regular outgoings, and where any potential savings could be made, including insurance. The majority of churches are insured with Ecclesiastical, and we are aware many of your policies are due for renewal this year, where PCCs are likely to see an increase in premiums due to the cost rises. Whilst, to help churches Ecclesiastical will cap the premium increase as a result if indexation, they are aware churches may struggle to pay. Therefore, do discuss the options with them as they are keen to help, offering possible solutions to reduce premiums such as adjusting the excess levels on your current policy. PCC’s may also wish to consider switching from 100% to a reduced basis of cover, particularly those that effectively operate as a type of Festival church with limited services and activities. Do consult with your Archdeacon if this is an option being considered. Lastly, like utilities above, consider where your PCC may have responsibility for multiple churches and/or other buildings such as church halls as a group policy is also likely to save funds. You can call Ecclesiastical helpful team on 0345 777 3322.

Energy saving tips for places of worship

Energy efficiency measures can make a difference. Many churches will offer challenges for reducing energy usage. However, some simple measures can reduce the costs.

Churches often require a lot of power to heat. Poor insulation and inefficient heating systems can make it more difficult.

Servicing boilers and pipes regularly have a cost, but it can save money. Serviced boilers are up to 15% more effective.

Insulating ancient buildings can be complex and often very expensive. However, you can take simple steps to improve internal insulation and ventilation such as draft proofing and keeping doors closed. Consider areas of heat loss and simple temporary measures that could be taken to help. Please consult with your church architect for any measures considered, they will also have excellent pragmatic advice to help.

The same goes for lighting. Many places of worship are in near-constant use and use lights for security. Up to 25% of a church's electricity bill is associated with lighting.

Ensure all lighting within the church and churchyard are LED bulbs. Encourage staff and volunteers to switch off lights after use to reduce your energy usage. The PCC may need to decide to switch off temporarily any outside lighting to save costs at this time.

Also consider ways to further reduce energy waste as this can lower bills and have a positive impact on the environment. Asking users of your building to support energy efficiency measures is a good strategy. The first step could be turning off appliances and lights when not in use. Even small measures can make a big difference. For example, only filling a kettle with the required water can reduce energy usage.

Consultant the national [Energy Efficient Measures Guidance](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/energy-efficiency-measures).

## Short term solutions

**Communication**

* Ensure the congregation and the wider community are aware that operating the church building at regular levels is going to be a challenge. Encourage giving and advise in advance any cost saving strategies you are taking. If regular users of the building pay a hire fee, let them know the charge is likely to increase to cover the cost of the rising utilities.

* This may mean simply that the current heating system can not be turned on as regular as before, or even at all. Focus heating the areas within the church that are being used rather than all of the building at the same time.
* If you have been advised by your church architect/surveyor to keep the heating set to a constant temperature, often referred to 'Conservation Heating' (used to maintain the environmental conditions in your church required for the preservation of a historic collection or historic building fabric, such as wall paintings that are sensitive to changes in relative humidity) please do consult with the architect before adjusting settings or switching the heating off.
* Asking everyone to come wrapped up warm to church, with warm clothing and footwear. If able provide blankets for those attending worship and other activities to keep extra warm.

**Alternative temporary heating**

* Should your main church heating system fail during the coming winter months or the PCC considering temporary alternative plug-in options, it is recommended that electric convector or fan-assisted heaters with thermostatic cut-outs (that operate in the event of over-heating) are used.
* Liquid petroleum gas (LPG) heaters give off lots of water vapour which can have an adverse effect on the building and can lead to the onset of rot in woodwork. If they are used, cylinders should be kept to a minimum and preferably changed in the open air in a well-ventilated area away from any source of ignition.
* Electric radiant heaters and paraffin/oil fired heaters should never be used, even as a temporary measure.
* Portable heaters should be sited well clear of woodwork or other combustible materials, and where possible, protected against the possibility of being knocked over or moved accidentally by the fitting of guards.
* Temporary heaters should not be left unattended for long periods or used when the building is unoccupied and should never be moved once they have been switched on.
* It is important to always check with [your insurers](https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/church-cold-weather-advice/) and refer to, and update the churches risk assessment. In particular consider any slip and trip hazards from any additional wires across the floor.
* Another affordable solution which can be readily plugged in are [heated pew cushions](https://www.hrballiance.org.uk/news/roving-reporter/heated-pew-cushions/).
* Consider simple solutions how feet can be elevated from cold floors, whilst sat for any long periods, including additional rugs, but do ensure they have a natural breathable backing, rather than rubber, which will trap moisture and cause damage to the floor.

**Use of candles**

* There may be a desire for more use of candles to save switching on the lights, it’s always important to [revisit risk assessment procedures](https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/safe-use-of-candles/) for safe use.

**Considering alternative spaces**

* The PCC may need to consider moving regular meetings and other activities to alternative public spaces within the local area to save costs, such at the parish hall, local pub, within homes, or other alternative spaces. Also consider a neighboring church within the parish or deanery that perhaps has more suitable facilities such as an enclosed meeting room to keep warmer.

## Looking further ahead

It is predicted that this crisis will be ongoing for some time, therefore it is important to begin considering future heating options and energy saving measures the church can make for the future.

* Start by creating a forward heating plan [using the national guidance and checklist](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/heating#na)
* Consult latest quinquennial report for recommendations and speak to your church architect
* Obtain a free energy audit from [Green Journey](https://greenjourney.org/churches_and_religious_buildings.html) to provide really useful advice on current consumption and possible greener alternatives.
* Submit your energy data with your parish returns via the [Energy Footprint tool](https://www.churchofengland.org/about/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/about-our-environment/energy-footprint-tool)
* Consider the diocesan Environment pages [www.bathandwells.org.uk/faith/environment/](http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/faith/environment/) and further advice and support can be sought from Sara Emmett, Diocesan Climate Justice and Environment Adviser sara.emmett@bathwells.anglican.org

Further resource links

* Heating - [www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/heating](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/heating)
* Renewables - [www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/renewable-energy](http://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/renewable-energy)
* Route map to Net Zero - [www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/net-zero-carbon-routemap](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/net-zero-carbon-routemap)
* Energy Efficiency and Historic Buildings - [historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/energy-efficiency-and-historic-buildings/](https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/energy-efficiency-and-historic-buildings/)
* Eco Church - [ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/](https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/)

Upcoming Church of England webinars

Electric Heating Solutions - From pews and panels to chandeliers and cushions
[Book on the course for Tuesday, 4 October, 12-1pm](https://churchofengland.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=50eac70851c7245ce1ce00c45&id=ca435ea61b&e=031c3688ae).

[Book on the course for Friday, 7 October, 4-5pm.](https://churchofengland.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=50eac70851c7245ce1ce00c45&id=4f6b9d6a8b&e=031c3688ae)

Climate resilience - How to prepare your buildings for more extreme weather
[Book on the course for Thursday, 10 November, 4-5pm.](https://churchofengland.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=50eac70851c7245ce1ce00c45&id=1142d87a10&e=031c3688ae)

How to use your church to protect your community
[Book on the course for Friday, 25 November, 12-1pm](https://churchofengland.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=50eac70851c7245ce1ce00c45&id=d98f1e7541&e=031c3688ae)

[Find dates, details, and past recordings of all the Church of England’s Environmental webinars.](https://churchofengland.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=50eac70851c7245ce1ce00c45&id=68bb2de2ae&e=031c3688ae)

Who to contact for help

Emma Brown, Church Buildings Adviser. Email: emma.brown@bathwells.anglican.org

Sara Emmett, Climate Justice & Environment Officer. Email: sara.emmett@bathwells.anglican.org

Sarah Williams,DAC Assistant Secretary. Email: sarah.williams@harris-harris.co.uk

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