

You've been brilliant thank you ...

“ Electricity prices here for the past two years was like being in an out-of-control tornado, which mentally and emotionally put me in a spin. It wasn't better, like everyone said it would be. Now it is. I couldn't thank you enough for all that you have done. You've been brilliant, thank you”

Nikki, Weston-super-Mare

Nikki Mellon was originally referred to the Centre for Sustainable Energy, a partner in WHAM, back in February 2019 by North Somerset council's private housing team because she had debt on her electricity account with British Gas. Her home was heated by old and inefficient night storage heaters, and her usage was very high. Nikki suffers from mobility issues, depression, anxiety and PTSD and she had not been communicating with British Gas regarding the debt, which had reached an unmanageable £2,230.

In response to CSE's intervention, British Gas put Nikki on a prepayment meter.

Incredibly, though, they installed it in her attic where she could not access it, meaning her son needed to visit every week or so to top up the meter.

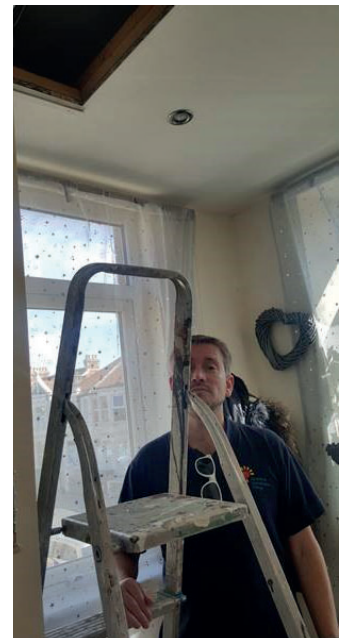
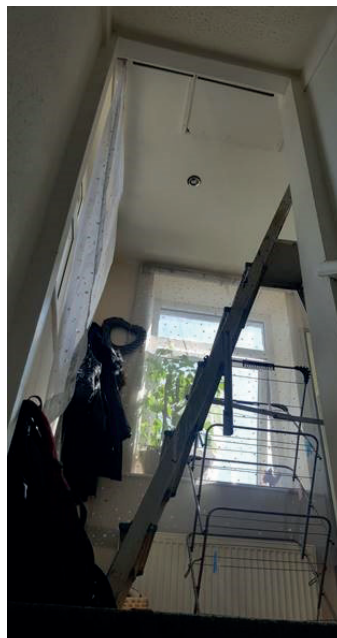
This extraordinary state of affairs came to light when caseworker Mark Tyler visited Nikki (see photos, below). He launched a complaint against British Gas

WHAM caseworker, Joe Pitt, takes up the story ...

Prior to my involvement, Will Cotterill from CSE's energy advice team had helped Nikki apply for the Warm Home Discount worth £140 and was working with her landlord to install gas central heating in the property. A grant from Wales and West Utilities for the new gas connection saved £633.60 on this. The new gas central heating system has full thermostatic controls and is estimated to save Nikki around £160 a year. Once the new gas heating was

Where would you install a prepayment meter that a customer suffering from mobility issues, depression, anxiety and PTSD needed to access every couple of weeks? Somewhere accessible, presumably. Certainly not in a loft space that can only be reached by step ladder on a narrow landing.

Incredibly, though, this is exactly what a British Gas installer did. CSE's Mark Tyler (pictured) was not impressed ...



installed, Will also arranged for the old economy 7 meter to be swapped for a single rate electric meter, saving around £120 annually.

When Nikki's case was referred to WHAM in May 2020, the complaint with British Gas was still pending so I launched an additional complaint with the Ombudsman. I also applied to the British Gas Energy Trust for help with Nikki's electricity debt and to the Wessex Water Restart/ Assist scheme for her water debt which stood at £360.

I'm pleased to say that the Ombudsman upheld our complaint awarded Nikki £150 who also received a written apology from British Gas. The BGET application was also successful and Nikki was awarded £1,600, completely clearing the debt on the electric meter. Nikki's electric meter has now been switched to prepayment mode which she prefers, and will prevent debt accumulating again in future. Our Wessex Water applications were also successful, clearing this debt and saving Nikki £138 annually on water bills going forward. We also switched her gas supplier to Bristol Energy, saving another £63 a year.

Nikki was also signed up to the Priority Services Register with Western Power Distribution, the local operator of the gas and electricity networks.

As Nikki was struggling financially during the COVID-19 lockdown with higher bills, we provided two £28 vouchers for her energy.

During the course of our support, Nikki went through a particularly tough spell and didn't respond to calls and texts. This happens with many clients of the WHAM project but we always ensure that the case is kept open so that when the client is ready to get back in touch we can pick up where we left off.



Joe Pitt

KEY OUTCOMES

How Nikki benefitted from WHAM ...

Issues with meter positioning resolved and a formal apology issued from British Gas, along with a total of £200 in goodwill payments following a complaint to British Gas and interventions from CSE and the Ombudsman.

Gas central heating with controls installed to replace inefficient night storage heaters, using a grant of £633 from Wales and West Utilities for new gas connection. Savings of around £160 on annual bills.

E7 meter swapped for a smart single rate meter which is easier to top up, saving £120 annually.

Signed up to PSR with WPD and energy suppliers.

Warm Home Discount applied for two years running.

Successful application to the British Gas Energy Trust, clearing £1,600 of debt.

Successful application to Wessex Water Restart/ Assist, clearing £360 debt and saving £138 annually.

Provision of £56 in fuel vouchers during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Switched to cheaper gas tariff with Bristol Energy, saving £63 annually.

Behavioural advice given regarding heating controls and appliance usage.



WHAM is funded by Bristol City Council, Bristol Energy and the Warm Homes Fund.

It is delivered by the Centre for Sustainable Energy, Talking Money and We Care Home Improvements, Bristol and North Somerset councils, Citizen's Advice, Bristol Energy Network and AMS Electrical.

