



Rt. Hon. Claire Coutinho MP
Secretary of State for Energy Security & Net Zero
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Cc: Rt Hon Alex Chalk KC MP (Lord Chancellor), Amanda Solloway MP (Minister for Consumer Energy), Angus Brendan MacNeill MP (Chair, Energy Security & Net Zero Committee), Sir Robert Neill MP (Chair, Justice Committee), Anne McLaughlin MP, (Chair, APPG on Prepayment Meters). Jonathan Brearley (Chief Executive, Ofgem), [REDACTED] (Director of Enforcement, Ofgem)

3 November 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

The latest revelations [in the Times](#) on forced prepayment meters (PPMs) should shame the energy industry, regulators and the Government.

At every point in the long running campaign against forced PPMs, we have been fobbed off with reassurances about best practice, voluntary codes and people trying to wash their hands of responsibility.

The reality is that forcing vulnerable people through a court process is problematic enough, but it resulting in a court-sanctioned warrant for an energy firm to break into a home is barbaric.

We appreciate that in the two cases reported by The Times there has been a resolution, in that Scottish Power says it won't now proceed with the warrants.

However, it shouldn't be up to a national newspaper's investigations team to help vulnerable people avoid being forced onto PPMs.

We're concerned that the checks and systems Scottish Power have in place are not fit for purpose. Given the firm has been making progress towards being granted permission from Ofgem to restart forced PPM installations, we believe this calls into question the whole system the regulator has in place.

The court's response to The Times' reporters was also disappointing - they seem to operate under a cloak of secrecy and apparently refuse to confirm what the listing guidance is, where the pilot programmes are taking place and what the rules for magistrates currently are.

The same old magistrates' practices seem to have continued in these new examples: Distant hearings, nodding through batch applications, not checking for vulnerability and a failure to inform customers that they are due to have their case heard.

No one can be confident of getting justice under the current system.

This scandal must stop here.

The [letter](#) you sent to Scottish Power and Ofgem this week is a first step. However, we need you to show further leadership on this issue.

The Government must ban the practice of forced prepayment meters outright through legislation in the House of Commons. Ministers rejected the opportunity to do this during the passage of the Energy Act, but the case for a ban is now even more convincing.

In the meantime, given the doubts around the process, there can be absolutely no way that Ofgem can approve any supplier for a restart of forced prepayment meters this winter. The Government must instruct Ofgem that the current ban - which includes switching of smart meters into PPM mode - must stay in place until at least April 2024.

We would also request that Ofgem now places Scottish Power under heightened monitoring for all aspects of its customer service and for its dealings with vulnerable customers. As a first step, Scottish Power and its subcontractors must be instructed to cancel all warrants it has sought so far and cease any current warrant applications being made.

Of course we share the concerns of energy firms about the levels of household energy debt. This is why there is widespread support for the introduction of a [Help to Repay scheme](#) (which we and others have written to you about previously) and why we also back plans for an [Emergency Energy Tariff](#) this winter.

Your sincerely,

The End Fuel Poverty Coalition

To discuss the issues raised above, please contact the Coalition coordinator, Simon Francis on



The End Fuel Poverty Coalition is a [broad coalition of more than 70 anti-poverty, health, housing and environmental campaigners, charities, local authorities, trade unions and consumer organisations](#). It is also supported by academics, social enterprises and those working on the front line of fighting fuel poverty.

We believe that everybody has the right to a warm, dry home that they can afford to heat and power.

Members of the Coalition include [Action with Communities in Rural England](#), [ACE Research](#), [Advice for Renters](#), [AgeUK](#), [All Birmingham's Children](#), [Austerity Action Group](#), [Association of Green Councillors](#), [Association of Local Energy Officers](#), [Association for Decentralised Energy](#), [Asthma + Lung UK](#), [Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council](#), [Beat the Cold](#), [Brighton & Hove City Council](#), [Bruton Town Council](#), [Camden Federation of Private Tenants](#), [Child Poverty Action Group](#), [Church Poverty Action](#), [Chartered Institute of Environmental Health](#), [Chartered Institute of Housing](#), [Community Action Northumberland](#), [Centre for Sustainable Energy](#), [Climate Action Network West Midlands](#), [Disability Poverty Campaign Group](#), [Disability Rights UK](#), [E3G](#), [EBICO](#), [End Child Poverty Coalition](#), [Energy Saving Trust](#), [Energy Cities](#), [Fair Energy Campaign](#), [Epilepsy Action](#), [Foster Support](#), [Friends of the Earth](#), [Fuel Poverty Action](#), [Fuel Poverty Research Network](#), [Generation Rent](#), [Good Law Project](#), [Greenpeace](#), [Groundwork](#), [Hackney Foodbank](#), [Home Start Oxford](#), [Independent Age](#), [Inner City Life](#), [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), [Lambeth Pensioners Action Group](#), [London Borough of Camden](#), [London Borough of Lewisham](#), [Mayor of London](#), [Moorland Climate Action](#), [National Pensioners Convention](#), [National Union of Students](#) / [Students Organising for Sustainability](#), [NCB](#), [National Energy Action](#), [New Economics Foundation](#), [National Federation of Women's Institutes](#), [Northern Health Services Alliance](#), [Oxford City Council](#), [Positive Money Tower Hamlets](#), [Redcar & Cleveland Council](#), [Repowering London](#), [Retrofit Bruton](#), [Right To Energy Coalition](#), [Ryecroft Community Hub](#), [Save the Children](#), [Scope](#), [Shaping Our Lives](#), [Social Workers Union](#),

[South East London Community Energy](#), [Southwark Group of Tenants Organisations](#), South West London Law Centres, [Stonewater Housing Association](#), [Stop The Squeeze](#), Uplift, [UNISON](#), Warm & Well North Yorkshire, [Warm & Well in Merton](#).

The coordination for the [End Fuel Poverty Coalition](#) is provided by social enterprise [Campaign Collective](#) and the Coalition is also part of the [Warm This Winter](#) campaign. In Scotland we work closely with [Energy Action Scotland](#). In Wales, we work with [Climate Cymru's Warm This Winter](#) activity and in Northern Ireland with the NEA-backed [Fuel Poverty NI coalition](#).