

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 24 APRIL**



## **npower set to launch the nation's first Fuel Bank trial**

**24 April 2015** - Energy supplier npower is to launch a three month trial of the nation's first Fuel Bank in partnership with leading poverty charities The Trussell Trust, National Energy Action and Durham Christian Partnership. The trial will support households most in need of help by giving them funds to pay for gas and electricity alongside emergency food aid.

Placed in existing food banks, npower's Fuel Banks will help households using pre-payment meters, whether they are npower customers or use another energy supplier. People can visit a participating food bank and receive a £49 credit which they can use to top up their gas and electricity meter. This will enable households that have run out of energy to get the power back on within a few hours and keep the lights and heating on for up to two weeks.

The npower Fuel Bank have been launched specifically to address the problem of households who 'self-disconnect' in order to save money. Research conducted by Citizens Advice found that one in every six homes that use a prepayment meter has self-disconnected, meaning up to 1.62 million people go without electricity or gas each year.

The npower Fuel Bank will be piloted in 21 locations in County Durham, Kingston-upon-Thames and Gloucester. If successful, npower will extend the initiative nationwide. The ambition is to support up to 13,000 households in the first year.

### **Matthew Cole, npower's Head of Policy & Obligations, said:**

"Through our longstanding Health through Warmth programme and our partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support, npower has worked hard to help our most vulnerable customers. However, we are keen to do more and this new trial with food banks could be an important breakthrough. It will provide immediate and hassle free support to households where often the choice is between food or warmth."

### **David McAuley, Chief Executive of the Trussell Trust, said:**

"We are pleased to be partnering with npower in creating the nation's first Fuel Bank. In many cases people coming to food banks can be facing financial hardship that leaves them both hungry and in fuel poverty. By providing npower Fuel Bank vouchers at food banks, we can make sure that people who are most vulnerable are not only given three days' food, but can turn on the energy supply to cook it and heat their homes too. The Trussell Trust is working hard to create more and more business partnerships like npower Fuel Banks which help people in crisis."

### **Jenny Saunders, Chief Executive of National Energy Action, said:**

"We often talk about the choice between heating or eating to describe the challenges people of low incomes face in balancing their household budgets. We will be helping some of the most vulnerable in our society to have both food and heat at a time of crisis."

### **Rt Hon Frank Field MP, said:**

"Ask me my response to npower's initiative and it's praise, praise, praise. This praise is also aimed at shaming the other companies to now beat npower's initiative. This is such an important breakthrough in the fight back against hunger. Our cross-party inquiry highlighted in Feeding Britain an unbearable choice - between putting money in the gas meter or food on the table - facing too many families who simply cannot afford the essentials. npower deserves huge credit for recognising and acting on our concerns. This single move could prevent some of our fellow citizens from having to go several days or weeks without buying food."

## Notes to editor

### How the npower Fuel Bank works:

The Fuel Bank pilot has been designed to utilise the existing food bank referral process.

#### Step 1

Individuals who are identified as being in crisis by care professionals, such as Citizens Advice Bureaus, GPs, social workers or police, are issued with a food bank voucher to redeem at their local food bank.

#### Step 2

When the individual goes to the food bank with their voucher, if their household is supplied by npower on a prepayment meter (PPM) for electricity and/or gas, they will receive a top-up voucher. Non-npower PPM customers who are deemed most in need by the Fuel Bank manager (or a senior staff member) will also receive a voucher. As the issuing of a pre-payment top up is mirroring the eligibility criteria of the food banks, as standard customers will be issued vouchers a maximum of three times per crisis. This would be managed via the care professional who completes the referrals.

#### Step 3

npower will provide a unique npower Fuel Bank voucher to the food bank on the same day of request. The food bank will then contact the individual via an agreed means (telephone, text, email or in person) to share this voucher.

#### Step 4

The individual then takes this code to any shop with a PayPoint machine where it can be redeemed against electricity and/or gas using their pre-payment key or card at no cost to the customer. The npower Fuel Bank code can only be used for electricity and gas.

#### Step 5

Once the code has been redeemed, when the individual puts the relevant pre-payment key or card in their meter or meters the money will appear as a credit.

### For further information please contact:

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