

Fuel Banks to be rolled out following successful first year

Foodbank charity The Trussell Trust and npower are today announcing the expansion of the npower Fuel Bank™, following a successful pilot year. npower's initiative gives foodbank users with pre-payment meters vouchers for gas or electricity, so they do not have to choose between 'heating and eating'.

npower has committed at least £2.25m to this initiative until March 2018 and will be opening Fuel Banks in 10 new areas in the first half of 2016.

Launched in April 2015 with The Trussell Trust, National Energy Action (NEA) and Durham Christian Partnership, the npower Fuel Bank has so far been running in four areas: Kingston on Thames, Durham, Gloucestershire and the Wirral. In these four areas, over 7000 vouchers have been issued so far, meaning more than 16,000* adults and children have benefited from the help, regardless of whether they are npower customers or not.

* This is a measure of people helped by fuel banks since the scheme began, but it is not a measure of unique individuals. Some people were helped more than once.

Because the scheme gives people around two weeks' worth of energy, the value of the voucher will fluctuate between the winter and summer months: from April to end October the value will be £30 and this will increase to £49 from 1st November to 31st March.

Before making the decision to extend the scheme, npower commissioned NEA, the UK fuel poverty charity, to undertake an evaluation of the scheme. A survey of a sample of people who had been helped by the Fuel Bank found that many were from households with dependent children, while almost a third said someone in their home suffered from ill health or a condition made worse by the cold. The inability to afford adequate power interrupted ordinary family life which made conditions such as stress and anxiety worse.

*"The Fuel Bank has made a significant impact in the four pilot areas" said Jenny Saunders, Chief Executive of NEA. "The majority of people we spoke to were in a critical situation and had self-disconnected or were close to doing so. The fuel voucher made a real difference to these families. We found it not only enabled reconnection to energy supplies or helped avoid self-disconnection, it also helped families with their wider household budget, relieved stress and anxiety and enabled access to the basics of family life that are often and rightly taken for granted by most. **"*

Today, the first of the new npower Fuel Banks is opening its doors at Brent Foodbank, which helped 1669 people between October 2014 and September 2015. The first client of the Fuel Bank, Marie (name changed), said, *"I know a lot of women, like me, that have got to either pay for gas, electricity, the rent, or food. You don't want to live in darkness, so you just go without heat. Without the voucher, we'd be even worse off."*

The locations for the other new npower Fuel Banks which will be opening over the next few weeks are:

- Kingfisher Foodbank (Castle Bromwich)
- Birmingham (B30 Foodbank)

- Smethwick Foodbank
- Sheffield S6 Foodbank
- Hull Foodbank
- Hastings Foodbank
- G52 Community Group, Glossop (independent foodbank?)
- Glasgow South East Foodbank
- Cardiff Foodbank

David McAuley, Chief Executive of the Trussell Trust said:

“Across the Trussell Trust foodbank network, we are seeing a real need all-year round for help with energy as well as food. In winter, foodbank clients come to us having to choose between going hungry or heating their homes, and in summer, we find some people come to us saying they can’t afford to heat the food parcels we give them. It’s heart-breaking when people in desperate situations try to give back food like pasta and soup simply because they can’t afford to cook it. Combining the distribution of food parcels with npower Fuelbank vouchers will ensure that many thousands of people at foodbanks get the help they need to feed themselves and stay warm. We are very grateful to npower for working with us on this ground breaking project, we know it will have a positive impact on people facing crisis in the UK today.”

Guy Esnouf, npower’s Director of Corporate Responsibility said:

“Our first step was to trial the Fuel Bank in four areas last year. This proved the concept works - getting the right support to the people who need it most. We’re now expanding to ten new areas – including opening Fuel Banks in Wales and Scotland – meaning we can reach thousands more people in crisis.”

Notes to editors

**The Fuel Bank Research can be viewed on the NEA website at: www.nea.org.uk/?p=1523

Areas where Fuel Bank is operational:

	Areas	Number of distribution centres in each area
Current locations	Durham	28
	Gloucester	1
	Kingston	4
	Wirral	15
New locations	Kingfisher	2
	B30	1
	Smethwick	2
	Sheffield	3
	Hull	2
	Hastings	1
	Glossop	1
	Brent	1
	Glasgow SE	3
	Cardiff	7

How the npower Fuel Bank works:

The npower Fuel Bank has been designed to utilise the existing Foodbank referral process developed by The Trussell Trust.

Step 1

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

Step 2

When the individual goes to the Foodbank with their voucher, if their household is on a prepayment meter (PPM) for electricity and/or gas, they will receive a top-up voucher. As standard, customers will be issued a maximum of three vouchers in 6 months, and not receive more than one voucher within 10 days. This is checked by Charis Grants who administer the scheme on npower's behalf prior to the voucher being issued.

Step 3

npower will provide a Fuel Bank voucher to the client via text message or email. If the client doesn't have a phone or email account the voucher will be emailed to the Foodbank within 24 business hours (vouchers are not issued on weekends or bank holidays). If required, the Foodbank will then contact the individual via an agreed means to share the voucher.

Step 4

The client 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 Banks 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.

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