

District heating and customer protection



Your home or business gets its heating and hot water from a district heating network (also known as a heat network or communal heating).

This customer information sheet gives an explanation of district heating. It also provides information on Heat Trust, a new customer protection scheme, and what to do if you have a complaint about your heat supplier.

What is district heating?

On a district heating network, heating and hot water from a local energy centre is delivered to homes and businesses through a network of insulated pipes.

The key difference between district heating and a conventional heating system is that there is no need to have a separate boiler in each home. Repairs and maintenance of the local energy centre are also taken care of by the heat energy supplier.

District heating networks can operate with a range of fuel sources including gas, renewable heat (e.g. biomass) and even waste heat (e.g. from a factory). Using a heat network to heat homes can lower costs and also lower carbon emissions.

Modern district heating networks are fitted with heat interface units (HIU) and heating controls, so that each customer has as much control as they would experience with an individual boiler.

For more information on district heating please visit our website:
www.heattrust.org/index.php/heat-customers

What is Heat Trust and what does Heat Trust do?

Heat Trust is a new customer protection scheme for residential and micro-business customers.

Heat Trust has developed rules that set a common standard in the quality and level of customer service expected from heat energy suppliers. It also provides an independent process for settling complaints between customers and their heat supplier.

The standards of service have been designed to be comparable to those required by electricity and gas suppliers. Areas covered by Heat Trust include: support for vulnerable heat customers and customers that need extra support; procedures for reporting and responding to a fault or emergency; metering and billing, debt management and complaint handling.

How does Heat Trust work?

Heat energy suppliers need to apply to Heat Trust in order to register the district heating networks that they manage.

Heat energy suppliers that become members of Heat Trust make a commitment to follow and abide by the rules and requirements set by Heat Trust. They will be monitored by Heat Trust to ensure they are meeting the Scheme's standards.

Once a heat network has been successfully registered with Heat Trust, customers on that network will benefit from the Scheme's standards.



Illustration courtesy of the Association for Decentralised Energy (ADE)

Which heat networks are registered with Heat Trust?

Heat Trust is a voluntary scheme. To find out which heat networks are registered with Heat Trust, please see the Registered Site section of our website here: www.heattrust.org/index.php/members

What do I do if I have a complaint about my supplier?

If you have a complaint about your supplier, the first step is to contact your supplier and explain your complaint. Contact details for your supplier will be on your bill. Heat Trust has sets rules which require its members to have a clear process to manage complaints. We expect suppliers to resolve complaints within eight weeks.

What if I am not happy with my supplier's response to my complaint?

If you are not happy with your supplier's final offer to resolve your complaint or it has been over eight weeks since you made your complaint, you can ask the Energy Ombudsman to investigate. This service is free to customers.

Heat Trust has put this service in place with Ombudsman Services. They have expertise in dealing with customer complaints and will investigate complaints fairly, by listening to both sides of the story and looking at the facts. They will then decide what action, if any, should be taken.

Please note that Heat Trust itself is not able to investigate complaints or make enquiries on behalf of individuals. Heat Trust set standards that require its members to have a robust complaints process and provide their customers access to the independent Ombudsman service.

For more information, please visit the Heat Trust website:
www.heattrust.org/index.php/heat-customers

Will Heat Trust monitor its members?

Yes, we will. We require heat suppliers that have registered heat networks with Heat Trust to submit reports on performance twice a year. Heat Trust will also receive feedback from the Energy Ombudsman.

We require each heat network that is registered with Heat Trust to undergo an independent audit every five years. Heat Trust can order an audit to take place earlier if reporting shows a significant number of complaints over the previous year, or if the Scheme Administrator feels an audit would help improve the service to customers.

Heat Cost Calculator

Heat Trust has developed a Heat Cost Calculator to provide customers living on district heat networks an indication of what it would cost to heat a similar sized property using an individual gas boiler. The Heat Cost Calculator is for information purposes only.

It is most applicable to new build properties that have a heat meter. The results are indicative only and will not provide a like-for-like comparison to your particular situation.

To access the Heat Cost Calculator, please visit the Heat Trust website:
<http://www.heattrust.org/index.php/heat-cost-calculator>

