

## Get Ready For Winter!

### Is your organisation ready for winter?

This year everyone across Scotland is being encouraged to get ready for winter.

Getting ready for winter is something we all need to do – it takes only a few simple steps.

It's time to start thinking about how you could be affected by severe weather, and what you need to do now to be better prepared.

Whether it's at home, in



### Be Prepared For Gales

**Very strong winds have the potential to bring down trees, power lines and signs, and can turn unsecured objects into dangerous projectiles.** Prior to

anticipated storms, secure loose objects such as garden furniture. Securely fasten all windows and doors. Park vehicles in a garage if



possible or park clear of trees and buildings. Make sure that chimneys, satellite dishes and tv aerials are structurally sound.



your community and neighbourhood, or behind the wheel, we all need to consider how we can get ready for winter.

By thinking about how we can all get ready for winter, we can help Scotland be better prepared.

A few years ago the severe weather caught many people out. How prepared are you should

it happen again this winter?

From a voluntary sector perspective this is a good time to think about your responsibilities as an employer, your personal safety, and your duties to vulnerable clients.

If you would like a copy of our Business Continuity Template please contact Lesley at [lesley.kelly@mvacvs.org.uk](mailto:lesley.kelly@mvacvs.org.uk)

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**KEEP THIS NEWSLETTER SOMEWHERE SAFE FOR REFERENCE...WHY DON'T YOU EMAIL IT TO YOUR HOME ADDRESS IN CASE YOU DON'T MAKE IT INTO THE OFFICE?**  
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If you are caught outside during high winds, take cover next to a building or under a secure shelter. Stand clear of roadways or train tracks, as a gust may blow you into the path of an oncoming vehicle. Use handrails where available, and avoid elevated areas such as roofs.

Watch for flying debris. Tree limbs may break and street signs may come loose during strong winds.

In the event of a downed power line:

· Report downed lines to the electricity company

and the police

- Avoid anything that may be touching downed lines, including vehicles or tree branches
- If a line falls on your car, stay inside the vehicle. Take care not to touch any part of the metal frame of your vehicle. Honk your horn, roll down the window and warn anyone who may approach of the danger. Ask someone to call the police. Do not exit the car until help arrives, unless it catches fire. To exit, open the door, but do not step out. Jump, without touching any of the metal portions of the car's exterior, to safe ground and get quickly away.

## Drive Safely This Winter

Lots of voluntary sector staff in Midlothian commute to work, or have to drive as part of their job. There are lots of simple things we can all do to make journeys safer and less stressful during really bad weather. Taking a bit of time to think now and plan ahead for the weather could make life much easier. **Ready Scotland** give the following advice about travelling...



### Before Your Journey

It can really help to plan your journey in bad weather. Before travelling you should:

- check the weather forecast and road conditions
- think if you really need to travel right now. Could you wait until the weather improves?
- think about alternative routes and other modes of transport
- allow extra time for your journey
- make sure your vehicle's ready for a journey in poor weather
- consider fitting winter tyres or snow socks to your vehicle
- carry an emergency kit
- consider whether you need to change your driving style to suit the conditions
- tell someone at your destination what time you expect to arrive
- visit the Traffic Scotland website to identify any problems on trunk roads [www.trafficscotland.org](http://www.trafficscotland.org) or call the Traffic Customer Care Line on 0800 028 1414

### Some Essentials to Carry in Your Car

Here are some simple things you should keep in your car, in case the weather turns nasty:

- a blanket
- warm winter clothing (including boots)
- ice scraper and de-icer
- battery jump leads
- map for any unplanned diversions
- a first-aid kit
- a torch and spare batteries
- a mobile phone and charger
- a shovel for snow
- food and drink that will last (and a warm drink in a flask before each journey)



MVA also produce a Transport e-briefing which can be requested from [margaret.nisbet@mvacvs.org.uk](mailto:margaret.nisbet@mvacvs.org.uk) or downloaded from our website <http://www.mvacvs.org> this contains more information that might be of use for preparation for severe weather, as well as more general driving and other transport information.

### Before You Drive

It is important to check that your vehicle is well maintained and serviced. You should:

- make sure the battery's reliable (and replace if it's not)
- check your tyres have plenty of tread depth and are at the correct pressure
- keep your lights clean and check the bulbs
- keep your windscreen clean (dirty windows and mirrors can make it hard to see in low winter sun).
- replace worn wiper blades
- add anti-freeze to the radiator and winter additive to the windscreen washer bottles
- before driving off, make sure your windows, lights and mirrors are clear of mist, ice and snow (inside and out)

### During Your Journey

Be aware of changing road and weather conditions, even if it's a road you use regularly. When the weather's really bad, you may need to change the way you drive. You should:

- reduce speed in bad weather
- increase stopping distances
- avoid sudden acceleration and braking
- use dipped headlights in poor conditions
- take breaks every two or three hours
- do not pass closed snow gates
- listen to radio travel bulletins
- check the information on roadside message boards

### Driving Through Ice and Snow

- your stopping distance increases ten times when driving in snow and ice
- select second gear when pulling away, easing your foot off the clutch gently to avoid wheel-spin
- it's not always obvious that the road's icy – look for clues like ice on the pavement or on your windscreen
- don't brake too hard – it'll just lock up your wheels and make you skid further
- clear any snow on the roof of the vehicle before you drive off, as it can slip down over the windscreen and obscure your view
- look out for winter service vehicles spreading salt or using snow ploughs

## Midlothian Roads

Midlothian Council, as part of its Winter Service Policy and Operational Plan has agreed the following Policy Service Standards:

1. Keep agreed priority routes and main bus routes free from snow and ice as far as reasonably practicable.
2. Clear agreed road and footway 'Access Routes' to all schools and education establishments within Midlothian during periods of snow.
3. Support facilities management staff within school grounds during periods of prolonged snow conditions, as required and as resources are available.
4. Support social / care centres in clearing pedestrian access routes in and around facilities.
5. Maintain waste collection services as far as possible, set up local collection points when and if conditions allow.
6. Treat NHS facilities within Midlothian as part of the priority route hierarchy and provide hand crews to clear footways and pedestrian access areas.
7. Support local community groups by providing bulk bags of salt / grit at pre-agreed locations during periods of prolonged snow conditions.



The Council also publishes some useful documents including:

- Midlothian Priority Gritting Routes
- Winter parking restrictions

All these documents are available at:

[http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/downloads/1291/gritting\\_and\\_snow\\_clearance](http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/downloads/1291/gritting_and_snow_clearance)

**IMPORTANT COUNCIL  
PHONE NUMBERS**

Check the Council's  
website  
[www.midlothian.gov.uk](http://www.midlothian.gov.uk)  
or call their contact  
centre on 0131 663 7211.

In a social work  
emergency you can call  
**0800 731 6969 (out of  
normal office hours).**

## Winter Information and Safety Tips



- \* In bad weather, Midlothian Council clears priority routes first. Details of these can be found on our website at [www.midlothian.gov.uk/gritting](http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/gritting).
- \* If possible, clear snow from paths and pavements outside your home and those of elderly and vulnerable neighbours.
- \* Always wear suitable clothing and footwear outdoors.
- \* If you must abandon your car, try to leave it where it will not hinder Council staff from removing snow.
- \* Heed police warnings not to travel. Always carry an emergency kit in your car when driving.
- \* Please check up on anyone who might be at risk in severe weather. During the festive period when offices are closed, the emergency social work service can be contacted on 0800 731 6969.

**NB: Check the Midlothian Council website for up-to-date information on [www.midlothian.gov.uk](http://www.midlothian.gov.uk). You can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter. For general winter service enquiries call us on 0131 270 5730.**



## Winter-Proof Your Office

Some things you might want to think about, particularly if your office is closing over the winter break...

- Follow Scottish Water's advice on protecting your pipes.
- Know where your stop valve is and how to turn off your water.
- If cold weather is forecast, and during a cold snap, keep your heating on at a low temperature to help prevent pipes from freezing.
- Know how to turn off your electricity supply at the mains.
- Making your premises energy-efficient will make it cheaper and quicker to heat during cold weather.
- Check the terms of your insurance policies, and find out what cover you have for risks such as flood or storm damage, or for the costs of temporary accommodation if your premises are not habitable.
- Make sure you will be able to clear your paths and driveway if severe weather strikes. It's a good idea to keep a shovel (specially designed snow shovels are particularly good), and some salt or grit at your premises, and find out where your nearest local authority public

grit bin is.

- A non-mains powered landline telephone will help you stay in touch during any disruptions to your power supply.

### Dealing with common winter damage to your office

- If your pipes freeze, turn off the stop valve immediately, open all cold taps to drain the system, but don't turn on hot taps - your hot water cylinder may collapse if the pipes leading to it are frozen. Call a licensed plumber if you are in any doubt about what to do. More advice on burst and frozen pipes is available from the Scottish Water website.
- Never attempt to thaw out frozen pipes by switching on your immersion heater or central heating boiler. Instead, check for leaking joints or bursts in the pipes. Then gently heat any frozen sections with a hairdryer or a heated cloth wrapped around the pipe. Never apply a direct flame.
- Be aware that snow and ice could fall from roofs suddenly. Be prepared and predict where it might fall and don't leave your car, bikes or garden furniture in its path. Contact your insurer if snow or ice has caused damage to the fabric of your property.

**Protect your pipes**  
Be prepared this winter  
heat, insulate and protect your home

[www.scottishwater.co.uk/winter](http://www.scottishwater.co.uk/winter)  
 Customer Helpline: 0845 601 8855  
[www.facebook.com/scottishwater](https://www.facebook.com/scottishwater)  
[twitter.com/scottishwater](https://twitter.com/scottishwater)

Download a QR reader to scan the code on your smart phone for more information.

**Scottish Water**  
Always working together

- If you need to evacuate (and if it's safe and time permits) turn off the water and electricity, grab your emergency kit, and secure your premises.

More information is available from:

[www.scottishwater.co.uk/winter](http://www.scottishwater.co.uk/winter)  
 Customer Helpline: **0845 601 8855**  
[www.facebook.com/scottishwater](https://www.facebook.com/scottishwater)  
[twitter.com @scottishwater](https://twitter.com/scottishwater)

## Loss of Utilities



Power cuts and the loss of other utilities including gas, water and telephones can happen during the winter - just when we need these services the most.

While utility companies in Scotland have

well-tested plans in place to deal with all kinds of events, there are steps you can take now that will help you cope with any loss of utilities in future.

Keep mobile phones and lap top computers fully charged, so you will have use of battery power for a short time at least if there is a power cut. Certain types of mobile phone allow you to access the internet and other services, which will help you to stay informed.

Make a list of all the telephone numbers you might need, and keep them handy.

Here are a few to get you started:

**SP Energy Networks (to report power loss)**  
0800 092 9290 from a landline or  
0330 1010 222 from a mobile

**National Gas Emergency Service (if you smell gas)** 0800 111 999

**Scottish Gas** 0800 048 0202

**Scottish Power** 0845 272 7999

**Scottish Hydro Electric** 0800 300 999

**Scottish Water** 0345 601 88 55



## What Do Employers Need to Know About Bad Weather?

**A couple of years ago Law at Work provided this very useful article about employers' rights and responsibilities....**

In recent years arctic conditions have caused many travel and broken down boiler related nightmares, but for employers and HR staff the snow and ice also bring additional problems when deciding how to cope if the majority of their workforce cannot make it into work or if they are forced to close the workplace.

Employers should be aware that they are under no obligation to pay employees in a situation where they are unable to get into work due to snow, unless the employee's contract specifically provides for payment in such circumstances. It is important that employers should consider any means that they can to accommodate such employees, for example by letting them work from home, providing alternative means of transport or allowing them to work on different days.

If there are no such options available the employer should notify employees as soon as possible that they will not receive pay, will receive pay, or if they will

be paid on a discretionary basis. They may want to inform the employee that they can take annual leave if they wish but the employer cannot insist on the employee doing this.

There will be some situations where an employer is forced to close their business. Again, some employees may be able to work from home, in which case the employer will be eligible to pay them. If employees are unable to work when the employer closes the business, then the employer should pay them for this period unless the employee's contract provides for



a period of unpaid lay off or the employees have agreed that there will be a period of unpaid lay off. In a situation where there is a contractual clause allowing for unpaid lay off, the employee may still be entitled to a guarantee payment, which has a maximum level of £25.00 per day.

A key consideration for employers in these

circumstances is communication.

Employees and staff should be updated as to whether they will receive pay or whether the workplace is to be closed. The last thing an employer wants is for a member of staff to travel all the way to work to find out that the business has been closed for the day. Employers should also ensure that the business premises are salted and cleared of snow.

The TUC have stated that the "best practice is simply to pay as normal those staff who cannot make it in." However, this is not necessarily a realistic approach for two reasons: firstly, employers will be unable to run their business and make a profit without their staff and, secondly, it is extremely unfair for those members of staff who make an effort to endure the extreme weather and make their way to work, to find that those who do not are paid anyway.

So communicate, decide early and don't feel that you have to act like Santa Claus!

Law At Work is a support organisation, specialising in helping clients identify, manage, reduce, and eliminate risk to their businesses in employment law, human resources, and health & safety.

[www.lawatwork.co.uk](http://www.lawatwork.co.uk)

## How Cold is Too Cold?

**What is the minimum/maximum temperature in the workplace?**

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 lay down particular requirements for most aspects of the working environment. Regulation 7 deals specifically with the temperature in indoor workplaces and states that: 'During working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable.' However, the application of the regulation depends on the nature of the workplace, such as a bakery, a cold store, an office, a warehouse.

The associated ACOP (Workplace health, safety and welfare. Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. Approved Code of Practice) goes on to explain:

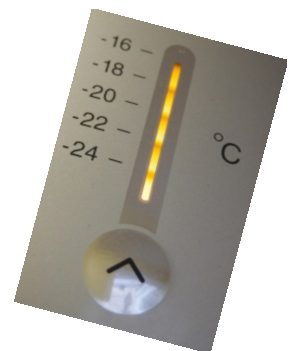
The temperature in workrooms should provide reasonable comfort without the need for special clothing. Where such a temperature is impractical because of hot or cold processes, all reasonable steps should be taken to achieve a temperature which is as close as possible to comfortable. 'Workroom' means a room where people normally work for more than short periods.

The temperature in workrooms should

normally be at least 16 degrees Celsius unless much of the work involves severe physical effort in which case the temperature should be at least 13 degrees Celsius. These temperatures may not, however, ensure reasonable comfort, depending on other factors such as air movement and relative humidity.

This text was supplied by the National Health & Safety Company

[www.nationalhealthandsafetycompany.com](http://www.nationalhealthandsafetycompany.com)



## Supporting Vulnerable Clients

The MET office notes that severe cold weather can be dangerous for vulnerable groups such as older people and those with serious illnesses. It's important for people to look after their health as the winter months can mean:

- an increase in heart attacks and stroke - accounting for 40 per cent of excess winter deaths;
- pressure on GPs - GP visits for respiratory illnesses increase by up to 19 per cent for every 1 °C drop below 5 °C of the mean temperature;
- more pressure on the NHS - in 2009/10, the cost of emergency admissions due to falls on snow and ice was estimated at £42million; and
- it is estimated that over £850 million is spent by the NHS each year as a result of the impact of cold housing on people's health.

### Understanding the effects of cold weather

Cold, especially extreme cold, can be dangerous for everyone. Even in a normal winter, there are tens of thousands of deaths caused by the cold.

The NHS provide the following guidelines to their employees about supporting vulnerable clients, many of which are useful for voluntary sector staff.

Extremely cold weather can cause mild hypothermia, which increases the risks of some illnesses – including heart attacks, strokes and respiratory disease – and the likelihood of falls.

### Who is at risk?

Some people are more at risk of becoming ill during cold weather. A number of factors can determine who is more vulnerable during winter:

- Older age – especially people who are over 75 years old.
- Young age – particularly children with respiratory problems, such as asthma.
- Chronic and severe illness – including heart conditions, respiratory insufficiency, asthma and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).
- Fuel poverty – over 75% of those who cannot afford to adequately heat their homes are single adult households.
- Inability to adapt behaviour to keep warm – this affects people with disabilities, babies and the very young.
- Environment and overexposure – such as homelessness, or living in a cold, damp home with poor or inadequate heating and insulation.

### Planning ahead

By planning ahead, health and social care providers can offer care and support for people at risk in the event of a cold snap. All high-risk individuals who live alone are likely to need daily contact with care workers, volunteers or informal carers. Older people, especially older women, people with chronic or serious illness or mobility problems, or those living in hard-to-heat accommodation, may need extra care and support.

Cold snaps can take place with little warning, with illness and death occurring within the first couple of days. In fact, it is possible to predict when excess deaths occur after a cold snap: deaths caused by heart attack happen two days later; deaths caused by stroke happen five days later; and deaths caused by respiratory disease happen 12 days later. So it is best to be prepared before cold temperatures are forecast – ideally by the beginning of November. Use care plans to help you to assess which individuals are at risk, and identify what extra help they might need.

### Before a cold snap...

If you are treating, visiting, supporting or caring for someone in their own home, take these steps before the weather turns cold. Where possible, involve their family and any informal carers.

#### Top tips – heating in the home

Poor heating is a key factor in many excess winter deaths. People living in cold homes are at 20% greater risk of excess winter death than those living in warm homes.

Ask whether the home is properly insulated: lofts should have at least 10 inches of insulation, and wall cavities should be insulated too. There are grants available to help make homes more energy efficient – see [Changeworks](#) article opposite.

Make sure the thermostat is set so that the main rooms are at 21°C during the day and bedrooms are at 18°C at night. See whether they have fitted draught-proofing to seal any gaps around windows and doors.

#### Top tips – health and benefits

- Check whether the person needs a benefit entitlement check. If they are eligible for additional benefits and credits, they could see an increase in their annual income of over £1,400.
- Make sure they have had a seasonal flu jab.
- Advise giving up smoking – this would improve circulation and reduce the chance of a heart attack.

## During a Cold Snap...

There are a number of actions that people can take to keep themselves warm during winter.

### Top Tips – Keeping Warm

- Advise them to close curtains and shut doors to keep heat in the rooms used the most.
- Recommend using hot water bottles or electric blankets (but never both together) if the bedroom is cold at night.
- Encourage them to eat well – food is a vital source of warmth, so they should eat regular hot meals and drinks throughout the day.
- Encourage them to keep moving if possible – it is good for health and improves circulation.

### Top Tips – for Health and Social Care Providers

- Stay in regular contact throughout the cold snap.
- Try to arrange for someone to visit at least once a day.

## Midlothian Council Support for Vulnerable Individuals

Once again, the emphasis this year is on Midlothian Council working with communities in severe weather.

Councillor Bob Constable, said: “Five years ago when the snow was particularly bad our staff continued to provide an often exceptional service during very difficult conditions.

“For example, many were walking far distances so elderly clients could get the help they needed at home.

“Meanwhile, the roads team was committed to doing its bit by keeping the county’s main roads open.”

Cllr Constable said he was confident all the necessary measures are in place to cope whatever the weather throws at us.

As a priority the council clear main roads and pavements such as routes to schools and hospitals, before tackling, for example, roads to industrial estates. It is only then that gritting teams can get down residential streets. The council has stockpiled more than 5,000 tons of grit to keep Midlothian moving this year.

Cllr Constable added: “But we need residents help too.”

They simply can’t get down all residential streets quickly in severe weather and rely on householders to, if possible, keep roads and pavements outside their home free of snow and ice.

“Most residents do a sterling job and we can’t thank them enough but this year, if there’s a neighbour who might need help then why not offer some? Of course everyone should take the necessary precautions and not let anyone in your house you don’t know but there’s still plenty we can all do to help this winter. Even just having a chat and checking an elderly neighbour are okay can make a real difference if they’ve been stuck indoors feeling lonely.”

Midlothian council also has robust procedures in place to look after vulnerable people. By working closely with agencies including NHS Lothian, the voluntary sector and the emergency services they make sure those in greatest need are cared for.

For example, working with the voluntary sector, the council can organise practical help and support, including shopping and collecting prescriptions, for many elderly people living alone.

It also makes sure places like care homes get the necessary access they need to goods and services and it liaises with the NHS to support patients being discharged from hospitals who need extra support.

For more information on what the council does in severe weather visit [www.midlothian.gov.uk/severe-weather](http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/severe-weather)

## Stop norovirus spreading in your workplace this winter

Norovirus, sometimes known as the ‘winter vomiting bug’, is the most common stomach bug in the UK, affecting people of all ages. It is highly contagious and is transmitted by contact with contaminated surfaces, an infected person, or consumption of contaminated food or water. The symptoms of norovirus are very distinctive – people often report a sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea.

Good hand hygiene is important to stop the spread of the virus. People are advised to:

- Wash their hands thoroughly using soap and water and drying them after using the toilet, before preparing food & eating
- Not rely on alcohol gels as these do not kill the virus

An infection with norovirus is self-limiting and most people will make a full recovery in 1-2 days. It is important to keep hydrated – especially children and the elderly. Do not visit either A&E or GPs with symptoms as this may spread the virus.

If you have any questions about norovirus, call the NHS inform helpline free on 0800 22 44 88 (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88). The helpline is open every day 8 am to 10 pm and also provides an interpreting service. Visit [www.nhsinform.co.uk/norovirus](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/norovirus)

## Welfare Reform

The recent welfare reform changes have impacted on people on low income's ability to survive a cold spell. With so many households now having pre-paid meters fitted in their homes, some families and individuals could be left without access to electric or gas with no means of safely heating their homes or of cooking hot food during the winter.

### What can local organisations do?

- Be aware of the changes brought about by welfare reform, such as the bedroom tax, that impact on the resilience of people on low incomes.
- Work with clients to get them to think how they would cope if, for example, it snowed and the buses weren't running. How would they access food and fuel?
- Be aware of the sources of support for people on low incomes. See the MFIN website at [www.mfin.org.uk](http://www.mfin.org.uk) for more information.
- Consider hosting a (non-perishable) food parcel or two. Midlothian Food Bank is looking to have food parcels hosted by organisations across Midlothian, so that people can access support in their local communities – essential if it snows! Contact Janice Burns, the Food Bank Manager at [janiceburns@midlothian.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:janiceburns@midlothian.foodbank.org.uk) if you can help.



## CHANGEWORCS

Energy prices keep rising and many people will struggle this winter living in a cold home or will get into fuel debt.

There is help out there to support people who are struggling to keep their home warm: to identify if someone needs help **ask them these four key questions:**

- Is your home cold?
- Is your home damp?
- Is your home draughty?
- Are you concerned about affording to heat your home?

**If the answer is 'yes' to any of these, what next? Support is available through:**

1) The Scottish Government's Warmer Homes Scotland. Call Home Energy Scotland on 0808 808 2282 for more information.

## Cold Weather Payments

People on low incomes may get a Cold Weather Payment if they're getting certain benefits. Payments are made when the local temperature is either recorded as, or forecast to be, an average of zero degrees Celsius or below over 7 consecutive days. They will get a payment of £25 for each 7 day period of very cold weather between 1 November and 31 March.

<https://www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment>

### Disconnection and Self-disconnection: Key facts

- Some suppliers may start to take action to disconnect clients with arrears as early as ten working days from the date on their bill.
- Fuel suppliers can't cut clients off without sending a disconnection notice first.
- In practice, it's unlikely clients would be disconnected, as long as they can pay for their fuel and agree to pay something off towards the arrears. If clients do get a disconnection notice, contact the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on **0845 404 0506**.
- If clients can't afford to pay off the arrears in this way and want to keep their gas or electricity supply, they may have to accept the instalment of a prepayment meter. A prepayment meter will allow them to pay a fixed amount off their arrears at the same time as paying for the fuel they're currently using.
- Some groups of customers may have extra protection from being disconnected: people of pensionable age; people who have long-term ill-health; disabled people; people with severe financial problems.
- Beware also of self-disconnection – clients opting not to turn their heating on as they feel they can't afford it. Link them into the sources of support outlined below.

## Keeping Affordably Warm This Winter

2) **Changeworks' Affordable Warmth Team** provide outreach support to people who struggle with heating costs, gas or electricity debt, or with staying warm, dry and comfortable in their home. We help people get the most out of their heating and hot water, resolve fuel billing problems, negotiate a better tariff with suppliers, access energy efficiency grants and give advice on choosing a suitable gas/electricity tariff. We support people living in Midlothian, Edinburgh and East Lothian, and can visit people at home.

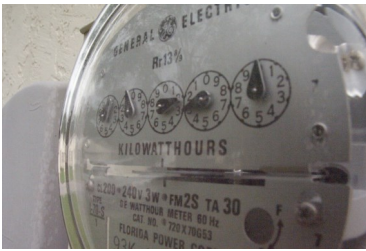
If you would like to contact one of our energy advisors:

email [warmth@changeworks.org.uk](mailto:warmth@changeworks.org.uk)

Or call 0808 808 2282 and ask for the Affordable Warmth Team. The service is free to use.



## Hardship



Winter can be a particularly difficult time for people on benefits or low incomes - with many having to sometimes choose between buying food for their children; putting money in their gas and electric meters or paying their rent.

Due to changes in the welfare system, some vulnerable individuals and families with young children are falling through gaps in welfare provision. As a result some are being left without enough money to cover their day to day essential living costs such as food; cleaning and hygiene products and electricity or gas to cook with or heat their home.

For example, draconian benefits sanctions are now being imposed on Job Seekers who fail to meet stiff new requirements for claiming benefits, with their total allowance being stopped for a minimum period of four weeks. However if it's the second or third time they have failed to meet all the stringent new requirements, their money will be stopped for thirteen weeks.

If any of your service users are struggling with their benefits or need urgent help due to financial hardship you can contact the Welfare Rights Service Midlothian Council who can provide details about what help is available locally (e.g. food banks; Crisis Grants; Welfare Advice drop-ins etc.) and can provide signposting information.

**Contact:** Midlothian Council Welfare Rights Service on 0131 270 8922

### Scottish Welfare Fund

#### (a) Crisis Grants

As from April 2013 Crisis Loans for living expenses which were previously available from the Social Fund, have been replaced by Crisis Grants which in Scotland are managed by local authorities on behalf of the Scottish Government, through a new scheme called the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF). Crisis Grants provide a safety net in the event of a disaster or emergency for people who are usually in receipt of or eligible for income-based benefits such as Universal Credit, Job Seekers Allowance, Employment Support Allowance or Income Support, although it is not essential for applicants to be claiming benefits if they meet the other criteria.

Someone can apply for a crisis grant if they have no money and need help to cover immediate essential daily living costs such as food, non-food household items like washing powder, toiletries etc., or gas and electric if they have a pre-payment meter. Crisis Grants for food are normally paid in the form of vouchers which can only be redeemed in exchange for food at certain local food stores. Up to a maximum of three crisis grants may be awarded to an individual within any 12 month period, although if they have a partner, both of them may be eligible for up to three crisis grants each. A crisis grant is normally awarded to cover essential daily living costs until the next benefit payment is expected, but if there is a further delay in payments it may be possible to get a crisis grant extended.

**Applications for crisis grants** can be submitted by phone by calling **0131 270 5600**. Midlothian council aim to process applications for Crisis grants within two working days and the person applying will receive a phone call to notify them of the decision and if successful they will be able to collect their grant from council offices in Dalkeith or Penicuik. As from the 1st April 2014 people who are currently on a benefit "Sanction" will be treated the same as any other applicant and if they meet the criteria they can be awarded a grant.

#### (b) Community Care Grants

The SWF also manages community care grants which help people to leave care and live on their own, or to continue living in their own home. For instance by providing furniture and essential household items like a cooker for someone moving into their own home after a period of living in a hospital, care home, hostel or prison setting. In certain circumstances a Community Care Grant can provide money for clothing, for instance, to someone leaving prison or fleeing domestic violence. Midlothian Council Aim to process applications for Community Care Grants within 15 working days.

Crisis and Community Care grants **do not have to be repaid**.

**To find out more or to apply contact:**

**Midlothian Scottish Welfare Fund: 0131 270 5600**

## COMMUNICATION

### How Will We Communicate if it Snows?

If there is another episode of severe weather the Council will set up daily Emergency Planning meetings to coordinate the Midlothian response. MVA will attend these meetings on behalf of the voluntary sector, and feed key information out to the sector through our e-mail distribution list. We can also raise issues of concern to the voluntary sector at the meeting. In addition to e-mails we will keep our Facebook site updated. Please contact us if you think we may not have an up-to-date e-mail address for your key staff member(s).



### Social Media

#### Midlothian Council:

Website: <http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/midgov>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/MidlothianCouncil>

#### Midlothian Voluntary Action

Website: <http://www.mvacvs.org.uk/>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/MVACommunity>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/MidlothianVoluntaryAction>

#### Lothian Region Transport

Website: <http://lothianbuses.com/>

Twitter: [http://twitter.com/#!/ON\\_LOTHIANBUSES](http://twitter.com/#!/ON_LOTHIANBUSES)

**ON LOTHIANBUSES**

(a good site to check if you have a Smartphone and want to know if the bus you are waiting on has got stuck in snow!)

#### First Bus

Website: <http://www.firstbus.co.uk/>

#### Other Essential Contacts

For all other essential contact details see the Ready Scotland website:

<http://www.readyscotland.org/>

### Remember: Protect Your Data!

If you have staff working from home using personal computers or laptops during severe weather you must still comply with your data protection responsibilities. **DO NOT HOLD PERSONAL DATA ABOUT STAFF OR CLIENTS ON UNENCRYPTED LAPTOPS OR COMPUTERS.** If you need more information about keeping electronic data secure contact Lesley at [lesley.kelly@mvacvs.org.uk](mailto:lesley.kelly@mvacvs.org.uk)

### READY SCOTLAND

The Scottish Government's 'Ready Scotland' website provides a wide range of information on emergencies and how to prepare for them. The site is available at: <http://www.readyscotland.org>

