

User Guide - Energy Choices Tool (Jan 2025)

Introduction

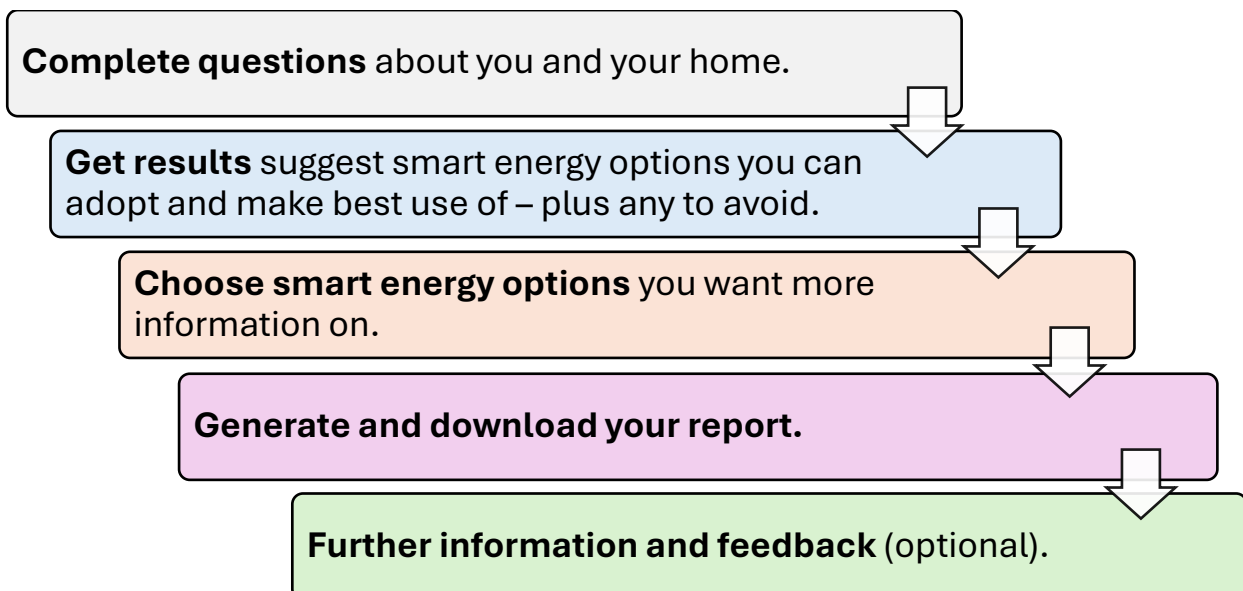
The Energy Choices Tool gives you personalised advice on smart and low-carbon energy options that work for you. It has been developed by independent charity, the Centre for Sustainable Energy in partnership with Distribution Network Operators (regional energy network companies that manage electricity supply).

Part of the Centre for Sustainable Energy's mission is for everyone – regardless of income or circumstances – to be able to benefit from the transition to low carbon energy. Too often smart products and services are aimed at those who can afford to invest in them, or are comfortable with digital technology, or who can be flexible in when they use electricity.

But not everyone has those advantages. Some people, for example, don't use a smart phone or have poor internet connection. Others can't shift the times they use energy, for example because they need to cook for the kids at peak times or because they depend on medical equipment.

But there will be some smart energy products or services that can cut bills or improve comfort and convenience. The Energy Choices Tool will help identify them.

What's involved?



You can revisit the Energy Choices Tool and edit your question answers, for example if you move home or take up a smart energy option.

What the Energy Choices Tool doesn't do

The Energy Choices Tool doesn't recommend specific brands, products or services. It contains **types** of smart energy options ('smart plugs') rather than specific products. You need to thoroughly check all details before purchasing or signing up to any new product, service or tariff to ensure that it meets your needs and circumstances.

Using the Energy Choices Tool

In the top bar there are resources to aid your use of the Energy Choices Tool.

Advice pages

We'd suggest looking at **Where do I start with smart energy options?** first, on the Advice Pages. This outlines what steps to take first as you think about your home and energy use.

The Advice Pages then has guidance on key topics and for specific groups around smart energy options. There is also a Grants guide.

Topics	People	Money
• Energy monitoring • Smart meters • Understanding energy tariffs • Flexibility services • Making the most of renewable energy and low carbon technologies	• Renters • Disabled people, those with chronic illness and carers • Those less confident with digital skills	• Grants guide

Resources

- Glossary – explains key terms e.g. different types of tariff and batteries
- Smart energy FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) - about smart technologies broadly
- Further resources – like fact sheets and where to find trusted installers
- Speak to an advisor – contact details for energy advice organisations

Change visual settings

To improve your experience of using the Energy Choices Tool, you can change the font size, site theme colour, background colour or switch to greyscale mode via Settings.



Assessing your capacity to shift electricity use

Flexibility services offered by your energy supplier reward you for shifting when you use electricity. Usually this involves using less electricity in of peak time (4-9pm) when the UK uses most electricity. These services help to maximise use of renewable energy when it is available and to keep the lights on if demand is greater than supply on the National Grid.

Also, time of use tariffs have different tariff rates over a 24-hour period.



UK electricity demand over 24 hours¹

If you know how much electricity your household uses and when you use it, you may benefit from these smart energy options.

To assess your household's capacity to shift electricity use, think about which appliances with high electricity consumption you could use at a different time. These include:

- Electric power shower
- Washing machine and tumble drier
- Electric oven, kettle, kitchen appliances that heat
- Electric heating
- Immersion heater

If you can move the time of laundry, cooking, electric space or water heating regularly to not occur 4-9pm, you might benefit from a smart tariff, smart products or opting into demand flexibility services. For some households shifting electricity use may be difficult or impossible.

1. Complete questions about your home

The Energy Choices Tool takes you through a set of questions about your home and circumstances.

The terminology is confusing. What does 'XXXX' mean?

We know that the language around smart energy options is prone to technical terms, which we've tried to limit. Please check the Glossary if there's a term you're not sure about.

I haven't finished answering all the questions. Can I complete them another time?

A progress bar above each question indicates how far you've got. You can come back to answer questions by logging in again with your email address. You will be taken back to the question you last completed.

Can I change my answers?

When you've completed the questions, you can edit your answers. You could also change your answers to explore different scenarios e.g. if you don't currently have a smart meter and you got one, what smart energy options might then be suitable for you.

Find smart energy options

Review your answers

What kind of electricity meter do you have?	Standard meter (not smart)	Edit answer
Would you consider getting a smart electricity meter?	No, I do not want a smart meter	Edit answer
Do you monitor your energy usage?	Yes - I take regular meter readings	Edit answer
Would you consider switching tariff?	Yes	Edit answer
What internet do you use?	Broadband	Edit answer
Does anyone in your household (including you) rely on electricity for medical reasons?	No	Edit answer

2. Get results

Your results page has instructions and filters on the left and smart energy options grouped together into categories on the right. The number of smart energy options found is at the top.

Your results
Using this page

Filters
Results will update automatically when you adjust filters.

Categories

- ☒ Cheaper, greener
- ☒ Heating
- ☒ Solar PV
- ☒ Heat pump
- ☒ EV

Advanced filters ▼

Bespoke report
Select one or more smart energy options to include in your report by selecting 'Add to report'.
[Find out more](#)

Found 4 smart energy options

Cheaper, greener ☐ Add all to report

Timer plug Product

Timer plugs let you set timers for appliances to be turned on or off.
[More details](#) ▼ ☐ Add to report

Also worth considering...
These smart energy options are not currently accessible to you, but could be with a few small changes.
[View 4 smart energy options](#) ▼

Heating

Sorry, there are no heating smart energy options matching your search criteria.

Also worth considering...
These smart energy options are not currently accessible to you, but could be with a few small changes.
[View 6 smart energy options](#) ▼

Solar PV ☐ Add all to report

Solar monitor Product

Using this page and **Find out more** about bespoke report

Click on **Using this page** to find out about the red match bar shown on the right for each smart energy option. This bar indicates how suitable the smart energy option might be for you, based on your question answers.

Timer plug Product

Timer plugs let you set timers for appliances to be turned on or off.
[More details](#) ▼ ☐ Add to report

You can also generate your own bespoke report using the category and advanced filters. Click on **Find out more** under **Bespoke report** for details on how to select smart energy options that you want to include in your report. Select 'Add to report' for individual smart energy options. Select 'Add all to report' if you want all the smart energy options in a category.

Found 4 smart energy options

Cheaper, greener ☐ Add all to report

Timer plug Product

Timer plugs let you set timers for appliances to be turned on or off.
[More details](#) ▼ ☐ Add to report

Also worth considering...
These smart energy options are not currently accessible to you, but could be with a few small changes.
[View 4 smart energy options](#) ▼

Advanced filters

You can also use **Advanced filters** to identify smart energy options that most align with your priorities. Each smart energy option is identified as a product, service or tariff. It also has been assessed using the following criteria:

- **Upfront cost** – how much you'd spent initially on the smart energy option (free to over £2500).
- **Effort to implement** – how much effort is needed to implement and install the smart energy option (very small to very large).
- **Running cost risk** – how much risk of increased fuel bills the smart energy option has if used incorrectly (very small to very large. It isn't possible to give a financial value to this risk).
- **Carbon reduction** – how much the smart energy option can potentially reduce your carbon footprint (very small to very large).
- **Running cost saving** - how much the smart energy option can potentially reduce your fuel bill each year (none to over £250).

Scroll down the advanced filters which are displayed on the left side of the page.

Advanced filters	Effort to implement	Carbon reduction
Type of smart energy option ☐ Product ☐ Service ☐ Tariff	How much effort are you willing to make to implement or install a smart energy option? ☐ Very small ☐ Small ☐ Medium ☐ Large ☐ Very large	Some smart energy options can reduce your carbon footprint when used effectively. What level of carbon reduction are you interested in? ☐ Very small ☐ Small ☐ Medium ☐ Large ☐ Very large
Upfront cost How much could you spend on purchasing and installing a smart energy option? ☐ Free ☐ Under £100 ☐ £100-£1000 ☐ £1000-£2500 ☐ Over £2500	Running cost risk Some Smart Energy Options carry a risk of increasing energy bills if used incorrectly. What level of risk are you comfortable with? ☐ Very small ☐ Small ☐ Medium ☐ Large ☐ Very large	Running cost savings Some smart energy options can save on your energy bills when used effectively. What amount of annual saving are you interested in? ☐ None ☐ Under £10 ☐ £10-£100 ☐ £100-£250 ☐ Over £250

You can select multiple filters to tailor your results list. For instance, if you just want to find out about energy options that cost up to £1000 with medium to very large carbon reduction.

We do annual calculations to update these figures, using an annual UK average for fuel tariff prices and carbon intensity. For electric heating we calculate running cost savings and running cost risk are compared to gas central heating.

Your smart energy options

For each smart energy option, you can view **More details**. This includes details based on the advanced filters, benefits of the smart energy option and where to get more information.

**Timer plug** Product

Timer plugs let you set timers for appliances to be turned on or off.

[Hide details](#) 

☐ Add to report

Upfront cost
£ £ £ £ £ Under £100

Running cost savings
£ £ £ £ £ £10-£100

Effort to implement
● ○ ○ ○ ○

Running cost risk
● ● ○ ○ ○

Carbon reduction potential
● ○ ○ ○ ○

Timer plugs allow you to:

- Set timers for appliances to be turned on or off.

Control your appliances more easily

If a wall socket is hard to reach, a timer plug can help you turn appliances on and off more easily. Once the timer is set, you won't need to access the socket regularly. Timer plugs can be used with any appliance that plugs into a wall socket, and they are controlled through buttons on the plug itself or via a remote control, depending on the model.

Save energy and money

You can reduce your electricity consumption by setting timers for appliances to turn on at a set time and turn off when you don't need them. If you are on a time of use tariff, you can set appliances to come on at the times when electricity is cheapest.

Installation

These devices are very simple to use. You can find them online or in hardware shops and prices start at around £5. Timer plugs can be installed yourself simply by plugging them into a wall socket.

More information:

Please note that each link opens in a new tab.

[How to use a Plug-In Timer Switch – Setting up a Mechanical Timer Switch \(youtube.com\)](#)

You can also look at other smart energy options that are worth considering.

Also worth considering...

These smart energy options are not currently accessible to you, but could be with a few small changes.

[View 4 smart energy options](#) 

You can view these smart energy options.

**Smart plug** Product

Smart plugs let you to control appliances remotely and monitor their energy consumption via an app on your smart phone or tablet.

[More details](#) 

☐ Add to report

View **More details** for changes you'd need to make if you wanted to take up the smart energy option. This is shown with a lightbulb symbol.

To take up this smart energy option, you'll need to make these changes:

You need specific digital devices: Smart phone/tablet

💡 Digital devices – To make the most of some smart energy options, you may need to manage or control them using an app or online account. Find out how you can develop your understanding of computers, tablets and smart phones by taking a look at Digital skills on the Advice pages.

You need specific digital skills: Confident using apps

💡 Digital skills – You could ask a family member or friend for help, or find out about local support to learn digital skills. You might also want to look at Digital skills on the Advice pages.

Match bar (optional)

Each smart energy option has a red **Match bar**. The match bar shows a percentage score based on your question answers. It depicts to what extent you can take up the smart energy option. This is based on

- **‘Essential’ factors – what is needed to take up each option, and**
- **‘Desirable’ factors - which help you get the most benefit from an option.**

For example, it is essential to have a smart meter to participate in a demand shifting scheme. It is desirable that you can shift your electricity usage to get the most from it.

If you double click on the match bar, further information is given on the Essential and Desirable factors that your answers have matched or are missing. An example is given on the next page.

The Essential missing factors is what is indicated for smart energy options **Also worth considering** by the lightbulb symbol. Any missing factors are also given in your report.

Match explanation for 'Demand shifting schemes'

Total score

62%

Details

Missing

Essential

For the Smart Energy Option question	Missing requirements
You need a specific kind of electricity meter	Meter type - You will need a smart meter to use many smart energy options. You can ask your energy supplier for a smart meter. Occasionally smart meters do not work in some locations or properties due to signalling issues. For more information on smart meters, see the Advice pages.

Desirable

For the Smart Energy Option question	Missing requirements
You need high electricity usage	High electricity usage - If you had higher electricity usage, you would probably save more on running costs with this smart energy option. You can still take up this option. You could calculate how many years it would take to recoup your investment if you took up this smart energy option, based on your electricity costs, to find out if it would be worth your while.
You need electricity storage	Electricity storage - Whether you have renewable energy generation at home or not, learn how battery storage can save you money. Electric batteries store home-generated or grid electricity. For more information, see Advice pages: Making the most of renewable energy and low carbon technologies and Flexibility services.

Matching

Essential

For the Smart Energy Option question	Smart Energy Option requirement	Your question	Your answer	Score
You need a specific type of internet connection	Wi-Fi or mobile data	What internet do you use?	Broadband	13%
You need specific digital devices	Smart phone/tablet or computer	What kind of computer devices do you use?	Desktop PC or laptop	13%
You need specific digital skills	Confident using apps or an online account	Do you feel confident using the following?	Just online accounts	13%
Subtotal score				37%

Desirable

For the Smart Energy Option question	Smart Energy Option requirement	Your question	Your answer	Score
You need to be able to...	Yes	Would you be able to...	Yes	13%

1. Check the total match score percentage. How much is missing?

2. What is missing?

Essential = needed to take up the option. For this example, you need a smart meter.

Would you be willing to make the change required here to take up this smart energy option?

Desirable = get the most from the option. If there is an entry here, you could still take up the option. **Could you make a change to get more benefit from this option?**

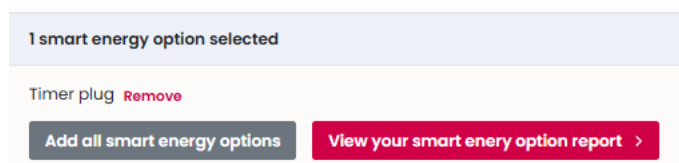
Your report will include suggestions for how to meet missing requirements.

3. Matching.

Shows how the total score is made up, based on your answers, for both Essential and Desirable.

3. Choose smart energy options you want more information on

Look at your smart energy options results and used the filters to identify the smart energy options of most interest to you. Select **Add to report** if you want to include full details of the smart energy option in your report or **Add all to report** for a category of smart energy options. When you select a smart energy option, **Generate report** will appear in the bottom right of the screen. Here, you can also select to **Add all smart energy options**.



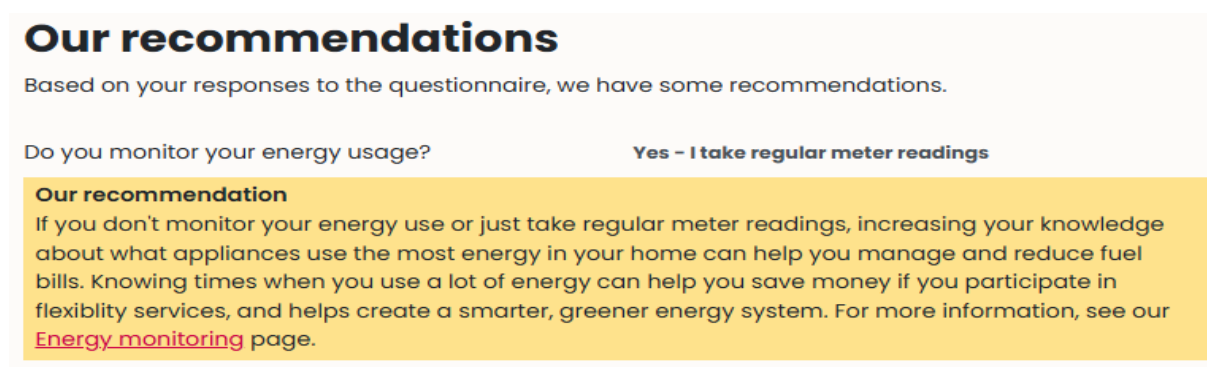
4. Generate your report

Your bespoke report includes:

- Recommendations for further action based on your question answers
- Full details of the smart energy options you selected, including any factors currently missing that are needed for you to take up the smart energy option or to get the most from it.

You can use the print button to print your report or to download and save it as a PDF.

Your report starts with recommendations for action and links to further information in the Energy Choices Tool to help you.



Full details for each of your selected smart energy options are then given. This includes Essential requirements to take up the smart energy option and Desirable factors that help to get the most benefit from it. For each requirement the report states whether **You meet this requirement** or **You do not meet this requirement** (shown below for Solar photovoltaic panels). This can help you decide if you want to make any changes to be able to take up a smart energy option.

Essential requirements

To take up this smart energy option you need to meet the following requirements.

You need to be able to make changes to your home

Structural

✔ You meet this requirement

Desirable

To get the most benefit from this smart energy option, these will help but are not essential.

You need to be able to flex your electricity usage

✔ You meet this requirement

You need to be comfortable with possible bill fluctuations

✔ You meet this requirement

You need to be planning on staying in your home long term

✔ You meet this requirement

You need electricity storage

Electric battery

✔ You meet this requirement

You need high electricity usage

✘ You do not meet this requirement

💡 High electricity usage – If you had higher electricity usage, you would probably save more on running costs with this smart energy option. You can still take up this option. You could calculate how many years it would take to recoup your investment if you took up this smart energy option, based on your electricity costs, to find out if it would be worth your while.

5. Further information and feedback

Next steps

The Energy Choices Tool gives suggestions on smart energy options that may be appropriate for you, based on your question answers. Please scrupulously research any smart energy option you are thinking of taking up, to come to an informed decision.

For example, some battery storage brands are not eligible for some tariffs. Some battery storage is only available if household usage is below a certain threshold e.g. 9000 kWh/ a year. (Most household consumption is well below this).

If you need further information or advice, visit the Resources section of the Energy Choices Tool: Further resources page and Speak to an advisor page.

Complete your journey

After printing your report (if you choose to), click on Finish.

 **Print**

Print your smart energy option report. You can also select "Save as PDF".

Finish

Click here to complete your journey. You'll be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the process.

Service satisfaction

You can opt into providing feedback by phone on the Energy Choices Tool to an independent evaluation organisation. This is to support the national evaluation of energy advice tools. If you opt into this, you are asked for your contact details. The independent evaluation organisation does not have access to your question answers.

Personal information

You have an option to provide personal information, like your age and ethnicity. You do not need to share this information if you do not want to. This information is never associated with your email address or question answers.

We use this information to learn if the Energy Choices Tool is reaching the broadest range of people possible in the UK population. We will work with community organisations and other partners to try and reach any groups that the tool is not reaching.

Follow up email

You'll receive an email from Centre for Sustainable Energy the day after you've used the Energy Choices Tool. It contains a link to a very short anonymous survey. Please do tell us what you think about using the tool and how to improve it via the survey.

Returning to reuse the Energy Choices Tool

You can return to the Energy Choices Tool at any time. When you enter your email address you will be sent a six-digit code to use to log into the tool.

6. Other questions on the Energy Choices Tool

Who has access to my question answers?

Anonymised question answers are shared with National Grid Electricity Distribution and Northern Powergrid (Distribution Network Operators) to inform their future services and for Ofgem reporting purposes.

Who has access to my personal information?

Anonymised personal information is shared with National Grid Electricity Distribution and Northern Powergrid (Distribution Network Operators) for Ofgem reporting purposes

How is the Energy Choices Tool updated?

Centre for Sustainable Energy researchers regularly monitor the smart energy options markets for new types of products, services and tariffs. As new smart energy options emerge, they are added into the Energy Choices Tool. The tool is updated annually.

What if I have a question or want to give further feedback?

Please send an email to energychoicestool@cse.org.uk