Student Money Saving Tips – Utilities

Whilst mundane, making sure that you have enough money to pay for your utility bills (gas, electricity and water) should be one of your spending priorities. However, there are a number of things that you can do to help reduce the cost of these bills.

- Check which bills you will be responsible for paying – are some included in with your rent? This will allow you to set aside money for such bills and reduce the likelihood of unexpected costs you hadn't accounted for.

- Try to come to an agreement with housemates about how bills should be paid. Do you want to open a joint account for all household bills to be paid from? Have one person responsible for each bill?

- Often the cheapest way to pay bills is by monthly Direct Debit. Many energy companies offer discounts to customers who agree to pay this way. Speak to your energy company to see if they provide such discounts. If you pay your bills by direct debit you will need to make sure you have sufficient funds in your account to cover this as your bank will charge you if the payment fails.

- Another way to cut down on your costs is with paperless billing. Again, many suppliers offer discounts if you agree to this. Instead of receiving bills in the post, you'll get emails from your energy supplier and can manage your account and submit meter readings online.

- Consider using price comparison websites to look at the best deal for you. According to gas and electricity regulator Ofgem, customers who switch both gas and electricity suppliers could stand to make significant savings - but do your research before you make changes. Comparison sites such as www.uswitch.com/ or www.moneysupermarket.com/ might help. If you're not sure about average energy costs to estimate when comparing providers check out whatprice.co.uk

- Ensure you read gas, electricity and water meters when you move into a new house to make sure you only pay for the energy you use – and not what previous tenants used. Regularly submit meter readings to your provider to ensure your bills are accurate and reduce the risk of under or over paying.

- Switch off lights and appliances when not in use. Don't leave appliances on standby. Switching appliances off can save between £40 -£85 per year in a typical household.

- Use energy saving light bulbs. They last up to10 times longer than ordinary bulbs, and using one can save you around £45 over the lifetime of the bulb.

- Turn the thermostat down on your heating and water and don't leave windows open when the heating is on. By reducing your room temperature by 1ºC you could cut your heating bills by up to £75 per year.

- At night and especially during the winter or when it is cold, closing your curtains can help retain a considerable amount of heat.

- Have a shower rather than a bath. A bath can use as much as 80 litres of water, taking a shower can save almost two thirds of water that is needed to fill a bath.

- Only fill the kettle with the amount of water you need to use.

- Don't leave the tap running when brushing teeth, washing or shaving. Put the plug in and only use as much water as you need. Did you know by installing a water meter it can help to reduce water usage and could save you money? Use this free calculator to see how much you could save. Paying for what you use also means less water is wasted. Visit Northumbrian Water and request a free water saving kit.

- Don't use the washing machine if you haven't got a full load or use the half load setting.

- Avoid using a tumble dryer – dry clothes on a clothes rail in a well ventilated room or hang outside on a washing line. Electric tumble dryers are the second biggest energy user in the home, after fridges.