



Essential Services: Getting extra help

Services such as gas, electricity, water, phones, broadband and public transport are not luxuries. We need them every day and if you're older, ill or have a disability, or you've suddenly found yourself in vulnerable circumstances, you may have particular needs. This leaflet tells you about free services that can give you extra help.

Your phone and broadband

Free directory enquiries. If you struggle to look up a phone number because you're visually impaired or have another disability, tell your phone company. They can make Directory Enquiries free for you.

Making calls clearer. If you are deaf or have difficulty speaking, there's a service that can translate phone calls into text on a smartphone, tablet or computer. It's called **Relay UK**. Visit www.relayuk.bt.com/about-relay-uk.html

Calling 999 by text message. If you're deaf or speech-impaired, you can call the emergency services by sending a text message. You need to register your mobile phone before you can use the service. Visit www.emergencysms.org.uk

Calling 999 by video relay. Deaf BSL users can call the emergency services in BSL. Download the 999BSL app or visit www.999bsl.co.uk

Running your phone and broadband account. If you need help managing your account, for example to make sure bills are paid on time, you can nominate a friend or family member. Ask your phone or broadband company about 'Third Party Bill Management'.

Faster fault fixing. You may depend on your home phone or broadband service because of ill-health or a disability. If so, your home phone or broadband company can give you priority if

there's a problem with your line. Ask them to put you on their 'Priority Fault Repair' list.

Easier to follow bills and contracts. You can ask for all communications (other than marketing) in accessible formats such as large print or braille.

Post and parcels

Royal Mail offers free first class or International Standard postage for blind people under the Articles for the Blind scheme. For more information, including how to take part and to check eligibility, please visit www.royalmail.com/sending/articles-blind

All parcel operators must enable disabled customers to provide information about any needs they have when receiving a parcel – for example, extra time to answer the door, or asking the courier to ring the doorbell as well as knock. You can typically do this by setting your preferences in parcel operators' apps, or when you receive a delivery notification about a parcel.

Water

*This information relates to individuals in England and Wales. Residents in Scotland should consult Scottish Water for more details: www.scottishwater.co.uk/-/media/ScottishWater/Document-Hub/Factsheets-and-Leaflets/Leaflets/070120PriorityServicesBooklet2020.pdf

Residents of Northern Ireland should consult the UKRN Northern Ireland essential services leaflet.

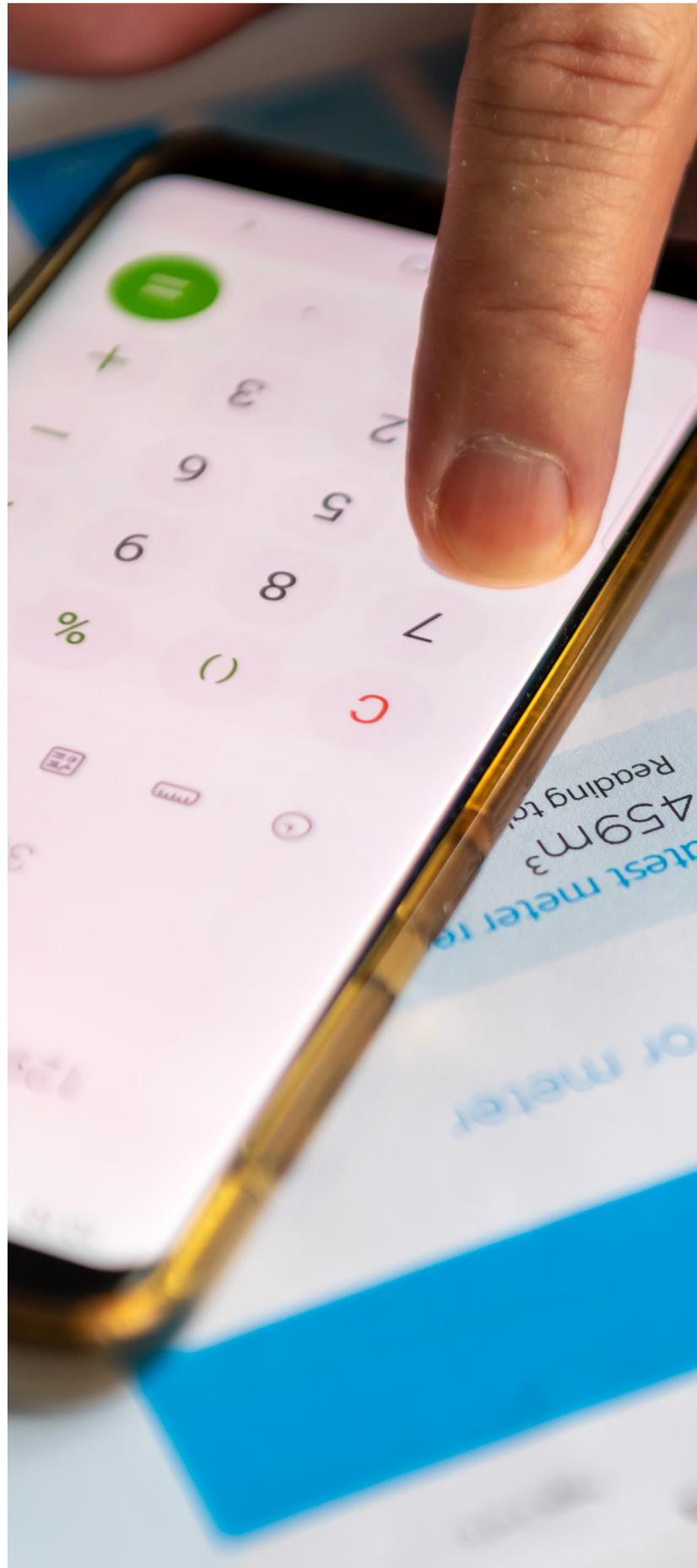
Priority Services Register (PSR). If you have any additional needs, either long term or short term, you can sign up to a Priority Services Register to receive extra support from your energy or water company. Its free to sign up and offers a range of services to meet an individual's particular needs.

This includes knocking and waiting if you have limited mobility, creating a password for employees to use when visiting your premises, and help reading your water meter. You can also join the PSR if you have a child under five years old. More details here: www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/priority-services-register-extra-services-from-energy-suppliers/

Accessible communications. If you have sight, speech, hearing impairment, dyslexia, dyspraxia, learning difficulties, or if English is not your first language, you can register your preference for how the company communicates with you. This includes but is not limited to large print or braille documents, alternative language bills/ documents, and sign language home visits.

More warning of supply interruptions.

Sometimes water companies need to turn off the water supply to do work in your area.



If you have additional medical needs such as kidney dialysis at home, water companies will provide you with advance notice of their plans.

Nominated contact. If you have a serious illness, a cognitive impairment such as a stroke or brain injury, or a mental health problem you can register to have a nominated contact receive copies of your bill on your behalf. This person can also be contacted on your behalf if you choose.

Capping your costs. If you need to use additional water for medical reasons, live with three or more children under 19 years old, or you receive certain benefits and have a meter you may be eligible for a capped tariff called WaterSure: www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/water-bills/

Moving your water meter. If you have a water meter and it's difficult to reach and read, your water company may agree to move it for you. Alternatively, your company may offer help with meter reading so that you can monitor your water consumption.

Gas and electricity

*If you are resident in Northern Ireland, please see the UKRN Northern Ireland essential services leaflet.

Easy reach pre-payment meters. If you have a problem reaching your meter, your provider may agree to move it.

Meter Reading. If you struggle to read your meter, you may be able to ask for your supplier to do it for you.

Become a priority customer. Customers with certain needs can ask for advanced notice if a supply is going to be interrupted, and to be put at the front of the queue to be reconnected.

Request back-up facilities. You may be able to ask for alternative cooking and heating facilities if your energy supply is interrupted.

Get a doorstep password. If anyone needs to call at your home, ask them to quote a password so you know they are genuine.

Stay safe. Customers who receive certain benefits can ask for free safety checks of their gas appliances.

Clear bills. You can ask for large print and braille communications.

Copy a friend. You can ask for a copy of your bills to be sent to a trusted friend or family member for checking.

Travel by bus



Buses are an essential service for many people but are not regulated in the same way as the other services in this leaflet. Thanks to Bus Users UK (which campaigns for the rights of bus users) and the Department for Transport for providing the information below:

Do you have a wheelchair? Most buses built since 2000 are wheelchair accessible. By law, single deck buses must have a ramp and a suitable wheelchair space.

What about mobility scooters? There is no law requiring buses to carry mobility scooters; it's at the discretion of the bus company. Many bus companies will assess your scooter and, if it meets their requirements, they'll issue you with a permit allowing you to take your scooter on the bus. The requirement is usually that it's a 'Class 2' scooter (not a 'Class 3' that can do 6-8mph) and that it's no more than 600mm wide and 1,000mm long.

Free bus travel. Eligible older and disabled people can apply for a bus pass which will enable them to travel for free on off-peak local bus services throughout England.

Eligible older people must live in England and have reached either their state pension age (women) or the state pension age of a woman born on the same day (men).

You can find out more by contacting your council or at the Gov.uk website: www.gov.uk/apply-for-elderly-person-bus-pass

Eligible disabled people must live in England and have a disability which meets at least one of seven published criteria. You can find out more and apply for disabled bus pass by contacting your local council or by following this link www.gov.uk/apply-for-disabled-bus-pass

Additional concessions are available in some areas. These might allow people with an eligible disability to be accompanied by a companion free of charge, for older people to access free travel before they reach state retirement age or for pass holders to travel during peak hours or on other modes of transport. Contact your council for full details of what is available in your area.

Concessionary travel outside England is the responsibility of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Governments.

Travel by rail

Help on your journey. Customers can book assistance to help them travel by train, or request assistance when they arrive at the station. Rail staff are trained to help passengers with a range of needs, and can help plan journeys, book tickets and make reservations. They can also help you at stations and onboard trains.

Information about this help. To find out more about the help available, ask at any staffed station for a leaflet called *'Making Rail Accessible: Helping older and disabled people'*. You will also find it on the train operators' websites. Alternatively, you can call National Rail Enquiries on 08457 484950 or visit the National Rail Enquiries website. This explains the help that is available and provides links to the train operators' own sites.

Stations Accessibility. The National Rail Enquiries website has information about the accessibility of all GB stations, including information about accessibility services, features and facilities such as accessible toilets, staffing, and step-free access. Visit their website and enter the station you want to find out about: www.nationalrail.co.uk

The Disabled Person's Railcard. This gives discounts on fares for disabled people and their travelling companions. To find out more visit www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk

Help with luggage. You can ask for assistance with your bags, but this does need to be arranged in advance.

Do you need a ramp? Your train operator can provide one at stations and on trains.

Ask about free station parking. Some stations offer free bays in their car parks for Blue Badge holders.

Travel by air

Free assistance. For most flights to and from a European Union airport, passengers with disabilities and reduced mobility can request free assistance to help complete a journey. This can cover travelling through airports, getting on and off planes, transferring between flights at an airport and help during the flight itself.

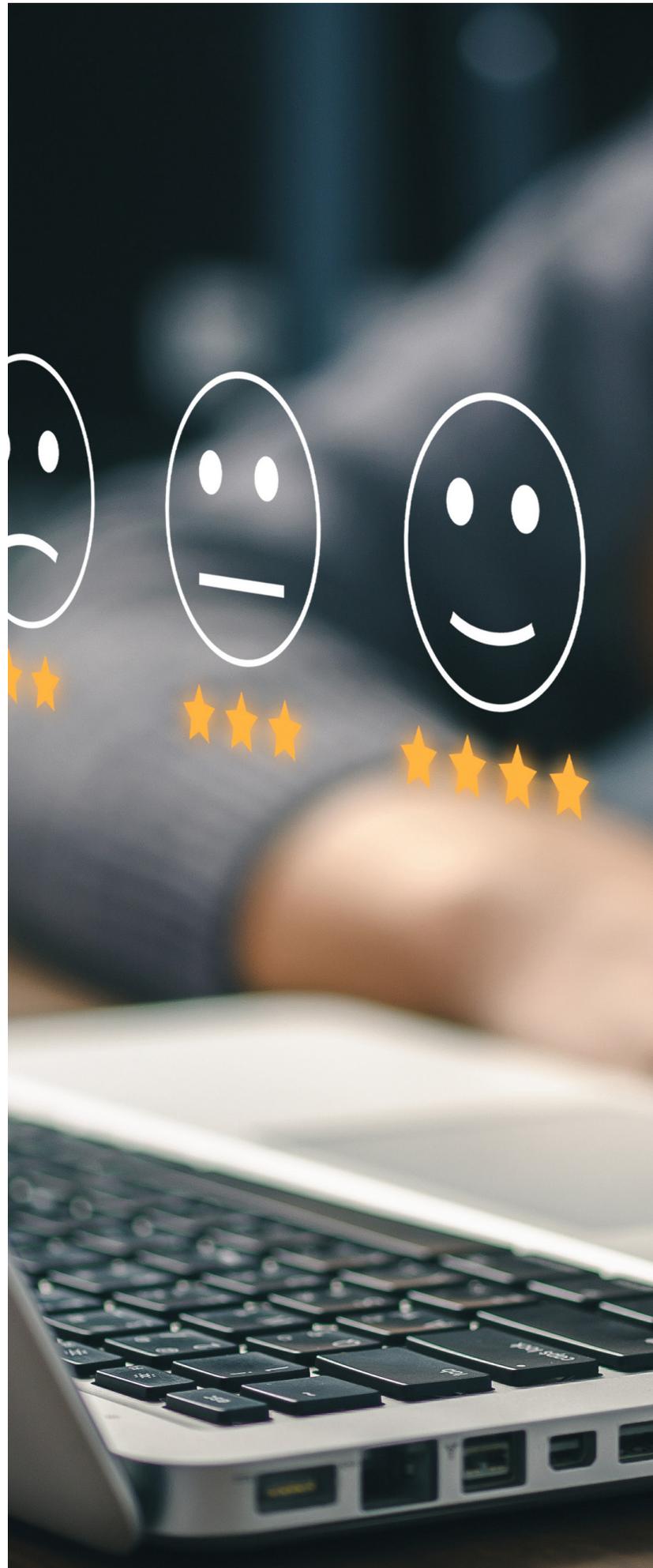
Taking your wheelchair. Airlines must carry two pieces of mobility equipment free of charge, so long as the equipment fits through the aircraft doors.

Book in advance. Assistance needs to be booked 48 hours in advance in order to be guaranteed. You can book where you bought your ticket, e.g. airline, travel agent. Airlines can only refuse a booking, or ask a passenger to travel accompanied, on aircraft safety grounds.

Travelling outside the UK? Similar rights apply in other countries including the United States. However, there are many parts of the world where assistance may require a fee or may not be available at all.

You can find more information about what assistance is available at the CAA website:

www.caa.co.uk/passengers/prm/



Financial products and services

Meeting your needs. Providers should make sure that individuals who have different needs get outcomes as good as those experienced by other customers. Examples include if you've experienced a significant life event or, for example, because of low income or health problems. You can talk to your provider about your circumstances and they'll explain if and how they can help you and will let you know about any other support available.

A higher standard of protection. From 31 July 2023, all products and services on sale must meet the FCA's Consumer Duty rules. Under these rules, you should expect to get the support you need, when you need it, and communications you understand. You should also expect financial products and services that meet your needs and offer fair value. For older products that are no longer on sale, these rules will apply from 31 July 2024. If you feel that a provider hasn't met any of these standards, you have the right to complain: www.fca.org.uk/consumers/your-rights-financial-services#section-protection-if-something-goes-wrong

Support using products and services. If you're disabled, you may be entitled to reasonable adjustments when dealing with providers.

For example, a provider may make changes to a bank branch to help British Sign Language or braille. Get in touch with your provider to find out what adjustments they can make.

What to do next

For help with **gas, electricity, water, or your phone or broadband service**, simply call the enquiries number shown on your bill or contact them via their website.

For **rail travel**, use the links and contact details shown above. If you can't find the information you need, contact the train operator, or visit Transport Focus www.transportfocus.org.uk/

For **air travel**, there is a directory of links to relevant pages from major airlines and UK airport websites at www.caa.co.uk/passengers/prm/arranging-special-assistance/

For **bus travel**, the rules vary according to where you live. Visit www.bususers.org for more information.

Please note that the services above are designed for people with particular needs due to age, impairment, disability, or long-term condition.

You may be asked to prove that you need extra help, for example by getting a health professional's signature. For more information on the Consumer Duty please follow this link: www.fca.org.uk/news/news-stories/consumer-duty-higher-standards-financial-services

About this leaflet

The information in this leaflet has been prepared by the UK Regulators' Network (www.ukrn.org.uk).

This group is formed of the official bodies that regulate the UK's essential services.

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