

# Cost of Living and Fuel Poverty

## March 2023



Creating  
better  
**Living Solutions**

We understand the pressures that so many of our customers are currently facing when it comes to the cost of living. In response to these challenges and the increased risk of our customers being in fuel poverty and struggling with day to day living costs, customers and team members came together to co-produce ideas and solutions to ensure that ateb is doing all it can to support those living in an ateb home.

The key message to our customers is that if you are struggling to keep on top of bills, pay your rent or heat your homes, contact ateb as soon as possible so that we can ensure your income is maximised and you are receiving all the help and support available.

## Mark Lewis

Executive Director for Customer





## You said:

- **You want** more home energy advice, including how to install SMART metres, and you want ateb to target advice to vulnerable customers and those living in homes that are not very energy efficient.
- **You said** that generally rents and service charges were affordable, but you were worried about next year and concerned that service charges were becoming more expensive whilst the quality of some services provided were not to a high standard.
- **You want** more advice and training on how to make the best use of solar panels and other energy efficient technologies where homes have them installed.
- **You want** more immediate support this winter through the provision of “keep warm packs”, containing blankets etc. and access to “warm spaces” where customers can go to keep warm.
- **You want** more information on food banks and food share projects and for ateb to explore how food could be delivered to customers where they can not travel to these projects themselves.
- **You want** ateb to use bulk buying power to purchase energy efficient bulbs, more efficient electric portable appliances that can be sold on or donated to customers.
- **You want** ateb to fund healthy living and cooking events to promote saving money and staying healthy.
- **You said** you want more opportunities for face-to-face support from the ateb team including emotional and mental health support.
- **You want** ateb to invest in your homes to make them more energy efficient and better for the environment.
- **You want** to see ateb customers supported into employment and/or training.
- **You want** to see more opportunities and funding for customers to grow their own fruit and veg to help with increasing food costs. Providing training and promoting positively through competitions.



## We will:

The ateb team are committed to working with partners in supporting customers who are experiencing problems paying bills, paying rent, heating homes, and eating well.

- **We will** continue to provide a dedicated Energy Support and Advice service funded through grant funding that we have received to the Summer of 2023. We will evaluate this service to determine if ateb should continue delivering the service using its own funds beyond this date.
- **We will** specifically target support this winter to those who have been identified as vulnerable or are living in an ateb home that is not very energy efficient.
- **We will** continue to adopt a “Living Rent” that ensures rents are affordable and consult widely with our customers on the rents we will charge from April 2023.
- **We will** carry out a review of our rents and service charges in our Independent Living Schemes to ensure they offer good value for money and are affordable.
- **We will** work closely with our partners over the next 12 months to improve the quality of services delivered where our customers pay a charge.
- **We will** not evict anyone from our homes because of financial hardship if they work closely with us to put a plan in place.
- **We will** continue to signpost and help customers access the benefits that they are entitled to and help customers access any direct financial assistance that is available including from the ateb hardship fund.
- **We will** review the criteria for our hardship fund so we can ensure it is providing the financial assistance needed this winter.
- **We will** signpost and help customers understand the support that might be available to help pay utility bills.

- **We know** that increasing costs of living can cause stress and worry. We will continue to support and signpost to local schemes which support health and well-being.
- **We will** work in partnership with Welsh Government to invest in our homes, and by next winter have a greater proportion of our homes better equipped to bring down household bills and develop our plans to make all our homes more energy efficient and carbon free in the longer term.
- **We will** complete our review of our Housing Solutions team and ensure customers are aware of how they can access face to face support from ateb if they find themselves in financial difficulty this winter.
- **We will** ensure our customers have information on local food banks and food share projects and consider how we might be able to support customers living in rural areas who might find it difficult to access these services themselves.
- **We will** work with our third sector and local authority partners to ensure that ateb customers have the information they need on accessing “warm community spaces” and “keep warm packs”.
- **We will** explore with our partners how we could deliver wellbeing and healthy living initiatives including healthy living and cooking events, growing your own fruit and veg and accessing employment and training.

## We did:

### Progress update — March 2023

- We have grant funding in place for a dedicated energy advice and support until the end of July 2023, and we will be reviewing how we deliver this service when the funding ends.
- Our Home Energy Officer has been contacting people who live in an ateb home that is not very energy efficient (EPC D or below) to provide targeted energy saving advice and support.
- We used our living rent methodology when setting rents and service charges for 2023/24, but we know some people who live in an ateb home may still struggle to pay their rent and service charges. We are exploring what additional support we can provide to those who are struggling to pay their rent due to the rising cost of living.
- We have carried out a review of rents and service charges for people who live in our Independent Living Schemes, that concluded ateb rents and service charges were at the lower level when compared to other landlords.
- We have surveyed customers on their cleaning service and other service contracts and several improvements have been identified and actions being taken forward. We have been reviewing how we monitor the quality of grounds maintenance services aim to implement further improvements.
- We have not evicted any one from an ateb home for the past 3 years.
- We continue to offer money advice and support to customers providing 3,801 advice and support interventions between April 2022 and March 2023.
- We have reviewed the criteria for accessing our Financial Assistance Fund from April 2023. To the end of March 2023, 38 ateb households had received financial assistance from ateb through the fund — averaging £197.50 per household.
- Our Home Energy Officer has provided energy advice and support to 333 distinct ateb households between April 2022 and March 2023.
- We are joining the Fuel Bank that will enable ateb customers to access emergency financial support with energy costs.

- We have secured grant funding from Welsh Government to invest in some of our homes, so they are better equipped to bring down household bills by making them more energy efficient. Works will start during financial year 23/24.
- We have completed a review of our Housing Solutions Team, reducing the number of homes each individual team member has in their area making it easier for customers to access holistic advice and support.
- We have been regularly promoting through our social media channels how our customers can access support from Food Banks, and we supported our partners at PATCH by delivering Christmas food and toy parcels to 30 households in time for Christmas.
- With the support of our suppliers and partners we donated toys to PATCH to distribute to Pembrokeshire households in time for Christmas.
- We have regularly promoted through our social media channels how our customers can access warm community spaces and we are playing a pivotal role in distributing Winter Warm Packs to households across Pembrokeshire including people who live in ateb homes. We distributed 600 packs over the winter period.
- We held 2 events during February 2023 involving key partners to provide advice and support on dealing with the rising costs of living along with advice on improving wellbeing and healthy living initiatives.
- ateb has joined the National Databank which aims to provide free mobile data to those who need it by providing free sim cards or vouchers. We have promoted this scheme to customers.

If you have any questions or would like additional help, please contact our Customer Service Team.

Tel: 0800 854 568

Email: [hello@atebgroup.co.uk](mailto:hello@atebgroup.co.uk)

Facebook: [@theatebgroup](https://www.facebook.com/theatebgroup)

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Creating  
better  
**Living Solutions**

For the **people** and  
**communities** of West Wales