

Energy debt fears rise as Epsom's Good Company's support steps up

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Rising energy costs could push more households into debt this year, with local support services warning of growing pressure on low-income families.

Good Company (Surrey), which runs the Epsom & Ewell Foodbank, says many of the people it supports are already struggling to keep up with bills. With further increases in gas and electricity prices expected when the energy price cap is reviewed in July, concerns are mounting about the impact on vulnerable households.

Energy debt among clients is already significant, averaging around £900 per household. The charity says this is placing “enormous pressure” on families trying to manage day-to-day living costs.

To help address the issue, Good Company has expanded its programme of energy support workshops. These sessions offer practical advice on reducing energy use and costs, alongside providing items such as energy-efficient appliances and heated blankets to help people stay warm at home.

One participant described the sessions as eye-opening, saying: “So many things! Learning about radiator reflectors, energy surveys, how much a shower costs per hour. Being provided with further info to go away and look into. The £50 voucher and the appliance were a fabulous surprise. Thank you!”

For households already in arrears, the organisation is also offering access to an intensive debt relief programme, working with specialist energy advisers to help people find a sustainable path out of debt. Tom, Participation and Prevention Director at Good Company, said: “At Good Company, we can’t control global events — but we can help local families reduce their energy use, ease the burden of debt, and feel more secure at home.”

Employment support under review

Alongside energy concerns, the charity has been reviewing how well employment and skills support is working locally.

A recent event brought together advisers and senior leaders from local services to discuss findings from research into clients’ experiences. The study found that access to good quality work can make a major difference to financial resilience and wellbeing, but that support is not always reaching those who need it most.

While some people reported positive experiences and success in finding new roles, others highlighted gaps in awareness of available services. There were also concerns about continuity, with some clients losing support when advisers move on, and difficulties accessing training in specific sectors. Some felt held back by a lack of qualifications.

The findings have prompted discussions about improving promotion of employment support through community touchpoints such as GP surgeries, strengthening adviser handovers, and increasing awareness of local training opportunities. Ellie, Community Researcher, said: “This has been a great exercise for us, inspiring us to think about where we can improve our service and maybe even add in some new initiatives.”

New platform aims to join up services

In a further step to improve support, Good Company has launched ReferSurrey, a secure referral platform designed to connect people with a wider network of local services.

The system links users to advice, health and community organisations, with the aim of addressing the underlying causes of financial hardship through more coordinated support. Fifteen agencies have already joined, with a further 22 due to come on board shortly.

Call for community support

The charity is also appealing for donations, warning that demand for foodbank and advice services remains high across East Surrey despite the area’s perceived affluence.

Rising living costs, accessibility barriers and ongoing inequalities are continuing to drive need, while food donations have fallen. Good Company says regular contributions, even small ones, can help ensure local people are able to access essential support.

“Every contribution, however modest, helps ensure that local people can access the help and support they need, whatever their circumstances. Together, we can build a fairer, more compassionate community where no one is left to struggle alone.”

Sam Jones - Reporter



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