

National Bargee Travellers Association

STATEMENT

09th December 2022

ENERGY BILLS SUPPORT SCHEME: AN UPDATE FOR CONCERNED BOATERS

Over the past few months, there has been a lot of understandable confusion and anxiety within our community over the situation regarding boaters' access to financial assistance during the UK's ongoing fuel and cost-of-living crisis. We at the National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA) therefore think it is essential to layout the situation as it has developed, and as it currently stands.

On 26th May 2022, the government announced a series of measures aimed at reducing household energy bills in the light of the national fuel crisis. The central plank of these was the Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS). The EBSS takes the form of a discount on energy bills worth £400 per household to be paid directly to energy suppliers, therefore automatically deducted from household energy bills. Initially, no specific provisions were made for off-grid households - including boaters both itinerant and with a home mooring - whose energy bills are not paid directly to a supplier.

The NBTA and other traveler organisations immediately began lobbying the government for the inclusion of off-grid households in the EBSS. After an NBTA petition gained thousands of signatures and many supporters wrote to their MPs, the government made a general commitment to providing the EBSS discount to off-grid households via other means. But since this statement back in August, boaters have been left unsure of exactly *when*, *how* and even *if* they would indeed be eligible for the payment.

On October 25th, parliament passed the Energy Prices Bill which committed the government to the Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSS-AF) - a scheme for providing the £400 payment to any household that would otherwise miss out on the EBSS. With this commitment still lacking specific provisions for eligibility and delivery, both the NBTA and MPs have continued to contact the Minister and civil servants for clarity.

On November 29th, Graham Stuart MP - the Minister for Energy and Climate - made a statement to MPs clarifying that off-grid households would indeed be included in the EBSS-AF. Whilst the precise details are still being decided, fixed off-grid addresses including boaters **with** a home mooring will be included in the scheme, it will be delivered via local authorities, and it will be open for applications in January 2023.

On December 6th, a senior civil servant at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) emailed the NBTA to clarify the current situation for delivering the EBSS-AF to itinerant boaters **without** a home mooring, and to other itinerant off-grid households unable to provide traditional 'proof of address'. He confirmed that the scheme will be criteria-based and is "*aimed at providing support to people in relation to energy costs incurred in their main residence*". To that end, he has asked for the input of the NBTA in suggesting how itinerant boaters can make a single application which both establishes their eligibility, and provides a means by which they can receive the £400 payment.

Following a public meeting held later on December 6th, the NBTA has agreed to consult with BEIS on how the scheme should be delivered, guided by the following aims:

- That we demand to be supported to the same extent that people living in bricks and mortar houses are.
- That a range of solutions should be offered that include both a) different ways to prove that we are itinerant liveaboards, and b) different ways of receiving the £400 payment.
- That our solutions offered to the government should be detailed and prescriptive, and should come in the form of a guidance document.
- That we will reach out to other traveller organisations to work with them on this guidance document.
- That time is short, winter has already begun and boaters want definitive answers as soon as possible.

With temperatures already plummeting across the country and a yellow weather warning issued, boaters are rightly anxious that their inclusion in the EBSS-AF be clarified as soon as possible, in practice as well as principle. The fact that BEIS has asked us to help them build the terms and conditions for the payment is encouraging, but it is still a work-in-progress. We must hold the government to their promises - working with them if we can, and pressuring them if we must.

The NBTA therefore invites anyone who wishes to be involved in this ongoing process to join our working group by emailing secretariat@bargee-traveller.org.uk. We also encourage those who haven't already to join the NBTA via our membership form [here](#) and to visit our [website](#) in order to be kept up to date with any further developments.

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Notes for Editors

1. For more information please contact 0118 321 4128 or press@bargee-traveller.org.uk

2. The petition is here: <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/include-off-grid-households-in-government-ps400-energy-bills-support-scheme>
3. The Energy Prices Bill can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/energy-prices-bill-how-households-and-businesses-will-be-supported/how-households-and-businesses-will-be-supported-by-the-energy-prices-bill>
4. Graham Stuart MPs 29th November statement can be read in full here: <https://www.bargee-traveller.org.uk/energy-bills-support-scheme-still-no-definite-answers-for-itinerant-households/>
5. The National Bargee Travellers Association (NBTA) is a volunteer organisation formed in 2009 that campaigns and provides advice for travelling boat dwellers on Britain's inland and coastal waterways. This includes anyone whose home is a boat and who does not have a permanent mooring for their boat with planning permission for residential use. See www.bargee-traveller.org.uk