

Smart Meter Frequently Asked Questions

What is a smart meter?

It's an energy meter with the ability to have two way communications with the supplier utilising mobile phone technology. The meter can send half hourly consumption data and register readings (scheduled or ad-hoc) & various alerts. The supplier can send tariff updates, switch functionality between credit and PAYG* and instruct the meter to de-energise. The meter is seen as the communications hub from the property to the outside world and as technology advances more and more products will be able to talk to it, such as in home applications.

Why is Spark Energy doing this now?

In a market where estimated billing appears to be the norm, smart metering gives us and the tenant greater control over energy management. Plus if we wait for the Government proposal to be actioned, it could be another ten years before these benefits reach our customers.

How does the smart meter work?

The meter works on exactly the same principals as the existing meter in terms of measuring consumption, however the clever part is with the on board memory & embedded SIM card which records usage and meter reads and transmits the data (as an SMS) to us when scheduled. We then use this information to create the customer invoice.

Can the customer view the data?

The meters include a digital display which can be toggled through to see reading, consumption, credit levels (if PAYG) etc. We are also reviewing options for an in home display unit and web service that will be of benefit to the consumer.

What happens if there's a fault or damage to the meter?

The meter has a number of tamper and fault alerts built into it. If anything goes wrong we will know about it and our smart metering partner can resolve as necessary. If the customer identifies any issues with the meter they should contact us.

What's the roll out plan?

Spark Energy will be carrying out a number of regional trial installations in the first instance, followed by a national roll out later in the year. Not all properties can support a Smart Meter but we aim to have national coverage this year. Our Smart Metering Partner (Onstream – part of national grid) will be contacting customers in each area as the roll out gathers pace and will aim to make all meter exchange appointments directly with them.

Will Spark contact Partners to arrange any installations?

Only if the property is empty or if the customer isn't responding to Onstream. Where we have identified the property as empty Onstream will contact you to arrange access either with keys or an accompanied visit.

What are the normal appointment times?

Dependant on work load availability, Onstream will be able to offer appointment slots varying from all day to a morning or afternoon appointment.

What happens if the tenant wants to reschedule their appointment?

On the installation letter from Onstream the customer will have contact details to enable rebooking. Alternatively contact us and we will re-route the call.

What happens if the tenant fails to be in as agreed?

The customer will be contacted directly by Onstream to schedule an installation date and again called on the day of the appointment. If the customer fails to re-book the appointment before the installation date or is out when the engineer arrives, the engineer will report back a failed visit. They will leave a calling card requesting that the customer calls Onstream to reschedule the installation. If the customer has committed to an appointment but isn't in and hasn't re arranged, an aborted visit charge may be applied to the customers account.

Will the power need to be turned off?

Unfortunately, yes. In order for the engineer to work safely on site, the power will go off for approximately 45 minutes, the customer will be advised of this during the appointment process and will therefore have ample opportunity to be prepared should there be sensitive equipment at the property.

***PAYG (Pay As You Go)** – Smart meters can operate in credit or PAYG mode without the need to install a traditional pre payment meter. The meter can be remotely switched at the touch of a button so agents don't suffer from the normal frustrations associated with inheriting a prepay meter and subsequent tenants can chose the payment method that best suits them.

This mode can also be enabled where the tenant repeatedly fails to maintain a healthy payment record or to set up a Direct Debit. The tenant can then top up credit by contacting Spark Energy. An 'emergency credit' facility is also available to the tenant, should they not be able to contact us and are running low.