

Winter Healthy Home Check – Bridport Energy Champions

A check-sheet for 9 out of 10 typical homes

1.	Test your heating	Does the boiler switch on and off when it should, and do radiators heat up?	If the heating system doesn't switch on, and you think that the controller and room thermostat are set correctly, you may need advice from a professional; a GasSafe registered technician if it's a gas-powered system, or a qualified electrician or oil-fired heating specialist as appropriate.
2.	Feel your radiators	Do some radiators warm up nicely but others stay cold or just about warm?	Check that the control valves or thermostats of each radiator are set sensibly. The numbered knob at one end sets temperature, the other valve controls its share of the hot water. If a radiator remains cold at the top it may need bleeding of air – a simple task which is occasionally needed on some systems. Ask someone who has done it if unsure.
3.	Check your timer or programmer	Is its clock right, and are the "on" and "off" times as you would like them?	To avoid wasting energy, in a household of working people set the timer to switch off half an hour or so before the last one leaves the house in the morning, and to come on ten minutes before the first comes home. If you're unfamiliar with the programmer, ask someone who has used one before.
4.	Check thermostat temperatures	Could the temperature be reduced without making it too cool?	Most people find that 18°C is right for living spaces – less active or unwell people might need a degree or two more. Remember that the cost of heating rises rapidly the warmer it is. Coming in from a hot workplace or car might make it seem cold at home when actually it isn't, it's just less warm.
5.	Check for draughts	Are there places where you can feel air currents from a window, door or floor?	Draught proofing tape or temporary double-glazing in the form of a clear plastic sheet will help with windows; a floor "sausage" is good for draughts under doors. Keep room doors closed. Remember though that some air movement is essential for health, and that air vents in a kitchen area or near a solid fuel burner may be necessary and should not be blocked.
6.	If you have a solid-fuel burner, have the chimney checked	Is it partly blocked, whether by soot, birds' nest debris or a damper?	Every chimney which is in use should be swept annually. Failing to do this increases the risk of chimney fire, carbon monoxide poisoning, and poor fuel combustion. Block any unused fireplace to avoid heat from the room constantly being lost up the chimney, leaving just a trickle of air ventilation.
7.	Avoid mould formation	Are there any patches of mould on walls, in corners or behind furniture?	Mould comes about when moisture forms on cold surfaces and is not able to dry out. Make sure that there is good ventilation when cooking and avoid drying clothes indoors. If an area is persistently damp look for outdoor causes such as an overflowing gutter or vegetation. Remove existing mould using bleach or a proprietary cleaner.
8.	Insulate the loft, if it isn't already.	Is there a good layer of insulation above your uppermost ceilings?	Heat escapes through ceilings, which are thin. At least 20cm, ideally 30cm of proper loft insulation is needed to keep it in. It can be a diy job, or you may qualify for a grant to get it professionally installed.
9.	Check your energy tariff	Is your energy deal the best for your usage?	Any energy provider will tell you whether you're on the best tariff they can offer you; or, you may find that another company offers a better deal. Although switching suppliers is easy in principle, there are many factors to consider and it's worth getting advice from someone who understands the options.
10.	Read and understand your energy bill	Do you rely on estimated bills? There's no need.	Estimations can result in you paying more than you need. Whether or not you have smart meters, all suppliers will accept monthly meter readings and will calculate their bills accurately from them.

Where Bridport area residents can find impartial advice and practical help

Home rented from a Housing Association (or a “Registered Provider”)

1. Explain the issue concerning you to the landlord, and make sure they understand and have taken note of your problem.
2. Contact Ridgewater Energy (01202 612710), who are Dorset Council’s “Healthy Homes” official partners and ask what help they can offer. Depending on your circumstances and what they find out, they may even be able to access grants for any work needed.

Home rented from a private landlord

1. If your landlord is approachable, explain the issue concerning you to them and see whether they are willing to help sort it out.
2. Contact Dorset Council’s Housing Standards team (01305 251010, ask for that department). They have a dedicated team to deal with queries from occupants of privately rented homes, and can assist with issues relating to heating, ventilation, insulation and so on. Your landlord may not need to be involved, depending on the exact circumstances.
3. Contact Ridgewater Energy (01202 612710), who are Dorset Council’s “Healthy Homes” official partners and ask what help they can offer. They may even be able to get work carried out for no cost.

Owner-occupied home

1. Contact Ridgewater Energy (01202 612710), who are Dorset Council’s “Healthy Homes” official partners and ask what help they can offer. Their advice is free and impartial and they know what grants are available for different topics.