



IMPROVING ENERGY MANAGEMENT ON TRAVELLER SITES

West Sussex County Council

Control, monitor and manage energy better than ever.

West Sussex County Council has 10 traveller sites with 113 pitches across the county, ranging in capacity from three to 23 caravans. Each site provides hard standing areas for caravans next to brick-built utility blocks containing a toilet, shower, electricity points and meters for water and electricity.

West Sussex County Council's traveller sites have a very low turnover rate of approximately five per cent, so there is often a waiting list for would-be tenants. The majority of residents stay for years at a time and take great pride in their homes and gardens. Many caravans have little or no insulation, so travellers are often heavy users of electricity as a result of heating their homes, as well as for power washing machines, tumble driers and so on.

A reliable and accurately metered electricity supply is therefore a vital part of the service that the council provides.

“Working with Energy Controls, we have introduced a new cashless prepayment system at our traveller sites, which is more convenient for residents and gives them greater privacy than before. Since the introduction of PayPoint it has made the process even easier. The service is safe and secure, and income rates have increased to cover actual consumption costs accurately. Residents feel they have more control over their electricity usage and staff time has been freed up, enabling them to work more with the residents.”

*Esther Quarm, Gypsy and Traveller Team Manager
West Sussex County Council*

Key Facts

System benefits

- Accurate meter readings
- Remote disconnection
- Rapid remote tariff updates
- Prepayment of energy

Products and services

- GSM prepayment SMART meter
- Energy monitor
- Full service, from supply and installation to maintenance
- 24/7 access to web portal



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Legacy system

West Sussex County Council has historically used coin-operated meters to supply electricity to residents at a fixed rate per unit across its 10 sites.

The process involved representatives from the council visiting residents on a weekly basis to read meters, carry out checks and collect money.

Esther explains,

“There were a number of issues with the current system. Clearly there was a risk that meters may be broken into, but there are also health and safety implications for staff handling the value and weight of cash.”

“The age of the meters also meant that some were not calibrated accurately, which can give residents the impression that they are paying more than necessary for their electricity.”

“These disputes can take time to resolve and can undermine trust in the council. In reality, we have negotiated a good deal with the Energy Supplier on their behalf and our charges simply cover our costs. As a council we have to make sure that we recharge accurately as we would have to pay for any shortfall.”

Energy Controls' solution

Energy Controls installed the latest GSM prepayment SMART meters at West Sussex County Council's first two sites in October 2013.

Following the installation, instead of using pound coins, residents can now either pay the authority directly during one of its twice-weekly visits and have their meters topped up remotely using SMS comms via a web portal that is managed by Energy Controls, or residents can pay via one of thousands of PayPoint terminals found in retail outlets throughout the UK.

Esther says,

“The installation was really good and the residents were looking forward to it. We wrote to everyone in advance and Energy Controls' support has been excellent – nothing was too much trouble.”

Results

According to Esther, the new system is making a big difference.

“We still visit residents weekly, but the new meters mean that we have more time to spend on health and welfare issues instead of collecting money.”

“Having meters that are accurately calibrated to the latest M.I.D. standards of accuracy has helped rebuild residents' trust in the system as we can show them exactly how much electricity they are using. Although tampering hasn't been a serious issue in the past, the new system should eliminate it altogether.”

“Energy Controls' new SMART Metering system also includes some really customer-friendly functions, for example, a 'Disconnection Override Period' which ensures that residents' electricity isn't cut off between 5pm and 10am, at the weekend or during bank holidays, even if they run out of credit.”

As well as saving time for the council, completing tariff changes, which used to take several weeks, can now be implemented remotely in minutes, without the need to visit each meter, ensuring that any savings in energy costs are passed on to residents quickly and accurately.

“The new system goes a long way towards transferring responsibility and ownership of energy from the council to the resident, just like those living in 'bricks and mortar' houses, which we know is important to them.”

