

Radio Teleswitching Project Newsletter #2

February 2024

Welcome to the second edition of the Energy UK RTS Newsletter.

Since our first Newsletter issued in June 2023, Energy UK has continued to work with its members, Government, Ofgem and other key stakeholders as they help customers to prepare for the eventual closure of the aging Radio Teleswitching infrastructure.

After over 40 years of operation, Energy UK is now able to confirm that the Radio Teleswitching Service (RTS) provided to homes and businesses will officially end on 30th June 2025.

What this means is that customers who rely on RTS to switch their electricity consumption between peak and off-peak rates (typically used by households and businesses that use electricity for their heating and hot-water arrangements) will need to have a new smart electricity meter installed to continue to benefit from cheaper, off-peak electricity use for their heating and hot-water needs.

Smart meters that are already being rolled out nationally, supported by a dedicated communications infrastructure are the natural technology upgrade for RTS. Using smart meters as the replacement for RTS equipment will also open up the benefits of smart meters to over 900,000 electricity customers.

All electricity suppliers are contacting impacted customers to offer them a smart meter upgrade, and the key message now is the need for customers to take action as soon as their electricity supplier contacts them, and not just wait until closer to the RTS service ending. With over 900,000 homes and businesses still utilising the RTS system, electricity suppliers will need to carefully plan their RTS replacement activity against smart meter installer capacity, so it is essential that customers respond to their electricity supplier as soon as possible to ensure all RTS equipment can be replaced before the RTS service ends.

We have made updates to our customer focused FAQs and Answers to provide greater assistance to the many consumer facing organisations, housing associations and Local Authorities who deal directly with consumers worried about the close-down of the RTS system.

In conjunction with Smart Energy GB, we have also produced a new consumer-focused RTS Digital Leaflet explaining more about the RTS service closure (included as part of this latest newsletter).

As before, we're encouraging as many organisations as possible to include our FAQs and the new Digital Leaflet on their websites and with any consumer/customer comms that they may be planning over the coming months.

Progress on RTS close-down activities

Since last year, electricity suppliers have started ramping-up their customer engagement activities, and we are starting to see some notable increases in the number of smart meter upgrades being completed. Clearly, there is still a long way to go which is why our key focus is to ensure the message to consumers remains clear that they should respond to their electricity supplier at the earliest opportunity to arrange for their smart meter upgrade.

Over the coming months, Energy UK will be working with industry colleagues and partners to ensure everything possible is in place to ensure the closure of the RTS service goes as smoothly as possible for consumers. We will continue to keep all of our stakeholders and interested parties updated in future editions of the RTS Newsletter.

Improving smart connectivity, and solutions for those that can't be connected

We are acutely aware that for some consumers, where they live means that it might not be possible to connect a smart electricity meter to the smart metering communications network just yet. We now have some exciting news for these consumers in that work is progressing to facilitate trials using an alternative connectivity technology to open up the benefits of smart meters to more consumers wherever possible. If these trials prove successful, it is possible that alternative connectivity technologies may be ready to be rolled-out for some consumers before the RTS service ends.

In addition to this, electricity suppliers will also be able to provide smart electricity meters that aren't completely reliant on being connected to the smart meter communications network. These meters will be installed with pre-set peak/off-peak switching times to minimise consumer impact once the RTS service ends.

So, even if the roll-out of the alternative connectivity technology isn't quite aligned to the RTS system close-down in June 2025, or consumers live in an area where a smart meter still won't be able to connect to the smart metering network, their supplier will be able to provide them with a smart meter that enables their electric heating and hot-water systems to continue to operate, and a tariff that continues to provide lower-cost off-peak pricing options.

Radio Teleswitching FAQs

What is the Radio Teleswitch Service, and what is it used for?

The Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS) uses a radio signal to tell some older electricity meters when to switch between peak and off-peak rates. There are just over 900,000 RTS meters in Great Britain.

RTS is used for some traditional multi-rate meters and was designed to support those who use electricity for their heating and hot water. This may include those who use electric storage systems, panel heaters or immersion heaters in water tanks – some of which typically charge up overnight.

RTS allows electricity suppliers to offer different tariff rates; so that consumers can make use of cheaper off-peak tariffs to charge their heating and/or hot water systems up overnight. RTS was introduced in the 1980s, and whilst the RTS infrastructure has remained reliable over the years, it is now reaching the end of its natural operational life.

Will the Radio Teleswitch Service continue indefinitely?

No it won't. The RTS service will end on 30th June 2025. In the meantime, all electricity suppliers are contacting impacted customers who use RTS equipment to offer them a smart meter upgrade.

What is being put in place to replace RTS?

The national smart meter infrastructure now in place for GB is the natural (and only) technology upgrade for RTS. Smart electricity meters can be directly programmed to deliver similar capability that the old RTS equipment was able to provide. Many electricity suppliers also offer a wider range of Time of Use products/tariffs that make use of smart electricity meter capability. It is expected that more innovative and flexible Time of Use tariffs will eventually replace the vast majority of the older legacy electricity tariffs that have been available in the past.

What's the benefit of having a smart meter?

Smart meters send meter readings directly to your electricity supplier, so you get accurate bills based on the electricity you've actually used, not an estimate. Your supplier will provide you with an In-Home Display that will allow you to keep a closer eye on how much electricity you're using and how much you're spending. You can see where you might be able to save energy, for example by turning the heating down when you don't need it or switching the TV off at the wall. Having a smart meter installed will also enable you to have access to 'smart meter only' tariffs.

Will I be able to stay on the same tariff?

Your supplier will be able to tell you which tariffs are available to you. They should offer a tariff that is suitable for you and supports multi-rate functions, if that is required for the hot water and/or heating set up in your home. Having a smart meter installed will also enable you to have access to 'smart meter only' tariffs.

Can every RTS customer have a smart meter upgrade right now?

Unfortunately not. There are some situations where your electricity supplier won't be able to offer you an appointment for a smart meter upgrade just yet. If that's the case, then your electricity supplier will contact you once they're ready to carry out the upgrade.

Will the national smart metering infrastructure provide connectivity to every home/business?

The smart meter communications infrastructure provides coverage to around 99.25% of premises across the UK. However, trials will begin in 2024 seeking to improve this. There may be a very small number of locations in the UK that can't yet be connected. If you're reliant on RTS and your home/business is in one of these locations, your electricity supplier may need to provide you with a smart meter that doesn't need to be connected to the communications infrastructure. These meters will have pre-set peak/off-peak switching times built in to provide cheaper off-peak electricity for your heating needs.

What happens if I don't upgrade to a smart meter?

A smart meter upgrade will give you a similar service to your RTS meter. If you decide not to upgrade, the heating and/or hot water provisions in your home or business are likely to be affected. You may find that your heating and/or hot water is continually left on or off, or the charging-up of your heating and/or hot water happens at the wrong time of day. Your electricity supplier won't be able to confirm how much electricity you have used during peak or off-peak times, which means your electricity costs are likely to be much higher than before.

I still don't want a smart electricity meter. What will happen when RTS ends and what will I need to do?

If you rely on RTS for heating and/or hot water provision, and you're still not prepared to accept a smart electricity meter upgrade as the replacement for RTS equipment, then there is a high probability that heating and hot water provision in your property will be affected – this is due to the way in which RTS controls and switches the flow of electricity to charge storage/panel and immersion heaters during off-peak electricity usage periods.

It could be the case that without receiving RTS messages, your heating could be left continuously on or off. If this happens, then it is highly likely that you will face increased electricity costs if your heating is continuously on, or your electricity supplier has to charge all of your electricity use at a single rate as a result of not being able to establish the split of electricity used between the more expensive peak and cheaper off-peak time periods.

If you don't accept the offer of a smart electricity meter upgrade as the replacement for RTS, then you are likely to need to engage the services of an electrician or electrical contractor to make some internal wiring changes in your home/business, and/or to fit a new heating controller to ensure the effective ongoing operation of heating and/or hot water equipment. The cost of making any changes needed to your internal wiring, or adding new heating/hot-water heating controls are the responsibility of the consumer/bill-payer or the property owner and not your electricity supplier.