

Oil and Oil Clubs

This advice is provided by Warm Homes and domestic fuel expert [Rix Petroleum](#).

Using oil to heat your home can be expensive and staying warm at a low cost can be a challenge. Oil prices not only change from week to week but the prices can be higher in the winter than in the summer.

Tips that may save you money

Buy your heating oil at the right time - One of the most effective ways to reduce the cost of heating oil is to buy your fuel at the right time of the year. Like any product or service the level of demand will affect the price. As the demand for heating oil falls, prices decrease. Research by [Which?](#) found that the best time to buy heating oil is during the summer.

Compare prices to get the best deal – Some price comparison sites, such as those shown below now include comparisons for oil which helps you to find the cheapest provider.

- fueltool.co.uk
- boilerjuice.com
- heatingoil.co.uk

Carefully consider whether a direct debit scheme or a fixed-term contract with a supplier is the best option. It may offer good value at the time but a fixed price prevents you from shopping around and finding a better deal, particularly when prices tend to fluctuate over the summer.

Use a heating timer - You may reduce energy you use by setting your heating to go on and off at select times. For example, setting your heater to go on half an hour before you get up in the morning will mean getting up to a warm house and is much more energy efficient than waiting until you wake up and then putting your heater on full blast, only to waste all of that heat when you go out.

If your central heating does not allow you to control the temperature, think about investing in a manual control system, such as a thermostat. Heating control devices allow you to control the temperature inside your home as well as the amount of hot water you can use.

Ensure your Boiler is Fully Serviced - All the energy-saving and cost-cutting measures you take will have little effect on your overall fuel efficiency if your boiler isn't operating to a good service. Regular servicing can help keep your boiler running efficiently and may save money in the long term.

If your boiler is old and inefficient you may qualify for funding towards boiler replacement from the local council, visit kent.gov.uk/warmhomes for more information.

Oil Clubs

One way to save on heating oil is to join a buying group. By buying heating oil in bulk, the group can get more oil for their money and the members will each make an individual saving that they wouldn't have if they purchased individually. You can find out more about setting up your own club by visiting the [Citizens Advice](#) website and searching 'oil clubs'.

Before setting up a club, find out if there is already one near to where you live. You can visit the oil club website at oil-club.co.uk. This is a larger club with members from across the county.

Credit Unions – These lend small amounts of money and charge low interest. Kent Savers is a local credit union which may help you buy oil by offering a short term loan. kentsavers.co.uk.

Tips for oil club co-ordinators

If this is going to be your role then the following tips, drawn from previous scheme co-ordinators' may assist you.

Setting up an oil club:

- Be realistic about how much time you can devote to the role. Larger clubs with several hundred members may be able to offer better savings because of multiple orders, but they take more co-ordination.
- If you want to keep it small, advertise locally first via parish magazines, word of mouth, village websites and social media. If you wish to go bigger, then promote your scheme using local newspapers, and organisations such as Housing Associations, the parish council, the CAB and other charities.
- Consider providing members with basic terms of reference i.e. what they can expect from the club. Hold a meeting of interested members and advertise it via the local media, events, shop windows etc.
- You could join a bigger group. There are county-wide heating oil groups where members pay an annual membership fee. It's worth checking the benefits of this approach if such a group exists in your area.

Running an oil club:

- Agree order dates for the year in advance so that people can plan ahead. This will depend on the size of the group.
- Members don't have to buy heating oil solely through the club. They are free to purchase interim orders if they need to, so make this clear in your communications and terms of reference. People can organise their own deliveries independently however it's good to check if others are in this position because oil companies may reduce their price on deliveries over a certain amount.
- When placing orders for winter, try to do so early in the autumn when suppliers are usually less busy and able to offer better discounts. Peak months are December, January and February.
- Keep abreast of daily oil prices. National newspapers carry such information or check online.
- Set up a list of oil suppliers which can be updated and regularly reviewed. A spread sheet can be used to collate this information. Include information about the service record and pricing record of oil companies too.
- Make sure your ordering system is backed up with hard copies in case your computer system crashes. A card index as a back-up is a good idea.
- Email members in good time before placing an order, usually two to three weeks before hand and phone members not on email. You can also take orders via a letter collection box at an agreed posting point for people not online.
- Use village events to promote your club and when new people move into the area invite them to become members.
- Residents not online may need a bit of extra help. The great thing about oil clubs is that they can spread the benefits to more vulnerable members of the community. Some members could be invited to partner with an elderly neighbour.
- The internet can really speed things up. Consider using the village website or a social media page like Facebook to pass on information and updates. If you don't know how to do this there may be someone in the community who can.

Charging:

Some co-ordinators see this role as their contribution to the community. Some charge an amount to cover costs, particularly those involved in bigger clubs. Make sure this is clearly communicated when the club is set up. An annual membership fee could be used for a community fund to help members struggling with their fuel bills.

Suppliers:

If cost is the only factor you might go for the best price each time, however consider other factors such as reliability and good customer service. Try to establish a good rapport with oil companies.

Payment:

It's the responsibility of the members to pay the supplier, not the organiser. Make sure this is clear in the terms of reference for the group.

Consider using a computer spread-sheet which contains all order details such as tank location, instructions for automatic gates, dogs etc. You can find a list of information the supplier needs to know on the Federation of Petroleum Suppliers website fpsonline.com.

General:

Keep scheme members up to date on other schemes that can help them to save fuel costs – home insulation grants for example. If you have a website you could advertise these.

The club is likely to grow over the years as word spreads so be ready to review arrangements to let other members know if changes are going to be made.