Winter Home Health Check

1.	Test your heating	Does it switch on OK? Does the system heat up?	If your heating doesn't switch on, call a GasSafe registered heating engineer. Do not take risks with your heating.
2.	Check your radiators	Do all of your radiators heat up? Is the heat even? Are you heating the spaces that you need and not the ones you don't?	If some radiators don't heat up, you may have a block in your system. Call a GasSafe registered heating engineer to clean out your system. If a radiator has warm patches and cold patches, it might have air bubbles inside it. You can "bleed" your radiator to remove these bubbles. You'll need a radiator key, available from most hardware stores. Watch this video on how to bleed a radiator: www.youtube.com/watch?v=YR97NZdVWbY Most radiator valves will let you change settings (often from 1-5 or I -III). Turn down the radiators in rooms that you don't use very often.
3.	Check your timers	What time is your heating set to switch on? Are your timers set the same every day?	It's easy just to set your timers and forget about them, but you'll save money and be more comfortable if you adjust them from time to time. See how long it takes for the heating to warm up and set your timers to match this, so you're not wasting energy heating space when it's empty. Try to match your timers to your lifestyle – programme or adjust them for weekends or if you're working shifts. Check the next day's weather forecast and see if you can leave your heating off for an extra hour in the morning.
4.	Check your temperatures	What temperature is your system set to? What do you do if you're too hot or too cold?	Recommended temperatures are 18-21 degrees in a living room and 18 degrees in a bedroom. If your home is consistently below 18 degrees, you could face health issues or find that your home has problems with damp and mould. If you're sitting still for long periods, you will start to feel colder. Move around to warm up. Make sure you're dressed appropriately – that extra jumper won't hurt. If you're too hot, turn the eating down or off. Try not to open the windows as this just lets the heat out.
5.	Check your chimney	Is your chimney blocked? Is there a damper fitted in the chimney? Are there draughts coming from a chimney that is not in use?	Fires and stoves need ventilation from a chimney. If your chimney is blocked, it may not "draw" properly and dangerous carbon monoxide may spill out into the room. A damper is a flap which can be opened (when a fire is in use) or closed (when there is no fire). Closing the damper helps reduce draughts coming down the chimney. If you have a gas fire and a damper, the damper should be permanently open. If you do not have any sort of fire or stove, you can install a draught excluder into your chimney. These are usually in the form of thick plastic balloons or panels of insulating material. Do not block your chimney if you use your fireplace.
6.	Check for draughts	Are there draughts coming from windows or doors?	You can buy draught proofing tape at hardware shops; simply stick around the edges of leaky doors or windows. A cover for your letterbox can keep draughts out and draught excluders along the foot of a door can help keep you warm. Do not block vents! They are there to help prevent the build-up of condensation and damp.
7.	Keep mould under control	Are there patches of mould on walls, in corners or behind furniture?	Mould comes about when moisture gets stuck in cold rooms. Make sure you get moisture out by opening vents and using extract fans when you are cooking, washing or drying clothes. If mould does appear, keep it under control through regular cleaning. Mould sprays are available at local shops. If you're redecorating, you can get paint designed for rooms that are damp.
8.	Lag that loft	How well insulated is your loft?	Check your loft. Ideally, you should have loft insulation that's around 30cm (12 inches) deep. You can buy loft insulation from local hardware shops and install it yourself. Alternatively, you may qualify for free or discounted loft insulation through a government scheme. Find out more at www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk/pages/energy-company-obligation Make sure that loft insulation is evenly spread across the space with no gaps. And insulate or draughtproof your loft hatch too.
9.	Check your tariff	Are you getting the best deal that you can?	You don't have to switch energy supplier to get a better deal. You can phone your current supplier and ask them if you are on the best tariff for your use. If you are on a fixed term deal, or if you're considering one, check the terms for what your tariff will be at the end of the fixed term. Sometimes they go up significantly! Make a note to shop around again as you reach the end of the fixed term.
10.	Make sure your bills are accurate	Do you still rely on estimated bills?	If you're relying on estimated bills, you might be paying too much for your energy. Read your meters regularly and give the readings to your energy supplier so you can get an accurate bill. Your energy supplier may also offer a smart meter or a visual display to help you monitor how much energy you're using. Smart meters are free to install.