



Utility Regulator

ELECTRICITY GAS WATER

Consumer Protection Programme



2019-2022

Foreword

Protecting and empowering all consumers is the overarching purpose of our new Corporate Strategy (2019-2024), reaffirming our commitment to protect consumers today and tomorrow.

We recognise that vulnerable domestic consumers require additional and bespoke regulatory interventions in order to ensure they too secure the benefits of competition and choice and also achieve fair outcomes. This is a fundamental role for regulators across the UK, and even more so in Northern Ireland given our relatively high levels of deprivation.

Our Consumer Protection Programme is a key vehicle to deliver these fair and equitable results for domestic consumers of electricity, gas and water, especially those in vulnerable circumstances.



Jenny Pyper
Chief Executive

Consumer Protection Programme Priority Projects



YEARS ONE AND TWO

OBJECTIVE	PROJECT
AFFORDABILITY	Best practice framework (1): Consumers experiencing an unforeseen change in circumstance which heightens their vulnerability (a) improved early identification of consumers at risk of crisis; (b) ensure that consumers made vulnerable through unforeseen circumstances (e.g. bereavement or health issue) are protected in best practice ways; and (c) ensure utility staff are adequately trained to identify and help potentially vulnerable consumers at risk.
	Examine back-billing arrangements in NI and ensure they operate fairly.
	Supplier debt communication review.
	Review energy consumer pathways to better deals.
EQUAL ACCESS	Review Quick Check 101.
EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION AND TRANSPARENCY	Deliver new published content to help educate/empower consumers and stakeholders about energy market and consumer outcomes.
	Review electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS).
LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT	Consumer Insights Tracker (CIT): a new baseline of domestic consumer outcomes, attitudes and experiences in relation to energy markets. Initial CIT to be released in 2019/2020 and repeated at least every two years.
	Best practice framework (2): Investigating and delivering best practice approaches by regulated companies to vulnerable consumer protection, such as (a) staff training, (b) practical measures and (c) signposting and engaging in multi-agency approaches.
	Utility Regulator to take part in stakeholder and consumer engagement and in working groups with external bodies, including government/regulatory/statutory, to capture best practice approaches which are advantageous to consumers and can be responsibly imported into NI.
	Establish and adopt a definition of vulnerability for NI domestic consumers. Ensure this definition is adequately adopted across regulated companies.

YEAR THREE

OBJECTIVE	PROJECT
AFFORDABILITY	Review existing processes and procedures for domestic consumers switching supplier.
EQUAL ACCESS	Supplier care registers review.
	Consider extension of Quick Check 101 to suppliers (currently network companies only).
	Scope and review the establishment of a universal utility care register.
LEADERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT	Establish consumer/industry/Utility Regulator group for consumer issues.

Our Consumer Protection Programme

Our Consumer Protection Programme has been developed at a time when the strategic focus on consumers in regulated sectors, especially those who are vulnerable, has never been higher. The Consumer Protection Programme is a central element of our Corporate Strategy 2019-2024.

The aim of the Consumer Protection Programme is to bring clarity, consistency and best-practice to consumer protection in Northern Ireland's energy and water sectors, whilst recognising our specific characteristics and sometimes unique challenges. We are confident that the projects identified in the tables will provide positive outcomes and benefits for consumers in Northern Ireland, particularly those more vulnerable.

We have committed enhanced resource to the delivery of our Consumer Protection Programme. This reflects its importance and the positive impacts it will deliver.

Working together is fundamentally important to the success of the Programme and we have been encouraged by the support shown by stakeholders and convey our thanks to those who have participated in this process. We look forward to continuing to work together through the delivery of the projects identified.



We are the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland's electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries. Our work is based on our statutory duties which include:

- **Energy (electricity and gas)** – protecting the interests of electricity consumers with regard to price and quality of service where appropriate by promoting effective competition; and promoting the development and maintenance of an efficient, economic and coordinated gas industry.
- **Water** – protecting the interests of water and sewerage consumers by promoting an efficient industry delivering high quality services.

For full details on our Corporate Strategy 2019-2024 and the Consumer Protection Programme, please visit our website – www.uregni.gov.uk



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