



Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance

August 2023



About the Utility Regulator

The Utility Regulator is the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland's electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries, to promote the short and long-term interests of consumers.

We are not a policy-making department of government, but we make sure that the energy and water utility industries in Northern Ireland are regulated and developed within ministerial policy as set out in our statutory duties.

We are governed by a Board of Directors and are accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly through financial and annual reporting obligations.

We are based at Queens House in the centre of Belfast. The Chief Executive leads a management team of directors representing each of the key functional areas in the organisation: Corporate Affairs, Markets and Networks. The staff team includes economists, engineers, accountants, utility specialists, legal advisors and administration professionals.



Our mission

To protect the short- and long-term interests of consumers of electricity, gas and water.



Our vision

To ensure value and sustainability in energy and water.



Our values

- Be a best practice regulator: transparent, consistent, proportionate, accountable and targeted.
- Be professional – listening, explaining and acting with integrity.
- Be a collaborative, co-operative and learning team.
- Be motivated and empowered to make a difference.



Abstract

The Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) set out prescribed service levels which *individual consumers* can expect from electricity companies, including compensatory payment requirements when the company has failed to adhere to the standards (subject to certain exemptions). Overall Standards of Performance (OSP) set out general required standards that are not customer specific and do not carry a compensatory payment if breached.

The GSS/OSP were specified in Regulations made under Article 42 of the Electricity (NI) Order 1992 by the Director General of Electricity (who preceded the Utility Regulator) and whose powers to do so were conferred by the Department. The Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations Northern Ireland 1993 came into force on 1st January 1994. The regulations were later amended by the Electricity (Standards of Performance) (Amendment No 3) Regulations (NI) 1999 and the current standards have been in place since 1st October 1999. The GSS/OSP regime currently applies only to the electricity distribution company in Northern Ireland.

This consultation proposes the introduction of a GSS/OSP regime for electricity supply companies in Northern Ireland and an update to the GSS/OSP for the electricity distribution company.

Audience

This document is most likely to be of interest to electricity distribution and supply companies, regulated energy companies, consumer organisations, community and voluntary organisations, natural gas, electricity and water consumers, government and other statutory bodies.

Consumer impact

GSS/OSP set out the prescribed levels of service which consumers can expect from their electricity distribution company. This consultation seeks to update the GSS/OSP for the electricity distribution company and extend these consumer service standards to electricity supply companies. The introduction of a reviewed and effective GSS/OSP regime, for both electricity distribution and supply, will enhance the levels of consumer protection offered to consumers in Northern Ireland. Failure to comply with the levels of service required under the GSS/OSP regime may result in compensatory payments to individual consumers and/or potential enforcement action.



Contents page

Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction.....	6
Background	6
Purpose of this paper and review	7
Context of the review	8
Consumer research	8
Overall Standards of Performance	8
Summary of GSS review proposals	9
2. Equality Considerations	11
Consultation Questions	11
3. Call for Evidence and 2017 Consultation	13
4. Electricity GSS/OSP Consumer Research	14
Background	14
Methodology	14
Key findings	14
Conclusion.....	16
5. Proposed Electricity Distributor GSS Requirements	18
Background	18
Proposed GSS for electricity distributors	18
Compensatory Payments	19
Distributors Fuse	21
Supply Restoration	21
Notice of Supply Interruption	22
Provision of supply and estimate of charges	23
Voltage complaints	23
Meter disputes	24
Prepayment meters	24
Metering Errors.....	24
Charges and payments	24
Appointments.....	25
Complaints.....	25
Multiple Disconnections.....	25
Rota Disconnections.....	26
Timing of Notification	26
Notice of Rights	26
Consultation Questions	28
6. Electricity Distributor Overall Standards of Performance	29



	Consultation Question	29
7.	Proposed Electricity Supplier GSS Requirements	30
	Background	30
	Proposed GSS for electricity suppliers	30
	Meter disputes and Prepayment meters	31
	Appointments.....	33
	Charges and payments	33
	Complaints.....	34
	Non-payment Proposed Guaranteed Standards of Service.....	35
	Consultation Questions	37
8.	Proposed Electricity Supplier Overall Standards of Performance.....	38
	Consultation Question	38
9.	Reporting and Exemptions	39
	Exemptions.....	39
	Notice of Rights	39
10.	Implications and Implementation.....	41
	Implementation	41
	Timeline for implementation.....	41
11.	Next Steps	42
	Table 1: Summary of Activities.....	43
12.	Annex 1	44
	Table 2: Proposed new electricity GSS standards.....	44
13.	Annex 2	50
	Table 3: NIEN Overall Standards of Performance.....	50
14.	Annex 3	51
	Table 4: Glossary and Acronyms.....	51



Executive Summary

Background

The electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) set out prescribed service levels which domestic and non-domestic consumers can expect in individual cases from their electricity distributor (in Northern Ireland, this is Northern Ireland Electricity Networks [NIE Networks]). The GSS include compensatory payments in recognition of poor performance, specifically where there has been a failure by a company, presently NIE Networks, to adhere to the standards (subject to certain exemptions).

The electricity Overall Standards of Performance (OSP) set out general required standards that are not individual consumer specific and do not carry a compensatory payment if breached. Where there is poor performance and/or breach by a company of their GSS/OSP the Energy (NI) Order 2003 provides the legal basis with which the Authority may consider action pursuant to the UR enforcement procedure.

The UR has conducted a review of electricity GSS and OSP. This review involved carrying out consumer research¹ with domestic and non-domestic consumers, a benchmarking exercise to our local NI gas GSS regime in place for other utilities, and consideration of similar GSS/OSP provisions in GB. This consultation provides details on the outcome of this review and the UR's proposed changes to the current electricity GSS/OSP in Northern Ireland.

Purpose of the review of electricity GSS/OSP

The current electricity GSS/OSP regime in Northern Ireland applies only to electricity distribution and does not include electricity suppliers. This review aims to update the electricity GSS/OSP requirements for NIE Networks, reflecting the current industry structure, and for the first time put in place a new GSS/OSP regime for electricity suppliers.

In 2014, the UR introduced Individual Standards of Performance for gas suppliers in Northern Ireland². This resulted in a gas GSS regime for both gas distributors and suppliers and afforded gas consumers protection across the gas industry as a whole.

The primary purpose of this review is to ensure that the GSS/OSP regime is fit for purpose and provides an enhanced level of consumer protection. We believe that the new GSS/OSP proposed in this consultation strikes the appropriate balance of

¹ A copy of the consumer research report accompanies this consultation document. Research of a representative sample of consumers, likely to be affected by such standards, is a legislative requirement under the Energy Order.

² [The Gas \(Individual Standards of Performance\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2014 | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)



providing protection for consumers whilst not overburdening the electricity distribution company or suppliers.

This consultation paper follows a call for evidence to stakeholders and interested parties on 24th November 2016 designed to help form a perspective on the relevant policy considerations and approach to take in the review and an initial consultation on proposed electricity GSS published on 12th April 2017³.

The information obtained from this further consultation will be used to inform our decision on the electricity GSS and OSP. The proposed outcome of the review will be the introduction of new and updated regulations setting out the GSS and OSP for all electricity supply and distribution companies under licence.

Proposed changes to the current electricity GSS/OSP

In Sections 5 to 8 of this consultation paper, we set out in detail the proposed changes to the electricity GSS/OSP.

For the electricity distributor, proposed changes to the existing electricity GSS are:

- A reduction in the supply restoration time due to a fault from 24 hours to 18 hours in normal weather conditions;
- The introduction of GSS for supply restoration in normal weather conditions, when more than 5,000 customers are affected;
- The introduction of categories of “severe weather”⁴ for supply restoration; and
- The introduction of GSS in relation to metering errors, responding to complaints, multiple disconnections and rota disconnection.

We propose at this stage to retain the existing OSP in relation to the electricity distribution company.

For the electricity suppliers, we propose the inclusion of GSS in the following areas:

- Meter disputes and Prepayment meters;
- Appointments;

³ [Guaranteed Standards of Service \(GSS\) consultation | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](https://www.uregni.gov.uk/news-centre/utility-regulator-publishes-its-decision-paper-nie-licence-mod-severe-weather)

⁴ The UR implemented a licence modification on 5th February 2015 to include a definition of “severe weather event” <https://www.uregni.gov.uk/news-centre/utility-regulator-publishes-its-decision-paper-nie-licence-mod-severe-weather>



- Charges and payments;
- Complaints;
- Timing of notification; and
- Notice of rights.

We propose to set new OSPs for electricity supply companies which will set targets for responding to customer correspondence and customer complaints in line with the gas OSPs for NI.

Compensatory payments

The GSS compensatory payment values do not reflect or attempt to remedy losses that may be experienced by each consumer, in whole or in part depending upon the unique circumstances of every case, rather, they aim to create a uniform approach in acknowledging the inconvenience caused to the consumer when company performance is below the prescribed level. The UR proposes to continue with this approach.

However, as part of our review we intend to update the compensatory payment values payable where the electricity GSS is not met. We propose to increase the GSS compensatory payment values in Northern Ireland. The proposed compensatory payment values are shown in Annex 1.

We acknowledge that these compensatory payments will be higher than those applied to gas consumers within the gas GSS Regulations. However, as part of a future Consumer Protection Programme we intend to carry out a simultaneous review of both gas and electricity GSS to bring them both up to date with regards to progress in consumer protection practices and in line with each other.

Automatic Compensatory payments

The consumer research highlighted that both domestic and non-domestic consumers overwhelmingly want automatic payment of compensatory payments from lower than expected standards of service from electricity companies, both NIE Networks and suppliers.

The UR proposes to make the majority of compensatory payments to consumers from the electricity distribution and electricity suppliers' automatic.



Future review of electricity GSS

For the purposes of this consultation, the UR is mindful that to ensure that the electricity GSS/OSP regime is fit for purpose we will need to carry out further reviews to capture changing consumer expectations for service standards amongst any other changes in the marketplace and/or consumer protection practices. This review will form part of a future Consumer Protection Programme as indicated above. However, in the first instance, the UR needs to address the lack of electricity supplier GSS/OSP provision and put in place an appropriate GSS/OSP regime.

Consultation Questions

We ask that consultees respond to the following questions:

Q1: Do respondents share the view of UR that the equality impacts of the proposed electricity GSS/OSP are positive and therefore do not require a full screen? If not, please provide details of any evidence you feel UR should consider.

Q2: What do respondents estimate the key costs from the implementation of GSS/OSP are likely to be? Please provide evidence.

Q3: Are respondents content with the proposed GSS for electricity distribution in Northern Ireland?

Q4: Are respondents content with the proposed level of GSS compensatory payments for the electricity distribution?

Q5: Are respondents content with the proposed retention of the existing OSP for electricity distribution in Northern Ireland with no changes?

Q6: Are respondents content with the proposed GSS for electricity suppliers in Northern Ireland?



Q7: Are respondents content with the proposed level of GSS compensatory payments for the electricity suppliers?

Q8: Are respondents content with the proposed OSP for electricity suppliers in Northern Ireland?

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 The electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) set out prescribed service levels that consumers can expect in individual cases. They include compensatory payments in recognition of poor performance, specifically where there has been a failure by a company to adhere to the standards (subject to certain exemptions).
- 1.2 The electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service were specified in Regulations made under Article 42 of the Electricity (NI) Order 1992 by the Director General of Electricity (who preceded the Utility Regulator) and whose powers to do so were conferred by the Department. The Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations Northern Ireland 1993 came into force on 1st January 1994. The Regulations were later amended by the Electricity (Standards of Performance) (Amendment No 3) Regulations (NI) 1999 and the current standards have been in place since 1st October 1999⁵.
- 1.3 The electricity Overall Standards of Performance (OSP) are performance targets applicable to the entire customer base serviced either by the distribution company or supply company under licence. No compensatory payments apply to the OSP. Their importance is in highlighting any persistent poor performance and breach by a company of their OSP that may then potentially provide the legal basis with which the Authority may consider action under its enforcement policy.
- 1.4 The current electricity GSS/OSP⁶ in Northern Ireland refer only to NIE Networks and have been in place since 1 October 1999. There are currently no GSS/OSP provisions for electricity suppliers. The UR has committed, through the Consumer Protection Programme (CPP)⁷, to review the electricity GSS/OSP. This review aims to update the electricity GSS/OSP requirements for NIE Networks, reflecting the current industry structure, and for the first time put in place a new GSS/OSP regime for electricity suppliers.
- 1.5 GSS and OSP for both gas Network and Supply companies were introduced in Northern Ireland in 2014. The existing electricity GSS requires a revision and update to reflect the current regulatory and legislative environment. It is proposed that new standards are introduced which are informed by GB

⁵ [Electricity \(Standards of Performance\) \(Amendment No. 3\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1999](#)

⁶ [Electricity \(Standards of Performance\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

⁷ The CPP is the UR's principal vehicle to deliver positive outcomes for domestic electricity, gas, and water consumers in Northern Ireland and includes a suite of bespoke projects aimed at enhancing consumer protection for all consumers.

standards (Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations 2015)⁸. For electricity supply, we want to capture GB best practice on electricity standards and use the NI gas supply standards as benchmarks. There has been significant progress with new standards developed, and more than one review has already taken place in GB, since our own local standards were last developed.

- 1.6 We will use the GB approach to inform our development of a GSS/OSP regime that is appropriate for NI and that provides adequate protection for consumers whilst not overburdening NIE Networks and suppliers.
- 1.7 The Electricity (NI) Order 1992⁹ requires the UR to conduct research with a representative sample of consumers in NI (including domestic and non-domestic) prior to reviewing both the electricity GSS and OSP requirements. Articles 42 and 43B of the Electricity (NI) Order 1992 requires the UR to arrange “for such research as the Authority considers appropriate with a view to discovering the views of a representative sample of persons likely to be affected” and to consider these results before prescribing new GSS and OSP respectively.

Purpose of this paper and review

- 1.8 The current electricity GSS/OSP requirements in Northern Ireland refer only to the electricity distributor, NIE Networks, and have been in place since 1 October 1999.
- 1.9 It is intended that this review will update the electricity GSS and OSP requirements to reflect the current industry structure and also introduce this regime for electricity suppliers. By introducing electricity supplier GSS/OSP, this aligns with the regulations for the gas industry in Northern Ireland which apply to both gas conveyors and gas suppliers.
- 1.10 We are proposing to introduce an increase to the monetary amount of the compensatory payments due if the electricity industry fail to meet the GSS. In addition, we would propose the majority of compensatory payments to be issued automatically rather than rely on consumers applying in the first instance to their supply or distribution company.
- 1.11 Once this new GSS regime for electricity distribution and supply has been implemented and reported upon, the UR will consider a wider review of both the existing gas industry GSS regime and the new GSS requirements for electricity as part of future Consumer Protection Programme work plans.

⁸ [The Electricity \(Standards of Performance\) Regulations 2015 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1000/contents/made)

⁹ [The Electricity \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1992 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1992/1000/contents/made)

- 1.12 We propose in this paper to retain the OSPs in relation to the distribution company (set out in Annex 2 of this document) and to set new OSPs for supply companies.

Context of the review

- 1.13 The UR commenced the review of electricity GSS in 2017, following the launch of the Consumer Protection Strategy (CPS), which listed a review of electricity GSS as a project for delivery. A review of electricity GSS progressed through a number of stages including a Call for Evidence and public consultation during 2017. However, due to a number of issues, including the legislative requirement to conduct research with consumers prior to developing the GSS, the UR had to pause the review and the electricity GSS/OSP project re-commenced in 2019.
- 1.14 The 2019 review of electricity GSS/OSP project maintained the overarching project objective of ensuring the GSS/OSP regime is fit for purpose and that the electricity GSS regime is extended to include electricity suppliers for the first time in Northern Ireland.

Consumer research

- 1.15 In order to comply with the legislative requirements for the development of GSS, we conducted research to identify local consumer expectations of utility companies with a representative sample of domestic and non-domestic customers likely to be affected. We engaged the services of Perceptive Insight to conduct this research and provide us with a final report. The summary findings of this research are included in Section 4 and the full final report accompanies this consultation document.
- 1.16 The consumer research commissioned by the UR demonstrates the high level of importance of GSS amongst domestic and non-domestic consumers. Due to this we have taken the decision to mirror the gas GSS regime for distribution and supply, which is already in place, for the new GSS for electricity distribution and supply.

Overall Standards of Performance

- 1.17 We propose at this stage to retain the existing OSP in relation to the electricity distribution company. Changes to the electricity OSP for the distribution company will be considered in a future review.
- 1.18 We propose to introduce new OSPs for electricity supply companies which will set targets for responding to customer correspondence and customer complaints in line with the OSP for NI gas consumers. This would be

specified in a Determination from the UR under Article 43 of The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992.

Summary of GSS review proposals

1.19 Following a review of the current GSS for electricity distribution, we propose changes and additions to the following individual standards for distribution companies:

- A reduction in the supply restoration time due to a fault from 24 hours to 18 hours in normal weather conditions;
- The introduction of GSS for supply restoration in normal weather conditions, when more than 5,000 customers are affected;
- The introduction of categories of “severe weather”¹⁰ for supply restoration;
- The introduction of GSS in relation to metering errors;
- The introduction of GSS in relation to responding to complaints;
- The introduction of GSS for multiple disconnections;
- The introduction of GSS for rota disconnection;
- Automatic compensatory payments for all consumers when individual standards for the distribution company have not been met (with exceptions for multiple and planned interruptions and for supply restoration in normal and severe weather conditions);
- Additional protections for Critical Care¹¹ Register customers and vulnerable customers¹² through automatic compensation payments for

¹⁰ The UR implemented a licence modification on 5th February 2015 to include a definition of “severe weather event” <https://www.uregni.gov.uk/news-centre/utility-regulator-publishes-its-decision-paper-nie-licence-mod-severe-weather>

¹¹ NIE Networks offer a critical care information service to customers who are dependent on life supporting electrical equipment. Being on the register means customers will receive up to date information by phone during a power cut or a planned interruption.

¹² Vulnerable persons are defined in NIE Networks Distribution Licence as persons of state pensionable age, or those who are disabled, blind or deaf. https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni.gov.uk/files/media-files/NIE_Distribution_Licence_-_Condition_21_Modifications_-_effective_21_September_2016.pdf

The Utility Regulator has proposed the implementation of a new wider definition of vulnerability in the Best Practice Framework Consultation (June 2023): ‘A consumer is deemed vulnerable when their personal characteristics or circumstances reduce their ability to engage effectively and achieve fair outcomes. A vulnerable consumer is significantly less able to protect or represent their interests and significantly more likely to suffer detrimental impacts on their health, wellbeing or finances.’ [Best Practice Framework Consultation Proposals: Code of Practice for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

supply restoration standards;

- An increase in the compensation payment values to align with GB;
- Annual reporting against these standards.

1.20 We propose the introduction of GSS standards in the following areas for electricity suppliers:

- Meter disputes and Prepayment meters;
- Appointments;
- Charges and payments;
- Complaints;
- Timing of notification;
- Notice of rights;
- Automatic compensatory payments for all consumers when these individual standards for suppliers have not been met;
- Annual reporting against these standards.

1.21 Where there will be interactions required between the electricity distributor and the electricity supplier in relation to standards, this is noted in the paper. This will include Metering issues, Timing of notification and Notice of Rights.

1.22 The proposed compensatory payment amounts can be found at Annex 1. Where the distribution or supply company fail to meet the guaranteed standards, it is proposed that payments are made within 10 working days.

1.23 We propose to retain the OSPs in relation to the distribution company (set out in Annex 2 of this document). We propose to set new OSP for supply companies which will set targets of 97% for customer correspondence and customer complaints in line with the gas overall standards¹³.

1.24 The Department for the Economy (DfE) has the role of laying the GSS regulations before the Assembly and that the regulations are subject to negative resolution (as per Article 93(2) of the Electricity Order).

1.25 The introduction of new OSP for electricity suppliers would be specified in a Determination from the UR under Article 43 of The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992.

¹³ [2014-03-03 Overall Standards of Performance.pdf \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

2. Equality Considerations

2.1 As a public authority, the UR has a number of obligations arising from section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998¹⁴. These obligations concern the promotion of equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

2.2 The UR must also have regard to the promotion of good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial groups. In the development of its policies the UR also has a statutory duty to have due regard to the needs of vulnerable consumers i.e. individuals who are disabled or chronically sick, individuals of pensionable age, individuals with low incomes and individuals residing in rural areas. Some of the above equality categories will therefore overlap with these vulnerable groupings.

2.3 In order to assist with equality screening of the proposed electricity GSS/OSP, the UR requests that respondents provide comments on the equality impact of the proposed electricity GSS/OSP and provide any information or evidence in relation to the needs, experiences, issues and priorities for different groups which you feel are relevant to the implementation of any of the proposals.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

2.4 A Regulatory Impact Assessment has been developed for the proposed changes to the electricity GSS/OSP. As part of this consultation, the UR would invite estimates from electricity companies of key monetised costs expected from the implementation of the proposed requirements.

Consultation Questions

We ask that consultees respond to the following question:

Q1: Do respondents share the view of the UR that the equality impacts of the proposed electricity GSS/OSP are positive and therefore do not

¹⁴ [Northern Ireland Act 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](http://legislation.gov.uk)

require a full screen? If not, please provide details of any evidence you feel UR should consider.

Q2: What do respondents estimate the key costs from the implementation of GSS/OSP are likely to be? Please provide evidence.

3. Call for Evidence and 2017 Consultation

- 3.1 The Utility Regulator issued a call for evidence¹⁵ to stakeholders and interested parties on 24th November 2016 to help form a perspective on the relevant policy considerations and approach to take in the review.
- 3.2 The Call for Evidence included a set of questions to which we invited feedback and evidence from relevant stakeholders. The responses to the Call for Evidence were reviewed and considered and an initial consultation paper was published which took into account the content of the responses received and set out our proposed approach.
- 3.3 The 2017 Consultation paper followed the same format as the current consultation and, overall, the proposals are the same. Since the publication of the 2017 paper, research has been completed with consumers to assess their views on GSS/OSP. This research is reported in Section 4. We would encourage stakeholders to respond to the current consultation to inform the UR approach at this time.
- 3.4 There were some concerns in response to the 2017 consultation paper on GSS/OSP that the introduction of electricity supplier GSS is unnecessary, given the level of consumer protection that the supplier Codes of Practice offer to consumers in the gas and electricity markets in Northern Ireland. The supplier Codes of Practice do indeed provide consumers with a minimum standard of service provision and a level of consumer protection, however, the principle for GSS is that individual customers would receive some compensation where a company fails to deliver on the prescribed levels of service.
- 3.5 Furthermore, we consider that not updating the GSS regime would have a negative impact on consumers. In updating the GSS Regulations, the UR is fulfilling its statutory duty to protect the short and long term interests of consumers.

¹⁵ <https://www.uregni.gov.uk/news-centre/electricity-guaranteed-standards-service-call-evidence>

4. Electricity GSS/OSP Consumer Research

Background

- 4.1 Consumer research is a prerequisite to this consultation, as under Article 42 of the Electricity (NI) Order 1992¹⁶ the Utility Regulator is obliged to carry out research on a representative sample of persons prior to making or amending the content of GSS Regulations.
- 4.2 The following section summarises the key findings from a comprehensive study, commissioned by the UR and carried out by Perceptive Insight, to assess the views of domestic and non-domestic customers in relation to GSS and OSP for electricity. A copy of the full research report accompanies this consultation document.

Methodology

- 4.3 A telephone survey of domestic customers was undertaken between November 2020 and February 2021 and during February and March 2021 for the non-domestic customers. In total, 1,211 domestic and 500 non-domestic interviews were completed.

Key findings

- 4.4 The consumer research asked both domestic and non-domestic consumers about their awareness and views of existing GSS/OSP standards. The research found that 91% of domestic consumers and 90% of non-domestic consumers believed that there should be similar standards of service in place for electricity companies as there are for gas companies.

Domestic consumers

Awareness and views of GSS/OSP for electricity companies

- 4.5 Although the findings point to a low awareness of minimum (overall) standards of service among domestic consumers, they suggest that domestic customers recognise their importance. Only 12% of respondents had heard of any minimum standards of service for electricity companies before they took part in the research, but 94% think it is important to have these overall standards alongside standards at an individual level.
- 4.6 The findings from the research point to a strong desire for consistent standards across both gas and electricity companies, with 91% of domestic respondents saying there should be similar standards of service in place for

¹⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1992/231/article/42>

both utilities.

- 4.7 In addition, it should be noted that domestic customers want to see the promotion of standards of service with 93% of domestic consumers believing it is important to also have standards for the provision of information on GSS.

Support and response times for specific GSS

- 4.8 The survey found that there is a high level of support for having GSS in place across all of the areas of provision that were included in the research, with in excess of 82% of domestic customers rating each of the standards of service as important. In relation to the maximum times that are set to respond to issues as part of the GSS, the majority of domestic consumers are keen to see shorter time frames in place for a number of areas including:

- queries about faulty meters and bills;
- responses to complaints; and
- the restoration of power in normal weather.

Level of payment and making claims

- 4.9 The majority of domestic consumers (85%) are in favour of payments being made when a standard of service has not been met, particularly those who have or live with someone who has a disability (93%). Most domestic consumers are in favour of having this payment made automatically by the electricity company (84%), and that any payment set should increase with the cost of living (72%). The time it takes to make this payment is also significant with 88% of people saying it is important to have a GSS to ensure timely payments are made.

Non-domestic consumers

Awareness and views of GSS for electricity companies

- 4.10 Similar to domestic consumers, there was a low level of awareness of minimum (overall) standards of service among non-domestic customers, but a very high level of importance attributed to having them in place. Only 13% had heard of minimum standards of service before taking part in the survey, but almost all (97%) think it is important to have them for electricity companies alongside standards of service for individual customers.
- 4.11 Non-domestic consumers also showed a desire for electricity and gas companies to share consistent standards, with 90% saying there should be similar standards of service for electricity companies as there are for gas companies.

Support and response times for specific GSS

- 4.12 Again, there was a high level of support for having GSS in place across all of the areas of provision that were included in the research, with in excess of 76% of non-domestic customers rating each service area as important (apart from time taken to respond to a change in payment method which had 66% rating it as important).
- 4.13 In relation to the maximum times that are set to respond to issues as part of the GSS, the majority of non-domestic customers are keen to see shorter time frames in place for a number of areas including:
- queries about faulty meters;
 - responses to complaints;
 - the restoration of power in normal weather; and
 - the notice given for planned interruptions.

Level of payment and making claims

- 4.14 The survey found that non-domestic consumers are in favour of being eligible to receive a payment when a standard has not been met (87%). Businesses felt that any payment should be made automatically by the electricity company (79%) and should increase with the cost of living (70%).
- 4.15 However, as one business suggested “*money back doesn’t solve the problem*”, and the results suggest that businesses place greater importance on the notice given for planned interruptions (99%), replacement of faulty mains fuses (97%) and the restoration of supply in normal weather (96%) than they do on the time it takes for a payment to be made if a standard has not been met (81%). This points to businesses being more concerned with having a continuous supply to ensure they can continue operating than they are with being reimbursed if the service they receive does not meet the required standard.

Conclusion

- 4.16 We are mindful that the consumer research indicated that, in order for licensees to achieve some individual standards, consumers would wish to see increased levels of service from electricity distribution and supply companies in Northern Ireland.
- 4.17 However, for this review we do not propose increasing the requirements of the individual GSS to those detailed in the research at this time. We have

decided in the first instance to implement the GSS to be on a par with those provided for gas consumers. We will allow a bedding-in period for electricity suppliers to ensure that these new standards or service are implemented, delivered and monitored. We then propose to conduct a further review of both gas and electricity GSS as part of a future Consumer Protection Programme.

- 4.18 The consumer research highlighted the need to increase the compensatory payments associated with GSS with the cost of living and that these payments should be made automatically by the companies to affected consumers. We propose including both an increased rate of compensatory payments and that the majority of compensatory payments be issued automatically in the new GSS regime for both electricity distribution and supply.
- 4.19 We consider that the evidence provided via the research programme supports the UR's proposals and approach with regard to implementation of GSS.

5. Proposed Electricity Distributor GSS Requirements

Background

5.1 In formulating a proposed approach to the review of electricity distribution GSS, we have taken the following into account:

- Consumer research;
- The need to align consumer protection with that currently available to gas customers in NI;
- The existing GSS applied to electricity distributors and how fit for purpose they are; and
- Comparison of consumer protection provided via GSS in NI with that in GB.

Proposed GSS for electricity distributors

5.2 The new regime we propose to introduce contains updated provisions of some existing electricity GSS which are currently in place in NI for the electricity distributor, will also introduce additional new standards for the electricity distributor, and introduce new standards for suppliers. These are all detailed in Annex 1.

5.3 We have made the decision to follow an incremental approach to the levels of GSS. The proposals will allow a good level of consumer protection whilst allowing a bedding-in period to ensure that these new standards of service are implemented, delivered and monitored effectively. We then propose to conduct a further review as part of the Consumer Protection Programme of both gas and electricity simultaneously to bring them both in line with standards of performance regulations in GB.

5.4 The changes we propose to introduce with the new GSS for electricity gas distributors are:

- A reduction in the supply restoration time due to a fault from 24 hours to 18 hours in normal weather conditions;
- The introduction of GSS for supply restoration in normal weather conditions, when more than 5,000 customers are affected;

- The introduction of categories of “severe weather”¹⁷ for supply restoration;
- The introduction of GSS in relation to metering errors;
- The introduction of GSS in relation to responding to complaints;
- The introduction of GSS for multiple disconnections;
- The introduction of GSS for rota disconnection;
- Automatic compensatory payments for all consumers (with exceptions for multiple and planned interruptions and for supply restoration in normal and severe weather conditions);
- Additional protections for Critical Care¹⁸ Register customers and vulnerable customers¹⁹ through automatic compensation payments for supply restoration standards;
- An increase in the compensation payment values to align with GB;
- Annual reporting.

5.5 Where there will be interactions required between the electricity distributor and the electricity supplier in relation to standards, this is noted. This will include Metering issues, Timing of notification and Notice of Rights.

5.6 These proposals for electricity distribution GSS are discussed in more detail below.

Compensatory Payments

5.7 The GSS regime aims to create a uniform approach in acknowledging the

¹⁷ The UR implemented a licence modification on 5th February 2015 to include a definition of “severe weather event” <https://www.uregni.gov.uk/news-centre/utility-regulator-publishes-its-decision-paper-nie-licence-mod-severe-weather>

¹⁸ NIE Networks offer a critical care information service to customers who are dependent on life supporting electrical equipment. Being on the register means customers will receive up to date information by phone during a power cut or a planned interruption.

¹⁹ Vulnerable persons are defined in NIE Networks Distribution Licence as persons of state pensionable age, or those who are disabled, blind or deaf. https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni.gov.uk/files/media-files/NIE_Distribution_Licence_-_Condition_21_Modifications_-_effective_21_September_2016.pdf

The Utility Regulator has proposed the implementation of a new wider definition of vulnerability in the Best Practice Framework Consultation (June 2023): ‘A consumer is deemed vulnerable when their personal characteristics or circumstances reduce their ability to engage effectively and achieve fair outcomes. A vulnerable consumer is significantly less able to protect or represent their interests and significantly more likely to suffer detrimental impacts on their health, wellbeing or finances.’ [Best Practice Framework Consultation Proposals: Code of Practice for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](https://www.uregni.gov.uk/best-practice-framework-consultation-proposals-code-of-practice-for-consumers-in-vulnerable-circumstances)

inconvenience caused to the customer when company performance falls below the prescribed level. The compensatory payment values do not reflect or attempt to remedy the actual loss, either partial or whole, experienced by each customer in the unique circumstances of every case. The UR intends to continue with this approach.

- 5.8 In GB, the majority of compensatory payments²⁰ are made automatically to Priority Services Register customers. The Priority Service Register provides additional services for customers who are of pensionable age; are disabled or chronically sick; have a long-term medical condition; have a hearing or visual impairment or additional communication needs or are in a vulnerable situation.
- 5.9 We intend to mirror this provision in so far as is possible by automating the majority²¹ of compensation payments for Medical Care Register customers and vulnerable customers, with the following exceptions due to the nature of the issue, which will apply to all customers:
- The GSS in relation to multiple interruptions where a customer must make a valid claim within three months of the end of the year which runs from 1st April to 31st March.
 - The GSS in relation to notice of planned interruptions where a customer must make a valid claim within one month of the failure to provide the notice.
- 5.10 For all other customers (not included in paragraph 5.9 above), we propose that GSS payments should also be made automatically by the company. The exceptions outlined in the previous paragraph would still apply including the following exception for all other customers as the company would not be aware that it has failed without notification by the customer:
- Supply restoration GSS (both normal and severe weather conditions) where a customer must make a valid claim within three months of the date supply is restored.
- 5.11 Existing compensatory payment amounts and proposed changes to these amounts are provided against each of the standards below.

²⁰ Customers are required to submit a claim in relation to Regulation 10 (Multiple interruptions) and Regulation 12 (Notice of Supply Interruption) in the GB Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations 2015.

²¹ All customers, whether on the critical care/vulnerable register or not, will need to make a claim in relation to the GSS for multiple interruptions and notice of a planned interruption. This is because the company may not be aware that it has failed to meet this standard without the customer submitting a claim and therefore the payment cannot be made automatically.

Distributors Fuse

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.12 The current standard requires replacement of a distributor's faulty main fuse within 3 hours on a working day²², or 4 hours on any other day. A payment of £25 is due if this is not achieved.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.13 We propose to retain the existing time frame in this standard and to increase the compensatory payment from £25 to £30.

Supply Restoration

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.14 The current standard in NI is 24 hours for supply to be restored following a fault, after which a compensation payment is triggered of £50 for domestic customers and £125 for non-domestic customers, then £25 for every subsequent 12 hour period. In GB, the current standard is 12 hours, which was introduced by the Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations 2015. In the previous GB Regulations introduced in 2010 the standard was 18 hours reflecting a decrease in the number of hours.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.15 We intend to reduce the restoration time in NI during normal weather conditions to 18 hours (when less than 5,000 customers are affected), after which a GSS payment of £75 will be triggered for domestic customers and a payment of £150 will be due for non-domestic customers. We will consider reducing this restoration period further to 12 hours to align with the current standard in GB when we review the GSS at a later date as part of a future Consumer Protection Programme. A further payment of £35 will be due for every subsequent 12-hour period in which supply is not restored.
- 5.16 We intend to introduce a new standard for supply restoration in normal weather conditions when 5,000 or more customers are affected. The restoration period will be 24 hours, after which a payment will be due of £75 compensation for domestic customers and £150 for non-domestic customers. A further payment of £35 will be due for every subsequent 12-hour period in which supply is not restored, subject to a maximum cap of

²² as period between "7.00 am and 7.00 pm on each working day and 9.00 am and 5.00 pm on any other day"

£300. This standard aligns with the current provisions in GB²³.

5.17 We intend to introduce a GSS standard for cases of severe weather, which mirror the provisions currently in GB. Regulations 5, 6 and 7 of the Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations 2015²⁴ provide three categories of severe weather events as follows:

- Category 1 (medium events) includes lightning events – where there are at least 8 times the daily average amount of faults in a 24 hour period affecting less than the category 3 threshold number of customers; and non-lightning events – where there are between 8 and 13 times the daily average amount of faults in a 24 hour period affecting less than the category 3 threshold number²⁵ of customers. In category 1 events supply is to be restored within 24 hours.
- Category 2 (large events) includes non-lightning events where there are at least 13 times the daily average amount of faults in a 24 hour period affecting less than the category 3 threshold number of customers. In category 2 events supply is to be restored within 48 hours.
- Category 3 (very large events) applies to all severe weather events in which faults on the distribution system interrupt a number of customers above a specified threshold number. Supply is to be restored in a period as calculated by the following formula:

$$48 \times \left(\frac{\text{total number of customers interrupted}}{\text{category 3 threshold number of customers}} \right)^2$$

5.18 In relation to all three categories of severe weather events, a payment of £70 would be triggered where there is a failure by the distributor to meet the standard. For each subsequent period of 12 hours after the initial prescribed period has passed, an additional compensation payment of £70 would be payable, subject to a maximum cap of £700.

Notice of Supply Interruption

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

5.19 Currently the distributor is required to give a minimum of 3 days prior notice of a planned interruption to a customer's supply. When this is not achieved a

²³ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/699/pdfs/uksi_20150699_en.pdf

²⁴ http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/699/pdfs/uksi_20150699_en.pdf

²⁵ In GB each designated electricity distributor has its own threshold number of customers specified in the table in Schedule 2 of the 2015 GB Regulations.

payment is due of £25 for domestic customers and £50 for non-domestic customers.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.20 The UR intends to maintain the current notification period in NI, which is at least three days, rather than adopting the approach in GB that requires an electricity distributor to give at least two days' notice. If this notice period of three days is not given, and the customer makes a valid claim within one month of the failure to provide the notice, a payment of £30 would be due for domestic customers and £60 for non-domestic customers.

Provision of supply and estimate of charges

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.21 The current standard (Regulation 5 – Providing a Supply) requires the electricity distributor to make an appointment to install a meter and turn on supply within 2 working days (for domestic customers) or 4 working days (for non-domestic customers), or to keep an appointment for these purposes. The compensation payment due is £50 for domestic customers and £125 for non-domestic customers.
- 5.22 Additionally another standard (Regulation 6 – Estimate of Charges) requires the distributor to provide a cost estimate for a new electricity supply where there is an existing connection within 7 working days (for small jobs) or 15 working days (for larger jobs). The compensation payment due is £50.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.23 We propose to retain these standards for Regulation 5 (Providing a Supply) and Regulation 6 (Estimate of Charges) from the existing GSS Regulations in NI.

Voltage complaints

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.24 The current standard requires distributors to explain what will be done to resolve a voltage problem within 5 working days of being notified of it. Or, if a site visit is required, within 7 working days.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.25 We propose retaining this standard with a change to the payment due when it is not met, increasing from £25 to £30.

Meter disputes

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.26 The current standard requires that a distributor, once notified, must offer an appointment to investigate the meter problem within 7 working days or offer an explanation within 5 working days if a visit is not required.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.27 We propose retaining this standard and applying a version of it to suppliers. Application to suppliers is discussed in the supplier GSS section of this paper. For distributors we also propose an increase in the payment due when not met, from £25 to £30.

Prepayment meters

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.28 The current standard requires a distributor to deal with a problem with a customer's pre-payment meter within 3 hours of being informed during a working day and 4 hours on any other day.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.29 We propose retaining this standard and applying a version of it to suppliers. Application to suppliers is discussed in the supplier GSS section of this paper. For distributors we also propose an increase in the payment due when not met, from £25 to £30.

Metering Errors

- 5.30 This would be a new provision that would apply where a customer is billed an incorrect amount by an electricity supplier as a result of an incorrect meter reading or incorrect meter calibration which has occurred due to an error by the electricity distributor.
- 5.31 Where this applies, a compensation payment of £30 would be due from the electricity distributor if the distributor is proven to be at fault.

Charges and payments

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.32 Currently the distributor should address a query regarding payments due under guaranteed standards within 5 working days. Where payments are due, they should then be made within 5 working days. Not achieving this

would mean a compensation payment of £25 is due.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.33 We propose retaining this standard for distributors, with an increase to the payment due from £25 to £30.

Appointments

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.34 An electricity distributor should offer a timed appointment for visits to customer premises between 8.30am and 1pm, or 12 noon and 5pm. If this appointment is not kept, a payment of £25 would be due to the customer.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.35 We propose retaining this standard for distributors, with a change to the payment due, increasing from £25 to £30.
- 5.36 The current GB regime includes a requirement for the company to provide either morning or afternoon appointments or a two-hour appointment window. We do not propose to introduce two-hour appointment windows at this stage.

Complaints

- 5.37 This would be a new standard for distributors and is different from the existing standard on voltage complaints. We intend to introduce a standard on responding to complaints. The distributor should provide an initial response to verbal or written complaints from customers within 10 working days, and provide a substantive response within 20 working days. If this standard is not met, then a payment of £30 would be due to the customer. This will be a new GSS standard paid by distributors for electricity customers and will mirror the protection offered to consumers in gas in NI. In their Complaints Procedure²⁶, the distributor, NIE Networks, already provide a 10 working day period for responding to complaints.

Multiple Disconnections

- 5.38 This would be a new GSS standard in NI for distributors. It would provide that where a customer has four or more power cuts in one year, each lasting longer than three hours, the electricity distributor must make a compensation payment of £75 to the customer, subject to the customer making a claim

²⁶ <http://www.nienetworks.co.uk/help-advice/claims-complaints>

before the end of the year (running from 1st April to 31st March).

Rota Disconnections

- 5.39 This would be a new standard in NI for distributors, which would apply when supply to a customer's premises needs to be interrupted due to a shortage of electricity. It would enable the available electricity to be distributed fairly until cause of the shortage could be rectified. If a customer is disconnected on this basis for over 24 hours, a payment of £75 would be triggered for domestic customers, with £150 due for non-domestic customers, paid by the electricity distributor.

Timing of Notification

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.40 The current standard applies when a distributor is notified under specified standards²⁷ after 4pm on a working day or at any time on any other day, this is treated as being notified the following working day.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.41 We propose retaining the current standard for distributors. Please see the Timing of Notification section in the supplier GSS section of this consultation for changes of the standard for suppliers (paragraph 7.44).

Notice of Rights

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 5.42 The current standard requires the distributor to prepare and from time to time revise a statement describing customer rights in relation to GSS and the Overall Standards of Performance (OSP), in a form and having a content that could be reasonably understood by customers. The distributor is further required to:
- a) Give a copy of the statement, and of any revision of the statement to the Utility Regulator and the Consumer Council before making it available to customers;
 - b) At least once in any period of 12 months dispatch to each tariff customer a copy of the statement (in the form current at the time it is provided), provided that where in relation to any premises more than one person is a tariff customer, the obligation shall be satisfied by

²⁷ Specified in the current Electricity GSS Regulations as: Providing a supply; Estimate of charges; Voltage complaint; Meter disputes; Charges and payments.

dispatching a copy to any one of them;

- c) Make a copy of the statement (in its current form) available for inspection by any person at any premises of or occupied by the distributor open to customers in the normal course of the business during the normal opening hours of the premises; and
- d) Dispatch a copy of the statement (in its current form) to any person who requests it.

5.43 The Regulation provides that NIE Networks may prepare a separate statement for domestic and non-domestic customers and satisfy their obligation under sub-paragraph (b) or (d) above, by dispatching the statement appropriate to the class of customer to whom it is dispatched.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

5.44 We propose retaining this standard for distributors, with amendment to reflect the distributor-supplier relationship.

5.45 Specifically, we propose that the electricity distributor, *for electricity suppliers*, shall prepare and from time to time revise a statement describing the customer's rights and benefits in regard to the following GSS:

- Meter disputes
- Metering errors
- Prepayment meters
- Appointments
- Supply restoration
- Providing a Supply
- Estimate of Charges
- Charges and Payments
- Notice of planned interruptions
- Voltage complaint
- Distributor's fuse
- Complaints
- Disputes

- Compensatory payments
- Exemptions
- Timing of notification

5.46 The content of this statement should be such that the electricity distributor considers it is within the understanding of the customers to whom the statement relates.

5.47 We propose that the distributor should:

- a) Give a copy of the statement, and of any revision to the Authority and to the Consumer Council before it is given to electricity suppliers;
- b) At least once in any period of 12 months send out to each supplier which supplies electricity to customers connected to the electricity distributor's system, a copy of the statement for the electricity supplier to make available by appropriate means to the supplier's customers;
- c) Make a copy of the statement available for inspection by any person at any premises occupied by the electricity distributor which is open to the public during normal business hours; and
- d) Make available by appropriate means a copy of the statement to any person who requests it.

The UR recognises that it is the electricity supplier, rather than the electricity distributor, who has the direct relationship with the customer and so it is more appropriate that the supplier provide a copy of the statement to customers.

Consultation Questions

Q3: Are respondents content with the proposed GSS for electricity distribution in Northern Ireland?

Q4: Are respondents content with the proposed level of GSS compensatory payments for the electricity distribution?

6. Electricity Distributor Overall Standards of Performance

- 6.1 Overall Standards of Performance (OSP) are general percentage based performance targets for the electricity distribution company to achieve on certain service standards across their overall customer base.
- 6.2 OSP targets are not customer specific and do not carry a compensatory payment if breached. However, the percentage targets create a further incentive for the company to improve overall customer service levels, allowing the Utility Regulator to monitor general service performance.
- 6.3 Existing OSP targets apply to the Electricity Distribution Company and cover the following standards²⁸:
- Restoring supply after power failure
 - Correcting voltage issues
 - Providing a new electricity supply
 - Restoring a supply after disconnection
 - Moving of meters
 - Change of meter
 - Meter reading
 - Responding to customer letters and emails

We propose to retain the OSP in relation to the electricity distribution company (set out in Annex 2 of this document).

Consultation Question

Q5: Are respondents content with the proposed retention of the existing OSP for electricity distribution in Northern Ireland with no changes?

²⁸ [Our customer standards for meter reading and restoring electricity | Northern Ireland Electricity Networks \(nienetworks.co.uk\)](https://www.nienetworks.co.uk)

7. Proposed Electricity Supplier GSS Requirements

Background

- 7.1 In 2014, the UR introduced Individual Guaranteed Standards of Service for gas suppliers in NI. These Standards of Service were designed to afford protection to the consumer in terms of services offered to them by gas supply and distribution companies.
- 7.2 The UR now consults on how this consumer protection can be afforded to electricity customers in NI through similar Standards of Service. As indicated earlier, we note that while the supplier Codes of Practice do indeed provide consumers with a minimum standard of service provision and a level of protection, the principle with regard to GSS is that individual customers would receive a small, standard payment when a company fails to deliver on prescribed levels of service.
- 7.3 This section of the paper will provide more detail on the UR's proposed GSS regime for electricity suppliers in Northern Ireland.

Proposed GSS for electricity suppliers

- 7.4 In order to be consistent, where appropriate, with the protection offered to energy customers in GB and to gas customers within NI we propose introducing a number of regulations for electricity suppliers. This section of the paper also highlights important interactions between the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers (which was alluded to in previous sections).
- 7.5 The UR is considering six GSS areas for electricity suppliers in NI, they include:
1. Meter disputes and Prepayment meters;
 2. Appointments;
 3. Charges and payments;
 4. Complaints;
 5. Timing of notification; and
 6. Notice of rights.
- 7.6 As noted earlier in this paper, the consumer research recently conducted

found that there is a high level of support for having GSS in place for energy consumers across all of these areas of provision, with in excess of 82% of domestic customers rating each of the areas as important.

- 7.7 The findings from the research also point to a desire for consistent standards across both gas and electricity industries, with 91% of domestic respondents saying there should be similar standards in place for both utilities.
- 7.8 The existing electricity GSS Regulations came into force in 1994 prior to the separation of supply and distribution and as such refer to the “supplier”, defined as the “Public Electricity Supplier”, meaning Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE), as it was at that time. For the purposes of this paper, when explaining the existing electricity GSS Regulations, we have referred to Northern Ireland Electricity as NIE Networks (NIEN).
- 7.9 Finally, the associated compensatory payment values for customers if the proposed GSS are not met are also included. As stated before, the compensatory payment values do not reflect or attempt to remedy actual loss experienced by a customer in the unique circumstances of every case. It is proposed that all compensatory payments would be issued automatically by the supplier.

Meter disputes and Prepayment meters

- 7.10 The UR acknowledges the difference that exists between the gas and electricity industries in regard to responsibilities for meter provision, maintenance and meter reading. In NI, NIEN is the ‘common services provider’ for electricity and is responsible for the meter provision, meter maintenance and meter reading.
- 7.11 The common service provider model does not exist in the gas industry in Northern Ireland. Whilst the distribution company is responsible for meter provision and maintenance, the gas supplier is responsible for meter reading.
- 7.12 In light of the above, the UR proposes to require electricity suppliers to notify the electricity distributor when a customer informs the electricity supplier that a problem has occurred in regard to their meter. This will include instances of meter disputes and prepayment meter problems.
- 7.13 The UR seeks to implement a new GSS which requires the electricity supplier to inform the electricity distributor of the meter related problem within a specified time period (set out below). This obligation already exists for gas suppliers. The compensatory payment to be paid to domestic customers if this proposed GSS is not met will be £30.

Meter disputes

7.14 In regard to GSS on Meter disputes, the UR wishes to mirror the current arrangements in the gas GSS.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

7.15 In the existing electricity distributor GSS for meter disputes in NI, the electricity distributor once notified, must offer an appointment to investigate the meter problem within 7 working days or offer an explanation within 5 working days if a visit is not required.

7.16 Regulation 8A of the existing electricity GSS Regulations in NI applies where NIE Networks is informed by a consumer:

- that the customer considers that an appropriate meter is or may have been operating outside the margins of error; or
- that circumstances exist which NIE Networks might reasonably expect to have been caused by the meter operating outside the margins of error.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service for suppliers

7.17 We propose to add a new obligation for electricity suppliers which would apply where the consumer informs the electricity supplier of a meter issue as described in paragraph 7.16 above. We propose that the electricity supplier must report this meter problem to the electricity distributor within 1 working day.

7.18 The level of compensatory payment paid to customers if this GSS is not met would be set at £30. A summary of this proposed GSS is detailed in Table 2.

Prepayment meters

7.19 In regard to GSS on Prepayment meters, the UR wishes to have regard for both the current arrangements in the gas GSS and the existing electricity GSS.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

7.20 Existing electricity GSS Regulations requires that the electricity Distributor, NIE Networks, must deal with a problem with a customer's prepayment meter within 3 hours of being informed during a working day or 4 hours on any other day.

7.21 This applies where NIE Networks is informed (other than by post) during working hours by a customer who takes their supply through a prepayment

meter either that the prepayment meter is not operating to permit a supply to the customer's premises, or if circumstances suggest that the prepayment meter is not operating.

- 7.22 Where information is received by NIE Networks outside working hours it is deemed to have been received at the start of the next working day.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service for suppliers

- 7.23 We are now introducing a linked guaranteed standard on the electricity supplier. Where a consumer informs their electricity supplier of an issue as described above, we propose that the electricity supplier must report this to the electricity distributor within 3 hours during a working day and 4 hours on any other day. The electricity distributor would then be required to deal with this problem within the timeframes specified against the standard in paragraph 5.28.

- 7.24 We propose that the compensatory payment for consumers if this GSS is not met is £30. A summary of this proposed GSS is detailed in Table 2.

Appointments

- 7.25 In regard to GSS on Appointments, the UR wishes to mirror the current arrangements in the gas GSS.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 7.26 In the existing electricity GSS Regulations in Northern Ireland, a provision for appointments applies to the electricity distributor.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service for suppliers

- 7.27 We propose that a provision for appointments would also apply to electricity suppliers.
- 7.28 Under this regulation, we propose that where the customer requests a visit from the supplier, the electricity supplier must offer a timed appointment for a visit to the customer premises between 8.30am and 1pm, or 12 noon and 5pm. The appointment slot offered must be kept by the supplier.
- 7.29 The level of compensatory payment paid to consumers if this GSS is not met will now be set at £30. A summary of this proposed GSS is detailed in Table 2.

Charges and payments

- 7.30 In relation to charges and payments, the UR wishes to mirror the current gas

GSS in Northern Ireland.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 7.31 In the existing electricity GSS Regulations the distributor is required to address a query regarding payments due under guaranteed standards within 5 working days. GSS payments that are queried should also be made by the Distributor within 5 working days.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service for suppliers

- 7.32 We propose that a provision for queries on charges and payments would also apply to electricity suppliers where a customer informs a relevant electricity supplier:
- that the consumer requests a change in the method by which they make payment to the relevant electricity supplier in respect of the supply; or
 - of a query as to (i) the correctness of an account relating to the supply presented to the customer by the relevant electricity supplier; or (ii) a GSS payment that ought to be made.
- 7.33 We propose that the electricity supplier should respond to a request to change a payment method or an account query (as to the correctness of the account or a GSS payment due) within 5 working days. If the query relates to a GSS payment which is due, the payment should then be made within 5 working days.
- 7.34 The compensatory payment for customers if this GSS is not met will be set at £30. A summary of this proposed GSS is detailed in Table 2.

Complaints

- 7.35 The UR proposes introducing a new GSS for complaints which mirrors the current Gas GSS in Northern Ireland.
- 7.36 Under this Regulation, electricity suppliers would be required to respond to a complaint within a prescribed time period; this will ensure consistency with the existing gas GSS in Northern Ireland.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

- 7.37 No equivalent standard in Northern Ireland.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service for suppliers

- 7.38 This provision would apply where the electricity supplier receives from or on

behalf of a consumer, in their capacity as such, a verbal complaint (by use of a telephone number) or written complaint relating to its activities to which the electricity supplier reasonably expects the consumer will anticipate a response.

- 7.39 We propose that the electricity supplier should provide an initial response to verbal or written complaint from customers within 10 working days, and to provide a substantive response within 20 working days.
- 7.40 The compensatory payment paid to customers if this GSS is not met will be set at £30. A summary of this proposed GSS is detailed in Table 2.

Non-payment Proposed Guaranteed Standards of Service

- 7.41 The following two proposed GSS, (1) **Timing of notification** and (2) **Notice of rights**, have no compensatory payment attached to them. These two GSS relate to operation time frames in dealing with consumer's queries and the distribution of prescribed information to consumers on a routine basis. As such, they are not individual Standards of Performance and therefore do not have compensatory payments for consumers attached to them.
- 7.42 The UR believes that these GSS are of benefit to the electricity distributor, suppliers and consumers. The 'Timing of notification' GSS will ensure that electricity distributors and electricity suppliers are given adequate time to respond. In regard to the second GSS, 'Notice of rights', the UR considers that the sending out of all information to consumers at the same time is the most efficient and effective method of providing consumers with the full details of their rights.
- 7.43 These two GSS are both included in the gas GSS. The UR proposes to include them in the new electricity GSS regime which includes electricity suppliers.

Timing of notification

- 7.44 This GSS is in force in the existing electricity GSS Regulations in NI to ensure that where a notification is received from a customer by NIE Networks in relation to specified Regulations after 4pm, it can be treated as being received by the electricity distributor the following working day.
- 7.45 We propose to extend this provision to also cover electricity suppliers; ensuring that both the suppliers and distributor have adequate time to respond.

Existing Regulations

- 7.46 Regulation 15 of the existing GSS Regulations in Northern Ireland provides

that for the purposes of Regulations on Providing a Supply, Estimate of charges, Voltage complaints, Meter disputes and Charges and payments, where NIE Networks receives notification of these Regulations by the customer after 4pm on a working day or at any time on any other day, they shall be deemed to have been satisfied on the next following working day.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service for suppliers

- 7.47 We propose that for the purpose of GSS for electricity suppliers relating to Providing a Supply, Estimate of charges, Voltage complaints, Charges and payments and Meter disputes, where the electricity supplier receives notification of the requirements of these Regulations after 4pm on a working day or at any time on any other day, they are deemed to have been satisfied on the next following working day.

Notice of rights

- 7.48 The UR wishes to include a Regulation on the information that electricity suppliers share with consumers in regard to certain GSS and also on the information that the electricity distributor shares with electricity suppliers in regard to certain GSS.

Existing Regulations

- 7.49 Regulation 11 of the existing electricity GSS requires NIE Networks to prepare and from time to time revise a statement describing consumer rights in relation to GSS and the Overall Standards of Performance (OSP), in a form and having a content which could be reasonably understood by consumers. (See Paragraph 5.42).
- 7.50 The Regulation provides that NIE Networks may prepare a separate statement for domestic and non-domestic consumers.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service for suppliers

- 7.51 It is proposed, as in paragraph 5.47 that as it is the electricity supplier, rather than the electricity distributor, who has the direct relationship with the customer, it is more appropriate that the supplier provides a copy of the statement prepared by NIE Networks to customers.
- 7.52 We propose that the electricity supplier, for both domestic and non-domestic consumers, shall also prepare and from time to time revise a separate statement describing the domestic consumer's rights and benefits in regard to the following GSS:
- Meter disputes;

- Prepayment meters;
- Appointments;
- Complaints;
- Charges and payments;
- Compensatory payments; and
- Timing of notification.

7.53 The content of this statement should be such that the electricity supplier thinks it within the understanding of the customers to whom the statement relates. The supplier should:

- a) Give a copy of the statement, and any revisions of the statement, to the Utility Regulator and to The Consumer Council before the statement is made available to the consumer;
- b) Make a copy available to each consumer by appropriate means;
- c) Make a copy available for inspection by any person at any premises which is occupied by the electricity supplier which is open to the public during normal business hours;
- d) Make a copy available by appropriate means to any person who requests it; and
- e) At least once in any period of 12 months, make available by appropriate means to each consumer of the electricity supplier the information in any statement which has been sent to the electricity supplier by the electricity distributor.

7.54 The electricity supplier may prepare a separate statement for domestic and non-domestic customers and satisfy their obligation under sub-paragraph (b) or (d) above, by dispatching the statement appropriate to the class of customer to whom it is dispatched.

Consultation Questions

Q6: Are respondents content with the proposed GSS for electricity suppliers in Northern Ireland?

Q7: Are respondents content with the proposed level of GSS compensatory payments for the electricity suppliers?

8. Proposed Electricity Supplier Overall Standards of Performance

- 8.1 Overall Standards of Performance are general percentage targets for the electricity company to achieve on certain required service standards across their overall customer base.
- 8.2 OSP targets are not customer specific and do not carry a compensatory payment if breached. However, the targets create a further incentive for the company to improve overall customer service levels, allowing the Utility Regulator and interested parties to monitor general service performance.
- 8.3 Currently OSP targets are in place for the electricity distribution company. However, there are no OSP targets for electricity supply companies.
- 8.4 We propose to set new OSP for electricity supply companies which will set targets for customer correspondence and customer complaints in line with the gas overall standards, as set out below²⁹.
1. In 97% of cases, written correspondence receives a reply within 10 working days from and including the date the electricity supplier receives the relevant correspondence;
 2. In 97% of cases, customer complaints receive a full response within 10 working days from and including the date the electricity supplier receives the relevant complaint.
- 8.5 This would be specified in a Determination from the UR under Article 43 of The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992.
- 8.6 Once in each year, (by such date as agreed with the UR) each electricity supplier shall provide to the UR information with respect to the level of performance achieved by the supplier under these overall standards.

Consultation Question

Q8: Are respondents content with the proposed OSP for electricity suppliers in Northern Ireland?

²⁹ [2014-03-03 Overall Standards of Performance.pdf \(uregni.gov.uk\)](#)

9. Reporting and Exemptions

- 9.1 With the updated regime we want to ensure that all payments made under the new Regulations are reported on annually (including goodwill payments) so that we have a measurable marker of performance.
- 9.2 Annual reporting for electricity distributors will be completed within the Regulatory Instruction and Guidance (RIGS) templates.
- 9.3 Annual reporting for electricity suppliers will be completed within the Retail Energy Market Monitoring (REMM) templates in line with reporting for gas supply GSS. Once the GSS are agreed, we will provide draft REMM reporting templates for completion in line with the arrangements under the REMM (2015) framework³⁰.
- 9.4 We would expect that all GSS payments made to customers by distributors and suppliers are reported on, together with any goodwill payments made. We would also expect that NIE Networks report on how long it takes them to restore supply.
- 9.5 The UR will consider whether to publish annual figures on company performance under the GSS regime on our website.

Exemptions

- 9.6 We intend to include exemptions similar to those in the current GB Regulations³¹. These are in relation to regulation 9 of the GB Regulations contains exemptions for the normal and severe weather supply restoration standards and regulation 20 contains general exemptions to the other provisions.

Notice of Rights

- 9.7 With this standard, we intend that the electricity distributor prepares a statement showing customer rights under the GSS regime and provides this annually to the UR, the Consumer Council and to suppliers. A copy must also be available on the electricity distributor's website. In addition we propose that the electricity distributor provides annually to the UR, The Consumer Council and customers, information on the Overall Standards of Performance by appropriate means³².

³⁰ [REMM Final Decisions | Utility Regulator \(uregni.gov.uk\)](http://www.uregni.gov.uk)

³¹ Regulations 9 and 20 of The Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations 2015
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/699/pdfs/ukxi_20150699_en.pdf

³² the UR considers that "appropriate means" in relation to sending the Notice of Rights can be a written medium received by the customer via for example a letter, email or bill insert. The UR does not

- 9.8 We also intend that electricity suppliers prepare a statement showing customer rights under the GSS regime (including the information they have been sent by the electricity distributor) and provide this annually to the UR, The Consumer Council and to customers by appropriate means. No compensatory payments would be attached to this provision.
- 9.9 This provision would reduce the burden on NIE Networks who are required by the existing electricity GSS Regulations to dispatch information on GSS annually to customers. As electricity suppliers have a more direct link to the customer, we consider that it is suitable for electricity suppliers to provide the Notice of Rights by appropriate means. This provision is further discussed in the electricity supplier GSS section of this paper (paragraph 7.51).

wish to place undue burdens on companies to send information by post where other communication channels are already in existence.

10. Implications and Implementation

- 10.1 The UR recognises that there is a need, in the future, to review and revise the GSS regime, as and when required, to reflect changes in the regulatory environment.
- 10.2 The UR does not propose to provide a regulatory allowance or incentive mechanism for electricity companies to cover the cost of implementing a revised GSS regime. The UR is of the view that it would not be appropriate, nor incentivise company performance if customers ultimately had to fund a scheme for service underperformance.
- 10.3 When the new Guaranteed Standards of Service Regulations come into force, we consider that the Change of Law provisions within NIE Networks' distribution Licence would be the appropriate mechanism to address the potential costs associated with the implementation of this legislation.

Implementation

- 10.4 We will be working with the Department for the Economy to enact the new Regulations.

Timeline for implementation

- 10.5 Following this public consultation, the UR will analyse responses and produce a final decisions paper. This decisions paper shall allow a 28 day period for comment.
- 10.6 Once the final decisions paper has been published, and the 28 day period required for comment has ended, the Department of the Economy will proceed with the implementation of the GSS regulations. This will involve seeking Ministerial approval, potential Northern Ireland Assembly Statutory Committee scrutiny and consultation with the Departmental Solicitors Office. This process is dependent upon other legislative priorities and timelines.
- 10.7 The Department of Economy has the role of laying the regulations before the Assembly and that the regulations are subject to negative resolution (as per Article 93(2) of the Electricity Order).

11. Next Steps

11.1 All response documentation to this consultation must be received by **4 pm** on **Thursday 2nd November 2023** for consideration.

11.2 Responses to this consultation should be forwarded to:

Mabel Stevenson

The Utility Regulator

Queens House

14 Queen Street

Belfast

BT1 6ED

Email: mabel.stevenson@uregni.gov.uk

11.3 It is our preference that responses are submitted by email where possible. If you would prefer to provide us feedback in another format (for example via a meeting) please get in touch and we will try to facilitate this.

11.4 Your response may be made public by the Utility Regulator. If you do not want all or part of your response or name made public, please state this clearly in the response by marking your response as 'CONFIDENTIAL'.

11.5 If you want other information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this, it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential.

11.6 Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA)).

- 11.7 As stated in the GDPR Privacy Statement for consumers and stakeholders, any personal data contained within your response will be deleted once the matter being consulted on has been concluded though the substance of the response may be retained.
- 11.8 This document is available in accessible formats. If required in alternative formats please contact: Mabel.Stevenson@uregni.gov.uk
- 11.9 The UR will review all evidence provided in response to this consultation.
- 11.10 As legislative changes will be required to bring the new GSS and OSP regime into effect, we will work collaboratively with the Department for the Economy.
- 11.11 **Table 1** below shows a summary of the activities the UR will undertake and an indication of the time frames for completion.

Table 1: Summary of Activities

Activity	Description	Timing
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive responses to Consultation. 	Q3 2023
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Consultation responses and draft Final Decision Paper. 	Q4 2023
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish Final Decision Paper (allow 28 days for comment). 	Q1 2024
Conclusion	UR makes GSS/OSP regulations.	Q1 2024
	UR seeks Ministerial approval.	Timing to be determined
	Regulations laid by DfE with the Assembly.	Timing to be determined

12. Annex 1

Table 2: Proposed new electricity GSS standards

Guaranteed Standards	Existing	Proposed
Payments	<p>Distribution company to make payments due when they have failed to meet the guaranteed standards, within 10 working days.</p> <p>£25 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>	<p>Distribution company to make payments due when they have failed to meet the guaranteed standards, within 10 working days.</p> <p>£30 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p> <p>Supply company to make payments due when they have failed to meet the guaranteed standards, within 10 working days.</p> <p>£30 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>
Distributor's fuse	<p>Distribution company to replace a faulty main fuse within 3 hours on a working day, or 4 hours on any other day.</p> <p>£25 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>	<p>Distribution company to replace a faulty main fuse within 3 hours on a working day, or 4 hours on any other day.</p> <p>£30 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>
Restoration of supply (Normal Conditions with less than 5,000 customers affected)	<p>Distribution company to restore electricity supplies following a fault on the network, within 24 hours.</p> <p>£50 compensatory payment for domestic customers (£125 for non-domestic customers) if not achieved;</p> <p>£25 for every subsequent 12 hour period.</p>	<p>Distribution company to restore electricity supplies following a fault on the network, within 18 hours.</p> <p>£75 compensatory payment for domestic customers (£150 for non-domestic customers) if not achieved;</p> <p>£35 for every subsequent 12 hour period.</p>
Restoration of supply (Normal Conditions with more than 5,000 customers affected)	<p>No equivalent standard in NI.</p>	<p>Distribution company to restore electricity supplies following a fault on the network, within 24 hours.</p> <p>£75 compensatory payment for domestic customers (£150 for non-</p>

		<p>domestic customers) if not achieved;</p> <p>£35 for every subsequent 12 hour period.</p> <p>Maximum payment capped at £300.</p>
<p>Restoration of supply (Severe Weather Conditions)</p>	<p>Current exemption provided in Regulation 14 to the GSS requirements during a severe weather event.</p>	<p>Severe Weather</p> <p><u>Category 1 (medium events)</u></p> <p>Lightning events - where there are at least 8 times the daily average amount of faults in a 24 hour period affecting less than the category 3 threshold number ³³of customers. Supply to be restored within 24-hours.</p> <p>Non-lightning events - where there are between 8 and 13 times the daily average amount of faults in a 24 hour period affecting less than the category 3 threshold number of customers. Supply to be restored within 24 hours.</p> <p><u>Category 2 (large events)</u></p> <p>Non-lightening events - where there are at least 13 times the daily average amount of faults in a 24 hour period affecting less than the category 3 threshold number of customers. Supply to be restored within 48 hours.</p> <p><u>Category 3 (very large events)</u></p> <p>All severe weather events – supply to be restored in a period as calculated by the following formula:</p> $48 \times \left(\frac{\text{total number of customers interrupted}}{\text{category 3 threshold number of customers}} \right)^2$ <p>Payment: Distribution company to pay £70 compensatory payment if not achieved then £70 for every subsequent 12 hour period. Maximum payment capped at £700.</p>

³³ In GB each designated electricity distributor has its own threshold number of customers specified in the table in Schedule 2 of the 2015 GB Regulations.

<p>Notice of supply interruption</p>	<p>Distribution company to give minimum 3 days prior notice of supply interruption.</p> <p>£25 compensatory payment for domestic customers (£50 for non-domestic customers) if not achieved.</p>	<p>Distribution company to give minimum 3 days prior notice of supply interruption.</p> <p>£30 compensatory payment for domestic customers (£60 for non-domestic customers) if not achieved.</p>
<p>Providing a supply</p>	<p>Distribution company to make an appointment to install a meter and turn on supply within 2 working days (domestic) or 4 working days (non-domestic).</p> <p>Or keeping an appointment for the above purpose.</p> <p>£50 compensatory payment for domestic customers.</p> <p>£125 for non-domestic.</p>	<p>Retaining current standard</p> <p>Distribution company to make an appointment to install a meter and turn on supply within 2 working days (domestic) or 4 working days (non-domestic).</p> <p>Or keeping an appointment for the above purpose.</p> <p>£50 compensatory payment for domestic customers.</p> <p>£125 for non-domestic.</p>
<p>Estimate of charges</p>	<p>Distribution company to provide a cost estimate for a new electricity supply within 7 working days (small jobs) or 15 working days (larger jobs).</p> <p>Compensatory payment £50.</p>	<p>Retaining current standard</p> <p>Distribution company to provide a cost estimate for a new electricity supply within 7 working days (small jobs) or 15 working days (larger jobs).</p> <p>Compensatory payment £50.</p>
<p>Voltage Complaints</p>	<p>Distribution company to explain what will be done to resolve a voltage problem within 5 working days of it being notified; or if a site visit is needed to investigate, to do so within 7 working days.</p> <p>£25 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>	<p>Distribution company to explain what will be done to resolve a voltage problem within 5 working days of it being notified; or if a site visit is needed to investigate, to do so within 7 working days.</p> <p>£30 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>
<p>Meter disputes</p>	<p>Distribution company, once notified, must offer an appointment within 7 working days to investigate the meter problem or offer an explanation within 5 working days if a visit is not required.</p> <p>£25 compensatory payment if not</p>	<p>Distribution company, once notified, must offer an appointment within 7 working days to investigate the meter problem or offer an explanation within 5 working days if a visit is not required.</p> <p>Where a customer informs their</p>

	achieved.	<p>Supplier of an issue, the Supplier must report this to the distribution company with 1 working day.</p> <p>£30 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>
Prepayment meters	<p>Distribution company to deal with a problem with a customer's pre-payment meter within 3 hours during a working day and 4 hours on any other day.</p> <p>£25 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>	<p>Distribution company to deal with a problem with a customer's pre-payment meter within 3 hours during a working day and 4 hours on any other day.</p> <p>Where a customer informs their Supplier of an issue, the Supplier must report this to the distribution company within 3 hours during a working day and 4 hours on any other day.</p> <p>£30 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>
Metering Errors	No equivalent standard in NI.	<p>Where a customer is billed an incorrect amount by their Electricity Supplier as a result of the Supplier calculating the amount billed by reference to an incorrect meter reading or incorrect meter calibration caused by an error by the relevant electricity distributor.</p> <p>£30 compensatory payment paid by the Distributor when this is applicable.</p>
Charges and payments	<p>Distribution company to address a query regarding payments due under guaranteed standards within 5 working days, and if payment is due to do so within 5 working days.</p> <p>£25 compensatory payment if not achieved.</p>	<p>Supply company to respond to a request to change payment method or an account query (as to the correctness of the account or a GSS payment due) within 5 working days.</p> <p>Distribution company to address a query regarding payments due under guaranteed standards within 5 working days.</p> <p>GSS payments which have been queried should be made by the Distributor or Supplier within 5 days.</p>

		£30 compensatory payment if not achieved.
Appointments	Distribution company to offer a timed appointment for visits to customer premises between 8.30am and 1pm, or 12 noon and 5pm. £25 compensatory payment if appointment is not kept.	Distribution or supply company to offer a timed appointment for visits to customer premises between 8.30am and 1pm, or 12 noon and 5pm. £30 compensatory payment if appointment is not kept.
Complaints	No equivalent standard in NI.	Distribution or supply company to provide a response to verbal or written complaints from customers within 10 days, and to provide a substantive response within 20 days. £30 compensatory payment if not achieved.
Multiple Disconnections	No equivalent standard in NI.	Distribution company to pay compensatory payment to customers who experience interruptions lasting 3 hours or more, on 4 or more occasions within a 12 month period starting on 1 April. £75 compensatory payment when this is applicable.
Rota Disconnections	No equivalent standard in NI.	Distribution company to pay compensatory payment to customers whose supply is interrupted on a rota basis, in order to share the available load when there are supply shortages. £75 compensatory payment for domestic customers (£150 for non-domestic customers) when this is applicable.
Timing of notification	No equivalent standard in NI for suppliers. Currently applies to distributors for the following standards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a supply • Estimate of charges 	Extend requirements to suppliers and amend distributors requirements to reflect the supplier/distributor relationship. No compensatory payment would be attached to this standard.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voltage complaints • Meter disputes • Charges and payments <p>Where the distributor receives notification of these Regulations by the customer after 4pm on a working day or at any time on any other day, they shall be deemed to have been satisfied on the next following working day.</p>	
Notice of Rights	<p>No equivalent standard in NI for suppliers.</p> <p>Currently applies to distributors, who have to prepare, revise, dispatch and make available on request, a statement of the rights of customers under the GSS. Further detail on what is involved is set out above in the main body text.</p>	<p>Extend requirements to suppliers and amend distributors requirements to reflect the supplier/distributor relationship.</p> <p>No compensatory payment would be attached to this standard.</p>
Exemptions	<p>Current exemptions apply via the original Regulations from 1992, not updated since then, as GB exemptions have been.</p>	<p>Whilst exemptions have no compensatory payments, we intend to include similar exemptions to GB standards.</p>

13. Annex 2

Table 3: Northern Ireland Electricity Networks Limited Overall Standards of Performance³⁴

Turning your power back on	We aim to reconnect 87% of customers affected by a power cut, due to a fault on our distribution system, within 3 hours and all customers within 24 hours.
Putting voltage issues right	We will correct known voltage issues outside the stated limits within 6 months, subject to any agreement needed from landowners.
Getting a new supply of electricity	We will complete all new low voltage connections for domestic customers within 30 working days or within 40 working days for non-domestic customers once the terms of the connection have been accepted.
Getting you back on if you were cut off (due to debt)	Once you have made an agreement with your supplier and they let us know, we will get your electricity back on within 24 hours of a working day.
Moving a meter	We will reposition your meter on your meter board within 15 working days of our quotation being accepted.
Changing your meter if you change your tariff	If your new tariff needs a new meter installed at your home, we will change the meter within 10 working days of being notified by your supplier.
Reading your meter	We aim to get a meter reading for 99.5% of customers once a year.
Replying to your letters and emails	We will reply to you within 10 working days.

³⁴ [Our customer standards for meter reading and restoring electricity | Northern Ireland Electricity Networks \(nienetworks.co.uk\)](https://www.nienetworks.co.uk)

14. Annex 3

Table 4: Glossary and Acronyms

CCNI	Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
Common Services Model	Electricity metering services are all performed as part of the common services included in NIE Networks licence. These common services include meter operations, data collection, processing and registration.
Critical Care Register	Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIE Networks), offer a critical care information service to customers who are dependent on life supporting electrical equipment. Being on the register means customers will receive up to date information by phone during a power cut or a planned interruption of electricity supply.
Distributor's Fuse	This is the fusible cut-out or automatic switching device of the electricity distributor for disconnecting the supply to the customer's premises.
DfE	Department for The Economy
DNO	Distribution Network Operator
Electricity Distributor	Refers to any company with a licence to distribute electricity in Northern Ireland, namely Northern Ireland Electricity Networks.
Electricity Supplier	Refers to any company with a licence to supply electricity in Northern Ireland.
Existing Northern Ireland Regulations	Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act 2000
GB	Great Britain
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation

GSS	Guaranteed Standards of Service
Gas GSS	Gas (Individual Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014
NI	Northern Ireland
NIE Networks	Northern Ireland Electricity Networks Limited
OSP	Overall Standards of Performance
Priority Services Register	Register maintained in Great Britain by suppliers and network operators providing additional services for customers who are of pensionable age; are disabled or chronically sick; have a long-term medical condition; have a hearing or visual impairment or additional communication needs; are in a vulnerable situation.
REMM	Retail Energy Market Monitoring
RIG	Regulatory Instruction and Guidance
UR	Utility Regulator