



Energy Supplier
Customer Service Levels –
UR Consultation Paper
Response

1.1

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1. Version Control

Version	Date	Editor	Comments
1.0	08.04.24	David Armstrong	Complied for Review
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2. Introduction

The UR has published a Consultation Paper on 25 March 2024 - [UR Energy Supplier Customer Service Levels: Consultation Paper March 2024](#). As a stakeholder, Click Energy has complied the below response to the UR.

3. Discussion Topics

3.9 Consumers in vulnerable circumstances

- 1. Domestic consumers, in particular those in vulnerable circumstances, must be able to easily identify a method of contacting their energy supplier that meets their needs. The effectiveness of these methods must be regularly reviewed by suppliers.**

Click Energy currently gives customers a variety of methods for contacting us. Customers can contact Click Energy via telephone (freephone number), email, live chat, letter or via our social media channels.

Services such as screen reading software often come as an extension to a web browser, for example 'Google Screen Reader' is an extension available to Google Chrome. Click Energy regularly review advances in technology for new methods allowing our customers to contact us in an efficient manner.

- 2. Suppliers must have processes in place to identify and prioritise enquiries from domestic consumers in vulnerable circumstances who may require immediate assistance, or representatives acting on their behalf and in their interest. This should include adequate training to ensure these processes are being followed sufficiently (discussed under requirement 6 in customer contact centre services).**

All customer facing staff of Click Energy are trained on every aspect of their role and therefore we do not have various different departments within our Customer Service function. For this reason, we purposely do not have an IVR on our phone lines requesting the customer to press 1 or 2 for different departments or in relation to different queries. Should a vulnerable customer contact Click Energy, the staff member who answers the customer query in the first instance, would be expected to assist the customer in full. In extreme cases, our advisers may require additional support and we therefore would have a senior member of staff on hand at all times to be able to make any decision required or take over the customer query, if required. As Click Energy do not have excessive hold times, a small percentage abandonment rate, and all email/letter contacts responded to in a timely manner, we do not believe that a triage system is required and if forced to implement this, feel it may have an overall negative impact on our current customer service levels. We take on board the point and feel that this may work well for some suppliers but it is not required for Click Energy and therefore should not

be mandated on all suppliers. Training staff on how to identify a vulnerable customer and showing empathy, is business as usual process for Click Energy. We have a warm referral program with Advice NI and will often sign post to CCNI and other advice agencies and charities. We also have plans to work with an independent charity around additional/refresher training for our team on how to identify and serve a vulnerable customer.

- 3. Suppliers must implement appropriate processes/services to provide a freephone telephone number for domestic consumers that are in vulnerable circumstances. Eligible customers must be made aware of and directed to free methods of contact as soon as their supplier is aware of their eligibility.**

This item is already in place, and customers contacting Click Energy can do so using our freephone telephone number on 0800 1 070 732.

3.11 Customer contact centre services

- 1. At an overall level, suppliers must ensure they have and maintain robust internal capability, systems and processes to enable them to adequately deliver their customer contact centre services.**

We are satisfied with our current systems and processes and believe that our staff possess the knowledge and skills required to service all our customers. We also ensure that all staff have the system access to service our customers and deliver a top-class service.

- 2. Customers must be able to easily identify methods of contacting their suppliers.**

Our telephone number is visible on our website homepage, top-up cards, invoices and all letters issued to our customer base. Additionally, customers can contact us via email using chat@clickenergyni.com, via our social media channels or via our web chat service. Each of the services are advertised on our website (some on the homepage and others within 1 click of the homepage).

- 3. Suppliers must ensure customer contact centre services are open at times that meet the needs of their domestic customers.**

Click Energy have opening hours of Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm and Saturday 9am to 4pm. We feel that the current opening hours more than meet the needs of our customer base. During these hours, Click Energy staff will be available to answer calls, reply to emails and service customers via our web chat service.

- 4. Consumers must be able to reach their supplier's customer contact centre easily without experiencing an excessive call wait time to speak to an operative (not over an average wait time of four minutes).**

We consider this more than achievable. At peak times our customers may experience a longer than 4 minute wait time. However on average, wait times will be much less than 4 minutes. We will continue to monitor this and ensure that this is achieved.

5. Suppliers to implement a triage system for all calls.

As mentioned above in 3.9.2, all customer facing staff of Click Energy are trained on every aspect of their role and therefore we do not have various different departments. For this reason, we purposely do not have an IVR on our phone lines requesting the customer to press 1 or 2 for different departments or in relation to different queries. As Click Energy do not have excessive hold times, a small percentage abandonment rate, and all email/letter contacts responded to in a timely manner, we do not believe that a triage system is required and if forced to implement this, feel it may have an overall negative impact on current our customer service levels. We take on board your point that and feel that this may work well for some suppliers but it is not required for Click Energy and therefore should not be mandated on all suppliers.

6. Customer contact centre operatives must be adequately trained to ensure they can provide accurate and consistent information to consumers.

We are satisfied with current training and refresher training programs. As above, we will continue to monitor this. Click Energy also has a senior member of staff on site during all opening hours so that if a customer requests to escalate an issue, a more senior member of the staff, who has authority to make decisions, will be available to handle their request.

7. Call back services must be offered by all suppliers and acted upon in no more than 24 hours.

We are satisfied with current processes. All call backs are completed within a timely manner. If, following 3 call attempts, we have not been able to reach a customer, we will send an SMS/letter/email. The option to request a call back is not currently available on our telephone systems and nor do we see this as a requirement. As mentioned above, Click Energy do not have excessive hold times and have a small percentage abandonment rate. We also have long opening hours (Mon to Fri 8am to 8pm and Sat 9am to 4pm), therefore our customers should be able to reach us with little to no hassle. There are also various methods to reach us as mentioned in 3.9.1.

8. Suppliers must ensure that their call abandonment rate is not excessive (not above 12.5%).

We consider this more than achievable at present and will continue to monitor this area to ensure that we meet this suggested minimum standard.

9. A customer's call must never be disconnected when they contact their supplier during their customer contact centre operating hours (apart from circumstances outside of the supplier's control).

A call would only ever be disconnected if the customer was being abusive towards a staff member and only after following a 3-strike rule informing the customer of what was to happen should the abuse continue. Staff are also trained on how to defuse a situation if a customer is being abusive towards a staff member.

- 10. Written customer contacts (all mediums of written contact with consumers including webchat, social media platforms and emails) must receive timely responses within a maximum of 24 hours.**

We consider this achievable. At present, auto response is not required as all emails are responded to within a reasonable timeframe. Should this become an issue, an auto response may be considered. We will continue to monitor.

- 11. Suppliers must implement a triage system for written contacts.**

Any written communication received by Click is responded to within a timely manner. If the customer is requesting urgent help from a supplier, they are less likely to engage via letter. Email correspondence is replied to usually on the same day that we receive it.

3.12 Supplier processes for setting fixed direct debits

- 1. Suppliers must take all reasonable steps to ensure that when setting the fixed direct debit for a new customer, it is based on the best and most accurate information: the fixed direct debit value must be calculated specific to the individual customer and based on up-to-date and accurate information.**

- **For new customers, payments must be based on a number of factors, which includes information provided by the customer. This must, as a minimum, include the following:**
 - i. Up to date meter reading;**
 - ii. Size of the property;**
 - iii. How many people live at the property;**
 - iv. Take account of any other relevant information provided by the customer.**

Currently Click Energy base the customers' fixed payment amount on an up-to-date meter reading and/or Estimated Usage Factor / Actual Usage Factor (EUF / AUF) supplied to Click Energy by NIE Networks. The fixed payment amount is communicated to our customer via their preferred contact method and we request that if the customer feels this amount is unsuitable (too low or too high), that they contact us to discuss further.

If a customer has just moved into a property, the current EUF / AUF consumption data will not relate directly to that customer. We therefore create a follow up task within our system (assigned to a work queue) to reach out to this customer and discuss their fixed amount and take into account the above factors.

For established customers or customers that have lived at the property for more than 12 months (but are new customers to Click Energy), we strongly believe that setting the fixed payment amount using the EUF/AUF is the most accurate way as this provides the supplier with information regarding the consumption history of the property covering a period of 12 months. The EUF is more accurate than profiling a customer based on property type, size, occupational pattern and how many people live at a property. Every property has different consumption patterns and internal appliances therefore the most accurate way to set a direct debit, in our view, is by using the EUF.

Should the customer's usage change, the EUF/AUF is updated every time a meter reading is obtained and this information is used within our 6-monthly review process. If no meter reading has been obtained in some time, the review cannot be completed and we would write to the customer to request a meter reading before carrying out the review the following month. As we bill on a monthly basis and the customer reads are also requested monthly, the EUF/AUF should be very accurate. Granted, not all customers will supply monthly meter reads but NIE Networks would also attempt to obtain meter reads every 12 weeks. Furthermore, as for any supplier going through a strong growth phase, it can be difficult to engage and discuss fixed payment amounts with each customer who registers online. Another area is where there are changes to any of the above factors and we are reliant on the customer informing us of any changes to any of these factors, e.g. should a property become occupied when it was previously unoccupied or should the number of occupiers increase. Again, any of these changes would result in changes to consumption which will be reflected on meter reads and EUF/AUFs. We feel that using an up-to-date meter read and calculating the fixed payment amount using the EUF/AUF, is the most suitable way. Meter reads can be provided to Click Energy via email, phone, live chat or the customer self serving via the online portal.

- 2. For any fixed direct debit payment plan (new and amended) suppliers must provide clear and accessible information to the consumer on how this payment plan operates.**

When signing up a customer to a fixed direct debit payment plan, the supplier must clearly explain how the fixed direct debit operates. This must be clearly articulated to the customer at the point of sign up (verbally if in person or via phone or written if online) and confirmed in writing by the customer's chosen method of contact. The supplier must include the following information (as a minimum):

- i. How the customer's fixed direct debit has been calculated;**
- ii. That the fixed direct debit value can change over the course of the contract and that it will be reviewed at regular intervals (to ensure it is reflective of customers actual usage either lower or higher);**
- iii. How and when the supplier will review the fixed direct debit;**
- iv. How and when the customer can request a review of the fixed direct debit;**
- v. How the customer can help improve the accuracy of the fixed direct debit e.g. by providing meter reads at regular intervals to ensure there is an accurate record of actual usage;**
- vi. That a fixed direct debit payment plan can result in overall account credit or debit if the energy usage is different to that expected;**
- vii. What options the customer has if they accrue credit (to include how to request payment of their credit (see 3.13) and processes for discussing with the supplier any debt that has accrued on the account).**

No issue with any of the points mentioned above. We will take action to ensure that all our customers are informed via their chosen communication method.

- 3. Reviewing the fixed direct debit - the fixed direct debit review must be conducted on a regular basis at set regular intervals (a minimum of six months) and the value must be based on up-to-date accurate information.**

- a) Suppliers must conduct a regular review of fixed direct debits to ensure they accurately reflect the customer's actual energy usage. This must occur (i) at least every six months (as a minimum) or (ii) if there is a trigger such as a build-up of excess credit, or (iii) following a customer request.
- b) Customers can submit their own meter reads to their supplier, these must be used by the supplier to review their fixed direct debits to ensure the value is based on accurate information and not estimated reads.
- c) If a supplier changes a customer's fixed direct debit (e.g. due to a tariff change or a supplier-initiated review) the customer must receive clear, informative and timely communications on the fixed direct debit change, including the supplier's reason for the change. This communication must be sent by the customer's preferred means of contact. The communication cannot be solely through information on the face of the bill (as per requirement 2).
- d) In addition to the six-month review, suppliers must have controls in place to identify and trigger a review when a customer has excessive credit or debit amounts accrued (further detail on what is deemed excessive is defined under supplier processes for return of customer credit).

As above, no issue with any of the points mentioned above. One point for consideration, Click Energy currently reviews fixed direct debits every 6 months, however this can only be completed when an actual meter read has recently been obtained (via NIE Networks or from the customer). If a customer has failed to submit a recent meter reading, we would contact the customer via their chosen communication method. As long as the customer submits a meter reading, we can complete the review of the fixed direct debit amount the following month. If the customer has failed to submit a meter reading, the fixed direct debit amount review cannot be completed based on an estimated read.

3.13 Supplier processes for return of customer credit

1. **Customer Credit – customers on a fixed direct debit must not have excessive credit on their account and any accrued customer credit must be easily obtained from their supplier.**
 - a) Excessive credit is defined as the monetary value in excess of an average three-month period of usage over a 12-month period (therefore taking account of seasonal usage).
 - b) Any customer in credit can, on request, receive payment of their credit in a timely manner and this must not require multiple contacts by the customer. This must take account of the latest actual meter reads and coverage of an imminent bill. The payment must be made within a maximum of 28 days from the request being made by the customer (or as soon as is practical).
 - c) Excessive customer credits must trigger a review by the supplier to ensure the customer's fixed direct debit is set at the correct level. If the customer is paying in excess of their usage, the supplier must either reduce the customer's fixed direct debit or refund the customer's credit (dependent on the customer's preferred option).

No issue with any of the points mentioned above, however an up-to-date meter reading is required to ensure that the credit build up is a true reflection of the actual consumption.

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