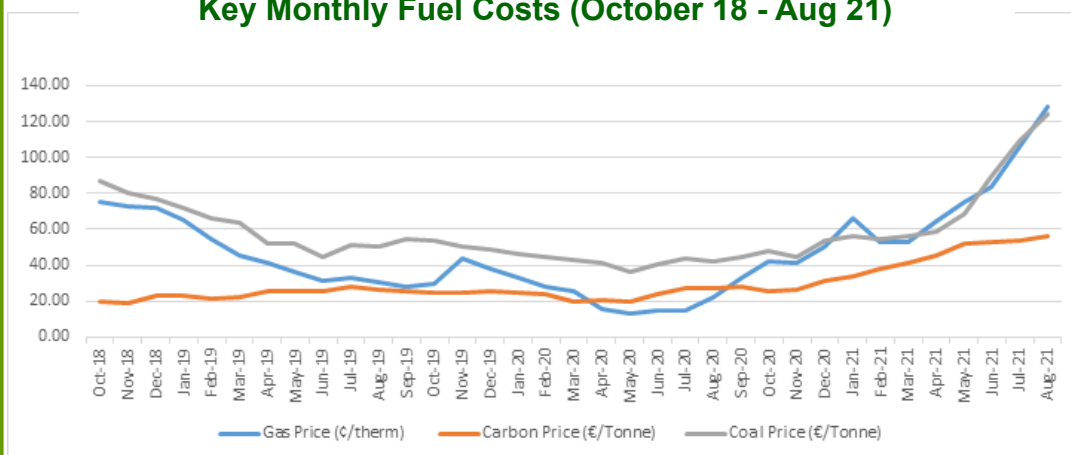


Wholesale electricity and gas price trends

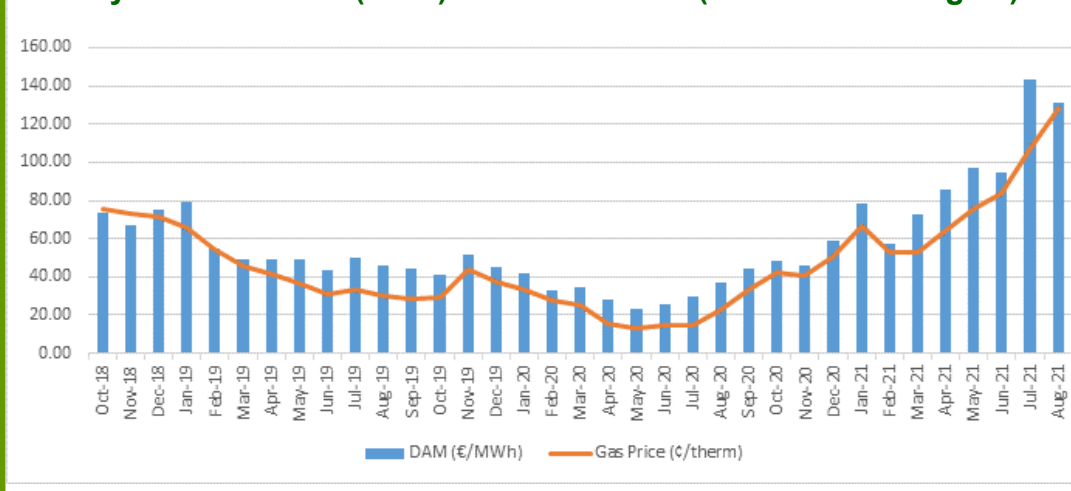
Global energy prices have risen to unprecedented levels during 2021. Wholesale gas costs in Europe have hit all-time highs with costs continuing to rise. These increases led to the gas tariff increases announced during September 2021.

Costs of other key energy commodities have also increased significantly. Higher gas, coal and carbon costs are driving up the prices in our wholesale electricity market, the SEM. Prices in August were 256% greater than prices seen in August 2020. We continue to see higher costs in periods with lower wind availability, and lower costs with higher wind availability. Average wind generation on the system across August 2021 decreased by 13% compared to August 2020 impacting market prices.

Key Monthly Fuel Costs (October 18 - Aug 21)



Day Ahead Market (DAM) and Gas Prices (October 18 - Aug 21)



Consumer protection when a supplier leaves the market

Energy continues to be high on the media agenda with a number of smaller suppliers going out of business in Great Britain. Consumers in Northern Ireland do not need to worry. Although the recent energy price increases have not yet led to a supplier exiting the market here, we continue to closely monitor market developments and speak regularly to suppliers. If, for any reason, an electricity or gas supplier ceases trading, robust systems are in place to ensure the lights stay on, gas keeps flowing and consumers are protected. Established arrangements ensure that affected customers are seamlessly transferred to another provider and there is no interruption of supply. We have published more information on this process, known as Supplier of Last Resort, on our website.

Delivering PC21 – the opportunities and challenges

Following the publication of our [final determination](#) on Northern Ireland Water's PC21 price control, the focus has moved to implementation and delivery. NI Water's [PC21 Monitoring Plan](#) has been agreed and published. This confirms the company's commitment to the delivery of PC21 and any associated targets, provided it is fully funded.

We have commenced engagement with NI Water on proposed enhancements to our existing processes for monitoring and reporting delivery. This includes our Capital Investment Monitoring Submission and the Output Monitoring Submission presented to stakeholders at the Output Review Group on a quarterly basis. These changes will help promote transparency with regard to delivery and will allow us to more easily report on individual elements of the programme, such as the Living with Water Programme (LWWP), a strategic initiative which accounts for a significant element of PC21 investment.

Our PC21 determination provides significant opportunities. It will allow NI Water to maintain its asset base, enhance drinking water and environmental quality, cater for growth and enhance consumer service. It represents the most significant step change in capital investment since the regulation of NI Water began and provides for delivery of outputs to the value of £2.08bn in nominal terms, an increase of 87% in real terms compared with the previous price control, PC15. As a result it will also allow NI Water to start to address the lack of capacity in Northern Ireland's sewerage networks and wastewater treatment works

by removing development constraints in 49 towns. This is an issue which has been limiting the development of both housing and industry across the region.



Whilst it is widely acknowledged that this level of investment is required, delivery will not be without its challenges. Funding is critical and will need to be secured within a public expenditure regime which continues to be subject to budgetary pressures. Delivering proposed annual increases in investment of around 30% over three consecutive years early in the period will be difficult. This will require advanced planning and procurement for major schemes by NI Water, so that delivery contracts can be put in place and supply chain capacity can be secured. NI Water will need to develop final solutions for large elements of the sewerage networks and wastewater treatment work programmes so they can be submitted to the UR for determination prior to the PC21 mid-term review. This will require confirmation of environmental needs by NIEA and the successful completion of integrated environmental studies to identify the most cost effective solutions.

Successful delivery of PC21 and the significant opportunities it offers is achievable. It will however require focus and a concerted effort and we will continue to engage and work with NI Water and other stakeholders to try to ensure this occurs.

Support for consumers

If you are worried about paying for your electricity or gas, please contact your supplier as soon as possible.

- Suppliers will work with you to agree a repayment plan if you have fallen behind with your energy bills.
- If you already have a repayment plan, suppliers can review this for you if you are struggling to keep up with the payments.
- If you use a Prepayment meter and have a repayment plan in place to clear your debt, suppliers can review the amount of debt that is taken off each top-up you make so this is affordable for you.

How can I find out who my electricity or gas supplier is and how to contact them?

- For electricity, if you have your meter point number (known as an MPRN a 17 digit number) you can [contact NIE Networks](#) to check who your supplier is. You can find your MPRN number on your electricity bill.
- Gas is slightly different and your supplier will depend on the area you live in. If you live in the Greater Belfast area, your supplier will either be [SSE Airtricity Gas Supply](#) or [firmus energy](#). If you live in the Ten Towns area¹, your gas supplier is [firmus energy](#) and in the West of Northern Ireland, your supplier will be [SSE Airtricity Gas Supply](#).
- You can find [a full list of all the electricity and gas suppliers on our website](#) including contact numbers and email addresses.

What other support is available?

- You can check if you are eligible for support from the government
 1. **[Winter Fuel Payment:](#)** If you were born on or before 26 September 1955 you could get between £100 and £300 to help you pay your heating bills. You will usually get this automatically if you are eligible and get State Pension or another social security benefit (not

Housing Benefit, Child Benefit or Universal Credit). If you are eligible but don't get paid automatically, you will need to make a claim.

2. **Cold weather payment:** If you're receiving certain benefits, you could qualify for extra money for each week there is very cold weather in your area.
3. **Fuel Direct Scheme:** You can have some of your bills (including rent, services charges, fuel or water bills) paid directly out of your benefits payments if you're having difficulties (this is also known as 'third party deductions'). You can find more information on the [NI direct website](#). If you receive Pension credit, contact the [pension centre](#) for more information.

- You can get free and independent debt advice

A money advisor at Advice NI will be able to provide advice on managing debt:
Advice NI: 0800 915 4604

Other tips

- Contact your supplier and check if you are on the cheapest tariff available to you.
- Paying by direct debit may also be cheaper if it is suitable for you – please contact your supplier for advice on this.
- You might also be able to save money by switching your supplier. The Consumer Council have a free [switching tool](#) that you can use.
- Contact your supplier to check if you are eligible for their Customer Care Register. If you are of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick you are able to benefit from some additional services.
- Use the [NI Direct benefits checker](#) as a guide to the benefits available to you.

Where can I get advice on how to save energy in my home

- Contact your energy supplier who will give you information and advice on how to use your electricity or gas more efficiently.
- Energy advice is also available on the [NI Direct government](#) website.
- The Consumer Council's [Switch On leaflet](#) contains also has useful information on efficiency information.
- You can also contact [NI Energy Advice](#) who offer free independent and impartial energy advice, including advice about energy grants/schemes and other sources of help. For example, [The Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme](#) (NISEP) provides help to install energy saving measures in your home. This can include energy-efficient boilers, heating controls, loft insulation and cavity wall insulation. The [Affordable Warmth Scheme](#) also provides support for energy efficiency measures and a [Boiler Replacement Scheme](#) is also available.



STAFF PROFILE

Dr. Paul Stewart Network Asset Manager in Networks Price Control Team



Paul works as a manager in the Networks team that delivers price controls for NI Water and the gas and electricity distribution companies. He is a civil engineer who spent 16 years working in the water industry after completing a PhD. His industry career included the planning, design and delivery of capital investment projects, followed by a Head Office business planning role where he gained his first experience of regulatory reporting. This proved pivotal in his decision to join the Utility Regulator when it began regulating 'water' in 2007. His team is primarily responsible for reviewing and challenging capital investment proposals. In addition, it sets and monitors delivery of the majority of NI Water's output targets, assesses engineering related operating costs for the gas distribution companies and evaluates additional capital investment proposals during price control periods. Paul says: "Our role is wide and varied and the task of regulating three utility areas at the same time is a challenge. However, the extensive experience of delivering water, gas and electricity investment that exists within the team means we are well placed to effectively engage with the utility companies and evaluate their investment and output proposals. This is particularly valuable when comparative benchmarking is not practical or possible. We recognise the contribution our work makes to minimising consumer bills through the overall cost challenge delivered by the wider price control team in our determinations. The fact that we assess individual projects or programmes of work and monitor their delivery, also helps us to see beyond the numbers and appreciate the real benefits being delivered on the ground for consumers, the environment and society as a whole".

Job Opportunities

As an economic regulator, our role is to enable, incentivise, and hold electricity, gas, and water companies to account for providing the best levels of service to consumers in Northern Ireland.

Details about [job opportunities](#) within the Utility Regulator are on our website.

Consultations/News Update

During September we published the following consultations and updates.

Please click on the links for further details:

- [Regulated Entitlement Values Information Note](#)
- [Consultation launched on licence modifications to SONI's Transmission System Operator licence](#)
- [Approval published of PTL-GNI \(UK\) Gas Transportation Agreement](#)
- [Cost and Performance Report for NI's gas transmission services is published](#)
- [Utility Regulator comments on Firmus Energy's regulated gas tariff increase](#)
- [Utility Regulator comments on SSE Airtricity Gas Supply's regulated tariff increase](#)

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Get the latest news updates directly to your email by [subscribing to our news alert service](#).

CONTACT US:

By post: Utility Regulator Queens House 14 Queen Street Belfast BT1 6ED

By telephone: +44 (0) 28 9031 1575

By email: info@uregni.gov.uk

To contact individual staff members:
firstname.surname@uregni.gov.uk

