

Open letter to all NI domestic energy suppliers

Re: Customer Service Levels and Contact Centre Performance

14 March 2023

Dear Managing Director,

I wrote to NI domestic energy suppliers in both November and January in response to the rising number of complaints, and concerning reports, regarding customer service standards and contact centre performance. In those letters I reminded suppliers of their obligations in this area, and in particular the requirement in the Minimum Standards of the Complaints Handling Code of Practice which outlines that suppliers must establish and operate an “accessible” procedure which will enable all customer complaints to be “promptly dealt with”.

We are of course aware that recent issues such as volatile energy prices and the delivery of the government support schemes has led to an increase in consumers attempting to contact their suppliers. However, it is precisely during uncertain times that supplier contact centres play their most vital role. Suppliers represent the customer-facing element of the energy market, and it is our expectation that suppliers must be accessible, make it easy for consumers to contact them, and ensure that their customer service arrangements are fit for purpose. To do so, we expect suppliers to allocate and maintain such level of resources as may reasonably be required to enable them to receive, handle, and process consumer contacts and complaints in an efficient and timely manner.

We have been made aware of some poor examples of supplier contact centre performance over an extended period. To better understand the actual concerns, since November last year we have been receiving contract centre metrics from all domestic suppliers and now have a number of months data to compare across time and between suppliers. The analysis of these submissions has offered important insight into market wide contact centre performance. It also

provides background to the anecdotal reports and actual examples we've received from individual customers and consumer bodies.

Overall, we have found that the performance of the contact centres of some NI energy suppliers has fallen below what we would consider to be an acceptable standard, particularly in the months of late 2022 and early 2023. Evidence received to date would indicate that some suppliers are performing well, however some are falling well below standard and on occasions to worryingly levels. For the latter instances, we will be following up with immediate effect to ascertain any potential non-compliance, pursuant to our enforcement procedure.

In addition, we will urgently be inviting all domestic suppliers and the major NI consumer bodies to a meeting to discuss the issues and options for the resolution of these. I would appreciate your organisation's active participation and co-operation in this discussion.

In the medium term we will be seeking to strengthen our regulatory framework in the area of customer service levels. This will include both contact centre performance and suppliers' processes for setting customers direct debits. We will be consulting on options for both of these in the coming weeks.

Kind regards,



Kevin Shiels
Interim Chief Executive