Non – Domestic consumer views of electricity supply loss during severe weather events

August 2025

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1. Key Findings

In July 2025, the Utility Regulator (UR) commissioned Cognisense to conduct a telephone survey with a representative sample of non-domestic (business) electricity consumers in Northern Ireland, to gather their experiences of losing electricity supply during severe weather, their main priorities at this time and their views on the provision of a payment for the inconvenience caused by the loss of power during these weather events.

The findings from the research will be used to inform the UR's review of the Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) and Overall Standards of Performance (OSP) for the electricity distributor and electricity supply companies in Northern Ireland.

204 non-domestic consumers (businesses) participated in the survey. In the remainder of the report we refer to these participants as businesses. Some of the key findings from the research are as follows:

Experiences of losing electricity supply due to severe weather or a storm

- 39% of businesses reported they had lost electricity during severe weather or a storm. Of those respondents who had previously lost supply, 51% had lost electricity due to Storm Éowyn back in January 2025.

- Thinking back to the last time they were without power due to severe weather, 44% of those who had lost electricity supply were without electricity for less than 12 hours.

- 54% reported to have lost their electricity supply for over 12 hours, with 27% being without power for over 24 hours.

Consumer priorities during power loss

- When asked to think about what was most important to them during the last time they lost electricity because of severe weather, 54% stated it was the health and safety of their staff.

- 23% stated the restoration of electricity was the most important consideration for their business.

- No business considered compensation for the inconvenience to be the *most* important factor during the period without power.

- When combining the top three considerations viewed as important when without power, ensuring the health and safety of staff was the most prevalent (83%), followed closely by electricity restoration (78%). One of the lesser important considerations, when combining the top three, was receiving compensation for the inconvenience, with 34% mentioning this.

Views on payments for loss of power

- 86% of businesses agreed that electricity consumers who go without power due to storm damage for over 24 hours should be entitled to claim a payment in acknowledgement of the inconvenience caused.

- Across those who agreed, the vast majority (87%) of businesses believed all consumers affected by the outage (both households and businesses) should be entitled to claim the payment. 13% stated only businesses should be entitled to claim.

- 33% considered it was the responsibility of the consumer to fund the payment while a similar proportion (32%) thought the government should be responsible. 26% suggested the Northern Ireland Electricity Networks should fund the payment.

- If a payment was introduced, 56% reported they would be willing to pay extra on their future electricity bills to fund consumers who were without power, of which a majority (71%) were willing to pay an additional £21 to £50 to their annual bill.

- In the event they experienced a loss of electricity due to severe weather, 82% stated they would be likely to submit a claim for a payment to acknowledge the inconvenience caused.

2. About this research

2.1 Background

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

As part of the Utility Regulator's Consumer Protection Programme 2024 – 2029[1], a commitment was made to review the electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) and Overall Standards of Performance (OSP). The purpose of the review is to update the current electricity GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations for the electricity distributor and electricity supply companies in Northern Ireland, to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide an enhanced level of consumer protection to Northern Ireland consumers.

The electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) set out prescribed service levels which domestic and non-domestic consumers can expect in individual cases from both their electricity distributor and electricity supplier. They include payments in recognition of poor performance, to acknowledge the inconvenience caused to the customer when company performance falls below the prescribed level. The 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 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.

Due to the events of Storm Éowyn and the need to gather consumer views specifically on severe weather payments as part of this review, in July 2025 the Utility Regulator commissioned Cognisense to conduct quantitative research with Electricity consumers in Northern Ireland.

The findings from the research will be used to inform the Utility Regulator's review of the GSS and OSP.

[1] Consumer Protection Programme 2024 – 2029 (CPP24) – Final decision paper | Utility Regulator

2.2 Methodology

A telephone survey of 204 VAT registered Northern Ireland businesses was administered during July and August 2025. All respondents had to be solely or jointly responsible for arranging electricity contracts or paying the electric bills within the business.

Quota controls were employed during fieldwork on employee size to enable sub-group level analysis by size and sample targets were set to ensure there was a broad range of industry groups included within the final sample. The geographical location of the business was also monitored.

It was found to be challenging to speak with key personnel responsible for the electricity contracts of those larger businesses with 50+ employees, therefore due to time constraints quotas were relaxed to ensure a sample of at least n=200 was achieved. Corrective weighting was applied during data analysis to ensure the final sample was representative of Northern Ireland VAT registered businesses by employee size.

Employee Size Band	Target no of interviews n=	Achieved no of interviews n=	% of NI population (for weighting)
0-9	100	108	89%
9-49	60	73	9%
50+	40	23	2%
Broad Industry Groups			
Manufacturing, motor trades	20	26	
Construction	30	10	
Professional and Business Service	30	42	
Hospitality - Leisure, hotels and catering	20	26	
Retail/Distribution/other services	30	42	
Agriculture	30	11	
Public Admin	20	27	
Community and Voluntary	20	20	

The following figures (figures 1 and 2) illustrate the profile of the final sample collected. Postcode was used to determine whether the business was based within Greater Belfast or the Rest of NI.

Figure 1: Profile of sample by business size, industry group and location[2]

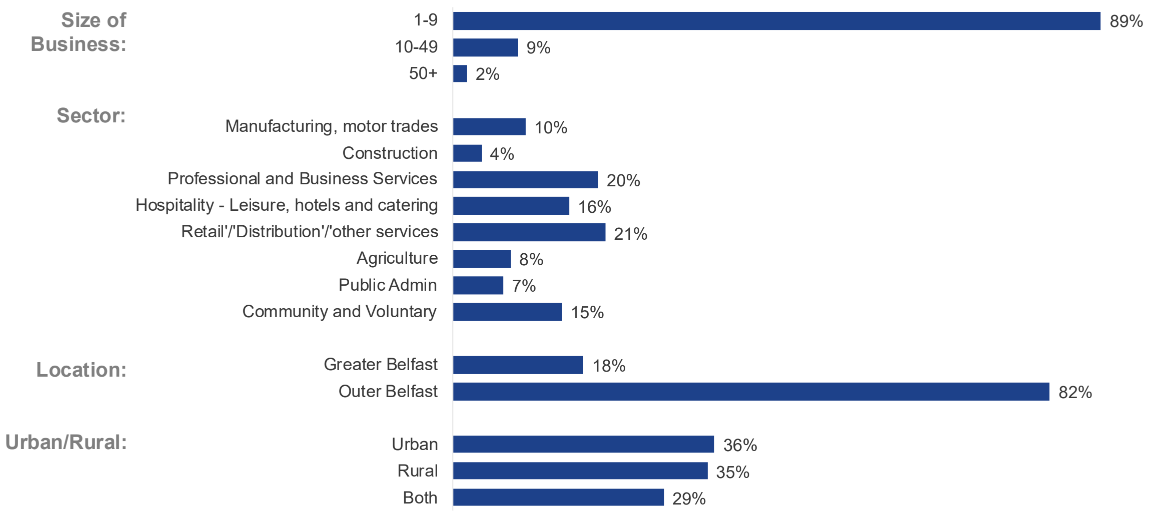
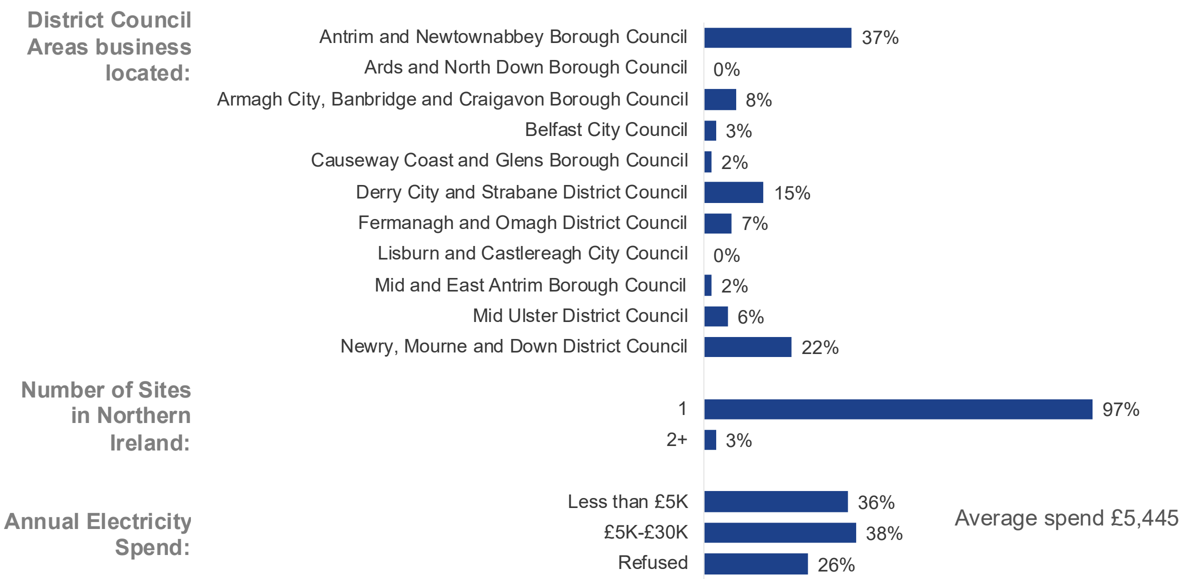


Figure 2: Profile of sample by District Council, number of sites the business has in Northern Ireland and annual electricity spend



[2] Respondents who reported that their business was in both urban and rural locations were counted against both categories in the analysis.

The questionnaire used for the survey was developed by the Utility Regulator with advice from Cognisense.

All research was carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct.

When reading this report, please be aware of the following:

- As a result of the rounding of figures and the use of questions for which multiple answers could have been given, the sums on charts may not always total 100%.

- The relevant base sizes are detailed under each chart with 'n' representing 'number'.

- Where differences have been identified, these have been tested at a 95% confidence level. The margin of error on a sample size of n=204 is +/- 6.9%

- Caution is advised when analysing results where low base numbers are present. These have been highlighted with an asterisk (*) throughout the report.

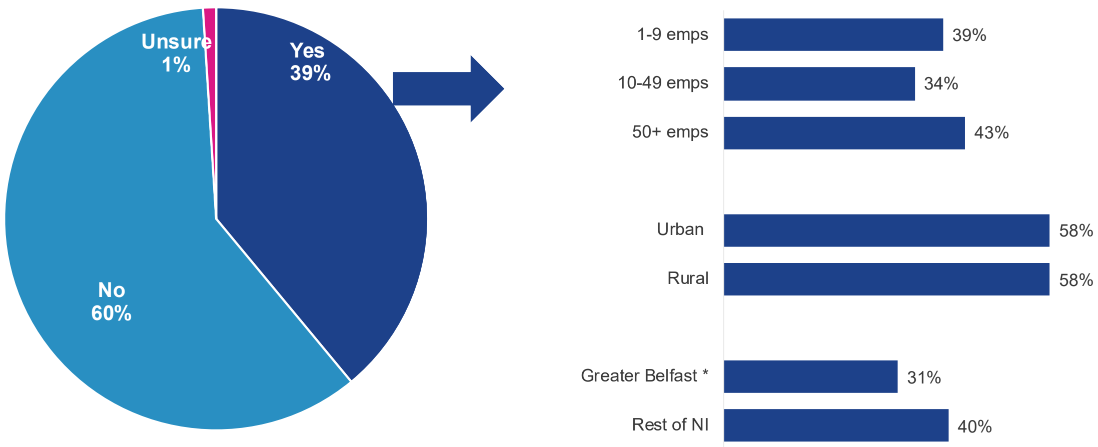
3. Experience of loss of electricity supply due to severe weather events

Participants were asked questions regarding whether they had ever lost electricity supply during a severe weather event, if they had lost supply during Storm Éowyn and how long they were without power for.

3.1 Ever lost electricity to your home during severe weather or a storm

39% had lost electricity to their business, due to severe weather or a storm (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Have you ever lost electricity to your business during severe weather or a storm?

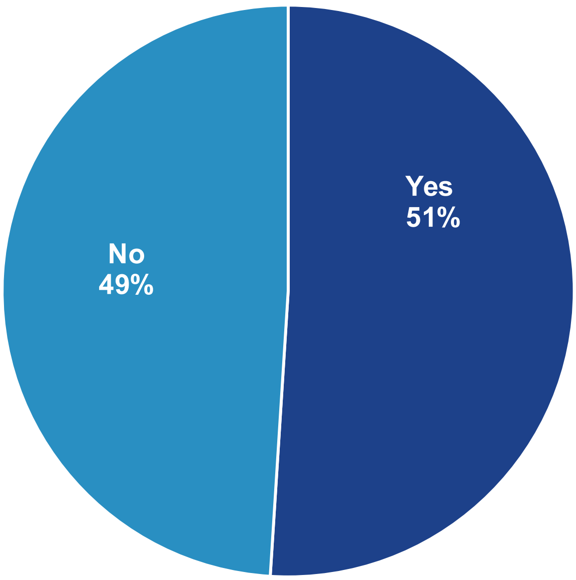


Base: all businesses (n=204)

3.2 Lost electricity due to Storm Éowyn in January 2025

51% of those who had lost supply to their business reported it was due to storm Éowyn. (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Did you lose electricity to your business as a result of the storm in January this year (Storm Éowyn)?



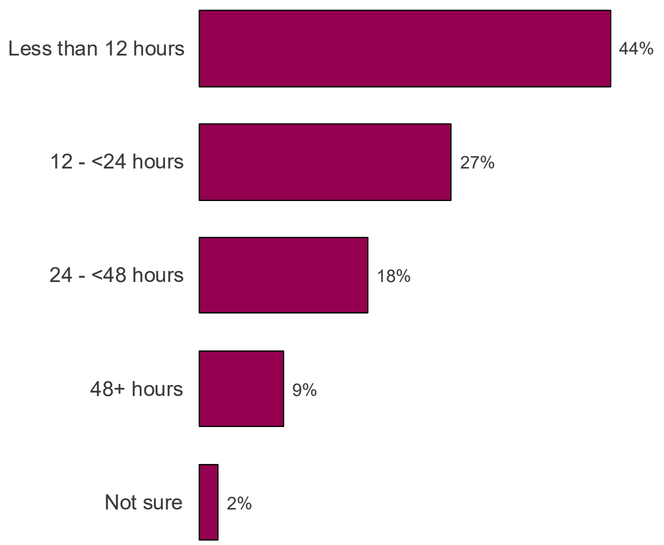
Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=77)

3.3 Duration of power loss

Of those who had experience of losing electricity supply, 44% were without power for less than 12 hours.

54% were without power for more than 12 hours, with 27% being without power for over 24 hours. (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Thinking of the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, how long was your business without power?



Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=77)

4. Consumer priorities during power loss

Participants were asked to rank what was most important to them during their time without electricity supply.

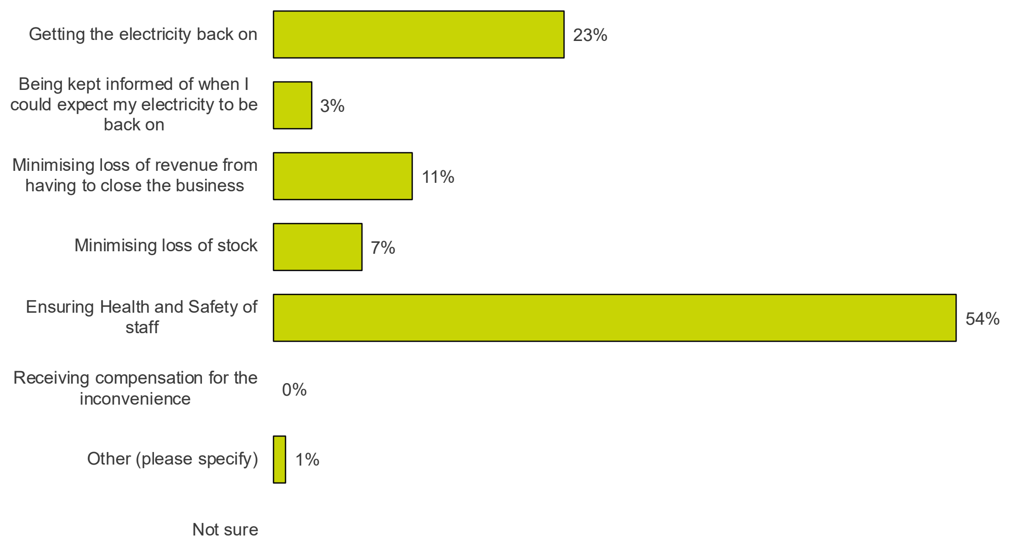
4.1 Most important consideration

For 54% of businesses the most important consideration during the period without power was the health and safety of their staff whilst 23% stated their electricity being restored to be the most important.

No business considered compensation for the inconvenience as being the most important issue during the period without power.

Being kept informed of when their electricity would be restored was most important to only a small proportion of businesses (3%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Thinking about the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, what was most important to you during the period your business was without power?

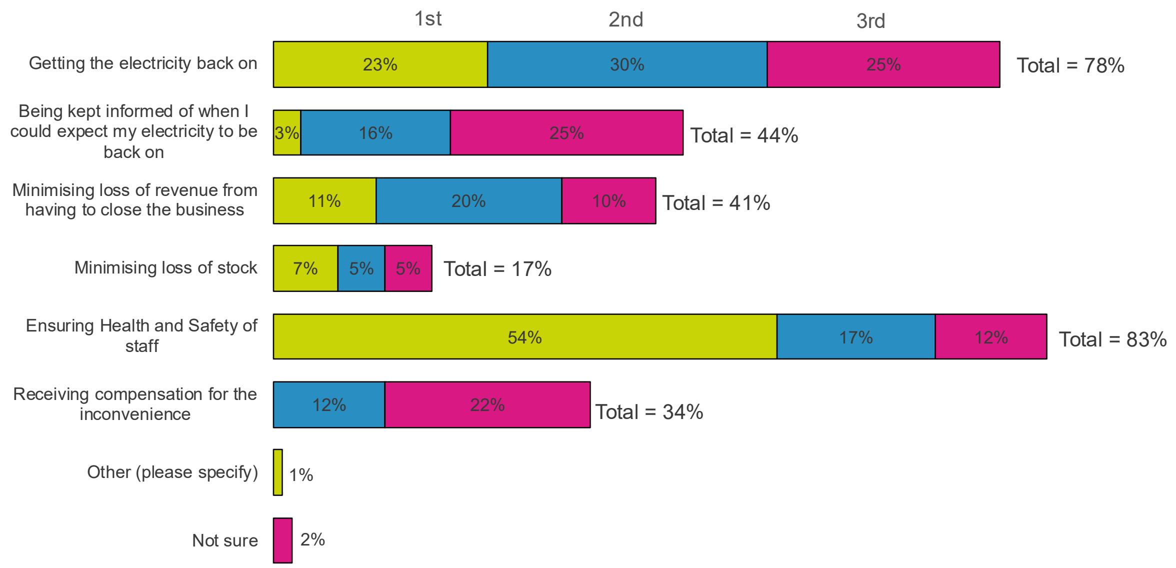


Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=77)

4.2 Top 3 considerations

When combining the top three considerations, ensuring the health and safety of staff remained the most prevalent (83%), followed closely by getting the electricity turned back on (78%). 34% considered receiving compensation for the inconvenience important (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Thinking about the last time you lost electricity because of severe weather, what was most important to you during the period you were without power? <u>Top Three</u>



Base: all who had lost electricity during severe weather or storm (n=77)

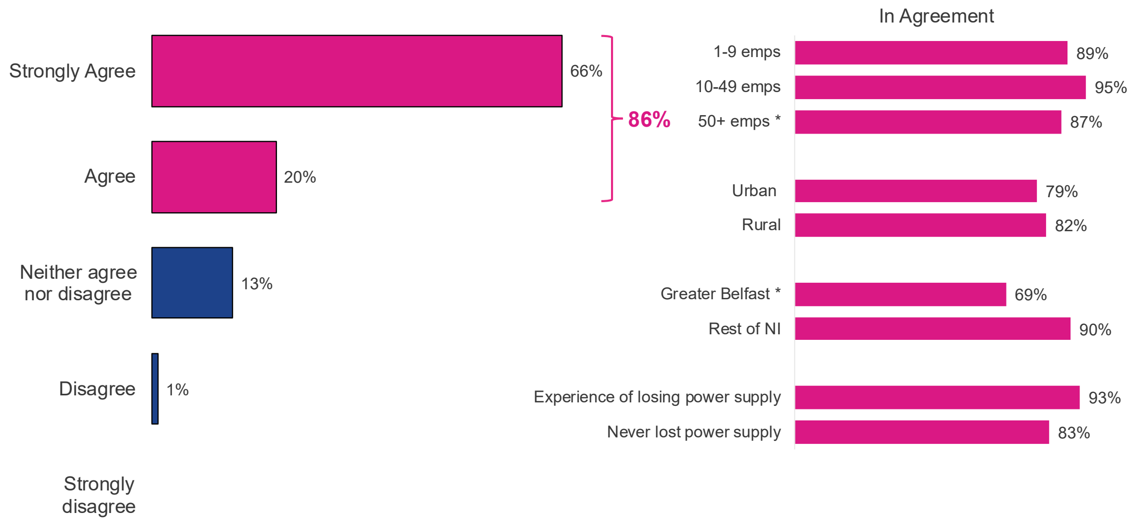
5. View on payments for loss of power

Participants were asked for their views on whether those who were without power for over 24 hours should be entitled to receive a payment for the inconvenience caused. Questions were also asked to understand views on who they felt should receive these payments, how they thought such payments should be funded, whether they would be willing to pay more on their electricity bills to fund such a payment and whether they would claim such a payment.

5.1 Entitlement to payment for inconvenience

86% of businesses either strongly agreed or agreed that customers without power for over 24 hours should be entitled to payment for the inconvenience. Some 13% neither agreed nor disagreed while 1% disagreed (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Do you agree or disagree that electricity consumers who go without power due to storm damage for over 24 hours should be entitled to claim a payment in acknowledgement of the inconvenience caused?



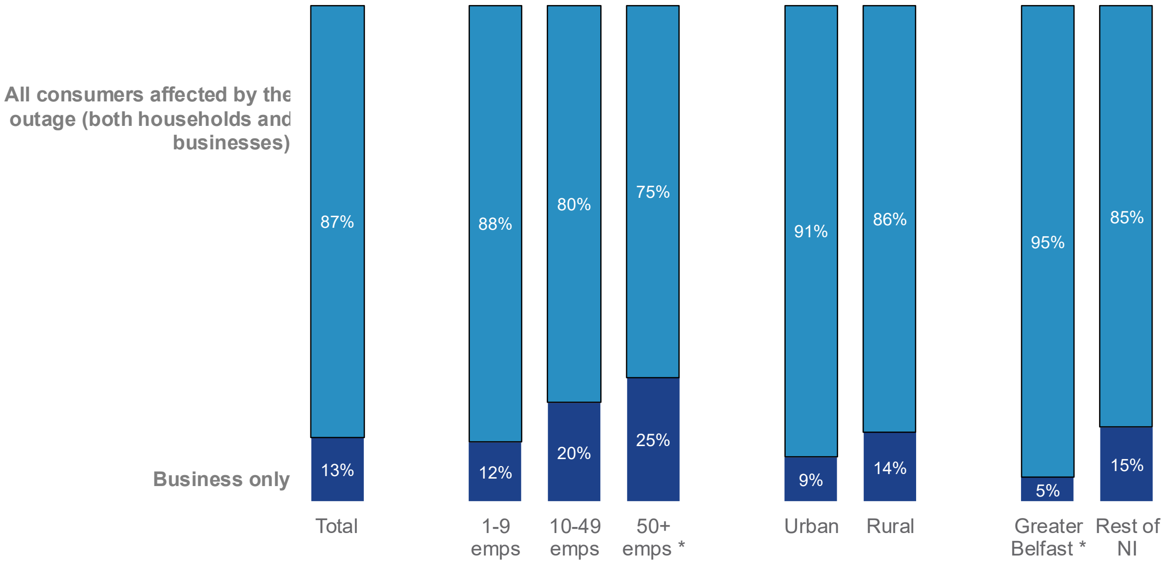
Base: all businesses (n=204)

Businesses outside Greater Belfast (90%), those medium in size with 10-49 employees (95%) and those who have experience of losing power supply to their business (93%) were more likely to strongly agree or agree than their counterparts (Figure 8).

5.2 Who should be entitled to the payment

The vast majority (87%) felt all consumers affected (both households and businesses) should be entitled to claim the payment, while 13% felt it should be businesses only (Figure 19).

Figure 9: Who do you think should be entitled to claim the payment?



Base: all who agreed with payment for inconvenience (n=181)

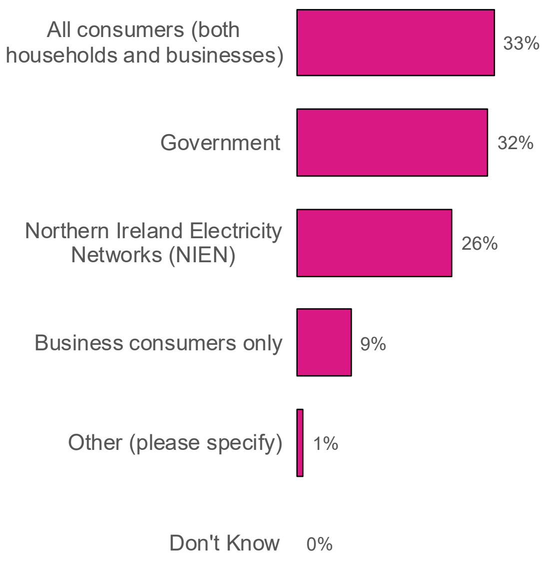
5.3 Who should fund the payment

If a payment was introduced, a third (33%) considered it should be the responsibility of all consumers to fund such a payment. A similar proportion thought it should be the government's responsibility (32%).

26% thought Northern Ireland Electricity Networks should be responsible for funding the payment.

9% felt the payment should be funded by business customers only (Figure 10).

Figure 10: If a payment was introduced for those who had lost electricity supply because of severe weather, who do you think should fund this payment?



	1-9 emps	10-49 emps	50+* emps	Urban	Rural	Greater * Belfast	Rest of NI
All consumers (both households and businesses)	33%	23%	43%	33%	29%	29%	33%
Government	33%	19%	13%	28%	43%	28%	33%
Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIEN)	25%	36%	30%	34%	18%	41%	23%
Business consumers only	7%	21%	9%	5%	10%	2%	10%
Other (please specify)	1%	-	-	1%	-	-	1%
Don't Know	-	1%	4%	-	0%	-	0%

Base: all businesses (n=204)

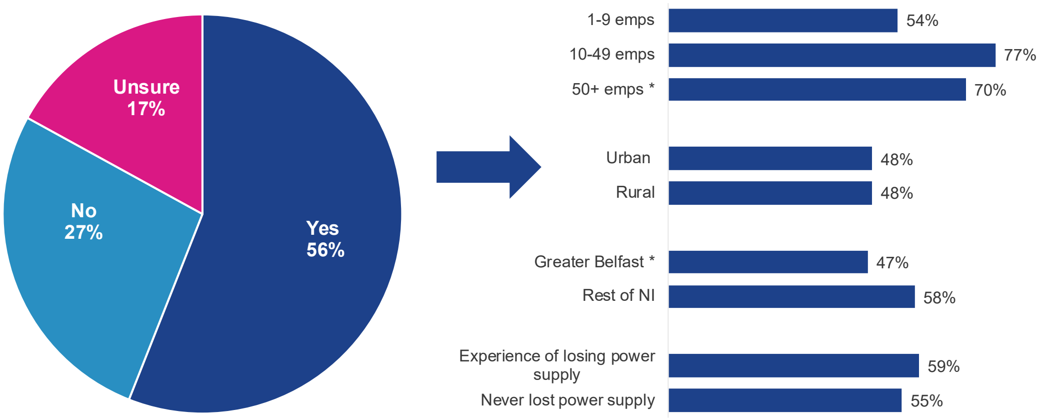
Those most likely to state funding should come from Government were the smaller businesses with 1 to 9 employees (33%) and those based in rural areas (43%).

Those based in urban areas were most likely to suggest funding should come from Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (34%) (Figure 10).

5.4 Willingness to pay extra on bills

56% stated they would be willing to pay extra on their electricity bills to fund consumers who were without power during severe weather or storms for over a certain period of time. However, some 27% were unwilling to pay extra, while 17% stated they were unsure (Figure 11).

Figure 11: If a payment was introduced, would you be willing to pay extra on your future electricity bills to fund consumers who are without power during severe weather for over a certain period of time to claim a payment?



Base: all businesses (n=204)

Willingness to pay more was higher amongst those medium sized businesses with 10-49 employees (77%).

Not willing to pay more was highest amongst the smaller businesses with 1 to 9 employees (29%) (Figure 11).

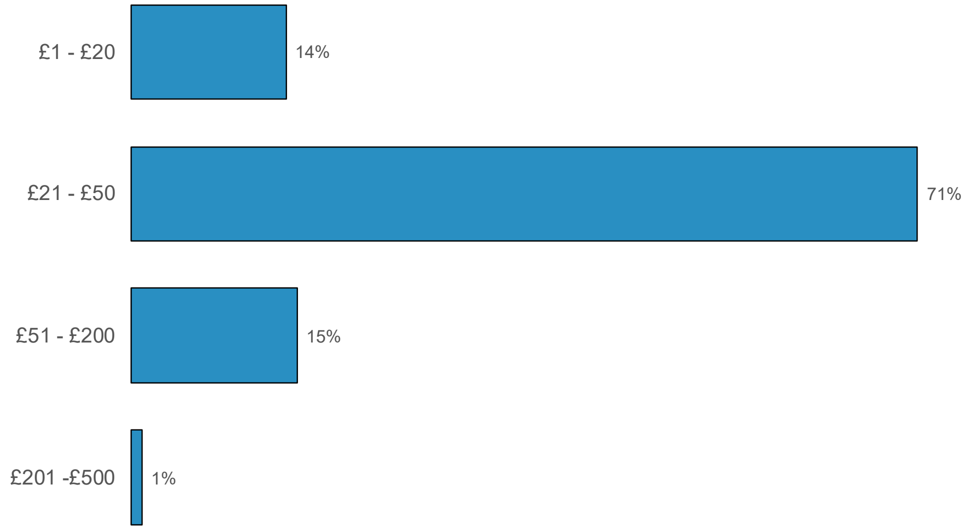
5.5 Amount extra prepared to pay annually

Across those willing to pay extra, the majority (71%) stated they were willing to pay between £21 to £50 extra annually.

14% stated that they would be prepared to pay less than £20 whilst a similar proportion (15%) were prepared to pay £51 to £200 extra each year.

A small proportion (1%) reported that they would be prepared to pay between £201 and £500 extra on an annual basis. (Figure 12).

Figure 12: How much extra would you be prepared to pay annually on your future electricity bills? (This would be an ongoing annual amount that would be spread across your bills each year).



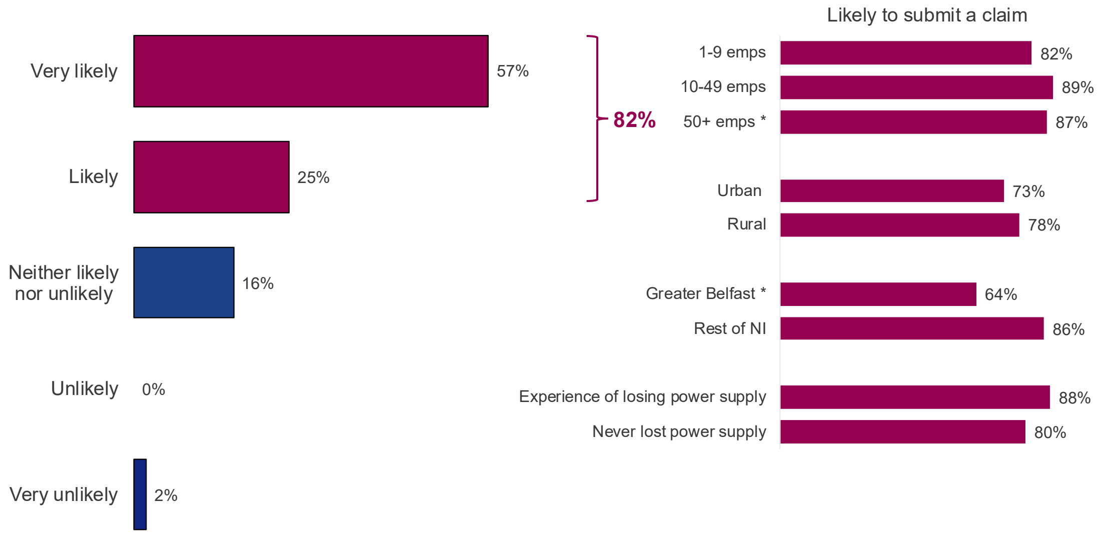
Base: all prepared to pay extra (n=129)

5.6 Likelihood of submitting a claim for a payment

The majority of businesses (82%) stated they would be likely to submit a claim if inconvenienced by loss of electricity. Within this, 57% were very likely to submit a claim.

16% were neither likely nor unlikely to submit a claim while 2% were unlikely (Figure 13).

Figure 13: In the event that you experience a loss of electricity due to severe weather, how likely or not are you to submit a claim for a payment to acknowledge the inconvenience caused?



Base: all businesses (n=204)

Likelihood to submit a claim was higher among businesses based outside of the Greater Belfast area (86%), whilst those who were unsure if they would or not were based in more urban areas (24%) (Figure 13).

6. Summary

Experience of loss of electricity supply due to severe weather events

- 39% had lost electricity to their business due to severe weather or a storm. 51% of those who had lost supply to their business reported it was due to storm Éowyn.

- Of those who had experience of losing electricity supply, 44% were without power for less than 12 hours.

Consumer priorities during power loss

- For 54% of businesses, the most important consideration during their period without power was the health and safety of their staff. The second most important consideration was restoration of supply (23%).

- No business considered compensation as being the most important issue during the period without power.

View on payments for loss of power

- 86% of businesses either strongly agreed or agreed that customers without power for over 24 hours should be entitled to payment for the inconvenience.

- 87% felt that all consumers affected (both households and businesses) should be entitled to claim the payment.

- If a payment was introduced, a third (33%) considered it to be the responsibility of all consumers to fund the payment, whilst a similar proportion thought it should be the government's responsibility (32%).

- 56% stated they would be willing to pay extra on their electricity bills to fund consumers who were without power during severe weather or storms for over a certain period of time.

- 82% stated they would be likely to submit a claim if inconvenienced by loss of electricity.