



Third Party Intermediaries in the Energy Market

Response by the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland

06 November 2025

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1. Overview of our response

The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (the Consumer Council) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Third-Party Intermediaries (TPIs) in the Energy Market from the Utility Regulator (UR).

TPIs are organisations or individuals that assist energy customers, particularly businesses, with their energy-related needs, and there is a fee to be paid for their service. TPIs include, but are not limited to, energy brokers, switching websites and face to face sales.

The Consumer Council has stressed the importance of providing full transparency of information for non-domestic customers. TPIs must openly disclose any affiliations with specific energy suppliers regarding fees and commissions so customers can separate any associated TPI service charges from energy costs on both their bill and contract. The unit price for their tariff should be shown upfront, before any additional charges or fees are applied and this price must match the rate listed on the supplier's website for the corresponding tariff.

The new ruling by the Utility Regulator requiring electricity and gas suppliers to publish each of their tariffs on their website provides businesses with the opportunity to now compare prices between suppliers. Previously these business customers would have had to call the suppliers during normal working hours, which can be difficult for small or micro business to achieve whereas now they can compare prices and tariffs in their own time to find the best deal.

TPIs are currently operating without any regulation in Northern Ireland so establishing a clear regulatory framework would help eliminate poor practices and strengthen trust in the sector, ensuring TPIs act in their clients' best interests. The mechanisms to resolve or compensate those affected by problems arising from and subject to TPI involvement do not exist. Strict guidelines on responsibility and accountability are essential if customers want to avail of their services.

TPIs should also sign up to a recognised accreditation scheme or Code of Practice (CoP) to participate in the energy market. Legitimate concerns should be raised in relation to the practices of a TPI that avoids signing up to one of these.

The UR has powers to introduce conditions on a supplier, that would allow indirect regulation of TPIs to provide the necessary protections. A voluntary Code of Practice would give customers a certain degree of confidence, and it would also show a willingness by TPIs to adhere to this.

The NI business market has a high number of microbusinesses. Many of these businesses are family run businesses that have between 1 and 4 employees. The Consumer Council believes that small family businesses, which often lack the resources to review their energy bills, should receive the same protections as domestic customers. All consumers deserve accessible, transparent information on their energy usage and costs from both TPIs and supplies to help them make informed choices.

2. About the Consumer Council

The Consumer Council is the statutory consumer representative body for Northern Ireland, responsible for protecting, empowering and representing consumers, and promoting their interests.

We operate under our sponsor department, the Department for the Economy (DfE), on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive.

We are an insight-led evidence-based organisation:

- Providing consumers with expert advice and confidential guidance.
- Engaging with government, regulators and consumer bodies to influence public policy.
- Empowering consumers with the information and tools to build confidence and knowledge.
- Protecting consumers by investigating and resolving consumer complaints under statutory and non-statutory functions.
- Undertaking best practice research to identify and quantify emerging risks to consumers.
- Campaigning for market reform as an advocate for consumer choice, welfare and protection.
- Our statutory powers cover consumer affairs, energy, transport, water and sewerage, postal services and food affordability and accessibility.

These legal responsibilities are drawn from legislation, licences given to companies working in Northern Ireland, and cooperation agreements set in memorandums of understanding. The work we carry out also aligns with a number of the Articles in the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland¹ (NI Protocol).

Our non-statutory functions educate, empower and support consumers against discriminatory practices in any market through advocacy work, as well as education and outreach programmes covering a broad range of topics including promoting consumer rights, financial inclusion and a more sustainable energy future.

We serve Northern Ireland's 1.9 million citizens and champion consumers in everything we do. We prioritise those who are disabled or chronically sick, who are of pensionable age, who are on low incomes and who live in rural areas.

We have responsibilities under the Rural Needs Act 2016 and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Our aim is to ensure government policies recognise consumer needs in rural areas and promote equality of opportunity and good relations across a range of equality categories.

¹ [Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland](#), House of Commons Library

Our role in energy

Part IV of the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003² (the 2003 Order) confers certain functions on the Consumer Council regarding “the interests of consumers” (that is the interests of consumers in relation to gas or electricity supplied by authorised suppliers) and “consumer matters” (that is any matter connected with “the interests of consumers”).

In considering “the interests of consumers”, we are required to have particular regard to those detailed earlier in this section, but this does not mean that regard may not be had to the interests of other descriptions of a consumer or consumer groups.

The functions of the Consumer Council under the 2003 Order (Articles 17 to 23) include the following:

- Obtaining and keeping under review information about consumer matters, and information about the views of consumers on such matters. In relation to this, where the Utility Regulator is required by any provision of the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992³ and the Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996⁴ to publish a notice or any other document, it shall send a copy to the Consumer Council.
- Making proposals, or providing advice and information about consumer matters and representing the views of consumers on such matters to public authorities, persons authorised by a licence or exemption under the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 and the Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, and other persons whose activities may affect the interests of consumers. This includes undertaking independent research and monitoring consumer experiences.
- Providing information about consumer matters to consumers of electricity or gas supplied by authorised suppliers.
- Publishing statistical information about certain complaints about authorised electricity and gas suppliers.
- Publishing advice and information about consumer matters to promote interests of consumers.
- Investigating certain complaints made by any customer, or potential customer of, or user of electricity or gas supplied by an authorised supplier.
- Investigating other matters relating to the interests of consumers in relation to electricity and gas supplied by authorised suppliers.

The Consumer Council also has the following statutory responsibilities in energy:

- Under the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 and the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 regarding the standards of service, we deal with complaints and billing disputes between an electricity supplier and a customer.

² [Energy \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2003](#), UK Parliament

³ [Electricity \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1992](#), UK Parliament

⁴ [Gas \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1996](#), UK Parliament

- Under the Gas (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, we deal with billing disputes between a gas supplier and a customer.
- Under the Energy Act (Northern Ireland) 2011⁵, we deal with disputes of standards of performance between gas suppliers and customers in individual cases.

⁵ [Energy Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2011](#), Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Our approach

In this section, we have set out our approach to the Third-Party Intermediaries in the Energy Market from the Utility Regulator.

3.1 Consumer protection principles

The Consumer Council uses eight guiding principles to assess where the consumer interest lies, and develop and communicate our policies, interventions and support.

They provide an agreed framework through which we approach regulatory and policy work and ensure we apply a consistent approach across statutory and non-statutory functions, and in our engagement with consumers and stakeholders.

Figure 1: Consumer protection principles



They serve to protect consumers, setting out minimum standards expected from markets when delivering products or services in Northern Ireland.

They frame our policy position and approach to addressing emerging detriment and resolving consumer disputes with industry, offering a straightforward checklist to analyse and validate outcomes, in particular amongst vulnerable consumer groups.

3.2 Northern Ireland consumer position

Before setting out our response, we feel it is important to highlight some key considerations about the consumer position in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has unique considerations with a more vulnerable population, a regional market, geographical separation from the remainder of the UK market, a land border with the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and European Union (EU), and a legislative environment impacted by regulatory divergence.

Consumer detriment levels in Northern Ireland can be significant but given our relatively small population in comparison to the UK, the detriment our consumers face can sometimes struggle to be prioritised, reported and monitored on, at a national level.

We are more rural

Northern Ireland represents just 3% of the total UK population⁶ but we have more than double the proportion of citizens living in rural areas (36%)⁷ compared to England (16.6%)⁸ and Scotland (17%)⁹.

This is particularly relevant as our population growth in rural areas from 2001-2020 has outstripped urban areas by a factor of almost three to one (20% to 7%)¹⁰. Rurality can heighten vulnerability in some markets and supply chains.

We are more vulnerable

Every day, we support consumers with expert, confidential advice and services.

Between April 2021 and March 2024, we have supported over 70,000 consumers through to our consumer helpline and free and independent complaint investigations, and outreach and education programmes across Northern Ireland. Our casework shows heightened vulnerability with more complex and multi-faceted needs.

This work is underpinned by our extensive portfolio of consumer monitoring and research into their lived experiences, expectations and perspectives. We therefore have unique insights into the socio-economic trends influencing consumers' behaviour and confidence, and the challenges and opportunities they face.

We also take quarterly temperature checks of the cost of living impacts on consumers in Northern Ireland. Our latest Pulse Survey from March 2025¹¹ found:

- 42% felt that their household was worse off when compared to 12 months ago and only around a quarter (26%) believed their household would be better off in 12 months' time.
- Almost three quarters (70%) agreed they could keep up with bills and buying essentials, but 16% said they have £50 or less each month, with 32% stating they have £150 or less left over each month, after mortgage/rent and all essential bills had been paid.

⁶ [Estimates for the population for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland: Mid-2024](#), September 2025, Office of National Statistics

⁷ [NI: IN PROFILE Key statistics on Northern Ireland](#), November 2022, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

⁸ [Statistical Digest of Rural England - GOV.UK, May 2025](#)

⁹ [Rural Scotland Data Dashboard: Overview](#), December 2023, Scottish Government

¹⁰ [Key Rural Issues: Northern Ireland](#), 2024, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

¹¹ [Consumer Pulse Survey](#), March 2025, Consumer Council

- 45% agreed dealing with financial matters was a burden and more than a third (38%) agreed their mental health was negatively affected by their financial situation.
- Almost three in five (57%) stated they have had to cut back on spending on essentials after their mortgage/rent and any loan or overdraft payments have been made.

We are less well off

The Consumer Council has monitored household income and expenditure since 2021. The latest Northern Ireland Household Expenditure Tracker¹² found half of our households had less than £110 per week after paying taxes and essential spending.

Between April and June 2025, our lowest earning households:

- Had a total household income per week before tax of just over £295.94, which is 6% lower than the UK average.
- Had just over £52 per week after paying taxes and paying for essentials, which is 19% lower than the peak of Q1 2021, of just over £64.
- Spent almost half (46%) of their total basic spending on food and non-alcoholic beverages, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels, and transport.
- Are more reliant on social securities, with 70% of income coming from benefits compared to 8% for the highest earning households in NI.

We have lower financial resilience

Northern Ireland has lower financial capability, and our citizens are almost twice as likely to use cash to pay for things¹³. We also have the highest rate of economic inactivity at 26.9% compared to 21% in the UK¹⁴, and almost double the Disability and Carer's Benefit claimants¹⁵ at c22.6%, compared to England and Wales at c13.3%¹⁶.

Illegal lending remains an issue that is particularly prevalent in Northern Ireland, although it is accepted that the problem is significantly underreported. Our recent study into consumers' views and behaviours in response to the rising cost of basics¹⁷ found 3% of respondents reported using illegal lenders.

Northern Ireland's largest debt advice charity, Advice NI, reported its debt service was dealing with increasingly higher levels of illegal lending, with nearly £46,022 of debt dealt with during 2023-2024¹⁸, averaging approximately £3,287 per debt. This was an increase of 16% from 2022-2023.

¹² [Household Expenditure Tracker Q2 2025](#), October 2025, Consumer Council

¹³ [Financial Lives Survey 2024](#), May 2025, Financial Conduct Authority

¹⁴ [Regional labour market summary](#), 14 October 2025, Office of National Statistics

¹⁵ [Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary May 2025](#), 27 August 2025, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

¹⁶ [DWP benefits statistics: August 2025](#), 1 October 2025, Department for Work & Pensions

¹⁷ [Consumers' views and behaviours in response to the rising cost of basics](#), March 2024, Consumer Council

¹⁸ [Debt Advice - A Complex Issue](#), March 2025, Advice NI

We have a unique energy market

Northern Ireland has a unique energy mix to the rest of the UK. Most households here (62.5%)¹⁹ use heating oil as their primary source of energy to heat their homes, rising to 82% in rural areas²⁰. Alongside this, approximately 51% of gas and electricity customers in Northern Ireland are on prepayment meters²¹, compared to approximately 14% overall in the UK²².

This presents higher risks of self-disconnection, particularly amongst vulnerable consumer groups, against a continuing backdrop of high energy prices, and a unique challenge for Northern Ireland net zero ambitions.

We are a micro business economy

Northern Ireland is a micro business economy with the registered business population accounting for just under 3%²³ of the total UK figure (2.7 million in 2023)²⁴.

There are:

- 81,135 businesses registered for VAT and/or PAYE
- 89% or 72,470 micro-businesses with fewer than 10 employees
- Just over 2% (1,750) medium or large businesses
- Four in ten businesses (40% or 32,140) with a turnover of less than £100,000
- Just over one in ten (13% or 10,415) with a turnover in excess of £1 million.

Many micro and small businesses act like consumers. They share similar experiences, problems and concerns and can operate at similar levels of market engagement and understanding, and redress.

¹⁹ [NISRA Census 2021 health & housing statistics](#), (main statistics tables (phase 2)) December 2022, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

²⁰ [The cost of living crisis in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, 19 July 2023](#): Centre for Progressive Policy

²¹ [Quarterly Retail Energy Market Monitoring Report for Q2 2025](#), 30 September 2025, Utility Regulator

²² Calculated based on the estimated number of pre-payment customers ([Ofgem launches national evidence-call on prepayment meters](#), March 2023, Ofgem) as a percentage of the total estimated number of UK households ([Families and households in the UK: 2023](#), July 2025, Office of National Statistics).

²³ [Northern Ireland Business: Activity, Size Location and Ownership, 2025](#), 11 June 2025, Northern Ireland Statistics and research Agency

²⁴ [UK Business: activity, size and location: 2025](#), 24 September 2025, Office for National Statistics

4. Our response to individual questions

In this section, we have set out our response to the Third-Party Intermediaries (TPIs) in the Energy Market consultation from the Utility Regulator.

4.1 Desired outcomes

The recent introduction requiring electricity and gas suppliers to publish clear price information for small business consumers on their website is a very welcome change, as it will allow customers to compare prices and get the best deal for their needs.

The UK Government's call for evidence in 2021 identified key risks like irregularity of information, mis-selling and lack of access to dispute resolution²⁵.

The Consumer Council has identified the following additional measures to improve transparency, accountability and fair treatment of non-domestic customers and root out bad practices. This will ensure that TPIs are working in the best interest of their clients in Northern Ireland.

- Full transparency of fees for non-domestic customers is required, so the customers can clearly distinguish how much they are paying for the TPI's service and how much they are paying for their energy.
- Clear presentation of any fees or commission paid by a supplier to a TPI must be displayed in the principal terms of the contract.
- The price the customer is paying for each unit of energy should be displayed before any other charges or fees are added to it. It should therefore mirror the unit price that is displayed on the supplier's website for that specific tariff.
- Ofgem set up the TPI Alternative Dispute Resolution Scheme (ADR Scheme) in December 2022. This scheme ensures that energy suppliers only work with brokers and TPIs that are part of the scheme. This example should be followed in Northern Ireland.
- TPIs must clearly state if they are affiliated with a particular energy supplier. This will ensure there is transparency around fees and commission.

The introduction of a clear regulatory framework would eliminate any bad practice and build confidence in the sector ensuring that TPIs are working in the best interest of their clients.

²⁵ [Regulating Third-Party Intermediaries \(TPIs\) in the retail energy market: consultation document](#), Department for Energy Security & Net Zero, 2025.

4.2 Individual questions

Question 1. Do you agree with our proposed strategic aim, objectives and scope in relation to this TPI project? If no, please provide reasoning.

Overall, the Consumer Council agrees with the proposed strategic aim, objectives and scope. From our perspective, the focus should be on transparency, information clarity, and the protection of consumers.

We believe that the strategic aim to ensure non-domestic consumers and micro/small-scale generators are “adequately informed and protected” is fundamental.

There is evidence of activities in Great Britain (GB) by a minority of TPIs falling short of providing optimal services, despite most operating responsibly. TPIs have used indirect methods to secure their commission that include:

- TPIs telling businesses that their service is free because they are paid by the energy supplier. This obscures the fact that the commission is built into the unit rate, meaning the customer indirectly pays for it.
- The broker adds a small, often un-itemized, uplift to the pence per kilowatt-hour (p/kWh) price from the supplier. The supplier then pays the broker based on the customer's energy consumption over the contract term.
- The TPI adds a commission to the daily standing charge.

Microbusinesses make up a significant portion of Northern Ireland's business landscape (89%), and their needs often mirror those of domestic consumers, particularly regarding a general lack of market expertise and limited resources to focus on complex energy-sector topics. Therefore, the Consumer Council believes that the project's focus on these specific groups is appropriate.

The Consumer Council concurs that the objectives to “gather, inform, identify, explore, consider, and implement” form a comprehensive and proactive framework. These are important for addressing market factors, such as a lack of clarity around commissions and the clarity and completeness of contract terms. We note that if enhanced monitoring was to be adopted, together with a programme of engagement, the Utility Regulator (UR) could move from a reactive to a proactive stance in protecting small business consumers.

In the Consumer Council response to the previous consultation (Review of the regulation of the non-domestic energy retail market), we noted that the scope of the project should include the treatment of debt relating to TPI-facilitated contracts. We highlighted that this is a significant consumer protection issue for microbusinesses and warranted consideration as a potential area of concern. Our view on this matter is unchanged.

The Consumer Council supports the objective of information provision but would emphasise that its effectiveness depends on consumer awareness and engagement. We urge the UR to ensure not only that relevant information is published but also that it prioritises and promotes information accessibility.

We note that previous initiatives, including the Consumer Council small business tool, have had limited uptake, highlighting the need for an ongoing promotional awareness campaign to ensure the target audience becomes aware of the suppliers, tariffs on offer, and uses this information to improve their understanding of their purchasing options and to inform their decision-making.

The Consumer Council is unable to comment on the appropriateness of the project's scope for small generators.

Question 2a. Do you think development, publication and promotion of relevant Retail TPI (RTPI) information on the UR's website would be beneficial to consumers? Please provide a clear rationale for your answer.

The Consumer Council agrees that this would be beneficial to non-domestic retail consumers. Such a measure could directly address the current information gap by providing a central, trusted source for consumers to better understand the TPI market. It would help empower consumers to make more informed decisions, potentially improving transparency and trust in the market.

Using a trusted source like the UR to publish the information would lend it credibility and authority, meaning it is more likely to be trusted by consumers. We support such a measure, as a relatively simple means of improving consumer awareness. We urge the UR to ensure that all information is in plain English and accessible to all non-domestic consumers.

Question 2b. Do you suggest any alternative/additional methods of sharing this TPI information with non-domestic consumers? If so, please describe.

The Consumer Council has identified two potential methods as follows:

- **Direction communication and educational campaigns:**
The UR could engage directly with non-domestic consumers through targeted campaigns, including publishing information via the UR's social media channels and website. The goal would be to raise awareness about TPIs and the importance of understanding all costs, including commission, before signing a contract. We see this channel as including webinars or in-person events covering topics, such as how to identify a reputable TPI, key questions to ask and how to interpret contract terms and fees.
- **Partnership with consumer bodies:**
The UR could work with established consumer bodies such as the Consumer Council, to provide information. In Great Britain, Citizens Advice provides a wide range of TPI information on their website to help consumers make informed choices. We believe a similar collaborative model could be established in Northern Ireland, where a trusted third-party organisation could publish information on TPI performance, customer complaints and contract and pricing transparency.

Question 3a. Would you consider enhanced monitoring and reporting (to include) 1) regular supplier information submission. 2) a programme of engagement to be beneficial in ensuring that consumers are adequately protected. Please provide clear rationale for your answer.

The Consumer Council considers that this enhanced monitoring and reporting approach would allow the UR to be more proactive in its consumer protection efforts by regularly gathering data from suppliers and engaging with TPIs. The UR should be able to identify potential issues such as high-pressure sales tactics or hidden fees at an early stage before they cause widespread consumer detriment.

The Consumer Council believes it is important that the purpose of such information gathering is to actively ensure consumer protection, not merely to just collect data as a box ticking exercise.

However, we note that it is important that measures implemented are not overly burdensome for suppliers, striking a balance between regulatory effectiveness and operational feasibility.

Question 3b. Should a regular supplier information submission be voluntary or implemented through a licence requirement?

The Consumer Council view is that a voluntary approach would be simpler and could be implemented more quickly than a change to supplier licences. It would depend upon the UR clearly communicating the rationale for the information collection, proposed information uses and anticipated benefits for all parties. Also, the UR must find a low-cost solution that does not impose significant additional reporting requirements on suppliers. It would also require the cooperation of TPIs.

If a voluntary approach is trialled and does not provide the necessary transparency, the UR should consider whether a mandatory licence requirement for suppliers would be appropriate, recognising that the project is focused on TPIs.

Question 3c. Can you suggest any alternative methods of monitoring and reporting TPI activity?

Without a change to its powers, the UR must rely on existing market participants to monitor and report on TPI activity, primarily through energy suppliers and consumer bodies. The UR could seek to encourage TPIs to implement voluntary reporting measures. However, it is not clear that TPIs would have an incentive to comply, and the benefits of partial information provision could be limited.

Question 3d. Would it be beneficial for the TPI information gathered by UR to be anonymised and published (in

addition to being used internally by UR for market monitoring)?

If the UR publishes the TPI information that it gathers, it should increase market transparency and benefit non-domestic consumers by enabling them to make more informed decisions.

While we believe that publishing anonymised data would be positive, the Consumer Council is of the view that publishing attributable data would be more effective. Full disclosure would mean individual TPIs would need to be more accountable for their fees and contracting practices, providing a stronger incentive for fair conduct.

In GB, Citizens Advice publishes information on how small businesses can complain to their energy broker, and price comparison sites provide information about using business energy brokers; there are also consumer websites that provide information on all you need to know about TPIs.²⁶

Question 4a. Are you of the view that TPI commissions being published would increase levels of transparency and benefit consumers?

Please provide clear rationale for your answer Detail your response to the question here.

Yes, the Consumer Council agrees that TPI commissions being published would increase transparency and benefit consumers by empowering them to make more informed decisions. It would enable businesses to better compare deals and assess the contract costs over time.

Question 4b. Which publication format should be used for Third Party Costs: i) consumer bills and on request, ii) a customer's Principal Terms and upon request iii) both i and ii or iv) another publication?

Please provide information to support your answer.

The Consumer Council believes that a combined approach would be the most effective way to improve transparency and provide information to consumers. It addresses the need for proactive disclosure at contract commitment and ongoing transparency throughout its duration:

(i) Consumer bills and on request: Including tariff information on a customer bill serves as a continuous reminder of the contracted unit cost. The Consumer Council has previously expressed a preference for information to be provided on customer bills for transparency in the "Review of the regulation of the non-domestic energy retail market"

²⁶ [Third Party Intermediaries in the Retail Energy Market, Utility Regulator, 2018](#)

(ii) Principal Terms: Disclosing third-party costs in the principal terms ensures consumers receive this information at the point of sale. We believe that this allows them to make an informed decision and should help to ensure they are aware of all associated charges before signing a contract.

An alternative to including information on every bill could be to add the information to annual statements, should suppliers find the former too burdensome.

Question 4c. Which publication cost structure would be most beneficial to consumers: i) a lump sum for contract duration, ii) a cost per unit, iii) combined approach (both i & ii), iv) other? Please provide information to support your answer.

The Consumer Council believes that a combined approach would be the most beneficial to consumers as this provides flexibility and recognises the different ways that businesses evaluate costs, allowing them to better compare tariffs. By offering both options, businesses can choose the structure that best aligns with their operational needs, accounting practices, and preferred method of cost evaluation.

The lump sum or one-off payment may be more beneficial to smaller businesses to know what they are paying up front but with an option to spread that cost over a period. Large businesses with a higher usage may benefit more by getting a reduced unit price when they reach an agreed level within a certain period.

Question 4d. What changes to billing systems or wider systems and processes - would be required in order to enable the publication of TPI commissions on a customer's bill?

No Comment.

Question 5a. Do you agree with the exclusion of the potential measures (4-6) for the reasons described above? If not, please provide reasoning.

The Consumer Council agree with the exclusion of the proposed measures (4-6):

Measure 4: Code of Practice: The UR does not have the vires to introduce and enforce a code of practice for TPIs, and the absence of an existing TPI trade association in Northern Ireland makes a voluntary scheme unfeasible, since there is no management or accreditation body in place.

We note that in GB, TPIs are subject to more stringent requirements, including a code of practice, and that the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) are currently exploring regulation of the TPI market.

As many of the TPIs operating in Northern Ireland are based in GB, the UR could seek voluntary commitments that they are currently operating under in GB to transfer to Northern Ireland, thus maintaining consistent standards across jurisdictions.

Measure 5: Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) scheme: There is no independent ADR service in Northern Ireland's energy sector. Although the lack of an ADR service is a consumer protection weakness (particularly compared to GB), its absence is a valid reason for not implementing this measure.

Measure 6: General Authorisation Regime: This measure would require new legislation, which is a complex and time-consuming process. The UR does not have the legal power to implement this regime unilaterally, necessitating its exclusion.

Question 5b. Are there any alternative measures not discussed that you think should be considered? If so, please provide a description.

No comment

Question 6. Are you aware of any issues/concerns impacting micro/small scale generators through their arrangements with TPIs? If yes, please specify.

No comment

Question 7. Do micro/small scale generators require regulatory protection when engaging with TPIs in the energy market in Northern Ireland? Please provide any information to support your answer.

No comment

Question 8. If you answered yes to Q7, what regulatory protections do you feel would benefit micro/small generators in Northern Ireland? Please provide examples to support your answer where necessary.

No comment

Question 9. Do you think that any of the potential measures outlined in Section 3 in relation to Retail TPIs could or should be considered for application to Wholesale TPI operations? Please provide any information to support your answer.

No comment

5. Conclusion

The Consumer Council would like to thank the Utility Regulator for the opportunity to respond to this consultation on Third Party Intermediaries for Northern Ireland.

TPIs are relatively new to the Northern Ireland energy market and although only a small number of businesses use their services, they currently operate without regulation.

UR should introduce a requirement for energy suppliers to make public which TPIs they are affiliated to and work only with TPIs that are members of a customer dispute resolution and redress scheme. This will give non-domestic customers comfort that they will have access to a fair dispute resolution process, should any problems arise.

Transparency and easy access to all information relative to non-domestic customers who wish to get the best deal for their operational needs is critical to instil confidence in this sector.

As Northern Ireland begins to transition to a smarter, more digital energy system, new, more innovative and potentially complex TPI models are likely to emerge. The UR must regulate TPIs to protect non-domestic customers of all sizes as the energy market evolves with the transition to Net Zero.

6. Contact information

If you have any questions, require further information or wish to discuss any aspect of our consultation response, please contact:

Brónach Graham
Senior Energy Policy Officer

Direct line 028 9025 1630
Email: bronach.graham@consumercouncil.org.uk

The Consumer Council consents to this response being published.

Consumer Council for Northern Ireland

Floor 3, Seatem House

28-32 Alfred Street

Belfast BT2 8EN

Freephone: 0800 121 6022

Email: contact@consumercouncil.org.uk

Website: www.consumercouncil.org.uk

