REVIEW OF THE ELECTRICITY GUARANTEED STANDARDS OF SERVICE AND OVERALL STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE

Decision Paper
Non-metering
July 2026

www.uregni.gov.uk

Utility Regulator

About the Utility Regulator

The 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.

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

We are governed by a Board of Directors and are accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly through financial and annual reporting obligations.

We are based at Millennium House in the centre of Belfast. The Chief Executive and two Executive Directors lead teams in each of the main functional areas in the organisation: CEO Office; Price Controls; Networks and Energy Futures; and Markets and Consumer Protection and Enforcement. The staff team includes economists, engineers, accountants, utility specialists, legal advisors and administration professionals.

OUR MISSION

To protect the short and long-term interests of consumers of electricity, gas and water.

OUR VISION

To ensure value and sustainability in energy and water.

OUR VALUES

ACCOUNTABLE: We take ownership of our actions.

TRANSPARENT: Ensuring trust through openness and honesty.

COLLABORATIVE: Connecting and working with others for a shared purpose.

DILIGENT: Working with care and rigour.

RESPECTFUL: Treating everyone with dignity and fairness.

ABSTRACT

In August 2023 and October 2025, Utility Regulator (UR) consulted on its 'Review of the Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS) and Overall Standards of Performance (OSP)'. This paper sets out UR's decisions for the GSS and OSP standards (except for metering) following this consultation process and includes a summary of the responses received and the rationale for the decisions made.

AUDIENCE

This document is most likely to be of interest to the electricity distributor and electricity supply companies, regulated energy companies, consumer representative organisations, business representative organisations, community and voluntary organisations, consumers of natural gas, electricity and water, government and other statutory bodies.

CONSUMER IMPACT

GSS and OSP set out the prescribed levels of service which domestic and non-domestic consumers can expect from the electricity distributor and their electricity supplier. UR's review of the GSS and OSP regimes updates the standards to enhance the levels of consumer protection offered to consumers in Northern Ireland.

Contents Page

Executive Summary

Background

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 (in Northern Ireland, this is Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIE Networks)) and their electricity supplier. The GSS are specified in Regulations made under Article 42 of the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 (the Electricity Order). They include payments to individual consumers in recognition of poor performance, specifically where there has been a failure by a company to deliver against a standard of performance for which it is reasonably expected to meet, subject to certain exemptions. The GSS regime aims to acknowledge the inconvenience caused to the consumer when a company's performance falls below the prescribed level. However, the payment values do not reflect or attempt to remedy the actual loss, either partial or whole, experienced by each consumer in the unique circumstances of every case.

The electricity Overall Standards of Performance (OSP) set out general required standards that are not specific to individual consumers and do not carry a payment to consumers if breached. The OSP are specified in a Determination made by the Utility Regulator (UR) under Article 43 and 43A of the Electricity Order (as it existed at the time they were made) and licensees have a licence obligation to conduct their business in a manner which they reasonably consider to be best calculated to achieve any OSP.

The current electricity GSS are set out in the Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993 (as last amended in 1999). The current OSP Determination has been in place since 1993.

Review of GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations

The purpose of this 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 that the GSS and OSP provisions are fit for purpose and provide an enhanced level of consumer protection to Northern Ireland consumers. UR has conducted a review of the electricity GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations.

This review has involved carrying out consumer research with domestic and non-domestic consumers to gain insights into consumer views on the requirements, stakeholder engagement, a benchmarking exercise to the gas Regulations, and consideration of similar electricity GSS and OSP provisions in Great Britain (GB).

Consultation process

UR published a consultation paper on the proposed changes to the electricity GSS and OSP on 10 August 2023. The consultation closed on 2 November 2023 and received six responses.

A further consultation paper was published on 28 October 2025 and closed on 15 January 2026, receiving 12 responses. This consultation paper covered specific areas of the GSS and OSP review which required additional consideration, including:

a) A clarification of the correct application of the GSS Regulations;

b) A consultation on all metering related GSS and OSP standards;

c) A consultation on the suitability of providing a GSS standard that would apply during severe weather; and

d) A consultation on raising the payment levels offered under each GSS regulation, and on the introduction of annual inflationary adjustments to these payments using a pre-set formula.

Responses received to both the 2023 and 2025 consultations have been used to inform UR's final decisions in this paper.

Purpose of this paper

This paper sets out UR's final decisions in relation to all electricity GSS and OSP provisions, except for those related to metering. Decisions have been informed by the responses received to the public consultations. Where required, a summary of our decision making and rationale has been provided.

During the process of the GSS review, it became apparent that updates to the primary legislation on metering responsibilities are required. We have been working with the Department for the Economy (DfE) to consider options for progressing amendments to the legislation on metering responsibilities, with a view of maintaining the status quo regarding current operational practice. Decisions on all metering GSS and OSP are dependent on the approach taken by DfE regarding the legislative amendments and therefore UR are unable to finalise these decisions at this time. To ensure that decisions on all other GSS and responses to consultation feedback are published in a timely manner, it has therefore been decided to publish our decisions in two separate papers.

Next steps

The non-metering GSS Regulations will now be prepared by UR for presentation to DfE.

Following confirmation from DfE on their approach to the legislative changes, we will then make and publish our decisions on the metering GSS and OSP. The metering GSS Regulations will then be prepared by UR for presentation to DfE.

UR's approach and timelines for presenting the proposed new GSS Regulations to DfE for its consent will be informed by DfE's approach to amending the primary legislation on metering responsibilities. If it then consents to the new Regulations, DfE will have the responsibility of laying the Regulations before the Northern Ireland Assembly. Regulations made under Article 42 of the Electricity Order are subject to negative resolution, as per Article 93(2) of the Electricity Order.

OSPs are a Determination which are made by UR under Article 43 and 43A of the Electricity Order. The timelines for the introduction of updated OSP will align with the implementation of the new GSS Regulations. Following publication of the Determinations, it is the duty of the licensees to conduct their business in a manner which they reasonably consider to be best calculated to achieve any OSP.

Future review

UR is mindful that further reviews of the electricity GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations will be required to ensure they remain fit for purpose and to capture changing consumer expectations for service standards, as well as any other changes in the market and/or consumer protection practices. A future review of both the electricity and the gas GSS and OSP will be completed by UR and will build upon the enhanced protections offered by the current review process. It is anticipated that the next review will take place during the development of RP8 which is expected to commence during 2028.

1. Introduction

Background

1.1 The electricity GSS set out prescribed service levels which both domestic and non-domestic consumers can expect in individual cases from both their electricity distributor (in Northern Ireland, this is Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIE Networks)) and their electricity supplier, in relation to a standard of service for which the company is reasonably expected to meet, subject to certain exemptions.

1.2 The GSS are a statutory provision specified in Regulations made under Article 42 of the Electricity Order[1]. The standards have been in place since 1994 and are set out in the Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993[2]. They were subsequently amended in 1999 under the Electricity (Standards of Performance) (Amendment No 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999[3].

1.3 The GSS include payments in recognition of poor performance, specifically where there has been a failure by a company to meet the standards which they are reasonably expected to deliver. They are subject to specific exemptions, which are also set out in the Regulations. The payments are not intended to compensate consumers for any loss incurred as a result of the failure to provide a standard of service, rather they are intended as an acknowledgement of the inconvenience that this may cause.

1.4 The electricity OSP set out general required standards that are not individual-consumer specific and do not carry a payment if breached.

1.5 The OSP are specified in a Determination made by UR under Article 43 and 43A of the Electricity Order[4] and licensees have a licence obligation to conduct their business in a manner which they reasonably consider to be best calculated to achieve any OSP.

1.6 UR has conducted a review of electricity GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations. This review involved carrying out consumer research with domestic and non-domestic consumers, a benchmarking exercise to the local Northern Ireland gas GSS Regulations, and consideration of similar GSS and OSP provisions in Great Britain (GB).

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[1] Article 42 - The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992

[2] Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993

[3] Electricity (Standards of Performance) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999

[4] Article 43 and 43A- The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992

1.7 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.

2023 Consultation

1.8 On 10 August 2023, UR published a consultation paper on its 'Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance'[5].

1.9 The consultation provided details on the outcome of UR's review of the current GSS and OSP provisions in Northern Ireland and outlined its proposed changes as a result of this review.

1.10 The consultation proposed to update the electricity GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations to ensure they are fit for purpose within the current Northern Ireland electricity market and to better align the regulations with those in place for both the Northern Ireland gas sector and with electricity standards in GB.

1.11 In relation to the GSS Regulations, the consultation proposed:

a) Updating the GSS Regulations that currently apply to NIE Networks as the electricity distributor.

b) Introducing new GSS Regulations for NIE Networks.

c) Introducing GSS Regulations for electricity suppliers.

d) Increasing the payment amounts due if the electricity company fails to meet the GSS Regulations.

e) Introducing automatic payments for the majority of compensatory payments.

1.12 In relation to the OSP Determinations, the consultation proposed:

a) To retain the OSP Determinations in their current form for NIE Networks.

b) To introduce new OSP provisions for suppliers.

1.13 The public consultation was open for a period of 12 weeks and invited responses from all interested parties. The consultation closed on 2

[5] 2023 paper – [Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance | Utility Regulator]

November 2023 and received six responses. Responses were received from the following stakeholders:

- Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
- Electric Ireland
- Northern Ireland Electricity Networks
- Power NI
- SSE Airtricity
- An independent stakeholder

1.14 Since the closure of the 2023 consultation, UR further reviewed the scope and application of the electricity GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations, which clarified that the position outlined by UR in its 2023 consultation paper was not correct. As a result, UR corrected the applicable areas in the 2025 consultation paper to be consistent with UR's understanding of the legal position at the time of publication. The corrections included providing a clarification of the existing role of both the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers to deliver GSS to consumers and on responsibilities in relation to metering GSS and OSP.

2025 consultation

1.15 On 28 October 2025, UR published a supplemental consultation paper[6] which covered areas of the GSS and OSP review that required further consideration.

1.16 The 2025 paper also corrected the information provided in the 2023 consultation paper, by providing clarification on the correct application of the GSS and re-consulting on the proposals for all metering related GSS and OSP standards.

1.17 In addition, the events of Storm Éowyn in January 2025 highlighted a need to explore the role of the GSS during periods of severe weather. Following the storm, a working group was established comprising DfE, NIE Networks and UR to consider the options available to facilitate the provision of payments to consumers who had lost power due to Storm Éowyn. One of the outworkings of the group was a commitment for UR to revisit the supply restoration GSS regulation to specifically consult on the

[6] 2025 paper – [Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance | Utility Regulator]

suitability of introducing a GSS payment that would apply during severe weather.

1.18 Finally, in the 2025 paper UR also consulted on an increase to the payment levels offered under each GSS regulation, and on the introduction of a mechanism to allow for inflationary uplifts to these payments. The proposal was to bring the payments in line with those offered in GB, which had been further updated since UR's 2023 consultation was published. Furthermore, the introduction of a system for inflationary uplifts would allow GSS payments to stay in line with the current financial and economic climate without requiring a full review of the GSS regime.

1.19 The consultation was open between 28 October 2025 and 15 January 2026[7] and invited responses from all interested parties. 12 responses were received from the following stakeholders:

- Advice NI
- Budget Energy & Flogas
- Click Energy
- Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
- Electricity Association of Ireland
- Electric Ireland
- National Energy Action
- Northern Ireland Electricity Networks
- Power NI
- Share Energy
- SSE Airtricity
- Ulster Farmers Union

1.20 Stakeholder responses to both the 2023 and 2025 consultation have been used to inform UR's final decisions with regards to the proposed introduction of new and updated GSS and OSP.

[7] The consultation was initially published for eight weeks from 28 October 2025 to 23 December 2025. The closing date was extended in response to requests from industry and consumer body representatives.

Purpose of this paper

1.21 This paper sets out UR's final decisions on the proposed amendments to the GSS and OSP requirements for all licenced electricity supply and distribution companies, except for those standards in relation to metering.

1.22 The decisions in this paper were made following due consideration of the responses received to both the 2023 and 2025 consultation from all interested parties. Where required, a summary of UR's decision making and rationale has been provided.

1.23 To ensure that our decisions on metering GSS and OSP provide the best outcomes for both consumers and industry, we have been working with DfE to consider options for progressing amendments to the legislation on metering responsibilities, with a view of maintaining the status quo regarding operational practice. An Electricity Metering Amendment Working Group (EMAWG) has been set up by DfE for this purpose, which UR attend as members.

1.24 On 1 May 2026 DfE wrote to UR and to industry to provide an update on the legislative position on electricity metering. The letter set out that it was DfE's intention to correct the legislative position on electricity metering to align with operational practice and to identify the most appropriate legislative vehicle to make the necessary amendments.

1.25 Decisions on all metering GSS and OSP are dependent on the approach taken by DfE regarding the legislative amendments and therefore UR are unable to finalise these decisions at this time. To ensure that decisions on all other GSS and responses to consultation feedback are published in a timely manner, it has been decided to publish our decisions in two separate papers.

1.26 Following confirmation of its approach to amending the primary legislation on metering responsibilities, UR will then progress to make the GSS and OSP metering decisions.

1.27 UR will now prepare the proposed GSS Regulations relating to the non-metering GSS for presenting to the Department for Economy (DfE) for its consent.

1.28 The proposed metering GSS Regulations will be prepared for presentation to the Department when the metering decisions have been made.

1.29 UR's approach and timelines for presenting the proposed new GSS Regulations to DfE for its consent will be informed by DfE's approach to amending the primary legislation on metering responsibilities. If it then consents to the proposed new Regulations, DfE will have the responsibility of laying the Regulations before the Northern Ireland Assembly. Regulations made under Article 42 of the Electricity Order are subject to negative resolution, as per Article 93(2) of the Electricity Order.

2. Impact Assessments

2.1 As part of the consultation, UR published a Section 75 policy equality screening form, a development stage Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA)[8]. Respondents were invited to share their views on the impacts of the policy proposals across these three areas and to provide evidence along with their responses.

2.2 UR has considered all consultation feedback and published our responses below. Responses do not include feedback on the impacts of proposed amendments to metering GSS and OSP. This feedback will be addressed in the decision paper on metering GSS and OSP. The impact assessments will then be reviewed and updated to reflect the impacts of all decisions on metering GSS and OSP.

2.3 The final impact assessments will be published with the GSS Regulations.

Equality considerations

2.4 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998[9] requires UR to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity when carrying out its functions between:

a) persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;

b) men and women generally;

c) persons with a disability and persons without; and

d) persons with dependants and persons without.

2.5 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 also requires UR to have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

2.6 Our provisional decision was that an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was not required for the GSS and OSP review. This decision was made following the Section 75 screening process. As part of this process, we concluded that GSS and OSP are universal standards that apply equally to all consumers including the Section 75 groups detailed above. This means

[8] The Equality Screen was completed by UR
The Regulatory Impact Assessment was completed by UR, with support from DfE
The Rural Needs Impact Assessment was complete by DfE, with support from UR

[9] Northern Ireland Act 1998

these standards do not affect equality of opportunity or good relations between the relevant Section 75 groups.

2.7 We also found no evidence to suggest that any Section 75 group would be negatively affected by the consultation proposals[10]. To ensure we understood the needs, experiences and priorities of the relevant groups the screening process was informed by analysis of the following:

- Independent quantitative research commissioned by UR that took place between November 2020 and February 2021 with electricity consumers[11]. This research found high levels of support among all domestic consumers for having standards (GSS and OSP).

- Independent quantitative research commissioned by UR that took place during July and August 2025 with electricity consumers to establish their experience of the loss of electricity supply and their views relevant to a GSS payment regarding severe weather events[12]. This research found that the key priority for all domestic consumers is getting their electricity power back on if this was lost due to severe weather.

- Qualitative engagement with consumer representative bodies that took place in July 2025 which found communications and support as key areas of importance for consumers affected by the loss of electricity supply caused by severe weather, and that payments for inconvenience in this situation was broadly a secondary issue.

2.8 However, it is important that we review the provisional Section 75 equality screening decision and consider stakeholder feedback to the consultation before making a final decision on the need for an EQIA.

Consultation responses

2.9 We discuss below stakeholder consultation responses, our response to stakeholder feedback and UR's final decision on the need for an EQIA.

2.10 All four consumer representatives who responded to the consultation provided a response in this area. Additionally, five suppliers responded to this part of the consultation.

2.11 Most consumer representatives said that they did not find any negative impact related to the GSS and OSP consultation proposals. One consumer representative said it expected GSS and OSP to be positive for all

[10] Review of Electricity GSS and OSP Consultation - Annex 6 - Equality Screening
[11] Consumer Research Electricity GSS OSP.pdf
[12] Annex 3 - Domestic Consumer Research.pdf
Annex 4 - Non Domestic Consumer Research.pdf

consumers. Additionally, one consumer representative agreed with UR's provisional position that there is no need for an EQIA as GSS and OSP apply equally to all consumers.

2.12 A non-domestic consumer representative acknowledged the neutral nature of the GSS and OSP proposals but highlighted the importance that UR recognises rural vulnerability in its final decisions due to the disproportionate impact of prolonged power outages that affect rural households and farms.

2.13 All those suppliers that responded to this part of the consultation disagreed with UR's provisional position. Several suppliers commented that consumers could or will be negatively affected by the proposed GSS and OSP. Most suppliers felt that the key cause of the negative impact on consumers would come from the perceived increased supplier costs related to the metering GSS and OSP. These suppliers added that increased costs may or will be passed through to consumer electricity tariffs which would disproportionately affect consumers with a disability, older consumers, rural consumers and those on low incomes.

2.14 We have also reviewed stakeholder responses to the consultation that took place in 2023. One consumer representative and two industry stakeholders responded to this part of the consultation.

2.15 In 2023 the consumer representative commented that GSS and OSP are positive for all consumers and a full EQIA screen was not required. The two industry respondents also agreed with UR's position at that time. One supplier said there would not be any negative equality impacts for electricity users in Northern Ireland. The other industry respondent agreed with UR that the equality impacts of the proposed electricity GSS and OSP are positive and do not require an EQIA.

UR response

2.16 We welcome the consumer representative feedback that they did not find any negative impact on the Section 75 groups and that one consumer representative added that it agreed with UR that the standards apply equally to all consumers.

2.17 We also acknowledge the non-domestic consumer representative feedback that urged caution against assuming there would be no negative impact in rural areas. We discuss this in paragraph 2.51 and reflect on this in the updated RNIA (which will be published along with the GSS Regulations).

2.18 We note supplier concerns and issues raised in response to UR's provisional EQIA position on the protected groups. However, we consider that supplier concerns and issues are primarily in relation to metering GSS and OSP. This feedback will therefore be addressed in the metering decision paper.

UR decision

2.19 We have decided that an EQIA is not required. GSS and OSP apply equally to all consumers including the Section 75 groups so do not affect equality of opportunity or good relations between the relevant groups.

2.20 GSS and OSP are important parts of the consumer protection framework for electricity consumers. These are universal standards that suppliers and distributors are reasonably expected to meet to protect all consumers from poor service.

2.21 We consider that supplier concerns and issues are primarily in relation to metering GSS and OSP. These concerns will be addressed in the metering decision paper and equality impacts will be reviewed again at this stage.

Regulatory Impact Assessment

2.22 A RIA[13] was developed by UR and DfE to consider the potential economic impacts of the proposed changes to the electricity GSS and OSP. This included potential impacts on electricity companies and the wider business community.

2.23 The development stage RIA was published as an annex to the consultation. UR invited estimates from electricity companies and from businesses of key monetised and non-monetised costs and benefits expected from the implementation of the proposed requirements.

Consultation responses

2.24 Two consumer representatives and all suppliers who responded to the consultation provided a response in this area.

2.25 All suppliers expressed significant concerns regarding the potential impacts of metering GSS and OSP. The key monetised and non-monetised impacts highlighted by supplier respondents included operational costs, legal costs and compliance risks. Monetary estimates were not provided.

2.26 Several suppliers also provided feedback on the costs associated with making GSS payments.

[13] Regulatory impact assessment guidance | Department for the Economy

2.27 One supplier was of the view that the development stage RIA lacked detailed evidence to quantify the key costs and benefits. It considered that the RIA did not meaningfully assess monetary impacts on suppliers, how these costs will be recovered or effects on vulnerable consumers, low income households or other protected groups. It stated that increases in GSS payments would be funded directly by suppliers and are likely to be passed through to consumers, increasing bills. Another supplier also responded that the costs of GSS payments may result in increased consumer tariff pricing for both residential and commercial customers, as supplier costs are ultimately passed through.

2.28 A consumer representative agreed with UR's position not to provide a regulatory allowance or incentive mechanism to cover the cost of implementing the revised GSS regime, as consumers should not bear the cost of poor performance. They were of the view that any costs must be borne by the company and taken from its profits, making this an incentive for better performance.

2.29 Another non-domestic consumer representative noted that administrative and compliance costs may be passed on to consumers, putting potential upward pressure on electricity bills if severe weather payments are made recoverable. It emphasised that the greatest economic benefit to agriculture would come from improved network resilience and faster restoration, rather than modest post-event payments.

2.30 UR also revisited the consultation responses from 2023. Three suppliers provided feedback on the estimated cost impacts of the consultation proposals, as proposed in 2023. Respondents considered that there would be additional costs for the following (monetary estimates were not provided):

- System changes;
- Process changes;
- Reporting requirements;
- Customer communications;
- Staff training; and
- Payment processing (including for automatic payments).

UR response

2.31 The purpose of the RIA is to consider the monetised and non-monetised impacts of changes as a result of the policy proposals, which are to update the electricity GSS and OSP.

2.32 We consider that the key impacts of concern to suppliers are primarily in relation to metering GSS and OSP. Feedback specific to metering GSS and OSP will be addressed in the metering decision paper.

2.33 We note the supplier comments that the costs of making GSS payments would be passed through to consumers putting upward pressure on the cost of electricity for commercial (and residential) customers. While we sought stakeholder views on how GSS payments for supply restoration in severe weather conditions (if introduced) should be funded, we stated in the consultation that for all other GSS payments, costs will not be recovered from consumers (non-domestic and domestic). This is because the purpose of GSS payments is to acknowledge the inconvenience caused to the consumer when the electricity company fails to deliver against a standard of performance for which it is reasonably expected to meet. UR is of the view that it would not be appropriate, nor incentivise company performance if consumers ultimately had to fund a scheme for service underperformance. We welcome the consumer representative body support for this approach.

2.34 We also note the non-domestic consumer representative concerns about the potential negative impacts on electricity bills if severe weather payments are made recoverable. This is addressed in Chapter 5.

2.35 We acknowledge that there may be some additional administrative costs associated with making and monitoring of GSS payments however we would re-iterate that GSS are standards of service that all consumers should expect from electricity companies and are standards that we consider all electricity companies can and should be reasonably expected to meet. Therefore, administrative costs should be kept to a minimum if standards are met.

UR decision

2.36 We do not consider that the decisions set out in this paper will have a negative economic impact on the business community in Northern Ireland.

2.37 The RIA will be reviewed by UR when preparing its decisions on metering GSS and OSP.

2.38 The final RIA will be published along with the GSS Regulations.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

2.39 A RNIA was completed by DfE and published as an annex to the consultation. The purpose of the RNIA is to consider the potential impacts of the proposed changes on those living in rural areas.

2.40 As part of this consultation, UR and DfE welcomed views, information or evidence in relation to the impact of the proposals on those living in rural areas.

2.41 We received consultation responses in this area from nine stakeholders. Below we discuss stakeholder consultation responses, our response to this feedback and DfE's decision on the RNIA.

Consultation responses

2.42 All four consumer representatives who responded to the consultation provided a response in this area. Five suppliers also responded to this section of the consultation.

2.43 Most consumer representatives commented on the negative impact that the loss of electricity power has on rural consumers.

2.44 These negative impacts included rural consumers being more likely to experience electricity power losses due to severe weather compared to their urban counterparts. Two consumer representatives also highlighted the additional costs incurred by rural consumers when affected by the loss of electricity. The non-domestic consumer representative body talked about the significant impact on the farming community. Another consumer representative stated that rural pensioners are likely to be less able to absorb the costs associated.

2.45 One consumer representative commented that GSS and OSP may be more important to those living in rural areas as they can be more negatively affected by the loss of power caused by severe weather.

2.46 Those suppliers that responded to this part of the consultation raised several issues with GSS and OSP that they felt were relevant to the RNIA. We provide an overview of these issues below.

2.47 Some of these suppliers highlighted that rural consumers can experience longer power restoration times and are more likely to be negatively affected by severe weather events as the rural network is less resilient. In this context, these suppliers raised concerns about being penalised for factors outside their control leading to higher supplier costs.

2.48 Most suppliers provided further comments about the higher costs associated more generally with GSS and OSP service provision in rural areas. More specifically two of these suppliers felt the higher costs would or are likely to increase the price consumers pay for electricity, with one of those suggesting this would affect rural tariffs.

2.49 Some suppliers highlighted that there may or would be reduced service provision in rural areas. Two suppliers suggested that GSS and OSP should reflect the rural context by adjusting the standards or by applying flexibility. Another supplier explained compliance with the standards would be more challenging.

2.50 Two suppliers also suggested a more thorough or robust rural needs impact assessment was required including detailed evidence and modelling.

UR response

2.51 We acknowledge the consumer representative views on the negative impact on rural consumers when they experience a loss of electricity due to severe weather events and note the comments about the significance of the costs incurred by those affected. We consider this helps to underline the importance of building a more resilient network. In the consultation we considered NIE Networks proposal to bring forward investment in light of Storm Éowyn to be well founded[14]. A consultation on licence modifications necessary to allow NIE Networks to fund this work was published in April 2026[15].

2.52 Our recent research also underlines the need for this investment to increase the resilience of the network[16]. This research shows that for rural domestic consumers their top priority when affected by the loss of electricity is to have their supply restored. The key findings show:

- A greater percentage of rural domestic consumers (85%) have lost electricity to their home during severe weather or a storm compared to urban domestic consumers (45%); and
- A greater percentage of rural domestic consumers (66%) say that getting their electricity back on is most important to them during periods of loss of power compared to their urban counterparts (52%).

2.53 The same research also shows that for rural non-domestic consumers their top priority when affected by the loss of electricity is to ensure the

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[14] Information on NIE Networks Resilience workstream is referred to in paragraphs 6.8 – 6.10 of the GSS Consultation paper. Consultation - Review of Electricity GSS and OSP.pdf

[15] Consultation on additional allowances for NIE Networks relating to storm resilience | Utility Regulator

[16] Annex 3 - Domestic Consumer Research.pdf. Annex 4 - Non Domestic Consumer Research.pdf

health and safety of their staff. The key findings for this part of the study show:

- The same percentage of rural and urban non-domestic consumers (55%) have lost electricity to their business during severe weather or a storm; and
- A similar percentage of rural non-domestic consumers (86%) and urban non-domestic consumers (84%) say ensuring the health and safety of staff is most important to them during periods of loss of power.

2.54 We expect the investment in network resilience to benefit all consumers including those living in rural areas. In addition, GSS and OSP applies equally to all consumers including rural consumers which means suppliers and distributors are reasonably expected to meet their respective standards to protect all consumers from poor service.

2.55 We note the issues raised by suppliers related to supply restoration and their concerns about being penalised for factors outside their control leading to higher supplier costs. It is important to highlight that the electricity distributor is responsible for the supply restoration GSS and the relevant OSP. These specific standards do not apply to suppliers. This was the position in the consultation paper[17]. Therefore, given this context we do not consider that there are additional costs for suppliers in these areas.

2.56 We note supplier concerns about increasing supplier costs more generally. We discuss these above as part of the RIA response (paragraphs 2.31 to 2.35).

2.57 We have considered the supplier suggestion that the GSS and OSP standards should be adjusted to reflect the rural context. GSS and OSP are universal minimum standards. We consider that adjusting the level of service for some consumers is inconsistent with the purpose of GSS and OSP. There must continue to be a minimum set of universal standards that apply equally to protect all consumers, including those living in rural areas.

2.58 We expect the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers to meet these minimum standards. When rural consumers experience poor performance, they must be treated in the same way as their urban counterparts. GSS and OSP serve this purpose.

2.59 UR considers that the supplier request for a more robust rural needs impact assessment primarily relates to the potential impacts of GSS in

[17] Microsoft Word - Annex 1 - Summary of GSS Proposals. Microsoft Word - Annex 2 - Summary of OSP Proposals

relation to supply restoration in severe weather conditions and to metering GSS and OSP. Our decision on severe weather GSS is set out in Chapter 5. Feedback specific to metering GSS and OSP will be addressed in the metering decision paper.

UR decision

2.60 We consider that GSS and OSP meet the needs of rural consumers and that these standards apply equally to those living in rural or urban areas.

2.61 The RNIA will be reviewed by DfE when UR's decisions on metering GSS and OSP are shared with the Department.

2.62 The final RNIA will be published along with the GSS Regulations.

3. GSS Regulations

3.1 This chapter sets out UR's decisions for the GSS proposed in 2023 that were not reconsulted on in 2025. Decisions in this chapter are for the following GSS:

- Distributor's fuse
- Supply restoration (in normal weather conditions)
- Notice of supply interruption
- Voltage complaints
- Charges and payments
- Appointments
- Complaints
- Rota disconnections
- Notice of rights
- Disputes
- Payments
- Timing of notification

3.2 While these proposals were unchanged in 2025, the 2025 consultation provided opportunity for stakeholders to share any further comment on the proposals. This chapter summarises stakeholder comments received in both 2023 and 2025, our responses to this feedback and our subsequent decisions.

3.3 The chapter also sets out our decisions on the introduction of a definition of working days and amendments to the definition of working hours in the Regulations (as consulted upon in 2025).

3.4 Where no comments were received, the standard will be implemented as proposed. This has been outlined where applicable.

3.5 Payment amounts for domestic and non-domestic consumers against each standard are specified in the decisions.

3.6 The GSS Regulations apply to the electricity distributor and all electricity suppliers, and it has been highlighted below where there are specific responsibilities for a particular party.

3.7 Decisions on the supply restoration in severe weather conditions GSS and exemptions are covered in Chapters 5 and 6. Decisions on automatic payments[18], uplifts to payment levels and annual inflationary adjustments are in Chapter 7.

3.8 Decisions on metering GSS will follow in a separate decision paper.

Distributor's fuse

3.9 This standard applies to the electricity distributor only.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.10 The standard applies where the electricity distributor[19] is informed (other than by post) by a customer during working hours, that, or of circumstances suggesting that, the distributor's fuse has operated so as to disconnect the supply to the customer's premises.

3.11 Where this occurs the electricity distributor must replace the faulty fuse within 3 hours on a working day or 4 hours on any other day. If not, a payment of £25 is due to any domestic or non-domestic consumer affected.

3.12 Within the Regulations, the definition of working hours applicable to this standard[20] is defined in Part II of the Schedule as 7.00 am and 7.00 pm on each working day and 9.00 am and 5.00 pm on any other day.

3.13 Where information is received by the distributor outside working hours it shall be deemed to have been received at the commencement of the next following working day.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.14 We proposed to retain this standard in its existing form and to increase the payment amount to £40.

Consultation responses

3.15 No comments were received for this standard.

[18] Automatic payments were consulted upon in 2023.

[19] In the existing GSS Regulations the term 'supplier' is used throughout. For the purposes of this paper, when referring to the existing Regulations, we have amended the term to either 'electricity distributor' or 'electricity supplier' where applicable.

[20] This definition of working hours applies to the Distributor's Fuse GSS (Regulation 3) and to the Prepayment meters GSS (Regulation 8B).

Decision

3.16 This standard will be retained in its existing form, with the exception of an increase to the payment amount due. Domestic and non-domestic consumers will be entitled to a payment of £40 where this regulation occurs and the electricity distributor does not take the required action.

Supply restoration in normal weather conditions

3.17 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor only.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.18 The current standard requires the electricity distributor to restore supply to a customer's premises within 24 hours, where the interruption to supply has been as a result of a failure of, fault in or damage to the supplier's distribution system[21].

3.19 If supply is not restored within this timeframe, a payment of £50 is due to any domestic consumer and £125 for any non-domestic consumer affected. For each subsequent 12 hour period during which supply is not restored, a further payment of £25 is due to any consumer affected.

3.20 The current standard is subject to exemptions under Regulation 14[22], which includes the severe weather conditions exemption clause.

3.21 Payment is dependent on the consumer making a valid claim to the electricity distributor within one month of the date on which the supply is restored.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.22 We proposed that this standard would apply where a customer experiences an interruption to supply that has been caused as a result of a failure of, fault in or damage to the supplier's[23] system, in normal weather conditions.

3.23 If less than 5,000 customers are affected, the electricity distributor must restore supply within 18 hours. If this standard is not met, a payment of £95 is due to any domestic consumer and £190 for any non-domestic consumer affected. A further payment of £45 will be due for every subsequent 12 hour period in which supply is not restored.

3.24 If more than 5,000 customers are affected, the electricity distributor must restore supply within 24 hours. If this standard is not met, a payment of

[21] With the exception of where the Distributer's Fuse Regulation applies.

[22] Regulation 14.-Exemptions

[23] Within the updated Regulations, we will refer to this as 'the Distributor's system.'

£95 is due to any domestic consumer and £190 for any non-domestic consumer affected. A further payment of £45 will be due for every subsequent 12 hour period in which supply is not restored, up to a maximum cap of £390.

3.25 The standard will be subject to exemptions (as set out in Chapter 6) and would not be applicable during severe weather conditions. A separate standard for supply restoration in severe weather conditions was consulted on as part of the 2025 consultation and the decision on the outcome of this is included in Chapter 5.

<u>Consultation responses</u>

3.26 One consultation response queried why the proposed amendment to supply restoration timelines in normal weather conditions differed from those in the GB Regulations. At the time of the consultation, in GB the supply restoration time before a payment was due was 12 hours, this has since been reduced to 6 hours.

3.27 A consumer representative expressed concern at the different categories for supply restoration in normal weather conditions and the potential for this standard to be confusing for consumers. It highlighted that a consumer would not know if the threshold of 5,000 customers had been reached and therefore would not be aware of the specific timelines they should expect for supply restoration before being eligible for a payment.

<u>UR response</u>

3.28 UR's approach to this review was to use the GB GSS Regulations to help inform the amendments to the Northern Ireland regime and to implement a stepped approach to align the two regulations. The future review of the GSS and OSP provisions will consider any further opportunities for alignment.

3.29 In order for a payment to be made in reference to this standard, the consumer must make a valid claim within three months of the date supply is restored. The consumer will be entitled to make a claim if their electricity supply is not restored within 18 hours. NIE Networks will then validate and pay the claim based on the thresholds described above on affected customers. The customer has a right to raise a dispute if they do not consider the payment is correct.

<u>Decision</u>

3.30 This standard will be implemented as proposed.

Notice of supply interruption

3.31 This standard applies to the electricity distributor only.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.32 This standard applies where the electricity distributor discontinues the supply to a customer's premises for an authorised purpose[24].

3.33 The electricity distributor must provide a minimum of 3 days prior notice of a planned interruption to a customer's supply. The standard also applies if the electricity distributor disconnects the supply on a day other than the day stated in the notice. If this standard is not met, a payment of £25 is due to any domestic consumer and £50 for any non-domestic consumer affected.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.34 We proposed to retain this standard in its existing form. In the 2025 consultation paper we clarified that the timeframe of '3 days prior notice' would refer to 3 working days.

3.35 We also proposed to increase the payment amounts to £40 for domestic consumers, and to £75 for non-domestic consumers.

Consultation responses

3.36 No comments were received for this standard.

Decision

3.37 This standard will be retained in its existing form, with the exception of an increase to the payment amount due. The payment will increase to £40 for domestic consumers and £75 for non-domestic consumers.

3.38 Payment is dependent on the consumer making a valid claim to the electricity distributor within one month from the date of disconnection.

Voltage complaint

3.39 This regulation is applicable to the electricity distributor only.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.40 This standard applies where the electricity distributor is informed that a customer's supply is or has been given at a voltage outside the limits of

[24] Regulation 7 (4) In this regulation "authorised purpose" means testing or any other purpose connected with the carrying on of the activities which he is authorised by his licence to carry on in relation to his electric lines and electrical plant (other than the supplier's fuse).

the permitted variations, or an event has occurred that could have reasonably been caused by a voltage outside the permitted limits.

3.41 The electricity distributor must:

a) Where a visit to the consumer's premises is required to investigate the issue, offer an appointment for this purpose within 7 working days of being notified; and

Attend the appointment made for this purpose during the specified time.

b) Where a visit is not required, provide an explanation of the probable cause for the issue within 5 working days of being notified.

3.42 If any of the standards above are not met, a payment of £25 is due to any domestic or non-domestic consumer affected.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.43 We proposed to retain this standard in its existing form and to increase the payment amount to £40.

Consultation responses

3.44 No consultation responses were received on this specific standard.

Decision

3.45 The standard will be retained in its existing form, with the exception of an increase to the payment amount due. The payment will increase to £40 for both domestic consumers and non-domestic consumers.

Charges and payments

3.46 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.47 This standard applies when:

a) A customer informs the electricity distributor or electricity supplier that they wish to change the method by which they make a payment. If it is unable to approve the customer's request, the electricity distributor or electricity supplier must provide a substantive response within 5 working days.

b) A customer queries the correctness of their account. The electricity distributor or electricity supplier must provide a substantive response within 5 working days.

(i) If any payment is owed as a result of the customer's query, the electricity distributor or electricity supplier must pay the amount owed within 5 working days of issuing its substantive response.

c) A customer queries if they are due a payment under the GSS Regulations. The electricity distributor or electricity supplier must provide a substantive response within 5 working days.

3.48 If any of the above standards are not met, a payment of £25 is due to any domestic or non-domestic consumer affected.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.49 We proposed to retain this standard in its current form and to increase the payment amount to £40 for domestic consumers and non-domestic consumers.

Consultation responses

3.50 A supplier responded that the proposed standard, as drafted in the 2023 consultation, did not align with the current Gas GSS Regulations[25] in place in Northern Ireland. It was noted that in the Gas GSS where the customer informs the company that they wish to change the method by which they make a payment, a substantive response is only required 'where the supplier does not expect to be able to approve the request.'

UR response

3.51 UR acknowledges the respondents comment and would like to clarify that this condition already exists in the electricity GSS and our intention is for that to be retained. For clarification, the current electricity GSS for Charges and Payments which we proposed to retain aligns with the current gas GSS for Charges and Payments.

3.52 The 2023 consultation paper had summarised the existing electricity standard, however UR has amended its drafting in both the 2025 consultation and in this decision paper to provide clarity of the exact requirements of the standard.

[25] The Gas (Individual Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

Decision

3.53 The standard will be retained in its existing form, with the exception of an increase to the payment amount due. The payment will increase to £40 for both domestic consumers and non-domestic consumers.

Appointments

3.54 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.55 This standard applies where the customer informs the electricity distributor or electricity supplier that the customer wishes the relevant company to visit the customer's premises, or the electricity distributor or electricity supplier informs the customer that the relevant company wishes to visit the customer's premises.

3.56 The electricity distributor or electricity supplier must offer a timed appointment for visits to customer premises within a reasonable period and between 8.30 am and 1 pm, or 12 noon and 5 pm. The relevant company must also keep this appointment (subject to exemptions). If either of the standards are not met, a payment of £25 is due to any domestic or non-domestic consumer affected.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.57 We proposed to retain this standard in its current form and to increase the payment amount to £40 for domestic consumers and non-domestic consumers.

Consultation responses

3.58 The consultation responses requested clarity on how this standard would work in practice. An electricity supplier explained that appointments to visit a consumer's premises are carried out by NIE Networks presently and booked via the NIE Networks booking system. The respondent expressed concern at being liable for a GSS payment for a missed appointment that was not their responsibility to keep.

UR response

3.59 For clarification, this regulation currently applies where:

a) the customer informs the supplier/distributor that the customer wishes the supplier/distributor to visit the customer's premises, or

b) the supplier/distributor informs the customer that the supplier/distributor wishes to visit the customer's premises,

being in either case a visit in connection with the activities which the supplier/distributor is authorised to carry on under its licence which requires access to be afforded to his representative, or for which it would otherwise be reasonable to expect the customer to be present.

3.60 The Regulation will continue to apply in these circumstances.

Decision

3.61 This standard will be retained in its existing form, with the exception of an increase to the payment amount due. The payment will increase to £40 for both domestic consumers and non-domestic consumers.

Complaints

3.62 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.63 We proposed to introduce this as a new standard that would apply when a customer submits a verbal or written complaint to either the electricity distributor or electricity supplier.

3.64 The relevant company should provide:

a) A substantive response within 10 working days.

b) Where the relevant company is unable to provide a substantive response to the complaint without visiting the customer's premises, it should provide an initial response explaining this within 10 working days. The company should then provide a substantive response within 20 working days.

3.65 If this standard is not met, a payment of £40 is due to any domestic or non-domestic consumer affected.

Consultation responses

3.66 Two suppliers raised that this standard did not align with other regulatory requirements that electricity suppliers are required to meet, for example the Code of Practice on Complaints Handling which already sets out requirements for responding to complaints and thus may lead to confusion.

UR response

3.67 UR acknowledges that for electricity suppliers and NIE Networks there are other regulatory requirements in place with regards to complaints handling.

3.68 The supplier Code of Practice on Complaints Handing[26] specifies timeframes for an initial first answer or acknowledgement of a complaint (5 working days) and for resolving complaints (3 months).

3.69 NIE Networks' Complaint Handling Procedure[27] sets out a timeframe for updating customers if a complaint requires further investigation (10 working days).

3.70 We consider both of these requirements to be distinct from the GSS requirements in that GSS requirements are specific to timeframes for providing a substantive response to a complaint (rather than resolving a complaint or advising if further investigation is required).

3.71 We wish to provide further clarification that circumstances where the electricity company is required to provide an initial response of 10 working days (then 20 working days for a full response) also applies if the company needs to make enquiries with persons other than officers, employees or agents of the relevant electricity supplier or electricity distributor. This is in line with the gas GSS.

Decision

3.72 This standard will be implemented as proposed.

Multiple disconnections

3.73 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor only.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.74 We proposed to introduce this as a new standard that applies if a customer experiences four or more power cuts in one year (running from 1 April to 31 March), each lasting longer than 3 hours.

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[26] Code of Practice minimum standards on Complaints Handling Procedure 'the timeframe in which the supplier will endeavour to resolve the complaint which shall not be longer than three months, including a prompt first answer or acknowledgement within 5 working days of the receipt of the complaint.'

[27] Submitting a claim or a complaint to NIE Networks | Northern Ireland Electricity Networks 'While we strive to resolve complaints quickly, some cases may require further investigation. In such instances, we will update you within 10 working days.'

3.75 A payment of £95 is due to any domestic or non-domestic consumer affected, provided that a consumer submits a claim before the end of the year.

Consultation responses

3.76 A consumer representative welcomed the introduction of this standard.

3.77 NIE Networks outlined in their 2023 consultation response that this standard should only apply in cases where the interruptions were not due to planned work to the electricity network. In its 2025 response, NIE Networks added that it considered that this GSS should not be applicable to interruptions as a result of transmission faults, faults that occur during storm exemption periods or if a generator has been offered to the customer within three hours of the fault notification.

UR response

3.78 UR confirms that the GSS Regulation will only apply in cases of unplanned or un-notified outages[28]. The 'Notice of Supply Interruption' standard already sets a requirement that must be met during periods of planned supply interruptions[29].

3.79 This GSS is informed by Regulation 10 (Supply restoration: multiple interruptions) of the GB Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations 2015. Regulation 10 sets out a number of circumstances that are not treated as an interruption for the purposes of this standard. In addition to the circumstances in paragraph 3.78, relevant to paragraph 3.77 this includes when:

- The interruption was a result of failure of, fault in or damage to the transmission system;
- The interruption was one where any of the following regulations apply – Supply Restoration (both normal and severe weather conditions), Rota Disconnection, Distributor's Fuse; and
- The customer agreed with the electricity distributor that the action taken by the distributor before the end of the 3 hour period should be treated as the taking by the distributor of the action required to cause the interruption to cease. Where that action included a promise to perform any action (whether within or after the expiry of that period) the distributor then duly performed that promise.

[28] Where NIE Networks has not given the customer prior notice of its intention to interrupt the supply to the customer's premises.
[29] Planned interruptions are where the distributor had given the customer prior notice of its intention to interrupt the supply to the customer's premises.

Decision

3.80 This standard will be implemented as proposed.

Rota disconnections

3.81 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor only.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.82 We proposed to introduce this as a new standard that applies when supply to a customer's premises needs to be interrupted due to a shortage of electricity. It would enable the available electricity to be distributed fairly until the cause of the shortage could be rectified.

3.83 If a consumer is disconnected for over 24 hours on this basis, a payment of £95 for any domestic consumer and £190 for any non-domestic consumer affected is due.

Consultation responses

3.84 NIE Networks raised concerns that the rota disconnections are determined by the System Operator for Northern Ireland (SONI), and therefore NIE Networks have no control over the decisions made. It also highlighted that NIE Networks would have limited to no control over remedying the cause of the shortage in these cases.

UR response

3.85 UR has given the comments due consideration and has decided to implement this standard as proposed, with the view of ensuring the GSS Regulations are fit for purpose both today and for the future of the electricity market.

3.86 UR acknowledges the role of SONI with regards to rota disconnections; however, UR considers it appropriate to implement a standard that would be applicable if a rota disconnection were to occur and NIE Networks were the cause of the supply interruption.

3.87 To clarify, NIE Networks would only be responsible for making a GSS payment in instances where it has been identified as the cause of a consumer being off supply for over 24 hours due to a rota disconnection. NIE Networks would not be liable for payments if SONI initiate the disconnection.

Decision

3.88 This standard will be implemented as proposed.

Notice of rights

3.89 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers and gives direction on how the company should make information available on the GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations. There is no payment associated with this standard.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.90 The current standard requires the company to prepare, and from time to time revise, a statement describing customer rights in relation to GSS and OSP, in a form and having a content that could be reasonably understood by customers. The company is further required to:

a) Give a copy of the statement, and of any revision of the statement to the Utility Regulator and the Consumer Council before making it available to customers;

b) At least once in any period of 12 months dispatch to each tariff customer a copy of the statement (in the form current at the time it is provided), provided that where in relation to any premises more than one person is a tariff customer, the obligation shall be satisfied by dispatching a copy to any one of them;

c) Make a copy of the statement (in its current form) available for inspection by any person at any premises of or occupied by the company open to customers in the normal course of the business during the normal opening hours of the premises; and

d) Dispatch a copy of the statement (in its current form) to any person who requests it.

3.91 The standard provides that the company may prepare a separate statement for domestic and non-domestic customers and satisfy its obligation under sub-paragraph (b) or (d) above, by dispatching the statement appropriate to the class of customer to whom it is dispatched.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.92 We proposed to retain this standard for the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers with an amendment to reflect the distributor-supplier relationship.

3.93 Due to the fact that it is the electricity supplier, rather than the electricity distributor, who has the direct relationship with the customer, UR deems it more appropriate that the supplier, in addition to its own statement, would also provide a copy of the statement prepared by NIE Networks to customers.

3.94 This standard would require the electricity distributor to prepare, and from time to time revise, a statement describing consumers rights and benefits regarding the GSS and OSP provisions, which are applicable to the electricity distributor, for circulation by the electricity supplier. UR proposes that the distributor should:

a) Give a copy of the statement, and of any revision to the Authority and to the Consumer Council before it is given to electricity suppliers;

b) At least once in any period of 12 months send out to each supplier which supplies electricity to customers connected to the electricity distributor's system, a copy of the statement for the electricity supplier to make available by appropriate means to the supplier's customers;

c) Make a copy of the statement available for inspection by any person at any premises occupied by the electricity distributor which is open to the public during normal business hours; and

d) Make available by appropriate means a copy of the statement to any person who requests it.

3.95 The electricity supplier, in addition to circulating NIE Networks' statement to consumers, would be required to prepare, revise and circulate its own statement with regards to the GSS Regulations and OSP Determinations applicable to them.

3.96 Suppliers should also:

a) Give a copy of the statement, and any revisions of the statement, to the Utility Regulator and to the Consumer Council before the statement is made available to the consumer;

b) Make a copy available to each consumer by appropriate means;

c) Make a copy available for inspection by any person at any premises which is occupied by the electricity supplier which is open to the public during normal business hours;

d) Make a copy available by appropriate means to any person who requests it; and

e) At least once in any period of 12 months, make available by appropriate means to each consumer of the electricity supplier the information in any statement which has been sent to the electricity supplier by the electricity distributor.

Consultation responses

3.97 Electricity suppliers expressed concerns with regards to the supplier being responsible for circulating NIE Networks' statement under this standard. Some respondents felt this was a duplication of effort or may cause confusion with consumers.

3.98 A consumer representative highlighted that consumer awareness of GSS and OSP was already low, and therefore a clear and strong promotion of the standards was required.

3.99 One supplier also requested clarity on what would be deemed 'appropriate means' for making the GSS and OSP statements available to consumers.

UR response

3.100 UR acknowledges the concerns raised by respondents and agrees that a streamlined process will reduce the potential for duplication of efforts and help in raising consumer awareness. Following due consideration, UR has decided on an alternative approach to address the concerns raised, where UR will be responsible for preparing and revising the statement and electricity suppliers and the distributor will have responsibility for making the statement available. The process for this is outlined in our decision below.

3.101 The term 'appropriate means' has been defined by UR as follows:

a) The statement should be available on the company's website at all times.

b) Printed copies should be available at the company's premises for inspection.

c) When a copy of the statement is requested by the consumer (as per paragraphs 3.94(d) and 3.96(d)), the term 'appropriate means' shall have effect as to mean the format for which the customer has opted to receive their general communications. For example, if a consumer has opted to receive their bills by post or email (or if they receive their communications in an alternative format), then they should also receive a copy of the GSS statement via these means.

d) The company should use reasonable endeavours to provide the statement in accessible formats were requested by the consumer, or where the consumer already receives communications in this format.

e) With regards to paragraph 3.96 (e), this information should be provided in the format for which the consumer has opted to receive their general communications, such as bills and statements. This should include making the customer aware of and signposting to the Notice of Rights as available on the supplier's website as part of one of these communications. In addition, the consumer should be provided with contact details for if they wish to request the information in an alternative format.

Decision

3.102 This standard will be implemented as follows.

3.103 Preparation and revision of the Notice of Rights is addressed is paragraphs 3.104 to 3.108.

3.104 A single, uniform 'notice of rights' statement will be prepared by UR, which will set out the GSS and OSP provisions that are available for consumers. This statement will have clear sections to communicate what standards the electricity distributor is responsible for meeting and what standards the electricity supplier is responsible for meeting.

3.105 The statement will clearly define any specific provisions in the standards for domestic or non-domestic customers, including the different payment amounts due.

3.106 UR will give a copy of the statement, and any revisions of the statement, to the Consumer Council, the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers before the statement is made available to the consumer.

3.107 This statement will be used by all parties who have a responsibility or interest in sharing the information with consumers. It will ensure that a consumer can access consistent information on GSS and OSP regardless of what channel they use to access it.

3.108 UR will revise the statement as it considers appropriate. For example, where any further amendments are made to the standards.

3.109 Circulation of the statement is addressed is paragraphs 3.110 to 3.112.

3.110 The electricity distributor will be required to:

a) Make a copy available to each consumer by appropriate means;

b) Make a copy of the statement available for inspection by any person at any premises occupied by the electricity distributor which is open to the public during normal business hours; and

c) Make available by appropriate means a copy of the statement to any person who requests it.

3.111 The electricity supplier will be required to:

a) Make a copy available to each consumer by appropriate means;

b) Make a copy available for inspection by any person at any premises which is occupied by the electricity supplier which is open to the public during normal business hours;

c) Make a copy available by appropriate means to any person who requests it; and

d) At least once in any period of 12 months, make available by appropriate means to each consumer a copy of the statement (in the form current at the time it is provided).

3.112 Definitions of appropriate means are provided in paragraph 3.101.

Disputes

3.113 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers. There is no payment associated with this standard.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.114 This standard applies if a dispute is referred to the Utility Regulator for determination under Article 42(5) of the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992.

3.115 The standard states that a company must furnish (either to the Utility Regulator or, if required, to the Consumer Council[30]) evidence to enable the dispute to be determined.

3.116 If a payment is to be made by the company, due to an order made under Article 42(5) and the company fails to make the payment, the consumer may off set the payment against any charges owed to the company in relation to supply.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.117 No amendment was proposed to this standard.

[30] Regulation 11 – Notice of Rights refers to the 'Consumer Committee' in the Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993. The functions of the Consumer Committee in relation to energy were conferred on the General Consumer Council (now CCNI) by the Energy (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

UR decision

3.118 This standard will be retained in its existing form.

Payments

3.119 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.120 This standard applies where the electricity distributor or electricity supplier is obliged to make a payment to a customer under any regulation for which a payment is available.

3.121 The electricity distributor or electricity supplier must both notify the customer that a payment is due and make the payment within 10 working days (subject to exceptions).

3.122 If not, a payment of £25 is due to any domestic or non-domestic consumer affected.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.123 We proposed to retain this standard in its existing form and to increase the payment amount to £40 for domestic consumers and non-domestic consumers.

Consultation responses

3.124 No consultation responses were received on this specific standard in 2023.

3.125 One supplier noted that the proposed timeframe of 10 working days for making a payment differed from the gas GSS payment standard of 20 working days. It proposed that, to provide consistency for customers, the electricity regulation should be aligned to the existing gas standard.

UR response

3.126 We note that for the equivalent standard in the gas GSS Regulations (Regulation 14 of 'The Gas (Individual Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014), that the timeframe for making a payment is 20 working days[31].

[31] Exception to the 20 working days timeframe within the gas Regulations is where the following conditions apply:

1. Where a gas supplier receives a payment from a gas conveyor for onward transmission to a customer whose premises are directly connected that gas conveyors pipe-line system.
2. Where a gas conveyor receives a payment from a gas conveyor for onward transmission to a customer whose premises are directly connected to its pipe-line system.

3.127 We note that for the electricity GSS, the timeframe for making payments for any GSS is 10 working days.

Decision

3.128 We consider that the timeframes for making payments should be aligned with those in the current gas Regulations applicable in Northern Ireland (20 working days). At the next review of electricity and of gas GSS, we will then consider reducing timeframes to 10 working days.

3.129 The payment will increase to £40 for both domestic consumers and non-domestic consumers.

Timing of Notification

3.130 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers. There is no payment associated with this regulation.

Existing Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.131 This standard applies to the following Regulations:

- Providing a supply;
- Estimate of charges;
- Voltage complaints;
- Meter disputes; and
- Charges and payments.

3.132 Where the electricity distributor or electricity supplier receives notification in regard to any of these standards by the customer after 4pm on a working day or at any time on any other day, they shall be deemed to have been satisfied on the next following working day.

Proposed Guaranteed Standard of Service

3.133 We proposed to retain the standard in its existing form, and in our 2025 consultation paper we expanded the list of applicable standards to include metering errors and complaints.

Consultation responses

3.134 One supplier respondent requested that UR consider applying this regulation to all provisions that require a notification to be received from

In both circumstances, a payment is required within 10 working days.

the consumer. This would mean that any notification received from a consumer in relation to any standard would be considered 'received' at the commencement of the next working day.

UR response

3.135 UR appreciates the respondent's opinion that extending this standard to all consumer notifications would provide for a consistent approach. However, there are instances where it is not appropriate for this standard to apply, for example in instances that require a more urgent response or action taken in order to reduce the impact on the consumer affected. We have expanded the list of standards that Timing of Notification is applicable to, to include all necessary standards at this time. This will be considered again as part of UR's next review of the electricity GSS and OSP regimes.

Decision

3.136 This standard will be implemented as proposed.

Definitions of working hours and working day

Working day

3.137 The term 'working day' is not currently defined in the existing electricity GSS Regulations. Within the 2025 consultation we proposed to introduce a definition of working day as 'any day other than a Saturday, a Sunday and specified public holidays.'

3.138 This definition aligns with the definition used in Part 1, paragraph 2 of the Gas (Individual Standards of 74 Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Consultation responses

3.139 No responses were received regarding the proposed definition.

Decision

3.140 This definition will be implemented within the Regulations as proposed.

Working hours

3.141 The following Regulations apply a definition of working hours:

- Distributor's fuse (Regulation 3)[32]
- Prepayment meters (Regulation 8B)[33]

3.142 This definition is defined in Part II of the Schedule as 7.00 am and 7.00 pm on each working day and 9.00 am and 5.00 pm on any other day.

3.143 Within the 2025 consultation we proposed to update the definition of working hours in recognition of the operational differences between the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers, including the different opening hours offered.

3.144 We proposed that a definition of 'supplier working hours' be added to the GSS Regulations as follows - '*between 8.30 am - 5:00 pm on each working day and 9:00 am - 5:00 pm on any other day*'. This definition aligns with Schedule 1, Part II of the existing Northern Ireland Gas GSS Regulations.

3.145 For the electricity distributor, we proposed that the definition of working hours remains as the current definition of between '*7.00 am and 7.00 pm on each working day and 9.00 am and 5.00 pm on any other day*'.

Consultation responses

3.146 No responses were received regarding the proposed definition.

Decision

3.147 Given that the definition of working hours applies only to the Distributer's fuse and Prepayment meters GSS, our decision on whether to include a separate definition for suppliers will depend on our final decisions for the metering GSS. UR's decision will therefore be set out in the metering decision paper.

General consultation responses

3.148 In addition to the standards consulted on, some stakeholders raised further queries relevant to GSS more generally. Proposals for additional standards were also provided by some consumer representative respondents.

[32] 3 - (1) This regulation applies where a supplier is informed (other than by post) by a customer during working hours that, or of circumstances suggesting that, the supplier's fuse has operated so as to disconnect the supply to the customer's premises.

[33] 8B - (1) This regulation applies where a supplier is informed (other than by post) during working hours by a customer who takes his supply through a prepayment meter either that the prepayment meter is not operating so as to permit a supply to the customers premises in the manner in which it is designed to do, or if circumstances suggesting that the prepayment meter is not so operating.

Communication methods

3.149 A supplier requested clarity regarding the method by which a consumer's query or claim is received, i.e. via means other than a telephone (emails and letters), and when a company can deem the consumer's communication via these means to be 'received'.

3.150 Where the Timing of Notification[34] is applicable to a GSS, this should apply to the communication received (whether telephone, email or letter).

3.151 For GSS where the definition of working hours applies (Prepayment Meters GSS and Distributor's Fuse GSS), this will apply to the communication received.

3.152 In relation to the Overall Standards of Performance, standard working hours will apply. If email or post is received outside of the company's working hours, it would be deemed as received at the start of the next working day.

Additional standards for consideration

3.153 Two consumer bodies submitted recommendations for additional standards that could be introduced, or areas where existing standards could be enhanced further for UR to consider. These included standards related to switching, final bills and refunding of final credit balance, supplier responsibilities for disconnections and restoration of supply, enhancement of the complaints GSS to cover also mismanagement of accounts, estimated bills, direct debit issues and disputes with back-billing.

3.154 UR welcomes suggestions for additional standards. We have made the decision to follow an incremental approach to enhancing the levels of GSS. We will conduct a further review of both the electricity and gas GSS and OSP as part of a future work programme and will consider additional GSS and OSP provisions at this stage.

Compliance

3.155 One consumer representative requested clarity on how UR will monitor compliance with the updated GSS and OSP, how enforcement will operate in practice and whether information on compliance will be made publicly available.

[34] The Timing of Notification GSS applies to the following GSS - Providing a supply, Estimate of charges, Voltage complaints, Meter disputes and Charges and payments. The Timing of Notification standard will also apply to the new Complaints GSS.

3.156 UR expect regulated companies to comply with the existing and revised obligations as appropriate. We reserve the right to use our Enforcement powers where there is sufficient evidence of failures by any electricity distributor or supplier in relation to any standard of performance under the GSS or OSP. We carry out this function in accordance with our Enforcement Policy Approach and Procedure[35].

3.157 Information on monitoring and reporting is included in Chapter 8.

[35] UR Enforcement Procedure

4. OSP Determinations

4.1 The electricity Overall Standards of Performance (OSP) set out general required service targets that are not specific to individual consumers and do not carry a payment to consumers if breached.

4.2 The OSP are specified in a Determination made by UR under Article 43 and 43A of the Electricity Order[36] (as it existed at the time they were made).

4.3 OSPs are a licence obligation. Licensees have a licence obligation to conduct their business in a manner which they reasonably consider to be best calculated to achieve any OSP.

4.4 The 2023 consultation set out our proposals for updates to the OSPs.

4.5 The 2025 consultation reconsulted on all metering OSPs.

4.6 This chapter sets out UR's decisions for all non-metering OSP standards, including a summary of the comments received on that standard in the responses to both the 2023 and 2025 consultations and the rationale for the decision made. Where no comments were received, the standard will be implemented as proposed. This has been outlined where applicable.

4.7 Decisions for metering OSPs will be published in a separate decision paper.

4.8 The OSP Determinations apply to the electricity distributor and all electricity suppliers, and it has been highlighted below where there are specific responsibilities for a particular party.

General feedback on non-metering OSPs

4.9 A consumer representative stated that it was content that the OSP for the electricity distribution are retained. It did not provide feedback on the proposed OSP for suppliers.

4.10 The consumer representative was of the view that OSP outputs should be published annually to demonstrate how the company is performing. It considered this would provide a greater incentive to meet targets and overachieve.

4.11 A supplier stated that it was content with the retention of existing OSP for NIE Networks and was of the view that these sufficiently cover the standards related to a network provider. The supplier also stated that it

[36] The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992

would like further clarification on when or where these results are published or made available for customers and suppliers alike to review.

4.12 Another supplier stated that, in principle, it supported the OSP, however it requested clarity in terms of what is defined as 'received' for both whitemail and email correspondence. It also considered that requirements to support OSP reporting will require potentially complex system change and effort, dashboard development and testing to implement the reporting requirements.

4.13 A supplier noted that it agreed with the merit of the OSP.

4.14 NIE Networks provided feedback on the meter reading OSP only. This feedback will be addressed in the metering decision paper.

<u>UR response</u>

4.15 UR welcomes the general support for Overall Standards for Performance. We consider that OSP targets are an important driver of high performance standards that benefit all consumers.

4.16 We recognise the value in publishing OSP returns from suppliers and NIE Networks. This is addressed in Chapter 8 – Reporting and Monitoring.

4.17 Clarification on when correspondence is deemed as received is provided in paragraphs 3.149 to 3.152.

Restoring supply after power failure

4.18 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor only.

<u>Existing Overall Standard of Performance</u>

4.19 This standard requires that 87% of customer's affected by a power cut, due to a fault on the distribution system, are reconnected within 3 hours and all consumers are reconnected within 24 hours.

<u>Proposed Overall Standard of Performance</u>

4.20 We proposed to retain this standard in its existing form.

<u>Consultation responses</u>

4.21 No consultation responses were received on this specific standard.

<u>Decision</u>

4.22 This standard will be retained in its existing form.

Correcting voltage issues

4.23 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor only.

Existing Overall Standard of Performance

4.24 This standard requires that known voltage issues outside the stated limits are corrected within 6 months, subject to any agreement needed from landowners.

4.25 This standard should be met in 100% of cases

Proposed Overall Standard of Performance

4.26 We proposed to retain the standard in its existing form.

Consultation responses

4.27 No consultation responses were received on this specific standard.

Decision

4.28 This standard will be retained in its existing form.

Restoring a supply after disconnection

4.29 This standard is applicable to the electricity distributor only.

Existing Overall Standard of Performance

4.30 This standard requires that a customer's electricity is restored within 24 hours of a working day, following the customer making an agreement with their electricity supplier.

4.31 This standard should be met in 100% of cases.

Proposed Overall Standard of Performance

4.32 We proposed to retain the standard in its existing form.

Consultation responses

4.33 No consultation responses were received on this specific standard.

Decision

4.34 This standard will be retained in its existing form. To provide further clarity on the standard, the wording has been updated as follows:

'This standard requires that a customer's electricity is restored within 24 hours of a working day by the electricity distributor, following the customer making an agreement with their electricity supplier.'

Providing a new electricity supply

4.35 This standard is currently applicable to electricity distributor.

Existing Overall Standard of Performance

4.36 This standard currently requires the electricity distributor to complete all new low voltage connections for domestic customers within 30 working days or within 40 working days for non-domestic customers once the terms of the connection have been accepted.

4.37 This standard should be met in 100% of cases.

Proposed Overall Standard of Performance

4.38 We proposed to retain the standard in its existing form[37].

Consultation responses

4.39 No specific feedback was received on this individual standard.

Decision

4.40 This standard will be retained in its existing form.

Replying to written correspondence

4.41 This standard is currently applicable to the electricity distributor. In the 2023 consultation, we proposed to introduce this OSP for electricity suppliers also.

Existing Overall Standard of Performance

4.42 This standard requires that a reply to a customer's written correspondence is provided within 10 working days, from and including the date the relevant correspondence is received, in 97% of cases.

Proposed Overall Standard of Performance

4.43 We proposed to retain the standard in its existing form, to be applicable to the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers.

[37] While we did not include this OSP in the metering consultation chapter in the 2025 consultation, in the summary chapter on OSP, we incorrectly stated that this OSP was the responsibility of suppliers.

Consultation responses

4.44 One supplier in 2023 requested clarification on when a consumer's letter or email would be deemed as 'received'.

4.45 A supplier in 2025 stated that this OSP can be facilitated by suppliers provided this correspondence relates to legitimate supply related activities (the example of billing was provided).

UR response

4.46 We have provided clarification on when a customer's letter or email is deemed as received in paragraphs 3.149 to 3.152.

4.47 This standard applies to any customer correspondence received by email or letter.

Decision

4.48 This standard will be implemented as proposed.

Responding to complaints

4.49 This is a new standard informed by the gas OSPs. This OSP will be applicable to the electricity distributor and to electricity suppliers.

Proposed Overall Standard of Performance

4.50 This is a new standard which was proposed that requires the electricity distributor or the electricity supplier to provide a full response to a customer's complaint within 10 working days, from and including the date the electricity distributor or electricity supplier receives the relevant complaint, in 97% of cases.

4.51 This standard aligns with the new electricity GSS for complaints (also applicable to gas suppliers and conveyors), where the company is required to provide 'a substantive response within 10 working days.'

Consultation responses

4.52 No consultation responses were received on this specific standard in 2023.

4.53 One supplier in 2025 stated that this OSP can be facilitated by suppliers provided the complaint relates to legitimate supply related activities (the example of billing was provided).

UR response

4.54 This standard applies to all complaints received.

4.55 To ensure consistency with the complaints GSS, the target excludes those cases where the 20 working day timeframe would apply.

4.56 Where the relevant company is unable to provide a full response to the complaint without either:

a) Visiting the customer's premises; or

b) Making enquiries with persons other than officers, employees or agents of the relevant electricity supplier or electricity distributor.

It should provide an initial response explaining this within 10 working days. The company should then provide a full response within 20 working days.

Decision

4.57 This standard will be implemented as follows:

The electricity distributor or the electricity supplier will provide a full response to a customer's complaint within 10 working days, from and including the date the electricity distributor or electricity supplier receives the relevant complaint, in 97% of cases.

4.58 The target will exclude those cases where paragraph 4.56 applies.

4.59 For the purposes of the electricity GSS and OSP, we consider that a full response and a substantive response are the same thing.

5. Supply restoration in severe weather conditions

Background

5.1 The 2023 consultation proposed to introduce a GSS for supply restoration that would apply to NIE Networks during severe weather conditions. Currently in Northern Ireland, the supply restoration GSS is subject to exemptions, most notably the severe weather exemption. This means that, in periods of severe weather, as defined in NIE Network's Distribution Licence[38], NIE Networks can apply for an exemption to making GSS payments, if it meets the criteria.

5.2 The GSS consulted upon was informed by the standards for supply restoration which were in place in the GB Regulations at the time of consultation[39]. UR proposed to introduce specific exemptions for this standard which were also informed by the GB Regulations.

5.3 Following on from Storm Éowyn in January 2025, a working group was established comprising DfE, NIE Networks and UR to consider the options available to facilitate the provision of payments to consumers who had lost power due to this severe weather event. One of the outworkings of the group was a commitment for UR to revisit the supply restoration GSS regulation to specifically consult on the suitability of providing a GSS payment that would apply during severe weather conditions. This commitment was also reflected in the DfE Energy Strategy Action Plan for 2025, published in March 2025[40].

2025 Consultation – options presented

5.4 The consultation was published on 28 October 2025 and sought stakeholder feedback on four options around GSS for supply restoration in periods of severe weather.

[38] Severe weather is defined on Page 12 of NIE Networks' licence as when the number of incidents affecting the distribution high voltage network linked to severe weather conditions reaches 13 times the average daily fault rate within a 24 hour period. At such times, NIE Networks can apply for an exemption to the GSS Regulations. The exemption does not apply automatically and whether or not it applies to the consumer's claim must be assessed on a case by case basis.

[39] The Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations 2015

[40] Action 14 – 'The NI Utility Regulator will consult on amendments to the Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service, including in relation to incidents of adverse weather.'
Energy Strategy - The Path to Net Zero Energy - Action Plan 2025

5.5 The options presented were informed by the current and previous electricity supply restoration standards in GB and by Ofcom's 'delayed repair following loss of service compensation scheme'.

5.6 The value of payments that would be made to consumers (and associated costs of making these payments) differed across each option. Feedback was sought from stakeholders on their preferred option and on who they felt should cover the costs of the payments (whether NIE Networks, consumers or both).

5.7 We also consulted on the introduction of a severe weather cost recovery threshold for NIE Networks. The application of this threshold would mean that the costs of providing a GSS payment during periods of severe weather would be paid for by NIE Networks up to a capped amount of £1M for each regulatory year. Any costs incurred beyond this threshold would be recovered via consumer charges.

5.8 These options are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of options for introducing a supply restoration GSS in severe weather conditions

Option	
Option 1	No change to the current GSS.
Option 2	£70 after the first 48 hours + £70 every subsequent 12 hours. Cap of £700. Informed by the 2015 GB standard for supply restoration in severe weather conditions.
Option 3	£85 after the first 48 hours + £45 every subsequent 6 hours. Cap of £2,000. Informed by the 2024 GB standard for supply restoration in severe weather conditions.
Option 4.	£10 per day after the first 48 hours. Cap at 30 days. Informed by the Ofcom 'delayed repair following loss of service compensation scheme'.

5.9 To inform consultation responses, analysis was completed against each option to estimate the effects if that option had been in place during previous storms over the last five years, including Storm Éowyn.

5.10 The analysis presented for each option was as follows:

- The total number of consumers who would have been eligible for a GSS payment following each storm and the total value of payments that would have been made to these consumers.
- The maximum payment amount that would have been received by individual consumers if each option had been applicable during Storm Éowyn.
- The estimated costs to NIE Networks of providing a payment during each storm.
- The impact on domestic and non-domestic tariffs, if these costs were recovered entirely from consumer charges:
    - ♦ If all consumers received a payment and costs were recovered entirely from both domestic and non-domestic consumers.
    - ♦ If only domestic consumers received a payment and if those costs were recovered from domestic consumers only.
- Cost estimates were presented both with and without the application of a severe weather cost recovery threshold of £1M.

5.11 Full details of the options presented for consultation, including accompanying analysis, can be found in Chapter 6 of the 2025 consultation[41].

5.12 Feedback was sought from respondents on:

- Their preferred option (see Table 1);
- Views on the proposed level of payments and caps to the payment levels; and
- Views on how the payment should be funded (if implemented).

5.13 Consultation responses below are grouped into views on whether a standard should be introduced and views on how such a payment should be funded.

Consultation Responses

Views on a preferred option and on proposed levels of payments and caps to the payment levels

[41] Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance | Utility Regulator

5.14 Three consumer representatives would like to see GSS payments for supply restoration in severe weather conditions introduced to acknowledge the inconvenience of prolonged periods without supply. However, there was recognition by two of these representatives that this specific standard is not the same as the underperformance addressed by the other GSS payments. It was noted that NIE Networks may be constrained by safety issues during severe weather events as well as the scale of damage to the network. It was acknowledged by one consumer representative that it therefore may not be reasonable to fund these payments in exactly the same way as more routine failures of service.

5.15 Two consumer representatives stated that their preferred option was to implement the current GB Regulations that came into force on 1 November 2024 (Option 3). One representative considered that this option provides the most credible acknowledgement of the disruption experienced by agricultural businesses during severe weather. The other representative noted how this option maintains alignment with GB, builds on an established framework, and provides acknowledgement of the impact on consumers who experience extended loss of supply. Another consumer representative, while not stating this as their preferred option, noted that Option 3 would keep standards and payment levels in line with those in GB.

5.16 One consumer representative did not have a particular preference as in its view, across all options, there would be a substantial trade-off for consumers of receiving a payment but seeing their bills rise. It was of the view that payment levels from Options 2 and 3 (levels of payments in the GB 2015 and GB 2024 GSS Regulations) are the best reflection of need. However, its stated preference was to see any additional funding focused on facilitating access to timely and effective support networks rather than payments.

5.17 Two consumer bodies noted that Option 4 (delayed repair following loss of service payment scheme) may be the preferred option for consumers. Both considered the advantage of this option being that it would have the least impact on consumer bills, if costs were to be recovered from consumers. The stakeholders were of the view that this option may be acceptable to consumers given that UR's consumer research demonstrated that receiving a GSS payment was of low priority to consumers during severe weather events. Both viewed the disadvantage of this option being that it would result in substantially lower payments to those affected, representing a weaker acknowledgement of the hardship caused by prolonged outages than Option 3.

5.18 A non-domestic consumer representative was not supportive of the no change option (Option 1) or Option 4. It was of the view that not having a standard entrenches an inequitable outcome for rural consumers and fails to reflect the essential nature of electricity to farms. The stakeholder considered that Option 4 (£10 per day) did not provide a meaningful acknowledgement of the impact of prolonged outages. Its preferred approach from a farming perspective would be to implement Option 3 noting that this would result in higher initial payments, faster escalation and a higher cap. It was felt that this option better reflects the time-critical nature of modern farming systems. The response stated that while GSS payments will not compensate full business losses, this option provides the most credible acknowledgement of the disruption experienced by agricultural businesses during severe weather.

5.19 The non-domestic consumer representative stated that for farmers, the overriding priority is a reliable and resilient electricity supply rather than post-event compensation. It emphasised that the greatest economic benefit to agriculture would come from improved network resilience and faster restoration, rather than modest post-event payments.

5.20 The importance of network resilience was also stated by two other consumer representatives. One stakeholder responded that they were supportive of NIE Networks' proposal to bring forward its tree-cutting programme in order to improve network resilience. The stakeholder stated that they considered the expected increase to consumer bills of approximately £1.50 to be a proportionate and preventative investment. Another consumer representative stated that network resilience will be instrumental in being prepared for future severe weather events.

5.21 NIE Networks' position is that UR should retain the status quo whereby the company is exempted from the supply restoration standard during a severe weather event (Option 1 – no change).

5.22 It considers that introducing GSS payments for supply restoration in severe weather conditions would not be good value for consumers, referring to the consumer research published alongside the 2025 consultation which indicated that receiving GSS payments was of low priority to consumers[42].

5.23 NIE Networks is of the view that spending money on GSS payments would divert monies that could otherwise fund resilience-enhancing investments and/or improved restoration efforts and communications during severe weather events – all of which it notes from the consumer research and stakeholder engagement are of higher priority to consumers than receiving payments.

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[42] Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance | Utility Regulator – Research and Stakeholder engagement with domestic and non-domestic consumers is summarised in Chapter 2 of the Consultation.

5.24 NIE Networks consider that the research and stakeholder engagement supports the idea that it would be considerably better for the people of Northern Ireland if monies are not spent on GSS payments and instead are spent on making the network more resilient, so that severe weather events cause fewer and/or shorter power outages in the first place.

5.25 NIE Networks refer to the rationale behind the GSS regime which is to make payments 'in recognition of poor performance, specifically where there has been a failure by a company to deliver against a standard of performance for which it is reasonably expected to meet.' Using the example of Storm Éowyn, NIE Networks argue that it is not reasonable to expect that it could have done anything to prevent the power outages caused and how in the aftermath of the storm their staff, contracting partners and mutual aid support workers from other networks, worked tirelessly to restore power safely to customers.

5.26 In addition, NIE Networks considers that introducing such a standard could be considered as contrary to UR's statutory duties[43] below:

a) Financing duty – NIE Networks consider that if the exemption is removed and it is held liable for funding some amount of compensation, then NIE Networks' ability to finance all other activities is clearly harmed. It considers that this may be at odds with UR's duty to have regards to the need to secure licence holders can finance the activities to which they are obligated.

b) Duty to protect the interests of electricity consumers – NIE Networks consider that any move away from the status quo arrangements for GSS payments, combined with a decision to socialise costs if they exceed the recovery threshold amount, will put upward pressure on the price of electricity, and may thus be at odds with UR's duty to protect the interests of consumers.

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[43] Utility Regulator Statutory Duties

The principal objective of the Utility Regulator in carrying out its electricity related functions is:

> *to protect the interests of consumers of electricity supplied by authorised suppliers, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition between persons engaged in, or in commercial activities connected with, the generation, transmission, distribution or supply of electricity.*

The interests of consumers include their interests in the fulfilment by the Authority when carrying out its functions as designated regulatory authority for Northern Ireland, of the objectives as set out in Article 36(a) to (h) of the Electricity Directive.

And also having regard to:

> *(a) the need to secure that all reasonable demands in Northern Ireland or Ireland for electricity are met; and*
>
> *(b) the need to secure that licence holders are able to finance the activities which are the subject of obligations imposed by or under Part II of the Electricity Order or this Order (the Energy (NI) Order 2003*

5.27 While a standard for supply restoration in severe weather conditions would not be applicable to suppliers, several suppliers expressed that they were not supportive of introducing a standard for supply restoration in severe weather conditions.

5.28 Two suppliers were of the view that investment in the network to prevent supply disruption would be a better use of funds than payment of GSS.

5.29 One supplier noted the lack of equivalent standards in the Republic of Ireland, despite a similar market structure.

5.30 In addition to feedback on the introduction of a GSS for supply restoration in severe weather conditions, the importance of better identification and support for vulnerable consumers was noted by one stakeholder. It highlighted the importance of greater promotion of NIE Network's Medical Care Register and the need for improved advance preparation. It suggested that this should include coordinated advice on how to stay safe, warm and supported during severe weather events. Another consumer representative also stated that it would be supportive of pre-emptive communications, such as the provision of household booklets on emergency preparedness.

View on funding a GSS for supply restoration in severe weather conditions

5.31 The preference for consumer representative stakeholders is that if a standard for supply restoration in severe weather conditions is implemented, all GSS payments should be funded by industry and should not be recovered from consumer electricity bills.

5.32 However, there was recognition by two consumer representatives that severe weather events are not directly comparable to other forms of service underperformance and that it may not therefore be reasonable to expect this particular GSS payment to be funded in exactly the same way as others. The importance of a proportionate approach that balances the inconvenience faced by consumers and the financial impact on distribution companies was noted.

5.33 The potential for costs to be passed on to consumers was acknowledged. All domestic consumer representative respondents expressed considerable concerns about the impact of any measures that would result in increases to electricity bills, particularly the impacts on low-income and vulnerable households.

5.34 It was emphasised by one stakeholder that financially vulnerable consumers would struggle to make any unexpected payments if costs of GSS payments in severe weather conditions were to result in increases to consumer bills. Another consumer representative expressed concerns about the risk of excessive increases to bills during years with multiple severe weather events. It strongly cautioned against any approach that places an undue or open-ended financial burden on consumers, particularly those already in or at risk of fuel poverty.

5.35 One consumer representative stated that the proportion of any costs paid by the consumer must take account of the size of the network, consumer population and other Northern Ireland specific factors, such as its rural nature and vulnerable consumer base. It further noted that payment levels and systems which work in GB may not be appropriate for Northern Ireland.

5.36 It was proposed by another consumer representative that there should be an option for any increases to the consumer bill to be taken over a period of time, which it suggested may be more manageable than one lump sum. Another consumer representative suggested that safeguards would need to be implemented to prevent against excessive cumulative costs.

5.37 One consumer representative recognised the necessity for caps on the amount paid out by NIE Networks, if payments for severe weather GSS were introduced. It considered that these caps should be reviewed regularly to ensure consumers pay as little as possible. Further information was requested by two consumer bodies on how the £1M threshold was determined.

5.38 One stakeholder considered that as network resilience improves, the amount of GSS payments funded by consumers should reduce.

5.39 NIE Networks considers that it should not be held liable to fund any amount of severe weather GSS payments, if these were to be introduced. It considers that provided it has acted as a reasonable and responsible steward of the network, requiring NIE Networks to fund such payments is tantamount to levying an unwarranted penalty on the company.

5.40 NIE Networks state that the storm restoration and repair efforts as a result of Storm Éowyn cost NIE Networks over £22 million of which 50% was not recoverable through the RP6 price control[44], therefore costing NIE Networks over £11 million from their own funds. NIE Networks are of the view that if it had been liable for making GSS payments, this would effectively have been an extra penalty.

[44] NIE Networks state in their response that they had already exhausted the storm recovery cost allowance, and thus could only recover half of the costs incurred through the 50/50 mechanism.

5.41 In line with its reasoning in the preceding paragraphs, NIE Networks do not consider the introduction of a severe weather cost recovery threshold (similar to the principle in GB[45]) of £1M to be fair.

5.42 In addition to viewing any costs of payments up to the threshold as an unfair penalty, NIE Networks note the differences between the Northern Ireland and GB markets and regulatory regimes. It refers to how there is a much larger customer base in GB from which socialised costs can be recovered which limits the extent of these costs for each consumer. In addition, it states that distribution networks operators in GB typically have more flexibility in their price controls to absorb new and/or unexpected costs.

UR Response

Views on a preferred option and on proposed levels of payments and caps to the payment levels

5.43 UR note that consumer representative stakeholders would like to see a GSS for supply restoration in severe weather conditions introduced. This aligns with the consumer research completed by UR in 2025 where 77% of domestic respondents and 86% of non-domestic respondents 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[46].

5.44 We note the view expressed by some consumer representative stakeholders that a GSS applicable in severe weather events is not directly comparable to other forms of service underperformance addressed by GSS payments. We note also that NIE Networks consider that introducing a severe weather GSS would not align with the principle behind the GSS regime that was stated in the consultation, which is to make payments 'in recognition of poor performance, specifically where there has been a failure by a company to deliver against a standard of performance for which it is reasonably expected to meet.'

[45] Currently in GB, the costs of providing a GSS payment during periods of severe weather are paid for by the electricity distributor, up to an amount which is capped by a severe weather threshold. Any costs incurred beyond this threshold are recovered via consumer charges. Special Condition 4.4 of the Electricity Distribution Licence provides the methodology for the 'Severe Weather Supply Restoration Term' which calculates the threshold up to which the electricity distributor must fund GSS payments in severe weather.

[46] Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance | Utility Regulator
Chapter 2 - Research and Stakeholder Engagement
Annex 3 – Domestic Consumer Research
Annex 4 – Non Domestic Consumer Research

5.45 We note the feedback from the non-domestic consumer representative that the greatest economic benefit to agriculture would come from improved network resilience and faster restoration, rather than post-event GSS payments. The aligns with the feedback from our stakeholder engagement in 2025 where non-domestic stakeholders (across various business sectors) stressed that businesses need a reliable and constant supply of electricity as interruption to this supply is the biggest cost to members.

5.46 We acknowledge also NIE Network's point in reference to the consumer research and stakeholder engagement completed by UR in 2025, that receiving payments is of low priority for consumers during periods without power and their view that it would be better value to consumers to invest in areas of higher priority.

5.47 We agree that investing in network resilience is of primary importance for the people of Northern Ireland so that severe weather events cause fewer and/or shorter power outages in the first place. Our survey research in 2025 found that 57% of domestic consumers and 23% of non-domestic consumers viewed getting their electricity back on as being most important to them during a severe weather incident.

5.48 Within the consultation paper, we provided information about NIE Networks resilience workstream which will involve a long-term programme of tree cutting on the 11kV main line overhead network to reduce the impact of future storm events. It is planned that this workstream will be completed by March 2031. Completion of this work will see a significant reduction in interruptions if a similar event occurred in future. UR published a separate consultation on the licence modifications necessary to allow NIE Networks to fund this work[47]. To incentivise efficient expenditure on severe weather storm recovery we have maintained appropriate mechanisms within the proposed licence modifications'.[48] UR will review the scope and appropriateness of the current RP7 reliability incentive as part of the RP8 Price Control process.[49]

5.49 We note that one consumer representative stated that its preferred approach was that any additional funding was focused on facilitating access to timely and effective support networks rather than GSS payments. While we agree that effective supports at the time of need are

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[47] Consultation on additional allowances for NIE Networks relating to storm resilience | Utility Regulator

[48] These include to limit pass-through of costs incurred to consumers to maintain incentives for the company to manage expenditure efficiently and to ensure that any costs passed through to consumers are subject to reasonable regulatory scrutiny and challenge.

[49] RP7 FD Main Report [Final]_0.pdf, Chapter 8 – Innovation and Incentives
Annex M - Reliability Incentive Model for RP7.xlsx

of key importance, this is outside the scope of this consultation and NIE Network's core role as Distribution Network Operator.

5.50 While also outside the scope of this consultation, we agree with consumer representative feedback on the importance of promoting NIE Network's Medical Care Register to ensure that customers' who rely on electricity for healthcare needs can be identified. We consider that the Best Practice Framework Customer Care Register project[50] will provide significant benefits regarding better identification, support and protection for these consumers.

5.51 We do not consider that the consultation responses provide evidence of a consensus on a preferred option among stakeholders. We note that, on balance, the preferred option of consumer representatives is to introduce a standard that aligns with the level of payments in the current GB Regulations (Option 3). However, we take account of the consumer body representative view that if the costs of GSS payments were to be recovered via consumer bills, Option 4 may be a more acceptable approach for domestic consumers. We also take into consideration that Option 4 was not supported by a non-domestic consumer representative. In addition, we note that NIE Networks was not supportive of introducing any severe weather GSS.

Views on funding a GSS for supply restoration in severe weather conditions

5.52 We acknowledge the significant levels of concern raised about the potential financial impacts on the network company if it were to be liable for payments and also concerns about the potential impact on consumer bills (in particular for low income and vulnerable households) if costs were to be recovered from consumers. We note also that only 17% of domestic respondents in the 2025 survey stated that they would be willing to pay extra on their electricity bill to fund such a payment. We do not consider there to be a consensus between industry and consumer representative respondents with regards to how these specific GSS payments should be funded, if they were to be introduced.

5.53 For the four options presented in the GSS consultation paper, analysis was presented against each option to estimate the effects if that option had been in place during previous storms over the last five years, including Storm Éowyn. Over this five-year period there were three storms after

[50] Best Practice Framework Customer Care Register Project - Information and Decision Paper | Utility Regulator

which NIE Networks would have been required to make GSS payments, if a standard had been in place.

5.54 If no threshold was in place and all costs were recovered by NIE Networks, the total cost over the five-year period would have been £23.9M[51]. We do not consider that NIE Networks has provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that being liable to make GSS payments in severe weather conditions would harm their ability to finance all other activities. However, we recognise their concerns about the potential financial impacts of being liable for large one-off payments, particularly if they are required to fund the full costs of GSS payments and in the event of multiple severe weather events within the same year.

5.55 The implementation of a cost recovery threshold of up to £1M each regulatory year would protect against these financial impacts to a considerable extent. If a £1M threshold per regulatory year had been applicable, the total cost to NIE Networks over the five years would have been £1.1M[52]. However, we note (as per paragraphs 5.39 to 5.42) that NIE Networks consider any level of liability for payments to be a penalty.

5.56 We do however re-iterate as mentioned in the consultation paper, the analysis does not make any projections on the potential impacts of future severe weather events. Potential future financial impacts for NIE Networks of each option, if implemented, are unknown. This is based on the inability to predict frequency or severity of storms over a price control period.

5.57 Furthermore, the introduction of this threshold would mean that any costs above this amount would be funded by consumers. UR takes into account the considerable levels of concern expressed by consumer representative bodies regarding the potential impact on consumer bills, if costs were to be recovered from consumers.

5.58 Further clarification was requested from two consumer bodies on how the threshold of £1M was determined. UR analysed storm data between 1998 and 2025 (27 years). If a GSS for supply restoration had been in place and a £1M threshold applied over these years, consumer bills would only have been impacted during three of these years. We considered that this threshold level allows for a proportionate approach where consumers would be largely protected from increases to their bills while also balancing the need to ensure NIE Network's ability to finance their activities would not be impacted.

[51] These are the estimated costs for Option 3 which was the preferred option of consumer representative respondents.

[52] £0.1M in 2023/24 (Storm Isha)
£1M in 2024/25 (Storms Darragh and Éowyn)

5.59 We also note the points raised by both NIE Networks and a consumer representative body about the differences between Northern Ireland and GB including a smaller population and a more rural customer base. This could mean that a greater overall proportion of the population may be off supply for extended periods during severe weather conditions (and therefore potentially eligible for a payment) and that the costs of a payments scheme would be recovered over a relatively small number of consumers.

5.60 We agree with NIE Network's point that socialisation of GSS payment costs across the customer base, if they exceed the recovery threshold, may put upward pressure on the price of electricity. While the impacts of future storms cannot be ascertained, the analysis presented in Chapter 6 of the 2025 Consultation paper provides an indication of potential cost impacts[53]. We also note the high levels of concern expressed by consumer representative stakeholders regarding the potential impacts on consumer bills.

5.61 We agree with the sentiment behind the consumer representative respondent view that as the network becomes more resilient, any consumer contribution towards GSS payments should reduce.

5.62 We thank the consumer representatives who shared ideas for how costs should be recovered from consumers, if introduced.

5.63 We thank suppliers for their feedback and note that they consider investment in the network to prevent supply disruption to be a better use of funds that GSS payments. We note also that one supplier raised that there are not equivalent standards in Ireland[54].

5.64 In developing our decision in relation to this aspect of the consultation we have fully considered all stakeholder viewpoints and our duty to protect the interest of consumers.

UR Decision

5.65 UR have taken into account the principle of GSS payments, which is to recognise the inconvenience caused to an individual consumer as a result of underperformance by an electricity company. Payments are made due

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[53] Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance | Utility Regulator

[54] In Ireland, the electricity distributor has a standard for supply restoration in normal weather, which they are exempt from having to meet "in exceptional circumstances such as extreme weather conditions or extensive disruption."

to poor performance, when companies are reasonably expected to meet specific standards of service and have not met those standards.

5.66 UR acknowledges the considerable levels of concern expressed by consumer representatives regarding the potential impact on consumers, if costs of GSS payments were to be recovered from consumers. In particular, we note the concerns expressed regarding low income and vulnerable consumers. We have also taken into consideration the potential financial impacts on NIE Networks if they were to be liable for the costs of severe weather GSS payments.

5.67 We have taken into consideration feedback from the consultation and stakeholder engagement sessions on the importance of building network resilience to help prevent outages from occurring in the first place.

5.68 Finally, UR have taken into account that while the majority of consumer representatives were supportive of introducing a GSS applicable in severe weather conditions, there was no consensus on a preferred option that was considered acceptable to all stakeholder respondents (domestic and business). Furthermore, there was no consensus between NIE Networks and consumer representatives with regards to how GSS payments should be funded.

5.69 UR therefore do not consider that a standard for supply restoration in severe weather conditions should be introduced at this time. The main reasons for this decision are outlined below:

- The effects of severe weather events are unpredictable and are not NIE Network's fault. As the principle of GSS is around NIE Networks meeting standards they could be reasonably expected to meet, the severity and unpredictability would take away from the expectation that NIE could meet these standards.

- It is NIE Network's responsibility that the network is maintained and resilient in a storm. However, exposing NIE Networks to unpredictable severe weather GSS payments without any threshold may impact its ability to finance other activities.

- The implementation of a threshold (at any level) would require costs above this amount to be recovered from consumers. Socialisation of these costs was generally not supported by consumer research or the consultation responses, and the detrimental impact on consumers in vulnerable circumstances was noted by several.

- We consider that investment in network resilience so that severe weather events cause fewer and/or shorter power outages in the future is of greater benefit to Northern Ireland's domestic and business consumers than funding of severe weather payments post event.

5.70 UR will keep this position under review as further investments in the Network are made. Our position will be revisited during the development of RP8 which is expected to commence during 2028.

6. Exemptions

Background

Northern Ireland Exemptions

6.1 The Northern Ireland GSS Regulations are currently subject to a single set of exemptions which are set out under Regulation 14[55]. These exemptions list the circumstances under which the electricity distributor or electricity supplier are exempt from being required to deliver a GSS standard and from having to make a payment to any consumer impacted by the standard not being met.

6.2 Regulation 14 is currently applicable to the following standards:

- Regulation 3 – Supplier's fuse
- Regulation 4 – Supply restoration
- Regulation 5 – Providing a supply
- Regulation 6 – Estimate of charges
- Regulation 7 – Notice of supply interruption
- Regulation 8 – Voltage complaints
- Regulation 8a – Meter disputes
- Regulation 8b – Prepayment meters
- Regulation 9 – Charges and payments
- Regulation 10 – Appointments
- Regulation 13 – Payments

6.3 For the avoidance of doubt, the current Northern Ireland GSS exemptions contain a clause whereby the electricity distributor or electricity supplier are exempt from meeting the GSS standards in severe weather conditions. As outlined in the list above, this includes supply restoration.

GB Exemptions

6.4 At present, the exemptions which apply to the GB GSS Regulations for electricity distribution are set out under two separate standards.

[55] The Electricity (Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993 - Regulation 14

a) Regulation 9 sets out the circumstances under which the GB electricity distributors are exempt from adhering to the normal and severe weather supply restoration standards only[56]. Regulation 9 does not include an exemption clause for periods of severe weather.

b) Regulation 20 sets out the exemptions for the remaining applicable standards in GB[57]. Regulation 20 does include a clause for severe weather.

6.5 The exemptions which apply to the GB GSS Regulations for electricity suppliers are set out under Regulation 9 (of the supplier Regulations).

6.6 In the 2023 consultation paper, UR proposed to include exemptions similar to those in the current GB Regulations.

6.7 In the 2025 consultation paper we provided further detail on the differences between the Northern Ireland and GB exemptions.

Consultation proposal

Exemptions for supply restoration standards

6.8 We proposed that, if following consultation, it was decided to introduce a standard for supply restoration in severe weather conditions for the electricity distributor, that UR would implement exemptions which are informed by those that are currently in place under Regulation 9 of the GB GSS Regulations for electricity distributors. This would involve introducing a separate set of exemptions applicable to the supply restoration standards only.

6.9 These exemptions applicable to supply restoration standards, would not include a severe weather exemption clause.

Exemptions for other GSS Regulations

6.10 In addition to the specific exemptions proposed for supply restoration standards, for all other applicable GSS Regulations, we proposed to implement an updated set of exemptions for the electricity distributor and electricity suppliers that are informed by Regulation 20 of the GB Regulations for electricity distributors and Regulation 9 of the GB Regulations for electricity suppliers.

[56] Regulation 9 is applicable to Regulations 5 - 8 of the GB Regulations for electricity distributors.
[57] Regulation 20 is applicable to Regulations 11 - 19 (excl. 18) of the GB Regulations for electricity distributors.

Consultation responses

6.11 We received consultation responses from nine stakeholders that provided their respective views on updating the GSS exemptions informed by the GB approach. We provide an overview of stakeholder consultation responses below along with our response to this feedback and we explain UR's final decision.

6.12 All four consumer representative bodies who responded to the consultation provided a response in this area. Additionally, five suppliers also responded to the relevant consultation question.

6.13 All consumer representative bodies supported UR's proposed approach. Three of the consumer representative bodies made comments on the need for and importance of more clarity on the exemptions to ensure they are appropriate for the Northern Ireland consumer landscape. One non-domestic consumer representative also highlighted the importance that exemptions are clearly defined and applied consistently.

6.14 Supplier feedback was mixed. We discuss this below.

6.15 Two suppliers were supportive of UR's proposed approach but on the basis that it reflects the operational environment in Northern Ireland, and that suppliers are not accountable for non-compliance issues for events outside their control.

6.16 One supplier disagreed with the proposed approach. It commented that Northern Ireland needs a bespoke exemption regime. Like the above suppliers it stated that the operational realities need consideration. This supplier also commented that exemptions must recognise situations where suppliers are dependent on NIE Networks so suppliers are not liable for these activities.

6.17 One supplier said more detail is needed on how the exemptions will be drafted and on how these will affect suppliers.

UR response

6.18 We welcome consumer representative bodies support for the proposed approach to update the GSS exemptions informed by those in place in GB.

6.19 We also note suppliers' views, where some are supportive on the basis that the adopted approach reflects the operational environment in Northern Ireland, where one disagreed with the proposed approach, and where others felt they were unable to provide a substantive response.

6.20 As our decision (as set out in Chapter 5) is not to introduce a standard for supply restoration in severe weather conditions at this time, we will not be introducing a separate set of exemptions for supply restoration standards.

6.21 For clarification, the severe weather exemption clause will continue to apply to all GSS, including the GSS for supply restoration.

6.22 The exemptions for all other GSS Regulations will be unchanged.

UR decision

6.23 There will be no change to the GSS Regulation for exemptions.

7. Automatic payments, payment levels and annual inflationary uplifts

Background

7.1 The 2023 consultation proposed that the majority of GSS payments should be issued automatically rather than relying on consumers applying in the first instance to their supply or distribution company. The 2023 consultation also proposed increases to the GSS payment values to align with GB payment levels at that time.

7.2 The 2025 consultation proposed further increases to the payment levels offered under each GSS regulation to align with GB payment levels (which had increased since the 2023 consultation). The 2025 consultation also proposed the introduction of a mechanism to allow for annual inflationary uplifts to these payments.

Automatic payments

Proposals

7.3 In the 2023 consultation paper, UR proposed to introduce:

a) Automatic GSS payments for all consumers (with exceptions for multiple and planned interruptions and for supply restoration in normal and severe weather conditions).

b) Additional protections for Critical Care Register[58] (CCR) customers and vulnerable customers through automatic payments for supply restoration standards.

Consultation Responses

7.4 The provision of automatic payments was strongly supported by a consumer representative body as it noted that this would mean minimal action would be required from the customer.

7.5 The consumer representative further welcomed the proposed introduction of automatic payments for supply restoration standards for those on the Medical Care Register (MCR) and vulnerable consumers. The importance of improving uptake on these registers was also noted to

[58] NIE Networks offer a critical care information service (known as the Medical Care Register) to customers who are dependent on life supporting electrical equipment. Being on the register means customers will receive up to date information by phone during a power cut or a planned interruption.

ensure these consumers could be identified. The consumer representative stated that there needed to be further clarity around how vulnerable consumers not registered on the MCR would be identified and provided with automatic payments.

7.6 The industry consultation responses raised concerns about the feasibility and costs of automatic payments.

7.7 One electricity supplier stated that the implementation of automatic payments would be a key cost from the implementation of the updated GSS and OSP. An estimate of the associated costs was not provided.

7.8 NIE Networks raised concerns in their 2023 and 2025 responses about their capability to issue automatic payments, noting that it currently issues all GSS payments using manual processes. It highlighted that NIE Networks do not currently hold consumer bank details and noted the time it would take for them to gather this information.

7.9 In relation to the proposal to automate payments for vulnerable consumers when the distributor has failed to meet supply restoration standards, NIE Networks advised that their existing systems do not enable them to do this. It stated that with their current monitoring equipment, IT systems and processes, they do not know if or when they have failed the supply restoration standard (irrespective of whether the customer is on the MCR, and/or is vulnerable).

7.10 NIE Networks stated that that provision of automatic payments to customers on the MCR, and to vulnerable customers, would require the development of substantial new processes, supported by network-wide monitoring equipment and new IT systems, to enable identification of customers who have not had supply restored within the required timeframe. It added that there would be significant costs associated with this. The estimated costs of implementation were not provided.

7.11 NIE Networks proposed that automatic compensatory payments could only become obligatory at a date in the future, to allow time to make the necessary investment in IT systems, and to consider and resolve the issue regarding the gathering, use and retention of customers' banking details.

<u>UR response</u>

7.12 It is our view that payments should be automatic where this is practical, to reduce the burden on consumers of having to make an application and to avoid the risk of consumers not receiving a payment when due.

7.13 However, we consider that a decision on the introduction of automatic GSS payments should be revisited at the next GSS review for the reasons outlined in subsequent paragraphs. UR's next review of electricity and gas

GSS will be completed during the development of RP8 which is expected to commence during 2028.

7.14 We are aware that NIE Network's current systems may not allow them to determine the time off supply with the level of accuracy required for making automatic payments for supply restoration standards for consumers on NIE Network's Medical Care Register (MCR) and to vulnerable consumers. We understand that processes would need to be put in place to allow for identification at individual level. Furthermore, while NIE Networks would be aware of customers on their MCR, they would not be aware of other vulnerable customers who may be on a supplier or NI Water's register, but not on NIE Network's MCR. Processes would also need to be put in place for this. The implementation of the shared single utility customer care register across electricity, gas and water companies[59] will enable this identification of all vulnerable consumers.

7.15 We note the issues raised by NIE Networks about their ability to fulfil automatic payments at this time, given that they do not hold customer bank details. While not raised in the consultation responses, we also take into consideration that suppliers would not be required to hold bank details for their prepayment meter customers. Revisiting the introduction of automatic payments at the next review would allow time for electricity companies to explore the most efficient options for making automatic payments, for example 'distributed payments[60]' (where the supplier sends the payment to the customer on the distributor's behalf) which would resolve the issue of NIE Networks being required to collect and store

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[59] Best Practice Framework Customer Care Register Project - Information and Decision Paper | Utility Regulator

[60] The Electricity and Gas (Standards of Performance) (Suppliers) Regulations 2015
Distributed Payments (GB 2015 Regulations)
7.—(1) When a supplier receives a distributed payment for onward transmission to the supplier's customer, the supplier must relay the distributed payment to that customer within 10 working days of receipt of the distributed payment.
(2) In this regulation—

"customer" means any person who is supplied or requires to be supplied with gas conveyed through pipes or with electricity at premises which that person owns or occupies; and

distributed payment" means a payment to be made by—
a gas transporter to a customer—
i. in fulfilment of an obligation imposed on it by regulations made undersection 33AA of the Gas Act; or
ii. following a determination by the Authority under section 33AB of the Gas Act; or
an electricity distributor to a customer—
i. in fulfilment of an obligation imposed on it by regulations made undersection 39A of the Electricity Act; or
ii. following a determination by the Authority under section 39B of the Electricity Act.

consumer bank details. This would also provide time for suppliers to explore solutions for providing automatic payments to their prepayment meter customers.

UR decision

7.16 Neither electricity suppliers nor the distribution company will be required to implement automatic GSS payments at this time. This will be reviewed as part of the next review of the GSS Regulations.

Payment levels

7.17 The GSS provides a regulatory framework under which payments can be made in acknowledgment of the inconvenience caused to the consumer when either the electricity distributor or electricity supplier fails to deliver against a standard of performance for which it is reasonably expected to meet.

7.18 The payment values do not reflect or attempt to remedy the actual loss, either partial or whole, incurred by the individual consumer in the unique circumstances of every case. Furthermore, GSS payments are not intended to take the place of household or business insurance. UR intends to continue with this approach.

7.19 The current payment amounts set for each GSS Regulation in Northern Ireland have remained unchanged since 1999, and under the existing regime, changes to these payment levels are only undertaken during a full review of the Regulations.

Proposal

7.20 In the 2025 consultation paper, UR proposed to increase the payment levels in Northern Ireland to be informed by those provided in GB at that time. The increased payment level amounts for each standard can be found in Chapter 3.

Consultation Responses

7.21 All consumer representative respondents were supportive of increasing GSS payment levels to align with GB.

7.22 One consumer representative considered that the proposed increases represent a more reasonable and proportionate acknowledgment of the inconvenience caused to the consumer.

7.23 Another consumer representative recommended the highest level of payments reasonably permissible within the framework. However, they added that this should not detract from the primacy of investment in network resilience.

7.24 Another consumer representative stated that it is worthwhile mirroring practices in other jurisdictions and/or seeking parity when it has a positive impact for consumers. They also stated that it was important that Northern Ireland does not fall even further behind the standards in GB.

7.25 One supplier did not agree with UR's proposals to align with payment levels in GB. It stated that GB-level payments would have a materially greater financial impact, especially on smaller suppliers, increasing the risk of higher tariffs, reduced competition and, potentially, supplier exit. The supplier stated that this risk is acute during severe weather events, where GB-style payment levels could trigger liabilities far exceeding annual supplier margins.

7.26 Another supplier was of the view that aligning with GB payment levels was reasonable in principle to ensure consistency and fairness. However, it added that it is important to consider the operational differences between Northern Ireland and GB, particularly in terms of regional infrastructure resilience and response dynamics during severe events.

7.27 Similarly, a supplier stated that they support maintaining meaningful compensation for consumers. However, it did not support full alignment with GB payment levels at this stage given the differences in market structures between Northern Ireland and GB and stated that suppliers in Northern Ireland do not currently control the processes needed to comply with GSS regulations.

7.28 One supplier expressed that they would like more detail on the proposed mechanism for providing payments to consumers. It was of the view that there was a lack of clarity regarding the specifics of the refund mechanism between networks and suppliers.

UR response

7.29 UR welcomes the consumer representative support for the increases to GSS payment levels.

7.30 We welcome also that some suppliers expressed support for the principle of increasing payments. However, we note supplier's concerns which are addressed in the subsequent paragraphs.

7.31 UR notes the concerns from suppliers regarding the financial impacts of increases to GSS payment levels to align with GB with several suppliers referring to these risks as being most acute during severe weather events. For clarification, supply restoration GSS are applicable only to NIE Networks, not to suppliers. In addition, it has been decided not to introduce a standard for supply restoration in severe weather events at this time. The reasons for this decision are set out in Chapter 5.

7.32 UR notes the concern among respondents surrounding financial resilience and the differences between the Northern Ireland and GB markets.

7.33 It is important to emphasise that GSS payment levels in Northern Ireland have remained unchanged since 1999. We consider that the increased payment levels are more appropriate within the current financial and economic climate. We do not consider these updated payment levels to be unreasonable or that they would pose any additional financial risk to organisations subject to GSS.

7.34 We note the supplier queries regarding how payments should be provided to consumers and also regarding the specifics of any refund mechanisms between NIE Networks and suppliers. It is for each electricity company to decide on the most appropriate method for making GSS payments to consumers and to ensure they are compliant with the regulations. As set out in paragraph 7.16, we are not requiring companies to make automatic GSS payments at this time. However, if companies chose to do so, we would be supportive of this.

UR decision

7.35 The payment levels will remain as indicated in the consultation paper. We believe that the payments levels are more in line with the current economic and financial climate. We also believe that the updated levels will not place extensive financial pressures on organisations liable to GSS and will continue to encourage satisfactory levels of performance.

Inflationary uplifts

Proposal

7.36 In the 2025 consultation paper, UR proposed a mechanism for the GSS payment levels which was informed by the mechanism currently in place in the GB Regulations for electricity distributors[61]. We proposed that this inflationary adjustment mechanism would be applicable to GSS payments for both the distributor and suppliers.

7.37 We proposed that the payment amount for each Regulatory year[62] will be calculated by adjusting the value of the payment amount as it was on 1

[61] Regulation 21A (Principal Regulations) and Regulation 17A (Connection Regulations) - Indexation of prescribed caps and prescribed sums [The Electricity (Standards of Performance) (Amendment) Regulations 2023]

[62] The Regulatory Year runs from 1st April - 31st March

October 2023 ('the base year') by the percentage change in the CPIH[63] index published for the month of January preceding the Regulatory year for which the adjustment is being made (the 'inflationary adjustment factor'). The payment amount will then be rounded, either up or down, to the nearest multiple of £5.

7.38 Table 7.1 in the consultation paper provided examples of adjustments to payments for the Regulatory year 2025/26. The table has been updated below for 2026/27.

Table 2: Example adjustment to payment amounts for Regulatory Year 2026/27

Payment amount as of 'base year' (2023)	'Inflationary adjustment factor' (% change between CPIH Jan 2023 - Jan 2026)	Calculated change to payment amount	Payment amount as of 1st April 2026	Inflationary Increase applicable?
£35	1.12	+£39.09	£40	Yes
£70		+£78.19	£80	Yes
£175		+£195.47	£195	Yes

7.39 Full details of the proposed methodology can be found in Chapter 7 and Annex 8 of the Consultation.

Consultation Responses

7.40 All consumer representative respondents agreed with the proposed annual inflationary uplifts. One consumer representative noted that such uplifts would mean that payment rates do not remain stagnant for long periods of time, meaning they become less of a deterrent for companies to negate standards.

7.41 One supplier agreed in principle that inflationary uplifts provide a transparent and predictable way to maintain value of payments over time.

7.42 Another supplier also stated that they were supportive in principle of annual inflationary updates. However, it added that this was subject to clarification of market structure, GSS (metering) being resolved first, transparency in calculation and notification.

7.43 One supplier responded that they considered the method for the inflation calculation was reasonable. It added that payment levels will need to be

[63] CPIH - The Consumer Prices Index which includes owner occupiers' housing costs

incorporated into processes and systems, as such it is imperative that suppliers are given appropriate lead time to remain compliant.

7.44 A supplier stated that it did not agree with the inflationary uplifts, they expressed concerns around finances and the ability to absorb costs. It also expressed concern that costs would be recovered through tariffs ultimately increasing bills for consumers. The supplier recommended that UR rejects automatic inflationary uplifts in favour of periodic, evidence-based reviews of payment levels and that payment levels are only amended after consultation with stakeholders.

7.45 A consumer representative was of the view that consumers would prefer RPI rather CPIH, to be used as the basis for inflationary uplifts. It stated that RPI more closely reflects the cost pressures faced by rural and agricultural businesses, particularly in relation to energy, fuel and operational inputs, and is therefore more appropriate for maintaining the real-terms value of GSS payments over time.

UR response

7.46 We agree with the consumer representative stakeholder responses that the payments must be updated to be more reflective of the current financial environment.

7.47 We welcome that some suppliers were supportive for the principle of annual inflationary uplifts, while noting also some of the concerns raised by suppliers, which are addressed further below.

7.48 We welcome also the supplier feedback that they considered the methodology for inflationary uplifts was reasonable.

7.49 We agree that it is important that electricity companies are given appropriate lead time to remain compliant with increased payment levels each year. As set out in the 2025 consultation paper, notification of the annual inflationary adjustment and a table of the new payment amounts to be paid for each GSS Regulation for the upcoming Regulatory year will be published by UR in March of each year to be applied from 1 April onwards.

7.50 In relation to stakeholder concerns regarding the financial impacts of inflationary uplifts, we have analysed the GSS payments from the returns received for the 12 month period between Oct-24 to Sep-25 (excluding Storm Éowyn payments) and based on this information, we anticipate the likely impact of the inflationary changes would pose minimal financial risk to the organisations subject to GSS payments, provided they perform their duties to a reasonable standard.

7.51 We note the supplier proposal that payment levels are instead reviewed periodically and only amended after consultation with stakeholders. However, we consider that annual inflationary adjustments mean that more timely adjustments can be made to payment levels. Additionally, for GSS payments to encourage companies to meet a required standard, we consider that these payments must be aligned to the current financial and economic climate otherwise there is a potential for reduced incentive to meet the standard.

7.52 We note also the feedback from one stakeholder that the costs of these payments would be recovered through tariffs ultimately increasing bills for consumers. For clarification, the costs of making GSS payments for failure to meet any standard will not be recoverable from consumers. The purpose of GSS payments is to acknowledge the inconvenience caused to the consumer when the electricity company fails to deliver against a standard of performance for which it is reasonably expected to meet. UR is of the view that it would not be appropriate, nor incentivise company performance if customers ultimately had to fund a scheme for service underperformance.

7.53 We understand the consumer representative's point on RPI, however in the early 2010s a review of inflation metrics carried out by ONS determined that the RPI index does not meet international standards for measuring inflation and as such RPI was deemed an inaccurate measure of inflation. A subsequent piece of work carried out by Paul Johnson, Director of the Institute of Fiscal Studies on behalf of the UKSA (UK Statistics Authority) concluded that 'government and regulators should work towards ending the use of the RPI as soon as practicable'.

7.54 In 2019, the UKSA proposed changing the approach to calculating RPI so it would align with CPIH, effectively meaning that RPI would be replaced by CPIH. The then Chancellor indicated its consent, provided the change was implemented no earlier than February 2030. The UKSA signalled intent to ask the government for permission to make the change at the earliest practicable time in 2030.

7.55 Therefore, using CPIH is the most reliable inflationary measure at this time and many of our price controls either operate in CPIH or will be moving from RPI to CPIH.

<u>UR decision</u>

7.56 Annual inflationary adjustments to payments will be introduced applying the methodology set out in the consultation paper.

7.57 Notification of the annual inflationary adjustment and a table of the payment amounts to be paid for each GSS Regulation for the upcoming

Regulatory Year will be published by UR in March to be applied from 1 April of each year.

7.58 The first inflationary adjustment will be made for the first regulatory year following the implementation of the new GSS.

8. Reporting and monitoring

8.1 Within the 2023 consultation UR stated that all payments made under the new Regulations are reported on annually (including goodwill payments) to provide UR with a measurable marker of performance.

8.2 We stated that annual reporting for electricity distributors will be completed within the Regulatory Instruction and Guidance (RIGS) templates.

8.3 We stated that annual reporting for electricity suppliers will be completed within the Retail Energy Market Monitoring (REMM) templates in line with reporting for gas supply GSS. We added that UR will provide draft REMM reporting templates for completion in line with the arrangements under the REMM (2015) framework.

8.4 We stated that UR will consider whether to publish annual figures on company performance under the GSS regime on our website.

Consultation feedback

8.5 A consumer representative was of the view that reports from suppliers and the distribution network operator should be published to provide transparency about how each company is performing.

UR response

8.6 UR is of the view that there would be benefits for consumers in publishing GSS and OSP returns. However, we consider that there should be a bedding in period of the updated GSS and OSP before publishing these returns. This position will be kept under review.

8.7 Reporting templates for suppliers and NIE Networks for the updated GSS and OSP will be provided with the metering decision paper. Timelines for submissions will also be provided in this paper.

9. Implementation and Next Steps

9.1 The non-metering GSS Regulations will now be prepared by UR for presentation to DfE.

9.2 A separate decision paper on the metering GSS and OSP will be published following confirmation from DfE of the approach for amending the primary legislation on metering responsibilities. The metering GSS Regulations will then be prepared by UR for presentation to DfE.

9.3 Further clarification regarding the practical and operational delivery of the standards will be provided in the proposed new GSS Regulations.

9.4 UR's approach and timelines for presenting the proposed new GSS Regulations to DfE for its consent will be informed by DfE's approach to amending the primary legislation on metering responsibilities.

9.5 If it consents to the new Regulations, DfE will have the responsibility of laying the Regulations before the Northern Ireland Assembly. Regulations made under Article 42 of the Electricity Order are subject to negative resolution, as per Article 93(2) of the Electricity Order[64].

9.6 UR will specify the OSP for both electricity suppliers and the electricity distributor in Determinations made under Article 43 and 43A of The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992. Timelines for the implementation of the updated OSP will align with those for the implementation of the updated GSS Regulations.

[64] The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992

Glossary

Term	Description
Consumer Council	Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
CPIH	The Consumer Prices Index which includes owner occupiers' housing costs
DfE	The Department for the Economy
Electricity distributor	Refers to any company with a licence to distribute electricity in Northern Ireland, namely Northern Ireland Electricity Networks
EMAWG	Electricity Metering Amendment Working Group
Electricity Order	The Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1992
Electricity supplier	Refers to any company with a licence to supply electricity in Northern Ireland
EQIA	Equality Impact Assessment
GB	Great Britain
Gas GSS	Gas (Individual Standards of Performance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014
GSS	Guaranteed Standards of Service
Northern Ireland Assembly	The devolved legislature for Northern Ireland
NIE Networks	Northern Ireland Electricity Networks
OSP	Overall Standards of Performance
RIA	Regulatory Impact Assessment
RNIA	Rural Needs Impact Assessment
Storm Éowyn	The storm which Ireland and United Kingdom experienced on 24th January 2025
UR	The Utility Regulator
2023 Consultation	'Review of Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service and Overall Standards of Performance' consultation paper as published by UR on 10 August 2023