

## Small Business Energy Charter – FAQs

### **1. Who are the commitments in the charter applicable to?**

The commitments in the charter are applicable to all small business consumers. For electricity, this generally means consuming less than 50 MWh per annum. For gas, it generally means consuming less than 73.2 MWh per annum. The full licence definitions are set out below.

| Licence                             | Term                     | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Northern Ireland Gas Supply         | small business consumers | A business consumer who is supplied with gas and consumes less than 73.2 MWh per annum based on the Annual Quantity of the supply meter point as defined in the Network Code.<br>This does not include a business consumer who is a single legal entity with more than one premises where the total gas consumption of those premises is more than 73.2 MWh per annum.                                                                                                                                |
| Northern Ireland Electricity Supply | small business customers | A non-domestic customer who is supplied with electricity and consumes less than 50 MWh per annum based on its most recent previous actual 12 months consumption or, where such data is not available, the estimated consumption used for customer billing or the Actual or Estimated Usage Factor.<br>This does not include a non-domestic customer who is a single legal entity with more than one premises where the total electricity consumption of those premises is more than 50 MWh per annum. |

### **2. What does making a financial commitment to a third-party hardship fund involve and how much will be contributed? Who will look after the hardship fund and how can consumers get this support?**

All suppliers have committed to supporting a third-party hardship fund for consumers in need. Contributions will be made to an external fund or to another charity of the supplier's choosing. Suppliers will inform UR at the start of the Charter period who their donation will be going to.

The amounts being donated are at the discretion of each supplier. The fund providers decide who is eligible for support and how they can access help. These funds are available to those who are struggling most with their gas and electricity payments. We are confident that these charities will be able to get this support to those most in need.

### **3. Can I discuss contract renewal options in the middle of a contract?**

Options available to you will depend on the terms and conditions of your contract, and your supplier can discuss these with you. If you are struggling within a contract, it's important to let your supplier know so that they can provide you with suitable advice.

### **4. What are the alternative options to disconnection?**

It is important to engage with your supplier as early as possible when experiencing affordability or debt issues, to allow them to provide support and advice.

Suppliers may be able to offer repayment plans and can discuss alternative contracts and tariff types (where a change can be facilitated contractually). They can also signpost you to other third-party support services and provide practical advice on energy efficiency measures that could help you to reduce your energy bills.

### **5. What should I do to compare energy contracts?**

You can contact your gas or electricity supplier directly to discuss the contract and tariff options available to you. Suppliers also publish small business tariff rates on their websites, helping you compare deals and make informed choices about your energy contract. If you know your annual usage (in kWh) or your annual spend (in £), the interactive tool can estimate your energy costs over 1, 3, 6 and 12 months.

### **6. What is a Third Party Intermediary?**

When we are referring to Third Party Intermediaries (TPIs), we are referring to organisations or individuals that can help customers compare, negotiate, arrange, or manage energy contracts. TPIs may be described as brokers, consultants, sales agents, price comparison websites, bundled service providers, or energy advice companies.

TPIs can be useful for small business that want support to understand the energy market, compare supplier offers or negotiate a new energy contract. However, if you are working with a TPI, it is important that you understand what service the TPI is offering, how they are paid and their contract terms. For more information about TPIs, visit our [website](#).

### **7. Why are the commitments in the Small Business Energy Charter voluntary?**

The Charter provides additional protections for Small Business Consumers during the winter period, over and above suppliers' existing regulatory obligations. The

voluntary approach allows commitments to be reviewed each year and adapted in response to emerging consumer needs and market circumstances.

## **8. What will be done to make sure suppliers honour their commitments?**

Since suppliers have made a voluntary commitment to the charter, there is every reason to believe they will act in accordance with it. Utility Regulator will nevertheless monitor supplier behaviour to ensure they honour the commitments they have made and will remain in touch with them during the charter period. We will also meet with suppliers at the end of this period to discuss the impact of the charter on consumers.

## **9. What should consumers do if they need any help or support?**

You should contact your supplier directly if you need help or support. All the information that you need should be on your supplier's website and this might be the quickest way to get the information that you require.

We want to encourage consumers to talk to their supplier if they are concerned about paying their bills. If you are worried that you cannot afford to make a payment, get in touch as soon as possible. Your electricity and gas supplier will treat you with empathy and respect and will consider reasonable repayment plan options. All suppliers have trained staff who are happy to help. Whether you're worried about paying your bills, or you are in debt to your energy supplier already, if you engage with your supplier they will work with you.

If you are struggling to pay your energy bills or experiencing debt difficulties, you should contact your supplier directly for help or support. Advice NI can also provide free business debt advice and information. Visit Advice NI's [website](#).

If you have an issue with your energy supplier, contact them first so they have the opportunity to resolve it. If your complaint remains unresolved, or you are not satisfied with their response, the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland may be able to help. Visit the Consumer Council's [website](#) or call 0800 121 6022.