



Federation of Small Businesses
Northern Ireland Policy Unit
Cathedral Chambers
143 Royal Avenue
Belfast
BT1 1FH

Neil Bingham, Esq
NIAUR
Queen's House
14 Queen Street
Belfast
BT1 6ED

20th September 2010

Dear Sir

Re: Consultation on the options for co-ordinating the relinquishing of firmus energy's supply exclusivity in the ten towns area

The Federation of Small Businesses is Northern Ireland's largest business organisation with 8000 members, across all industry sectors.

The small business sector is the backbone of the local economy, with 95% of businesses employing fewer than 10 people. It is already the case that NI businesses have the highest overhead costs in the United Kingdom and, given the current economic climate, it is imperative that all possible measures are taken to manage these costs and, where possible, create the market conditions that will lead to reductions.

It is important that small business customers have access to alternative suppliers. All customers should be able to shop around for the best possible deal available to them. It is the view of the FSB that competition should be encouraged and that there should be no barriers to those who wish to enter the market.

Energy costs are an unavoidable overhead for businesses and, therefore, it is critical that a competitive and straightforward price structure should exist that can foster competition and ultimately grow the size of the marketplace.

We do not accept the proposition that introducing competition would be confusing to business customers – businesspeople are well-practised at sourcing best deals. If clear information, practical advice and guidance are in place, consumers can easily make effective choices.

The FSB is opposed to closed markets believing that, ultimately, it is the customer who suffers. Therefore we would ask that open competition is established as soon as possible.

We hope you find these comments useful and look forward with interest to learning of the findings from this consultation.

Yours sincerely,

Wilfred Mitchell OBE

Northern Ireland Policy Chairman