

033 Individual response

Sent: Wednesday, August 23, 2023 4:10 PM

To: Retail Stakeholder Team <RetailStakeholderTeam@ofgem.gov.uk>

Subject: Ofgem's Consumer Standards Consultation Response

Hello

I am the only energy advisor for the 15th largest Housing Association in the country (redacted name)

We currently have around 39,000 properties and our customers rely heavily on the support they get from energy advice services such as provided by CSE

I would endorse fully the comments that CSE have made

<https://www.cse.org.uk/news/make-it-easier-for-us-to-contact-energy-companies-cse-urges-ofgem/>

Energy advisors are a useful tool for the customer and the energy company. We act as interpreters explaining the language and processes of Ofgem. the Energy Ombudsman and the Energy Companies and advocate for the customer

We support the resolution of complex complaints and often we are the only resource or support the customer has.

Many of our customers complain that it is near impossible to get through some energy companies currently and I on a daily basis struggle to get through to most of the energy companies.

I can give you an example yesterday I was supporting a customer with learning disabilities where the lack of an agency telephone number or email is a barrier to resolving a situation and this puts the customer at risk as he needs to put his medication in a fridge and he is at high risk of disconnection

Yesterday I was told the customers Smart PAYG meter had stopped communicating again we had previously put a complaint about this two months ago the meter was then communicating again but yesterday I was informed it had stopped communicating . The customers was left solely reliant on his neighbours adding the top up code to his meter which he got when he paid for his credit He can't see to add the codes .Last week I was told because he could not get support he went off supply .By yesterday he was back on supply but this was likely to happen again and his neighbour was concerned as they were going on holiday .

I proceeded to rang SSE 4 times on one occasion being put through to the credit team who said they couldn't assist then put me through to the call waiting for the PAYG team and the call ended .Each time I rang I had waits over half an hour and then the phone call was terminated by SSE on each occasion .I also tried to get through on SSE CHAT and there was a long wait on the CHAT .When I finally got through SSE could only offer to add emergency

credit to his card and as they stated they would not send a meter operative out until he moved to Ovo unless he went off supply

The emergency credit to his card was not going to assist as they and he could not get his emergency credit to his meter

The only option he was left with they stated with was to wait and try and ring someone to help him to ring SSE when he went off supply Previously when he had tried to ring he was not offered support to get his meter to communicate and he said he was told he had to wait until meter transferred to Ovo

This gentleman was on the PSR which included his sight issues his learning disability and his need to put his medication in the fridge .I like most energy advisors have a large caseload since the energy crisis and spending an entire afternoon trying to resolve a situation meant that other customers did not get support .It also meant that if I have the same issues again of speaking to someone at SSE I might not have the time available to do this when he runs out of credit so there is a risk of customer being off supply for long period of time

Needless to say I have put a formal complaint into SSEE and have mentioned the issues of contacting them yesterday which I could only do when I had managed to make contact so I could be added as a third party

Apart from the issues that long call waits and issues with energy company call systems prevent customers from getting resolution to their issues ,we as energy advisors are evaluated by how many people we see, how much money we enable people to save ,the income maximised and outcomes such as adding people to the PSR .It could affect our positions and funding when we see a reduced number of people due to the poor customer service availability of many energy companies .We are left unable to provide energy advice to as many people as we are able as so much of our time is taken up just trying to get through to customers on behalf of our clients. Wherever possible we signpost customers to ring/email or contact through their app the energy companies and we provide information about what to ask but many customers particularly those who are older or with health or disabilities cannot get through or don't use the internet and we are left making choices who gets to get our support first due to the time this takes

It does not make good business sense for the energy companies not to provide direct access telephone or email routes for energy advisors as our support is usually funded elsewhere so it's a free service that supports their customers and they are not supporting that valuable service .I hope this comment is of assistance

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