

Ofgem Heat Networks Consultation Team,

As someone living in Barking Riverside and using a heat network, I want to contribute to this consultation to highlight some of the pricing and service issues we deal with under the current system.

At the moment we pay a daily standing charge of £1.50 for heating and hot water. This charge applies even when no energy is being used, including periods when we are away. Because it is a prepayment system, we can return to our flats and find there is no heating at all, simply because the daily charge has built up while the property was empty. We are also not allowed to set up a payment plan, so if credit runs out, we have no way to spread the cost or avoid losing access. There is no flexibility in how we pay, no alternative to prepayment, and no option for retrospective payment, even in urgent situations.

There is also no transparency around what this daily charge actually covers. It increases significantly each year, but we are not given a clear explanation of what we are paying for or why the amount keeps rising. We believe there should be a cap or stricter limits on how much this charge can increase annually.

Another issue is that we do not have a direct contract with the supplier. Our contracts go through the freeholder, which means we cannot raise issues with the supplier directly or contact them in emergencies. This setup makes it difficult to resolve problems or get support, even though we are the ones paying for the service.

There is also a lack of provision for vulnerable customers. Residents who are disabled or have specific needs are not offered any form of protection or access to a social tariff. There is no way to pause charges during emergencies, even when a resident may be physically unable to top up or access support. Upon having liaised with L&Q, it became clear they have no department, representative or strategy for supporting vulnerable or disabled customers. Their online system frequently goes down, making it impossible to top up when needed, and access to social tariffs has evidently been passed onto the freeholder, who is a building development company and therefore does not manage these queries. These gaps leave vulnerable residents exposed and without support, which is especially concerning given the scale of the development and the number of people affected.

Thank you for taking this into account.

Kind regards

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