



Call for input response

National Energy Action response to Ofgem's Consumer Outcomes

About National Energy Action

National Energy Action¹ works across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland to ensure that everyone in the UK² can afford to live in a warm and safe home. To achieve this, we aim to improve access to energy and debt advice, provide training, support energy efficiency policies, local projects and co-ordinate other related services which can help change lives.

Background to the response

National Energy Action welcomes Ofgem's intent to define clear consumer outcomes and simplify regulation while protecting people from harm. We recognise recent gains in average satisfaction, but they are not shared equally; outcomes remain worse for people in vulnerable circumstances. For that reason, and consistent with our previous submissions, we do not support a move away from prescriptive rules on principle, particularly regarding consumers in vulnerable situations. In an essential service with entrenched information and power imbalances, clear and enforceable rules are needed to prevent foreseeable harm, ensure consistent minimum standards, and give certainty to consumers. Outcomes and principles can add value, but they should complement rules rather than replace them.

Summary of our response

NEA sees a hybrid approach as workable, provided there is a strong, enforceable backstop of prescriptive rules and Guaranteed Standards of Performance (GSOPs) in high-harm areas. NEA supports placing a small number of tightly defined, measurable outcomes into the licence to focus market participants on real-world results and create space for innovation, but the backstop must remain firm where incentives are weak, or the risk of detriment is significant.

This requires non-regression on core minimums, with targeted licence rules and GSOPs retained or strengthened in discrete, high harm areas. Priority areas include affordability and debt management; billing accuracy and timeliness; metering and reconnection support including prepayment protections; vulnerability and Priority Services; complaints and redress; switching and credit balances; customer contact and accessibility; and safety and appointments.

If a more outcomes-based model is pursued, its success depends on clear definitions, proportionate evidence standards, and consistent enforcement, set alongside the existing backstops.

Ofgem should keep the framework tight and practical, with clear outcome definitions, proportionate evidence standards and consistent audit trails, supported by a simple public map that shows how each material risk is controlled across outcomes, licence rules and GSOPs. Above

all, Ofgem should avoid diluting existing protections or substituting clear rules with subjective judgments.

Answers to the call for input questions

Question 1. In your view, what are the key factors we should consider if we are updating our regulatory framework for retail energy suppliers, keeping in mind the balance between our growth and net zero goals, and consumer interest duties?

The key consideration should be a hybrid, outcomes-based framework underpinned by non-regression on core, prescriptive protections. The regulation of an essential service requires clarity, predictability and enforceability at its heart. GSOPs provide simple, time-bound minimums with automatic compensation, and targeted licence conditions remain necessary where harms are discrete and foreseeable. Outcomes can help set direction and allow firms to innovate, but they must complement rules rather than replace them.

Any reform should also reflect current market dynamics. The number and variety of smart tariffs and new tariff structures is increasing as the system shifts toward greater flexibility, with rapid growth in domestic time-of-use adoption reported over the last year. This indicates that the current regulatory approach is not, by itself, stifling innovation. A modern framework should enable this trajectory while ensuring that efforts to accelerate innovation do not dilute protections in high-detriment areas. Outcomes can foster innovation and allow flexibility, while GSOPs and targeted licence rules continue to anchor the non-negotiables.

Experience suggests that a principles-only approach does not land consistently in practice. Interpretation-led delivery has left some households facing persistent problems in areas such as billing accuracy and timeliness, access to support when in difficulty, recognition of advocates and basic contactability. That reality underpins our view that clear backstops remain essential, even as outcomes are used to encourage better ways of working.

To build confidence, any streamlining should be evidence-led. Where Ofgem proposes to retire prescription, it should identify the specific clauses and explain why they are unnecessary and publish a simple map showing how each material risk will be controlled under outcomes, licence rules or GSOPs. The framework should be tight and practical, with clear outcome definitions and proportionate evidence standards so results are applied consistently across the market.

Inclusion must be explicit. While the market is bringing forward more smart and flexible offers, the benefits are not equally accessible. People without smart meters, those who cannot afford enabling technologies, and many prepayment users still face limited or harder-to-navigate options. The Consumer Outcomes should therefore make it clear that the transition must work for everyone, with expectations that protect vulnerable and digitally excluded consumers and ensure parity of core protections for prepayment customers.

A hybrid regime can balance growth, innovation and consumer interest, and ensure that when things go wrong consumers receive certain and timely redress.

Question 2. Why do you think there is such a divergence of satisfaction rates across different consumer cohorts?

There are three elements to consider.

First, affordability pressures remain high for households whose incomes have not recovered from the cost-of-living crisis. Even with prices lower than the peak, energy remains expensive relative to many budgets, and the buildup of arrears constrains choices. Ofgem's published data shows

that domestic consumer energy debt reached £4.43 billion by Q2 2025, with roughly three-quarters in arrears with no repayment plan in place. That scale of unresolved debt is both a symptom and a driver of weaker experiences for the most financially constrained households.

Second, there are the beginnings of a market where more affluent customers who can adopt smart technology and flexible tariffs often access better service and can reduce bills by shifting loads. People who cannot easily adopt those tools, including many on prepayment and many with lower digital confidence, do not see the same benefits. Practical barriers reinforce this divide, such as some suppliers making prepayment tariffs harder to view or switch to online while credit tariffs can be compared and switched digitally in minutes. Consumers also struggle to compare new smart offers because product information is not presented in a standardised, like for like way across suppliers. Outcomes should therefore explicitly include expectations on comparability of information and accessibility of channels so that engagement is possible on fair terms as the market evolves.

Third, access and support practices still vary widely. Some firms now exceed minimums, but households in vulnerable circumstances face long resolution times for billing corrections, difficulty reaching the right team at the first attempt and uneven recognition of appointed advocates. Targeted licence prescriptions and GSOPs should be kept for high detriment events, combined with outcome measures that surface cohort differences rather than masking them in an aggregate average.

Question 3. The Consumer Outcomes have been developed based on what industry, charities, consumer groups and consumers have told us they need to cover. Do you agree that these outcomes cover the most important expectations consumers have of energy suppliers?

Broadly yes.

The set reflects what Ofgem's engagement and commissioned research describe as core expectations of accessibility, responsibility and transparency. To make implementation land consistently across the market, two practical emphases will help.

First, within the outcomes on prices and on service quality, it should be unmistakable that affordability and a small, consistently measurable baseline of customer service are part of the expected experience for everyone, not only for those who can navigate complex offers. That is consistent with Ofgem's intent and with the evidence that satisfaction gains are not yet uniform across cohorts.

Second, as flexible products and smart tariffs expand, consumers need to be able to understand and compare what is on offer without specialist knowledge. We therefore support an explicit expectation that suppliers present key information for smart tariffs and services in a standard way that allows straightforward, like for like comparison. This is a practical enabler of informed engagement and sits squarely within the transparency aim of the Outcomes package.

Finally, our advice work shows that many people in vulnerable circumstances rely on a trusted advocate to resolve problems with their supplier. In too many cases, engagement is delayed by slow or inconsistent recognition of those advocates due to weak record keeping or unclear processes. The Outcomes should make it clear that suppliers are expected to recognise appointed advocates promptly and maintain adequate records so the right person can act on the customer's behalf without friction. This is a modest operational improvement that directly supports the intent of outcomes on accessibility and fair treatment while leaving space for innovation in how firms deliver it.

Question 4. Do you think we should streamline or consolidate the Consumer Outcomes further and, if so, which should we prioritise?

Streamlining is helpful where it increases clarity and sharpens delivery. We suggest consolidating the set around four consumer facing clusters that can be evidenced with a small number of measures: affordability and billing accuracy, access and responsiveness, fair treatment and redress, and resilience. Each cluster should have plain English definitions, simple measurement, and a published escalation route if performance persistently falls short. This keeps the regime light without weakening protection.

Question 5. Do you agree with the explanations provided of the Consumer Outcomes in the appendices of this call for input? Do they help you understand the intent of the outcomes?

The appendices provide a useful narrative on intent. For enforcement and delivery, they should be accompanied by standard KPI definitions, precise timelines and mapping that allocates each material issue to outcomes, licence prescription or GSOP minimums. This will reduce disputes, make audit efficient and guard against overlapping or missing protections.

Question 6. Why do you think these outcomes are not materialising consistently for all consumer groups given that they are in line with our existing rules?

Because several practical blockers stop principles and existing rules from landing consistently in day-to-day delivery:

- **Ambiguity and uneven interpretation:** Broad principles are read differently across firms, so performance diverges without crisp minimums in high-harm areas. Ofgem's Consumer Outcomes paper explicitly weighs where prescription is still needed, and its 2023 Consumer Standards decision added firmer access and transparency duties for this reason.
- **Debt pressures strain service:** Domestic energy debt reached £4.43bn by Q2 2025, with around three-quarters in arrears. That environment slows complex case handling and makes discretionary protections less reliable than clear, automatic redress.
- **New frictions from smart/flexible offers:** As time-of-use and other smart tariffs grow, low awareness, complex choices and inconsistent product information make it hard for some consumers to engage on fair terms, even when firms are nominally compliant. Ofgem's research and parallel evidence on consumer-led flexibility highlight these barriers.
- **Gaps expose the limits of principles-only approaches:** Where harms are acute and time critical, Ofgem has had to add specific duties (for example, activating 24-hour metering support for customers off supply due to meter faults) and is reviewing GSOPs that have not been fully refreshed since 2015. Both moves recognise that targeted minimums remain essential alongside outcomes.

Question 7. Do you think some outcomes are more important for consumers than others?

Yes. Affordability, treatment of debt, accurate and timely billing, and rapid, accessible support when off supply or in difficulty are foundational for consumers. These areas are closest to people's lived experience and should carry the strongest safeguards. They should be delivered through outcomes that focus on results and are supported by targeted prescriptions and GSOPs that prevent predictable harm and guarantee redress when service fails.

Question 8. Do you see an opportunity for outcomes, though not necessarily the Consumer Outcomes set out in this call for input, to be applied to wider market participants? Who should they apply to and why?

There is an opportunity to extend outcomes to parts of the retail market that have a material impact on the consumer journey, particularly in data access and consent, switching and metering support, flexibility provision, aggregation, and load control. As these type of market participants expected to play a larger role in the retail space over time, there is a strong case for exploring a set of outcomes, at a minimum, to apply to these areas of the market, beyond the currently proposed load control licensing regime. Outcomes that focus on clarity, speed and reliability of these processes could improve accountability across organisational boundaries and reduce harmful handoffs.

Question 9. Do you have a preferred approach among those outlined below or should we retain the current framework? Do you have an alternative suggestion? Please explain your reasoning.

NEA does not support shifting away from prescriptive rules on principle, particularly regarding consumers in vulnerable situations. Energy retail is an essential service with entrenched information and power asymmetries and a track record of uneven delivery for people in vulnerable circumstances. In that context, clear and enforceable rules and Guaranteed Standards of Performance are necessary to prevent foreseeable harm, secure consistent minimum standards, and give certainty to consumers. Outcomes and principles can add value by focusing attention on real world results, but they should complement rules rather than replace them. Approaches that rely mainly on interpretation after the event risk slower redress, greater dispute, and gaps that only become visible once harm has occurred.

Our preferred model is a hybrid, and we offer constructive feedback to make it work. We support inserting a small number of tightly defined, measurable outcomes into the licence to steer firms toward results that matter to consumers, but only alongside a strong, enforceable backstop of targeted licence rules and Guaranteed Standards of Performance in high harm areas. We do not support wholesale removal of existing licence requirements or any option that removes GSOPs. Where Ofgem proposes to retire a rule, this should proceed only when the specific clause is identified and an equal or stronger protection is demonstrably provided under outcomes or GSOPs, with a clear map that shows how each material risk is controlled. Without that clarity, there is a material risk of protection gaps discovered only after detriment.

To avoid regression, a short list of non-negotiable minimums should remain in licence or regulation, anchored by GSOPs where the event and harm are discrete. At minimum, this includes the 12-month back billing cap, timely and accurate first and final bills with prompt refunds, 24/7 metering support and time-bound reconnection where meter faults cause off supply, and swift implementation of Energy Ombudsman remedies. Affordability and debt practices should be underpinned by auditable obligations, including affordable repayment assessments and breathing space checks before collections progress. These standards deter failure, reduce disputes, and guarantee automatic redress when service falls short, which is precisely where consumers need certainty rather than judgment calls.

Guidance and reputational incentives can support improvement but are not sufficient on their own to secure adequate standards across the whole market. Guidance should clarify definitions, timelines, and evidential requirements so outcomes are applied consistently, and should not be a substitute for enforceable minimums. Reputational tools can add transparency, but they cannot replace binding protections for households who face the greatest risks and have the least ability to absorb service failures.

As the market evolves, particularly with growth in smart tariffs and flexibility services, the hybrid approach must hold firm on the protections that matter most to people. Outcomes can encourage innovation in how suppliers deliver service, but core minimums on billing accuracy, timely correction and redress, reconnection after meter faults, and fair treatment of customers in debt must remain non-negotiable. Accessibility and comparability should continue to be explicit expectations so that consumers who are vulnerable or digitally excluded are not left behind as offers become more complex.

How this balances growth, innovation and consumer interest

A hybrid model gives suppliers flexibility to innovate in service delivery and tariff design while firm minimums remain wherever consumers need certainty. Outcomes can drive novel design and faster fixes, but they must not dilute existing protections or replace clear rules with subjective assessments.

Question 10. a) What level of action/intervention do you feel would be proportionate to drive up customer service in the non domestic sector? Does it differ from domestic?

N/A

Question 11. Do you think a voluntary approach – where suppliers make a public commitment to deliver the Consumer Outcomes without formal regulatory change could be effective? What conditions would need to be in place for this to work?

No. A voluntary approach will not deliver consistent protection or level-up weaker performers in an essential service. The incentives are too uneven, the costs of better service fall on individual firms, and consumers cannot reliably tell the difference between a promise and delivery without a binding backstop. Outcomes only have value when they sit on top of enforceable minimums and clear consequences.

In practical terms, the areas that matter most to people are the least suited to voluntary arrangements. Back billing limits, final bill and refund timeliness, reconnection after meter faults, and the timely delivery of Ombudsman remedies are high detriment events that require certainty and automatic redress. Leaving these to public commitments would expose consumers to avoidable harm and would disadvantage suppliers that invest in doing the right thing.

Question 12. Could a more outcomes based regulatory framework benefit the supply market? Do you think this kind of approach could unlock innovation and growth? Please provide examples.

Yes, provided outcomes are tight and paired with hard backstops. Outcomes can give suppliers room to tailor delivery for households with different needs and characteristics, while prescriptive rules and GSOPs provide a floor on minimum protections. The value is in allowing flexibility in how good service is achieved, not in weakening what must be achieved.

An example of this could be:

Fair and sustainable payment support: An outcome on affordability could enable personalised repayment schedules, budgeting tools and proactive outreach based on risk signals, while firm backstops require standardised affordability assessments, breathing space checks before collections and clear limits on charges.

Question 13. Are there specific licence conditions where less prescription could benefit the retail market without compromising consumer protection?

At this time, NEA does not support removing prescription in any area of the supply licence. The current risk environment, the evidence of uneven outcomes across cohorts, and Ofgem's own recent decisions all point to the need to maintain targeted, enforceable minimums, not retire them. Our position is that, at an absolute minimum, prescription should remain in place wherever harms are foreseeable, discrete and significant.

a) For suppliers: are there any areas where you find guidance helpful or unhelpful?

N/A

Question 14. Are there areas where prescriptive rules should remain in place? If so, why?

Yes. NEA supports retaining or strengthening prescription where events are discrete, harm per incident is high and incentives are weak. Priority examples include prepayment rules, such as robust checks before any involuntary installation or remote switch, rapid restoration where meters fail, and access to emergency and friendly credit. This extends to the 12-month back billing limit, final bill timelines and prompt refunds with GSOP compensation for breaches, the 24-hour metering support duty for customers off supply due to meter faults, and the GSOP £40 automatic compensation level with an additional £40 if payment is late. These instruments deter failure, resolve disputes quickly and keep the floor of protection visible and enforceable.

Alongside these, clear rules should continue to apply in the following areas so that protections are certain, auditable and delivered consistently across the market:

- **Billing and information:** accurate first and final bills, clear bill content, limits on estimated billing, fair notice of price or tariff changes.
- **Metering and smart metering:** prompt fault diagnosis and replacement, accuracy obligations, safe installation standards, and clear controls on smart meter mode changes that require consent, welfare checks and post-event review.
- **Reconnection and prepayment support:** time-bound reconnection after supplier or meter faults, the prepayment protections package including consent and vulnerability checks, minimum emergency and friendly hours credit, and 24/7 top up access.
- **Affordability and debt:** affordable repayment assessments, breathing space checks before collections, and prohibitions on punitive fees or inappropriate security deposits.
- **Vulnerability and Priority Services:** proactive identification, reasonable adjustments and protections against disconnection for households in vulnerable circumstances.
- **Complaints and redress:** response timelines, fair escalation and binding, timely implementation of Energy Ombudsman remedies.
- **Switching, credit balances and direct debits:** error free transfers, controls on unjustified objections, automatic refund of credit balances within set timeframes, evidence-based direct debit setting.
- **Customer contact and accessibility:** minimum opening hours, maximum response times across channels and accessible routes for non-digital users.
- **Safety, siteworks and appointments:** defined appointment windows, compensation for missed appointments and time-bound emergency visits.

These prescriptions prevent foreseeable harm in high detriment scenarios, provide certainty to consumers and compliance teams, and ensure that outcomes are delivered on a stable, enforceable base.

Question 15. What factors should we consider to determine whether specific rules are best delivered through prescription, principles or outcomes?

Adopt a transparent test that considers detriment severity and frequency, incentive alignment, measurability, enforceability and delivery cost. Where detriment is high, incentives diverge from consumer interest and events are discrete, prescription and GSOPs are most appropriate. Where behaviours differ by model, but measurable results can be audited, outcomes can play a role. Principles are best used to cover genuine grey areas and should be supported by guidance and examples. Publish the test and apply it consistently to build confidence in the new architecture.

Question 16. Which of the monitoring approaches we outline below would be the most effective for monitoring supplier performance against the Consumer Outcomes? Are there alternative approaches? Please provide evidence.

The best fit is a combination of Ofgem's proposed supplier reporting and a regulator view of market performance, supported by proportionate reputational incentives.

In practice, this means: publish a short, common set of outcome measures for every supplier, using plain English definitions that Ofgem sets, and present them through a single regulator view so comparisons are easy. This aligns with the call for input's direction to keep things simple and consistent.

To add to transparency, link the published view to reputational incentives already in place, notably the website display of Citizens Advice star ratings, so consumers see service information in one place and poor performance carries a visible cost.

Keep the reporting burden proportionate by focusing on a small number of measures, adding cohort splits where risk of hidden detriment is higher, for example for prepayment and Priority Services Register customers. Use Ofgem's consumer research in parallel to test whether the published results match lived experience and to spot gaps early.

Finally, integrate GSOP signals with the outcomes picture, so discrete high-harm failures are visible alongside trend measures. This ensures that monitoring supports outcomes, minimum standards, and enforcement as one coherent system.

Question 17. How do we best measure our success as to whether we have:

- a) Improved consumer outcomes and achieved our ambitions for customer service and**
- b) Reduced regulatory burden and encouraged growth and innovation**

For a), track changes in outcome KPIs and supplier dispersion, and monitor the gap in satisfaction between vulnerable cohorts and the average, as well as monitoring overall satisfaction over time. Use survey evidence and existing data gathering programmes to validate whether perceived service quality is rising and monitor complaint and Ombudsman escalation volumes to ensure that improvements are tangible and persistent.

For b), measure the number and scope of prescriptive clauses that can be safely simplified or retired, the cost and timing of system changes required to implement new obligations, and the uptake of new models and channels launched since the outcomes went live. Report these measures annually alongside the dashboard to maintain transparency about trade-offs.

Question 18. Is there anything Ofgem can do to improve how we work and engage with you as a stakeholder on retail energy supply policy and regulation?

While it is not possible for organisations of our size to respond to every publication relevant to our focus area, we will continue to provide comprehensive written responses on high priority strands. Where resource is tight, a short 1:1 session with the relevant policy leads, followed by a concise note from us setting out our asks, positions, and concerns, can be a practical alternative to a full submission. This keeps momentum, ensures clarity on what Ofgem needs to decide and reduces process overhead on both sides.

References and notes

¹ For more information visit: www.nea.org.uk.

² National Energy Action also works alongside our sister charity Energy Action Scotland (EAS) to ensure we collectively have a UK-wide reach.