

23<sup>rd</sup> June 2026

# Ofgem – Guaranteed Standards of Performance Research

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Qualitative research with domestic consumers  
Report of findings

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## 1. Executive summary

The Guaranteed Standards of Performance (GSOP) framework outlines automatic compensations payments made to energy consumers when certain service standards are not met. This covers specific service areas relating to energy suppliers, distribution network operators (DNOs)<sup>1</sup> and gas distribution networks (GDNs)<sup>2</sup>.

Ofgem is reviewing the energy supplier GSOP to understand where change may be required to improve the GSOP effectiveness and purpose in the wider context of its [Consumer Confidence Programme](#) to set out what good service should look like and how Ofgem regulates to achieve those outcomes.

Alongside a wider Call for Input to understand stakeholders' views to inform proposed updates to energy supplier GSOP going forward, Ofgem commissioned Thinks Insight and Strategy to capture the views of domestic energy consumers and understand their experiences of service failures in specific areas. Commissioning direct consumer research, along with engaging consumer groups and charities, ensured that consumer views were factored into the policy work. The fieldwork took place during January and February 2026, engaging 59 participants through this qualitative research. This included 29 participants with lived experience, 24 at-risk and likely to experience a heightened impact should they experience a service failure, and 6 participants with experience of a new network connection.

### The specific objectives of this research were to:

- Understand consumer experiences of certain service failures and the associated main pain points through the GSOP process
- Explore how perceived levels of harm vary based on the type of service failing<sup>3</sup> / GSOP area, as well as customer type, demographic or circumstantial factors
- Identify what consumer satisfaction during the resolution process looks like.

## Key findings

**Participants have low awareness of GSOP.** Most are typically unaware of the scheme, even when they have experienced a supplier service failure and/or received a GSOP payment.

**Across the board, participants have low expectations about how energy companies will respond to service failings.** Participants assume their issues will be ignored and that it will be difficult to reach a resolution. This is based on both broader negative experiences with customer services across a range of sectors and specific negative perceptions of the energy sector. Participants from the “at risk” cohort often have particularly low expectations and are more likely to have experienced negative interactions in the past, particularly when requesting additional support for their needs across a range of sectors.

**Participants feel a good response to a service failing requires the underlying issue to be resolved with clear, empathetic communication from the energy company**

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<sup>1</sup> Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) manage the infrastructure that delivers electricity from the electricity network to homes and businesses

<sup>2</sup> Gas Distribution Networks (GDNs) manage the infrastructure that delivers gas into homes and businesses

<sup>3</sup> Areas explored in the research where a GSOP could, in theory, be applied.

**throughout.** Fundamentally participants feel the priority in any service failing scenario needs to be rapid resolution of the issue in a way that minimises further inconvenience for the consumer (e.g. delivering an appointment outside of hours).

**There is widespread agreement that compensation is an important element of responding to service failings.** Financial compensation is seen as important to recognise the impact of a service failing on a consumer and to mitigate the potential impacts of the issue on a consumer.

**Service failings related to loss of supply are typically seen as the most severe.** Ensuring a constant supply is seen as the core responsibility of all energy companies. Failure to deliver this and issues with restoring supply are seen as severe service failings for all participants, but especially for those who have energy reliant health conditions.

**When considering the severity of service failings not related to loss of supply, consumers focus on the financial and emotional impacts of each.** Participants tended to feel that service failings that lead to financial loss are the most severe (as financial loss is almost always stressful). Service failings without a financial impact can still be seen as severe, dependent on the emotional impact of these.

**The impact of service failings not related to supply, that have financial consequences, varies. Those who are financially vulnerable are likely to be more impacted than non-financially vulnerable.** The knock-on impacts of financial loss are greatest for financially vulnerable consumers, many of whom express concern that financial loss can result in further detriment (e.g. resulting in them falling into debt, failing to be able to pay bills or cover food costs).

**Views on the appropriate level of compensation vary widely amongst the sample, with many agreeing that issues with higher perceived levels of harm should result in higher compensation amounts.** However, perceptions of what high and low compensation amounts are differ between participants. The expectations for the amount can vary depending on what the payment is seen to represent. Those seeing the payment as an accountability or goodwill gesture are more likely to suggest a smaller amount than those who see it as compensation payment for the time and stress involved.

## 2. Background and objectives

To inform potential updates to energy supplier GSOP going forward, Ofgem commissioned Thinks Insight and Strategy to capture the views of domestic energy consumers and understand their experiences of service failures in specific areas.

The specific objectives of this research were to:

- Understand consumer experiences of the certain service failures and main pain points through the GSOP process
- Explore how perceived levels of harm vary based on the type of service failing / GSOP area, as well as customer type, demographic or circumstantial factors
- Identify what consumer satisfaction during the resolution process looks like.

Given the Ofgem Call for Input on supplier GSOP included scope, this research explored consumer experiences of specific areas covered by GSOP, along with a limited number of areas where automatic compensation could, in theory, be applied to. For the purpose of this report, when referring to consumer views on both where GSOP standards have not been met and experiences of these potential areas, the term service failing has been used.

As well as understanding consumer experiences of supplier GSOP areas, this research was an opportunity to explore experiences of GSOP that DNOs and GDNs are responsible for, which mostly relate to re-connecting supply after an outage such as severe bad weather. Energy suppliers do have a GSOP to re-connect supply when it relates to debt. Where this report mentions re-connection after being off supply but does not explicitly state whether this was an energy supplier or DNO/GDN issue, it should be read that the findings from participants are applicable to both.

As part of this research, we also engaged participants that had experienced a new connection to the electricity network. Findings from these participants are set out in section 8.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Who was involved

A total of 59 participants were involved in the research, recruited for three distinct consumer types: at-risk, lived experience and connections.

- For the **at-risk sample**, 24 participants were recruited across key groups of interest who are likely to have higher level of need, or to experience a heightened impact / harm as a result of service failings. This includes those who:
  - are financially vulnerable
  - have a long-term health condition / disability
  - have inflexible working conditions (e.g. zero hours contract)
  - have caring responsibilities
  - are on the Priority Services Register (PSR)
  - have young children living at home
  - said they have low digital confidence
- For the **lived experience sample**, 29 participants were recruited to have experienced at least one of the energy supplier service failings. Participants were broadly representative of the general public based on key demographic criteria (such as age, gender, income level).
- For the **new network connections sample**, 6 participants were recruited to have completed a self-build home or building conversion (from commercial to residential) in the past 5 years that needed to a new connection to the electricity network.

A detailed breakdown of participant characteristics can be found in Appendix A.

### 3.2 The research process

We undertook a three-stage approach.

**Stage one: Online community with the at-risk sample** which ran for one week, conducted on Thinks' online platform, Recollective. Activities were set for participants to complete via the platform to understand participants' expectations of energy suppliers, their thoughts on four service failing scenarios and prompted views on the GSOP.

**Stage two: Online community with the lived experience sample**, also open for one week and conducted on Recollective. Participants completed activities that explored their experiences of energy service failings and its impacts, the resolution process, life at the time of the service failing, expectations of energy companies and prompted views on the GSOP.

**Stage three: In-depth interviews with the network connections sample**, each lasting 60 minutes conducted via Zoom videocalls. These interviews understood the process of getting a new electrical connection to the electricity network, experiences of service failings and pain points, and what the impact of delays to connections would be.

Research materials used at each stage can be found in Appendix B.

#### How to read this report

This report provides an analysis of key themes emerging throughout the research, and the implications for how participants think about GSOP. It does not follow the same structure as the research materials.

Three different consumer types were engaged throughout this research. Sections 4 to 6 of the report detail the findings from the at-risk and lived experience cohorts (i.e. the issues that fall under supplier GSOP), with section 7 specifically referencing the connections cohort (i.e. issues under the connections GSOP). As such, service failings in Sections 4 to 6 should be assumed to refer only to supplier GSOP, and Section 7 as connections GSOP, unless otherwise stated.

### **Rationale for this methodology**

Two key approaches were used in this project:

- Individualised online activities for the majority of lived experience and at-risk samples
- Telephone depth interviews for the new connections cohort and digitally disconnected participants

These approaches were informed by three key considerations:

- Creating an appropriate atmosphere for participants to share potentially sensitive information. Experiences of service failings and vulnerability are often sensitive and group-based discussions and activities can result in participants feeling uncomfortable disclosing their experiences, creating a negative research experience for participants and skewing the data towards those with less sensitive experiences and/or those who are more comfortable sharing their experiences.
- Ensuring flexibility when recruiting low prevalence groups. Relatively few people fit into the “connections cohort”. A depth interview methodology, where sessions can be scheduled around participants availability as opposed to a more prescriptive timeline (which an online approach would necessitate) is therefore more practical for maximising response rates.
- Ensuring the ability to explore both lived experiences of service failings and the differential impacts of service failing on vulnerable customers. Given the wide range of GSOP areas and vulnerabilities that needed to be covered in this research it would have been highly difficult to guarantee cross-cutting representation of different service failings and vulnerability groups, especially in sufficient numbers to be able to draw conclusions about the impact of different types of vulnerability on experiences. Using a projective approach with at-risk consumers enabled analysis of the impact of differing vulnerabilities in a way that was practical to recruit for.

There are two key limitations to this approach:

- The at-risk sample’s perceptions of the impacts of different service failings is based on assumptions about how each would affect them rather than lived experience. This means they may over or underestimate the potential impacts or fail to identify unexpected ways in which they would be impacted.
- The lived experience and connections sample were predominantly reliant on their memories of service failings or the connections process. This means they may misremember or forget aspects of the process. A longitudinal and/or ethnographic approach would allow exploration of impacts in the moment. This would likely be

more practical with the connections cohort as recruitment of those experience service failings “in the moment” would likely be very difficult.

## 4. Awareness of supplier GSOPs

**Awareness of GSOP is very low across participants in the at-risk and lived experience samples.** Some form of compensation is expected from energy companies in the event of service failings, but participants are not aware that there are automatic payments in the form of GSOP<sup>4</sup>. Even when asking those who had experienced service failings that fall under GSOP, they report low awareness.

**However, this does not necessarily mean that participants weren't told about GSOP.** For participants in the lived experience sample, GSOP are low salience because they are often prioritising other things when experiencing service failings, such as reaching out to their energy company and trying to get the issue fixed.

*“It wouldn't have changed how I interacted as this was not my main focus for communicating with them. I think the type of outage I had does not require to be financially paid.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with reconnecting supply within the time they said

**Additionally, some believe that GSOP compensation would not apply to them as they think payments are only reserved for the most severe, extreme cases of service failings.** In the at-risk sample, there is also the expectation that compensation is typically difficult to 'fight for' and companies would rather withhold than pay them out to customers, deterring participants from finding out more information about them or pursuing complaints.

*“I thought that maybe under certain, more extreme cases of service failings that payments could be made to customers.”*

At-risk participant, LTHC / disability

**Participants across all three cohorts feel it would be useful for consumers to have higher levels of awareness of GSOP.** They feel that being aware of GSOP payments would help them understand what levels of service they should expect from their energy company and consequently assist them in dealing with their energy company if there is a service failure.

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<sup>4</sup> Unlike other forms of financial compensation that require customer action, such as taking an unresolved complaint to the Energy Ombudsman where they instruct the supplier to award compensation.

## 5. Expectations of energy companies in the event of supplier service failings

Compensation when standards covered by GSOP aren't met is automatically paid to consumers without them having to take action.

However, as not all participants in this sample had experienced a service failing (i.e. those in the at-risk sample) or had experienced an issue that is currently covered by GSOP, we first explored participants' expectations of energy companies in the event of a service failing.

### 5.1. What participants think *will* happen in the event of service failings

#### At-risk and lived experience samples

Participants across the at risk and lived experience samples report low expectations for their energy company in the event of a service failing. Many participants have low trust in the energy sector, and in energy companies more specifically, meaning they expect that consumers will receive poor outcomes from service. In particular, this is driven by two factors: negative previous experiences of customer service, and low trust in the energy sector (which reflects our findings in previous research for Ofgem).<sup>5</sup>

Low expectations of energy companies when it comes to service failings are particularly pronounced amongst the at-risk sample. These participants are likely to see themselves as needing additional support from companies, (both in energy, but also across other sectors) when it comes to customer services, and are more likely to report feeling they have been let down by these services previously. For example, many report feeling that they have been misunderstood or treated unempathetically in the past, particularly when reporting issues relating to financial vulnerability or health conditions, meaning they expect the same when it comes to service failings.

### 5.2. What participants think *should* happen in the event of service failings

Participants across both the at-risk and lived experience samples were asked what they would imagine as the bare minimum and best in class responses to service failing issues by their energy companies. Although these are quite similar across the samples as they emphasise the same principles, there are also a few differences.

For the **at-risk sample**, there are five main areas that participants expect as the bare minimum from energy companies. These include:

- **An apology**, demonstrating their energy company is taking accountability and cares for their customers on a personal, individual basis.
- **Clear, timely communication** to reassure them that their energy company is working to resolve it. For those who are digitally disengaged, phone calls are much more preferred to online methods which can be difficult to access.

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<sup>5</sup> Ofgem, Consumer Outcomes research, 2025, <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-11/Consumer%20Outcomes%20Research%20Report.pdf>

Ofgem, Deliberative Research on the Future of Energy Pricing, 2025

<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-07/Deliberative%20research%20on%20the%20future%20of%20energy%20pricing.pdf>

- **Fast resolution** – Following acknowledgement of the issue, participants then want to be provided with a solution as soon as possible to mitigate further consequences. Ideally, the issue is resolved with minimal disruption and if not resolved immediately, a timeline is shared for full transparency.
- **Adequate compensation** – Especially where the service failing has incurred a financial cost, participants want compensation. Most participants discuss expecting this compensation to come in the form of a payment, however others discuss vouchers or a discount on future bills as also being acceptable. Financially vulnerable participants emphasise the importance of compensation as many already struggle with living costs and would likely take a further hit from experiencing a service failing. Some discuss the importance of compensation being automatic to further reduce the burden on consumers.
- **Support for priority customers** – Priority customers, such as those on the PSR, are highlighted as a group that requires additional support when service failings occur. Participants with long term health conditions (LTHCs) / disabilities in particular suggest the idea of having a support plan in place, particularly for the service failing areas they see as higher impact, such as those that impact supply or have financial consequences. These participants discuss contacting vulnerable consumers as a priority to inform them of the issue and offer temporary fixes (i.e. alternative or backup power sources). Some also discuss emergency credit options for issues related to billing or payment issues.

Participants in the **lived experience sample** cover similar points but additionally provide a few more specific recommendations that speak to their experiences. This consists of:

- **Good recordkeeping** – Many participants describe the frustration of speaking to different advisors when calling their energy company on multiple occasions, producing a lack of consistency where they must re-explain their context repeatedly. To resolve this, they suggest energy companies keep a log of conversations on their system tied to customers' accounts to remove the need to repeat information and ensure they are speaking to staff who are familiar with their situation.
- **Human interaction** – Participants talk about wanting to speak to 'actual people' rather than robots, preferring phone calls and in-person interactions rather than online chatbots or emails which often provide delayed responses and generic advice.
- **Following the Ombudsman's recommendations in full** – For the participant who had experienced issues with their energy company failing to act on the Ombudsman's recommendations, this was essential.

Best in class expectations for both at-risk and lived experience participants are very similar to the points made above.

- **At-risk participants** are more likely to report financial concerns related to service failing issues both directly (e.g. a loss of funds) and indirectly (e.g. missing out on wages due to needing to stay home for an appointment). They therefore place a greater emphasis on **compensation, notifying customers of issues in advance** (to help manage other commitments in their life) **and implementing measures to prevent the issue from reoccurring in the future.**

- **For those in the lived experience sample**, best in class looks like **empathetic customer service** that makes customers feel respected and valued as individuals, not as though they are 'just another customer'.
- It also takes the form of **ownership** – energy companies being proactive, holding themselves accountable and taking the weight off of customers' shoulders.

## 6. Views of the impact when supplier service standards are not met

### 6.1 Overview of how feedback was gathered

In order to understand the impact of supplier service failings, we took a different approach among the different cohorts:

- **For the lived experience strand:** We wanted to explore participants personal experiences and reflections on resolution with different service failings, whilst recognising that experiences were likely to be highly individualised and influenced by a range of intersecting personal circumstances. We therefore developed an online community plan that provided space for participants to share detail on their personal, lived experience of service failings, by asking them to walk through the different stages of the journey. The findings in this section reflect their lived experience of service failings, and the impacts felt.
- **For the at-risk strand:** Whilst some of the participants in the at-risk cohort had experienced a service failing previously, many had not. We therefore exposed these participants to four scenarios, and asked them to imagine the potential impact of each. We wanted to explore the potential perceived harms and impacts of service failings with these participants, based on their real-world experiences.
  - Further information on the scenarios tested can be found in Appendix B.

### 6.2 Overarching views of the severity of different service failings

We have summarised views of each of the tested service failings in the table below (ordered from most to least severe as self-reported by participants).

**Impact of service failing issues currently covered by GSOPs:**

Service failing	Financial impact	Emotional impact
Energy company not reconnecting an energy supply within the time they said they would	High	High
Issues with getting a final bill from an old supplier	High	Medium
Issues with receiving a credit balance from an old supplier	High	Medium
Suppliers not turning up to a metering appointment	Medium	Medium
Energy company not fixing a faulty meter within the time they said	Medium	Medium
Energy company not completing a switch to a new energy supplier within the time they said	Medium	Medium

**Impact of service failing issues *not* currently covered by GSOPs:**

Service failing	Financial impact	Emotional impact
Issues with billing (inaccurate bill due to supplier error or bill issued late)	High	High
Incorrect meter reading due to a meter reading error that the supplier made	High	Medium
Issues with energy suppliers not taking forward recommendations from the Energy Ombudsman	Low	High
Issues with energy companies not responding to complaints or queries in the stated timeframe	Low	Medium
Supplier blocking the change of a payment method where there is no remaining debt*	Low	Medium

Participants across the lived experience and at-risk cohorts tend to view an energy company not reconnecting an energy supply within the time they said they would as the most serious service failing. This is due to two key reasons:

- **Providing a constant supply of energy is the key role of an energy company** – failure to deliver this therefore represents a fundamental failure.
- **Loss of supply can lead to a range of detriments.** These range from issues that are seen as:
  - Annoying, but manageable, e.g. being unable to watch television.
  - Financially damaging, e.g. loss of food in freezers.
  - Detrimental to health, especially for those with energy dependent health conditions.

Outside of loss of supply, participants tend to use two factors to assess the severity of different service failings:

- **Financial consequences**
  - This can include **direct financial consequences** (such as a threat to funds as a result of an incorrect bill), or **indirect consequences** (such as missing out on wages when needing to wait at home for an appointment).
  - Concerns are particularly pronounced among those who are **financially vulnerable or work zero-hour contracts**. These participants report significant levels of worry around being left out-of-pocket or missing out on wages, even for very short amounts of time.
- **Emotional impact**
  - The level of perceived emotional impact of a service failing issue ranges from **low level annoyance** or inconvenience to **high levels of anxiety or stress**.

- The level of emotional impact can vary depending on:
  - **type of issue:** Issues linked to financial consequences are typically seen to generate higher levels of stress or anxiety.
  - **pre-existing conditions or needs:** Those with physical or mental health conditions are more likely to report high levels of concern around the impact on their wellbeing.

### 6.3 Detailed views of specific service failings

#### Energy company not reconnecting an energy supply within the time they said they would

Participants feel **very strongly** about issues with reconnection as a service failing area, seeing it as being **one of the most impactful failings** for a consumer to experience.

Across the sample, for both those who have personally experienced issues with reconnecting to supply as well as those who have not, **the impacts of this service failing are seen to be significant and far reaching**. Those who have experienced the issue themselves describe the issue as being **a major practical disruption**. They share experiences of electricity being cut off without warning and being left without power for up to six hours, unable to continue with their daily activities.

*“The biggest impact was that it is really dark in Scotland at this time of year, so I needed to go stay at my daughter’s as there was no electricity... Practically it was an inconvenience... Emotionally this upsets my dog as she likes to be in her own home.”*

Lived experience participant, Issue with energy company not reconnecting an energy supply within the time they said they would

For those in the at-risk sample, the perceived impact of this service failing is felt to be particularly pronounced. **Those with young children or long-term health conditions / disabilities are very concerned** about the risks this service failing could have on their health or wellbeing, flagging that it may even be life-threatening for themselves or their family. Whilst other service failings are inconvenient, **this issue is seen as a potential disaster for those with energy-dependent conditions** as they are unable to store medication in the fridge or be warm in their own houses.

*“The impact of no energy would be devastating and life threatening for my family with a disabled son and medication in the fridge. Life changing impact! Physically and mentally and not a position I should be in a first world country!”*

At-risk participant, LTHC / disability, PSR household

**Perceived impacts include practical, financial and emotional impacts**, seen to range from impacts to daily comforts, through to a threat to safety.

Specific concerns flagged by participants reflect this range including:

- Food in freezer defrosting
- Unable to keep medication at the required temperature if not kept refrigerated

- Health conditions made worse by lack of heating
- Anxiety or stress around not knowing what's happening and when power might be restored

Participants say they want **fast communication and complete transparency from energy companies** when being updated on when the supply will be reconnected, including a full timeline. Throughout both samples, participants also flag that **extra support should be provided to more vulnerable customers** (e.g. those on the PSR) to support their medical and essential needs, offering practical solutions such as providing generators.

*“As a minimum, I think they should contact their customers ASAP to inform them that they are aware of the issue and reassure them that it is being investigated. For customers on the PSR, they should make an effort to ensure that those individuals are adequately supported for any medical / essential needs.”*

Lived experience participant, Issue with energy company not reconnecting an energy supply within the time they said they would

**Overall, a consistent supply is viewed as the bare minimum service** that an energy company should provide. As such, any issues relating to reconnecting supply are seen as highly unacceptable.

### Issues with getting a final bill from an old supplier

Issues with getting a final bill from an old supplier are perceived as **low impact** by participants, **although the potential for financial consequences increases the risk associated.**

Those who have experienced this failing in the lived experience sample say the issue is low or medium impact. **Concerns largely stem from the uncertainty of receiving a high bill**, particularly if the final bill is received from the winter season, as participants must pay higher than they expected and are left with fewer funds for future bills. One participant also shared their experience of waiting on the return of a positive balance of £250, which they described as not being a hugely significant sum for them personally, although did feel that it could have been used for other expenditures. Participants also mention the **emotional impact from feeling frustrated with poor service and stress** from not knowing how much the final bill will be or when it will be received.

*“The real issue was the delay in receiving about £250 in positive balance that was held by the provider I was switching from... I could have used the money I was owed for other things. Better in my account than theirs!”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with getting a final bill from an old supplier

For participants on pre-payment meters, there is **acknowledgement that the issue is lower impact** as it can be easier to keep an eye on spending via pre-payment, however not knowing exactly can still be an inconvenience. One participant in the at-risk sample experienced difficulty with this issue when moving home as they needed a final bill to send to their housing agency to receive their deposit back. This took months of constantly phoning their energy company, **creating additional stress whilst going through a difficult process.**

*“It was difficult when moving... I needed my final bill to send to my agency to prove the account was closed so I could receive my deposit. They took months after and I was constantly phoning them to get my deposit back.”*

At-risk participant, PSR household

Other than transparent communication, **participants expect energy companies to be proactive** in solving this issue rather than waiting for customers to reach out. As participants feel the financial impacts of this service failing most strongly, mitigating these can improve customer experiences.

*“Best in class would mean pro-actively contacting the customer before the customer has to chase... Setting realistic expectations, providing the customer with regular updates without prompting... Silence is poor practice, visible ownership and clarity is best practice.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with getting a final bill from an old supplier

### Issues with receiving a credit balance from an old supplier

The perceived impact of issues with receiving a credit balance from an old supplier **varies according to individual circumstances, generally higher for the at-risk than the lived experience sample.**

For participants in the lived experience sample, being unable to receive a credit balance has **large emotional, rather than financial, impacts.** Like other service failings, the emotional toll comes from feeling frustrated from contacting energy companies constantly, having to re-explain their circumstances to different advisors and taking time out of the day to resolve the issue. **These feelings of frustration are exacerbated by individual context** as one participant mentions they were going through a mortgage process at the same time which added another layer of stress. Another participant discussed having a challenging home environment with an autistic child which takes up most of their time and energy. **However, the financial effects are deemed much lower** as participants were able to cover bills by moving money around and although extra funds for one participant’s holiday would have been nice, this didn’t impact their experience at all.

*“From a practical impact, there was a significant amount of time and energy put into resolving this matter from my part... Receiving the credit balance prior to going on holiday would’ve been a helpful additional source of funds, but ultimately it did not have a great impact.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with receiving a credit balance from an old supplier

Conversely, **those in the at-risk sample perceive the financial impacts as much more significant.** Many participants, particularly those who are financially vulnerable, share how they already struggle with paying their bills and living costs. Therefore, **participants feel anger at losing money that’s theirs** as this could be used towards paying other bills, leading them to find other sources of funds to cover this. One participant talked about their experience of being unable to receive hundreds of pounds worth of credit from their previous supplier whilst moving house, which further exacerbated the financial and emotional pressures.

*“I went through much of this with an old supplier that has now folded... couldn't get my credit back, they wouldn't reply... I was stressed as I was hundreds of pounds in credit and literally couldn't get it back from them. It was my money and I needed it as I was moving home which is pricey as it is.”*

At-risk participant

**Participants overall expect a refund as the priority** and for their company to transfer credit as a matter of urgency or provide a clear timeframe within which the credit will be returned. Although less important, **some participants in the at-risk sample also mention a goodwill gesture of compensation** added onto the returned credit with one participant suggesting a compensation rate that increases with the length of time taken to resolve the issue (e.g. every week a lump sum is added to the amount).

*“Apologise, explain why it's happened and what steps will be taken to fix this in the future... This feels like the minimum level. Compensation for the time and money spent contacting them too.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with receiving a credit balance from an old supplier

### Suppliers not turning up to a metering appointment

Participants view the issue of suppliers not turning up to metering appointments as **lower impact than other service failing issues**. Participants in both the at-risk and lived experience samples view this as an **inconvenience rather than a major issue** as it doesn't directly impact energy supply.

Those who have personally experienced this issue describe it as **annoying and frustrating as they had changed their schedule to be home for the appointment**, largely by taking off days from work to make sure they were available. For some, this had knock-on effects, for example one participant was unable to take their mum to her doctor's appointment and had to take more time off work to take her at another time. Participants also highlight the **financial implications from being unable to accurately estimate their bills**, therefore stopping them from following through with plans such as going for out to dinner and the cinema.

*“Emotionally it was annoying... It was quite stressful not getting to my mum when I was supposed to get there. Financially my bills were higher due to estimating my usage. This stopped me from doing things I had planned to.”*

Lived experience participant, Issue with supplier not turning up to a metering appointment

When presented with a scenario which prompted participants to think about the effects of suppliers missing a metering appointment, **many in the at-risk sample state they would feel angry and frustrated**. These emotions are felt most strongly by participants whose circumstances would make it more difficult to move around their schedules, such as single parents who work multiple shifts, those who have to find additional childcare or options for school drop-offs and pick-ups, and those with mental health issues. **Those who are**

**financially vulnerable share particular concern with having missed a day of work**, as for some this means a day's worth of wages missed out on leading to further financial instability.

*“If I had taken a day off work, I would be very annoyed because I would be losing money and it would be hard to take more time off work. It would cause me stress and would be a waste of my time and money.”*

At-risk participant, Financially vulnerable, PSR household

In the case of missed metering appointments, participants from the lived experience sample emphasise the **importance of clear, consistent communication from energy companies**. One participant uses the example of delivery services which allow customers to see exactly where their drivers are, update them on any delays and notify customers if they need to rebook their slot. Those in the at-risk sample feel similarly and expect **a call from the company, an explanation and apology, and a rebooked appointment at a time that suits the customer**.

*“The minimum they should do is keep you informed where you can see where they are and how many jobs they are away and if they are running late then to tell you or more importantly if they are definitely coming.”*

Lived experience participant, Issue with supplier not turning up to a metering appointment

Some also **acknowledge that a missed appointment may not be the energy company's fault completely** as external factors may be involved (such as getting stuck in traffic between appointments). Therefore, at the very least customers expect an apology and clear communication from energy companies.

### Energy company not fixing a faulty meter within the time they said

Participants view the issue of failing to fix a faulty meter within the time energy companies said as a **medium impact issue with potential emotional and financial impacts** for customers.

Similarly to the issue with missed metering appointments, those who have personally experienced this issue **feel inconvenience from:**

- **Moving around their schedule** to make time for a visit from the energy company to fix the faulty meter.
- **Constantly chasing up energy companies** who are slow to resolve the issue themselves.
- **Feeling more anxious** when checking emails and bill and becoming more cautious with their finances.
- **Being stressed** as managing the issue is another responsibility they must juggle with other commitments.

*“From a practical perspective, [the service failing] disrupted my routine and created unnecessary inconvenience. I had to spend additional time following up and trying to find alternative solutions... Emotionally, the situation was frustrating and disappointing.”*

Lived experience participant, Issue with energy company not fixing a faulty meter within the time they said

Participants in the at-risk sample talk about how the **impacts of this service failing are heightened when their circumstances make them reliant on smart meter readings**. One participant shared how being disabled means they need a smart meter to take readings as they cannot check the meter themselves. Therefore, they express concerns that **a faulty meter could mean they are paying higher bills without even knowing**, creating a direct financial impact.

*“Being disabled [I] switched to a smart meter... this would have a financial problem of me where I’m gearing up to pay a bill and they’re going to make an estimate which means either I will be paying higher or later or later in rotation.”*

At-risk participant, LTHC / disability, Financially vulnerable

When this issue arises, participants across the samples expect a **clear, realistic timeline for resolution** which allows them to stay informed and hold their energy companies accountable if they fail to meet those timeframes. Participants also expect **acknowledgement of the issue quickly and an explanation of what went wrong**, with financial compensation as an extra.

*“I would expect a timeline for resolution. I can’t imagine this is the first time a smart meter has failed to work, yet it seems like it is as much of a surprise to the provider as it does to me. [They] should give a clear demonstration of time to resolve and what steps need to happen.”*

Lived experience participant, Issue with energy company not fixing a faulty meter within the time they said

### **Energy company not completing a switch to a new energy supplier within the time they said**

Participants’ views on this issue are **more complex than others**, as the **perceived level of impact varies depending on the potential knock-on effects**.

For those who have personally experienced this service failing, **the emotional and financial impacts are most significant**. Participants describe feeling **constantly anxious and uncertain** around who was supplying their energy and what tariff they were paying. They also recall feeling stress from spending time on emailing their energy companies and regularly chasing them up. On the financial side, **participants worry about remaining on their old tariff longer than expected** which could mean they pay more than initially stated, as well as **concerns regarding payment errors** such as direct debits being taken out by both previous and new energy companies.

*“The delay in creating my switch created ongoing uncertainty around who was supplying my energy and what tariff.... I remained on my existing supplier’s tariff for longer than expected, this put me at risk of paying more than expected.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with energy company not completing a switch to a new energy supplier within the time they said

**Participants in the at-risk sample highlight similar financial concerns** around paying two suppliers at once which some say they really wouldn't be able to afford. **Some assume that not completing a switch in time may also lead to no energy at all, the threat of which is seen to be especially daunting and would create a crisis** for those heavily dependent on energy in their homes. When presented with a scenario illustrating this risk, participants emphasised detrimental impacts on physical and mental health, emotional stress from trying to sort the issue out, and potential future consequences on things like billing or logging into accounts.

*"I would be concerned if I was switching supplier and I wasn't switched in the time frame. Especially if I was owed money from the previous supplier... Financially this would affect me a lot as it would be like paying two suppliers, I really couldn't afford this."*

At-risk participant, Child aged 2 or younger, PSR household

*"In the case of my existing supplier not completing a switch to another supplier on the appointed date and my electricity was turned off then that would be a crisis."*

At-risk participant

In such cases, participants want an **apology, regular communication and fast resolution**. One participant who had experienced the failing says the energy company emailing them immediately and keeping them well informed throughout the process was essential in keeping them satisfied. **Ultimately, participants want prompt action to contain the issue and prevent any spillover effects** that may increase the severity of its impacts.

*"Clear communication, expected time to rectify the issue.... Acknowledge the issue clearly and promptly."*

Lived experience participant, Issues with energy company not completing a switch to a new energy supplier within the time they said

## 6.4 Detailed feedback on service failings *not* currently covered by GSOP

### Issues with billing (inaccurate bill due to supplier error or bill issued late)

Issues with billing as a result of supplier errors are perceived by participants across both at-risk and lived experience samples as **very high impact**, stemming from the **direct financial cost that customers have to bear which subsequently creates emotional distress**.

Participants who have experienced this issue personally share details of the financial hits they took as a result of the service failing, this includes:

- **Owing more money for other household bills** that participants were unable to pay on time, with a late payment fee on top of that.
- **Making daily lifestyle changes to save more money**, such as staying in rather than going out and being unable to buy children treats.
- **Having to put in more shifts at work** to earn extra money.
- **Being unable to put more money towards existing debts**.

*“When you have no cash, you have not as much choice to do things you like or treat [your] kids... I did not know amounts and was using too much so turned down [the] heat.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with billing (inaccurate bill due to supplier error or bill issued late)

These financial impacts have **severe knock-on emotional and practical consequences** as participants cut down on expenses through tighter budgets and turning off the heating in their homes to reduce energy bills. This issue **exacerbates participants’ struggles with living costs and forces them to change their lifestyles**. For one participant, the stress of dealing with their energy company was especially detrimental as they experienced flare ups of their chronic skin condition and described being in tears when calling their company for help.

*“I have stopped trying to sort out my bills at the moment as the stress causes fares of Nodular Prurigo... I have been in tears on the phone to them asking for help.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with billing (inaccurate bill due to supplier error or bill issued late)

Participants in the at-risk sample echo these concerns as they share worries that issues with billing will lead to **extra charges, inability to cover all monthly outgoings and an increased risk of being put into debt**. This concern is **particularly pronounced for financially vulnerable participants** who already find it very difficult managing bills, creating an additional financial burden. **Those with long-term health conditions / disabilities also flag this issue as one of the most impactful service failings** as the stress can worsen anxiety, mental health issues and cause flare ups of illnesses.

*“Any issues that would affect costs such as a high bill [would have the biggest impact], this would affect me financially as I already find it hard to manage bills... An emotional impact too because it would cause me stress.”*

At-risk participant, Financially vulnerable, PSR household

To effectively manage this issue, **participants want an apology from energy companies** accompanied by regular communication, a dedicated helpline and an estimated timeline for resolution. Participants who have experienced this issue emphasise **the importance of speaking to the same person each time** for consistency and allows that customer service representative to take ownership of the problem. Compensation is also suggested to alleviate financial burden.

*“It would help so much to speak to the same person as the advice is not always the same... [this] would facilitate ownership of the complaint... speaking to different people means that the case gets ‘muddled’ in that I feel too many opinions and not enough facts affect the complaint.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with billing (inaccurate bill due to supplier error or bill issued late)

### **Incorrect meter reading due to a meter reading error that the supplier made**

Participants believe incorrect meter reading issues are also **very high impact**.

In the lived experience sample, **participants recount feeling stressed that their following month’s bill would be much higher** creating financial stress, particularly distressing in the winter when bills are already higher. This means **participants adopted energy and money saving habits** such as using funds from other sources to cover expenses and not eating out for the weeks the issue hadn’t been resolved. Some participants were also worried that their electricity may go off at any point without warning.

*“I was stressed as I was concerned that the following month the bill would be very high... especially when in winter the bills are already very high. I had to find some funds from another budget – so we did not eat out those few weeks.”*

Lived experience participant, Incorrect meter reading due to a meter reading error that the supplier made

Those in the at-risk sample share the same worries **but to a heightened scale due to their vulnerabilities**. Participants find it unfair as they are losing money that’s theirs when it’s the fault of the company rather than the customer, leaving them with fewer funds to cover their expenses. When presented with a scenario prompting participants to imagine being in this situation, **emotions of stress and worry are most common** with many emphasising that energy bills are already high and unaffordable as they are. **To reduce negative impacts, participants talk about reducing expenditures and usage** like turning off their heating and taking shorter, colder showers which would make the home uncomfortable.

*“Error in meter readings could produce a larger bill for me. I am a single working mum with one wage coming in, I have to budget, a larger bill would massively affect me.”*

At-risk participant, Financially vulnerable, PSR household

**Financially vulnerable participants and those with children** say their budgeting would be affected massively by the threat of a larger bill. **Those with long-term health conditions / disabilities are also disproportionately affected**, with one participant saying they have dealt with this issue and it has had a large ongoing impact on their mental health.

*“Wrong meter readings could lead to extra charges, time spent managing issues... Time spent sorting an issue out, effects on finances, stress caused by the issues and potential lack of sleep worrying.”*

At-risk participant, LTHC / disability, Child aged 2 or younger

Participants expect **immediate contact from their energy company** to explain the issue and prevent further delays, alongside advice on next steps (e.g. if a new meter is required, how can customers get this replacement). In the longer term, participants want any **overpayments to be corrected** with additional compensation as a goodwill gesture.

### **Issues with energy suppliers not taking forward recommendations from the Energy Ombudsman**

Although participants have less to say on this issue, most participants in the at-risk sample believe this is a **high impact issue**, reflected by the participant who has experienced this personally in the lived experience sample.

Those in the at-risk sample mostly rank this issue as high or very high, with a third believing it is medium impact. A few participants in this sample had also taken their issues to the Ombudsman and talk about it as a **lengthy, stressful process that took months to eventually resolve**.

*“I went through much of this with an old supplier... I went via the Ombudsman in the end, took months but got there. Was stressful.”*

At-risk participant

For the participant in the lived experience sample who had experienced this issue before, **the impact was very high**. Dealing with the issue felt like a **‘constant headache’ and took over a small part of their life** that from time spent rearranging their day to make calls and chase up problems that should have been sorted out by the energy company. These produced emotional consequences as **everyday life felt heavier than usual and weighed on their mind**, making even daily activities feel draining.

*“It felt like this issue took over a small part of my life I didn’t have to give up. Practically, I kept having to rearrange my day to make calls, check emails, and chase things.... Emotionally, it was draining – there’s a weird stress that comes from feeling like you have to force someone to do what’s already been decided.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with energy suppliers not taking forward recommendations from the Energy Ombudsman

As a minimum, it is expected that energy companies **follow the recommendations made by the Ombudsman** without customers having to chase them up. **Transparency and honesty**

**throughout the process** is also expected to ensure that customers feel clear on what is happening at all stages to reduce stress. **Taking ownership through proactivity** is identified as a key area for energy companies to improve in enabling the burden and weight of handling the issue to be lifted off of customers' shoulders.

*“Best in class to me would be a company that actually takes the weight off of customer’s shoulders. From the moment something goes wrong, they’d reach out clearly and honestly... They’d own the problem, follow through on any Ombudsman recommendations straight away, and keep you updated in a way that feels human, not automated.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with energy suppliers not taking forward recommendations from the Energy Ombudsman

### **Issues with energy companies not responding to complaints or queries in the stated timeframe**

Participants view issues with delayed responses to customer complaints and queries as **medium impact, primarily due to the emotional frustration and practical inconvenience felt by participants.**

Participants in both the at-risk and lived experience samples talk about a range of emotional and practical impacts caused by this issue, including:

- **Chasing up the energy company** to respond by making calls and emailing them consistently, causing stress and frustration.
- **Spending lots of time on the issue** which means less time available for their other daily activities.
- **Constant stress from prioritising this issue**, often causing people to lose sleep and exacerbating the severity of existing mental health issues.
- **Waiting for callbacks**, wasting even more time that could be spent doing other things.

*“It became a major inconvenience of taking up my time and this was very frustrating as I would be expecting a callback that never came... When I could have been with family or running errands or even taking time for myself, I was left having to focus on an issue that I shouldn’t have been.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with energy companies not responding to complaints or queries in the stated timeframe

*“I would be very concerned about them not responding to complaints and my queries. Being a user of their product, if they aren’t willing to be helpful, it would be very annoying as they are always very quick when asking for payments and debiting money from my account.”*

At-risk participant

Ideally, **participants want their energy companies to be proactive** as they believe it shouldn't be the responsibility of the customer but rather the company to resolve the issue. **Transparency, accountability and an apology** are all valued by participants alongside **regular communication and updates on the status of their complaint / query.**

*“I think it’s important for them to take ownership and responsibility for their part in the process... Apologise and acknowledge that they were at fault for not following through as they should have... and reassure a customer that they will resolve this through to the end.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with energy companies not responding to complaints or queries in the stated timeframe

### **Supplier blocking the change of payment method where there is no remaining debt**

Issues with suppliers blocking the change of payment method are generally thought to be **low impact** by participants, with only a few stating it as higher impact due to their individual circumstances.

Participants largely describe this issue as an **inconvenience, saying how it can be stressful having to contact and chase your energy company**. For one participant, this took months of constantly reaching out to their supplier, a highly time-consuming task especially as they were dealing with challenges at home as a single parent taking care of two children with special educational needs (SEN). There was **little to no financial impact** for participants as it was largely the time and effort spent trying to deal with the issue that they found impactful.

*“I found it very upsetting and stressful especially when I have two children with SEN needs and am priority yet still felt like I wasn’t put first and the service failing was disappointing.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with supplier blocking the change of a payment method when there is no remaining debt

For those in the at-risk sample, perceptions of this issue **vary from low to high impact**. A few participants suggest that **if there was no remaining debt left, the issue would not be urgent** and therefore not a priority when compared to other service failings. For most participants in this sample, where there is no clear, immediate financial impact (i.e. no remaining debt), then the issue is not seen to be urgent.

*“Blocking of change of payment method when there isn’t a debt, I don’t think that’ll impact me a lot. As I do not understand why I would want to change payment method when there isn’t a debt remaining.”*

At-risk participant

In terms of expectations, participants who have experienced this issue want energy companies to be **more accurate with readings and clearly explain the conditions of switching** to make sure that customers are always informed. The process can be confusing, and participants want **honesty and detailed information from the beginning** to help those who struggle with understanding what is involved.

*“They need to be more accurate with readings and explain the conditions of switching clearly and keep us as their customers in the know at all times... They should be honest and upfront to explain in detail so that people like myself who struggle with communication can understand.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with supplier blocking the change of a payment method when there is no remaining debt

## 7. Spontaneous views of how much compensation should be offered for supplier GSOP areas

After informing participants of GSOP payments and what this means, participants were asked to estimate how much this would be. Across both at-risk and lived experience samples, this amount **ranged from as low as £10 to as high as £250 with the most common being £50** for both samples. This indicates a huge range in expectations, with some even saying they wouldn't have expected anything at all.

**Participants' thoughts on what the compensation amounts represent also differ across the amounts they suggest.** Those who guessed lower amounts (£10 - £40) typically say that the payment represents a goodwill gesture that shows energy companies are taking accountability and acknowledging the inconvenience caused to customers. Participants who guessed mid-range amounts (£50 to £90) suggest the payment compensates customers for the time and stress involved in complaining, reaching out and resolving the issue. Those who guessed higher amounts (£100 to £250) reiterate these points but add that the payment would make sure customers are not financially disadvantaged after the issue, particularly helpful for those on lower incomes.

*“It would acknowledge that they did things wrong and wanted to put things right. As someone who is on a low income at present, it would help with day to day expenses. This in turn would make me feel less stressed about the situation.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with billing (inaccurate bill due to supplier error or bill issued late)

Although most people choose a fixed sum, there are also a handful of participants who say the payment should **vary according to the duration and severity of impacts**. A 'one size fits all' approach feels wrong for some as each service failing experience is different, with the amount of time, stress and effort created by an issue specific to each issue. Participants suggest a **daily fee is incurred for every day that the issue remains unresolved** (similar to the approach currently taken in relation to connections), often saying it should be £10 per day to acknowledge customers' financial loss and help cover the cost of future bills.

*“I think it should be a day rate or few days free electricity so £10 per day it's not resolved. I never got any compensation but could use £10 per day or even £5 per day for the stress and it can be used to future bills, put me into credit for a change.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with billing (inaccurate bill due to supplier error or bill issued late)

*“Supply issues would be the most important. If supply was cut off incorrectly or not re-established when the company promised they would, then the customer should get a compensation payment. Possibly quite a large one depending on the length of time it was taken to resolve the issue.”*

At-risk participant

Overall, compensation is viewed by participants as **very important**, as participants believe it:

- **Makes up for emotional and practical impacts felt by customers**, such as wasted time, effort spent reaching out and increased stress.
- **Alleviates the financial burden placed on customers**. High living costs are frequently mentioned by participants as a difficult aspect of daily life, therefore compensation not only makes up for direct cost from the service failing but helps customers in an already financially difficult environment.
- **Shows that companies are taking accountability and responsibility for their actions**. Participants feel that a payment of compensation shows that energy companies are truly apologetic beyond ‘lip service’ or empty promises.
- **Improves the relationship between companies and customers**. Participants feel that receiving a compensation payment would build trust and loyalty to their energy company by reducing feelings of anger and frustration and increasing favourability.

*“It’s the only way to make them take it seriously. Without a payment, it’s just words and empty promises... A proper payment hits home: it says, “We messed up, and we’re making it worth your while”, and suddenly it’s no longer just lip service.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with energy suppliers not taking forward recommendations from the Energy Ombudsman

*“It builds trust and loyalty... A payment recognises that the failure had a consequence. It shows accountability and acknowledges customers’ time.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with energy company not fixing a faulty meter within the time they said

**Participants with LTHCs / disabilities and those who are financially vulnerable feel that compensation is particularly important.** A few mention that energy companies are making large profits at the cost of customers, so it is only fair that customers are paid in return.

*“They [energy companies] have made record-breaking profits and have taken so much at the cost of us. They need to be penalised for what they do.”*

At-risk participant, LTHC / disability, Financially vulnerable, PSR household

Those who believe compensation is **less important** would appreciate a gesture of goodwill but would **rather see improvements in the overall quality of service instead**. Some also acknowledge that energy companies are not completely at fault for all service failings, for example it would be unfair to expect compensation in the case of natural disasters.

*“I think it is more important to improve the quality of service for all customers.”*

Lived experience participant, Issues with getting a final bill from supplier

## 8. New connections cohort findings

### 8.1 Awareness of GSOPs

**Much like the supplier GSOP cohorts, participants in the connections sample are also unaware of GSOP.** GSOP are not front of mind for those connecting to the electricity network, particularly as the building and connection processes are often complex and time-consuming (and often handled by a contractor, rather than the individual themselves). Participants acknowledge that information on GSOP may have been written in documents but failed to have been verbally communicated. One participant mentioned that it is likely GSOP would have been mentioned and explained in the paperwork, but this was probably missed or forgotten.

*“I was on the phone when they phoned me up to arrange the guy to come survey it all... they tell you all the legal stuff and I just switch off... I’m sure it’s on the paperwork somewhere but I didn’t really pay attention.”*

Connections participant

### 8.2 Expectations of energy companies in the case of a connections service failing

#### Expectations of what participants think *will* happen in the event of connections related service failings

As with those in the at-risk and lived experience cohorts, for those undertaking a project that requires a connection to the electricity network, expectations of energy companies are heavily informed by negative previous experiences of customer service, as well as low trust in the sector.

When initiating the build, those who need to connect to the electricity network mostly believe the process will be **slow and prone to setbacks or delays**. This view is primarily held by those who have heard negative experiences from friends and family that have connected to the network previously.

*“We did think, right it’s going to take a really long time because we’ve done this before where we’ve connected a completely new supply... our expectations were probably lower.”*

#### Expectations of what participants think *should* happen in the event of a new connection related service failings

Connections participants have similar expectations of what *should* happen in the event of service failings to those in the lived experience and at-risk categories, however this expectation is often particularly pronounced.

As connecting to the network is one stage in a sequence of events in a larger build or project, later parts of the project often get delayed or put on hold if they require a connection to the electricity network in order to happen. This can cause significant knock-on consequences, particularly financial, to a wider build if there are service failing issues with connecting to the network.

*“I actually think it’s a big financial loss, because if you’re having a leasehold, your payments don’t stop because work isn’t being done. So*

*essentially it's like you're paying for a property and then not being able to live in it."*

Connections participant

As such, these participants particularly emphasise the importance of clear communication, clarity around timelines, rapid resolution and compensation in the event of a service failing.

*"There's always room for improvement. Communication could have been better, systems could have been better, information could have been better."*

Connections participant

### 8.3 Detailed views of connections service failings

For those connecting their builds to the electricity network, **most recall having to think about connecting from a very early stage**. This often means that extra time and money is accounted for the connecting process when budgeting the overall project itself. Undertaking a build is complex, therefore **a certain level of disruption is also expected** from the connection procedure, particularly if participants know little about it beforehand.

*"From day one... You've bought the plot and you're thinking okay, these are all the things I've got to do and one of the priorities was okay, I need to connect it to the grid."*

Connections participant

However, **they also spend a lot of money on the application and subsequently expect it to go to plan** and be managed effectively by their Distribution Network Operator (DNO) and / or energy company. Consequently, there is a stronger spontaneous belief that they will be offered compensation if things go wrong, when compared to the other cohorts.

*"I would have expected it [compensation] to be at least a thousand pounds... The application itself is about two grand, and the money that you pay alongside it is ridiculous, so I think if you're making that kind of compensation.... It needs to be a good amount."*

Connections participant

Participants also have **different experiences based on their level of involvement** in the project. Those who were managing the entire project, including the connection, subsequently knew more about the details of the process and were made aware of any disruptions or delays. Whereas those who used someone else to manage the connections process had a vaguer understanding. Overall, there is consensus that **being able to switch off from the connection process feels positive** as it implies that nothing has gone wrong and their time and effort can be spent elsewhere.

*“In the project overall so much is happening that requires so much headspace, there’s so many things you have to fix in place in order to get the next done - it’s like a series of stepping stones where you can’t move forward until the next bit is done. So by the time you’ve crossed 101 stepping stones, the connections bit is just like ‘oh, is that it?’ - you look back and realise because it’s been continuously going on in the background so you don’t realise the time has passed and it’s done.”*

Connections participant

The financial impact of failing to install the connection varies across participants, based on context of the projects, **but can be considerable**. A major cost associated with delays to the connection is the money spent on running the project whilst it is at a standstill. Where project managers, contractors and builders are hired, participants describe the **large amount of money spent having to cover their wages** to keep them on the project even when they are unable to work and waiting for installation – a cost that can be manageable and absorbed by a few days, **but increasingly difficult to cover as time goes by**. Undertaking a build is already expensive as it is, having paid more than one thousand pounds for the application fee alone, so participants feel that this additional financial loss exacerbates this burden even more.

*“Any delay is obviously money, it’s costing you time, money. People leaving the job because they’ve got other work... they’re stuck with no money because you can’t afford to pay their wages and then struggling to get them back... a massive impact on the build getting finished, stress on me.”*

Connections participant

**Emotional impacts can also arise** depending on the impact produced by the severity of knock-on effects. For one participant, living in the Scottish Islands meant that companies found it difficult to reach them and multiple cancellations / delays left them constantly making arrangements, feeling frustrated that they had to take all responsibility.

*“We live on an island... And you make for allowances for all of that as being on an island, but it just gets so frustrating... I just get fed up taking time off work to be there when nobody turned up... If I were to add it up, it was nearly two weeks of my life and more that was wasted in terms of making all the arrangements.”*

Connections participant

#### **8.4 Spontaneous views of how much compensation should be offered for connections GSOP areas**

For those in the connections sample, **expectations of the GSOP amount are hugely different from the at-risk and lived experience cohorts**, as most participants estimate

**the payment to be a lot higher** (for some this was higher than £1000), largely due to the very high costs associated with undertaking the build and the connection process.

Participants claim the **application is already expensive itself**, reaching costs of over two thousand pounds, therefore expect the GSOP payment to match this scale.

*“I would have expected it to be at least a thousand pounds. I know that sounds unrealistic but a part of me is like, the application itself is about two grand and the money that you pay alongside it is ridiculous... If it was one hundred pounds... that would be ridiculous.”*

Connections participant

Some participants also talk about the **direct financial cost of delays which would leave staff (e.g. builders, contractors, project managers) without wages** – a difficult cost to cover, especially when the delay is often for an indefinite period of time. As a result, participants expect the GSOP payment to cover these costs through higher amounts with one participant suggesting an hourly / daily rate.

*“If I was managing the site and I’ve got two or three lads all waiting, not being able to work... I’d at least want help towards their wages while I’m waiting for this to be connected.”*

Connections participant

However, one participant highlights that **labour costs are not the only cost incurred** from delays, as organisational costs are also involved, for example from having to rearrange appointments multiple times. Time is very valuable for participants, so the loss of time spent managing service failings means that they want compensation to make up for it.

*“To some extent, there is the hourly wage, the day’s wages, but actually it is more than that... time spent in emails, time spent to take photographs, time to take measures... all of that stuff... all of that is probably two or three times what the hourly rate is.”*

Connections participant

## 9. Recap of key findings

**Participants have low awareness of GSOP.** Most are typically unaware of the scheme, even when they have experience a supplier service failure and/or received a GSOP payment.

**Across the board, participants have low expectations about how energy companies will respond to service failings.** Participants assume their issues will be ignored and that it will be difficult to reach a resolution. This is based on both broader negative experiences with customer services across a range of sectors and specific negative perceptions of the energy sector. Participants from the “at risk” cohort often have particularly low expectations and are more likely to have experienced negative interactions in the past, particularly when requesting additional support for their needs across a range of sectors.

**Participants feel a good response to a service failing requires the underlying issue to be resolved with clear, empathetic communication from the energy company throughout.** Fundamentally participants feel the priority in any service failing scenario needs to be rapid resolution of the issue in a way that minimises further inconvenience for the consumer (e.g. delivering an appointment outside of hours).

**There is widespread agreement that compensation is an important element of responding to service failings.** Financial compensation is seen as an important to recognise the impact of a service failing on a consumer and to mitigate the potential impacts of the issue on a consumer.

**Service failings related to loss of supply are typically seen as the most severe.** Ensuring a constant supply is seen as the core responsibility of all energy companies. Failure to deliver this and issues with restoring supply are seen as severe service failings for all participants, but especially for those who have energy reliant health conditions.

**When considering the severity of service failings not related to loss of supply, consumers focus on the financial and emotional impacts of each.** Participants tend to feel that service failings that lead to financial loss are the most severe (as financial loss is almost always stressful). Service failings without a financial impact can still be seen as severe, dependent on the emotional impact of these.

**The impact of non-supply related service failings that have financial consequences varies, with those who are financially vulnerable likely to be more impacted than non-financially vulnerable.** The knock-on impacts of financial loss are greatest for financially vulnerable consumers, many of whom express concern that financial loss can result in further detriment (e.g. resulting in them falling into debt, failing to be able to pay bills or cover food costs).

**Views on the appropriate level of compensation vary widely amongst the sample, with many agreeing that issues with higher perceived levels of harm should result in higher compensation amounts.** However, perceptions of what a high and low compensation amounts are differ between participants. The expectations for the amount can vary depending on what the payment is seen to represent. Those seeing the payment as an accountability or goodwill gesture are more likely to suggest a smaller amount than those who see it as compensation payment for the time and stress involved.

**Appendix A****Online community with 24 x At-risk participants**

<b>Sample category</b>	<b>Sample subcategory</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Gender	Female	14
Gender	Male	10
Age	25-34	6
Age	35-49	11
Age	50-64	4
Age	65+	3
SEG	A	0
SEG	B	8
SEG	C1	8
SEG	C2	5
SEG	D	0
SEG	E	3
Size of energy supplier	Small	5
Size of energy supplier	Medium	2
Size of energy supplier	Large	17
Location	London and Southeast	6
Location	Northwest	2
Location	East Midlands	1
Location	West Midlands	2
Location	Yorkshire and Humber	2

<b>Sample category</b>	<b>Sample subcategory</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Location	Scotland	5
Location	Wales	6
Ethnicity	White British / White European / White other	15
Ethnicity	Mixed	1
Ethnicity	Asian / Asian British	5
Ethnicity	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	2
Ethnicity	Other	1
Vulnerability category	PSR household	13
Vulnerability category	Long term health condition	13
Vulnerability category	Financially vulnerable	7
Vulnerability category	Digitally excluded	2
Vulnerability category	Inflexible working conditions e.g. limited ability for hybrid of remote working	6
Vulnerability category	Zero hours contract	2

### Online community with 29 x Lived experience participants

<b>Sample category</b>	<b>Sample subcategory</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Gender	Female	12
Gender	Male	17
Age	18-24	3
Age	25-34	4

<b>Sample category</b>	<b>Sample subcategory</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Age	35-49	10
Age	50-64	11
Age	65+	1
SEG	A	0
SEG	B	6
SEG	C1	15
SEG	C2	4
SEG	D	2
SEG	E	2
Size of energy supplier	Small	2
Size of energy supplier	Medium	10
Size of energy supplier	Large	17
Location	London and Southeast	8
Location	Northwest	2
Location	East Midlands	1
Location	West Midlands	1
Location	Yorkshire and Humber	3
Location	Scotland	10
Location	Wales	4
Ethnicity	White British / White European / White other	21
Ethnicity	Mixed	2
Ethnicity	Asian / Asian British	5

<b>Sample category</b>	<b>Sample subcategory</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Ethnicity	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	1
Type of service failing experienced	Energy company not reconnecting an energy supply within the time they said they would	2
Type of service failing experienced	Issues with billing (inaccurate bill due to supplier error or bill issued late)	5
Type of service failing experienced	Incorrect meter reading due to a meter reading error that the supplier made	3
Type of service failing experienced	Issues with getting a final bill from an old supplier	2
Type of service failing experienced	Issues with receiving a credit balance from an old supplier	2
Type of service failing experienced	Issues with energy suppliers not taking forward recommendations from the Energy Ombudsman	1
Type of service failing experienced	Suppliers not turning up to a metering appointment	3
Type of service failing experienced	Energy company not fixing a faulty meter within the time they said	2
Type of service failing experienced	Energy company not completing a switch to a new energy supplier within the time they said	2

<b>Sample category</b>	<b>Sample subcategory</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Type of service failing experienced	Issues with energy companies not responding to complaints or queries in the stated timeframe	5
Type of service failing experienced	Supplier blocking the change of a payment method where there is no remaining debt	2

### **In-depth interviews with 6 x Connections participants**

<b>Sample category</b>	<b>Sample subcategory</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Gender	Female	4
Gender	Male	2
Age	25-34	1
Age	35-49	2
Age	50-64	3
Location	London and Southeast	1
Location	Yorkshire and Humber	3
Location	Scotland	2

## Appendix B: Detailed breakdown of research materials

### Lived experience cohort:

For the lived experience strand, we wanted to explore participants personal experiences and reflections on resolution with different service failings, whilst recognising that experiences were likely to be highly individualised and influenced by a range of intersecting personal circumstances. We therefore developed an online community plan that provided space for participants to share detail on their personal, lived experience of service failings, by asking them to walk through the different stages of the journey, including their experiences of the GSOP framework.

The online community followed the below structure;

Activity	Title
1	<b>Getting to know you and your thoughts about your energy supplier</b> Aim: To establish connection with and learn more about participants
2	<b>Your experience of your energy service failing</b> Aim: To understand the experience of the service failing
3	<b>Resolution</b> Aim: To understand what resolution looks like for participants and understand the importance of compensation payment within this
4	<b>Your life at the time of the energy service failing</b> Aim: To understand the wider context of participants' lives at the time of the service failing
5	<b>Impact on you and your life</b> Aim: To explore the impact of service failings
6	<b>Expectations of your energy company</b> Aim: To explore participants expectations of service, and compare these to what happened.
7	<b>Guaranteed Standards of Performance (GSOP)</b> Aim: To understand awareness of GSOP payments and what they mean for participants
8	<b>Wrap-up thoughts</b> Aim: To collect final thoughts and recommendations

**At-risk cohort:**

For the at-risk strand, the aim was to explore how those with specific personal circumstances or demographic characteristics may be more ‘at risk’ of experiencing harm as a result of service failings. We wanted to explore the potential perceived harms and impacts of service failings with these participants, based on their real-world experiences.

Whilst some of these participants had experienced a service failing previously, many had not. We therefore exposed participants to four scenarios, and asked them to imagine the potential impact of each. These scenarios were designed by Ofgem and are included below:

1. *You’ve arranged an engineer appointment with your energy supplier to check an issue with your meter at home. They informed you that someone over the age of 18 would need to be at home for the appointment, even if the meter is outside. You were given a specific time window, reorganised your day, and stayed home all day – but the engineer never arrived, and the supplier did not notify you of any changes to your appointment.*
2. *You recently switched your energy supplier as you found a better deal. At the time of switching, your account was in credit. You expected to receive your final bill and be refunded any remaining credit balance. Weeks passed without receiving the bill or refund. You had to contact the supplier to ask for updates, and you were unsure when to expect your money back*
3. *For scenario 3, participants saw different scenarios based on their payment type:*
  - a. **For those not on pre-payment meters:** *You noticed that your electricity meter seemed to be giving higher readings than normal, so you contacted your supplier as you weren’t aware of using more electricity than you usually do. They said they would investigate this and get back to you within 5 working days. It has been over 5 working days, and you haven’t received an update from them. You are not sure if the readings are correct and if that means you will be billed the correct amount or not.*
  - b. **For those on pre-payment meters:** *You noticed that your electricity meter doesn’t look like it has been credited with the full amount you have just topped up. You contact your supplier in the morning to check if there is an issue with your meter. They said they would investigate this and get back to you within 3 hours. It is now the evening, and you haven’t received an update from them.*
4. *You contacted your energy supplier to close your account as you are moving home. You are moving in with someone, to their address, who also has the same energy supplier. As part of closing your account, you were asked to provide the new address. On the day that you move in, you receive a notification from this energy supplier to say that they have successfully completed the transfer of your account to your new address. You check with the person you have moved in with, and they have received a final bill and notification that their account has been closed. This is not what you asked for.*

The online community followed the below structure:

Activity	Title
1	<b>Getting to know you and your thoughts about your energy supplier</b> Aim: To establish connection with and understand how they currently interact with the energy sector
2	<b>Your expectations of energy suppliers</b> Aim: To understand expectations of suppliers when it comes to service failings
3	<b>Scenario exploration (x2)</b> Aim: To understand what good and bad would look like for at-risk customers in the event of a service failing
4	<b>Scenario exploration (x2)</b> Aim: To understand what good and bad would look like for at-risk customers in the event of a service failing
5	<b>Guaranteed Standards of Performance (GSOP)</b> Aim: To understand awareness of GSOP payments and what they mean for participants
6	<b>Wrap-up thoughts</b> Aim: To collect final thoughts and recommendations

### Connections cohort:

For the connections cohort, we conducted depth interviews to provide early insight into the experiences of consumers trying to connect to the electricity network. We took an exploratory approach to this cohort of consumers, covering:

- “User journey” mapping to build understanding of the process of connecting to the network, including:
  - When in the process of building conversion/home-building connection to the network happen
  - How this process is managed
  - What subsequent steps (of either a self-build or building conversion) are contingent on connection
- Understanding and awareness of the GSOP process, and what this means.