

Consumer Bills and Communications Roundtables – Terms of Reference

Date 22 August 2012

Purpose

The purpose of the Consumer Bills and Communications Roundtable Group (CBCRG) is to:

- deliver a proposed approach for improving consumer bills and communications to customers, including recommendations to government where changes in legislation may be necessary;
- provide a forum for constructive debate around consumer bills and communications;
- allow discussion around the types of information that should be included in consumer bills and communications;
- provide a platform to debate how best to communicate relevant information;
- allow discussion of, and provide recommendations regarding, what information could be streamlined or rationalised (such rationalisation should include ensuring that each supplier communication has a distinct and understood function, avoiding unnecessary duplication of information and avoiding unnecessary costs); and
- provide a forum for sharing research and evidence relating to consumer bills and communications in the interests of better understanding what is effective for consumers.

Objectives

The objective of the CBCRG is to:

- review the current effectiveness of consumer bills and communications with regard to the key messages they are intended to convey;
- discuss opportunities for clarifying, and reducing the amount of, information contained on bills and communications;
- gain participants' feedback on Ofgem's RMR proposals regarding bills other communications;
- identify the types of information that consumers need (and want) to be provided on their bills and communications;
- come to a common agreement on how consumer information needs can be best met through bills and other communications;
- develop a set of recommendations for government, Ofgem, suppliers and other relevant parties, identifying where the group feels legislative requirements with regard to consumer bills and communications are restrictive, and where improvements can be made to current practice; and
- consider how regulatory and other developments with regard to consumer bills and communications can best be monitored beyond the lifespan of the CBCRG.

Composition

The CBCRG will be composed of representatives from Ofgem, Citizens Advice, Consumer Focus, DECC (to represent both the Better Regulation and Energy Markets teams), Energy UK, Which?, and both Energy UK affiliates and non-affiliates.

Given this is a consolidative group the CBCRG cannot be effective with a large number of representatives in attendance. To assist the functioning of the group Energy UK will coordinate the feedback of its membership.

However, we propose that suppliers affiliated with Energy UK (up to a maximum of two representatives) may attend the meetings of the CBCRG directly, on the basis that these are technical experts and are representatives adopting an “all supplier” approach, as opposed to attending on behalf of their own organisation. These representatives would preferably attend on a fixed rather than a rotating basis, where possible, in order to allow for continuity and effectiveness of discussions. They should bring the necessary technical expertise to be able to participate in, and add to, debate on the topics raised for discussion.

In addition, Ofgem will seek representation from those suppliers that are not members of Energy UK, up to a maximum of two. As above, it is expected that the relevant representatives approach the meetings from an “all supplier” perspective rather than as a representative of their own organisation.

For the avoidance of doubt, there should be no discussion of the costs incurred, or likely to be incurred, by individual suppliers.

Nominations can be made to Ofgem to change current representatives or to appeal the extension of membership to an additional participant.

The Chair and Secretariat functions of the CBCRG will be discharged by Ofgem.

We propose that membership of the CBCRG is limited to stakeholders with relevant background to constructively input into discussions of the group.

It will be possible to include non-members of the CBCRG where the group feels that these relevant parties can offer necessary expertise on certain issues that are raised for discussion. Any decision to include these expert individuals or organisations will be made in advance of their attendance by the group.

For the avoidance of doubt, any comments or views expressed by Ofgem on licence conditions or legislative requirements at CBCRG meetings should not be treated legally binding and should not be relied on.

Agenda

Given Ofgem’s ongoing policy development with regard to consumer bills and communications within the RMR, it is proposed that for the July and August meetings the focus will be on Ofgem’s proposals. This is in order to inform thinking before the next round of RMR consultations.

After this point the focus of the group will turn to the development of the set of proposals for government, with the aim of having a fully drafted recommendations document ready at the beginning of 2013.

Each member of the CBCRG will be expected to play an active role in pushing forward the working paper and developing the recommendations document.

Any proposed agenda items should be sent to Ofgem before the meeting. The agenda will be circulated at least a week in advance. Please note we are looking to keep agendas focused, to allow the group an opportunity to discuss each item properly.

For the avoidance of doubt, we propose that Ofgem’s role in the series of roundtables be that of a facilitator and participant, rather than as a driver of discussions. Each member of the CBCRG is encouraged to engage in positive spirit in the discussions, table suggestions and bring forward relevant material to be discussed by the group.

Meetings and frequency

Initially CBCRG meetings will be held approximately every 4-6 weeks until the beginning of 2013 [January 2013], at which point we aim to have a fully developed set of proposals and recommendations for government.

A meeting request will be sent in advance of the meeting to the relevant people. The group may wish to re-evaluate appropriate meetings frequency as time goes on.

Each meeting will be chaired by a designated individual from Ofgem, and each meeting will have a note-taker present.

All members may submit working papers, for discussion by the CBCRG. Any such papers should be circulated at least a week in advance to allow for proper consideration before the meeting of the group.

Representations to the CBCRG should be made formally with details submitted in advance such that the meeting agenda can be drafted.

A space will be set up on the Ofgem website to host the relevant documentation of the group. This documentation may include: agendas, terms of reference, meeting notes, working papers and research material. For the avoidance of doubt, this documentation will be posted on the website only after all confidentiality considerations have been taken into account.