

Review of the Priority Services Register – Update and Next Steps

Response by E.ON

General remarks

- 1 We welcome Ofgem's review of the Priority Services Register (PSR). We support the broad objectives of actively identifying vulnerable customers, on objective of equal outcomes for customers with additional safety, access and communication needs; and improved data sharing between energy companies. However, there is much to do to clarify the detail of the proposals and we look forward to participating in the proposed workshop and the development of licence conditions.
- 2 Eligibility
Identifying potential vulnerability
 - 2.1 We agree that energy companies should be active in identifying potential vulnerability in their customers, but believe that the term 'proactive' is too imprecise. Suppliers should take reasonable steps to identify vulnerability in response to a trigger, by asking appropriate questions, but it would not be appropriate to ask questions unprompted: "just because the customer was on the phone".
 - 2.2 We would expect to be more proactive where the question is less intrusive, for instance in a website interaction or by selective mailing to customers.
 - 2.3 We would question whether a new licence condition is required as the underlying requirement: to offer services that provide equal outcomes to customers with additional safety, access and communication needs is already covered by licence condition 25C, Customer Objective and Standards of Conduct. Any new licence condition would also need to avoid implying that information on potential vulnerability is only required for the PSR; suppliers also of course require it to meet their vulnerability strategy.

Additional safety needs

- 2.4 The key purpose of the PSR is to support distributors in prioritising support to customers how are or may be about to be off supply. We therefore look to the ENA Customer Safeguarding Working Group (CSWG) to define the eligibility criteria. In principle we agree with the proposal to include families with children under 5 within the core group to receive additional help during interrupted supply and to change the eligibility criteria for the elderly from 'pensionable age' to 'over 75', but this decision should be driven by the additional support they will receive. We will need this to be clear so that we can articulate the purpose for sharing this data to the customer.
- 2.5 For simplicity, we would urge Ofgem to align the winter moratorium to the new criteria.
- 2.6 We would require the CSWG to be clear on the criteria for a wider and more flexible PSR than the core group, based on customer concerns over safety. For instance, to be clear

that the wider group should have a greater need than a typical member of the core group (rather than any typical customer).

- 2.7 We support the addition of pregnant women (in an owner occupier household receiving means-tested benefits) to the core group to be eligible for free gas safety checks. To expand on the steps described above to actively identify vulnerability, we could use the knowledge of pregnancy as part of selective marketing of the PSR, but it would be inappropriate to intrusively follow-up identifying pregnancy to seek to confirm 'family under 5'.

Additional access needs

- 2.8 We would also urge Ofgem in their drafting of any changes to the obligation to re-site a PPM free of charge, to ensure that the obligation only applies where the PPM is no longer safe and practicable to access due to changes in the customers physical circumstances and not where the customer has chosen to make alterations to their home.
- 2.9 We propose that there is no explicit requirement for 'knock and wait'. We believe that standards of conduct (with a nudge from Ofgem in raising the issue) will require us, and our representatives, to have an appropriate policy, which can recognise different scenarios. It would not be appropriate for instance to 'knock and wait' on a regular meter read (assuming that there is some simple facility for a customer to provide a meter read, prompted by a card left by the meter reader).

Additional communication needs

- 2.10 We are very concerned about the way in which eligibility criteria for customers with additional communications needs is drafted. To determine with a degree of consistency as an individual organisation and as an industry what a 'typical' customer looks like, where it comes to their ability to communicate with their supplier is far too subjective. Therefore meeting compliance with this standard will also be subjective and lead to inconsistent customer experiences throughout the industry.
- 2.11 The level of subjectivity in the eligibility criteria could lead to customers for who their first language isn't English, expecting/demanding that to comply with our obligation we must translate all communications into their chosen language to ensure equal outcomes. Ofgem must be mindful of this in their drafting of the new obligations, so as not to make compliance unnecessarily expensive for suppliers and therefore consumers.
- 2.12 We are already obligated to make reasonable adjustments as required by the Equality Act (duplicated in the licence for customers with visual and hearing impairments). We are also obligated under the Standards of Conduct to ensure we treat customers fairly. We therefore do not believe that new regulation is required, although we would expect to have to develop our policy on how we would identify and support customers with broader communications needs. We would welcome Ofgem expanding on their



expectations in their response to the consultation document; this would be available more quickly than formal guidance.

3 Services

- 3.1 We believe there is a clear difference of principle between services that provide equal outcomes for customers (such as quarterly meter reads for those who cannot access their meter) and additional services for vulnerable customers (such as free gas safety checks). We ask for clarity on what is intended by Ofgem's proposals to require *'expect energy companies to offer other services to customers where need is identified and where practical to do so'*.
- 3.2 The provision of services comes at cost. Therefore any obligation to offer additional services will come at a cost that will be recovered through energy charges.
- 3.3 Aside from ensuring equal outcomes for safety, access and communication needs, there shouldn't be an obligation under the PSR licence conditions to identify and offer other services to broader indicators of potential vulnerability.

4 Data sharing

- 4.1 Whilst we would agree that any data sharing between energy companies should be fully informed, we would welcome Ofgem considering whether it may be appropriate to make sharing of data for certain needs codes, where there is a safety need arising from a need to have an uninterrupted supply, permissible without consent. This ensures those customers most at risk are considered during a supply outage.
- 4.2 Obtaining informed consent could prove a challenge in a world of increased data sharing. Challenges include:
- How to manage data where a customer is happy for a supplier to share data with networks but not another supplier;
 - How to manage data where a customer is happy for some of their vulnerability indicators to be shared but not others;
 - Where the need is not safety related, being able to articulate how other energy companies will use the data to encourage consent to be given;
 - Keeping networks up to date with data where a customer withdraws consent to have their data shared.
- 4.3 We recommend that for now network operators do not onward share data with suppliers following a change of supplier. We believe it will be practicable on this basis for us to secure informed consent to share data with gas and electricity network operators.
- 4.4 In relation to point 3 of paragraph 4.2, we will expect networks to inform on what data they require and for which purpose. The ENA CSWG is the appropriate forum for agreeing this information. This will prove the ultimate test in determining if we can make this a simple and clear customer experience for customers.

- 5 Improving take up of service
 - 5.1 To improve awareness of the PSR, it needs to be kept simple, easy to understand, easy to articulate to a customer and there needs to be consistency in the customer experience.
 - 5.2 Currently suppliers include the PSR and any associated services, within their overall vulnerable customer support and will include services for customers that otherwise will not qualify for the PSR. On our website this is contained in "Support and advice for customers who need a little extra help".
 - 5.3 In order to improve awareness of the PSR in a market where customers are encouraged to switch suppliers, there needs to be a consistent experience. By keeping the PSR tightly defined so as to limit subjectivity on eligibility and the associated service offering, would make it simpler to promote both to customers and advice organisations.
- 6 Compliance and monitoring
 - 6.1 We welcome Ofgem's updated proposals to adopt a principles based approach to compliance and to monitor supplier performance through SOC Panel, mystery shopping and revised SOR.
 - 6.2 The SOR requirements are currently very tightly defined and leave little to no room for interpretation on who should or should not be included for the purposes on each data item. Given that qualification to be added to the PSR is likely to be subjective, especially for additional communication services, and there may be customers who don't take up any of the minimum services, but take up services unique to individual suppliers to meet a safety, access or communication need, SOR data may not in isolation show how suppliers are meeting their PSR obligations.
 - 6.3 We expect there will be a formal consultation process for any changes to SOR, and would welcome the opportunity to work with Ofgem in defining any new reporting requirement.