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Sent by email: vulnerability@ofgem.gov.uk

14 July 2016

Dear Jonathan

Priority Services Register Review – Statutory Consultation

British Gas welcomes the opportunity to respond to Ofgem's Statutory Consultation on the Priority Services Register (PSR).

We are pleased to note that the final draft supply licence conditions have addressed the majority of our previous comments and concerns. As set out in our letter of 18 February, we see these changes as a positive development of (and improvement to) the current PSR, not only for consumers, but also for energy suppliers and distribution networks.

However, we would like to take this opportunity to reiterate a couple of key points, made in our previous responses, which do not appear to have been addressed within the latest consultation document.

We continue to believe that "pensionable age" should be replaced with "75 and over" as a core category. This is because being of "pensionable age" is not a proxy for vulnerability. Analysis, both our own and that undertaken by the Customer Safeguarding Working Group, finds that customers who have a "pensionable age" indicator are not vulnerable due to their age, but due to another (e.g. health) category such as "sight impairment". We urge Ofgem to reconsider changing the "Personal Characteristics" from "pensionable age" to "75 and over". If Ofgem feels unable to do this – it should set out why not.

Additionally, "families with children aged five and under" has not been included in the definition of "Personal Characteristics" in draft SLC 26.2, although it has been added to the "core" group for network operators. This difference in eligibility between networks and suppliers could lead to consumers with service needs not being correctly assigned to either networks' or suppliers' priority services registers. We would like to see the inclusion of "families with children aged five and under" within the Personal Characteristics for suppliers' licence conditions to provide consistency.

We are encouraged and supportive of Ofgem's moves towards acknowledging transitory vulnerability, i.e. to reflect that individual consumers' circumstances change over time. However, we feel that the example cited within Section 2.13 (which refers to changing a prepayment meter where the customer has a broken leg), demonstrates a disproportionate approach to that particular transitory vulnerability. Rather, and more generally, we would argue that suppliers should assess what is right for each individual customer, once the particular customer's needs have been identified and discussed and agreed with them, or

their authorised agreed representative. We would like to see this more pragmatic and realistic approach reflected within the guidance.

Within the attached Appendix, we have made some minor suggested amendments (our highlights in red) to the wording of the draft licence conditions SLC 26.1 and SLC 26.2.

I trust that you will find the above helpful. If you have any questions on the information provided, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Howard'.

Nigel Howard
Head of Consumer Regulation
British Gas

Appendix

Condition 26. Priority Services Register

Duty to establish a Priority Services Register

26.1 The licensee must:

(a) establish and maintain a Priority Services Register of its Domestic Customers, who, due to their Personal Characteristics or otherwise being in a vulnerable situation, may require Priority Services;

(b) take all reasonable steps to promote the existence of the Priority Services Register and the Priority Services which may be available from the licensee; and

(c) take all reasonable steps (which are appropriate in the circumstances, having regard to the interests of the Domestic Customer) to:

(i) identify such Domestic Customers **who may require Priority Services** in the course of interactions between the licensee and Domestic Customers, and

(ii) offer to add any or all of the Minimum Details to the Priority Services Register during interactions.

26.2 In so far as permitted by any laws relating to data protection and/or privacy, the licensee must add the Minimum Details to the Priority Services Register.

Duty to share information

26.3 In so far as permitted by any laws relating to data protection and/or privacy, the licensee must share the Minimum Details **of domestic customers on its Priority Services Register** using the Relevant Industry Mechanisms.