

Jonathan Blagrove
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Email to: vulnerability@ofgem.gov.uk

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Dear Jonathan

Priority Services Register Review: Statutory Consultation

EDF Energy is one of the UK's largest energy companies with activities throughout the energy chain. Our interests include nuclear, coal and gas-fired electricity generation, renewables, and energy supply to end users. We have over five million electricity and gas customer accounts in the UK, including residential and business users.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the final set of proposed licence conditions relating to Priority Services. We fully support the work that Ofgem and the industry have been doing in this area and believe that the proposals will provide more effective protection to those customers who require additional support.

We appreciate the level of openness and engagement that this consultation process has followed. Through effective cross industry working, we are better able to support vulnerable customers, and as a member of the Safeguarding Customers Working Group, we believe that the industry has joined together, not only to facilitate the delivery of Ofgem's proposed licence changes, but more widely to explore any other improvements we can make to more effectively support vulnerable customers.

We are pleased that Ofgem has retained the requirement to share safety and communication requirements with the Network providers, based on the core vulnerability groups. By taking this approach, it allows suppliers to innovate and more widely support a broader group of vulnerable customers, but still permits us to target the safety and communication requirements solely to those customers who most need this type of support.

We are also pleased that Ofgem has considered our suggested drafting changes to facilitate delivery of meter reading where no-one at the premises is able to read the meter themselves. By making this requirement one where we can target the actual frequency of the customers chosen billing arrangements, we are better able to support and deliver this service to those who need it.

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However, we do not believe that the current drafting of the proposed Supply Licence Condition (SLC) 26.5(c) accurately reflects the policy intent. We believe the intent behind the provision of meter reading was unchanged from the current SLC26, in that it was to be provided if no-one in the property was able to read the meter themselves. However, new SLC26.5(c) states that if the "domestic customer (or any other person....) is unable to do so". This would mean that if anyone in the premises is unable to do so, then we are required to provide the service. We feel that the new licence condition should be drafted as follows: "if the Domestic Customer (and all other persons occupying the same Domestic Premises) is unable to do so".

We welcome the clarity the current licence drafting provides, around which types of service suppliers are required to offer to vulnerable customers under this condition, i.e. these are services of a non-financial nature. Furthermore, we are pleased with the inclusion of SLC 26.5(f) "such further or additional services (of a similar non-financial nature...as the licensee identifies are appropriate to the needs of its Domestic Customers and reasonably practicable for the licensee to provide". This will enable suppliers to innovate in this area and provide differential services to best suit and support our customers.

Within our previous response, we had raised a concern around the drafting of "all reasonable steps" to identify vulnerability. We were disappointed to see that Ofgem has chosen not to implement the recommendation we made, as we considered the phrase "all reasonable steps" to be too broad and open to vastly different interpretations. We suggested that 'reasonable steps' would be much more appropriate and would align to the policy intent as described in paragraph 1.30 of the consultation document, which proposes "*energy companies to take reasonable steps to identify eligible customers*".

We welcome Ofgem's clarity within the consultation that "all reasonable steps" will differ depending on the individual circumstances of the case. Further, we appreciate the confirmation that this would not need to involve lengthy additions to call scripts regardless of the reason for the call.

However, we remain cognisant that any questioning, or approach to gathering vulnerability information, must be aligned to customer expectation and must avoid being intrusive. Our customer insight analysis has shown that two key factors must be taken into consideration – namely pride (e.g. those unwilling to discuss financial matters) and independence (customers wanting to do as much as they can themselves). Therefore, we believe that there remains a fine line between being proactive and being intrusive (as perceived by customers').

We agree with the proposal to use a single branded name across the industry for Priority Services. This supports the comments made from some consumer groups, and ourselves, during the initial workshop arranged by Ofgem in 2013. It not only reduces confusion for customers, but also enables more effective support to be given by consumer groups who

may be searching for the relevant information on suppliers' websites. By having a single branded name, this information will be more easily accessible.

We note that Ofgem appears to have removed the obligation on suppliers to prepare and publish a statement outlining the requirements of SLC 26 within the new drafting. However, Ofgem has retained this obligation on Network providers through their licence conditions. We wish to clarify that this is Ofgem's intent and suppliers are no longer required to prepare and publish this statement.

We would like to start delivering some of these changes immediately, rather than waiting for the statutory consultation period to expire, a decision document to have been published, and then waiting a further 56 days for the licence condition to come into force. We would welcome confirmation that Ofgem is happy for us to do this, given that the current drafting of the licence may not reflect the proposed licence position and objectives.

Should you wish to discuss any of the issues raised in our response or have any queries, please contact Denise Willis on 07875 119946, or myself.

I confirm that this letter may be published on the Ofgem website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Paul Delamare".

Paul Delamare
Head of Customers Policy and Regulation