

How we monitor energy suppliers



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How we address emerging issues

Where we identify emerging issues or service failures, Citizens Advice will work with the supplier, and/or with Ofgem, to ensure it is put right.

Suppliers

We work with suppliers in response to our ongoing and reactive monitoring of the market.

As shown on the following slide, the level of engagement increases where problems are more severe or consistently not addressed. If problems are not addressed this can ultimately lead to referral to Ofgem.

What Citizens Advice is able to share

We are unable to provide suppliers with the personal details of consumers who have contacted us for advice and who have not been transferred to the EHU or their supplier.

Suppliers do have the option of adding an additional telephone number to their RAST and the consumer service advisers will provide this number to any advice-only clients signposted back to their supplier.

Ofgem

The Citizens Advice service meets with Ofgem and the Energy Ombudsman every two months to share intelligence on the retail market. This is known as the **tripartite process**.

The tripartite meetings are used to:

- Identify emerging trends
- Assess issues and effectively prioritise compliance activity
- Engage with suppliers to address or prevent issues escalating
- Target further investigation and thematic deep dives
- Build understanding of supplier conduct

As part of our tripartite working, Citizens Advice provide feedback and analysis on significant industry events, such as supplier failures and trade sales.

We have a duty to provide data and evidence to Ofgem. Citizens Advice will share the data provided to Ofgem with the supplier.

Introduction

This document outlines how Citizens Advice monitors the activities of energy suppliers.

The energy retail market is changing faster than ever before. By the end of 2020, the energy market will look very different to consumers, as a result of supplier failures, mergers and acquisitions.

Citizens Advice carries out regular monitoring of supplier performance, working closely with suppliers themselves. Our priorities include:

1. Providing consumers with information and support to help them make effective decisions;
2. Identifying and helping to address any shortcomings in supplier performance; and
3. Helping build trust in the market.

To help consumers make informed decisions, we publish ratings of supplier performance. For domestic consumers, this is the **star rating**. For those running small businesses, it is the **league table**.

We share the insights from our monitoring with energy suppliers, particularly where they fall short. This gives companies the chance to put things right. This not only means resolving problems for individual customers, but also when a company decision or policy results in poor outcomes for their customers.

Where energy suppliers fail to take the opportunity to put things right for their customers, we work with the company and Ofgem to make sure the supplier address. Where our evidence demonstrates that suppliers are consistently not following the rules, we are required to **formally refer** them to the Ofgem compliance and enforcement team.

Citizen Advice is the statutory advocate for energy consumers

We use research and evidence from the people who contact our advice service every day to understand the problems facing energy consumers in Great Britain.

We help solve these problems by engaging with industry, changing policy and supporting consumers to navigate the market.

Our advice services

We provide personalised advice to consumers struggling with their energy bills through three main channels: **local Citizens Advice Offices, the Citizens Advice consumer service and the Extra Help Unit.**

Citizens Advice helps support **local Citizens Advice offices (LCAs)** that provide face-to-face advice on a range of issues in approximately 2,300 locations across England and Wales. Citizens Advice Scotland's network includes 59 offices in Scotland. LCAs are independent charities.

Our Citizens Advice **consumer service** provides advice on all consumer issues, with specialist advice on energy and post issues. The consumer service can refer eligible household consumers or microbusiness to suppliers via the company referral mechanism.

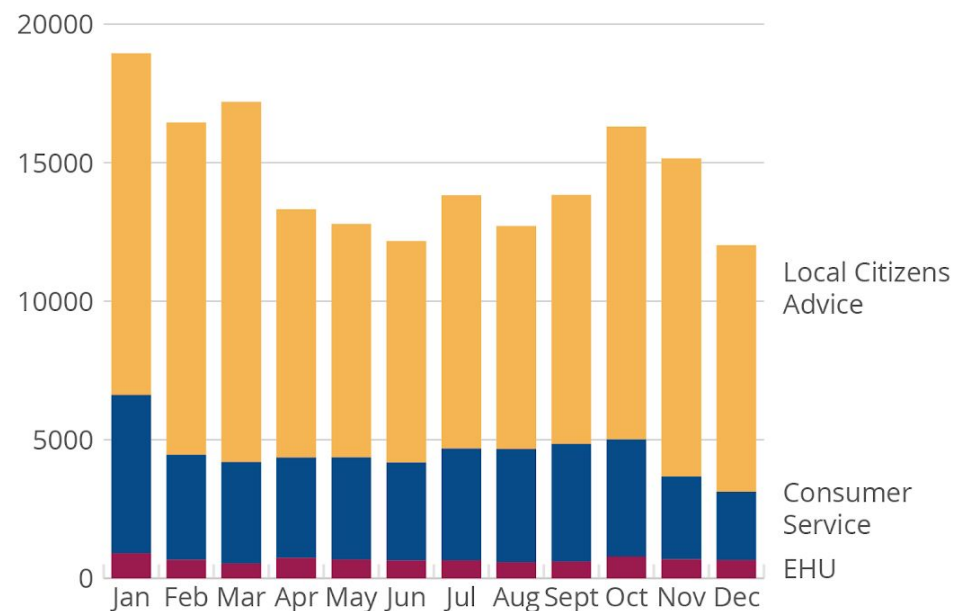
The **Extra Help Unit (EHU)** is a specialist support service for consumers in vulnerable situations. It deals with complaints where a household consumer or microbusiness:

- Has been disconnected
- Has received a threat of disconnection
- Is considered to be vulnerable based on either personal circumstances or their difficulty in managing the issue themselves.

The EHU is a referral only service and receives cases from the consumer service, Ofgem, Ombudsman Services or parliamentarians.

We deal with over 150,000 energy cases a year

Monthly contacts to Citizens Advice about energy supply issues in 2019, broken down by service



We also provide online advice through the Citizens Advice website



In 2019, the **energy advice pages** of our website received 1.1 million unique page views.

What data we use

As well as data from the Citizens Advice Service, we use data from suppliers, the Energy Ombudsman and from social media to monitor the market

Data from Citizens Advice	Consumer service	Anonymised data from our energy consumer service
	Extra Help Unit	Data collected monthly from the EHU
	Local Citizens Advice	Cases highlighted from our local offices through Evidence Forms. These are used by advisers to highlight issues that are of particular of concern, or becoming increasingly common.
Data from suppliers	Direct complaints	Suppliers are responsible for providing Ofgem and Citizens Advice with monthly and quarterly reports. This covers the numbers of complaints received, complaints by category, and total customer accounts. We carry out regular analysis comparing direct complaints to third-party contacts.
	Star rating Request for Information (RFI)	Collected quarterly from suppliers via a Formal Information Request (under Section 24 of the Consumers, Estate Agents and Redress Act 2007). This includes data on: call centre wait times, email and social media response times, bill accuracy and timeliness, and switching.
Data from other stakeholders	Ombudsman data	Data on domestic cases for the OS:E, based on a monthly report to suppliers showing cases accepted. This is collected quarterly and includes cases accepted by OS:E, where the consumer has been unable to get their complaint resolved for more than eight weeks.
Data from social media	Twitter	We regularly monitor tweets sent to energy companies using software called Method52
	Other social media	The team also checks other sites such as TrustPilot, Google reviews, and internet forums

Our monitoring approach

We monitor all suppliers on an ongoing basis. We also carry out reactive monitoring in response to specific events or incidents.

Ongoing monitoring

Each month we analyse the case notes, social media and local Citizens Advice data for each supplier. We compare the supplier's performance against their previous performance, and against suppliers of a similar size. We look for new and emerging trends which may be causing detriment to their customers.

If we spot anything of concern, we will contact the supplier to ask for more information such as what they're doing to fix any problems or service failures. The diagram on the next page shows the stages of our engagement and escalation of cases.

We will always try and attempt to speak to the supplier about our concerns before taking any further action.

However, if we identify issues that are of serious or immediate concern, we may escalate the issue directly to Ofgem.

Reactive monitoring

Our reactive monitoring can be in response to:

- Issues flagged by our colleagues in the consumer service or the EHU
- External events happening in the market

Colleagues in the consumer service or EHU may flag issues that include:

- Consumers contacting us that they can't get through to the supplier
- Consumers being unable to top-up on their prepay card
- Our Consumer Service agents being unable to transfer consumers to a supplier
- Consumers reporting that suppliers are giving them inaccurate or misleading information

Other events may include supplier failures, trade sales or acquisitions, or the introduction of new billing systems.

If our monitoring identifies that consumers are experiencing difficulty getting in contact with their supplier or not receiving necessary information then we will escalate the matter to the relevant supplier.

If we believe that there is a risk of serious immediate detriment to consumers, the situation may be escalated to Ofgem.

Citizens Advice operates a no surprises policy. We will inform suppliers about our concerns before making a formal referral to Ofgem.

How we monitor the smart meter roll-out

We also use our data to monitor supplier performance in the smart meter roll-out

We produce monthly reports on household contacts to the Citizens Advice consumer service and LCAs about smart meters. We also produce a quarterly report about microbusiness contacts.

These reports provide a snapshot of recent issues that consumers are experiencing with smart meters. We highlight any new emerging or continuing trends in the data.

BEIS and Ofgem receive a version of the report with a breakdown by supplier of the number of and severity of the issues people have contacted us about.

We regularly report the findings to the Smart Meter Installation Code of Practice Group (SMICOP) and the Independent Suppliers Forum. We also provide an anonymised version of the report to the Smart Meter Delivery Group (SMDG).

An interactive summary of the report data is published on **our website**.



How we escalate issues

We engage with suppliers and Ofgem depending on risk

We increase our engagement where there is greater risk of consumer harm and where a supplier consistently fails to address issues. Suppliers can move up or down this pathway depending on their performance.



Helping consumers make decisions

We publish supplier rankings based on their customer service performance

We encourage consumers to make switching decisions based on both price and customer service.

For domestic consumers

We publish the supplier **star rating**. The results of this are integrated into the results of our **price comparison website**.

For those running small businesses

We publish the non-domestic **league table**.

A breakdown of the data we use in these rankings is set out in the following pages.

Decisions on what metrics and data to use in the ratings in are made consultation with suppliers and other stakeholders.

The star rating

 Updated quarterly

Who's covered

Domestic suppliers:

- with over 25,000 meter points are automatically included
- with over 10,000 meter points can join voluntary

99% of the market is covered, as of Q4 2019 release. Customer numbers are provided by suppliers as part of a recurring request for information.

We use the current and historic star rating data for our ongoing supplier monitoring and advocacy work. We publish historic and market level data from the star rating **here**.

The non-domestic league table

 Updated quarterly

Who's covered

All non-domestic suppliers:

- with over 10,000 micro-business meter points

This threshold was set to be representative of the market whilst also being statistically robust. It reflects the average smaller size of suppliers in this sector.

How we calculate the star rating

The star rating uses data from the supplier request for information as well as complaints data from the Citizens Advice service and the Ombudsman

Data received from suppliers is reviewed and sense-checked against our own complaints and performance data as well as other publicly-available information. We raise any queries with suppliers before publication.

We are changing some of the data we use to calculate the rating. This change is expected to be from the December 2020 (Jul-Sep) release onwards, but it could be later, due to COVID-19. The table shows the data we will use from Q3 2020 onwards. More information about the future methodology changes is [here](#).

Metrics used

Category	Weight	Metric	Data source
Complaints	35	A complaints ratio of complaints per 10,000 customers.	Consumer service
			Extra Help Unit
			Energy Ombudsman
Billing	20	The proportion of customers who got a bill based on a meter reading in the past year (excluding prepayment customers)	RFI
Customer service	15	Average call waiting time	RFI
	10	Emails answered within 2 working days of receipt	
		Average social media response time	
Switching	10	Switches completed in 15 working days	RFI
Customer commitments	10	Membership of: Vulnerability Charter, Energy Switch Guarantee	Publicly available

How we calculate the non-domestic league table

The league table is based on data on complaints made to independent bodies. It uses data from Citizens Advice consumer service, the Extra Help Unit and Ombudsman Services: Energy.

Complaints are weighted to reflect the seriousness of the complaint and the time and effort spent by the micro-business consumer to get their problem resolved.

Metrics used

Category	Weight	Definition	Data source
Complaints	10	Cases where a consumer has sought advice or help (not information) from Citizens Advice consumer service, or been referred to the supplier via the company referral process.	Consumer Service
	25	Complaints from vulnerable consumers that have been referred from consumer service to the EHU due to the nature of the case	Extra Help Unit
	30	Cases accepted by Ombudsman Services: Energy (OS:E) the industry alternative dispute resolution scheme, where the consumer has been unable to get their complaint resolved for more than eight weeks.	Energy Ombudsman

How monitoring informs our advocacy work

Supplier monitoring improves our advocacy work.

It gives us unique insights into the problems people face. It helps us identify where the market is not working. We use this information to advocate for evidence-based policy changes to deliver improvements in consumer outcomes. Where we identify new or continuing problems, our work focuses on understanding and addressing the underlying causes.

Insights and real-world examples from our supplier monitoring are used in consultation responses, reports, blogs and press releases. We meet regularly with BEIS and Ofgem discuss emerging trends or issues within the market, and to help them identify where there needs to be changes to guidance or legislation.

Our monitoring work informs the good practice guides for suppliers. These are listed in the annex.

Insights from our monitoring work led to our advocacy work on

Closing the protection gap for microbusinesses and

Improving support for energy consumers in vulnerable circumstances who fall behind on their bills.

Our reactive monitoring of industry events resulted in a greater focus in 2019/20 on supporting consumers of failed suppliers, leading to the **Picking up the Pieces** report and our **Good Practice Guide for SoLRs**.

Our energy policy publications are online [here](#).

We regularly engage with suppliers to share our current plans and work priorities. Where appropriate, we try and collaborate on specific pieces of research.

Our good practice guides

We use the insights from our monitoring to create good practice guides in areas where suppliers need help to deliver a good service.

Links to our current good practice guides

Supplier of last resort

Recovering energy debt from the smallest businesses

Signposting and referring vulnerable consumers

Responding to PPM customers who self-disconnect

Holistic support for PPM customers who self-disconnect

Supporting customers with restricted meters

Supporting vulnerable consumers during the smart meter roll out

Complaints signposting

Supporting consumers affected by Covid-19

Good quality, independent advice. For everyone, for 80 years.

We give people the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are, and whatever their problem.

Our network of charities offers confidential advice online, over the phone, and in person, for free.

With the right evidence, we show companies and the government how they can make things better for people.



citizensadvice.org.uk

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