



***Supporting the most vulnerable energy consumers in
Northern Ireland***

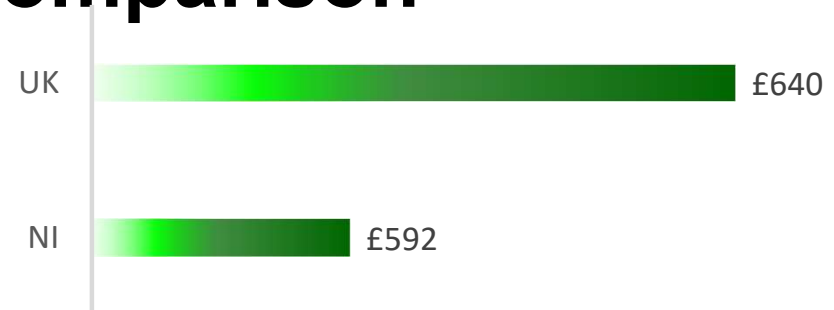
Kevin Shields, Acting Chief Executive, Utility Regulator

National Energy Action's Annual Conference, 24th January 2023

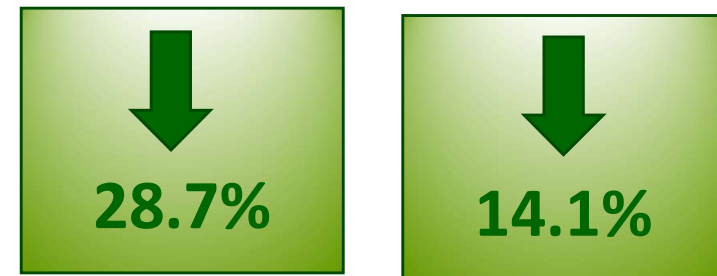


NI Demographics – UK Comparison

- NI weekly earnings £48 below the UK average
- Lowest average household income; largest decrease in the UK in the last year
- Higher proportion of population in receipt of disability benefits.



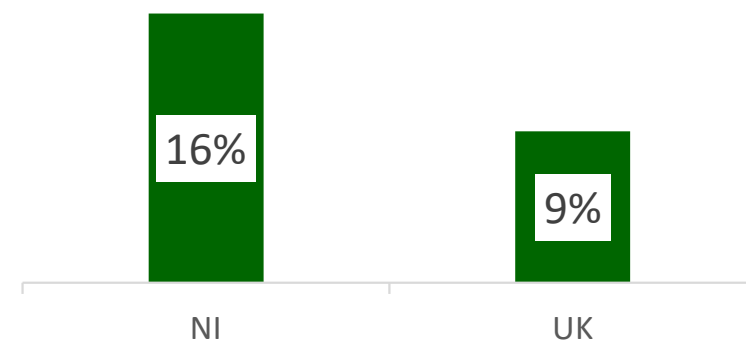
Fall in Discretionary Income 21-22



NI

UK

Population on Disability Benefits





Immediate priority:

BEIS Energy Bills Support Scheme

- £600 single non-repayable payment
- Energy Bills Support Scheme (£400) +
Alternative Fuel Payment (£200)

Energy Price Guarantee for domestic customers – discount to all electricity and gas bills

Energy Bill Relief Scheme – businesses and other non-domestic consumers



Consumer Energy Charter

- To provide households with extra support measures this winter
- Collaboration across government, industry and consumer representatives
- Includes
 - hardship fund commitment;
 - reduction of the max debt repayment rate to 20%;
 - protections around moving on to pre-payment meters

Consumer Energy Charter

The Consumer Council
Utility Regulator
ELECTRICITY GAS WATER

OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

- The commitments within the Energy Charter have been made on a voluntary basis.
- All signatories will use best endeavours to implement the commitments as soon as they can and adhere to them to 31 March 2023.

Financial commitment

01 Electricity and gas suppliers will commit to making a financial contribution to a hardship fund to support customers struggling to pay their bills.

Pre-payment meter customer commitment

02 From 1 December 2022, electricity and gas suppliers will support those in debt by reducing the debt repayment amount from a maximum of 40% down to 20%. In addition, they will also undertake a bespoke assessment of the customer's ability to pay.

03 Electricity and gas suppliers will ensure that customers on their customer care registers are not moved on to a pre-payment meter, unless the customer requests it.

04 Electricity and gas suppliers will not compel customers in debt to move onto a pre-payment meter over the Christmas period (16 December 2022 to 20 January 2023), unless specifically requested by the customer.

Debt

05 For all credit customers, electricity and gas suppliers will continue to assess customers' ability to pay, and if this identifies any issues, they will look to reducing repayment rates and/or extending debt repayment timeframes.

06 Electricity and gas suppliers will review and commit that debt collections processes, including those carried out by their agents, will be strictly conducted in line with the Utility Regulator's Code of Practice for Payment of Bills.

07 Electricity and gas suppliers will make contact with those on their customer care registers and inform them of the best available tariffs.

Communications

08 Electricity and gas suppliers, government and consumer bodies will together, provide up-to-date, accurate information to consumers through the Consumer Council's website, and their own individual social media channels.

09 Suppliers will have staff appropriately trained to deal with the needs of vulnerable consumers and make this option clear on their websites and other customer communications.

budgetenergy
Northern Ireland's Electricity Company

click energy

electric ireland

firmus energy

power ni
part of energia group

sse Airtricity



The Consumer Protection Programme

Consumer Protection Programme Objectives

Affordability

Equal Access

Empowerment
through
education and
transparency

Leadership and
engagement



The Best Practice Programme

Development of a new mandatory Code of Practice for consumers in vulnerable circumstances

10 Principles with supporting rules





Hope for the Future (1)

New Energy Strategy for NI:

- Consumers at the heart of the strategy – informed, empowered, supported & protected
- Energy Efficiency and Affordability
- One Stop Shop – energy information, advice and support scheme delivery

“In the past we have been told that fuel poverty couldn’t be fully tackled because of the volatility of fossil fuel prices. There is a massive opportunity over the coming years to eradicate fuel poverty supported by the delivery of more stable energy costs,”

Department for the Economy NI



Hope for the Future (2)

- Affordability intervention policy debates
- Joined-up discussions happening
- Lessons from the crisis
- Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Strategy