

Citizens Advice Energy Supplier Rating: Consultation on new customer service metrics and other updates

Thank you for sharing the consultation document and for providing the opportunity to share views on the proposed changes to the Energy Supplier rating tool. I have set out below our answers to each of the consultation questions.

SSE welcomes the review of the rating and agrees that there is benefit in periodically checking the relevance of the metrics. It was also useful to have the opportunity to discuss the results of the exploratory RFI at the workshop and to hear your initial plans for progression, which has set the scene well for this consultation document. Over and above the responses to the questions, we wanted to raise an additional point around whether consideration has been given to the need for force majeure under exceptional circumstances impacting on customer service performance, such as being targeted by an online petitioning organisation or an incident affecting the operation of a contact centre?

We hope that this response is helpful and look forward to receiving your decision document in November.

Email

Q1: Do you agree with our proposal to include e-mail as a customer service metric?

SSE agrees that e-mail is an appropriate customer service metric to include given how popular this method is for customer contacts.

Q2: Do you agree with our proposal to use percentage response time (within a certain number of days) as our measure of supplier performance?

SSE agrees with the proposed methodology to measure performance based on percentage response times within certain number of days.

Q3: Do you agree with our proposal to measure response time to subsequent e-mails from consumers, following supplier responses, and to exclude response time to secondary messages?

Whilst SSE agrees with the rationale for this proposal, unfortunately our current e-mail system does not allow us to report in this way and therefore we would be unable to provide response times that strip out responses to secondary messages. We are continuing to review our reporting packages to allow for enhanced reporting in future, but will not have additional reporting set up for the 1st January deadline that would allow us to strip out response times to secondary messages from our average response times.

Q4: Please share any relevant research you are aware of on customer expectations of e-mail response time.

We made attempts to source relevant research that would help inform our response to this question, but unfortunately, we were not able to find anything appropriate on customer expectations around e-mail response times.

Q5: Do you have any further comments on our proposal to include e-mail as a customer service metric?

We do agree on the inclusion of this metric but are interested to understand the outcome, particularly for those suppliers who choose to favour electronic communication over telephone. For this reason, it would be beneficial for CitA to review the model once some performance data has been published to understand the impact on those suppliers who chose to predominately communicate electronically, rather than via telephony, to ensure that from a customer perspective the results are transparent and comparable. We note that in the annex to the consultation that another respondent has suggested that the weighting of the new metrics should be linked to the proportion of contacts a supplier receives via that channel – which is connected to this point.

Also, to reiterate a point made in our response to the exploratory RFI request, SSE is only able to report on our main customer service e-mail basket that receives the vast majority of e-mail contacts from our customers, including webforms. This is the e-mail basket widely signposted on customer correspondence and our website. There are other smaller and more specialist MS Outlook e-mail addresses less widely available to customers, that we do not currently report on, and that tend to deal with follow up contacts from customers.

Social Media

Q6: Do you agree with our proposal to include social media as a customer service metric?

SSE agrees that social media should be included as a customer service metric, especially as it is growing in popularity.

Q7: Do you agree with our proposal to measure Facebook and Twitter contacts, and only to measure direct messages?

Yes, SSE agrees with the proposal to measure only direct messages from customers using Facebook and Twitter.

Q8: Do you agree with the decision not to make social media a mandatory contact channel, but to penalise suppliers who have a presence on social media but do not respond to customer queries via this channel?

SSE agrees that suppliers who have a presence on social media, and who accept messages via these channels, should have their performance measured.

Q9: Do you agree with our proposal to change the wording around ‘answered substantively’ in our information request?

SSE welcomes the intention to move away from ‘respond to’, particularly as we agree that automated responses should not be included. We note that this proposal excludes messages that do not address the issue, yet at the same time includes

cases where a supplier migrates consumers over to a more suitable contact channel. As a result, we believe that there is scope for confusion where a customer may receive a reply proposing a time to discuss their issue over the phone, for example – whereby they have been migrated to another channel but their issue has not yet been addressed. We would welcome further clarity on this proposal to ensure that there is consistency around how suppliers report on this.

Q10: Please share any relevant research you are aware of on customer expectations of social media response time.

As above, we made attempts to source relevant research that would help inform our response to this question, but unfortunately, we were not able to find anything appropriate on customer expectations around social media response times.

Q11: Do you have any further comments on our proposal to include social media as a customer service metric?

We note that CitA has requested suppliers to remove response time to secondary messages where the customer has not yet received a response to their initial contact. Our current reporting system is able to provide data on average initial response times and average overall response times, however, there is no way of removing secondary messages from that count. As with e-mail, we will continue to review our social media reporting packages and so this may be possible in future, but not for the 1st January deadline.

Webchat

Q12: Do you agree with our proposal not to include webchat as a customer service metric at this stage, but to keep in under review as part of future iterations of the rating?

Yes, SSE agrees that it would be useful to revisit as and when the rating tool is next revised in the hope that more suppliers offer this service and are able to provide the relevant reporting.

Q13: Do you have any further comments on webchat as a customer service metric?
No.

Additional Telephony Metrics

Q14: Do you agree with our proposal not to include telephone ringbacks and abandonment rates as customer service metrics?

SSE agrees with CitA's assessment that there is little value in including ringbacks as a metric and recognises the risks of effective IVR being unintentionally measured as poor performance, rather than good practice.

Proposals on incorporating the new metrics into the overall rating

Q15: Do you agree with our proposal for incorporating the new customer service metrics into the rating?

SSE agrees that the proposal for incorporating the new metrics is sensible and comprises a fair and even spread.

Energy Industry Changes

Q16: Do you agree with our proposal to include the Energy UK Vulnerability Code of Practice in the rating?

We agree, in principle, with the proposal to include the EUK Vulnerability Code of Practice in the rating. We would welcome further detail when this becomes available on the decision making around scores and weightings and how suppliers who already achieve the maximum five stars available will be recognised for signing up to an additional customer commitment. For example, when we achieved the BSI for inclusive provision accreditation, as we already scored the maximum 5 points in the Customer Guarantee section, we were not able to score points for this additional commitment.

Q17: Do you have any comments on the broader role of the Company Commitments element of the star rating?

Not currently, however as referred to in Q16, we would welcome further details once progress has been made on the Vulnerability Code of Practice and the chance to comment on any changes proposed.

Q18: Do you have any comments on the opportunity to dispute the reports from the Energy Ombudsman in the star rating process?

SSE agrees that the proposed change is a sensible approach and would welcome this change, particularly if it removes delays to the publication of the rating. We note that CitA has advised that the method for removing duplicates during the transition period had a minimal impact on 'most suppliers'. We would welcome more clarity on suppliers who may be disadvantaged during that phase.

Q19: Do you have any comments on the proposal to align the star rating measure of switching timeliness with Ofgem's proposals?

We agree with the decision and rationale behind aligning the switching timeliness measure with Ofgem's new guaranteed standards. This will simplify reporting and reduce the scope for error when suppliers are submitting data.