



**By email to:** Thomas.brookebullard@citizensadvice.org.uk

18/10/2019

**Strictly Private & Confidential**

Dear Thomas Brooke Bullard,

**Re: Consultation - New customer service metrics and other updates**

Tonik Energy welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

Tonik Energy is a green energy supplier and renewable technology provider based in Birmingham. We entered the market in March 2017, and since then we have been growing at a significant but controlled pace. Currently we supply energy to c.130k households in the UK. We have built a reputation for offering renewable energy combined with award-winning customer service. Tonik's long-term aim is to help our members (customers) utilise innovative green technology such as battery storage, solar and EV charging to significantly reduce their energy consumption.

We recognise the value that the Citizens Advice league table has to open a conversation on service, opposed to merely just the cheapest suppliers in the market. We are however disappointed by Tonik's current placement within the league table (30<sup>th</sup> out of 39). We do not feel this is representative of the actual service level received by our members. For example, we have a genuine Trustpilot score of 4½ "Excellent" and we also measure Net Promotor Score (NPS) at a number of key engagement points. This highlights that overall our members are very satisfied with service they receive from Tonik. We do however continue to invest significantly in recruitment, systems, processes and training. This includes a number of projects delivering towards the end of this year that we expect to have significant step change in relation to our ability to provide exceptional service.

We are supportive of this review and proposals, however, we have always thought that the single measure of average speed to answer the telephone does not provide an accurate representation of a supplier's customer service level. We welcome the opportunity for this element of the star rating to be improved with the addition of email and social media. However, we feel that a sole focus on speed of response still provides a fairly narrow picture of performance. For example, it does not reflect the quality of the interaction, or indeed if the matter were resolved. Furthermore, it also does not reflect the complexity of an interaction. At Tonik, we sell a number of innovative green energy products (e.g. solar, battery storage and EV chargers) which are all serviced through our member service team. These have inherently more complex service issues, which warrant a more detailed discussion and a higher level of training. We also

have concerns that the proposal does not take into account when we, or our members, use multiple communication channels. It is possible that we could use a number of channels when resolving a complex issue.

We are also keen to see the additional proposals – in particular, we welcome the inclusion of the new Energy UK Vulnerability Charter however, we have found engaging with Energy UK on the matter quite difficult. We would also welcome the impact of the Energy Switch Guarantee being reduced. We feel that membership of this group provides a disproportion weighting to the score, particularly as their performance metrics are duplicated elsewhere in the league table. We would like to see membership of the ESG reduce to 1 star.

As we have demonstrated during this consultation, we are keen to help improve the league table, which we believe to be a powerful and increasingly trusted tool to communicate more about a supplier, rather than simply a price. We would very much welcome the opportunity to explore some of these ideas further during a bilateral meeting, or a workshop, if that is helpful.

In addition to our comments above, please see included with this letter our thoughts on the specific questions raised in this consultation. If you have any questions for Tonik, please do not hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Parry', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dan Parry  
Regulation & Compliance Manager  
Tonik Energy

## Appendix 1 – Answers to consultation questions

### Q1: Do you agree with our proposal to include email as a customer service metric?

*Yes, we agree that emails should be included as a customer service metric. Email is no longer a novel communication channel and is now considered part of a core offering. At Tonik, we have roughly a 50/50 split of all interactions coming from telephone and email, with only a small proportion via social media.*

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

*Yes, however we do not believe that response time should be the sole reflection of strong supplier performance. We recommend that further exploration is placed on how to measure the effectiveness of resolving issues, rather than merely just the speed of response. For example, it would always be our preference to delay the response slightly in favour of a full first contact resolution. We have concerns that measuring the speed of response [only] could encourage suppliers to ping-pong emails back and forth with the customer or responding as quick as possible, without necessarily resolving the issue. So, whilst the speed of response would indicate good customer service, the reality may be very different and frustrating for customers.*

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

*Yes, we agree that secondary messages should be excluded, however, we do have concerns over measuring all emails in a chain. We have identified a number of valid reasons for not responding quickly or ever to an email. Examples of these include, complicated issues that may require back and forth communications with other teams / industry stakeholders (e.g. a complex metering issues that could require justified large periods of little customer contact), confirming appointments which could take weeks to confirm or if a supplier / customer opts to move queries between channels e.g. moving the conversation from email to telephone. We also have concerns over the last communication with a customer on a matter. We feel that it is unclear from the proposals when response times should stop being measured. It could sometimes be counter-productive to respond to communications from customers thanking us for the resolution of a matter. Overall, we feel there are too many complications with the approach outlined in the consultation document which could result in a false reflection of supplier performance and challenges in reporting on this metric.*

*We feel this approach should be explored further and would be happy to arrange a bilateral with Citizens Advice to discuss this matter in more detail as we understand it is extremely complicated. We would also suggest that Citizens Advice arrange bilateral meetings with multiple suppliers as we are not the only supplier to raise this concern.*

**Q4: Please share any relevant research you are aware of on customer expectations of email response time.**

*We have not conducted nor are aware of any research related to customer expectations of email response times.*

**Q5: Do you have any further comments on our proposal to include email as a customer service metric?**

*No.*

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

*Yes, we believe this is another important metric to include and it is growing as a communication channel, with some customers expecting it to be an option. It is often seen as an alternative to phone and email when the customer is frustrated by the speed of response from a supplier.*

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

*Yes, we agree that only Facebook and Twitter contacts should be measured as these are the most popular channels.*

**Q8: Do you agree with our proposal 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?**

*Yes, we agree this the most appropriate proposal.*

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

*The point of ‘answered substantively’ further highlights the need for our request for a multi-channel approach to customer service . We believe that measuring supplier’s ability to resolve an issue, regardless of the channel, is a much more effective measure of strong supplier performance.*

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

*We have not conducted nor are aware of any research related to customer expectations of email response times. However, based on our own experiences, we feel that customers expect a quicker (if not almost instant) response time on social media, and which is why they might use this communication channel.*

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

*No.*

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

*Yes, we agree that webchat should be not be included at this current stage but should be reviewed in the future.*

**Q13: Do you have any further comments on webchat as a customer service metric?**

*No.*

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

*Although these are two very important metrics, we agree that they should not be included for the time being. We feel that they are too closely related to call centre wait times and do not provide any additional insight into a supplier's performance.*

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

*Yes, we agree that the bill timeliness measure should be removed due to its lack of need. We would however like the portion of the score to remain at 20%. Billing is a fundamental part of the service and we feel the league table must continue to reflect this.*

*We disagree with Citizens Advice's proposal to have the phone metric accounting for 15% and email 5%. This seems disproportionate. In addition, weighting social media the same as email would also be disproportionate. Tonik currently has roughly a 50/50 split between telephone and email and a very small percentage from social media. Therefore, we propose that both telephone and email are both weighted at 10% and social media at 5% (or a similar split based on the first part of our answer to this question).*

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

*Yes, we agree this should be included. However, despite multiple attempts, Energy UK have not been communicating with us on this matter. If there is any information Citizens Advice could share with suppliers on this matter, this would be much appreciated.*

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

*We believe that the Company Commitments is an important part of the star ratings and we are happy with the current overall scoring of 10%. However, with the introduction of Ofgem's new guaranteed standards of performance, we believe Citizens Advice should re-evaluate the role of the ESG in the star rating. Furthermore, there is a duplication of these performance metrics elsewhere in the star ratings, for example, suppliers are already rated on their ability to process switches within 14 days. Therefore, we believe the ESG should be worth less stars (we propose 1 in line with other measures).*

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

*We find it difficult to comment on the dispute process for Ombudsman cases as we have never disputed a case when reporting to Citizens Advice. We require further clarification on this process and request some more information from Citizens Advice on this matter.*

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

*Yes, we agreed it should be aligned with Ofgem's proposals.*