

## The Northern Energy Consumer Group (working title)



To the Electricity Pricing Review Panel

**22/03/2019**

We are writing to express our support for the Electricity Pricing Review underway and to offer comment on a number of key options proposed. We see the review as a vital opportunity to create change for consumers, and value the Panel's focus on fairness and affordability, and the voice of the consumer in influencing the direction of the sector. We see ourselves as providing a leading voice for change which benefits consumers into the future, and align ourselves strongly with the Panel's recommendation to establish a new Consumer Advisory Council. We support this initiative to strengthen consumer voice and intend to actively support this proposed new group.

### Who we are

The Northern Energy Consumer Group (working title) has recently formed around a shared belief that consumer voices need to be stronger in industry and government decision-making, and that their interests belong at the heart of our energy sector. We want to be a leading voice for change which benefits consumers. As networks which are majority owned by consumer trusts, our consumer interests are our interests. We see the sector as being on the brink of significant change and opportunity, and we want to lead a new energy future with the voices and interests of our communities at the centre.

### Our energy future – our consumers' energy future

Our progress towards decarbonisation and renewable generation; new technology and innovation; as well as the role of energy use data, will disrupt traditional industry structures and will change the role of the consumer. We want to ensure that this change is fair and benefits all consumers, including the consumer of the future. We recognise that many of the changes and opportunities which are facing the sector cut across different segments of the market – we therefore see coordination and collaboration as critical to gaining better outcomes for our consumers.

### *Strengthen the consumer voice*

We strongly support the options in A to strengthen the consumer voice. We also believe that there is a role for industry to play in ensuring that the interests and voices of consumers are central to decision making. We therefore see the new forum of the Northern Energy Consumer Group as sitting alongside the proposed Consumer Advisory Council. Our vision is to create a forum which brings together strong consumer representation and industry expertise to strengthen consumer engagement, and to be proactive in considering and leading the future of the energy sector.

### *Reduce Energy Hardship*

We strongly support the options proposed in this section, in particular the option to establish a network of community-level support services in B3 as well as the option to set up a fund to help

homes in energy hardship become more energy efficient in B4. We support educating and empowering consumers to be more energy efficient, and believe that giving consumers easier access to their electricity usage data would also support this objective.

*Better use of data for consumers*

We support the options in *C3: Make it easier to access electricity usage data* and *E6: Ensure access to smart meter data on reasonable terms*. We believe that delivering better and more efficient services for consumers starts with knowing them better. The potential for customer data to change the sector is significant – we believe that progress in this area should begin with a strong model of customer ownership.

*Enabling innovation and technology: coordination*

We believe that technology and innovation has a key role to play enabling the sector to deliver better outcomes for consumers – uptake of this technology and innovation will also play a critical role enabling the sector to navigate new challenges. For example, distributed energy services can support our just transition to a zero-carbon economy, by deferring distribution costs associated with managing demand peaks. As electric vehicle uptake increases, and as we transition to more intermittent sources of renewable generation, flattening peak demand affordably is likely to be key in enabling a just transition to a low carbon future. As we noted above, we believe that opportunities and challenges facing the sector cut across vertical market segments, and therefore require a coordinated response. We do not support the Panel's proposal in *F1 to give the Electricity Authority clearer, more flexible powers to regulate network access for distributed energy services* as this would compromise coordination across the sector and the uptake of distributed energy technology and innovation.

We extend our thanks to the Panel for its ongoing work delivering the Electricity Pricing Review. We consider this to be an exciting opportunity for the sector to pivot towards the future and we look forward to the results of the review.

Yours Sincerely,

**The Northern Energy Consumer Group**