

Supporting vulnerable consumers

Diarmuid Cowan, Vulnerability Lead



What does UKRN do?

The UK Regulators' Network brings member regulators together, for the benefit of consumers and the economy.

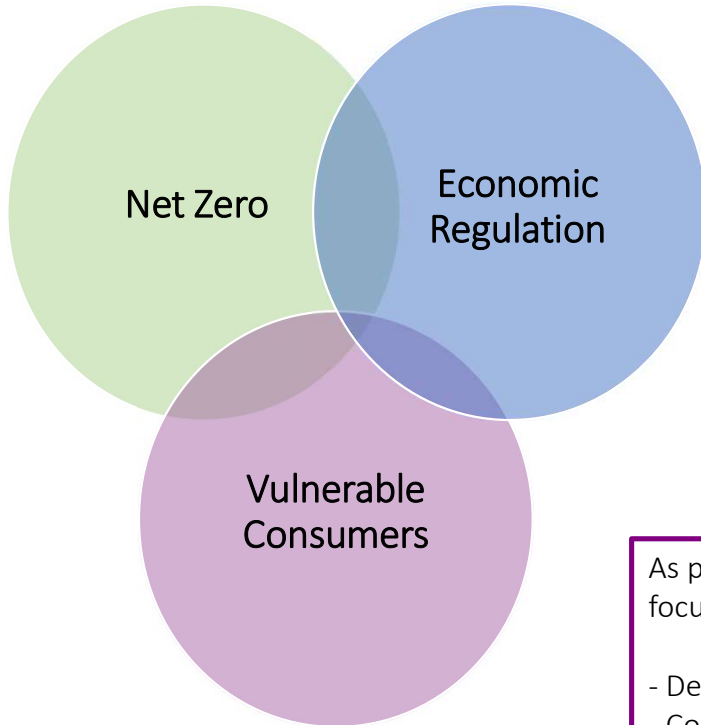
Working closely with government to develop cross-sector approaches, we drive improvements for better outcomes for consumers through collaboration on common challenges by sharing shared expertise.

The UKRN is funded by 13 member fees and staffed by a small central office who are seconded from UKRN regulator members. Members also provide additional resources in the form of staff time allocated to projects, networks and events; meeting rooms; and event venues and support.



The net zero transition will cut across sectors, will lead to costs and investment needs, new challenges in changing or replacing networks, infrastructure and service provision.

UKRN will support members to ensure we remove barriers and facilitate change with responsive, agile regulation, whilst recognising the variation in government steer and duties across members.



Economic regulatory reform is high on the Government policy agenda. This will continue to be an important area for members to engage with to ensure the approach reflects experience and provides good regulatory outcomes. This connects to regulatory reform in train more generally.

- As part of the vulnerability workstream we will be focusing on the following themes:
- Debt and affordability
 - Cost of living
 - Digital exclusion
 - Data use
 - Net Zero impact on vulnerable consumers

This diagram outlines the overlapping priorities of UKRN work going into 2022 and the involvement of multiple networks and working groups facilitated by UKRN.



Best practice principles to supporting vulnerable consumers

- Understand customers
 - Building trust in data security
 - Easy access to support and offering signposting
 - Supporting the digitally excluded
 - Monitor, evaluate, share and report
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uk rn Examining some best practice across different industries

- Learning from other sectors
- Vulnerable consumers registration services
- Training for frontline staff
- Streamlining social tariffs applications
- Debt advice and support

- Other things to consider:
 - County Court Judgements
 - Equality Impact Assessments



The image shows the top portion of a document cover. On the right is the Ofcom logo (making communications work for everyone). Below it, the title reads: "Treating vulnerable customers fairly". Underneath, it says: "A guide for phone, broadband and pay-TV providers".

3. Good Practice

Section summary
This chapter highlights areas and initiatives where energy suppliers are performing well, in order to enable wider industry to learn from this best practice. We encourage all suppliers to consider whether similar approaches would help improve their performance.

Proactively engaging consumers to avoid bill shock

3.1. We identified some good practice examples where suppliers regularly contact customers through all available or preferred contact methods to request readings in line with their payment method and frequency. This approach seems to have a direct impact in driving higher percentage success rates for obtaining readings from customers. This, in turn, helps to ensure bills are accurate and customers are not over or under charged, preventing bill shock and debt build-up due to customers needing to pay a larger amount than their estimated bill back to their supplier. **We would like to see this good practice adopted more widely across the market.**

3.2. Most suppliers have processes in place to validate readings and update bills accordingly. Where readings fall outside of tolerance levels, suppliers have escalation processes in place to resolve and communicate clearly with the customer when required. Such processes seem to result in these suppliers recording extremely low volumes of bills that were sent with inaccuracies that were not caused by the customer. Some suppliers have multi-tiered best estimation processes to calculate bills based on the most accurate information held. This ranged from using historical usage patterns from the same period the previous year, extrapolating readings based on previous reads and factoring in seasonality using published industry algorithms. **We would encourage all suppliers to consider how they can utilise these good practices to minimise inaccurate bills.**

Ensuring customers are on the most suitable payment methods

3.3. The total amount of customers using prepayment meters (PPMs) decreased in 2020.