

NIE NETWORKS CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO ENERGY ONE STOP SHOP IMPLEMENTATION – CONSULTATION ON POLICY OPTIONS

January 2023

ENERGY ONE STOP SHOP IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

CONSULTATION ON POLICY OPTIONS – QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the Energy One Stop Shop underpinning principles? [Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Yes

NIE Networks welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on implementing the Energy One Stop Shop. Overall, we believe it would be a positive step forward for NI. This has the potential to be a really useful resource for the NI consumer and could also help NIE Networks and other organisations in increasing public awareness of the benefits and requirements of decarbonising energy usage in a safe and cost-effective way.

2. Do you agree with the definitions for each of the proposed principles? [Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.
3. Do you agree with the proposed strategic objectives for the Energy One Stop Shop? [Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.
4. Do you agree that the Energy One Stop Shop should provide advice, information and support to domestic consumers, micro, small and medium businesses and community energy groups? [Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Yes

We recognise there already exists a wide number of agencies that already provide advice, funding or set policy and this could potentially grow. While consolidation of these would be of benefit, a number of agencies have a statutory or regulatory remit to provide some services and the design of the One Stop Shop should be mindful to avoid duplication and/or consumer confusion. NIE Networks are keen to engage further on this throughout the design and implementation of the service.

5. Do you agree that the Energy One Stop Shop should take account of the needs of vulnerable domestic consumers, in particular those with low incomes, of pensionable age, digitally excluded, living with chronic ailment or disability or in rural areas? [Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Yes.

NIE Networks agrees with the statement that the One Stop Shop should take into account the needs of vulnerable domestic customers, however we would be concerned that the definition above is very broad. We broadly follow the UR's definition of vulnerable which is "A consumer is deemed vulnerable when their personal characteristics or circumstances reduce their ability to engage effectively and achieve fair outcomes. A vulnerable consumer is significantly less able to protect or represent their interests and significantly more likely to suffer detrimental impacts on their health, wellbeing or finances"

This definition looks at consumers of an individual basis rather than a simply by their age, income or location which could be construed as discriminatory. An agreed definition of vulnerable is therefore necessary.

6. Do you agree with the types of services and support that the Energy One Stop Shop should deliver? [Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Yes

Any signposting or referral service will require clear lines of communications between the One Stop Shop and NIE Networks as clear delineation over what agency provides what advice and how that advice is kept up to date. Customers should not be passed between organisations unnecessarily which will create frustration and confusion. We would like to further understand how these services would impact on NIE Networks customer contact levels and what level of enquiry resolution the One Stop Shop would seek to target.

We would observe that other agencies currently produce national and sectoral statistics and the inclusion of this in the One Stop Shop would be a departure from the core objectives.

7. Should the Energy One Stop Shop deliver any other services or activities? [Yes/No] If "yes", please rank your top 3 priorities for additional services from the list below from 1-3 (where 1 - Most Important, 3 - Least Important):

- Lead in the production of national and sectoral statistics to meet reporting obligations, guide policy and inform investment decisions;
- Undertake a programme of energy and behavioural research;
- Deliver or administer financial support schemes, especially targeted to those who need it most;
- Provide support to businesses and Public Authorities including grants, financial support, energy audits, training, toolkits and kitemark certification;
- Provide support to Sustainable Energy Communities including financial support, support with applications to any Renewable Support Schemes, training and toolkits;
- Support energy education in schools;
- Monitor compliance and raise awareness of labelling and eco-design regulations.

Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Yes

Our view is that the One Stop Shop needs to be more outward focussed than inward by providing services / advice / funding etc. as outlined above.

General consumer education on energy matters would also be a benefit and not just restricted to schools.

There is a significant amount of uncertainty, knowledge gaps and misinformation circulating around customers and quite often this void would appear to be filled by misinformation that is often – but not always - well-intentioned. The area around Low Carbon Technology, in

particular EV Charging within individual properties is an area that could benefit massively from a central, consolidated message from government on the best way forward.

We would also see a gap in the public's understanding of what is possible and what is required in micro- and small-scale generation, particularly Photo Voltaic generation. While NIE Networks can advise on how to complete application forms and technical requirements, we recognise that outside of some charitable organisations, e.g. Action Renewables, there is a void of impartial advice for customers wanting to know what to consider, what is available and what would be required as they consider different options. We would be conscious that organisations like Action Renewables may not have the bandwidth required to provide info and advice on the scale required. At present, this void of impartial advice is most likely being filled by commercial entities with inherent business interests.

If the one-stop shop is to see one of their core functions to be research / monitoring and reporting, we believe this should be the less significant part since other agencies do a lot of this type of work already e.g. NISRA.

8. Do you agree with the proposed initial list of consumer engagement channels for the Energy One Stop Shop? [Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.

Yes

While we agree with the list of engagement channels it may be helpful for us to share our customer contact levels.

NIE Networks operates a telephone contact centre for enquiries and fault reporting and a website contact facility for fault reporting. In 2022 we received just over 191,000 calls – 54% were calls reporting electricity faults, 17% connection enquiries, and 29% were general business enquiries including supplier related calls. Call abandonment levels were on average 0.6% per month. In 2022 when customers are reporting faults 21% were reported via the website facility and 79% via telephone.

Our experience, in both the above statistics (and separate customer preference and satisfaction surveys) is that customers still have a strong preference for telephone contact and the One Stop Shop should be cognisant of this.

We are very aware that decarbonising through electrification will involve some form of contact with NIE Networks and that a significant proportion of One Stop Shop enquires may then involve us. We welcome an opportunity to further explore the levels of commitment required from partner organisations.

When considering how to resource face to face engagements it would be worth considering forecasts suggests that there could be 300,000 Electric Vehicles and 120,000 heat pumps by 2030. NIE Networks regularly contacts customers through a variety of channels in relation to specific Connections queries, but regular face-to-face meetings would usually only be for larger or complex projects and not small or routine jobs.

9. Do you agree with the proposed approach to refine and improve consumer engagement?
[Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.
10. Do you agree with the proposal to commence the operation of the Energy One Stop Shop with a Pilot [Yes/No]; Do you agree that the Pilot should launch as soon as possible?
[Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.
11. Do you agree with the proposed Energy One Stop Shop Implementation Roadmap? [Yes/No]
Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.
12. Do you agree with the proposed services that would be available in Year 1 of the Pilot?
[Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.
13. Do you agree with the proposed additional services that the Energy One Stop Shop Pilot would introduce in Years 2 and 3? [Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.
14. Do you agree with the proposed services that the Energy One Stop Shop may consider introducing from Year 4 onwards? [Yes/No] Please provide evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions.
15. Do you agree with the proposal to create a new brand for the Energy One Stop Shop?
[Yes/No] Please suggest names for the service and evidence to support any additional comments or suggestions



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