

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for the Economy

REVIEW OF ELECTRICITY STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE – GUARANTEED OVERALL STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE (OSP)

Published at 1.30pm on Wednesday 30 July 2025

Dr Archibald (The Minister for the Economy): I wish to provide an update on the issue of payments for customers whose electricity is disrupted by severe weather events. The regulatory framework for payments is set out in the Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS). Currently these standards allow the electricity distribution company – NIE Networks – to apply for an exemption in cases of severe weather events. This exemption cannot be overruled by government. The UR's 2023 consultation proposed a payment of £70 where there is a failure by the distributor to meet the GSS standard set in cases of severe weather. For each subsequent period of 12 hours after the initial prescribed period has passed, an additional payment of £70 would be payable, subject to a maximum cap of £700. The consultation received six responses. A final decision paper was not published. This issue was brought into sharp relief by Storm Éowyn which left many households without electricity. The UR is carrying out a fresh consultation on a range of GSS issues and it will include options for payments in severe weather conditions, along with the likely costs of those options. Consumer research with both domestic and non-domestic electricity consumers is an essential part of the consultation process and the UR has commissioned surveys and roundtable discussions to explore consumer opinion and fully inform the consultation options and their impacts. For example having a smaller population than Britain, the cost of payments after a major storm would be shared among fewer people, meaning the cost to each consumer would be greater. The administrative costs of any scheme could potentially also be relatively high.

The timeline that the UR is working to is as follows:

- UR is currently undertaking consumer research to inform their consultation.
- UR will publish their consultation for eight weeks from the week commencing 27th October to the week commencing 15th December 2025.
- The UR will offer their Decision paper and any necessary draft regulations to DfE in March 2026.
- My Department will then, without delay, bring forward new regulations if required in response to any changes agreed by the Executive. In addition, NIE Networks has commenced a strategic review of network resilience and its response to severe weather events. NIE plans to deliver a comprehensive range of improvements as a rolling multi-year programme with actions ongoing this calendar year and beyond, subject to UR review and agreement as part of the regulatory framework. As an example, it is already clear that an enhanced tree cutting programme will bolster grid resilience. To minimise planned interruptions and ensure efficient delivery of the improvements, the additional work will be integrated with NIE Network's existing plans for tree cutting, network reinforcement and IT development.