

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department for the Economy

REVIEW OF ELECTRICITY GUARANTEED STANDARDS OF SERVICE AND OVERALL STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE

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Dr Archibald (The Minister for the Economy): I wish to provide an update to the Assembly, following the Written Ministerial Statement I made on 30 July 2025, on the issue of payments for electricity consumers whose electricity supply is disrupted by severe weather events.

Under the existing Electricity Guaranteed Standards of Service (GSS), the electricity distribution company, NIE Networks, may apply for a severe weather exemption from payments, and this exemption cannot be overridden by Government.

In my statement of 30 July, I informed the House that the Utility Regulator was carrying out a fresh consultation on a range of GSS issues, including options for payments in severe weather conditions, along with likely costs of options. I also indicated that the Utility Regulator had commissioned surveys and roundtable discussions to explore consumer opinion to inform its consultation options and their impacts.

The Utility Regulator has now completed its review of the current regulations. It has advised the Department that at this time it is not proposing any change to the existing severe weather exemption. It has also advised that feedback from consumers and stakeholders emphasised the importance of improving network resilience, alongside concerns raised by consumer representatives about the potential impact on electricity bills, particularly for vulnerable and low income households, if payments costs were to be recovered from consumers.

NIE Networks is undertaking significant investment in the electricity network aimed at increasing network resilience, thereby reducing the impact of future severe weather events. This investment ought to reduce the frequency and duration of supply interruptions during severe weather events.

While improving network resilience is currently the priority, I am setting a clear policy direction that customers should receive payments when they are left without electricity for a period of time as a result of severe weather events. I have therefore asked my officials to develop the policy, the details of which will be set within this mandate.