Annual Report

of the

Commission for Energy Regulation’s

Energy Customers Team

2008

CER09/209
To: Mr. Eamon Ryan, T.D. Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources

In accordance with the requirements set out in S.I. 452 of 2004 and S.I. 60 of 2005 the Commission is please to present its second report on the number and type of complaints received from customers, their resolutions and the service levels provided by suppliers in respect of the period 1st January 2008 to 31st December 2008.

This report also outlines the activities of the Commission’s Energy Customers Team during 2008, including the development and launch of the Commission’s customer website energycustomers.ie.

Michael G. Tutty
Chairman
Foreword

2008 was a big year for the Commission’s Energy Customers Team, with a number of significant projects throughout the year, including the launch of energycustomers.ie, and high levels of calls and queries from customers.

The Energy Customers Team spoke or corresponded with over 1,200 customers during the year with respect to their queries or complaints; this included 182 complex complaints on which the Commission issued formal decisions. Details of the type of contact and the issues these customers raised can be found later on in the report. With customer contact in the early months of 2009 already at higher levels than in 2008, it is shaping up to be another busy year for the Team.

The key project which the Team concentrated on was the implementation and launch of our new customer website energycustomers.ie. Considerable time and effort went into researching information for the site based on the types of queries we had received from customers. The website was formally launched in October 2008 with a press launch and a weekend of meeting customers at the Ideal Homes Exhibition in Dublin. The launch received coverage in most of the main national papers and a number of local papers. In addition the Exhibition was deemed a huge success with over 27,000 in attendance over the five days and in the region of 5,000 of these visitors having direct contact with the energycustomers.ie stand.

While the launch of energycustomers.ie represented the public launch of our customer information and dispute resolution service, the Team were kept busy putting in place the necessary systems and processes to support the service. A new customer management system was put in place to record, monitor and track phone calls, emails and letters received from customers. The system itself is built around key formal processes and procedures developed during the year.

While 2008 was a challenging and rewarding year for the Energy Customers Team, 2009 will bring its own challenges with respect to customer services, complaint resolution and the provision of relevant information. This is particularly relevant in the context of burgeoning competition at the residential end of the market.

Key priorities for the team in 2009 will include:

- Further promotion of the energycustomers.ie brand and increasing public awareness of our services
- Expanding the energycustomers.ie website to include more information for customers on areas of direct relevance and interest.
- Reviewing the existing guidelines for suppliers’ Codes of Practice and Customer Charters with a view to creating a handbook for new entrant suppliers
- Continuing to investigate customers complaints and feed into the development of customer related policy as issues arise

Michael G. Tutty
Chairman
# Table of Contents

Foreword .......................................................................................................................... 3

1.0 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 5

1.1 Role of the Commission ............................................................................................ 5

1.2 The Energy Customers Team .................................................................................... 5

1.3 Overview of work in 2008 ......................................................................................... 6

1.4 Structure of report ..................................................................................................... 6

2.0 Operational Work ....................................................................................................... 7

2.1 Information Requests: ............................................................................................... 7

2.2 Standard Complaints .................................................................................................. 7

2.3 Complex Complaints .................................................................................................. 9

3.0 Case Studies .............................................................................................................. 11

Case Study 1 ...................................................................................................................... 11

Case Study 2 ...................................................................................................................... 11

Case Study 3 ...................................................................................................................... 12

Case Study 4 ...................................................................................................................... 13

Case Study 5 ...................................................................................................................... 13

4.0 2008 Project Work .................................................................................................... 15

4.1 Launch of energycustomers.ie .................................................................................. 15

4.2 Customer Management System ................................................................................. 16

4.3 Review of Codes of Practice & Customer Charters .................................................... 16

5.0 Plans for 2009 .......................................................................................................... 18
1.0 Introduction
This report is a summary of work undertaken by the Commission’s Energy Customers Team in 2008. The Energy Customers Team was established late in 2006 to provide a complaint resolution and information service directly to small business and domestic customers.

In 2008 the first Energy Customers Team annual report was produced which included information on operational and project work completed in 2007. It also highlighted areas that the Energy Customers Team would be working on in 2008. These areas included the development of a customer friendly website, the implementation of formal processes, a Customer Management System, and finally the branding of the Commission’s customer brand, previously referred to as ‘Ask CER’. This year’s annual report will follow a similar outline and will document the progress made in 2008.

1.1 Role of the Commission
The Commission has a statutory responsibility to provide a complaints resolution service to customers with an unresolved dispute with their supplier or network operator. The Energy Customers Team fulfils this role for domestic and small business customers on the Commission’s behalf. When a customer has completed their supplier or network operator’s internal complaint process, and is still not satisfied that their complaint has been adequately considered, they can then contact the Energy Customers Team who will investigate the matter on their behalf. Following investigation the Commission has the power to direct suppliers and network operators to award compensation or to resolve the complaint in a set fashion if the customer’s complaint is upheld. (Section 3 outlines examples of investigations completed by the Commission and the directions given).

Another function of the Commission is to ensure customers have access to information regarding gas and electricity. The Energy Customers Team is the Commission’s first point of contact for domestic information requests and now also provides a customer friendly website, energycustomers.ie.

In addition to responding to customer queries and complaints, the Energy Customers Team uses the information gained through its investigations to give input to industry policy development and to raise customer issues with suppliers and network operators.

1.2 The Energy Customers Team
The Energy Customer Team is part of the Commission’s Safety, Environment and Customer Affairs Division. The Team has 2 Customer Affairs Officers and 1 Customer Affairs Administrator who all report to the Customer Affairs Manager.
1.3 Overview of work in 2008

The work of the Energy Customers Team can be categorised in two ways:

- Regular operational running of the Energy Customers Team, dealing with complaints and information requests from customers; and
- Project based work.

1.4 Structure of report

This report provides an overview of the main work streams for Energy Customers Team in 2008.

Section 2 of the report covers the day to day operational work of the Team. We have provided a summary of the number and type of complaints which we have dealt with alongside information on the other type of contact which we also have with customers.

Section 3 provides an overview of five individual complex complaints. These case studies show the types of complaint being handled by the Commission, the way in which they are investigated and the outcome of the customer’s complaint.

In Section 4 we cover the project work completed in 2008. This section includes information on the launch of the Commission’s new customer website energycustomers.ie, the implementation of a new Customer Management System and the review of suppliers Codes of Practice & Customer Charters.

Finally Section 5 of this report covers the Commission’s plans for 2009.
2.0 Operational Work

The Energy Customers Team deals with 3 main categories of customer contact: Information Requests, Standard Complaints and Complex Complaints.

2.1 Information Requests:

Information Requests are defined as general questions and queries from customers referring to natural gas, electricity or the functions of the CER. The type of Information Requests received include general information on disconnection and reconnection fees, list of suppliers, information on how to get connected, and inquiries on what role the CER plays.

In most cases the Energy Customers Team can relay the information to the customer at the first point of contact. However in some cases it is necessary to discuss the information requests with other internal departments. In other cases the request may not fall under the Commission’s remit and at this point the Energy Customers Team will direct the customer to the appropriate body.

The chart on Information Requests below shows that in 2008 the Energy Customers Team received 389 Information Requests.

Over 17% of these were requesting a list of gas and/or electricity suppliers. The Energy Customers Team have this information to hand and can give the details over the phone, send out information in the post/email or alternatively direct the customer to the new website energycustomers.ie which provides a full list of suppliers and networks operators in Ireland.

In 2008 a different process was applied to setting the tariffs for the year ahead and this was reflected in the figure of just under 20% requesting information on billing and tariffs. Billing queries involve helping a customer to understand their bill in relation to units used, prices applied and the methods to pay the balance. Tariff queries relate to new price increases or decreases and how they will be applied to the customer’s account.

The Energy Customers Team also received calls requesting information on the new Smart Metering pilot scheme being operated by ESB Networks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Requests:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CER Role / Policy</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How billing Works</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dis/Re Connection Fees</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplier Deposits</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart Metering</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Suppliers</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Tariff Info</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non CER</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Standard Complaints
Standard Complaints are defined as general complaints which do not require the full scale investigation of a supplier’s or network operator’s behaviour in relation to a specific incident. In general they can be answered at the first point of contact or with limited correspondence. Examples of these would be complaints regarding fixed regulated standing charges, customer’s dissatisfaction regarding the introduction of new fees or tariffs or general policy complaints. The Energy Customers Team monitors these complaints to ensure that if a trend is visible in the type of issues being raised by customers that feedback is given to the division within the Commission with responsibility for that issue. This ensures that as policies are reviewed customers’ views are included for consideration.

The Energy Customers Team dealt with 646 standard complaints in 2008.

The single biggest area of complaint in 2008 related to the matter of cost in some respect. These issues included general complaints regarding estimated bills, tariffs, fees, and deposits. Estimated billing issues are also a common factor for Complex Complaints, however within a Standard Complaint they refer to a customer who has contacted the Commission and complains in general about the process of estimation. In cases like these, the Energy Customers Team advises the customer to contact the dedicated phone line for meter readings and submit their own meter. They may also direct the customer to energycustomers.ie for information on how to read your meter or apply for a key to unlock the meter. This issue represented just under 20% of Standard Complaints and shows a similar trend to contacts received in 2007.

13% of complaints referred to either price increases or decreases, which occurred in 2008, while 19% were in relation to suppliers’ deposits. Some customers believe that they should not need to pay a deposit for opening an account. These customers are advised that the policy of applying deposits to customers' accounts is to protect both the customer and the supplier from bad debts accruing on accounts. Suppliers’ policies in this regard, are monitored by the Commission. During 2008, a number of complaints were received in relation to the duration of time that Bord Gáis Energy Supply were holding on to customer deposits. At the time their policy was to hold a deposit indefinitely. Following discussions with the Commission, Bord Gáis Energy Supply agreed to alter this policy following the implementation of their new billing system. They will now refund customers’ deposits after 14 months provided that the customer has maintained a good credit history for the previous six bills.

In addition to complaints regarding natural gas and electricity, the Energy Customers Team also receives complaints from customers which do not fall under the CER’s remit, for example, complaints regarding oil, LPG and petrol products. Where possible these customers are referred to the appropriate body to assist them with their complaint.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard Complaint Type</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Billing / High Cost</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billing / Estimated Readings</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dis/Re connection Fees</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplier Deposits</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tariffs</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas Boiler Repairs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voltage Problems</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESB Lines/Poles on land</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>646</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3 Complex Complaints

A Complex Complaint is a complaint between a customer and a supplier or network operator, or both, which requires a full investigation by the Commission. A complaint will only be logged as a Complex Complaint if it has completed the supplier or network operator’s full complaints handling process and if this has been confirmed by both the customer and the supplier or network operator. The investigation of a Complex Complaint includes liaising with the customer, supplier, and/or network operator whilst determining the full extent of what has occurred in relation to the issue raised by the customer. Once the Energy Customers Team is satisfied that enough information has been provided to issue a determination on the matter a decision is made by the Commission. The Commission has the power to direct a supplier or network operator to compensate or put in place a solution to the problem, if appropriate.


Examples of Complex Complaints include estimated meter readings, cross metering, time switch problems. Estimated meter reading Complex Complaints usually involve a customer receiving a large bill due to estimated readings. This means that no meter readings were taken at premises. Each bill was under estimated and when a meter reading is finally received a large outstanding balance is left on the account. These are dealt with on case by case basis as there can be many reasons for this.

Cross metering complaints are received from customers who have been billed for electricity being used in a different property. Typically this complaint will arise when a customer (the occupant or owner of an apartment) suspects that the bill does not reflect his or her pattern of usage, e.g. if the apartment has been unoccupied for a period. Usually this occurs in new housing complexes when a builder has provided incorrect housing numbers for meters installed.

Time switch complaints refer to electricity day and night meter. Sometimes the day time is not set correctly or the time switch may be broken. This can lead to customers being under-charged or over-charged. When the error is identified ESB Networks fix the meter and test the average consumption over the next few weeks. They then compare the percentage used in the day time and night time and recalculate the incorrect bills using this information. In some cases the customer may have been undercharged and is now left with a large outstanding balance on their account.

As was the case in 2007, a large proportion of Complex Complaints (35%) refereed to long term estimation of electricity bills and a further 18% represented complaints which were triggered by the receipt of large bills. Customers with complaints arising from long term estimated meter readings usually contact their supplier first as they have received a large bill. These complaints are also logged against the network operator, given that the root cause of the complaint relates to the meter reading service. While ESB Networks aim to take four actual meter readings per year this is not guaranteed and a number of customers may not receive a meter reading for long periods, up to 5 years in some of the cases dealt with by the Energy Customers Team. The reasons for this can be attributed to the customer or to the meter reading service depending on the circumstances, e.g. gates locked, no access to the meter inside premises, no meter reader in the area. For some customers who do not receive meter readings for an extended period of time this may lead to large bill being received when an actual meter reading is taken. Of the cases investigated by the Energy Customers Team, 64 were regarding this type of complaint.

The Commission has had a number of discussions with ESB Networks and individual suppliers about initiatives to reduce the amount of complaints in this area. Current initiatives include making the information on how to avoid estimated reads more visible on bills and an easy step-by-step process to follow on how to submit readings.

The Energy Customers Team also advises all customers who make contact in relation to the estimation of bills to monitor their bills and provide their own meter readings if they believe that their bills are being estimated incorrectly. All cases regarding the long term estimation of bills are dealt with separately as there are varying reasons behind this issue; as such, the Commission’s determinations vary in these cases. As with Standard
Complaints, the Energy Customers Team monitors trends in issues being experienced by customers and feeds back to the appropriate division within the Commission as appropriate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complex Complaint Type:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Billing / Incorrect</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection Charges</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Meter Reads</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross Metering</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Switch</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faulty meter</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tariffs</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to Land/Property</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>182</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Breakdown of the level of complaints upheld vs not upheld by the Commission:
3.0 Case Studies

These case studies represent a sample of the complaints received by the Commission in 2008. They outline the complaint that was received, the investigation process and the outcome of the complaint. They serve to illustrate the range and individual nature of complaints.

Case Study 1 – Serious Billing Error

**Complaint**
A Customer complained that he had received a very large bill, in the sum of more than €3,000 from ESB Customer Supply. The customer had been set up on equaliser payments for the previous 6 years which meant he was to pay a certain amount into his account every month. This was to be taken directly from his bank by direct debit and he received bills, which confirmed that payments had been received. The customer received the large bill with no explanation as to where this figure had come from. When he queried this with his supplier he was advised that the payment had not been taken from his bank account. When he complained he was offered a payment plan for the bill. He did not believe this was fair and submitted his complaint to the Commission for examination.

**Investigation**
The Commission confirmed that the payments reflected on his bills had been incorrectly taken from a different person’s account, known as person X. This was only spotted when person X queried why ESB Customer Supply had been taking funds from the account.

It was the Commission’s view that the error originated solely due to the administrative error on the part of ESB Customer Supply when setting up person X’s account. They incorrectly changed the account details of the customer rather than those of person X. The Commission also observed that the bills issued to the customer led him to believe the account was up to date as it was clearly stated that the bill had been paid by direct debit. The Commission had no doubt that the electricity was used but, was not actually paid for by the customer; however due to the mistake made the customer believed that his bills had been paid.

**Points considered when making the decision:**

- Customer received bills advising that payment was received
- The error originated due to an ESB Customer Supply administrative error
- The customer service received was poor
- The customer now had a bill for 6 years worth of electricity
- The electricity was used by the customer, but in actual fact not paid for
- The customer did not check that the funds were being taken from his bank account

**Outcome**
The customer’s complaint was upheld.

In addition to the customer’s complaint being upheld and given the particular exceptional circumstances of the case, the Commission directed ESB Customer Supply to reduce the bill by 50% and arranged that a payment plan be put in place for the remainder of bill. The Commission determined that this had occurred due to a once off administrative error rather than a system problem.

Case Study 2 – Disconnection on Safety Grounds

**Complaint**
A customer complained in relation to charges applied to her account, when a technician was dispatched to her property after she contacted Bord Gáis Networks reporting a suspected gas leak. The costs were in relation to a boiler being disconnected on safety grounds. The customer believed that as she had complained about a smell of gas, the technician had no right to disconnect the boiler. She was advised she would need to have the boiler serviced before it would be reconnected. The customer believed she should not be liable for the charges to reconnect her boiler.

**Investigation**

The Energy Customers Team confirmed that the customer contacted Bord Gáis Networks with a suspected gas leak. As such Bord Gáis dispatched a technician to investigate the matter. Although the technician did not detect a gas leak, he did issue a Notification of Hazard following tests which set off an adjacent Carbon Monoxide alarm. Before the boiler could be safely reconnected the customer needed to have the boiler serviced.

**Points considered when making the decision:**

- The customer contacted Bord Gáis Networks regarding a suspected leak
- Bord Gáis followed the correct procedure in testing the area
- A Carbon Monoxide alarm was set off
- The technician followed the correct procedure in turning of the boiler

**Outcome**

The customer’s complaint was not upheld.

The Commission was satisfied that the technician acted in accordance with safety procedures and as such did not uphold this complaint.

**Case Study 3 – Estimated Meter Readings**

**Complaint**

A commercial electricity customer complained about receiving a large bill from his supplier, ESB Customer Supply. When he queried this he was advised the bill was under-estimated for 1 year and the additional charges on his bill reflected the actual consumption over the year. The customer believed this was an ESB error and therefore should not be held liable for these charges. ESB Networks had offered a reduction in his bill and ESB Customer Supply had offered a payment plan. The customer declined the offer and believed he was not liable for any of the charges.

**Investigation**

The Energy Customers Team confirmed the bills had been estimated for a period of 1 year as there was no meter reader employed in the area at the time. However, it was also noted that on every bill issued throughout the year it was clearly visible that the bill was based on estimated readings as an E was noted beside the reading. As such the customer was made aware of this and had the option to call in with an actual meter reading.

**Points considered when making the decision:**

- Duration of problem; the meter was not read for a period 1 year
- Every bill clearly indicated that the bill was based on an estimate
- There were details on each of the bills on what to do when you get an estimated read
- The customer did not call in with a meter reading
**Outcome**

This customer’s complaint was not upheld.

Although the Commission recognised that the meter was not read during the period, the duration of time over which this had occurred and lack of effort made on the customer’s part were also taken into account. The Commission also determined that ESB Customer Supply and ESB Networks had made a fair and reasonable offer to rectify the situation and did not direct either company to compensate the customer further.

**Case Study 4 – Meter Reading Error**

**Complaint**

A commercial electricity customer complained after receiving a large bill from his supplier, Energia. He was advised that his meter had not been read for over a year and that his bills had been under-estimated. He was advised that the bill was large as an actual meter reading had now been obtained. Energia offered a 10% reduction in relation to the bill if the remaining balance was cleared immediately or alternatively offered the customer a payment plan with no reduction on his arrears. The customer complained that it was not his responsibility to read the meter and believed Energia had failed him.

**Investigation**

While the customer’s complaint centred on the explanation given to him by Energia, that his bill had been under-estimated due to meter reading, during investigation, the Team established that while the under-estimations had contributed to the bill, they were not the main factor in its cause. On investigation it was discovered that ESB Networks had carried out work as requested by the customer to increase the MIC (capacity of the electricity connection) from 29kVA to 40kVA. After completion of this work a multiplier of 50 was to be set on the meter. This multiplier is used to multiply what is recorded on the meter by 50 to determine the customer’s actual electricity usage. This did not happen for 5 months and as such the customer’s bills during this period were 50 times less than they should have been.

**Points considered when making the decision:**

- Energia did not investigate the matter with ESB Networks and the customer was not given correct information in relation to how the bill had arisen.
- ESB Networks had made a mistake in relation to the customer’s multiplier.
- The actions the customer could have taken in relation to his meter readings.
- Offer made by ESB Networks once the issue was identified during investigation.

**Outcome**

The customer’s complaint was upheld.

The Commission determined that the customer had been failed by both his supplier and network operator. As such, blame was apportioned to both parties. ESB Networks were required to reduce the bill by 10% and Energia were also required to make a further 10% reduction and enter into a 1 year payment plan for the remaining balance.

**Case Study 5 – Application of Tariff for Large Residential Gas Consumer**

**Complaint**

A customer complained that Bord Gáis Energy Supply had placed him onto the large residential user rate tariff. As a result the customer is paying a separate capacity charge in addition to his unit rate and which is
a higher fixed charge than that paid by a regular domestic customer. The customer believed that this was unfair as it was a residential premises and he believed he should be on the regular domestic tariff.

**Investigation**

The Energy Customers Team confirmed that the customer had been placed on the large residential user rate tariff. This was due to the customer’s level of consumption which had been over 76,000 kWh for the previous year. Any customer whose usage is above 73,000 kWh per year is transferred on to the large residential user rate. This tariff requires customers to pay for the capacity they are allocated on the gas network separately to their energy use. This means that they pay higher fixed charges, however their unit rate for gas is lower than that of a regular domestic customer. This charge is incorporated into the unit rate for standard domestic customers.

**Points considered when making the decision:**

- The customer used in excess of 73,000 kWh the previous year
- The correct procedure was used when determining the customer’s tariff band

**Outcome**

This customer’s complaint was not upheld.

The Commission determined that the customer fulfilled the criteria to be placed on the large residential user tariff. As such, Bord Gáis Energy Supply had not acted incorrectly. The Commission indicated to the customer that if he reduced his consumption to below 73,000 kWh over the next year that he would be placed on the standard domestic tariff.
4.0 2008 Project Work

2008 was a busy year for the Energy Customers Team with project work concentrated in three main areas.

1) The launch of energycustomers.ie;
2) The implementation of a new Customer Management System; and
3) The review and development of Codes of Practice and Customer Charters

4.1 Launch of energycustomers.ie

The first half of 2008 saw the Energy Customers Team concentrating on the development and launch of the Commission’s customer brand energycustomers.ie.

The website has been developed primarily to provide information for domestic electricity and natural gas customers. It provides customers with an overview of:

- The electricity and natural gas markets in Ireland
- Information on their rights and energy suppliers’ codes of practice
- What to do if they experience problems with their bills
- Steps to take for connection to the electricity or natural gas network
- How to read your meter (avoid estimated bills)
- Information on changing supplier
- Safety information for both gas and electricity

The website also provides a full list of energy suppliers’ contact details and has a helpful hint section. This includes information on:

- Moving Home (what to do regarding electricity or gas accounts)
- How to Be Bill Aware
- Payment Issues
- If You Have a Complaint

A formal complaints process has been implemented by the Energy Customers Team and this process is available on the website and outlines in detail the steps a customer should take when making a formal complaint.
In October 2008, the Commission launched the website energycustomers.ie at the Ideal Homes Exhibition in Dublin. The exhibition was held over 5 days and was attended by over 27,000 people. This allowed the Energy Customers Team to meet the public face to face and explain the role they play and the support they offer. The Team interacted with over 5,000 people over the weekend and provided 4,000 leaflets to the public. Over the 5 days they received many questions and queries regarding suppliers’ practices, how to avoid estimated bills and how to switch supplier. It also allowed the Energy Customers Team to direct customers to the website for future assistance.

The launch was covered by over 15 newspapers and websites following a successful photo-call and PR campaign.

To coincide with the launch of the website a leaflet outlining the role of energycustomers.ie was published. It included all relevant contact details and outlined what information is available on the website.

4.2 Customer Management System

To support any increase in customer contact following the launch of energycustomers.ie, the Commission implemented a new customer management system to monitor, track and record all calls, emails and letters from customers. Following a procurement process a suitable system was identified and configured to suit the Team’s requirements. This system allows the Energy Customers Team to search and identify complaints in a more efficient and easy manner when contacted by customers.

It also allows for more accurate recording of the number and type of complaints being received and the identification of trends in issues being experienced by customers.

The system can run regular daily, weekly and monthly reports which allow the Team to identify any problem area or any issues which then lead to further discussions or investigations with Suppliers or Network Operators.

4.3 Review of Codes of Practice & Customer Charters

All suppliers and network operators are required to put in place codes of practice and customer charters to protect customers in relation to certain aspects of their business. Suppliers are required to produce codes on billing, their practices in relation to disconnection of customers and their marketing practices. In addition to these, suppliers and network operators are required to put in place services for vulnerable customers, a complaint handling process and a customer charter. The Commission approved and formally launched these codes of practice and customer charters in March 2007. Suppliers are now operating to their
approved codes and charters and in 2008 they had to report on their first year’s performance from March 2007 up until March 2008.

During the summer months suppliers were asked to provide reports setting out their performance against their codes and charters. These were reviewed and the Commission is satisfied that all suppliers have in place their required codes of practice and customer charters and that they are operating in line with their commitments. Following review of the reports however, it was clear that the reports received could not be compared and it was decided to develop standard reporting procedures for future reports. At the beginning of November an industry forum was held to discuss the format of reporting for 2009 and the standard definition of a complaint for reporting purposes. To this end, a standard complaint reporting template was discussed at the forum and comments/suggestions were requested. The Energy Customers Team will be progressing this in 2009 with a view to implementing a standard reporting requirement for all suppliers.

In addition to work reviewing the existing Codes of Practice and Customer Charters, a consultation paper for proposed Guidelines for a Code of Practice on Natural Gas Prepayment Meters were published on 25th November 2008. Responses were received before 23rd December 2008 and the decision on this paper will be issued in early 2009.
5.0 Plans for 2009

In 2009 the Energy Customers Team will continue to respond to, answer and investigate complaints received by customers. It also intends to heighten awareness of energycustomers.ie with new literature and a public awareness promotion programme. The aim is to encourage householders to become more 'bill aware’ and to take responsibility for their energy consumption.

Projects which will be undertaken in 2009 include:

- A review of existing guidelines for Code of Practice and Customer Charters
- Further development of the energycustomers.ie website
- Review of Customer Impact Analysis