

Media Release

CER Publishes Annual Customer Care Report and Reminds Electricity, Gas and Water Customers to ‘Know Their Rights’

- **Nearly 3,500 contacts from energy and water customers received by the CER Customer Care Team shows slight decrease from 2015**
- **Almost 50% of ‘Complex Complaints’ were upheld by the CER in favour of the Customer**
- **CER encourages customers to complain to its Customer Care Team, which provides an independent dispute resolution service**
- **Energy supplier complaints down, but increase in complaints for Gas Networks Operator**

8 June 2017: The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) has reminded customers to ‘know their rights’ when dealing with utility companies in the energy and water sectors with the publication of its Annual Customer Care Report today. The report details the level of contacts and complaints that its Customer Care Team (CCT) dealt with in relation to the energy and water sectors in 2016.

The Team was established in 2006 and provides an independent complaints resolution service to customers who may have an unresolved dispute with their energy supplier, network operator or water supplier.

During 2016, there were 3,392 contacts from customers to the Customer Care Team. While this was a small decrease in the level of contacts from customers in 2015, the high Level of demand illustrated the importance of the services that the Customer Care Team provide.

Of these contacts, the most common issues raised by customers were account problems, issues with customer billing by suppliers or network operators, meter issues and leak and flow issues for water users. Across all of the electricity, gas and water sectors, almost 50% of complaints were either upheld in favour of the customer or the customer accepted a settlement offer.

A case study* of one such complaint investigated and settled by the CER showed a customer was incorrectly charged €2,500 for gas use due to a crossed meter. Following a complaint to the Customer Care Team and investigation, Gas Networks Ireland offered to waive the total adjustment, offered the customer €100 as a goodwill gesture and apologised for their error.

Energy

The electricity and gas supply market generated 83% of all complex complaints to the CER, which are contacts from customers that require a full investigation, received by the CER. These included issues with inaccurate billing, account issues, such as incorrect account details, problems with budget plans, and large catch up bills following estimated readings.

There are twelve suppliers now active in the domestic and Small and Medium Enterprises combined energy retail sector. The market share among suppliers has remained stable with less than 1% change between 2015 and 2016.

In 2016, among the large combined energy suppliers, which are those who have over 100,000 customers, Electric Ireland held 50% market share in the combined energy market, the largest in the sector, but did not hold a corresponding level of complaints in generating 38% of all complex complaints.

By comparison, Bord Gáis Energy held a market share of 23% in 2016, but generated 35% of all complex complaints that were closed the CER Customer Care Team in 2016. This continued a positive annual trend by Bord Gáis Energy since 2014, bringing the level of complex complaints it generated down from 43% in 2015, with the same combined market share of 23%.

SSE Airtricity reduced the level of complex complaints to 9% with a 15% market share. Energia saw an increase in the level of complex complaints, from 2% in 2015 with a market share of 5%, to 6% in 2016 with a market share of 6%. PrePay Power significantly reduced the level of complex complaints from 12% in 2015, to 4% in 2016 while maintaining a market share of 4%.

Networks

In terms of the networks that supply electricity and gas to customers, this is delivered through ESB Networks (ESBN) and Gas Networks Ireland (GNI) as regulated monopolies. In terms of electricity networks, ESBN delivers electricity to over 2.2 million sites and GNI supplies gas to almost 675,000 sites

Based on the number of complex complaints made against network operators, for every 10,000 sites, 0.2 complex complaints were logged against ESBN. The number of complex complaints logged per 10,000 sites against GNI increased from 0.3 per 10,000 sites to 0.6 per 10,000 sites in 2016. While the complaint numbers are low and there are no particular issues that have driven the increase, the CER will continue to closely monitor this trend in 2017.

Water

There were 473 Irish Water contacts received in 2016, a decrease of 27% on the 650 received in 2015. This is down significantly from the high of 786 contacts in 2014, which was attributed to the large number of queries following the public announcement on water charges in that year.

Equally, the decline in contacts in 2016 is primarily attributable to the suspension of domestic water charges. In 2016 Irish Water contacts equated to 14% of all contacts received by the CCT.

The water contacts received reflected similar issues seen in the energy sector and were mainly with regard to account problems and billing. 19% of contacts that the Customer Care Team received

were instances where the CCT had to refer the customer back to Irish Water. This situation mainly occurs in instances where the customer has brought their complaint to CCT without having first completed Irish Water's complaints process, as is the case with energy suppliers and network companies.

The CER Commissioner with responsibility for the retail sector, **Aoife MacEvilly**, said: *"It is vital to provide customers with an independent source for information, referral and dispute resolution to ensure customers are receiving fair and appropriate treatment by utility companies.*

2016 saw a reduction in the number of complaints that the Customer Care Team received, which may be due to a number of factors, including a reduction in energy prices throughout 2016 or the suspension of water charges. This is to be welcomed as it also indicates that customers are experiencing fewer difficulties when dealing with suppliers, network operators and Irish Water.

However, it is important that both energy and water customers continue to refer complaints to the CER as suppliers and network operators have a responsibility, under the codes of practice set out by the CER, to maintain a minimum level of customer service. If they are not satisfied with the service they receive, a complaint will allow the Customer Care Team to pursue the issue on behalf of the customer and also allow the CER to work with the suppliers or network companies to improve any areas of poor service that customers are experiencing."

Energy or water customers who have an unresolved complaint with their service provider are encouraged to contact the Commission for Energy Regulation Customer Care Team by visiting the website, www.cer.ie, calling 1890 404 404 or emailing customer@cer.ie.

ENDS

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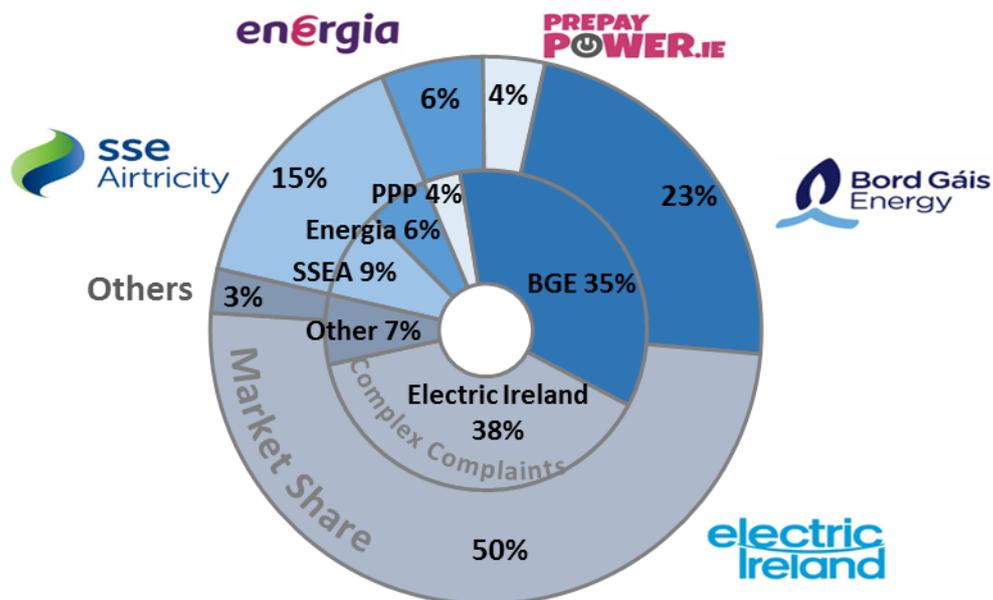
Notes to Editor:

Note 1: The types of customer contacts received by the Customer Care Team are classified to allow each contact to be dealt with as efficiently as possible and are categorised as:

- 1) **Return to Supplier or Network Operator:** Contacts are referred back to supplier's/network operators complaints handling process. This accounted for 2,555/75% of total contacts received in 2016.
- 2) **Complex Complaints:** Issues that are escalated to the CER and require a full investigation. Complex complaints represented 278/8% of total contacts received in 2016.
- 3) **Information Requests:** General queries and requests for information in relation to the function of energy or water markets. These represented 493/15% of the total contacts received in 2016.
- 4) **Refer to Third Party:** contacts that fall outside of the CER's remit e.g. water quality, pollution. These accounted for 43/1% of contacts received in 2016.
- 5) **Standard Complaints:** Relate to CER policy or tariff decisions. These represented 23/1% contacts in 2016.

Note 2:

Combined Energy Sectors - Market Share and Complex Complaints



*Case Study - Gas Crossed Meters - Complaint Upheld

A customer contacted her supplier after she received a large bill for €2,500. Her supplier referred her to her network operator as the large bill was the result of a crossed meter.

The customer purchased the property in 2004 and the crossed meter went undetected until early 2016 when her neighbour upgraded their gas boiler which resulted in her gas being disconnected. The network operator attended the premises and discovered that the customer's meter had been crossed with her neighbours. The network operator corrected the situation and adjusted the reads for each of the customers, which resulted in the large bill.

The network operator stated that the meters were crossed since the premises were built and therefore the adjustment reflected the customer's consumption. The network operator offered 25% reduction as a gesture of goodwill which was rejected by the customer as being a pensioner she could not afford this bill and was duly stressed.

The CCT investigated the matter and requested information from the network operator into whether any other gas works was carried out at the property since 2004. On further investigation by the CCT and following discussions with the customer, it transpired that the neighbour in question had also put in a gas fire a few years back, but the customer's gas was not affected. We discussed this with the network operator who undertook a further investigation and discovered that the error was because the network operator had inputted information incorrectly on their system a number of years ago.

The network operator offered to waive the total adjustment, offered the customer €100 as a goodwill gesture and apologised for their error. The CCT felt this was a fair offer by the network operator and in our final decision we directed them to implement it.

This case raised some concerns with how the network operator investigate and calculate the usage for cross-meters. Due consideration was not given to length of time the customer is in the premises or the fact that the error could have occurred after the builder completed his work. It was only when the CCT investigated the matter that the full facts came to light.