

# The Extra Help Unit: Priority Process

Citizens Advice Scotland

March 2021

## Overview

The Extra Help Unit (EHU) provides support to vulnerable domestic consumers and micro-businesses across Great Britain with their energy complaints. As defined in the CEAR Act 2007, the EHU has statutory duties to deal with cases where the consumer's energy supply has been disconnected or is at risk of imminent disconnection. The Unit also has statutory powers to support vulnerable consumers. A person may be deemed to be vulnerable due to their personal circumstances, the complexity or urgency of their complaint. The EHU is a referral only service with agreed referral partners including Citizens Advice Consumer Service, Ofgem and Ombudsman Services: Energy.

The new priority process has been designed to streamline and assist the EHU in dealing with priority cases seen regularly such as self-disconnection, prepayment and RPU cases but we understand the need for flexibility in more complex cases. This will be our process for both domestic and micro business priority complaints.

## Process

- The EHU will log the priority complaint in our database on receiving a mid-call transfer from Citizens Advice Consumer Service or by any other referral partners due to a consumer being off supply or at imminent threat of disconnection
- The EHU Caseworker in our Priority Team will take all the details from the consumer including their vulnerability and reasons for being off supply and telephone the energy supplier straight away.
- The EHU expects the energy supplier to take the details of the priority from the EHU Caseworker and deal with it immediately. The EHU expect the energy supplier to call us back as soon as possible to update us but at least within two hours of logging the priority to provide an update. If for some reason the supplier is unable to contact the consumer after making reasonable attempt to contact them, please let the EHU know as soon as possible.
- The EHU must have an update to all priorities logged with a supplier by 4:30 on each day unless it logged after this time.
- If a priority is logged after 4:30 the EHU expect confirmation the supplier has picked the priority up and contacting the consumer to resolve imminently. On these priorities the EHU expect an update later that evening or early the next day. The update can be provided by email to [EHUPriority@ehu.org.uk](mailto:EHUPriority@ehu.org.uk)
- The EHU will then email the supplier a priority form from [EHUPriority@ehu.org.uk](mailto:EHUPriority@ehu.org.uk) and expect a response to this email address within **two** working days. The supplier should complete all the points and confirm the action taken to restore the energy supply or prevent imminent disconnection – there may be occasions that the form confirms additional actions in the future to resolve the overall issue/complaint
- If the response received is satisfactory, the EHU will aim to review the response and close our priority complaint within a maximum 10 working days from the date the response is received.

## Escalations

- If the EHU Caseworker has not received a call-back from the energy supplier within two hours, they will attempt to call the supplier and contact the adviser dealing with the priority to get an update.
- If a supplier had not contacted the EHU and the EHU Caseworker has tried to contact the supplier to chase an update to no avail, then an EHU Team Manager will contact the supplier by telephone or email to escalate the priority complaint. It may be escalated by an EHU Team Manager if the priority is towards the end of a working day and the EHU Caseworker has not been able to chase the priority within the timescales above.
- If EHU Team Manager is unable to reach the energy supplier's escalated contact after making a telephone call to escalate, we will follow up with an email to the named escalated contact.
- Not responding to a consumer being off supply will be logged as a breach of Ofgem's Complaint Handling Standards set out by Ofgem. Therefore, it is imperative suppliers have resources and contacts in place to handle priority cases effectively.

## Responding to a priority form

- The EHU expect a response within **two** working days from the priority form being sent e.g. priority form received Monday, expect a response by Thursday.
- Compliance with this timescale will be monitored. Although we will take a pragmatic approach, regular breaches which cannot be satisfactorily explained, will result in the matter being referred to Ofgem as a breach of the Complaint Handling Standards.

## Contacting the EHU Priority Team

- The EHU will send all priorities from [EHUPriority@ehu.org.uk](mailto:EHUPriority@ehu.org.uk) and can be reached on this email address
- The plan is to have a new dedicated hunt number which will be a direct line into our priority team which we will share in due course. The Priority Team can currently be contacted on the normal the EHU telephone number 0800 458 2245.