UK Government

RAF022/2526 Communicating the rollout of smart-contingent contracts (and associated policy changes) to non-domestic customers

Research findings report

Produced by Verian as part of a research project

Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2026)

The stimuli used in this research were designed based on policy proposals outlined in the Government's October 2025 Non-domestic smart meter rollout post-2025 consultation[1]. Fieldwork was conducted across December 2025 - January 2026, and the Government published its response to this consultation in September 2026[2]. Materials tested in this research should therefore not be interpreted as representing the final policy position. More information can be found on Pages 13 and 14.

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[1] Non-domestic smart meter rollout post-2025 - GOV.UK
[2] Non-domestic smart meter rollout post-2025 - GOV.UK

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Glossary table

Table 1: glossary of terms used in this report

Term	Definition
Smart meter	Smart meters enable accurate billing by recording consumers' energy use in every half-hour period, allowing suppliers to bill based on consumers' actual rather than estimated usage. They also send regular and accurate meter readings to suppliers automatically, ending the need for manual meter reads.
Traditional meter	An electricity and/or gas meter that requires manual meter readings and does not have the capability to send these automatically to the supplier.
Advanced meter	While both smart and advanced meter types record energy at half hourly intervals, there are differences in how they operate and the functions that they provide, for example in the amount of information each meter can provide. Advanced meters, at a minimum, provide energy usage information, whilst smart meters also provide tariff information.
Third-party intermediary (TPI)	Organisations or individuals that give energy related advice, aimed at helping non-domestic customers buy energy and/or manage their energy needs. TPIs include switching sites, energy brokers and any company that offers support with energy procurement.
Framework agreement provider	An intermediary that procures energy on behalf of non-domestic organisations, often in the public sector (these may be called 'Public Sector Buying Organisations' (PSBOs).
Smart-contingent contract	Fixed term non-domestic energy supply contracts (i.e. contracts that are for a pre-determined, set period of time) that require customers to have, or agree to the installation of, smart or advanced meters under the terms of that contract.
Microbusinesses	Businesses with 1-9 employees, turnover under £2 million.
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)	Businesses with 1-249 employees, turnover between £2-44 million.

Executive summary

Background and research objectives

Smart-contingent contracts are fixed term energy contracts that require non-domestic consumers to agree to the installation of smart meters, and which can be offered at a rate significantly cheaper than alternative contract types available in the non-domestic market. Energy suppliers are increasingly using these smart-contingent contracts to convert the minority of traditionally metered consumers to smart meters as smart meter uptake reaches higher levels.

The government considers that there are positive opportunities to be realised from the increase in smart-contingent contracts, though there are also potential risks for non-domestic consumers caused by inconsistent market implementation. These risks include consumer confusion and unfair enforcement action (such as penalising the consumer even if not having the smart meter installed was outside of their control). The government's position is that prompt policy action can help to support the development of this market in a way that protects non-domestic consumers from inconsistent treatment by the market whilst driving the levels of smart meter coverage needed for the Clean Power 2030 Mission.

In October 2025, the government therefore launched a 12-week consultation[3] on a package of new energy supplier licence conditions intended to both ensure non-domestic consumers are protected from the risks of these contracts and drive additional consumer demand for smart meters. This included measures to standardise the rollout of non-domestic smart-contingent contracts across energy suppliers to ensure a phased transition for consumers over time (by requiring suppliers to make all new fixed term non-domestic energy contracts entered into after the same date smart-contingent and to communicate this to consumers in advance) and a requirement on suppliers to follow a legally binding consumer protection code of practice with respect to the implementation and enforcement of smart-contingent contracts.

The government's response to its consultation on the Non-Domestic Smart Meter Rollout Post-2025[4] has now confirmed that:

- From 1st September 2027, if energy suppliers enter into new fixed term energy contracts with non-domestic customers, they must ensure the contract includes a term which provides that the customer has, or agrees to have, smart or advanced meters installed in their designated premises.
- From 1st January 2027, energy suppliers must start to communicate the upcoming policy changes so that non-domestic consumers understand what is expected, why and when.

[3] Non-domestic smart meter rollout post-2025 - GOV.UK
[4] Non-domestic smart meter rollout post-2025 - GOV.UK

- Energy suppliers must be fully compliant with a legally binding consumer protection code **by 1st September 2027**.

DESNZ commissioned this research around the time of consultation (October 2025) to identify how information on policy changes regarding smart-contingent contracts could be communicated to non-domestic customers, should the proposed policy package be implemented. Specific research questions were:

- RQ1. What communication content will most effectively convey the smart-contingent policy package to consumers ahead of its implementation?
    - Which pieces of information do consumers consider most important when learning about smart-contingent contracts, and why?
    - Which framings are most effective at enabling consumer understanding and acceptance of the policy, as well as intention to act, and why?
- RQ2. How should information be presented so that consumers can easily understand the smart-contingent policy package (e.g. design features such as language, length, tone)?
    - How do design features such as language, length and tone affect consumer understanding of, and attitudes towards the policy, and why?
    - How does the messenger affect how communication is received, and which messengers would consumers prefer the engagement to include, and why?

Methodology

Verian conducted online focus groups and interviews with a total of 43 participants from micro-businesses, SMEs, and public sector organisations, all of whom were decision-makers about energy contracts. The sample covered a range of sectors, tenures, and pre-existing attitudes to owning a smart meter. Fieldwork took place in December 2025 and January 2026, during the smart-contingent policy consultation.

Discussions were primarily based around exploring a hypothetical communication received from their energy supplier, developed by DESNZ, explaining the proposed smart-contingent policy package and the implications for their organisation. This included draft text on:

- What is happening (i.e. standardising the rollout of smart-contingent contracts)
- What organisations need to do
- Why the smart-contingent policy package is happening, including three alternative framings, each emphasising a distinct part of the rationale for the policy changes or the rollout of smart-contingent contracts more broadly:
    - Benefits of smart meters: explaining that the government wants to make it easier for organisations to access the benefits of smart meters. The framing also

included information on benefits that smart meters provide for energy suppliers and Great Britain's energy system.

  - Consumer protection: that the government has introduced the changes in response to smart-contingent contracts already being rolled out by energy suppliers, and therefore to establish common rules that suppliers must follow to strengthen protections for organisations and drive consistency in implementation.
  - Standardisation: that the government is introducing changes to efficiently complete the modernisation of Great Britain's metering infrastructure through the roll-out of smart meters.

- What happens if organisations don't want a smart meter (implications for the type of contract available and what happens if they sign a smart-contingent contract but later choose not to proceed with the smart meter installation)
- What happens if organisations can't get a smart meter (i.e. if, after signing a smart-contingent contract, the smart meter installation is unsuccessful for reasons outside of the organisation's control)

Findings

RQ1. What communication content will most effectively convey the smart-contingent policy package to consumers ahead of its implementation?

Which pieces of information do consumers consider most important when learning about smart-contingent contracts, and why?

Participants wanted the main communication from suppliers (e.g., the first letter or email they received informing them of the change) to:

- Clearly state what policy change is happening, including the implementation date
- Explain why smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes are happening (to aid their understanding and acceptance)
- Clearly state the alternative to agreeing to have a smart meter: choosing an alternative contract type
- Inform them that fixed term contracts are, on average, cheaper than alternatives[5]
- Explain the consequences of not installing a smart meter after signing a smart-contingent contract and provide reassurance that customer circumstances would be taken into account where installation was not possible
- Provide reassurance that they don't need to do anything until their energy supplier contacts them

[5] In the stimulus tested, participants were told that 'fixed term contracts are, on average, around 40% cheaper than 'out of contract' or deemed rates that you may be placed on'. This statistic was included in the consultation and based on DESNZ analysis of publicly available rates in the market at that time (October 2025).

- Clearly state that meter exchanges will be offered at no additional cost

To keep the main communication as concise as possible, participants suggested that supplementary information should be provided and include additional detail on: qualifying information on non-domestic customer rights and expectations; third party support in cases of disputes; nuances for specific business or organisation types; and practical information about installations.

Which framings are most effective at enabling consumer understanding and acceptance of the policy, as well as intention to act, and why?

To enable acceptance of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes, organisations need to understand and accept the reasoning behind it. Out of three reasonings provided – benefits of smart meters, consumer protection (regarding the implementation of smart-contingent contracts), standardisation (modernising infrastructure) – the benefits framing was found to be most persuasive. Framing the change in terms of the benefits smart meters provide to organisations and wider beneficiaries was reasoning which was intuitive and easy for participants to understand.

Highlighting the benefits smart meters can have to an organisation (of accurate bills, free and regular information on energy use such as through an online portal or app, and potential bill savings) was seen as necessary content to include by all participants, irrespective of their attitudes to getting a smart meter. It was motivating to those who were accepting of/indifferent to smart meters at the time of research. Those less positive about getting a smart meter were not motivated as much by this information, however they still expected it to be included as they wanted to know why smart meters were a good idea before being told they need to agree to have one in order to begin new fixed term contracts. In this way, benefits were seen to promote acceptance of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes amongst those less positive about smart meters.

Stating the benefits of smart meters to the organisations was more motivating to participants than stating the benefits to the wider energy system. That said, some participants responded well to hearing about potential benefits to Great Britain's energy system and considered that these might have knock-on positive impacts for their own business. For example, higher resilience and reliability of energy supply were seen as positive as participants linked lower dependence on fossil fuels to increased national energy security and stable bills.

The main advantage of including wider benefits, however, was that their inclusion helped increase trust and acceptance of the reasoning for the change; including who else will benefit was seen to demonstrate transparency which made respondents more likely to trust the message.

In addition to the benefits framing other message components worked well to enable understanding and acceptance:

- Participants responded well to the smart meter rollout as 'modernising Great Britain's infrastructure' (as stated in the standardisation framing) as they felt this helped to imply

progress and improvement. It is suggested that this is used in tandem with benefits as this was generally not seen as sufficiently motivating enough in isolation.

- Participants appreciated the idea that the government is introducing these changes to protect consumers and liked references to fairness and consistency in the consumer protection framing. However, this was not as intuitive to understand as the other framings, and some found this a confusing message to receive from their energy supplier. It was felt that this message would be better placed in supplementary government communication, alongside information about the proposed consumer protection code.

RQ2. How should information be presented so that consumers can easily understand the smart-contingent policy package (e.g. design features such as language, length, tone)?

How do design features such as language, length and tone affect consumer understanding of, and attitudes towards the policy, and why?

Participants highlighted a range of design features that would aid their understanding and acceptance of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes:

- Keeping it simple: the opening paragraphs should be as simple as possible, avoiding qualifications, caveats or unnecessarily complicated phrases. Detail on topics such as multiple sites or framework providers could be moved to supplementary information rather than the initial communication. This aided ease of comprehension by enabling people to grasp the key information quickly and easily.
- Using a constructive tone: e.g. emphasising that suppliers will work together with organisations to find an installation time (or plan) that works for them, and acknowledging any potential disruption associated with an installation and thanking them. This implied a collaborative relationship and made them feel that the author was taking any inconvenience into account.
- Communicating what the choice is: clearly describing the alternative option if organisations don't want a smart meter when introducing the idea of smart-contingent contracts (i.e. that they will need to choose an alternative contract type). This helped people feel that they have autonomy over the decision.
- Being clear: explaining new concepts clearly, with the necessary information, at the point they are introduced. For example, if referring to consequences of signing a smart-contingent contract and later choosing not to proceed with the smart meter installation, explain what these consequences are. This prevented people filling in the gaps (incorrectly) with their own guesses and being distracted when continuing reading.

Participants felt a 1-2 page letter was acceptable, although shortening would be welcomed, especially for email formats. Bullet points and subheadings were appealing to make information digestible and to aid skim-reading.

How does the messenger affect how communication is received, and which messengers would consumers prefer the engagement to include, and why?

Participants understood and accepted that the main communication will come from their energy supplier. However, the content needed to align with their expectations of what would be likely to come from this source, for example information about consumer protections was seen to be more appropriate coming from government.

In addition to supplier communication, participants expected there to be information from government (e.g. on GOV.UK) to provide reassurance and confidence in the policy change. They wanted this to include detail on extenuating circumstances and how these will be decided, potential routes of appeal and consumer protection information.

Participants preferred communications from their supplier to be written in an active first-person voice (i.e. “we will”) to show suppliers are taking accountability and ownership of the change.

Conclusion

There are four broad principles which our evidence suggests could be applied to effectively communicate the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and associated changes. These are:

- **Frame the rollout as beneficial to organisations and as part of a wider national upgrade:** providing benefits to organisations and reinforcing that smart meters are part of a broader modernisation of national infrastructure provides an intuitive, meaningful rationale for the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and accompanying policy changes
- **Address consumers’ needs around cost and convenience:** for example, by reassuring them that meter exchange(s) will be offered at a time convenient to them and at no additional cost
- **Build trust:** signpost the government’s oversight of the policy changes and be transparent by referencing the wider benefits of smart meters to suppliers and to Great Britain’s energy system
- **Make further information easy to find:** signpost to where organisations can find more information on the policy, such as nuances for businesses that use intermediaries or roles and responsibilities regarding installation

More widely, insights from this research show that consumers would welcome information from government (e.g. on GOV.UK) to provide reassurance and confidence in the policy change. They wanted this to include detail on extenuating circumstances and how these will be decided, potential routes of appeal and consumer protection information. They expected supplier communications to signpost this and felt it would provide reassurance and confidence in the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes.

The principles along with other learnings from this research have been compiled as guidance in a communication toolkit for energy suppliers which is published alongside this report[6]. The toolkit provides guidance on how to apply these principles in communications from energy suppliers – including recommended content, ordering, language, and presentation. It also provides a template of a letter that applies these principles in practice for energy suppliers to use should they wish to.

[6] Communicating the rollout of smart-contingent contracts to non-domestic customers – GOV.UK

Background and objectives

Context

Energy suppliers are rolling out smart meters to smaller businesses and public sector sites: the majority of non-domestic sites now have smart or advanced meters (67% at end Q1 2026)[7]. Smart meters are expected to reduce non-domestic energy consumption in smaller businesses and public sector sites by 2.8% (electricity) and 4.5% (gas), delivering customer bill savings and avoiding estimated bills.[8] To support this, energy suppliers are required to provide all small organisations with smart meters with free and regular information on their energy use. This can help organisations with monitoring and management of energy costs including identification of ways to reduce overall consumption, run operational processes more efficiently, upgrade equipment and choose the best energy deal/tariff to maximise bill savings.[9]

Smart-contingent contracts are fixed term energy contracts that require non-domestic consumers to agree to the installation of smart meters. They can be offered at a cheaper rate than alternative contract types available in the non-domestic market. The government has observed the growing use of these contracts by non-domestic energy suppliers, who have started to use these contracts to drive smart meter uptake, particularly amongst smaller organisations who are more disengaged with smart metering.

If implementation of smart-contingent contracts is left wholly to the market these contracts offer risks and opportunities. The current energy supplier offerings are at an early stage of development and are inconsistent in their application. If left to the market to implement, there are risks of negative outcomes for the market and energy consumers, stemming from uneven energy supplier delivery. These risks include consumer confusion over what action they need to take or suppliers implementing unfair or prohibitive enforcement action against consumers (such as penalising the customer even if not having the smart meter installed was outside of their control).

In October 2025, the government therefore launched a 12 week consultation on a policy package to coordinate the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and protect consumers from the risks of market-led implementation.[10] It proposed requirements on energy suppliers to make all new fixed term non-domestic energy contracts entered into after the same date (proposed at consultation - 1st January 2027) contingent on the customer agreeing to have a smart meter installed and to communicate this to consumers in advance. It also included a requirement on suppliers to follow a legally binding consumer protection code of practice with respect to the implementation and enforcement of smart-contingent contracts.

[7] Smart meters in Great Britain, quarterly update March 2026 - GOV.UK
[8] Smart Metering Implementation Programme - Cost-Benefit Analysis 2019
[9] Maximising non-domestic smart meter consumer benefits, improving the data offer and enabling innovation - GOV.UK
[10] Non-domestic smart meter rollout post-2025 - GOV.UK

The government has since published a response to its consultation in August 2026[11] which confirmed a number of refinements to policy design in response to stakeholder feedback. In particular, it confirmed that:

- From 1st September 2027, if energy suppliers enter into new fixed term energy contracts with non-domestic customers, they must ensure the contract includes a term which provides that the customer has, or agrees to have, smart or advanced meters installed in their designated premises.
- From 1st January 2027, suppliers must start to communicate the upcoming policy changes so that non-domestic consumers understand what is expected, why and when.
- Energy suppliers must be fully compliant with a legally binding consumer protection code by 1st September 2027. This will be introduced as a new schedule to the Retail Energy Code (REC).

DESNZ commissioned this research around the time of consultation (October 2025) to better understand how stakeholders could clearly explain the concept of smart-contingent contracts and the policy proposals to organisations (including why the government is taking steps to ensure fair implementation of these contracts across the market).

High level objectives were to identify how information on smart-contingent contracts could be communicated to ensure non-domestic customers are aware of and understand the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes, and how information could be best presented to enable organisations to engage with it.

Specific research questions were:

- RQ1. What communication content will most effectively convey the smart-contingent policy package to consumers ahead of its implementation?
    - Which pieces of information do consumers consider most important when learning about smart-contingent contracts, and why?
    - Which framings are most effective at enabling consumer understanding and acceptance of the policy, as well as intention to act, and why?
- RQ2. How should information be presented so that consumers can easily understand the smart-contingent policy package (e.g. design features such as language, length, tone)?
    - How do design features such as language, length and tone affect consumer understanding of, and attitudes towards the policy, and why?
    - How does the messenger affect how communication is received, and which messengers would consumers prefer the engagement to include, and why?

[11] Non-domestic smart meter rollout post-2025 - GOV.UK

Methodology

This section contains a summary of the research approach. Additional detail on the research approach, sample, and research materials can be found in the technical appendix.

Summary of approach

Group discussions and interviews

Verian conducted seven 90-minute focus groups and three 60-minute interviews with representatives of businesses and public sector organisations who currently did not have smart meters installed at any or all of their sites. All discussions and interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Fieldwork was conducted in December 2025 and January 2026, during the consultation period for the policy change.

All participants were joint or sole decision-makers for their organisation's energy contracts, which included responsibility for whether or not to have a smart meter installed.

Groups and interviews were structured around reviewing hypothetical example communications from an energy supplier, developed by DESNZ. These communications provided an overview of the proposed policy change from the 1st January 2027 (the originally proposed date as per the consultation), the rationale for doing so, and the implications for customers. The full stimulus shown to participants is included in the next section.

Sample summary

A total of 43 participants took part in discussions. The sample was structured to include a mix of organisation types, size, tenure, energy contract arrangements and attitudes to smart meters that reflected the known distribution of current attitudes toward smart meters among non-domestic consumers.

- **Attitude to smart meters:** Those indifferent to or accepting of smart meters, and those who would reject smart meters[12]
- **Size and type of organisation:** Microbusinesses (1-9 employees and a turnover under £2 million), SMEs (1-249 employees and a turnover of under £44 million), and public sector organisations

[12] Attitudes to smart meters were defined in the recruitment questionnaire using the question: 'If you were offered a smart meter installation for your organisation in the next 6 months, how likely would you be to accept it?' All participants gave their expected likelihood to accept on a five-point scale, from definitely would accept to definitely would not accept. Those who definitely would accept or probably would accept were classed as acceptors, those who were not sure were classed as indifferent and those who probably or definitely would not were classed as rejectors.

- **Tenure type and energy contract arrangement:** Organisations that owned their own premises, those renting premises where the landlord holds the energy contract, and those renting premises where the tenant holds the energy contract
- **Use of third-party intermediaries:** Organisations that used a third-party intermediary to arrange or manage their current energy contract(s) and those that did not
- **Part-smart organisations**: One group of part-smart businesses with multiple sites, with smart meters currently installed in some but not all

Table 2: number of participants from each of the core segments[13]

Segment	Core quotas	Number of participants
Microbusiness and SMEs	Accepters / indifferent Own premises	8
Microbusiness and SMEs	Accepters / indifferent Rent premises Landlord / Tenant holds energy contract	7
Microbusiness and SMEs	Rejectors Own premises	8
Microbusiness and SMEs	Rejectors Rent premises Landlord holds energy contract	3
Microbusiness and SMEs	Rejectors Rent premises Tenant holds energy contract	4
Part-smart organisations	Mix of acceptors / indifferent and rejectors	7
Public sector organisations	Accepters / indifferent	6
	Total	**43**

[13] To protect participant confidentiality, cells with a count of fewer than 3 have been suppressed and combined with adjacent categories. This aggregation is applied to ensure individuals cannot be identified within small subgroups.

Note on interpreting the findings

This research is qualitative in nature. While the sample size reflects this, it was designed to be broadly representative of non-domestic organisations without smart meters, and to capture a range and depth of participant perspectives. As the proposed smart contingent policy package had not been introduced at the time of the research, participants were asked to imagine that they received stimulus materials in the form of email or letter communications (provided through the research) from their energy supplier.

Note on public sector organisations

Public sector organisations included in the research were predominantly from schools (6 out of 9 participants). This is a limitation of the sample and findings relating to public sector organisations may not be fully generalisable to those in other public sectors. Throughout this report, areas where findings from public sector organisations differed from other participants are specifically highlighted.

Stimulus shown to participants

This section shows the stimulus that was provided to participants during fieldwork.

Note on stimulus

As outlined earlier in the report, the content of the stimulus relates to the policy proposals outlined in the government's October 2025 consultation. The final policy design (as confirmed in the government's response to its consultation in September 2026) has several refinements, including to policy timelines and supplier obligations regarding arranging smart meter installation appointments. Therefore, the stimulus shown below should not be interpreted as government policy. Nevertheless, the findings throughout this report deliberately focus on broad principles for communication, which are relevant for communicating the final policy design (including any amendments since consultation) as outlined in the government response.

Main message shown to participants

Note that:

- *where wording differed in messages shown to public sector organisations this has been highlighted in bold brackets*
- *various framings were tested in the section 'why is this happening' (see next section)*

Dear [business]

From 1st January 2027, small businesses **[/ public sector organisations who buy their energy direct from any energy supplier and]** who want to enter a new fixed term energy contract (or renew one) with any energy supplier will need to agree to switch to smart meter(s) if they do not already have them. This includes businesses with multiple meter points; every meter point should be upgraded to a smart or advanced meter.

If your energy contract is with an intermediary (such as a **[public sector]** framework provider), not directly with a supplier, your intermediary will be told to make their fixed term contracts dependent on switching to smart meters. They will inform you whether their new offer is dependent on this.

Your meter(s) will be exchanged at no additional cost and at a time that's convenient for you.

What do you need to do?

You don't need to do anything until your energy contract comes up for renewal. However, if you want, you can request a smart meter installation before your contract ends: you don't have to wait.

Your supplier will contact you before your contract ends to remind you that you will need to switch to smart meters if you want a new fixed term contract.

They will arrange an installation appointment with you within three months of your new contract starting. If you have four or more sites that require upgrading, your supplier will work with you on an installation plan within three months of your new contract starting.

Why is this happening?

The government has introduced these measures to strengthen protections for small businesses **[/ organisations]** and ensure consistency in how suppliers are implementing these contracts.

Some suppliers are already rolling out business energy contracts that require smart meters and have their own rules for these contracts. By requiring all suppliers to roll out smart-contingent contracts from 1st Jan 2027, the government can enforce a Consumer Protection Code. This will ensure the process is clear, consistent and fair for all businesses. Under the Consumer Protection Code, suppliers will:

- Guarantee you are clearly informed about your smart-contingent contract terms to prevent accidental contract breaches and penalties
- Protect your business from penalties if you can't install a smart meter for reasons outside of your control

- Arrange your smart meter installation(s) with you, within an agreed timeframe, to make it easier for your business to meet your contractual requirements

What happens if you can't get a smart meter?

If you can't install a smart meter for a reason outside of your control, your energy supplier must take steps to ensure you are not penalised and that you keep access to a fixed term contract.

Reasons outside of your control include:

- The written refusal of your landlord or tenant, or anyone else with direct influence over the metering arrangements

- A technical reason which prevented your smart meter installation being successful

When deciding whether an organisation will face penalties for breaching their contract, suppliers must also pay particular attention to the needs and circumstances of:

- Organisations struggling to pay their energy bills who are in financial difficulty

- Commercial premises where some people live, such as a park home

- Any site delivering critical services on behalf of the government

What happens if you don't want a smart meter?

From 1st January 2027 businesses **[/ organisations]** that do not want a smart meter cannot start a new fixed term energy contract with an energy supplier. Fixed term contracts are, on average, around 40% cheaper than 'out of contract' or deemed rates that you may be placed on.

If you agree, under your contract, to have a smart meter installed but do not proceed with the installation, your energy supplier must give you a chance to explain your circumstances.

However, if you choose not to proceed with the installation despite there being no barriers outside of your control identified, you may be deemed to have breached your contract and risk losing access to your agreed rate.

Alternative framings for 'why is this happening' sections

Participants were shown three alternative framings for the 'why is this happening' section of the letter, each emphasising a distinct part of the rationale for the policy changes or the rollout of

smart-contingent contracts more broadly. These were shown in rotating order across the groups, to minimise potential ordering affects influencing perceptions.

Consumer protection

Explaining that the government has introduced the changes in response to smart-contingent contracts already being rolled out by energy suppliers, and therefore to establish common rules that suppliers must follow to strengthen protections for organisations and drive consistency in implementation.

'Why is this happening?' – consumer protection framing

The government has introduced these measures to strengthen protections for small businesses **[/ organisations]** and ensure consistency in how suppliers are implementing these contracts.

Some suppliers are already rolling out business energy contracts that require smart meters and have their own rules for these contracts. By requiring all suppliers to roll out smart-contingent contracts from 1st Jan 2027, the government can enforce a Consumer Protection Code. This will ensure the process is clear, consistent and fair for all businesses. Under the Consumer Protection Code, suppliers will:

- Guarantee you are clearly informed about your smart-contingent contract terms to prevent accidental contract breaches and penalties
- Protect your business **[/ organisation]** from penalties if you can't install a smart meter for reasons outside of your control
- Arrange your smart meter installation(s) with you, within an agreed timeframe, to make it easier for your business to meet your contractual requirements

Standardisation

Explaining that the government is introducing changes to efficiently complete the modernisation of Great Britain's infrastructure through the roll-out of smart meters.

'Why is this happening?' – standardisation framing

The rollout of smart meters to businesses **[/ public sector organisations]** modernises Great Britain's infrastructure, much like the switchover to high-speed internet. Smart meters are now the norm, and two-thirds of small businesses **[and public sector organisations]** have already upgraded.

To complete the rollout efficiently smart meters will now be a routine condition of all fixed term business energy contracts **[/ contracts provided by an energy supplier for small business and public sector organisations].**

We understand that accepting a smart meter appointment is an additional action to take when you enter your new contract. Your supplier will arrange the installation(s) at a time that works for you to minimise any inconvenience and guide you through the process.

Thank you for playing a part in making this transition smooth and efficient.

Specific message components tested in standardisation framing:

- Using a familiar analogy by likening rollout to the switchover to high-speed internet / modernising Great Britain's infrastructure
- Using social norms (that 2/3rds of businesses now have smart meters)
- Using the word upgrade rather than exchange to motivate customers
- Using empathy and acknowledgement that accepting smart meters is an additional action for customers to take
- Using assumptive language to signal positive expectation by thanking customers for their role in transition

Benefits

Explaining that the government wants to make it easier for organisations to access the benefits of smart meters. The framing also included benefits that smart meters provide to energy suppliers, and Great Britain's energy system.

'Why is this happening?' – benefits framing

The government wants to make it easier for businesses **[/ public sector organisations]** across Great Britain to access the benefits of smart meters. Benefits of smart meters to your organisation include:

- Free and regular information on your energy use, such as through an online portal or app. This can help you more easily manage your organisation's energy consumption and help save on bills.
- Only being billed based on the energy your business **[/ organisation]** actually uses. This means you will no longer received estimated bills, providing accurate information for business budgeting.
- **[Helping you to meet sustainability and carbon reduction targets by identifying and reducing energy waste.]**

As well as benefiting you, smart meters are also beneficial to energy suppliers, to Great Britain's energy system, and to the National Grid:

- Automated data from smart meters reduces the number of billing errors suppliers are faced with and means energy suppliers can use the half-hourly data provided by smart meters to improve estimates of how much energy they need to buy.
- Smart meters also help the National Grid to balance energy supply and demand more efficiently and integrate home-grown renewable energy. This leads to fewer outages, a more resilient energy grid and less dependence on fossil fuels from other countries.

Specific message components tested in standardisation framing:

- Addressing knowledge barriers by informing customers of direct benefits to their business, helping them make the link between monitoring their consumption and lower bills
- Being transparent to customers on the wider benefits to other parties (suppliers and the grid) to promote trustworthiness
- Including a statistic that fixed term contracts are, on average, 40% cheaper than alternatives to incentivise organisations[14].

[14] In the stimulus tested, participants were told that 'fixed term contracts are, on average, around 40% cheaper than 'out of contract' or deemed rates that you may be placed on'. This statistic was included in the consultation and based on DESNZ analysis of publicly available rates in the market at that time (October 2025).

Findings

This section sets out some contextual findings and then findings against each research sub-question. Alongside this report, DESNZ has published a toolkit for energy suppliers[15], which sets out guidance for applying the research findings more practically. We refer readers to the toolkit throughout this section.

Context

Pre-existing attitudes to smart meters

Each group began with contextual discussions of participants' current attitudes to smart meters for their organisations, before being shown any stimulus which may influence them.

Participants were generally aware that smart meters are available for businesses and other organisations and were broadly familiar with the difference between smart and traditional meters.

Participants were asked what, if anything, had previously prevented them from seeking a smart meter installation. Reasons provided predominantly focused on perceived disruption from an installation and a lack of time to schedule appointments. Part-smart organisations particularly noted logistical challenges. In several cases these organisations had relationships with multiple energy suppliers and were often 'part-smart' as they felt that only some of their sites were straightforward to upgrade to smart meters. In addition, businesses operating in certain sectors, particularly in manufacturing and hospitality, were more concerned than other participants about the impact of needing to have power switched off to facilitate appointments. They were concerned about lost revenue from downtime, particularly if anything went wrong with an appointment (extending the duration), or if an appointment had to be rescheduled last-minute.

Some organisations were content with the status quo. For example, they did not see manual meter readings as burdensome and therefore did not see a clear benefit to their organisation (at this point they had not seen stimulus which provided information on other benefits). A minority mentioned that they appreciated the flexibility of being able to use estimated readings to balance their cashflow and outgoings and were concerned that switching to a smart meter would reduce their ability to do this (as it would mean being accurately billed for how much energy they use).

[15] Communicating the rollout of smart-contingent contracts to non-domestic customers – GOV.UK

What information do consumers consider most important when learning about smart-contingent contracts, and why?

This section contains findings on how participants responded to each part of the stimulus shown, and what they considered to be the most important information to include in the communication overall.

Participants wanted the main communication from a supplier to include key information about the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes and the implications for their organisation, with further detail available in supplementary information for them to explore elsewhere.

Key information for the main communication to include

What is happening

Participants wanted the main communication to:

- Clearly explain the policy change in simple language, including the date this change will take effect. This was seen as the most important information to include to help them understand the change and begin to consider the implications for their organisation. They felt this information should be presented at the start of the letter as, given their busy day-to-day contexts, participants acknowledged they might not pay close attention to supplier communications or read them in full. Instead, they tended to scan messages quickly to decide whether any action was required from them.
- Emphasise that they wouldn't need to have the installation before entering the contract (they would just need to agree to getting one): The example communication shown included the phrase *'businesses who want to enter a new fixed term energy contract (or renew one) with any energy supplier will need to agree to switch to smart meter(s) if they do not already have them'.* However, some participants did misinterpret (or miss at first reading) the implications of the phrase 'agree to', and interpreted the change to mean they would need to have a smart meter installed before they could enter a new fixed-term contract (when in fact they would only need to agree to having a smart meter installed at a later date when starting a new fixed-term contract). Participants noted they would welcome this point being emphasised and explained clearly if the policy proposal was introduced.

Why this is happening

After explaining what is happening, participants felt that the next key piece of information to include would be an explanation of why this change has been brought in. This was seen as important both for understanding and acceptance of the policy changes regarding the rollout of smart-contingent contracts: participants felt that due to the perceived inconvenience or disruption of having a smart meter installed (although the extent to which they saw an installation as inconvenient varied), it is reasonable for the main communication from suppliers to justify why this change is being brought in.

This was considered especially important for rejectors, who felt that justification was important to avoid assumptions that all organisations are actively seeking smart meters. Participants who were indifferent or accepting of smart meters also welcomed this detail but with a different emphasis, welcoming an explanation which would frame the change in a way that made them feel more positive about having a smart meter installed.

How to communicate why the rollout of smart-contingent contracts is happening is covered in the section ‘Which framings are most effective at enabling consumer understanding and acceptance of the policy, as well as intention to act, and why?’ (pg. 28).

What happens if they don’t want a smart meter

Participants wanted a clear explanation of the consequences of choosing not to have a smart meter installed, so that they could make a fully informed choice about doing so or not. They saw two important elements to this, which should both be included in the main communication: 1) explaining that those who do not wish to agree to a smart meter installation will need to choose an alternative type of energy contract at renewal, and 2) the specific consequences of not agreeing to the smart meter installation after signing a smart-contingent contract.

Explaining that an alternative contract to a fixed term would be on average more expensive[16] was seen as an important part of explaining the change. This was seen as motivating to encourage organisations to accept smart meters.

> *"… this is actually what we want to get down to, I think it’s helpful to say its 40% cheaper than out of contract, so it’s interesting to know…" Micro/SME, acceptor*

What happens if they can’t get a smart meter

Participants appreciated the example letter including reassurance that suppliers would acknowledge any specific circumstances which might prevent organisations from installing a smart meter. This was seen as important to include in the main communication.

When explored in more detail, some participants were unclear about whether their organisational circumstances would be classified as outside their control and therefore accepted as a reason for not being able to install a smart meter. They acknowledged this would depend on the specific circumstances and therefore was likely to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Participants acknowledged that the main communication from suppliers could not set out comprehensive detail on acceptable reasons why organisations could not install a smart meter.

[16] In the stimulus tested, participants were told that ‘fixed term contracts are, on average, around 40% cheaper than ‘out of contract’ or deemed rates that you may be placed on’. This statistic was included in the consultation and based on DESNZ analysis of publicly available rates in the market at that time (October 2025).

It was seen as sufficient for the main communication to reference circumstances beyond their control to provide reassurance and then signpost to supplementary information for more detail.

What they need to do and the next steps their supplier will take

The example communication included an explanation that *'You don't need to do anything until your energy contract comes up for renewal.'* The communication emphasised that the supplier would contact them before the end of their contract to remind them of the change.

Participants appreciated the reassurance of knowing the supplier will remind them of this, which was seen as reducing the burden on them to remember and take action. The implication of suppliers taking ownership of this change and helping organisations to manage this was appreciated.

However, some participants did note that '*you don't need to do anything'* could cause them to 'switch off' and disregard the letter. It should therefore come towards the end of the letter to avoid them from disengaging.

Participants also welcomed specific references to meter exchanges being offered at *'no additional cost'*. Several participants had already assumed this would be the case, but did not feel that including this in the communication had any negative effect.

Supplementary information

To support the main communication, participants also welcomed supplementary information from suppliers and/or government to provide further detail on topics seen as relevant, but not as important for comprehension and acceptance as the information above. The most important consideration for participants was having this information available in some place as needed, but there was an expectation that information relating to consumer protection would come from government and that information relating to participants' own specific circumstances (e.g. practical considerations for installations) would be better placed to come from energy suppliers as they would be able to adapt this information as relevant.

Participants wanted supplementary information to include more detail on circumstances that would be classified as outside their control and therefore accepted as a reason for not being able to install a smart meter. They wanted this to include examples which they could judge their own organisation against, as well as information on potential routes of appeal if they wanted to challenge a decision, and the protection offered to them. Some participants, particularly those in public sector groups, larger SMEs and those using third-party intermediaries also wanted supplementary information on the implications for their own circumstances.

Participants also wanted to have supplementary information on practical considerations for installations, such as timing of appointments, length of appointments and need to turn off

power. Some participants had previous experience of limited availability of supplier appointments or of suppliers cancelling appointments, and wanted reassurance that these factors would be taken into account should they impact their ability to have a smart meter installed.

Schools referenced specific logistical challenges, such as requiring technicians on-site to have Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks if visiting in school hours or needing to schedule appointments in school holidays only. These participants were keen for tailored communications to acknowledge these challenges and provide reassurance that these factors would be taken into account (for example, reassurance from suppliers that appointments could be offered in school holidays if needed).

Which framings are most effective at enabling consumer understanding and acceptance of the policy, as well as intention to act?

To explore which framing of the rationale for the change is most effective DESNZ developed three iterations of this section in the example communication, with each emphasising differing rationales for the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes. One framing emphasised the benefits of smart meters to organisations and the wider energy system, one emphasised consumer protection (regarding the implementation of smart-contingent contracts), and one emphasised standardisation (that the change was part of modernising infrastructure). The full text of these is included above.

A benefits framing was most effective

The benefits framing explained that the government wants to make it easier for organisations to access the benefits of smart meters. The framing included benefits that smart meters provide for organisations, energy suppliers, and Great Britain's energy system.

Emphasising the benefits of smart meters was consistently the most effective framing shown overall. Participants appreciated the communication describing the benefits of smart meters to their organisation and to the wider system (e.g. energy suppliers and the grid) alongside this. The former was seen as most important and relevant to them (providing motivation to get a smart meter), but the latter as useful information to include as well, as the transparency of sharing that it benefited others meant the message was seen as more trustworthy.

This framing was generally seen as justifying the wider rollout, rather than solely focusing on the policy changes regarding the rollout of smart-contingent contracts specifically, but justifying the rollout was seen as crucial for acceptance and understanding of the change (rather than assuming acceptance of the benefits). Participants wanted to understand why smart meters are an upgrade on traditional meters, before being told why they need to agree to them in order to start a new fixed term contract.

"This gives you even more information, on how it would benefit you as a small business, but also how it would benefit the country overall so that's even more convincing" – Micro/SME, acceptor

The explanation of the benefits of smart meters, and therefore why they were being rolled out more widely, was seen as intuitive and easy for participants to understand.

Responses to the specific benefits highlighted was varied:

- '*Free and regular information on energy use which could help organisations better manage consumption and reduce bills'* was consistently seen as motivating.
- '*Being billed based on actual energy use'* was also viewed positively; however, some participants were unclear how this would represent an improvement on their current arrangements, particularly where they already submitted regular meter readings to ensure accurate billing.
- Smart meters' role in enabling *'… fewer outages, a more resilient energy grid and less dependence on fossil fuels from other countries*' was responded positively to by some participants who thought it might have knock-on positive impacts for their own business. For example, higher resilience and reliability of energy supply was seen as positive as participants linked lower dependence on fossil fuels to increased national energy security and stable bill prices.

In addition, the inclusion of wider benefits to suppliers and the energy system was generally welcomed as a sign of transparency, which in turn helped to build trust in the rationale for the rollout of smart-contingent contracts. Public sector and accepting / indifferent microbusinesses and SMEs found these interesting and helpful to include, whilst rejectors and part-smart businesses tended to be less interested. For these latter groups, wider benefits did not undermine or reduce acceptance but did not have any positive impact.

Responses to other framings

Standardisation framing

The standardisation framing emphasised that the government is introducing changes to efficiently complete the modernisation of Great Britain's infrastructure through the roll-out of smart meters.

Responses to the standardisation framing were mixed. Overall, standardisation was seen as the most effective framing for part-smart organisations, and some public sector participants. These organisations tended to be more pragmatic about switching to smart meters and didn't feel the explanation of the benefits was as important as other groups did.

Most appreciated the reference in the standardisation framing of the smart meter rollout as '*modernising Great Britain's infrastructure*' and felt this helped to imply progress and improvement. However, this was generally not seen as sufficient in isolation to motivate them to accept a smart meter, although it could work well when combined with the benefits framing.

The comparison with high-speed internet tested in the standardisation framing was generally seen by participants as unhelpful, as internet speeds were seen as a much more direct and tangible benefit than switching to smart meters.

The reference to ‘upgrading’ to a smart meter had neither a particularly positive or negative impact on participants. It was not spontaneously noticed, though when prompted some liked the phrase however a few found it presumptive (as they did not all agree that a smart meter would be an upgrade on their current meter), but did not feel that this word would impact their response to the policy changes around smart-contingent contracts.

The idea of smart meters being the norm and the claim that two-thirds of businesses had already upgraded was polarising. Groups who were accepting / indifferent to smart meters found it reassuring and motivating, but rejectors felt this didn’t ring true in their experience and were more sceptical about the claim (this statistic was accurate at the time of research). Some rejectors felt that their scepticism about the claim could make them more distrusting of the letter in general.

Consumer protection framing

The consumer protection framing emphasised that the government has introduced the changes in response to smart-contingent contracts already being rolled out by energy suppliers, and therefore to establish common rules that suppliers must follow to strengthen protections for organisations and drive consistency in implementation.

Participants appreciated some elements of the consumer protection framing, but all felt one of the other framings would be more effective for them.

Participants did not immediately understand the point being made, finding it less intuitive than the other framings. This is likely due to understanding of the framing requiring processing (new) information in two steps: firstly, understanding a new premise – that there are already smart-contingent contracts – and secondly, that how these contracts are implemented can lead to consumer detriment. It is only after understanding these two premises that the reasoning for the change is clear – participants’ lack of understanding showed that this is too cognitively demanding for a framing.

However, participants did take a broad point from the framing – that the change is government policy, rather than driven by energy companies. This information was seen as reassuring and therefore helpful to include in communications.

Participants noted that information about protecting consumers from energy suppliers’ practices was counter-intuitive and confusing to receive from the energy supplier. However, this information would be welcomed from other messengers such as government (discussed below). For this reason, information about the consumer protection code was generally felt to be better placed in supplementary information rather than this portion of the main communication.

How should information be presented so that consumers can easily understand the smart-contingent policy package (e.g. design features such as language, length, tone)?

Length and navigation of the communication

Participants wanted the main communication to be as concise as possible. The stimulus shown was 1.5 pages in length. A length of 1-2 pages was generally felt to be acceptable for a letter, as it aligned with the length of other official letters organisations received. However, participants felt that this may be too long for an email format, with participants saying they may be put off by having to scroll through large blocks of text.

Participants felt that they would likely skim read any letters and emails to pick out the sections most relevant to them. Therefore, the use of subheadings was welcomed to help them navigate the text. Bullet points were also appealing to break down the text.

Organisations who were part-smart were most likely to emphasise having limited time to engage with supplier communications and had the strongest preference for communications to be as concise as possible.

Level of detail

In the opening paragraphs of the stimulus tested, there were references to how the rollout of smart-contingent contracts would apply to businesses with multiple meter points and those using third parties. Participants thought this was unnecessary detail for the main communication, as it did not apply to all organisations, instead sitting better in supplementary information.

No participants in the sample had heard of ‘advanced meters’ and so references to this in the opening paragraph was felt to be distracting. Participants felt that using the term ‘smart meters’ was sufficient to communicate the point, and any further nuance on advanced meters could again be contained in supplementary information. However, it’s noted that organisations with advanced meters may have a different response.

> *"Because this is setting the scene, you don’t want to lose the audience in the first paragraph over a simple definition” – Micro/SME owner, acceptor*

In the section on organisational and wider benefits, participants felt that the text could be streamlined. While they appreciated the sentiment of the text, they felt that some words and phrases could be cut to save space, without affecting the meaning. This included phrases like “*half-hourly*” data and “*to balance supply and demand*”.

Overall, removing qualifications, caveats and unfamiliar phrases, and making the text more concise, was felt to improve comprehension of the communication.

Language: Communicating the consequences of not having a smart meter installed

The stimulus referenced consumer protections that energy suppliers would need to follow in implementing the rollout of smart-contingent contracts. This included ensuring organisations are not penalised if they cannot have a smart meter for reasons outside of their control, and circumstances suppliers would need to take into account when making decisions regarding any penalties they apply for breaches of contract.

The research found that phrases such as ‘penalties’ and ‘contract breaches’, without additional context or explanation, caused confusion and speculation. Therefore, to mitigate this, communications about consumer protections, or from energy suppliers regarding their contract terms and conditions, should consider alternative language (e.g. ‘consequences of not having a smart meter installed after signing a smart-contingent contract’) and set out clearly what the consequences of this would be.

In addition, participants wanted any consequences of not proceeding with the smart meter installation after signing the contract to be set out clearly and early on in any communications (after information on what is happening and why it is happening).

Participants also had some concerns about communications relating to enforcement of contractual conditions coming solely from their energy supplier, and would be looking for additional, signposted information to trusted third parties (e.g. government, Energy Ombudsman) to support them in cases of disputes.

Tone

Participants responded well when the tone of text was neutral and direct – for example participants generally felt the tone of the opening phrase was acceptable: *‘From 1st January 2027, small businesses who want to enter a new fixed term energy contract (or renew one) with any energy supplier will need to agree to switch to smart meter(s) if they do not already have them’*

> *"It’s direct and straightforward – that’s the kind of language you need when you're dealing with people in the public sector” – Public sector organisation*

A constructive tone was also welcomed. Participants liked phrases such as ‘*we will work with you to arrange an appointment’* and appreciated when potential disruption was acknowledged and they were thanked for their engagement. This implied a collaborative relationship and made them feel that the author was taking any inconvenience into account. The ‘thank you’ phrasing was generally well received, some participants found it slightly patronising, although not to the point it was felt to be off-putting.

How does the messenger affect how communication is received, and which messengers would consumers prefer the engagement to include?

Author of main communication

Participants were told to respond to the communication as if it had come from their supplier.

Overall, participants felt that the main communication coming from their energy supplier made sense. In most cases, the energy supplier was the one who had the contract with the organisation directly. Participants felt contact from the energy supplier was logical, as they were the ones who could offer appointment booking, FAQs and supplier-specific information.

> *"It should come from the energy supplier first because they'll be handling this" – Public sector organisation*

Those who used third-party intermediaries either expected this intermediary to be the messenger (if they had no contact with the energy supplier themselves) or expected to receive communication from both their energy supplier and intermediary. They felt receiving communication only from their energy supplier would be a change from their day-to-day experience.

In the stimulus there were some uses of the third person to refer to suppliers, which was confusing and made participants question who was behind the rollout of smart-contingent contracts. All participants wanted communications to unambiguously come from the supplier, including using the first person 'we will' (this would likely be the case in any real communication). They felt this implied ownership and accountability, which was reassuring.

The role of government

In addition to supplier communication, participants expected there to be information from government which would provide reassurance and confidence in the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes.

The key information they wanted from government related to consumer protection. Some participants did not trust that energy suppliers would be transparent about, or consistent in, how extenuating circumstances are reviewed and decided which risks unfair implementation. They therefore expressed a preference for government communications and/or guidance which could a) clearly set out consumer protections and help drive standardisation in the way they are implemented and b) signpost potential routes of appeal. It was felt that, as a neutral party independent from energy suppliers, government would be best placed to set out how organisations would be protected and who they could escalate any concerns to. Participants also felt there was a role for government in providing supplementary information on potential routes of appeal and consumer protection.

The stimulus tested cited the proportion of organisations that have smart meters installed (from official government statistics, however this source was not referenced). Some participants, more often rejectors, were slightly sceptical of these figures and some felt that having a source for these statistics from government would be beneficial to look up if desired. They felt this may increase confidence in these statistics. Note that the inclusion of a source was not explicitly tested in the research and so may require further testing with organisations.

Other expected messengers for public sector organisations

Schools who were engaged in the research reported expecting some form of sector-specific communications on top of communications from their energy supplier. They felt that there was a role for the Department for Education to communicate with them directly about the rollout of smart-contingent contracts. This would likely make them take the changes more seriously, as it would flag it as a government priority. This point was not brought up by other public sector organisations in this research, but it's possible this could apply to other sectors too.

Some headteachers who participated also reported being part of School Trusts and suggested that the Trust would be the more appropriate recipient of the information as they had more decision-making power. This implies that there may be a need for some form of communication from Trusts to individual schools.

Feedback on boilerplate letters for tenants and landlords

This section sets out participant responses to boilerplate letters put together by government to support tenants and landlords to communicate with each other around the policy. These were tested with a sub-set of tenants (n = 14) within the main sample. Landlords were not included in the research and so the below insight represents the tenant viewpoint only.

Note on stimulus

The letters shown below were included in the October 2025 consultation[17]. Using findings from this research and consultation feedback, the government has since made a number of refinements to both the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) policy statement and to the boilerplate landlord and tenant letters (e.g. communication templates). These have been published in supplementary guidance alongside the September 2026 government response[18].

[17] Non-domestic smart meter rollout post-2025 - GOV.UK
[18] Non-domestic smart meter rollout post-2025 - GOV.UK

Stimulus shown

Landlord to energy bill-paying tenant letter

This letter was shown to participants who were energy-bill paying tenants.

Dear [Tenant],

I am writing to confirm my consent for you to arrange the installation of a smart meter(s) within the premises you are currently leasing from [organisation].

According to the government's official website:

From 1st January 2027, energy suppliers cannot enter into a new fixed term energy contract with non-domestic consumers in Great Britain unless that consumer has, or agrees to have, a smart or advanced meter installed in their premises.

To this effect, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero considers that, in most instances, in the context of commercial tenants seeking the installation of a smart meter to meet their contractual commitments with their energy supplier (and access the cheaper rates of energy associated with fixed term energy contracts), a commercial landlord who refuses a request from a tenant under a commercial lease to install a smart meter would be acting unreasonably. The full statement can be found here [link].

Please contact your energy supplier to arrange for smart meters to be installed in the premises at your earliest convenience to ensure you can access fixed term energy contracts at renewal.

Smart meters are usually installed in non-domestic premises at no additional cost. Smaller organisations with smart meters also receive free and regular information on their energy use from their supplier to help manage bills.

If you encounter any unexpected issues during the installation process, I would be more than happy to discuss in finding a solution.

Regards, [LANDLORD]

Energy-bill-paying tenant to landlord

This letter was shown to participants who were energy-bill paying tenants.

Dear [Landlord],

I am writing to seek your consent for the installation of smart meters within the premises we are leasing from you.

According to the government's official website:

From 1st January 2027, energy suppliers cannot enter into a new fixed term energy contract with non-domestic consumers in Great Britain unless that consumer has, or agrees to have, a smart or advanced meter installed in their premises.

To this effect, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero considers that, in most instances, in the context of commercial tenants seeking the installation of a smart meter to meet their contractual commitments with their energy supplier (and access the cheaper rates of energy associated with fixed term energy contracts), a commercial landlord who refuses a request from a tenant under a commercial lease to install a smart meter would be acting unreasonably.

The full statement can be found here: [Link]

We would be grateful if you can confirm your consent by no later than [date] to ensure we can access the best energy rates when we next come to renew our contract.

We will then contact our energy supplier to arrange the installation.

Smart meters are usually installed in non-domestic premises at no additional cost. However, if our energy supplier raises any unexpected issues during the installation process we will of course be in touch with you to discuss next steps before proceeding.

Regards, [Tenant]

Energy bill-paying landlord to tenant

This letter was shown to participants who were tenants and whose landlord paid the energy bills.

> Dear [Tenant],
>
> I am writing to inform you that I/organisation intend to install smart meters in your leased premises [at “address of premises”].
>
> According to the government’s official website:
>
> From 1st January 2027, energy suppliers cannot enter into a new fixed term energy contract with non-domestic consumers in Great Britain unless that consumer has, or agrees to have, a smart or advanced meter installed in their premises.
>
> This means [organisation] will need to install smart meters to ensure we can secure the best energy rates and avoid unnecessary cost increases for the premises.
>
> [Our energy supplier] will contact you shortly to schedule the installation/s. We would be grateful if you can arrange for someone to grant access to the premises at a time convenient to you. You can request an appointment outside of business hours to minimise disruption.
>
> Regards, [Landlord]

Participant reactions to boilerplate letters

The tone across all letters was consistently seen as formal and legal in nature. Some larger business and multi-sited tenants felt that this was in line with the kind of communications they would receive from their landlord. Some smaller organisations felt that they have more of an informal relationship with their landlord and would likely avoid such a tone to minimise any impacts on the relationship. That said, some tenants felt that they could still use the letter as a boilerplate to adapt in line with their own style of communication or use as a last resort if communication with their landlord had broken down. Shortening sentences and simplifying language could go some way to drive earlier use of, or more engagement with, the letters by tenants.

As with other aspects of the research, recipients of such a letter may expect additional information on the policy changes to be provided or signposted, including more explanation of the benefits to them. This could be, for example, the landlord/tenant’s energy supplier’s website.

Any reference to securing the best rates of energy and/or avoiding cost increases should be clearly contextualised and explained (e.g. with clearer links to smart-contingent contracts) to avoid incorrect assumptions that this relates to rental costs.

Participants wanted the letters to set out a clearer explanation of roles and responsibilities with respect to having the smart meter installed (e.g. in terms of who needs to contact the energy supplier or wait to be contacted by the energy supplier or landlord).

Conclusion

There are four broad principles which our evidence suggests could be applied to effectively communicate the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes. These are:

- **Frame the rollout as beneficial to organisations and as part of a wider national upgrade:** providing benefits to organisations and reinforcing that smart meters are part of a broader modernisation of national infrastructure provides an intuitive, meaningful rationale for the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and accompanying policy changes
- **Address customers' needs around cost and convenience:** for example, by reassuring them that meter exchange(s) will be offered at a time convenient to them and at no additional cost
- **Build trust:** signpost the government's oversight of the policy changes and be transparent by referencing the wider benefits of smart meters to suppliers and to Great Britain's energy system
- **Make further information easy to find:** signpost to where organisations can find more information on the policy, such as nuances for businesses that use intermediaries or roles and responsibilities regarding installation

More widely, insights from this research show that consumers would welcome information from government on extenuating circumstances (and how these will be decided), potential routes of appeal and consumer protection information. They expected supplier communications to signpost to this government information which would provide reassurance and confidence in the rollout of smart-contingent contracts and associated policy changes.

These conclusions also apply to public sector organisations included in the research, with some small nuances. Some participants from educational facilities would welcome communications from sector specific stakeholders (e.g. government) in addition to their energy supplier to flag the rollout of smart meters as a government priority and prompt them to take it seriously. These organisations indicated that they would be happy to follow instructions from government about implementing smart meters, and therefore a standardisation framing, rather than a benefits framing, may be sufficient to promote acceptance.

The principles above, alongside insight from this research, were compiled in a communication toolkit for energy suppliers which is published alongside the government's response to its consultation[19].

The toolkit provides guidance on how to apply these principles in communications from energy suppliers – including recommended content, ordering, language, and presentation. It also provides an example template of a letter that applies these principles in practice for energy suppliers to use.

[19] Communicating the rollout of smart-contingent contracts to non-domestic customers – GOV.UK

This publication is available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/communicating-the-rollout-of-smart-contingent-contracts-to-non-domestic-customers

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