

# HEAT NETWORK CUSTOMER CHARTER

CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

[Version 1 dated 2025]

## **1 ABOUT THE CUSTOMER CHARTER**

- 1.1 This customer charter sets out the standards of service and behaviour that the City of Edinburgh Council (the Council) expects from persons operating a network or other communal system to supply heating, cooling and/or hot water to customers in Edinburgh. Those persons are referred to in this customer charter as 'heat suppliers'.
- 1.2 Heat suppliers must comply with the minimum standards set by the Heat Trust rules, described further at clause 3 of this charter. This charter repeats some of the key obligations in the Heat Trust rules and also sets some higher standards which heat suppliers are also expected to comply with.
- 1.3 This customer charter applies to all heat networks in Edinburgh. If the owner of a heat network is separate to the entity responsible for its operation, the owner will be responsible for ensuring that the operator is complying with the obligations set out in this charter.
- 1.4 All heat network customers in Edinburgh can expect to receive these standards of service and behaviour as a minimum from their heat supplier.
- 1.5 The Council will seek to enforce compliance with this customer charter where possible in its role as a planning authority or potential developer, customer, or facilitator of heat networks in Edinburgh. The Council may also seek to enforce compliance through its role as a consent authority pursuant to section 20 of the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021 if it becomes so designated under that act, or by working with the consent authority if it is not.

## **2 Regulation**

- 2.1 The regulation of heat networks is in a transitional phase. Heat networks are not currently regulated under statute, although there are voluntary standards developed and administered by the Heat Trust which heat suppliers can commit to, as further described below.
- 2.2 Legislation has now been passed by both the UK Government and the Scottish Government to introduce a new statutory framework for heat regulation – the Energy Act 2023 and the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021. The detailed regulations, particularly those that will enhance consumer protection for heat network customers, are currently in development. It is anticipated that these regulations will build on the Heat Trust standards.
- 2.3 Consumer Scotland has been designated by the UK Government as the statutory advocate for heat network customers in Scotland. As part of its role, Consumer Scotland will carry out research into the issues and experiences heat network users face, using this evidence to advocate for improvements on behalf of consumers. It will also formally represent consumers on industry and advisory groups, ensuring the consumer voice is heard at all stages of decision making.

- 2.4 As a minimum, heat suppliers will be expected to comply with all applicable legislation (including, but not limited to, the Energy Act 2023, the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021).
- 2.5 Where this charter sets a higher standard than the legislation, heat suppliers in Edinburgh must meet the obligations imposed by law, and the higher standard set by this charter. If there is a conflict between this charter and any legislation, the legislation will take precedence.

### **3 Heat Trust**

- 3.1 All heat networks in Edinburgh must be registered with the Heat Trust. Heat suppliers in Edinburgh should provide evidence to the Council of their registration with the Heat Trust.
- 3.2 Heat Trust is an independent, non-profit consumer champion for networks. Heat Trust seeks to protect customers by setting minimum standards that they should expect, making sure customers are treated fairly and working with suppliers to deliver high-quality customer service. Once the new regulations referred to in Clause 2 are in force, the Heat Trust rules will cease to apply. There may be a transitional period in which some of the Heat Trust rules remain in place before being fully phased out. Customers can also obtain further information from Ofgem's website once legislation is in force.
- 3.3 This charter incorporates the Heat Trust rules which can be found on Heat Trust's website<sup>1</sup>. All heat suppliers in Edinburgh must meet, and where possible, exceed Heat Trust minimum requirements. The Heat Trust rules may be amended from time to time and heat suppliers are expected to comply fully with any changes to the rules.

### **4 Service Standards**

- 4.1 Heat suppliers must provide a robust and resilient supply of heating, cooling and/or hot water to customers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365/366 days a year except for planned interruption and outages.
- 4.2 If there is an unplanned interruption or outage, heat suppliers must restore supply to customers as quickly as possible.
- 4.3 At least 48 hours' notice of planned interruptions and outages must be provided to customers.
- 4.4 Heat suppliers must deliver the guaranteed performance standards set by Heat Trust. Heat suppliers must pay guaranteed service payments to customers where they fail to meet minimum requirements regarding planned interruptions and unplanned outages. Guaranteed service payments are set by Heat Trust and reviewed regularly<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Website address: [https://heattrust.org/the-scheme-rules\\_](https://heattrust.org/the-scheme-rules_)

<sup>2</sup> Full details can be found on Heat Trust's website: [https://heattrust.org/the-scheme-rules\\_](https://heattrust.org/the-scheme-rules_)

- 4.5 Heat suppliers must establish and maintain a customer helpline to support customers and deal with complaints regarding the heat network. As a minimum, the helpline shall be accessible via phone and internet during normal business hours of 9.00am – 5.00pm Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).
- 4.6 Heat suppliers must establish a separate emergency customer helpline for the purposes of reporting any faults and for customer emergencies. The helpline shall be accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365/366 days a year.

## 5 Prices

- 5.1 Heat suppliers must offer a fair, transparent and clear pricing structure to all customers.
- 5.2 For most heat supplies from heat networks, customers will be asked to pay:
- a volumetric tariff – a price charged for each unit of heat consumed,
- plus**
- a standing charge – a fixed daily or monthly charge to reflect the cost of providing and maintaining the heat network.
- 5.3 Customers may also be asked to pay a one-off connection charge to connect to the heat network. Such connection charge must be notified to the customer before the customer signs a heat supply agreement.
- 5.4 Heat suppliers must offer prices which are no more than the cost of delivering the heat supply plus a reasonable profit margin.
- 5.5 All prices and any other charges payable should be clearly and transparently communicated to customers.
- 5.6 To clearly demonstrate value for money, heat suppliers must explain how their pricing compares to a low carbon 'counterfactual' which shows customers what they could expect to pay for an alternative supply of low carbon heat.
- 5.7 The mechanism for price reviews and price changes should be communicated to customers in a clear and transparent way.
- 5.8 Heat suppliers must give customers at least 31 days' advance notice of any price increases and may not increase prices more than once every six months.
- 5.9 Heat suppliers must offer a wide range of payment options to suit all customer needs. Where a pre-payment meter is installed for a heat customer, the heat supplier must adhere to the Heat Trust guidance

on pre-payment meters<sup>3</sup>. Heat suppliers must also ensure that prepayment customers receive a tariff comparable to that of credit customers, ensuring fairness and transparency in their pricing.

- 5.10 Heat suppliers must offer to connect all customers within their heat network zone in Edinburgh for a reasonable connection charge, to be calculated on an open and transparent basis reflecting the costs incurred by the supplier and benchmarked against the cost of installing a counterfactual low carbon technology.
- 5.11 Heat suppliers must clearly publish details of their tariffs for the supply of heat to domestic and industrial customers on an annual basis to allow customers to easily compare tariffs between heat suppliers.
- 5.12 Heat suppliers must benchmark their tariffs for the supply of heat to domestic and industrial customers against other heat suppliers in the UK and publish the results of such benchmarking on an annual basis.

## **6 Suspension of Services**

- 6.1 Heat suppliers must clearly set out the circumstances in which heat supply to existing customers may be suspended and the detailed process to be followed including the process for addressing non-payment and the process for resuming supplies following suspension.
- 6.2 Suspension of heat supply for non-payment must be a last resort once the process for addressing non-payment has been exhausted. Heat suppliers must offer customers the opportunity to repay any outstanding debt within a reasonable time through a structured payment plan before suspending their heat supply.
- 6.3 Heat suppliers must not suspend heat supplies during the period from 1 October to 31 March to any customer which the heat supplier knows or has reason to believe is in a vulnerable situation<sup>4</sup>.

## **7 Information and Data Protection**

- 7.1 All information provided by heat suppliers to customers shall be clear, accurate and consistent. Customers should be provided with all the information they need to understand their rights.
- 7.2 Heat suppliers must provide a welcome/induction pack for all customers which meets the minimum Heat Trust requirements and also contains all the information customers need to operate their heating system efficiently and effectively.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://heattrust.org/images/docs/PPM-guidance-v2-Jul24.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See section 14 of the Heat Trust Scheme Rules for the definition of Customers in Vulnerable Situations and associated best practice guidance <https://heattrust.org/best-practice-guidance-and-templates>.

- 7.3 All customers should be given full details of who to contact if there is a problem with their heating system or in an emergency. This must be kept up to date at all times.
- 7.4 Heat suppliers must provide billing information to customers which meets Heat Trust requirements on content and frequency. Billing information should provide customers with the information they need to take action to reduce consumption.
- 7.5 Heat suppliers must have a maintenance plan in place for their heat networks updated regularly in accordance with good industry practice and keep customers informed about the maintenance plan, including providing information on any responsibilities of the customer e.g. allowing access to properties for maintenance to take place.
- 7.6 All heat suppliers must protect information they hold about customers and treat it as private and confidential. Heat suppliers must use that information fairly and lawfully.

## **8 Additional Support**

- 8.1 Heat suppliers must be mindful of the personal situation of customers and provide extra support if customers need it. Heat suppliers should be as flexible as possible to provide the correct support to the meet the needs of customers.
- 8.2 Heat suppliers must maintain an up-to-date priority services register of all customers who require additional support.
- 8.3 Heat suppliers must also maintain a record of heat customers in a vulnerable situation and must define vulnerability in accordance with Heat Trust requirements.
- 8.4 Heat suppliers must proactively engage with customers who may experience difficulties paying for their heat and shall make every reasonable effort to help customers restructure their payments so that they are manageable and affordable.

## **9 Complaints and Disputes**

- 9.1 Heat suppliers must have a Heat Trust compliant complaints process and provide clear information to customers on how to register a complaint and the full complaints process.
- 9.2 Heat suppliers must comply with a Heat Trust compliant complaints process for all complaints raised by customers.
- 9.3 Customers who remain unhappy with how a heat supplier has responded to a complaint can access an independent dispute resolution service through the Energy Ombudsman:  
<https://www.energyombudsman.org/>.

- 9.4 Customers can also contact Advice Direct Scotland (<https://advisedirect.scot/>) and Citizens Advice Bureau (<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/>) for further support and advice in relation to a specific complaint against a heat network operator.

## 10 Property Access

- 10.1 If a heat supplier needs to access a customer's property, then they must meet the following minimum standards of behaviour:

- provide a minimum of 48 hours written notice
- agree a convenient appointment
- ensure employees and contractors wear identity badges
- be professional and helpful
- respect the customer's property
- perform work in a clean and tidy manner and remove all rubbish
- clearly explain what work has been done and what further work may be required

- 10.2 Heat suppliers should ensure that all personnel, including contractors and subcontractors, entering a customer's property are vetted appropriately for that role. This vetting process shall include, but is not limited to, background disclosure checks, qualification verification and any other relevant assessments to ensure staff are competent and suited to carry out the relevant tasks.

## 11 Monitoring and Reporting

- 11.1 Heat suppliers must report to the Council on performance at least annually. Self-assessment of performance should be based on engagement with customers through customer experience surveys.
- 11.2 Heat suppliers must provide a community engagement report to the Council describing the community engagement undertaken by the heat supplier in relation to the heat network and how the heat supplier has taken account of any representations received by virtue of the community engagement on an annual basis.
- 11.3 Heat suppliers must provide a statement to the Council explaining how the heat network contributes to meeting fuel poverty targets on an annual basis.

## **12 Customer Responsibilities**

12.1 To benefit fully from this customer charter, the Council requests that all customers:

- treat heat supplier employees and contractors with respect.
- provide reasonable access to their property for maintenance or to investigate and rectify faults.
- raise concerns or problems early so that they can be addressed.
- request additional support if they need it and provide details of their circumstances.
- follow the complaints process provided to help resolve issues quickly.
- pay for heat in accordance with their supply terms.