

Policy Response to ONS Smart Meter Research Publication

A successful roll-out smart meter data in Great Britain will depend on consumers being reassured that they will retain control over who accesses their data and how it is used. Rollouts in other countries have been slowed or halted because of a failure to understand consumer concerns about collection of granular energy consumption data.

The Government has put in place licence conditions that govern the ways in which different parties can access energy consumption data, the purposes for which they can use it and the choices that consumers will have about this. The core principle is that, other than when data is required for billing and regulated duties, consumers will have control over their energy consumption data. Energy suppliers are only permitted to access daily data if the customer has not opted out, and to access half-hourly data they must have the customer's explicit consent.

Network operators will be able to access energy consumption data, including half-hourly energy consumption data for regulated purposes without consent, if they have had plans for aggregation approved by Ofgem to address potential privacy concerns.

Third parties will be able to access consumer data through the Data and Communications Company (DCC) only if they have explicit consumer consent. Third parties who wish to access data through the DCC must become signatories to the Smart Energy Code, and are required to undergo privacy and data security audits before accessing data and then regularly thereafter.

We note that you intend to include a page at the start of the research explaining that in commissioning the research on use of granular smart meter consumption data, you have given careful consideration to potential concerns about consumer privacy. This also makes clear that you have consulted privacy groups who have indicated that have not objections to the research going ahead, given the potential societal benefits it could ultimately deliver. This is very helpful, and we would encourage you to explain this in all relevant presentations and publications to reduce the risk of material being taken out of context and consequently raising privacy concerns. We have suggested some amendments to the page to improve accuracy and to make even clearer that you do not intend to use the data at individual household level.