



INFORMATION ABOUT THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR CONSUMERS IN VULNERABLE CIRCUMSTANCES

Utility
Regulator

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Introduction to the Code of Practice

The Code of Practice for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances has been developed by the Utility Regulator to provide protections and supports for domestic consumers in vulnerable circumstances. We will refer to it as 'the Code' throughout this document.

The Code applies to all electricity and gas suppliers, gas network operators (Evolve, firmus energy and Phoenix Energy) and also NIE Networks and NI Water.

This document provides information about:

- The consumers who the Code applies to;
- The support and protections provided by the Code; and
- How you can sign up to receive this additional support.

You can see the full Code on our website, and also at this link - [Code of Practice for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances | Utility Regulator](#)

Does the Code apply to me?

If you need extra support from your electricity or gas company or NI Water, due to your circumstances or needs, you could benefit from the help outlined in the Code.

The definition of 'vulnerable' that applies to the Code is as follows:

A consumer is deemed vulnerable when their personal characteristics or circumstances reduce their ability to engage effectively and achieve fair outcomes. A vulnerable consumer is significantly less able to protect or represent their interests and significantly more likely to suffer detrimental impacts on their health, wellbeing or finances.

We understand that anyone can be vulnerable at any stage of their life. You may not think of yourself as vulnerable. However, your unique circumstances and experiences may mean that you require some additional support to ensure that you experience the same outcomes as all consumers, when it comes to your electricity, gas and water services.

Your circumstances could mean you have long-term support needs, which could be with you for your whole life. However, the Code also applies even if you find you need additional support for a shorter time.

You might need additional support for one or more of the following reasons:

- You are of pensionable age.
- You have a disability, chronic illness or terminal illness.
- You are experiencing certain circumstances such as bereavement, redundancy, recovering from injury or you are a carer.

This is only a short list of some of the circumstances that could make someone vulnerable. There are many other characteristics, situations or conditions, not listed, that may result in an individual needing additional support that is provided under the Code.

What support could I receive?

The Code sets out the protections and support available for domestic consumers in vulnerable circumstances.

As a consumer in vulnerable circumstances, you will receive tailored support and positive outcomes when interacting with your electricity or gas company or NI Water. These companies provide a range of free additional services and protections for consumers who may need extra help. One or all of these supports may be applicable to you due to your specific circumstances.

We have listed below some examples of the additional services and protections that are available and which companies provide them. If you contact your electricity or gas company or NI Water and discuss your individual needs, they will be able to ensure you receive the appropriate support. They may also offer some additional services that are not included here.

Customer Care Registers:

- Electricity suppliers, gas suppliers and NI Water hold Customer Care Registers for consumers in vulnerable circumstances. NIE Networks hold a Medical Care Register for those who rely on electricity for healthcare needs.
- To be added to your company's register simply contact them - it is free to be added. NI Water, NIE Networks and some electricity and gas suppliers allow you to sign-up yourself on their website. You will find the contact details at the end of this factsheet.
- If you are on a company's register, that company will contact you at least every two years to ensure they are providing you with the support you need.

Contacting your electricity or gas company or NI Water:

- When you contact your electricity or gas company or NI Water, you can be assured that staff have received training that includes, but not limited to, disability training (in relation to hidden disabilities, learning difficulties or communication barriers), mental health awareness training and empathy training.
- There are a number of consumer bodies who can provide you with additional support or advice depending on your particular circumstances. If your electricity or gas company or NI Water identifies that you could benefit from getting in touch with an organisation who could provide you with further support, they will offer to make a referral on your behalf.

Additional support if you are experiencing payment difficulties:

- For all domestic consumers, if you are in debt with your electricity or gas supplier, they will work with you to develop a repayment plan that suits your own personal circumstances and your ability to pay. For consumers in vulnerable circumstances, this will include the option of 'breathing space', where you will be given time to work with debt advice agencies and seek appropriate solutions for your debt, before you begin your debt repayment plan.
- If you are finding it difficult to pay for your electricity or gas, your energy company will offer to refer you to a consumer body who can carry out a benefit entitlement check for you. They will make this referral on your behalf.
- If you are in debt but actively engaging with your electricity or gas supplier to manage your energy bill, then you will not be disconnected from your electricity or gas supply.
- If you need to pay to have your electricity or gas supply reconnected, you can set up a flexible repayment plan with your supplier. The payment plan will be developed between you and your electricity or gas supplier, based on your own personal circumstances and your ability to pay.

Safety measures:

- If you are worried about people calling to your home, you can ask your electricity or gas company or NI Water to provide specific identification for their employees who will call to your home. This will allow you to identify if a caller is from that company before opening your door or letting them in.
- If you are vulnerable and live on your own, or if everyone who lives in your household is vulnerable, your gas supplier can arrange a free gas safety inspection for your home.

Additional assistance available:

- If you find it hard to manage your emails or letters or need assistance with the management and/or understanding of your bills, you can ask your electricity or gas supplier to send your energy bills to both yourself and another trusted person, for no additional cost.
- If you need alternative forms of communication (for reasons such as sight or hearing issues), your electricity or gas supplier or NIE Networks will provide this free of charge.
- If you have difficulty accessing your electricity or gas meter, either to read your meter or to top up a pay as you go meter, then your electricity or gas supplier or NIE Networks may be able to change the position of your meter, or provide special controls and adaptors free of charge, so that you can use and access your meter.
- If neither you nor anyone else in your home can read your electricity or gas meter (due to age, disability or terminal or chronic illness) then your supplier

can arrange to read your meter, on your behalf, free of charge, at least once every three months.

- If you need advice on the use of any electricity or gas appliances or fittings in your house (due to age, disability or terminal or chronic illness), you can ask your supplier.

How do I sign up to get this support?

The first step is to contact your electricity or gas company or NI Water. They will work with you to see if you could benefit from any of the additional services and protections that they provide, based on your specific needs.

Contact details for the electricity, gas and water companies

The contact details for electricity and gas suppliers, NIE Networks, NI Water and gas network companies are available on our website at the following link:

[Supplier contact information](#)