

IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW SUPPLIER CODE OF PRACTICE ON ENERGY BILLS AND STATEMENTS

FINAL DECISIONS

05 JULY 2017



About the Utility Regulator

The Utility Regulator is the independent non-ministerial government department responsible for regulating Northern Ireland's electricity, gas, water and sewerage industries, to promote the short and long-term interests of consumers.

We are not a policy-making department of government, but we make sure that the energy and water utility industries in Northern Ireland are regulated and developed within ministerial policy as set out in our statutory duties.

We are governed by a Board of Directors and are accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly through financial and annual reporting obligations.

We are based at Queens House in the centre of Belfast. The Chief Executive leads a management team of directors representing the markets, networks and corporate affairs functional areas of the organisation. The staff team includes economists, engineers, accountants, utility specialists, legal advisors and administration professionals.

Our Mission:

Value and sustainability in energy and water

Our Vision:

We will make a difference for consumers by listening, innovating and leading

Our Values:

Be a best practice regulator: transparent, consistent, proportional, accountable, and targeted

Be a united team

Be collaborative and cooperative

Be professional

Listen and explain

Make a difference

Act with integrity

Abstract

The Utility Regulator (UR) has developed a code of practice on energy bills and statements following an extensive period of engagement and consultation with stakeholders. Suppliers are required to comply with this code of practice as a result of the Energy Efficiency Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014. The final code of practice sets out the principles and rules that must be adopted by electricity and gas suppliers when producing bills and statements for domestic and non-domestic customers.

Our extensive stakeholder engagement included bi-lateral meetings with stakeholders (prior to the initial consultation); two consultation papers (published in August 2016 and March 2017); and a stakeholder meeting (December 2016). We received a large amount of feedback regarding our proposals at all stages throughout the development of the code of practice. Following our review of the responses to our most recent consultation we have made our final decisions on the implementation of the code of practice on bills and statements. This paper provides information on the final decisions, and the timeframes for suppliers to become compliant with the new code of practice. The accompanying appendices present the final code of practice.

Audience

This document is most likely to be of interest to regulated electricity and gas supply companies and consumer organisations.

Consumer impact

This paper includes the Utility Regulator's decisions on the implementation of the code of practice on energy bills and statements. The final code of practice will promote best practice energy billing and facilitate customer engagement in energy markets in Northern Ireland (NI). This paper also discusses our plans for future consumer research which will include customers' opinions on billing related issues.

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Glossary

Name	Definition
The Billing Regulations	The Electricity and Gas (Billing) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010
CCNI	Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
COPNI	Commissioner for Older People Northern Ireland
The Energy Efficiency Regulations	The Energy Efficiency Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014
EU	European Union
IME3	EU Third Internal Energy Package (2009) concerning common rules for the internal markets in electricity (Directive 2009/72/EC) and gas (Directive 2009/73/EC)
kWh	Kilowatt hour
MPRN	Meter Point Registration Number
NEA	National Energy Action
NI	Northern Ireland
REMM	Retail Energy Market Monitoring
SMPN	Supply Meter Point Number
UR	Utility Regulator
VAT	Value Added Tax

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the paper

On 16 March 2017 we published a second consultation¹ on the implementation of a new supplier code of practice on energy bills and statements. We received feedback mainly in the form of written consultation responses with verbal feedback from a couple of respondents. The purpose of this paper is to:

- Discuss the responses to the consultation;
- Present our final code of practice on energy bills and statements, including our reasons for any changes made since the second consultation; and
- Detail the timeframe for the implementation of the new code of practice by suppliers.

This paper does not attempt to revive issues that were resolved prior to the publication of the second consultation paper – only issues consulted on in the second consultation paper are included in this decision paper (all other decisions remain as previously stated).

1.2 Background

We have both legislative and consumer protection reasons for implementing a code of practice on bills and statements. These reasons were covered in both consultation papers, but we have included a short summary below.

1.1 Legislative background

The three pieces of energy legislation we consider to be most relevant to this code of practice are described below:

¹ Second consultation on the implementation of a new supplier code of practice on bills and statements:
<https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/consultations/Bills%20%26%20statements%20consultation%20%20FINAL.pdf>

- The EU Third Internal Energy Package (2009) (**IME3** – implemented in 2012) – this legislation introduced a number of additional billing requirements e.g. provision of annual consumption information; and ensuring that information on bills is clear and understandable.
- The Electricity and Gas (Billing) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 (the **Billing Regulations**) – these regulations require domestic suppliers to provide customers with a consumption comparison between the current billing period and the corresponding period in the previous year.
- The Energy Efficiency Directive (2012) – this was implemented in Northern Ireland (NI) in part by the Energy Efficiency Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 (the **Energy Efficiency Regulations**). These regulations require that *“Any bill or statement of account sent to a customer.....complies with the guidance issued and published by the Authority.”*

We transposed the requirements of both IME3 and the Energy Efficiency Regulations into the electricity and gas supply licences following extensive consultation with stakeholders. The requirements in the Billing Regulations currently sit separately to the electricity and gas supply licences.

1.2 Consumer protection background

The consultation process and the responses from our stakeholders have confirmed our view that bills and statements are the most important means of communication between an electricity or gas supplier and its customers. As such we consider that there are also non-legislative reasons for developing the code of practice on bills and statements. These include: providing principles for suppliers to follow when designing or amending bills or statements and setting minimum requirements for certain elements of bill/statement content and format. In addition, the development of the code of practice on bills and statements will assist suppliers (and other stakeholders e.g. consumer representative bodies) by bringing together all requirements related to billing (which the UR is responsible for governing).

1.3 Development of the final code of practice on bills and statements

The final code of practice on bills and statements is the result of an extensive stakeholder engagement programme prior to and during the consultation phases of this project. Prior to the development of the initial consultation paper we held bilateral meetings with eight electricity and gas suppliers and three third sector organisations². On 10 August 2016 we published the first consultation on the implementation of a new supplier code of practice on bills and statements. We received 14 written responses from stakeholders.

Our review of the consultation responses highlighted some areas which various stakeholders were opposed to within the proposed code of practice. We considered this feedback and decided that the best approach was a full review of the proposals. In order to maximise our engagement with stakeholders we held a stakeholder meeting prior to issuing the second consultation paper. The feedback we received during and after the meeting was reflected in the updated proposals presented in the second consultation paper.

We received seven written responses to the second consultation paper from the following stakeholders:

- The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI);
- Electric Ireland;
- Energia;
- Firmus Energy;
- National Energy Action (NEA);
- Power NI; and
- SSE Airtricity

Most respondents to the second consultation made very positive comments about the engagement process we had undertaken throughout the project. We have included a couple of the comments made by our stakeholders below:

² National Energy Action (NEA); Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI); and Commissioner for Older People NI (COPNI)

- *“Energia acknowledges the level of engagement that the UR has undertaken during the consultation process and welcomes the changes made to the proposed Code of Practice based on stakeholder feedback.”*
- *“We commend the UR for the thorough interaction which took place with stakeholders throughout the consultation process in 2016.” (NEA)*

The written responses to the second consultation paper are published alongside this decision paper. Annex 1 contains links to each of the consultation responses. The updated proposals for the code of practice on bills and statements are included in Annexes 3-6 of this paper (final versions and tracked versions showing changes from the second consultation paper are included).

1.4 Structure of this paper

We thank all our stakeholders again for their engagement throughout the development of this code of practice. We received a large amount of written and verbal feedback during this process and we are confident that we have developed a final code of practice that is representative of the feedback we received throughout the project. This paper aims to summarise and respond to the issues raised by stakeholders in response to our second consultation paper (note: as stated above this paper will not reconsider issues that were resolved following the initial consultation). However, it is not possible to detail every comment and respond to each one individually. As a result we have included those comments that are most significant or those opinions that have been shared by a number of respondents.

As in the second consultation paper we have produced versions of the final codes in the annexes which include the tracked changes from the second consultation and we have also added clean copies for clarity.

The structure of this paper is as follows:

- Chapter 2 – this chapter presents the general feedback and comments made by stakeholders on broad issues, our response to the feedback and our final decisions where relevant.
- Chapter 3 – this chapter addresses specific issues that were raised in regard to the more detailed aspects of the code of practice. It provides feedback on the responses and details our new proposals.
- Chapter 4 – this chapter details the next steps in the implementation of the new code of practice.
- Annex 1 – links to consultation responses to our second consultation (published in March 2017).
- Annex 2 – list of differences between domestic and non-domestic code of practice.
- Annex 3 – final code of practice on domestic bills and statements.
- Annex 4 – final code of practice on domestic bills and statements (version with tracked changes).
- Annex 5 – final code of practice on non-domestic bills and statements.
- Annex 6 – final code of practice on non-domestic bills and statements (version with tracked changes).

1.5 Equality considerations

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 places a number of obligations on public authorities concerning the promotion of equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between different categories. We aim to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;

- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

One of the respondents to the original consultation was concerned that the increased level of detail proposed for inclusion on the bill or statement may not positively impact customers with numeracy or literacy issues. In the second consultation paper we noted that we had undertaken a Section 75 screening of the original proposals alongside our review of the consultation responses. We also stated that the revised code of practice helps all consumers and we do not anticipate any negative impacts on any groups (and the changes made between the first and second consultation will in fact increase the extent to which all groups will benefit).

Only one stakeholder made a response in regard to the equality considerations. This stakeholder confirmed that they anticipated no issues relating to Section 75 and that their bills and statements would continue to be available in appropriate formats to assist disabled and vulnerable consumers. We have not made any changes to the final code of practice with regard to Section 75.

2. General comments on the proposed code of practice

2.1 Introduction

As mentioned above, this chapter details the general comments we received with regard to our second proposals for a new supplier code of practice on bills and statements.

There were many positive comments regarding our programme of engagement with stakeholders during the development of the code of practice. Almost all respondents were appreciative of the opportunity to provide feedback at various points throughout the process and noted that the second proposals were reflective of much of the feedback we had received. We consider this input from stakeholders to be invaluable in developing a code of practice that will benefit consumers, suppliers and other stakeholders.

The general feedback is discussed in detail below. We have included examples of the stakeholder comments, our response to these comments and our final decisions where relevant.

2.2 Implementation of final code of practice

1.3 Proposed arrangements for the monitoring of compliance with the code of practice

In the second consultation paper we reiterated our expectation that suppliers will keep a record of all changes that are made to bills and statements. We also explained that changes which may seem trivial to suppliers may in fact alter the clarity and ease of understanding of a bill or statement, and therefore impact whether or not the bill or statement would be deemed to be compliant with the code of practice. In addition we proposed that the Retail Energy Market Monitoring (REMM) compliance reporting

template would be amended to include a place for suppliers to submit the log of changes made to bills and statements along with the annual licence compliance submission.

Stakeholder feedback

Two stakeholders commented that REMM provides the appropriate means of submitting the record of changes to bills and statements made on an annual basis. However, one of these stakeholders commented that the detail of the reporting requirements should be provided to all stakeholders for comment prior to the publication of the final decision paper. In addition this stakeholder stated that the record of changes should just include changes in relation to the regulated aspects of billing (e.g. where the UR introduces a new measure or where a supplier chooses to change their method of achieving compliance with an existing requirement).

A third stakeholder commented that the REMM process should identify any issues with regard to vulnerable customers. This stakeholder also commented that the principles approach has the potential to have less focus than mandatory regulations, but that monitoring should ensure that this approach continues to protect consumers.

UR decision

We continue to consider REMM to be the most appropriate means for suppliers to submit a log of changes made to bills and statements on an annual basis. For the avoidance of doubt we expect that suppliers submit a record of ALL changes made to their bills and statements. We do not agree that the log should only include changes in relation to the “regulated aspects of billing.” As stated in the consultation paper even small changes to font size or colour may affect how easily the bill is to read and hence how clear and understandable it is. This would directly affect how a supplier complies with the code of practice and as such this change should be recorded and submitted to us.

As the code of practice on bills and statements will only be operational from January 2018 suppliers will have to submit additional information in the REMM annual return that

is made in February 2019 (for the 2018 calendar year). However, we realise that throughout 2018 suppliers will need to record the changes to the billing systems in an appropriate manner for REMM submission. In order to facilitate suppliers in recording the appropriate information for the REMM submission we will advise suppliers in November 2017 of the requirements to be submitted as supplementary evidence to the annual REMM return.

With regard to the comment that the REMM process should identify issues affecting vulnerable customers, we do not agree that REMM is the appropriate means to identify these issues. REMM is a reporting tool for compliance and market monitoring metrics only. In the second consultation paper we made the decision to amend the wording in the code of practice to ensure that it is applicable for all consumers (including vulnerable consumers). Suppliers are required to make provisions for vulnerable customers through various other licence conditions and pieces of legislation; and therefore we have not placed any additional requirements on suppliers through this code of practice.

In addition we would like to remind stakeholders that any failure of suppliers to comply with the code of practice on bills and statements will be a failure to comply with their licence and therefore may result in a formal investigation and enforcement action in line with our enforcement procedure.

1.4 Timeframe for implementation of final code of practice

In the second consultation paper we indicated that we consider six months to be an adequate time period (from the publication of this decision paper) for all suppliers to begin to produce bills and statements which are compliant with the final code of practice. As such, the code of practice will come into effect from 05 January 2018. We also stated that if any supplier (for any reason) believes they are not able to be compliant within this timeframe they will have to provide us with reasons for this in addition to a comprehensive compliance plan agreed with the UR and within a timeframe which we deem to be reasonable.

Stakeholder feedback

Only two stakeholders (both suppliers) commented on the delivery timeframe of six months. One supplier stated that it expects that six months will be sufficient to produce compliant bills and statements. However, this supplier also requested a workshop to clarify detail on a number of points in order to produce compliant bills within this timeframe. Another supplier commented (based on the version of the code in the second consultation paper) that it would take at least nine months to implement from the point of agreement of scope internally (and may even take longer based on the final code of practice).

UR decision

We still consider the six month timeframe to be compliant with the new code of practice to be adequate and the lack of challenge on this from other suppliers suggests that it is not an unreasonable timeframe. As mentioned above, if any supplier is unable to meet this timeframe they must provide us with reasons for the delay in compliance and provide a detailed compliance plan agreed with the UR and within a timeframe which we deem to be reasonable.

The code of practice on bills and statements will come into effect from 05 January 2018. We expect to be made aware as soon as practicably possible (and in any event before the end of August 2017) if any supplier anticipates any issues with achieving compliance with the code of practice prior to 05 January 2018. We encourage all suppliers to begin implementing the code of practice immediately so that potential issues can be addressed within the timeframe for compliance.

2.3 Customer research – content and timing

The UR plans to undertake a programme of customer research starting in early 2018. This research was detailed in the second consultation paper. We informed stakeholders that the research would commence with a consumer summit in Q4 of 2017 and that this would be followed up by more detailed research in 2018/19.

Stakeholder feedback

Two suppliers requested further clarity on the proposals for the customer research, particularly regarding the timeframe for the research. One supplier encouraged us to ensure that the research outlined in the decision paper is substantive and would welcome further input into the research plans. In addition this supplier and one other have noted the timing of the research. One supplier has commented that it is “far from ideal”, but acknowledges that planning for such engagement is a welcome step. The other supplier that noted the timing commented that full consumer research and testing is required before introducing prescriptive requirements.

Another supplier noted that the UR’s plans to undertake consumer research activities to review the effectiveness of the new code of practice in 2017 are contradictory as it is also minded to give six months for the suppliers to implement the code of practice. The supplier supports the research being undertaken to examine and trial the proposals prior to requiring suppliers to implement the final code of practice.

Two consumer bodies responded positively about the UR plans to undertake consumer research in the near future. One of these consumer bodies noted that it wants to be involved in the consumer engagement activities and that it would be helpful to understand the timing of the consumer research in relation to the implementation of the code of practice.

UR decision

Following our review of the consultation responses and noting the confusion portrayed by some respondents we recognise that the description of the customer research in the consultation paper was not as clear as it might have been. For clarification, the research described in the consultation paper will be undertaken largely as part of the Consumer Protection Strategy (CPS) which was consulted on in 2015³, with the final strategy published in February 2016⁴. We plan to incorporate our research on billing

³Consultation on Consumer Protection Strategy:

<https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/consultations/Draft%20Consumer%20Protection%20Strategy.pdf>

⁴ Final Consumer Protection Strategy https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni.gov.uk/files/media-files/Consumer_Protection_Strategy_final.pdf

into this wider consumer research. Our first step is to ensure that suppliers are able to produce bills that are compliant with the code of practice, but then our focus will move to engaging consumers on whether or not they deem their bills to be “clear and understandable”. We will use this consumer research to begin to benchmark our expectations regarding the operation of the code of practice.

As mentioned in the second consultation paper the research will take the following format:

- consumer summit (this is now likely to take place in early 2018);
- specific focus groups on billing related issues (e.g. content and format) in 2018/19 – the consumer summit will assist in determining which billing issues will be covered by the focus groups; and
- I&C consumer research⁵ – this is currently being scoped by the UR and will include the introduction of additional consumer protection measures for small I&C customers.

We note that the final code of practice on bills and statements will only be implemented a short time prior to the research being carried out, but we do not consider that suppliers’ bills or statements will need many amendments in order to be compliant. As such we are confident that customers will be able to provide useful feedback on bills and statements which can be used to form the basis for future focus groups etc.

Following our review of the results of the customer research we will reconsider the current code of practice. If any amendments are required to address the results of the research we will consult on these.

⁵Information paper on measures to enhance consumer protection for small I&C customers:
<https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/media-files/Information%20Paper%20-%20Measures%20to%20Enhance%20the%20Operation%20of%20the%20Small%20Business%20Energy%20Market%20V2.0.pdf>

2.4 Coverage of the code of practice

Following our review of the responses to the initial consultation we decided to reduce the number of codes of practice from four to two. The two codes of practice that were consulted on in the second consultation were:

- Code of practice on domestic bills and statements; and
- Code of practice on non-domestic bills and statements.

In the second consultation paper we noted that suppliers have differing views on how to classify direct debit communications (some classify them as bills; others classify them as statements). As such we were content to amalgamate bills and statements into one code of practice that would cover direct debit statements irrespective of whether suppliers deemed them to be bills or statements.

Stakeholder feedback

Three stakeholders (two suppliers and one third sector organisation) responded with regard to the updated proposals on the coverage of the code of practice and requested that further clarity is provided. One supplier noted that the requirements and provisions included for bills and statements would also apply to annual prepayment statements, which require no payment. The second supplier commented that the current definition which includes “any communications” implies that operational letters such as payment reminder letters would be required to comply with the code of practice (despite them being neither bills nor statements). This supplier proposed that the definition is expanded as follows:

‘For the purpose of this code, bills and statements refer to any communications with a customer that shows how much energy they have used and makes a request for payment, provides information about the collection of direct debit payments or informs the customer about the status of their account.’

The third sector organisation expressed concerns that the code of practice does not cover follow up communication to customers with late payments or debt and noted that those customers struggling with their finances need better communications in this area.

Another stakeholder requested clarification on the requirement to issue statements to customers that have requested to receive bills or statements electronically and the requirement to issue final statements to prepayment customers.

In addition, a few stakeholders noted that some requirements for prepayment customers have been incorporated in the non-domestic code of practice.

UR decision

In the second consultation paper it was our intention to simplify the implementation of the code of practice by grouping bills and statements together (but not providing an exact definition for 'bill' or 'statement'). The consultation responses indicate that some stakeholders would prefer us to provide definitions for 'bill' and 'statement'. At this point we are not inclined to do this as we consider suppliers to be better placed to decide (based on their own internal processes and systems) what they deem to be a bill or a statement. However, we can confirm that the code of practice does not apply to other forms of communication related to billing, such as reminder letters or letters regarding a customer's debt. We note the concern expressed by the third sector organisation and we will consider this aspect of communication with customers when we are developing our consumer research.

In addition we realise that prepayment statements have slightly different requirements than normal bills and statements. As such we have amended the final code of practice to ensure that it is obvious where requirements are modified or not applicable for prepayment customers. We can also confirm that prepayment customers do not require a final statement to be sent within six weeks of the supplier ceasing to supply the customer.

In order to clarify our position on the issues raised above we have amended the information at the start of the domestic code of practice as follows:

This code of practice applies only to domestic bills and statements. For the purpose of this code, bills and statements refer to any communications with a credit customer that show how much energy they have used, make a request for payment, provide

information about the collection of direct debit payments or inform the customer about the status of their account⁶. Annual statements for prepayment customers are considered to be a separate type of communication. For the purpose of this code these will be referred to as “annual PPM statements”.

With regard to prepayment requirements for non-domestic customers, these will all be removed from the final code of practice as they are not currently appropriate for non-domestic customers. We are considering the availability of prepayment meters for non-domestic customers under a separate project. If we progress with this we will update the code of practice on non-domestic bills and statements accordingly.

For clarity we have included a list in annex 2 that states the differences between the domestic and non-domestic code of practice on bills and statements.

⁶ For the avoidance of doubt, this code of practice does not apply to communications such as reminder letters or debt collection letters etc.

3. Content of the code of practice

3.1. Introduction

As mentioned earlier in this paper, this chapter details the comments we received with regard to the content of the code of practice (including the high level principles associated with the code of practice).

This chapter will also present our response to the feedback received from the consultation responses. It will also detail the changes we propose to make to the final code of practice. We have only included the sections of the code that stakeholders made comments on – the rest of the code of practice will remain as proposed in the second consultation paper.

3.2. Overarching principle – all bills and statements are clear and easily understandable

In the original consultation we had proposed that all bills and statements are clear and easily understandable to the average consumer. However, following our review of the consultation responses and our stakeholder meeting in December 2016 we decided to remove the reference to average consumers. In addition, the concept of an average consumer was not developed by the UR so we did not consider it to be within our remit to determine how individual suppliers can comply with this. For these reasons we proposed in the second consultation paper that the code of practice would apply to all customers (without singling out any particular customer group).

Stakeholder feedback

We received feedback from two consumer bodies on this principle (no suppliers responded in this regard). One of the consumer bodies welcomed our decision to remove the reference to average consumers and commented that this approach recognises the needs of all, including vulnerable consumers. The other stakeholder

commented that the specific needs of vulnerable consumers should still be acknowledged and further argued that the consumers who have limited literacy or numeracy are the ones that are likely to need advocacy.

UR decision

We have considered the responses from the stakeholders and note the concern raised by one of the respondents. However, we still consider that the drafting as proposed in the second consultation paper covers all customers, including those who are vulnerable and may have literacy or numeracy issues. In addition, as stated in the second consultation paper, suppliers are still expected to meet the needs of vulnerable customers via other licence requirements, and other applicable legislation.

The overarching principle in the final code of practice will remain as drafted in the second consultation paper. We also intend to use the customer research to examine customers' opinions of how clear and understandable their bills are (following implementation of the code of practice).

3.3. Principle 2 – a customer will know immediately what action is required from them when reading a bill or statement

In the second consultation paper we proposed that suppliers will state clearly if a customer does not need to take any action on receipt of a bill or statement. We proposed that “no action” would include the following circumstances:

- the customer has a direct debit that covers the full amount of the bill for each billing period and no adjustment is required – in this case the bill or statement is for information only, giving the amount owed and the date on which it will be collected from the customer's account; or
- the communication is an annual statement for a prepayment customer.

In addition we proposed that suppliers also inform direct debit customers of the status of their account (i.e. if the customer is in debit or credit with the supplier; and if the customer is able to amend the direct debit amount etc.).

Stakeholder feedback

We received a substantial amount of feedback regarding the detail of our proposals for this principle. Much of this feedback came from suppliers who raised concerns about telling customers that no action needs to be taken on receipt of a bill or statement. Three suppliers were in agreement that informing a customer that no action needs to be taken is potentially very confusing for them. One supplier noted that while elements of the direct debit arrangement require little input from the customer, the customer must retain a sufficient balance in their account to ensure that the direct debit continues unhindered. Another supplier noted that by expressly stating to a customer that they should not take any action on a bill, they could argue that it is the supplier's fault if a direct debit is missed and the supplier should be liable for any fees associated e.g. missed direct debit fee.

One supplier responded with regard to the proposal to inform direct debit customers of the status of their account. This supplier commented that the UR is mandating a number of requirements that are at odds with the normal operation of a 12 month direct debit tariff offer and that additional bill messages are not helpful in the operation of a direct debit tariff. In addition this supplier argued that printing the exact direct debit collection date is problematic for suppliers. This is because the customer may be offered a date that is convenient for them, but the actual payment will be lifted on the nearest banking day to the agreed date. Increasing the functionality of the billing system to reflect banking days etc. is a "nice to have" rather than a consumer protection necessity.

Two suppliers noted that the no action statement in the proposed non-domestic code of practice includes a reference to prepayment customers which is unnecessary in the non-domestic market.

UR decision

In the second consultation paper we decided to try and add more clarity to the code of practice and hence to bills and statements by being more prescriptive about the information that the suppliers must include in order to ensure that customers are aware of what action they need to take on receipt of a bill or statement. However, it appears that our proposals may inadvertently cause confusion for customers. It is not our intention to make things more complicated for customers and as such we have decided to remove these requirements from the final code of practice. The final code of practice will not contain any reference that a customer does not need to take action, and with regard to the presentation of direct debit information on bills or statements we are content that suppliers simply inform customers that the direct debit amount will be collected “as agreed”. The reference to prepayment meters in the non-domestic code of practice will be removed.

3.4. Principle 4 – customers will be made aware if there are cheaper tariffs available to them

In order for customers to engage fully in energy markets it is necessary for them to understand their tariff options. We aim to encourage customers to engage with suppliers (their current supplier and others where available) in order to try and get the best deal possible. We also note that the best deal for a customer is not necessarily just the lowest pence per kWh tariff (depending on the customer’s desired payment method and billing option). This aspect of the first consultation paper generated a lot of feedback in the consultation responses and the stakeholder meeting. We listened to the concerns put forward by suppliers regarding the difficulty of providing tailored tariff statements to individual customers and to the third sector comments regarding the need to enable customers to fully engage in energy markets.

We decided that the best way forward (in the absence of detailed customer research) was to propose a mandated statement for domestic bills and statements which will inform customers that there may be cheaper tariffs available to them. We proposed to

amalgamate the tariff statement with the current requirement for suppliers to make customers aware that other suppliers are available (and to give details of where the customer can seek impartial advice). The proposed mandated statement for domestic customers was as follows:

Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We offer a range of tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumer council.org.uk

We did not propose to include this requirement in the non-domestic code of practice, following review of the consultation responses and the discussions at the stakeholder meeting.

Stakeholder feedback

This principle received a lot of feedback from stakeholders. There were a number of positive comments regarding the revision to this part of the code or practice from the first consultation. We welcome this feedback and appreciate the input from our stakeholders on this principle. The feedback on the proposal in the second consultation was broadly supportive of the mandated statement. In particular, CCNI welcomes the reference to its impartial advice service as part of the mandated statement. However, there were a few concerns regarding the operation of the mandated statement and its applicability to all customers as detailed below:

- Some customers will already be on the lowest tariff available from a particular supplier and the customer may then become dissatisfied if they contact the supplier and cannot be given a better deal. This may lead to increased customer complaints and an increased cost to serve.
- Not all domestic natural gas customers in NI are able to avail of a range of tariff options (due to residing in an area with only one regulated domestic supplier) and the statement could be misleading for these customers.

- Regulated domestic suppliers are not able to offer a range of tariff options as the prices are set by the UR through the price control process.
- Customers on fixed term contracts may have to pay an exit fee to leave their current tariff. This means that any potential saving may be offset by an exit fee.

In addition, one supplier is unsupportive of including the statement regarding the availability of other suppliers on the front page of the bill or statement. The supplier does not like that this is one of the first messages a customer will see on a bill or statement and believes this will have a negative impact on the customer's ability to know what action is required.

The other comments received regarding this principle were related to clarity. One supplier queried if the requirement in section 3.5.1 of the proposed domestic code of practice was covered by the inclusion of the switching statement as part of the mandated statement. Another supplier noted a formatting error that occurred in the tracked version of the non-domestic code of practice which implied that we had retained the requirement to inform customers if they were in a position to renegotiate the terms of their contract (this had been removed as part of the development of the second consultation).

One third sector respondent raised a concern regarding the removal of the requirement to include the tariff statement on non-domestic bills and statements. The respondent disagreed with supplier assertions and the position of the UR that non-domestic customers have more awareness and are engaged about tariffs. In addition the respondent proposed that the mandatory statement is included on non-domestic bills and statements until the project on small I&C customer protection is carried out and the statement is demonstrated not to be necessary.

UR decision

We have considered the responses and understand the concerns stakeholders have regarding the operation of the mandated statement for all domestic customers. Some useful points were raised and we agree that we want to minimise the potential for customers to be dissatisfied. We reflected on the balance to be struck between keeping

the tariff statement as simple as possible, and minimising any potential disappointment on the part of the customer. One option we considered was to provide caveats with the mandated statement so that customers in the scenarios mentioned above would be made aware that lower tariffs may not be available to them. However, we deemed this to be too difficult to implement and operate for suppliers and harder for us to ensure compliance.

In addition, we are not in total agreement that customers of regulated suppliers cannot get a better deal with their current supplier. If a customer changes payment method or billing options there may be different tariffs available, even with a regulated supplier.

Our final decision is to make a few small amends to the mandated statement that was proposed in the second consultation paper as follows (changes tracked):

*Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We **may** offer ~~a range of~~ **other** tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumer council.org.uk or by phoning **0800 121 6022**.*

We can also confirm that the formatting error has been amended in the final non-domestic code of practice. In addition, the final domestic code of practice will ensure that there is clarity regarding the requirement in section 3.5.1 being met by inclusion of the mandated statement.

At this point we do not intend to change our position regarding the removal of the mandatory statement for non-domestic bills and statements. We will review this decision following the project on implementation of consumer protection measures for small I&C customers. The non-domestic code of practice will remain as proposed in the second consultation paper.

3.5. Requirements for suppliers' billing processes

There were a number of individual issues raised with regard to suppliers' billing processes which we have detailed and responded to below. However following our own internal review of the proposed code of practice we have decided to make a few small drafting changes in order to further clarify a few requirements. These changes are included in the final code of practice but do not change any of the requirements that were proposed in the second consultation paper. The changes are in sections 2.2 and 2.5⁷ of the final code of practice and the tracked versions in annexes 4 and 6 show these clearly.

1.5 All bills and statements must be designed and formatted in consultation with the Authority and the General Consumer Council

As mentioned in the initial consultation paper, when the code of practice is in place the current requirement in condition 38(16)(b) of the electricity supply licence (condition 2.19.16(b) in the gas supply licence) will effectively be removed i.e. the supplier will no longer be expected to consult with the UR and with CCNI on the content and format of bills and statements. We included this point in the proposed code of practice as we think it is important to reintroduce this requirement. In the second consultation we clarified the requirement that all bills and statements for new suppliers must be designed and formatted in consultation with the UR and CCNI. In addition we proposed that all current suppliers should also consult with CCNI if they decide to make significant changes to the format of their bills or statements. At the meeting in December we stated that suppliers should decide on a case-by-case basis if the changes being made should be made in consultation with CCNI.

With regard to making changes to bills and statements for non-domestic customers we proposed that suppliers would not be required to consult with CCNI. However, we also noted that this does not prevent suppliers from seeking advice from CCNI or other

⁷ The clarifications in section 2.5 (final bills and statements) only apply to the domestic code of practice

business/manufacturing groups in determining how best to present information to non-domestic customers.

Stakeholder feedback

CCNI and two suppliers provided feedback on this part of the code of practice. CCNI is supportive of the requirement for suppliers to consult with them on significant changes to the content and/or format of all bills and statements. CCNI also wished to reassure suppliers that they see their role as one of providing guidance on what works best for customers, and further noted that they are available to assist suppliers on changes to non-domestic bills and statements.

Both of the suppliers that responded requested further clarity on what is deemed to be a significant change to a bill or statement. In addition, one supplier commented that in order for this to be manageable an industry process should be devised with CCNI which has agreed timeframes for response. This supplier also stated that the absence of an agreed process and definition could potentially disrupt commercial activity and subsequently restrict suppliers in communicating with their customers.

UR decision

We are still of the opinion that suppliers and CCNI can work together to determine if a change to a bill or statement is deemed to be significant. Initially this will be on a case by case basis, but over time suppliers and CCNI will build up experience on what is deemed to be significant. CCNI is content to work with suppliers on this basis and we do not consider it to be beneficial at this stage to try and give a definitive list of what might be a significant change.

We do not agree that the absence of an agreed process and definition will disrupt commercial activity or restrict suppliers in communicating with their customers. However, if suppliers and CCNI wish to develop an industry process with agreed timeframes etc. this can happen independently of the UR. This is not something we will mandate as part of the code of practice. This section of the final code of practice will remain unchanged from the second consultation paper.

1.6 Frequency of bills

This part of the code of practice relates to how often suppliers must send bills or statements to customers under different circumstances. The requirements in this section of the code of practice are largely taken from the licence requirements in condition 38(5) of the electricity supply licence and condition 2.19.5 of the gas supply licence. The requirements for billing frequency were modified during the implementation of the Energy Efficiency Directive.

Stakeholder feedback

This aspect of the code of practice was not commented on following the initial consultation, but following the amalgamation of bills and statements into one code of practice, there have been a few concerns raised by stakeholders. Two suppliers have commented that by grouping bills and statements together (and not separately defining prepayment annual statements) there is an unintended obligation placed on suppliers to offer quarterly statements to prepayment customers.

Two suppliers have also commented that, with regard to non-domestic customers, some suppliers bill more frequently than once per quarter. This is particularly applicable to large customers with very high consumption that request/agree to be billed on a monthly (or more frequent) basis.

UR decision

We acknowledge that the amalgamation of bills and statements into one code of practice has created an unintended obligation for suppliers to send statements to prepayment customers on a quarterly basis. Prepayment customers must receive an annual prepayment statement only and we have corrected this in the final code of practice. The original proposals attempted to retain the structure from the licence condition; however we have decided to redraft this section of the code in order to ensure that the requirements regarding the frequency of billing is clear.

With regard to non-domestic customers receiving bills and statements more frequently than quarterly, we can confirm that suppliers are permitted to send bills and statements

more frequently than quarterly if they have agreed this with the customer. We are aware that a number of suppliers bill more frequently and we encourage suppliers to continue this practice. The code of practice merely sets the minimum bill frequency for different customer groups. However, we will clarify this further in the final code of practice by stating that suppliers must send a bill or statement “at least” once per quarter to the relevant customer group.

3.6. Requirements for the content of bills and statements

1.7 Provision of consumption information to electricity and gas suppliers and energy services providers

The requirement in electricity and gas supply licences for suppliers to provide consumption information to other electricity and gas suppliers and energy services providers was updated through the Energy Efficiency Directive. The code of practice (as proposed in both consultation papers) does not impose any additional obligations on suppliers that are contained in condition 44 of the electricity supply licence and condition 2.28 of the gas supply licence.

Stakeholder feedback

One supplier raised a concern that the billing information passed on from one supplier to another or to an energy services provider might not solely consist of consumption information but could also include sensitive data such as debt information. The supplier suggested that the drafting of the code of practice should be specific to volume and AQ rather than any other element of bills and statements.

UR decision

We understand the concerns that suppliers have when passing on customer information and particularly if this information contains any sensitive data. However, this licence condition (and hence the code of practice) does not limit the information that can be

shared to consumption information only. The licence condition defines billing information as:

- a) *Any information relating to the consumption of electricity (or gas) by the customer at the premises identified in the request; and*
- b) *Any information enclosed with or set out in any bill or statement sent by the licensee to the customer at such premises.*

The licence condition also states that “*the Licensee shall not submit a customer information request to another Electricity (or gas) Supplier unless it has, and retains evidence of, the consent of the Customer for it to obtain the information which is specified in the request to the other Electricity Supplier.*”

A customer must give consent for their personal information to be passed on and as such we do not agree that there is a need to amend this part of the code of practice. The final code of practice will remain as proposed in the second consultation paper.

1.8 Customer meter reads

Section 2.4.5 of the proposed code of practice (both domestic and non-domestic) states:

If the customer receives a bill or statement showing an estimated meter reading it may provide the supplier with a customer meter reading. The supplier must accept this customer meter reading and provide an updated bill or statement reflecting this reading (if requested).

This requirement in the proposed code of practice is a current requirement on suppliers as per condition 38(10) of the electricity supply licence and condition 2.19.10 of the gas supply licence.

Stakeholder feedback

Two suppliers provided similar feedback on this requirement. Both suppliers commented that the wording of the requirement implies that a supplier must accept a

meter read from a customer even if it is significantly out of sync with the customer's estimated consumption.

UR decision

We agree that, if taken in isolation, section 2.4.5 of the code of practice implies that the supplier must accept any meter reading provided by a customer. However, section 2.4.3 states that if a supplier does not consider a customer meter read to be reasonably accurate the supplier must take all reasonable steps to contact the customer to request a new meter reading. This applies to section 2.4.5 of the code of practice as well. We do not expect suppliers to accept meter readings from customers if they do not consider them to be accurate. We will add further clarification of this in section 2.4.5 in the final code of practice.

1.9 Additional information to be provided on or with the bill or statement

In section 3.6.1 of the domestic code of practice (section 3.5.1 of the non-domestic code of practice) we proposed that suppliers must include the contact address and telephone number of their complaints handling department and of CCNI (in relation to their role in assisting with complaint resolution). We had proposed in the original consultation that suppliers would provide a breakdown on a bill or statement of how a customer's debt was reducing over time. However, in the second consultation paper we removed the prescriptive requirements regarding how suppliers communicate with customers in debt. We consider it adequate if customers in debt are communicated with independently of their bills/statements so long as the communication is in writing.

Stakeholder feedback

One supplier suggested that reference is made to the address being the postal address of the complaints handling department and CCNI (to add clarity to "contact" address). With regard to the issue of communicating with customers in debt, one stakeholder agreed that the customer should be kept informed of how the debt is reducing and that written communication is the most appropriate method.

UR decision

We have amended the drafting of the final code of practice to clarify that the address to be provided on the bill or statement is the postal address. The requirements regarding communication with customers in debt will remain as proposed in the second consultation paper.

As mentioned above, we intend to undertake extensive consumer research beginning in 2018. One of the areas the research will cover will be the additional information included on or with bills and statements. There are a number of legislative requirements that must be included; however, we consider there may be additional information that could be added to bills and statements that might benefit customers. One example of this is information about care registers for customers who require additional and special services. This is an important register for electricity and gas customers that have specific needs and we plan to include this as an item for discussion in our customer research.

3.7. Requirements for the format of bills and statements

This section of the code of practice details how the information on bills and statements must be presented to the customer. It includes information on the font (typeface, size and colour), and the layout of important information. There are no current requirements on suppliers regarding the format of bills and statements and as such this section of the code of practice was included for consultation.

1.10 Font – typeface, size and colour

The consultation paper included proposals for the typeface, colour and size of the font used in bills, as summarised below.

It was proposed that the supplier will:

- use a font typeface and line spacing that is easily readable; and

- give regard to the use of font colours and avoid colours that are more difficult to read.

Stakeholder feedback

One third party stakeholder agreed with our decision to remove the requirement for minimum font sizes for particular pieces of information.

Two suppliers noted editorial errors in the code of practice as follows:

- Paragraph 4.1.3 (regarding the use of minimum font size of 8 for all information not included in 4.1.1 and 4.1.2) is included in the tracked version of the code in Annex 3 but is not included in the clean version of the code in Annex 2. The wording and meaning of 4.1.3 is unclear.
- Paragraph 4.1.1 states that the font must be readable for the average consumer. As the UR plans to remove references to average consumers it is assumed this is an editorial error.

UR decision

We agree that both of these issues are editorial errors. Paragraph 4.3.1 should not have remained in the tracked version of the code (or it should have been obvious that it was being removed). This requirement was removed following the first consultation, but the formatting of the tracked version does not show this correctly. The clean version is correct in this case and the final code of practice will remain as per the clean version.

Paragraph 4.1.1 should no longer contain a reference to an average consumer as this should have been removed in the second consultation paper. The final code of practice will be updated to reflect this.

1.11 Layout of important information

Stakeholders provided much feedback on this part of the code of practice in response to the first consultation paper. Following our review of the responses and our meeting with stakeholders we decided to remove some of the requirements which we had originally

proposed for the front page of the bills. In the second consultation paper we proposed the following should be included on the first page of the bill:

- Customer details (name; account number/MPRN/SMPN⁸; and billing address);
- Supplier details (name and contact number);
- Billing period;
- Total balance due/total charges – including VAT;
- Date of payment (credit payment due or direct debit payment to be collected);
- What action needs to be taken by the customer (if no action is to be taken this must also be stated as per section 3.4); and
- Customer’s tariff information as detailed in section 3.2 (this includes the mandatory statement re tariff availability).

Stakeholder feedback

Only one third sector organisation and one supplier provided feedback on this part of the code of practice. The third sector organisation was disappointed that its recommendation to have energy usage on the front page of the bill has not been adopted. This stakeholder considers that providing usage information “upfront and central” to customers is one of the key ways to bring about the “game change” that is required to engage customers with their energy bills. In addition it will reinforce the benefits of any energy efficiency improvements.

Just one supplier noted concern regarding the level of detail the UR is proposing for suppliers to include on the front of domestic bills and is disappointed that this requirement has remained largely unchanged from the original consultation. The supplier is still of the view that the proposals will not simplify things for consumers and that the inclusion of a variety of information on the front of the bill may negatively impact the customer clearly knowing what action is required of them when they receive the bill or statement.

⁸ MPRN – Meter Point Reference Number (electricity); SMPN – Supply Meter Point Number (gas).

UR decision

We have considered the feedback from the two respondents: one commenting that our proposals do not include enough information on the front page of bills and statements; and the other suggesting that we have included too much information on the proposals for the front page. We are content with the level of detail we proposed for the front page of bills and statements in the second consultation.

We understand the comment from the third sector organisation that providing usage on the front of a bill may help to educate customers, but our main principle for the bills and statements is that they are clear and understandable. As such we consider this information to be more appropriate on the second page of a bill. However, if a supplier wishes to include this on the front page they are not prohibited from doing so, as long as it does not reduce the clarity of the mandatory information. When we develop the scope of the consumer research we may decide to include this as an issue to further explore with customers.

We acknowledge the supplier's comments on the level of detail we have proposed for the front of the bill or statement but we disagree that the proposals have remained largely unchanged from the first consultation and note that only one supplier has commented in this regard. We do not consider that the proposals will have a negative impact on the customers' ability to know what action is required of them when they receive a bill or statement. In addition we are unsure why a comparison of a tariff rate to a standard tariff would take up such a large space on a bill or statement. We are happy to explore this further with the supplier in question.

Following our review of the responses we do not propose to amend the list of requirements for the front of the bill or statement. However, as we have removed the requirement to include a statement when no action is required from the customer, the final list will be as follows:

Front of bill or statement
Customer details including: Name MPRN/SMPN/account number Billing address
Billing period – to which the bill or statement relates
Total charges for the period including VAT
Action to be taken by the customer – see section 1.3.1 ⁹
Date of any payment due
Customer's tariff information as detailed in section 3.2 ¹⁰

⁹ When a customer receives a bill or statement it must be obvious to them what action is required, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid details of how much to be paid, and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements.

¹⁰ The supplier will include the following tariff related information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- The full name of the customer's applicable tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name);
- The unit rate of the customer's applicable tariff – expressed in "pence per kWh" where applicable;
- Any discount or premium that applies to the tariff when compared to the supplier's standard tariff (where applicable for the same payment method); and
- The following statement to highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available:
Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer other tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumer council.org.uk or by phoning 0800 121 6022.

4. Next steps

In the second consultation paper we indicated that we considered six months to be an adequate time period (from the publication of the decision paper) to produce bills and statements which are compliant with the final code of practice. We have not changed our position on this timeframe following our review of the responses to the second consultation paper. The date for compliance with the final code of practice is 05 January 2018. We urge suppliers to begin implementation of the final code of practice immediately. If for any reason a supplier does not believe that they are able to be compliant within this timeframe they must provide us with their reasons for this, in addition to a comprehensive compliance plan agreed with the UR within a timeframe which we deem to be reasonable (under the circumstances). If we have not received such communication from suppliers before 30 August 2017 we will assume that compliance can be achieved within the required timeframe.

In addition, as mentioned throughout this paper, we intend to undertake extensive customer research beginning in 2018 which will include research on bills and statements. We will engage with stakeholders prior to this research to give you an opportunity to work with us to ensure we ask our consumers the right questions and maximise the benefit for stakeholders and consumers.

Annex 1 – Responses to the consultation

We have published the responses to the consultation and these are available at the links below.

The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI)	https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/media-files/Bills%20and%20Statements%20Final_0.pdf
Electric Ireland	https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/media-files/Electric%20ireland%27s%20Response%20to%20New%20Supplier%20Code%20of%20Practice%20on%20Energy%20Bills%20and%20Statements%20-%20Second%20Consultation_0.pdf
Energia	https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/media-files/Energia%20response%20to%20UR%20Consultation%20on%20Implementation%20of%20a%20New%20Supplier%20Code%20of%20Practice%20on%20Energy%20Bills%20and%20Statements_0.pdf
firmus energy	https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/media-files/FE%20-%20Billing%20Code%20of%20Practice%20Second%20Consultation%20Response.pdf
National Energy Action (NEA)	https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/media-files/NEA%20NI%20response%20to%20Implementation%20of%20a%20New%20Supplier%20CoP%20on%20Bills%20and%20Statements.pdf
Power NI	https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/media-files/Power%20NI%20response%20to%202nd%20Billing%20CoP%20Consultation.pdf
SSE Airtricity	https://www.uregni.gov.uk/sites/uregni/files/media-files/SSE%20Airtricity%20response%20to%20UR%202nd%20Consultation%20on%20the%20Billing%20Code%20of%20Practice%20-%2028th%20April%202016.pdf

The responses to the initial consultation can still be found on our website at the following link: <https://www.uregni.gov.uk/publications/responses-utility-regulators-consultation-new-supplier-code-practice-bills-and>

Annex 2 – List of differences between the domestic and non-domestic code of practice

The list below gives an indication of the requirements that are included in the domestic code of practice which are not required under the non-domestic code of practice:

- Requirements relating to prepayment meter customers (various sections – where appropriate);
- Principle 4 – mandatory tariff statement;
- Design and format of bills must be developed in consultation with the Authority and CCNI (section 2.1.2);
- Significant changes to bills must be made in consultation with CCNI (section 2.1.3);
- All requirements relating to domestic codes of practice i.e. the code of practice on payment of bills; the code of practice on services for persons who are of pensionable age or disabled or chronically sick; and the code of practice prepayment meter customers (sections 2.2.4 – 2.2.8);
- Consumption comparison information, as per the Billing Regulations – consumption comparison of the current billing period with the corresponding period in the previous year (sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2);
- Note regarding the existence of a code of practice for customers having difficulty paying bills (section 3.5.3 second bullet point); and
- All requirements relating to the formatting of the bills and statements (all of section 4).

Annex 3 – Code of practice on domestic bills and statements

Published July 2017



UR code of practice on domestic bills and statements

Condition 38(2) of the electricity supply licence and condition 2.19.2 of the gas supply licence require suppliers to “*comply with the Billing Code of Practice*”. This code of practice on bills and statements is mandatory and enforceable under this condition and all suppliers must comply with this code.

Nothing in this code of practice is intended to, or should be deemed to, constitute an exemption from the Suppliers’ legal obligations to comply with any and all relevant legislation, statute, statutory instrument, regulation or order (or any provision thereof) or any subordinate legislation.

This code of practice applies only to domestic bills and statements. For the purpose of this code, bills and statements refer to any communications with a credit customer that show how much energy they have used, make a request for payment, provide information about the collection of direct debit payments or inform the customer about the status of their account¹¹. Annual statements for prepayment customers are considered to be a separate type of communication. For the purpose of this code these will be referred to as “annual PPM statements”.

1 High level principles

1.1 Overarching principle: all bills and statements are clear and easily understandable

1.1.1 The supplier will follow the principles and rules in this code of practice when developing and/or amending their billing processes and billing systems and processes.

1.2 Principle 1: A customer is able to find quickly and understand important information on the bill or statement

1.2.1 This information includes (but is not limited to) items such as how much money is owed, and when it is due.

1.2.2 The information must be provided in a manner that is accessible for all consumers.

¹¹ For the avoidance of doubt, this code of practice does not apply to communications such as reminder letters or debt collection letters etc.

- 1.2.3 Other pieces of information, such as the availability of alternative tariffs or complaints handling information must not make it more difficult for customers to find and understand the key information.

1.3 Principle 2: A customer will know immediately what action is required from them when reading a bill or statement

- 1.3.1 When a customer receives a bill or statement it must be obvious to them what action is required, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid details of how much to be paid, and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements.

1.4 Principle 3: Bills and statements present accurate and timely information to the customer

- 1.4.1 The supplier will comply with the requirements on data accuracy etc. as detailed in the electricity and gas supply licences to ensure that bills and statements are based on accurate information and up-to-date meter reads where possible (these details are incorporated into the next sections of this code of practice).

1.5 Principle 4: Customers will be made aware that there may be cheaper tariffs available to them

- 1.5.1 The supplier will highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available and include the following statement:
Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer other tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumer council.org.uk or by phoning 0800 121 6022.

2 Requirements for suppliers' domestic billing processes

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The main billing and consumption information requirements are detailed in conditions 38 and 44 of the electricity supply licence and conditions 2.19 and 2.28 of the gas supply licence. Further requirements have been introduced through the code of practice minimum standards¹² – these are noted with (COP) below.
- 2.1.2 All electricity and gas bills and statements for new suppliers must be designed and formatted in consultation with the Authority and the General Consumer Council.
- 2.1.3 All significant changes to the content and/or format of all electricity and gas bills and statements must be carried out in consultation with the General Consumer Council and notified to the Authority.

2.2 Communication methods

- 2.2.1 Before completing a contract with a customer a supplier will inform the customer of all of the communication types available for credit bills and statements¹³.
- 2.2.2 At least annually (after completion of the contract) the supplier will inform the customer of the types of communication available for credit bills and statements (including electronic communication).
- 2.2.3 The supplier will send credit bills and statements in the format requested by the customer (provided the supplier offers the requested type of communication).
- 2.2.4 The supplier will ensure that all contact with the customer relating to bills and statements is friendly and non-aggressive. (COP)
- 2.2.5 The supplier will operate a nomination or bill or statement redirection service for those customers who wish to have their bills or statements redirected to a nominated person. (COP)
- 2.2.6 The supplier will only send bills or statements in respect of 2.2.5 where it has received confirmation that the nominated person has agreed to receive bills or statements on the customer's behalf. (COP)
- 2.2.7 The supplier will send a copy of the redirected bill or statement to the actual customer where requested. (COP)

¹² Decision paper on codes of practice minimum standards:
http://www.uregni.gov.uk/uploads/publications/Final_Codes_of_Practice_Decision_Paper.pdf

¹³ This includes all types of electronic communication

2.2.8 The supplier will ensure that it has facilities available to assist blind or partially sighted, or deaf or partially deaf customers to enquire or complain about any bill or statement.
(COP)

2.3 Frequency of bills

- 2.3.1 The supplier will send a bill or statement at least once a quarter:
- to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements electronically¹⁴; or
 - to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements on a quarterly basis.
- 2.3.2 The supplier will send a bill or statement once every six months to any credit customer that has not requested to receive electronic bills or statements and has not requested to receive a bill or statement quarterly.
- 2.3.3 The supplier will send an annual PPM statement to any customer with a prepayment meter.

2.4 Meter reading and billing

- 2.4.1 The supplier will use all reasonable endeavours to take an actual meter reading for each metered customer on at least an annual basis¹⁵.
- 2.4.2 The supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer by reference to an actual meter reading where available (as per section 2.4.1).
- 2.4.3 If an actual meter reading is not available the supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas used by reference to a customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate). If the supplier does not consider the customer meter reading to be reasonably accurate it will take all reasonable steps to contact the customer and request a new meter reading.
- 2.4.4 If neither an actual meter reading nor a customer meter reading is available the supplier will estimate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer (based on previous consumption data if available).

¹⁴ For clarity, all customers that have requested electronic bills or statements must receive these at least quarterly

¹⁵ Gas suppliers are responsible for reading customer meters: electricity suppliers are not responsible for this task. However, electricity suppliers have an agreement with NIE Networks as the common services provider. NIE Networks reads customer meters on behalf of electricity suppliers. The supplier is responsible for having systems in place to obtain meter readings from NIE Networks.

2.4.5 If the customer receives a bill or statement showing an estimated meter reading it may provide the supplier with a customer meter reading. The supplier must accept this customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate) and provide an updated bill or statement reflecting this reading (if requested).

2.4.6 Where a supplier has not been able to take a meter reading for a customer on at least an annual basis the supplier will retain evidence of the reasonable endeavours taken to secure a meter reading for at least three years. The supplier will provide this evidence to the Authority if requested.

2.5 Final bills and statements

2.5.1 Where a credit customer has ended its contract with a supplier according to the terms and conditions of the contract, the supplier will send a final bill or statement to the credit customer no later than six weeks after ceasing to provide electricity or gas to the customer¹⁶ (note: this is not applicable for a prepayment customer).

2.6 Provision of consumption information to electricity and gas suppliers and energy services providers

2.6.1 This section of the code relates to the provision of billing information¹⁷ to electricity and gas supplier and energy services providers. It applies in those circumstances where a supplier:

- currently supplies electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request¹⁸; or
- has in the previous twelve months supplied electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request; and
- the billing information specified in the customer information request is held or recorded by the supplier.

2.6.2 The supplier will provide the billing information specified in the customer information request free of charge and within ten working days to any electricity or gas supplier or energy services provider.

¹⁶ Suppliers are encouraged to send final bills as soon as practicable when a customer has switched supplier; however, this must not be later than six weeks after the customer has switched supplier.

¹⁷ Billing information means: (a) any information relating to the consumption of electricity or gas by the customer at the premises identified in the request; and (b) any information enclosed with, or set out in, any bill or statement previously sent by the licensee to the customer at such premises.

¹⁸ A customer information request means a request for billing information in respect of the customer at the premises identified, and for the period specified, in the request.

- 2.6.3 If the information held by the supplier is not in a form that can be determined for the specified period as requested in the customer information request, the supplier will:
- give notice to the electricity or gas supplier or the energy services provider (as the case may be) that the billing information cannot be provided for only the specified period; and
 - provide the requested billing information held for any period that includes the specified period.
- 2.6.4 The supplier will not process a customer information request for any energy services provider unless the energy services provider submits written evidence of the customer's consent to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.
- 2.6.5 The supplier will not submit a customer information request to another electricity or gas supplier unless it has (and retains) evidence of the consent of the customer for it to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.

2.7 Free of charge

- 2.7.1 The supplier will not charge the customer for any information, including any bill or statement. This requirement does not apply in respect of providing additional copies of bills or statements.
- 2.7.2 With regard to section 2.6, the supplier will not charge the customer for providing any of the services set out in 2.6 to the customer, to any electricity or gas supplier, or to an energy services provider.

2.8 Changes to bills or statements

- 2.8.1 The supplier will keep a record of any changes made to its bills or statements in each calendar year.
- 2.8.2 The supplier will submit the record of changes referred to in 2.8.1 to the UR on an annual basis (along with the annual Retail Energy Market Monitoring information) or on request if necessary.

3 Requirements for the content of domestic bills and statements

This section includes many of the legislative requirements with regard to energy billing. However, there are also requirements related to billing which come from other pieces of consumer legislation. For the avoidance of doubt, suppliers are responsible for ensuring that all bills and statements comply with all relevant legislation.

3.1 Customer and supplier information

3.1.1 The supplier will include the following information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- Supplier name and address; and
- Customer Meter Point Registration Number (MPRN) – for electricity customers;
or
- Customer Supply Meter Point Number (SMPN) – for gas customers.

3.2 Tariff information

3.2.1 The supplier will include the following tariff related information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- The full name of the customer's applicable tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name);
- The unit rate of the customer's applicable tariff – expressed in "pence per kWh" where applicable;
- Any discount or premium that applies to the tariff when compared to the supplier's standard tariff (where applicable for the same payment method); and
- The following statement to highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available:

Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer other tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumer council.org.uk or by phoning 0800 121 6022.

3.3 Consumption and charging information

3.3.1 The supplier will include the following consumption and charging information on all customer bills and statements:

- The total charges for the period of the bill or statement.
- The breakdown of the total charges, including:
 - any applicable standing charges;
 - total charges exclusive of VAT; and
 - total charges including VAT.

Where other charges are applicable, these will be listed separately in the breakdown of charges.

- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer since the last bill or statement sent to the customer. The amount of electricity or gas is determined according to section 2.4 i.e. the supplier will calculate the consumption using an actual read where available; a customer read where an actual read is not available; or an estimated meter read where neither an actual nor a customer read is available.
- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer at the premises in the previous 12 months – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for 12 months or more.
- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer at the premises since the supplier started to provide the supply of electricity or gas – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for less than 12 months.

3.3.2 For customers that are supplied via a prepayment meter (or were for any part of the statement period), the supplier will provide, on the annual PPM statement, the number and total value of the pre-payments made by the customer in each calendar month of the statement period.

3.3.3 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer if any action needs to be taken following receipt of the bill or statement, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid, details of how much to be paid and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements.

3.4 Consumption comparison information

- 3.4.1 This section of the code relates to the provision of consumption information to customers that have been with the electricity or gas supplier throughout the period:
- commencing with the start of the corresponding period in the previous year; and
 - ending with the end of the period to which the bill or statement relates.
- 3.4.2 The supplier will provide a comparison of the customer's consumption of electricity or gas in the period covered by the bill or statement with the same customer's consumption of electricity or gas for the corresponding period in the previous year.

3.5 Additional information to be provided on the bill or statement

- 3.5.1 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer that other electricity and gas suppliers are available. Details of where the customer can obtain impartial advice and information about changing electricity or gas suppliers will also be provided¹⁹.
- 3.5.2 Electricity suppliers only: the supplier will include the fuel mix information – this must be the most recently published fuel mix information (published annually by the Authority as per Condition 41 of the electricity supply licence).
- 3.5.3 The supplier will include a statement to:
- advise customers that are having difficulty paying their electricity or gas bills to contact them immediately for help and guidance; and
 - Inform customers about the existence of a code of practice for customers that are having difficulty paying for the supply of electricity or gas²⁰.

3.6 Additional information to be provided on or with the bill or statement

- 3.6.1 The supplier will provide information about the handling of complaints including:
- the customer's right to complain to the supplier and initiate the complaints procedure (free of charge), as outlined in the code of practice for complaints handling procedure – this includes providing the postal address and telephone number of the supplier's complaints handling department and details on how to request a copy of the code of practice;

¹⁹ For clarity, the requirement under 3.5.1 is covered within the requirement under section 1.5.1

²⁰ Decision paper on codes of practice minimum standards:

http://www.uregni.gov.uk/uploads/publications/Final_Codes_of_Practice_Decision_Paper.pdf

- the role of CCNI in assisting the resolution of complaints which the supplier has not resolved to the customer's satisfaction – this includes providing the postal address and telephone number of CCNI; and
- the customer's right to refer billing related complaints to the UR if CCNI has not been able to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction.

3.6.2 The supplier will inform customers that the Energy Consumer Checklist is accessible from the supplier's website; and that the supplier will send a copy to the customer on request, and free of charge.

3.6.3 The supplier will include contact details (including website address) of at least one organisation that provides information or assistance on measures which will help customers to improve their energy efficiency.

3.7 Supplier's Notice of Rights (gas suppliers only)

3.7.1 The supplier will include the following on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- the website address of the Supplier's Notice of Rights; and
- details on how the customer can request a printed copy of the Supplier's Notice of Rights.

4 Requirements for the format of domestic bills and statements

4.1 Font – typeface, size and colour

4.1.1 The supplier will choose a font size, typeface and line spacing that is easily readable for the customer.

4.1.2 The supplier will give regard to the use of font colours and avoid colours that are more difficult to read.

4.2 Layout of important information

4.2.1 The supplier will include the following information on the front of the bill or statement:

Front of bill or statement
Customer details including: Name MPRN/SMPN/account number Billing address

Billing period – to which the bill or statement relates
Total charges for the period including VAT
Action to be taken by the customer – see section 1.3.1 ²¹
Date of any payment due
Customer’s tariff information as detailed in section 3.2 ²²

4.2.2 Any information added to the front of the bill or statement in addition to 4.2.1 must not reduce the customer’s ability to see clearly, read and understand the mandatory information.

²¹ When a customer receives a bill or statement it must be obvious to them what action is required, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid details of how much to be paid, and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer’s account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer’s agreed collection arrangements

²² The supplier will include the following tariff related information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- The full name of the customer’s applicable tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name);
- The unit rate of the customer’s applicable tariff – expressed in “pence per kWh” where applicable;
- Any discount or premium that applies to the tariff when compared to the supplier’s standard tariff (where applicable for the same payment method); and
- The following statement to highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available:
Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer other tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumerCouncil.org.uk or by phoning 0800 121 6022.

Annex 4 – Code of practice on domestic bills and statements – tracked version

Published July 2017



UR code of practice on domestic bills and statements

Condition 38(2) of the electricity supply licence and condition 2.19.2 of the gas supply licence require suppliers to “*comply with the Billing Code of Practice*”. This code of practice on bills and statements is mandatory and enforceable under this condition and all suppliers must comply with this code.

Nothing in this code of practice is intended to, or should be deemed to, constitute an exemption from the Suppliers’ legal obligations to comply with any and all relevant legislation, statute, statutory instrument, regulation or order (or any provision thereof) or any subordinate legislation.

This code of practice applies only to domestic bills and statements. For the purpose of this code, bills and statements refer to any communications with a credit customer that show how much energy they have used, make a request for payment, provides information about the collection of direct debit payments or informs the customer about the status of their account²³. Annual statements for prepayment customers are considered to be a separate type of communication. For the purpose of this code these will be referred to as “annual PPM statements”.

1 High level principles

1.1 Overarching principle: all bills and statements are clear and easily understandable

1.1.1 The supplier will follow the principles and rules in this code of practice when developing and/or amending their billing processes and billing systems and processes.

1.2 Principle 1: A customer is able to find quickly and understand important information on the bill or statement

1.2.1 This information includes (but is not limited to) items such as how much money is owed, and when it is due.

1.2.2 The information must be provided in a manner that is accessible for all consumers.

²³ For the avoidance of doubt, this code of practice does not apply to communications such as reminder letters or debt collection letters etc.

1.2.3 Other pieces of information, such as the availability of alternative tariffs or complaints handling information must not make it more difficult for customers to find and understand the key information.

1.3 Principle 2: A customer will know immediately what action is required from them when reading a bill or statement

1.3.1 When a customer receives a bill or statement it must be obvious to them if what action is required, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid details of how much to be paid, and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements. ~~if no action is required, a statement to this effect.~~

~~No action includes the following circumstances:~~

- ~~• the customer has a direct debit that covers the full amount of the bill for each billing period and no adjustment is required — in this case the bill or statement is for information only, giving the amount owed and the date on which it will be collected from the customer's account; or~~
- ~~• the communication is an annual statement for a prepayment customer.~~

1.4 Principle 3: Bills and statements present accurate and timely information to the customer

1.4.1 The supplier will comply with the requirements on data accuracy etc. as detailed in the electricity and gas supply licences to ensure that bills and statements are based on accurate information and up-to-date meter reads where possible (these details are incorporated into the next sections of this code of practice).

1.5 Principle 4: Customers will be made aware that there may be cheaper tariffs available to them

1.5.1 The supplier will highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available and include the following statement:

Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer other a range of tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information

about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumerCouncil.org.uk or by
[phoning 0800 121 6022](tel:08001216022)

2 Requirements for suppliers' domestic billing processes

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The main billing and consumption information requirements are detailed in conditions 38 and 44 of the electricity supply licence and conditions 2.19 and 2.28 of the gas supply licence. Further requirements have been introduced through the code of practice minimum standards²⁴ – these are noted with (COP) below.
- 2.1.2 All electricity and gas bills and statements for new suppliers must be designed and formatted in consultation with the Authority and the General Consumer Council.
- 2.1.3 All significant changes to the content and/or format of all electricity and gas bills and statements must be carried out in consultation with the General Consumer Council and notified to the Authority.

2.2 Communication methods

- 2.2.1 Before completing a contract with a customer a supplier will inform the customer of all of the communication types ~~the types of electronic communication~~ available for credit bills and statements²⁵.
- 2.2.2 At least annually (after completion of the contract) the supplier will inform the customer of the types of ~~electronic~~ communication available for credit bills and statements (including electronic communication).
- 2.2.3 The supplier will send credit bills and statements in the format requested by the customer (provided the supplier offers the requested type of communication).
- 2.2.4 The supplier will ensure that all contact with the customer relating to bills and statements is friendly and non-aggressive. (COP)
- 2.2.5 The supplier will operate a nomination or bill or statement redirection service for those customers who wish to have their bills or statements redirected to a nominated person. (COP)
- 2.2.6 The supplier will only send bills or statements in respect of 2.2.5 where it has received confirmation that the nominated person has agreed to receive bills or statements on the customer's behalf. (COP)

²⁴ Decision paper on codes of practice minimum standards:
http://www.uregni.gov.uk/uploads/publications/Final_Codes_of_Practice_Decision_Paper.pdf

²⁵ This includes all types of electronic communication

- 2.2.7 The supplier will send a copy of the redirected bill or statement to the actual customer where requested. (COP)
- 2.2.8 The supplier will ensure that it has facilities available to assist blind or partially sighted, or deaf or partially deaf customers to enquire or complain about any bill or statement. (COP)

2.3 Frequency of bills

2.3.1 The supplier will send a bill or statement at least once a quarter:

- to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements electronically²⁶; or-
- to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements on a quarterly basis.

~~2.3.1 The supplier will send a bill or statement once a quarter to any customer that has requested to receive bills or statements on a quarterly basis.~~

2.3.2 The supplier will send a bill or statement once every six months to any credit customer that has not requested to receive electronic bills or statements and has not requested to receive a bill or statement quarterly ~~and is not a prepayment customer.~~

~~2.3.2~~ 2.3.3 The supplier will send an annual PPM statement to any customer with a prepayment meter.

2.4 Meter reading and billing

- 2.4.1 The supplier will use all reasonable endeavours to take an actual meter reading for each metered customer on at least an annual basis²⁷.
- 2.4.2 The supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer by reference to an actual meter reading where available (as per section 2.4.1).
- 2.4.3 If an actual meter reading is not available the supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas used by reference to a customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate). If the supplier does not consider the customer meter reading to be reasonably accurate it will take all reasonable steps to contact the customer and request a new meter reading.

²⁶ For clarity, all customers that have requested electronic bills or statements must receive these at least quarterly

²⁷ Gas suppliers are responsible for reading customer meters; electricity suppliers are not responsible for this task. However, electricity suppliers have an agreement with NIE Networks as the common services provider. NIE Networks reads customer meters on behalf of electricity suppliers. The supplier is responsible for having systems in place to obtain meter readings from NIE Networks.

- 2.4.4 If neither an actual meter reading nor a customer meter reading is available the supplier will estimate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer (based on previous consumption data if available).
- 2.4.5 If the customer receives a bill or statement showing an estimated meter reading it may provide the supplier with a customer meter reading. The supplier must accept this customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate) and provide an updated bill or statement reflecting this reading (if requested).
- 2.4.6 Where a supplier has not been able to take a meter reading for a customer on at least an annual basis the supplier will retain evidence of the reasonable endeavours taken to secure a meter reading for at least three years. The supplier will provide this evidence to the Authority if requested.

2.5 Final bills and statements

- 2.5.1 Where a credit customer has ended its contract with a supplier according to the terms and conditions of the contract, the supplier will send a final bill or statement to the credit customer ~~within six weeks of~~ no later than six weeks after ceasing to provide electricity or gas to the customer²⁸ (note: this is not applicable for a prepayment customer).

2.6 Provision of consumption information to electricity and gas suppliers and energy services providers

- 2.6.1 This section of the code relates to the provision of billing information²⁹ to electricity and gas supplier and energy services providers. It applies in those circumstances where a supplier:
- currently supplies electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request³⁰; or
 - has in the previous twelve months supplied electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request; and
 - the billing information specified in the customer information request is held or recorded by the supplier.

²⁸ Suppliers are encouraged to send final bills as soon as practicable when a customer has switched supplier; however, this must not be later than six weeks after the customer has switched supplier.

²⁹ Billing information means: (a) any information relating to the consumption of electricity or gas by the customer at the premises identified in the request; and (b) any information enclosed with, or set out in, any bill or statement previously sent by the licensee to the customer at such premises.

³⁰ A customer information request means a request for billing information in respect of the customer at the premises identified, and for the period specified, in the request.

- 2.6.2 The supplier will provide the billing information specified in the customer information request free of charge and within ten working days to any electricity or gas supplier or energy services provider.
- 2.6.3 If the information held by the supplier is not in a form that can be determined for the specified period as requested in the customer information request, the supplier will:
- give notice to the electricity or gas supplier or the energy services provider (as the case may be) that the billing information cannot be provided for only the specified period; and
 - provide the requested billing information held for any period that includes the specified period.
- 2.6.4 The supplier will not process a customer information request for any energy services provider unless the energy services provider submits written evidence of the customer's consent to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.
- 2.6.5 The supplier will not submit a customer information request to another electricity or gas supplier unless it has (and retains) evidence of the consent of the customer for it to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.

2.7 Free of charge

- 2.7.1 The supplier will not charge the customer for any information, including any bill or statement. This requirement does not apply in respect of providing additional copies of bills or statements.

2.7.2 With regard to section 2.6, the supplier will not charge the customer for providing any of the services set out in 2.6 to the customer, to any electricity or gas supplier, or to an energy services provider.

2.8 Changes to bills or statements

2.8.1 The supplier will keep a record of any changes made to its bills or statements in each calendar year.

2.7-2.8.2 The supplier will submit the record of changes referred to in 2.8.1 to the UR on an annual basis (along with the annual Retail Energy Market Monitoring information) or on request if necessary.

3 Requirements for the content of domestic bills and statements

This section includes many of the legislative requirements with regard to energy billing. However, there are also requirements related to billing which come from other pieces of consumer legislation. For the avoidance of doubt, suppliers are responsible for ensuring that all bills and statements comply with all relevant legislation.

3.1 Customer and supplier information

3.1.1 The supplier will include the following information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- Supplier name and address; and
- Customer Meter Point Registration Number (MPRN) – for electricity customers; or
- Customer Supply Meter Point Number (SMPN) – for gas customers.

3.2 Tariff information

3.2.1 The supplier will include the following tariff related information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- The full name of the customer's applicable tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name);
- The unit rate of the customer's applicable tariff – expressed in "pence per kWh" where applicable;
- Any discount or premium that applies to the tariff when compared to the supplier's standard tariff (where applicable for the same payment method); and
- The following statement to highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available:

Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer other a range of tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumercouncil.org.uk or by phoning 0800 121 6022.

3.3 Consumption and charging information

3.3.1 The supplier will include the following consumption and charging information on all customer bills and statements:

- The total charges for the period of the bill or statement.
- The breakdown of the total charges, including:
 - any applicable standing charges;
 - total charges exclusive of VAT; and
 - total charges including VAT.

Where other charges are applicable, these will be listed separately in the breakdown of charges.

- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer since the last bill or statement sent to the customer. The amount of electricity or gas is determined according to section 2.4 i.e. the supplier will calculate the consumption using an actual read where available; a customer read where an actual read is not available; or an estimated meter read where neither an actual nor a customer read is available.
- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer at the premises in the previous 12 months – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for 12 months or more.
- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer ~~that~~ at the premises since the supplier started to provide the supply of electricity or gas – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for less than 12 months.

3.3.2 For customers that are supplied via a prepayment meter (or were for any part of the statement period), the supplier will provide on the annual PPM statement, the number and total value of the pre-payments made by the customer in each calendar month of the statement period.

3.3.3 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer if any action needs to be taken following receipt of the bill or statement, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid, details of how much to be paid and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements ~~if no action is required, a statement to this effect.~~
~~No action includes the following circumstances:~~

- ~~• the customer has a direct debit that covers the full amount of the bill for each billing period and no adjustment is required—in this case the bill or statement is for information only, giving the amount owed and the date on which it will be collected from the customer's account; or~~
- ~~• the communication is an annual statement for a prepayment customer.~~

3.4 Consumption comparison information

- 3.4.1 This section of the code relates to the provision of consumption information to customers that have been with the electricity or gas supplier throughout the period:
- commencing with the start of the corresponding period in the previous year; and
 - ending with the end of the period to which the bill or statement relates.
- 3.4.2 The supplier will provide a comparison of the customer's consumption of electricity or gas in the period covered by the bill or statement with the same customer's consumption of electricity or gas for the corresponding period in the previous year.

3.5 Additional information to be provided on the bill or statement

- 3.5.1 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer that other electricity and gas suppliers are available. Details of where the customer can obtain impartial advice and information about changing electricity or gas suppliers will also be provided³¹.
- 3.5.2 Electricity suppliers only: the supplier will include the fuel mix information – this must be the most recently published fuel mix information (published annually by the Authority as per Condition 41 of the electricity supply licence).
- 3.5.3 The supplier will include a statement to:
- advise customers that are having difficulty paying their electricity or gas bills to contact them immediately for help and guidance; and
 - Inform customers about the existence of a code of practice for customers that are having difficulty paying for the supply of electricity or gas³².

3.6 Additional information to be provided on or with the bill or statement

- 3.6.1 The supplier will provide information about the handling of complaints including:

³¹ For clarity, the requirement under 3.5.1 is covered within the requirement under section 1.5.1

³² ³² Decision paper on codes of practice minimum standards:

http://www.uregni.gov.uk/uploads/publications/Final_Codes_of_Practice_Decision_Paper.pdf

- the customer's right to complain to the supplier and initiate the complaints procedure (free of charge), as outlined in the code of practice for complaints handling procedure – this includes providing the ~~contact~~postal address and telephone number of the supplier's complaints handling department and details on how to request a copy of the code of practice;
- the role of CCNI in assisting the resolution of complaints which the supplier has not resolved to the customer's satisfaction – this includes providing the ~~contact~~postal address and telephone number of CCNI; and
- the customer's right to refer billing related complaints to the UR if CCNI has not been able to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction.

3.6.2 The supplier will inform customers that the Energy Consumer Checklist is accessible from the supplier's website; and that the supplier will send a copy to the customer on request, and free of charge.

3.6.3 The supplier will include contact details (including website address) of at least one organisation that provides information or assistance on measures which will help customers to improve their energy efficiency.

3.7 Supplier's Notice of Rights (gas suppliers only)

3.7.1 The supplier will include the following on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- the website address of the Supplier's Notice of Rights; and
- details on how the customer can request a printed copy of the Supplier's Notice of Rights.

4 Requirements for the format of domestic bills and statements

4.1 Font – typeface, size and colour

4.1.1 The supplier will choose a font size, typeface and line spacing that is easily readable for the ~~average~~ customer.

4.1.2 The supplier will give regard to the use of font colours and avoid colours that are more difficult to read.

4.2 Layout of important information

4.2.1 The supplier will include the following information on the front of the bill or statement:

Front of bill or statement
Customer details including: Name MPRN/SMPN/account number Billing address
Billing period – to which the bill or statement relates
Total charges for the period including VAT
Action to be taken by the customer (if any) – see section 1.3.1 ³³
Date of any payment due
Customer’s tariff information as detailed in section 3.2 ³⁴

4.2.2 Any information added to the front of the bill or statement in addition to 4.32.1 must not reduce the customer’s ability to see clearly, read and understand the mandatory information.

³³ When a customer receives a bill or statement it must be obvious to them if what action is required, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid details of how much to be paid, and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer’s account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer’s agreed collection arrangements if no action is required, a statement to this effect. No action includes the following circumstances:

- the customer has a direct debit that covers the full amount of the bill for each billing period and no adjustment is required – in this case the bill or statement is for information only, giving the amount owed and the date on which it will be collected from the customer’s account; or
- the communication is an annual statement for a prepayment customer.

³⁴ The supplier will include the following tariff related information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- The full name of the customer’s applicable tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name);
- The unit rate of the customer’s applicable tariff – expressed in “pence per kWh” where applicable;
- Any discount or premium that applies to the tariff when compared to the supplier’s standard tariff (where applicable for the same payment method); and
- The following statement to highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available:
Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer a range of other tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumer council.org.uk or by phoning 0800 121 6022.

Annex 5 – Code of practice on non-domestic bills and statements

Published July 2017



UR code of practice on non-domestic bills and statements

Condition 38(2) of the electricity supply licence and condition 2.19.2 of the gas supply licence require suppliers to “*comply with the Billing Code of Practice*”. This code of practice on bills and statements is mandatory and enforceable under this condition and all suppliers must comply with this code.

Nothing in this code of practice is intended to, or should be deemed to, constitute an exemption from the Suppliers’ legal obligations to comply with any and all relevant legislation, statute, statutory instrument, regulation or order (or any provision thereof) or any subordinate legislation.

This code of practice applies only to non-domestic bills and statements. For the purpose of this code, bills and statements refer to any communications with a credit customer that show how much energy they have used, make a request for payment, provide information about the collection of direct debit payments or inform the customer about the status of their account³⁵.

1 High level principles

1.1 Overarching principle: All bills and statements are clear and easily understandable

1.1.1 The supplier will follow the principles and rules in this code of practice when developing and/or amending their billing processes and billing systems and processes.

1.2 Principle 1: A customer is able to find quickly and understand important information on the bill or statement

1.2.1 This information includes (but is not limited to) items such as how much money is owed, and when it is due.

1.2.2 Other pieces of information, such as the availability of alternative tariffs or complaints handling information must not make it more difficult for customers to find and understand the key information.

³⁵ For the avoidance of doubt, this code of practice does not apply to communications such as reminder letters or debt collection letters etc.

1.3 Principle 2: A customer will know immediately what action is required from them when reading a bill or statement

1.3.1 When a customer receives a bill or statement it must be obvious to them what action is required, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid details of how much to be paid, and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements.

1.4 Principle 3: Bills and statements present accurate and timely information to the customer

1.4.1 The supplier will comply with the requirements on data accuracy etc. as detailed in the electricity and gas supply licences to ensure that bills and statements are based on accurate information and up-to-date meter reads where possible (these details are incorporated into the next sections of this code of practice).

2 Requirements for suppliers' non-domestic billing processes

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The main billing and consumption information requirements are detailed in conditions 38 and 44 of the electricity supply licence and conditions 2.19 and 2.28 of the gas supply licence.

2.2 Communication methods

2.2.1 Before completing a contract with a customer a supplier will inform the customer of the communication types available for credit bills or statements³⁶.

2.2.2 At least annually (after completion of the contract) the supplier will inform the customer of the types of communication available for credit bills and statements (including electronic communication).

2.2.3 The supplier will send bills or statements in the format requested by the customer (provided the supplier offers the requested type of communication).

2.2.4 The supplier will ensure that all contact with the customer relating to bills and statements is friendly and non-aggressive.

³⁶ This includes all types of electronic communication

2.3 Frequency of bills

- 2.3.1 The supplier will send a bill or statement at least once a quarter:
- to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements electronically³⁷; or
 - to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements on a quarterly basis.
- 2.3.2 The supplier will send a bill or statement once every six months to any credit customer that has not requested to receive electronic bills or statements and has not requested to receive a bill or statement quarterly.

2.4 Meter reading and billing

- 2.4.1 The supplier will use all reasonable endeavours to take an actual meter reading for each metered customer on at least an annual basis³⁸.
- 2.4.2 The supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer by reference to an actual meter reading where available (as per section 2.4.1).
- 2.4.3 If an actual meter reading is not available the supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas used by reference to a customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate). If the supplier does not consider the customer meter reading to be reasonably accurate it will take all reasonable steps to contact the customer and request a new meter reading.
- 2.4.4 If neither an actual meter reading nor a customer meter reading is available the supplier will estimate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer (based on previous consumption data if available).
- 2.4.5 If the customer receives a bill or statement showing an estimated meter reading it may provide the supplier with a customer meter reading. The supplier must accept this customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate) and provide an updated bill or statement reflecting this reading (if requested).
- 2.4.6 Where a supplier has not been able to take a meter reading for a customer on at least an annual basis the supplier will retain evidence of the reasonable endeavours

³⁷ For clarity, all customers that have requested electronic bills or statements must receive these at least quarterly.

³⁸ Gas suppliers are responsible for reading customer meters; electricity suppliers are not responsible for this task. However, electricity suppliers have an agreement with NIE Networks as the common services provider. NIE Networks reads customer meters on behalf of electricity suppliers. The supplier is responsible for having systems in place to obtain meter readings from NIE Networks.

taken to secure a meter reading for at least three years. The supplier will provide this evidence to the Authority if requested.

2.5 Provision of consumption information to electricity and gas suppliers and energy services providers

2.5.1 This section of the code relates to the provision of billing information³⁹ to electricity and gas supplier and energy services providers. It applies in those circumstances where a supplier:

- currently supplies electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request⁴⁰; or
- has in the previous twelve months supplied electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request; and
- the billing information specified in the customer information request is held or recorded by the supplier.

2.5.2 The supplier will provide the billing information specified in the customer information request free of charge and within ten working days to any electricity or gas supplier or energy services provider.

2.5.3 If the information held by the supplier is not in a form that can be determined for the specified period as requested in the customer information request, the supplier will:

- give notice to the electricity or gas supplier or the energy services provider (as the case may be) that the billing information cannot be provided for only the specified period; and
- provide the requested billing information held for any period that includes the specified period.

2.5.4 The supplier will not process a customer information request for any energy services provider unless the energy services provider submits written evidence of the customer's consent to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.

2.5.5 The supplier will not submit a customer information request to another electricity or gas supplier unless it has (and retains) evidence of the consent of the customer for it to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.

³⁹ Billing Information is defined in Condition 44 of the electricity supply licence and Condition 2.28 of the gas supply licence as: (a) any information relating to the consumption of electricity by the customer at the premises identified in the customer information request; and (b) any information enclosed with, or set out in, any bill or statement sent by the licensee to the customer at the premises.

⁴⁰ A customer information request means a request for billing information in respect of the customer at the premises identified, and for the period specified, in the request.

2.6 Free of charge

- 2.6.1 The supplier will not charge the customer for any information, including any bill or statement. This requirement does not apply in respect of providing additional copies of bills or statements.
- 2.6.2 With regard to section 2.5, the supplier will not charge the customer for providing any of the services set out in 2.5 to the customer, to any electricity or gas supplier, or to an energy services provider.

2.7 Changes to bills or statements

- 2.7.1 The supplier will keep a record of any changes made to its bills or statements in each calendar year.
- 2.7.2 The supplier will submit the record of changes referred to in 2.7.1 to the UR and an annual basis (along with the annual Retail Energy Market Monitoring information) or on request if necessary.

3 Requirements for the content of non-domestic bills and statements

This section includes many of the legislative requirements with regard to energy billing. However, there are also requirements related to billing which come from other pieces of consumer legislation. For the avoidance of doubt, suppliers are responsible for ensuring that all bills and statements comply with all relevant legislation.

3.1 Customer and supplier information

- 3.1.1 The supplier will include the following information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:
- Supplier name and address; and
 - Customer Meter Point Registration Number (MPRN) – for electricity customers; or
 - Customer Supply Meter Point Number (SMPN) – for gas customers.

3.2 Tariff information

- 3.2.1 The supplier will include the following tariff related information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- The full name of the customer's applicable tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name); and
- The unit rate of the customer's applicable tariff – expressed in “pence per kWh” where applicable.

3.3 Consumption and charging information

3.3.1 The supplier will include the following consumption and charging information on all customer bills or statements:

- The total charges for the period of the bill or statement.
- The breakdown of the total charges, including:
 - any applicable standing charges;
 - total charges exclusive of VAT; and
 - total charges including VAT.

Where other charges are applicable, these will be listed separately in the breakdown of charges.

- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer since the last bill or statement sent to the customer. The amount of electricity or gas is determined according to section 2.4 i.e. the supplier will calculate the consumption using an actual read where available; a customer read where an actual read is not available; or an estimated meter read where neither an actual nor a customer read is available.
- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer at the premises in the previous 12 months – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for 12 months or more.
- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer at the premises since the supplier started to provide the supply of electricity or gas – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for less than 12 months.

3.3.2 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer if any action needs to be taken following receipt of the bill or statement, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid, details of how much to be paid and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collections arrangements.

3.4 Additional information to be provided on the bill or statement

- 3.4.1 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer that other electricity and gas suppliers are available. Details of where the customer can obtain impartial advice and information about changing electricity or gas suppliers will also be provided.
- 3.4.2 Electricity suppliers only: the supplier will include the fuel mix information – this must be the most recently published fuel mix information (published annually by the Authority as per Condition 41 of the electricity supply licence).
- 3.4.3 The supplier will include a statement to advise customers that are having difficulty paying their electricity or gas bills to contact them immediately for help and guidance.

3.5 Additional information to be provided on or with the bill or statement

- 3.5.1 The supplier will provide information about the handling of complaints including:
- the customer's right to complain to the supplier and initiate the complaints procedure (free of charge), as outlined in the code of practice for complaints handling procedure – this includes providing the postal address and telephone number of the supplier's complaints handling department and details on how to request a copy of the code of practice;
 - the role of CCNI in assisting the resolution of complaints which the supplier has not resolved to the customer's satisfaction – this includes providing the postal address and telephone number of CCNI; and
 - the customer's right to refer billing related complaints to the UR if CCNI has not been able to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction.
- 3.5.2 The supplier will inform customers that the Energy Consumer Checklist is accessible from the supplier's website; and that the supplier will send a copy to the customer on request, and free of charge.
- 3.5.3 The supplier will include contact details (including website address) of at least one organisation that provides information or assistance on measures which will help customers to improve their energy efficiency.

3.6 Supplier's Notice of Rights (gas suppliers only)

- 3.6.1 The supplier will include the following on each bill or statement sent to the customer:
- the website address of the Supplier's Notice of Rights; and

- details on how the customer can request a printed copy of the Supplier's Notice of Rights.

Annex 6 – Code of practice on non-domestic bills and statements – tracked version

Published July 2017



UR code of practice on non-domestic bills and statements

Condition 38(2) of the electricity supply licence and condition 2.19.2 of the gas supply licence require suppliers to “*comply with the Billing Code of Practice*”. This code of practice on bills and statements is mandatory and enforceable under this condition and all suppliers must comply with this code.

Nothing in this code of practice is intended to, or should be deemed to, constitute an exemption from the Suppliers’ legal obligations to comply with any and all relevant legislation, statute, statutory instrument, regulation or order (or any provision thereof) or any subordinate legislation.

This code of practice applies only to non-domestic bills and statements. For the purpose of this code, bills and statements refer to any communications with a credit customer that show how much energy they have used, make a request for payment, provides information about the collection of direct debit payments or informs the customer about the status of their account⁴¹.

1 High level principles

1.1 Overarching principle: All bills and statements are clear and easily understandable

1.1.1 The supplier will follow the principles and rules in this code of practice when developing and/or amending their billing processes and billing systems and processes.

1.2 Principle 1: A customer is able to find quickly and understand important information on the bill or statement

1.2.1 This information includes (but is not limited to) items such as how much money is owed, and when it is due.

1.2.2 Other pieces of information, such as the availability of alternative tariffs or complaints handling information must not make it more difficult for customers to find and understand the key information.

⁴¹ For the avoidance of doubt, this code of practice does not apply to communications such as reminder letters or debt collection letters etc.

1.3 Principle 2: A customer will know immediately what action is required from them when reading a bill or statement

1.3.1 When a customer receives a bill or statement it must be obvious to them if what action is required, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid details of how much to be paid, and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements.~~if no action is required, a statement to this effect.~~

~~No action includes the following circumstances:~~

- ~~• the customer has a direct debit that covers the full amount of the bill for each billing period and no adjustment is required — in this case the bill or statement is for information only, giving the amount owed and the date on which it will be collected from the customer's account; or~~
- ~~• the communication is an annual statement for a prepayment customer.~~

1.4 Principle 3: Bills and statements present accurate and timely information to the customer

1.4.1 The supplier will comply with the requirements on data accuracy etc. as detailed in the electricity and gas supply licences to ensure that bills and statements are based on accurate information and up-to-date meter reads where possible (these details are incorporated into the next sections of this code of practice).

2 Requirements for suppliers' non-domestic billing processes

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The main billing and consumption information requirements are detailed in conditions 38 and 44 of the electricity supply licence and conditions 2.19 and 2.28 of the gas supply licence.

2.2 Communication methods

- 2.2.1 Before completing a contract with a customer a supplier will inform the customer of ~~the communication types the types of electronic communication~~ available for credit bills or statements⁴².
- 2.2.2 At least annually (after completion of the contract) the supplier will inform the customer of the types of ~~electronic~~ communication available for credit bills and statements (including electronic communication).
- 2.2.3 The supplier will send bills or statements in the format requested by the customer (provided the supplier offers the requested type of communication).
- 2.2.4 The supplier will ensure that all contact with the customer relating to bills and statements is friendly and non-aggressive.

2.3 Frequency of bills

- 2.3.1 The supplier will send a bill or statement at least once a quarter:
- to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements electronically⁴³; or -
 - to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements on a quarterly basis.
- ~~2.3.12.3.2~~ ~~The supplier will send a bill or statement once a quarter to any customer that has requested to receive bills or statements on a quarterly basis.~~
- ~~2.3.22.3.3~~ 2.3.3 The supplier will send a bill or statement once every six months to any credit customer that has not requested to receive electronic bills or statements and has not requested to receive a bill or statement quarterly.

2.4 Meter reading and billing

- 2.4.1 The supplier will use all reasonable endeavours to take an actual meter reading for each metered customer on at least an annual basis⁴⁴.
- 2.4.2 The supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer by reference to an actual meter reading where available (as per section ~~2.34~~.1).

⁴² This includes all types of electronic communication

⁴³ For clarity, all customers that have requested electronic bills or statements must receive these at least quarterly.

⁴⁴ Gas suppliers are responsible for reading customer meters; electricity suppliers are not responsible for this task. However, electricity suppliers have an agreement with NIE Networks as the common services provider. NIE Networks reads customer meters on behalf of electricity suppliers. The supplier is responsible for having systems in place to obtain meter readings from NIE Networks.

- 2.4.3 If an actual meter reading is not available the supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas used by reference to a customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate). If the supplier does not consider the customer meter reading to be reasonably accurate it will take all reasonable steps to contact the customer and request a new meter reading.
- 2.4.4 If neither an actual meter reading nor a customer meter reading is available the supplier will estimate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer (based on previous consumption data if available).
- 2.4.5 If the customer receives a bill or statement showing an estimated meter reading it may provide the supplier with a customer meter reading. The supplier must accept this customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate) and provide an updated bill or statement reflecting this reading (if requested).
- 2.4.6 Where a supplier has not been able to take a meter reading for a customer on at least an annual basis the supplier will retain evidence of the reasonable endeavours taken to secure a meter reading for at least three years. The supplier will provide this evidence to the Authority if requested.

2.5 Provision of consumption information to electricity and gas suppliers and energy services providers

- 2.5.1 This section of the code relates to the provision of billing information⁴⁵ to electricity and gas supplier and energy services providers. It applies in those circumstances where a supplier:
- currently supplies electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request⁴⁶; or
 - has in the previous twelve months supplied electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request; and
 - the billing information specified in the customer information request is held or recorded by the supplier.
- 2.5.2 The supplier will provide the billing information specified in the customer information request free of charge and within ten working days to any electricity or gas supplier or energy services provider.

⁴⁵ Billing Information is defined in Condition 44 of the electricity supply licence and Condition 2.28 of the gas supply licence as: (a) any information relating to the consumption of electricity by the customer at the premises identified in the customer information request; and (b) any information enclosed with, or set out in, any bill or statement sent by the licensee to the customer at the premises.

⁴⁶ A customer information request means a request for billing information in respect of the customer at the premises identified, and for the period specified, in the request.

- 2.5.3 If the information held by the supplier is not in a form that can be determined for the specified period as requested in the customer information request, the supplier will:
- give notice to the electricity or gas supplier or the energy services provider (as the case may be) that the billing information cannot be provided for only the specified period; and
 - provide the requested billing information held for any period that includes the specified period.
- 2.5.4 The supplier will not process a customer information request for any energy services provider unless the energy services provider submits written evidence of the customer's consent to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.
- 2.5.5 The supplier will not submit a customer information request to another electricity or gas supplier unless it has (and retains) evidence of the consent of the customer for it to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.

2.6 Free of charge

- 2.6.1 The supplier will not charge the customer for any information, including any bill or statement. This requirement does not apply in respect of providing additional copies of bills or statements.
- 2.6.2 With regard to section 2.65, the supplier will not charge the customer for providing any of the services set out in 2.65 to the customer, to any electricity or gas supplier, or to an energy services provider.

2.7 Changes to bills or statements

- 2.7.1 The supplier will keep a record of any changes made to its bills or statements in each calendar year.
- 2.7.2 The supplier will submit the record of changes referred to in 2.7.1 to the UR and an annual basis (along with the annual Retail Energy Market Monitoring information) or on request if necessary.

3 Requirements for the content of non-domestic bills and statements

This section includes many of the legislative requirements with regard to energy billing. However, there are also requirements related to billing which come from other pieces of

consumer legislation. For the avoidance of doubt, suppliers are responsible for ensuring that all bills and statements comply with all relevant legislation.

3.1 Customer and supplier information

3.1.1 The supplier will include the following information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- Supplier name and address; and
- Customer Meter Point Registration Number (MPRN) – for electricity customers; or
- Customer Supply Meter Point Number (SMPN) – for gas customers.

3.2 Tariff information

3.2.1 The supplier will include the following tariff related information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- The full name of the customer's applicable tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name); and
- The unit rate of the customer's applicable tariff – expressed in "pence per kWh" where applicable.

3.3 Consumption and charging information

3.3.1 The supplier will include the following consumption and charging information on all customer bills or statements:

- The total charges for the period of the bill or statement.
- The breakdown of the total charges, including:
 - any applicable standing charges;
 - total charges exclusive of VAT; and
 - total charges including VAT.

Where other charges are applicable, these will be listed separately in the breakdown of charges.

- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer since the last bill or statement sent to the customer. The amount of electricity or gas is determined according to section 2.4 i.e. the supplier will calculate the consumption using an actual read where available; a customer read where an actual read is not available; or an estimated meter read where neither an actual nor a customer read is available.

- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer at the premises in the previous 12 months – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for 12 months or more.
- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer ~~that~~ at the premises since the supplier started to provide the supply of electricity or gas – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for less than 12 months.

3.3.2 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer if any action needs to be taken following receipt of the bill or statement, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid, details of how much to be paid and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collections arrangements. ~~if no action is required, a statement to this effect.~~

~~No action includes the following circumstances:~~

- ~~• the customer has a direct debit that covers the full amount of the bill for each billing period and no adjustment is required – in this case the bill or statement is for information only, giving the amount owed and the date on which it will be collected from the customer's account; or~~
- ~~the communication is an annual statement for a prepayment customer.~~

3.4 **Additional information to be provided on the bill or statement**

- 3.4.1 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer that other electricity and gas suppliers are available. Details of where the customer can obtain impartial advice and information about changing electricity or gas suppliers will also be provided.
- 3.4.2 Electricity suppliers only: the supplier will include the fuel mix information – this must be the most recently published fuel mix information (published annually by the Authority as per Condition 41 of the electricity supply licence).
- 3.4.3 The supplier will include a statement to advise customers that are having difficulty paying their electricity or gas bills to contact them immediately for help and guidance.

3.5 Additional information to be provided on or with the bill or statement

- 3.5.1 The supplier will provide information about the handling of complaints including:
- the customer's right to complain to the supplier and initiate the complaints procedure (free of charge), as outlined in the code of practice for complaints handling procedure – this includes providing the ~~contact~~ postal address and telephone number of the supplier's complaints handling department and details on how to request a copy of the code of practice;
 - the role of CCNI in assisting the resolution of complaints which the supplier has not resolved to the customer's satisfaction – this includes providing the ~~contact~~ postal address and telephone number of CCNI; and
 - the customer's right to refer billing related complaints to the UR if CCNI has not been able to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction.
- 3.5.2 The supplier will inform customers that the Energy Consumer Checklist is accessible from the supplier's website; and that the supplier will send a copy to the customer on request, and free of charge.
- 3.5.3 The supplier will include contact details (including website address) of at least one organisation that provides information or assistance on measures which will help customers to improve their energy efficiency.

3.6 Supplier's Notice of Rights (gas suppliers only)

- 3.6.1 The supplier will include the following on each bill or statement sent to the customer:
- the website address of the Supplier's Notice of Rights; and
 - details on how the customer can request a printed copy of the Supplier's Notice of Rights.