

Chapter 4

Key outputs

Customer service - 1

Covering:

DG6: Response to billing contacts
Connected properties
Billing denominators

Chapter 4

Key outputs (customer service) - 1

DG6 - Response to billing contacts

These lines cover the number of billing contacts received during the report year and the time taken to respond to them.

The information in this table is used to monitor and compare company performance against the DG indicators. It is published, in summary, in the annual 'Levels of Service' report.

Lines 1 to 5: DG6 Response to billing contacts

Aim

To identify the total number of billing contacts received during the report year and the time taken to respond to them.

Common definitions

Billing contact:

This covers any communication from a customer or their representative (e.g. their bank) regarding a bill which requires a response or an action by the company and does not constitute a written complaint, which should be reported under DG7. Billing contacts can be received by telephone, in writing, by electronic transmission, by personal visit or written on a piece of company correspondence, for example, a bill which is returned to the company, except where it is offensive or abusive.

Billing contacts should include calls that are made to a Customer services department to pay a bill as this results in an action being taken on the customer's account. Contacts to automated payment lines where a message is left and needs to be actioned by the company should also be included. Calls to automated lines where credit/debit card details are taken and payment is made automatically with no action from the company agent should not be included. Where a call to an automated line is rejected and a call is routed to an operator to answer, then these calls should be included as **an action** is undertaken by the company agent.

For transactions completed via a company website, those contacts which require **no action** from the company or agent can be excluded from DG6 reporting. Companies should be able to demonstrate to their reporters that no action is required. If an action or a response is required by the company, for example, a customer record needs updating or a leaflet or bill needs to be posted or emailed to the customer then these should be included in DG6.

Where any automated element has failed (e.g. telephone payment not accepted by bank or website email reply not sent) and consequently some action is required by the company, contacts should be reported as DG6.

Companies should be able to demonstrate to reporters how such instances are monitored and reported.

Care should be taken when classifying a written communication, as it may be a DG6 or DG7 event. Where the content or tone of written communication from a customer or customer's representative indicates an element of dissatisfaction, however mildly worded or unjustified, it should be classified as a written complaint and reported under DG7.

Response time:

This is the number of working days between receipt of a contact by the company up to and including the day of dispatch of a response. For the purpose of this calculation, the day of receipt is counted as day zero and the next working day as day one.

Response:

This is defined as a response to a billing contact which does one or more of the following:

- provides an explanation of the company's relevant policy or procedure and indicates why, in the company's opinion, no further action on the customers billing contact is required; or
- results in all requested action being taken on the customer's account. The response time is to be reported from the receipt of the billing contact to the point where all requests for action by the customer have been completed even if they will be delayed e.g. waiting for a weekly print run. When a telephone contact has requested a leaflet or other information the contact should be closed when the information is dispatched to the customer not when the process is initiated; or
- informs the customer of when action on his/her account will be taken if action cannot be taken immediately due to circumstances beyond the company's control, for example when clearance is needed from a third party, such as a landlord. For written account queries where a reprint bill or leaflet is requested and this cannot be sent due to third party printing if a letter is sent to the customer to inform them of the timescales for reply, for reporting purposes this letter will count as a substantive reply to the customer.

Whichever type of response is dispatched it **must** substantively answer **all** points raised by the customer.

Guidance

Billing contacts:

Within the methodology section of the return, the company should provide a copy of any formal written procedures or guidance covering the allocation of customer contacts to DG6, DG7 and the non-reportable categories.

Please see the notes in chapter 5 for guidance on recording the number of billing complaints received by telephone. These should be included in the total billing contacts reported in line 1.

CCNI:

For the avoidance of doubt the recording of billing contacts received via the appropriate CCNI office on a customer's behalf should be included.

Response time:

The number of working days between receipt of a billing contact and the dispatch of a response is calculated as follows:

Contact received	Thursday 23 February 2006	
Response dispatched	Tuesday 28 February 2006	
Total Days	23/24/25/26/27/28 February	6
Less day of receipt	23 February	1
		5
Less non-working days	25/26 February	2
Response time (working days)		3

The date of receipt of a contact is the date it arrives at the **company**, whether this is the usual inlet or not. It is not necessarily the date when it reaches the customer services section or the date when it is opened, both of which could be later than the date of arrival.

Emails/Faxes

For email/fax contacts which can be sent at any time, the company should record the receipt date as the date it is delivered to the company even if this was not within normal operating hours.

The numbers of days taken to respond remains working days. This means that for email/fax contacts the date of receipt should be the date it arrives at the company (including out of hours and non working days). The company should not count non-working days in the response time. For example, if an email is received on a Saturday this is recorded as day 0. The next working day (Monday) would be counted as day 1. If an email is received on a Sunday then this is recorded as date of receipt – day 0 and Monday as day 1.

For bank holidays the date of receipt would be recorded when the email/fax arrived at the company regardless of whether it is a bank holiday. However the further non-working days would be removed from the response time.

We expect that companies now have adequate systems and processes in place to record and report email/fax contacts. Where this is not the case this should be explained in the commentary including:

- Where the company is unable to determine the receipt date as that shown on the email/fax please indicate how many email contacts have been received in total, and if this is likely to be material e.g. what is the typical time taken to respond to emails?
- Where the company does not report in line with the email/fax reporting requirements, this should be reflected in the confidence grade. The company should include in its commentary the reasons for the confidence grade awarded.
- The company should also include any actions planned to report in line with the reporting requirements in future.

The reporter should comment on the company policy for recording email/fax contacts and implication of any weaknesses for overall DG6 reporting.

Dispatch Date:

The date of dispatch refers to the date a response is sent to the customer; it is not necessarily the date that it is printed or the date that the response leaves the customer services section, both of which could be earlier than the date of dispatch. The company should state in their commentary how the dispatch date of the response is recorded especially for copy bills, leaflets or payment cards. Details of third party printing should also be included.

Where companies manually add days to the response time to take account of dispatch issues, details should be included in the commentary including the assumptions used to calculate the number of days.

Where the company uses substantive holding replies to inform customers of the timescales for receiving items such as copy bills or payment cards, details should be provided in the commentary. This should include whether this applies to all contacts received or only where a contact is received on the telephone.

We expect that companies now have adequate systems and processes in place to record and report dispatch date. Where this is not the case this should be explained in the commentary.

Where the company does not report in line with the dispatch date reporting requirements, this should be reflected in the confidence grade. The company should include in its commentary the reasons for the confidence grade awarded.

The company should also include any actions planned to improve future recording and reporting. Where actions were identified in AIR09, updates should be provided on these in the company AIR10 commentary.

Reporters are asked to comment where company policy does not meet the reporting requirements.

Postal strikes:

Postal strikes may impact on dispatch date. It is not expected that short term strikes will have a material impact on performance; however, the company should keep a record of the number of items delayed by a strike. Where systems do not readily provide this information, please keep a count of items of post delayed and the proportion that are DG6/DG7/other.

The company should report in their Annual information return actual performance but state in their commentary the impact any delays have had on operations within the company which have impacted on DG6 performance.

Some companies use one address (address 1) for customer correspondence and a different address (address 2) for customers to send payments to. Customers may include written queries in with their payments sent to address 2 and these are forwarded on to address 1 using postal services. The company then deals with them directly and usually within DG6 timescales of them having first arrived arriving at address 2. Postal strikes potentially affect this process.

In such instances the company should

1. Continue to keep records to be in a position to report the actual number of days taken to dispatch replies, including any delays as a result of the post strike.
2. Consider if there are any alternative options for transferring records.
3. Keep a count of as far as practical, if not estimate, the number of DG6 replies that have been delayed as a result of the postal delays.

The company should report in their Annual information return actual performance but state in their commentary the impact any delays have had on operations within the company which have impacted on DG6 performance.

Contacts not dealt with at end of year:

Where billing contacts are not dealt with at the end of the year, the company is to use one of the following methods:

- the contact is to be included in the total number of billing contacts received for the year in which it is received and the response time is also to be included in that year's information although it may continue into the following year; or
- the contact is to be included in the total number of billing contacts received for the year in which it is dealt with and the response time is also to be included in that year's information although it may commence in the previous year.

Whichever method is adopted, care should be taken to ensure that undercounting or double counting does not occur and that the method used is consistently applied in subsequent years. The company **must** state in their methodology statement which approach they have adopted.

Holding reply:

This is defined as a response to a billing contact which advises the customer that the company will need to undertake additional research or other actions before being able to respond to the customer's contact. A holding reply can be counted as a substantive response if it informs the customer what further action needs to be taken to respond to the query and includes a date by which investigations or further actions will be complete and by when the customer will receive a further communication from the company. A substantive holding reply will close a contact for reporting purposes but not for the company until all actions have been taken and a further response is sent to the customer. The company should explain their policy for using holding replies in response to customer queries in their commentary.

Where the company is unable to provide the date by which investigations or further actions will be complete the company must include the number of days in which the company will contact the customer again **and** the number of days after the contact that the substantive response will be sent to the customer. For example, where a visit is required the response should state the company will be in contact within XX days to arrange the appointment and that a substantive response will be provided XX days after the visit.

Reporting billing contacts received about another undertaker's policies and procedures and reporting billing contacts received from other undertakers or agents:

The guiding principle is that the contact should be reported by the company that responds.

Answering written billing contacts by telephone or by visit:

Where the company use the telephone or make a visit to respond to a written billing contact, then the date of the telephone call or visit will count as the date of response for DG6 purposes.

Maintaining audit trails:

There **must** be an auditable record of the response made by the company to all contacts regardless of whether the response is made by telephone call, letter, visit or by taking the necessary action on the customer's account. For example a file note or a confirmatory response letter confirming the substance of the response.

The company should state their policy regarding the use of responses by telephone and/or visit, and the timing of confirmatory letters in the methodology section.

The company should state how they ensure that all responses are recorded in order to maintain an auditable record.

Sampling:

Where the information for this indicator is derived from a sample basis, the company **must** explain the:

- justification for using a sampling method rather than counting actuals (and when this method will be replaced); and
- sampling method used by the company including how the sample is selected, the size of the sample and how robust it is.

Assumptions:

Any assumptions, including those which are made about the response times, for example to particular types of contacts, **must** clearly be stated in the commentary, together with the reasons for the assumptions.

Lines 6 – 8: Connected properties**Aim**

To identify the number of connected properties for water supply only, water and sewerage and sewerage services only.

Common definitions

Total number of properties is defined as the total number of household and non-household properties connected to either the distribution system, or the sewerage system, or both.

Water supply only is defined as the number of properties connected to the distribution system for the supply of water only.

This number should:

- be the total number of properties for which a water supply only is provided, i.e. it excludes those properties which also receive a sewerage service.

Water and sewerage services is defined as the number of properties which are connected to the distribution system for the supply of water **and** connected to the sewerage system for the transportation and disposal of sewage.

Sewerage services only is defined as the number of properties connected to the sewerage system for the transportation and disposal of sewage, i.e. it excludes those properties connected for a water supply.

Guidance

Connected properties

The company is asked to report the total number of household and non-household properties connected for

- water supply only;
- water and sewerage services; and
- sewerage services only

at the end of the reporting year.

Company commentary for table 4

The company should:

- comment on significant year on year changes in reported figures explaining any factors that may have influenced figures;
- comment on any areas of the reporting requirements which are not met providing an explanation of why and what plans the company has in place to meet the reporting requirements in future years;
- comment on their policy for recording emails/faxes. Where the company does not meet the reporting requirements, the company should include details of planned actions and how this is taken account of in confidence grade;
- state in their commentary how the dispatch date of the response is recorded especially for copy bills, leaflets or payment cards. Details of third party printing should also be included.
- describe impact of any postal strikes within the report year in their commentary;

- explain their policy for using holding replies in response to customer queries in their commentary.
- state any sampling method used by the company including how the sample is selected, the size of the sample and how robust it is, and the justification for using a sampling method rather than counting actuals (and when this method will be replaced);
- state any assumptions, including those which are made about the response times, for example to particular types of contacts, **must** be clearly stated in the commentary, together with the reasons for the assumptions; and
- provide justification for the confidence grade assigned to each line including an explanation for any changes in confidence grades from previous years. Confidence grades should take account of any areas where the company does not meet the reporting requirements.
- Ensure methodology is up to date with any new automated services offered on phone or website etc. In commentary include uptake of such services and how these are reported for DG6 for example, action/no action automation.

Methodology statement

The methodology statement should clearly describe and explain the methods and procedures adopted in order to monitor and report on the levels of service they provide to their customers. It should follow the layout given in the introduction to the reporting requirements.

In particular the company should:

- provide a copy of any formal written procedures or guidance covering the allocation of customer contacts to DG6, DG7 and the non-reportable categories.
- **must** state in their methodology statement which approach they have adopted for reporting contacts not responded to at the end of the period.
- state their policy regarding the use of responses by telephone and/or visit, and the timing of confirmatory letters in the methodology section. The company must state how they ensure that all responses are recorded with an auditable record.
- Update methodology to reflect web services or any other new services offered.

Guidance to Reporter

The reporter should:

- Confirm whether all methods used by the company are as the company has described;
- Confirm whether the company has disclosed all assumptions;
- Confirm whether the confidence grades assigned by the company reflect the methods it applies;
- Comment on any area of concern/action arising from previous Annual information returns;
- Comment on any area/policy that does not meeting the reporting requirements;
- Comment on company policy for dispatch date especially where policy does not meet reporting requirements;
- Comment on the company policy for recording email/fax contacts;
- Comment on the methods used by the company. In particular:
 - Reporters should look carefully at any sampling techniques used by the company, confirm whether in all circumstances where sampling is used, all weaknesses have been exposed by the company; and
 - The methods used to identify DG6 contacts from all customer contacts;
 - The methods used to ensure contacts are substantively answered before closure; and
- Describe in detail the checks that the reporter has carried out in order to be able to confirm and comment on each of the points set out above. Including for example how the

reporter has selected any samples for audit from the full sample; quantity sampled; robustness of sample; materiality of assumptions and any weaknesses; discussions held with company staff.

Table 4 line definitions

A DG6 RESPONSE TO BILLING CONTACTS - GENERAL

1	Total billing contacts	nr	0dp
Definition	The total number of billing contacts received.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

2	Number dealt with within 5 working days	nr	0dp
Definition	The number of billing contacts dealt with within five working days.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

3	Number dealt with in more than 10 working days	nr	0dp
Definition	The number of billing contacts dealt with in more than 10 working days.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

4	DG6 Percentage dealt with within 5 working days	%	1dp
Definition	The percentage of billing contacts dealt with within five working days.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Calculated: the result of line 2 divided by line 1, all multiplied by 100		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

5	Percentage dealt with in more than 10 working days	%	1dp
Definition	The percentage of billing contacts dealt with in more than 10 working days.		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Calculated: line 3 divided by line 1 multiplied by 100		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

B CONNECTED PROPERTIES

6	Nr. of properties connected for water supply only	nr	Odp
Definition	<p>The total number of household and non-household properties connected to the water distribution system for water supply only at the end of the report year.</p> <p>This must include properties which are connected but not billed (e.g. temporarily unoccupied) but should exclude properties which have been permanently disconnected.</p> <p>A group of properties supplied by a single connection should be counted as several properties. They should only be treated as a single property if a single bill covers the whole property.</p>		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

7	Nr. of properties connected for water and sewerage services	nr	Odp
Definition	<p>The total number of household and non-household properties connected for both water and sewerage services at the end of the report year.</p> <p>This must include properties which are connected but not billed (e.g. temporarily unoccupied) but should exclude properties which have been permanently disconnected.</p> <p>A group of properties supplied by a single connection should be counted as several properties. They should only be treated as a single property if a single bill covers the whole property.</p>		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

8	Nr. of properties connected for sewerage services only	nr	Odp
Definition	<p>The total number of household and non-household properties connected for sewerage services only at the end of the report year.</p> <p>This must include properties which are connected but not billed (e.g. temporarily unoccupied) but should exclude properties which have been permanently disconnected.</p> <p>A group of properties supplied by a single connection should be counted as several properties. They should only be treated as a single property if a single bill covers the whole property.</p>		
Primary Purpose	Confirming delivery of key outputs and service.		
Processing rule	Input		
Responsibility	Comparative Efficiency & Performance Team		

CHANGE CONTROL SHEET

CHAPTER 4

2008/1.0	First issue of chapter for the SBP period
2009/1.0	Second issue of chapter for the SBP period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Billing contact definition amended for 'rejected' calls to automated lines - Billing contact definition amended to read from a customer <i>or their representative (e.g. their bank)....</i> - Company and Reporter guidance for e-mails/faxes and dispatch dates amended
2010/1.0	Third issue of chapter for the SBP period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes to guidance