

Consultation Paper on the Price Control Paper

Deadline: Monday 3rd July 2006

Advice NI is a membership organisation that exists to provide leadership, representation and support for independent advice organisations to facilitate the delivery of high quality, sustainable advice services. Advice NI exists to provide its members with the capacity and tools to ensure effective advice services delivery. This includes: advice and information management systems, funding and planning, quality assurance support, NVQs in advice and guidance, social policy co-ordination and ICT development.

Membership of Advice NI is normally for organisations that provide significant advice and information services to the public. Advice NI has over 70 member organisations operating throughout Northern Ireland and providing information and advocacy services to over 100,000 people each year dealing with over 225,000 enquiries on an extensive range of matters including: social security, housing, debt, consumer and employment issues. For further information, please visit www.adviceni.net.

Advice NI is currently actively engaged with NIE in Northern Ireland in terms of discussing benefit uptake activities under the Vulnerable Customer Programme.

Proposals under discussion include:

- Advice NI will apply an holistic approach to tackle fuel poverty, benefit uptake and energy efficiency using the expertise of the Advice NI membership;
- Advice NI propose to maximise the use of ICT, in particular e-Group communication, web-based discussion and support and IT-based case recording systems.

- Advice NI propose to devote a section of Newsheet and website to benefit uptake matters.
- The benefit uptake activity has the potential to involve social groups such as lone parents, older people and people with disabilities; and people from particular disadvantaged geographical areas;
- Advice NI will work in partnership with Neighbourhood Energy Action to weave a training programme to build capacity within the advice sector to identify fuel poverty, identify causes and assist people to avail of particular schemes and ultimately changes in behaviour to lift people from fuel poverty and in turn reduce emissions of noxious fumes;

There have been some very positive discussions between Advice NI and the team within NIE charged with taking forward their vulnerable customer work. However it is frustrating that the ideas and momentum generated have not been progressed further due to the delays in finalising the financial element of the proposal.

Advice NI would therefore wish to put forward the clear view that we would wish to see definite movement on finalising the Price Control proposals – in particular the Vulnerable Customer Programme.

Advice NI would also ask OFREG and NIAER to consider using the tried and tested Advice NI eConsultation service as a means by which targeted organisations (and the individuals whom they provide a service to) are included in consultation exercises.

Further information on the Advice NI eConsultation service can be found at <http://www.adviceni.net/econsultation/default.asp> .

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