



CONSULTATION ON A NEW SUPPLIER CODE OF PRACTICE ON BILLS AND STATEMENTS

Disability Action's Response DATE 2010

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INTRODUCTION

- 1 Disability Action is a pioneering Northern Ireland charity working with and for people with disabilities. We work with our members to provide information, training, transport awareness programmes and representation for people regardless of their disability; whether that is physical, mental, sensory, hidden or learning disability.
- 2 21% (369,390) of adults and 6% (105,540) of children in Northern Ireland have a disability and the incidence is higher here than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Over one quarter of all families here are affected.
- 3 As a campaigning body, we work to bring about positive change to the social, economic and cultural life of people with disabilities and consequently our entire community. In pursuit of our aims we serve 45,000 people each year.
- 4 Our network of services is provided via our Headquarters in Belfast and in three regional offices in Carrickfergus, Derry and Dungannon.
- 5 Disability Action welcomes the opportunity to respond to this draft and to aid our response has put the relevant page/paragraph of the draft in brackets at the end of our comments.

SPECIFIC COMMENTARY

- 6 Disability Action welcomes the statement that the consultation does not intend to replace suppliers legal obligations. (1.1). Disabled people all have different requirements and a “one size fits all” approach does not work. Reasonable Adjustments, which are a requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act often assist people to attain a service by making a change to the way it is provided.
- 7 We appreciate that the code will set minimum standards and will also encourage innovative solutions for providing best service. (2.1) However we would encourage the code to ensure that the diverse needs of people with disabilities are met. We would also advise that the code encourages suppliers to engage with their service users who have a disability and ask them how best they can meet their needs.

8. We welcome the Code's aims to present information in an "understandable and clear way". Disability Action would also ask that the code highlights the need for information to be presented in accessible formats that meets the needs of disabled people. Disability Action would be willing to discuss this with the Utility Regulator.

9. Disability Action would prefer a consistency of layout between bills. We feel this would make utility bills more easily understood and managed for some groups of disabled people. (3.2)

10. The proposal for presenting key information on the front of the bill and putting detailed information on the back is also one that we feel would be useful to many disabled people. Clear and well laid out information will enable more people with disabilities to take in the information about their bill and understand it. (3.4)

11. Disability Action would strongly recommend that any suppliers engage with us and other organisations representing disabled people to ensure that language on bills is accessible and can be understood by as many disabled people as possible. (3.5)

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Disability Action feels that the Code must stress to suppliers the varying needs of disabled people and that a "one size fits all" approach will not work. We recommend a minimum of 14 Arial on all printed information and to be laid out clearly. All information should also be available in large print (as specified by customer), Easy Read, Plain English, audio, email and Braille. However this list is not prescriptive and suppliers should ensure that they meet the needs of any request for accessible formats of bills and statements.

CONCLUSION

Disability Action has welcomed the opportunity to make a submission. Disability Action looks forward to continued dialogue on this and other issues of major significance to people with disabilities throughout Northern Ireland.

