
C1: CUSTOMER VIEWS

Customer consultation process

The company may choose to rely on the results of work carried out at national level by the joint stakeholders. The company may also wish to carry out its own customer research on issues of particular relevance to its local situation.

The company will need to explain to us and others how its business plan reflects the views of its customers.

We do not require the company to carry out detailed market research, but we will expect the company to show that it has considered available evidence on customers' views.

This may include:

- its own tracking research;
- work carried out for the last price review; and
- other evidence such as the level of complaints about particular issues.

The company should describe how it has consulted its customers, including the involvement of the NI Environment Agency, CCNI, DWI, or any other bodies. The description should include an explanation of the steps taken to ascertain the views of particular groups, e.g. business customers, environmental groups, low-income households etc.

The company should identify the main sources of evidence on which they have relied in drawing conclusions about customers' views. Where evidence is drawn from customer research, copies of reports on that research, including methodologies, questionnaires and detailed results including computer tables should be included with the submission.

If the company has plans for further consultation, these should be set out, including the proposed timetable.

Conclusions about customer priorities

The company should summarise the conclusions it has drawn about customers' views with reference to the options, if any, for enhanced services, supply/demand balance and quality, and any other issues relevant to decisions on future price limits.

For each option that the company is considering, or has consulted on, the company should set out:

- potential extent of enhancement by 2012 and impact on average bills;

-
- the reason for considering the enhancement, e.g. prior evidence of customer needs, results of market research, suggestions by CCNI, the NI Environment Agency or other bodies;
 - costs directly attributable to the enhancement.

The summary should include the company's assessment of:

- the extent to which customers expect, or want, enhanced services post 2010;
- customers' relative priorities between the service options, if any, considered during the consultation process;
- customers' views about the broad balance between future service standards and future prices.

If the company considers that customers' views on other issues, such as how best to manage the future supply/demand balance, are relevant on the periodic review, these should be set out.

The company's assessment of customers' views should be cross-referenced to the evidence included with the submission. Where the company considers that there are significant differences of view between segments of the customer base, (e.g. businesses, households, low-income households, etc.) these should be clearly identified.