

Social Action Plan Workshop

NIW Access Arrangements

1st June 2009

Marie White
Head of Customer Services

What We Do....

- We offer a range of free services for priority customers.
- We encourage any customer who is an older person, has a disability, a serious medical condition or needs extra help for any other reason, to sign up to our priority services register.
- ‘Priority Services for Domestic Customers’ is outlined in Northern Ireland Water’s Codes of Practice and Customer Charter, which were developed with the Consumer Council and approved by the Utility Regulator.

The services available to priority customers include:-

1) Helping Customers with their bill

- Large-print bills
- Reading your bill by phone
- Sending bills to a friend or relative
- Braille bills

2) General Information and Letters

- We can make nearly all of our general information leaflets and letters available in large print, in Braille or on audio cassette/CD.
- Customers with hearing difficulties can contact us via our 24-hour *typetalk* phone service, or by fax.

3) Loss of Supply

- If we plan an interruption for longer than 4 hours, we give at least 48 hours notice in writing, letting customers know the date, the time and how long we expect the interruption to last.
- For customers with medical conditions that health could be put at risk if they didn't have water, we can make special arrangements to give you alternative supply for example, bottled water or a small tank of water.
- We encourage customers to register with us by phone or by sending us the application form in our leaflet.
- If we turn off the water supply for more than 24 hours, we will give customers alternative water supply anyway, no matter what the customers needs are.

4) Flooding

- Customers registered on the Priority Services Register can receive special assistance to evacuate their home due to flooding.

5) Help with checking your meter

- For customers that have a disability which means they find it difficult to check their meter, we can provide up to two extra readings each year, free of charge.

6) Bogus Callers

- Bogus callers are another area of concern for NI Water as they often prey on the vulnerable and we offer advice on how to deal with suspected bogus callers in our leaflet.
- NI Water has a doorstep password system whereby customers can arrange a password which staff will always use when they call.

Promoting Priority Services

- Leaflets
- Website: www.niwater.com
- Radio Interviews
- Direct Communication with various groups such as:-
 - RNIB (audio interview)
 - RNID (leaflet inserted in their quarterly magazine)
- Poster to be finalised and distributed to Doctors surgeries throughout Northern Ireland.
- Currently liaising with the health board to promote alongside their channels of communication

Next Steps

- NI Water would welcome the opportunity to work with other utilities and relevant consumer bodies such as CCNI, CAB, Help the Aged, etc, to develop policies and procedures.
- NI Water is committed to working with customers and key stakeholders, to understand their expectations and views.
- A unique distinction of the water sector is that there is no legal provision for the disconnection of water and/or sewerage services as a result of non-payment of bills. Therefore, we recommend that the Utility Regulator takes into account the fact that the characteristics of a vulnerable water customer may not be the same as a vulnerable energy customer.

- NI Water already has an extensive education programme which includes school, community and public components to promote awareness of the precious nature of water and the need to consume water efficiently. We look forward to working with the Utility Regulator in further promoting water efficiency.
- Most of the actions contained within the Social Action Plan are already being considered within NI Water's normal business. In addition to monitoring and ensuring compliance, NI Water will regularly review special services to customers in light of current/future customer views surveys.

Conclusion

- Over 1.7 million people in Northern Ireland rely on NI Water for their water and wastewater services. NI Water is dedicated to providing the community it serves with water and wastewater services which meet regulatory requirements at the lowest sustainable cost.
- NI Water is committed to the community we serve and making a positive contribution by working in partnership with businesses, local authorities, charities, as well as educational and voluntary organisations. We look forward to our continued interaction with the Utility Regulatory, consumer representative bodies and other utility providers in addressing the issues raised in the Utility Regulator's Social Action Plan.



Any Questions?

