

CODE OF PRACTICE ON DOMESTIC BILLS AND STATEMENTS

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UR code of practice on domestic bills and statements

Condition 38(2) of the electricity supply licence and condition 2.19.2 of the gas supply licence require suppliers to “*comply with the Billing Code of Practice*”. This code of practice on bills and statements is mandatory and enforceable under this condition and all suppliers must comply with this code.

Nothing in this code of practice is intended to, or should be deemed to, constitute an exemption from the Suppliers’ legal obligations to comply with any and all relevant legislation, statute, statutory instrument, regulation or order (or any provision thereof) or any subordinate legislation.

This code of practice applies only to domestic bills and statements. For the purpose of this code, bills and statements refer to any communications with a credit customer that show how much energy they have used, make a request for payment, provide information about the collection of direct debit payments or inform the customer about the status of their account¹. Annual statements for prepayment customers are considered to be a separate type of communication. For the purpose of this code these will be referred to as “annual PPM statements”.

1 High level principles

1.1 Overarching principle: all bills and statements are clear and easily understandable

1.1.1 The supplier will follow the principles and rules in this code of practice when developing and/or amending their billing processes and billing systems and processes.

1.2 Principle 1: A customer is able to find quickly and understand important information on the bill or statement

1.2.1 This information includes (but is not limited to) items such as how much money is owed, and when it is due.

¹ For the avoidance of doubt, this code of practice does not apply to communications such as reminder letters or debt collection letters etc.

- 1.2.2 The information must be provided in a manner that is accessible for all consumers.
- 1.2.3 Other pieces of information, such as the availability of alternative tariffs or complaints handling information must not make it more difficult for customers to find and understand the key information.

1.3 Principle 2: A customer will know immediately what action is required from them when reading a bill or statement

- 1.3.1 When a customer receives a bill or statement it must be obvious to them what action is required, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid details of how much to be paid, and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements.

1.4 Principle 3: Bills and statements present accurate and timely information to the customer

- 1.4.1 The supplier will comply with the requirements on data accuracy etc. as detailed in the electricity and gas supply licences to ensure that bills and statements are based on accurate information and up-to-date meter reads where possible (these details are incorporated into the next sections of this code of practice).

1.5 Principle 4: Customers will be made aware that there may be cheaper tariffs available to them

- 1.5.1 The supplier will highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available and include the following statement:
Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer other tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumer council.org.uk or by phoning 0800 121 6022.

2 Requirements for suppliers' domestic billing processes

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The main billing and consumption information requirements are detailed in conditions 38 and 44 of the electricity supply licence and conditions 2.19 and 2.28 of the gas supply licence. Further requirements have been introduced through the code of practice minimum standards² – these are noted with (COP) below.
- 2.1.2 All electricity and gas bills and statements for new suppliers must be designed and formatted in consultation with the Authority and the General Consumer Council.
- 2.1.3 All significant changes to the content and/or format of all electricity and gas bills and statements must be carried out in consultation with the General Consumer Council and notified to the Authority.

2.2 Communication methods

- 2.2.1 Before completing a contract with a customer a supplier will inform the customer of all of the communication types available for credit bills and statements³.
- 2.2.2 At least annually (after completion of the contract) the supplier will inform the customer of the types of communication available for credit bills and statements (including electronic communication).
- 2.2.3 The supplier will send credit bills and statements in the format requested by the customer (provided the supplier offers the requested type of communication).
- 2.2.4 The supplier will ensure that all contact with the customer relating to bills and statements is friendly and non-aggressive. (COP)
- 2.2.5 The supplier will operate a nomination or bill or statement redirection service for those customers who wish to have their bills or statements redirected to a nominated person. (COP)

² Decision paper on codes of practice minimum standards:
http://www.uregni.gov.uk/uploads/publications/Final_Codes_of_Practice_Decision_Paper.pdf

³ This includes all types of electronic communication

- 2.2.6 The supplier will only send bills or statements in respect of 2.2.5 where it has received confirmation that the nominated person has agreed to receive bills or statements on the customer's behalf. (COP)
- 2.2.7 The supplier will send a copy of the redirected bill or statement to the actual customer where requested. (COP)
- 2.2.8 The supplier will ensure that it has facilities available to assist blind or partially sighted, or deaf or partially deaf customers to enquire or complain about any bill or statement. (COP)

2.3 Frequency of bills

- 2.3.1 The supplier will send a bill or statement at least once a quarter:
- to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements electronically⁴; or
 - to any credit customer that has requested to receive bills or statements on a quarterly basis.
- 2.3.2 The supplier will send a bill or statement once every six months to any credit customer that has not requested to receive electronic bills or statements and has not requested to receive a bill or statement quarterly.
- 2.3.3 The supplier will send an annual PPM statement to any customer with a prepayment meter.

2.4 Meter reading and billing

- 2.4.1 The supplier will use all reasonable endeavours to take an actual meter reading for each metered customer on at least an annual basis⁵.
- 2.4.2 The supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer by reference to an actual meter reading where available (as per section 2.4.1).
- 2.4.3 If an actual meter reading is not available the supplier will calculate the amount of electricity or gas used by reference to a customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate). If the

⁴ For clarity, all customers that have requested electronic bills or statements must receive these at least quarterly

⁵ Gas suppliers are responsible for reading customer meters: electricity suppliers are not responsible for this task. However, electricity suppliers have an agreement with NIE Networks as the common services provider. NIE Networks reads customer meters on behalf of electricity suppliers. The supplier is responsible for having systems in place to obtain meter readings from NIE Networks.

supplier does not consider the customer meter reading to be reasonably accurate it will take all reasonable steps to contact the customer and request a new meter reading.

2.4.4 If neither an actual meter reading nor a customer meter reading is available the supplier will estimate the amount of electricity or gas consumed by the customer (based on previous consumption data if available).

2.4.5 If the customer receives a bill or statement showing an estimated meter reading it may provide the supplier with a customer meter reading. The supplier must accept this customer meter reading (if the supplier considers the reading to be reasonably accurate) and provide an updated bill or statement reflecting this reading (if requested).

2.4.6 Where a supplier has not been able to take a meter reading for a customer on at least an annual basis the supplier will retain evidence of the reasonable endeavours taken to secure a meter reading for at least three years. The supplier will provide this evidence to the Authority if requested.

2.5 Final bills and statements

2.5.1 Where a credit customer has ended its contract with a supplier according to the terms and conditions of the contract, the supplier will send a final bill or statement to the credit customer no later than six weeks after ceasing to provide electricity or gas to the customer⁶ (note: this is not applicable for a prepayment customer).

2.6 Provision of consumption information to electricity and gas suppliers and energy services providers

2.6.1 This section of the code relates to the provision of billing information⁷ to electricity and gas supplier and energy services providers. It applies in those circumstances where a supplier:

⁶ Suppliers are encouraged to send final bills as soon as practicable when a customer has switched supplier; however, this must not be later than six weeks after the customer has switched supplier.

⁷ Billing information means: (a) any information relating to the consumption of electricity or gas by the customer at the premises identified in the request; and (b) any information enclosed with, or set out in, any bill or statement previously sent by the licensee to the customer at such premises.

- currently supplies electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request⁸; or
- has in the previous twelve months supplied electricity or gas to the customer identified in the customer information request; and
- the billing information specified in the customer information request is held or recorded by the supplier.

2.6.2 The supplier will provide the billing information specified in the customer information request free of charge and within ten working days to any electricity or gas supplier or energy services provider.

2.6.3 If the information held by the supplier is not in a form that can be determined for the specified period as requested in the customer information request, the supplier will:

- give notice to the electricity or gas supplier or the energy services provider (as the case may be) that the billing information cannot be provided for only the specified period; and
- provide the requested billing information held for any period that includes the specified period.

2.6.4 The supplier will not process a customer information request for any energy services provider unless the energy services provider submits written evidence of the customer's consent to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.

2.6.5 The supplier will not submit a customer information request to another electricity or gas supplier unless it has (and retains) evidence of the consent of the customer for it to obtain the information specified in the customer information request.

2.7 Free of charge

2.7.1 The supplier will not charge the customer for any information, including any bill or statement. This requirement does not apply in respect of providing additional copies of bills or statements.

⁸ A customer information request means a request for billing information in respect of the customer at the premises identified, and for the period specified, in the request.

- 2.7.2 With regard to section 2.6, the supplier will not charge the customer for providing any of the services set out in 2.6 to the customer, to any electricity or gas supplier, or to an energy services provider.

2.8 Changes to bills or statements

- 2.8.1 The supplier will keep a record of any changes made to its bills or statements in each calendar year.
- 2.8.2 The supplier will submit the record of changes referred to in 2.8.1 to the UR on an annual basis (along with the annual Retail Energy Market Monitoring information) or on request if necessary.

3 Requirements for the content of domestic bills and statements

This section includes many of the legislative requirements with regard to energy billing. However, there are also requirements related to billing which come from other pieces of consumer legislation. For the avoidance of doubt, suppliers are responsible for ensuring that all bills and statements comply with all relevant legislation.

3.1 Customer and supplier information

- 3.1.1 The supplier will include the following information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:
- Supplier name and address; and
 - Customer Meter Point Registration Number (MPRN) – for electricity customers; or
 - Customer Supply Meter Point Number (SMPN) – for gas customers.

3.2 Tariff information

- 3.2.1 The supplier will include the following tariff related information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:
- The full name of the customer's applicable tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name);

- The unit rate of the customer's applicable tariff – expressed in “pence per kWh” where applicable;
- Any discount or premium that applies to the tariff when compared to the supplier's standard tariff (where applicable for the same payment method); and
- The following statement to highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available:

Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer other tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumercouncil.org.uk or by phoning 0800 121 6022.

3.3 Consumption and charging information

3.3.1 The supplier will include the following consumption and charging information on all customer bills and statements:

- The total charges for the period of the bill or statement.
- The breakdown of the total charges, including:
 - any applicable standing charges;
 - total charges exclusive of VAT; and
 - total charges including VAT.

Where other charges are applicable, these will be listed separately in the breakdown of charges.

- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer since the last bill or statement sent to the customer. The amount of electricity or gas is determined according to section 2.4 i.e. the supplier will calculate the consumption using an actual read where available; a customer read where an actual read is not available; or an estimated meter read where neither an actual nor a customer read is available.

- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer at the premises in the previous 12 months – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for 12 months or more.
- The amount of electricity or gas that has been consumed by the customer at the premises since the supplier started to provide the supply of electricity or gas – in those cases where the supplier has provided a supply of electricity or gas to the customer at the same premises for less than 12 months.

3.3.2 For customers that are supplied via a prepayment meter (or were for any part of the statement period), the supplier will provide, on the annual PPM statement, the number and total value of the pre-payments made by the customer in each calendar month of the statement period.

3.3.3 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer if any action needs to be taken following receipt of the bill or statement, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid, details of how much to be paid and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements.

3.4 Consumption comparison information

3.4.1 This section of the code relates to the provision of consumption information to customers that have been with the electricity or gas supplier throughout the period:

- commencing with the start of the corresponding period in the previous year; and
- ending with the end of the period to which the bill or statement relates.

3.4.2 The supplier will provide a comparison of the customer's consumption of electricity or gas in the period covered by the bill or statement with the same customer's consumption of electricity or gas for the corresponding period in the previous year.

3.5 Additional information to be provided on the bill or statement

- 3.5.1 The supplier will include a statement to inform the customer that other electricity and gas suppliers are available. Details of where the customer can obtain impartial advice and information about changing electricity or gas suppliers will also be provided⁹.
- 3.5.2 Electricity suppliers only: the supplier will include the fuel mix information – this must be the most recently published fuel mix information (published annually by the Authority as per Condition 41 of the electricity supply licence).
- 3.5.3 The supplier will include a statement to:
- advise customers that are having difficulty paying their electricity or gas bills to contact them immediately for help and guidance; and
 - Inform customers about the existence of a code of practice for customers that are having difficulty paying for the supply of electricity or gas¹⁰.

3.6 Additional information to be provided on or with the bill or statement

- 3.6.1 The supplier will provide information about the handling of complaints including:
- the customer's right to complain to the supplier and initiate the complaints procedure (free of charge), as outlined in the code of practice for complaints handling procedure – this includes providing the postal address and telephone number of the supplier's complaints handling department and details on how to request a copy of the code of practice;
 - the role of CCNI in assisting the resolution of complaints which the supplier has not resolved to the customer's satisfaction – this includes providing the postal address and telephone number of CCNI; and

⁹ For clarity, the requirement under 3.5.1 is covered within the requirement under section 1.5.1

¹⁰ Decision paper on codes of practice minimum standards:

http://www.uregni.gov.uk/uploads/publications/Final_Codes_of_Practice_Decision_Paper.pdf

- the customer's right to refer billing related complaints to the UR if CCNI has not been able to resolve the complaint to the customer's satisfaction.

3.6.2 The supplier will inform customers that the Energy Consumer Checklist is accessible from the supplier's website; and that the supplier will send a copy to the customer on request, and free of charge.

3.6.3 The supplier will include contact details (including website address) of at least one organisation that provides information or assistance on measures which will help customers to improve their energy efficiency.

3.7 Supplier's Notice of Rights (gas suppliers only)

3.7.1 The supplier will include the following on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- the website address of the Supplier's Notice of Rights; and
- details on how the customer can request a printed copy of the Supplier's Notice of Rights.

4 Requirements for the format of domestic bills and statements

4.1 Font – typeface, size and colour

4.1.1 The supplier will choose a font size, typeface and line spacing that is easily readable for the customer.

4.1.2 The supplier will give regard to the use of font colours and avoid colours that are more difficult to read.

4.2 Layout of important information

4.2.1 The supplier will include the following information on the front of the bill or statement:

Front of bill or statement
Customer details including: Name MPRN/SMPN/account number

Billing address
Billing period – to which the bill or statement relates
Total charges for the period including VAT
Action to be taken by the customer – see section 1.3.1 ¹¹
Date of any payment due
Customer's tariff information as detailed in section 3.2 ¹²

4.2.2 Any information added to the front of the bill or statement in addition to 4.2.1 must not reduce the customer's ability to see clearly, read and understand the mandatory information.

¹¹ When a customer receives a bill or statement it must be obvious to them what action is required, for example: if an outstanding amount is to be paid details of how much to be paid, and the date of payment; if a direct debit payment is to be collected from the customer's account, details of the amount to be collected and the customer's agreed collection arrangements

¹² The supplier will include the following tariff related information on each bill or statement sent to the customer:

- The full name of the customer's applicable tariff (in all cases where the tariff has a name);
- The unit rate of the customer's applicable tariff – expressed in "pence per kWh" where applicable;
- Any discount or premium that applies to the tariff when compared to the supplier's standard tariff (where applicable for the same payment method); and
- The following statement to highlight to the customer that there may be cheaper tariff options available:
Thank you for choosing <supplier name>. We may offer other tariff options so please check our website <website details> or speak to one of our advisors <customer number> to find out if you are on the best deal for you. You may also change your <electricity/gas> supplier. Impartial advice and information about tariffs and switching can be found at www.consumer council.org.uk or by phoning 0800 121 6022.