



Code of Practice for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances

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Code of Practice for Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances.

This code of practice outlines our policies in relation to the provision of special services to customers in vulnerable circumstances who require them. This code only applies to our Northern Ireland residential electricity customers.

The definition of 'Vulnerable' or 'Vulnerability' as per the Code of Practice is: *"A consumer is deemed vulnerable when their personal characteristics or circumstances reduce their ability to engage effectively and achieve fair outcomes. A vulnerable customer is significantly less able to protect or represent their interests and significantly more likely to suffer detrimental impacts on their health, wellbeing or finances."*

Electric Ireland is committed to providing the best service possible to all our customers. In particular, we are concerned about customers who require special services, for example, those with special requirements and the elderly and any customer in vulnerable circumstances.

In this Code of Practice, we have set down our commitments to providing those special services which are provided by Electric Ireland free of charge.

- ▶ We will provide a customer care register for customers who require special services covered by this code. Registration details will be requested during the sign-up process for a new contract. If there is a change in customer requirements, these can be provided by contacting us at any time.
- ▶ We will contact our customers on an annual basis to advise them of the existence of this register.
- ▶ We will ensure that our staff are trained to implement this Code of Practice. We have a specialist vulnerability team to support any customer who requires specialist support and we will ensure are trained to proactively identify any customer who is potentially vulnerable, establish if they are in need of support and provide the relevant support.
- ▶ We will work closely with organisations representing customers with additional needs, to support the services we provide and connect customers with these organisations to offer further support.
- ▶ Customers can nominate a friend, relative or carer to liaise with Electric Ireland on their behalf and receive their electricity bills if required. Please call us on 0345 600 5335 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am–7pm) to arrange this service.
- ▶ Where available, we will provide free reasonable adjustments or special controls and adaptors for customers who are on our care register and have difficulty accessing or using their meters or other electrical appliances in their home.

For vision impaired, hearing, speech or mobility impaired customers

We offer a range of services for customers who have sight, hearing or mobility difficulties and to avail of these services, customers must register their details with us. Details for customers who sign up for these services will be forwarded securely to NIE Networks for inclusion in the industry register. These special services include:

- **Braille bills**– we can provide braille bills to people who are braille readers.
- **Talking bills** – we can provide talking bills to people who are blind or have a visual impairment. When a bill is due for issue, we will telephone the customer, or a nominated contact person, with the details. The paper bill is then posted to them.
- **Large print bill** – for people with visual impairment.
- **Redirecting bills** – for customers who have sight, hearing or mobility difficulties, we can send the bill to a nominated friend or relative, by agreement if requested to do so.
- **SMS** – we provide an SMS text service which is particularly useful for customers with hearing difficulties. Customers may also avail of our social media platforms to contact us.

These facilities are also available to all our customers who may wish to make enquiries, or complaints about any services provided by Electric Ireland.

To understand our complaints process please visit: www.electricireland.com/residential/helpful-links/codes-of-practice

Customers with mobility problems

If a customer has a mobility difficulty or cannot read their meter or wishes to have their meter re-located, they should contact us on 0345 600 5335 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am–7pm) to discuss their needs and we will advise on the most suitable options available.

Meter readings

Should our customer or any other person occupying their premises be unable to read the electricity meter, we will arrange to have the meter read at least once each quarter and we will inform the customer of the reading.

Payment difficulties

Customers who are struggling to pay their energy bills should contact us as soon as possible and we can work with you to agree a payment plan that considers your individual circumstances. We promise to engage with all customers in a sensitive and professional manner.

Further details on our policies may be found in our Code of Practice on payment of bills. We will take all reasonable steps to never knowingly disconnect the energy supply of any vulnerable customer between 1st of October and 31st of March. If you are vulnerable and are having problems paying your bills, let us know so that your supply is not disconnected and we can find a suitable repayment arrangement for you.

Energy efficiency advice

We also provide energy efficiency advice to all customers to support them in understanding, managing and reducing their energy consumption to help reduce costs. More information is available in our Code of Practice on the Efficient Use of Electricity.



Registration for customers dependent on medical equipment

We offer a registration service for customers who are reliant on home medical equipment, both life supporting and non-life supporting. This equipment includes home dialysis, oxygen concentrators, nebulisers, stair lifts, bath hoists etc.

Details of customers who register will be forwarded securely to NIE Networks for inclusion in their Medical Customer Care Register. This will enable NIE Networks to identify customers who are particularly vulnerable to an energy supply interruption. We can then provide priority support to them and update them on the expected duration of any power cut.

NIE Networks can be contacted directly on 0345 764 3643 at any time in relation to the Medical Customer Care Register, power cuts, or supply quality.

Elderly customers

In the case of elderly customers (defined as those over pensionable age) who are registered with us, Electric Ireland will pass on the customers' details securely to NIE Networks for inclusion in their medical customer care register. This register will give customers who rely on electricity for healthcare needs - extra support during a power cut.

Confidentiality

The details of customers who register with us for Priority Services or Special Services needs must be passed securely to NIE Networks for inclusion in their medical and customer care registers, to enable them to provide the relevant support depending on your individual circumstances.

Identifying Officers

Any officer attending a customer's premises will carry photographic ID bearing their name, issue date/expiry date, and a contact telephone number, which can be called to verify their identity. If NIE Networks call out to a customer's premises on our behalf, they will also carry photographic ID.

If you are unsure of any caller, you can also call the **Quick Check 101** service on freephone 0800 0132290 to check if the caller is genuine. The Quick Check 101 operator will inform the PSNI if information provided appears suspicious.

We also operate a password system whereby the customer can advise us of a password, which can be used to identify any company officers or representatives who may call to the customer on behalf of Electric Ireland.

For more information and support for any of these services please contact us:

Tel: 0345 600 5335 (Monday to Friday 8.30am-7pm)

Email: customerservice@electricireland.com

General advice for our vulnerable customers is also available from the Consumer Council – see contact details below:

The Consumer Council

Floor 3, Seatem House

28-32 Alfred Street

Belfast

BT2 8EN

Tel: 028 9025 1600

Email: contact@consumercouncil.org.uk

Web: www.consumercouncil.org.uk

Copies of our Customer Charter and other codes can be obtained in the following ways:

Tel: 0345 600 5335 (Monday to Friday, 8:30am-7pm)

Email: customerservice@electricireland.com

By post: Electric Ireland
1st Floor, 1 Cromac Quay, The Gasworks,
Belfast BT7 2JD,
Northern Ireland

By email: customerservice@electricireland.com

Online: www.electricireland.com

