

L18/08/09



Eimear Smyth
Gas Supply and Distribution Division
The Utility Regulator
Queen's House
10-14 Queen's Street
Belfast BT1 6ER

5 August 2009

Dear Eimear

Re: Consultation on Prepayment Gas Meters in Northern Ireland

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to your consultation on the important issue for older people of prepayment gas meters. As the Advocate for older people I would suggest the following recommendations should be followed through as soon as possible:

- Utility suppliers should consider the merits of introducing a harmonised code of practice in relation to helping customers to avoid debt and in the event of debt occurring in the management of their way out of that debt
- **4.5:** Customers should pay the same amount for the same level of service provision at any time, regardless of the cost of installed equipment and this should also apply to Quantum meters
- **5.0:** In the current difficult financial climate it is imperative that consideration be given to the specific needs of vulnerable customers who are paying off debt through PAYG meters with a debt facility and should be on the same tariff as other PAYG customers

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Joan'.

DAME JOAN HARBISON
Older People's Advocate