



# Meeting the needs of all consumers

Inclusive Customer Service



# Foreword from our CEO



Phoenix Natural Gas has been fuelling homes and businesses locally since 1996, and as the owner and operator of the largest natural gas distribution network in Northern Ireland we recognise the importance of delivering our services in a manner that best meets the needs of consumers.

Throughout the last 25 years, we have embedded a culture of continuous improvement across our business with the aim of carrying out our activities in a manner that recognises the specific needs of our customer base while also delivering on our vision to be recognised for excellence as a world leading utility operator.

Central to that is a relentless focus on ensuring our services are fully inclusive and deliver fair and equitable results for all consumers, and in particular that we have the right processes and protections in place to support consumers in vulnerable situations.

Working closely with industry and consumer representative parties such as the Utility Regulator (UR) and Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (CCNI), we have developed our approach to inclusive customer service in a way that is designed to identify consumers with specific needs, and in turn ensure that we can suitably shape our service delivery in a manner that is most relevant to meet these needs.

Through our work with external agencies and our own consumer engagement, we recognise that across our customer base there will be a breadth of specific needs and vulnerabilities, both fixed and transient in nature, and as such we have developed our approach to inclusive customer service to align to the Utility Regulator's definition of vulnerability:

*'A consumer is deemed vulnerable when their personal characteristics or circumstances reduce their ability to engage effectively and achieve fair outcomes. A vulnerable consumer is significantly less able to protect or represent their interests and significantly more likely to suffer detrimental impacts on their health, wellbeing or finances'*

**Utility Regulator Northern Ireland**

I trust you will find our approach to inclusive customer service helpful and we look forward to continuing to work with consumers, representative bodies and communities as we continually improving and adapting our services to ensure they best meet societal needs.

**Michael McKinstry**  
Chief Executive Officer

# Contents

<b>2</b>	Chief Executives Foreword	<b>10</b>	Championing Vulnerability
<b>4</b>	The Phoenix Values	<b>11</b>	Industry Support
<b>5</b>	An Inclusive Approach	<b>12</b>	Supporting communities
<b>6</b>	Inclusive Training	<b>13</b>	Useful Contacts
<b>7</b>	Partnership Working	<b>14</b>	Standards of Service
<b>8</b>	Understanding your needs	<b>16</b>	Contact Us
<b>9</b>	Easy to reach		

# The Phoenix Values

The Phoenix Values are at the heart of how we do business. Embedded across our business, they are the standards we hold ourselves and our employees to in delivering the best possible outcomes for our customers and the communities we serve.



# An Inclusive Approach

As an essential services provider we play an active and critical role in the lives of local communities, engaging with domestic and business energy users, members of the public and community representatives.

Each year we:



Help **122,000** customers over the phone



Engage with **51,000** consumers face to face



Build **80km** of new gas network



Connect **8,000** new customers to our gas network

From building new gas infrastructure to connecting homes and businesses to the gas network and maintaining our existing apparatus, our operational activities are typically carried out in public areas, requiring us to engage with members of the public on a regular basis.

With a focus on providing inclusive customer service, we recognise that there may be times when some consumers will need additional, specific support from us.

This may be due to a range of issues, including but not limited to:



Mobility challenges



Communication barriers



Mental Wellbeing



Financial hardship



Disability, including hidden disabilities

In the sections to come, we detail the key ways in which we ensure that our business and our employees are equipped with the right training, skills and knowledge to meet the needs of all consumers.

# Inclusive Training

We aim to provide the highest standards of service in every consumer interaction, which means recognising differences and ensuring a culture of respect and inclusivity throughout our business.

To ensure a consistent approach to inclusive service, we have invested in specific training for all customer-facing employees.

Through the training, which is refreshed annually, we equip employees with the skills and knowledge they need to identify situations where a consumer may have additional needs and in turn identify the ways we can adapt our processes to ensure they have equitable access to our services.

The delivery of our training and service provision is focussed on 3 key principles:



- What are the **Signs** that a customer may need additional support?
- **Consider** the impact our works or processes may have on the consumer.
- What can we do to **Adjust** our process or activities to make things easier for the consumer?

In addition to understanding a wide range of vulnerabilities and the practical steps that can be taken to support consumers, the training also promotes the Vulnerability Hub, an online resource for all employees which highlights a range of supports available both internally and externally for consumers in vulnerable situations.

Employees have access to an online Signs, Consider, Adjust Toolkit and can speak to any of our expert internal Vulnerability Champions for any further support or guidance they may need to assist a consumer.

# Partnership Working



Our teams are trained to treat every customer with respect, empathy and dignity. Recognising that we cannot always provide all the support a consumer may need, we work with expert partners and charities, that are often best placed to provide more holistic interventions for a range of consumer groups, including:

### - JAM Card Friendly

Our teams have undertaken training to better support consumers with autism, a learning disability or communication barrier with the 'Just-A-Minute' initiative, discreetly helping when they need that extra minute or bit of time when accessing our services.

### - Dementia Friendly

Working with the Alzheimer's Society NI, we have delivered Dementia Friends training to employees across the organisation, equipping them with a wider understanding of dementia and the small things they can adjust in our service delivery to help make life easier for consumers with dementia.

### - Advice NI

Our partnership with Advice NI provides additional support for consumers with welfare, financial and debt management concerns. Through an established referral process, we can ensure consumers get access to practical welfare, money advice and support from Advice NI, the independent advice network.



# Understanding Your Needs

**Meeting the needs of all consumers means putting people first and providing flexible service solutions.**

We actively engage with consumers and consumer bodies and representatives to ensure our services and business decisions are shaped by consumer insight and experience.

These insights are captured through a variety of ways, from formal independent consumer research and surveys through to direct consumer and representative body feedback on the services delivered. All of this insight informs and improves our operations and ensure we deliver a high quality consumer experience in every interaction.

One output of such insights has been the development of Special Considerations notifications which enable us to ensure that service adjustments for a consumer are communicated to all colleagues and teams involved. While only a small change to our process, the development of these notifications means that consumers only need to tell us once about any adjustments they need, without having to detail them on any subsequent works at their home.



# Easy to reach

We offer a range of ways for consumers to communicate with us, and our Belfast based contact centre team provide consumer support through a range of different communication channels, including:

-  Telephone
-  Email
-  Letter
-  In person

Upon request, for consumers with specific requirements we provide:

- **Alternative large and braille format letters**
- **Text-to-speech and speech-to-text relay services**
- **Translation services for consumers who do not use English as a first language**
- **Minicom access for consumers with hearing impairments**

**- If we need to contact you:**

We do not carry out works unannounced unless it is an emergency or there is a safety concern.

In advance of planned meter works, consumers will be notified at least six weeks in advance, with clear contact details included should an alternative appointment date or time need to be arranged.

When visiting a consumers home, our employees will always carry identification. Consumers can also confirm an employees identity by calling Phoenix directly or using Quickcheck and dialing 101 - the police non-emergency number.



# Championing Vulnerability

Supporting our commitment to inclusive service and to ensure we provide the best possible service to consumers with specific needs, we have developed a specialist team equipped to provide guidance to our customer-facing teams.

The Phoenix Vulnerability Champions cover all areas of our operations and provide additional support and expertise in cases which are more complex or where additional adjustments are needed in our service provision.

Speaking about the role, Annemarie Scott, Phoenix Vulnerability Champions explains:

**“We want to ensure employees are aware of and confident in raising any concerns or issues they have about a consumer in a vulnerable situation, and when they need further guidance or support, that’s where we as a team of Vulnerability Champions can help.**

**“It’s really important that having completed the vulnerability training that employees feel empowered to help consumers and to know they have the tools available to enable them to provide the best possible service and support for all consumers.”**

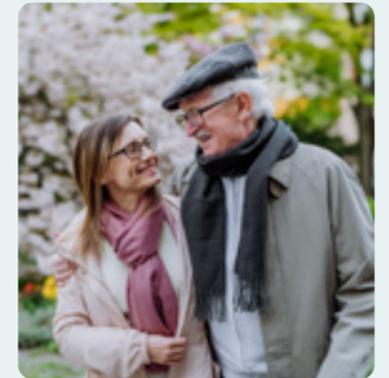


# Industry Support

As a responsible network operator, we work alongside natural gas suppliers to ensure consumers are aware of additional help and support available across the wider industry, including:

- **Energy Care Schemes** – Natural gas suppliers offer a range of free services and additional support for consumers who:
  - are of pensionable age
  - are registered disabled
  - are chronically sick

Consumers can contact their suppliers directly to register for these free, voluntary schemes. We promote Energy Care Schemes throughout our operations and encourage eligible consumers to register for the gas supplier Energy Care Scheme.



- **Energy Efficiency** – We help consumers use only the energy they need and ensure their home is as energy efficient as possible.

We work with partners to raise awareness of the practical and financial support available for home energy efficiency improvements, including:

- The Boiler Replacement Allowance Scheme
- The Affordable Warmth Scheme
- The Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme

**Did you know** that Phoenix offer free Energy Efficiency talks for groups to help people to learn how to use less energy in their home to experience the same outcome?

To find out more or to book a talk contact [marketing@phoenixnaturalgas.com](mailto:marketing@phoenixnaturalgas.com)



- **Help Beyond Energy** - We know that we cannot provide all the help that a consumer may need which is why we work with a number of expert external organisations that can offer specific, additional support for consumers when they need it. This includes support across:

- Finance
- Mental and physical health
- Addiction
- Loneliness and isolation

We aim to provide a warm handover or referral to partner agencies where we have consumer consent, such as Advice NI, ensuring they get all the support they need.



We strive to deliver the best possible standards of service and we continue to review and enhance our service with feedback from our customers, communities, partners and teams.

# Supporting Communities



## Addressing Disadvantage

Phoenix Natural Gas established the Energy for Children Charitable Trust in 2005 to provide financial support to groups and individuals that may slip through the net of the wider charity network.

Founded on the principle that 'all monies raised go directly to local children and young people', the Trust aims to reach deeper into the heart of local communities throughout Greater Belfast and beyond in order to really make a difference to disadvantaged children's lives.

Although the Trust was founded initially by the natural gas industry, it is now supported by a variety of different sectors and organisations locally as it continues to grow. Since its formation, the trust has helped over 8,000 local children and every month continues to help those who need it most.

Contact the Energy for Children Charity Liaison Officer at:  
[gillian.orr@energyforchildren-ni.org](mailto:gillian.orr@energyforchildren-ni.org) for further information.

## Supporting Communities

As a responsible business, we work to deliver positive impacts, beyond our core business operations, across the communities we serve.

To enable thriving and connected communities in 2022, Phoenix established the Phoenix Community Fund. The Fund is designed to support community groups and organisations across our licence area, helping them deliver activity that reduces social isolation, removes barriers to inclusion and promotes equality in their community.

The Phoenix Community Fund is currently open for applications, with applications reviewed and funding awarded on a quarterly basis.

Full information on the Phoenix Community Fund, including Terms and Conditions is available on our website.



# Useful contacts

You may find some of these external agencies useful:



**Advice NI**  
0800 915 4604  
[www.adviceni.net](http://www.adviceni.net)



**NI Energy Advice**  
0800 111 4455  
[www.nihe.gov.uk/Energy/Energy-Query](http://www.nihe.gov.uk/Energy/Energy-Query)



**Gas Safe**  
0800 408 5500  
[www.gassaferegister.co.uk/](http://www.gassaferegister.co.uk/)



**Northern Ireland House Executive**  
03448 920 900  
[www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)



**NI Federation of Housing Associations**  
028 9023 0446  
[www.nifha.org](http://www.nifha.org)



**Quick Check** - Check if a caller is genuine  
101  
[www.psnipolice.uk](http://www.psnipolice.uk)



**Utility Regulator NI**  
028 9031 1575  
[www.uregni.gov.uk](http://www.uregni.gov.uk)



**Consumer Council NI**  
028 9025 1600  
[www.consumercouncil.org.uk](http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk)

# Standards of Service

Phoenix Natural Gas prides itself on delivering the highest standards of customer service. As well as operating in a highly regulated environment where standards are expected, we believe in exceeding customer expectations in every interaction.

Outlined below are the Phoenix Standards of Service including actual performance for 2021.

STANDARD OF SERVICE	ACTUAL	PERFORMANCE LEVEL TARGET
<b>CUSTOMER CONTACT</b>		
<b>Customer correspondence</b> Written correspondence will receive a reply within ten working days. Correspondence may be responded to by telephone unless you request a written response.	100%	97%
<b>Customer Complaints</b> Complainants will receive a full response to their complaint within 10 working days, where applicable.	99%	97%
<b>CONNECTION</b>		
<b>Moving of meter</b> Phoenix Natural Gas will reposition an ordinary meter within 15 days of a quotation being accepted.	90%	100%
<b>Change of meter</b> Phoenix Natural Gas will change the meter of a domestic customer within 10 working days of a referral by the Supply Company	100%	100%
<b>RESPONDING TO GAS EMERGENCIES</b>		
<b>Uncontrolled gas emergencies</b> Uncontrolled gas escapes will be attended to within one hour of being notified to Phoenix Natural Gas.	98%	97%
<b>Controlled gas escapes</b> Controlled gas escapes will be attended to within two hours of being notified to Phoenix Natural Gas.	100%	97%
<b>PREPAYMENT METERS</b>		
<b>Faulty Prepayment Meters</b> Phoenix Natural Gas will visit a faulty prepayment meter with 4 hours of being notified.	100%	97%
<b>RESTORATION OF GAS SUPPLY</b>		
<b>Supply Restoration</b> Following the disconnection of a domestic customer's gas supply due to a fault in the network, the transportation business will restore, on the basis of reasonable practicality, the domestic customer's gas supply within 24 hours.	100%	97%
<b>Reconnection after non-payment</b> Customers disconnected for non-payment will be reconnected within 24 hours of referral by a gas supplier.	100%	100%

# Standards of Service

The Individual Standards of Service were introduced as part of the Energy Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and determine the expected standards of performance measures which local gas companies must provide for their customers.

The standards appliance for Phoenix and how we have performed against them in 2021 are outlined below:

STANDARD OF SERVICE	% pass
<b>METER DISPUTES</b>	
Distribution companies must provide customers an explanation on the probable cause of any meter accuracy issues within 15 working days. If an appointment is necessary, the company must offer this within seven working days to investigate. Where a customer informs their supplier of an issue, the supplier must report this to the distribution company within one working day.	99%
<b>METER MIX UPS</b>	
Distribution companies must ensure that customers are not billed erroneously due to a wrongly assigned meter.	100%
<b>PREPAYMENT METERS</b>	
Distribution companies must deal with reports of problems with prepayment meters within four working hours. Where a customer informs their supplier of a problem with a prepayment meter, the supplier must notify the distribution company of any report of the problem within four working hours.	100%
<b>APPOINTMENTS</b>	
Distribution companies and supply companies must offer and keep an appointment within a maximum two hour time band, or if acceptable to the customer an appointment within the time bands: • AM 8.30-13.00 or • PM 12.00-5.00	100%
<b>SUPPLY RESTORATION</b>	
Distribution companies must restore supply within 24 hours to a customer whose gas supply has been discontinued as a result of a failure of, fault in or damage to the pipe-line system operated by the relevant gas conveyer.	100%
<b>REINSTATEMENT OF CUSTOMERS</b>	
Distribution companies must reinstate customer premises within 5 working days following work to a service pipe and any associated work to a distribution main where the pipe or main lies under or within the premises of a customer.	100%
<b>QUOTATIONS FOR CONNECTION</b>	
Distribution companies are required to provide customers with a cost estimate for a new gas supply within 10 working days for standard jobs and 28 days for non-standard work.	100%
<b>NOTICE OF PLANNED INTERRUPTION</b>	
Distribution companies must give at least three days notice to customers whose supply will be interrupted by planned maintenance or replacement work to the pipe-line system operated by the relevant gas conveyer.	100%
<b>RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS</b>	
Distribution companies must provide a substantive response to written or verbal complaints within 10 working days.	99%



# Contact Us

We make it as easy as possible for consumers to get in touch.



## Contact Us



0345 4 555 555



[info@phoenixnaturalgas.com](mailto:info@phoenixnaturalgas.com)



Customer Services, 197 Airport Road West,  
Belfast, BT3 9ED



Facebook - Phoenix Natural Gas, Twitter - @Phoenixni



197 Airport Road West, Belfast BT3 9ED

---

If you smell gas or are worried about gas safety call the 24  
hour Gas Emergency Service on - **0800 002 001**

If you are worried about the identify of a person claiming to be from Phoenix Natural  
Gas at your door, call QuickCheck on **101** - the police non-emergency number

---