

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

11CM13

John Briggs,  
Clerk and Chief Executive

7 May 2008

Ms S Evans  
Consumer Policy Manager  
Riverside House  
2A Southwark Bridge Road  
LONDON  
SE1 9HA

Dear Ms Evans

***OFCOM REVIEW OF ADDITIONAL CHARGES***

The Public Services Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 10 March 2008 decided that a scrutiny panel should be established to consider a response to the above consultation document. (Membership of a scrutiny panel comprises two members from each political party and one independent; the Panel is facilitated by Council officers). As a consequence of its deliberations, the following comments are made:

Armagh City and District Council wishes to place on record its concern at the impact additional charges will have, particularly on the most vulnerable in society : senior citizens and those on low incomes and benefits. It believes that customers should be able to choose a method most suited to their needs and therefore should not be penalised for paying by a different method. By imposing charges there is also a risk of customers incurring additional bank charges as a result of inadequate funds in the account to meet the direct debit payment.

Armagh City and District Council wishes to stress that many senior citizens do not have bank accounts and currently pay bills through the collection of stamps at post offices. In particular, the Council is concerned about the detrimental impact proposed closures of many post offices will have on the rural area as this will only further exacerbate problems in this community.

Whilst the Council welcomes the BT Basic Scheme, it considers that BT should extend its scheme to all citizens and particularly wishes to see the inclusion of those on low incomes as, in some cases, families on low incomes are less well-off than some families in receipt of benefits. In addition, the Council is concerned about the lack of awareness raising in relation to the scheme.

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The Council expresses concern at the level of awareness campaigns and communication of the change in payment policy. It considers that extensive work in this area is required in order to ensure that customers are aware of the charges from the outset and would suggest that this should be completed through the use of appropriate communication channels suited to individual needs.

The Council wishes to be kept informed of developments. It would be helpful if your response could be e-mailed to [jennifer.mcaneney@armagh.gov.uk](mailto:jennifer.mcaneney@armagh.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely

W J Briggs  
*Clerk and Chief Executive*

/JMCA