



Western Power Distribution Customer Collaboration Panel

Spotlight Report 2018-2019

1. Introduction

The Panel is a group of people who meet in one of WPD's local depots four times a year. It has been in place for 11 years and currently has a pool of 33 permanent, expert members.

Our approach has always been to work with WPD to support the development, delivery and scrutiny of their plans. With the creation of new terms of reference, we have been able to clarify and confirm the co-creative nature of the Panel and provide an identity distinct from the challenge provided by the Customer Engagement Group (CEG). Following the issue of Ofgem's guidance on Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement to "give consumers a stronger voice in setting outputs, shaping and assessing Business Plans" we endorsed WPD's planned approach to the set-up of the CEG.

The CEG was established this year following our review and ratification of WPD's proposals for the plan and structure. The group reviewed the extensive work WPD had done on the recruitment of the CEG Chair and made key recommendations to improve the process, which were actioned in full by WPD, including the anonymisation of applications to ensure equality of opportunity.

Our objectives as a Panel are to:

- Act as an advocate for consumers.
- Provide expert advice on, but not limited to, WPD's initiatives, customer service and operations.
- Provide feedback, analysis and opinion on WPD's initiatives.
- Highlight and advise WPD on key issues of current or emerging consumer concern to help scope and shape WPD's approach.
- Act as a "sounding board" to allow WPD to test innovation and ideas for initiatives.
- Provide an environment where new ideas supporting WPD's development can be created, shared and evolved.
- Support and facilitate partnerships between WPD and consumer or specialist interest groups.

The Panel holds closed sessions for members preceding the main meeting with WPD. This facilitates an open discussion on any issues that need to be highlighted and how any challenges or questions will be presented. The closed session allows members to reflect on the agenda and ensures each member is able to raise new topics for further discussion.

2. Executive Summary

Following on from the formation of the CEG, we changed our name to Customer Collaboration Panel (CCP), to reflect the collaborative nature of the work we do with WPD.

The Panel continues to scrutinise WPD's 'Strategic Priorities' (previously agreed by stakeholders). In June 2018 our focus was 'keeping the lights on', in September 2018 we discussed 'Smart Networks' and the move to become a Distribution System Operator (DSO), in December 2018 we discussed 'Government legislation and policy' and in March 2019 we covered 'customer data and awareness'. We look forward to working with WPD to analyse and address the future challenges from the CEG, and to build upon the work we have delivered together this year.

We are proud to report that at the end of 2018/19 our Panel consisted of 38 members with, on average, attendance of 13 members at each meeting. Our members bring skills and experience from a wide range of sectors, serving the interests, diverse needs and requirements of WPD's 7.9 million business and domestic customers.

The following sectors continue to be represented:

- MPs and Government
- Storage providers
- Energy aggregators
- Connections
- Community Energy (CE) groups
- Network security
- Emergency resilience
- Health
- Utilities/energy industry
- Parish Council/Local Authority/LEP
- Education/academics
- Distributed Generation
- Major Energy Users
- Innovation
- Business customers
- Fuel poverty
- Environment
- Vulnerable/hard-to-reach
- Customer service/consumer interest
- Domestic customers

Our role in WPD's overall stakeholder engagement activities is seen as necessary and valuable. Our discussions resulted in 24 substantive actions and improvements in 2018/19 alone and over 100 over the last five years. Outputs range from shaping WPD's consumer vulnerability policies to the review of WPD's Strategy and Engagement Plan. The Panel is able to further scrutinise, challenge and question WPD at specialist afternoon surgeries which follow the main Panel session - 'Connections and Business Customers' and 'Social Obligations'.

2. Executive Summary

The Connections and Business surgery delivered value on a range of topics during 2018/19 including:

- Strengthening WPD's Incentive on Connections Engagement (ICE) workplan and review of WPD's current and future activities and priorities.
- Assessing and feeding into WPD's engagement on Community Energy as part of their work on the future of networks and the transition to a DSO.
- Reviewing the content of WPD's Community Energy web pages to assess how understandable WPD's services are to Community Energy groups, leading to improved content with more accessible information for those Groups.

The Social Obligations surgery delivered a number of improvements, for example in:

- Social media and communications for customers on the Priority Services Register (PSR).
- WPD's Consumer Vulnerability Strategy and priorities for 2019.
- Crisis packs for vulnerable customers in a power cut.

We remain confident that our contributions, ideas and challenges drive WPD to act in the best interests of customers and look forward to another impactful year. The following sections highlight some of the key work that the Panel has influenced and undertaken in more detail during the last year.

3. Panel Actions

Through our expertise the Panel has been able to advise, evaluate and co-create solutions with WPD to drive better outcomes for all customers, domestic and business. A summary of some of this key work has been highlighted in this section and builds upon the extensive stakeholder engagement work carried out by WPD to drive actions and improvements and meet current and future challenges.

3.1. Panel Development and Stakeholder Engagement

The Panel has discussed the possibility of more digital engagement for members and other stakeholders, with the potential to access an online platform for discussion and information. Whilst there is no replacement for face-to-face engagement, WPD has, in collaboration with the Panel, introduced a new online 'Your Power Future' engagement portal which includes further ways for stakeholders to engage with WPD. For example, during the annual flagship workshops in February 2019, in order to broaden discussions to wider customers, WPD filmed each presentation and posted videos online so stakeholders can watch short contextual clips before answering a series of survey questions (both voting and free-form text). They were promoted via Twitter, LinkedIn and email to allow the workshop engagement to be supplemented with 955 stakeholder responses.

3.2. Skills and Sector Review

The members were involved in a key piece of work to ensure that the Panel is made up of the right level of experience and skill. The review included a comprehensive survey and thorough desktop assessment of expertise and sector representation. Members include customer and vulnerable customer representatives, major energy and business users, charities and fuel poverty partners. The review analysed potential gaps such as health, environment, low carbon, electric vehicle and government and concluded that there is a need to invite new members to ensure there is a refresh in the skills and interests in the group, particularly in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)/forestry and future customers where there is a total gap in the sectors represented.

3.3. Performance

The Panel continues to scrutinise WPD's performance with focus on customer services, contact centre performance, network reliability, social media, and lost time accidents. This has driven improvements in the information presented to the Panel.

For example, the Panel specifically requested details on lost time accidents and near misses and has been able to review, and provide feedback on, WPD's safety performance including near misses, risk assessments and WPD's ongoing climate change survey which looks one step further into behavioural safety. We are looking forward to seeing whether data is available to be able to make European and international comparisons.

3.4. Smart Networks

We continue to discuss the WPD DSO plan and have provided advice regarding digitalisation, local energy, local consumption and local area modelling. The Panel supports WPD's commitment to ensure that vulnerable customers are not left behind in a smart future.

3. Panel Actions

3.5. Environment

We worked with WPD to look at sustainable purchasing for the Crisis Packs delivered to vulnerable households during power outages. Following the review, the Panel helped to co-create new versions of the packs which now include wind-up torches (removing the need for batteries) and canvas bags. In addition, packs no longer include hand warmers and foil blankets following member discussions with their clients and colleagues to obtain consumer opinion on what is most useful. The Panel also requested that all supplier's sources were reviewed to assess how sustainable and cost effective they are.

3.6. Connections

The Panel scrutinised WPD's Incentive on Connections Engagement (ICE) plan ensuring that the correct priority areas had been addressed, this included the provision of information on connection charging to reflect Ofgem's charging review decisions.

The panel has contributed to the discussions on Assessment & Design (A&D) fees including the method and timing of charges to ensure they are fair for customers and provide flexibility and capacity for Distribution Network Operators (DNOs).

The review of WPD's work on Flexible Connections looked at the ways more customers can be added without changes to the physical network including the use of limited connection agreements. Panel contributions led to the roll out of flexible and alternative connections for customers as well as improved web pages to educate customers in the opportunities to participate.

Future growth and capacity constraints present a challenge for DNOs and the panel takes an active part in the discussions to support WPD's work in this area.

3.7. Future energy scenarios

The panel has scrutinised and fed in to WPD's Electric Vehicle (EV) Strategy, focusing on the increasing number of existing households converting to EV charging and the capacity of DNO's to cope with the additional demand.

3.8. Customer Satisfaction

To support WPD's drive for continuous improvement the Panel continues to scrutinise Contact Centre performance and Customer Service metrics, driving the provision of better information to facilitate this. This year the panel have requested the addition of social media performance statistics to the information presented by the CEO/Director. Slides now include additional information on the speed of Twitter and webchat responses which builds upon the earlier challenges presented by the Panel to strive towards more digital engagement with customers.

The panel also drove improvement in the information on customer contact by requesting a breakdown of how many medically dependent customers on the PSR were called within certain times during recent storms/incidents. Beneath WPD's longstanding target to call all medically dependent customers within three hours of an incident (100% achieved in 2018/19), they now record the profile of these calls and could report that 71% were called within one hour and 96% in less than two hours.

3. Panel Actions

Panel members tested and provided feedback on the WPD mobile application alarm facility designed for customers with sleep apnoea, for example. This led to improvements in the functionality of the App and the information provided to customers. This also led to PSR customers being able to elect to receive calls out of hours in the event of a power cut.

Panel members have also given extensive feedback on the information provided to customers, including on the WPD website, such as information on Connections, Community Energy, videos on the PSR and the new website 'Your Power Future'.

3.9. Social Obligations

In the last year, the social obligations surgeries have covered a wide range of topics including Power Up, Innovation Fund, Crisis Packs and WPD's Social Obligations programme. The surgery reviewed the strategic aims to improve WPD's understanding of vulnerability, improving the accuracy of the PSR data and addressing fuel poverty. The surgeries also reviewed WPD's future priorities for RIIO ED2.

Listening to Panel feedback, WPD introduced five short animated videos to explain the benefits of the PSR for key hard-to-reach groups: carers, ventilator users, hearing impaired, recent hospital leavers and sufferers of mental health issues.

Our advice on the Priority Services Register (PSR) back in 2017/18 led to a Panel decision that WPD should implement a rolling programme to cleanse the PSR of customers with whom no contact had been made/received in three years. Last year, in the second year of this programme, WPD wrote to over 320,000 customers, enabling removal of around 250,000 customers from the ever-growing register.

The Panel has continued to provide a steer on the development of the Power Up projects, including driving more and better information about the current initiatives and the new Power Up Health and Smart projects on the WPD website.

The Panel also worked with WPD to design a Consumer Vulnerability Innovation Fund – an £80,000 fund allowing organisations to propose new and innovative projects to help tackle fuel poverty. Recognising health as a key factor in customers' ability to cope during power cuts they aimed to find schemes that align with local health services to support vulnerable customers specifically living in off-gas, electrically heated homes. 40 applications led to six new approaches. In total, by March 2019, these projects had already supported 925 customers to save a total of £269k.

3.10. Workforce renewal skills and training

As part of the work WPD are delivering on workforce diversity and inclusion the Panel has requested a female graduate to attend a meeting to tell us about their work.

A Panel member completed a website review and proposed a number of changes which mean the WPD careers website now has a wider appeal and a fits better with the WPD Diversity and Inclusion plan.

4. Next steps

CEG

As the CEG develops we look forward to developing our interface with it, taking our well established and effective approach to scrutiny and co-creation to develop innovative solutions to any challenges that are presented. Our role as a Panel is to help WPD build plans which will be fed into the CEG for them to challenge; we will advise and support WPD to assess the challenges presented back to WPD and help find innovative and effective solutions.

WPD Business Plan

The Panel provided a steer on the WPD Business Plan commitments report by assessing whether the current three tier report meets stakeholders requirements. The Panel has completed a review of WPD's and other DNO reports. We look forward to seeing a final report that is a single document with links to more detailed content. The report should also be readable and accessible for domestic customers, with a good use of infographics and a simple layout.

Community Energy

This growing area will continue to challenge WPD as communities seek to democratise, decentralise and decarbonise electricity production and sales. The Panel will continue to familiarise itself with this fast-changing landscape bringing both challenges and ideas to WPD's thinking. We realise that this should be seen within the larger piece of Smart Grids within which the issues of such things as energy storage, electric vehicles, heat decarbonisation and the continued growth of renewable generation are embedded. A deeper familiarity of the way that new and emerging energy technologies interact with community energy business models is key to this.

The Panel

The current Panel is a good size but would benefit from members from travel/tourism, Local Authorities/planners, and young people as future energy customers. Our member and sector review also identified gaps in:

- AONB/forestry
- Future customers

Power Up Brand

The Power Up advice hubs form part of the WPD Social Obligations programme, which has been overseen, designed and developed with support from the Panel, the current branding has been in place for a number of years. The core projects are split across four schemes covering each of WPD's licence areas; Coventry Citizens' Advice help customers living in the West Midlands, Auriga supports customers in the East Midlands, South Wales customers receive support from Energy Saving Trust and the Centre for Sustainable Energy help customers living in South West England.

The Panel will collaborate with all delivery partners to refresh the Power Up brand to ensure that the logo, strapline and key messages reflect the key work that WPD funds to tackle fuel poverty and promote energy efficiency for vulnerable customers.

3. Overview

