Major Connections Strategy RIIO-ED2

July 2021

WESTERN POWER DISTRIBUTION

Serving the Midlands, South West and Wales

Contents

Who We Are

Western Power Distribution delivers electricity to 7.9 million customers (27% of the UK population) over an area of 55,000km^2.

This electricity is distributed over 220,000km of overhead lines and underground cables, fed from 185,000 substations. The area served by WPD is shown in the map below and covers four licence areas, East Midlands, West Midlands, South West and South Wales.

Large power stations	Transmission	Western Power Distribution				Supply

| Centrally generated power | | Transmitted around the country at 275kV or 400kV | Grid Supply Point | Large substation 132kV | | Primary substation 33kV | | Distribution substation 11kV | Electricity meter | 7.9 million customers (domestic & businesses 230V) |
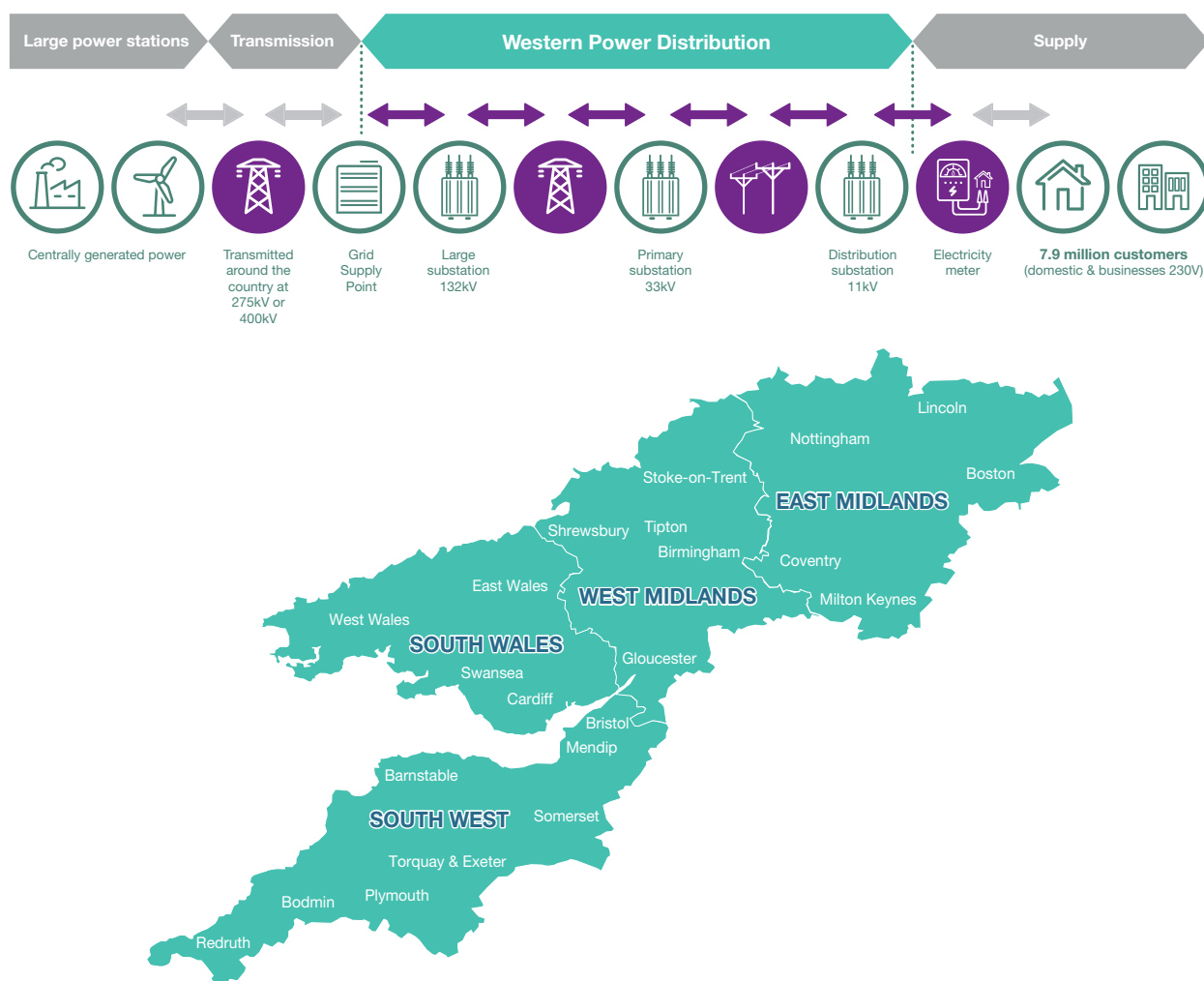
Our core responsibilities as part of RIIO ED-1 are to keep the lights on, maintain equipment, fix the network and connect new customers.
As we transition to becoming a Distribution System Operator, and we take on additional roles within the developing energy system these roles will require an increased level of coordination with existing operators and consumers, as well as the creation of new forms of coordination with emerging energy participants.

Keep the lights on by operating our network assets effectively

Maintain equipment so that the network is in a condition to remain reliable

Fix the network if equipment gets damaged or is faulty

Connect customers by upgrading existing networks or building new ones

Promote innovation flexibility and non-network solutions

Facilitate neutral markets for more efficient whole system outcomes

Improve the resilience and security of the electricity system at a local level

Drive competition and efficiency across all aspects of the system

1. Introduction

Our long-term Major Connections Strategy is central to delivering continuous improvement for our connections customers.

Welcome to our Major Connections Strategy (the "MCS"); our strategy setting out the benefits we will deliver for our major connection customers during the RIIO-ED2 price control period 2023-2028.

Setting the scene for RIIO-ED2

Providing new and augmented connections to the electricity network is one of the core activities that we have responsibility for as a licensed distribution network operator. Each year we build the electrical infrastructure and end connections to feed approximately 30,000 new premises, across four distribution service areas.

Our network must support a wide range of connection types. This includes predominantly demand developments consisting of domestic, commercial and industrial premises and also generation units that harness energy such as solar and wind to export power to the distribution system.

We also modify and upgrade existing connections to adapt to a customer's ongoing needs. This may be due to an increase in required supply capacity, for example to cater for new machinery, or to change the operational characteristics, such as installing generation capability at a demand site.

Regardless of the type or size of connection, our customers want to be able to connect to the network in accordance with their timescales and operational requirements. In order to do this the customer must have at their fingertips, sufficient and appropriate information to help them understand and assess the connection options that are available to them.

Generation and energy storage operators wishing to export energy to the network want to know where the most expedient location to connect is and understand whether they may experience any level of curtailment in capacity constrained areas. They may also look to provide flexible services to ease those constraints and so rely on the accuracy of available information to help them to decide how and where to connect to the distribution system.

The Government's Road to Zero strategy sets the ambition that almost every car and van will be zero emission by 2050 and that the planned date for ending the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles will be 2030. This transition to electric vehicles (EVs) means that demand for charge points is rising and we need to be ready to meet that demand, whether that be at home, at work or in transit. Stakeholders are telling us that this is one of their top priorities

so we have been engaging with developers and local authorities to understand their needs both now and in the future and consider how we can best facilitate the anticipated significant increase in take up of EVs.

The recently published Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution focuses on the changes that we will see. Decarbonisation of heating to reduce carbon emissions is a key priority with Government aiming for 600,000 heat pump installations per year by 2028.

It's clear that we have many challenges ahead if we are to connect such large volumes of Low Carbon Technology (LCT). We are already focusing on the task to ensure our distribution system is capable of supporting the Government initiative during RIIO-ED2 and beyond. As a DNO and a DSO, we will strive to develop innovative ways to deliver new and augmented connections during a period of significant increase in the number and type of LCTs.

We will continue to invest in the network to ensure that the system is efficient and reliable but also prioritise solutions which minimise the time and expense associated with conventional network reinforcement schemes, such as using flexibility services to manage peak loads. Our role as a DSO is pivotal in this respect. To enable a greater volume of demand, generation and storage to be connected, our networks are becoming smarter and more active. Creating a more efficient and flexible system will benefit all customers and empower them to be at the centre of the energy revolution.

It is increasingly important that we provide guidance and information through various medium that is easy for the customer to understand. It needs to be readily available and tailored to the specific needs of the customer. The availability and utilisation of good quality and accessible data is key. We recognise that improving our data and delivering our digitalisation commitments are key to turning data in to information that benefits customers, produces better insight in to asset capability for customers and develops new connection and service propositions.

1. Introduction

Our Major Connections Strategy for RIIO-ED2

We have independent strategies for DSO, Digitalisation, Innovation, Electric Vehicles and Heat Pumps. Whilst they can be considered in isolation, they are all integral to our overall strategy and together they combine to ensure we are best placed to drive the business forward and meet our RIIO-ED2 objectives.

We have made significant progress during RIIO-ED1 but we believe we still have much to do and so our MCS sets out a roadmap showing how we will continue to innovate and improve processes during RIIO-ED2 and ensure we continue to provide excellent service for our connections customers.

The RIIO-ED2 framework focuses on three consumer facing outputs that are critical to delivering value for money for consumers, namely to:

- **Maintain a safe and resilient network;**
- **Deliver an environmentally sustainable network; and**
- **Meet the needs of consumers and network users.**

The provision of new and modified electricity connections to the network forms an integral part of meeting the needs of our consumers and network users. Our ambition is to deliver a high quality and reliable service to all customers wishing to connect to our network.

As part of our RIIO-ED2 Business Plan, we are required to develop a MCS that details our long-term plan for delivering quality services for connection customers. This mechanism serves to incentivise DNO's to improve service standards for major customers. We consider this as an opportunity to build upon the foundations laid during RIIO-ED1 that will enable us to continually drive improvements and efficiencies in our connection processes.

The MCS adheres to three high-level principles which seek to improve the customer journey beginning at pre-application stage, through the application process itself and finally delivery post-offer acceptance.

Associated with these high level principles are a number of baseline expectations which are intended to embed an appropriate minimum level of service. Our supplementary document to this MCS sets out in detail how we intend to meet these baseline expectations through both existing and future planned services. We have also included a number of specific initiatives surrounding data visibility, application processes and online enquiry tracking that we believe are key to helping us deliver customer service in RIIO-E2.

Central to our MCS are our five 'Core Commitments'. These commitments have been developed and refined following extensive stakeholder engagement and form part of our overall Business Plan.

They focus on key areas that are central to delivery of the MCS and further demonstrate our undertaking to deliver excellent customer service.

As we deliver our MCS, we will remain mindful of the changing electricity landscape and the potential for this to alter the needs of our customers. We will continually review, update and adapt our MCS to ensure we deliver innovative solutions and excellent customer service which meets our customers' needs for the future.

Graham Halladay
Operations Director

2. Major Connection Customers

Under RIIO-ED2 a network operator is required to develop a connections strategy that meets the specific needs of its major connections customers.

2.1 Who are our Major Connections Customers?

Our major connections customers include metered demand, metered generation and unmetered connection customers. The concept of major connections customers was first introduced under the Incentive on Connections Engagement (ICE), the aim of which was to replicate the type of activities Ofgem expect network operators to undertake in market segments that are subject to effective competition. The relevant market segments are described below.

Table 1: Relevant market segments under RIIO-ED1

CONNECTIONS Relevant Market Segments								
Demand Connections				Distributed Generation		Unmetered Connections		
LV work	HV work	HV & EHV work	EHV work & above	LV work	HV & EHV work	LA work	PFI work	Other work
Connections to metered premises for demand customers at all connection voltages e.g.: • Domestic houses • Commercial & industrial units • Electric vehicle charging points • IDNO networks				Connections to metered premises for generation at all voltages e.g.: • Rooftop solar installations • Largescale windfarms • Battery storage		Connections to unmetered premises for demand connections for local authorities or private sector e.g.: • Street lights • Bus shelters • Telecoms kiosks		

Under the new price control period, RIIO-ED2, the relevant market segments remain unchanged. Smaller low voltage single service and small project demand connections are excluded market segments and are not covered by this MCS.

2. Major Connection Customers

2.2 Targeting Major Connections Customers

All our customers are important to us and we do not discriminate between them. Our aim is to provide excellent service across the whole spectrum of connections customer.

However, we understand the particular relevance of major connections customers and their specific needs. Our major connections customers have an important role to play in helping to achieve net zero emissions, for example, through the facilitation of renewable generation or participation in a Demand Side Response (DSR) programme.

It is important that we help the economy to grow by ensuring the electrical infrastructure is in place to support development, whilst also helping the Government to achieve its net zero emissions target. Major connections customers can help us to expand the existing roll out and application of network solutions to the higher voltage networks, prioritising areas which are the most likely to benefit.

Taking on the additional role of system operator is essential to driving performance and efficiency from our network and to ensure it can meet the future energy needs of our major connections customers. To ensure we fully understand their needs we will engage with them on the development of our own initiatives and through industry led work streams such as the Open Networks project. Central to delivery will be to increase the availability and utilisation of good quality and accessible data and to continue our industry-leading approach to innovation work.

Our ongoing dialogue with local authorities, local enterprise partnerships and other authorities will help us to build an accurate picture of potential future energy scenarios in to RIIO-ED2 and beyond that will allow us to balance the need for building additional infrastructure and the use of flexibility through smart networks.

3. Developing Our Major Connections Strategy

Our MCS has been developed with the help of our connections stakeholders to ensure we deliver improvements that will best meet their needs throughout the course of RIIO-ED2.

3.1 Developing our Major Connections Strategy

To ensure we have correctly identified customer priorities we have undertaken an extensive course of stakeholder engagement. This has included both wider engagement at a higher level and liaison with a number of expert groups.

Preliminary engagement with stakeholders began back in 2019 when a number of workshops were held. Stakeholders were given a blank canvas to discuss the issues which were most important to them. We used an independent body to analyse the feedback, grouping it into high-level topics – starting with Ofgem's three output categories, before adding two more for feedback that lay outside of those. Detailed points were then grouped into sub-topics, based on the volume of discussion in each area.

A detailed report was created that consolidated the stakeholder feedback and allowed us to zone in on the key areas of concern.

A second stage of engagement in 2020 built on the previous 'preliminary engagement' work by exploring the detailed stakeholder opinions around each priority, including proposed commitments. Feedback was collected and our proposals drawn together in to our Core Commitments. These were further revised following our Connections Workshop in November 2020.

In February 2021 we played back our draft outputs one more time at a stakeholder event and consequently refined the Core Commitments again. We believe these Core Commitments form the spine of our overall strategy and serve to support the initiatives we have committed to under this MCS.

External Stakeholder Engagement on the Connections Strategy 2020-21		
Event	**Date**	**Number of attendees**
Connections Workshop	November 2020	53
WPD Stakeholder Workshops	November 2020	86
WPD Stakeholder Workshops - connections	February 2021	63
Customer Connections Steering Group	February 2021	20

For further information regarding our engagement strategy please refer to section 9.

3. Developing Our Major Connections Strategy

3.2 Aligning our strategies

Our MCS is key to delivering benefits for connections customers. We recognise that many of the benefits will be delivered through improved network information and flexible connection solutions. Therefore, it is critical that our strategies are aligned and co-ordinated to meet our wider needs and aspirations, providing a foundation to develop solutions to meet the changing needs of the business and customers.

This includes utilising our Digitalisation of Data programme to develop pre-application information to a more granular level and combining separate sets of mapping data into a centralised mapping function. Improved data enables customers to make more informed decisions on where and how to connect to the distribution system. In addition, the DSO Strategy will assist in increasing the range and frequency of flexible alternatives to traditional reinforcement, facilitating quicker connections at a lower cost.

WPD Strategies		
Connections	DSO	Digitalisation
Innovation	Digital Comms	IT / OT

We will continue to strengthen these links to shape and deliver effective connections solutions delivering tangible and measurable benefits for our customers.

4. Our Major Connections Strategy

Our MCS is built around extensive engagement with stakeholders undertaken prior to RIIO-ED2.

As with the overall Business Plan, its development has been constructed using a common principle: to start with a blank piece of paper, ensuring that we deliver the needs of our customers and not those based upon pre-conceived ideas. It combines our Core Commitments with the high level principles and baseline expectations identified by Ofgem in their sector specific methodology decision document.

4.1 Our Core Commitments

Our Core Commitments are constructed on the basis that they must:

• **Be based on stakeholder feedback;**
• **Provide a real stakeholder benefit;**
• **Be well justified and supported by evidence to show that it's the right course of action;**
• **Demonstrate that alternative options have been evaluated prior to selection of the most effective method of delivery; and**
• **Identify how we are going to measure the impact and success of delivering that output.**

Our Business Plan sets out the full list of our 45 Core Commitments. Core Commitments 11 to 15 of the Business Plan relate specifically to connections and are set out below.

Core Commitment 11	**Achieve an average customer satisfaction of 90% or higher for all connection types (including major connections and low carbon technology connections).**
Core Commitment 12	**Improve our performance against Time to Quote and Time to Connect for LCTs by 1% from RIIO-ED1 level (small schemes) and deliver 90% satisfaction with timeliness of connections for larger schemes.**
Core Commitment 13	**Provide a same day connections' response for customers by introducing online self-assessment tools for individual domestic low carbon technology applications.**
Core Commitment 14	**Hold 90 local energy surgeries per year for local authorities, supporting them to deliver their local area energy plans.**
Core Commitment 15	**Increase the number of flexible connection offers made by lowering the reinforcement cost threshold to >£75k per MW and works that will take more than 12 months to complete.**

Each of these Core Commitments will be underpinned by specific initiatives to be delivered against our MCS. WPD's strategy for major connections customers, whilst meeting these Core Commitments, ensures to incorporate the principles and baseline expectations DNO's need to deliver as set out in Ofgem's sector specific methodology decision document. Further detail on the Core Commitments can be found in the Annex to **Chapter 5 of our Business Plan.**

4. Our Major Connections Strategy

4.2 Delivering best practice

The need for best practice is clear and we are committed to ensuring our activities are in line with obligations set out under various regulations, Licence Conditions, Engineering Recommendations and Energy Networks Association (ENA) Guidance. Specifically, our MCS is developed in accordance with;

- **The Electricity Act 2003**

- **The Electricity (Connection Charges) Regulations 2017 (ECCR's)**

- **The Electricity (Connections Offer Expenses) Regulations 2018**

- **Connection Guaranteed Standards of Performance (GSoP)**

- **Licence Condition - LC13**
  Charging Methodologies for Use of System and connection

- **Licence Condition - LC14**
  Charges for Use of System and connection

- **Licence Condition - LC15**
  Standards for the provision of Non-Contestable Connection Services

- **Licence Condition - LC19**
  Prohibition of discrimination

5. High Level Principles and Baseline Expectations

Ofgem's sector specific methodology decision document sets out three high level connection principles and twenty associated baseline expectations that it expects network operators to adhere to in the provision of customer service.

The foundations of our MCS are underpinned by services that we already provide. We have used this as the baseline for standards of performance and will build upon these services through RIIO-ED2 to improve the services provided to major connection customers and ensure we continue the lead the way on connections provision.
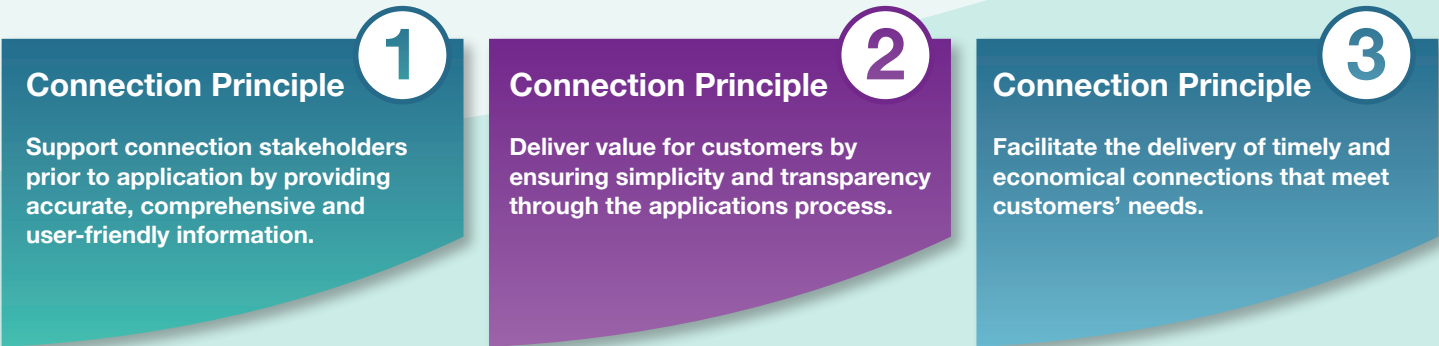
In RIIO-ED2 we will further improve our end-to-end connections service as follows:

- **Continue to explore innovative ways of connecting LCTs and build on initiatives, to introduce large capacity, rapid EV charge points at strategically important locations such as motorway service areas.**
- **Enhance our online service to provide a wider range of online quotations.**
- **Ensure that customers have a single point of contact at both the quotation and the connection stage to provide updates and advice.**
- **Achieve a minimum 9 out of 10 average customer satisfaction score for connections activities.**
- **Improve our ability to provide quotations and connections in a timely manner and in line with customers' expectations.**
- **Improve clarity concerning the availability of flexible connections and promote access to deliver more efficient network utilisation.**
- **Develop tailored processed for meeting different customer groups, needs for initial application stage the final connection and energisation.**

5.1 High Level Principles

The three high level principles that network operators are to adhere to are set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2: RIIO-ED2 Connection Principles

Connection Principle 1

Support connection stakeholders prior to application by providing accurate, comprehensive and user-friendly information.

Connection Principle 2

Deliver value for customers by ensuring simplicity and transparency through the applications process.

Connection Principle 3

Facilitate the delivery of timely and economical connections that meet customers' needs.

These three connection principles form the core of our MCS and act as the framework under which we will deliver proposed initiatives to provide excellent customer service.

5. High Level Principles and Baseline Expectations

Connection Principle 1

Support connection stakeholders prior to application by providing accurate, comprehensive and user-friendly information.

In accordance with Connection Principle 1 we will ensure that we provide sufficient and high quality information to connection stakeholders so they are able to make informed decisions about connecting to the distribution network prior to application stage.

Stakeholders require up to date data to help them to decide how, and where, to connect to the distribution network so we will ensure that all the information we provide to connection stakeholders is accurate and set out in plain English. We will also ensure all information is sufficiently comprehensive and tailored to the needs of the specific customer group.

We will ensure that information about the connections process is clear and simple for customers without technical backgrounds, especially for LCT's such as electric vehicle charge-points and heat pumps.

Connection Principle 2

Deliver value for customers by ensuring simplicity and transparency through the applications process.

In accordance with Connection Principle 2 we will ensure that we take all appropriate steps to make connection processes simple and transparent, so that customers receive a streamlined service from application to connection completion.

In particular, we will ensure effective communication and engagement processes are in place, not only to respond to customers' needs when they arise but also to ensure we are proactively engaging with stakeholders, understanding their needs and improving our processes accordingly.

We will review our guidance documentation and application process and make enhancements to ensure that requirements for application are easily found and understood and that the application process is straightforward.

We will review and enhance our online application process and widen our existing portal for ICP's to include other major and/or frequent use customers.

Connection Principle 3

Facilitate the delivery of timely and economical connections that meet customers' needs.

In accordance with Connection Principle 3 we will ensure that we take all appropriate steps to identify efficiencies in the connections process to deliver timely and economical connections for customers.

In particular, we will develop more efficient ways of doing things as well as introducing innovative connection solutions to reduce costs, and improve connection timescales, for customers.

We shall explore innovative connection solutions for customers which may include, amongst other things, improved coordination with other utility connection providers and between connection customers.

5. High Level Principles and Baseline Expectations

5.2 Baseline Expectations

Ofgem has outlined the baseline expectations that we must align our service provision to. There are 20 baseline expectations which are categorised under the three high level connection principles, ensuring a minimum level of service provision at three key stages of the connections process.

Pre-application: requires information to be provided which ensures clarity over the connections process and enables customers to make informed decisions about how and where they may connect to the network.

This stage includes methods by which customers may engage with us to discuss their connection needs prior to being ready to make an application for a specific site.

Application process: requires processes to be simplified, ensuring they are well explained and easy to follow. This stage includes clear explanation of the options available in the application process, such as flexible connections and identified 'fast track' applications.

Connection Delivery: requires clear communication between all parties throughout the delivery of a connection, ensuring timely and economical provision of connection works. This stage includes providing specified points of contact and clear explanation of queue management processes. Our supplementary document to this MCS details the connections principles and their associated baseline expectations. It includes the market segments the baseline expectations are relevant to and the metrics by which we can evidence successful delivery of associated improvements.

It should be noted that not all baseline expectations apply to all relevant market segments in the scope, nor do they apply where WPD has passed the Competition Test against the relevant market segment.

Further information relating to the market segments that have been passed is given in 'Competition Test under DPCR5'.

6. Our Key Initiatives

Our MCS will ensure we deliver against the baseline expectations but we also want to develop a number of key initiatives that demonstrate our wish to target specific areas we believe are integral to meeting the needs of our connections customers throughout RIIO-ED2.

Beyond meeting the baseline expectations, we will also undertake a number of specific initiatives which are key to ensuring that we continue to deliver excellent customer service during RIIO-ED2

6.1. Issues prevalent in WPD's four licenced areas

During the extensive engagement undertaken in the development of the overall Business Plan and the associated strategies for the RIIO-ED2 period, stakeholder feedback identified a number of areas in which they feel WPD could make changes to provide industry leading improvements.

These issues relate to three key themes:

• **Availability of information;**
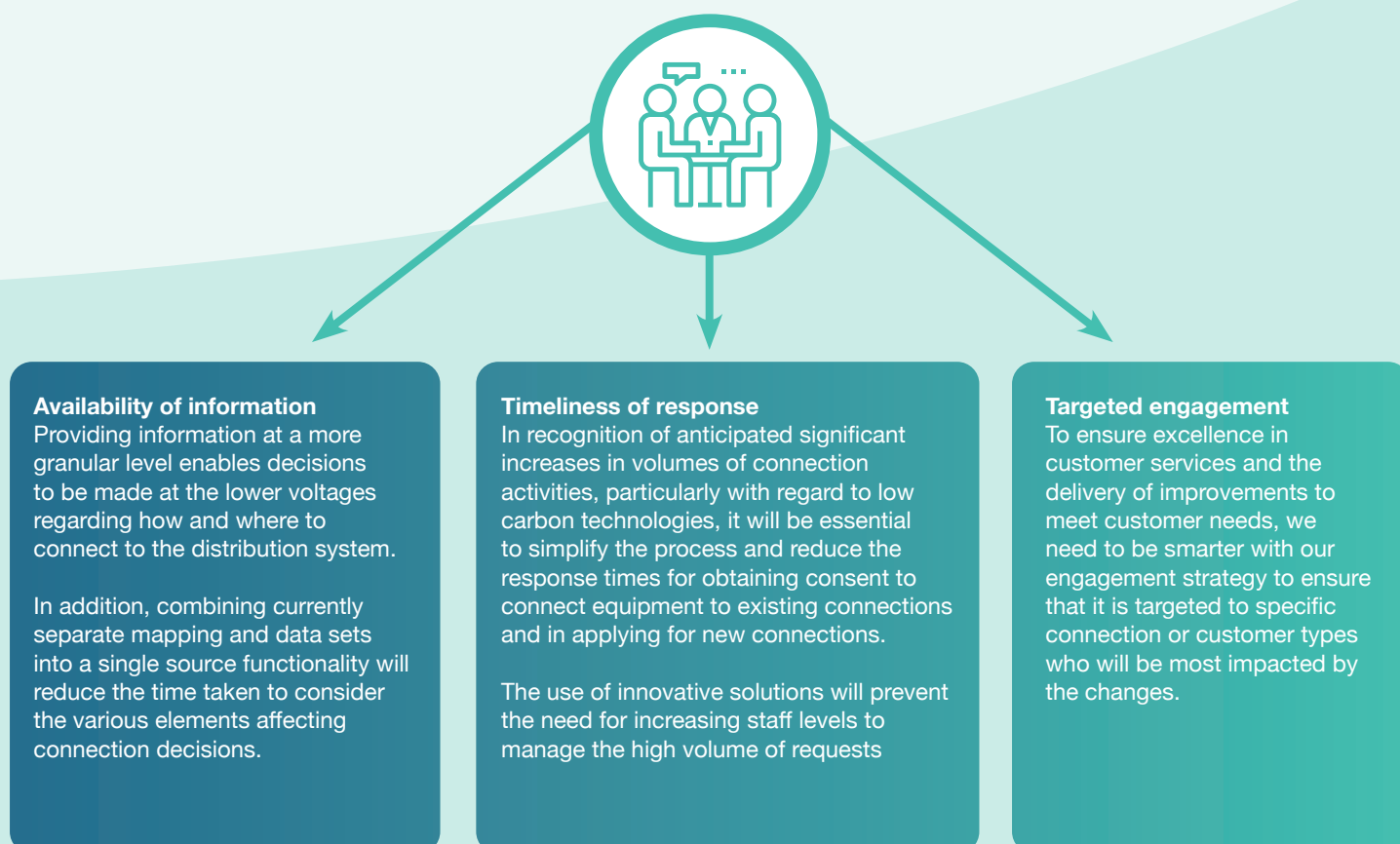• **Timeliness of response; and**
• **Targeted engagement**

6.2 Addressing the three key themes

In addressing the key areas raised by our stakeholders we have committed to ensuring we provide an enhanced approach to improvement and not simply take the minimum solution available to address the areas of concern. We want to ensure to deliver a high standard of improvement, ensuring the greatest possible benefit for our connection customers.

To facilitate this we have developed 6 key initiatives which together cover all three high level principle areas.

6.3 Key initiatives

The following initiatives are set out under the relevant high level principles. Each initiative sets out a description of the improvements we are looking to undertake during RIIO-ED2, the benefits to be provided, targets including dates and measurable outputs plus the associated metrics.

Availability of information
Providing information at a more granular level enables decisions to be made at the lower voltages regarding how and where to connect to the distribution system.

In addition, combining currently separate mapping and data sets into a single source functionality will reduce the time taken to consider the various elements affecting connection decisions.

Timeliness of response
In recognition of anticipated significant increases in volumes of connection activities, particularly with regard to low carbon technologies, it will be essential to simplify the process and reduce the response times for obtaining consent to connect equipment to existing connections and in applying for new connections.

The use of innovative solutions will prevent the need for increasing staff levels to manage the high volume of requests

Targeted engagement
To ensure excellence in customer services and the delivery of improvements to meet customer needs, we need to be smarter with our engagement strategy to ensure that it is targeted to specific connection or customer types who will be most impacted by the changes.

High Level Principle 1 - Key Initiatives

Support connection stakeholders prior to making a connections application by providing accurate, comprehensive and user-friendly information.

Initiative	Initiative description	Benefits provided	Target	Metric
We will make data more visible and interactive for customers through centralised data mapping functionality.	Improve the visibility of real time data by combining separate mapping systems into a centralised data mapping functionality with a number of overlays. Ensure that the data provided is more granular and refreshed to provide a real time understanding of the availability of capacity or flexibility opportunities across WPD's distribution system.	Providing a centralised mapping functionality with multiple overlays will: • Ensure access to the right information at the right time; • Improve the visibility of connection opportunities; • Remove the requirement to utilise separate and more complex GIS systems; and • Provide easy access to data for local authorities and local enterprise partnerships.	Centralised mapping functionality delivered in RIIO-ED2 Year 1 • Number of hits on centralised map • User satisfaction with the centralised map	50% increase in the use of the centralised map by 2028
We will use targeted stakeholder engagement to ensure that improvements identified are specific to the relevant subject area, market segment and customer types.	In addition to the broad range of connection customer engagement, such as the Connections Customer Steering Group (CCSG) and the Distributed Generation Owner Operator (DGOO) Forum, we will request consent to engage directly with stakeholders for specific areas. This will include targeted engagement relating to the digitalisation of data, implementation of scheme tracking systems, introduction of automated LCT responses.	Providing more targeted engagement will: • Capture issues affecting specific users of systems, processes and information resources; • Ensure improvements identified are relevant to the user; and • Keep users informed of the development and implementation of changes which impact upon their day to day interaction with WPD.	Methods for identifying engagement groups implemented in RIIO-ED2 Year 1 • Number of engagements • User satisfaction with engagement	Customer satisfaction score greater than 90%

We will make data more visible and interactive for customers through centralised data mapping functionality.

During RIIO-ED1 we developed a number of maps which provide essential information, such as the EV heat map, capacity map and network constraint data. Whilst we will look to provide the detail at a more granular level as requested during stakeholder engagement events, ensuring that our customers can make decisions based on more specific information, we recognise that customers would benefit from a single source approach to viewing the available information. By combining the various data sets into a single mapping functionality with multiple layers, users will be able to better interrogate their connection opportunities at a specific location.

We will use targeted stakeholder engagement to ensure that improvements identified are specific to the relevant subject area, market segment and customer type.

Through targeted engagement we can ensure that information made available pre-application is easy to understand and clearly delivers against their specific needs. This engagement at a targeted level can then feed into further developments in the application and post-acceptance processes through a cycle of reviewing, amending and implementing changes. This will ensure that improvements are specific to the user and relevant to their needs in any particular market segment, customer type or subject area.

High Level Principle 2 - Key Initiatives

Deliver value for customers by ensuring simplicity and transparency through the applications process.

Initiative	Initiative description	Benefits provided	Target	Metric
We will implement a Customer Portal to provide an online facility to manage the end to end process, from application through to delivery.	Develop the online portal to enable all customers to request and track connection activities, from application through to delivery. Provide user accounts for repeat and major customers whilst enabling guest user access for one-off applicants. Provide enhanced functionality to recognise regular user patterns to direct the user to their most frequently used area of the portal. For example, regular applicants of large scale generation to be directed to a portal version of the G99 application form in the first instance. **Refer to Principle 3 for further information relating to additional functionality of the Customer Portal for post-acceptance processes.**	Providing an online portal for end to end application and tracking will: • Reduce the time taken to submit an application since information relating to specific user, such as correspondence details, will be automatically stored; • Simplify the process by directing users to their most commonly used areas within the portal; and • Ensure that one-off applicants receive the same level of service and visibility of scheme progress as regular applicants.	Single system for end to end tracking implemented by RIIO-ED2 Year 2 • Number of registered accounts for the Customer Portal • User satisfaction with the customer portal	75% increase in the use of online accounts by 2028
We will provide a simplified online process for Low Carbon Technology which incorporates the ENA approved equipment and includes automated acknowledgements for compliant installations.	Develop simplified online notification and application processes for Electric Vehicle Charge Points and Heat Pumps, aligning the required information with the ENA EV/HP Application form. Enable technical data to be auto-populated using ENA database references and provide automated acknowledgement or approval to connect for installations which meet specified criteria. Continually review and adapt the system to take account of emerging technologies.	Providing simplified online processes for low carbon technologies will: • Enable quicker and simpler application processes; • Improve the accuracy of the technical specification without requiring users to obtain manufacturer data sheets; • Improve the response times for providing acknowledgement or approval to connect for compliant equipment; and • Ensure alignment of processes, irrespective of the type of low carbon technology selected for use by the customer.	New online process, including automated responses, implemented by RIIO-ED2 Year 1 • Number of automated LCT acknowledgements and approvals • User satisfaction with the online LCT application process	Customer satisfaction score greater than 90%

We will implement a Customer Portal to provide an online facility to manage the end to end process, from application through to delivery.

The use of customer accounts will minimise the amount of information customers need to provide where they make a number of applications. We want to ensure that any account based system provides more than a simple one way application process but delivers an end to end job tracking functionality. We are also proposing to make this system intuitive.
There are various types of connection requests that may be made, from new domestic developments to generator unit installations to the addition of low carbon technologies such as electric vehicle charging. By recognising patterns for specific users, we can direct them to their most frequently used areas within the portal, improving their connections journey and minimising the time it takes to undertake activities such as completing an application for connection.

We will provide a simplified online process for Low Carbon Technology (LCT) which incorporates the ENA approved equipment and includes automated acknowledgements for compliant installations.

We anticipate a significant increase in volume of LCT installations throughout RIIO-ED2 in preparation for the net zero emissions target. We believe a system based approach, rather than increased staffing levels, would better facilitate the high volume of applications. Where specified criteria are met and technical studies are deemed not to be required, an automatic acknowledgement will provide customers with an instant response allowing them to proceed with their installation.

Incorporating the ENA register, enabling users to enter for example a Heat Pump database registration number, will minimise the time taken to make an application to connect low carbon equipment and ensure the accuracy of the information.

High Level Principle 3 - Key Initiatives

Facilitate the delivery of timely and economical connections that meet customers' needs

Initiative	Initiative description	Benefits provided	Target	Metric
We will implement a Customer Portal to provide an online facility to manage the end to end process, from application through to delivery.	Develop the online portal to enable all customers to request and track connection activities, from application through to delivery. This should include enhanced functionality to combine job tracking of WPD tasks with tracking of the legal and consents process. Provide contact details for the WPD responsible person at each stage of the connections process. Enable document upload functionality to ensure that information, such as changes to site layout plans, can be provided to WPD and a timely and simple manner. **Refer to Principle 2 for further information**	Providing an online portal for end to end application and tracking will: • Enable the customer to clearly track the progress of their scheme, including where third parties are involved such as solicitors for legal consents; • Provide clarity on the relevant WPD point of contact at each stage of the scheme, from system planner to wayleave officer to delivery technician, including relevant contact details; and • Enable document upload functionality to ensure that information sharing between the customer and WPD is quick and easy.	Single system for end to end tracking implemented by RIIO-ED2 Year 2 • Number of registered accounts for the Customer Portal • User satisfaction with the customer portal	75% increase in the use of online accounts by 2028
We will provide an online tool for interactive work scheduling.	Develop an online interactive work scheduling tool, enabling customers to have visibility of team availability, self-select suitable work dates and update, amend or cancel their scheduled works.	Providing an online interactive work scheduling tool will: • Enable customer visibility of engineering team availability and work lead times; • Provide a quicker and easier approach to agreeing dates for full or partial work completion; and • Facilitate quicker and more efficient connections to suit the customers needs.	Online interactive work scheduling tool to be implemented by RIIO-ED2 Year 3 • Number of customers self-scheduling dates to suit their own needs • User satisfaction with the customer portal	50% increase in the use of self-scheduling by 2028

We will implement a Customer Portal to provide an online facility to manage the end to end process, from application through to delivery.

As discussed under Principle 2 improvements, we want to ensure that any account based system provides more than a simple one way application process but delivers an end to end job tracking functionality. We want to enhance existing processes and combine them into a single location resource for tracking the status of a particular scheme, understanding the progress made towards any legal permissions, consents and land rights whilst ensuring to provide clear contact details for the WPD responsible person should further discussion be required.

Enabling document upload functionality will also ensure that information is shared with WPD in a timely manner, including providing relevant information as and when it is available.

We will provide an online tool for interactive work scheduling.

We are committed to ensuring that we deliver connections in timescales to meet the needs of customers. To better facilitate this and ensure we are transparent in our approach, we want to develop an interactive work scheduling tool.

This will provide customers with clear visibility of the availability of our teams and enable them to self-select dates which are most suitable to their own needs and scheduling activities.

7. Measuring Success

Our MCS and associated initiatives must be effectively tracked and measured to ensure we are delivering benefits for all. We have a number of methods by which we can measure success of delivery, through dedicated targets for specific initiatives to overall satisfaction with connection services measured through the Major Customer survey.

Feedback on progress to date to shape our future development and delivery will be vital and to that end we will continue to extensively engage with our stakeholders through various means. We will also, as with our ICE Workplan during RIIO-ED1, provide regular updates on the progress we are making. This will provide visibility that initiatives remain on track whilst providing an opportunity for customers to challenge us should they feel we are not going far or fast enough with our development.

7.1. Understanding our employees' and customers' needs

We will continue to engage both internally and externally to better understand the changing needs of our stakeholders. We will clearly highlight the progress we are making in the delivery of our initiatives and identify new areas for improvement as they arise.

7.2 Delivering value from our solutions

We must measure the impact of our improvements, understanding how they benefitted our customers and where they can be further improved to ensure that we provide excellent customer services.

7.3 Effectively collaborate

Capturing our collaborative approach to connection improvements will demonstrate our continuing commitment to ensure that our actions are driven by the requirements of our customers. We will ensure to capture not only directly collaborated improvements but to recognise best practice within the wider industry where we agree that our customers would benefit from adapting improvements made by other DNOs and IDNOs.

7.4 Accountability

DNOs that fail to demonstrate how they meet the Connection Principles and baseline expectations could be subject to a financial penalty under the Business Plan Incentive.

To ensure that DNOs are incentivised to deliver best practice in the provision of non-contestable activities, Ofgem has decided that for the non-contestable activities the MCS Delivery ODI will operate on a reputational basis in Relevant Market Segments that pass the Competition Test.

For RIIO-ED2, an ex post evaluation will be introduced to assess companies' performance against the baseline expectations and in delivering their strategies. This will ensure companies remain accountable for delivering their strategies in line with baseline expectations within-period and incentivise them to develop ambitious and best practice initiatives which exceed the levels of service we would expect from an economic and efficient DNO.

The timing of assessment is not yet decided although will likely be mid-term and at the end of the RIIO-ED2 price control. It will be confirmed once the approach to assessing performance has been developed more fully. Regardless of the exact timings of assessments during the price control, Ofgem consider that annual reporting will be key to ensuring DNOs are both accountable and ambitious in the delivery of their strategies. We will publish an annual report that describes how we are progressing initiatives against each of the baseline expectations.

7. Measuring Success

7.5 Ofgem performance measuring metrics

Ofgem will use a number of metrics to measure DNOs success in meeting their obligations under the connection principles and baseline expectations. The full extent of those metrics is yet to be decided but they will consider each of the three connection principles and likely cover customer satisfaction areas as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Likely performance measuring metrics

1

Metrics monitoring performance of baseline expectations under Principle 1

- Customer satisfaction with pre-application.

2

Metrics monitoring performance of baseline expectations under Principle 2

- Customer satisfaction with quotations.

3

Metrics monitoring performance of baseline expectations under Principle 3

- Customer satisfaction with connections completed.

7.6 Feedback

We will seek customer feedback through stakeholder engagement for the duration of RIIO-ED2 and revise and refine our MCS, as required. If you would like to share your thoughts and feedback and please contact our Connections Policy Team at:
wpdconnpolicysupport@westernpower.co.uk

8. The Competition Test

In the Distribution Price Control period 5 (DPC5) that ran from 2008 to 2015, Ofgem introduced a Competition Test to understand the extent to which competition existed effectively in the market for new connections. DNO's were able to apply to Ofgem to have price regulation lifted if they could demonstrate that competition was successfully effective.

8.1 Competition Test under DPC5

The result of the DPC5 Competition Test by our Licence areas against the relevant market segments is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Market segments passed under the Competition Test under DPCR5

License Area	Relevant Market Segment								
	Demand Connections				Distributed Generation		Unmetered Connections		
	LV work	HV work	HV & EHV work	EHV work & Above	LV work	HV & EHV work	LA Work	PFI work	Other work
WPD East Midlands	✘	✘	✓	✓	✘	✘	✓	✓	✘
WPD West Midlands	✘	✘	✓	✓	✘	✘	✓	✓	✘
WPD South Wales	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✓	✓	✘
WPD South West	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✘	✓	✓	✘

Although the incentive framework for RIIO-ED2 excludes market segments that passed the Competition Test, our commitment is to deliver improvements across all the relevant market segments.

8.2 Competition Test under RIIO-ED1

During their sector specific methodology consultation, Ofgem consulted on the potential to re-run the Competition Test in order to reassess the current level of market penetration by Independent Connection Providers. It was decided that the Competition Test should be re-run and in May 2021 Ofgem consulted further on how the Competition Test might be undertaken.

The intent was to create a template to collect relevant information and data from DNOs that showed the extent of competition penetration in each Licence area and for each relevant market segment. A policy decision will be issued in the Summer 2021, followed by publication of a 'minded-to' position for consultation and then final decision by Autumn 2021.

Dependent on the outcome of the new Competition Test, the relevant market segments covered under this Connection Strategy may change.

We remain responsible for completing non-contestable connection activities in relevant market segments that have passed the Competition Test. To ensure that we deliver best practice in the provision of non-contestable activities, and to maintain our commitment to deliver improvements across all market segments, our MCS captures these activities even where these have passed the Competition Test.

9. Our Engagement Strategy

Our approach to engagement both leading up to the creation of our MCS and for its future evolution will not radically change from that which we have utilised during RIIO-ED1 under the ICE.

9.1 External engagement

It is vital to the success of the development of our MCS and the delivery of initiatives that we continue to provide a clear programme of stakeholder engagement.

This enables us to readily identify the priority focus areas for our customers and to develop initiatives that will help us build towards our overall strategy of providing excellent customer service. By obtaining input from a broad range of stakeholders we can be sure to represent all areas of connections activity.

Part of the feedback we receive is obtained via the Major Customer Survey that is carried out monthly by an independent body on our behalf. Utilising this feedback helps us to understand how we are performing and identify the main areas for improvement.

For example, the areas customers asked us to prioritise regarding the lead up to and following issue of a quotation for a connection, for the period April 2020 to March 2021, is set out in Figure 1.

We have also liaised with a number of expert groups to co-create this Connections Strategy to ensure it delivers the improvements our customers want and not necessarily what we think they want. The Customer Engagement Group (CEG) is fundamental to this process. As an independent group they provide input, challenge our proposals and hold us to account if we do not deliver on our commitments.

Our Connections Customer Steering Group (CCSG) comprises a panel of experts representing a broad range of connection types across the market who inform, influence and feedback on our connection plans and activities. The outputs from this group also feed into our overarching customer panel.

Figure 1: Major connection customer survey areas to prioritise.

Major Customer Survey April 2020 - March 2021
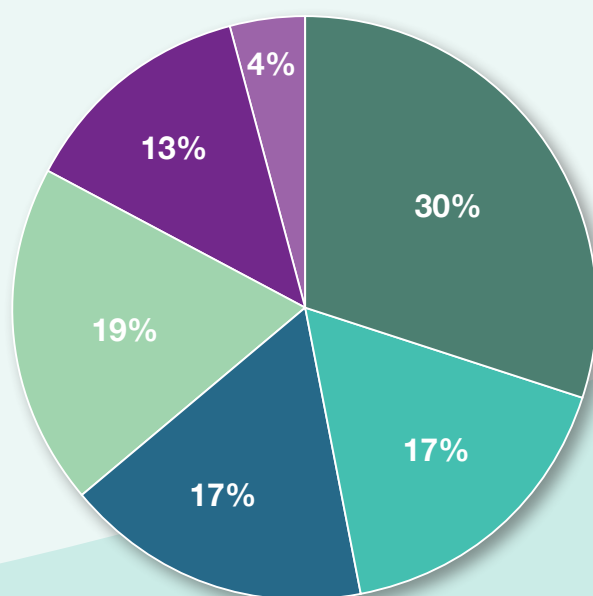
- ■ Communication - Pre Application/Site Visit
- ■ Quotation Cost (Cheaper)
- ■ Quotation Timescales
- ■ Quotation Simplified / Jargon
- ■ Customer Service (responding to customers)
- ■ One Off Issues

9. Our Engagement Strategy

The Distributed Generation Owner Operator forum (DGOO) meet regularly to help us gain an understanding of DG owner/operator needs. They continue to provide input into the development of actions to improve the services we provide and the associated connections processes.

In addition to these established groups, we hold workshops and events targeted to cover specific topics such as local area investment, community energy and low carbon technologies. Figure 2 summarises our external stakeholder engagement strategy.

Figure 2: External stakeholder engagement strategy

Engagement must lead to action
We never host talking shops or tick-box exercises.
We always engage for a reason and feedback drives outputs.

Engagement is everyone's responsibility at WPD
Core connections engagement activities are centrally coordinated, but delivery is embedded locally and led by those who will be directly responsible for acting on the feedback.

Utilise a range of engagement methods, but face-to-face is always best
We tailor to suit stakeholder preferences to maximise reach. Direct interaction is preferred for discussion/dissemination of complex issues with other methods complementing rather than substituting for this.

Be transparent about feedback and accountability
We publish all presentations, reports and actions - stakeholders can see how their feedback is directly incorporated into WPD's ICE Plan and track the success of the initiatives they generate.

Build long-term relationships with stakeholders
We earn trust by continually demonstrating that feedback leads to action. As stakeholders' knowledge and confidence grows, the breadth of their influence and ability to critically challenge will increase.

Collaborate wherever possible, but if it slows progress, take the lead
We share best practice openly, learn from others and encourage co-delivery in common areas. if industry is slow to act we do not wait but will share our learning to inform industry wide solutions.

Well established and effective

Our stakeholder engagement strategy is firmly entrenched in our culture. Established in 2007, the strategy firmly underpins our connections improvement activity, driving how and why we engage.

It is fundamental to how we do business and drives a continual cyclical engagement programme. Its longevity has established a mature and effective approach, which has built long-term stakeholder relationships facilitating meaningful engagement with vital feedback and challenge.

The fundamentals of our approach are enduring, and guided by steadfast principals providing its foundations. However, to maintain effectiveness, the strategy is evaluated and updated each year with sign-off from our CEO and Directors.

This ensures that our engagement approach continues to deliver effectively our initiatives, demonstrating we are adaptable to changes in the connections environment and better positioned to meet our stakeholders' priorities and expectations.

9. Our Engagement Strategy

9.2 Internal engagement

Our staff are pivotal to the successful operation of our business. Enabling staff to be effective and efficient in their roles is integral to our strategy and the delivery of our action plan.

Staff at all levels feed in to the strategy, which is critical to highlight their needs and expectations and encourages them to 'own' the policies that sit behind the connections process.

We engage regularly with our staff to understand their connections related needs. Since they are at the sharp-end of the delivery of connections activities they have invaluable insight as to what customers want and, just as crucially, how we might provide an enhanced service that meets the customers' needs.

Our primary engagement is with Network Services (locally based teams delivering low and high voltage connections up to 11kV) and Primary System Design, regionally based teams designing the EHV and 132kV network infrastructure and connections.

We also engage with other teams that are critical to delivering connection activities. These include:

- **Records;**
- **Call Centre;**
- **Information Technology;**
- **Estates and Wayleaves; and**
- **Regulatory Compliance**

We recognise that internal systems and processes must be fit for purpose if we are to deliver excellent customer service and that this can only be achieved by engaging with internal staff.

9.3 Continuing engagement

Our engagement has served us well to this point, enabling us to establish an initial strategy, roadmap and programme of connections activity to deliver tangible benefits to a wide set of users. It is important that we continue to engage effectively throughout RIIO-ED2, ensuring we react to changing customer and regulatory requirements. This will ensure we maintain a MCS that meets the needs of both our stakeholders and staff.

We continue to recognise the invaluable benefits of workshops and other face to face events in acquiring feedback. We equally recognise that other means and media are available, enabling stakeholders to interact more informally or from a remote location where their time is limited. We will ensure that there is a balance between formal, large-scale engagement and opportunities for more informal and smaller face to face surgeries or online engagement sessions. We will continue to focus on targeted engagement, enabling discussion on specific topics to improve the level of detail provided by our stakeholders.

We will expand our use of other methods of interaction through webinars, videos and social media. It is important that we are able to reach as many stakeholders as we can so these methods ensure that our engagement continues to be broad and inclusive of all stakeholder groups.

Cycle of engagement

Having a cycle of engagement which listens to our customers, develops the required improvements and provides feedback to check whether the changes are delivering the anticipated benefits or further improvements are required is integral to our MCS. This approach ensures are customers are at the heart of what we do, that they feel we are listening to their concerns and actively working within them to deliver the changes to best suit their needs.
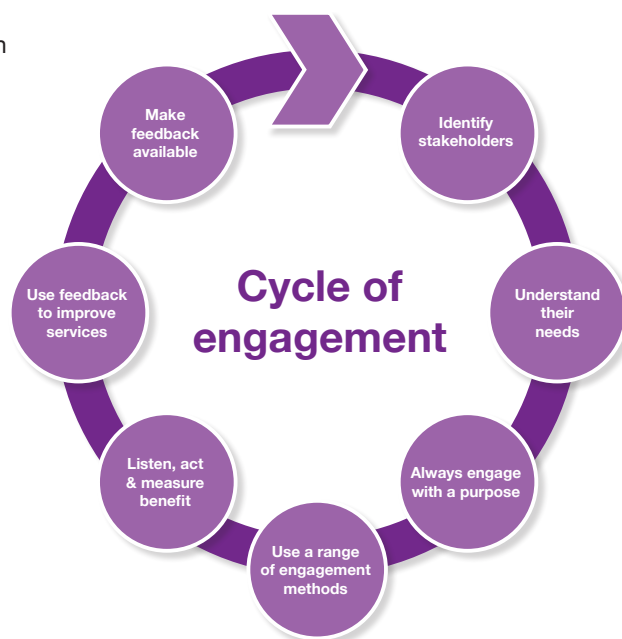
9.4 Have your say

You can influence our strategy going forward. We will seek customer feedback through stakeholder engagement for the duration of RIIO-ED2 and revise and refine our MCS, as required. If you would like to share your thoughts and feedback please contact our Connections Policy Team at: **wpdconnpolicysupport@westernpower.co.uk**

10. Governance

WPD's governance arrangements for the development of improvements to connections services include extensive stakeholder engagement, publication of information and, where applicable, standardisation across the industry.

We have engaged extensively with Industry working groups to develop standard approaches to connection activities thus ensuring consistency of approach. Examples of such collaboration include the application of milestones in connection offers and changes to the interactivity processes for customer looking to connect in the same locality.

This collaboration has not prevented us from developing our own policies and processes to improve the customer experience and ensure connections are delivered in a timely and efficient manner. One such example is the implementation of our new approach to the reservation and allocation of network capacity.

Combining industry discussions with feedback provided through the Broader Measure of Customer Satisfaction and Major Connection Customer surveys ensures that areas for improvement are clearly identified and can then be address through extensive engagement to ensure we deliver real benefits for customers.

We engage at an early stage in the process with customer representatives to present the issues identified and develop the required solutions. We maintain a cycle of engagement to ensure that stakeholders have every opportunity to provide feedback throughout the development of process and policy changes.

This puts customers at the forefront of development, ensuring that the improvements can be adapted to better suit their needs and that they understand and support the changes at the point of implementation.

WESTERN POWER
DISTRIBUTION

Serving the Midlands, South West and Wales

www.westernpower.co.uk

@wpduk