

WPD

Social Obligations workshop report
Executive summary

Bristol: 25th February 2013

Birmingham: 27th February 2013



Summary of comments - Birmingham

- It was noted that more work should be undertaken in order to raise the profile of the Priority Services Register
- It was agreed that data on vulnerable customers should be updated regularly and most stakeholders felt that two years was too long
- The general consensus was that WPD ought to work more effectively in partnership with other organisations to share data and that this should be a two-way activity
- It was commented that much of this data already exists and that accessing it is key. It was added that vulnerable customers may not necessarily appreciate more 'cold calls' in order for WPD to update its data and that better working relationships with suppliers ought to be fostered
- A number of stakeholders were of the view that contact with vulnerable customers to update information should be more frequent than every two years
- It was broadly agreed that reaching out to vulnerable customers to promote the Priority Services Register presented a challenge. Simply sending leaflets to customers was seen by many as being ineffective and it was felt that improved partnership working with existing organisations was the best way to achieve this
- It was commented that sharing information with local authority social services departments was a valuable way of ensuring data is kept up to date
- There was a good deal of praise for the crisis packs that WPD offers for vulnerable customers, although it was noted that it was important that these are distributed to those vulnerable customers who need them most
- It was widely agreed that, when there is a power cut, communication is key. Contacting vulnerable customers as soon as possible to let them know that WPD is aware of the problem was seen as vitally important. It was felt that four hours without power was a very long time for certain vulnerable customers and that regular updates ought to be given
- Working closely with Citizen's Advice Bureaux and other relevant organisations to distribute crisis packs to vulnerable customers was seen as an important way of providing support for those people who would be most affected by a power cut
- It was commented that there is a certain stigma attached to fuel poverty and that this presented a challenge. This issue means that WPD call centre staff need to be sensitive when asking questions to identify whether or not a customer would benefit from assistance
- This point was also made in regard to customers being included on the PSR
- There were a number of suggestions of organisations that WPD should refer customers to in order to help address fuel poverty. This included specific debt advice charities as well as Age UK and the Citizens Advice Bureau

- It was noted that WPD should avoid duplicating the good work that is already being carried out by organisations whose sole purpose is dealing with issues relating to fuel poverty
- When asked to comment on the amount of money that ought to be dedicated to providing support to vulnerable customers and those in fuel poverty, it was widely agreed that more information was needed in order to give an informed answer. It was also felt that budgets for these activities should be reviewed at regular intervals

Summary of comments - Bristol

- It was noted that there are already a number of organisations, including local authorities, housing associations and energy suppliers who have their own data on vulnerable customers. It was widely felt that it would be beneficial if these organisations could share information. It was also commented that a single agency to manage this data would be a good thing
- Most stakeholders were of the view that updating data every two years was too long and that this information should be updated more regularly
- It was noted that certain people may not wish to be on the Priority Services Register, even if they are eligible. A number of stakeholders felt that by working in partnership with trusted organisations such as Age UK, WPD could better promote the PSR and ensure that those people who are eligible are included
- It was agreed that early contact to give reassurance to vulnerable customers in the event of a power cut was vitally important. It was also commented that for some people there is no substitute for a visit
- There was support for the distribution of crisis packs to vulnerable customers and a number of suggestions were made of other items which ought to be included. These included thermal clothing and thermos flasks
- There was a good deal of support for WPD working more effectively with trusted organisations who operate at a local level, particularly in rural areas
- There was no agreement on the length of time for which it is acceptable for vulnerable customers to be without power before assistance is given. It was noted that for very vulnerable customers an hour is too long
- Stakeholders did not feel they were in a position to comment on the exact amount of money that should be spent on power cut support. It was broadly agreed that the important thing was how the money is spent rather than how much money is allocated
- It was widely felt that fuel poverty is an issue that is growing in importance. All stakeholders were of the view that things would only get worse as energy prices increase and grants to organisations who provide support are cut
- There was broad agreement that WPD contact centre staff should be trained to identify vulnerable customers and refer them to sources of assistance in relation to energy efficiency and debt advice

- There were a number of suggestions of organisations that WPD should work with to help to address fuel poverty. It was, however, commented that WPD should not duplicate the work already being carried out by the 'big six' energy companies
- Not everyone was in agreement that it is WPD's responsibility to tackle issues relating to fuel poverty through outreach initiatives. It was commented that the role of WPD should be to identify those people who are having difficulties and refer them to bodies who specialise in providing assistance.