

WPD

Social Obligations workshop report

Birmingham: 27th February 2013



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2. Introduction

2.1. Date and location

The social obligations workshop took place on 27th February 2013 at Birmingham: The Centre for Voluntary Action, 138 Digbeth, B5 6DR

2.2. Attendees:

18 stakeholders attended the workshop. The details of all attendees are shown below:

- Alvina Ali - Climate Change Officer, Wolverhampton Homes
- Belinda Hoste – Manager, Shelter
- Ben Watson - Programme Lead Long Term Condition Management, Terrence Higgins Trust
- Cosmo Graham - Director, Centre for Consumers and Essential Services
- D C Jones - Priority Consumer Consultant
- Daniel Alchin - Policy & External Manager, Energy UK
- Emma Hutchinson - Social Segment Manager, E.ON
- Jan Warner - Home Energy Advisor, Festival Housing
- Jayne Millard - Home Energy Advisor, Energy Extra
- Joseph Surtees - Policy and Research Officer, StepChange Debt Charity
- Kaye Welfare - Assistant Chief Executive, Severn Wye Energy Agency
- Marilyn Price - Financial Capability Worker, Stratford-upon-Avon Citizens Advice Bureau
- Nicholas Mills - Energy Advisor/Analyst, Hanover
- Nick Cadd - Housing and Communities Manager, Stratford-upon-Avon District Council
- Patrick Wreford - Money Advisor, Orbit Heart of England
- Pauline Mahon - Consultant
- Simon Toennigs - Home Energy Advisor, Energy Extra
- Siobhan O'Loughlin - Customer Public Affairs Manager, RWE npower

Western Power Distribution

- Alison Sleightholm - Regulation and Government Affairs Manager
- Alex Wilkes - Stakeholder Engagement Regulatory & Government Affairs
- Nicki Johnson - Regulation & Government Affairs Support Assistant

Green Issues Communiqué

- James Garland - Director (workshop facilitator)
- Emma Webster - Associate Director (workshop facilitator)
- Floyd Jebson - Consultant (workshop Facilitator)
- Andrew Vaux - Consultant (scribe)
- Laura Edwards - Account Executive (scribe)
- Rob De Angeli - Account Executive (scribe)

3. Executive summary

3.1. Feedback from participants

- 59% of attendees found the workshop to be *'useful'* and 41% told us it was *'very useful'*. Encouragingly, none of the stakeholders who attended said that the workshop was *'not useful'*
- All of the attendees told us that we had provided enough information for them on the day and all felt that they had had enough opportunity to express their views

3.2. Topics for discussion

- Data
- Power cut support
- Fuel poverty and cold homes

3.3. Summary of comments

- 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

4. Introduction to vulnerability

4.1. Q1. What is your experience of working on behalf of vulnerable customers and of working with WPD?

Table 1

- A council representative explained that s/he worked with *'several teams to ensure social inclusion for vulnerable people living across the local authority area'*
- An energy representative employee told the group that his / her work was *'mainly with tenants'*. S/he said his / her *'organisation maintained a Priority Service Register (PSR) of its own'*
- An advisory service representative commented that his / her work involved *'people either living with, or affected by, HIV'*
- A housing association representative explained that his / her organisation was *'responsible for managing 15,000 properties across the West Midlands'*. S/he said *'we helped vulnerable people with financial difficulties'*. S/he commented that *'the most relevant part of the workshop would be the session on fuel poverty'*
- An energy representative employee said that his / her *'organisation maintained a PSR of its own and shared the data with distributors'*. S/he commented that *'vulnerability and fuel poverty were two extremely topical and relevant issues'*
- An energy representative employee told the group that his / her organisation *'had procedures in place to flag up vulnerable customers'*

Table 2

- An advisory service representative made the point that *'not everyone knows that there is a Priority Services register'*
- An energy representative agreed, stating that it *'was news to me'*
- An energy representative asked *'are the supplier's criteria the same as yours?'*
- An energy representative said *'I always thought the priority service was wider than that'*
- A housing association representative asked *'with the priority service users, are you solely relying on your energy suppliers for information on issues?'*
- A housing association representative was of the view that *'a lot of people are missed from the register as they are stubborn and too proud to come forward to join the register'*

- A housing association representative made the point that there are *'fewer incentives for people to come forward than there were before'* and further added *'there are no new tariffs for priority service'*
- An energy representative queried *'surely doctors inform you of people who are at risk?'*
- An advisory service representative stated that from his / her experience, *'WPD always made sure that if there was an issue late on a Friday night they would fix it even if it was an issue with money'*

Table 3

- An advisory service representative stated s/he has seen the effects that a power cut can have on individuals through working with the *'Red Cross and other charities'*. S/he said *'the word vulnerable is key and at different times in everyone's lives, we can all be classed as vulnerable'*. S/he said the elderly and other groups of individuals with health issues *'go through periods of being vulnerable'*. S/he stated the work WPD is carrying out is commendable but overall it is a massive issue WPD cannot address alone
- An advisory service representative commented that *'who does go on the register is a sales issue'*
- An energy representative employee said WPD needs to address and be aware of Ofgem categories when deciding who is vulnerable. S/he asked *'how do you address it? How do you decide who is and isn't on the list?'*
- An advisory service representative pointed out there is currently a list in the area where s/he works but *'people move and die and it is an issue and it needs to be kept up to date'*
- An energy representative employee agreed and was of the view WPD and the 6-7 suppliers need to realise there is a future issue of ensuring the data stays correct. S/he pointed out *'it is not just about creating the register now as it will never be complete'*

5. Data

5.1. Q2. What do you think of what WPD is proposing to do to improve its data?

Table 1

- A housing association representative asked the question *'why is the data needed and what will it be used for?'* S/he said *'vulnerable people already get enough cold calls and adding to this could cause extra anxiety and distress'*
- An energy representative employee believed that *'data should flow both ways'*. S/he said his / her organisation *'shared data with WPD, but would WPD reciprocate?'*
- A council representative recognised that the data required to populate the PSR is *'out there in abundance.'* An energy representative employee said *'the priority should be to unlock who has the data and work out how we can share it'*
- A council representative pointed out that *'many adaptations to houses require electricity and should be recognised within the PSR categories – e.g. external lifts and ramps'*
- A housing association representative asked *'can people can put themselves onto the PSR'*

Table 2

- An energy representative commented that *'customers don't know about the service'*
- An energy representative was of the view that *'something needs to be done to get information directly to customers'*
- An energy representative asked *'what are you doing with other organisations to help with data?'*
- An energy representative wished to make the point that s/he believed that *'good partnerships are strong only when both partners are supported by the other'*
- An energy representative agreed, saying that WPD *'need to support partners'*

Table 3

- A housing association representative asked *'does WPD rely on information from suppliers?'* S/he commented *'in my experience suppliers are not informing customers of the register and customers are unaware, especially those who need to be on it'*
- An energy representative felt it is difficult to ask if someone is vulnerable. S/he stated *'suppliers can do more to promote the register but it is a two-way thing'*. S/he was of

the opinion *'those who are aware of the register may not ask to be added as they do not trust suppliers. More awareness and reassurance is needed'*

- An advisory service representative was also of the opinion suppliers *'cannot ask if someone is vulnerable as it is a difficult thing to do'*. S/he did recognise that there is a problem and *'more people need to be asked but in the right way'*
- An advisory service representative stated *'the key is putting out information for people to be aware of so they then ask to be on the list'*. S/he commented there is a transition period in being vulnerable and s/he experienced hostile response from some individuals as *'it is a delicate issue'*. His / her view in moving forwards is there is a need *'to teach staff the right skills of prompting and asking right questions'*

5.2. Q3. Do you agree that WPD needs a dedicated team to keep records as up to date as possible?

Table 1

- An energy representative employee admitted that *'one of the biggest challenges is people who may need to be on the PSR for just a short period of times'*. S/he gave the example of *'a forty-year-old who had a four-bedroom house and was diagnosed three times with cancer'*. When asked why they hadn't contacted their energy company, the household responded that *'it wasn't at the top of the list of priorities'*

Table 2

- An energy representative commented that s/he thought it was a *'very good idea to contact clients directly'* and that records need to be kept *'as up to date as possible'*

Table 3

- An advisory service representative said *'yes a team is needed, it is a big issue and other workshops with suppliers are needed to reach an agreement on what vulnerability means'*
- An energy representative employee commented the definition of vulnerable comes from Ofgem. S/he viewed the current system of having many different policies which all *'define vulnerability differently'*
- An energy representative employee asked *'how is it operationalized in terms of data?'* S/he stated it is a challenge but felt *'transit vulnerability does not always need to be kept up to date'*

5.3. Q4. Do you think it's reasonable that WPD will contact registered customers every two years to check their details?

Table 1

- A council representative believed that *'it is a sensible idea to contact people on the PSR at regular levels to ensure they're still living at the address and still need the same level of service'*

Table 2

- An advisory service representative queried *'how are you going to communicate with people with communication issues'*
- An advisory service representative said it *'might be better to check details more regularly than that'*

Table 3

- An advisory service representative asked *'why every two years? Why not annually?'*
- An advisory service representative pointed out one problem is the team all staff members will need to be highly trained. S/he felt *'after someone has been defined as being vulnerable it is difficult to keep up to date with their progress as they may not have a phone or may choose to not answer their mobile'*
- An advisory service representative was of the view *'2 years is too long'*
- An energy representative employee agreed
- An advisory service representative said *'some customers need to take on their own responsibility and alert of change of circumstances the same way they do when they notify their bank when they move'*
- An energy representative employee agreed and pointed out *'WPD are not a customer-facing business and while customers may tell British Gas their change of address, British Gas should also be looking to update the register'*

5.4. Q5. How could WPD work better to promote its Priority Service Register and identify vulnerable people?

Table 1

- A housing association representative believes *'leaflets don't work as people don't read them'*. S/he suggested *'the best way forward would be for briefings direct to housing association teams'*
- A council representative pointed out that *'there are hundreds of housing associations within the region covered by WPD and a more practical method might be for WPD to go direct to the National Housing Federation, get onto its agenda and disseminate information through its network'*
- An energy representative employee indicated that research showed that energy was one of the least engaging topics for vulnerable people. This, combined with the fact

that vulnerable people tend to be less proactive, makes them a difficult sector of society to engage and communicate with

- An energy representative employee pointed out that trust plays an important role in getting people to engage

Table 2

- A housing association representative said that *'WPD should work with Age UK'*
- An energy representative agreed, adding that staff from WPD could come to their organisation and shadow their work, saying *'it would benefit what WPD are trying to do'*
- An advisory service representative queried *'is there not a temporary register for people who are in between vulnerability'*
- An advisory service representative recommended *'broadening the borders of the register'*
- An advisory service representative commented that *'I know people for a fact people don't get registered, due to pride'*
- An energy representative concurred with this view saying that *'some people will not take help, especially the older generation who refuse priority service'*
- An energy representative was of the view that *'changing the name could be an idea to get people to sign up'*

Table 3

- An energy representative employee would like *'to see a meeting with suppliers and WPD being set up to discuss vulnerability and how all organisations can work together in all areas as working together is key'*
- An advisory service representative commented persistent correspondence is key from suppliers and WPD should try to get involved. S/he said *'when customers are changing suppliers they may not be aware they are on the register'*
- An energy representative asked *'should suppliers be sharing data? Should there be one register?'*

5.5. Q6. How could WPD work with other public service or voluntary agencies to share data on vulnerability, whilst adhering to data protection requirements?

Table 1

- A council representative wondered if his / her council's Social Services department, which captured this information transferred this information to partners. S/he explained that Social Services gather information at a local level which passes it to county level

which passes it to Central Government. Social Services could therefore be a useful conduit for gathering information

- A housing association representative made the point that data protection can work to protect vulnerable people by not allowing the spread of confidential information
- A council representative said that examples of useful partners would be organisations that make adaptations to people's homes. For example, Foundations or the Local Government Association could share data with WPD as these organisations capture a great deal of information. These organisations could also share best practice and bring uniformity to how data is captured so that organisations *'aren't working in 150 different ways'*
- A council representative asked WPD what conversations are regularly had with local Social Services departments which hold a lot of information. S/he said Social Services departments hold *'pages and pages'* of information and know many people since they were born
- An energy representative suggested WPD could link up with social workers and healthcare professionals to jointly capture data

Table 2

- An energy representative was of the opinion that *'data protection is an excuse to not do something and there are many ways around it'*
- An energy representative added that *'it's really important for WPD to work with all organisations so that they can share information and support costs'*

Table 3

- An advisory service representative would *'like to see WPD working with supporting agencies such as Age UK and others as they are in direct contact with customers'*. S/he stated *'the question of vulnerability arises again but more promotion is needed'*
- An advisory service representative stated *'other agencies and front line workers should be informed of the register as they work with the target audience'*
- An advisory service representative felt *'all groups should work together but there are so many unknown agencies in local communities. WPD should share the load'*
- An energy representative pointed out there are lots of programmes out there such as Energy Best Deal. S/he would *'like to see WPD working with Ofgem to roll out the best deals across the network using the information on the network'*. S/he stated *'more information needs to be delivered to front line workers'*
- A housing association representative agreed with data sharing on vulnerable customers but pointed out the data is not always up to date. S/he said *'working with WPD would be helpful to raise the awareness of the register and social media sites such as Facebook are good as it is common and the elderly are educated on the site'*. S/he also

commented putting information in his / her company's tenants update newsletter which goes out quarterly would also be beneficial

- A housing association representative agreed that *'a website as well as all other communication methods need to be used'*
- A housing association representative commented on Uswitch which s/he is working with to promote the best deals. S/he said *'at one event over 200 people attended'*
- An advisory service representative asked if any of the stakeholders *'had experienced any language problems?'*
- A housing association representative said *'it is not a problem as lots of members of staff can speak different languages'* and s/he also uses *'language line which can access eight common languages'*. S/he also commented *'lots of information leaflets have been translated into many languages'*
- An advisory service representative asked if any of the stakeholders *'had tried to speak to the younger generation about vulnerability and when to ask for help by doing talks at schools?'*
- A housing association representative said *'yes I have discussed energy issues at schools with the students and their parents'*
- An advisory service representative commented s/he *'goes into schools and colleges to teach students how to manage their finances'*. S/he said s/he *'runs a money club with parents as well which focuses on money and energy saving'*
- A housing association representative pointed out there is *'big national regional events such as climate change week'*. S/he said his / her *'organisation set up a stall with a book stand aim to get messages out to customers'*. S/he commented *'freebies are a good way to attract customers'*
- An advisory service representative said *'it is a good method to have a stand and reach out to people'*
- A housing association representative agreed that *'the big energy week is a good idea and WPD should attend'*
- An advisory service representative agreed and commented *'energy week appears in the news so people will attend events'*

5.6. Q7. Is there anything else WPD should be doing?

Table 3

- An advisory service representative stated *'WPD needs to use all possible channels to communicate'*

- A housing association representative commented *'with the welfare reform coming into force soon it is important to get all information out there'*. S/he felt an *'effective method would be door knocking'*
- An advisory service representative commented *'the most effective method of communication is television adverts but I realise it involves big costs but will have an incredible response'*
- An advisory service representative agreed that *'the TV and radio is the most effective way to get information out to customers'*
- A housing association representative commented *'people are only interested if it affects them'*

6. Power cut support

6.1. Q8. What do you think of WPD's proposals with regard to power cut support?

Table 1

- An advisory service representative stated s/he has *'always had a good experience when dealing with WPD to help people when there are power cuts'*

Table 2

- An advisory service representative was of the opinion that *'it's a question of informing customers and letting them know when the power will return as it assures you that something is being done'*
- An energy representative agreed adding *'if this service is not available it can have serious repercussions to peoples' mental and physical health'*

Table 3

- An advisory service representative asked *'how will packs be distributed?'*
- A housing association representative answered stating *'it is through Citizens Advice and they send out the packs to all customers who are on their database as being vulnerable'*
- An advisory service representative said *'the key to get out packs before a power cut and give contact information if anything is needed'*

6.2. Q9. What type of support do you think WPD should offer?

Table 1

- A council representative suggested WPD need to put together a detailed engagement plan covering as many partners as possible to ensure its data was gathered in the most effective way possible and that this plan informs how WPD supports vulnerable customers when there is a power cut
- An advisory service representative would like *'crisis packs to be available at food banks'*
- An advisory service representative agreed and said *'food banks can be a signpost to the register as the crisis packs can be a point of discussion for the register'*

Table 2

- An energy representative made the point that *'first contact is the most important, as if they have someone with them to help they might not need the support from WPD'*

Table 3

- An advisory service representative said *'analogue phones are needed in the crisis pack'*. S/he commented *'people will probably have a backup plan and customers need to have some responsibility for having a plan in place'*

6.3. Q10. Do you agree that WPD should continue to target resources to provide information to vulnerable customers so that they can help themselves?

Table 1

- A council representative queried the merits of handing out crisis packs proactively saying they may end up somewhere where they're not needed
- An advisory service representative asked if WPD worked with suppliers of personal alarms for vulnerable people as this could be a good source of data
- An energy representative employee suggested that 'learning difficulties' should be a category within the PSR because, combined with their existing condition, a power cut could lead to panic and anxiety
- A council representative suggested the two processes should be carried out *'hand in hand'* as it could take up to two years to establish all the networks required to effectively share data, and cleansing could be done whilst these networks were being built up

Table 2

- An energy representative made the point that *'information is key as people are unaware of the support offered'*
- A housing association representative would like to see *'more links between WPD and agencies'*

Table 3

- A housing association representative said *'yes'* and s/he only comes across people who need to be on the register *'through work'*. S/he commented *'many vulnerable customers are unaware of the register and do not realise they can ask for help'*. S/he felt *'a familiar face for customers when speaking to someone regarding the register is key'*
- A housing association representative agreed but felt *'it is not just the vulnerable that are unaware of the Register's existence'*. S/he pointed out *'many colleagues are not aware of register'*. S/he said *'it is important all front line workers need to be told of all agencies'*
- An energy representative employee felt that *'community outreach is key'*

6.4. Q11. How long is it acceptable for a vulnerable customer to be without power before we provide assistance?

Table 1

- An electricity representative employee commented that four hours is a long time if someone is stuck in their home
- An energy representative employee pointed out that certain people would need to go to hospital if they didn't have electricity and couldn't wait four hours. If they knew at the outset how long the power cut would be, then they could make alternative arrangements

Table 2

- An advisory service representative said *'the shorter the time the better'*
- An energy representative commented that *'first contact is the most important thing as some people may not need assistance'*
- A housing association representative commented that s/he believed *'it's a really good idea to keep tabs on people every four hours, however there are issues with peoples phones not working'*

Table 3

- A housing association representative said *'it depends on who it is and what their health problems are'*
- An energy representative employee also pointed out *'it depends on the time of year and if other methods of heat are available'*
- An energy representative employee asked *'how can WPD make contact with customers on the phone when there is no power as many phones now need power to work?'*
- An advisory service representative said *'four hours is stretching it but it depends on what time of day the power cut happens'*. S/he pointed out *'some agencies are only available until 10pm'*. S/he also stated *'WPD can only do so much and there needs to be support from other agencies'*
- A housing association representative said *'if people are prepared they will be ok'*. S/he felt *'it is a massive task for any agency to ring everyone on the register and the plan has to be reasonable and manageable'*
- A housing association representative said *'communication is key'*. S/he suggested *'customers giving WPD their phone number so in times of power outages they can receive an email and/or text updating them on the situation'*
- A housing association representative felt that *'WPD need to be proactive with texting'*

- A housing association representative stated *'a list of agencies would be helpful so there are more agencies going out to people rather than WPD having the pressure of contacting them all'*
- An advisory service representative suggested *'it would be beneficial if all agencies make reference on their websites about WPD and for WPD to provide advice on its website for customers'*

6.5. Q12. How else could WPD work with public service or voluntary agencies to make a difference to help vulnerable customers during a power cut?

Table 1

- An energy representative employee suggested packs good be given out via Citizens Advice Bureaux

Table 2

- An energy representative said that WPD should *'let us know so we can communicate with other agencies and help them'*
- An advisory service representative was of the view that *'if you know of anybody who the social services should know about, then people should inform them'*
- An advisory service representative stated that s/he *'would be very happy to discuss how we can work together'*
- An energy representative queried *'do you keep in contact and get information to local councillors?'*
- An advisory service representative agreed stating *'getting the information out is the most important thing'*

6.6. Q13. WPD is proposing to spend £500k on this each year across the regions. Is this about right or should we spend more or less?

Table 1

- With regards to the £500k planned on being spent each year, an energy representative employee commented that careful checks should be put in place to ensure the money was being spent wisely and effectively as it would ultimately end up being added to customers' bills

Table 2

- An energy representative commented that *'it is not enough, but better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick'*
- An energy representative further added that WPD *'need to maximise that money by working with the right people'*

- An energy representative was of the opinion that *'you can squeeze the most out of that money if you think carefully and work with partners'*

Table 3

- A housing association representative said *'if you have the money then spend it'*
- An advisory service representative asked *'is that relating to current staff people or five new members? How many people will be funded out of this money?'*
- An energy representative employee felt *'it is a difficult figure to look at alone and more information is needed'*
- An energy representative employee asked *'what the cost of the call centre would be? How many customers will be spoken to?'*
- An advisory service representative also felt *'it is a difficult question to answer and the figure has been created from knowledge, something I do not have'*

7. Fuel Poverty and Cold Homes

7.1. Q14. Should WPD Contact Centre staff be trained to be able to identify vulnerable customers and refer them to sources of advice and assistance in relation to energy efficiency and debt advice?

Table 1

- A housing association representative acknowledged this is a difficult and sensitive area. *'How do you get on to the topic? If someone raises the point you can't ignore it. It's an odd situation if you're trying to wheedle information out of someone'*

Table 2

- An energy representative commented *'yes, it's a good idea but needs to be very practical and it should involve actually going to people's homes, so they can shadow people involved'*
- An advisory service representative said that *'it has to be dealt with in the right way as you can scare people away'*
- An advisory service representative felt that *'training is always a good idea, but you need to address changes to data accrument'*
- An energy representative was of the view that *'it's about making the calls effective and getting to the point quickly'*
- An advisory service representative disagreed, saying that *'if someone has a problem they will want to talk but it's about pushing the right button to open them up but you can't be too intrusive'*
- An advisory service representative was of the view that *'no one will want to define themselves as being in poverty'*
- An advisory service representative added that *'fuel poverty has to be taken into perspective with the other issues that are currently affecting them'*
- An energy representative stated *'effective phone calls are a necessity'*
- An advisory service representative made the point that *'if other utility companies are working with partners then a good idea is for WPD to work with them as well'*

Table 3

- An energy representative employee said *'yes, but staff should be trained to a high level first'. S/he said 'poverty and vulnerability are not linked and therefore they should be treated differently'. S/he stated 'if a person is struggling, the call centre staff should be*

aware and trained on how to pick up on this and then how to deal with it'. S/he stated 'all decisions should be made in the best interest of the customer'

- *An energy representative employee agreed and said 'it is the right thing to be doing something'*
- *An energy representative employee felt 'in order to help a customer it is more beneficial to refer the customer rather than signpost them '*
- *An advisory service representative was of the view 'WPD should build up a network and partnerships so it is easy to refer customers for help and advice'*
- *An energy representative employee pointed out s/he would 'like to see a dedicated bureau who receives and deals with referrals'*
- *An advisory service representative was of the opinion 'networks are developing but WPD have to be proactive'*
- *An advisory service representative stated 'WPD are a professional company and they need to keep this image through the service and advice they give to customers from the call centres'. S/he felt 'WPD will need to develop an appropriate way to get the whole story from customer but it is important they are not coming across as being patronising'. S/he also felt if 'a customer is on a pre-paid meter it could indicate they have financial problems and therefore training is key'*
- *A housing association representative disagreed and stated 'being on pre-paid meters may be best for those who are on a budget'*
- *A housing association representative also disagreed, stating 'some customers can spend up to £60 a week on meters'. S/he went on to point out '75% of people who go to my agency for help and advice are on benefits'*
- *An energy representative employee said 'it can be a cultural thing to have to have a pre-paid meter'*
- *A housing association representative stated 'many customers choose to have a meter as it allows them to disconnect themselves from suppliers '*
- *A housing association representative pointed out 'pre-paid meters are in a lot of landlord properties to reduce risk of tenants not paying their bills'*
- *All agreed meters do not mean a customer is poor*
- *An advisory service representative pointed out 'circumstances create questions and you cannot draw out certainties on circumstances'*
- *An energy representative employee said 'customers give information to agencies and it is important this information is handled appropriately'*

7.2. Q15. Which type of agencies should WPD make referrals to, to provide advice on fuel poverty and energy efficiency?

Table 1

- A council representative recommended Action Energy as a good partner for WPD to work with, describing the organisation as *'a one-stop shop'*
- A housing association representative pointed out that whatever plan WPD goes with has to be simple. If WPD is making referrals it has to be agencies which can cope with this and who are up and running
- An advisory service representative believed WPD should look at the quality of referral agencies. S/he warned that the future of many such agencies is in doubt and many may disappear when they run out of funding within the next 12 months

Table 2

- An advisory service representative said that *'we are a good agency to refer to'* (Step Change Debt Charity)
- An advisory service representative was of the view that *'some people have different ways of wanting to be contacted and therefore there should be different agencies to work with'*
- An energy representative made the point that it *'is important that WPD target hotspots and therefore organise programmes or initiatives in those areas'*
- An energy representative further added that *'rural areas are an issue'*

Table 3

- An energy representative employee stated *'Citizens Advice is a good service as well as Age UK and the Energy Advice Service'*
- An energy representative employee felt *'it is best to speak to the supplier first'*
- An advisory service representative was of the view *'financial advisors at the Citizens Advice Bureau are the best people to speak to'*
- An advisory service representative said *'WPD should work with Age UK as they help people who are 55+ and may be out of work and struggling'*

7.3. Q16. How can WPD get involved in multi-agency partnerships tackling fuel poverty and social exclusion?

Table 1

- A council representative admitted s/he didn't see it wholly as WPD's responsibility and this should instead sit with regional advice centres, commenting *'rather than duplicating'*

some of the work under way at grassroots levels, let your guys get on with what they're good at

- A housing association representative asked if WPD could fund advice agencies
- A council representative said it would be *'extremely interesting'* to have a conversation with WPD about innovations

Table 2

- An energy representative stated that *'warmth partnerships are a great idea'*
- An advisory service representative listed Money Advice Liaison Group and Bristol Debt Advice Group as two partners
- An advisory service representative made the point that *'universal credit is coming, you might want to be in contact with DWP'*

Table 3

- A housing association representative commented on the *'Affordable Warmth Action Group which is networked and used to promote and share services'*. S/he would *'like to see WPD getting involved'*
- An advisory service representative agreed and said it would be *'a very welcome move'*
- An energy representative employee asked *'what has WPD got to offer the group?'*
- An advisory service representative said *'there are so many groups and WPD may not be aware of them all'*. S/he suggested *'WPD advertise and ask to be contacted by agencies'*
- An energy representative employee asked *'in relation to fuel poverty what can WPD do?'*
- An advisory service representative commented *'WPD has been doing some good work in Derbyshire and direct engagement will offer success'*
- An energy representative employee also commented on the project in Derbyshire and felt *'all network companies should look to be doing something similar'*
- An energy representative employee would like to see *'WPD doing more outreach to charities'*
- A housing association representative agreed and felt *'it would be a good idea as the charities have local knowledge and WPD do not'*
- An energy representative employee asked *'how is data through the call centre used to get customers to sign up to schemes?'*
- An advisory service representative commented that *'customer service is an alternative indirect route and lines of communication should always be kept open'*

7.4. Q17. How far should WPD go to help tackle these issues?

Table 1

- An energy representative employee queried where does the responsibility start and end, admitting that it's *'a very sensitive area.'* S/he explained that his / her organisation looks for early warning signs e.g. when not been paid the last three quarters bills they'll work with other organisations to ensure things don't become an issue
- An energy representative employee explained that his / her organisation already reaches out to people through community initiatives. If WPD doubled up with this activity then the cost would be added to customers' bills
- A council representative believed that WPD's best role would be to offer expertise in areas of innovations, e.g. cladding, power distribution network and ground source heat pumps. S/he described this as a *'niche for WPD to occupy'*
- An advisory service representative said s/he was confused as to what WPD's goal was. S/he commented that a lot of organisations were trying to tackle fuel poverty but questioned whether WPD was best placed to do this as the organisation didn't see enough people as compared with other bodies, for example Social Services, the NHS and the DWP

Table 2

- An energy representative was of the view that WPD *'should go an awfully long way to tackle these issues, as it has a strong link to their business'*
- An energy representative agreed, stating *'it has a wider effect on WPD as a whole'*
- An energy representative made the point that *'it doesn't do any harm to have people who are involved in energy efficiency to work to give advice to customers'*
- An energy representative commented that WPD *'can link these issues to other areas of the WPD business and can therefore link it towards their CSR goals'*

Table 3

- An advisory service representative was of the opinion *'identifying other agencies skills is key'. S/he felt 'other agencies have more relevant skills than WPD and we should all be working together and asking how can we help the people, that is the question?'*
- An energy representative employee agreed and stated *'by speaking to the customer who is struggling could lead on to other agencies/charities helping'*
- An advisory service representative asked *'can we deal with the treatment rather than cure?'* S/he felt *'the key is to be prepared'*
- A housing association representative *'would like to see WPD carrying on with what they are doing in Derbyshire'*

- A housing association representative pointed out *'housing associations are often the first point of call in a power cut and it would be good for WPD to work with them'*
- An advisory service representative stated *'education in schools is important'. S/he would like to see 'organisations reaching out to teenagers by telling them the basic facts'*
- A housing association representative said s/he *'works with young people and tells them the cost of standby and the importance of not over filling the kettle as this will save money which can be spent on the heating bill instead'*
- An advisory service representative commented *'it would be a great benefit to target second year university students as that can be where debt begins'*
- A housing association representative said *'in the past there was never a problem as energy bills were manageable but due to increases young people should now be targeted as they are unaware'*
- An advisory service representative said *'pitching it at the right level is key'*
- A housing association representative commented *'in terms of educating customers pictures in leaflets tell more stories than words and are easier to understand'*

7.5. Q18. We are proposing £500k each year across our regions on fuel poverty. Is this about right or should we spend more or less?

Table 1

- An energy representative employee asked if Ofgem would analyse the £500k
- An energy representative employee asked if the driver behind the £500k was Ofgem or WPD
- An energy representative employee pointed out that it would be extremely hard to see if the £500k offered value for money

Table 2

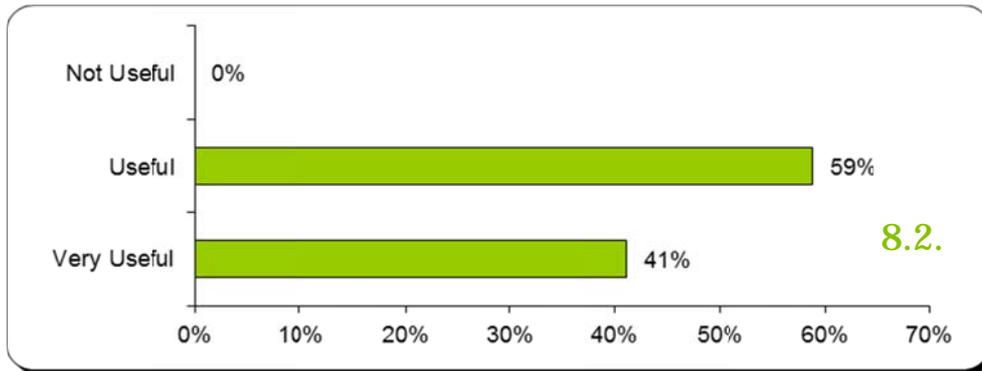
- An energy representative stated it was *'not enough'* and WPD need to *'use it well'*
- An advisory service representative said that it is *'not how much you have but what you do with it'*
- An energy representative was of the view that WPD need to *'target where you need to use the money carefully'*
- An energy representative said WPD should *'use that funding to create really specified innovate projects'*

Table 3

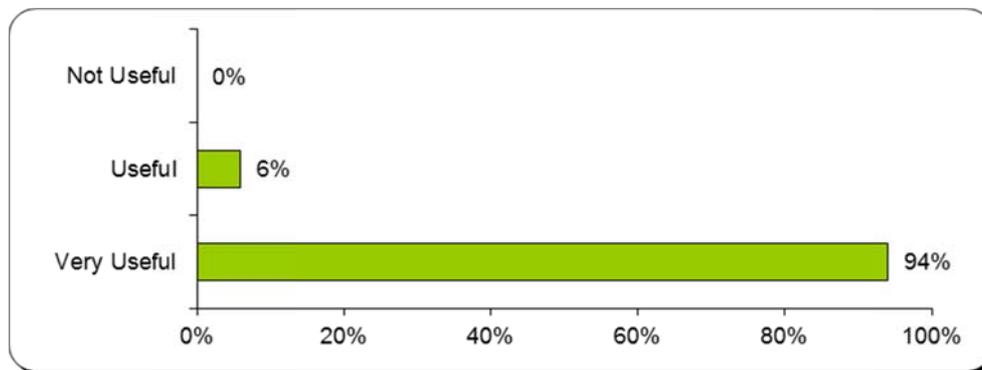
- An advisory service representative asked *'what is a fair period of review? Is six months long enough?'*
- An advisory service representative asked *'what are WPD allowed to charge? Is it related?'*
- An advisory service representative asked *'is it a matter of recruiting ten agencies on WPD's behalf and pay amount in set time?'*
- An advisory service representative said *'WPD needs to invest in call centres'*
- An energy representative was of the view *'as there are many existing schemes out there and it may be cost effective if WPD joins in'*
- An energy representative employee would like to see *'WPD using the network to create relationships with other agencies'*
- An advisory service representative stated *'in house training and awareness is important for WPD'. S/he would like 'WPD to wave the flag initially and use its intranet to make all members WPD members of staff aware of what everything is about'*

8. Stakeholder feedback

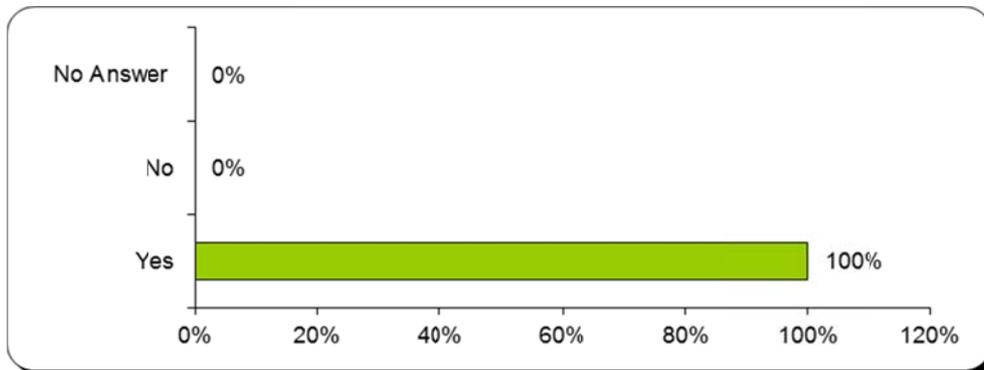
8.1. Q1. Did you find the workshop to be 'very useful'; 'useful'; or 'not useful'



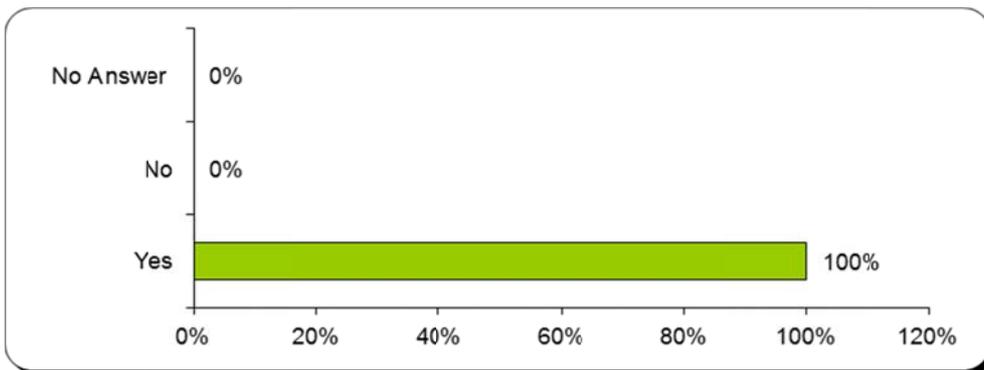
8.3. Q2. Was the venue conveniently located for you?



8.4. Q3. Did we provide you with enough information at the workshop?



8.5. Q4. Did you feel you had sufficient opportunity to express your views today?



8.6. Written feedback

A number of stakeholders left written comments on their feedback forms. A selection of these comments is shown below:

- *'Generally illuminating and run very professionally'*
- *'Close to train station'*
- *'Structure of round table discussions was useful and effective'*
- *'Informative-good mix of opinions'*
- *'Useful to Western Power Distribution, less useful to a District Council'*
- *'I have a lot more info and ideas that could be input'*
- *'I would be happy to discuss ideas on more detail on how best to link to agencies and develop projects'*
- *'Well facilitated and interesting good to be asked our views'*
- *'As this was a 'consultation,' not particularly useful for me or my organisation other than having the opportunity to give feedback'*
- *'Very interesting to understand the approach being put toward by WPD'*
- *'Very central, easy to get to from Birmingham New Street'*
- *'Excellent to get an understanding of WPD's plans around social obligations'*
- *'Very clear presentations'*
- *'1st session perhaps a bit rigid'*
- *'Well organised-excellent timing, well managed'*
- *'The round table discussions gave everybody opportunity to speak. It was interesting to hear other views'*
- *'It was good to put forward issues from the frontline as an energy advisor that I come across in my visits'*
- *'I have learnt more about WPD that I didn't previously know'*
- *'Thank you for the opportunity to share my views'*
- *'The structure of the day was excellent'*
- *'Thanks for an excellent event. I found the event very worthwhile'*