



Western Power Distribution

Small and Medium-sized Businesses Stakeholder Engagement Events

April 2015

*Actions to be taken in response to the
key findings report*

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1 Context – workshops overview

Context

- 1.1 At WPD's most recent round of events with wider stakeholders (held in six locations in January 2015), WPD received feedback from small and medium-sized businesses that they would like more targeted engagement with WPD. In particular they raised the issue of the potential vulnerability of small businesses, as a priority for WPD to address.
- 1.2 In response to this, in April 2015, WPD hosted two bespoke workshops dedicated to addressing the concerns of small and medium businesses in Birmingham and Bristol. We then conducted telephone interviews with a number of small business owners and relevant representative organisations, such as the Federation of Small Businesses.

Dates & locations

- 1.3 WPD hosted two stakeholder workshops as follows:
 - Birmingham (Aston Villa Football Club), Wednesday 15th April 2015
 - Bristol (Bristol Pavilion), Thursday 23rd April 2015

Attendees

- 1.4 A total of 16 stakeholders attended the two workshops. There were a range of stakeholders, including representatives from small and medium businesses, FSBs, LEPs, Chambers of Commerce, other business organisations and the engineering and energy/utility sectors.
- 1.5 A total of 22 stakeholders conducted telephone interviews, representing small and medium businesses, FSBs, Chambers of Commerce, LEPs and other business organisations.

Key objectives

- 1.6 The workshops were designed to achieve 2 key objectives:
 - Better understand the impact of WPD's operations on SMEs – particularly in the event of a loss of power, due to a severe weather incident, for example
 - Better understand the issues that we can work together on, to improve our service in a number of areas including providing a reliable electricity supply, the impact of our day-to-day operations on SMEs and the provision of new connections to the network.

Format of the workshops

- 1.7 Each workshop session featured presentations by senior WPD representatives followed by roundtable discussions. The roundtable workshops were facilitated by trained Westbourne facilitators and stakeholders' comments were captured by Westbourne scribes. During the telephone interviews, stakeholders were asked a series of multiple choice questions about their views and experience of WPD's engagement, with a Westbourne facilitator noting down any additional comments they made.
- 1.8 Each event included three sessions each with a WPD presentation then a round-table discussion:
 - **Session 1: Understanding vulnerability for small/medium businesses**
 - **Session 2: Developing an action plan with respect to:**
 - Low customer awareness
 - Reliability and resilience
 - **Session 3: Developing an action plan with respect to:**
 - New connections
 - Street works

2 Key findings

- 2.1 It was clear from the quantitative findings that small and medium businesses and their representatives felt they were 'vulnerable', often because they did not have any kind of resilience plan in place. There was a strong consensus that there was a role for WPD to play in engaging with them.
- 2.2 The key factors impacting small businesses include power cuts, low customer awareness, connections, street-works, quality of supply and use of system charges.
- 2.3 Small and medium businesses are particularly vulnerable as they don't tend to consider their own resilience and equipment such as generators represent a significant cost for them.
- 2.4 WPD's role in the wider energy industry isn't viewed as being clear enough.
- 2.5 WPD could help businesses develop a resilience plan by sending out a list of questions or points to cover. This could include low cost, small-scale solutions for businesses.
- 2.6 Businesses want a sense of confidence that WPD are 'on top of it'. This could relate to awareness of unexpected power cuts, giving sufficient notice on planned outages or simply ensuring there is a reliable supply.
- 2.7 Engagement should be through existing channels like local business organisations, as small and medium businesses don't have much time to engage with WPD.
- 2.8 Only 14% of attendees thought their business had a resilience plan in place.
- 2.9 89% felt it was important to raise awareness of WPD amongst SMEs.
- 2.10 Businesses believe WPD should engage with them, through their representatives, about the best time to do street-works.
- 2.11 WPD should also raise awareness of the importance of the connections process and encourage businesses to contact them as soon as they can.

3 Summary of actions

As a result of the feedback received, WPD will take 5 actions and will report back to stakeholders on the progress of these. They are:

Raise awareness of WPD We will:

- 3.1. Better target our annual awareness campaign via organisations such as the Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses.

Improve resilience We will:

- 3.2. Develop an electricity resilience checklist for SMEs to incorporate into wider business continuity planning.
- 3.3. Include a smartphone app feature to let customers register for power cut updates at multiple sites.

Address issues with street works and connections We will:

- 3.4. Review our street works policy to improve local liaison.
- 3.5. Raise awareness of the connections process and the need to engage early with WPD, possibly via local council planning packs.

4 Further information

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