



# Western Power Distribution Social Obligations Workshops Bristol And Birmingham October 2019

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In October 2019, WPD held two workshops to discuss its social obligations programme with stakeholders. This included work done to support both customers in vulnerable situations, as well as those in fuel poverty.

The first workshop was held in Bristol on 23 October and the second was held in Birmingham on 24 October 2019. Stakeholders in attendance included local authorities, consumer bodies, and charities and NGOs involved in this sector.

The purpose of the workshops was to inform stakeholders about the company's current and future programme, to get feedback on its activities and to improve collaboration and joint ways of working. The workshop was split into four sessions. Each included a presentation followed by a round-table discussion. The sessions were as follows:

1. WPD's current social obligations programme, including referrals and a pilot mental health project;
2. Ofgem's new vulnerability strategy;
3. Ensuring the transition to DSO is smart and fair; and
4. Stakeholder priorities for the next Business Plan (RIIO ED2).

The presentation given on the day can be downloaded at <https://yourpowerfuture.westernpower.co.uk/workshops-and-events>.

WPD instructed EQ Communications, a specialist stakeholder engagement consultancy, to independently facilitate the workshops and to take notes of the comments made by stakeholders. Comments were not attributed to individuals to ensure that all stakeholders were able to speak as candidly as possible.

This report is a summary of the feedback that was gathered during the round-table discussions as well as the data from the written feedback forms that stakeholders were asked to complete at the end of the workshop. This report covers both the workshop in Bristol as well as the workshop in Birmingham.



## 2 | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The workshops gathered feedback from stakeholders on areas relating to the existing and future social obligations programme. At each workshop, a WPD representative gave a presentation, followed by a round-table discussion designed to collect stakeholder feedback. This chapter is a summary of the key findings.

### WORKSHOP ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OUR CURRENT PROGRAMME

Stakeholders generally had a positive experience of working with WPD in this area. It was felt that the team were always looking at ways to improve and were responsive to stakeholder feedback. Areas for improvement included ensuring a better flow of information between WPD and its referral partners and reducing the amount of administration required on projects.

In general, stakeholders praised WPD's current programme and felt that the existing schemes worked well. They agreed that partnerships were key to delivering these programmes and urged for more collaboration across the board, particularly with other utilities and wider service providers. A range of recommendations were proposed to help advance the four different parts of WPD's social obligations programme, particularly in relation to how to improve the accuracy of the Priority Services Register (PSR).

### WORKSHOP TWO: OFGEM'S VULNERABILITY STRATEGY

Stakeholders provided feedback on how WPD could work to address some of the outcomes in Ofgem's new vulnerability strategy, with a particular focus on three areas where WPD felt it needed to improve.

To see better use of data across regulated sectors to enable more holistic and targeted support: there was consensus that GDPR has created challenges in this area. Stakeholders wanted to see WPD work more closely with other service providers, particularly in the healthcare sector. They also supported the creation of a single PSR for all utilities.

Suppliers and networks to demonstrate innovative measures to support customers in vulnerable situations: stakeholders wondered if WPD could investigate innovation around smart meters to ensure that they are making the most of the roll-out and its ability to support customers in vulnerable situations. Several stakeholders made the point that innovation is not just about technology, but that human innovations would be very important in this area. A range of innovations were suggested by stakeholders.

Greater understanding and consistency across essential service markets for more joined-up action to improve the experience of consumers in vulnerable situations: support was expressed for a single point of contact that brought all utilities together so that there was only one touchpoint for a customer. It was felt that the current approach can be very confusing and time-intensive for customers. Better collaboration with the health service was raised again.

## WORKSHOP THREE: A SMART AND FAIR FUTURE – THE TRANSITION TO DSO

For the most part, stakeholders were aware of the changes taking place in the energy sector and what this would mean for them. However, they stressed that the people they worked with (those customers in vulnerable situations or fuel poverty) were completely unaware of the changes that were about to take place. The conversations repeatedly returned to the importance of trust as the transition to smart networks takes place, and of identifying and working with those trusted parties to support these customers to ensure they are not left behind.

In general, it was felt that those who would be left behind the most would be those who experienced digital / technological exclusion – largely the elderly, but also those who are not engaged in technology. However, it was recognised that the ability of customers to have more control over their energy usage via these new technologies was also an opportunity, particularly through encouraging the younger population to interact and engage more with their electricity consumption.

Stakeholders felt that the transition to a smart network presented real opportunities for those in fuel poverty. It was felt they would respond to financial incentives and would be keen adopters of flexible tariffs. Some challenges for fuel poor customers were also raised. It was felt they would be left behind when it comes to electric vehicles and that they might have to pay disproportionately for reinforcements to the networks if costs are socialised.

Stakeholders felt that service providers have a key role to play in helping to facilitate the transition to a smart network. It was felt that they had the trusted relationships and would therefore be critical in helping to educate the consumer about this new world. It was also felt that they could help identify customers who wanted to reduce their bills by participating in flexibility services.

## WORKSHOP FOUR: YOUR PRIORITIES FOR OUR NEXT BUSINESS PLAN (2023 – 2028)

When asked to identify their priorities for the next Business Plan, stakeholders said that a lot of what they wanted to see was the continuation of the work that WPD is already doing in this area as they felt the projects were well run and were critical in being able to provide support to customers in vulnerable situations and fuel poverty. This included: increasing PSR registrations through referral partnerships; maintaining and cleansing the PSR; supporting those in fuel poverty; and supporting customers in power cuts.

However, other priorities were suggested that were new – or certainly represented a new emphasis for WPD. Some of these related to the transition to a smart network, such as running innovation projects to ensure the transition is fair. It also included a much greater emphasis on educating customers on a range of issues including on low-carbon, energy efficiency, PSR, and the transition to DSO. In fact, educating consumers was the top priority for stakeholders by a considerable margin.

## EVENT FEEDBACK

After the event, stakeholders were asked to complete written feedback forms. In terms of the event, the feedback was as follows:

- All stakeholders reported that they found the event interesting, with 83% opting for 'very interesting' and 17% for 'interesting'.
- 98% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they had the opportunity to make their points and ask questions.
- 91% 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that WPD covered the right topics on the day, and no stakeholders disagreed with this statement.
- 89% of stakeholders felt that the workshop facilitation was 'very good', compared to 9% who opted for 'good'.

A full report of the event feedback received can be found in Appendix 1.

### 3 | ATTENDEES

53 stakeholders attended across both workshops, representing 43 organisations. The organisations represented were as follows:

- Accent
- ACE (Action in Caerau & Ely)
- Act On Energy
- AgilityEco Services Limited
- Air Liquide Healthcare
- Auriga Services
- Avon Fire & Rescue Service
- Bath and North East Somerset Council
- Bristol City Council
- British Red Cross
- Care & Repair, Cardiff and the Vale
- Care & Repair in Powys
- Centre for Sustainable Energy
- Citizens Advice Bassetlaw
- Citizens Advice Coventry
- Citizens Advice Derbyshire Districts
- Citizens Advice Mendip
- Citizens Advice North Warwickshire
- Citizens Advice Plymouth
- Citizens Advice South Hams
- Citizens Advice South Somerset
- Combe Hay village
- Elim Housing
- Exeter Community Energy
- Fortis Living
- Groundwork
- Harborough District Council
- Headway UK
- Homes in Sedgemoor
- Marches Energy Agency
- National Energy Foundation
- North Bristol NHS Trust
- Piparia Consulting Limited
- Plymouth Energy Community
- Riverside Advice
- Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks
- SE2 Limited
- Severn Wye Energy Agency
- South East Wales Energy Agency
- Wales & West Utilities
- Wessex Water
- WPD Customer Panel
- YES Energy Solutions

## 4 | WORKSHOP ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OUR CURRENT PROGRAMME

The presentation provided a brief introduction to WPD's role. It then outlined the current activities that WPD is delivering as part of its social obligations work. These were split into four main areas: improving our understanding of vulnerability; improving the data accuracy of the Priority Services Register; improving power cut services for customers in vulnerable situations; and addressing fuel poverty. This was followed by an introduction to a new project WPD is running in conjunction with Citizens Advice South Somerset to help customers with mental health and financial difficulties. The presentation closed with an overview of the work that WPD's referral partners are doing to help customers join the Priority Services Register.

### WHY HAVE YOU ATTENDED TODAY?

- Several stakeholders wanted to gain an understanding about how to identify customers in vulnerable situations, including those that are particularly hard to reach.
- Many wanted to learn more about the types of projects that WPD are involved in.
- There was a desire to share work that was already being done in this space, particularly best practice.
- Several wanted to know what support WPD would provide in an emergency and how agencies can get better at data sharing.
- Many stakeholders in attendance already ran projects with WPD and were there to see what could be done better and if there were any other opportunities to work together.
- Stakeholders were there to ensure that what was being done already was joined-up. For example, a member of the emergency services wanted to make sure they were doing everything they could when they were in someone's home.
- One stakeholder expressed a desire to learn more about the link between the transition to Net Zero and those in fuel poverty.
- Some stakeholders expressed concern that the level of social care delivered via the public sector had decreased significantly and stressed the importance of the role WPD plays.

## WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH US TO DATE?

- In general, stakeholders had a positive experience of working with WPD. For example, they felt that they were responsive, were always looking at ways to improve and that as a team, they were very joined-up.
- It was felt that members of the team were willing to listen to the experts in this area, were always open to new ideas and were willing to give innovation a go.
- There was a sense that stakeholders were pleased that WPD took responsibility for things like fuel poverty, rather than being solely interested in laying new infrastructure.
- It was felt that through many of the schemes, stakeholders had an opportunity to build fruitful long-term relationships with WPD which facilitated good working.
- Several stakeholders did flag, however, that there was a lot of administration involved, including when reporting back on projects, with the Affordable Warmth Scheme in particular receiving a special mention. That said, they did understand why this had to be the case.
- One stakeholder complained that it wasn't acceptable that charities had to pay a fee to tender for projects.
- Several commented that there was a need for a better flow of information between WPD and its referral partners. For example, the suggestion was made that WPD publish a list of all the projects that they support as well as other projects they are working on with other utilities.
- It was noted that it can be quite insular working at a charity. The partnership meetings for Power Up were cited as being helpful, particularly in terms of being able to meet other referral partners and share experiences.
- Praise was given to the new 12-month funding round because short funding timeframes mean that charities lose staff and their expertise.
- The matter of funding was raised as an ongoing issue for all service providers, although several said that WPD were doing a lot in this area, particularly compared to suppliers.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY VIEWS ON OUR CURRENT PROGRAMME?

In general, stakeholders praised WPD for running these projects and broadly felt that the schemes they had were successful. A common theme was the need to drive collaboration across DNOs, other utilities and wider society. Another general comment was the need for organisations to try to get to people before they end up in crisis and that more work needs to be done in this space as prevention is better than cure. Stakeholders gave feedback in relation to the four current parts of WPD's social obligations programme.

### Improve our understanding of vulnerability

- Work with local branches of Citizens Advice to run online learning courses; and
- Recognise that fuel poverty is just a sub-set of poverty and requires a holistic approach across different service providers.

### Improve the accuracy of the PSR

- Continue to promote WPD as a company, as the low level of awareness is a barrier to increasing sign-ups;
- Do more to promote the PSR on social media while remaining cognisant that not everyone has access to or can use technology (Ovo Energy was given as an example of best practice in this area);
- Combine promotion of the PSR with energy saving and efficiency advice;
- Continue to promote collaboration with other DNOs, utilities and service providers to reduce the number of contacts that people receive;

- Look to do more with the healthcare sector, including working with: hospital trusts (via NHS Improvement); hospital discharge teams ('green teams'); charities like the Neurological Alliance; and prescription delivery drivers;
- Run a TV advertising campaign to reach a large audience, as well as advertising on public transport and in supermarkets;
- Provide clarity to service providers on the difference between the DNOs' and the suppliers' PSRs;
- Consider how best to ensure that people who move to a new house remain on the PSR, given the registration is currently tied to a specific address;
- Ensure that the vulnerability map is up to date and dynamic;
- Make the PSR consent form clearer; and
- Consider how to increase sign-ups for new parents, for example by providing information as part of the baby boxes.

#### Improve power cut services for customers in vulnerable situations

- Do more to raise awareness of the availability of crisis packs, as well as the 105 number;
- Note that the Power Cut Reporter app is sometimes incompatible with public sector work phones, due to their IT;
- Include electric heating as a factor in terms of how you prioritise people (particularly those in vulnerable situations) when there is a power cut;
- Work with home care providers, such as Home Is Best;
- Supply smart bulbs to customers in vulnerable situations;
- Liaise with Cardiff Council to learn about their projects with telecare providers to see if there is joint working that could be done in this space;
- Recognise that it is about identifying who it is that a customer in a vulnerable situation trusts and look to engage with those people (e.g. health visitors, neighbours, etc.); and
- Continue to work with fire and rescue services, and resilience partnerships.

#### Address fuel poverty

- Provide more information on fuel poverty and where to go to get support;
- Work with Ofgem to encourage suppliers to enter into Power Up schemes;
- Do more to support energy efficiency measures in homes that are harder to treat, for example, housing in rural areas or those on inefficient electric storage heaters or oil heating;
- Target the users of prepaid meters as their energy costs are much higher; and
- Look to promote education among university students and young people about how to use electric heating systems to ensure that a lack of understanding isn't costing them money.

### **DO ANY OF YOU WANT TO BECOME A REFERRAL PARTNER / DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO WOULD WANT TO BE A REFERRAL PARTNER?**

Stakeholders in attendance were asked whether they would like to become a referral partner / if they could recommend anyone who could become a referral partner. Over the course of the two workshops, WPD signed up a further 11 referral partners.

## 5 | WORKSHOP TWO: OFGEM'S VULNERABILITY STRATEGY

The presentation introduced Ofgem's proposed new consumer vulnerability strategy between now and 2025. It outlined the four different areas and associated outcomes included within the strategy. It then set out the outcomes that WPD had identified as requiring more work in order to seek stakeholder views on how best to address them.

### DO YOU HAVE ANY VIEWS ON HOW WPD CAN WORK TO ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES?

Improving identification of vulnerability and smart use of data: to see better use of data across regulated sectors to enable more holistic and targeted support for consumers in vulnerable situations

- There was a consensus view that GDPR has created difficulties with the sharing of data, and that even if it is not actually a problem according to the legislation, people perceive it to be a problem. Stakeholders suggested working collaboratively with Ofgem and others in the sector to ensure that GDPR does not prevent the sharing of PSR data.
- Stakeholders wanted to work with other service providers to ensure that data can be shared wherever possible. For example, oxygen providers sign consent forms with the fire and rescue services which should also include the PSR.
- A common theme amongst stakeholders was the need for DNOs to work more closely with the health service, with specific reference to: nurses and care practitioners; community care groups; and energy advisors in hospitals. It was also felt that data should be shared between telecare and careline companies to help target vulnerability.
- A frequent suggestion was the need to create one single PSR for suppliers and networks. Building on this, there was also a desire to see a centralised PSR database for the whole industry that all service providers can use. It was noted that Auriga Services are working to develop a UK PSR portal with Citizens Advice Bureau, which received support.
- It was noted that water companies are under huge pressure from Ofwat to increase the numbers of customers on their PSR. Stakeholders want WPD to share the vulnerability mapping tool with water companies.
- They also want more communication with service providers in general to help them gain a better understanding and identify the links between the work of different utilities in this area.
- They advocated closer working and data sharing with regulated sectors that may be less obvious, for example, large charities that are regulated by the Charity Commission or the banking sector.
- WPD was urged to do more to understand the ethnicities of customers on the PSR and work to ensure that those from vulnerable backgrounds are on the register. In that regard, it would be important to cross check the PSR with the census data to start to understand ethnic representation. Whilst they are not on the census, refugees were given as an example of a particularly vulnerable group.
- Stakeholders wanted to see more work with social landlords who could, for example, include PSR information in welcome packs for new tenants.

- They also wanted WPD to explore whether there were opportunities to work with council tax officers, as they will be working with many customers in vulnerable situations.
- In terms of a holistic approach, stakeholders emphasised that WPD should be clear in its communications that fuel poverty is an indicator of wider poverty to help encourage a wider range of sectors to share data more effectively.

### Encouraging positive and inclusive innovation: suppliers and networks to demonstrate innovative measures to support customers in vulnerable situations

- The suggestion was made that WPD should look at Wessex Water's debt assist scheme as a good example of innovation in this area.
- Another suggestion included ensuring that family members are included in PSR alerts, among other things, as it is important to recognise that carers are not always just paid staff.
- It was felt that WPD could be better at pre-warning customers so they can prepare for a planned power outage and that, as this is such a big challenge for WPD, it should be identified as an area to explore innovative solutions.
- A common suggestion was to establish what innovations could be used around smart meters. For example, whether smart meters could be targeted at customers in vulnerable situations to send last-gasp signals to them.
- The suggestion was made that WPD could work with other sectors to establish what wider use could be made of smart meter data as, for example, dramatic changes in energy usage could be used to help identify vulnerability. More generally, it was felt that the installers of smart meters should be upskilled to provide advice to customers in vulnerable situations or help identify vulnerabilities, although it was noted that these were often not trusted people.
- Several times, stakeholders made the point that innovation does not need to be technological and that, in fact, human innovations are very important in this space. For example, doing more work to improve neighbourhood resilience so that neighbours help provide the support systems for people in vulnerable situations.
- Another suggestion was looking to work with new technologies, such as Alexa or Google Assistant, to provide support to customers in vulnerable situations in their homes.
- The point was made that any innovations in this space need to be mindful of how quickly the industry is changing and the impact that this will have on the way services are delivered for customers in vulnerable situations who may find themselves excluded on the basis of digitisation, knowledge or cost.
- It was felt that there could be innovations in terms of the tariffs that are offered to ensure that people who are struggling to pay their bills are not disadvantaged, although it was recognised that this is primarily a task for suppliers.
- Stakeholders also felt that innovation could be used to identify and work with young people to help them manage their household budgets.
- Another innovation that was suggested included installing batteries rather than diesel generators as backup for the homes of customers in vulnerable situations.

Working with others to solve issues that cut across multiple sectors: we want to achieve greater understanding and consistency across essential service markets for more joined-up action to improve the experience of consumers in vulnerable situations

- Support was expressed by stakeholders for more joined-up action as it was noted that currently, each customer must manage multiple touchpoints with different service markets, which can be confusing and time-intensive. A single touchpoint was suggested, which would mean a customer could reach all utilities via one contact.
- It was felt that the transition to a DSO might help join up the action across different service markets.
- Collaboration with health service providers was raised again by stakeholders, for example, the importance of working with the NHS to change the consent form so that outpatient data could be shared with utility companies.
- Another suggestion was that WPD's vulnerability map data is shared using GIS so that other service providers (including councils) can access and build on it.
- The point was made that WPD should work with other sectors to understand and identify areas of high vulnerability and then prioritise delivering the infrastructure in those areas, including flood risk areas.
- Stakeholders wanted to see WPD lobbying the government on behalf of essential service markets to help improve the experience of consumers in vulnerable situations.
- It was noted that more needs to be done to identify what vulnerability means by sector and to jointly educate customers that anyone can be in vulnerable circumstances at different stages of their life.



## 6 | WORKSHOP THREE: A SMART AND FAIR FUTURE – THE TRANSITION TO DSO

The presentation explained how the industry was moving from a traditional network to a 'smart network' and the opportunities this may bring to customers. It also set out some of the areas that WPD was focusing on to ensure that no one – particularly those in fuel poverty and in vulnerable situations – is left behind. There was a presentation from the Centre for Sustainable Energy, which outlined some research they were doing in this area.

### WERE YOU AWARE OF THESE CHANGES – DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THE TRANSITION TO DSO / SMART NETWORKS MEANS?

In general, stakeholders were aware of these changes. However, they stressed that the people that they work with (customers in vulnerable situations and those in fuel poverty) might not be aware of the changes. It was felt that a considerable amount of education would need to take place to explain the benefits to customers, and that access to clear information would be key.

Time and again, conversations returned to the issue of trust and that this was the critical factor in whether the transition to a smart network would work for everyone. The point was made that sometimes, there was a Big Brother-type fear associated with smart networks and that DNOs will need to work with groups already trusted by customers in vulnerable situations. There was concern that people's experience of the roll-out of smart meters would make these conversations much harder as trust had been broken.

It was felt that the industry should learn the lessons from the smart meter roll-out by suppliers, where installers would send a letter or a text and then just turn up, almost wresting control away from the customer and having done little to build trust first. Smart meters were also sold in the wrong way: it should have been an infrastructure upgrade rather than a choice for people who wanted to save money.

It was noted that ultimately, customers would end up going to Citizens Advice to try to understand these new challenges, so the networks will continue to need a close working relationship.

### WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR CUSTOMERS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS AS WE TRANSITION TO A SMART NETWORK?

Stakeholders felt there were both opportunities and challenges for customers in vulnerable situations as we transition to a smart network.

In terms of challenges, it was felt that those that would be left behind most would be those who experienced digital / technological exclusion. Whilst this would include the elderly, it would also include people who are just not engaged with technology.

However, this was also seen to be an opportunity as it was felt that those with vulnerabilities in the younger generation might be able to interact better with their energy usage in this smart new world. Another opportunity that was cited was the dual benefit to be realised from, for example, putting solar panels on the roof of the home of a customer who finds themselves vulnerable, thereby ensuring that they remain resilient to a power cut whilst providing power to the grid.

The conversation continually returned to the importance of building trust with those customers in vulnerable situations to ensure that they aren't left behind. It was felt that this might preclude energy companies being closely involved in the roll-out of new technologies as they are not trusted parties. It was also felt that people can be quite relaxed about someone else taking control of energy usage, as long as there is an override switch.

It was stressed that when planning for this smart future, it is important to recognise that customers in vulnerable situations are not a homogenous group: the margin of difference between people that are defined as vulnerable and non-vulnerable can be very small and so instead, the industry needs to think about the overall customer journey.

## **WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR FUEL POOR CUSTOMERS AS WE TRANSITION TO A SMART NETWORK?**

Perhaps more so than customers in vulnerable situations, stakeholders felt that the transition to a smart network presented opportunities for fuel poor customers. Stakeholders felt that the introduction of flexible tariffs could present a real opportunity. One stakeholder said that the most active switchers of energy suppliers can often be fuel poor customers looking for the best deal. It was therefore felt that, more than other groups, fuel poor customers might benefit from incentives to change energy usage at certain times of day as they would see it as another way to reduce their energy bills.

It was felt that fuel poor customers might be more inclined to hand over control to the DSO so that companies could actively manage network demand on the basis that customers' bills would be reduced. Pensioners were given as an example of a group that might benefit from cheap daytime energy.

It was noted, however, that work needed to be done to understand what would be enough to incentivise fuel poor customers to change their energy usage. Some stakeholders felt cash incentives would be popular. There was a sense that a small overall reduction (the example of 5% was given) would not be sufficient to encourage fuel poor customers to participate.

There was also a range of perceived challenges for fuel poor customers. One was that for fuel poor customers, their energy usage is often low down on the list of expenses to worry about so they may not engage fully enough to benefit from the opportunities presented. There was also concern that fuel poor customers like having a fixed cost bill rather than a bill that changes based on their energy usage. One stakeholder also highlighted that knowing about your energy usage can be a cause of anxiety in and of itself and can cause fuel poor customers to disconnect in response.

Another challenge raised was that there are fuel poor customers who are at the mercy of unscrupulous private landlords where cost benefits may not be passed on. Similarly, there are housing associations which install new technologies but don't teach the tenants how to use them efficiently (especially electric heat pumps). The importance of the need to educate customers was raised again to ensure that they are not wasting energy (and therefore experiencing higher bills) as a result of new technologies.

The point was made that, in terms of the adoption of new technologies, fuel poor customers could be significantly left behind. It was noted that electric vehicles remain hugely unaffordable for most people, let alone those in poverty. For example, those with lower incomes buy used vehicles. Second-hand electric vehicles will have the early technologies which will mean the running costs will likely be more expensive.

It was also felt that fuel poor customers might have to pay disproportionately for reinforcement and new connections to the network, particularly if these costs are socialised across all customers. It was felt that fuel poor customers should not be subsidising reinforcement so that more wealthy customers can benefit from new technologies, and that there should be different subsidy rates for different categories of people, e.g. those with garages versus those in blocks of flats.

## **WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS AS WE TRANSITION TO A SMART NETWORK?**

The need to educate customers and help facilitate this transition to a smart network were seen as significant opportunities for service providers.

The issue of trust was raised again in this context. As trusted partners, it was noted that service providers would have a significant role to play in the dissemination of information and the provision of support to customers, particularly in educating those that are harder to reach.

Beyond education and information provision, it was felt that service providers could help identify customers who are in particularly vulnerable situations to help ensure that no one is left behind.

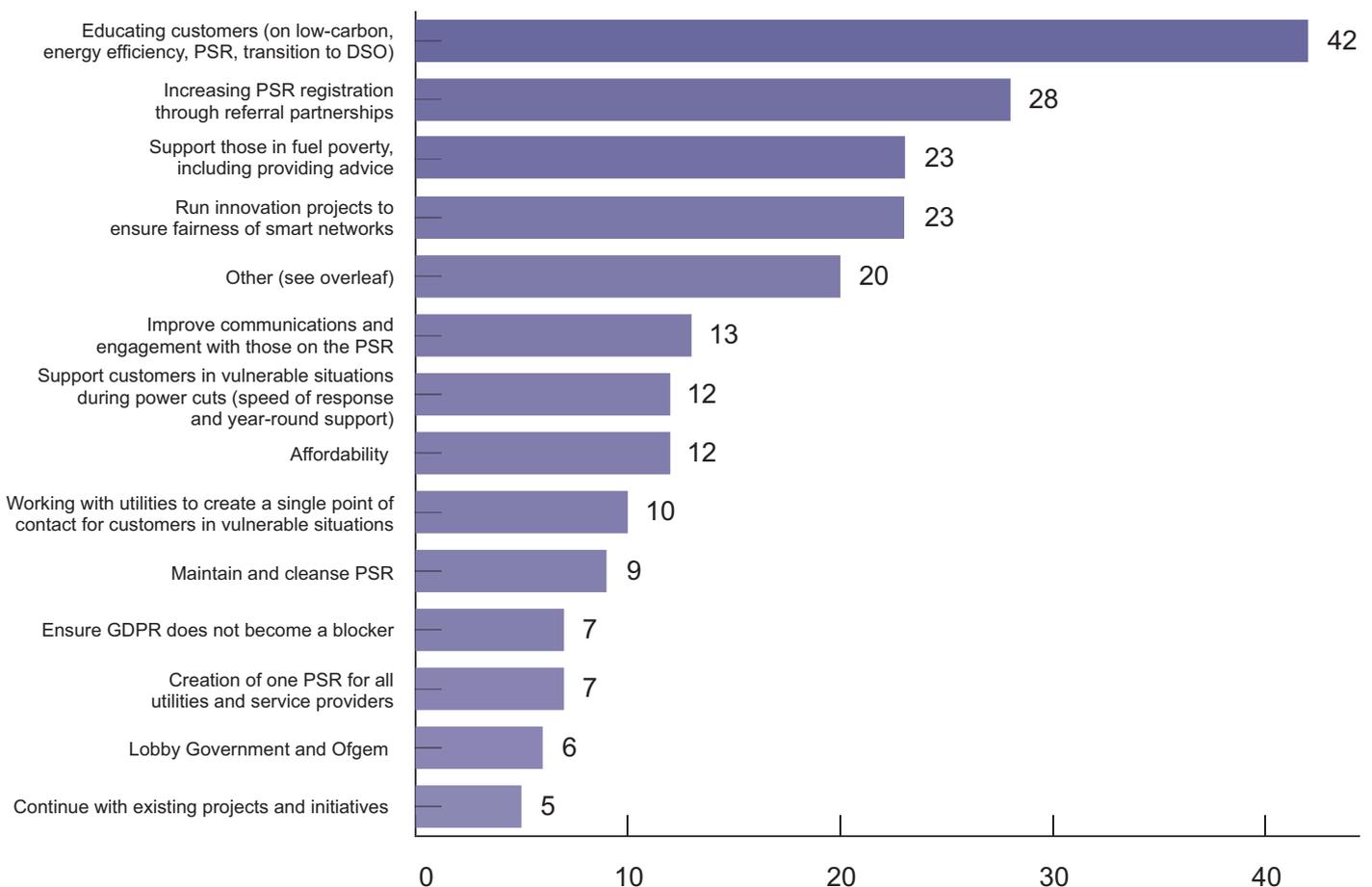
It was also felt that service providers could help to identify customers who could be aggregated to provide flexibility services on the basis that this would reduce customer bills. Social housing providers were particularly willing to help WPD provide flexibility services.

## 7 | WORKSHOP FOUR: YOUR PRIORITIES FOR OUR NEXT BUSINESS PLAN (2023 – 2028)

The presentation explained the regulatory framework for DNOs and how WPD is starting to develop its next Business Plan (2023 – 2028). It then introduced the round-table exercise, where stakeholders were given a blank sheet of a paper and asked to identify their priorities in terms of consumer vulnerability and fuel poverty for the next Business Plan.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK THE PRIORITIES SHOULD BE FOR WPD'S NEXT BUSINESS PLAN TO INCLUDE UNDER THEIR CONSUMER VULNERABILITY STRATEGY?

Stakeholders were asked to identify what their priorities were for the next Business Plan. These priorities were collated by the table facilitators and written onto a facilitation board (see Appendix 2). Stakeholders were then given five votes and asked to put these against the priorities that the table had identified (the votes could be split up or all put against one priority depending on preference). The graph below summarises the results from this exercise. Where priorities were similar, but the wording was slightly different, they have been merged and summarised as a single priority in the graph below.



When asked to identify their priorities for the next Business Plan, many of the suggestions put forward by stakeholders were activities that WPD is already doing in the area of social obligations. This included: increasing PSR registrations through referral partnerships; maintaining and cleansing the PSR; supporting those in fuel poverty; and supporting customers in power cuts. Stakeholders said that they wanted a lot of the work that was already taking place to continue in the next Business Plan – so much so that several stakeholders captured it as a priority in and of itself ('continue with existing projects and initiatives').

However, other priorities were suggested that were new, or that certainly represented a new emphasis for WPD. Some of these related to the transition to a smart network, such as running innovation projects to ensure the transition is fair. It also included a much greater emphasis on educating customers on a range of issues including on low-carbon, energy efficiency, PSR, and the transition to DSO.

During the table discussions, the priorities noted down on the facilitation boards (as shown on the graph above) were explained in more detail. The following section provides further clarification as to what stakeholders meant by each of the priorities listed above.

### Educating customers

'Educating customers' received the highest number of votes from stakeholders by a considerable margin. They wanted WPD to focus on continuously improving their advice and information for customers in a range of different areas, including: energy efficiency; decarbonisation; the PSR; and the transition to a smart network.

For example, stakeholders wanted WPD to inform customers in vulnerable situations about what they can do to benefit from a smart system. It was felt that customers need to be informed to help them make changes in their behaviour and reduce energy usage, which will ultimately bring benefits both to the network and to customers. It was noted that education on energy usage should also focus on commercial customers.

WPD's role in facilitating and empowering customers to ensure they don't fall into crisis was felt to be important, as prevention is better than cure. It was noted this should involve educating families so they can support those in vulnerable situations too.

Stakeholders wanted to see a more joined-up approach across the company to educating customers, for example, the customer service team should advocate the PSR and other important services during each customer contact.

### Increasing PSR registration through referral partnerships

The second highest priority for stakeholders was the need for WPD to continue to educate and communicate the PSR via referral partnerships. It was noted that certain areas could do with additional focus, particularly health providers such as hospital discharge teams or prescription providers. It was noted that charities are the ones who are connected within communities and are best able to refer people to the register, so WPD should continue to roll out these schemes.

### Support those in fuel poverty, including providing advice

The third highest priority for stakeholders was that WPD continues to support fuel poverty interventions. It was felt that supporting service providers to deliver measures such as income maximisation, switching and energy efficiency should be a priority for the next Business Plan too. It was noted that energy efficiency advice must be provided all year round, as summers are becoming more of an issue with hotter weather. The importance of energy efficiency measures in people's homes, such as wall insulation, was regarded as key.

### Run innovation projects to ensure fairness of smart networks

The fourth highest priority for stakeholders was a new one, specifically in relation to the transition to a smart network. Stakeholders wanted WPD to ensure that electrification takes place in a way that is accessible to all. They also wanted to make sure that those customers who won't or can't use technology are not left behind. To help ensure a smart future is fair, stakeholders wanted to see innovation funding being used for pilot projects. This included projects ensuring new technologies were accessible, but it was also felt it should not just be about technological innovations, but also human innovations such as neighbourhood support systems. Stakeholders also wanted to see pilot projects taking place to educate customers before they get into crisis, as preventing a crisis from taking place was an important way of innovating in this future energy system. The example was given of working with housing associations to educate their tenants.

## Other

Stakeholders raised a range of other suggestions that received a lower number of votes but were still seen as priorities. This included: providing incentives for people to adopt smart technologies; using vulnerability mapping to ensure that infrastructure investment supports areas with high vulnerability; creating new offers and tariffs for customers in vulnerable situations as part of this smart system, i.e. a new social tariff or PSR tariff; delivering a needs-based service; keeping the lights on for customers in vulnerable situations; and building trust in WPD.

### Improve communications and engagement with those on the PSR

Stakeholders wanted to see WPD continue to focus on proactive communications and engagement with customers on the PSR, as well as with service providers.

### Support customers in vulnerable situations during power cuts

Stakeholders felt it was important that customers continue to get support during power cuts. It was noted that DNOs are best placed to provide this advice and support as they are more trusted than suppliers. The speed of response in particular was noted as important for those in the most vulnerable situations.

### Affordability

It was felt by several stakeholders that underlying all of this, WPD still needs to focus on bringing down costs for customers, particularly those most in need. One suggestion was to focus on reducing losses so that costs could be reduced for customers in vulnerable situations.

### Working with utilities to create a single point of contact for customers in vulnerable situations

There was a strong desire to see WPD collaborate more with other utilities and third parties. In particular, it was felt that the industry needs to take a more holistic approach to the support those customers in vulnerable situations need. It was suggested that WPD should help to develop a model which provides a single point of contact for people in vulnerable situations to make it clearer for the customer. The example of Local Area Coordinators was given, which are used as part of the Australian model. It was felt that WPD is in a unique position to take a leadership role in this area.

### Maintain and cleanse PSR

Stakeholders made the point that, as well as increasing sign-ups to the register, the PSR needs to be consistently maintained to ensure the data is current. To do this, WPD would need to continue their programme of telephoning contacts regularly to ensure that details are up to date.

### Ensure GDPR does not become a blocker

Stakeholders expressed concern that GDPR is becoming a barrier to the sharing of data across different sectors. A specific example was raised by one stakeholder, which was whether when someone registers a death, the energy networks could receive this information to help cleanse the PSR. It was felt GDPR could prevent this from happening. The point was made by one stakeholder that when a major incident occurs, data can be shared under the Civil Contingencies Act. It was felt it would be beneficial if data could also be shared in an emergency to better support customers in vulnerable situations.

### Creation of one PSR for all utilities and service providers

It was noted that the creation of a single PSR was already in progress, but that it was something WPD should look to support as it moves into its next Business Plan. It was felt that better collaboration would help provide more accurate and richer data.

## Lobby Government and Ofgem

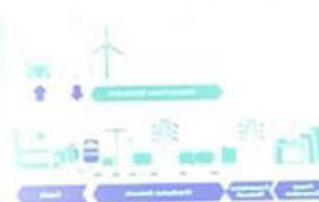
Several stakeholders felt that it should be a priority for WPD that they lobby the Government and the regulator in this area. They wanted to see WPD engage with Ofgem to ensure that there is appropriate regulation to safeguard customers in vulnerable situations and those in fuel poverty. They also wanted to see lobbying to encourage suppliers to offer variable tariffs and to allow DNOs to be able to incentivise customers (particularly fuel poor customers) to provide flexibility services.

## Continue with existing projects and initiatives

Several stakeholders stressed that it was important not to reinvent the wheel, as the work that WPD is already doing in this area is very important. The point was made that if the funding from WPD stopped then there would be no one to enable these important projects to continue. The point was also made that with the cuts to public sector funding, it is considerate capitalism that needs to pick up the pieces, and that the funding from private companies such as WPD keeps whole networks of support services and charities running.



## The energy system is changing

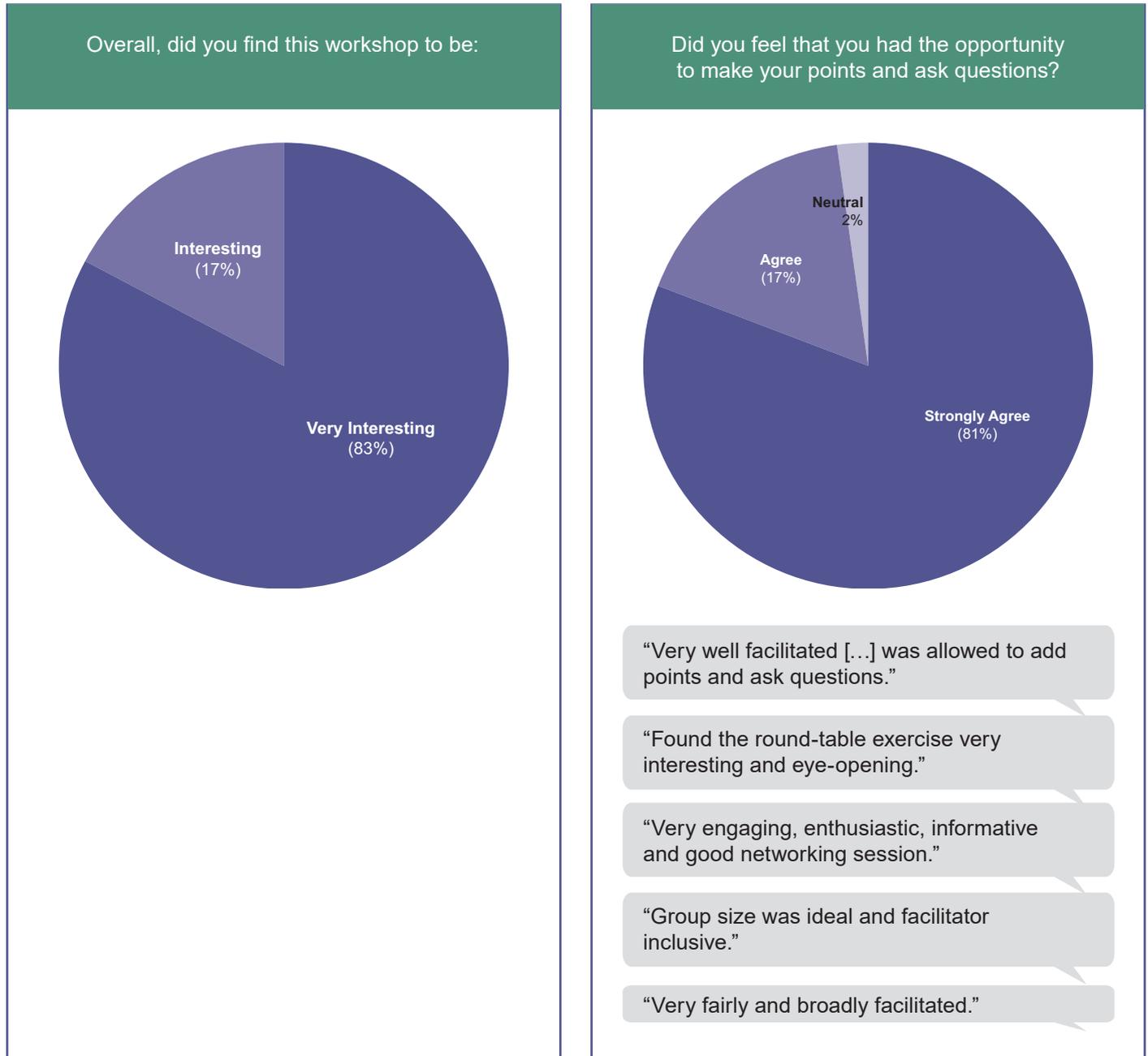


ALL CREATIVE PEOPLE WANT TO DO THE UNEXPECTED

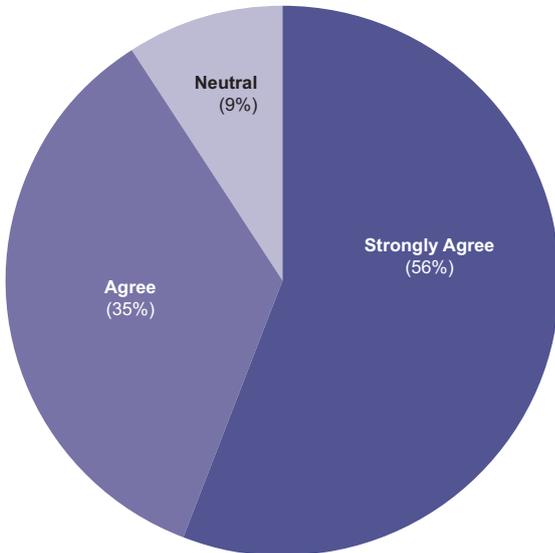
WHEN I FIRST SAW A MOTORCYCLE I GOT A MESSAGE FROM IT... MOTORCYCLING IS A TOOL WITH WHICH YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING MEANINGFUL. IN MY VIEW THIS IS AN ART.

## 8 | APPENDIX 1: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

At the end of the workshop, stakeholders were asked to provide their written feedback on the format of the workshop itself. The feedback is summarised below.



### Did we cover the right topics on the day?

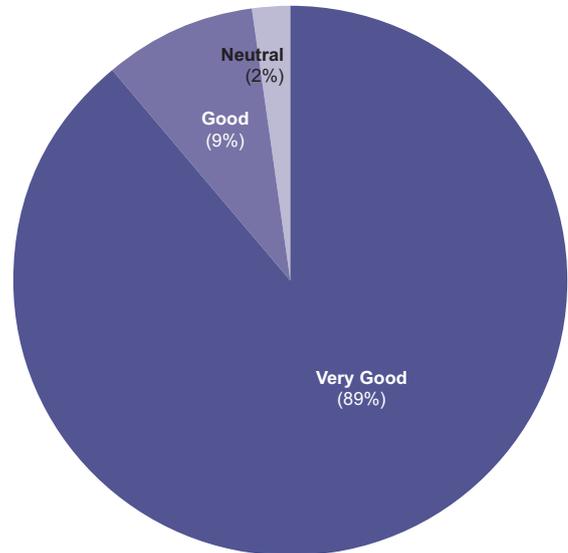


“Very interesting subjects.”

“Enjoyed the discussions.”

“Very good mix.”

### What did you think about the way that the workshop was chaired by your table facilitator?



“Very good, encouraged input and conversation and kept us on track and to time.”

“Felt all points had a chance to be discussed.”

“Very useful to have a good mix of people on the table.”

“Relaxed and informative, enabled everyone to feed into the discussion.”

“Very engaging and knowledgeable.”

### ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

“A really useful and interesting day, I will definitely share all the information learned.”

“Excellent, interesting, learnt a lot.”

“Great venue, very organised, nice length of time.”

“An excellent session, really informative with plenty of opportunities for debate and discussion.”

“Good mix of organisations and robust challenge to further explore points raised.”





