

WPD Customer Collaboration Panel
Spotlight report 2019/20
(written by the members)

1. Introduction

The Customer Collaboration Panel (CCP) is a group of people who meet quarterly - usually in one of Western Power Distribution's (WPD) local depots. The Panel has been in place for 12 years and currently has a pool of 30 permanent, expert members.

Our objectives as a Panel are to:

- Act as an advocate for consumers.
- Provide expert advice on, but not limited to, WPD's initiatives, customer service and operations.
- Provide feedback, analysis and opinion on WPD's initiatives.
- Highlight and advise WPD on key issues of current or emerging consumer concern to help scope and shape WPD's approach.
- Act as a "sounding board" to allow WPD to test innovation and ideas for initiatives.
- Provide an environment where new ideas supporting WPD's development can be created, shared and evolved.
- Support and facilitate partnerships between WPD and consumer or specialist interest groups.

The Panel holds closed sessions for members preceding the main meeting with WPD. This facilitates an open discussion on any issues that need to be highlighted and how any challenges or questions will be presented. The closed session allows members to reflect on the agenda and ensures each member is able to raise new topics for further discussion and ask questions freely.

2. Executive Summary

The Panel continues to scrutinise WPD's 'Strategic Priorities' (previously agreed by stakeholders). In June 2019 our focus was Distribution System Operator and the Business Plan Commitments report. In September 2019 we discussed the progress of the RIIO-ED2 regulatory price control and Electric Vehicles. In December 2019 we discussed Future Energy Scenarios and the Safety Climate survey.

In March 2020 CCP members were invited to attend one of WPD's flagship stakeholder engagement workshops instead of a panel meeting. A short meeting was held at the Birmingham event for those members who were present. Many of the 30 members were able to attend one of the roadshows and feedback was that the events were very effective in soliciting and collecting the views of a wide range of stakeholders.

The Panel had anticipated more interaction during the year with challenges raised by the Customer Engagement Group (CEG). In practice, for the nature of the challenges raised, other means to respond have been more appropriate.

At the close of regulatory year 2019/20 the Panel consists of 30 members with, on average, attendance of 13 members at each meeting. Members continue to bring skills and experience from a wide range of sectors, serving the interests, diverse needs and requirements of WPD's eight million business and domestic customers.

The following sectors continue to be represented:

- MPs and Government
- Storage providers
- Energy aggregators
- Connections
- Community Energy (CE) groups
- Network security
- Emergency resilience
- Health
- Utilities/energy industry
- Parish Council/Local Authority/LEP
- Education/academics
- Distributed Generation
- Major Energy Users
- Innovation
- Business customers
- Fuel poverty
- Environment
- Vulnerable/hard-to-reach
- Customer service/consumer interest
- Domestic customers

Our role in WPD's overall stakeholder engagement activities is seen as necessary and valuable. Our discussions resulted in 20 substantive actions and improvements in 2019/20 alone and more than 100 over the last five years. Outputs range from review of online web pages to creating the format of stakeholder engagement workshops. The Panel is able to further scrutinise, challenge and question WPD at specialist surgery sessions which now take place alongside the main Panel session. 'Connections and Business Customers' and 'Social Obligations' sessions allow more detailed consideration of topics in which panel members have particular expertise.

In 2019/20 the Connections and Business surgery delivered value on a range of topics including:

- Provision of Legal Permission and Consents information
- The introduction of a Priority Business Register
- Community Energy content on WPD's website

The Social Obligations surgery also co-delivered extensive improvements, for example in:

- Branding update and revision of the Power Up webpages
- Shaping the agenda for the Social Obligations workshops and making proposals to broaden representation amongst workshop participants

We remain confident that our contributions, ideas and challenges drive WPD to act in the best interests of customers and look forward to another impactful year. The following sections highlight some of the key work that the Panel has influenced and undertaken in more detail during the last year.

3. Panel Actions

3.1. Stakeholder Engagement

The CCP repeatedly highlighted the role of Local Authorities (LA) and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) in the roll out of regional plans for low carbon technologies, most often in the context Electric Vehicle (EV) charging. The Panel suggested that WPD would need to work closely with LAs to implement local energy plans. In response to this WPD developed methods to present data by LA boundaries, making engagement easier. Furthermore WPD committed to offer engagement to all Local Authorities in its four licence areas on Distribution Future Energy Scenarios – the feedback from that local engagement will be used at WPD’s annual Local Network Investment sessions to further engage with and inform stakeholders.

3.2. Performance

WPD provided regular updates on network performance and customer service performance through the year. The Panel discussed and sought explanations for changes in performance and in some cases added a different perspective to established thinking.

The Safety Climate survey was discussed in the context of the existing level of accident and near miss reporting. The Panel was able to discuss with the Company some of the proposed different approaches to refresh the safety message.

3.3. DSO/Smart Networks/Low Carbon Technology

Discussions in the June and September meeting covered future energy scenarios, Distribution System Operator and societal adoption of Electric Vehicles (EV). The Company set out several scenarios for the installation of chargers for EV. To achieve efficient investment the Panel encouraged liaison with Local Authorities. Alignment with congestion charge areas and traffic plans was considered to be a key part of an effective roll out.

Cities within the WPD region have set out aspirations to become ‘Net Zero’, albeit using different criteria and at different timescales. WPD acknowledged the need to respond to these aspirations. The Panel stressed the importance that rural customers should not be left out of the transition to Net Zero and access to EV chargers.

3.4. Connections

Panel discussions identified the need to review WPD’s Community Energy webpages. Panel members supported the design of the workshop with Community Energy stakeholders which took place in August/September.

The Panel also reviewed and recommended changes to the ‘Making a connection’ webpages to improve the logic, flow and presentation of relevant information.

3.5. RIIO-ED2 Business Planning

WPD had received various feedback relating to the Company’s Business Plan Commitments Report. The report had a three tiered approach, each tier containing increased level of detail. Other DNOs had produced reports in different formats which WPD shared with the Panel. Some stakeholders had stated that the existing WPD format contained too much

detail for their needs. Discussion with the Panel concluded that a single document using more infographics and containing links to other more detailed documents would better serve stakeholders. The new report was produced in this format.

3.6. Social Obligations

'Power Up' is WPD's key fuel poverty action scheme. Every contact with a customer known to be vulnerable during a power cut is offered the opportunity of a direct referral to an expert partner who then offers a range of income, tariff and energy efficiency support and advice. The Panel worked with WPD to rebrand the 'Power Up' scheme and refresh the web pages which support this service with relevant and accessible information. In parallel the Priority Services Register (PSR) webpages were refreshed and reviewed.

Panel members this year also helped to shape the Social Obligations workshop content, including the addition of a presentation about mental health to the agenda, and made suggestions to increase the breadth of representation among workshop attendees.

3.7. Covid-19

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic WPD established the 'In This Together - Community Matters Fund'. The CCP was engaged to administer the fund and was able to help WPD to support the communities within its operating region. A subgroup of Panel members advised WPD on appropriate criteria and method to score the applications for funding – which supported 175 organisations and reached 130,000 vulnerable people in the first two weeks alone.

4. Next Steps

Looking forward to next year, the CCP can identify a number of items which it anticipates will appear on its agenda. Undoubtedly other items will arise.

The Panel may help the Company to respond to future challenges raised by the CEG.

As WPD produces its Business Plan as part of the RIIO-ED2 price control the Panel will offer a stakeholder perspective on content and readability.

The CCP recognise merit in establishing a Priority Business Register and will advise WPD on its scope and implementation.

The Company plans to run its biannual competition for grants from the Energy Affordability Fund to support the delivery of affordable warmth and PSR related services. Panel members will help score applications and make funding recommendations.

The Customer Collaboration Panel