

FAO Jemma Baker

Please see below some of our thoughts and suggestions in response to your request for information.

1. Improved access does not mean improved quality service to customers:
 - a. Triage customers so that customers are placed efficiently to the right customer service adviser, whether that be billing issues, managing arrears or emergency issues like no power due to self-disconnection arising from lack of affordability
 - b. Remove outsourcing of agents and ensure all advisers are trained to same high-quality standard that are knowledgeable and experts in their field
 - c. Remove protocol of scripting
 - d. Being sensitive to customer needs- identifying vulnerability early and noting the clients individual requirements to support their needs. Taking the customer at their word i.e., domestic abuse issues and not requesting evidence
 - e. Collections and arrears an obvious significant issue- need own in house debt advice service to ensure access to correct regulated advice. This can be sourced if necessary rather than just signposting.
 - f. To extend repayment rates based on clients' circumstances rather than supplier requirements
2. Vulnerability and/or issues with payments
 - a. To instigate a trigger/red flag system that highlights if customer has exceeded average use for property size/number of people living there.
 - b. Will enable supplier to be pro-active and investigate if there is a vulnerability issue- ie needs medical equipment or whether there is a supply metering issue.
 - c. Must be a duty and responsibility to investigate
3. Recognising 3rd parties
 - a. Remove barriers to access by accepting 3rd party authorities
 - b. Enable a system where we can submit these authorities- often get lost in email system and then not uploaded in a timely fashion- increased time spent for advisers
 - c. Direct line to specialist help for all money advisers
4. Trust and reputational integrity
 - a. Need to regain trust by providing a quality service and doing what suppliers say that they will do
 - b. Lack of continuity – notes not recorded and follow up calls wasting time requesting the same thing
 - c. Some impartiality and independence may be beneficial – meter quality service outsourced to provide independent reads from suppliers - levy on suppliers to fund independent service
5. Extension of Trust Funds
 - a. Make it an industry standard that all suppliers must have trust funds that are accessible to all

- b. Increase amount that can assist with – in line with approx. level of household arrears
 - c. Available funds throughout the whole year
 - d. Introduce use of social tariffs
- 6. Priority Services Register
 - a. Expand the scope- doesn't really seem to be of any real benefit to a customer
 - b. Currently no financial incentives or additional support
- 7. Additional powers for Ombudsman
 - a. Transparency of outcomes/resolutions and what reported changes need to be implemented and when
 - b. Need more powers to enforce resolutions to ensure that changes have been made
 - c. Suppliers have no incentive to change without this enforcement
 - d. Financial penalties should reflect the complaint, up to and including the full amount of the arrears owed not just a goodwill gesture, particularly where the complaint is about non-compliance of an initial complaint

With kind regards