

Minutes of Customer Journey Workshop Group held at Ofgem on 10 September 2008

Overview

As part of the transition process from energywatch to the new NCC and Consumer Direct, Ofgem and BERR jointly chair fortnightly workshops that bring together representatives from the new NCC, energywatch, other consumer groups, Consumer Direct, the energy retailers and network companies and agencies. The workshops are designed to facilitate a greater dialogue and allow input from all stakeholders on key issues.

1. Present

Chris Guiton	BERR
Paul Bland	BERR
Nigel Bell	BERR
Alison Hughes	Bizzenergy
Philip Arend	British Gas
Tom Ballard	Consumer Direct
Robert Eynan	E4B
Tina Pearce	E.ON
Ann Neate	EDF Energy
Neil Avery	energywatch
Nyree Connell	FSB
Siobhan O'Loughlin	npower
Chris Johns	npower
Liz Gibson	npower
Maxine Frerk	Ofgem
Lisa Taylor	Ofgem
David Mithem	Scottish and Southern Energy

2. Apologies

Gretel Jones	Age Concern
Keith Munday	Bizzenergy
Tony Herbert	Citizens Advice Bureau
Peter Hives	Consumer Direct
Ed Reed	Cornwall Energy Association
Trevor Saunders	Ecotricity
Audrey Gallacher	energywatch
Sue Jackson	Energy Ombudsman
Dr Garry Felgate	Energy Retail Association
Russell Hamblin-Boone	Energy Retail Association

Frances Williamson	Energy Retail Association
Robert Hammond	New NCC
Chris Shanley	National Grid
Marcus Clements	Ofgem
Grant Tierney	Scottish Power
Jacqui Maxwell	Scottish and Southern Energy
Frances Muller	Scottish and Southern Energy
Gareth Shields	Scottish and Southern Energy

3. Minutes from last meeting & Matters arising

3.1. Draft minutes were circulated before the meeting and accepted.

Review of outstanding action points 26 August 2008

3.2. CJWG members were to send their comments to Chris Guiton on his 'Consumer Voice: testing the consumer journey' document. Chris only received 2 responses so went round the table and asked members if they had contingency plans in place re: higher case volumes, using email transfers and working with Consumer Direct. Everyone confirmed that they did.

3.3. Liz Gibson asked if the Energy Ombudsman has contingency plans as well. Maxine Frerk replied that they did, part of Ofgem's approval of them was on the basis that they did.

4. Agenda Item 1: Review of task list

4.1. Regarding 'How will information request and provision process work between Consumer Focus and suppliers?'. Consumer Focus has defined the protocols and process. Ofgem, when requesting information from suppliers, will follow the same approach and if Ofgem require anything further from suppliers they will give them advance notice.

4.2. energywatch has provided Consumer Direct with an estimated volume, type and channel of referrals. Tom Ballard was asked to circulate the estimation to the group at the next meeting for information.

4.3. Regarding monitoring and resolving of cases, Philip Arend asked what Consumer Focus's priority/focus would be. Neil Avery responded that the emphasis will be on both:

- It will publish complaints performance information that is of interest to energy consumers and
- It will monitor emerging trends in the energy market and work collaboratively with industry and the regulator to address issues causing consumer detriment.

The information being requested from industry will support the organisation's dual roles.

4.4. Neil Avery suggested that it would be useful for suppliers to visit the Consumer Focus extra help unit – suggested early October.

4.5. Consumer Direct will be inviting suppliers to their Northampton contact centre. Tom Ballard will be sending out the invitations today/tomorrow for 22 September 2008.

4.6. Consumer Direct have contacted most suppliers, small suppliers and network operators for their contact details and information on their own complaint handling arrangements. Tom Ballard to show Ofgem the list to see if any are missing and to chase any if required.

4.7. Maxine Frerk asked that the list of advice agencies be circulated to the group to ensure all suppliers are aware of them.

4.8. Nyree Connell asked the group to explain the process for non-domestic consumer referrals.

It was explained that firstly the new consumer representation will create a more powerful consumer champion. The new complaints handling standards and redress scheme will benefit small business consumers by ensuring resolution in a dispute for the first time. Small suppliers with a query or complaint must first speak to their energy supplier. If no satisfactory resolution is met then they can take their case to the Energy Ombudsman. Vulnerable small businesses can contact Consumer Direct who will put them in touch with Consumer Focus.

Action	Person – By
Provide group with estimated volume, type and channel of referrals.	Tom Ballard – 23/9
Circulate to group Consumer Focus Case Handling Process document.	Neil Avery – done
Send Ofgem Consumer Direct's suppliers, small suppliers and network operators contact list.	Tom Ballard
Send list of advice agencies to Lisa Taylor to circulate to the group for info.	Gillian Cooper – 23/9
Send Nyree Connell the Guidance to Advice Agencies leaflet for information.	Steven Warren - asap
Circulate list of documents collated for the CJWG library to the group to comment on.	Lisa Taylor - done

5. Agenda Item 2: Consumer Direct customer journey update

5.1. Consumer Direct are progressing in ensuring that they are ready for 1 October. All suppliers said that they have found Consumer Direct helpful during this process. Consumer Direct and Consumer Focus had system testing yesterday which went fine. Currently undertaking case handling testing.

5.2. David Mithem from SSE asked Tom Ballard to clarify what information Consumer Direct want on the back of suppliers' bills. Tom confirmed that they want Consumer Direct's telephone number and website address – not the mini-com number.

6. Agenda Item 3: Vulnerable customer journey update

6.1. The change over from energywatch to Consumer Focus is going well. Current case volumes are at the forecasted resource level. Currently energywatch have 500 live cases so on target for change over, thanks to the efforts of suppliers in helping to resolve cases to have them closed before 1 October.

6.2. energywatch have been using email referrals: however considering workload, training and consumers wanting to talk to suppliers there may be an increase in calls going through to suppliers in the next two weeks.

6.3. Neil Avery thanked everyone for their comments on Consumer Focus' forward work plan, final approval will be given at the end of September.

7. Agenda Item 4: Communications update

7.1. The Communications sub group are progressing four strands of work:

- Guidance leaflet to advisers: Consumer Focus and Consumer Direct will distribute the leaflet to all large and small adviser groups during the week commencing September 15, and go onto the websites of Consumer Direct, Consumer Focus and BERR.
- Briefing pack for consumer journalists: BERR to send out by the third week of September, followed by a press release in the week commencing September 29.
- Briefing note for all MPs in England, Scotland and Wales, followed up in October with a BERR/Consumer Focus 'event' in the House – details to follow.

7.2. Suppliers asked to have a look at the communications sub group's external events calendar as they would like a coherent view of what everyone is doing and when. If it doesn't already the calendar should include Scottish and Welsh activity too.

Action	Person - By
Send to Lisa Taylor the communications sub group external events calendar for circulation to the group.	Steven Warren - done

8. AOB

8.1. Philip Arend asked Ofgem about their planned audit in October of the complaints handling standards. Maxine Frerk said that Ofgem is sending out an invitation to tender for external consultants to carry out this work. Because of the size of the tender consultants will be used rather than auditors. Maxine agreed to circulate the ITT to the group when it is ready. Within the ITT Ofgem have sought views on how to address small suppliers in the audit. Work on the audit will should start at the end of October with a report out at the end of the year. Suppliers will be told of timing for visits as soon as possible with the visits probably starting in November.

8.2. Ofgem is on track with the required licence changes – changing of names etc.

8.3. Tina Pearce asked Maxine Frerk who within Ofgem should suppliers' send their complaint information to?. Maxine to respond at next meeting.

8.4. Agenda item for next meeting: what are the priorities/tasks post 1 October?

9. Date of next meeting – 23 September at Ofgem