

Minutes of Customer Journey Workshop Group held at Ofgem on 22 January 2009

Overview

As part of the transition process from energywatch to the new NCC and Consumer Direct, Ofgem and BERR jointly chair 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 regarding the new arrangements.

1. Present

Company	Name
Age Concern	Gretel Jones
Age Concern	Jeanne Wilson
BERR	Peter Christodoulou
BERR	Douglas Robinson
British Gas	Philip Arend
Consumer Direct	Tom Ballard
Consumer Direct	Peter Hives
Consumer Direct	Michele Shambrook
Consumer Focus	Audrey Gallacher
Cornwall Energy Association	Ed Reed
E.ON	Tina Pearce
EDF Energy	Ann Neate
Energy Ombudsman	Sue Jackson
Energy Retail Association	Frances Williamson
Good Energy	Chris Welby
Npower	Siobhan O'Loughlin
Ofgem	Jude Cummins
Ofgem	Marcus Clements
Ofgem	Lisa Taylor
Scottish Power	Grant Tierney
Scottish Power	Pamela Kelly
Scottish & Southern Energy	Tyrone Garrick
Scottish & Southern Energy	David Mitchem

2. Apologies

Citizens Advice Bureau	Tony Herbert
Consumer Focus	Neil Avery
Ecotricity	Trevor Saunders

3. Review of first quarter's operation

3.1. Update from Consumer Direct

Tom Ballard reported that Consumer Direct Northampton (CDN) were operating well; 66000 calls had been taken since 1 October which was less than forecast. Just over 10% of the recorded cases had been referred to either Consumer Focus or an Energy Company. At the end of March CD would receive the results of their first customer satisfaction survey to include CDN (200 energy customers provide feedback quarterly) which would reveal how well customers thought the new arrangements were going. The headline results of this would be shared with the group. CD expect to sign their MOU with Consumer Focus this week. There were currently no issues with providing advice to small business customers, and call stats for them had been: October – 1700; November 1400; December 1000. CD would continue to monitor this. Peter Hives congratulated those around the table for the smooth transition of these new arrangements.

3.2. Update from Consumer Focus

Audrey Gallacher said that in the first three months there had been no major issues, and the new arrangements were working well. Cases received by the Extra Help Unit (put through from CD) in this first quarter had been 1980 – lower than originally forecast. More than 20% of these had been priority cases which was higher than forecast, probably due to the limitations of previous energywatch system for recording such cases. In addition to providing support for the Extra Help Unit, the Interim team had:

1. received and actioned 990 cases (mainly follow up contacts on previously closed energywatch cases);
2. received and forwarded 1,158 cases (mainly new cases redirected from closed energywatch offices which had been forwarded to CD);
3. resolved nearly all of the outstanding cases transferred from the closing energywatch offices; and
4. provided specialist support on the Knowledge Base and on High Level Complaints until the new posts were appointed in Glasgow.

A three month review has been scheduled with CD for 2nd February. Following that review they would set up a teleconference with CAB and Age Concern to review the effectiveness of the referral arrangements for vulnerable consumers (they were not aware of any current problems). They would soon have an MOU with the Energy Ombudsman signed. Consumer Focus would like a full picture of statistics (i.e. theirs, CD and Energy Ombudsman) before consulting with suppliers and subsequently publishing complaint statistics (hopefully by the end of March).

3.3. Update from Age Concern

Jeanne Wilson stated that they had received no complaints so far on the new arrangements. Age Concern staff were making good use of the dedicated telephone route to suppliers with a low number of calls going to CD.

3.4. Update from CAB

Tony Herbert had provided some comments in advance of the meeting. It was difficult to give a definitive view on how the dedicated lines/ CD / Consumer Focus Extra Help Unit were working for bureaux advisers as they had received only limited feedback from advisers. Only a few cases involving difficulties / unsatisfactory responses had been reported, while a small number of positive responses had also been received. They were pleased to see that where cases had not been handled as expected suppliers and CD / Consumer Focus had taken prompt steps to rectify problems reported. The fact that suppliers' dedicated help lines were limited to CAB advisers and Age Concern had limited

their ability to publicise them and they had raised this point with the ERA. They noted that these help lines could be reluctant to accept intermediaries' authority to act on the customers' behalf.

3.5. Update from Suppliers

All suppliers (and ERA) commented that the interfaces with CD and Consumer Focus were working well and they were generally pleased with how the arrangements had gone since 1 October 2008.

nPower asked if CD could record how many nPower cases they resolved without the case going to nPower. CD said that they were unable to collect this but Consumer Focus said that it would collect and circulate this information.

ScottishPower said that on occasion they had received the same case from CD and Consumer Focus. Tom Ballard explained that this was due to cases which required referral to Consumer Focus, being received by CD outside of Consumer Focus working hours. CD would send the case details to Consumer Focus for them to action the next working day but in the meantime contacted the supplier to get the case moving. Grant Tierney pointed out that this would distort reporting numbers if the supplier does not ensure CD takes it off their reporting – so only Consumer Focus captured it.

Good Energy sought clarification on the definition of a complaint as the handling of complaints in certain ways had huge cost implications for them. Everyone agreed that understanding whether a customer was dissatisfied was sometimes difficult and was often a matter of picking up the customer's tone of voice. Marcus Clements said that the audit would pick up areas of inconsistency of interpretation.

3.6. Update from Energy Ombudsman

Sue Jackson said the Ombudsman was happy with the relationships in place. There had been an increase in the number of calls in October but these were now dropping off and the complaints as a result of 8 weeks letters being issued was manageable. They already have quarterly review meetings with the Big 6 suppliers and will be encouraging new members of the scheme to visit the offices.

Jude Cummins congratulated all, saying it was a credit to this group that there were no major problems.

Action

Consumer Direct to distribute headline customer satisfaction results for CDN.

Person – By

Tom Ballard –
End of March
2009

Set up debate 'if current processes are working/are satisfactory' for highlighting if a customer is a vulnerable consumer before suppliers disconnect them.

Audrey Gallacher

Suppliers to report on the number of agency cases they handle – send to Lisa Taylor

Suppliers

4. Update on Complaints Handling Standards

4.1. Marcus Clements reported that the auditor, PKF, was still working on the reports, which he hoped would be published next month. Each company would receive their own report with the collated report being published. So far it is looking positive, with the auditors identifying a few common points of concern:

- Details of resolution
- Signposting of Complaint Handling procedures
- Ability for customer to raise a case orally
- Timescales for handling the complaint

They were looking to the auditors to flag inconsistencies and where necessary Ofgem would give guidance on these in the full report. The research work would be carried out shortly after the company to do it is appointed (early February) and will complement the audit work. Tina Pearce suggested that the researchers ask consumers if they would record their case as a complaint, as the company had done. Suppliers hoped Ofgem will ensure that the data on their customers being used in the research would remain secure and Marcus replied that appropriate data protection measures would be agreed and taken.

5. Update on interfaces between suppliers / Money Advice Trust / Debtline

5.1. Frances Williamson said that ERA would look to promote this once the dedicated helpline with CAB/Age Concern was deemed to be working well. As is, consumers who are in debt go to existing supplier debt teams. It may be a case of making these debt team numbers more visible to consumers and debt agencies.

6. A.O.B

Douglas Robinson passed on his congratulations to the group on a job well done. He asked the group if there was still concern for small businesses in terms of the support that they have. CD were taking calls from small businesses and giving them advice. The Energy Ombudsman had not received many complaints from them, even though their details are on the back of small businesses energy bills (though CD's are not). Consumer Focus raised some concerns specifically that the dwindling numbers to CD from business consumers from the peak of 1700 in October could be due to the loss of energywatch details from the back of bills. Consumer Focus are concerned this will continue and non-domestic consumers won't know where to go for help.

Jude Cummins noted that this is a policy area that Ofgem and BERR will keep an eye on.

BERR will host a six month review of the new arrangements in May with members of this group.

It was agreed that this would be the last Customer Journey Working Group meeting.