MAMCoP Subgroup, Meeting 1, 23rd Sept 2010
SBGI, Camden House, Kenilworth

Present:

Iain Heffey	National Grid Metering (Chairman)
Gary Cottrell	SBGI (Secretary)
Tom Chevalier	AMO
Steve Gandy	E-On Metering
Steve Brand	UU
Keith Stout	Fulcrum
Paul Smith	Energy Networks Association
Marin Bell	EDF Energy
Christopher Chambers	HSE
Sally Lloyd Davies	HSE
Nick Watson	SGN
Stephen Hanman	W&WU
Steve Marsh	British Gas
Ralph Reekie	Envoy
Jim Sibley	GL Noble Denton
Tony Nixon	National Grid
Kelly Sherwood	Siemens Metering
Stuart Godfrey	Radius
Steve Rowe	Ofgem

Apologises:

Vic Tuffen	OAMI
Mike Buss	Itron
Belinda Littleton	Ofgem
Robert Gibbs	EDF Energy
Paul Gibson	British Gas
Jason Stevens	ERA (Engage Consulting)
Trevor Andrews	E-On

1 Introduction:

IH: Welcomed all to the meeting and briefly explained to purpose of the meeting which was to endeavour to resolve all (or most) of the long standing installation issues for gas meters. He believed that there would be solutions to all issues, albeit at a cost of requiring regulatory or commercial changes.

TC: Further explained the purpose of the meeting and the need to resolve the issues in the run up to the Smart Metering Programme Rollout. Many of the issues in the original "Old Chestnuts" list are relating to electricity meters but the August 2010 document relate to gas meter installations. A similar group is meeting under the auspices of MOCoPA to resolve the electrical issues. Some issues are common across both fuels, e.g. damaged meter boxes, height of meters.

The Gas issues were raised at an Ofgem meeting in April that was looking at safety training. Ofgem will be involved in the MAMCoP subgroup meetings but they would prefer that industry developed enduring solutions.

The Smart Metering Prospectus is now issued and SMDG subgroup 3 is examining technical issues so the output of this group will be fed back to that SMDG subgroup. There will be a review of progress in October.

There are some issues that have been around for years and new issues that will be generated by Smart metering. We need to resolve the "old chestnuts" before we find the new ones as in a year or so there will be at least three times as many installations per day as we are currently seeing.

IH: Stated that without these issues being resolved the "hard to do sites" may get left. However, TC believed that Suppliers will have to complete the hard to do sites to achieve targets. The HSE view is that this is a one off chance to for the industry to get guidelines, Codes of Practices, standards and regulations all aligned in a practical.

PS: Stated that on the electrical side they have categorised the issues as:

1. Serious – require resolution immediately
2. Problem which must be resolved prior to meter fitting
3. Meter can be installed, but remedial issue requires fixing

IH: Said that if there are dual fuel meter fitters then both gas and electricity smart meters may both be installed on the same day. He believed that pre-visits may be needed to assess problems. These pre-visits had been used to good effect in National Grid.

PS: Believed that this may not be a practical approach as it would mean two site visits and therefore extra cost.

JS: Believed that it may be possible to carry out a selective pre-visit to an estate of similar houses etc. Others were not so sure that apparently similar estate house were actually the same.

TC: Stated that there were two goals in the smart rollout:

- Ofgem want Smart meters installed and working as quickly and safely
- Suppliers want a good customers experience as cost effectively as possible

IH: Said that in order to achieve 90% installed in 4 years then pre-assessment would be essential. But others believed that pre-assessments would severely delay the programme. Meter readers could be used to report on basic situation at premises but they are not sufficiently trained or experienced to give detailed assessments. There is also the issue of whether a pre-assessment would actually result in installs being done in one visit. This would be dependent upon the skill level of the surveyor but a high level of skill would be expenses and heavy on existing limited resources.

TC: Summed up that the consensus of the meeting appeared to be that pre-visits or assessments were not practical or effective.

JS: said that if there were common issues between both gas and electricity then there should be common solutions.

KS: Siemens metering had achieved 83% first time successes and 91% access rate on 10,000 meter installations. However, this did not involve bringing all sites up to grade 1 or today's standards.

PS: Said that we are not in a perfect world and we cannot expect to achieve grade 1 and today's standards during a full pressure rollout. However, we do need to resolve all safety issues and all simple fixes.

Group: Believed that we do need to identify the show stoppers with a full assessment of risk levels. However, it is essential that the customer has a positive experience and abortive visits must be the exception and not the rule.

KS: Said that the Siemens metering project of 10,000 meters was spread over a diverse geographic area and demographic customer profile.

IH: said that KS may have seen higher than normal success rates as he was dealing with willing and interested customers whereas the national rollout would be less easy as there may be uncooperative customers.

KS: said that comms issues had been a big factor of the failed visits.

TC: Stated that this group would not be considering comms issues as these were within the scope of the Ofgem sub-group 3. But others in the group believed that comms should be considered.

Moving the meter to achieve working install had to be the responsibility of MAM. Water meters can be communicated with because of "bump" aerials and we would not need to have exposed aerials that may attract vandalism.

PS: said that there is already a list of comms issues within Ofgem and we should not duplicate.

SB: Failures had been 50/50 gas/elec issues.

IH: Asked – should we prioritise the issues or proceed through the list from beginning.

JS: Said that there are show stoppers and others that are just long standing issues that do not actually prevent installation.

TC: Suggested dealing with the quick wins first.

PS: Suggested that we follow the guidelines in the diagram below:

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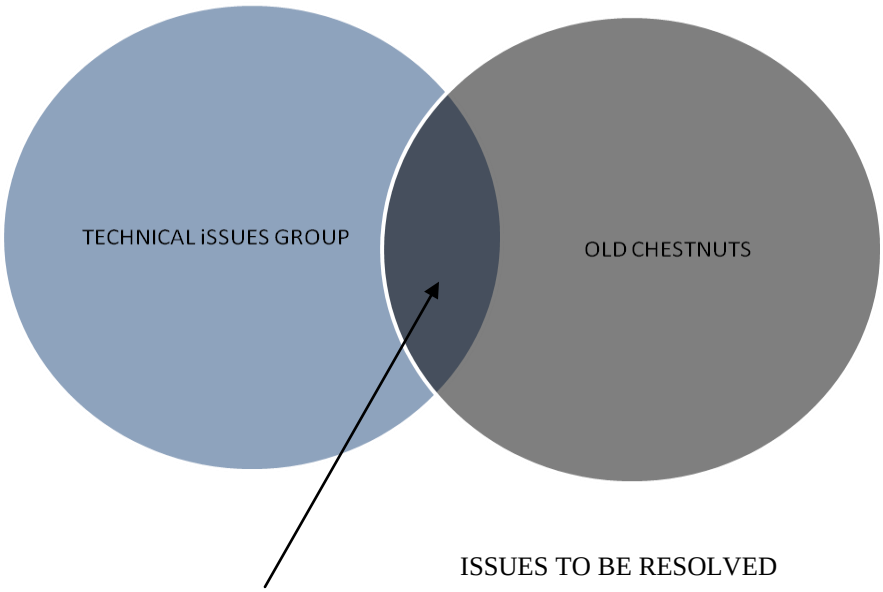


This group should concentrate on the overlap area.

MOCoPA looked into who owned what in the meter installation and it would be useful if we did likewise.

2 "Storming"

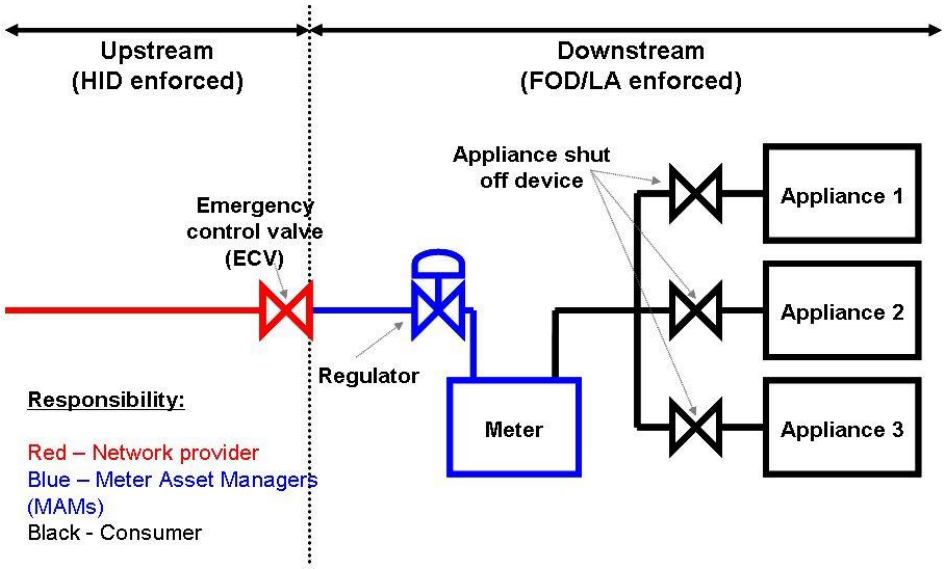
KS: Said that the diagram on page 6 of the 'gas old chestnuts' document would be a good example to study for this exercise.

TC: Asked what would be the resolution if the site shown in the photo graph needed the earth extended and the outlet pipe work needed to be changed?

The site/installation would sometimes be accepted as it has an adaptor. However, it was thought that because there are differing standards in different areas and with different services providers then this could result in confusion for the consumer.

TC: re-affirmed the statement from PS that faults need to be categorised.

There was a belief that the price control review was introducing some clarity on these issues and that it would help set the correct price levels.



The diagram shown above was introduced at this point.

RS: stated that BS6400 called for "due consideration to appropriate installs and cost". However, this is open to interpretation and needs more clarity to achieve consistent approach and costs.

JS/IH: both stated that 6400 is currently up for review.

TC: Believed that the group needed to consider the commercial issues – GT, MAM etc.

JS: stated that the standards are about competent persons making decisions based on standards and guidelines.

TC: Said that if standards are standing in the way of a pragmatic solutions then we should be exploring ways of changing the standards.

IH: Said that there could be guidance given in 6400 but not commercial guidance.

We should identify the component parts and who is responsible. Also, what skill sets are available. With the need for newly trained meter fitters with a reduced skill set there will not be the experience needed to make the decisions currently made by longer serving experienced staff.

PS: said that EU Skills will be kept up to date on the output from these meeting.

The group thought that balance was required and a skill level developed for a "meter fitter". e.g.

- Too highly skilled = cost model failure.
- Under skilled = H & S issues and negative customer experiences.

Group were asked several questions:

"What happens now if there is a lead outlet pipe now?"

Consensus was that this would be replaced at no cost to the customer but the replacement was then firmly the property and responsibility of the customer. However, if the lead was not actually an issue, it would be left and a supporting bracket fitted.

An end point for the replacement of lead pipe needs to be defined.

"Who is able to re-bond the earth connection and does this skill need to be included in the limited scope training programme?"

ACTION: ?? to raise this with EU skills. (can anybody advise who volunteered for this action as mu notes were incomplete?)

"What happens if the ECV handle is missing?"

The ECV handle must be fitted if the gas is on. The meter fitter would install meter but may leave gas turned off if there was no handle.

TC: Pointed out to the group that all GTs had agreed to provide handles but it was stated that Nat Grid are currently not yet doing this.

ACTION TC: to provide copy of this document, and progress with NG.

TC: Sated that there needs to be a consistent approach from all suppliers and MAMs. It should not be dependent on skill set or experience of the meter fitter available 'on the day'.

There was a considerable debate on why there is a requirement for a separation of the gas meter for electrical switchgear and cables of 150 mm and 25 mm respectively.

Has this some basis in fact or is it a case of "we have always done it that way"?

There was a belief amongst many that there were incidents that caused this regulation to be brought in although nobody at the meeting actually had any knowledge of the incidents or when and where they were. There was also some belief that the need for the separation may have been due to metal cut outs and rubber insulated cables. In most, but not all, cases this is no longer the case.

ACTION: JS to write to the panel for BS6891:2005 to raise this as an issue to be discussed and investigated.

3 Height of Meters:

Is there a rule on the height of meters?

6400 requires "easily accessible for meter reading".

The issues often arise in listed or old buildings or buildings that have been converted to flats. It may not be practical or acceptable to the customer to have the meter at an accessible level.

There is currently a licence condition on suppliers to ensure that disabled people can access their meter. This can result in the meter having to be moved at the suppliers' expense.

Going forward with Smart pre-pay there will be an In Home Display (IHD) and this may reduce these issues although the meter has to be accessible to apply credit or re-enable the supply.

There needs to be guidelines to ensure that the problem is corrected and that new installs do not make the matter worse than it currently is.

PS: sated that on the electrical meters the range was being defined as between 0.5 and 1.8 metres above floor level.

The group agreed that there must be a written rule that applied to builders and developers on all new installs.

4 Semi-concealed Meter Boxes

IH: Asked whether the group thought that concealed meter boxes were suitable for Smart meters installations because of water ingress etc.

The group suggested that there should be no more concealed boxes installed.

It was also commented that there are currently 4 different types of meter boxes and therefore the meter fitter may need to carry 4 differing types of smart meter to ensure they are able to complete the install.

IH: Added that these are different classes of meter to the in house meters.

It was asked if the manufacturers could design out these issues. Also if the 4 boxes were looked at, could the issues be resolved.

Some of the issues around concealed boxes and smart were related to communication with these locations for both HAN and WAN.

Other issues relate to the batteries and the electronics being affected by water etc. There would be warranty issues if the meters were flooded.

The group believe that the manufacturers must be clearer on where the meters were "fit for purpose" for concealed boxes.

The question was asked whether the meter fitter should always modify to a wall mounted box to overcome all the issues around mounting in a concealed box.

However, the group said that this was not always practical or possible.

Pre-pay meters are also an issue in concealed boxes.

It was suggest that all these points should be raised at SMDG Subgroup 1 (tech assessment group)

5 Damaged External Meter Boxes:

Original Purpose:

- Enable external meter reads.
- Shorter Service pipe.

Now:

- Better Comms

If the box is found to be damage. What action is taken?

A damaged meter box means that the metering asset are vulnerable to damage from the elements etc. Therefore the MAM may choose not to install the new meter.

Who pays for the new box? And how is it billed?

The Gas Act does not allow for additions to the bill. There is currently an obligation on the supplier to carry out a safety check at least every two years. This is much easier with external boxes.

SR: Advised that they had received an application for this obligation to be removed but it had currently not been progressed after Ofgem asked further questions.

The repair/replacement of meter boxes is a supplier issue and there need to be clear written guidelines to ensure that there is a standard process applied to all customers.

Currently there is a mixture of actions by GTs. Some would just notify the customer, while others would fix/replace free of charge to the customer.

ACTION: TC to document gas and electric views for consideration by Suppliers

Again we need consistency as with many other issues.

6 Yellow Label

These are sometimes fitted to the flexible pipe and this can result in the label being removed with the meter and not refitted to the ECV which is where it should always be located.

Again there needs to be a proper and consistent instruction.

This point will be raised at the next MAMCoP meeting.

7 Insulation Joints

The normal position in some areas is upstream of the ECV, however, there are situations where it is fitted downstream of the ECV.

The question was asked if insulation joints are required on metal services and if not fitted, what happens?

TD/4 requires that they are fitted at all times on metal services but not with a service head adaptor.

HSE raised the issue recently as a result of concerns in the SW.

The question was asked again on what should really be happening? And what is to be done going forward?

ACTION: all members to report back at next meeting

8 Conclusion

TC: summed up the progress so far and was pleased that we had covered as much ground as we had. He suggested a second meeting in approx 2 to 3 month's time and thanked SBGI for hosting this meeting and agreeing to host the next.

Data of next meeting:

Wednesday 8th December 2010, SBGI offices, Kenilworth.