



# 2012-13 DISCRETIONARY REWARD



## SUBMISSION PART 2

# INTRODUCTION



PHIL JONES  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

I think we have taken huge strides over the last twelve months in practically recognising that understanding and responding to our stakeholders' views is vital to our success.

Our engagement activity has told us that our stakeholders' interests lie in seven priority areas. Six align with the Ofgem output areas of power reliability and availability, social obligations, connections, safety, environmental impact and overall customer satisfaction; with an additional priority identified around investing in our workforce. A lot of the stakeholder feedback has shaped our business plan for the ten-year period to 2023; for example a clear emphasis on keeping costs down, accelerating our investment in flash flooding protection, and developing a mainstream response to a better informed and broader perspective on our social obligations.

Leadership from the top and good governance are vital for success in this area. Part of that requires me personally taking time, along with members of my executive team, to

engage directly with stakeholders as a key part of the wider programme of engagement that goes on throughout the business. In my case, that has involved many different types of engagement, ranging from listening to extremely frustrated stakeholders in Otley to interacting in detailed discussions with our stakeholder panel and our external expert groups. The input of those panels, covering social issues, customer service and smart powergrids has brought the views of stakeholders right into the decision making process. Constructive challenge and collaboration is causing us to think differently and is helping us to propose outcomes that would not otherwise have been on our agenda.

One area that I felt particularly strongly about was the need for us to step up our engagement on the wider social agenda. The issue of affordability is not going to get easier in our communities as energy prices rise and it has been through a process of engagement with a wider range of stakeholders than ever before that we have started to gain a much clearer sense of what we can and should be doing to play our part in the wider picture. We have a long way to go, but I think that we have made tremendous progress in this year.

Over the last year we've worked hard to raise our standards to

the level necessary to achieve external accreditation. If I'm honest I didn't even know there were stakeholder engagement standards against which companies could be assessed – but we embraced the need to learn more and change our approach. I'm delighted with the work that our team has done to guide us along the journey to achieving accreditation under the Stakeholder Engagement Standard AA1000 – I gather that we may well be the first energy network operator to do so. That has helped us to target our efforts more effectively and the result has been obvious in quality of the engagement and feedback that we have received through various activities. Also, the introduction of formal annual independent research and monthly executive review is adding rigour to the process and leading to much more usable and influential input being received by the executive leadership team.

In the end, a programme of engagement is only as good as the results that it produces. I think it is making a really positive difference - but you will judge that for yourselves

Phil Jones  
Chief Executive



# SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS – COLLABORATION IS KEY

As an organisation we are becoming increasingly conscious of the role we must play in supporting the wider social agenda and our customers who are most reliant on or impacted by our services. Over the last year we have stepped up our engagement with stakeholders and experts in this area to help us to understand what our role can and should be.

We have worked over a number of years to support our most vulnerable customers through our Priority Services Register (PSR). Our stakeholder engagement has helped us to understand how we can strengthen these services but also what more we could be doing for those customers who struggle to pay their energy bills or are not connected to the grid. We have learned that by adjusting the way we think about our role and learning to collaborate with other agencies, we can be a meaningful part of wider social action in this area.

## ENGAGING OUR STAKEHOLDERS – REACHING THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT WAY

We have recognised that this is an area where we need expert input to our plans and to help us to engage with the people who are impacted by these issues. We have established a number of strategic partnerships to help us to do this.

Our Social Issues Expert Group meets regularly to generate ideas, input to our plans and suggest areas for improvement. Derek Lickorish MBE, Chair of Fuel

Poverty Action Group (FPAG) chairs the group that includes: Jenny Saunders, Chief Executive of National Energy Action (NEA) and Shona Alexander, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Newcastle.

We have also started to work with Voluntary Organisations Network North East (VONNE) and Involve Yorkshire and Humber to communicate our services and engage with their members. As the membership organisations for over 700 charities, voluntary organisations, community groups, networks and social enterprises in Yorkshire and the North East their combined reach is in the tens of thousands.

NEA ran four focus groups for us in 2012, talking to customers across our region about their experiences of vulnerability and fuel poverty and what we could do to support them.

In February 2013 we commissioned Explain, independent market research experts, to interview 500 customers on our Priority Services Register by telephone to find out what they thought of, and what we could do to improve, the services we offer them. Explain also interviewed nine local and community organisation experts as part of this research, the experts were nominated through VONNE and Involve Yorkshire and Humber. We plan to repeat this engagement annually using these results as a benchmark for improvement.

*"I think it is great that Northern Powergrid has opened the door to talking to these new audiences. But it is really important to keep those channels of communications open and to keep building on those relationships."*

**JENNY WESTAWAY**  
COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING MANAGER,  
INVOLVE YORKSHIRE AND HUMBER

### OUR STAKEHOLDERS SAID...

#### COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION ARE KEY

From the stakeholder engagement outlined we have received a wealth of feedback. Our stakeholders have told us:

- Closer partnership working is required to promote and deliver services for vulnerable customers.
- Fuel poverty is a key issue; Northern Powergrid can play a valuable role by using their channels to communicate wider support and independent advice in addition to their baseline services.
- Raising awareness of the issues with our employees; developing a culture of personal

responsibility for helping vulnerable customers matters.

- Providing the information and tools for employees to do this is essential to having a real impact in this area.
- Engage with energy suppliers and other agencies/organisations to establish if we can get additional customer information via data-flows (name, telephone, mobile, e-mail etc.)
- Current communications we provide for power cuts work well.
- To consider alternative solutions for speaking to us during powercuts that are not dependent on electricity.

We have used this feedback to inform immediate improvements but also our medium and longer term plan.

### WE DID...

#### REDEFINING VULNERABILITY

Using the feedback from our expert stakeholders, we have expanded our definition of vulnerable customers to include a much wider range but also to recognise that people may move in and out of vulnerability dependent on the nature of it. Our PSR is open to all these

vulnerable groups and this classification helps us to develop tailored support that meets their differing needs. We have classified the following vulnerable groups:

- **Fully electrically dependent customers.** Where loss of power presents a critical risk for these customers, for example, where an electricity supply is used for a kidney dialysis machine.

- **Customers that have long-term or temporary critical medical conditions.** Though not life threatening, some customers may not be able to cope with sustained interruptions to their power supply, perhaps due to their medical treatment or their recovery from an operation.

- **Customers that require different methods of communication.** For example, those who are hard of hearing, or have sight impairments. They require different methods of communication than our standard approach; as do customers for whom English is not their first language.

- **Customers that may have other long-term or temporary support requirements.** Elderly customers, those with young babies, or households in fuel poverty, may each find a power cut to their home more difficult to deal with and may benefit from additional advice and support on issues like energy efficiency.

#### MAKING IT A MAINSTREAM ACTIVITY

Using our extended definition of vulnerability we have worked with NEA to review and refresh our contact centre scripts to incorporate key advice and questions our advisors can include in conversations with our customers to help us to identify and support those experiencing vulnerability.

Following up this partnership with the NEA we have agreed a plan to roll out a programme of training to our employees who work on the front-line with customers in our contact centre, our engineers out in the field and our dedicated

customer care team to ensure that they understand, are aware of, and sensitive to customer vulnerabilities as well as the appropriate response and support to these customers' needs.

#### DIRECT AND PERSONAL SUPPORT

Providing direct and personal support is something our vulnerable customers have told us they value.

Any customer that is registered on Northern Powergrid's Priority Services Register (PSR) obtains a priority routing service in the event of a power cut. Firstly, they are provided with an alternative Freephone (0800) number in the event of a power cut, where they can telephone our contact centre 24/7, and speak directly with one of our advisors. Furthermore, if a PSR customer dials our public Freephone power cut number, our system instantly recognises them and channels their call around our interactive voice response system to be answered immediately if a human advisor is free or to be placed at the front of the contact centre queue for the next available advisor. We have a priority services coordinator within our contact centre 24/7 who proactively keeps all customers that have contacted the business updated. Our coordinator also organises call-backs and any site response with our welfare service providers, the British Red Cross.

We have established a partnership with the British Red Cross which has seen them contact almost 500 of our vulnerable customers and visited those most in need in 2012-13. Any vulnerable customer that is subject to a power cut, that lasts longer than a three-hour period, is contacted by the British Red Cross to check on their welfare and assess if

further assistance is required. The British Red Cross also have access to ambulances and other vehicles which, resources permitting, can be deployed if during a major incident emergency care is required by a vulnerable customer. Feedback from our customers has been positive; they are prepared to trust the British Red Cross in a way they might not trust a utility company. The British Red Cross supplement our own customer care vans which are deployed regularly when there is an escalated situation, a fault is affecting a large number of customers over an extended period of time, or for planned powercuts for essential works in areas where vulnerable customers are being affected.

#### KEEP WARM AND STAY SAFE

We reach over 40,000 school children a year through our school safety programme. In partnership with National Energy Action (NEA) we have developed a new booklet "Keep warm and stay safe." The booklet offers advice and support on a much wider range of social issues than we have ever previously communicated including safety, metal theft, our priority services register, cutting bills and saving money, getting help with fuel debt, keeping warm and staying healthy.

The booklet is distributed through our schools programme and NEA to provide information, advice and support for children their families and teachers. To further encourage parents and teachers to access the information we are running an annual online competition for school children, in the final term of each school year, with the answer to one

of the key questions being found in the booklet which is also available online. The prizes on offer are high street vouchers for £50 to £20 pounds for those children in 1st, 2nd and 3rd place and £250 vouchers for the school attended by the winning child.

#### INNOVATION IN SOCIAL HOUSING

Last year we announced our partnership with Community Energy Solutions and Northern Gas Networks; to collaborate in supporting our customers who are experiencing fuel poverty and would benefit from alternative heating sources.

We are working to develop a model that allows the replacement of old and inefficient heating systems from multi-storey housing developments with efficient, controllable and affordable alternatives; which can be replicated across the industry. In the early part of 2012 we began working with Leeds City Council and their social housing providers as a pilot for this work. The scoping project to specifically identify high-rise buildings where fuel poverty is most acute and data sharing on the current energy supply, usage and planned investment is now complete. This scoping is now helping the council to prioritise investment and to continue to work with us to ensure that future heating solutions are tailored for residents needs, focussing where possible on renewable heating solutions to cut bills.

Newcastle City Council are now working with us on a similar project and using the model of working has meant that we have been able to fast track the progress, taking on board the lessons learned in Leeds.

# CONNECTING OUR CUSTOMERS – ENGAGING IN AN EMERGING MARKET

For a number of years we have been building a strong relationship with our regular connections customers; over the past year this has continued and we have been working to improve it. We have placed real focus this year on how we identify and engage with customers and other stakeholders particularly interested in connecting local (distributed) generation (DG) to our network. We believe we've made a significant step in the right direction but we're aware that as this becomes more commonplace through awareness of technology and the opportunities this brings we need to proactively reach out to emerging and potential stakeholders as well as continue to engage with our current stakeholders and act on their feedback.

## ENGAGING OUR STAKEHOLDERS – IN AN EMERGING MARKET

Our monthly connections surgeries and six-monthly programme of briefing seminars continue to be popular, with over 50 independent connection providers (ICPs), independent distribution network operators (IDNOs), connections customers and increasingly distributed generation and renewables customers and stakeholders attending each workshop; often

forming contacts with each other as well as with us.

We have also had a number of one to one meetings through early 2013 with over 25 of our connections customers to ask for their feedback on our service and to influence our improvement plans. We also used independent market research company Explain to run two focus groups for our small connections customers to better understand their issues and hear what they would like us to improve.

DG is a growing area of connections. We have recognised the need to adapt and build on our engagement for connections customers to meet the needs of those particularly interested in DG. Using our learning from social issues engagement we have focussed on engaging our DG stakeholders through established channels where these stakeholders already meet or communicate, like training and membership organisations. This has allowed us a much greater reach in terms of raising awareness of our role in DG and also encouraged those stakeholders to engage as we are approaching them through an already trusted and preferred source.

Our engagement has included; meetings with over 100 local farmers through attendance at regional National Farmers

Union meetings; invitations to feedback or contact us through National Farmers Union, National Renewable Energy Centre and National Association of Professional Inspectors and Testers; and closer working with Renewables UK. As a result more and more DG stakeholders have contacted us to arrange one to one meetings, attend existing connections events and provide feedback. DG is an area where we need to understand the experiences of a wider range

of stakeholders than just our existing or potential customers so we commissioned Explain to conduct telephone interviews with key individuals with a stake in delivering a DG project, including our customer; Green Rigg and their project architect and solicitor.

We provide progress updates on our connections improvements as a result of stakeholder feedback at our six monthly events, in our connections stakeholder newsletter and through our website.

### OUR STAKEHOLDERS SAID...

#### MORE ON LINE, QUICKER SERVICES AND INFORMATION

From the engagement we have had with our connections customers we know that what is important to them is:

- A need for improved communication in the connections service including availability of more information and communication online
- Shortening the time it takes to receive a quotation and then the quotation remaining valid for a longer time period
- The opportunity to have a discussion before requesting a quotation and the availability of technical information in advance would be helpful
- The need to act faster once payment is received for connections works
- The need for a seamless process
- Shorten the process and provide better access to information
- Make DG cheaper to connect
- Improve consistency among DNOs
- Take into account that DG is different to connections
- Collaborate with them
- Pay attention to project specifics to improve processes

The feedback from our connections and DG activity inform our annual connections and DG plans which we report progress on regularly through our website and at our regular workshops and surgeries. It also informs day-to-day improvements, our annual Connections and DG plans and our longer term plan for improving connections out to 2023.

Our DG customers also fed back specifically that we should:

*"I think these briefing days were a super idea. Being able to make face-to-face contact is the start, of building a relationship with any person and therefore any company. ...a major improvement was the reduction in time it took to the validation period for a quotation, which was initially 30 days and I think it was the feedback from open days like this that made that double from 30 to 60."*

**AMANDA BROWN**  
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, CLANCY DOCWRA

**WE DID...****IMPROVING OUR  
CONNECTIONS SERVICE**

Major improvements have been made to our connections services over the past year, including introducing new and improved web-enabled services. A complete redesign of the connections area of our website offers many new services which address issues raised by our customers over the past two years. Our customers are making great use of these online facilities, improving their experience with us as they contact us at a time convenient to them.

- Since going live on 1 August 2012, 13,000 customers have viewed our service alterations page with 2,500 receiving a formal quotation after filling in the online application form and 1,000 quotations accepted. This means that 74% of our customers visiting this page have been self-served with the remaining 26% calling our contact centre, where an advisor fills out the same web form on behalf of the customer. The typical length of time to carry out this work prior to our self-serve online tool was 49 days; our revised processes has now improved to 27 days. Following the launch of the new web tool we commissioned Explain to evaluate the experience of the customers who had used this new online process, so far to make sure it met their needs. Explain contacted 175 customers and a total of 49 surveys were completed. Customers were particularly impressed by the time it takes to get a quotation online with an average satisfaction rating for this aspect of over 80%.

We are constantly reviewing the process and addressing ways to improve as fewer than 65% of customers were satisfied with the amount of communication they received during the quotation process.

- 3,885 customers have viewed our new guide to standard connections and generation connections since its launch in July 2012. The guide has undergone further developments and has also been available on our mobile site, since September 2012. Customers can contact us at a time that suits them and access information online which explains the connections process and helps them understand what they need to do to get connected whether it is a small, medium or large connection. The system gives quick answers to customer's questions without them having to pick up the phone and call.
- Both our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) area and the 'use of system', launched July 2012, offers customers a convenient tool to receive instant answers. To date, 3,900 customers have viewed the FAQ area and more than 500 customers have used the 'use of system' price calculator.

Our online connections application process went live in April 2013 along with 'ask our expert', an indicative pricing tool and the small scale generation connection notification. This new development reduces our time to serve from around 12 days to no more than one hour.

The introduction of these web tools is having a significant positive impact as contact centre

advisors have more time to deal with more complex queries in person.

**MEETING OUR DG  
STAKEHOLDERS NEEDS**

Our DG customers and other stakeholders made it clear that although improvements to our general connections services do benefit them they have their own needs and requirements. In response to these needs in 2012-13 we:

- Published online grid capacity maps which set out where there is current capacity on the grid for DG connections. 2,400 people have used this service since we launched it in December 2012, it has been welcomed by renewables generators and local authority planners in particular.
- Increased the capacity of our DG delivery team employing seven more staff to take our overall resource of design engineers and design technicians to 82 and trained the majority of these staff to be able to deal with generation enquiries.
- Introduced new substation leases to match the lifetime of DG installations, so if for example, a windfarm developer has a 25-year lease and would struggle to align and sign up to our contract with our usual 99-year lease period, we match our leases to enable the project.
- Introduced step-in clauses to our contracts giving assurance and confidence of delivery to make it easier and more attractive for financiers to invest.
- Changed our electrical protection policy to simplify schemes and

reduce costs. On average the cost for a connection in a rural location for a medium sized project [200KV to 800KV] was previously £250k-£300k. This is reduced by approximately £120k for this size of project.

- Lined up our stage payments to align with project milestones. By only asking for minimum payments upfront and then further payments just before we need them we can help the cash flow of our customers.
- Extended our quotation acceptance period from 60 to 90 days.
- Explored the potential for local DG training for our team and customers. Through partnership with the UK National Renewable Energy Centre (NAREC) we provide technical support during their courses which aim to increase awareness and skills in the application of G59/2 connections to the UK Grid with regional renewable energy systems installers and developers. There has been overwhelming support from attendees about our presence on their courses and we're assisting in the development of their course material.

# CUSTOMER SATISFACTION – AT THE TOP OF OUR AGENDA

We are in business ultimately to give our customers the best service possible. Like stakeholder engagement, customer service and satisfaction is an area we are working hard to strengthen and improve; putting it at the heart of what we do. As we continue to engage with our customers, we're seeing positive results on individual initiatives and the resulting measures of take up and customer satisfaction however we recognise we still have a way to go to make significant improvements to our overall customer satisfaction.

## ENGAGING OUR CUSTOMERS – MULTIPLE CHANNELS OF ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

There are already a number of ways that we engage with and receive feedback from our customers; through our day-to-day interactions to the wider regulatory

measures within the Broader Measure of Customer Satisfaction (BMCS). In addition to the day-to-day engagement with our customers which feeds back into the business we also run specific engagement activities with customers to keep us informed of their wider issues and the bigger picture.

- We hold a daily and weekly meetings to review the day to day feedback on customer experience and stay ahead of any issues arising. Once a month, we use one of the calls to review our published customer satisfaction results in detail, with improvement plans assessed and re-aligned if required.
- In the past year Explain has run telephone interviews and focus groups with our customers focussing on complaints and their views on our current and planned customer service.

- Feedback on general customer services is also picked up through a wider range of engagement activity including vulnerable customer telephone interviews and connections workshops.
- We have established our Customer Experience Expert group, chaired by Lynne Mills of the Institute for Customer Service along with key representatives from Action for Hearing Loss and Capita. The group debate, collaborate and feedback on what we can do to improve customer experience.
- Our employees meet and talk to our customers on a daily basis and their experiences and feedback help us to improve services for our customers. We cover this later in this submission.

In addition to informing our operational improvement plans, the key messages across all our customer feedback come together to inform our strategic decision making through the executive weekly and monthly reviews.

This helps us to ensure that from individual concerns to themes for improvement over a period of time or across a number of stakeholders the feedback informs our response in the right place at the right time.

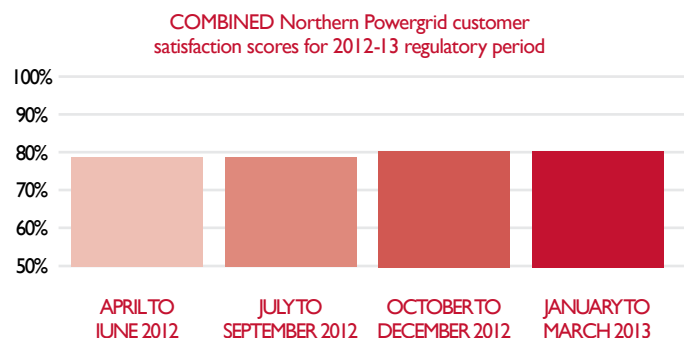


Figure 1: Combined customer satisfaction scores for 2012-13 regulatory period

### OUR CUSTOMERS SAID...

#### COMMUNICATION, OUR TEAM AND CHOICE OF CHANNELS ARE IMPORTANT

The key themes in feedback from our customers, other stakeholders and experts over the past year is:

- The need for multiple channels – customers being able to communicate with us when they want in the way they want
- Timely information and communication for planned powercuts
- General need to raise awareness of who we are and what we do
- Give more consideration to individual customer circumstances during a power cut
- Our employees and the importance of the right behaviours required to provide excellent customer service – professional, polite and knowledgeable.

**WE DID...**

**CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP  
MANAGEMENT (CRM)  
– HAVING THE RIGHT  
TOOLS FOR THE JOB**

We have recognised that our IT systems are outdated and do not support the service that our customers expect. So, we're investing in delivering new systems to improve our customer experience. The aim of the programme is to make it a lot easier to do business with us by cutting down on duplicate contacts, improving internal communications, and creating the opportunity to see all the interactions a customer has had with us in one place.

The CRM programme is not just about providing a computer system. The programme is all about our people, processes and technology, demonstrating a 'customer-first' attitude. We've listened to our customers from the start of the programme and tried to understand what it should feel like from their point of view.

As our CRM programme has become part of our everyday activity we've started to see a number of outcomes that we're pleased with so far, but we recognise we still have a long way to go:

- Our managers are listening and learning. Since November 2012, 35 of our senior managers have established regular visits to our contact centre. They spend their time sitting with our advisors and listening in to calls – hearing real issues and understanding how our interaction on the phone, impacts the customer experience. Feedback from the sessions highlighted how critical the relationship between the contact centre and the rest of the business is and the need for improved systems that will hold customer information in one place.
- We've improved the information we share with our team to give everyone a clear picture of how we are doing in different areas of the business to positively encourage each of us to take responsibility for improving the experience we provide to our customers:
  - Performance boards have been positioned in all of our offices and depots updated on a monthly basis and chart our customer service performance, based on the satisfaction scores we have received each month.
  - Our intranet 'the grid' has been redesigned to clearly communicate 'How are we doing' metrics on a daily basis. The metrics provide our employees with a clear indication on the company's performance in relation to customer service, network performance, safety and environment.

**COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT –  
LEARNING VALUABLE  
LESSONS IN OTLEY,  
WEST YORKSHIRE**

Our £1.2million investment scheme to significantly improve the reliability of electricity in Otley has not been one of our biggest schemes in financial terms but has had one of the greatest impacts on how we will deliver and communicate our works moving forward.

Following a series of power cuts in Otley during Autumn 2011, unhappy customers and other local stakeholders were very vocal about the impact this was having on them individually and in the town. Following meetings with local councillors, businesses and the local MP we brought forward our investment plan to upgrade the town's 11,000 Volt network.

A comprehensive communication and engagement plan was developed, which included:

- Two community information events and attendance at the Otley Show, festival, carnival and market days.
- A dedicated internet microsite for Otley, explaining the work we were doing in detail including maps, cable routes and notification of road works.
- Newsletters and letters to over 1,500 local residents and other stakeholders either directly or indirectly affected.
- Dedicated customer ambassadors for face-to-face communications and calling in on businesses and residents affected.

Through local engagement we amended the programme, delaying or bringing forward works and moving some cable routes to minimise the impact on the community. Residents were really pleased, it turned a bad situation round and set the blueprint for a new approach.

- Building on these lessons we have developed a communications toolkit to support our work. This system provides gold, silver or bronze communication packages based on the level of impact that the scheme will have. As well as taking account of any planned power cuts and disruptions to highways, we consider seasons, school holidays and local information like whether a fete or show is about to occur. It builds engagement and consultation routinely into our programmes and improves understanding for smoother implementation.

- The system has already successfully been used on major schemes in Bramhope, Penistone and Thornaby helping develop further microsites, information events and key customer communications sharing information with them in a way that we know they like to receive.

- We are now rolling this system out on larger investment projects. It provides valuable

*"Otley Town Council recognises the high standard of work being undertaken in the town by Northern Powergrid to improve power supply following considerable disruption to the network over recent years.*

*The Council wishes to place on record their thanks to Mr Steve Keeney (Northern Powergrid), his staff and the company's sub-contractors for both their professionalism and for their willingness to work with the community over the contract period.*

*The Council applauds their work in minimising disruption, engaging with community groups and the standard of their work in restoring the highways and verges."*

**CLLR JOHN EVELEIGH  
RESOLUTION PASSED BY OTLEY TOWN COUNCIL ON THE 21 JANUARY 2013**



support to our team who may not instinctively know of all the issues that they should consider. We are also recording customer feedback and using this within team events to promote the advantages of taking this approach.

**OTLEY TOWN AND WARD  
COUNCILLOR COLIN CAMPBELL  
(LIB DEM, PRINCE HENRY) AGREED:**

*"This organisation has done the best public consultation that any utility firm has since I can remember. They got it spot on."*

1ST FEBRUARY 2013

### IMPROVING AWARENESS, QUALITY AND CHOICE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE CHANNELS

Our customers have suggested a number of initiatives to improve the awareness, quality and choice of customer service channels we offer. As a result we have:

- Redesigned our web-site to reflect the way that our customers are using it. We use an internet statistics application called 'Crazy Egg', which shows us where customers are 'clicking' on our website. This helps us understand which sections of the website are popular and so we can structure the pages and content to be most beneficial for customers. For example, we have moved the 'why is my power off?' and 'who is my energy supplier?' functions to a more prominent place on our homepage as these are most popular with our customers and need to be easy to find.

- Over 200 employees from various office locations have been trained and now support the contact centre in handling customer calls to ensure calls are answered quickly and customers get to speak directly to an advisor if they wish. The 'overflow' team showed their true value during a major incident in April 2012, when a severe snow and ice storm brought down power lines causing power cuts to over 80,000 customers in our area. Our overflow team handled just under 7,000 calls, which would otherwise have had customers waiting in the contact centre queue for long periods or calls being abandoned by customers. In the worst winter storm in more than 40 years we answered 90% of all calls received, with 77% of these within our 15 second grade of service target. For the 2012-13 regulatory year, our overflow team handled 19% of all power cut calls received into the business.
- Worked with the telephone directory enquiries operators to help increase the awareness and raise the profile of our power cut numbers including developing our online presence to provide clearer information about who we are and what we do. We've also reviewed our adverts in Yellow Pages, BT Phonebook and KC Directories in Hull with similar information and created a better layout with a greater use of colour to make them clearer for our customers. They also now include our social media contact details.
- Published 0330 prefix telephone numbers lines for customers to use when calling from a mobile to report a power cut. This offers on average a ten-fold reduced calling cost for mobile users compared to the 0800 lines, or free service if customers' mobile contracts are all inclusive. The average cost to call an 0330 number from a mobile is 4.5p per minute compared to 40p per minute for an 0800 number.
- Learning from our previous response to major incidents, we wanted to streamline the process for customer compensation payments. After the April 2012 storms, June and September floods customers could apply online for a speedier payment. We also made this more prominent on our website and promoted it through local radio and social media.
- Our online service for booking shrouding services has been positively received with 70% of our customers choosing to take up this service almost instantly following launch. Results received from Explain demonstrate that customers are 94% satisfied with the online facility.
- We've introduced a number of improvements to the way we communicate our planned power cut activity including an information leaflet and enhanced letters to customers explaining the reason for the work more clearly.
- Social media has had a huge influence on the way we communicate with our customers, with Twitter proving a useful tool which our customers and other stakeholders have welcomed, particularly in communicating information on power cuts. Since April 2012, when we first joined twitter, we have sent 1,940 tweets and received 1,000 mentions. We currently have more than 1,400 followers with a potential reach to other customers and stakeholders of 300,000.
- Produced improved call scripts for advisors to use during various scenarios, ranging from general enquiries and power cuts, to complaints, connections enquiries and how to deal with vulnerable customers.
- All contact centre advisors and team leaders have been formally assessed on their customer service ethos. The assessment process involved a combination of online testing, contact centre scenarios and face-to-face interviews. All advisors and team leaders were provided with one-to-one feedback, and set personal development targets established to improve the customer experience.

## HEARING FROM OUR CUSTOMERS – THROUGH MULTIPLE CHANNELS

Dear Sir,

I would like to thank Morrison Utility Services and Northern Powergrid for the help you gave me on the day of my husband's funeral.

You can imagine how I felt when I finished sorting out the arrangements for the funeral. I then received a letter from you to say the whole of Hutton Henry would be without electricity that day. I didn't want to change the date of the funeral as this would cause confusion with friends and family. In desperation I called the number on the letter and I received a call two days later to say they would arrange a generator for the day.

The generator helped me and my family through a very difficult day. You hear so many bad accounts of gas and electricity companies that I wanted you to know you have one satisfied customer who thinks you're great.

Yours faithfully,

M BLACKBURNE



Senior managers listening to customer calls



Listening to our customers



Engaging at events

### ONLINE...

Of the services we now offer online, approximately 70% of customers now choose to do business with us in this way.

Really impressed with @Northpowergrid – came out within 1.5 hours yesterday, and sent tweet apologising for power outage 2day. #nottheirfault

10 Oct, Dr Bex Lewis @drbexl

Lots of power cuts tonight :o/(loving the map on the @Northpowergrid site though!)

24 Oct, Daryl Walker-Smith @darylws

Thank you @Northernpowergrid You engineers were stars. Worked through the night and left us a generator.

7 Mar, Gillian Smellie @GillianSmellie

@Northernpowergrid thank you for restoring our power yesterday in the snow, fantastic brave guys #awesome #Sheffield

21 Mar, Wendy Duggan @Wendydoyn

@Northernpowergrid fantastic customer care folks via telephone after reporting a power cut for the area of NE11 9FD

18 Feb, Andy @andydeltic

# OUR EMPLOYEES – AT THE FRONTLINE OF ENGAGEMENT, CUSTOMER SERVICE AND DELIVERY

Many of our 2,300 employees engage with our customers and other stakeholders on a daily basis; they are also the experts in delivering the services we provide. This means that they are in a strong position to bring customer and other stakeholder feedback and ideas for additional improvements back into the business.

We've been making some big strides in employee engagement, through communications, such as *the grid* and our internal magazine *Our Powergrid News*, to training programmes such as *Powertrain*, our interactive role-play workshops. An important part of our aim is to listen to our employees and learn from them to implement improvements for our customers and motivate overall employee engagement towards positive outcomes by communicating positive and negative customer situations and how to handle them.

## ENGAGING OUR EMPLOYEES – MAKING ENGAGEMENT PART OF BUSINESS AS USUAL

2012 saw the roll out of a company-wide training programme aimed at equipping employees with the behavioural skills necessary to deliver a personalised customer experience. Attendees commented that they enjoyed the interactive format of the training, as it provided useful insights into how to deal

more effectively with customers. Over 2,000 employees attended workshops, and further training was offered to our management teams to ensure they were able to support employees putting their training into regular use 'on the job'. Our senior management team helped drive engagement; taking the opportunity to drop into over 100 customer experience workshops and host 'hot-seat' Q & A sessions. This allowed employees to raise issues whilst also hearing first hand from our leadership team about customer service improvement and their vital role in making it happen.

## OUR EMPLOYEES SAID – COMMUNICATE MORE AND MANY OTHER THINGS...

Following the 'hot-seat' sessions we took the opportunity to review common themes and trends. Emerging themes touched on the use of enabling technology, areas impacting on our response times to power cuts, and encouragingly a keen interest in knowing how we can learn from other organisations. Our employees also told us we needed to improve the way we communicate with each other and our customers.

With over 1,000 queries raised during the customer experience sessions ranging from wanting more information on branding to the need for better organisation

of support rotas. We are using the key themes and specific feedback from the hot seat to inform regular feedback on improvements and to share more information.

## COMMUNICATING WITH OUR TEAM AND EACH OTHER

We communicate and engage regularly with our employees through a variety of channels and, following employee feedback we have continued to add to and improve these throughout 2012-13.

We have made significant improvements to 'the grid'; our intranet site available to Northern Powergrid employees

online and on smart phones. We have redesigned it to include:

- A more user friendly homepage
- Leadership comments – senior manager videos and articles talking about key initiatives and developments are uploaded regularly
- The Mobile Grid App means employees in the field can receive service alerts, read leadership comments posted by our executive team and be on top of the latest news.

Our *Powergrid News* includes latest news, features, customer feedback, health and safety information, and a regular 'Powergrid People' column so employees can learn more about their colleagues.



