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Anna Rossington,
R110-ED1
Ofgem, 9 Millbank,
London, SW1P 3GE

8th January 2014.

Dear Anna,

Fast Track Draft Determination for Western Power Distribution

I write to support of WPD's Business Plan as a suitable basis of its R110-ED1 price control settlement as published by Ofgem on 22 November 2013.

I am a Chartered Electrical Engineer with European Registration, now retired but formerly a senior member of Headquarters engineering staff in a quasi-governmental organisation providing an important public service. My own responsibilities included equipment specification, investigation of potential suppliers to establish their technical competence and ability to supply, contract negotiation and supervision and resolving complex technical on-site problems beyond the capacity of the field maintenance teams as well as intervention under catastrophic failure conditions. My training and previous experience also made me well aware of the complexities of operating a power distribution network as well as having had basic training in the technician and craftsman level work in the electrical distribution industry.

It would appear that the combination of my technical expertise and the fact that I am also involved with the Diocese in which I live in dealing with the problems posed by both rural poverty and the otherwise vulnerable in a rural setting made me of interest as a Panel member.

I was invited to join the WPD Consumer Panel some 18 months ago and have now attended a number of meetings. When I first went, I had a rather cynical view of the both the potential nature of the meetings and the influence that the Panel recommendations might have on WPD operational and planning decisions. I was most surprised and impressed to discover that the Panel is taken very seriously indeed and that meetings of it consistently have a very significant amount of senior executive and engineering management time devoted to it. It has become very evident that previous and current recommendations of the Panel have had a powerful effect on the way that WPD operates it's business at every level. Indeed, WPD has regularly gone well beyond the actual requirements of it's contract in many areas. What is more, it has very willingly and effectively done all that it can to assist consumers with their various problems – particularly those deemed vulnerable. This is a degree of service well beyond that which one would expect of fully commercial operation. It is, indeed, a company with a heart.

We have been given access to quite a number of areas of the company. I am impressed with the technical backup facilities in terms of availability and number of emergency generator sets of a wide range of capacities as well as rather more exotic provision such

as fire engines to be used as emergency pumps, highly mobile and of impressive capacity. The distribution of these resources is also very carefully planned for maximum availability. In the event of network damage then stores need to be available with the least delay : this also has been well considered. As the field maintenance teams are distributed rather than centralised at a few depots, this also aids network recovery in the event of wide-spread problems such as extensive flooding.

Network monitoring is also highly important and, again, is most effectively provided. As a SCADA systems specialist, this was my former area and, in fact, the reality of such a specialisation is that everyone's business effectively becomes your business so you achieve an overview of operations.

Finally, without staff, a company cannot actually achieve anything. These are the people who actually make it all work. I have been impressed by the high level of dedication of all of the members of staff that I have encountered. There is a level of trust up and down the management chain that would be enviable in any organisation, with a very high level of openness. Because of this, the operational and maintenance staff, in particular, show a willingness to "go the second mile" in restoring supplies to deprived consumers. I am very well aware of the incredibly difficult conditions under which the field teams often work, having often worked myself in remote places under difficult conditions with minimal facilities and under severe time pressures. This will have shown up under the very difficult conditions of the past few weeks. There is a very high level, too, of willingness to be flexible. This is not always possible where particular skills and training are required – especially where safety is at stake – but the office-based staff certainly will move wherever the pressure of current events requires.

You will already be well aware that consumers have rated WPD very highly indeed in just about every area. These ratings are entirely credible and fully deserved. WPD have also achieved impressively low levels of accidents as well as network reliability and the generally "green" way in which they operate.

I am, therefore, most happy to endorse the WPD business plan and consider that it reflects the views of WPD's stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,

Eur Ing Michael D. Rowe C.Eng MIET.

(Copy posted and also emailed to <RIIO.ED1@ofgem.gov.uk> & <anna.rossington@ofgem.gov.uk>