SUMMARY POLICY ISSUE PAPER – FOR EDAG DISCUSSION

Title of Paper	**Linking Meter Points**		
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Summary and recommendation

1. The issue considered by this paper is whether or not meter points relating to a given premises should be linked together in some way in the new switching arrangements.

2. Under current arrangements, if a consumer wants to switch, they typically provide their postcode and/or address to a supplier or price comparison website. The supplier or other party uses this address to interrogate industry databases to find the MPAN/MPRNs (MPxNs) associated with that address. The MPxNs, along with other data, are then passed through the various channels of the current switching arrangements to the parties that need to process the switch.

3. However, problems can arise due to differences in the addresses held for electricity and gas. If these cannot be reconciled, or incorrect records are held, this can cause delays or abandonment of the switch of one or both fuels, resulting in a poor consumer experience.

4. Our aspiration in relation to linking meter points is to ensure that a consumer can, upon entering basic information such as address at point of switch, be confident that the MPxNs related to their premises are correct and comprehensive, and can make an informed choice as to which ones they want to switch.

5. The policy paper attempts to articulate some of the issues that may arise due to the lack of a single attribute linking all related meter points at a given premises, in order to establish whether it is necessary or desirable to link them. It also outlines some of the potential attributes that could be used to link related meter points.

6. **We do not make any concrete recommendations at this point.** We continue to believe – and agree with views aired at the User Group meeting – that linking meter points for a premises served, while not absolutely necessary, may help to simplify the switching process and make it easier to rectify certain errors, reducing the need for manual intervention. We will continue to engage closely with the Delivery Strategy workstream as they gather evidence and develop potential solutions to cleanse industry data. Their product development will be an important input into our eventual recommendation in relation to linking related meter points.

7. **However, at this point, we welcome any observations the EDAG has on the content of this paper, and invite suggestions on:**

    - **Any further areas we should consider investigating, to help inform the options assessment**
    - **Additional options that we have not included here that we should consider**
    - **Initial reactions on the attractiveness or otherwise of any of the options that have been set out**

8. Our focus for this paper at this point is on domestic consumers, though we welcome views as to whether non-domestic consumers should also be considered.

Background and Analysis

9. The TOM v2 states that the Switching Programme is "an opportunity to join, harmonise and simplify the switching processes". This paper looks at whether this simplification and harmonisation can be aided by linking related meter points. This could involve linking electricity and gas meter points, and/or also linking multiple electricity or gas meters for a single premises.

10. In the majority of cases, using address data to uncover MPxN is unproblematic. However, issues can arise for a number of reasons:

    - When processing a dual fuel switch, because different databases are used to obtain the relevant electricity and gas data points, inconsistencies between the databases can cause delays to one or both switches.
    - Inputting address may not identify all relevant meter points for a given premises.
    - Even where all meter points for a given premises can be identified by an address, it may be difficult for the consumer to know which MPxN relates to which part of their energy supply. This could act as a deterrent to progressing their switch.

11. Addresses are currently held in distributed systems, and are updated at different times so that at any moment in time address data may be out of date in some systems. Manual intervention may be required on the part of the supplier to resolve the issue, adding cost and meaning processes are not as streamlined as they could be. The use of multiple source databases for addresses could, in itself, contribute to the problems experienced by some consumers when attempting to switch.

Related Issues

12. The Delivery Strategy team are currently developing a framework to capture current problems with industry data. A particular focus of this work is on matching of address and MPxN information. This will then be supplemented by a quantitative assessment to determine the scale of those problems that have been identified. Towards the end of the summer the team will start to develop options for improving the data. This quantitative assessment and solutions development will be a key input into our

considerations of the attributes that should be used to link related meter points, if any.

13. Additionally, the Business Process Design workstream is considering the issue of Related MPxNs. This separate piece of work considers how existing defined categories of related MPxNs should be handled under the new switching arrangements.

Analysis

14. The options we have identified to date that could act as the link between related meter points are:

    - **Option 1 – UPRN**: Under this option, the CRS would be populated with a Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN), a unique identifier for every addressable location in GB. The UPRN can act as a consistent reference number for each property, so may have benefits in dealing with changes of named address or merges/splits in existing properties. The UPRN is already partially used in the industry. Consumers would continue to be able to input their address, with the UPRN used to bridge any differences in electricity and gas addresses.

    - **Option 2 - Address**: Similar to current practice, consumers would continue to input their address when they want to switch. This solution would rest largely on the work of the Delivery Strategy workstream. Address data quality is a key focus of this work.

    - **Option 3 – Smart Meter Communications Hub**: As part of the smart meter rollout, households will have a smart meter communications hub installed, which will connect all meters at a premises within a home area network. A dataflow to the CRS could be created from the Data Communications Company database containing the relevant hub information.

    - **Option 4 – Consumer Linking:** Instead of inputting the address or postcode, the consumer would directly input their MPxN number at point of switch. In this case there would be no formal linking so no additional functionality in the CRS would be required.

    - **Option 5 – Do Nothing**: Current practice would continue and there would be no linking attribute in the new CRS. Electricity and gas switches would be processed separately and any differences in address or other data points between the two fuels would continue.

15. The pros and cons of each of these options are provided in the full *Linking Meter Points* paper.

Summary of key points from stakeholders

16. When discussing early thoughts on this issue with the User Group, we sought views on whether it was necessary or desirable to link related meter points. In general, the User Group suggested that it was not absolutely necessary to link related meter

points. However, there was a general consensus that linking meter points may be beneficial, both to consumers and to the switching processes as a whole.

17. The User Group also agreed that our aspiration should be that a consumer can be confident that the MPxNs identified for their premises are correct and comprehensive, when the consumer enters basic address information at a point of switch. User Group recognised that linking meter points could help to realise this aspiration.