Incentive on Connections Engagement

Our plans and commitments for connections customers

Half Year Update

Scottish and Southern Energy
Power Distribution

October 2015
Welcome

Almost six months have passed since I introduced our Looking Forward report 2015/16 – Our plans and commitments for connections customers and upon review I’m pleased to report things have moved forward significantly both in terms of engagement and delivery of our plans.

In that report I stated that it was important that we actively listen to stakeholders with an interest in our business, in particular our connections customers, and that is exactly what we have been working on.

The past few months have seen a continual change in the way we approach engagement as an organisation. We have a connections engagement strategy and connections engagement team in place which are now helping us to deliver tangible benefits for customers and our business this year and into the next.

Since that report was published we have:

- Scheduled 10 workshops (8 held to date) aimed at engaging different customer groups on issues that matter to them
- Hosted 10 surgeries across our distribution areas to offer face to face project support
- Maintained a presence at various major external events
- Launched our new connections customer steering panel (CCSP) to give connections customers a voice with our senior management team

I launched the Connections Customer Steering Panel in September, both in Glasgow and Winchester, and I look forward to attend future meetings, as hearing directly from customers we serve is vital. During these meetings I heard some very clear messages from our connections customers about what they wanted to see from our business as we move forward together.

These can be summarised as follows:

1. Communication and engagement – ‘we need to get better at telling you what we are doing’
2. Accessibility of the information we provide and the need to improve this
3. Greater transparency regarding our policies and processes
4. Improved consistency in the delivery of our services

The meetings provided us with an excellent foundation upon which to build our improvement strategy however the real challenge for us now is to respond to feedback and deliver the improvements. I look forward to the next meeting to demonstrate how we have acted on this feedback.

In general, the way in which we have expanded our engagement activities, including the use of online tools such as LinkedIn, has been well received by our customers. We understand there is a need to use a variety of communication channels as all our customers have different needs and preferences.

I was concerned by the number of customers I spoke to who were unaware of the steps we are taking to improve our service to them. Communicating with you is something we need to work harder at so we are investing in additional resource as a business in areas such our website and a dedicated connections engagement team to address this.

In response to this feedback we will be placing extra effort into the way in which we communicate with our customers including developing the use of webinar technology to assist customers with things like navigating our website, understanding our processes and also improving the visibility of information contained within our website.

We will also be focussing on the delivery aspect of connections work as it is clear that this is an area where customers want to see greater consistency across our distribution areas.

Over the following pages you will find a summary of our progress to date and updates to our report including:

- a more detailed update on our engagement activities which inform our ongoing improvements
- what we are doing to respond and tackle changing customer priorities
- an updated table of commitments on pages 6 and 7

We continually review our engagement approach and commitments, and are particularly interested in feedback from you on how we have performed recently and what areas you would like us to focus on next. There are a number of ways you can give that feedback, all of which are detailed on the back page of this booklet.

Colin Nicol
Managing Director of Distribution
Expanding our engagement

This year we have taken major steps to increase the range and number of opportunities for our customer and stakeholders to engage with us and influence our business.

Customer-Focused Engagement Days

Our approach to engagement is all about listening and responding to customer needs. We do not engage for the sake of it and we recognise that, as reflects our diverse connections customer base, one size does not fit all.

With this in mind, this year we designed, and are now delivering an extensive programme of ten improved engagement days across our distribution areas tailored to meet the needs of the broad spectrum of customers - from Microgeneration Customers, to Community groups and right through to Independent Connection Providers (ICP’s) and Independent Distribution Network Operators (IDNO’s).

The purpose of these events is to engage and inform customers in relation to specific topics that they had previously informed us would be of benefit to them. Subjects covered in these sessions include such topics as an overview of our systems and processes, the information and new tools available on our website and wayleaves and legal information.

Our engagement days are staffed by technical experts and customer facing staff from across our connections business. These experts are on hand to respond to questions from customers.

The agendas for these events are balanced between providing information and open discussion. Opportunities for customers to ask questions and share their views with us are built into every session, and where there are ideas for improvements to our service, we record these to help inform next year’s plans and commitments.

So far, 147 customers have attended our first eight events and the feedback we have received has been very positive. Of the feedback received (54% response rate) 94% of stakeholders said they would be interested in attending future engagement days and rated 9 out of 10 for how beneficial they found the events. We are reviewing what worked well and what we need to improve upon to inform future engagement activities, and we are looking to expand our programme of events next year. Importantly, these events also provide a valuable insight into what improvements customers would like to see us focus on next year. This feedback will be invaluable in preparing next years plans.

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Proactive engagement that appears to go beyond the CoP requirements, seems to be a genuine desire to help ICP’s/IDNO’s.

Mike Moseley
Morrison Utility Services

Great to have lots of SEPD team here. Team came across very well - approachable, transparent etc. Nice atmosphere.

Tamar Bourne, Regen SW Communities Event

Impressed with the engagement and direction SSE is taking
Chris Taylor, Modus South ICP / IDNO Engagement Day

A good step forward from previous engagement.

Jeff Reynolds, Clancy Docwra
Demand Customer Engagement Day
Engaging with our customers online

We plan to use all tools available to us to provide a better service.

Members of our connections steering panel informed us that they would like to see us using social media, informative you-tube like videos and webinars to connect with them. In response, we are increasingly 'live tweeting', and using video to record our events, in order to help communicate the learning points from our sessions to those customers who were unavailable to attend in person.

Earlier this year we launched our online events calendar so that people can arrange to see us at the click of a button. We also set up a connections group on LinkedIn. This group has grown to over 300 members and we use it to promote our plans, keep customers updated with our progress throughout the year and invite feedback.

Going the extra mile to hear from our customers

Our inclusive engagement approach is all about ensuring we are listening and responding to the needs of all our customers, not just the ones we already regularly communicate with. We realise that our customers and stakeholders have busy lives and that we must adapt to their needs. We have struggled in the past to obtain the views of some connections customers. In response to this, we have held meetings this year with representatives of the National Farmers Union, House Builders Federation and the Federation for Small Businesses. We have also exhibited and attended at a range of national and industry events including The Future Solent Conference, Energy 2015 and The Energy Event which had a combined estimated footfall of 62,000 people. We surveyed the customers who attended our engagement days, and although 84% of stakeholders indicated that they felt we offered them enough methods of engagement we still wish to go further.

Consequently, we are continuing to work on our approach, with a plan to increase the range of events we attend next year to make us even more visible and accessible. Details of these and all events we attend and will continue to be advertised on our events calendar.

Acting on Feedback

Throughout the year we actively seek to engage with stakeholders to obtain their views on our ‘looking forward’ plans.

From one to one discussion, workshops and trade shows to formal OFGEM consultation responses we seek to act, and continually improve on our work plan.

There are two key drivers for us in producing a half year update: to keep you informed of our progress, but also to clearly demonstrate that we take your feedback on board. To demonstrate this we believe we have made improvements to reflect your views in the following areas:

- Improvements to some Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s)
- Improving the visibility of scope of our engagement activities
- Improving our customer engagement when delivering the solution to ensure what we implement is fit for purpose

Stakeholders commented our KPIs ‘could be S.M.A.R.T.er/clearly defined’ and we have taken this into account. We have improved our KPI’s where appropriate to be more specific and measurable to ensure we can demonstrate the breadth of improvement in service received by stakeholders and customers.

In our looking forward report we published supporting stakeholder and customer endorsements, to ensure it was clear where the commitment had originated - based on feedback. However some stakeholders commented that we needed to improve this area by ‘clearly signposting the level of engagement that has informed the plan’. Therefore, in this update and in our future reports we aim to provide more quantitative information so that our stakeholders can see improved visibility of the scope of our engagement activities that have informed our plan.

Following on from this, additional comments received focussed around the area of engagement prior to ‘going live’ with the delivery of the commitment. You have told us that you want to be consulted and have input on the end result. We want stakeholders to feel they can directly affect and have a say on the end result.

We are committing to allowing enough time to put the proposed solution up for consultation before delivering the change. We will also use our database of feedback to ensure that the customers who have suggested the improvement are kept informed, but we will also publish consultations seeking views on our website.
Recent Priorities

Transmission to Distribution interface
During the last 6 months, the interface between the Transmission and Distribution networks has emerged as one of the key areas of concern across the industry. In our Scottish Hydro Electric Power Distribution (SHEPD) area, we have been working with Transmission constraints for many years and have developed a number of working practices that we are now collaborating with other Distribution Network Operators (DNO’s) on to disseminate our experiences.

An example of this is the inclusion of not only Distribution but also Transmission constraints within our Heatmap tool. Our stakeholders advised us that the information relating to potential transmission constraints is critical and needs to be made available before they even apply. We have responded to this, and now include Transmission constraint information including their likely rectification dates recorded against all Grid Supply Points in the SHEPD area. We are also working closely with National Grid to replicate this in our Southern Electric Power Distribution (SEPD) area.

Quicker and More Efficient Connections
Ofgem’s recent ‘Quicker and More Efficient Connections’ consultation sets out the next steps for the industry in relation to flexible connections, such as the use of consortia and flexible payment terms, and management of existing projects which aren’t progressing. These are areas that we have been working on for a number of years and are continuing to progress.

In relation to management of existing projects, there are two specific areas in which Ofgem is requiring further work: developing a set of principles for when DNOs can withdraw capacity from distributed generation (DG) projects which aren’t progressing; and developing cost effective options to manage the connections queue to release capacity from historic connection offers where milestones have not been met.

Our standard Connection offer already includes a series of milestones (‘progression clauses’) that a customer is required to meet in order to achieve the agreed connection date. Our Contract Managers then actively manage contracted projects to ensure that capacity is not being held by projects which are not progressing in line with the required milestones, where this capacity could be utilised by another project. We are now actively engaged with the other DNOs and DG stakeholders to share this.

Statement of works
Transmission constraints are impacting an increasing number of projects across the UK and customers need early sight of whether their project will be adversely affected. We together with other DNOs and in conjunction with National Grid and the Electricity Networks Association (ENA) have recently formed a working party to review the Statement of Works process which identifies transmission constraints for a customer, with a view to providing better clearer and more timely feedback on applications. Proposals were presented at the recent Distributed Generation Fora and work continues with a view to implementing a new streamlined approach in 2016.

Whilst customers wait for that new approach they still need clarity in their current offers of the likely impact of transmission constraints. To address this we have put in place an interim approach which ensures that customers clearly know when Statement of Works is required. In addition, wherever we are already aware that work is required at a transmission Grid Supply Point, we will explicitly show this in any offer. In these instances we will also skip the Statement of Works process and instead progress acceptances straight to National Grid’s next stage. We are committed to including this essential information as early as possible in customer offers so they can make informed decisions in relation to their project.

We are also actively engaged with other DNO’s and DG stakeholders to share best practice and agree on a common approach.

"
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We have recently launched and rolled out a number of workshops and engagement events an on-line process for alternative providers to identify their own POC for the majority of connections projects.

Ahead of target we have moved to charge for all alternative provider inspections retrospectively alongside a complete list of inspections that took place and their results.

Process updated and communicated

Our community account managers are now in place and have been working with community bodies to develop relationships with community connection customers.

They can be contacted at community.energy.champion@live.com.

After consultation with community bodies we have attended 4 community workshops so far with more events planned in the future.

SEPD: We have now launched our community connections guide in collaboration with Regen SW. This is available on our website.

SEPD: We are working with Community Bodies to tailor this to Scotland specific connections. Due to go live in Q3.

SEPD: Customer Connections Managers (CCM) now in place aligned with new regional structure. SEPD: CCMs will be in place by end November, ahead of target.

We have now produced simple guide for disconnectors. This is available to view and download on our website.

Phase 2 of our events calendar is due to go live by end December 2015. Improvements will include the ability to view all historic event material including presentations, pictures and videos from the day. Our Connections Customer Steering panel is now set up with a broad range of customers represented across all market segments. Next meetings in February 2016.

Staff contact maps for both generation and demand account managers are now available on our website.

We aim to improve this further by creating contact maps for our new regional structure once in place.

We have been conducting a trial of extending opening hours. So for the uptake of this has been minimal, further consultations are ongoing. We do however have staff working evening and weekends to progress customer applications.

Customer Connections

Our alternative provider register has now been improved based on direct customer feedback resulting in a surge of new registrations.

At the point of giving us your contact details, you have the option to agree to be informed by email, telephone or post about key policy changes and updates.

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If you have any questions, would like to be kept updated with our progress or are simply interested in finding out more please contact:

connectionsfeedback@sse.com

engage with us online
Stay updated with the latest news and improvements by following us on line:

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