

Wales & West Utilities
**Annual
stakeholder
report**

1 April 2015
to 31 March 2016



How to get involved with Wales & West Utilities

Our commitments are designed to give you a safe gas supply which is there when you need it, while also providing first-class customer service.

We really value your opinions and we would like you to continue to help us shape our business over the coming years.

If you're willing to help us, we would be pleased to hear from you. There are many ways you can get in touch and be involved.

- Would you like to be involved in our customer panels?
- Would you like to come to one of our stakeholder events?
- Do you have any suggestions on how this report could be better?
- We have funds available to support 'innovation projects' which help deliver our commitments – is this something you'd like to work with us on?

Need more information?

Please visit our website www.wwutilities.co.uk and register your interest today.

If you would like more information, call our stakeholder engagement team on **02920 278546** to chat about how you could get involved or email Elizabeth Warwick at elizabeth.warwick@wwutilities.co.uk

We look forward to working with you to continue to shape the future of our business.

For general updates and information, why not follow us on Twitter [@wwutilities](https://twitter.com/wwutilities) or on Facebook at facebook.com/wwutilities

To ask about our training academy and services, please email trainingacademyenquiries@wwutilities.co.uk or call **Theresa Williams** on **02920 278937**.

If you're carrying out work, to ask about the location of our pipes, stay safe and prevent damage, please email dig@wwutilities.co.uk or call us on **02920 278912**.

Interested in a career at Wales & West Utilities? Visit our website for the latest vacancies or contact our HR team by emailing recruitment@wwutilities.co.uk or call **Nicola Allan** on **02920 278628**.

Do you have an idea for a new product or research, which may be relevant to our business priorities? Contact our innovation team by emailing innovation@wwutilities.co.uk or call **Lucy Mason** on **02920 278958**.

For more information on, or to be considered for, our Warm Home Assistance scheme for financial help with a new gas connection, contact our team by emailing fuelpoor@wwutilities.co.uk or call **Stuart Neill** on **02920 278713**.

For general enquiries, please email enquiries@wwutilities.co.uk or call us on **0800 912 2999**.

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Welcome from our Chief Executive Graham Edwards

Delivering on our targets for all stakeholders remains central to our business strategy.

In this report we set out how we have performed during 2015/2016, the third year of the current price-control period. The price control is set by our regulator, Ofgem. Ofgem sets the targets we must deliver and the revenues we are allowed to collect.

We encourage and welcome feedback from many sources, listening and responding to what people tell us. This helps us to keep improving the services we provide to our 7.5 million customers.

Our continued focus on performance has brought us significant successes. We've been recognised by the Institute of Customer Service with a customer satisfaction rating that puts us in the distinction category, and we've continually achieved more than nine out of ten in Ofgem's overall customer satisfaction survey.

We have challenges ahead in the short and long term, but we will approach them with the involvement of our customers and a range of organisations. With our stakeholders' approval, we are focusing on how best we can give support to those who need it most – our customers who struggle to pay their bills and those people who are most vulnerable in our society. We are also addressing the dangers and potential costs to customers of gas thefts.

We plan to take a lead role in providing information on the imminent mass roll-out of smart meters, beginning this year.

What we've done, how we did it, and our next steps are set out on the following pages.



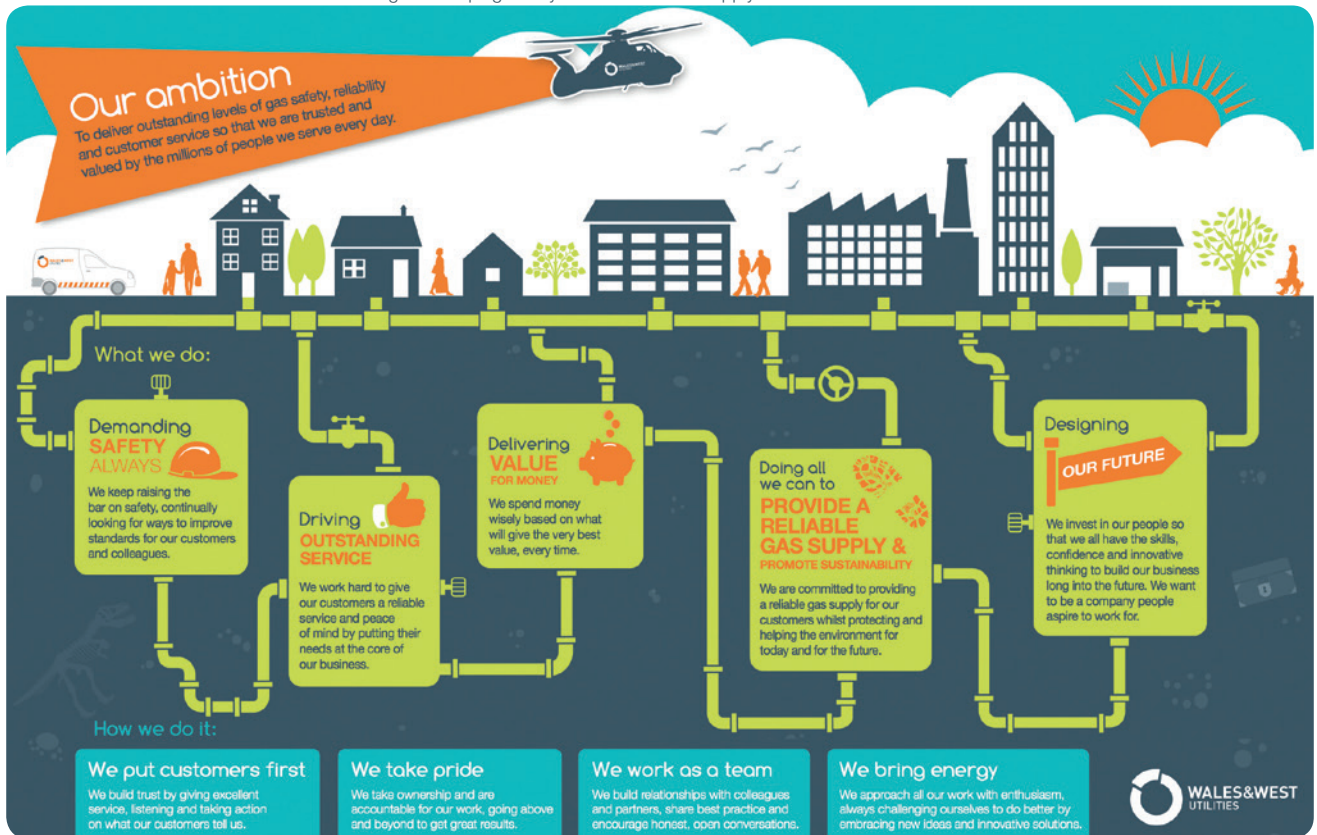
Graham Edwards
Chief Executive



Who we are and what we do

We always put our customers first. It's the core value of our company. Our ambition, priorities and values are at the heart of everything we do.

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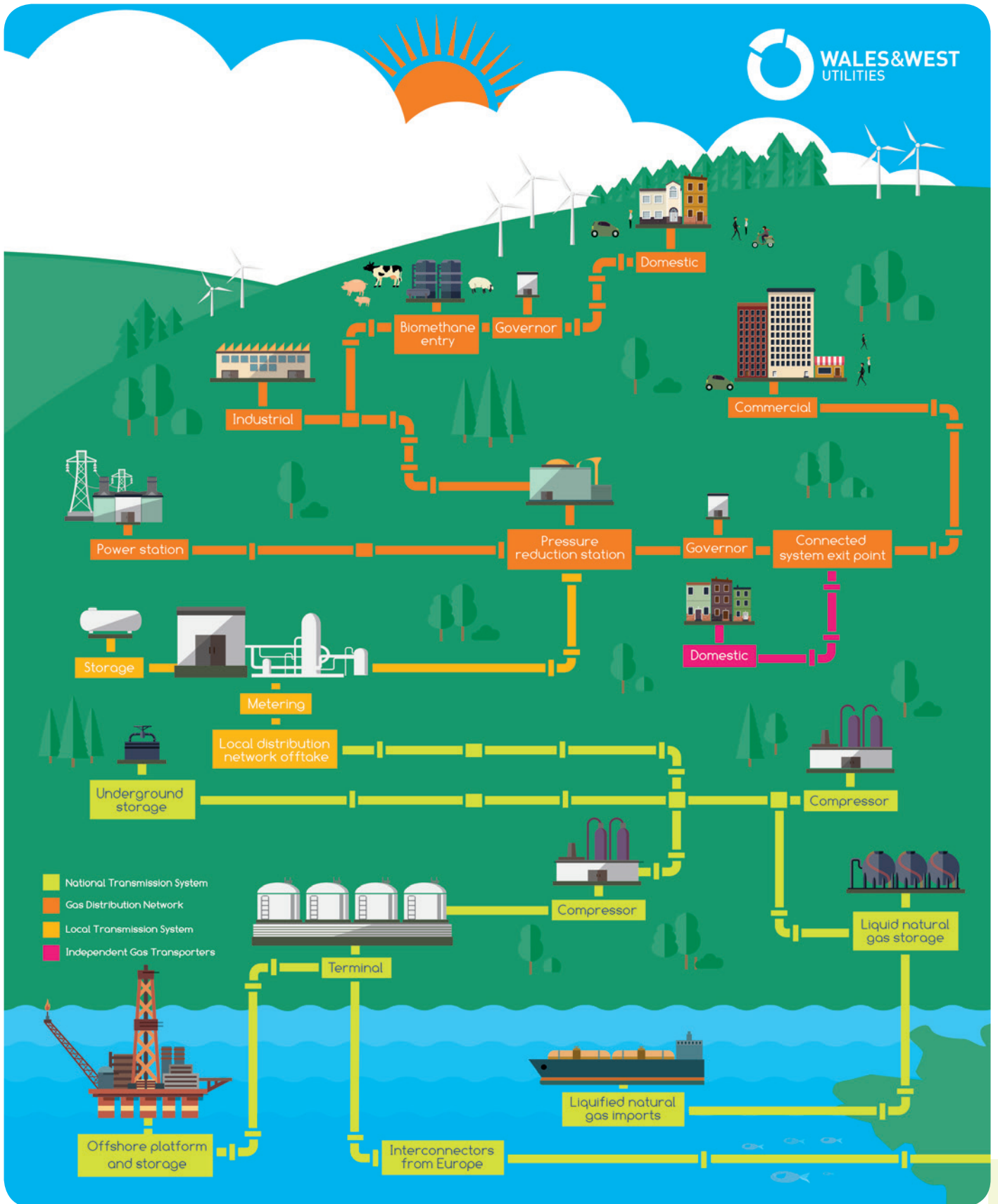
Each year we...

- **Attend** more than 85,000 gas escapes – over 80% of which are internal faults in customers' properties and not on our gas network. For those not on our network, we make the property safe. If we have to disconnect a supply for safety reasons, we can provide alternative cooking and heating facilities for those customers in most need.
- **Replace** around 430 kilometres of old metal mains as part of our programme, started in 2002, to replace all metal pipes which are within 30 metres of a building. We are replacing metal pipes with long-life plastic equivalents that will last for more than 80 years. We also renew 40,000 services a year – the smaller pipes that transport gas into individual properties.
- **Invest** over £120 million to maintain the safety and reliability of the gas network – replacing, refurbishing and maintaining a network that covers almost 20% of the UK.
- **Connect** over 11,000 new customers to mains gas (around 50% of all gas connections within our operating region). Of these, 1,539 have received assisted funding through our Warm Home Assistance scheme, as we play our part in reducing the effect of the rising cost of energy.
- **Provide** services to install and repair meters across our region on behalf of suppliers and meter owners. We compete for this work and it effectively reduces the cost of the emergency service we provide for customers.

Our job is to provide the infrastructure to deliver gas safely and securely to 2.5 million homes and businesses across Wales and the south west of England. We do not sell gas, we transport it, and over 7.5 million people within our area rely on us to do so.

Our dedicated team manages a network of over 35,000 kilometres of gas pipes to make sure we continue to provide a safe and reliable gas supply 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This involves responding to gas emergencies, maintaining and replacing our gas network, and connecting new customers.

What we do



Our main achievements for the business over the first three years of this price-control period, 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 include the following:

- **We have attended over 240,000 emergency call-outs.**
- **We connected more than 30,000 new properties to our gas network**, over 5,800 of which were through our 'fuel poor' scheme, providing financial support to customers to help them each save on average £450 a year on energy costs by switching to gas.
- **We replaced over 1,200 kilometres (km) of our old metal gas pipes with new plastic pipes** with a lifespan of over 80 years, securing safe and reliable gas supplies for our customers.
- **We trained 21 apprentices** – helping provide the gas engineers for the future.

Important achievements for 2015/2016

- We've efficiently achieved, and in many cases done better than, **all the targets set for the third year of the price-control period** while spending within our forecast.
- **We are also either on target, or ahead of target**, for outputs measured across the eight-year price control.
- **We've been recognised by the Institute of Customer Service (ICS)** with a **distinction** rating in customer satisfaction, and continually achieved more than nine out of ten in Ofgem's overall customer satisfaction survey.



- By working with partners, we are **providing innovative and targeted support to the most vulnerable people across our region**. (By innovative we mean new methods and creative thinking.)
- **The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has recognised our industry-leading safety processes by giving us an 'exemplar' rating in managing major accident safety and leadership**. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) awarded us a 'Gold Award' in 2014, 2015 and 2016.



- **We have received a range of awards** recognising the dedication and commitment of our people and we are delighted that Business in the Community (BITC) Wales has recognised us as Responsible Large Business of the Year in 2016 – a wonderful outcome that truly reflects our culture.



We have achieved all of this against a background of providing continuing good value for customers. The average cost to our customers, not including inflation, for 2015/2016 was under £121, which is less than the cost at the start of the current price-control period, which was £126. This reflects the efficiencies we are delivering. We continue to provide real value for money for all our customers and stakeholders.

We are also on target for outputs measured across the eight-year price-control period to 2021. After consulting our stakeholders, we are committed to delivering extra value in the areas they said were most important to them. Over the rest of the eight-year period to 2021, we will deliver:

- **funding for 20% more connections for customers in fuel poverty than originally allowed for** (fuel poverty is where people are left with an income which is below the official poverty line after paying their fuel costs);
- **more targeted support to vulnerable customers;**
- **greater reductions in emissions by 2021 than originally planned;** and
- **further reductions in costs we can control such as our facilities costs** (for example, printing, stationery and travel).

We continue to deliver against our commitments and thank our stakeholders (individuals, groups or organisations, who are affected by our business actions, objectives or policies) for their continuing support during the course of the year and over the rest of the price-control period.

The power of four

We are one of the four gas distribution networks that serve people across the UK. We've been working together since 2005, when we became independent gas networks, to deliver some great outcomes and benefits for the communities we serve, across a range of issues. These include:

- helping people who are in fuel poverty;
- promoting awareness and prevention of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning;
- supporting vulnerable customers;
- carrying out research and demonstration projects for sustainable heating solutions; and
- delivering and sharing innovation, providing benefits for customers and stakeholders now and into the future.

Our highlights

Helped secure **£25 million** for local authorities to support other initiatives.

Regularly communicating with more than **20,000** private landlords with messages about carbon monoxide and fuel poverty.

Working with others to encourage **biomethane connections to our networks.**

39.4% of people surveyed reported an increase in awareness about carbon monoxide.

Making sure people are safe and reducing the effect of the roll-out of smart meters on our customers.

14,715 CO alarms given to vulnerable customers.

How we have performed

We have achieved another outstanding performance in the third year of this eight-year price-control period.

We are continuing to build on the performance improvements we achieved in the first two years. We have met and done better for all output categories and are still on target to meet our outputs measured across the full eight-year price-control period while spending within the forecast we provided in last year's report.

Ofgem has asked all networks to provide a consistent summary of:

- **actual costs so far and forecast costs to 2021; and**
- **outputs delivered so far and forecast performance to 2021.**

You can find our summary on our website in 'Our Performance' at:
www.wwestutilities.co.uk/about-us/our-company/publications/

Plain English Campaign's
Crystal Mark does not apply to
this illustration

The main outputs delivered

929

**vulnerable customers added
to Supplier and Network
Priority Services register**

79,000

homes supplied
with green gas

100% COMPLIANCE TO LICENCE OBLIGATIONS
Development
of a world's first
climate change
impact mapping
unique product

70%

**OF COMPLAINTS
RESOLVED IN 24 HOURS**

CO AWARENESS CHANGE
= INCREASE TO **49%**
97% SURVEYED
TO TAKE FURTHER
ACTION TO PROTECT
AGAINST CO

117 new apprentices – 21 in 2015

1,559

fuel poor vouchers issued

**NEPRO
OMBUDSMAN
RULINGS**

**430km of iron
gas mains
replaced a year**

188

**upskilled
colleagues**

5,262

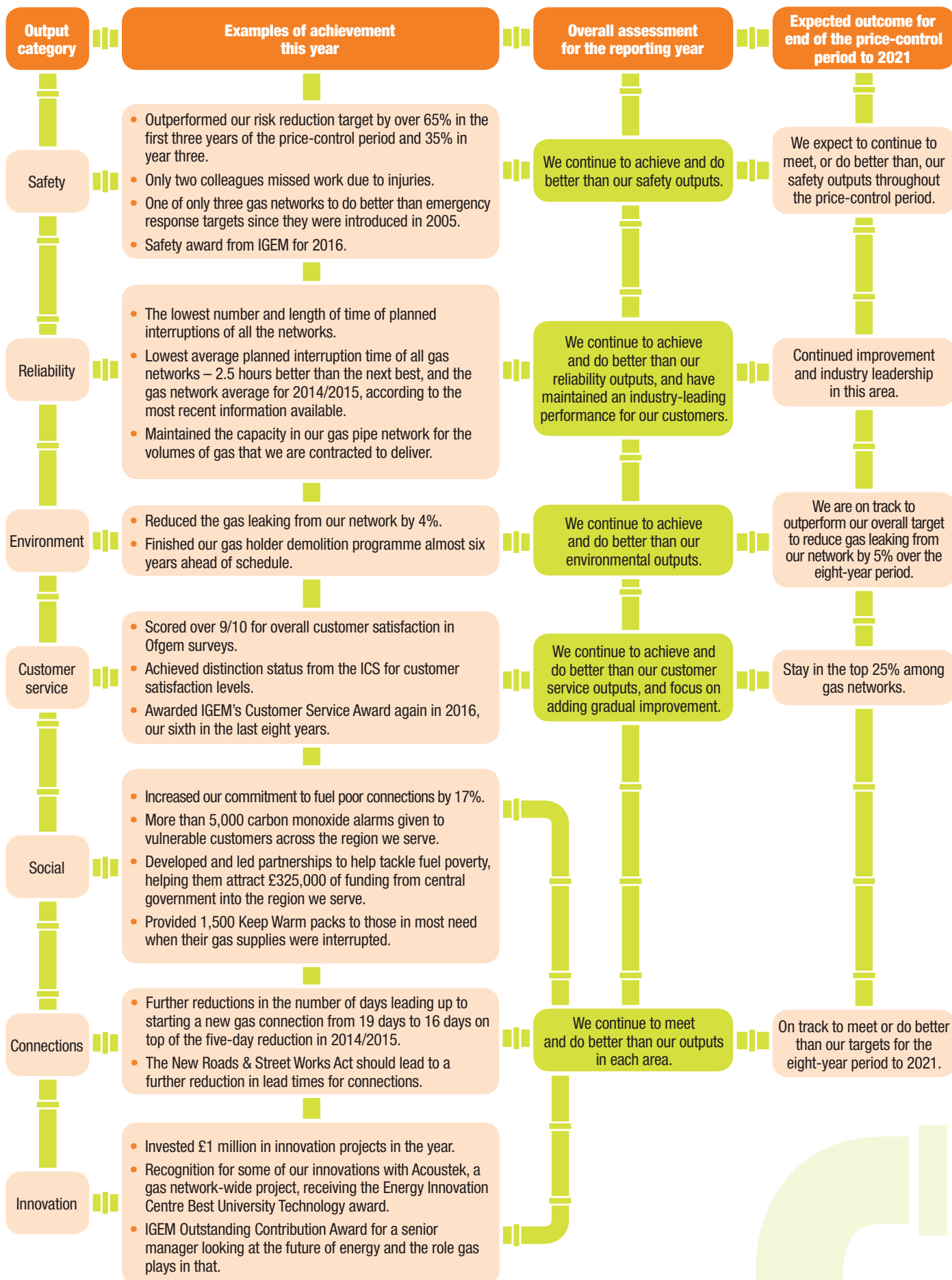
**CO ALARMS
DISTRIBUTED**

**85,000 emergency jobs
attended. 98.6% within 1 hour**

1,500

Winter Warm Packs issued

Our 2015/2016 performance across our regulated output categories



Focus on delivery

Our main principle is to put customers first. We use involvement from our stakeholders to inform and improve our customer service. This involvement is broad and inclusive but always has a clear focus on action to improve the services we deliver.

We receive feedback from more than 120,105 customers every year and people told us that reinstatement (putting the areas we have worked in back to how they were) and communication with us while we are working in the community are some of their main concerns. Customers and stakeholders also told us that money lost through the theft of gas was also a concern.

The following case studies show how we have listened and taken action to improve the delivery of our services.

Recovering money lost through the theft of gas was a stakeholder priority, so we increased our investigation in this area. We launched investigations into the top 100 live gas services, but where there were no registered customers. This has led to recovering £497,000 from 12 customers for gas theft in 2015. This helps us to reduce our transportation charges that form part of customers' gas bills.

Case study

Major incident response: teamwork deals with gas emergencies

Our aim

In every case of damage to our network not caused by us, we have to make decisions on what's best for our customers.

The challenge

In March 2016 there was accidental damage to a gas main on the outskirts of Bridgwater. The supply was lost to 550 homes in the village of Nether Stowey, and reduced pressure threatened a further 700 homes in the neighbouring village of Cannington. The decision was whether to keep Cannington on supply while repairing the main, even though this would delay the repair.

What customers and stakeholders told us

We know that our customers expect us to fix problems quickly, while making sure we provide maximum safety. This is always our goal. We also know that keeping customers well informed is very important.

How we overcame the problem

We decided the best option for everyone would be to isolate the supply to Cannington. This allowed us to turn off the gas in the area near the damage, making it a much easier repair job. But it meant that we had a loss of supply to 1,250 homes and we had to restore it quickly.

Our various teams set to dealing with the multiple issues that the damage had caused.

- We kept the media regularly informed of progress and
- also used our website and social media for updates. We
- visited customers, providing those in need with other
- cooking and heating appliances.

The outcome

- We repaired and turned our low pressure mains back on
- in both villages and then visited customers to turn their
- individual gas supplies and appliances back on.

- We visited vulnerable people on the Priority Service
- Register (PSR). Within 24 hours all properties had their
- supply back.

- Our Director of Operations, Andrew Hopkins, said: "The
- way we respond to emergencies, making sure that our
- customers – especially those most in need – are safe,
- makes me proud to be part of our company, and proud
- to lead our Operations Directorate. All colleagues involved
- did a fantastic job."

Next steps

- We learn from all incidents such as these. This has
- highlighted the importance of timely communication for
- communities, through many channels. We are reviewing
- how we can match our operational activities with
- community communications through all the activities we
- carry out, making sure we keep people informed and up
- to date. This also underlines the importance of spreading
- the message: 'dial before you dig', so people don't
- damage our equipment.

Responses from residents involved in the Cannington and Nether Stowey incident...



I thought the way your teams dealt with the gas cut to Cannington was exceptional. The professional and courteous approach of your staff in isolating, safety labelling, reconnecting and testing was excellent. The help you provided to local people by way of distributing microwave ovens, portable fan heaters and packs containing blankets, gloves, hats, hot water bottles and microwavable hand warmers was superb. Please pass my thanks on to all the people within your organisation who worked so hard to make a difficult situation bearable.



I was concerned about my parents who are both 90-plus, but your swift service with the means for them to keep warm and constant communication was excellent.



The service has been incredible considering this was a situation WWU was not anticipating. My daughter has a young baby and the relevant cooking and heating facilities were provided almost instantly.



Facebook comments



Keith Chesterton Thank you to all concerned for the prompt, efficient and helpful way this has been dealt with. Nether Stowey has been buzzing since early on with blokes turning supplies back on.
Like · Reply · 1 · March 4 at 10:21am

Wales & West Utilities Thanks Keith, that's good to hear. I'll pass the feedback on to the operational teams. Hope you're all sorted now. Reece.
Like · Reply · 1 · March 4 at 10:21am

Kerry Henderson I wanted to say thank you to everyone at WW utilities for their help today in Cannington. You are all doing a sterling job of looking after us while repairing the gas pipe. I only hope the people of Cannington and Nether Stowey have been kind in response to hearing the news that we are without gas. I've been really impressed by the care offered to us and the heater and hob we've been given. Well done all and please pass my thanks on to the engineers working hard to restore our gas supply.
Kind regards
Kerry Henderson
Sent from my iPhone
Like · Reply · 2 · March 3 at 9:01pm · Edited

Wales & West Utilities Thanks Kerry - I know the teams out on site will really appreciate the feedback and I'll pass this on to them. Best, Reece
Like · Reply · March 3 at 9:09pm

Karen Thacker Have just had the engineer turn us back on, thank you Wales & West 😊
Like · Reply · 1 · March 3 at 8:37pm

Wales & West Utilities Thanks Karen - good to hear that. Hope you didn't get too cold. Reece.
Like · Reply · March 3 at 8:39pm

Krissy Wilson reviewed Wales & West Utilities - 4.5
10 hrs · 📍
We lost our gas supply today and the assistance we got was amazing! Well done to all the men that were out and about till who knows what time sorting out our heating, your worth your weight in gold!
Like · Comment · Share

Sallie Hurley
10 hrs · Wemboldon
Our gas is back on, Rodway Close. Well done to Wales and West Utilities, very polite and helpful workmen visiting homes and explaining the situation, obviously dealing with the cause of the problem, and returning so quickly to turn our gas supplies back on, excellent job, very thorough and efficient.
Like · Share

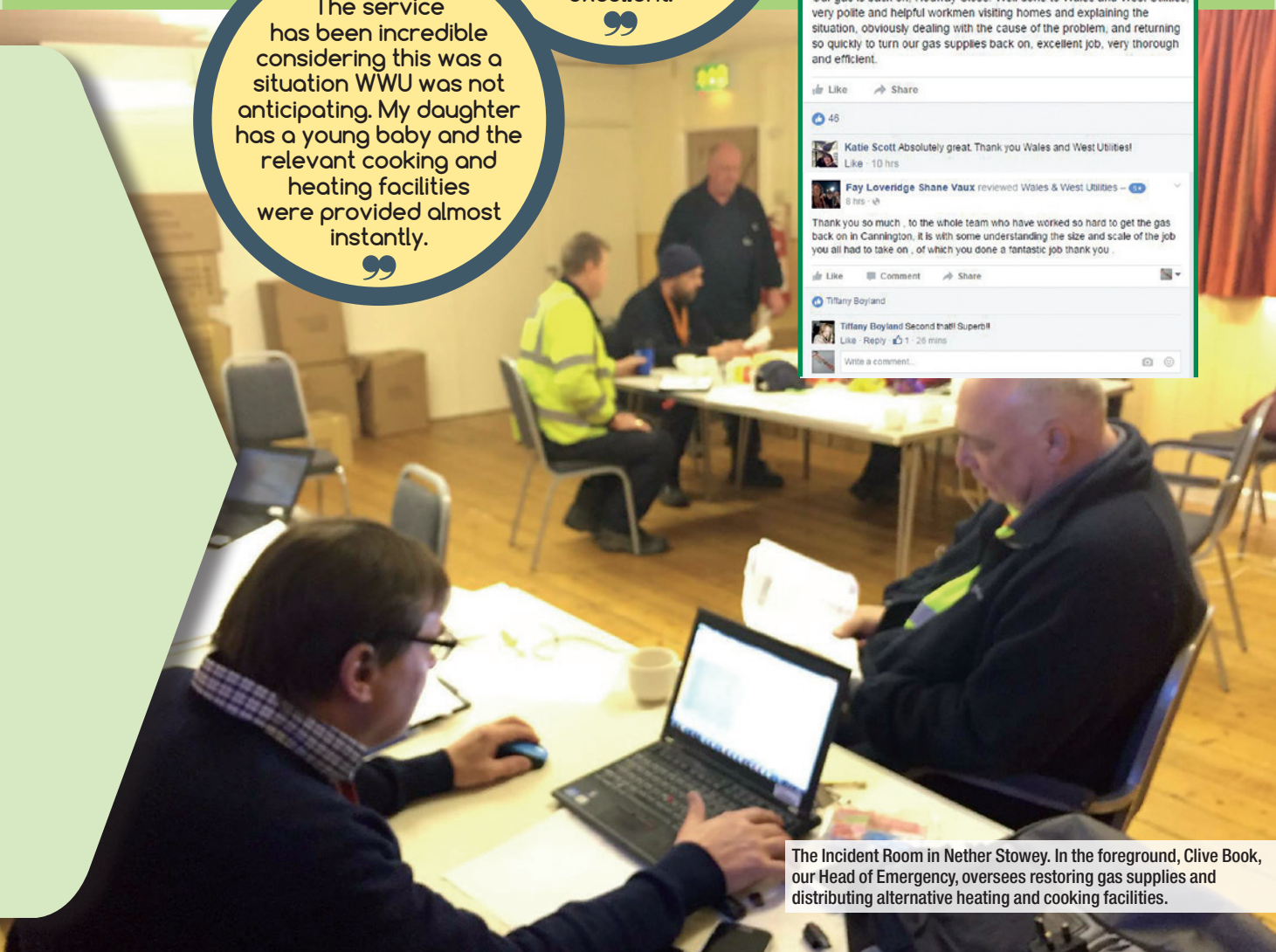
45

Katie Scott Absolutely great. Thank you Wales and West Utilities!
Like · 10 hrs

Fay Loveridge **Shane Vaux** reviewed Wales & West Utilities - 4.5
8 hrs · 📍
Thank you so much, to the whole team who have worked so hard to get the gas back on in Cannington. It is with some understanding the size and scale of the job you all had to take on, of which you done a fantastic job thank you.
Like · Comment · Share

Tiffany Boyland

Tiffany Boyland Second that!! Super!!
Like · Reply · 1 · 26 mins
Write a comment...



The Incident Room in Nether Stowey. In the foreground, Clive Book, our Head of Emergency, oversees restoring gas supplies and distributing alternative heating and cooking facilities.

Casestudy

A walk in our customers' shoes

Our aim

We want to understand fully how our work affects customers. The best way of doing that is to put ourselves in their shoes. When we fully understand what they expect from us, we can make sure that we deliver excellent service.

The challenge

Each year our £70 million gas mains replacement programme directly affects more than 2,400 roads and around 35,000 customers. We also deliver more than 10,000 new gas connections. We make sure our customers have a consistently good experience and this also benefits us.

How we planned to overcome it

We receive customer feedback from our customer apps, 'Insight' management information system, and a survey. We learned that while we performed well, there was scope for possible improvements.

We took this feedback on board and, working with other gas networks, we worked with customer experience experts, Hivemind, to help us take a walk in our customers' shoes.

What customers and stakeholders told us

We continually review customer survey scores and comments we receive from customers. Where we spot trends and themes, we act. Customers said they wanted tidiness on site, simple communication with the company and their supply back as quickly as possible.

What we did

Using Hivemind's structured approach to examine our processes and customer feedback, we looked at where our activities affect customers and what this experience would be like for them.

The outcome

As a result of this work we've set short-, medium- and long-term goals to help us improve the customer experience. We've already achieved some 'quick wins' and our customer focus group is working through the other challenges.

Next steps

We will assess the effect through our daily 'Insight' management information and through the customer feedback survey scores.

Short-term, medium-term and long-term goals:

Short-term (less than 3 months)

Remind customers two weeks before work starts and give an exact date for work on their gas service pipe.

Offer updates on work as and when the customer wants.

Text customers when work is done and ask for their satisfaction score.

Medium-term (3 to 12 months)

Standardised text and phone messages the day before work is due to start, and update customers on the day of the work if there are changes to the work plan.

Offer 'opt out' of survey process.

Long-term (more than 12 months)

Get name and address information so we can write personalised letters to customers who will be affected by our work.

Immediate reinstatement based on information received straight away from colleagues working on jobs.

Casestudy

Improving reinstatement

Our aim

We spend £9 million a year on putting areas back to how they were before our work, so getting this part of our service right for our customers is important to us. We wanted to find ways of providing a more satisfactory experience for those affected.

The challenge

To reduce inconvenience, we needed customer research. The information we gain could influence the shape of tenders for subcontracted roadworks and deliver better outcomes.

What customers and stakeholders told us

We decided to run two customer focus groups to let us know what customers wanted. We also planned to discuss aims and ideas with our contractors on how we could make the customer experience better. We asked a wide range of questions and asked for comments. We were told that priorities included safety, effective communication, access to driveways and parking, completing work quickly and doing a high-quality job.

Working with others

To tackle the issues, we brought together everyone involved in reinstatement work – from within the company as well as subcontractors.

What we did

We held a workshop with contractors, before our invitation to tender was issued. This was attended by reinstatement companies, operational managers from across our business and our contractor partners, customer service colleagues, and reinstatement team. It was opened by Rob Long, Programme Director, who is responsible for our gas main replacement programme. The goal was to investigate what could be done to improve performance and we examined all stages of the reinstatement process, including all the areas that concerned our customers.

The outcome

The outputs of the workshop, coupled with stakeholder feedback, helped to shape specific requirements that could be built into reinstatement tenders for subcontractors. As a result, new contracts have been designed and processes have also been changed.

Next steps

The new contracts have begun and we are already seeing improvements. We are developing new Service Level Agreements to be shared with operational managers, reinstatement supervisors and subcontractors. There'll be ongoing discussions about opportunities to improve performance.

Focus on vulnerable customers

Our strategy is developed and shaped by our vulnerable-customer panel. Our focus is on the following.

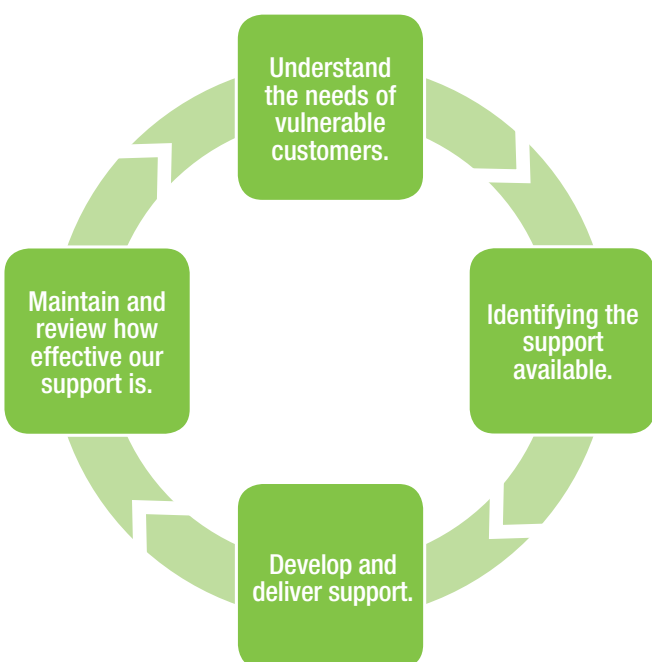


The goals of our strategy are as follows.

Long term – Aim for a more joined-up approach by utilities to deliver better support for the most vulnerable customers. Our aim is that every vulnerable customer receives the support they need during any contact with our company.

Medium term – Develop a directory of organisations which can provide support, beyond our duties as a gas network. We'll play our part in improving information on vulnerable customers and how it is used.

Short term – Develop and train our colleagues to give them confidence in being able to offer appropriate support, in particular to vulnerable customers.



What we have done

Following feedback and to make sure we provide the best possible service to our vulnerable customers, we decided to give relevant colleagues extra training to help them identify customers who could be vulnerable. Working with experts, we developed a tailored training programme that is being rolled out to more than 1,500 colleagues who have direct contact with customers.

So we could set up a customer hardship fund to best serve those in need, we benefited from the expertise of people in the vulnerable-customer forum in helping us set the criteria. The fund is now set at £20,000 a year, with colleagues made aware of how it operates.

Case study

Improving the Priority Services Register (PSR)

Our aim

We wanted to increase public awareness of the PSR and increase the number of people who sign up. We also wanted to make information we collect available to other utility companies. As a result, contacting a customer once could benefit individuals and the several companies that serve them.

The challenge

Research by Ofgem showed that public awareness of the PSR is low, with less than 25% being aware of it. Because of this, most vulnerable customers are unlikely to look for support on their own. Confusion over energy supply and distribution means that many are unlikely to contact their electricity distribution network operator (DNO) or gas distribution network (GDN) to ask for help.

How we planned to overcome it

We agreed to work with other gas and electricity companies and take part in an information collection trial in 2015/2016.

We also decided to make best use of how that information could be shared. We wanted to use our existing customer satisfaction smartphone app, used by our emergency and repair workforce, to collect contact information and record customers' permission to share information.

What people told us

Reports by Ofgem and DECC after the winter storms highlight the lack of access to accurate customer information, such as telephone contact details. DECC has called for action from the industry and stakeholders say they thought that industry obligations for the PSR were confusing.

Working with others

We worked with Ofgem, the Safeguarding Customers Working Group, other utility companies, and our vulnerable-customer panel.

What we did

While other gas and electricity networks agreed to use their frequent face-to-face contact with customers to encourage people to sign up for the PSR, we decided to use our smartphone app to provide this information. A three-month trial in Torquay and Plymouth, Gloucester and Cardiff and Newport took place in 2015/2016.

We made the decision to extend the scope of our trial to share the information we collected with all gas suppliers, so customers could be added to all energy company priority service registers following a single contact. This saves time, duplication of effort and, above all, helps to deliver an outstanding service to the customer. When dealing with people in certain categories (for example, those of pensionable age, chronically sick, registered

disabled), we trained our colleagues to explain sensitively the PSR and its benefits.

The outcome

Since May 2015 we have received more than 929 customer contacts through our app and 869 customers have been referred to their DNO to be added to their PSRs, and 871 to their energy supplier. On average 96.90% of people gave permission for suppliers to share their information in this way.

Within the gas network group, our smartphone app provided better results than paper forms or phone calls. We've since shared details of our app with other networks.

Customer feedback has been excellent.

“ A young engineer arrived... he delicately enquired about my mother's disabled status and with her consent added her details to a priority action list. ”

Next steps

During 2016/2017 we will extend the trial across our network, increasing the number of customers we can help. We expect to sign up as many as 150 each week.

We are extending our initiative to share information with the water sector. Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water is interested in an initial trial to extend the service to its customers.

Help for our vulnerable customers

Training for colleagues

Keep Warm packs

Hardship Fund

Heat and cooking support

Casestudy

Improving our Keep Warm packs

Our aim

Our Keep Warm packs for customers during emergencies contain various essentials. We distribute them during incidents, as well as providing alternative heating and cooking facilities for those who need them.

The challenge

We must make sure that in a gas incident we include the things that customers most value while representing value for money. We will change the packs as a result of feedback, and keep a substantial stock in stores.

What customers and other stakeholders told us

Research revealed a customer satisfaction rate of 9.8 out of 10. Having read the information booklet in the pack, 91% of eligible customers not already on the PSR said they would sign up.

Our engineers are pleased to have something to offer vulnerable customers – not only as a support measure, but also as a goodwill gesture.

What we did

Based on feedback received, we changed the contents of the pack to remove items that went out of date quickly. These have been positively received. We keep 600 packs in our stores for rapid use during gas incidents.

Next steps

We will continue to monitor what customers and colleagues tell us, making further changes to the packs as a result of the feedback we receive.



Casestudy

Reducing the risk from using temporary heating and cooking appliances

Our aim

We supply temporary heating and cooking appliances to customers during gas incidents. We wanted to reduce, as far as possible, any risk from their use.

The challenge

Some colleagues were concerned about leaving electrical fan heaters and hotplates with some vulnerable customers. There were possible safety issues, so we needed to look for alternatives.

What customers and other stakeholders told us

An occupational therapist from the charity Dying to Keep

- Warm advised us to provide some customers with oil-filled radiators for heating, to prevent the risk of burns, and microwaves as a safer alternative to hotplates.

What we did

We now offer oil-filled radiators and microwaves to customers who may not feel confident about using fan heaters and hot plates. At the moment, this is on a trial basis. Feedback from engineers and customers has been positive.

Next steps

We are monitoring the situation. Our engineers are now trained to provide appliances, as appropriate, to individual customers.



Focus on fuel poverty

Working to get rid of fuel poverty

We are committed to doing all we can to tackle the problem of fuel poverty (where people have difficulty affording their heating bills). In Wales, 30% of the population is fuel poor. In the south west, 11.7% of households are in fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is a problem in urban areas, but particularly so in some very rural areas not connected to the gas grid.

We are aware that the consequences of being fuel poor aren't just financial – poorly heated homes contribute to poor health. We want to provide practical

- help to people who are fuel poor. As a result, we work with a range of other organisations.
- Our strategy to achieve this has been to:
 - work together across the sector;
 - identify fuel-poor consumers;
 - provide clear advice on the help available;
 - look for opportunities for projects and funding to deliver solutions;
 - look for partners in fuel-poor schemes; and
 - give advice to local authorities and others developing fuel-poverty schemes.
- You can see how we do it below.

Casestudy

Fuel-poor hubs

The aim

We are committed to co-ordinating the National Energy Action (NEA) Warm and Healthy Homes Fund (WHHF) and the House Doctor and One-Stop Care & Repair services. The purpose is to make sure that people with health problems which are made worse by cold and damp homes are identified and offered support.

The challenge

The UK Warm Homes strategy applies guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence which link certain health issues to cold and damp homes. The NEA has received funding and is supporting 10 UK projects.

The WHHF focuses on supporting projects which help vulnerable consumers who are experiencing cold and unhealthy conditions. The need was to show how local agencies can work together to target resources effectively – allowing vulnerable people to stay healthy in warm, dry, well-ventilated homes.

How we planned to overcome it

We approached the NEA, along with our partner Warm Wales, to find out how we could best help. We

- worked with Cardiff and Flintshire councils, who wanted to bid for funding from this project to run trial projects. We also approached the Care & Repair agency, which provides services to carry out assessments of people and their homes.

What we did

- As well as working with the councils listed above, we gave Warm Wales funding to support partners delivering the project. Alongside Warm Wales, we helped in the successful bid for the WHHF project and the creation of the House Doctor – a one-stop service for vulnerable residents, in partnership with Care & Repair.

The outcome

- We provided in-depth support to Flintshire and Cardiff councils in the successful bid to NEA, resulting in an award of £325,000. The funding is tackling fuel poverty in a number of ways.

Next steps

- We will continue to support the fuel-poor hubs by delivering funding for new gas connections, where appropriate. We'll make sure that we share our learning with DECC and other organisations.

Casestudy

DECC Central Heating Fund (CHF) bid

Our aim

We wanted to make sure that funding is available for gas services and central-heating systems for eligible households.

The challenge

DECC announced a one-off £25 million fund for new central-heating systems in 2014. We wanted to help local authorities in our operating area to bid successfully.

How we planned to overcome it

We decided that we would raise awareness with a programme of communication with local authorities in our area – working with our partners in Warm Wales, who cover both Wales and the south west of England.

What local authorities told us

We discussed the opportunity with local authorities and several asked for our support.

What we did

- We supported the bids by providing information and advice on the bid process. Three local authorities were successful (Devon, Gloucester and Cornwall), winning 24% of the funding.
- We are working with three CHF projects in the south west to identify eligible households and make sure gas supplies are in place.

The outcome

- There is now much improved awareness among local authorities of how community-based gas connection schemes need to be managed. There have been 150 connections so far under the CHF, with another 500 forecast.

Next steps

- We are working with other GDNs who are helping local authorities in their own areas to deliver CHF connections.

Focusing on the future

Developing our colleagues

Since we started operations as an independent gas network in 2005, we have recruited more than 600 people.

We needed to refresh our workforce to make sure we can continue to deliver excellent customer service well into the future. Our apprentice intake since 2005 now makes up nearly 15% of our total operational workforce, representing a major investment in skills. We have recruited 117 apprentices, with 21 recruited in 2015, and we have a programme underway to recruit a further 25 apprentices in 2016.

We are committed to developing our colleagues, making sure we have the skilled people in place to help us face the challenges of the future. Last year we provided extra training to 188 colleagues. We have also launched an in-house 'First Line Manager' traineeship and a wide-ranging leadership programme for current and aspiring senior managers. Our training approach, working with arts-based training, has been recognised by a number of external awards.

At the end of 2015, we launched our brand new coaching programme, Pathways. We recruited and trained 12 managers to coach colleagues across the business, to help these high performing individuals focus on and solve their challenges, so they can achieve their potential.



Smart metering

Our aim

We want to support a successful roll-out of 2.4 million gas smart meters across our region by 2020.

The challenge

There are more than 30 suppliers who need to deliver the roll-out across our region. It is a huge challenge for the energy sector.

What our customers and stakeholders told us

Dedicated surgeries, held in April 2016 and attended by more than 100 representatives, told us to focus on awareness and to work together through Smart Energy GB.

Working with others

We have worked with specific groups locally and nationally to promote success. Examples include:

- meetings every three months with DECC;
- shared resources across all networks to contribute efficiently in six national strategic groups;
- Post-Emergency Metering service (our key gas service). We have been looking for solutions that will work for customers after the roll-out of smart meters; and
- a face-to-face meeting with Smart Energy GB to understand their main issues and concerns.



What we did

We forecast our potential workload requirements and kept a number of emergency teams to make sure we can cover extra workloads. We have also set up a dedicated Smart Meter Group to help with issues to do with our action plan. And we have updated our systems to identify emergency call-outs for smart meters and will continue to support the national working groups to make sure we achieve two-way learning.

The outcome

We are ready to work with the technology used by gas smart meters and are now preparing for the mass roll-out programme.

Next steps

Following feedback from customers and all other stakeholders involved, we are stepping up our efforts to support awareness of the roll-out of smart meters, due to begin from autumn 2016. We are preparing our awareness materials that we will share using a number of channels.

We are also carrying out a campaign within the organisation to tell our colleagues about the roll-out. We are also designing a customer web page.

Innovation

- We continue to improve our approach to innovation – we balance solving today's problems with planning for the future of the sector. We continue to provide technological innovation in our future role of gas exploration.
- Our project work with all the other gas networks and The University of Manchester was awarded 'Best University Technology' at the EIC UK Energy Innovation awards for our 'Acoustek' project. This uses sound waves to detect blockages and other problems in gas pipes.
- We make best use of our innovation activities through working with others. To make sure we do not duplicate effort we work with the industry to share best practice and develop a shared approach where possible. In 2016 we are chairing the innovation industry working group and are using this position to encourage more joint working.
- We assessed 145 ideas in 2015/2016. From this assessment we are taking forward 17 new projects and adding them to our existing portfolio of 15 live projects. Overall we had 32 Network Innovation Allowance projects, which are projects for which we have a financial incentive to help take them forward. We worked on 20 of these projects with at least one other gas network and we were the project lead for six of them. We end the regulatory year with 14 of the 32 projects completed and have carried over 18 live projects into the 2016/2017 regulatory year.

Future of heat

Our long-term vision to 2050 is to achieve a lower-carbon energy system that will make sure that people can continue to heat their homes at an affordable price. To achieve this, we are working with the energy industry 'energy futures group'. We believe that we can achieve this vision by creating a more joined-up energy system.

Involvement with stakeholders

We involved energy industry organisations such as the Department of Energy and Climate Change, local authorities, county councils, green gas producers and others to ask for their views.

What we did

Research into the future of energy production in the UK needed more detailed analysis from the consumers' viewpoint. We paid for an in-depth report, working with experts, on the requirements to heat all the properties in a typical medium-sized town in our area – Bridgend in south Wales.

The outcomes

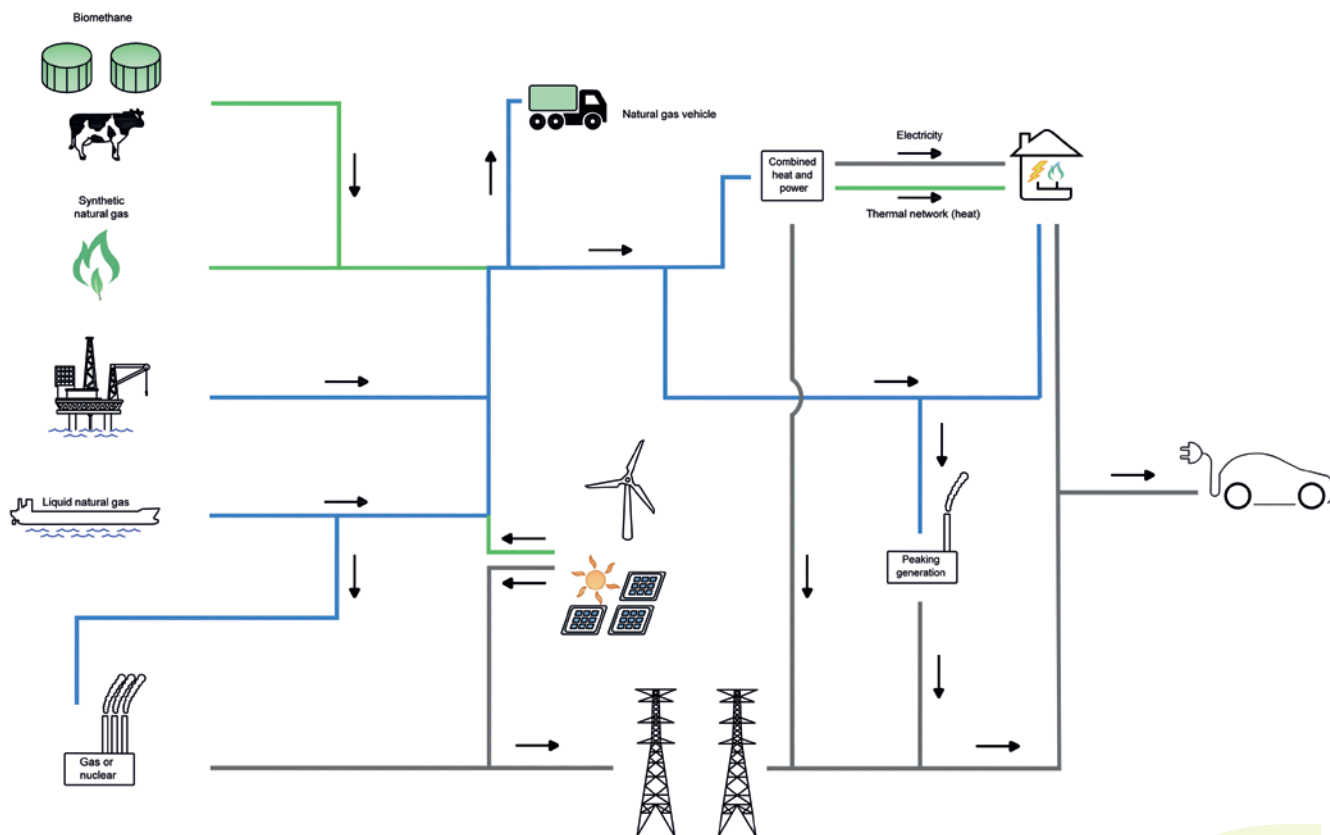
Our research found that gas is central to the UK achieving its carbon reduction targets by 2050, as part of a 'multi-option energy solution'. To achieve this will involve investment in the gas network for the long term. This will provide a reliable energy source that has lower operating costs as modernisation progresses.

Next steps

We are supporting the energy industry, industry policymakers and our customers in developing a total heat, light and power energy system, which will include generating energy from various sources including renewables.

We want to help stakeholders see what a low-carbon energy system could look like and what investment will be needed to achieve it and the unique energy storage model that would be required as part of this solution. This has led us to look at a joined-up energy system that will help us solve the three important challenges of making sure people have a secure and affordable energy supply that will allow us to move to a lower-carbon economy up to 2050 and beyond.

The vision: an integrated electricity and gas energy network






Ynys Môn
10,000th Warm Home Assistance gas connection, saving customers up to £500 per year




Rhewl Mostyn
500 new gas connections to help keep people safe and warm



Carbon Monoxide
More than 18,000 free alarms given away to keep people safe



Green Gas
12 sites injecting gas into our network (11 in the south west), enough to supply 79,000 homes



Bristol
Over £250,000 invested in new gas pipes to support the growing city

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