

Living with Water Poverty 2014

Recommendations

Identifying who needs help

- It is important to capture the first contact from a customer - there may not be another chance to establish a relationship.
- Frontline staff should have training to help them identify and empathise with customers who are struggling to pay. Training from, and/ or placements with, advice agencies could be useful.
- Companies to consider benchmarking themselves against BSI Standard 18477 in identifying customer vulnerability and subsequently to adjust the allowed time per customer contact for those identified as 'vulnerable'.
- Companies should make full use of the data which their billing systems collect in terms of customer payment patterns and signs that customers are falling into difficulties, e.g. failed Direct Debits.
- The industry should continue to work to secure opportunities to access data from DWP, local authorities and landlords where this would be in the interest of customers.
- The information currently provided by DWP in the event of a rejected water direct claim could help identify customers who would benefit from social tariffs or other assistance.

Promoting the availability of assistance

- Direct communication with customers should:
 - be 'easy read' (understandable to a typical nine year old) and make use of symbols and graphics where possible instead of text
 - make use of case studies to demonstrate how customers are being helped
- Single issue communication focussing on the help available rather than the debt owed should be considered. Companies may want to set a positive tone on envelopes signalling that potentially helpful information is inside.
- Opportunities to provide additional information to targeted customer groups should be utilised, including targeted bill designs if appropriate.
- A number of different channels should be used for promotion including social media, web chat and other web based approaches.
- Companies should ensure the availability of help is being promoted by a range of trusted third parties and advice agencies. Joint campaigns with

advice agencies, other utility suppliers and consumer bodies should also be considered.

- Companies should identify opportunities to raise awareness through community groups, the landlord portal (when established) and facilities such as food-banks.
- As Universal Credit is rolled out the option for customers to pay current charges only direct from benefits through Water Direct will no longer exist. Proactive communication about the availability of assistance now might help in establishing a relationship with these customers.

Delivering help

- Make short term concessions in order to establish a long term relationship. Change the frame of the relationship with the customer.
- Adopt a company driven approach, making the identification and delivery of help to customers a clear company objective and opportunity to motivate staff.
- Adopt a range of different assistance schemes to meet the diverse circumstances of customers.
- Support customers in their transition to Universal Credit.

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