

Information Sheet: Community Hub

The Vision – March 2018

Over the past two years South Staffs Water has been particularly focused on reaching into and building relationships with the communities in some of our most challenged areas. This work, although still small in scale has been tremendously successful and impacted on many lives often in ways that we did not anticipate. One lesson we are learning is that in this increasingly digital age, there are people in our communities, particularly but not exclusively in various groups that we may categorise as 'vulnerable' that do not want to access essential public services through digital channels or via centralised contact centres. On reflection, we believe there is a danger that their legitimate service preferences have been increasingly designed out and exchanged for 'efficiency'.

We decided to open our first high street community hub in central Wednesbury in the Black Country on 27th April, initially for a 12-month period to test how the model works and evolves over the period. It is there to support customers and serve their needs.

Key Facts – September 2018

- Since we opened our doors to the community Hub we have had over **1,200** customers visit us.
- **11,308** customers live within a one-mile radius of the hub (80,911 within a three-mile radius).
- The most popular reasons for visiting us are: discuss payment options including our social tariff, metering applications, priority service register, to visit a specific event – eg, a jobs fair or just to explain something.
- There are now **17** community groups and other agencies regularly using the Hub.
- On average we spend around **25 minutes** with each customer that comes to talk to us at the Hub.
- We are now including our contact centre staff, on rotation, in the Hub as our strong belief is that it improves empathy when back on the phone.

Community Relationships at the Hub:

Jobcentreplus hold regular job fairs and have a job vacancy boards in the hub which are changed on a weekly basis.

Citizen Advice are based in the hub every Monday so that customers can seek expert money advice.

SAFL (Sandwell Adults & Family Learning) run courses at the hub each week to support those looking for work. This includes letter writing, internet and email skills. At the moment they are running courses to help families with Universal Credit.

Breaking Bread a local foodbank has joined up with us so on the days they are closed we can offer food bank vouchers. We also collect donations both at the hub and at our offices.

npower we are now able to offer customers in need 'fuel bank' vouchers and warm home discount advice.

Making a difference:

“Thank you for your help, it’s made a difference getting the help face to face from the experts...”

“I only thought someone would be able to help me read my bill, I never thought you’d sort all this out. You have no idea how much of a relief it is.”

“I’m grateful that this place is here – it’s made a big difference, I like to speak to somebody face to face and it makes life a lot easier”

Where next?

- Research to determine (against a control sample) the impact of the Hub on trust and brand recognition.
- Benchmark against a ‘mobile hub’ which is based on a library van model.
- Discussion with STW and npower on a co-funded model to improve VFM – a utility hub.
- Exploring reciprocal home visit arrangement with npower – one visit, dual advice.
- Build case study at 12 months to share with industry and stakeholders.
- Continue to support its organic development.