

ARCoES project: Willingness to Pay (WTP) for a continuous electricity supply – Domestic Users Focus Group (Group 2 Southport) –

Meeting held March 2014. Transcript of meeting

See transcript of focus group 1 for summary of Facilitator's introduction to the Focus Group.

Focus group location: Southport

5 Participants; 4 female; 1 male

J (retired, 2 in household), L (working, one in household), B (retired, 2 in household), D (male, working, 1 in household), C (retired, 1 in household).

Facilitators / researchers

Main Facilitator: Karyn, second Facilitator: Mary (script), Note-taker: Madeleine (did not speak except for introductions).

Transcript of meeting

N.B. This is a partial transcript, as agreed with Karyn.

Introduction and opening words

Karyn: (not recorded) welcomed participants, told them to ask for clarification at any time.

Mary: (reads through introductory script, see Liverpool transcript for detail). Start of transcript: the project is valuing the electricity demand of domestic and business customers in the Northwest of England

C: lived in isolated areas in childhood ... lived without elec or gas Waste not want not ...appreciate everything in life more as a result ...

Start from 7.00mins.

Setting the 'what is it worth to me?' scenario

Karyn: talks about how one values services and separating that from what people pay for electricity ... finding out what it is worth to you in your daily routine Some things priceless ... how much is priceless?

The difference between value and worth example of buying a bottle of water .. but actually buying the feeling the water will give you when you drink it

Question 1 & 2: early morning routine and loss of electricity supply

13.00mins Mary: starts with first question ... daily routine ... think about what you use ... **no-one generates their own electricity** early morning routine ... no electricity, what would you miss?

B: showers. (general agreement)

J: one day, think 'so what' and get on with it. But if it continued. You'd get more and more annoyed.
.... No heating, ironing,

L: .. would miss cup of coffee. (but have water, not go out and buy one)

D: would go to Wetherspoons and have full English breakfast ... (wouldn't begrudge paying for it).
Would treat himself for one day.

C: would make do, wouldn't go out.

They volunteered that you would put layers on to keep warm.

Question 3: evening routine and a blackout

19.29 Mary: Evening routine ..

C: no tv ...

B: in winter it would be terrible, because you wouldn't be able to see what you were doing ... I do sewing (hobby and work) ...

C: (reminiscences of 3 day week in 70s) had 4 students B& B at that time.... Sat round fire and talked ... had candles ...

B: ... brought up in grandmother's house ... gas lights No electricity ... cooked on oven heated next to fire

J: ... you just take it (electricity) for granted ...

(mention of all electric equipment now used)

Karyn: (in a blackout situation) how would you feel about walking down the streets?

B: I would be scared in total blackness.

J: depends where you are ... in a rural area and used to it ... probably more wary somewhere like Southport ..

Mary: If a blackout in the evening

25 mins C: candles, I've always got candles ... (used to have Tilley lamps and a Rayburn or some such burner that could cook on) Reminisces about childhood without electricity ...

26.25 D: I'd go to sleep ... things in the larder that don't need warm preparation like bread and butter ... endure it, minor inconvenience for one day, two days, three days or so ... for a week, then I'd have to go somewhere where there was electricity ...

Karyn: ... easier if live alone because you don't have the stresses of others .. (some agreement)

B: ... but you also don't have the support (if live alone) ... totally on own in a blackout would be really scary

D: for a female ...

C: depends where you live ... if you live in a house (agrees with B), but if live in a flat it would be different .. I wouldn't feel as isolated as there are people around ... in house on your own would be nervous ...

C: Two lots of stairs (to her 10th floor), it's hard

Question 4 (not asked) Daytime routine – discussion just ended up on this topic

L: I work from home, so I would have been really annoyed all day ... I wouldn't have been able to use my computer ...

B: ... I do sewing during the day because I prefer daylight ... sewing machine would be off ... if doing a job wanted next day I would be in a panic ...

J: you'd find it strange and quiet ... you couldn't even read ... for a couple of days an inconvenience, after that it would start to get to you ...

(Talks about looking after the horses, and in winter) ... you'd have to use torches ...

Question 6 Items for use during a power cut

31.17 Karyn: do you all have torches?

General concensus that they had torches, C had three. All had candles, some only had scented-type ones.

Mary: ... pick up on housework that uses electrical appliances ... hovering, ironing, washing ... how feel if routine thrown out and couldn't do these jobs?

B: frustrated, very frustrated

C: ... (if couldn't do these) ... it wouldn't be crucial though. If you couldn't iron your clothes, everybody else couldn't iron theirs. If you couldn't Hoover, then it could wait, it wouldn't really matter ...

Karyn: asks about doing make-up – no-one bothered about this.

C: (situation of prolonged blackout) ...washing (clothes) would be the biggest problem .. if I run out of clean clothes that would be a problem

B: you'd have to wash them in the sink ...

C: ... and they'd be awful to dry ..

B: I couldn't be without a dishwasher

C: I've got one and I never use it

35.20 About working:

Karyn: (asks L) ... work strict week with weekends off?

L: yes. (So there is a difference between week and weekend.)

Mary: (exploring if they had invited people / family round, bought the food, then no electricity). How would they feel?

B: very cross ... especially if you'd bought fresh meat ... frightened to open freezer in case everything defrosts ...

C, B and J: general agreement that freezer defrosting and loss of food would be costly, 'a bad one' ... (practical discussion on not opening the door to keep goods frozen, questions about what would supermarkets do as also defrosting)

Question 5 Length of power cut

38.40 Mary: think about power cuts of different lengths of time ... what miss most?

< 1 hour: **B:** I'd be fine'. **Others:** computer, kettle, tv Generally the ease of having electricity at flick of switch ... recording of tv programmes, one not worried

4 hours: cup of coffee (kettle), warmth (especially winter – general agreement but manageable, go out for a walk in the day), evening – more inconvenient, go to bed, no electric blanket.

8 hours: nice hot meal in evening (general agreement), not matter if eight hours overnight,

Karyn: if could get out for an evening meal, would you, or would you sit it out?

C: Make do (not go out on own), make do with a cold meal ... (she would not go out 'especially on own' ... no way would I go off to The Bold or somewhere and have a meal there

D: I'd go out.

B: Make do (not go out on own) ... (if could go to pub) I would go but begrudge it (and have a cheaper option such as soup and sandwich) soup and a sandwich , as long as something to warm me up one not uncomfortable going out on own, depends.

L: (would probably stay at home, doesn't mind going out on own).

J: make do for one evening. If an OK evening may go out and get something to eat.

Question 2: Items for use during power cuts

Mary: items for use during power cut – blankets, warm gloves

All have warm clothing, a couple have handwarmers (some need a microwave). Would need more preparation than normal to keep warm in bed.

One didn't know where their torch was. Others might use torch on phone if had modern phone, one didn't think of this. Most knew where candles and matches were kept.

Most would go for their torch in case of sudden blackout, one for candles and knows where matches are.

Karyn: do any of you have camping stoves or similar?

None had these, but suggested they would be a good idea.

Mary: Items bought for power cuts or other purposes?

L: other purposes, I don't really think about power cuts

D: I always have torches in in case of a power cut ...

C: candles and torches for power cuts, have warm clothes anyway

Would wear woolly hats in own home. – all would, not find it strange.

Question 5 continued: length of power cut 24 or 48 hrs

Mary: what would you miss most if 24hr or 48hr cut?

C: bath and shower ... personal cleanliness .. that would be most important to me

L: work ... not paid ... feel quite annoyed. I think I would probably go out for coffee the second day

J: cleanliness

B: being clean ... (re no tv) - - Denis would be quite grumpy ... can't sharpen joinery tools

J: - (agreed you feed off the mood of those around, so if they are grumpy ...)

C: I would go out during the day, but not in the dark (10 flights of stairs)

B: wouldn't go out even in daytime

D: would go out to eat breakfast every day.

Question 8: planned power cut

Mary: planned power cut 24 or 48 hours – would this make a difference?

General agreement.

Preparation –

C: go and stay elsewhere None Would begrudge leaving house if one-off.

B: Could buy a camping stove – annoyed by loss of frozen food and refrigerated food – could have a barbeque. Felt they were well able to cope for 2 days.

Buy food that could be used. Store in freezer box / cool box. With enough notice, not buy frozen food but run down stock in freezer. Planned cut better than unplanned – all agreed.

Question 9: potential electricity generation shortage

56.00 Mary: factories paid to switch off at prime time to safeguard homes and vital supplies.

Questions asked re factories output – so that factories keep up their production.

Do you think it would safeguard your supply. B thinks it would safeguard her supply.

Think hospitals (vital services) should be kept on as a priority.

Any option to safeguard supply worth considering / trying to see if it would work.

Given the thought that no overnight shift, the one worked by (generally) poor people or couples with one working overnight to save childcare expenses, how would they feel about losing this shift? Would they think this is an argument for cutting down on domestic use?

Karyn: no night shifts so affects poor people. If poor people work affected: should we cut down on domestic use? What do you think?

L: ... other ways of looking at it ... cutting down supply during night to domestic ... in middle of night not a lot of people using a lot of electricity

C: from experience ... terminally ill may be in domestic homes and need to be kept warm 24 hours a day, Poor people might not be able to afford to eat properly so need to keep warm ... sick people are not just in hospital, they're everywhere

1.00.50 B: So really we don't want any cuts at all ...

D: domestically, cuts for 2 hours won't affect people much ... temperature (in house) wouldn't drop down that much

Karyn: asked how many had burglar alarms – answer: at least one, possibly two

B, J: they fear that burglars may be opportunistic if a set 2 hours without electricity, B 'scared'

J: 2 hours each day probably a better option than Even people who were sick could cope for two hours ...

C: I think that would be a better option than the factories ... because that is going to affect so many people ... livelihoods ... working arrangements ...

Question 10 Financial

1.03.24 Financial

Mary: intros financial 'what is it worth to you?' to have reliable 24hour supply – how much value the frustrating impact of losing power for 24 hours?

B: £1 per hour

D: (brought in the idea of what he pays for it – we tried to get away from that. Karyn talked through buying something that wasn't necessary, but get to till and it's cheaper and you are delighted – were going to pay £20, got it for £10, so that's called consumer surplus. Ends with 'so we've had £1 per hour ...)

B: so that's £24

L: (works from home, during week) I feel that it's something that should be available and I'm already paying to have it available. ... it would probably be worth double, so £48.

D: that's lots of drinks in the pub, so I'll go to the pub

J: I think you'd pay to have the peace of mind ... £1 an hour, £2 per hour, to have the facilities we use We're just spoilt and so used to it ... just turn it on ... pay £25 rather than go without.

C: I'd think about what my losses were going to be ... the contents of my freezer, so I'd pay about £30 to save me the hassle of having to stock up and clear it out ...

D: (I wouldn't pay anything) ...

Karyn: let's go to 3 days, and includes weekend ... frustration increased (general agreement) ...

Would you want £75, 3 x £25, or 3 x £30?

C: no, it's one-off (loss of freezer contents) .. once it's cleared up I don't know ... washing not piling up yet I'll pay £30, but not any more My losses are the same ... inconvenience I'll cope with it (extra inconvenience days 2 & 3)

B: I don't know. ... it's a lot of money ...

Karyn: it's monopoly money, you don't pay it how much is worth to you not to be annoyed by it?

B: £50 for 3 days

D: £10

L: it wouldn't go up

J: I don't think it would also ... it's hard setting a value against it ... washing and showering would probably get to me ... probably would increase it ... there would be a top level, say £50 ..

1.17.00 Karyn: how many days before at wits end?

D : 5 days

B: 4 or 5 days

C: a week

J: about 4 or 5 days

Karyn: after that ... would you start to think things are too difficult without electricity? Become intolerable?

B: yes, oh yes. I'd be trying to find out why it was still off

D: or you could buy yourself a generator?

Karyn: would you?

D: Oh yeah.

J: I think you would look at the different ways ...

Karyn: after a certain number of days, would you start to think this isn't short term and what do I need for the long term? (general agreement) ... and how many days is that?

L: about five (general agreement)

Karyn: and do you think you would be able cope more as time goes on?

C: you would, because you adapt to your circumstances

J: you'd alter how you lived

C: you'd become accepting, not accepting that it was OK, but accepting that this is the situation, and you'd find ways to work around ...

D: it is a reality that there are parts of the world where there is no constant supply of electricity and people have purchased generators ...

Karyn: talked about the student situation where some were sneaking in electric blankets and heaters – cheating on the others - ... generator situation, not everyone can afford it. ...

C asks about why we are valuing something we already pay for – Karyn explains with example of sunset and non-market valuation - trying to get at 'how people value their electricity' ... the convenience ... the peace of mind ... how value it ... more difficult with electricity because big companies and big profits ... what value do people put on being able to switch on and light in an instant ... no feedback to electricity companies ...

Karyn: ... to begin to wrap up ... we think that for one day willingness is about £24 to £25 to £50 But as time goes on learn to cope Is that what you think?

All: murmurs of agreement

B: you'd eventually get used to it

Mary: so would you buy thing like Primus stoves, Tilley Lamps?

A few mmms of agreement.

B: her grandmother managed with gas lamps and no electricity, and had a large family

J: different lifestyle ... it our expectations now

Karyn: do you think there would be a certain amount of relief, if you could go back to things being a little bit easier? Simpler life? Do you think there is a bit of nostalgia?

General 'yes'es

B: probably, but just to people my age that can remember. ... young people now don't know anything about that kind of living, so they would find it hard

General agreement

Experience of power cuts

L: I've experienced a powercut, but only once.

Karyn: it is a reality that in rural Ireland there are still blackouts, talked about powercut on Christmas eve ... reality for some people but NW have good quality electricity supply

Mary: would any of you consider things like solar panels?

C: I wouldn't Live in a flat .. but if I had the option, I'd consider anything

B: ... massively expensive ...

Karyn: would you be prepared to invest a lot short term for long term gains?

B: (jokingly) well I haven't got all that much longer left ... (general laughter) ... no, by the time I'd paid ... it would be no benefit to me, it might be a benefit to the next person who had the bungalow ...

C: ... but young people probably would ...

B: my husband definitely would not ...

J: ... I think you might, because then you'd actually have the electricity and you'd feel secure. ... I also think, if you didn't have electricity, you'd alter how you ran your life ... we're almost too reliant on electricity.

C: I think a lot of people waste a lot of power and electricity ... shops also with the doors open ... there's lots of tightening up that could be done regarding power ... (talking about private sector also) we should be more caring how we use it ... the cheapest unit of power is the one you don't use ... if people used it sparingly all the time, I do, it's the way I was brought up, ... so my bills are maybe two-thirds of what my neighbours (bills) are ...

D: in some instances you don't have to pay to get solar panels installed, ... if you have a location that gets enough sun, some companies will pay you to have the solar panels installed ...

C: and you get an income from it ..

D: it's fed into the grid, they generate income off it ... same with wind power ... if you have a site that is windy enough and it can generate enough power, some companies will pay you to install wind turbines so ...

C: but we don't like them , do we?

B: wind turbines, well I think they look magnificent.

General hmms so some not agreeing with B.

C: so you like them?

B: yes

J: I don't

C: I don't

Karyn: (gets them off topic) that's a different topic ...

Mary: ... Anything else you consider important about electricity and your use of electricity in your routine?

Conversation about how long before freezer defrosts and buying food at sell by date. D buying meat on sell-by date and eating 4 – 5 days later.

Mary and Karyn: thank participants for their full participation in the project and for sharing their thoughts.