

British Gas Customer Board

Phase One Summary
2011 - 2013

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(2011 - 2013)**
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(2014 onwards)**

British Gas Customer Board rates our progress on their priorities



“ British Gas hasn't done enough to influence leading Britain to a low carbon future. It could've made the debate around a need for low carbon generation more strongly in the media. ”



“ There is still a long way to go in getting the social and ethical message across. However, in light of the experiences of other brands, if an ethical message is preached British Gas need to be sure they are delivering. ”



“ The Customer Board is a courageous step to take at a time when most organisations were merely playing lip-service to the idea of customer engagement. I believe it has also demonstrated the benefit of responding in a timely way to customer concerns. ”

The British Gas Customer Board was established in 2011. And since that time its members have helped us make progress against the five point plan, set up by our original 'We're Listening' customer panel in 2009, below:

1. *Revolutionise customer service*
2. *Simplify the bills you receive*
3. *Make tariffs easier to use*
4. *Be more open and proud as a company*
5. *Lead Britain to a low carbon future*

The Board is chaired by Ann Robinson, Director of Consumer Policy at uSwitch.com, and is sponsored by Ian Peters, Managing Director Residential Energy British Gas. Its role is to provide independent feedback and to challenge British Gas to make sure we put our customers first. In 2013, the Customer Board reviewed a range of activities from customer service to pricing and tariff structures to our climate change commitments.

We surveyed the Customer Board to find out how they thought we'd done against the five point plan – see the table on the next page. Overall they thought we had progressed well. But they said we could do even more, especially on communicating more effectively about 'the real' British Gas, and in leading Britain to a low carbon future.

Customer Board survey results on progress made against the five point plan

Five point plan recommendations	Key changes introduced	The Board's view of our performance
<p>Revolutionise customer service</p> <p>7/10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call centre system improvements to enable better response times • Ended unsolicited doorstep selling • More Apps to help self-serve • Embedding improvements under the Standards of Conduct 	<p>Major investments have enabled real progress. But this momentum needs to be maintained.</p>
<p>Simplify the bill</p> <p>7/10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer and simpler bills • Combined Dual Fuel bill is being rolled out 	<p>Bills are now much easier to understand. But British Gas must be more radical and go further.</p>
<p>Make pricing easier to follow</p> <p>7/10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer tariffs • Tariff Check to help people onto the best deal • Single tier pricing structure 	<p>British Gas is working hard to make pricing easier to understand, in line with changes in regulation. But tariffs could be simplified further.</p>
<p>Be open and proud - let people see the real British Gas</p> <p>6/10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Serving Britain' campaign and regional communications launched 	<p>Public engagement on key issues is welcome. But British Gas should communicate more on its positive activities, such as support for vulnerable customers.</p>
<p>Lead Britain to a low carbon future</p> <p>5/10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lincs wind farm fully operational • Leading on UK smart meter roll-out 	<p>British Gas has re-focused on energy security and efficiency. But it needs to do more to lead change for a low carbon future.</p>

Charlie Casey on revolutionising Customer Service



Please introduce yourself and tell us how you became a member of the Customer Board:

“ I’ve been a British Gas customer all my working life (27 years) and before that my parents were. They’re my energy provider and I have trust and confidence in the services they offer. When the panel was formed and launched through national press and road-shows I was impressed that such a large organisation wanted, and welcomed, the voice of customers. So I applied. My professional career has also moved towards customer service and that has been an additional benefit. ”

Was there a particular area you were passionate about influencing when becoming a Customer Board member?

“ The overall customer experience. As a customer I want reliability of service and I’ve always been reassured by the strength of the British Gas name. I don’t expect them to be the cheapest, but I do want value for money. And by and large the service provided by British Gas is good – but as with many organisations it could be better.

I currently receive different communications for each part of my British Gas relationship. This could be presented in a more user-friendly manner and format. I also want proactive contact to make sure I’m on the tariff and service that gives me the best deal. ”

To what extent have British Gas and the Customer Board influenced change for customer services in 2013?

“ It is very clear to me that British Gas takes customer service seriously, and the vast majority of material presented has a strong customer focus. Smart Energy Reports and smart meters are big changes and help customers understand the breakdown of their energy expenditure. ”

How do you feel the subject of customer services was dealt with in meetings?

“ The fact our opinions are sought out is a sign of how seriously British Gas takes customer service. There have been consultations on tariffs and bill design, pricing of central heating/boiler installation and the introduction of a loyalty scheme through Nectar. This all proves that steps are being taken to enhance the customer experience. ”

Do you think the Customer Board is a positive initiative for British Gas?

“ Yes. The fact that we have presented to the British Gas Board of Directors shows how seriously our input is taken. The attendance of Ian Peters, and his candidness and honesty, is a major factor in the operating rhythm of the Customer Board. We’re given insights and explanations in a balanced manner from a British Gas Board member. However even with the existence of a Customer Board, the media coverage this year has been hostile so that makes me question the value we are adding – and how that could be improved? ”

Pat Kidds on simplify the bills you receive



Please introduce yourself and tell us how you became a member of the Customer Board:

“ I’m an active retired lady living in the West Country. I initially saw an advertisement for the ‘We’re Listening’ panel and applied via telephone interviews. When this had successfully run for a year, British Gas decided to form a permanent Customer Board and the panel members were invited to apply. I was successful and have attended all meetings since the Board was established three years ago. ”

Was there a particular area you were passionate about influencing when becoming a Customer Board member?

“ Making bills and annual statements easier to read. Reducing the number of tariffs. Making small print easier to find and read. Being able to pay for your energy as you go, without incurring an annual debit or credit. ”

To what extent has British Gas and the Customer Board influenced change for ‘simplified billing’ in 2013?

“ The new style bill was introduced in 2013 and it had a favourable response from Ofgem. ”

How do you feel your main area of interest was dealt with in meetings?

“ We were taken notice of and action taken. We were never ridiculed for having an idea. And we were valued from the start. ”

Do you think the Customer Board is a positive initiative?

“ Yes. Other companies could do similar – but only if they have a genuine interest in their customers. They must be prepared to acknowledge their shortcomings and put recommendations into place. Something British Gas has achieved. ”

Alison Smith on making tariffs easier to use



Please introduce yourself and tell us how you became a member of the Customer Board:

“ My name’s Alison Smith and I’m currently working as a Marketing Manager. I joined the initial Customer Panel in January 2010 as I wanted to understand how British Gas balanced being a national utility with needing to make a profit for shareholders – potentially a real clash of objectives. ”

To what extent have British Gas and the Customer Board influenced change for ‘making tariffs easier to use’ in 2013?

“ Much of the tariff simplification is driven by the regulator, but the Customer Board has actively participated in commenting on the options. ”

Do you think the Customer Board is a positive initiative?

“ Yes, it’s definitely a benefit for British Gas’ customers. I expect many complex businesses would benefit from a similar initiative. ”

Jenny Grant on being more open and proud as a company



Do you think the Customer Board is a positive initiative?

“ I think this was an excellent initiative by British Gas and one that I’ve suggested, without success, to two other national companies. ”

Please introduce yourself and tell us how you became a member of the Customer Board:

“ I’m Jennifer (Jenny) Grant. I live in Surrey and before taking early retirement I was a Deputy Director in HR, providing training and development opportunities for 2,500 staff of all levels. In 2010 I became a member of the British Gas “We’re Listening” panel, which I joined following a number of inherited boiler problems after a house move. Throughout the boiler problems I chose to stay with British Gas, a company which has served me well for almost 30 years, and when I was asked to join the Customer Board I willingly accepted. ”

To what extent have British Gas and the Customer Board influenced change for ‘being open and proud’ in 2013?

“ In spite of their good intentions, I think British Gas has a long way to go on this. I’d be pleased to see a little more public knowledge and understanding about the help the company gives to people in fuel poverty as well as to those with special needs, who can be severely affected when their boiler breaks down. British Gas also supports certain charities.

As Customer Board members we’ve been privileged to see some of the work carried out in call centre staff dealing with a plethora of personal problems relating to the provision of energy – or loss of it – in people’s homes. Letters from Chief Executives are great, but in my opinion most people are cynical about them. ”

Peter Archibald on leading Britain to a low carbon future



Please introduce yourself and tell us how you became a member of the Customer Board:

“ I’m Peter Archibald, a retired research and development manager in the food industry and now a campaigner for everyday carbon cutting – through things such as saving energy, recycling, ethical shopping and low-carbon travel. I joined the Customer Board in 2011 to challenge British Gas to help its customers use energy wisely. I was delighted when our finished product, the Customer Feedback Report, included “leading Britain to a low carbon future” as one of its five challenges. ”

Was there a particular area you were passionate about influencing when becoming a Customer Board member?

“ I joined the Customer Board to see our “low carbon leadership” challenge through to its fruition. I’d been delighted with the rapid decline in carbon intensity of British Gas’ parent company Centrica during 2010 and was equally pleased that it continued to fall during 2011 and 2012.

However, Centrica has not set targets for its future carbon intensity of power generation and, with its investment in Cuadrilla for exploratory shale gas extraction in Britain, I’m concerned that the decarbonisation of our energy supply will be too slow to meet our legal commitments under the 2008 Climate Change Act. I appreciate the complexity of influencing government and investors, but want to see strong public leadership on decarbonisation from the Directors of British Gas and Centrica.

There were other successful sustainability initiatives as a result of my engagement with British Gas on green issues. These range from the inclusion of sustainable sourcing logos on all of the company’s transactional mail (bills and targeted promotions) to its customers, to graphical comparisons of your own energy use with similar homes in your area on the website. ”

To what extent have British Gas and the Customer Board influenced change for ‘leading Britain to a low carbon future’ in 2013?

“ British Gas is leading the implementation of smart metering – a key component of the intelligent grid – which will one day allow tailoring of demand, in real time, to match supply. ”

How do you feel your main area of interest was dealt with in meetings?

“ My focus on cutting carbon emissions to mitigate global warming has been welcomed and even indulged by the Customer Board in 2013. I was invited to present my view on ‘fracking’ and prepared a detailed review of the local environmental harm as well as the climate change impacts of shale gas extraction. My concerns were received sympathetically and the Group Environment Director responded with assurances of precautions and conditions that British Gas and Centrica pledges to adhere to. ”

Do you think the Customer Board is a positive initiative?

“ I’m certain that the Customer Board is a valuable tool for British Gas – and any service company. Our role is that of non-executive advisors, representing the customer, and the essence of this role is to speak openly from an external perspective. This allows us to honestly appraise the company’s proposals and to criticise its operations and plans without fear.

Our presentations to the Corporate Responsibility Committee in 2011 and 2012 have been landmark contributions that have strengthened our impact within the business. ”

Three new members join the Customer Board



Bryan Lamb:

“ I joined the Customer Board because as a landlord I felt that I wasn't getting the best from British Gas – for me or my tenants either in terms of service or value for money. I want to help British Gas understand the unique relationship between all three parties (owner/tenant/service provider) and how the system can work on a business and social level.

I'm keen to see the landlord/tenant landscape develop in a way that landlords understand they have a obligation to their tenants and vice-versa. And I want to but look at the role British Gas has to play in making sure that the service and products they provide and are developing benefit the end user. ”



Ben Lewis:

“ I live in Yorkshire with my wife, two young children, a dog and a cat in a rented house. I am a nurse in the NHS and work on the neonatal unit (looking after preterm and poorly babies). For me the Customer Board is about improving

the service that British Gas provide to its customers. I want excellent customer service. People are happy with the product you provide, it's the customer service that causes the problems.

As a tenant I am not fussed by the offers of new boilers, insulation offers for the house, boiler breakdown cover, fitting new meters etc because I am not allowed to do that, it's all down to the landlord. Having said that, landlords should be given incentives to make their properties as energy efficient as possible.

I applied to join the Customer Board because I hope that I can make a difference and make the future slightly more secure for my children by improving the uses of renewable energy. I also want the Board to look in to energy pricing and why our energy prices don't go down when wholesale energy prices fall. And I want to know that the money I'm paying is going somewhere useful and not lining the pockets of the people at the top. ”



Neil Moss:

“ The reason I joined the Customer Board is so others don't have the same 'customer' experience as I did. I want people to actually struggle to find a reason to complain. I want people to be happy with the outcome of every interaction they have with British Gas. I'd like to help make people trust British Gas and help keep customers loyal, so they stay for a long time. ”

Next Steps for the Customer Board



We believe the Customer Board provides a valuable force for change at British Gas and its members do too. We look forward to continuing our work with the Customer Board, delivering progress against its new objectives:

Deliver great service

- Billing – making sure our bills are easy to understand, that they're accurate and that we make our Direct Debit reassessment process work for customers
- Vulnerable customers – giving more support to vulnerable customers and those who are finding it difficult to pay for the energy they use
- Empowered people – giving our employees the tools and the freedom to deal with customer complaints, so issues can be resolved first time around

Adapting to evolving customer needs

- Customer groups – making sure we really understand what matters to homeowners, tenants and landlords, so we can build our business around them and their individual needs
- Product development – in both Energy and Services so we can turn the idea of Connected Homes into a true reality with products such as smart meters and Hive Active Heating™
- Building a better future – from spreading the low carbon agenda through educating children on the importance of being 'green', to developing the skills of our staff and creating jobs for the country

Inform and engage

- Customer communications – with a focus on the positive action we take and making sure all our customer communications are clear and easy to understand
- The voice of the customer – the Customer Board will help us represent the viewpoint of customers to Ofgem, the industry regulator, on key topics such as billing
- Transparency in all aspects of what we do – to build trust

A word from the Board's Chairperson and Sponsor



Ann Robinson
Chairperson and
Director of Consumer Policy, uSwitch.com

“ There are a number of challenges ahead and the Customer Board is keen to work with British Gas in meeting them. There’s the full implementation of the Retail Market Review changes, and the introduction of Standards of Conduct – which requires energy companies to treat customers fairly. There are challenges too in helping consumers control their energy, particularly through ‘warm proofing’ their homes or changing the way they use energy. We also have smart meters being introduced which could really revolutionise the whole industry, taking out costs, enabling us all to save energy and by reducing peak demand for electricity help to save the planet.. ”



Ian Peters
Sponsor and
Managing Director, Residential Energy, British Gas

“ The Customer Board laid out a five point agenda for us in 2010 and while we have achieved much, we’ve a lot more to do. The world has moved on and it is right that a new, refreshed plan has been set down to guide and challenge us, and new members have joined the Board to bring different perspectives. Some of the themes are understandably the same, others are new. My team and I look forward to a further three years working with the Board. ”