

Water market opening to be blighted by poor data, experts warn

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The opening of the water market in 2017 will be blighted by the poor quality of data held by the incumbent suppliers, experts have warned.

Speaking to Utility Week, Ascendancy Water managing director Charles Vincent warned the poor and incomplete nature of the data currently held by suppliers will lead to a “reasonably messy opening” of the non-domestic water market in April 2017.

He said: “There’s going to be a lot of switching and when switching happens that’s when people realise how poor the data is.”

Water companies are said to be struggling to improve their data sets, with various meters missing or not accurately located, whilst some customers have duplicate accounts which have seen billing cease, rather than being removed from the system entirely. These issues, and a range of other problems, could delay and hamper the switching process for customers post-market opening if they remain unresolved.

To overcome issues surrounding the poor quality of the data by April 2017 Vincent stated that water companies need a “prioritised approach” to data cleansing.

He added: “Make sure the data is right for those likely to switch and that the most material issues are identified and dealt with. There is all sorts of mess that’s likely to come out.”

Gemserv chief operating officer Ken McRae agreed that the data will not be fully cleansed or complete by the time the market opens and warned suppliers and customers “don’t expect perfection from day one”.

He added: “You have to be realistic and pragmatic about that and how the market will look and is going to work at that point.”

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Market Operator Services Limited's (MOSL's) Ben Jeffs has acknowledged that data quality “remains a key issue” for the sector ahead of April 2017 and that “there are a lot of things that still need to be done”.

However, he has called on business customers to engage with the market opening process and to help the incumbent suppliers prepare for competition by making sure their data is accurate and up to date, especially if they are looking to switch soon after the market opens.

“The more businesses can do to make sure your data is accurate and lined up, the easier it will be for them to get the invoices they need from your supplier when the market opens,” Jeffs added.

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