INDUSTRY COMMENT

A DATE WITH DATA SHARING

1 April sees the pilot phase of the smart meter read hub launched, as MOSL's Simon Powell explains.

Smart metering promises a host of benefits for water companies and their customers, from faster identification of leaks to innovative new water efficiency services and tariffs.

With more than 10m smart meters being installed by 2030, including 800,000 businesses, traditional meters will soon be a fading memory, along with the need to visit them to take a meter read – with the emphasis on the singular 'a'.

Smart water meters' ability to take reads every hour, and transmit them automatically, means that one or two reads per year will become more than 100,000 reads per meter - and data sets that can run into billions of items for some companies.

Data share challenge

The arrival of smart metering in the competitive business retail market presents a number of challenges and opportunities for wholesalers and retailers. The first challenge is a practical one: how will water wholesalers and retailers share the data from smart meters?

The need to share data arises from trading parties' different responsibilities in the market: while wholesalers own smart meters and the data they produce, retailers are responsible for ensuring customers' meters are read and producing timely, accurate bills.

However, as the Strategic Panel noted in its National Metering Strategy in 2024, there was no agreed mechanism for sharing smart meter read data between trading parties. This risked companies developing their own systems and processes, creating complexity and inefficiency in the market, increasing costs and potentially impacting the service customers receive.

The Panel therefore asked MOSL to work with the Metering Committee and other trading parties to consider the options and develop a business case for the recommended solution. That solution: the smart meter read hub.

The smart meter read hub

The smart meter read hub is a single, central repository for all smart meter reads in the business retail market. Wholesalers will submit smart meter reads into the hub, which the relevant retailer can access and extract.

The hub supports multiple file formats and provides two interfaces: a web portal for submitting, viewing and amending lower volumes of data, and a system-to-system interface for higher volumes. Where wholesalers amend, replace or delete entries, the hub will automatically alert the retailer and offer a reason code for the change, if provided.

> **Trading parties will be mandated to use the hub when Phase 2 goes live in December 2026.**

When the Phase 1 'pilot' of the hub launches on 1 April, wholesalers can begin uploading live customer reads for retailers to access. Although trading parties are not obliged to use the hub during this first phase, more than a dozen 'early adopters' are expected to begin accessing it straight away, with others joining over the coming months.

To ensure customer data being shared is protected in accordance with UK GDPR regulations, trading parties wishing to use the hub will need to sign an Interim User Agreement, which will remain in effect until Phase 2 launches in December, at which point data protections will be provided via changes to the Market Codes.

Trading parties will be mandated to use the hub when Phase 2 goes live in December 2026. In Phase 2 the hub will be connected to the market's central operating system, allowing meter reads to be selected and sent automatically from the hub into CMOS for billing and settlement purposes, subject to preferences set by the retailer.

Realising benefits

Smart metering presents a huge opportunity to drive a range of benefits in the business market, from improving the speed and accuracy of customers' bills to providing insights to help address leakage, improve water efficiency and so on.

By enabling trading parties to share smart meter read data easily, efficiently and securely, the hub removes the primary obstacle to realising those benefits – and at lower cost to the market than trading parties developing their own, bespoke solutions.

Simon Powell is MOSL's chief information officer.

In doing so, the hub also helps avoid the increased costs and inefficiencies associated with retailers needing to use different wholesaler systems and processes to access customers' meter reads, which could have created barriers to entry to potential market entrants.

However – to state the obvious – the value of the data is only realised when it is turned into insights and action. The business case for developing the hub was principally based on improving operational efficiency, but it also has major implications for trading parties' data analysis capabilities and future innovation.

The hub provides a level playing field in terms of accessing data, but we expect to quickly see the data being used to drive differentiation and specialisation, particularly among retailers in terms of communications with customers, market segmentation and benchmarking, water efficiency products and services, innovative tariffs and so on.

What won't change, however, is the need for retailers and wholesalers to work together to deliver for business customers where their responsibilities overlap; be it in maintaining smart meters or identifying and responding to potential leaks.

The hub has had an excellent response from our 'early adopters' and we look forward to making it available to all trading parties from 1 April. TWR