

History of the Broken Gas Meter at Grenfell Tower

Re Gas meter located in the boiler house at Grenfell Tower Meter Point Reference Number (MPRN) 51341803, meter number 3541

In March 2006, S Pimbert read the gas meter corrector as 0563164. In May 2006, SP read the gas meter again with the same reading of 0563164. Because the meter is not read every month this was the first indication that the meter was not working. Because the corrector is used for billing purposes the meter dial is not normally read and at this time it was not known whether it was the meter or the corrector that was broken. Subsequent investigation showed that it was the meter that was at fault as the meter register did not increment even though the meter passes gas.

In May 2006, SP informed our gas supply company who at that time were Scottish and Southern and they in turn contacted National Grid Metering, (responsible for meters). However, as we were in the process of changing our gas supply company to British Gas Business, Scottish and Southern did not progress the issue and British Gas inherited the problem.

On 1st August 2006 British Gas Business became our new gas supply company and they were informed in September about the problem.

British Gas again contacted National Grid Metering. But it took a further six months and much prompting before National Grid Metering visited the site. In July 2007 National Grid Metering said the problem was that the meter was very large and it was no longer in production. Consequently they were looking at the possibility of modifying another meter and exchanging this for the broken one. However in August 2007 they then decided that they could not change the meter and the fault lay with the register (i.e. the device that records the passage of gas). They took the register away for repair.

October 2007 National Grid Metering replaced the register (and installed a new corrector) and it appeared to work as the register reading was higher than when it was taken away for repair. However before the end of the month it had again failed with the same fault.

We again contacted British Gas on the 7th of November but by January 2008 National Grid Metering had still not fixed the meter or given any indication of when they were likely to. On the 29th of January 2008 at the request of British Gas SP again supplied details of the problem and British Gas said they would again contact National Grid Metering to get someone to visit the site and decide how to get the meter fixed. In the meantime we would continue to be charged through estimated readings.

Because British Gas did not appear to be able to resolve the problem on their own, on 31st of January 2008 SP sent a letter to Energywatch -the government sponsored organisation set up to resolve disputes between consumers and gas and electricity supply companies, asking for their help.

On 6th February, a reply was received from Energywatch who confirmed that they had contacted British Gas asking them to report what steps they were taking to resolve the problem. Subsequently, 3 more letters dated 25/2/08, 3/3/08 and 10/3/08 were received from Energywatch saying that British Gas had yet to respond.

In March 2008, SP spoke to British Gas Business who confirmed that they had replied to Energywatch pointing out that the problems were the fault of National Grid Metering and not British Gas.

15 April 2008 SP spoke to Energywatch asking what progress has been made. Energywatch confirmed that they had received a reply from British Gas which said that British Gas had made many appointments for National Grid Metering engineers to visit the site and that the fault lay with National Grid Metering as they were responsible for the meter. Energywatch agreed to write to National Grid Metering to find out what was happening. SP also spoke to British Gas who confirmed that they had made yet another request for National Grid Metering engineers to visit the site.

17 April 2008 letter received from Energywatch saying that they had written to National Grid Metering about the problem asking what was happening. The next day Energywatch phoned SP asking for further details as they had just received a phone call from National Grid Metering asking for particulars about the meter and its location. These were provided. Energywatch indicated that they would expect a response from National Grid Metering within 10 days.

Following Transco's visit to the site they reported back to British Gas that the meter was indeed broken but because of its size and difficulty of access they were unable to replace it unless the TMO knocked down a number of walls and provided access from street level to the boiler room. Although there is a trapdoor in the roof of the boiler room it is not clear whether it can be opened or if it is big enough to allow the meter to fit through. British Gas has been asked to forward a copy of the Transco report to the TMO for consideration but to date this has not yet been received.

An alternative to using National Grid Metering is to use another company to replace the meter although this may cost the TMO. The TMO is interested in installing an automatic meter reading system to the meter at Grenfell Tower once it is repaired. Not all meters are suitable for connection to an AMR system and in these cases the meter needs to be replaced. Imserve, the company who make the AMR equipment, work with Energy Assets who are licensed by National Grid Metering to install gas metres and often do so on behalf of National Grid Metering. Philip Bellin Lee of Energy Assets visited Grenfell Tower on the 21st of April to see what would be involved in removing the meter and replacing it.

Energy Assets claim that provided the meter is more than 10 years old (the one at Grenfell Tower is more than 25 years old) the cost of the meter is met by National Grid Metering although the company wanting the exchange may have to pay for the installation. It is estimated that the cost to exchange the meter at Grenfell Tower would be approximately £7,000 excluding the costs to demolish and rebuild the wall of the meter room and the access hatch if it is not wide enough for the removal/replacement of the meter.

Energy Assets also claimed that the meter appeared to be oversized but detailed measurements would need to be undertaken preferably during the winter, to establish to what extent and whether a smaller meter could be installed. An alternative approach is for the TMO to purchase the meter installation from National Grid and then sell it to Energy Assets. Energy Assets could then exchange the meter and rent it back to the TMO. Because the price of gas charged by the gas supplier includes an allowance for metering charges the TMO should then be able to negotiate a lower unit price from British Gas to cover the rental.

Because Energy Assets have not been able to give any detailed costings the TMO are still pursuing other alternatives and are in the process of fixing up a meeting with Corona Energy a company that supplies gas as well as metering equipment to see what they can offer.