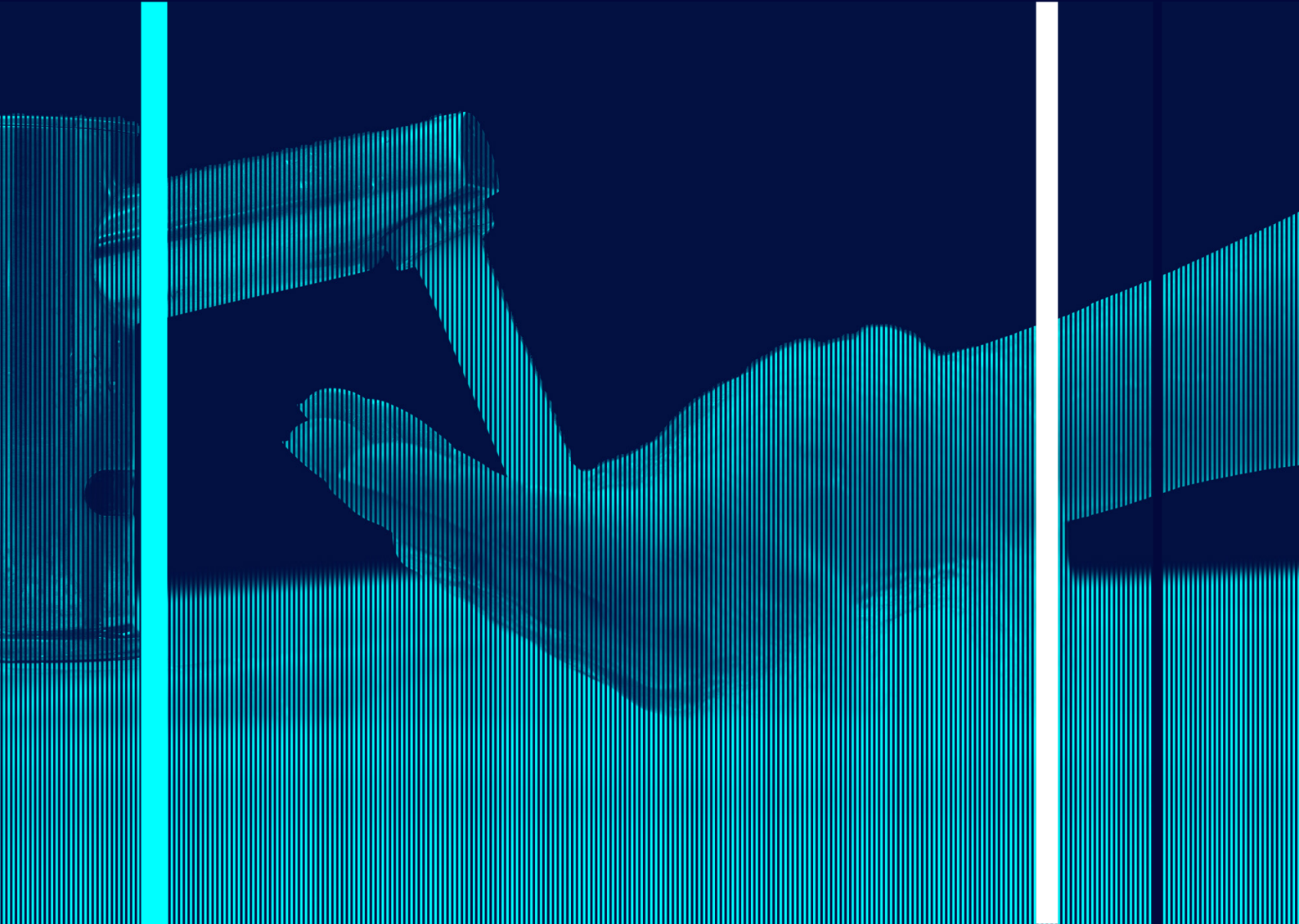


Business UNusual



Powering On

COVID-19: The Challenge for Utilities

 Capita

The Utilities challenge

As the growing impact of the Coronavirus pandemic obliges the UK government to impose ever-tighter restrictions on its citizens' freedom of movement and assembly, the vast majority of the population is coming to terms with the reality of enforced isolation as a means of protecting themselves and their loved ones from what is now a very real threat.

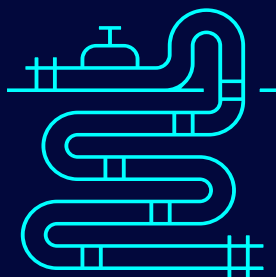
Home confinement for large swathes of the population – many of them for weeks at a time if they are self isolating or in self quarantine – means that the utilities industry has come under a degree of pressure it has rarely experienced before.

In practical terms, this means:

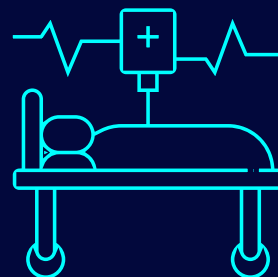
Homeworking 'could add £52m a week onto energy bills'

People working at home due to Coronavirus are expected to increase their bills by £16 a month, according to research by Uswitch. In analysis produced before Boris Johnson ordered a lockdown of the country, the switching service estimated that with 16.8 million people working from home, there will be an additional 25% more electricity and 17% more gas use per day.

[utilityweek.co.uk](https://www.utilityweek.co.uk) | 24 March 2020



Enforced school closures mean millions of children – and their carers – are adding to the growing demand for water, heat and power.



Hospitals and medical facilities at full capacity have also added to the demand for water and other utilities.



Demand for domestic water, gas and electricity has surged among employees who have been told to work from home.



Government and medical advice on vigorous and frequent handwashing as the first line of defence against COVID-19 – not to mention the thorough wiping down of household and office surfaces – invariably means that water usage has increased significantly since the crisis began.

Already a critical component of the country's national infrastructure, network operators and distributors of water, gas and electricity now have a huge burden on their shoulders: keeping the water running, the lights on and the heat pumping during this unprecedented and unpredictable period. As if this wasn't challenging enough, they also have to contend with staff shortages of their own as a result of employees falling ill or being required to care for children whose schools have been closed.

London hit by major water outage amid Coronavirus pandemic

Around 25,000 homes are without water this morning after a major outage hit properties across South West and West London.

metro.co.uk | 19 March 2020

Broadly speaking, utilities companies all face the same operational challenges: ensuring supply, managing surges in demand, dealing with peaks and troughs, avoiding outages and ensuring full customer service even though some of their staff may be incapacitated.

The utilities industry also faces a number of specific staffing challenges. Firstly, utilities call-centre employees traditionally work together in large numbers with systems that have been designed for campus-style working. They rarely work from home and may not have the systems or the cultural experience to do so successfully.

Secondly, large numbers of specialist engineering and maintenance staff in the sector often work remotely. Their job involves being out on the road and interacting with members of the general public – fixing burst water mains, repairing fallen electricity lines, maintaining sub stations, servicing boilers, etc. They are potentially putting themselves at risk in the current environment – if they fall ill or have been ordered to self isolate, they simply won't be able to do their jobs properly, if at all.



Business UNusual

At Capita, our priority is to support our utilities clients as they adapt to unprecedented circumstances to ensure that critical national infrastructure, businesses and services are kept running smoothly.

We are here to help and support you and your teams.

In terms of the here and now, we can provide solutions that are quick to deploy and can immediately solve some of the specific challenges faced by the utilities industry.

Looking to the future, we can help you adjust to new working norms post-COVID19 and help manage new expectations from your business customer and consumer base.

“ Our priority at Capita is to protect the well-being of our colleagues, clients and partners – and to carry on serving the communities and societies in which we operate.

Despite the uncertainty we are all facing across the world, our business operations are resilient. Our colleagues across Capita are doing everything they can to carry on serving our clients and helping them to maintain the vital services they provide to customers and citizens.”

Jon Lewis



Supporting your customers

When it comes to the supply of critical utilities like water, gas and electricity during a crisis, any problems or issues with these services need to be tackled quickly and effectively. Managing and resolving high-volume calls and queries, and surges in demand, are among the biggest challenges facing utilities companies, not least where they are also seeking to prioritise the health and wellbeing of their workforce.

Leveraging the latest digital technologies and best-in-class strategic and analytical thinking, Capita stands ready to assist our clients make the most of the available capabilities. These capabilities include:

Conversational AI

We can implement and advise on the optimal use of messaging apps, speech-based assistants and chatbots to automate communication and create personalised customer experiences, thereby enabling teams to deal with surges in demand quickly and at scale.

Contact centre support

We can bring in our own experienced call centre agents to supplement your team and triage the first-line response, freeing up your specialists to solve more complex issues. This can be scaled up and down quickly and easily, as required.

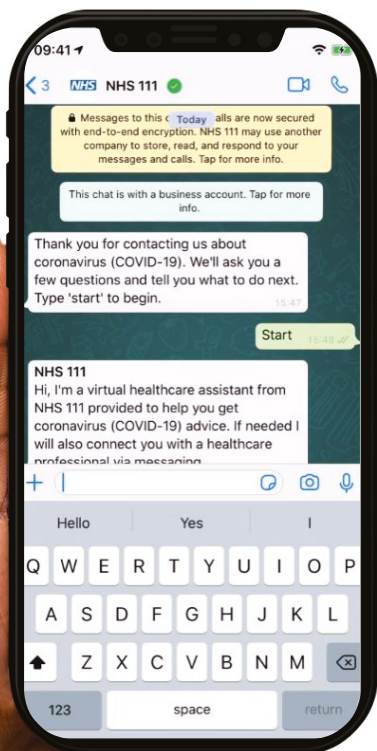


Remote working

Through softphone enablement, we can help you ensure that all calls are re-routed to your employees' mobile devices and laptops, allowing them to work effectively from home and continue to deliver best-in-class service to your customers.

Virtual support

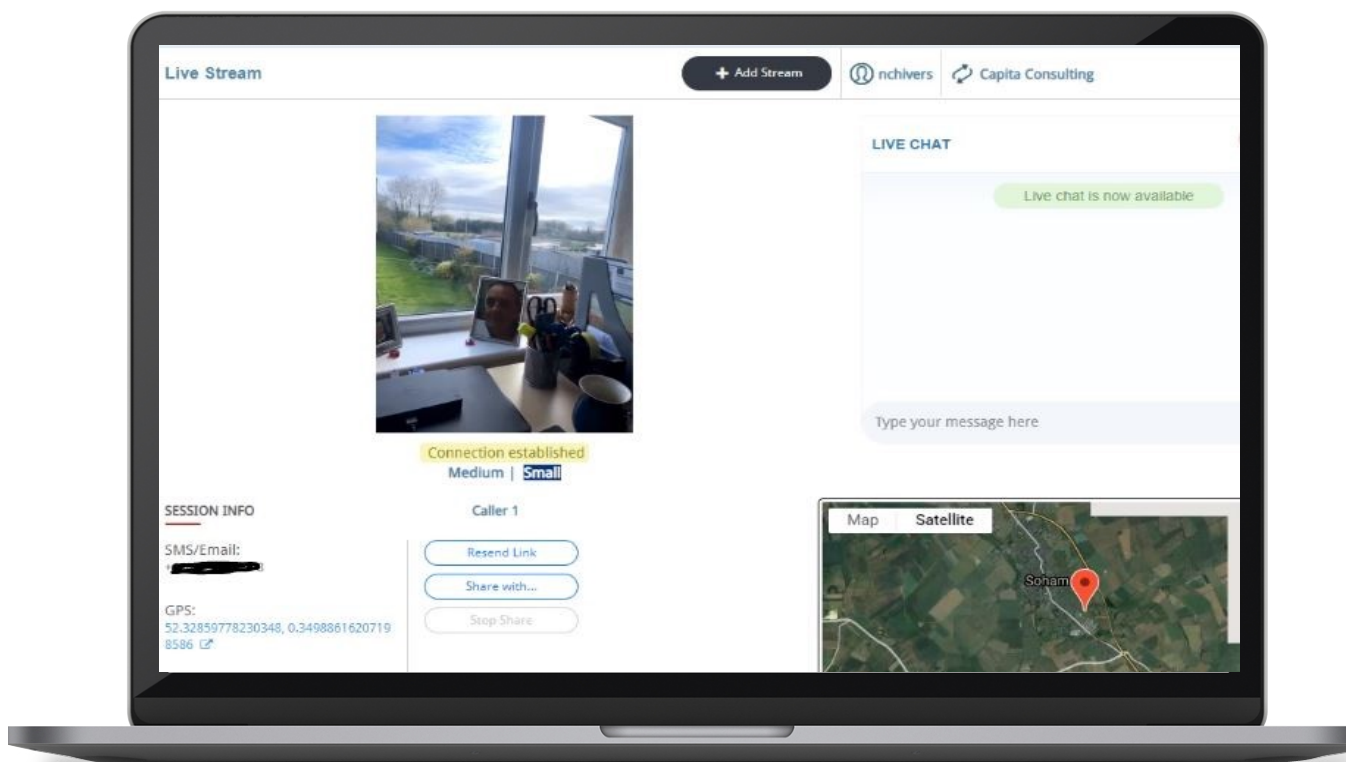
Easily deployable from the Cloud, our remote expert-support solution allows clients to send a text message to a customer-service agent to enable live video streaming or photo uploads, in order to enable quicker, better decision making and prioritisation. Staff can also use the service to call on remote expert advice to assist, if required.



Prioritising vulnerable consumers

A special area of concern for utilities companies is how they manage their most vulnerable customers at this unprecedented time. In response to the current crisis, Capita has developed an app-based solution to help critical infrastructure organisations manage their current and new vulnerable customer base in a number of different ways:

- By facilitating customers to more easily self-refer changes to their personal, health or financial situations. Utilities companies would then add these customers to a priority services register to ensure they are kept informed and prioritised during critical infrastructure events.
- Customers experiencing new financial hardship could also use the app to apply to change their payment plan, i.e. from monthly to pay-as-you-go.
- Geospatial mapping can be deployed to prioritise the allocation of resources to assist vulnerable customers at times of outages. For example, if a burst water main causes a large number of customers to be cut off, our tool can be used to help identify areas that have the highest density of vulnerable customers and therefore where repair prioritisation should occur.



We also have specific digital solutions to support the inevitable changes in working patterns that the utilities industry is now experiencing:



Remote call centre working

Originally developed by Capita for the NHS 111 service, this solution allows call centres to manage their services via the WhatsApp platform, meaning staff can work directly from home rather than having to log onto on-premises CRM systems. This is particularly useful for utilities companies with large billing and operational call centres which need to remain open and available to customers.



Field engineer support

We can support remote working in the field by providing access to a live video stream from a customer or another employee. This enables collaboration across teams in the event that a field engineer requires a second opinion from someone working remotely.

Supporting your people

Supporting your staff through this period is imperative. In such uncertain times, it would be easy for them to become disengaged and demotivated, leading to poor performance and service delivery.

As remote working increasingly becomes the rule rather than the exception for many in the telecommunications sector, potential new concerns around employees' mental health and wellbeing will also come to the fore. Such concerns – and the need to tackle them promptly, effectively and with empathy and compassion – should not be underestimated by employers.

Less than half of energy workers confident about resilience plans

Energy workers have a widespread lack of faith in their employer's workforce resilience plans, according to a survey carried out by the Prospect union. The poll raises concerns about social distancing and whether companies are moving quick enough to halt non-essential work.

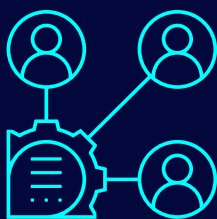
utilityweek.co.uk | 25 March 2020

We can help ensure your staff remain motivated, productive and in good mental shape during extended periods of homeworking by delivering training and development programmes that prioritise:



Productivity and employee engagement

Tailored online courses to maintain productivity and employee engagement, thereby helping staff protect their mental health whilst working remotely or in isolation.



Management development

Providing management and leadership training programmes that help managers adjust to managing remote teams and to understand, identify and mitigate the specific challenges of remote working.



Workforce management

Our workforce-management software solutions keep payroll and HR processes running smoothly, no matter where employees are working. It allows staff to log their hours and absences remotely using web and mobile devices, relieves the pressure on HR departments and gives employees peace of mind that they will be paid accurately for the work they have done.

Supporting your operations

It's important to remember that none of the day-to-day challenges of running your business go away during a time of crisis. In addition to the extraordinary measures being implemented to ensure a company survives and thrives during the pandemic, it's still 'business as usual' for major parts of the enterprise.

To this end, we can provide comprehensive operational support to help you keep the show on the road, whilst mitigating against new challenges that may arise.

This support includes:



Cyber protection

We can work with you to ensure your systems and people are protected from the threat of cyber attacks while remote working through rigorous testing to check that remote working isn't exposing your network to unnecessary security risks.



Business continuity

In addition to being able to provide you with expert staff in areas in which you may be experiencing a shortage, our business continuity testing service allows you to test your business continuity plans to the limit, putting it under intense levels of strain and stress in order to reveal any flaws.



Digital disruption and the new normal

The utilities industry was already going through its biggest transformation in generations before the COVID-19 crisis. Climate change, renewable energy sources and the phasing out of fossil fuels; the advent of new technologies and digital disruption; new regulatory obligations, and rapidly changing customer expectations – all of these combined at the same time to challenge the industry in a way it had rarely seen before.

The additional pressures and changes we are seeing now as a result of the pandemic will only accelerate the need for our utilities firms to focus even more closely on digitalisation and disruption. The crisis has effectively forced business' hand by creating a situation which obliges them to adapt to remote and flexible working if they want their enterprise to survive. It's hardly an ideal scenario – but it has advanced the digital agenda considerably.

When this is all over, things will not necessarily go back to normal.

People will no longer be willing to be deskbound in a large office miles from home for 35 or 40 hours a week.

Many will not want to lose the family, home-centric routines and work/life balances that have evolved.

We have to accept that there will be new norms. In terms of critical utilities, public and private-sector organisations alike will look to the industry for digital leadership and to ensure processes and systems catch up as quickly as possible.

It is also somewhat ironic that the pandemic appears to be having a broadly positive impact on our natural environment, as air travel is dramatically reduced and manufacturing and distribution are realigned. Perhaps this is the reality of what we need to be doing to address climate change? It shouldn't take another global crisis to drive this.

The Energy & Utilities industry is going through the biggest transformation since it's inception



Climate change

Commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under the 2015 climate change agreement (COP 21).



Energy prosumers

The affordability of solar panels, storage and electric vehicles is disrupting business models and supply/demand management.



Renewables

Significant growth in renewables over the last 10 years that creates new opportunities and challenge across the utility value chain.



Disruptive technologies

Smart Transport, buildings and technologies – energy services, electric vehicles, energy storage, CCS, value of data, hydrogen, AI-enabled control.



Regulatory impacts

The rate of change of technology innovation, politics (e.g. Brexit, renationalisation, RIIO-2) and attitudes to climate change are driving regulatory change.



Customer preferences

Preferences and expectations are shifting and smart meter rollout is increasing switching.

To learn more about how Capita can help your business in these extraordinary times, please visit our website, email our Head of Utilities, [Chris Cartwright](#), or speak to your Account Director today.

www.capita.com