

# Report

## Customer Experiences of Storm Arwen

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This report outlines a qualitative research project focused on understanding customer experiences during a power outage as a result of Storm Arwen. In particular, it focuses on impacts of the power outage as well as communication and support received from Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) during and following the incident. The findings of this project feed into a wider Ofgem review into the DNOs' responses to the storm.

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## 1. Executive Summary

### Introduction

In early 2022, Ofgem conducted qualitative research with people who had experienced an extended power loss due to Storm Arwen in parts of Britain (North East and North West of England, Northern and Southern Scotland) where people had been affected by longer than average outages related to this incident. The objective of the research was to inform Ofgem’s review of how electricity Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) responded to Storm Arwen by exploring affected customers’ experiences of communication and support from DNOs during the incident, as well as ongoing support following the incident.

### Key findings

#### ***How well did companies communicate with customers during the incident?***

The main communication need of affected customers during the outage was on expected restoration times and there was criticism of the accuracy of such updates by DNOs either on their website or via other outbound communication channels (e.g., text, email). This made it difficult for people to plan appropriately to mitigate the impacts of the outage.

For those who tried to contact their DNO by phone to get updates or ask other questions, it was reportedly difficult to get through to them during the outage due to lengthy queues and in some cases only getting access to recorded information rather than having the opportunity to speak to a person.

#### ***How well were customers in vulnerable circumstances identified and supported (including customers on the PSR)?***

There was a general feeling of a lack of information from DNOs on what support measures were available to affected customers, from whom, and under what circumstances.

Those who were aware of additional support being provided by DNOs, such as reimbursement for alternative accommodation or subsistence, tended to find this out through word of mouth or social media rather than directly from their DNO. Others were not aware of these provisions.

DNOs have an obligation to provide information and advice to PSR customers but most participants on the PSR did not recall receiving any proactive contact from DNOs during the outage. In addition, DNOs reportedly were not always taking the opportunity to identify vulnerability when customers phoned them. There were no examples cited of DNOs signposting vulnerable customers to community-based support available locally.

***How were customers looked after following the event, particularly in terms of providing fair and speedy compensation, and any ongoing support required?***

Most participants had received some compensation at the time the research was conducted. For some, the compensation they received met or even exceeded their expectations. However, others were less satisfied for the following reasons:

- Some felt that the amount they received was insufficient to compensate them for the impacts of the outage.
- There was also a perception that the level of compensation provided to affected customers within given areas was not always consistent (possibly related to additional goodwill payments having been made to some customers but not others). This caused some participants to question the fairness of compensation payments.
- In addition, there was criticism about how DNOs communicated about compensation measures. For example, some people received their statutory compensation payment without any explanation of how this was calculated. A number were not aware of the possibility of claiming for additional payment for certain expenses. Those aware of discretionary compensation generally found out about this through word of mouth or social media rather than directly from their DNO, and there was uncertainty about the criteria and requirements for making such claims.
- Finally, some people reported issues with the accuracy or timing of their compensation payment. In such cases, it was reportedly often difficult to contact their DNO to resolve these issues.

## **Conclusions**

Overall, while some people did not report problems with the communication or support they received from their DNO, a number were not satisfied with their DNO's response to the outage for the reasons outlined above. The dissatisfaction, where expressed, was with the perceived insufficiency of DNO communication and/or support provided rather than their efforts to resolve the situation as people generally felt that those who were trying to restore power were working hard in challenging circumstances.

## 2. Introduction

Ofgem conducted qualitative research to inform its review of how electricity Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) responded to Storm Arwen, which brought severe weather across the UK in late November/early December 2021. While the majority of affected customers had their power restored within 24 hours, the recovery time from Storm Arwen was longer for some customers than it had been for previous storms, especially in regions in the North of England and in Scotland. For this reason, the qualitative research focused on people who were affected by an extended (48+ hour) outage in four regions in order to understand their experiences. The aim was to use this feedback to help evaluate the following areas of Ofgem’s review:

- **Communication and support during the incident:** How well did DNOs communicate with customers during the incident? How well were customers in vulnerable circumstances identified and supported (including customers on the Priority Services Register<sup>1</sup>)?
- **Ongoing support after the incident:** How were customers looked after by the DNOs following the event, particularly in terms of providing fair and speedy compensation, and any ongoing support required?

During January and February 2022, consumer researchers from Ofgem conducted 22 in-depth interviews with people who had been without power from 2.5 days to more than 10 days across four regions:

- The North East of England (covered by Northern PowerGrid);
- The North West of England (covered by Electricity North West);
- Southern Scotland (covered by Scottish Power Energy Networks); and
- Northern Scotland (covered by Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks)

The sample represented affected customers with a variety of different personal characteristics, including:

- Both men and women, and a broad range of ages from 24 to 78;

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<sup>1</sup> The Priority Services Register (PSR) is a free support service to help people in vulnerable situations. Energy suppliers and network operators offer it. Each keeps their own register. Customers need to contact their energy supplier or network operator to get on it.

- Some (n=9) who were on the Priority Services Register (PSR) or could be considered to be vulnerable due to having a disability or health condition, young children at home or living on a low income; and
- Some (n=7) who ran businesses from home or nearby which were also affected by the outage.

Most participants were free found<sup>2</sup> by specialist recruiters. Two people who had directly contacted Ofgem about their experiences also agreed to participate in the research. The interviews were conducted by telephone or video call and typically lasted 45-60 minutes.

Qualitative research aims to capture depth and richness of customer experiences. Given the focus on capturing detail, qualitative research tends to have relatively small samples and hence findings should be treated as indicative rather than definitive. Nonetheless, this report provides valuable insights into the experiences of affected customers, which have been considered by Ofgem in its review alongside other available information obtained from stakeholders and DNOs.

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<sup>2</sup> Free-find recruitment refers to methods including on-street recruitment, drawing from data bases and using 'snowballing' or referrals from other participants. All respondents were fully screened to ensure their eligibility.

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### 3. The customer experience and impacts

#### Preparedness for outages

All of those interviewed in this research live in rural areas. This included a number who reside in remote locations outside of villages and some distance from their nearest neighbour. Due to their location, most receive mains electricity only and they rely on electricity both for cooking and powering their heating systems. Some also have water supplies which require electricity to power pumps.

A number had experienced shorter power cuts previously. These were due to previous storms, amongst other reasons. They were prepared for outages in terms of having a supply of candles and torches and, in some cases, alternative cooking facilities, such as gas-powered camping stoves and alternative heating sources, such as coal fires or woodburning stoves. However, affected customers did not feel it was possible to be prepared for an outage as lengthy as it was for some people affected by Storm Arwen.

*"I've lived in the valley about 25 years, and we have repeated power cuts. Every year, there isn't a year goes by (without one). I'm kind of used to power cuts each winter but I've never experienced anything as catastrophic." (Affected by a 6-day outage)*

#### Impacts

Those affected by an extended outage due to Storm Arwen reported experiencing a range of practical, financial, and emotional impacts.

##### Practical Impacts

As well as affecting lighting, the outage resulted in most people having no or much reduced heating in their homes. This meant that they experienced very cold temperatures inside, especially if they live in older or poorly insulated properties. The majority also had no hot water for baths or showers and no or only limited ability to cook or heat up food.

*"I could deal with not having lights but it was just so, so cold. It was minus five during the night, it was freezing." (Affected by a 4-day outage, eligible for the PSR)*



Another common impact of the outage was digital connectivity problems. There was no electricity to power fixed broadband and, typically, no or very low mobile signal due to storm damage to telecoms networks or pre-existing not-spots<sup>3</sup> where they live. A number of people with landlines also lost use of these as they had been transferred from analogue to digital networks, which rely on electricity. This made it very difficult for those affected by the outage to communicate with others, as well as to get updates on restoration progress.

*"The outside world may as well have been blown up. It was frightening, we were literally in the dark as well as in terms of communication; we had no landline, no mobile and no access to the internet."* (Affected by a 6-day outage)

Some households, who require electricity to power water pumps, had no water supply for bathing, flushing toilets, washing dishes. They also needed to find alternative sources of drinking water for themselves, as well as any pets and livestock.

*"We had no water for about 5 days because they needed the electric to pump the water to the house. We did have about 6 two-litre bottles of water from the water board. The rest of the water I just went to friends' houses and we couldn't flush the toilet or anything."* (Affected by a 10-day outage)

*"My biggest problem was, because we're on a private water supply, I obviously need power to run the water pump. So we hadn't got water for any of the livestock. We've got 300 cattle in the sheds that are on dry food and they were screaming their heads off for water day and night."* (Affected by a 10-day outage)

In addition, some households were affected by storm damage which exacerbated the effects of the outage. This included flooding and damage to roofs which let in more cold, broken chimneys meaning a fire could not be lit and fallen trees blocking nearby roads so they could not get out to access more supplies.

*"It flooded our dining room, our bathroom, an upstairs bedroom, the top landing, and our downstairs lobby. There was about three inches of water, it was absolutely incredible. We had no power, no heating. The mobile signal went down, probably*

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<sup>3</sup> Mobile not-spots - areas where people cannot access mobile services due to lack of coverage (<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/telecoms-research/mobile-smartphones/mobile-not-spots>)

*shortly afterwards, and we have no landline here, so we had no means of communication. We couldn't ring anybody to tell them there was a problem and neither could we get out.”* (Affected by a 11-day outage)

### **Financial Impacts**

The outage led to financial losses for most people within the research sample, which typically amounted to several hundreds of pounds. For example, due to the possibility of being snowed in during the winter, many had an extensive supply of frozen food which was spoiled during the outage. Additionally, most spent more than they would usually during the outage on alternative heating (e.g. additional wood or coal), cooking equipment (e.g. camping stoves or gas cannisters), as well as subsistence (e.g. meals out or takeaways) and transport to access supplies. A few even resorted to hiring or purchasing a portable generator.

*“I've got two freezers and everything had to go which was quite upsetting to see it all going in the bin.”* (Affected by a 5-day outage, on the PSR)

*“I can't just nip out to the shops here. There are no shops to walk to so everywhere you go you've got to take the car.”* (Affected by a 10-day outage)

### **Emotional Impacts**

As a minimum, people found living through the outage to be “inconvenient” and “irritating”. A number also spoke of the experience causing them significant stress and anxiety.

*“It lowers your mood; you don't feel great about going to work, you know. You've not slept well because you've been cold and you've not had decent food so there are all of those psychological impacts.”* (Affected by a 5-day outage)

*“It was really stressful. We had not long moved in and it was very unsettled again, especially for my son as his routine went out of the window.”* (Affected by a 2.5-day outage, eligible for the PSR)

*“When your mental health takes a battering it doesn't just come back at the click of a finger, it takes a while to come back.”* (Affected by a 3-day outage, on the PSR)

## Groups more severely impacted by the outage

Some people were more severely affected than others by the outage due to their personal circumstances. This includes people who are on or eligible for the PSR (e.g. people with disabilities or long-term health conditions, older people and those with young children) who tended to be more severely impacted. In addition, based on the interviewed sample, the following groups were particularly susceptible to detriment from the outage:

- People living alone, who tended to feel more isolated and less supported;
- People living on low incomes, who could not afford to pay for mitigations such as hotels or takeaway food;
- People, who had farm animals or pets that they could not leave; and
- People, who worked or ran businesses from home and whose livelihoods were affected.

### ***Case study 1 – Affected by a 5-day outage***

'Jane'<sup>4</sup> is in her 50s and lives with her teenage daughter in Northern Scotland. She is disabled and on the PSR. Her disability was affected by the cold and damp in the house due to the outage. However, she didn't feel that this was acknowledged by the DNO when she called them.

Jane is not able to work due to her disability and struggles to pay bills. This meant the freezer spoilage she experienced affected her badly. In addition, her car was off the road, so she could not easily get to the nearest village 7 miles away to pick up supplies.

She did not receive any welfare check from the DNO or other official body but fortunately received support from a neighbour who supplied her with a camping stove and additional coal.

### ***Case study 2 – Affected by a week-long outage***

'John' is in his 70s and lives alone in the Scottish borders. He has a heart condition and is on the PSR due to his health and age.

He had no heating or cooking facilities during the outage, except from a wood burning stove. He also had chilled food spoilage. In addition, he didn't have any form of communication at home as his internet, mobile and landlines were all down. Once power was restored, he found that his fridge blew its thermostat and needed to be replaced.

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<sup>4</sup> All names are pseudonyms

Fortunately, a neighbour cleared the lane of trees so he could drive into town. A lot of places were closed, however, due to the outage, so he could not easily access hot drinks or hot food.

***Case study 3 – Affected by a 10-day outage***

'David' is in his 50s and lives in Northern Scotland with his partner, who is disabled, and they are on the PSR. He runs a farm from his property and they are 'just scraping through' financially.

David's property relies on a private water supply that requires electricity to work the pump. This meant that there was initially no water for the couple themselves or their livestock, and they could not shower or flush the toilet. They also only had one coal fire, so the house was extremely cold. This was difficult to manage, especially for his disabled partner.

He needed the help of a neighbouring farmer with a generator to transport in water for his livestock. He and his partner showered at a friend's house. He also had to travel 7 miles to the nearest village to get additional supplies.

## 4. DNO communication and support during the incident

### DNO communication

The primary information need during the outage was for updates on expected restoration times. Some people also required information on what support they could access to mitigate the impacts of the outage.

The main source of information on these topics was their DNO's website, and some also tried to call the DNO. Relatively few received proactive updates by phone, text or email from their DNO during the outage, and this was the case even for customers on the PSR<sup>5</sup>. A number were not able to access information readily themselves due to their own limited means of communication during the power outage, as mentioned earlier.

Those who tried to call their DNO during the outage reported lengthy waiting times and some were not able to get through to a person. Even those who did get to speak to an agent generally felt that the person they were engaging with was not well-informed on who was affected by the outage, when their power was expected to be restored or what support was available in the meantime. Some also felt that the representatives they spoke to lacked empathy in the way they responded to their call.

*"We couldn't seem to get anywhere. It was pointless, we felt deserted. We were wondering what was going on and they couldn't even take time to answer the phone."* (Affected by a 2.5-day outage)

*"It was robotic. It made me feel like they couldn't be bothered, that it was just another person complaining. There was not much empathy there."* (Affected by a 2.5-day outage, eligible for the PSR)

There was also widespread criticism amongst the research sample of the accuracy of updates provided by DNOs on their website, as well as via text or email notification. In particular, participants reported they were led to believe power would be back on much earlier than it was ultimately restored, and that expected restoration times were amended numerous times during the course of the outage. This created uncertainty and meant

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<sup>5</sup> DNOs have an obligation to provide information and advice to PSR customers.

people affected by the outage felt less able to plan mitigations, such as moving to alternative accommodation.

*"The website was hit and miss so we were in the dark about what was going on. A couple of times it gave a time but the power didn't come on and we were just waiting again. It got our hopes up and then they were dashed."* (Affected by a 2.5-day outage)

*"We were getting updates every day that the power would be on the next day. Then they said the electricity was back on but we weren't on. It was getting beyond a joke. We were coming up to day 10 and we didn't know how much longer we could go on."* (Affected by a 10-day outage, eligible for the PSR)

*"They would say the electricity would be back on tomorrow at midday and then midday came and went. That can be worse actually. They should have been honest and realistic and said it could take a week. People are incredibly resilient but need to know what they're coping with. If we understood at the beginning that we were going to be off for 6 days, then we would have known what we were dealing with. As it was, we just got angrier and angrier and then no longer trusted them."* (Affected by a 6-day outage)

## **Support provided during the incident**

In addition, there was considerable confusion amongst the research sample about what support could be offered to people who were vulnerable or had additional needs. As mentioned, a number of customers on the PSR said that they had not received any proactive contact from their DNO and people also reported that call agents were not taking the opportunity to identify vulnerability when customers phoned in. There was also an absence of information on support measures on DNO websites. This meant that many people, including those on the PSR or who are vulnerable, assumed that no support would be available to them.

*"They didn't offer any support whatsoever. They just kept apologising."* (Affected by a 10-day outage, on the PSR)

*"As long as you didn't need electricity for insulin or an oxygen machine they didn't see you as a priority."* (Affected by a 5-day outage, on the PSR)

Where people were aware of support, it tended to be via other means than the DNO such as through word of mouth as well as from local Facebook groups, community newspapers and elected representatives. This was how some people came to know about the opportunity to claim for alternative accommodation and subsistence from their DNO, although for some people these provisions did not constitute suitable or sufficient support as they couldn't leave animals or afford to pay upfront for hotels or meals out.

*"They said I could go to a hotel and keep the receipt but I couldn't afford to go to a hotel. They never asked me if I was struggling to pay." (Affected by a 5-day outage, on the PSR)*

*"You can't just take a dog to the local hotel. This was reflected across this rural community. Most people have dogs, cats and our next neighbours they've got chickens. You can't just up and leave and go to a hotel. (Affected by a 11-day outage)*

There were also examples of vulnerable customers who were not offered any additional support even when they contacted their DNO and specifically told them about their needs.

**Case study 4 – Affected by a 3.5-day outage**

'Jack' is in his 20s and lives with his parents in North West England. His father is diabetic and requires refrigerated medication.

Jack initially called the household's energy supplier about the outage and was placed on the PSR when he identified his father as being vulnerable and with a medical need for electricity. He was then advised to contact his DNO, which he did, but he was not offered any support such as the opportunity for his father to stay in alternative accommodation or the possibility of accessing a portable generator to refrigerate his medication.

Fortunately, the family have relatives living nearby who were unaffected by the outage and they stayed there and used their fridge for his father's medication.

There was reportedly additional community-based support (e.g. access points for hot food, welfare checks, hiring out of generators etc.) provided in some areas but in others people felt that the local emergency response was not sufficient in terms of the speed of instigation and co-ordination. There were no examples reported of the DNO informing affected people of these local support measures.

## 5. DNO ongoing support following the incident

### Statutory compensation

Only a minority became aware of their entitlement to statutory compensation for their outage through communication from their DNO (e.g. from their website, a customer service agent or via a letter). Others initially found out about this through word of mouth, social media or only when their cheque arrived.

Most people had received some statutory compensation although there were a couple who had not. Some received their statutory compensation automatically while others said that they had to apply for it.

Some of those who received compensation were satisfied, and a few even said it exceeded their expectations.

*"I couldn't believe it. We weren't expecting anything."* (Affected by a 4-day outage, eligible for the PSR)

*"It came on its own which was brilliant."* (Affected by a 3-day outage)

However, others were unhappy with the aspects of their compensation experience, one of the main criticisms being about the level of compensation provided which some people regarded as too low to compensate them for impacts of the outage. In particular, people living in large households or who were affected by longer outages tended to be critical of the daily amounts and/or overall cap. One person also mentioned just missing the 24 hour cut-off to qualify for an extra day of compensation. In addition, it was generally felt to be unfair that people affected by an outage due to a severe storm would be entitled to less than they would have been if the incident was less severe (as the threshold for compensation to begin is a power loss for 24 hours in the case of a less severe storm but 48 hours for a severe storm).

*"It doesn't seem to be set up based on the consumer experience; it doesn't matter why it happened or how many people were affected."* (Affected by a 5-day outage)

*"I do feel a bit cheated about getting less than I had expected."* (Affected by a 3-day outage)



A number also reported that there was no explanation provided on how their compensation amount was calculated which raised questions about the transparency and accuracy.

*"I'm delighted that something turned up and I didn't have to chase but it didn't feel transparent as there was no information on how they came up with that amount."*  
(Affected by a 6-day outage)

*"It didn't actually make sense what we got. I don't even know how they worked this out."* (Affected by a 5-day outage, on the PSR)

## **Discretionary compensation (welfare support payments)**

There was low awareness of the possibility to claim additional compensation for expenses incurred during the outage which meant only a minority had done this.

*"No one told us, we chanced on it ourselves."* (Affected by a 4.5-day outage)

*"Everyone was like, 'you know you can claim compensation? Have you seen on Fubar News?' I was like, 'oh can I?' I didn't know any of this."* (Affected by a 4-day outage, eligible for the PSR)

As a result, many were critical about the lack of information provided by their DNO about the possibility of claiming for expenses.

*"I didn't know how to claim, where to claim, who to claim from."* (Affected by a 10-day outage)

*"This is the first time I have heard of it. If I knew about it at the time, obviously I would have looked into it. Now we do not have receipts for anything and it's probably a bit too late."* (Affected by a 3.5-day outage, on the PSR)

Of those who were aware of the discretionary compensation provisions, a number felt that it was not reasonable to expect people to provide receipts for all expenses (such as additional heating fuel) and that it was not fair to exclude some expenses (such as mileage and food spoilage). As mentioned, people on lower incomes could not afford to make upfront payments, such as for alternative accommodation, and then wait to be reimbursed.

*"They need to be reasonable about receipts, like offering £15 subsistence per person without the need for receipts." (Affected by a 6-day outage)*

*"I couldn't afford to go to a hotel. I found out since that they could pay for you and I would have taken it up if I'd known that." (Affected by a 5 day-outage)*

Feedback from participants also suggests that some people may have received an additional goodwill payment from their DNO without needing to claim for this, while others did not. This resulted in people living in the same localities receiving different amounts of compensation in some cases which raised questions about the consistency and fairness of compensation payments.

#### **Case study 5 – Affected by a 10-day outage**

'Anne' is in her 30s and she lives in a village outside North East England with her partner and young daughter although the household is not on the PSR.

She believes that they are entitled to £1,050 as this is what the rest of residents in the village received but they have only received £490. She contacted the DNO several times about this by phone, email and also tweeted them. She was initially told that the issue was due to a problem in their data base which wasn't recognising her post code. This is now meant to be fixed but so far they only received an additional £70 extra this week along with the rest of the village.

She says: *"It's so frustrating, I only want what I'm entitled to. I don't know where to go now."*

## **Compensation process experiences**

With both types of compensation, some people reported needing to wait a long time (up to several months after the storm) to receive it and a few said that they received cheques addressed to the wrong person.

Where people had issues with their compensation, they reported that these were difficult to resolve with dedicated email addresses no longer working and correspondence going unanswered meaning that they have had to recontact the DNO several times and in different ways in an effort to get resolution.

*"They need to provide an email address that works and cough up what they owe." (Affected by a 6-day outage)*

*"I found it difficult. I haven't had a response from them yet."* (Affected by a 10-day outage)

*"I'm not very happy at all. I don't know if they're hoping that people won't chase because they'll think it's better than nothing. But we'll keep chasing."* (Affected by a 10-day outage, on the PSR)

## 6. Overall satisfaction with the DNO response and suggested improvements

While some people were neutral in their feedback, a number of customers within the research sample were not satisfied with their DNO's response to the outage for the reasons outlined above. Overall, the dissatisfaction was with the perceived insufficiency of DNO communication and/or support provided rather than their efforts to resolve the situation as people generally felt that those who were trying to restore power were working hard in challenging circumstances.

*"We were seeing guys up poles all night. We had a lot of gratitude and respect for the people on the ground." (Affected by a 6-day outage)*

*"It was pretty tough out where we live with the amount of trees that would have been down. They were all doing a really good job." (Affected by a 5-day outage)*

Based on their explicit suggestions and other feedback from participants about their experiences, this research indicates that affected customers expect the following improvements from their DNOs in the response of DNOs to people affected by an outage like theirs.

### Communication

1. **Provide more realistic estimates** of when power will be restored including a worst-case scenario in early stages, if a more precise estimate cannot be given.

*"They should have provided more realistic estimates of when the power would come on. That would have been the most helpful piece of information we could have had rather than being under a false assumption that it was coming back on imminently." (Affected by a 5-day outage)*

*"If they had said from the outset that it could take 4, 5 or 6 days people would have made better, safer and more informed choices." (Affected by a 6-day outage)*

*"(They should have provided) an honest answer to when the electric would come back on. If they'd come and said 'we think it's going to be off for 10 days' we could have managed completely differently. Each day we just thought it would come on tomorrow." (Affected by a 9-day outage)*

*"They needed to give more accurate timescales. Say you don't know if you don't know or give the maximum time. As it was, we were living in hope and were in limbo." (Affected by a 10-day outage, eligible for the PSR)*

2. **Make it easier for people to contact their DNO** in the case of an outage caused by a severe storm. This could be by increasing the resourcing of response lines or providing alternative channels, such as text messages or web-based live chat.

*"Answer the phone, answer questions, keep us updated... Sometimes speaking to someone who has empathy is much better than auto messages." (Affected by a 2.5-day outage)*

*"I didn't want to be put on hold or to be phoned back, I just wanted to know when the electricity would be back on. I didn't really want to speak to them, I just wanted a text to say it will be back on Tuesday. A text update rather than the missed (return) phone calls would have been a better thing." (Affected by a 2.5-day outage)*

## Support during the incident

1. **Provide more training** to customer service staff on the range of circumstances (beyond medical need for electricity) that could make someone vulnerable in the context of an extended outage.

*"They need to realise that for vulnerable and elderly people the biggest issue is keeping warm and fed." (Affected by a 3-day outage, on the PSR)*

*"I honestly think that the people making decisions need to come out to our area and understand how people live in rural isolated areas. Some people had entire sheds of cattle that they needed to water. Farmers were absolutely desperate." (Affected by a 6-day outage)*

2. **Improve communication** about what support can be provided to affected people and under what circumstances.
3. **Ensure the PSR is accurate**, including by taking the opportunity to identify customer vulnerability when responding to customer-initiated contact.

4. **Consider upgrading the support available** to vulnerable customers, those affected by lengthy outages (5 days plus) or those who have no water supply. This could include offering pre-paid hotel accommodation or portable generators.
5. **Improve co-ordination with local authorities and emergency response teams** including to arrange welfare checks to those on the PSR if the DNO cannot them directly.

*"No one contacted us, it's absolutely disgraceful from a safeguarding point of view. Roger (the previous owner) was still in his 80s and if he had still been living here he could have died."* (Affected by a 6-day outage)

*"There was a shocking lack of co-ordination, villages are now arranging crisis intervention teams. There was a meeting about it last week in the village hall which collected people's contact details and what skills and resources they could bring."* (Affected by a 6-day outage)

## Support following the incident

1. **Provide more proactive communication** about compensation provisions.
2. Clearly communicate the **criteria for discretionary welfare payments**.

*"It would have been nice to know that we could have gone out every other night and had a takeaway, then claim the money back. But we didn't know that."* (Affected by a 10-day outage)

3. Provide explanation about **how compensation amounts have been calculated**.
4. Consider **reimbursing reasonable expenses** without requirement to show receipts.
5. Aim to **reduce the time taken** to process compensation payments.
6. **Improve the response to consumer queries** regarding compensation.

## Other improvements

There was also a view that DNOs could have been:

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- **Better prepared for such an event** in terms of maintaining lines (e.g. cutting back vegetation etc.); and
- **Better at quickly assessing the situation**, determining who is off power and how much remedial action is likely to be required to restore it.

*"Rather than paying compensation afterwards I'd prefer that they spend on protecting and future proofing the grid so this is less likely to happen"* (Affected by a 4.5-day outage)

These comments are indicative of a perception of issues with resourcing affecting the resilience of the electricity network and agility of the DNOs' response to incidents.