

# **Central Networks**

## Discretionary Reward Scheme Submission

Priority Customer Care

At Central Networks we pride ourselves on excellent communication. Older, infirm and vulnerable customers need focussed assistance to make their lives easier, not just in the event of a planned power outage – but at other times too. As part of our holistic approach to service provision we pay particular attention to considering how best to provide the right service at the right time.

### Our Priority Customer Care

Our Priority Service Register contains over 80,000 entries and underpins everything we do for our vulnerable customers. In order to provide the right service it is important to ensure that all priority services customers are identified along with any indication as to what type of assistance they are likely to need. Doctors, medical centres, Help the Aged and other organisations help to publicise our service, making it easier for people to be included. Accurate data means that assistance can be targeted; to achieve this **we are writing to all customers on the priority services register requesting feedback** using pre-paid envelopes.

An up to date register allows our customer support teams to be pro-active in the event of power outages. We appreciate the anxiety and stress that unexpected events can bring, and so have created a dedicated priority services team to contact customers on the register and provide them with advice, updates and explanations to help allay their concerns. During recent storms this service was acknowledged as “superb” by a local radio station.

The messages we give are supported by personal contact in the form of our own on-site staff through our Customer Support Vehicles (CSV) and the Women’s Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS). The CSV is maintained and held constantly on stand-by to provide support in the event of emergencies; this could be to old people’s homes providing warm drinks, hot food and a friendly face or providing warm bottles for babies, for example.

***“We’re committed to going that extra mile for our customers and understand that when there is a power cut that’s when our customers really need our help.”***

*Phil Wilson, Customer Operations Manager*

This year we updated our website with a page dedicated to priority customers. The page explains that customers who depend on electricity for medical reasons can email us,

phone us or contact their supplier and be added to our Priority Service Register.

[www.central-networks.co.uk/Content/Service/serv\\_priority\\_services.aspx](http://www.central-networks.co.uk/Content/Service/serv_priority_services.aspx)

We have also added web pages for ‘hard to reach’ customers whose first language is not English (see Wider Communication Strategies application for detailed information). Useful information and our contact details are now available in the six most widely used languages across the Midlands, as well as in English.

To add to this support we have developed a new suite of leaflets on topics such as ‘safety in the home’ and ‘advice during a power cut’. The leaflets are published over and above our licence obligations to further aid customer understanding and are sent to Citizens Advice Offices throughout our region.

We continue to attend targeted seminars and workshops across the region, working with the DTI, the police and other utility companies to increase awareness of doorstep crime, particularly for vulnerable customers.



### Our Winter Packs

The majority of our customers have never needed to contact us. However, the nature of our business means that a high proportion of the contact we do have with customers can be triggered by negative events such as power cuts. The possibility of power cuts can be a constant source of worry during the winter months – especially for older customers and the infirm. We wanted to show that despite our customers not necessarily thinking about us, we are always thinking about them, particularly our most vulnerable customers.

Our **pioneering free Winter Pack**, created using feedback received from customers, Age

Concern and employees ensures customers can contact us in the event of an emergency and that they have useful items to hand in the unlikely event of a power cut.

Feedback from employees led to improvements such as the introduction of a re-usable hand warmer rather than the single use equivalent which was used in the pilot. This allowed us to make the pack more sustainable and without any need for waste. Each 'Winter Pack' contains:

- a leaflet containing information useful in the event of a power cut
- emergency contact information
- a warm fleece blanket
- a pair of warm gloves
- a re-usable hand warmer, and
- a torch complete with batteries.

Following our publicising of the packs, distribution increased month on month and through our Age Concern electric blanket testing events, we were able to target their distribution as well as making them available on request. This helped us to build an excellent relationship with Age Concern across the Midlands.

Throughout 2006 we received numerous thank-you letters from customers and groups, as well as recognition from the Chief Executive of Age Concern (West Midlands Division) after our attendance at numerous Age Concern events. This emphasised that 'going the extra mile' is really worthwhile as the feedback received from customers is such an effective way of measuring success.



Helping our older and vulnerable customers stay safe and warm and knowing they can contact us in the event of a power cut is a great step towards our goal of giving customers the best service possible. Such work will continue and go hand in hand with a wide range of ongoing projects as part of our broader business processes:

- We ensure our Priority Service Register contains information which is as up to date and accurate as possible.
- We continue to utilise our pioneering customer service vehicles as much as possible and through our relationship with the WRVS provide advice and help to as many vulnerable customers as possible in the event of a power cut.
- Our call handlers are trained regularly to ensure they provide the best possible help and advice to all callers and are specifically trained to identify callers who might be vulnerable for any reason. Calls back to customers are offered during incidents as a matter of routine.
- Our blind and partially sighted customers can request documents and planned interruption notices in Braille and customers with hearing or speech difficulties can use the Type Talk facility when they contact us.
- We work hard to make and retain excellent working relationships with relevant charities and organisations who work with us to provide real benefits and useful information to customers.
- We have reviewed (and reissued where required) all employee and contractor Identity Cards to ensure customers feel safe and secure that they know who they are letting into their homes.

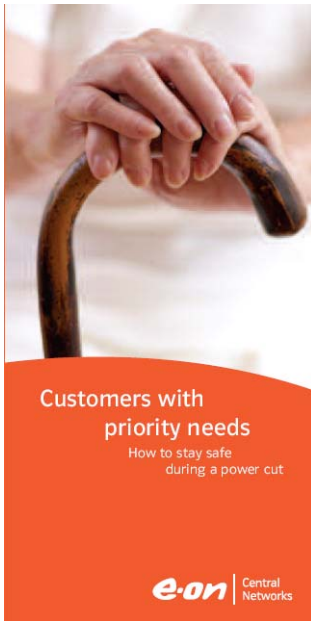
***"The packs have been really well received. We have had a huge amount of positive feedback with many people taking the trouble to write and thank us"***

*Phil Wilson, Customer Operations Manager*

In summary, we value our initiatives as part of a wider package available for priority customers. Central Networks has worked tremendously hard in recent months to make improvements that older and vulnerable customers will notice and benefit from.

We have improved our Priority Service Register and the communication of it to customers, undertaken a review of Identity Cards for both employees and contractors to ensure customers can easily identify our people and distributed over 7000 winter packs as part of a company wide ethos of putting customers first.

**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**



Our Priority Services Leaflet is part of a suite of leaflets available to customers and distributed to parish councils and Citizen's Advice Bureaus.

**How we can help you during a power cut**

Power cuts may be a result of circumstances that are beyond our control. That is why it's a good idea to be prepared for a power cut at all times. In this leaflet we are outlining what you can do to stay safe during a power cut if you rely on electricity for medical needs.

To provide you with the best service possible, we keep a confidential register of customers who depend on electricity for medical needs. The register makes sure we know about any special circumstances or priority needs you may have if you report a loss of supply to us. If you depend on electricity for medical needs and have registered with us, we will, where possible, endeavour to keep you informed in the event of an emergency power cut.

**People with priority needs**

We realise that customers with medical needs may depend on a supply of electricity more than some of our other customers, especially if they have to use special electrically-operated equipment.

**Helpful advice**

- Cordless (digital) telephones will not work during a power cut, so keep a corded (analogue) telephone or a mobile phone handy.
- If you have lost your electricity supply call the relevant emergency number for your area to let us know. You can find this on the enclosed fridge magnet. These free emergency numbers are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Call our general enquiries line, on the reverse of this leaflet, for a free pack which includes a battery-operated torch, hand warmer and a fleece blanket for use in the event of an emergency.

**How to register**

If you depend on electricity for medical needs you can register by:

- contacting your electricity supplier who will pass your details onto Central Networks.
- writing to the address on the back of this leaflet.

**Should you have a problem with your electricity supply please keep these numbers so that you can contact us.**

**Emergency - loss of electricity supply**

East 0800 056 8090  
West 0800 328 1111

[www.central-networks.co.uk/customer-services/central-networks.co.uk](http://www.central-networks.co.uk/customer-services/central-networks.co.uk)



Dear Central Networks

On behalf of Age Concern Insurance Services North Staffordshire, may I take this opportunity of saying a huge thank you to the powers that be in Central-Networks for their fantastic freebie offer to ourselves of the winter warm packs.

We have clients that range from 50 to over 103. People who visit the office are offered a pack and also the Information and Advice officers take these packs out with them to people who are unable to come into the office and need our help. Talks are arranged with various luncheon groups and the packs are also taken to these, but we have to make sure how many people will be attending to ensure that we take along enough packs or else we are faced with riots! The packs are so welcome.

Communication has been excellent with Jason and his crew also delivery has been very prompt.

Once again, many many thanks from myself and also all the people who have benefited from your generous gifts. Many thanks on behalf of all the people in North Staffs for all your efforts

Kind Regards,  
Elaine Stevenson

An extract from one of our Thank You letters

A screen shot of our Priority Services web page

