



**OFGEM CUSTOMER SERVICE
REWARD SCHEME 2009**
Submission by CE Electric UK

Priority Customer Care

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Encouraging vulnerable customers to join our Priority Services Register

2008/2009 has been a landmark period for our Priority Services Register with the launch of two powerful communication campaigns. Our innovative ways of encouraging our customers to join our register demonstrated best practice in our sector and raised numbers of households on the register from 94,000 last year to 174,686 today, four times the figure three years ago.

Flagship initiative

For the first time, the register became the driving force behind our *Preparing for Mother Nature* campaign – a potentially life-saving campaign that aims to raise awareness of the steps vulnerable customers can take to minimise the impact of winter power cuts. In autumn we wrote to almost 8,300 partners (5,000 the year before) including local authorities, parish councils, sheltered housing groups, libraries, doctors' surgeries and Neighbourhood Watch groups offering them our *Preparing for Mother Nature* posters and leaflets for distribution. In previous years these leaflets simply gave advice about how to prepare for a power interruption. This time, we published a dedicated hotline as a call to action for vulnerable customers to sign-up to the register. We highlighted our partnership with the WRVS to provide hot meals and drinks for those in need during power cuts. With energy prices adversely impacting older customers, we offered energy-saving guidance too.

To heighten awareness of the register to vulnerable customers, their family and friends, we held a series of *Preparing for Mother Nature* roadshows in Newcastle, Northallerton, York, Shipley and Grimsby. Four evening and six weekly newspapers publicised these events and the key messages of our campaign so that it reached out to customers across our network area. Customer ambassadors hosted each of the events from one of our customer support vehicles, from which they handed out our leaflets and welfare packs and gave advice about joining our Priority Services Register to interested passers-by.

Customers and stakeholders heralded the campaign a resounding success: a commendation which was supported by requests for posters and leaflets rising from 27,000 to 35,000, with a particularly significant leap during the winter months in requests for large-print leaflets, up from 520 to 7,350. Requests for audio or Braille versions rose from 3 to 339. Thousands of customers were reached via the roadshows, which were an excellent opportunity for two-way, face-to-face communication.

Through our ongoing research with vulnerable customers, our partners identified a need to increase awareness of our register and therefore we launched a second major campaign, which began this spring with the production and distribution of 50,000 larger-print leaflets, *Make This Your Top Priority*, encouraging people to join the register. The leaflet received the Plain English Campaign's crystal mark for its clarity. We again offered

the leaflet to our 8,300 partners.

We have also given details of the dedicated number for registration in a *Community Update* publication sent in March to 3,996 stakeholders and, for the first time, we are including it in the BT telephone book. The number is also published in the "Special Needs" section of our website, which attracted 1,864 hits last year.

What's more, we have continued to develop close links with Air Liquide, a major supplier of oxygen in our area. Last year they gave us details of 4,000 customers who rely on electricity for their oxygen concentrators, and who have now been added to our register. In addition, we have written to primary care trusts (PCTs) and hospices asking them for appropriate names to add to the register. We also asked PCTs for the names of key contacts we could liaise with during power interruptions to further safeguard the interests of priority customers.

Improving the quality of information on, and reliability of, the register

Updating and expanding our register is of paramount importance to us. We have a rolling programme of writing to all our registered priority customers, not just to verify names and addresses, but also to update details of any electricity-powered equipment on which they depend such as oxygen concentrators, nebulisers, ventilators, stairlifts etc.

Our *Make This Your Top Priority* leaflet asks potential priority customers for details of any electricity-powered equipment on which they depend, if they would like to create a password to be used when we call on them and if they prefer us to communicate with them in a language other than English. As this information comes in, it is added to the register as quickly as possible. Customers who register by phone are also asked for details about any electricity dependencies so the information on our register is as full as possible. Air Liquide also tell us not just new customers to add to the register but also those to be removed from it.

Making the most effective use of the register

At the start of every shift in our 24/7 Customer Relations Centre (CRC), we appoint a dedicated agent to handle all calls from priority customers during a planned or unplanned power interruption.

We have also developed the Priority Customers' Tracker. Thanks to a link we created between our database of households off supply and our database of households on the register, the dedicated agent now has a new, invaluable tool. For every planned or unplanned interruption, we know which priority customers are off supply, whether they are electricity-dependent and any specific needs they may have such as for the loan of a generator or a welfare visit from the WRVS or our customer ambassadors in our customer support vehicles with hot food and drinks. Our dedicated agent regularly rings all customers on the tracker individually and updates information about their circumstances on the tracker each time.

Sometimes the dedicated agent is told of neighbours who are also vulnerable. The agent checks the tracker and, if they are not listed on it, adds their names and details. These are then added to our register.

Calling back to check on people and to tell them when supply is due to be restored is particularly important to us. Last year we made 119,728 call-backs to all types of customer, not just those on our register.

In one month alone we contacted 538 priority customers who were off supply. Five were given small generators and seven larger generators, while others received home visits from our staff, who supplied hot drinks and lit fires. Our customer support vehicles went out five times.

Using feedback loops to ensure that services are responsive to the needs of priority customers

We have three types of feedback loop to ensure our services are responsive to the needs of our priority customers. First, we ask them directly; second, we use an external research company, Explain, to carry out surveys for us; third, we ask our community partners for their ideas. Our interaction with the latter group is detailed under the next heading.

To help us understand our priority customers' needs better, earlier this year we revised our priority information pack for them and included a feedback form. This asks for their views on the service we provide and for their suggestions about how we can improve it.

This is supplemented by research from Explain, which in January reported the results of four separate surveys covering our customer support vehicles, a stakeholder survey, a vulnerable customers' communication survey and our Priority Services Register survey. The results were really positive. One survey was of people who had visited our customer support vehicle following a prolonged interruption at Royston, near Barnsley. They scored our staff highly for politeness, willingness to help, understanding and usefulness and, when asked to rate the usefulness of the customer support vehicle, all respondents rated it at 4 or 5 out of 5.

Another survey of 300 electricity-dependent customers revealed that 88 per cent felt it "very important" they were on our register. There was a further survey of 300 people on the register who had had a power interruption. Of these, 78 per cent said they had received more than one call-back from us.

Community partnerships to understand and respond to customers' views

We regularly seek views from our stakeholder groups including representatives of Age Concern, British Lung Foundation, Mencap, Leonard Cheshire Disability, Social Services and NHS District Nurses, and whenever possible incorporate their ideas and advice. They suggested that the special number for priority customers to call during an interruption should be particularly prominent and so we now use bookmarks to feature the number instead of fridge magnets.

Earlier this year we joined engage, Help

the Aged's network of organisations that promotes best practice. In April a user-led organisation, Disability North, who also work with HMRC and Northumbria Police, began disability, equality and awareness training for our agents.

We also sought views about our services for priority customers in our consultation process for DPCR5 via surveys, focus groups and workshops. More than 70 organisations were involved from the WRVS to the Holme and Dearne Valleys Society for the Blind.

Furthermore, one of our employees, Steve Keeney, who has been responsible for liaison with our 1,224 parish councils since 2001, last year attended more than 70 meetings with them and many other community group meetings to gather and respond to customers' views. He collected more than 200 action points, all of which have now been dealt with.

We understand the fear of doorstep crime, particularly among priority customers, and are working with the police on two highly innovative campaigns to reduce it. When bogus callers claim to be from us, we quickly issue a warning to residents, working with the police and media. We also alert our staff and remind them of our *Entering Your Home* code of practice.

Evidence of improvements in outcomes for customers

See the Supplementary Support Page for bar charts on households joining the register and priority customers' awareness of the special number to call in an interruption.

Demonstrating that we are pioneers in our field, our CRC was named North East Contact Centre of the Year for those with fewer than 50 seats last year and three of our agents won individual awards. In addition, the second stage of an interactive voice response project in the CRC will bring new benefits in the second quarter of this year. If a priority customer calls during a power interruption but forgets to use the special number, which would automatically get them through to the dedicated agent, they hear a recorded message. In future, our technology will recognise they are a priority customer and put them straight through to the agent, whichever number they call.

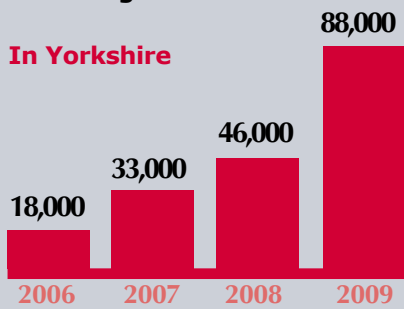
Also, any priority customer calling to request a new connection will be fast-tracked for priority service from later this spring.

Finally, evidence of how seamlessly our service can work is provided by our response to severe flooding in Morpeth, Northumberland, in September when 5,000 customers lost supply. Five ambassadors took our customer support vehicles to different locations providing hot meals, drinks and wind-up torch/radios, while a sixth ambassador organised generators for priority customers. John Healey, the Local Government Minister, said that the response to the floods by all parties was the best he had seen.

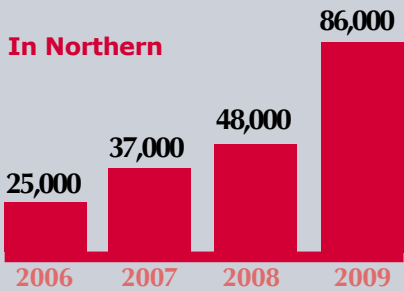
Supplementary Support Page

Number of households on our register*

In Yorkshire



In Northern



*Figures rounded up/down

Would you know where to find the CE Electric UK contact number to find out about a power cut and why it has affected you?



Survey of electricity-dependent customers on the register

"They were absolutely fantastic. The staff made an awkward situation bearable. Great guys."

Resident of Royston, near Barnsley, speaking of staff in the customer support vehicle who attended following a prolonged power interruption

"As a health professional, if the company wanted to give me leaflets about this free service, I would do so when I went to do my initial assessment."

Community nurse from Sheffield speaking about promoting the Priority Services Register

"I have a disabled son and he relies on electricity so I thought the service was great."

Vulnerable customer responding to a survey

"We have had really good service since we went on the register. They have been helpful when I have rung up and everything has been brilliant. My mum is nearly 80 and the reliable service gives her peace of mind."

Electricity-dependent customer responding to a survey

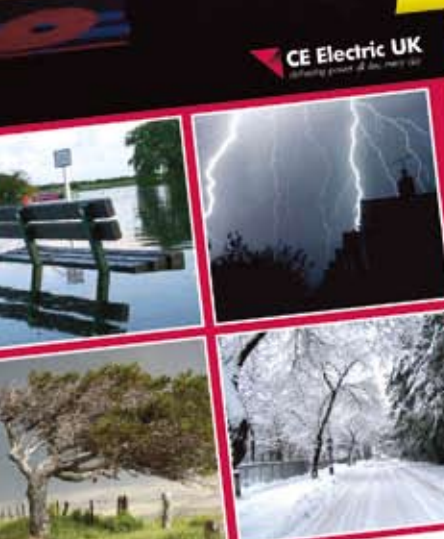
"For many older people, what they want is a simple system. It's having, for example, one telephone number that they could contact 24 hours a day, seven days a week, that is there as an emergency response situation. Having a human voice on the end of the phone can be reassuring."

Representative of Age Concern speaking at a stakeholder group and reinforcing the value of what we do already

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Details of priority customers kept up to date and accurate.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Register publicised in code of practice and "Special Needs" section of website.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Work with suppliers to improve daily data flows including details of medical equipment.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
New entries put on register the same day.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Weekly improvement meetings attended by senior management.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Customer service staff trained in responding to enquiries about register and how to deal with calls from customers on register.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
All customers on register sent information pack with dedicated telephone number to call during an interruption.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Aim to speak to all priority customers ahead of pre-arranged interruptions.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Contact programme with more than 1,000 parish councils.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Dedicated phone number for parish councils.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Grants to parish councils for emergency preparations.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Register integrated with our fault management system.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Market research on services to registered customers.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Welfare visits by customer ambassadors.			✓	✓	✓
Proactive contact with customers off supply.			✓	✓	✓
Customers can apply to go on to the register through the website.			✓	✓	✓
WRVS train staff and help in emergencies.			✓	✓	✓
Briefing paper for staff about medical equipment.			✓	✓	✓
Information campaign for all customers on preparing for power interruptions.			✓	✓	✓
Stakeholders asked about services for priority customers in DPCR5 consultation.				✓	✓
Welfare visits and packs.				✓	✓
Pool of 50 generators for pre-arranged or unplanned interruptions.				✓	✓
Two customer support vehicles mobilised where required.				✓	✓
Partners, including community groups, assist during major incidents.				✓	✓
Preparing for Mother Nature leaflets and posters provide a dedicated number to call to join the register.				✓	✓
Preparing for Mother Nature roadshows.				✓	✓
Links developed with Air Liquide.				✓	✓
Research with stakeholders including Age Concern, British Lung Foundation, etc.				✓	✓
Dedicated phone agent appointed to handle all calls from priority customers.				✓	✓
Priority Customers' Tracker linked to our fault management system.				✓	✓
50,000 Make this your Top Priority leaflets produced/distributed encouraging people to join the register.					✓
Community Update publication.					✓
Dedicated number for registration in BT phone books.					✓
Information pack for priority customers revised and feedback form included.					✓
Joined engage, Help the Aged's network of organisations promoting best practice.					✓
Disability North runs training courses for our customer service staff.					✓
Interactive voice response project to improve services to priority customers.					✓
Two campaigns with the police to fight doorstep crime					✓



CE Electric UK
 Customer Support Team
 Being there when you need us



Preparing for Mother Nature
 What to do if a power interruption occurs

CE Electric UK
 Being there when you need us



USEFUL NUMBERS

- Durham Constabulary - 0145 60 60 305
- Cleveland Police - 01542 325 316
- Northumbria Police - 03456 043 043
- Shading Stands - 09454 04 05 00
- Northumbria Water - 0945 717 1100
- United Utilities (Gas) - 0800 666677
- Northumbria Electric - 0545 395 0000

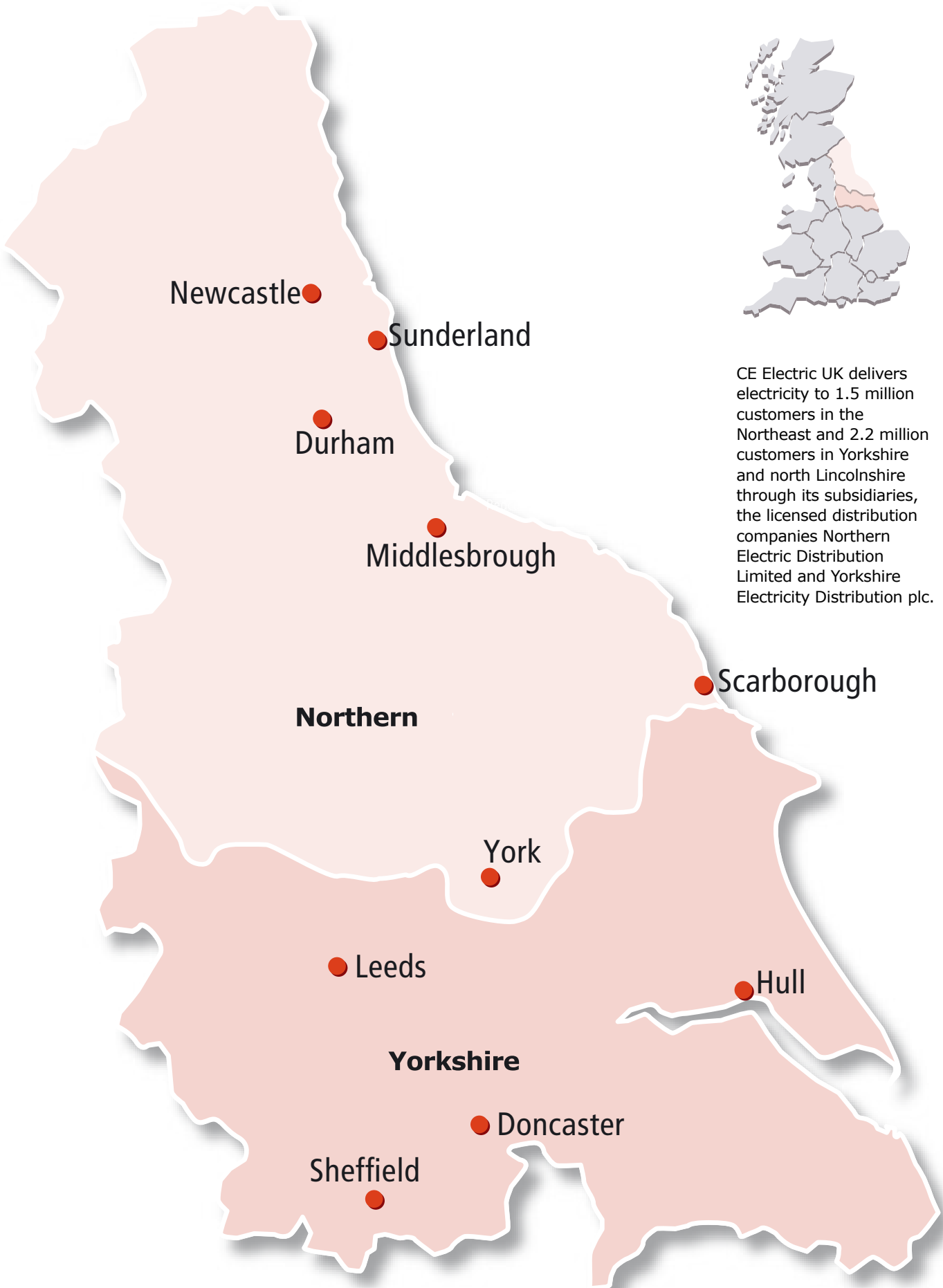


Customers with special needs
 Customers with additional needs
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engage
 business network



CE Electric UK delivers electricity to 1.5 million customers in the Northeast and 2.2 million customers in Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire through its subsidiaries, the licensed distribution companies Northern Electric Distribution Limited and Yorkshire Electricity Distribution plc.



Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

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