

Priority Customer Care Initiatives

Ofgem – Customer Service Reward Scheme

Our network engineers in SSE Power Distribution (SSEPD) work hard to keep the lights on, but occasionally power cuts still happen.

Regardless of the cause of the power cut, we do everything we can to restore customers' electricity supplies as quickly as possible. But no matter how quickly we do this, we understand it can be difficult to manage without electricity for any length of time, especially for those with special needs.

To help us anticipate and address the particular needs of vulnerable customers immediately when their electricity goes off, we maintain a Priority Customer Register.

But the Register is only effective if it is constantly and actively kept up to date.

Making sure that every customer who needs this priority service is on the Register is no easy task – SSEPD covers almost one third of the land mass of Great Britain.

Spreading the word on Priority Care

To reach all priority customers on our network, SSEPD embarked on an initiative called Power2Serve, which aims to empower our staff with the ability to provide the best service possible to our customers.

The approach taken is one of working from the inside out, embedding principles of customer focus in our business culture.

In terms of priority care, this raised the profile of the Priority Register and embedded a culture of awareness amongst our staff of the importance of looking out for these vulnerable customers when there are power cuts.

Our staff treat all customers with respect and compassion, but they are also trained to recognise vulnerable customers when out and about and encourage them to sign on for our priority care, with sensitivity to their needs.

Establishing a Caring Culture

Through the Power2Serve Initiative, we have:

- o Empowered our staff with the ability to make and keep promises, through development of our Power2Promise Initiative, which focuses on fulfilling our promises to customers; for example, a telephone operative promising to call a customer back by a certain time, and then delivering on that promise
- o Improved how we learn from our customers, through the creation of 'Learning Teams', from which we continually develop our understanding of customers' needs by actively listening to them rather than telling them what we think is important
- o Reached out to all our staff with the Priority Customer Care message, through internal staff communications, including a specially commissioned staff awareness DVD, which highlights the benefits of the Priority Service Register and explains how friends and family of vulnerable customers on our network could apply



Reaching Out

While making sure each and every member of SSEPD staff on the ground is armed with information and materials to sign up vulnerable people to the Priority Service Register – they can't be everywhere at once.



To reach out across communities to their most vulnerable members, we use a reward scheme to encourage charities and agencies to help us find them. For every 10 priority customers a charity or agency locates, we will give them a charitable donation as a thank you.



We provide a leaflet, specially developed for elderly customers, which invites them to join our Priority Service Register. The leaflet explains that we will keep our Priority customers updated during a power cut, and provides helpful advice and information that they may find useful if they experience a power cut.

We believe that the ability to reach vulnerable customers is considerably enhanced by working with external agencies that have direct contact with these individuals. We have therefore established relationships with local Social Services departments, Age Concern, local libraries and doctors' surgeries, sought their advice and asked them if they would support our quest by distributing some of our leaflets.

Making Registering Easy

We have made registering for our free Priority Service Register as simple as possible, by providing a simple form and prepaid envelope with each leaflet.

Alternatively, customers can register by calling our team of specially trained Careline advisors, free of charge on a dedicated number. For customers with hearing or speech difficulties that use text phones, we have a free textline that messages can be sent to. For those who don't speak English, we can provide an advisor who speaks their language upon calling us.



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For an elderly or vulnerable person, a power cut can be a very frightening experience. Ideally, no customer, least of all our most vulnerable members of society, would be subject to a power cut.

At SSEPD, we strive for the ideal. With this in mind, we began the Lights On initiative, aimed at maintaining supplies at a customer's home as far as possible and particularly addressing the needs of our Priority customers, for whom even a short interruption can be highly distressing.

Reliable Networks

To increase the reliability of our networks, the Lights On initiative suggested the use of Point of Use Reliability Equipment (PURE) installed in our customers' homes to minimise the impact of power cuts.

The concept of Lights On is simple, yet highly effective. It uses a standard Uninterruptible Power Supply designed for the small office PC market, which can be applied to essential appliances in a customer's home. For the first Lights On trial, the Lights On initiative aimed to do exactly that – keep our customers lights on.

Kilchoan

Kilchoan is the most Westerly village in mainland Great Britain. Situated in a beautiful but isolated location it has a population of around only 150 individuals, which includes many elderly residents.

In October 2008, we started discussions with the Kilchoan Community Council to begin a winter trial of the Lights On Initiative. The reception to our idea was good, a programme was agreed and 22 units were installed in nominated homes in the community.



A Heartening Response

The entire Lights On trial received an overwhelmingly positive response from the community. The only criticism during the trial was from a customer who was wondering why her elderly friend had not been included in the trial – which we were happy to rectify by adding her friend to the trial group.

"I was wondering if you could leave it in after the trial?"
Mrs Mac Clachan (62)

"Well pleased with the service. Can I pay to keep it?"
Mr Green for Mrs Green (91) who is unwell

"How much is it to keep?"
Mrs McDade (80)

"I'm surprised the idea hasn't been used earlier - I'm all for it"
Mr Thain (67)

Making them feel safer

"I didn't realise I had a power cut until I was told"
Customer, age 81, wishes to remain anonymous

"It is very useful and is a big advantage as I have stairs and cannot see well when in the dark"
Mrs Mac Clachan (62)

"As far as I'm concerned it can stay - it's a great safety aspect"
Mr Thain (67)

"It kicked in straight away which was brilliant; it saves my mum hunting around in the dark up the stairs for candles"
Son of Mrs Philips

Giving confidence

"Came on straight after the power cut and the lights and central heating stayed on"

Customer, age 81, wishes to remain anonymous

"The battery performed well during the power cut and came on straight away"
Mrs Mac Clachan (62)

"It gives me more confidence in my supply and getting around the house"
Mr Thain (67)

Improving the Future for Vulnerable Customers

Following the success of our Lights On initiative, we intend to further our ability to give our priority customers the ideal service, free from interruptions.

The next stage in achieving this is the Power On initiative, which aims to utilise the rapidly maturing technology of battery storage and high density energy storage to develop a PURE system capable of maintaining supplies to all essential services in the home, for up to three hours. This would include not only all lighting, but also basic communications, cooking and essential welfare equipment supplies – for example, stairlifts and home oxygen equipment.

We intend to develop the Power On concept and undertake a small scale trial through the winter of 2010.

"If SSE wants to trial any bigger UPS's - I am willing to be a trial customer"
Mr Thain (67)

