

# Looking after our vulnerable customers

## Vulnerable customers Ofgem submission



**electricity**  
**north west**

Bringing energy to your door

## Introduction

We are committed to supporting our customers in all situations where they may be vulnerable. To do this we need to understand who and where they are, and to know the most appropriate way to anticipate and meet their needs. Our aims are to ensure that our services are available and made accessible to all customers equally, regardless of their personal circumstances, and to embed these values throughout all aspects of our business.

This submission describes our approach to developing our services for Vulnerable Customers, and in particular those who are included on our Priority Services Register (PSR) or may be described as Fuel Poor. Our strategy, which will continue through RIIO-ED1, is to establish a network of contacts with other organisations and agencies that have similar interests to ourselves as service providers, or have areas of expertise that we can use to improve our understanding of vulnerable customers and their needs. We will continue to develop our services based on this collaborative approach.

We have developed a series of specific proposals, which sit within four broad categories:

- **To promote the Priority Services Register effectively, to ensure that it is used by all those who can benefit from it.**
- **To establish an effective contact strategy with vulnerable customers, to ensure that the data we hold is regularly refreshed.**
- **To establish a comprehensive data strategy for vulnerable customers, within the wider strategy for Customer Relationship Management.**
- **To improve the services we provide for vulnerable and fuel-poor customers.**

Many of the proposals do not require the provision of additional resources; however we recognise that organisational changes, both structural and cultural, will be necessary to drive our strategic commitment to vulnerable customers. We have also identified a number of activities and proposals which do have cost implications; however we are not seeking any additional funding for our activities in this area.

We believe that our developments across a broad range of customer service measures, including relevant stakeholder engagement, will drive sufficient incentive reward from the Broad Measure of Customer Service and the Interruptions Incentive Scheme to support these measures without a specific funding request.

The initiatives requiring investment are as follows:

- **IT systems for Customer Relationship Management.**
- **Resilience improvements of networks supplying regional hospitals.**
- **Resilience improvements of networks supplying a high density of vulnerable customers.**
- **Welfare provisions for vulnerable customers.**

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Our communication strategies in relation to vulnerable customers, both for promoting the service and for ongoing contact, are at the heart of the ongoing process for continual development of our plans throughout RIIO-ED1 and beyond. Our core strategy is to gain insight into the needs of groups of vulnerable customers by consulting with key agencies, and then to collaborate with them to deliver appropriate services. We fully understand that this approach cannot be used to override the needs of individual customers; however we Electricity North West Limited 6 17 March 2014 believe that the pooling of information and expertise is key to developing a properly considered action plan. We envisage that the enhancement of data will best be achieved by establishing a network of links with other organisations and targeting specific areas of customer data. For example, we are seeking to refresh our priority services data through relationships established with organisations having allied interests such as other network operators, councils and charities. This would be supplemented by the development of scripts for use by the contact centre to obtain relevant data directly from customers.

This engagement is targeted to deliver the following:

- **Provide the means for promoting the PSR to all our customers;**
- **Facilitate the regular refresh of the PSR data;**
- **Improve the data quality of our PSR;**
- **Enhance the services we provide to customers on our PSR; and**
- **Develop initiatives with agencies concerned with vulnerable customers to provide mutual support (eg to provide on-site support following loss of supply)**



**Our strategy for 2014/15 has been focusing on understanding where we need to start and building a strong foundation agreed by stakeholders and seen as best practice within the industry.**

# Shaping our strategy

***During 2013/14 we appointed a Vulnerable Customer Manager to help us drive changes to improve our services and develop our vulnerable customer strategy.***

The strategy aim is 'To prepare, be there for and delight our customers who need extra support during their time of need and to work with communities and agencies so that our services are accessible to everyone.'

The strategy has five areas of focus:

- **British Standard of vulnerability**
- **Raising awareness**
- **Services**
- **Data**
- **Future development.**

Our strategy for 2014/15 has been focusing on understanding where we need to start and building a strong foundation agreed by stakeholders and seen as best practice within the industry. We have worked with local authorities to understand areas of high vulnerability and focused on working with their communities.

The foundations we have built within the business are:

1. Defining, documenting and embedding processes for additional support for vulnerable customers as defined in the BSI.
2. Continuing to build up community relationships, and raising awareness of the additional, tailored services we offer vulnerable customers.
3. Developing an IT system that enables us to manage customer data more efficiently and effectively, helping us improve support for vulnerable customers

## Identifying vulnerable customer 'hot spots'

We have focused our efforts over the past year in Cumbria in the north of our operating area. Cumbria is the second least densely populated county in England and has an older population than the national average; 27% of residents are aged 60+ compared to just 22% nationally.

The area is supplied predominately through overhead lines and is exposed to high winds, flooding and snow fall so it is right that we focus our attention and resources on this area in particular.

Explain briefly what the focus has been on e.g. building partnerships, developing bespoke support etc.

## Transient vulnerability

need a clearer, more straightforward explanation here of provision for transients customers, and what the CRM system is, and how it has been adapted.

We have embraced the BSI standard of vulnerability and our work on managing and understanding different vulnerabilities and transient vulnerability has led to developments within the Customer Relationship Management system. The system to be implemented in 2015 will provide the ability for Electricity North West customers to start, stop and restart their periods of vulnerability as they see appropriate. This area may include examples of pregnancy, loss of work, or even just winter periods with dark nights. The training within the contact centre supported by the British Red Cross has focused on this area for the past 18 months. 70 customer advisors have trained over the period and in-house refreshers are carried out during the winter periods in preparation for any significant events.



## Investing in our network for vulnerable customers

Our stakeholder engagement has told us that our customers have many of the same needs but certain groups have a greater dependency on our services for their wellbeing than others.

For example hospitals with an accident and emergency unit provide a vital service to the communities we serve and protracted loss of power can cause significant distress. Other examples include areas where there are a higher than normal proportion of PSR customers, nursing homes and sheltered housing.



In response to this engagement, we included investment in our RIIO-ED1 plans to help ensure these customers receive the service they need when there is a fault on the network. We will install new technology to our network feeding 56 hospitals and the 87 substations serving high numbers of PSR customers over the RIIO-ED1 period. Recognising how important assurance of power supply is to these customers, we have made an early start investing over £580,000 in remote control and automation technology. This has already secured 31 of the hospital sites in 2014/15 and we will complete the remainder of the work as one of our highest priority investment programmes.

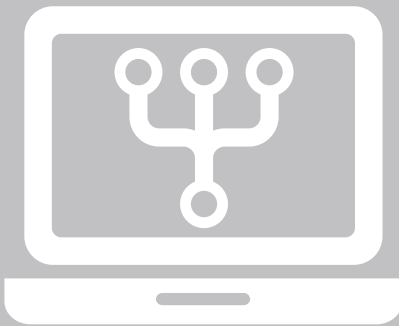


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# Improving our data

***We want to understand and perform for our customers with the same efficiency and effectiveness that we apply to looking after our network assets. This means making the most of the information currently available to us and looking forward to how that will be enhanced by future developments, both in our company and across the industry as a whole. The introduction of Smart Meters, which will be rolled out from the beginning of 2015, will help us bridge a major gap in our customer information.***



In the longer term (towards the end of RIIO-ED1 and throughout RIIO-ED2) we see significant potential to improve customer service through enhancing:

- Customer communication and interaction;
- Network performance monitoring;
- Management of power outages;
- Provision of connections;
- Demand Side Response; and
- Management of losses.

Smart Meter data on its own, however, is only part of the answer. It will certainly help us understand our customers' interactions with the network better but we need to do more to understand their wider relationships with our business as a whole.

We recognise that Customer Relationship Management extends beyond the systems for holding data itself to how we obtain the data and how we use it. We anticipate that our relationship with our customers will develop over time and that in the future there will be greater need for:

- Anticipating customer needs and desires;
- Segmentation of the customer base, using multiple factors, leading to more personalised services;
- Proactive initiation of services using intelligent software; and
- Empowered employees who can resolve issues quickly, supported by well-informed management.

We believe that customer satisfaction scores will be seen as a key indicator of confidence in our business, and this will become increasingly important because trust will be a major factor in persuading customers to share information and collaborate in new service applications. We expect that:

- Customers will increasingly expect offerings to be bespoke, personalised, or have the appearance of being tailored to their needs;
- Customer preferences and tastes will change more quickly; and
- Empowered customers will be increasingly confident in sharing their details in return for personalised and value-add services, but only on their terms and with organisations they trust.

Our vision is to hold all our customer data in one location, allowing us to offer a better more personalised service to our customers and creating a trusting relationship. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) will help us understand our customers' situations and experiences with Electricity North West by holding all the data in one location, which will benefit the customer in their interactions with us.

Our strategy is to use the example of vulnerable customers to drive the development of CRM for all our customers. We believe that if our CRM systems and processes are designed with the vulnerable customer in mind, then they will be fit for purpose in addressing the needs of the wider customer base. For example, we have identified the need to be able to search for data by location and also by customer as we are not generally notified if a customer moves property. We also need the flexibility to record transient cases of vulnerability and report areas where there is high density of fuel poor. In the case of vulnerable customers it is essential to their quality of life that we record everything we learn about them and utilise this for future dealings with them.







## Working with local authorities

Our strategy for 2014/15 has been focusing on understanding where we need to start and building a strong foundation agreed by stakeholders and seen as best practice within the industry. We have worked with local authorities to understand areas of high vulnerability and focused on working with their communities.

## Gathering data

### Stakeholder survey:

Objectives:

- To understand stakeholders current perceptions of the service provision to vulnerable customers.
- To identify areas of the service that require improvement

### Stakeholder feedback:

1. A targeted campaign at raising awareness of the PSR
2. Develop a process for ensuring the accuracy of the PSR database is improved/ maintained through a more concerted effort to communicate with customers listed as vulnerable
3. Develop a new innovative community 'self-serving' initiative – in which volunteers assist in caring for vulnerable customers during unplanned faults- this will be investigated further
4. Expand upon the list of agencies we are engaging with, particular large charities such as Age UK, and make customers aware of the association.

### Vulnerable customer survey

Vulnerable Customers survey conducted in April sought to understand the expectations PSR customers have and where we can improve the service we provide to them

- 68% of PSR customers are confident in the service they receive from us
- 87% Levels of confidence could increase to 87% if the right strategy is implemented
- Priority service restoration was considered the most important strategy to implement

- 74% felt an Induction Pack would be helpful when signing up to the PSR. The Induction Pack should include: Our contact details, a leaflet explaining the PSR, either wind-up torch or rechargeable light bulb
- The required advance notice of PSIs 4 working days and they prefer to be warned of a PSI by phone.
- In general contact with these customers should be done over the phone
- Re-contacting customers to verify the data held on the PSR is an opportunity to send them a newsletter just to update them on any developments or generally remind them of the benefits they receive by being on the PSR.

**Winter weather surveys (n=500) winter weather is when customers are most vulnerable and that some customers can become vulnerable for the first time during power outages in cold weather.**

Objective: Research was required to assist Electricity North West with its business planning for adverse weather winter conditions as part of a more proactive strategy to help its customers get ready for the winter.

Key insight - timing of communication during adverse weather

- **63% of customers feel that we should be proactive in communicating to customers in the event of bad weather, with the majority of customers in favour for us to notify them when an advanced weather warning is issued by weather forecasters (45%).**
  - A huge 89% of customers agree that information and support should be communicated to them three days before anticipation of adverse weather.



Our vision is to hold all our customer data in one location, allowing us to offer a better more personalised service to our customers and creating a trusting relationship.

## Vulnerable customer surveys

*We have carried out 300 telephone surveys with vulnerable customers to understand what they believe is important during a power cut. The feedback from this survey will be reviewed and compared against the aims of 2015/16 plan and if required alter our path of priorities.*



# Managing and supporting our Priority Services Register

## Promoting the PSR to new customers

### *Promotional activity in Cumbria*

This year Electricity North West joined Cumbria Community Messaging - a new scheme where we can send alerts to parish councils, local councillors or anyone else signed up to receive the alerts. This is great local initiative to let a close community prepare for bad weather or access information during incidents to help support each other. Throughout 2014/15 we have joined and attended a number of resilience events to raise awareness and support local groups.

Our Vulnerable Customer Manager and Customer Champions have attended events alongside:

- **South Lakeland District Council**
- **Cumbria Neighbourhood Watch.**

Throughout 2014/15 we have joined and attended a number of resilience events to raise awareness and support local groups.





After consulting stakeholders, we introduced a new system in 2015 which means that any customer who calls our emergency line from a number registered on our Priority Services Register will bypass our automated system and be put straight through to a customer service representative, or prioritised in a queue.

# Making our support for vulnerable customers 'business as usual'

## Generators for vulnerable customers

We have developed a new strategy to connect additional generators during faults and planned supply interruptions to provide power to our most vulnerable customers.

Generators are now available on a case-by-case basis using set criteria to prioritise those most in need. In 14/15 we provided generators to more than 500 vulnerable customers, mainly during faults. In 15/16 we aim to extend this strategy to proactively provide generators during more planned work.

## Phone priority for vulnerable customers

We were aware that some other DNOs had begun to use separate emergency phone numbers for customers on their Priority Services Register. We liked the idea of a prioritised line for vulnerable customers, but were also aware of potential confusion over promoting more than one number.

After consulting stakeholders, we introduced a new system in 2015 which means that any customer who calls our emergency line from a number registered on our Priority Services Register will bypass our automated system and be put straight through to a customer service representative, or prioritised in a queue.

## Trip switch call out

Through call and data analysis we identified that many vulnerable customers contact us regarding a loss of power where the fault is likely to be on the customer's side, rather than our network. In these circumstances our standard approach is to advise customers to check their trip switches.

However, a number of vulnerable customers had told us that their meter is above the front door, or in another inaccessible place, and they had no one to help them check.

In September 2014, we implemented a trial to go out to customers in this position to check their trip switches for them. In the seven months to April 2015 we carried out 42 visits where the issue was on the customer's side. We reset trip switches and also provided vulnerable customer packs as well as contact details of support agencies to help the customer. This trial has now become business as usual.

## Proactive weather warnings

In 2014, we carried out a trial of proactive weather warnings last for our vulnerable customers.

Feedback, via a telephone survey, revealed that 75% of customers believed the approach was useful, and should continue.

In response, we established a business process to implement communication through SMS texting, calls and emails. During the winter of 2014/15 we issued 274,381 texts, 254 emails and 258 telephone calls to Priority Service Registered Customers.

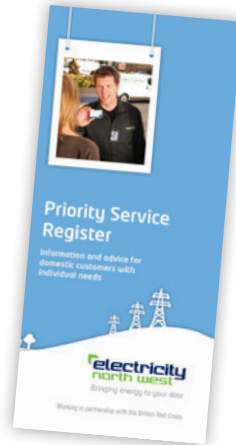






## Iviti power cut-proof light bulb trial

Electricity North West has committed to commence a trial during the summer of 2015 using Iviti light bulbs. The light bulb has a three-hour back charge so once power has been lost property lighting can still be provided. The trial will provide 50 vulnerable customers with three light bulbs to provide lighting in the stairwell and two other rooms selected by the customer. Following the trial we will be seeking feedback to understand the success and benefit to the customers to understand whether this is an area to progress.



## PSR welcome pack

In a recent survey of our PSR customers, 46% said they would find a leaflet explaining the welfare options useful. In response, we have developed a welcome pack which includes our contact details, and the welfare support available. We are also looking at developing a glow in the dark fridge magnet with our contact details on it, so that we can be easily contacted in the event of a power cut.

## Operational standards training, including vulnerable customer training

**Internal training video** – Following some feedback from one of our Priority Service Customer following a home visit she experienced we made the decision to turn this situation round and work alongside her to understand the key areas that caused her concern. Following the site visit she agreed to work with us to produce an internal training video, along with our Vulnerable Customer Manager so she could explain in her own words how the visit made her feel and how we could have approached the situation better. This video is part of our Operational Standards Training and forms part of the Vulnerable Customer module, the training is being rolled out to over 1000 members of customer staff and our contractors. The aim is for people to understand the impact they can have on a customer and the importance of the customer expecting their visiting and treating customers as individual. The overall training is aimed to increase the confidence of our staff when

they come across a customer that may have additional needs during a power cut, we also remind them of the services we have available to our customers and how they can mobilise them.

**External video** – We know that the awareness of our Priority Service Register and welfare support is low and although we have been working hard with communities across our region to help us raise awareness we understand that there are other options available to promote it. Our Vulnerable Customer Manager alongside a representative from the British Red Cross have developed the video which explains the register, who is eligible to sign up, how to sign up and what support we offer. The video is available on our YouTube channel but we also regularly promote through other social media channels and also through our partner agencies, such as Cumbria Community Messaging.



Electricity North West has committed to commence a trial during the summer of 2015 using Iviti light bulbs. The light bulb has a three-hour back charge so once power has been lost property lighting can still be provided.







In addition to publicising the PSR on our website, we have developed a contact strategy based on establishing a network of links with suppliers, other network companies, local stakeholders and agencies working with vulnerable consumers.

## Working in partnership

***We recognise that the data that we hold on vulnerable customers is in need of improvement in terms of both quantity (ie coverage of all customers who would benefit) and also quality (ie identifying the specific needs of individual customers).***

We plan to address this issue by being more proactive in publicising the Priority Services Register, and in obtaining data from a number of sources. We have trained our customerfacing people to recognise potential PSR customers and, where this is the case, provide a proactive registration service. We will ensure that all our front-line people including our contractors are regularly trained in these aspects on an ongoing basis. We will ensure that our PSR customers are contacted a minimum of once every other year so that the information we hold is up to date.

In addition to publicising the PSR on our website, we have developed a contact strategy based on establishing a network of links with suppliers, other network companies, local stakeholders and agencies working with vulnerable consumers. Our strategy and services will be further enhanced through our contact with relevant stakeholders. We have contacted a wide range of stakeholders who work with customers of different stages of vulnerability, for example:



**BritishRedCross**

### **British Red Cross**

We partner with the British Red Cross in order to provide customers with practical and personal support particularly if they are without power. The partnership provides us with invaluable insights into the needs of customers in this situation.



**Action for Warm Homes**

### **National Energy Action (NEA)**

We have worked with them on various projects including the evaluation of our educational schemes to include fuel efficiency messages, and on a scheme in Stockport with the dual aim of lowering network load whilst helping to alleviate fuel poverty in the area. We also have an NEA representative on our External Stakeholder Panel to help guide and shape our policies with regards to vulnerable customers.

We plan to establish a working group with external agencies that will meet twice a year to review service delivery performance and examine opportunities to enhance it, utilising the feedback from our stakeholder engagement. We believe that by facilitating this working together in support partnerships we will improve knowledge on such customers and find shared innovative solutions.

The strategy will drive a shared list of vulnerable customers and locations in the North West of England. We are committed to working with all stakeholders on sharing information within the requirements of the Data Protection Act in order to improve the delivery of necessary assistance to customers.



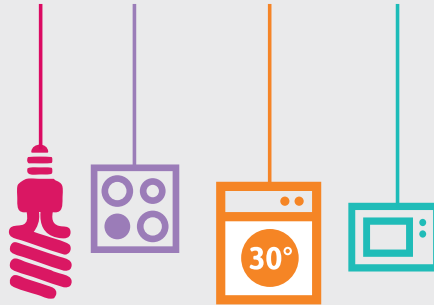
## Power Saver Challenge

Power Saver Challenge is a community project delivered in partnership with Stockport Council and National Energy Action to encourage customers to reduce their household energy consumption by 10%, by making small, everyday changes around the home.

Working in an deprived area of Stockport that was reaching network capacity and was in need of a new substation to cope with increased demand, we recruited 25% of the population in our target area. We wanted to see if we could delay – or prevent altogether – the need for this infrastructure upgrade, by reducing local families' electricity consumption, with a particular focus on peak times of use.



By the beginning of February 2015, 60% of participating teams had saved the target 10% or more electricity, measured against the same period last year (with cold-weather weightings applied). This is a great result – and ahead of our KPI of a 50% completion rate. A 10% saving



equates to £59 on the average annual electricity bill – a significant amount, especially for low income households who are vulnerable to fuel poverty.

A sizeable proportion of the local community in the trial area was either in fuel poverty, or risked falling into fuel poverty.

Through our joint workshops with Stockport Council and our home energy saving audits delivered by National Energy Action, we helped to identify several families at risk of fuel poverty, and direct them to the most appropriate support.

We also offered prizes to individuals of a AAA-rated kitchen appliance. The cost of replacing a broken white good can often prove a tipping point for those on the brink of fuel poverty.

Power Saver Challenge is an holistic, engaging and cost-effective model that is repeatable and sustainable. It saves money for DNOs and customers and also helps reduce fuel poverty.

We are now looking at new areas for a second trial helping us refine our learning before rolling the programme out more widely. We have also held a number of dissemination events on the challenge, including to other DNOs.



**POWER  
SAVER**  
challenge



**£59**  
AVERAGE SAVING  
TO CUSTOMERS



**£1m**

POTENTIAL  
SAVINGS IN  
NETWORK  
INVESTMENT



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