



2014-15 CONSUMER VULNERABILITY



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PUTTING VULNERABLE CONSUMERS FIRST

Our support for our more vulnerable consumers is shaped by our stakeholders, central to our service promises and is being judged against increasingly high standards.

I don't think there is an area in our business where our management perspective has changed more in recent years than the services we provide to those that need our help the most.

It's not news to us that everyone is more vulnerable during a power cut, and that some are more reliant on electricity than others. But we are now much more conscious that vulnerability is not limited to those who are on our Priority Services Register. We are now building a set of services that recognise that vulnerability can be transient for some and can change over time. For example, in recognising that one size doesn't fit all, we have had to adapt to make sure that our employees are trained to identify those needs and to know that our support services are available to any customer who has particular need during a power cut, and is trained to identify their needs. We're very conscious of the potential that our role as the local power distributor has to offer to the wider community, and particularly those on our register, if we forge the right relationships with others and develop new ways of handling the data that

exists across different agencies.

Most of the initiatives included in this document stem from discussions with our customers and stakeholders to understand properly what service would make the biggest difference to those most in need. Our methodical approach ensures we understand the needs and we consult about how best to deliver our services before piloting and running them. Our long-standing Social Issues Expert Group, our work with the NEA Fuel Poverty forums and our relationships with the regional voluntary sector umbrella bodies – VONNE and Involve – are particularly influential.

In addition to setting out the way that we develop our strategy and the governance arrangements that hold it all in place, across pages 2-4, we've chosen to illustrate how our services come together in practice through two case studies. The first comes from Bradford, and focuses on the way that different strands of our services knit together to care for some of our more vulnerable customers. The second is from the North East, and focuses on our customer care operations where we worked hard to

help those who were most vulnerable in the communities hardest hit by a series of lightning strikes during the summer of 2015. We've highlighted some of the key ways we meet Ofgem's requirements in the 'post-it' style boxes in the top right of some of the pages.

At the end of the document, we set out some of the key actions we will take over the next 12 months to improve our service further. We know we need to do more work on the quality of data of our Priority Services Register, we have a clear path to achieve the BSI standard for consumer vulnerability, and we will take the necessary steps to achieve the Action on Hearing Loss standard.

Thank you for taking the time to read about our approach and activities in this important area of our work. We're proud of what we've achieved so far, but know there is much more we can do.

Phil Jones,
Chief Executive



NORTHERN POWERGRID'S WELL JUSTIFIED BUSINESS PLAN, 2015-2023, SAYS

“Our primary social obligations are to provide a reliable electricity supply and minimise the costs of our operations for our customers. Here we differ from the energy supply companies, whose obligations are well defined in the various social schemes they are mandated to support. However, our local role gives us a universal relevance in the communities we serve and our plan recognises the potential value of that role in a new way.”

“It is crucial that we continue to develop more accurate information about our customers and identify those that are vulnerable, and understand their diverse needs. The scale of the impact of a power cut in these households can vary greatly dependent on the particular services... Our PSR is the primary mechanism through which we identify who our vulnerable customers are, and what the nature of their reliance on electricity is.”

OUR STAKEHOLDERS – EVERYONE AND ANYONE

Our Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability Policies are integrated into the way the company works. Experts in services for vulnerable consumers sit on both our Stakeholder Panel and our Social Issues Expert Group; and we work with Safeguarding Adult Boards, Resilience Forums and Fuel Poverty Forums across our distribution territory.

As a result, we are close to those who work day-to-day with the most vulnerable in society, and importantly we are able to understand the range of different groups of vulnerable people – those who are vulnerable through poverty, housing problems, health, disability, frailty, isolation or social circumstances. Each group has different ways in which a network operator can support them and it is a challenge that we are acutely aware of when devising our services for vulnerable customers.

Our Stakeholder engagement strategy outlines our approach to garner opinions across our stakeholder and consumer base and ensures we respond to them appropriately.

We engage with a range of other groups, statutory, private and voluntary, to build networks and understand service users needs and opportunities. In addition to our day-to-day interactions with our customers, we undertake a survey twice a year of our Priority Services customers which helps us understand their needs and how we can improve the services we offer. Infrastructure North is a partnership with Northern Gas Networks and the water companies in our area, that we have been in since 2013. Our partnership with the other utilities is wide-ranging, from economic coordination, running social programmes together and through working to improve our collective understanding of our vulnerable customers.

The partnership has been fruitful across all our sectors, with two recent examples to highlight – a project with Northern Gas Networks for referring customers benefiting from an Assisted Gas Connection Voucher to our Priority Services Register as a household in fuel poverty; and the two 'Working Together' events in November 2015. Professionals and practitioners from across housing, social care, health and voluntary sectors will come together to discuss our respective services for vulnerable consumers and advise on how we can improve them and work better with external partners. One of the outcomes we anticipate from the events is a closer collaboration with these sectors, including better signposting both onto and from our Priority Services Register.

OUR SERVICES

- › We have improved our online registration, giving more ways to register on our PSR
- › We offer a wide range of support services, tailored to individual need
- › We promote our PSR using social media, roadshows, local resilience events and radio campaigns
- › We work with stakeholders to maximise the number of vulnerable customers we can reach

Our Working Together events, in conjunction with our partners in Infrastructure North, is closely modelled on our Community Energy events earlier in the year



Our Online community has over 1,500 members and acts as a sounding board for issues across our business. The community comprises a cross section of customers who have been in touch with us and regularly provides useful feedback on how we operate across a wide range of issues.

from these questions included reminding us that we needed to ensure Priority Services customers were aware of the services they could expect from us, and suggesting that our priorities should include ensuring that we work closely with the NHS and medical equipment suppliers for those with a dependency on medical equipment.

- We maximise the number of channels our customers can use to interact with us
- We use a range of data to steer our social programme and our support services
- We are implementing new data systems, and refreshing our PSR data

All stakeholder and customer feedback

OPERATIONAL: ISSUE / TOPIC / RESPONSE

- SOCIAL ISSUES EXPERT GROUP
- OTHER STAKEHOLDER AND CUSTOMER FEEDBACK INCLUDING SURVEY DATA
- ONLINE COMMUNITY
- STAKEHOLDER PANEL

STRATEGIC: ISSUE / TOPIC / RESPONSE

- SOCIAL PROGRAMME BOARD
- EXECUTIVE MEETINGS
- TEN YEAR BUSINESS PLAN

Flow and Information:

- MONTHLY REPORTS:** From top to SOCIAL PROGRAMME BOARD.
- OPERATIONAL DIRECTION:** From SOCIAL PROGRAMME BOARD to TEN YEAR BUSINESS PLAN.
- STRATEGIC DIRECTION:** From EXECUTIVE MEETINGS to TEN YEAR BUSINESS PLAN.
- OPERATIONAL DECISIONS:** From SOCIAL PROGRAMME BOARD to bottom.
- Emerging and existing trend analysis:** From EXECUTIVE MEETINGS to SOCIAL PROGRAMME BOARD.
- Annual stakeholder report:** From top right to SOCIAL PROGRAMME BOARD.

Implement decisions inform stakeholders and customers

NORTHERN POWERGRID'S WELL JUSTIFIED BUSINESS PLAN, 2015-2023

OUR SOCIAL ISSUES EXPERT GROUP

Our Social Issues Expert Group is independently chaired, by Derek Lickorish (former chair of the government's Fuel Poverty Advisory Group) and its membership includes representatives from NEA, Citizens Advice, VONNE and the Red Cross. Between them, they bring extensive experience of working with and providing services for vulnerable customers and we are grateful for the robust challenge they bring in scrutinising our plans. Our Executives play an active role in the Group's work.

We update members on the pressing issues within the wider business and discuss the key areas where feedback from external partners would help us most develop our policies for vulnerable customers. They play a 'critical friend' role, providing external expertise and challenging us on how our services will be measured and could be improved. The group has met four times in 2015:

JANUARY

In January, the Group discussed the proposed changes to our Priority Services Policy, including categorisation, the higher payments policy and the most appropriate additional

services we could offer to different customers on the Register. The group's feedback contributed hugely to the development of our own policy, including how we grouped the different categories together and the decision to offer some of them double the statutory payment in the event of a qualifying outage

APRIL

In April we discussed the composition of our Care Quality Indicator and the outcome of the independently conducted focus groups with frontline Northern Powergrid staff. Following feedback from the Group, we revised our plans for the Indicator, and following further discussion at the group meeting in July it has now become part of our reporting regime.

JULY

In July the Group spent time listening to calls from our Contact Centre, focussing on the calls made by our Priority Services team. It provided them with an insight into how the company's day to day operations cater for vulnerable customers and is an invitation we have extended to a range of stakeholders with an interest in that aspect of our services.

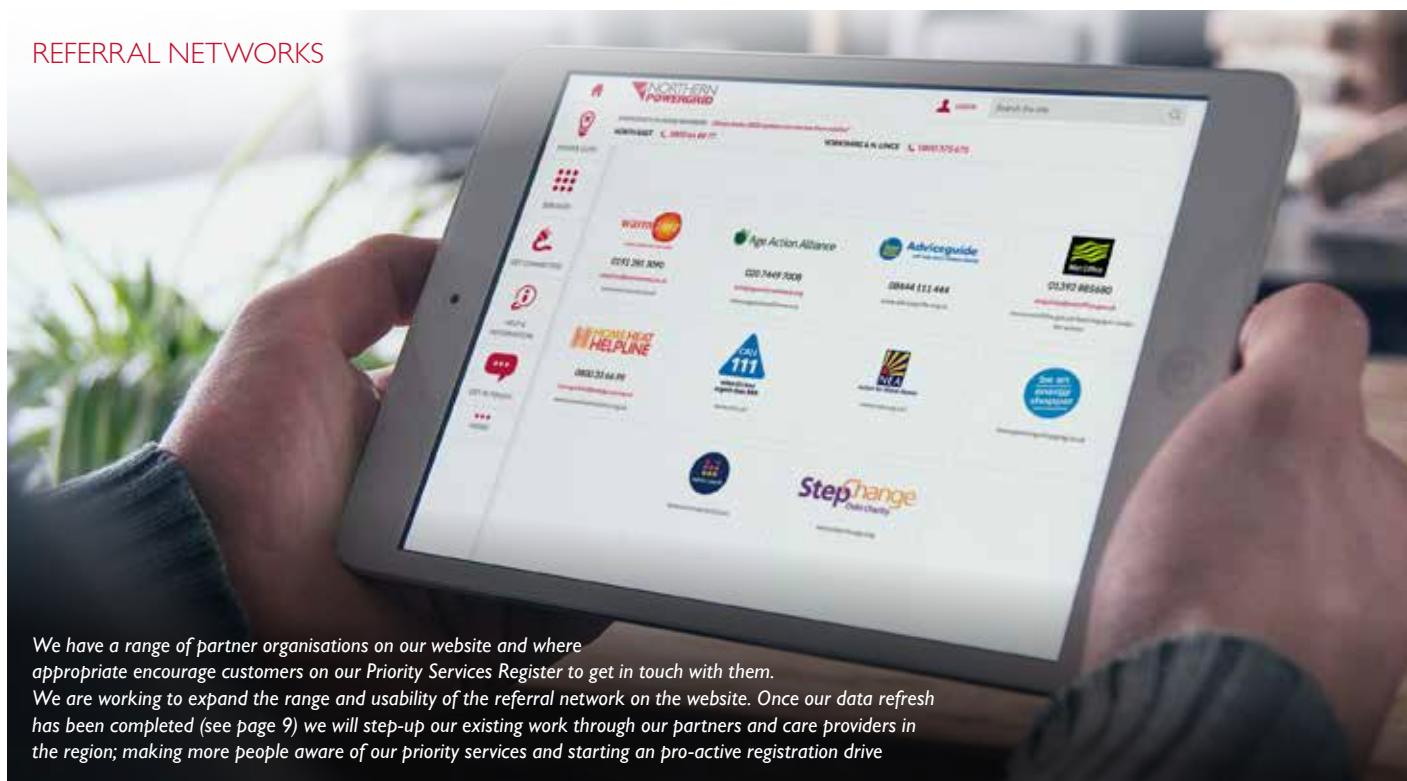
OCTOBER

In October, the Group's discussions included whether, with the increasingly close links between Northern Powergrid and Northern Gas Networks, the group should formally be shared between the two companies. They also advised us on our approach to the data refresh of our PSR which we cover in more detail on page 9.

OTHER GROUPS

Our Expert Group is complemented by our external Stakeholder Panel which discusses issues across the business and has representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors; and our internal Social Programme Board comprised of staff from across the business who agree how we best respond to our social responsibilities. Relevant issues recently discussed by the Stakeholder Panel include the impact on more vulnerable customers of the smart meter roll-out and the development of smart grids and how we can play an effective role in these areas beyond that of the traditional DNO.

REFERRAL NETWORKS



We have a range of partner organisations on our website and where appropriate encourage customers on our Priority Services Register to get in touch with them. We are working to expand the range and usability of the referral network on the website. Once our data refresh has been completed (see page 9) we will step-up our existing work through our partners and care providers in the region; making more people aware of our priority services and starting an pro-active registration drive

Bradford District is in the top 10% deprived districts for both Yorkshire and England. We use socio-economic and PSR data to help target our social programmes and determine where we can help most during an outage



- 22% of local residents report that they struggle to pay for heating and hot water
- 94 out of 307 neighbourhoods (Lower Super Output Areas) are in the most deprived 10% in England - a third of Bradford's population
- 32.5% of children are in families in receipt of Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance or whose income is <60% of median income (%) – above the England average of 24.5%
- There are more than 22,000 customers on our PSR in the city

CASE STUDY: BRADFORD

During the summer of 2015 we embarked on a new multi-partner project to improve energy affordability for the long term among vulnerable households in the Bradford and Leeds area.

We teamed up with Northern Gas Networks to develop a project that built on our existing partnership networks and provided long term solutions. We identified that our existing partnerships with the Trussell Trust and Bradford Children's Society would be a good opportunity to refer households on to the local Groundwork team who had developed an energy affordability scheme ('Green Doctors') in conjunction with local authorities.

During September 2015 the Green Doctors visited four foodbanks in the area. On all occasions they stayed from opening to closing, and used the time to speak to staff to provide them with an in-depth knowledge of their service, provided case studies to improve understanding of their service and a guide of how to refer people. They also provided staff with leaflets and contact details. Where possible service users were booked in for Green Doctor visits on the day, otherwise referrals for future visits were made.

As the project draws to a close we're evaluating its success. A detailed project

report will be produced and we will examine the best way of taking the project forward, including the referral process and opportunities for greater integration with other partners.

We've allocated some funding within our 2016/17 budget for a similar scheme and will be assessing the best way forward in the new year. This will be informed by the final evaluation, socio-economic maps and discussions with partners about the best way of developing the scheme to more households across our distribution territory.



Yorks&Humber TT RDO @TT_YHRDO

Jul 2

Amazing generosity & a sterling effort by [@Northpowergrid](#) collecting 4 BurngreaveFB [@TrussellTrust](#) #everycanhelps



Reply Retweet Favourite

OUR STRATEGY

- We run targeted training with our customer facing staff, so they can identify vulnerability and understand the services we offer
- We include our PSR and support services in our company wide Customer Experience Improvement plan, understanding that those services may also help non-vulnerable customers

SUMMER 2015 OUTAGE

In August, 84 customers in North West Bradford had an outage lasting almost 14 hours. Two families living on the same street were concerned for their children. It was the school holidays, and the only food they had in their houses was freezer food. Neither family had available disposable income to take their children out, and were concerned that they would be unable to feed their children during a power cut of this duration. They got in touch with us and we felt that the right thing to do was to arrange for food to be delivered, which meant happy parents and very happy children!

CASE STUDY: NORTH EAST

Severe lightning storms caused damage and disruption to areas of our network over two separate major incidents in early July 2015; 57,500 households were without power on 1st July, and 27,000 households were affected on 4th July. The very nature of our business is to respond appropriately, and to restore power to anyone affected as soon as possible. We are also extremely mindful of the consumer and community profiles of the areas affected, and ensure services are deployed as required to help the most vulnerable in our society.

Each major incident has a Customer Welfare Co-ordinator (CWC) appointed who sits on the group steering our response. The CWC ensures services are arranged for individual customers requiring assistance, and deployed to the communities worst affected by the power cut. These services

run separately to our Operations teams, whose focus will always be to restore the power as soon as possible.

We have a fleet of five Customer Support Vehicles across the region, which were deployed to 19 separate locations over the period, providing help and assistance to a potential 8,500 customers, 636 of whom were on our Priority Services Register. Our staff ambassadors volunteer in their own time, and the willingness to go out to help our customers at their time of need was overwhelming. They were able to provide face-to-face information, a listening ear and some reassurance to customers who were concerned about the power cut, and the affect it was having on their families.

Equipped with the addresses of all affected customers on our Priority Services Register,

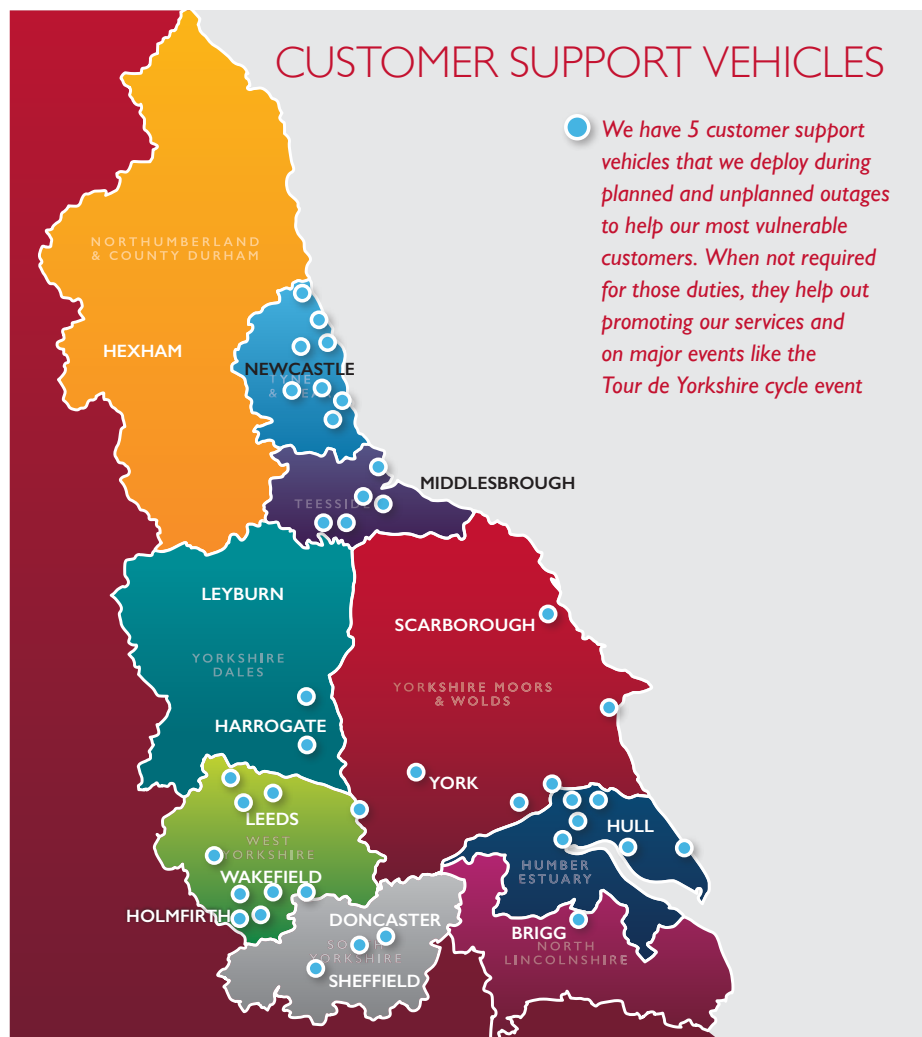
our ambassadors were able to door-knock to ensure the residents were okay. Those face-to-face interactions helped us to become aware of a number of customers who required additional support but had been unable to call in themselves.

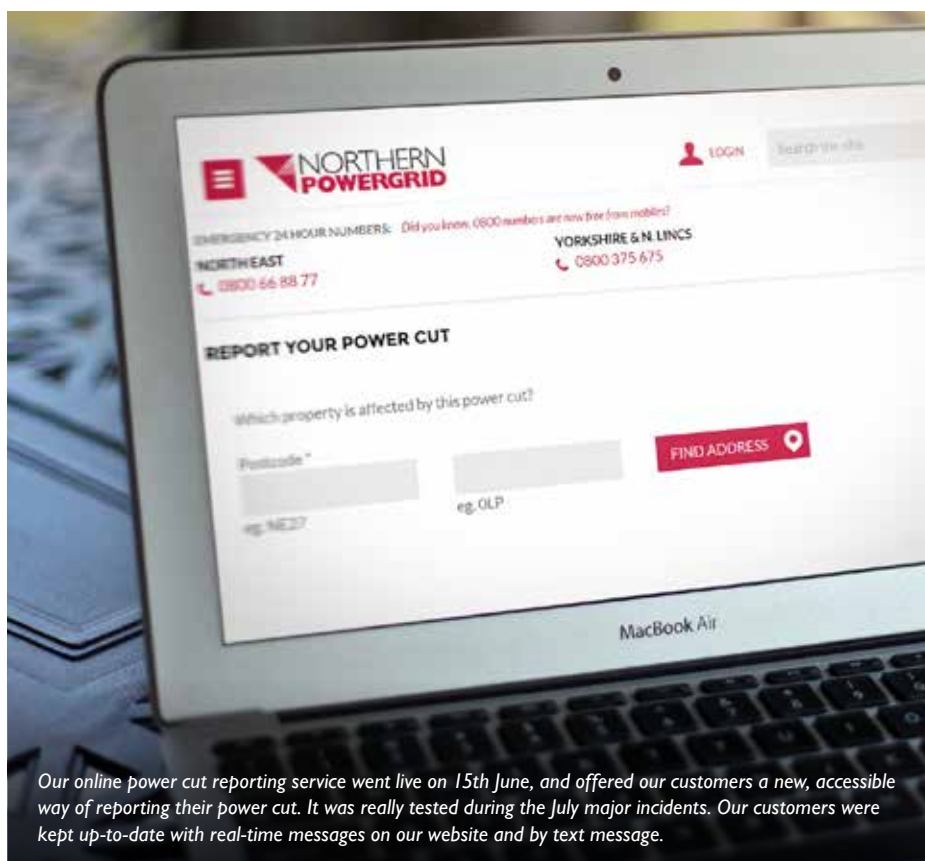
This was the first time our customers were able to get in touch with us digitally, to report a power cut during a major incident. This allowed our contact centre staff to focus on having quality conversations and identifying vulnerability without time pressure. We also made use of social media, offering every customer the most appropriate method of communication and accessing updates for their individual needs.

If a customer logged their power cut online and had a Priority need, an email was automatically triggered to our Priority Services Co-ordinator, allowing them to make contact with each customer to discuss their situation, and offer support and advice. For example, should a customer be reliant on an oxygen concentrator, we would either advise them to contact their Home Oxygen Provider, or would do so on their behalf, to arrange for additional back-up cylinders to be delivered at no cost to the customer.

DOUBLE AND QUICKER PAYMENTS

As they had been without power for 12 hours, we immediately initiated our payment process. Within our 2015-23 Business Plan we recognised that vulnerability includes customers for whom the impact of a power cut is significantly higher than others. Because of this, we have chosen to double this guaranteed standard payment to £200 for our qualifying customers. 13 of our most vulnerable customers benefited from the offer of this payment in this incident with our remaining domestic customers offered a payment of £100. Our plan (see page 10) for next year is to be able to start sending cash to qualifying customers through paypoint or a similar technology, getting the payment to the customer shortly after or even during the incident.





Our online power cut reporting service went live on 15th June, and offered our customers a new, accessible way of reporting their power cut. It was really tested during the July major incidents. Our customers were kept up-to-date with real-time messages on our website and by text message.



Our five Customer Support Vehicles promote our services during major events (shown here). During power outages they are focussed on where they can help our priority customers the most. They can provide the following services:

- Hot water, drinks and snacks
- A fridge to store refrigerated medication
- A microwave to heat food
- Charging points for mobile devices
- Practical items such as torches, hats, gloves and blankets

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

- › We understand the effect a power cut has on someone reliant on oxygen due to our relationships with Home Oxygen Providers, and we share this information with industry partners
- › We pilot projects that could be scaled up and have a significant impact in our communities
- › We are developing partnerships with Safeguarding Adults Board and Care Management teams, to direct our customers to other services which can help them

SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED...

Mr and Mrs L, whose 18 month old granddaughter was heavily reliant on various medical equipment including a ventilator and feeding machine. They were using the back-up battery pack for her equipment, but only had a limited time remaining. Our ambassadors made the CWC aware of their situation, and the CWC took over contact with the customer, advising them to seek medical advice while we were sourcing a solution. Unfortunately the little girl required a specific ambulance to transport her to hospital, which was unavailable so medical support was not a suitable option. We were able to supply a generator to get the medical equipment back up and running for the family.



Northern Powergrid
@Northernpowergrid

Jul 2

We've restored approx 55,800 customers since lightning affected our network yesterday afternoon & again at midnight.

Reply Retweet Favourite



Samantha McSorley
@berrywoman30

Jul 2

@northpowergrid hello. Please pass on my thanks to all the engineers and staff who have helped restore our power after a long 24 hours! Xxx

Reply Retweet Favourite

A WIDE RANGE OF SERVICES

In addition to the services we were able to illustrate through the two case studies, we have a wide range of other services that help our more vulnerable customers, from helping communities with their energy costs to funding and volunteering with foodbanks.

Our Community Energy work has helped many communities take a step forward in becoming more energy self-sufficient. We were nominated for an award at the national Community Energy Conference and our North East Community Energy project has been recognised for its innovation by both DECC and Community Energy England. One of the projects we have supported through our annual seed fund was the International Community Organisation of Sunderland which used its funding to roll out a customised one-to-one engagement programme across their area allowing people in wards with high levels of deprivation to get energy advice, and reduce their energy consumption and bills.

HELPING CONSUMERS WITH THEIR ENERGY BILLS

In the autumn of 2014 we started working with Newcastle Citizens Advice on a two year project to employ a fuel debt advice worker. She works with clients directly and provides training to volunteers at the CAB. She's taken a qualification in fuel debt advice and sees 100 clients each quarter. We were always keen to provide a similar service in Yorkshire but wanted to wait to see the outcomes from Newcastle before deciding the best partner and model to provide that service. We have just started talks with Leeds CAB with a view to funding an outreach and training role, which will allow us to compare and contrast the most effective way we can help fund fuel poverty advice services.

HELPING COMMUNITIES TAKE CONTROL

Our Customer Led Network Revolution Project was one of the biggest and most exciting innovation projects across the electricity network. Amongst many other aspects of the project we allocated washing machines into the homes of volunteers to help us monitor responsiveness to price signals.

Once the project was complete, we worked with VONNE to identify the most appropriate recipients of the spare washing machines. We were able to send them to organisations such as homeless shelters and a refuge service for women who have experienced domestic violence.



Jane Hustwit @Jane Hustwit

Apr 22

@powergridnews: @northpowergrid

t'day showed how *stakeholder engagement* can work; left + sense of a different, co-operative, smart future

Reply Retweet Favourite

Jane Hustwit, Chief Executive of Involve, Yorkshire and Humber voluntary sector body, on her first meeting as a member of our stakeholder panel

FUEL POVERTY CONFERENCE

This year's National Energy Action conference in Sheffield was sponsored by ourselves and National Grid (the electricity and gas distribution companies for the city). 358 delegates registered to attend, the highest in recent times. We presented on our research into transferring costs from network reinforcement into improved fuel efficiency for vulnerable consumers and led a discussion group on how distribution companies could support vulnerable customers and communities.

We helped fund the International Community Organisation of Sunderland project to help cut fuel bills for those in wards of high levels of deprivation. It was part of our long standing campaign to promote the uptake of Community Energy across our region



“My grandmother lives next door to me and she has a stair lift but the girl on the phone put her on the priority list, so I wanted to say that she was brilliant and just to thank her very much for doing that.”

BMCS VERBATIM, ANONYMOUS, AUGUST 2015

THE VALUE OF CUSTOMER DATA

In addition to traditional power outage maps, which include data on where our Priority Services customers live, we use a range of socio-economic data to add further layers of information to our online mapping.

We use this to steer our social programmes and help decide during power outages where we should direct our support. We are rolling out training and login details for this facility to local authorities, the NHS and other public bodies.

DATA MANAGEMENT

The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) model we're using will give us the ability to manage and record multi-channel customer interactions, capturing all communication against a customer's account and allowing us to maintain a complete history. Master Data Management (MDM) is a discipline to actively manage data across our systems. Data accessed from different systems will be the same, and each time information is updated, the central system will be updated. We will understand the full story of our customers, how they interact with us and how we respond to their needs.

With this ambitious and complex project, we're setting out to let our data support the best possible service to our customers, and compare ourselves with the best companies in retail, utilities and transport.

DATA REFRESH

In preparation for the implementation of MDM and CRM in 2016, we are undertaking a full refresh of our PSR. We have actively added customers to our PSR for several years, when identifying their vulnerability during a customer interaction, when they or a carer register through the website, when receiving information from a supplier or through our network of partners. However to provide the best service, targeted properly and efficiently, we need to ensure that they are delivered to the right people. Without an up to date register we can't do so effectively.

OUR ROLE

- We know that vulnerability goes further than our PSR, and that it can be temporary
- We feel we have a significant part to play in tackling fuel poverty and other social issues
- We believe in 'doing the right thing' for our customers and the communities we serve

Our approach has been based on the profile of our Priority Services customers, looking at their reasons for registration, the time they have been registered, and the contact options available. We have consulted with Ofgem and our Social Issues Expert Group to ensure that our proposed method of updating is suitable, and provides the best possible customer experience. Our approach to the data refresh has also included our plan for maintaining contact with each registered Priority Services customer.

THE FUTURE

With a refreshed register, and the new data management by CRM and MDM, we will be able to target our services to those who need them the most, helping them through the problems of being without power and increasing the effectiveness of our referrals network. We have also decided to double the frequency of our PSR survey (becoming twice a year to quicken the pace of feedback being incorporated into our services). Once the refresh is complete, we have earmarked budget to step up promotion of the register and work with partners to get more registrations and deepen the quality of the network.



"I can't praise Northern Powergrid enough. Such a comfort being called and kept informed about what's going on. I was also given a priority number because I am over 80 and live on my own."

BMCS VERBATIM, MRS HICKSON,
SEPTEMBER 2015

STEPS FOR THE FUTURE

We're committed to some major steps forward in our services for the most vulnerable over the coming months – some of the most important planned developments are shown here.

We continually discuss with our customers and stakeholders the next steps we need to take to provide the best services to our vulnerable customers. Some, such as achieving the British Standard accreditation for services for vulnerable people are an external discipline to ensure we're comparing ourselves with the best. Others, such as the data improvements and the new customer support vehicles are service improvements themselves.



We have been trialling a voice response app since July 2015 and are planning to roll it out across our frontline field staff from March 2016. The app makes it much easier for our front line engineers to communicate with customers for whom English is not their first language

NOVEMBER 2015 <p>Delivery of two brand new Customer Support Vehicles. They replace the two oldest vans in our fleet, and have been modified to provide as many services as possible. A more modern and better equipped fleet will help us reach more vulnerable customers and provide them with a better service.</p>	DECEMBER 2015 <p>We hope to be awarded the Louder than Words accreditation by Action on Hearing Loss. We completed their benchmarking audit in May 2014, and have been working on our action plan with the aim of being accredited ever since.</p>	JANUARY 2016 <p>We will start funding for a fuel poverty adviser (FTE) in Yorkshire, to complement our arrangement in the North East. The adviser role will be more focussed on training than our North East funded role – allowing us to learn from two different approaches to helping tackle fuel poverty.</p>
FEBRUARY 2016 <p>We plan to start a new Catering contract to add to the options available to us to help customers during an outage. As part of the same process, our review of payment methods to get cash to customers affected by an outage quickly will be completed.</p>	MARCH 2016 <p>We plan to roll out a voice translation app to all of our Rapid Response engineers. The app has been trialled since July 2015, and has proven to be very popular with our staff and customers.</p>	APRIL 2016 <p>April sees the launch of the industry Single Emergency Number, 105. Northern Powergrid is proud to have taken a lead role on the project, which will make it easier for customers to contact us.</p>
MAY 2016 <p>We will overlay the non-gas-grid map data information on our own mapping applications. Adding this to our existing map data will improve our ability to target our help during a power outage to those who need it most, such as those households without either fuel.</p>	JUNE 2016 <p>We hope to have completed the BS: 18477 standard in Consumer Vulnerability. We have been working to understand the requirements and move towards the Standard for several months. The process is proving an invaluable analysis tool for identifying service improvements.</p>	JULY 2016 <p>We are aiming to have completed our 6 month project cleansing our Priority Services records that are over 2 years old. Once this is complete, we will start the business as usual update process on records younger than 2 years and step up our promotional campaign for the register.</p>

“Our PSR is the primary mechanism through which we identify who our vulnerable customers are, and what the nature of their reliance on electricity is.”

NORTHERN POWERGRID'S WELL JUSTIFIED BUSINESS PLAN, 2015-2023

