



## **Review of the Priority Services Register – The Children's Society response**

***Q. Do stakeholders agree that 'families with children under 5' should be added as a specified eligible "core" group to receive additional help during interrupted supply and for the provision of free gas appliance safety checks?***

### **Changes to Core Eligibility groups**

The Children's Society welcomes plans to include families with children under 5 and pregnant women in the Priority Services Register core eligible groups.

For children under 5 years old, living in a cold home can have a negative impact on their health and development so their inclusion is a critical step in reducing a key health inequality. By ensuring that vulnerable families with children have access to the necessary support, we can ensure that the cycle of disadvantage is broken and does not have a negative impact on the lives of children and young people.

### **Additional services for vulnerable customers**

Additionally, we are pleased to see the suggestion for energy companies be expected to provide services beyond the current list of safety services, and to proactively identify vulnerable customers. However, we believe that this does not go far enough. We feel that Ofgem should be more explicit as to what these additional services could include, and which groups should be eligible for them. We would urge Ofgem to include the following groups for additional services:

1. Single parent families
  - Research that we have co-produced with Gingerbread shows that single parent families are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty as couple families, and many working single parents live below the poverty line – 300,000 children are growing up in poverty in working single parent families. Since these families typically have less support and more time commitments, these groups need more support in difficult circumstances, and their inclusion on the PSR would be an added security that would help support them.
2. All families in receipt of Child Tax Credits and with an income of less than £16k
  - Our research found that last winter two-thirds of families with children, around 5 million families, thought they were likely to turn down their heating over the winter because of the cost. Of these, more than half said that they were worried about their children becoming ill because their home was too cold. These families both have children in the household and are living on a low income; the combination of these two factors makes them a particularly vulnerable group. The £16k threshold used for provision of additional support for families on a low income
3. All young people under 18 living independently and care leavers until 25
  - We know from our practice base and previous research that this group of young people are particularly vulnerable, as they are moving into circumstances where they will have to manage their life independently for the first time, often with little support.

We would urge Ofgem to list these groups alongside the core eligibility criteria. We would recommend that Ofgem also include provisions so that energy companies follow up with customers who are moved onto PPMs within 14 days rather than 28 days in the winter, and for greater tracking of low-vent customers as well as zero vent customers, as this indicates that they are struggling to adequately heat their home.

The inclusion of priority access to assistance with energy debts is an important inclusion for services offered to vulnerable customers. Too often families struggle with unaffordable debts, because they do not get help to ensure repayment rates are affordable.

The PSR is often used by energy companies as a proxy measure for defining vulnerability, and as such the inclusion of these vulnerable groups would go a long way towards making sure that the support that they so desperately need is available.

**Suggested additional services & eligible customer groups**

<b>Proposed additional services for customers who are struggling to pay their energy bills</b>		
<b>Service</b>	<b>Customers eligible</b>	<b>Energy company (provider of service)</b>
Priority access to assistance for customers with energy debt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single parent families</li> <li>• All families in receipt of Child Tax Credits / with an income of less than £16k</li> <li>• All young people under 18 living independently and care leavers until 25</li> </ul>	All energy suppliers
Follow up with customers who are moved onto PPMs within 14 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single parent families</li> <li>• All families in receipt of Child Tax Credits / with an income of less than £16k</li> <li>• All young people under 18 living independently and care leavers until 25</li> </ul>	All energy suppliers
Tracking of low-vent customers as well as zero vent customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single parent families</li> <li>• All families in receipt of Child Tax Credits / with an income of less than £16k</li> <li>• All young people under 18 living independently and care leavers until 25</li> </ul>	All energy suppliers