



Scottish and Southern
Energy
Power Distribution

Supporting customers in vulnerable positions

RIIO-ED1 Stakeholder Engagement
and Customer Vulnerability Trial Submission

Supporting customers in vulnerable positions

We first set out our approach to supporting customers in vulnerable positions in our RIIO-ED1 Business Plan **Be responsible: Supporting vulnerable customers.**¹

Since then, we have been building on our approach to place vulnerable customers at the heart of everything we do. Our Strategy for Customers in Vulnerable Positions widens, and deepens, the support we provide to customers. It also details our commitment to work with others to tackle social issues, including fuel poverty.

¹ www.yourfutureenergynetwork.co.uk/07a_csr2014.pdf

To help explain the forces which have developed our strategy we wanted to provide an insight into our thinking.

- We have been helping our leadership team and staff understand what vulnerability is and why it is important that we think about the impact that our activities have on customers. This has enabled us to structure our business to be truly responsive to vulnerable customers.
- We needed to work in partnership to find the best ways to help customers who we identify, or who identify themselves, as being in vulnerable positions. From there only then could we start to embed this within our working procedures and realise this is an ongoing commitment.
- Keeping bills low seems like a glib statement but as we really begin to understand how financial difficulties can affect any customer (through outreach work and innovation projects) we know that this is a problem facing society and we have an integral role to play as an essential service provider.
- We are committed to treating our customers like family, which helps our staff to connect with an individual rather than a caller and give them time to build rapport. A natural outcome of this is that our customers have told us that the reason they were satisfied with our service is because our staff are “caring, calm and helpful”.
- Our networks have been battered by severe weather over the last two years with hurricane force winds, torrential rainfall and extensive flooding meaning that many customers were without power for an extended period. We needed to respond to this not only as engineers but also a customer service organisation. This has led to the regionalisation of our business and focus on anticipating and responding to customer needs.

Historically, severe weather affected our Scottish network more frequently than the one in England. Naturally this has meant that our support for those who become temporarily vulnerable during a power cut has been honed in Scotland. We are in the process of implementing the same strategic approach in England whilst taking local circumstances into account.

This resulted in us shaping our Customer Vulnerability Strategy around our five strategic framework priorities...

- 1 Ensure that addressing customer vulnerability is at the heart of our business strategy, our culture, our policies and all of our services.
- 2 Identify and respond to customer vulnerability timeously and with empathy.
- 3 Keep the distribution costs of our customers' electricity bills as low as possible.
- 4 Deliver an accessible and empathetic service to our Priority Services Register (PSR) customers.
- 5 Support those who become temporarily vulnerable during a power cut.

1 Ensure that addressing customer vulnerability is at the heart of our business strategy, our culture, our policies and all of our services.

Medium-Term Outcomes (2019)

What success will look like

- Customers in vulnerable positions tell us that they feel listened to and their views and needs are taken seriously.
- We can demonstrate that we have delivered improved outcomes for customers in vulnerable positions.
- There is increased external awareness of the work we do to serve customers in vulnerable positions.

The core purpose of the SSE Group is to provide the energy people need in a reliable and sustainable way. In 2006 we set out six values – long-term commitments which guide how we operate and grow.

In the distribution business this is reflected in our mission to provide a safe and reliable supply of electricity to the communities we serve by maintaining, repairing and improving the electricity distribution network.

Our service value was publicly redefined in October 2015 to emphasise that: “We put the current and future needs of customers at the heart of everything we do.”

We treat every customer as an individual, recognising that anyone can potentially be in a vulnerable position at any time as a result of the circumstances, external or personal, in which they find themselves.

Our six values

Safety

We believe all accidents are preventable, so we do everything safely and responsibly or not at all

Service

We put the current and future needs of customers at the heart of everything we do

Efficiency

We keep things simple, do work that adds value and avoid wasting money, materials, energy or time

Sustainability

Our decisions and actions are ethical, responsible and balanced, helping to achieve environmental, economic and social wellbeing for current and future generations

Excellence

We will strive to get better, smarter and more innovative to be the best in everything we do

Teamwork

We support and value our colleagues and enjoy working together in a team in an open and honest way

Customers in vulnerable positions

Drawing on best practice, we have changed our terminology from “vulnerable customers” to “customers in vulnerable positions” this reflects the fact that anyone can become vulnerable at any time due to their personal characteristics or circumstances or a combination of both which makes it hard for them to cope or represent their interests. This is also reflected in the way we do business as evidenced by the change to our service value.

Transforming our business to focus on customers

So we can deliver a consistent, high-quality service to our customers we have studied best practice customer service organisations such as The Ritz Carlton, John Lewis, Pret and INTUIT. This has informed our decision to restructure as a regional organisational model that reflects best practice within electricity and service industries which concentrate their resources on meeting customer needs.

We are in the process of recruiting a small, centralised team which will embed our Customer Service and Vulnerable Customer Strategy across the business. Their priorities and approach will be informed through engagement with customers and their trusted intermediaries, our colleagues and other stakeholders. They will offer support and guidance to our newly created regional units whose primary role is to respond to the specific needs of the communities they serve.

Our regional teams are empowered to be flexible so that decisions are made based on the needs of customers (especially customers in vulnerable positions) within their area. The newly created dedicated PSR team, under the guidance of our Social Obligations Manager, will help them to co-ordinate support for our customers in vulnerable positions, drawing on their additional expertise to assess the most appropriate solution for a customer’s situation on a case-by-case basis.

Our approach will also improve fault restoration times, and inspection and maintenance programmes so we can provide our customers with an even more reliable supply of electricity and allow our colleagues to respond to the needs of individuals.

Placing customers in vulnerable positions at the heart of our policies and services

We have reviewed and updated four work procedures and created two new ones, to recognise the impact that our activities have on vulnerable customers. This has resulted in an overarching procedure ‘Taking care of the needs of customers on the Priority Services Register’, which is referred to within work instructions for regional staff.

For example, when isolating a supply, regional field staff will check if there are any PSR customers on the circuit being isolated and arrange for them to be contacted and told about an imminent power cut. If necessary, the disconnection may be rescheduled to allow for medical arrangements to be made. The work instruction also advises staff how to arrange verbal or written translations into languages other than English, Braille, large print or audio CD.

2 Identify and respond to customer vulnerability timeously and with empathy.

Medium-Term Outcomes (2019)

What success will look like

- We have a wide research evidence base which we draw on to improve our understanding of vulnerability.
- Our staff feel empowered to treat customers as individuals and respond to their needs.
- Other organisations and charities seek to engage with us to better equip our staff and improve our signposting.

Training in identifying and responding to vulnerability

We train our staff to recognise signs of vulnerability in individuals, identify their needs and offer appropriate solutions.

Our training encourages staff to adopt a very wide definition in assessing whether customers are vulnerable and empowers them to do the right thing for each individual. Staff are encouraged to actively seek to identify any signs of vulnerability (physical, emotional, financial and/or circumstantial) by ensuring that they are knowledgeable and more clearly understand what vulnerability might entail. Training is in line with the Direct Marketing Agency White Paper on Vulnerability.

This has made us better equipped to identify and respond to a wide range of social issues following the roll out of our bespoke vulnerability training to 90% of call centre staff and we have trialled it with regional staff in five depots. This training is supplemented by monthly awareness days which focus on different forms of vulnerability, and the options which are available to help us to respond to individuals. This also allows the sharing of new ideas and learning amongst our teams and to offer staff the opportunity to suggest new innovative solutions to customer problems. These are delivered in partnership with key external agencies, for example Age UK and Macmillan Cancer Support.

Following training, staff can access guidance notes with prompts around the support we can offer, when it should be used and how to action it. During power cuts this includes the location and contact details for our welfare facilities.

In order to ensure that staff are putting this into practice, we now include identifying and responding to vulnerability in our coaching sessions. Where required, additional coaching is given.

After a prolonged power cut, we collate a list of lessons learned and ideas for improvement from managerial staff so that we can implement procedural changes where they are felt to deliver benefit to customers.

Our PSR team receives more in-depth training to ensure that they have the additional expertise they need to assess the most appropriate solution for a customer's situation on a case-by-case basis. This includes work shadowing a trusted intermediary to ensure that they have experienced real life vulnerability which complements classroom training.

For example, they spent a day shadowing representatives from the Dundee Energy Efficiency Advice Project which works within Dundee City Council to advise householders on fuel tariffs, how to reduce bills, energy efficiency measures and other advice and referral work. They are well respected in the community providing support across a wide a range of vulnerability - tackling fuel poverty by offering both energy and non-energy related advice. This provides our staff with first hand experience of the benefit to individuals that our signposting can provide. The PSR team visited customers' homes to gain a better understanding of what vulnerability looks like first hand, enabling them to provide extra help for those who need it most.

Our training on customer vulnerability has been independently assessed by Dr Irena Connors of the University of Dundee. Her report was very positive:

“Overall, the training course was impressive for its focus on empathetic skills development and for its focus on enhancing abilities to ‘think outside the box’ and exploring the complex dimensions of vulnerability...”

Following training, our staff said:

“I will take that extra time to look after the customer on the phone and put myself in their shoes.”

“It will make me even more mindful of our vulnerable customers.”

2 Identify and respond to customer vulnerability timeously and with empathy.

Dedicated PSR team and Social Obligations Manager

This five-strong team has increased the resource we can channel into supporting our customers in vulnerable positions. Since April 2015 we have:

- Begun updating our PSR data by identifying, registering and contacting customers to ensure that the information they have provided is still relevant as this is used to determine the ways in which we support them under the service.
- Developed welcome packs which explain what services we can offer as well as hints and tips on how to prepare for a power cut. We also survey 10% of new PSR customers to ensure that they understand the information we send out or if they need it in another format.
- Created help sheets (informed by our Expert Panel) for staff to help them signpost customers to appropriate third parties when they identify a vulnerability.
- Drawn on best practice to develop welfare packs which will be available to distribute to customers in vulnerable positions during an emergency to help them cope. To ensure the packs were fit for purpose, different pack combinations were user-tested with resilience partners and groups with which we developed community emergency plans.
- Escalated calls to provide advice and help to customers who are identified as needing extra assistance. Where we identify those who would not cope in the event of the power cut we respond to their individual needs.
- Learnt from past experience and provide PSR customers with advanced warning of weather that could result in a power cut. For instance, in advance of severe weather we have ensured that our customers who are dependent on oxygen concentrators are not left without oxygen. We contacted their oxygen supplier to arrange back up power packs or oxygen tanks.

Promoting our PSR services

We actively recruit eligible customers by promoting our PSR service on phone calls with customers, at public meetings, press releases, social media and through our PSR leaflet which details the key benefits of our free service.

Since April, we have distributed around 3,700 copies of the leaflet in partnership with trusted intermediaries who we identified as having regular contact and strong relationships with customers who could benefit from registration.

Reaching out to challenging groups

We learned that awareness of our company and our service is significantly lower among the following groups, meaning that they are less likely to know how to contact us in the event of a power cut:

- ethnic minorities
- those who speak languages other than English at home
- customers currently struggling to pay their energy bills

- customers currently in debt to their energy provider
- customers on incomes of less than £30,000 per year

To help these groups we are embarking on a significant awareness campaign between November 2015 and January 2016. The campaign includes 48-hour 'get ready' alerts in advance of severe weather. During a storm we will make extensive use of radio, print and outdoor advertising and digital media to raise awareness of who we are, how and why to contact us and who is eligible for our PSR service.

Trusted intermediaries we have been working with include:

Hospital units such as renal, pulmonary, remote monitoring and midwifery units; and resilience partners across both network areas
Local Age UK in our English network area
Local Age Scotland, Citizens Advice Bureaux and GP surgeries in our Scottish network area

388,780

Registered PSR customers (Sept 2015)

PSR database improvements

- To ensure customers understand that when they join our PSR by phone we may need to share their details with a third party before they receive the service, we have included the text as a pop up window in the database for staff to read out and gain confirmation from our customers.
- We are also tracking where customers hear about our service and how they joined, to inform future awareness campaigns and how we resource sign-up for the service.
- Our staff can now click on a tick box on our database to record when we have pre-warned customers of severe weather or a planned supply interruption.
- Other tick boxes allow staff to record if they have signposted customers in vulnerable positions to other trusted organisations.

Data sharing to improve our service

The Customer Safeguarding Data Sub-group's membership consists of Distribution Network Operators, Gas Distribution Network Operators, Suppliers and Xoserve.

The aim of this group is to work together addressing the needs codes and working towards a set standard for all utilities to share data easily in order to enhance the service we provide our vulnerable customers.

We are currently participating in a data sharing trial with British Gas to assess opening of the D0225 flow so that Networks and Suppliers have two way data transfer for Priority Customers. In doing this we are ensuring data is up-to-date and accurate.

As members of the Tayside Local Resilience Forum we have been working towards an agreed data sharing protocol. We hope to be able to share data in advance of an emergency situation so that we can have plans in place to help those who are most vulnerable during a power cut. We will also look to do similar work with local groups in our Southern network area.

2 Identify and respond to customer vulnerability timeously and with empathy.

Working in partnership to identify and deliver help for customers in vulnerable positions

We have made donations, totalling £1 million to the British Red Cross, Age UK, Macmillan Cancer Support and National Energy Action to help develop support functions or research for customers who find themselves in vulnerable positions during power cuts.

We are tackling fuel poverty by:

- Publicising the help available from a range of trusted organisations, and producing materials and hosting forums to support frontline workers in housing, health, social care, welfare, benefits and energy efficiency, so that they can help customers in vulnerable positions before they reach crisis point.
- Raising awareness among trusted intermediaries of the help on offer to those struggling to pay their energy bills, through media campaigns with a reach of 16,059,623 customers across the UK and a media value of £334,302.
- Supporting the Warmer Homes for Older People programme to deliver energy awareness sessions and recruit warmer home advocates to cascade information to their peers.
- Sponsoring two events to understand how to implement the English Fuel Poverty strategy at local level including rural areas.

We are better supporting older people through:

- Winter warmth grants in Andover, Dorchester, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire, Southampton and Wiltshire with a marketing reach of 30,000 which help 2,000 older people. The grants have also enabled 829 benefit entitlement sessions, 125 bespoke home energy checks, 35 awareness raising events, 225 befriending visits and 400 winter packs and hampers.
- Age Scotland grants which have enabled outreach work and promoted the PSR to 300 member groups and 20,000 older people in our area, group development, mentoring sessions, hosting local networking lunches and conferences.
- Producing a Disaster Preparedness report which looks at how Age UK and other agencies respond to vulnerable older people during extreme weather and power cuts.
- Preparing guidelines for companies on how to cater for the needs of older people, which can be used by any organisation and not just in an emergency such as a power cut.

- Providing Emergency Grant Pots for use by local partners in our areas, during emergencies.
- Introducing a 'Call in time' telephone befriending service where 20 of our staff volunteer making weekly friendship calls to older people.

We are supporting customers who become vulnerable in a power cut through:

- New, fully equipped emergency response vehicles which serve some of the areas across the UK covered by SSEPD.
- Funding a Support Line telephone service which provides a reliable source of information and comfort to those in distress during a crisis.
- Our volunteers' project to help build more resilient communities by training and equipping local people to prepare for and respond to emergencies by developing a bank of known, trained, accredited 'Occasional Volunteers' rather than relying on the public spontaneously volunteering.

We supported our customers who are living with cancer by funding the national support line for one month. The line offers information and emotional support as well as medical, welfare and financial guidance, enabling them to answer:

- 4,600 calls to the Cancer Information and Support Team who provide emotional support and practical guidance as well as putting callers through to more specialised teams enabling them to get in touch with local care services.
- 900 calls to the Welfare Rights Team helping people identify benefits and grants they are eligible for and supporting them to complete the necessary paperwork. We estimate that this will have helped to facilitate £1.5 million of additional benefits to people affected by cancer.
- 70 calls to the Financial Guidance Team which helps people with their personal finance, including alternative mortgage, savings and pension options.

Creation of an expert panel to guide us in our approach

Working together delivers mutual benefits and so in November 2014 we formed an expert panel to inform the development of our Customer Vulnerability Strategy and help guide us on how to identify and address vulnerability amongst the fuel poor; older people; those living with cancer; and those who find themselves in need due to a prolonged power cut. Since inception the group has helped us by:

- Reviewing our training programme to help us understand, identify and sensitively respond to vulnerability.
- Identifying trigger questions which will help us identify vulnerabilities and when to offer bespoke advice from trusted partner organisations.
- Advising us on how best to develop and utilise partnerships (e.g. referral networks) to provide help (both energy and non-energy) for customers in vulnerable positions.

They told us that the range of advice our customers require is so broad that we are best to signpost to national organisations who can then refer our customers to their local partners as required.

- Reviewing our welcome letters so that they are easier to read with clear symbols for our contact details and also include hints and tips on how to prepare and cope in a power cut.

Directing customers to energy and non-energy related help

We realise our staff may receive incidental information from the customer during the course of a conversation which indicates that the customer would benefit from help or advice. For example, during a call the customers could indicate that they are experiencing feelings of isolation; or that they are in financial difficulties. If deemed appropriate to the situation, we will encourage staff to let the customer know of third party organisations who can help the customer.

Staff are given guidelines, through awareness days, on how and when (and when not) to refer customers to another organisation. On the occasions where staff are concerned about a customer's welfare and either feel that signposting is not appropriate or they are unsure of the next best steps to take, they raise an alert with their manager. The manager, PSR team and advisor then decide next steps.

For energy related help we currently call the customer's energy supply company's priority service teams to escalate customer's concerns, where asked to do so, as we cannot progress this for the customer.

3 Keep the distribution costs of our customers' electricity bills as low as possible.

Medium-Term Outcomes (2019)

What success will look like

- Communities, households and businesses value our advice on energy efficiency and the use of low carbon technology.

A central commitment of our business plan is to keep the distribution costs of our customers' electricity bills as low as we can while still delivering a value for money service.

This recognises that the recent economic climate has impacted on the ability some of our customers have to pay for their bills while acknowledging that our customers do not want to see deterioration in supply safety and reliability or customer service.

In recognition of the pressures our customers are facing, we reduced our part of the electricity bill by 18% in 2015.²

² https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/sites/default/files/docs/2014/11/riio-ed1_final_determination_overview_-_updated_front_cover_0.pdf

Challenging policy makers

We know the importance to our customers of minimising expenditure that impacts on their electricity bills, and we regularly take direct action to protect their interests in this area. For example, in the last year we have:

- Challenged policies around submarine electricity cables, within Scotland's National Marine Plan which was adopted in March 2015. This is because if they are enforced they will affect our existing engineering practices and greatly increase our expenditure – contributing to higher customer bills. Therefore, we are seeking to establish whether or not the additional cost of protecting submarine electricity cables, represents value to our electricity customers and wider stakeholders through cost benefit analysis.³
- Led the debate with the Electricity Networks Association, DECC and the UK Government on who should pay for the cost of diverting existing electricity lines to facilitate rail electrification projects. Our view is that these costs should be funded as part of the national transport infrastructure project, and not passed onto electricity customers through increases in their bills.

³ <http://news.ssepd.co.uk/submarinecables/>

The fight against fuel poverty

Our partnership approach to fighting fuel poverty is detailed on page 5. We also have observer status on the Scottish Fuel Poverty Forum.

Managing electricity consumption

We are constantly seeking to improve our understanding of the challenges facing the distribution network in GB, and to find ways to overcome these challenges to ensure security of supply and value for money as Britain moves to a low carbon economy.⁴

⁴ <https://www.ssepd.co.uk/DistributionInnovation/>

SAVE Project

Utilising monitoring technology and innovative approaches of engaging with domestic customers, our SAVE project is establishing to what extent energy efficiency measures can be considered as a cost-effective, predictable and sustainable tool for managing peak demand as an alternative to network reinforcement.

SAVE is based in the Solent and surrounding area in the South of England, which is representative of much of the UK in terms of electrical networks, residents, electrical demand levels and the challenges these can cause for Distribution Network Operators.

On completion of the project we will produce a Network Investment Tool which will allow Distribution Network Operators to assess a particular network's suitability for demand reduction through energy efficiency measures and allow informed investment choices to be made between using customer engagement and energy efficiency measures as opposed to traditional measures, resulting in the:

- Potential to reduce capital investment requirements via management of network peak demand.
- Possibility of enabling customers to connect more low carbon technologies, such as EVs and heat pumps.
- Potential for reduced disruption and costs to customers by finding alternative methods of managing demand on the network.

4 Deliver an accessible and empathetic service to our PSR customers.

Medium-Term Outcomes (2019)

What success will look like

- Customers tell us that our PSR team is approachable, fully accessible and valued.
- Customer feedback tells us that the data we hold is up-to-date.
- Our signposting performance is valued by the organisations we refer to.

Independent accreditation that we provide an inclusive service BS18477:2010

The BS18477 Inclusive Service provision is a standard to demonstrate that a company meets the requirements for identifying and responding to customer vulnerability. The assessment process requires that all our services are available and made accessible to all customers equally, regardless of their personal circumstances.

In March 2015, the auditor confirmed our readiness for a Full System Audit to the requirements of BS18477:2010 which will take place in October 2015. This should reassure our stakeholders and customers that we are fulfilling our social obligations and Strategy for Tackling Customer Vulnerability.

Escalation service for PSR customers

If our call takers and regional staff have been unable to help a customer in a vulnerable position during a power cut, they will refer them to the PSR Escalation team, which will be better equipped to support customers who face significant challenges, including disability, illness, difficulty communicating and understanding or mental health issues.

Customers may be tired, worried, angry, upset, weary or vulnerable. The Escalation team's role is to understand their needs and to do its best to provide a solution. There is no 'one size fits all' solution to the issues the Escalation team handles, but the following provides a general guide to how the team works with customers in vulnerable positions.

We call it 'GREENLIGHT'

Greenlight

Greet
Review
Empathise
Explore options
Next steps agreed
Leave contact details
Instigate solution
Give update to customer
Happiness check
Take ownership – ensure it all happens

Delivering accessible communications

We offer help to those who are less able than the average customer to communicate their needs.

We have put in place a range of measures to deliver this and embed this important issue into our business practice.

To help them communicate with us we have procured a rapid, cost-efficient translation service for customers who do not speak English as a first language, or who are unable to read or hear our communications. This means that we can provide immediate, guaranteed access to translation services.

The service we can provide for some of our most vulnerable customers will be greatly improved by this instant translation service. Their phone call lengths will be reduced and the service they receive will be of a consistently high standard.

We also have services in place to accommodate any written communication needs upon request. For instance, we make publications available in different languages and in different formats such as large print, Braille and audio CD. Deaf or hard of hearing customers can also contact us using text talk.

We have redesigned our website to be in line with W3C AA Standards for Accessibility and ARIA Standards. Creating an easy to read format on our website for people with a learning disability also benefits those who do not use English as a first language, people with dyslexia and those with lower levels of literacy.

We are committed to trying to make communications we produce focused, clear and easy to act upon. This approach will reduce time and money spent explaining things in the long run – savings which can be passed on to customers. We will continually review the approach being taken to ensure that our communication channels are accessible and use recognised accreditation schemes, where appropriate, to assure our customers that we comply with best practice.

5 Support those who become temporarily vulnerable during a power cut.

Medium-Term Outcomes (2019)

What success will look like

- Customers who have become temporarily vulnerable in a power cut feel supported by us.
- Our role and performance in resilience planning is valued by our partners.

Engaging hard to reach customers

Our resilience planning partners found it very difficult to engage communities in developing community and individual emergency plans. However, in recent years our networks have been hit by a number of storms which have left customers without power, with some feeling unprepared. In an effort to address this, we have adapted material developed by Scottish Government, simplified it and made it more user friendly. Since then we have been inundated with requests from communities across both our network areas to help them prepare coping strategies in the event of a power cut but which could be used in any emergency. We are the lead organisation and we are supported by our resilience partners who have the same objective to safeguard customers. To date we have created over 40 community emergency plans through bespoke workshops.

We have clear evidence that where community emergency plans are in place, little or no additional support has been required from ourselves and our resilience partners during power cuts. At the same time, our PSR mapping study shows that where we have created emergency resilience plans there are higher numbers of eligible customers registering for our PSR service. We have become the first port of call for details of vulnerable customers requested by resilience partners. This has resulted in a much faster response being delivered to customers in vulnerable positions.

Our resilience partners

Scottish Government Resilience Team
Civil Contingencies Unit/Teams
Blue Light organisations (Police, Fire and Rescue, Maritime and Coast Guard Agency)
Local authorities
Highway Agencies
NHS
Clinical Commissioning Groups
Civil Contingencies Teams
Environmental Agencies
Local Flood Groups,
Gas, Water and Telecoms providers
Charities such as British Red Cross, Age UK, Age Scotland, Dementia Trust,
one community, Energy Action Groups
and Citizens Advice and Councils for Voluntary service

“Customers have been generous in their praise of the service provided by us and when asked have been unable to offer suggestions for further improvement. We have moved from being the agency to be criticised to the one that stands out as going more than the extra mile!”

Mo Bates, Stakeholder Engagement Manager

“Building community resilience has many benefits for the Police not just in dealing with weather related incidents. Having an identifiable and available additional community resource not only strengthens the bonds with the community but also improves the potential response and recovery capabilities.”

Inspector Ian Wallace, Divisional Coordinator of Police Scotland

Exemplars of best practice

In Scotland, the success of our approach has been noted by the Scottish Government Resilience Team and we have been invited to be a collaborative partner with them on all aspects of resilience, particularly community resilience. Working with the Scottish Government we have been reaching out to the fuel poor and to customers in vulnerable positions to help them prepare for power cuts. We are now considered to be an exemplar of best practice when it comes to resilience planning and have been invited to:

- Share our learning to help the British Red Cross DRIVER Project⁵ develop a European Resilience Standard.
- Share our approach to supporting customers in vulnerable positions with the Texas A&M University's (TEEX) Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center⁶ which leads on resilience and emergency response in the USA. We have also had a request to work collaboratively with one of their specialists who also works

as a contractor with US Home Defense on community resilience, looking at the potential to provide training to support the needs of rural resilience participants in the North of Scotland. This opportunity could offer the following: a rural civil service college that supports Northern region priorities; and the development of command and control training in the North of Scotland for chief officers and all staff. Additionally, the intention is to work towards the development of community resilience as a long-term goal across Europe.

In England, our customers, including our most vulnerable have highlighted a need to understand how our network operates, and what we do in the background. In direct response to this, we have developed an interactive model for use at community engagement events. The visual representation and hands on challenge enables our business to better manage customer expectations through proactive education.

⁵ British Red Cross Project – <http://driver-project.eu/content/driver-glance>

⁶ TEEX Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center – <http://hrrc.arch.tamu.edu/about/>

5 Support those who become temporarily vulnerable during a power cut.

How we have changed our storm procedures

Welfare is a key factor in our storm preparation and the Scottish Government has held us up as the standard that all Scottish agencies should aim for. We have introduced Community Liaison Managers and provide food and general welfare using our own staff alongside two outside contractors to cover the large rural areas where we operate in Scotland. In England we have five welfare vehicles which can be dispatched to vulnerable communities. Due to the positive customer response we have another five on order. Drop-in centres and peripatetic welfare providing food, mobile phone charging, hot drinks and other services, e.g. delivering additional essentials where necessary, are now integral to the way we prepare for storms.

Through Local Resilience Forums in England and Scotland, we have met with key vulnerability groups to hold meetings to explain what we do and to help communities and businesses, such as care homes, start to prepare so that they can support their customers in the event of a power cut.

We have increased our resources available during a storm so that we now have 26 trained members of staff who can be deployed anywhere in our regions to provide extra help and assistance to customers in vulnerable positions, either through our welfare provision or resilience partners, where previously we had none. Additionally we have 14 Customer and Community Advisors based in our regional teams to co-ordinate our storm response.

Whilst we have seen the demand for services increase, our more organised approach has resulted in better customer service.

Using social media to tell customers about provision in their area has resulted in positive customer feedback on our digital channels.

Working in partnership to overcome challenges

We maintain 'warm' relationships with our resilience partners all year round so we have a clear understanding of each other's issues and limitations. This helps us to support each other and makes it easy to obtain help when we really need it.

In Scotland, these strong relationships have meant that we have been able to:

- Obtain ferry space for our maintenance and welfare vehicles and have them classed as emergency vehicles so we can reach remote peninsulas and island networks without power.
- Have roads and airports opened and permissions granted to land helicopters with necessary equipment and supplies to restore power and deliver food for livestock in remote areas.

We are pleased that the commitment we made to our customers to keep them informed with the latest information during the January storms, via our blog 'Storm Live', has resulted in us being recognised with the 'Best Use of Digital in a Crisis Situation' award at the DigiAwards 2015, which is run by business magazine CorpComms. 'Storm Live' provided our customers with a live rolling news feed, which ensured they knew what was happening during the storms in January when 100mph winds battered the north of Scotland.

Deepening our understanding of vulnerability during a power cut

In April 2014, we embarked on a Knowledge Transfer Partnership with the University of Dundee to identify, implement, evaluate and disseminate best practices around supporting communities to prepare for and respond to power cuts and to mitigate human vulnerability.

Through the partnership we have developed a detailed understanding of five communities' recent experience of severe storms which resulted in power cuts. Combined, these communities are representative of populations within both our network areas.

In November 2015 we are taking these findings to collaborative workshops with community members and our partners so that we can draw upon local expertise and experience to develop a system with other agencies to give a more effective and co-ordinated crisis response to better help vulnerable people in an emergency, and to improve communication about the help that is available. The outputs from the workshops will help inform the specialist advice we offer households and communities on how to cope with power cuts during extreme weather events.

Community engagement

Communities we are engaging with help us understand how human and physical geography contribute to our customers finding themselves in vulnerable positions and how we can reduce this wellbeing gap are:

- Arisaig (a coastal village in rural Scotland)
- Fort William town centre (urban – but non city – area in Scotland)
- Brodick (an island community on Arran, encompassing small town/large village and small rural island settlements)
- Godalming town, Surrey (small town serving as a 'hub' for surrounding rural villages)
- Slough city centre (large city centre with multi-cultural and diverse community)

A particular focus was placed on how recent storms affected elderly residents, those with long-term health problems and with disabilities, and we also found that there are a number of barriers that could prevent customers in fuel poverty coping as successfully with power cuts. For example, people on low incomes may be less able to stock up on necessities such as food. They may also be more isolated and can sometimes face a degree of social exclusion, and some are too proud to ask for or accept help.

Additionally we have worked with our partners (including local community groups, our resilience partners and emergency responder organisations) who helped us to look after our customers during these storms to identify strengths, issues and weaknesses embedded in our collective and organisational response and how these affected the community and individual customers within the communities.

Resilience partner engagement

Including Category 1 and Category 2 Responder Organisations under the Civil Contingencies Act with administrative responsibility for the communities we engaged within:

- the Highlands and Islands Region
- the North Ayrshire Region
- Waverley and Surrey Regional institutions
- Slough and Thames Valley Regional response organisations

5 Support those who become temporarily vulnerable during a power cut.

Snuffing out the silent killer

We joined forces with SGN who manage the network that distributes natural and green gas to 5.8 million homes and businesses across Scotland and the south of England to raise awareness of risk posed by Carbon Monoxide (CO) gas during a power cut. We want customers to be aware that during a power cut they should:

- Never use cookers, portable stoves or barbecues as space heaters and never run a gas, petrol or diesel-powered generator indoors.
- Always ensure there is adequate ventilation as these are not designed to be used as space heaters and can produce toxic levels of CO very quickly in enclosed environments.
- Never sleep next to a gas fire or wood-burner to keep warm if the flue is blocked or the room is badly ventilated.

Helping fund our customers to implement their local emergency plan

Following the storms of December 2013 which caused severe disruption across the UK network, we established a fund to support communities in our network areas to prepare for future emergency weather events. We offer grants of up to £20,000 to support community projects in our network areas which:

- Protect the welfare of customers in vulnerable positions during a significant power cut or emergency situation.
- Enhance community facilities and services that may be used in the event of a significant power cut or emergency situation.
- Improve communication during an emergency situation, to keep communities informed or aid contact between local groups and response services.

The groups we have supported are representative of our network area with a mix of urban and rural organisations applying for funding. To date we have awarded £134,000 in the north and £162,000 in the south to support small-scale, high-impact community projects which represent value for money and which will help build good relationships between us and the community.

Those benefiting from the grants include community groups, flood action groups, parish councils, lifesaving groups, community councils, resilience groups and local radio stations. The grants have been used for a wide range of purposes including the purchase of emergency equipment and storage to support emergency plans, training for volunteers, generators for emergency use, radio transmitters, rechargeable radios and first aid kits.

How our engagement activities inform our approach to tackling vulnerability

We have learned that the following groups were more likely to say that they would not cope well in a power cut:

- women
- younger customers
- those in lower social classes (C2DE)
- those living alone
- households with children aged under 16
- less well educated customers
- those with a disability
- customers living in private rented accommodation
- economically inactive customers
- customers from minority ethnic groups
- those struggling to pay their energy bills
- those currently in debt to their energy provider
- those on lower incomes

Consequently we plan to target these groups when working with local communities to develop local and individual emergency plans in 2017.

Key deliverables to support customers in vulnerable positions.

This submission has set out our achievements between October 2014 and October 2015.

We have:

- Redefined our service value to emphasise the central role of customers throughout the SSE Group. We have embedded customer vulnerability into this service value.
- Changed our organisation so that we are regionally focused to enable a more responsive service for our customers, particularly those in vulnerable positions.
- Recruited a Social Obligations Manager to help implement our strategy – working to build processes that help us to respond better to customers in vulnerable positions.
- Established a dedicated PSR team to support our customers and made improvements to our PSR database.
- Reviewed our policies, procedures and work plans to ensure that they consider the impact our activities have on customers.
- Introduced training and awareness days to help us more ably identify and respond to customers' vulnerability.
- Consulted our customers to understand how best to deliver our strategic priorities.
- Worked in partnership with resilience partners and charities to support our customers.
- Challenged policy makers and innovated to get best value from our capital investment in the network to keep the distribution cost element of bills low.
- Introduced an accessible communication and translation service to help customers with special communications needs.
- Established our Knowledge Transfer Partnership which has started to help us understand how human and physical geography affect our customers and therefore how best to shape our company response within regions.
- We are working towards BS18477:2010 Inclusive Service Provision.
- Formed an expert panel to guide our approach to supporting customers in vulnerable positions.