

UK Power Networks Consumer Vulnerability Strategy



Our vision

UK Power Networks' vision is to be an employer of choice, a respected corporate citizen, sustainably cost efficient and to be the consistently best-performing Distribution Network Operator (DNO).



A key part of fulfilling our vision is the approach we take to serving our vulnerable customers. This document sets out our strategy for serving our vulnerable customers.

Our Consumer Vulnerability Strategy

Our vulnerability strategy, endorsed by our CFP's, is to understand the needs of, and where appropriate support (especially in the event of a power cut), our customers who are more likely to suffer detriment, or substantially more detriment, than a typical customer.

Every year we look to review our vulnerability strategy to ensure it continues to evolve and reflect the changing nature of vulnerability. This year we paid particular attention to the role data plays in both the development and delivery of our vulnerability strategy. We recognised that this was a symbiotic relationship, with data shaping the direction of our strategy and then the delivery of the strategy providing useful understanding and data to feedback into our planning.

This year we also focused on the impact of the changing energy landscape and future of energy on vulnerability. We debated the possibility of making this a fifth pillar of our strategy but felt that currently this thinking fits well into our current strategy, particularly pillar 4 but we will continue to explore this issue.

Aims of our Strategy

1. Understanding vulnerability

To be alert to, and build our understanding of, emerging factors that make our customers vulnerable.

2. The Priority Services Register

To reduce the impact of power cuts on customers who have a specific need or dependence on electricity by promoting and updating our register of customers who require a priority service in a power cut.

3. Fuel poverty

To make our customers aware of energy efficiency and money-saving advice that might enable them to reduce their fuel bills.

4. Hard to reach

To understand how we can better communicate with, and be accessible to, hard to reach individuals and communities.

1. Understanding vulnerability

We recognise that vulnerability is complex and confining it to three definitions risks limiting our understanding and ability to serve some vulnerable customers. The richness of our engagement – with customers, politicians, the media and subject specialists – helps us understand that vulnerability can be present in many guises. Our engagement is designed to increase our understanding of the vulnerabilities of our customers in all its complexity.

2. The Priority Services Register

The first group of vulnerable customers comprises those who qualify for the Priority Services Register (PSR). These customers have particular needs that are recognised as being exacerbated by a power cut. Therefore, it is essential that we know who they are and what needs they have so that we can develop services that will help them in the event of a power cut.

Our PSR data strategy

Our ability to serve the most vulnerable customers depends on the accuracy of our data. In addition we seek to ensure that:

- We adhere to the Data Protection Act at all times and are prepared for the introduction of GDPR;
- During conversations with customers we always seek to check and ensure their information and records are up to date

We follow a three-step approach to ensure that data management is a thorough and continuous exercise. First, our team will cleanse customer records when they talk to customers on a day-to-day basis. Secondly, new customers are added to the PSR immediately and thirdly, an annual external data cleanse is carried out by a specialist data management company against external databases, such as the national register of deaths.

Ensuring the data we hold is as accurate as possible enables us to offer a more proactive service and tailored support to our vulnerable customers. However the increase in scam calling and mis-selling in recent years has left many people, especially vulnerable people, concerned about unsolicited calls. Furthermore our stakeholders have told us that they did not want us to call customers on the PSR to check their details, because this could be mistaken for cold calling. We do not want to add to the anxiety of our vulnerable customers and therefore do not make cold calls to them. Instead, we promote and update our PSR data by:

- Working with carefully selected partners, to refer customers to our PSR,
- Developing innovative, targeted ways, to increase awareness of our PSR,
- Cleansing our PSR annually using available sources to validate and update the register

3. Fuel poverty

We regard those experiencing financial difficulty, specifically those in fuel poverty, as vulnerable. According to the Government's Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report 2016, the regions covered by our networks are the only regions where fuel poverty increased in the preceding 12 months. The causal link between poverty

and ill health means that without help to reduce their fuel bills, these customers may develop health conditions that would further increase their vulnerability.

4. Hard to reach

The final group of vulnerable customers is those who are hard to reach. There is an inherent risk that the failure of mainstream methods of communication to reach these individuals and communities place this group at a disadvantage. We make a particular effort to identify these groups, e.g. through our work with the London Sustainability Exchange on engaging with the Muslim community. This enables us to identify communication channels that will break through the barriers and bring their levels of contact and engagement with us in line with that of the wider population.

Working in partnership to support vulnerable customers

Our strategy is to develop a wide variety of partnerships that work with us to overcome limitations in our understanding of vulnerability and our ability to directly meet the needs of our customers in vulnerable situations. Through them we are able to provide effective support to our customers in vulnerable circumstances by utilising their expertise, knowledge and services.

In 2017/18 we reviewed all of our existing partnerships, mapping them against the four pillars of our vulnerability strategy to ensure they aligned to and delivered against our vulnerability strategy.

Our commitment to our vulnerable customers

Our 2015-23 business plan makes eight specific commitments that support our consumer vulnerability strategy:

1. During a power cut providing multiple ways for customers to stay regularly updated on the estimated time for supply restoration and of any changes to the estimated time
2. Proactively contacting 100% of registered vulnerable customers to offer support if they are without power
3. Double the number of customers on our priority service register
4. Provide every customer who is more vulnerable during a power cut an alternative high priority dedicated telephone number
5. Create a group of UK Power Networks' local community energy champions
6. Develop a series of targeted consumer surgeries designed to raise awareness of energy efficiency and how to manage energy bills
7. Provide an energy advice referral service for fuel poor customers
8. Host two subject-specific priority issue focus groups every year

Our culture

As part of delivering a quality service, our strategy is focusing on embedding 'respected corporate citizen' across the company, at every level, from CEO down to our front-line engineers. This means that at every level, our workforce is committed to focusing on customer service and satisfaction. We have also developed a Think Customer framework which supports our employees in putting customer service at the heart of their day-to-day role. This is reinforced across the business through company-wide incentive schemes.

Our employees deliver for customers identified as vulnerable by ensuring that:

- We take the time to understand their personal situation and requirements
- As a company, we are contactable 24/7
- We keep them updated on progress
- We provide easy to understand information

- We provide multiple ways to stay regularly updated, depending on what suits their needs and circumstances best
- We engage proactively with the communities we serve and our stakeholders

Evaluation and KPIs

There are a number of ways we measure success; this includes how many vulnerable customers we sign up to the PSR in a given period and the number and quality of our PSR data.

However, our key metric is customer satisfaction. Data over the last six years shows a very strong picture of satisfying our customers, as seen in the graph below.

