Northern Powergrid Annual Vulnerability Report 2023/24 NORTHERN POWERGRID.

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31st July 2024

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Foreword



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**Customer Service** 

# Our strategic approach to addressing consumer vulnerability

President

and CEO

Vulnerability in our region



A comprehensive overview of the vulnerability dynamics across our region and the sophisticated tools and processes we rely on to keep our understanding of these always up to date.



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"We are excited for what's ahead as our support programmes gain greater momentum and deliver even more benefits to customers in the remainder of ED2 and beyond."

Louise Lowes, Director of Customer Service

### Foreword



Phil Jones, President and CEO It is a privilege to lead the organisation responsible for powering everyday life for more than eight million people across 3.9 million homes and businesses in the North East, Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire.

Supporting our vulnerable customers is core to our role as an essential service provider. Delivering a 10/10 service for customers who need more support than most means being ready to go above and beyond when it comes to understanding what we can do ourselves or in conjunction with partners to help manage the impact of any disruption to their power supply and removing blockers so that everybody can participate in the energy system transition.

Here at Northern Powergrid, understanding and driving continuous improvements which will deliver better outcomes for our customers in vulnerable situations is a team effort – and contributing to that is part of everyone's role. Be that improving resilience at the network's edge, enhancing our storm response or helping to build a new energy system that works for everyone.

Thank you for your interest in the important work we are undertaking in this area. Our support programme has grown significantly in the last couple of years - and we are already achieving significant results. We are pleased with the progress we have made and are committed to making sure there is more to come.



Louise Lowes, Director of Customer Service We hear from our customers on a daily basis and our research supports the view that high energy costs, combined with a wider cost-of-living crisis, have pushed millions of households into fuel poverty. At the same time, many of our customers progressively face barriers that increase their risk of being left behind in the energy system transition.

Non-market related factors are also exacerbating the impact on customers: for example, the rising trend of weather instability has meant that more frequent and intense storms make our job of keeping the lights on safely and reliably ever more challenging. In short, it is a difficult time to be an energy customer.

Over the past year, we have built on solid foundations refined throughout the ED1 period to match our customers' growing need for help. Our enhanced vulnerability programme will see us support tens of thousands with in-depth, tailored services and many more with lighter-touch support.

### We have made significant investments across all pillars of our vulnerability strategy:

 We continued to target and recruit customers to our Priority Services Membership (PSM), while maintaining high data quality standards.

Increased our PSM records by 111,731 customers' reaching 63.9% of eligible households.

 We trebled the number of dedicated Priority Services contact centre advisors and bolstered our trained standby team from across the business to more than 500, to strengthen communication and the provision of welfare services to our customers, during emergencies and business as usual activities alike.

(i) Proactively contacted **87.1%** of all priority 1 customers in the first hour of an interruption.

- (ii) Our proactive responders have supported customers on-site at 93.7% of power cuts of 6 hours or more.
- We significantly expanded our fuel poverty programme, introducing 7 new partners that are now offering a portfolio of over 290 in-depth interventions tailored to each customer's needs and local dynamics.

"I couldn't fault it. The notification to ourselves, they couldn't have done better, we were prepared for what was going to happen, so we are happy"

- PSM BMCS customer feedback (planned power cuts)

 We led the way in establishing advice services on LCTs, working with 5 partners to develop industry-leading service models which respond to our customers' unique needs on their path to decarbonisation.

Delivered in-depth fuel poverty support to 16,484 customers to generate £2.8m of net social value in the first year of our service, rising to £9.16m realised in continued benefits for these customers over the 5-year ED2 period, in line with our ambitious 5-year targets.

We established a dynamic service model to tackle the barriers that are preventing our customers from enjoying the benefits of the energy system transition. Facilitated by a comprehensive programme of research and engagement, we are iterating actively to design the right support for customers at different stages of their journey.



- (i) Engaged over 2000 customers to understand their transition barriers and explore solutions to overcome these.
- (ii) Delivered in-depth energy transition support to over 700 customers, generating £320k of net social value in the first year of our service, rising to £1.16m realised in continued benefits for these customers over the 5-year ED2 period.
- While proud of our achievements over the past year, we are focused on achieving our ambition of making a meaningful difference in the lives of those affected by situations of vulnerability. We are excited for what's ahead as our support programmes gain greater momentum and deliver even more benefits to customers in the remainder of ED2 and beyond.

"They were very helpful as my father is disabled and needs a hoist which needs to be kept operational. They were very helpful on the phone and the engineer fitted a generator which was fantastic"

PSM BMCS customer feedback (planned power cuts)

### Vulnerability in our region

We have a high prevalence of vulnerability in the region we serve, with many customers experiencing overlapping challenges in affordability, reliance on electricity, and risk of being left behind in the energy transition. We recognise that vulnerability is a highly personal experience, unique to each individual and influenced by a range of circumstances.

The region we serve is geographically and demographically diverse, comprising large cities, two major ports, post-industrial and historic towns, coastal communities, and vast swathes of rural areas across Yorkshire, the North East and Northern Lincolnshire.

Our customers and communities all have their own specific characteristics which influence their relationship with energy: from housing type, tenure and age to levels of isolation and poverty, to local network resilience.

As their personal circumstances and characteristics interact with broader market factors, such as price shocks, these vulnerabilities often leave our customers less able to protect or advocate for themselves compared to the average consumer. This reality frequently means that our customers are at greater risk of harm, and when harm does occur, it tends to be more severe.

In the North East the proportion of children both in relative and absolute low-income families is the highest in the country – and increasing.

Source: Health Profile for the North East of England 2021

There are 15 Local Authorities in Yorkshire and Humber. Of these, 6 fall within the 25% of Local Authorities nationally with the highest overall deprivation scores.

Source: Health Profile for Yorkshire and the Humber 2021

Recognising the multidimensional and changing nature of vulnerability, we need to work to understand our customers' needs on an ongoing basis. Customers' needs are often complex and extend far beyond what Northern Powergrid can address as a Distribution Network Operator (DNO) or in our new role in the Distribution System Operation (DSO).

However, as an anchor organisation in the region we play a key role in supporting others to play their part through joint working, sharing insight and best practice.

Our role is crucial in identifying, protecting, preparing, and supporting customers facing challenging circumstances.

We collaborate with other utilities and support providers in healthcare, social care, and financial sectors to collectively serve customers in need. By leveraging our combined resources, we address service gaps and create an ecosystem of support for vulnerable customers.

Though we cannot solve every problem alone, we actively work with our partners to establish a network of support that enhances the quality of care and assistance provided.



Over the past year, the landscape of vulnerability within our region has been influenced by several significant micro and macro trends, including ongoing economic pressures stemming from a global financial crisis and the continuing instability of energy prices, affecting affordability.

Although there has been some stabilisation in energy costs, prices remain elevated compared to pre-2020 levels, necessitating longer-term planning strategies to help mitigate the impact on our customers.



In addition, at the regional level, the cost-of-living crisis has affected other providers of support to vulnerable people.

Local Authorities, charities and schools have all experienced funding pressures often leading them to reducing the breadth of the support they are able to offer. This makes working as part of a coherent ecosystem of support even more important, to maximise the collective impact on the customers who need us most. Our approach to understanding and addressing consumer vulnerability is anchored in two fundamental activities:

### (i) Vulnerability data

#### (ii) Customer and stakeholder engagement

Together, these activities not only inform but significantly enhance our ability to deliver meaningful and effective support to customers. They enable us to respond to changing customer needs and are integral to our strategy for addressing consumer vulnerability.

This strategy leverages both the quantitative depth of data and the qualitative insights from our engagement to create a responsive and effective framework for supporting our most vulnerable customers.

20%

increase in aggregated fuel poverty gap

Source: Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics in England, 2024, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

60%

adults report that the cost-of-living crisis has negatively impacted their mental health

Source: King's College London, 2023

### Vulnerability data

### How we collect data on vulnerability

We believe that gathering high-quality data around vulnerability within our region directly influences our ability to deliver effective, tailored support to our customers. Our vulnerability data is gathered through 4 key flows of information:

### 1. PSM Database

Our PSM database helps us identify and prioritise customers who require tailored services and emergency support.

This database is continuously updated through proactive campaigns with local partners, industry flows from energy suppliers and a dynamic data cleanse process, ensuring it reflects our customers' needs. How this data shapes our services is detailed in 'Proactively identifying and supporting our vulnerable customers'.

### 2. Partner Data

Partner-specific data from water and utility companies, Gas Distribution Networks (GDNs), and DNOs enables a detailed view of customer needs and infrastructure capabilities.

We are increasingly sharing our data and capturing partner data sets through Open Maps (see below) which enriches the overall picture of our region and customers' needs.

### 3. Third-Party Data

When conducting campaigns, we frequently use third-party data to access non-public information about our customers and demographics within our service region. Social media campaign organisations can layer their data with ours, enabling more granular targeting and effectiveness of messaging. This includes insights into social media usage and preferences, key influences, and customer trends. This year we also ran our PSM database through external sources for validation (see 'Proactively identifying and supporting our vulnerable customers').

#### 4. External Data

Data from public and thirdsector organisations is crucial for capturing information about local populations.

For example, data from Citizens Advice Manchester provides insights into calls about fuel debt, while organisations like Marie Curie provide information on medically dependent customers. Our delivery partners also keep us informed on the barriers to support and challenges experienced by our customers.

We use each of these data flows to inform and enhance our service delivery. Building upon this foundation, we have been part of the project developing an innovative visualisation tool that consolidates our vulnerability data into one comprehensive platform, which allows us to visualise information on local demographics, regional challenges, and service provision.

### Case Study: Open Maps



In collaboration with Egnida, we have developed Open Maps, a data visualisation platform designed to enhance support for our customers.

This project is part of a collaborative effort funded by the Network Innovation Allowance,

with Northern Powergrid, Northern Gas Networks, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, and Cadent as participating partners.

Open Maps integrates our data sources, both public and private, into a user-friendly interface, allowing for easy interpretation of complex information.

The tool uses machine learning to analyse and interpret qualitative data, such as customer feedback and call recordings, transforming these into quantifiable metrics that can be visualised on the map.

On top of this, our partners can share data through a secure, GDPR-compliant framework to ensure their insights are captured. Over the past year, more than 80 partners from GDNs, DNOs, Local Authorities, charities, and community groups have tested and fed back on how the tool can best support them in delivering services to vulnerable customers and communities. This enhances the tool's accuracy, helping us identify high-risk areas and target interventions effectively.

Open Maps enables the profiling of rural, urban, suburban, and coastal regions. The tool can produce filterable datasets or maps with different layers, which display the vulnerabilities identified in an area or information on the demographic of the local population.

Using the data and insights generated by the tool to shape our strategy and delivery, we have been able to allocate resources more efficiently, develop proactive support initiatives which target the specific needs of local populations, and build even stronger partnerships, ultimately improving our region's resilience and our customers' wellbeing.

How we use insights from the tool in practice is outlined throughout this document.



households in fuel poverty

12.6% of Middlesborough households in fuel poverty

#### Hull & Doncaster

concentration of disabled people targeted location face-to-face PSM

### Customer and stakeholder engagement

### Engagement over the last year

We engaged with stakeholders, customers, and their representatives in order to gain insight that, coupled with data, shapes our strategy and actions. We engage through a variety of methods, including surveys, focus groups, and direct consultations, to ensure that our engagement is inclusive and represents all perspectives.

By combining these insights with robust data analysis, we are able to develop well-informed strategies and take targeted actions that effectively address the vulnerabilities within our service region.

Our comprehensive approach ensures that our initiatives are not only datadriven but also grounded in the real experiences and expectations of those we serve, leading to more impactful and meaningful outcomes.

We endeavour to understand customers' needs and trends in vulnerability through three key streams of engagement: (i) Northern Powergrid-led activity, (ii) Northern Powergrid-commissioned research, and (iii) external insight and feedback.

### 5,700+

Stakeholders engaged

### Case Study: PSM Research

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In our ongoing commitment to enhancing customer experience, our regular PSM research survey has been in place for ten years.

We partner with Explain to conduct 1,200 telephone surveys to measure customers' satisfaction levels with our PSM. The

survey is strategically designed to further our understanding of customers' expectations and evaluate our performance throughout their PSM journey.

Each year we adapt the survey to gain insight on a new part of the journey. Previously having focused on customer experience at registration and during planned and unplanned power cuts, this year we designed the survey to place additional focus on understanding the membership validation process.

The survey gathered feedback from PSM members at three crucial points in their journey:

- Newly-registered members: Those who registered and joined the PSM within the months of September, October and November 2023.
- One-year members: Individuals who had been a PSM member for one year but had not yet validated their membership.
- Post-validation members: Customers who registered and validated their membership in 2021.

### Example activities from this year include:

Northern Powergrid-led activity - Cross-Utility Forum with gas, water and communications colleagues, Stakeholder and Citizen Panels, Fuel Poverty and Decarbonising Homes delivery partners, energy training sessions, quarterly Stronger Together workshops and engagement with regional political stakeholders, including MPs and Councillors.

Northern Powergrid commissioned research - understanding customers' expectations of the PSM through 1,200 telephone surveys, focus groups covering over 10-hour power cuts, ETR text messaging and communications language during a power cut, understanding vulnerable customers' needs through interviews with customers and stakeholders, 2 Low Carbon Technology (LCT) tracker surveys, understanding the attitudes of over 4000 households and LCT service model testing.

**External insight and feedback** - Energy Systems Catapult, Research Institute for Disabled Consumers, National Government and Parliament, Institute for Customer Service, charities and community groups in our region, Local Government departments and groups.

Engaging with stakeholders, customers, and their representatives provides a deeper and more nuanced understanding that, when integrated with data, fuels insights which are essential for shaping strategic decisions and actions. The primary goal of our engagement efforts is to comprehend the evolving needs and vulnerabilities of our customers, ensuring that our strategies and responses are both informed and effective. We share key examples of how we respond to this feedback throughout this report.

The research revealed valuable insights across awareness and communications, membership expectations, and the membership validation experience when we ask them to confirm their contact details and any change in their needs.

Customers expressed that they were particularly pleased with our services during power cuts, and how communication was handled during power cuts.

However, areas that were highlighted as opportunities for improvement included communications surrounding membership validation, as some customers were unaware that their membership had not been validated.

In response to this feedback, we have a robust plan in place, improving our welcome packs and trialing the introduction of in-person calls and 'white mail' contacts to enhance the existing data cleanse process.

As a business, our comprehensive engagement programme focuses on two key areas: the development of our future energy system and the needs of our customers. The two are naturally intertwined, and we thoroughly value the insights of experts in how vulnerable customers interact with energy markets and systems.

- Rachael Durrett, Stakeholder Engagement Manager

### **Forward Plan**

Over the coming year we will:

- Further understand our customers' attitudes towards decarbonisation, through working with Mustard Research Ltd to identify the bespoke personas, personality types and attitudes. This will enable us to understand our customers' unique needs and ensure our support is tailored to each individual.
- Progress stage 3 of the Open Maps project. This will include:
  - Operationalising the tool in addition to the strategic shaping and targeting of services and campaigns we will build the tool into our operational delivery, for example offering enhanced information to customers around local support available during a power cut.
  - Sharing the tool with wider partners helping them to offer localised tailored support as well as where possible safely and securely sharing some of
    their data sets with us. Ultimately this will strengthen our collaborative approach to a localised ecosystem of support.
  - Integrate a question function allowing users to ask the map a question and get a quick, visual answer pulling on the extensive range of data points.
  - Focus our engagement on the co-creation of service improvements in key areas, following extensive customer journey engagement to identify these improvements this year.

# Our strategic approach to addressing consumer vulnerability

At Northern Powergrid, our primary mission is to provide exceptional support and assistance to our vulnerable customers, in line with our role as a DNO. We achieve this through three targeted programmes of support: our Priority Services Membership, independent advice on Fuel Poverty, and our Decarbonising Homes programme of advice on LCTs.

Founded on a commitment to continuous learning and improvement, we invest in both internal and external capabilities to deliver these programmes and maximise their impact on customers.

Our approach is driven by specific objectives to (i) embed a focus on vulnerability, (ii) evolve our partnerships, and (iii) refine impact measurement and decision-making. These efforts are supported by five key enablers: Culture, Training, Processes and Governance, Partnerships, and Impact Measurement.

### Our vulnerability strategy is illustrated in the diagram below.

#### Aim

Provide exceptional support and assistance to our vulnerable customers informed by a detailed understanding of their needs.

#### Objectives

Embed a focus on vulnerability, Evolve our partnerships, Refine impact measurement and decision-making.

### Enablers

Culture, Training, Processes and Governance, Partnerships, Impact Measurement.

### Embedding a focus on vulnerability

Over the ED1 period, we embedded a focus on consumer vulnerability across all areas of our business, from the boardroom to the front line.

We continue to actively build on this, fostering a culture that ensures everyone at Northern Powergrid considers the impact of their actions on vulnerable customers. This is facilitated by training our colleagues to be able to identify and address when a customer is facing vulnerability and integrating vulnerability into our formal governance and decision-making processes.

### Culture

Consumer vulnerability is embedded in our culture at Northern Powergrid. Our focus is not just on Priority Services Members, but rather on ensuring that all customers in vulnerable circumstances are supported and cared for, and that the customer is central to everything we do.

Developing, maintaining, and evolving a culture focused on considering and addressing the needs of vulnerable customers started from consistent efforts to improve customer service. This is well exemplified by our flagship behavioural change programme delivered over the past year.



It is a joy to watch our team of Proactive Responders take such pride in delivering an excellent customer experience for some of our most vulnerable people and communities.

 Kara Chapman, Regional Customer Service Manager, South Yorkshire

### Case Study: Power of 10



Working towards our goal of achieving 10/10 customer satisfaction for everything we do, we have designed and implemented a company-wide behavioural change programme over the past year. This initiative empowers and inspires all colleagues

to deliver outstanding customer service in everything they do, and instils a sense of responsibility for the outcomes our customers will experience. Our reason for aiming for a 10/10 customer satisfaction score goes beyond measuring our performance or meeting regulatory requirements: we believe that it reflects the genuine care and dedication our colleagues provide. As an essential service, we know that our work has a significant impact on customers and they rely on us to deliver the support they need.

Our "Power of 10" initiative, made up of 5 "Power Principles", motivates our employees to excel both individually and as a team. In particular, the framework has helped colleagues in non-customer-facing roles understand how their work connects to a customer journey and the part they play within that. The programme has fostered a culture of excellence and ensures that we consistently exceed customer expectations. accessible customer service is just good customer service. We are committed to providing the support that our customers need,

whenever they need it."

- Jo Lawson-Green, Customer Service Programme Manager

"Inclusive and Our five Power Principles, which all employees have adopted, are:

- Personal responsibility
- Work as a team
- Deliver quality
- Drive improvement
- Build a stronger team

Following the launch of the Power of 10 in October 2023, we have rolled out the initiative through a series of internal workshops, presentations, training sessions, leadership engagement and comprehensive business-wide communications to ensure our colleagues adopt and engage with the principles.

By embedding these principles, we ensure that every interaction and service we provide is of the highest standard, particularly for our most vulnerable customers. This commitment to continuous improvement and teamwork helps us create a supportive and effective environment that benefits both our employees and our customers.

### **Case Study: BSI Inclusive Services Audit**



In December 2023, we became one of the first utilities to undergo the new British Standards Institute (BSI) 22458 Inclusive Services Kitemark. The Kitemark ensures high customer service standards across our website, partnerships and contact centres, highlighting both our successes and areas where we can improve the accessibility of our services. We were proud to receive the report confirming that we had achieved the standard.

We received positive feedback for having effective strategies in place for consumer engagement and information processes, consumer feedback and complaint resolution, interruption to service, and data protection. The audit highlighted areas for improvement and we are actively working to resolve each of those identified over the past year. This includes a complete redesign of the Northern Powergrid website and the exploration of new partnerships and projects aimed at engaging hard-to-reach customer groups. We are committed to creating a fully inclusive and accessible service and we will continue to undergo this annual audit to identify and address areas for improvement. The insight provided from this independent audit is vital to guiding our decision-making as a business and provides an external source of validation for the inclusivity of our services.

### Training

At Northern Powergrid, our commitment to a vulnerability-focused culture is upheld through comprehensive and consistent training for all our colleagues. We ensure our colleagues understand the unique challenges our customers face and are prepared to provide support during business as usual and major incidents.

Our extensive training programme is designed to not only meet the 10AA Standard Licensing Condition, but to surpass regulatory standards, displaying our commitment to delivering the highest quality of support for our customers. Our training programme includes a variety of consumer vulnerability training sessions across our operations. All of our colleagues are trained on consumer vulnerability at their induction into the business, and receive refresher training every 24 months. Over the past year, we have delivered this training to 262 colleagues across the business.

Additionally, we collaborate with external organisations to deliver specialised training tailored to specific teams, relevant to their roles and responsibilities. Partners such as Groundwork Green Doctors, MIND and Deaf Awareness: NE offer specialised knowledge and skills that enhance our team's ability to support vulnerable customers.

An overview of our training programme is illustrated below.		Key: Business wide Specialist training		
Online consumer vulnerability modules	Consumer vulnerability workshops	Groundwork Green Doctor training	Scope accessibility training	
Deaf awareness training	Major incident training	Specialist PSM call-handling training	Mind mental health awareness training	

We believe that by providing well-rounded training across the business, and specialised training tailored to specific roles, we are fostering a culture where consumer vulnerability is central to everyone's role and is a shared responsibility across the organisation.

### Case Study: Reviewed and refreshed training

This year we have reviewed, redesigned and expanded our consumer vulnerability training for colleagues including:

Refreshing the comprehensive training on consumer vulnerability that all new colleagues undergo at their induction, comprising
online e-learning modules, which have been reviewed and updated to include additional content on our Fuel Poverty and
Decarbonising Homes services. This ensures that all colleagues across the business have a thorough understanding of different
types of vulnerability and are attuned to the specific challenges faced by our customers within the context of each of our
rammes

support programmes.

- Following the redesign of our training package, colleagues joining in customer-facing roles will receive updated in-person consumer vulnerability training, to dive deeper into vulnerability. Through 2024, we will continue working with a network of expert partners to develop a training schedule that empowers our colleagues to support customers no matter their situation.
- Our contact centre staff have undertaken training with the leading mental health charity, Mind. The training is focused on identifying when a customer is struggling with their mental health, how to sensitively approach the subject, and how to refer them for support. Power cuts and service disruptions can exacerbate the frequency and severity of mental health issues for customers, meaning it is crucial for our staff to be trained to provide empathetic and effective support in these situations. By undertaking this training, our staff feel empowered to support our customers with enhanced mental health needs.
- Following the success of this training in 2024 we'll also extend our bespoke training with a rolling programme of external trainers and speakers to
  enhance our teams' knowledge on a range of vulnerabilities to adapt support requirements.

### Processes and Governance

Throughout ED1, we established strong governance and processes to ensure that consumer vulnerability is integrated into our operations and is central to decision-making. We have continued to strengthen our approach over the past year, by centralising consumer vulnerability roles and making the most of regular Business Plan Engagement Group meetings.

### Case Study: Business Plan Engagement Group



The Business Plan Engagement Group (BPEG) meets quarterly to ensure effective engagement and responsiveness to our stakeholders and customers. The group oversees the effective delivery of our annual Business Plan, and

ensures that stakeholder feedback is embedded in our priorities, investment decisions, and long-term strategies.

The BPEG provides a forum for stakeholder voices to shape the prioritisation, modification, and delivery of the commitments made in our Business Plan. Crucially, it provides an opportunity for cross-cutting engagement to be reviewed and integrated where there are synergies across multiple business functions. including strategic consumer vulnerability discussions. The group will also evaluate new priorities from stakeholders and advise on their incorporation into annual Business Plans or upcoming Price Controls.

Consumer vulnerability is considered across the quarterly and all Monthly BPEG groups, but is the particular focus of the 'Meeting the needs of consumers' monthly BPEG. Insights from this meeting shape our training programmes, support in establishing our vulnerability partnerships, and inform partnership management.

The group is observed by our Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG) to assess the quality and scope of our stakeholder engagement, and how well stakeholder insights are reflected in our initiatives. The ISG's role is to hold the business accountable and challenge our responsiveness to stakeholder needs.



### How we have evolved our partnerships over the past year

Our partnerships play an essential role in addressing vulnerability, enabling us to create effective and impactful support systems for those in need. Our strategic partnership network is composed of multiple layers and many different organisations, each contributing uniquely to our collective mission. This network includes the Northern Inclusive Energy Network, our delivery partners under Partners Together, the broader network under Stronger Together, and Industry Partners such as GDNs. Each layer enhances our capacity to deliver effective, localised support through collaboration, resource sharing, and innovative initiatives.



Over the past year, we have built on our relationships with partners to facilitate the delivery of exceptional services and deliver maximum value for customers. We have strengthened our partnerships strategy by: (i) Amending contract durations to unlock our partners' delivery capabilities, (ii) Strengthening collaborative work and the sharing of best practice, and (iii) Supporting the wellbeing of our partners, as exemplified in the case studies below.

### Case Study: Extending contract durations to maximise support for customers



At the beginning of ED2, we established one-year contracts with our partners, in order to test new partnerships and delivery models.

However, based on feedback from our partners, we have learned that short duration contracts often create challenges in recruitment and retention, as they can only recruit for the short period for which they have confirmed funding. This prevents them from investing in the people and skills necessary for long-term planning.

In response, we have implemented three-year contracts across our partnership network. This change is designed to offer our partners the security they need to maximise their ability to support vulnerable customers. With the assurance of ongoing funding over a longer period, our partners can now plan and execute their services with greater confidence.

In addition, these longer-term contracts have allowed partners to retain skilled advisors with the expertise they need to ensure that our most vulnerable customers receive consistent and reliable support.

Jenny Saunders, ISG

### Case study: Strengthening collaborative work and the sharing of best practice

#### Stronger Together



We have been working with a wide range of partners for a number of years to collectively deliver localised support for vulnerable customers. In light of the increasing challenges customers and local partners are facing and the ambitious commitments we made as part of our ED2 Business Plan, we have reviewed and refreshed our approach over the past year.

Working with Impact MR we piloted and formalised our Stronger Together Partnership Network, the cornerstone of our partnership programme, which aims to:

- Build the capacity and capability of Northern Powergrid consumer vulnerability and social responsibility partners.
- Run a continual and formalised network of activities which engage Northern Powergrid's partners, garnering insights that support Northern
  Powergrid to achieve its RIIO-ED2 goals relating to consumer vulnerability.
- Provide support which maximises the impact of Northern Powergrid investments and increases the sustainability of partnerships beyond direct funding.
- Understand the current and existing issues affecting partners and communities they support.
- Develop the service and support offered by Northern Powergrid and Impact based on a clear understanding of existing partnership needs.

The network contains 700+ partners including third-sector charities, Local Authorities, social housing and local grassroots organisations. We started with a pilot phase in 2023, and conducted thorough evaluation before embedding the programme into business as usual at the start of 2024. Having gathered partners' feedback and reviewed the successes of different aspects of the programme activities, we made changes to the programme itself and to our services to embed the needs of our customers and stakeholders.

Beyond support for our partners, further details of how this network is helping us to deliver enhanced services to customers and communities are included throughout this report.

### How the Stronger Together network has influenced our services

Partner feedback	Our response
"It's great to hear about Northern Powergrid along with learning what other local organisations are doing."	We have increased participation during the Stronger Together workshops, by encouraging partners to present key projects, and hosting roundtable discussions. <b>Commitment:</b> We are committed to delivering four events in 2024, focused on co-creating, testing and delivering key outcomes around consumer vulnerability. The focus of each event will be: (Q1) Shaping our Services and Engagement, (Q2) DSO and Nobody Left Behind, (Q3) Winter Preparedness and (Q4) Developing Innovation Projects.
"We have little to no time and resource available to find and share best practice or to gather insight/research even though it can be really useful."	We have sent three newsletters to over 1,400 individuals, containing quarterly insight tracking of useful external resources, case studies from partners and different vulnerabilities, and key research. <b>Commitment:</b> For 2024/25, a quarterly newsletter will contain Northern Powergrid-focused wider insights, resources, best practice, and case studies.
"We need more resources for us, and for the customers we support. Ensure information is easily digestible and simple to understand (for both offline and online comms)."	We have created and published a compendium of Northern Powergrid resources available in both digital and print formats and developed new resources, such as the Decarbonising Homes leaflet. <b>Commitment:</b> In 2024/25, Northern Powergrid will continue to develop and share resources in response to partner and customer needs and regularly refresh the resource compendium.
"Understanding the changing and future energy system and vulnerability within this is complex but important for us and our customers."	We have promoted and shared access to the Open Maps vulnerability visualisation tool, for partners to use and gain insight from. In addition, we offer free fuel poverty training to all our partners through Groundwork, including our wider partnerships network. <b>Commitment:</b> For 2024/25, Northern Powergrid will develop and offer carbon literacy training and deliver dedicated Open Maps training, including use cases.

### Case Study: Supporting the wellbeing of our partners



Our partners have reported an increased level of severity in the issues faced by our customers, particularly regarding financial difficulties and the wider impact this can have on wellbeing and mental health.

As a result, partners have encountered more customers exhibiting challenging behaviours, particularly the use of verbally abusive language, as well as an increased number of customers demonstrating severe mental health needs.

Recognising the emotional weight of the role we provided each frontline worker within our partner network with a £100 voucher to use towards enhancing their mental health and wellbeing. They chose different ways to use this bonus from organising Christmas parties for their team to counselling sessions and massages.

We appreciate our partners and frontline workers' commitment and welcomed the opportunity to support their mental health whilst they continue to deliver the exceptional, impactful support that our customers rely on.



### Refining impact measurement and decision-making

Understanding the impact of our services on customers is essential to measuring our progress in delivering exceptional support and assistance to vulnerable customers. We continue to build on our impact measurement processes, to drive robustness and ensure that we understand the multi-layered impact of our support on customers.

We have formulated a set of conditions that must be met to ensure that social value measurement is extensive and reliable. These conditions state that social value measurement should be based on robust social value modelling, independently assured, and used to influence decision-making. In line with these ambitions, we have engaged an expert independent third party to assess our social value modelling over the past year; this was further tested for its alignment with the industry-wide modelling standards as part of a assurance process that all DNOs must undergo on a yearly basis. The assurance process confirmed that our results were produced in line with all relevant industry standards.



### Impact measurement

Our journey towards robust social value measurement began in ED1. As standard, we use the industry-wide DNO rulebook to model the social impact of our support services. Using the rulebook ensures consistency with other DNOs in the way we model our services.

Whilst the rulebook has driven a step-change in the comparability of impact results across networks, our aim is to capture the real impact experienced by each individual customer wherever possible. We aim to use real data recorded and reported by our partners, gathered directly from customers on the ground.

We have been working with our partners to embed data collection and reporting processes within their operations in order to capture evidence from the field on the benefits gained by each customer receiving our support. Many of our partners have started to implement these data collection methods, and are beginning to report their findings on customers savings to us directly.

### Social value modelling

Over the past year, Sirio has calculated the SROI of our delivery using the comprehensive and detailed data we provided. This modelling was conducted in strict accordance with the industry-wide DNO RIIO-ED2 rulebook, ensuring an independent and unbiased view of value. By removing bias from the process the quality of the insights gained have been increased, enabling us to make more informed decisions.

In addition, Sirio has developed a streamlined reporting process for our partners, which extracts key outcomes from standardised partner reports. This process facilitates the measurement of SROI based on (i) assumptions and proxies in line with the rulebook and (ii) actual benefits reported by partners.

Both components are measured, tracked, and studied to better understand our impact and explore the drivers of discrepancies between rulebooklinked measurements and on-the-ground reporting. This comprehensive approach ensures we can rely on our social value modelling to accurately represent the real impact of our support on customers, guiding our future decision-making.



### 🔻 Impact on decision-making

We rely on social value measurement to guide our decision-making. For example, SROI helps us predict the social value that a partnership will generate, scale the impact of expanding programmes and partnerships, and inform our performance management. However, we believe that SROI should not be the sole determinant of our planning.

Therefore, we have designed a comprehensive decision-making framework. When approaching a decision, we appraise our investment options by forecasting social value, which includes assessing the social benefits and qualitative impacts of each option. In addition, we consider factors such as risk, system resilience, environmental impacts, financial and social cost benefit analysis, stakeholder insights, operational expenditure savings and engineering recommendations.



### **Case Study: Community Action Northumberland**



Our partnership with Community Action Northumberland began by sponsoring 44 Warm Hubs across Northumberland that were at risk of closure due to expired funding.

We were able to quickly identify that this partnership offered high SROI, due to their Warm Hubs accreditation standards.

Under the accreditation scheme, these hubs not only provide warmth and social interaction but also serve as essential centres for customers to receive advice and support. They address immediate concerns, such as difficulties in keeping warm at home, as well as providing hot meals, social interaction and transportation.

Customers are also encouraged to participate in indoor and outdoor games such as bowls, and fitness and leisure classes.

All of these factors create a holistic service which generates an SROI that is far higher than simply providing a warm location for individuals to attend.

In addition to expanding the reach of Warm Hubs, Community Action Northumberland has developed an online tool for local individuals and organisations to apply to become a Warm Hub. This tool streamlines the application process and encourages participation in helping the community.

Having delivered such a successful support scheme for our customers in the 2023/4 winter, we are now in the process of embedding accredited Warm Hubs in our core vulnerability offering across our entire region.

#### **Innovation Project: Supporting Warm Spaces**

- We have extended this work by establishing a Network Innovation Allowance project in collaboration with National Gas, National Grid Transmission, Northern Gas Networks and National Energy Action.
- This partnership now utilises the innovative Open Maps tool to identify areas within the joint service region that have the greatest need for support by looking at indicators such as free school meal recipients, benefits claim data and housing quality data. This data-driven approach allows us to strategically collaborate and establish new Warm Hubs where they are most required, under the policy and practice guidance of National Energy Action.

The preferred investment option is defined based on these appraisals, ensuring that social value is integrated into the decision-making process. Post-investment, the outcomes are measured and benchmarked to refine future decisions, creating a feedback loop to continuously enhance the incorporation of social value in our strategic planning. This holistic approach ensures we are well-informed and effective in our planning. Examples of this in action include:

- Forecasting SROI We model our partners' services during the trial or pilot phases of projects to estimate their potential social value upon full rollout and scaling. In our Decarbonising Homes programme, we forecasted the SROI based on previously delivered service models. These models demonstrated high returns on investment, underscoring the programme's potential benefits. To ensure our approach was aligned with customer needs, we tested three different service models through our Consumer Panel. This allowed us to gather valuable insights and understand which model would best address the needs and preferences of our customers. Using the SROI forecast and the service model chosen by our customers, we were able to develop a strong business case for the Decarbonising Homes programme. This thorough analysis not only supported the programme's implementation but also shaped its strategic direction, ensuring it is both impactful and aligned with customer expectations.
- **Benchmarking SROI** We have been working to set up outcome collection processes with our partners to measure the social value delivered and evidence the projects impact. As a result of embedding data collection processes, our partners report to us on a monthly basis, meaning we are able to track the impact of their services regularly throughout the year. With this data, we have been able to benchmark our partners' services against each other to identify where best practice is being used. We then use this insight to inform partnership management going forward.

Now in its final planning stages, this project will facilitate the opening of more Warm Hubs across the Northern Powergrid region, significantly expanding our impact. These Hubs play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable individuals, offering them a safe and welcoming environment, and ensuring they have access to essential services and social connections.

This initiative exemplifies how best practice can be identified through SROI tracking, and how this can be used to understand the real needs of vulnerable communities. This project highlights the value of combining SROI insights with data and engagement, and how this can lead to innovative solutions to community support.



# Proactively identifying and supporting our vulnerable customers

### Our strategy and approach

As a network, our primary role is to deliver a reliable energy supply to our customers. We work hard to keep the lights on and ensure our supplies are available 99.99% of the time. In any given year, most customers won't experience a power cut. However, if they do, we have robust plans and services in place to quickly mitigate the issues our vulnerable customers may experience. We recognise that all customers can be at an increased level of vulnerability when experiencing a power cut, and are proud to provide excellent enhanced services to vulnerable customers who require this essential service.

Our approach to supporting our vulnerable customers in the event of a power cut follows three key principles, which come together to allow us to deliver a first-class service for our vulnerable customers, whatever the circumstance.



In order to proactively respond to vulnerable customers' needs, we attempt to identify them in advance and encourage them to sign up for support in case of a power cut. In 2020, direct engagement with vulnerable customers highlighted that the stigma attached to a 'vulnerability register' is a significant barrier to the growth of the Priority Services Register (PSR). Therefore, we decided to rebrand the Priority Services Register to a Membership, emphasising the benefits of joining and the perception of 'community'. In addition to offering proactive support to PSM-registered customers, all Northern Powergrid colleagues are trained and empowered to identify customers experiencing vulnerability and offer them support as and when it is needed.

To achieve a first-class service, we focus on identifying our vulnerable customers, holding and managing robust quality data, understanding each customer's unique needs, and delivering inclusive communications. This allows us to offer a comprehensive portfolio of services to meet the needs of our vulnerable customers during supply interruptions.

### Our progress in supporting vulnerable customers

We have focused our efforts this year in improving our PSM data quality, increasing and testing new channels of our PSM recruitment approach and increasing our on-site support services for vulnerable customers.

### Actively Engage – PSM recruitment

The key to delivering excellent support is understanding the needs of those using the service. Therefore, we believe it is vital to get to know who is living behind every door in our network so that we can provide the best and most effective support for them personally.

As vulnerability is ever-evolving, it's essential we have a robust process to continually identify customers who need extra help and support and check we have the correct information regarding their needs.

We have set an ambitious target for our PSM numbers by the end of the price control in line with other DNOs. We have purposely chosen to set incremental targets in these first two years as we and the wider industry formalise, strengthen and standardise models for PSM recruitment.

This year we have made steady progress towards our 2028 target with 190,267 new PSM sign-ups and 63.9% of eligible customers signed up to the PSM by March 2024.



Our approach to recruitment is driven by years of testing and experience. We take a multi-pronged approach including:

- Using our data innovatively (Open Maps) to identify areas and populations where we have high eligibility but low sign ups and targeting our recruitment accordingly.
- Promoting awareness through holistic communications in addition to encouraging PSM registration, we highlight the support options available, empowering customers to request services when needed.
- Reaching as wide an audience as possible through outreach campaigns and extensive communications across multiple channels.
- More targeted approaches for hard-to-reach groups like those who are digitally excluded or have other communication needs. Our Fuel Poverty and Decarbonising Homes delivery partners continue to play a key role in shaping and delivering our PSM recruitment in this area.



Further details of some of the key recruitment activities we have undertaken this year, their impact and our learning, include:

- PSM-specific promotional campaigns and promotion of the PSM through wider campaigns like winter preparedness (further details included below on page 17).
- Sending e-mails and text messages to all customers on our database promoting the benefits of PSM sign-up for themselves, their family and friends.
- PSM promotion on our day-to-day customer communications, for example planned works notifications.
- We conducted outreach in shopping centres, targeting areas underrepresented on the PSM, to generate sign-ups in person. The uptake was quite low in comparison to other trials, so we will not continue this moving forward.
- Continuing to build PSM referrals into contracts for partners delivering Fuel Poverty and Decarbonising Homes services to vulnerable customers has led to 437 sign ups this year.
- Growing community partnerships to help more people access our support and services. We prepared and shared an asset toolkit with our network of 450+ partners to share PSM messaging and promote sign-ups. They use their own trusted channels, like the Age Friendly Network newsletter in North Yorkshire.
- We encourage customer PSM sign up during outreach ahead of bad weather, which is particularly effective, along with wider communications (text messaging) around preparing for power cuts.
- Our proactive responders actively promote PSM and sign customers up on site as well as attending community events to further promote membership and encourage registrations.
- "Just wanted to say a very big thank you to both you and Sarah from everyone at life lunches (soup Tuesday) for the great job you both did when you visited us. The feedback was really, really positive and they did not appreciate what Northern Powergrid could do for individuals when there was a power outage. Your information was spot on and extremely helpful."
  - Customer feedback following a PSM talk at a community event where 40 customers signed up to PSM

### Case study: "Your needs, our Priority"



Based on customer feedback indicating that examples and imagery of people experiencing similar vulnerabilities resonate with them, we developed the "Your needs, our Priority" campaign. The campaign was tailored to reflect the different types of vulnerability customers may experience.

It included examples of people living with a range of disabilities, additional communication needs, young children in the home or who are elderly, which were then targeted at those specific groups.

The campaign was promoted through:

- Advertising widely through DAX audio, Google and Facebook, receiving 3.55m impressions and 73,000 clicks overall.
- Tailored and targeted adverts for key groups in publications such as Able, the UK's Flagship Disability Lifestyle Magazine.
- Local Authority service communications and websites aimed at vulnerable customers.



Need **extra advice** and **support** in a power cut?

Join our free Priority Services Membership today.

northernpowergrid.com/care

### Maintain Quality - maintaining and managing quality data

In order to provide our enhanced services, it is crucial to ensure that our vulnerability data is high quality. As discussed, vulnerability is flexible and often changes as a result of personal circumstances and external market factors.

High quality data gives us a clear picture of what customers need, when they need us, and where they need us – which empowers our colleagues and partners to deliver the right support at the right time. Our own register, the PSM, is the cornerstone of our data strategy.

Our focus over the past year has been further strengthening our processes both internally and in partnership with industry and third party data providers, ensuring quality as well as quantity in our PSM database.



### Robust data cleanse process

The Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) created the industry methodology for calculating eligibility for Priority Services. This year they changed their methodology and in response we have completed an evaluation and improvement of our existing data cleanse exercise to ensure that our starting point for this price control is a strong, quality-focused baseline.

We have a robust data cleanse process in place which involves checking and validating PSM customer data.

### Day to day transactions – personalised service

It is embedded in our culture and processes that when we are in contact with customers through day-to-day transactions like planned or unplanned power interruptions, regular communications or other business as usual activities, our contact centre colleagues have conversations to check any changing needs or personal details that are then updated directly on our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

### Supplier data flows

Our two-way data flows with energy suppliers help us to validate our data and grow our PSM. If we have been in touch with a customer more recently, our direct contact data supersedes this. We have worked this year on a system and set of rules to improve the quality of this data, checking accuracy and where further validation is required. This will be launched following usertesting.

### Automated cleanse process

Where PSM customers are reaching the two-year mark since our last interaction with them, we will start communicating with them to check in about their situation and needs. Where we hold details, we will send text messages and emails asking for them to validate their details If they have not responded a week later, we will send a second communication. Following this, where we have a telephone number we wil instigate automated telephone messaging.

#### Third party data and validation

This year we also worked with Experian and Sagacity to run the entirety of our PSM data through their systems to identify where customers may be deceased or no longer living at an address, as well as anomalies in contact data. This adds an additional layer of robustness to our assurance that we have high quality data on our customers and their needs.

Receiving a non-response from our data cleanse process or information anomalies from the third party data does not necessarily mean that a vulnerable customer is no longer at the property. For those that have moved house or sadly passed away, rather than being removed from the PSM we ensure they are included in data cleanse moving forward, so that no customer is ever mistakenly removed from our records. Our approach is to make every reasonable attempt to contact customers to verify records, whilst taking the pragmatic view that it is better to assume that there is vulnerability at the premises. This ensures that we hold the most valid data possible to enable us to proactively communicate with customers and deliver a first-class service.

### Case study: Data sharing with water companies



We have been working as an industry through the Energy Networks Association for a number of years to agree and facilitate the sharing of vulnerable customer data with water companies. Complementing this is our regional project

Support For All which is looking at a 'tell us once' solution for PSM customers. As a result of phase 1:

- 350,000+ additional PSR customers are now receiving support, having been shared from one utility to another.
- — 160,000+ Updated PSR customer details e.g. telephone numbers, dates of birth, refreshed dates, have been added to PSR's.
- 110,000+ customers with additional PSR needs identified.

We are now in the second phase which is exploring expanding this model to include independent utilities and other sectors, for example the Royal National Institute of Blind People and Telco. To improve the customer experience we are also looking into giving our customers the ability to view, access and amend their data.



### Listen and change - How vulnerable customers shape our PSM services

Our vulnerable customers need us most at times when they are experiencing interruptions in their supply. However, individual circumstances, the duration of the outage and the nature of vulnerability mean that their needs are complex and can change over time. Understanding their needs is essential to ensure that we are able to offer services which are tailored, responsive, and deliver excellent customer experience.

Our strategic, targeted engagement with customers experiencing a range of different vulnerabilities continues to shape our work in order to provide an ever-improving service.

We have engaged extensively with our vulnerable customers over the last year to shape, test and improve our services and support including:

Engagement	Key themes and insights	Northern Powergrid outcomes and response
In-depth interviews with 40 PSM customers and 15 stakeholders representing them to refresh our understanding of how their needs in a power cut change over time.	Customers continue to value communications and updates as the priority and very few expect or require additional services as part of their membership.	We are making good progress against our proactive communication targets, contacting 87.1%* of Priority 1 customers within 1 hour and 87.4%* of all PSM customers within 3 hours of an unplanned power cut.
1,200 surveys with PSM customers as part of an enduring tracker to understand satisfaction and emerging needs.	The customer journey was explored and mapped by customer group, showing that there was limited but some nuanced difference between groups. Our services need to incorporate flexibility to respond to individual needs and circumstances.	93.7%* of sites where a power cut exceeded 6 hours were attended by a proactive responder to provide face-to-face, practical support. We are now moving towards a target of attending all power cuts exceeding 4 hours.
Broader Measure of Customer Satisfaction (BMCS) surveys to understand PSM customer satisfaction with services received.	Awareness of the PSM is high but more work needs to be done to increase the impact of PSM welcome packs. The packs contain introductory information for new PSM customers, including details of support available and direct contact information Northern Powergrid.	We are implementing a plan to improve customer recognition of and satisfaction with welcome packs throughout 2024/25. We have trialled PSM registration incentives with
Dedicated events and surveys with our partners to understand ongoing and emerging barriers to PSM sign-up.	Taking the time to help customers to sign up PSM customers is significantly more effective than signposting.	*Figures are average for the year

### Delivering the right support at the right time

Data and engagement are essential for framing and strategically targeting the support we offer our customers. However, we recognise that situations of vulnerability can change rapidly and substantially, so it is important to retain a level of flexibility in the services we provide. All our services are offered and deployed as a result of conversations between our trained PSM advisors and our customers to ensure that we tailor support to their unique needs and circumstances at that time. As a result, our PSM service portfolio offers enhanced support for vulnerable customers in 2 key ways:

i) Communicating inclusively

ii) Providing a first-class service

### Communicating inclusively

From our engagement with vulnerable customers about power cuts, we know that they want us to proactively communicate about the situation, but also ensure that they are able to quickly get in touch in a way that suits them. We offer a range of communication channels, giving choice through a variety of accessible options. Importantly, we ensure that whichever channel is used, our customers receive consistent, accurate and useful information.



### Our inclusive communication services in summary

Proactive telephone contact from contact center colleague 48hr before a planned power cut

Proactive telephone contact

for all PSM customers

from a dedicated advisor within

3hrs of an unplanned power cut

Additional updates, checks and welfare support calls throughout the duration of a power cut

Proactive telephone contact from a dedicated advisor within 1hr of an unplanned power cut for Priority 1 customers – those with acute reliance on electricity for health and safety reasons

Social media updates for those noting a preference – Whatsapp and Facebook messaging Recite Me available online to allow customers to view the website in a way that works for them Our new and improved Live Power Cut Map, allowing customers to see when an engineer is dispatched, when they are on site and how the fault restoration is progressing

Translation services available through Language Line and text relay for customers who are deaf or do not speak English We are making good progress in our aim to proactively contact high-risk PSM customers within the first hour of a power cut and the remaining PSM customers within three hours of a power cut.

To meet this commitment, we have expanded our dedicated PSM team from six to fourteen advisors, with plans to recruit another six colleagues over the coming year. This additional capacity is helping to increase the speed of response, and the ability to respond across channels according to the needs of customers.

For planned power cuts, we endeavour to speak to all impacted PSM customers. We also provide these customers with proactive telephone contact at least three days ahead of a planned power cut.

Providing multiple contact channels and making our communications accessible is a key commitment for Northern Powergrid. We communicate with and provide information to PSM customers in formats suited to a range of additional communication needs.

This includes:

- Translation via Language Line and Recite Me on the website.
- Proactive responders and PSM advisors attending deaf awareness training from Deaf Awareness: NE.
- Videos on our website use simple language, subtitles and both audio and visual explanations of the service.
- New this year are videos created in British Sign Language about winter preparedness and joining the PSM.
- An omni team of 20 trained advisors available 24/7 to respond to our customers on a range of digital channels.



### Providing tailored welfare support

Recognising that vulnerability is complex and can be exacerbated by different circumstances, our colleagues are trained not just to respond to, but to identify vulnerable customers and their needs. Whilst we consistently proactively support the customers on our PSM, we also offer the full suite of PSM services to customers who are not registered and are only identified and at the point of need.

### Our vulnerable customer support services in summary

Hot drinks for those who want them while they receive updates	Provision of generation at both household and community level	Hot meals – through Just Eat or local partners. New partnership with National Caterers Association in place for Major Incidents	Oxygen back-up for customers needing specialist equipment and support	Winter Warmer Packs containing blankets, torches, hot water bottles and other essentials	British Red Cross services available for anyone needing specialist support
Proactive responders – attending power cuts exceeding 6 hours to offer in-person support to customers and communities	Charging facilities for phones and laptops	Bottle warming for infants	Alternative accommodation for those who prefer to leave their homes, where suitable	Fully equipped customer service vans – offering a central source of on-site support and information	Community partners offering warm spaces and additional support during long-duration events

### **On-site welfare support**

We know from our research that our vulnerable customers find it particularly difficult to cope with power cuts exceeding six hours. In 2022/23 we established a new dedicated support team of 12 Proactive On-site Customer Service Responders who provide enhanced, personalised on-site welfare support. Our target for 2023-28 is to provide this support for 75% of unplanned power cuts expected to last longer than six hours, when more than one household is impacted.

The team of responders is now embedded, and this year they have exceeded initial targets, having attended 93.7% of these sites in 2023/24.

They are working at the front line, ensuring that vulnerable customers are prioritised for help during long-duration power cuts, delivering personalised advice and immediate relief (e.g. warm drinks, food, generators, charging facilities, plug-in heaters) on an ongoing basis. They are also proactively promoting the PSM whilst out and about in our communities.

### Dedicated PSM advisors and proactive on-site support team in action

Our contact centre advisor took a call from a customer's granddaughter. The customer was 102 and was going to be affected by a planned power cut the following day. Her granddaughter said her Nanna was unsteady on her feet and had 2 falls recently, and she was worried that if she fell she would be unable to alert anyone.

The power cut was going to be 9am-4.30pm and her house was fully electric. She also has a pendant which is connected to a careline in case she falls. Her Nanna hadn't told anyone about the planned power cut and so no preparation from her friends or family had been made.

She said she was just popping in to see her Nanna when she found out about this power cut, but ordinarily she is on her own all day and she was worried about her.

The call was referred onto our proactive responders who immediately called the granddaughter to find out what support we could offer her Nanna. Speaking to this customer allowed the team to deliver a first-class service including:

- Notifying the on-site engineer of the situation and arranging for them to call in to check on the customer first thing before switching off the power.
- Enquiring about the service provider for the careline pendant and ringing the council on the out of hours number to ask if the pendant had a battery back-up (they advised it would work for 24 hours).
- Arranging delivery of breakfast and afternoon tea.
- Checking in with the granddaughter at lunchtime to ensure the customer was well.
- Calling the customer to check that her power had been restored.

In a final call with the granddaughter to reassure her that all was well she said her Nanna hopes that we have more power cuts in future as she had enjoyed her day and had never had so much attention.

She was an extremely happy lady.

### Case study: Investing in the right tools and equipment to support our customers



Our colleagues are our most important resource in supporting our customers in vulnerable situations. Still, it is essential that we invest in the right tools, equipment and systems to support them in delivering a 10 out of 10 quality service.

This year we have:

Invested in 36 battery-powered generators (six in each of our six regions) to reduce the impact of long-duration power cuts. Our Proactive Responders deploy these for those customers who are most at risk, increasing our capacity to install remote generation.

This gets the power back on for those that most need it, quickly. This investment originated from a single customer requiring a bed-hoist during a power cut. Recognising the wider need, we then explored the most appropriate solution for small, responsive generation solutions for single premises.

Designed upgrades to our 6 new Customer Service Vehicles being deployed in 2024 based on customer feedback. In addition to the bottle warming, telephone charging and care packs that the previous vans offered, the new vehicles:

- Are red rather than white so they stand out from technicians' vans and are easier for customers to identify when on-site.
- Have a desk area so our Proactive Responders can take laptops and remotely access information to give the latest updates quickly.
- Include a whiteboard and a television so our Proactive Responders can display updates and link to the latest information on the screen from their laptops.
- Have canopies so customers can charge their phones and have a hot drink more comfortably – whatever the weather.

We have also designed and started to build functionality into our Live Power Cut Map so that customers can readily see where our Customer Service Vehicles are when a fault is happening.

We have continued to explore the PSM customer one stop shop solution that we committed to in our plan; this year we have been engaging with other DNOs, customers and stakeholders to build out the minimum requirements.

### Effectively supporting our customers during winter period

In line with a growing trend of more frequent severe storms, over the past winter our customers were affected by seven severe storms, with Babet, Pia, Isha and Jocelyn leading to power outages. Preparing and protecting customers from the impact of power cuts is at the heart of our remit as an essential service provider. This role only becomes more critical when we consider the significant impact that power cuts can have on the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable customers, especially during cold and dark winter months.

Learning from the impact of storm Arwen in 2021 we have worked with our colleagues, the industry and expert third parties to design and deliver a highly ambitious storm improvement programme. This programme has truly been all-encompassing, by including:

- Investments in assets and equipment (e.g. enhancing resilience through pole replacements and flood protections, investing in specialist equipment such as drones).
- Technology upgrades (e.g. new architectures for the website/telephony and the introduction of new communication channels, tested to handle tens of thousands of customers simultaneously).
- Investments in our people (e.g. trained an additional 460 colleagues to handle calls during emergencies, trained colleagues to fulfil specialist storm roles).
- Establishing the underlying tools, systems and processes that allow us to deliver a first-class service before, during and after an event (e.g. establishing a two-track approach for compensation payment supplemented by a robust and scalable payment mechanism).

The improvements brought about by our storm improvement programme have driven a step change in our ability to prepare and protect all customers. In addition to these, we have also implemented a range of tailored support mechanisms tailored to specific groups of vulnerable customers – this section presents an extract of the plans, results, lessons and next steps related to these targeted measures implemented over last winter.

"Fundamentally, inclusive and accessible customer service is just good customer service. We are committed to providing the support that our customers need, whenever they need it."

Jo Lawson-Green, Customer Service Programme Manager

### Examples of our plans to prepare our vulnerable customers

### 'Be prepared' Winter Campaign

Running before and throughout the winter, this communication campaign reached at least 3.5m customers through a multitude of channels ranging from digital and radio advertising to key partners including local authorities, community groups, MPs and other local resilience organisations.

The campaign focused on making customers aware of what to do during a power cut and how best to prepare for it to minimise the negative impact on their safety and wellbeing.

This included a bespoke 'be prepared' internet resource, the power cut map, and the 105 national power cut number. While this campaign reached all customers, specific steps were taken to prepare known and potential PSM customers including:

 Communication was particularly targeted in areas characterised by a high concentration of PSM customers', leveraging insight from our data mapping and historical power cut data.

### Examples of our plans to protect our vulnerable customers

### Enhanced welfare support services

While our standard welfare support services (presented on page 15) are available to all customers, we offer a package of enhanced support tailored to the needs of specific groups of vulnerable customers, which includes:

- Prioritised restoration of power Whenever reasonably practicable we will restore power for customers who are medically dependent on electricity as an absolute priority.
- Prioritised provision of mobile generators and batteries We prioritise the provision of over 610 generators and battery units to off-supply PSM customers. Over the past year we have embedded learnings from previous winters by procuring wheelbarrow generator units that enhance our capacity to deploy generators to single premises. This is supported by a newly established "single no supply" team dedicated to the deployment of these units.
- Prioritised communication We proactively contact all PSM customers, prioritising our most vulnerable 'P1' customers, to offer bespoke welfare support that meets each customer's individual needs and circumstances. Thanks to recent upgrades, when a customer on the PSM reaches out to us, our system identifies and assigns high priority automatically. All communication is handled by a dedicated team of 12 PSM advisors available 24/7. This team can be promptly scaled during emergencies thanks to training that upskilled over 570 colleagues to support our vulnerable customers during emergencies.
- Dedicated follow-ups Following the restoration of power, we proactively contact the affected PSM customers to assess whether they require any further assistance and to offer prioritised compensation via our new streamline process.

- We proactively contacted 100% of our PSM customers to share the direct dial PSM emergency number, reminders of the extra support available and free energy saving advice in addition to the preparedness communication delivered by the campaign.
- All customers were reminded of the extra help and priority support available to customers on the PSM, especially to customers medically dependent on electricity with guidance on how to join.

#### 'Winter warmer' packs

Over the past year we have continue to deliver 'winter warmer' packs for our most vulnerable customers. These include a range of items selected to mitigate the harm that customers in vulnerable situations can experience during power cuts in the winter months including a torch, a blanket, hat, gloves and socks. We targeted the provision of the packs via insight generated by Open Maps and delivered these via our front-line teams and community hubs.



### **Building community resilience**

- In 2022 we established the Northern Powergrid Foundation, a grantmaking charity, to enhance the resilience of the communities most impacted by the storms of the 2021/22 winter season. Over the past year, the foundation worked closely with communities to support a range of projects that will increase their self-sufficiency and ensure they can keep safe and warm during power interruptions. 60 communitydriven projects were funded with over £860k to establish and enhance community hubs with the installation of battery storage, solar panels, heat pumps and generators among other measures. These spaces have proven successful in providing a safe haven for many groups of PSM customers who have an opportunity to leave their homes during interruptions, while freeing up resources to provide emergency generators and restoration to our most vulnerable customers.
- We have continued to support the development of warm hubs as presented on page 10.

### Case study: Dedicated PSM advisors and proactive on-site support team in action

These communities are delivering unique and exciting projects that will have a lasting impact by enabling hubs to be self-sufficient in supporting their residents today, tomorrow and in the future. Projects include the establishment or the expansion of community hubs so that

the likes of community halls and parish halls can play a vital role in keeping their community safe and warm during power interruptions with the introduction of solar panels, heat pumps and generators. For example:

Slaley Commemoration Hall - The village to the southeast of Hexham, in Northumberland, Slaley received financial support from Northern Powergrid on behalf of the Northern Powergrid Foundation to enhance resilience at the Slaley Commemoration Hall, a hub used by local residents and ran by a small team of volunteers, with £18,400 to support their residents with battery storage to connect to their established solar panel arrays on the roof.

This means the warm and resilient hub will be able to run off the battery power stored from the power generated by the solar panels for up to three days should the power go off and also having the extra benefit of cost savings by operating from the battery and also have the opportunity to sell the electricity back to the grid.

Stanhope Emergency Response Volunteers received £4,725.50 from the foundation in support of generator hook up points and resilience materials, such as communication devices, to improve critical infrastructure for their community in times of need.

- "The grant funded multiple locations within the town to have generator connection points which enables the location to provide warm and safe spaces during times of power cut. We are also able to kit out our emergency response volunteers whose role it is to check on residents and to escalate risks and issues as part of local resilience plans, with protective gear to be easily identified and safely seen in the dark to provide peace of mind to our community".
  - Andy Craddock, Stanhope Emergency Response Volunteers (SERV) Chairman

### Assessing the effectiveness of our plans

- Went from proactively contacting 83.7% of Priority 1 customers if they went past 3 hours of a fault last year to contacting 87.1% of Priority 1 customers
  within the first hour of a fault this year. Reaching more of them, much sooner.
- Proactively contacted 98.2% PSM customers prior to a planned power cut (slightly down from 98.7% last year).
- 77.4% of PSM customers had power restored within six hours of a power cut (down from 81.3% last year), increasing to 98.9% within nine hours.
- 93.7% of sites were attended by a proactive responder where a fault exceeded 6 hours.
- These results, driven by our storm improvement programme and PSM-targeted measures resulted in an 89% PSM customer satisfaction with our response to power cuts (up from 88.8% last year).

### **T** Future plans inspired by lessons learned

While our plans were effective in supporting our vulnerable customers throughout the winter period, through close engagement with customers and stakeholders we identified a range of lessons that will drive further improvements in the coming winter.

Lessons learned	Plans for next year
We have deployed onsite responders to provide in-depth, tailored support to vulnerable customers during incidents exceeding six hours. Customers have told us that they typically experience negative impacts before six hours.	We are starting to deploy our onsite responders when incidents exceed four hours. We will continue to track customer feedback and amend our approach accordingly to maximise the value of our support.
We are aware of the importance that winter packs play in preparing customers for the winter period. We therefore engaged customers on their contents and they suggested the inclusion of further items that will help in mitigating the harm caused by power cuts.	We are exploring enhancing winter packs with the inclusion of thermometers, reusable hand warmers, battery powered glow in the dark lights, portable power banks and glow in the dark torches.
We have trained over 570 colleagues to provide support for vulnerable customers during the emergencies. However, we are aware of that up-to-date information on the support available to customer is vital to the empower our colleagues to make a difference.	We are exploring solutions to ensure that our colleagues have prompt and easy access to up-to-date information that will help them to best support vulnerable customers during emergencies including an internal visualisation tool, web-banners for the intranet and further on-going training.
During emergencies our onsite responders and on-the ground teams typically deal with significant need from many customers – speed of action is essential to avoid harm.	We are studying ways of empowering each member of our team to provide bespoke support tailored to each customers' circumstances quickly and independently.



### **Forward Plan**

- Trialling the introduction of in-person calls and 'white mail' contact as part of an enhanced data cleanse process.
- Scaling up PSM recruitment partnerships.
- Improving recognition of and satisfaction with our PSM welcome packs.
- Rolling out Open Maps to integrate with our BAU service to allow agents to direct people to available local support and tell them about live traffic if they are travelling to a friend or family's home during the power cut.
- Establishing the one stop shop solution for vulnerable customers
- Designing and trialling additional enhanced support packages for PSM customers who are having repeated faults.
- Reviewing and refreshing the application of vulnerability criteria in our asset and investment decision-making.

### **Tackling fuel poverty**

The critical objectives of our vulnerability strategy are to (i) mitigate the impact of fuel poverty on our customers, (ii) lift customers out of fuel poverty, and (iii) prevent families from falling into fuel poverty. The recent energy crisis has pushed more families below the poverty line and rapidly increased the demand for fuel poverty support across the country as a result. Over the past year, we have had to act quickly to meet the higher-than-ever demand, evolving our programme of support to achieve our ambitious goals for the 2023-2028 period.

### Understanding the dynamics of fuel poverty

While fuel poverty is a growing issue at a national level, we have long been aware of its prevalence across communities in our region. According to National energy Action (NEA), the North East and Yorkshire and The Humber are among the regions most impacted with 1.3% and 4.4% more households in fuel poverty, respectively, compared to the national average.

In Yorkshire and Humber, the proportion of households in fuel poverty has risen from 15.9% in 2023 to 17.5% in 2024. Similarly, the North East saw an increase from 13.1% to 14.4% in the same period. The fuel poverty gap, which measures the additional amount that fuel-poor households need to pay to keep their homes warm compared to typical households, has also widened.

In Yorkshire and Humber, this gap increased to £409 in 2023 compared to the previous year, and in the North East, to £305 from £278. Fuel-poor households are now paying on average £417 more per year for energy than they would if they lived in more efficient homes.

In addition, our engagement with local organisations and communities tells us that beyond the increase in the number of families who need support, the profile of those seeking help is changing. For example, our partners have reported seeing an increase in the number of public sector workers seeking assistance and people experiencing financial vulnerability for the first time.

These trends are supported by national statistics; the Office for National Statistics now reports that 4 in 10 adults are using less fuel in their homes due to cost of living increases, and the same proportion are struggling to pay their energy bills.



### Our approach to tackling fuel poverty

Over the past decade, we have developed and refined our approach to tackling fuel poverty iteratively and collaboratively, working with expert stakeholders, local partners, customers and our industry. We leveraged and built on these well-established foundations to deliver record levels of support and impact over the past year.

Our approach builds on three areas of focus:

- Gaining insight from data and engagement: We blend granular vulnerability data and feedback from customers and stakeholders to shape our fuel
  poverty approach.
- Tailoring services to customers' needs: We deliver personalised, bespoke support to maximise the positive impact on our customers' lives, their wellbeing and support experience.
- Partnering with local experts: We partner with trusted local organisations that have a deep understanding of customer needs gained from their
  experience in delivering support, ensuring our service is tailored and impactful.

### Gaining insight from data and engagement

Introduced on page 3, Open Maps is the cornerstone of our data-driven approach to fuel poverty. The insights generated by the tool have a profound impact on our strategy and operations, ranging from the selection of partners to the design and tailoring of support to match local dynamics.

### How data-driven insight influences our delivery

Insights		Action
Where support is needed the most	>	Ensure appropriate support is offered in areas of high deprivation
The challenges faced by local populations in different areas	>	Tailor support to the specific needs of the local population
Characteristics of the demographic in different areas	>	Ensure support is accessible to all customers
Gaps in service provision	>	Establish new partnerships or expand existing partnerships into new areas

### **Case Study: Insights to Action**

### **Citizens Advice Bradford & Airedale**

Closing gaps in service provision: We identified the need for enhanced support services by first mapping our existing services in collaboration with Northern Gas Networks (NGN) to support customers experiencing fuel poverty in our region. Using the Open Maps platform, we overlaid this data with demographic information and pinpointed Bradford as an area of high deprivation with insufficient resourcing. Neither Northern Powergrid nor NGN had direct service provision in this area. To address this, we expanded our network of Citizens Advice partnerships, introducing the Bradford & Airedale branch.

Shaping support service design: Insight from Open Maps also revealed Bradford's significant immigrant population, which further shaped our delivery model. Engaging with our local partners confirmed the need for in-person advice in multiple languages to cater to the large non-English-speaking community. As a result, we were able to increase funding to enable Bradford & Airedale to offer in-person advice in multiple languages and enhanced interpretation facilities.

Impact: Since January 2024, this partnership has supported 243 local residents, raising incomes by £369,438 through debt advice, tariff switching advice, benefits checks, and food parcels. As this is a matched funding initiative, Northern Powergrid funds the provision of benefits advice, while NGN supports debt advice, ensuring comprehensive support for the community.



### Tailoring services to customers' needs

We know from extensive customer insight and experience that support is most effective when it is (i) bespoke, (ii) holistic, and (iii) accessible to all. Recognising that no two customers are the same, we strive to ensure that every individual receives personalised, tailored advice, by merging support from a wide portfolio of services to match their unique circumstances. Leveraging our diverse network of partners we were able to offer a comprehensive portfolio of over 290 types of support services to tackle, mitigate and resolve the complex and multifaceted impact of fuel poverty on our customers. The diagram below showcases some of the services we offer our customers in response to common challenges they are facing.

#### How we respond to customers' circumstances

	Immediate support short-term	Sustainable solutions medium-term	Cost containment long-term
Challenge	- Cannot afford to keep home heated to a comfortable temperature - Necessity to have medical equipment running at all times	- Financial distress due to mounting debt - Uncertainty of how to reduce or manage energy bills	- Energy inefficient housing - Mental health concerns - Employment issues
Services offered	- Fuel voucher - Referral to Warm Hub - PSM sign-up	- Help to establish repayment plans with utility companies - Income maximisation advice - Benefits checks - Energy efficiency advice	- Support to apply for funding and grants - Outbound referrals to mental health support; employment support services

### Tailoring support to customer needs and local dynamics

Over the past year we have implemented different service and delivery models in each location based on partner insight, data and our understanding of customers' needs. Significant examples include:

### Case study: Advice focused on those facing debt

#### **Citizens Advice Sheffield**

Partner insights and Open Maps highlighted Sheffield as an area with severe levels of debt. We worked with Citizens Advice Sheffield to set up sophisticated debt support through trained

advisors who establish payment plans, assist with debt write-off applications, and provide mental health support throughout the process. In the past six months, this partner has written off more than £350,000 worth of debt for customers.

### Case Study: Advice to support those in poor quality housing



### **Citizens Advice Leeds**

Open Maps revealed that the population in Leeds faces a significant challenge related to poor urban housing, resulting in high incidences of damp and mould. We shared this insight with Citizens Advice

Leeds and collaborated to focus their advisors' efforts on providing energy-specific advice to help residents minimise the risk of damp and mould. They typically offer guidance on preventive measures, steps to take when damp and mould occur, and inform private tenants of their rights in these situations.

### **Providing holistic support**

Our longstanding experience in tackling fuel poverty tells us that the situations of vulnerability impacting our customers are often interlinked and overlapping.

To make a meaningful difference to our customers' situations we combine services from a vast range of support that matches their individual circumstances. This is well illustrated by specific examples of customer case studies, outlined below.

### **Example of Holistic Support Services**

A single mother of five children owed over £4,600 to her electricity, gas, and water suppliers. Our advisor conducted a debt assessment and referred the customer to our specialist debt service, who helped the customer develop a financial statement used to apply for grants from energy and water suppliers. The client received detailed advice on their options regarding dual fuel bills and prepayment meters, as well as their legal rights if bailiffs were to visit their property.

The advisor provided information on social water and broadband tariffs, as well as energy-saving advice to reduce monthly expenses. Follow-up support ensured the client was on track with the advice given. As a result, the client's gas debt was reduced significantly from £2,601 to £155, and their electricity bill was also due to be reduced.

The client successfully applied for a grant from their water supplier to clear the outstanding debt, achieving significant financial respite. This support not only addressed immediate financial crises but also provided sustainable strategies for long-term financial stability for this customer and her family.



### Ensuring support is accessible to all

We strive to ensure that our services are accessible to everyone. Our expert partners have told us that customers face challenges in accessing services due to:

- Living in rural areas
- Language barriers
- Physical disabilities
- Mental health issues

We have used Open Maps to identify where these barriers are prevalent and adjusted our delivery models in these areas accordingly.

### Case Study: British Sign Language Programme

### **Citizens Advice**



We have introduced the British Sign Language Service in all Citizens Advice branches in our network, to ensure that deaf individuals are not excluded from receiving support.

The BSL advisors, who are profoundly deaf, have been instrumental in this initiative. This not only supports a marginalised group by providing them with access to the labour market but also enhances the service experience for users.

Service users are more receptive as they can communicate in their first language and learn from their advisor how to navigate various tasks, such as communicating with their supplier using text relay. This approach ensures that the support is both accessible and effective, promoting consistent service levels and comprehensive support for diverse customer needs.



Support led to the client's debt being reduced significantly from £2,601 to £155. A reduction of £2,446.

### Case Study: Making support accessible to specific customer groups

### Live Inclusive



"Listening to

our partners' expertise about their clients and

service users, and giving them

the freedom to

programmes to

reflect that, has been the single

biggest success

in enabling us

to deliver such high customer

satisfaction

scores. We

are safe in the knowledge that

our partners

customers and are addressing

know our

their needs

holistically." Ella Pinder, Vulnerability Policy Manager

differentiate their

Our partner in Doncaster and Rotherham, Live Inclusive, provides essential support for individuals with complex disabilities, long-term health conditions, mental health issues, or who are socially excluded. Support is delivered in person through home visits to remove barriers that some customers face due to physical disabilities, health conditions, or anxiety disorders.

Their service aims to reduce loneliness, build confidence, offer energy and benefits advice, and facilitate peer support groups for both young adults and older persons. Each individual undergoes an initial assessment and benefits check, receiving bespoke support and an action plan based on their specific needs.

Benefits advice workers help customers claim the benefits they are entitled to, such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP). This service is crucial because many of Live Inclusive's clients are eligible for PIP but encounter significant barriers when trying to claim the benefit due to the challenges in proving the level of disability.

This partnership is dedicated to reaching and supporting a hard-to-reach group, specifically individuals with disabilities. Live Inclusive has supported 41 customers and generated more than £95,000 in financial benefits for them.

Focusing on this often-excluded demographic has a substantial return on investment both in terms of direct financial gains and soft benefits such as increasing customers' level of wellbeing. Many of these individuals would otherwise struggle to claim the support they are entitled to, underscoring the invaluable impact of this targeted support.

### Case Study: Adjusting a delivery model to rural settings



### **Citizens Advice North Yorkshire**

Our partner in North Yorkshire employs a decentralised delivery model, which utilises many smaller hubs to provide advice across the rural area they serve. The partner also introduced a bus service to bring advice directly to residents, eliminating the need for them to travel and ensuring their services are accessible to all customers.

### Partnering with local experts

Close two-way collaboration between our teams and our extensive partnership network plays a crucial role in our ability to support fuel poor customers.

Over the past year we have continued to build on a collaboration model established in ED1 that drives continuous improvement via:

- (i) building local capacity and capability through the sharing of resources and training from Northern Powergrid to Partners.
- (ii) the sharing of customer needs and local dynamics from Partners to Northern Powergrid.
- (iii) the sharing of best practices among partners.



### How we collaborate with our partners / Partners → Northern Powergrid

Our delivery is guided by our partners' expertise, experience and insights into customer needs and local dynamics. From the onset of a potential collaboration, we ask our partners to detail the prominent challenges in a target area and the services and delivery models that would best fit the challenges faced by specific communities.

Additionally, we regularly host workshops during which partners share their experience in delivering support on the ground, focusing on customers' attitudes, the challenges they face, and any strengths and weaknesses in the current approach.

By maintaining an open dialogue with our partners, we can adapt our services to better address the evolving needs of our customers, ensuring that our support remains relevant, effective, and responsive to the communities we serve.

### Case Study: Flow of insights from partners to Northern Powergrid

#### Stronger Together

Through our Stronger Together network events and surveys, our partners regularly share their views on new and emerging issues impacting customers. This feedback has informed our ongoing delivery strategy, enabling us to work with partners to tailor support to help customers most in need.

Partner insight	Our response
People are experiencing financial struggles and difficulty paying energy bills due to the cost-of-living crisis. Partners recommend a 'whole-person' energy approach and believe we could play a coordinating role, ensuring not to duplicate existing initiatives.	Recognising that it's not just energy that people can't pay for, we provide holistic support and outbound referrals for wider issues and overall financial stability, rather than just energy related issues.
People are struggling with their mental health, and the consequences of this. Partners highlighted the increasing acuteness of the issue as well as prevalence.	Research shows that mental health issues can often be triggered or exacerbated by people experiencing debt. Our Citizens Advice Sheffield service supports customers experiencing mental health issues and shares this learning with our other delivery partners.
Issues experienced by people living in isolation are being exacerbated by the cost- of-living crisis e.g., giving up pets, unable to afford activities outside the home.	Warm Hub sponsorship in rural areas includes social activities and free hot meals as well as just a warm space to be. We sponsored 44 Warm Hubs over the winter which would otherwise have been closed down. Additionally, hubs can arrange transport for those who don't drive.
Partners are seeing more people that have become financially vulnerable for the first time, including public sector workers.	We widely promote our advice and support through campaigns and customer communications ensuring that wider customers are aware that support is available. Our support services are open to all at the point of need without any qualifying criteria or requirement.
There has been a rise in instances of customers with prepayment meters at risk of self-disconnection.	We offer fuel vouchers as part of our services, but these are limited (3 £49 vouchers per year). Our approach across all partnerships is to offer this when the acute need is presented and then to try to engage the client around more sustainable financial support.
Partners are increasingly seeing a rise in energy arrears.	Our services include a focus on income maximisation services as bill payment remains a primary concern for many individuals.
Customers are experiencing a rise in cold, damp, and condensation in homes due to only heating one room.	In addition to training our wider partners, Green Doctor also offer an in-home service addressing energy efficiency and safety issues including the installation of small measures.

### How we collaborate with our partners / Northern Powergrid -> Partners

We trust our partners' knowledge and experience in delivering on-the-ground support, believing they will use this expertise to shape the most effective support and delivery models for their service users. To further empower our partners, we invest in their development and capabilities by offering targeted training, assistance in identifying service gaps, and enhancing their operational efficiency and reporting processes.

### Case Study: Enhancing the effectiveness of our Citizens Advice network

### **Citizens Advice Network**

Expansion and Impact: Citizens Advice is a trusted brand among customers and a key delivery partner for Northern Powergrid. Over the past year, we have successfully expanded

our collaboration from 5 to 9 branches. This expansion has led to the support of 14,940 customers in the past year, a significant increase from 9,262 1-1 interventions in 2022/2023.

Performance and Quality Officer Role: Recognising the need for this crucial role, we have worked together to design and fund a new role within their network: the 'Performance and Quality Officer'. This officer, based at Citizens Advice Leeds, coordinates the Northern Powergrid support programme across all 9 branches to ensure consistent delivery, reporting, and measurement of outcomes, while also driving the implementation of best practices and improvements.

Network-Wide Implementation of Initiatives: As above, the position has facilitated initiatives like the British Sign Language Service across all Citizens Advice branches in our network, promoting consistent service levels and comprehensive support for diverse customer needs.

 Best Practice Sharing: Collaborating with service leads across the network to identify and share best practices. This includes sharing conversation templates and creating a minimum requirements table to ensure a consistent basic level of support across the network. Branches can then layer targeted, region-specific, or demographic-specific interventions on top of these foundational supports.

 Engagement and Feedback Loops: Running a regular engagement group to address issues and challenges related to reporting and evolving customer requirements. Additionally, playing a key role in feedback loops, addressing low scores and analysing successes that lead to high customer satisfaction scores (CSAT), which is crucial to the success of our overall CSAT ratings.

By implementing these strategies and utilising the expertise within our expanded Citizens Advice network, we continue to enhance our service delivery and ensure our customers receive the highest level of support.



### Case Study: Building our partners' skills

### **Green Doctor Training**

We offer free Fuel Poverty Awareness training to all partners across our network, through Groundwork Green Doctors. This course helps frontline workers to understand fuel poverty,

explain common problems and barriers that those in fuel poverty face, understand the key physical and behavioural factors of energy efficiency, and provide basic help and energy advice. The 2.5-hour training covers:

- Energy and water saving advice
- Installation of energy-saving measures
- Applying for energy efficiency grants/discounts
- Applying for social water tariffs
- Identifying, assessing, and reporting housing/heating repairs

This training helps our partners to deliver expert advice and support to customers who are in need. Green Doctor Yorkshire have run the Fuel Poverty Awareness training course since 2019 and trained 854 frontline workers to date.



### How we collaborate with our partners / Partner ← → Partner

We facilitate collaboration between our partners by hosting bi-annual Partners Together Forums, where a representative from each service delivery partner will attend a one-day workshop. During this workshop, partners share their ambitions, impact, and progress. These sessions encourage the sharing of best practices amongst partners, helping each other to improve their services. These sessions consistently receive positive feedback from all partners in attendance.

this event -

### Case Study: Best practice shared between partners

#### Two-tiered advice system

Through our consistent engagement with partners during Partners Together sessions and wider research, the benefits of the whole-person energy approach were highlighted and established as a goal of Northern

Powergrid and our partners. During engagement sessions, our partners were able to share their ideas on how to approach whole-person support, and we have been able to assist other partners in adopting processes successfully trialled by others.

As a result, many of our partners have implemented or are piloting a two-tiered system, an approach pioneered by Citizens Advice Leeds and developed in close collaboration with Northern Powergrid vulnerability experts. This model consists of two tiers of support:

1. Triage Call: The first call serves to identify and, where possible, address the customer's immediate needs.

2. Expert Advisor Call: A second call with an expert advisor who can offer in-depth, bespoke advice and handle any ongoing case work.

Different types of advice are strategically assigned to either the first or second call, based on efficiency and customer engagement. Immediate concerns are tackled in the triage call, while more complex issues like benefit applications or debt advice are addressed in the follow-up call. The bi-annual forums have been particularly helpful for partners to share information about which services have worked best in the first and second tiers of support. This collaborative exchange of insights has further refined the two-tiered approach, benefiting all partners involved.

The two-tiered system has streamlined the advice delivery process, ensuring that customers receive prompt support for urgent needs and comprehensive assistance for long-term issues. Additionally, this model has proven efficient for our partners, enhancing their ability to manage resources effectively while maintaining high levels of customer engagement and satisfaction.

### **Forward Plan**

In 2024/25, we will continue to expand our successful partnerships and collaborate with our partners to maximise the impact of our support. Our strategy will focus on several key areas, including:

- Conducting a full review of each partnership to assess the outcomes for customers and to expand the scope of support where possible, particularly by introducing high-value advice to customers.
- Developing a written communication to be sent to customers after speaking with an adviser, detailing additional types of support they may be eligible for, such as free school meals and NHS prescriptions, to maintain high customer satisfaction and increase the change of customer action.
- The Citizens Advice Performance and Quality Officer to create user guides for advisors to standardise the support provided at a minimum level, serving as a guideline rather than a prescriptive script, further raising and standardising the service enjoyed by customers across our region.
- Funding ongoing British Sign Language training for advisors across the Citizens Advice network, to ensure this service is offered consistently across our branches.
- Strengthening our understanding of soft benefits and the impact of our support on customers' level of wellbeing before and after receiving support. We are working with our partners to capture the impact of our support on wellbeing in our SROI modelling in the next regulatory year.

# Ensuring that nobody is left behind in the transition to Net Zero



Leaving nobody behind in the transition to Net Zero is one of our central business objectives for the RIIO-ED2 period and beyond. Reflecting the importance of this role, we set out ambitious targets, and a customer-driven, comprehensive programme that will support tens of thousands to overcome barriers to the smart energy transition in the coming years.

At Northern Powergrid we believe that all customers, notwithstanding their personal circumstances and their environment, should participate in and benefit from the transition to Net Zero with awareness, affordability and accessibility.

### Our approach to leaving nobody behind rests on two key areas of focus:

- The 'Decarbonising Homes' programme forming the core of our approach, the programme leverages a multipronged service model that relies on partners and internal capabilities to deliver tailored and targeted support to customers in adopting LCTs and the behaviours required to benefit from the transition.
- Embedding fair and inclusive services across all customer touchpoints fully and effectively involving all customers in the transition must be everyone's objective at Northern Powergrid. As we embed a focus on this outcome across all customer touchpoints, building inclusivity as a core pillar of our transition to a Distribution System Operator (DSO) remains a key focus. We will seize this unique opportunity to design a new energy system that works for everyone by eliminating the obstacles and inefficiencies that contribute to many of the challenges our customers face today.

### Understanding the obstacles our customers face

Our extensive experience in supporting customers in situations of vulnerability tells us that their circumstances are constantly evolving. These combine with a rapidly changing energy system to create complex and overlapping barriers that prevent our customers from participating in and enjoying the benefits of the transition to Net Zero.

It is crucial to understand the barriers and find ways to overcome them. We have engaged extensively with customers and stakeholders to further explore these challenges. The resulting insight, presented below, is actively shaping a portfolio of tailored services and initiatives to support them in the energy system transition.

### Our research into transition barriers and potential solutions

Decarbonisation is a mid-to-long-term journey for most people, influenced by personal circumstances and a broad spectrum of external factors. As a result, our customers find themselves at different points along this path. Our in-depth research tells us that they face a range of barriers in their transition to LCTs; the most significant amongst these are driven by the affordability, accessibility, usability, knowledge of new technologies, behaviours and the wider energy system.

The overlap of these barriers with personal circumstances (e.g. old age, disabilities) and a customers' environment (e.g. complex planning laws in conservation areas) give rise to significant complexity that, on one hand, further limits their ability to participate and, on the other, complicates efforts to address and remove the barriers they face.

Our engagement with customers and vulnerability experts has taught us that affordability and knowledge barriers are particularly significant amongst our customers.

#### Focus on affordability barriers

The adoption of LCTs and behaviours is an afterthought for those experiencing energy affordability issues, like most of our customers in vulnerable situations. While affordability is a widespread issue that impacts nearly half of all households across Great Britain, our customers are more likely to struggle to pay their bills. Moving beyond the current high cost of energy, our in-depth engagement tells us that most of our customers consider the cost of LCTs as a key barrier.

For example, focusing on heat pumps, 42% of the customers we engaged were concerns about the upfront costs, 33% about the relative costs of home insulation and alterations and 30% about running costs.

The connection between fuel poverty issues and customers' readiness to consider the adoption of LCTs and behaviours is clear and has profoundly shaped our service model as described in the following section.

### Focus on knowledge barriers

Lack of knowledge and awareness about LCTs and the support and advice available to homeowners, tenants and landlords to adopt these is another significant barrier. In addition to a lack of knowledge on funding schemes, our research has shown that even fewer customers have applied for these. This points to the complexity of the application process for major funding schemes – an issue we have targeted in our early efforts to remove participation barriers.

Our research and engagement also focused on exploring and testing potential solutions to removing transition barriers. We concluded that the complexity of overlapping barriers must lead us to consider every customer's situation independently and take a 'whole person approach' that systematically identifies, prioritises and addresses the blockers our customers face; this is particularly important where situations of fuel poverty prevent significant consideration and progress of the energy transition.

### 80%

customers say cost is a barrier to installing LCTs

Source: Mustard segmentation research

17%

of customers are aware of any support available related to LCTs

Source: Mustard segmentation research

### Customer insight shapes our actions and approach

In response to this feedback we have developed a 'Decarbonising Homes' programme based on principles of:

- **Trust:** deliver support through trusted channels and partners
- Understanding: communicate in plain English and easy to understand
- Specific needs: tailor support to specific needs, personalised where possible
- Holistic: deliver multi-channel and multi-faceted support
- Interventions: offer multiple interventions at key points in the journey

These principles will guide us in ensuring that our flexible service model – that will evolve in response to our customers' needs, market and policy dynamics in the coming years – is always set up to deliver maximum impact for our customers.

### Our approach and progress in delivering support to customers

### **V** Our 'Decarbonising Homes' service model

We have introduced and are currently experimenting with a multi-layered service model to remove participation barriers. This model reflects the diverse and wide-ranging nature of the barriers that customers face at different phases of their journey and builds on the initial stakeholder-driven approach proposed in our ED2 business plan. Underlying the model is a continuous process of research, engagement, testing and refinement that will lead us in improving our programme based on the insight we gather.



### Progress in delivering support over 2023/24

### **Case studies: Direct holistic LCT services**

### **Citizens Advice in Stockton**

Citizens Advice in Stockton serve both Stockton and Middlesbrough, two of our most deprived communities identified through the Open Maps tool developed in partnership with NGN. We have partnered with them to

provide LCT advice and support to 200 customers who face barriers to accessing LCTs (e.g. economic deprivation and fuel debt). They receive in-person advice and information on the range of LCTs available and are supported in their adoption to the point of installation; this can range from ECO-like energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures, to low impact energy efficiency measures such as draught proofing and LED lightbulbs. This pilot has unlocked a net social impact of £333,263 (NPV) over the past year alone and is demonstrating that tailored advice provided in-person from a high-street branch is an effective solution to engage customers on a complex topic such as LCT adoption.

In addition to direct services Stockton Citizens Advice have been running a programme of community outreach raising awareness and increasing knowledge of LCTs. They have attended multiple local markets, the Stockton Wellness Festival which targeted the wellbeing of the over 50s, and 'Here to Help' sessions across the local authority aiming to address the cost-of-living crisis. They are also working closely with Stockton Borough Council to ensure referrals to the ECO4 and ECO4 Flex scheme are completed smoothly.

The partnership with Citizens Advice Stockton also exemplifies our focus on bringing partners together to improve customer outcomes.

Thanks to an introduction made by the Northern Powergrid team, who understood the challenges faced by both partners, the advice and handholding provided by Citizens Advice is now supported by a team of ECO experts at Utilita, helping customers apply for energy efficiency and low carbon measures.

The seamless integration between these two partners and their respective relationships (e.g. Local Authorities via Utilita and expert installers via Citizens Advice Stockton) offers customers a clear, streamlined, and easy customer journey that guides them from consideration to adoption.

Working with Northern Powergrid has enabled us to promote and deliver LCT advice and information in the Teesside area and to expand our support into fundamental building fabric improvements that bring about long-term, genuine savings for clients. Northern Powergrid have also introduced us to other providers, such as Utilita. We have worked with both Northern Powergrid, Utilita and the Local Authority to expand the offer of access to LCT in the Stockton area and to produce a bespoke leaflet about ECO which informs people who may be unsure of what technologies are right for them. This partnerships has allowed us to remain updated and informed in the LCT sphere of influence and we look forward to strengthening our relationship moving forward."

Ian Bartlett, Stockton Citizens Advice

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### **Decarbonising Homes in action**

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Frank and his wife rely on their Pension Credit and State Pensions for income and were finding it more difficult to heat their home due to the increase in energy prices. Frank had recently had their boiler replaced but had not received any other energy efficiency measures in their home and wanted to see if there was any further measures they could take to stay warm in their home.

Frank was made aware that he could qualify for support through ECO4 and that this could support him with potential insulation measures that could make his home warm and comfortable. Frank was supported in contacting an installer to look at what measures he and his wife would benefit from.

He was also made aware of the benefits of LCT that could reduce their energy expenditure and thereby maximise their income.

### **YES Energy Solutions**

YES Energy Solutions, a Yorkshire-based Community Interest Company with national presence, are piloting the provision of LCT advice over the phone. Over the past year, they have

reached 395 highly vulnerable customers across our network, ensuring a region-wide approach. The advice was provided via a two-tiered programme of support that recognises the strong link between fuel poverty issues and customers' readiness to consider the adoption of LCTs. First, expert advisors present an overview of the solutions available to customers while gaining a deeper understanding of the barriers they face. Then all customers are offered a personalised and tailored assessment as a result of which they receive a readiness report setting out next steps and the funding support available.



### Case study: Tailored self-service support

#### **Developing our Smart Energy Choices Tool**

Over the past year we have worked closely with our project partners at National Grid Energy Distribution (NGED) and the CSE to develop our flagship, self-serve digital LCT support tool

'Smart Energy Choices'. This tool, developed with inclusivity and accessibility at its core, is designed to address the clear need for easy-to-access advice that a wide range of customers can receive without experiencing pressure and stigma that typically prevents them from seeking in-person support.

The tool will provide each user with a tailored, downloadable report, based fully on the information they provide about their personal situations and their environment. Crucially, reflecting the fast-evolving LCT landscape, they will be able to log back into the platform and update their information to access refreshed advice based on their current situation. The project builds on the insight and software tools that CSE's research team has developed as part of the 'Smart and Fair' programme and the 'Smart Energy Actions Plan' pilot that CSE's Home Energy Services team has been piloting with NGED.

In developing the tool, we are also collaborating with the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers to ensure the tool is accessible and the advice is appropriate.

The tool is being developed and will be ready for testing in Q4 of 2024; we expect to roll it out to all customers by 2025.



### Building the capacity and capability of local partners

Our extensive engagement with partners and expert stakeholders has taught us that many local organisations want to learn more about the Net

Zero transition and how they can actively support their customers to realise the benefits it can offer.

At the same time, we recognise the opportunity to empower local organisations as a way to broaden and deepen the reach of our vulnerability programme.

Responding to this insight and opportunity, we launched our Carbon Literacy training which is free to all our partners in 2024. Delivered by Green Doctor, the new training course aims to give an awareness and understanding of climate change, and what partners and their organisations can do to support the green transition.

The one day accredited course focuses on the science behind climate change, social equity and climate change, what partners can do to act on climate change and strategies and skills for communicating action on climate change.

This programme is enabling partners to offer advice and sign-post support to the communities they work in, engaging hard-to-reach customers effectively via trusted community members.

### Delivery obstacles and how we are addressing these

Along with our partners, we have observed lower than expected take up of our LCT support services. At the same time, customers who are engaging with this support tend to adopt smaller energy efficiency improvements rather installing large scale measures such as heat pumps. Our extensive engagement, national data and collaboration with DNOs and industry partners tells us that this is a wider challenge, not specific to our programme.

We believe we have a key role in addressing this challenge and have started taking steps to do so in recent months by furthering our extensive research programme and continuing our close collaboration with partners and expert stakeholders.

Industry-leading research – We have commissioned research from Mustard who are currently engaging over 2000 homeowners, landlords and tenants through an on-line community, focus groups and surveys. A first of its kind, this research will map blockers that prevent specific groups of customers from participating in the energy transition. Grouped in key customer personas, the insight into these blockers will result in a playbook to overcoming key barriers, from shaping customer targeting and communications, to the tailored support services and the channels through which these should be delivered.

Impactful collaboration with our partners – We will share our learnings with key partners with the aim of improving the quality of energy transition support and removing the barriers to its uptake. As an energy network at the heart of the Net Zero transition we believe we have a key role to play, within our region and a national level. We will achieve this ambition by working with UK-wide organisations such as Citizens Advice as we build on recent success in shaping policy and best practice (e.g. collaboration in developing a framework to leverage data as a key driver in the procurement of energy transition support services).

We look forward to implementing the insight from this industryleading research effort in the coming months and to drive further take up of LCT support services to effectively remove barriers to the transition in our region.

### Embedding fair and inclusive services across all customer touchpoints

As well as supporting our customers to decarbonise their homes we work hard to ensure that our wider services and activities are inclusive and fair to ensure that nobody is left behind in the energy transition.

This ranges from our flagship innovation projects, to our novel DSO role and our close collaboration with regional stakeholders.

Some highlights of our progress over the last year include:

### 'Rural Electrification 2.0'

— Through 'Rural Electrification 2.0' we are working towards ensuring that farmers in our region have equal access to LCTs. We engaged with the National Farmers' Union to understand the impact of decarbonisation on the agricultural sector and to identify, mitigate and remove barriers. This project will increase understanding of the technologies or business models that have potential in rural communities and how these will impact the distribution networks.

### Launching Community DSO

Community DSO is our flagship innovation project delivered with £14.5m secured from the Ofgem Network Innovation Competition. It aims to test the potential of flexibility on a highly localised scale – at the consumer level – by testing the concept of the independent 'energy community'. We expect to host a series of four trials with up to 1,000 homes and businesses participating across distinctly different community archetypes within our operating area. The trials will demonstrate how local energy optimisation can interface with and support new ways of managing electricity networks, whilst empowering communities to develop and manage local energy schemes for the benefit of members. In addition to the technical benefits that this project will deliver for managing our network, it will also generate important learning on how the energy transition can be fully inclusive and ensure all customers benefit.

### Enabling decarbonisation in social housing

Established in 2023 our Social Housing Decarbonisation Group brings together social housing representatives. The aim of the group is to discuss the common challenges they are facing in decarbonising their stock and to create a forum for regular engagement with the Northern Powergrid Regional Insights team. The small roundtable format enables in-depth discussions, shared learning and the ability for us to identify areas for improvement. In 2023 the key focus of discussions has been around de-looping services, available tools and data for multiple connections, and streamlining processes to remove a key barrier for the uptake of LCTs across our region.

### Removing barriers to participation in flexibility services

 We have successfully procured flexibility services from Octopus to address constraints on our LV network, helping us manage it in a smarter and more efficient way, while enabling our customers to participate in the energy transition whilst saving on their bills.



### **Forward Plan**

In 2024/25 we will build on the research and testing conducted in this first year to scale up our delivery in line with our ambitious targets.

#### Key highlights include:

- Launch our Smart Energy Choices Tool that will enable self-service access to tailored advice.
- Recruit our Community Energy Advisors. Working with vulnerable customers and communities, they will guide people through the LCT journey enabling access to existing support, facilitating collaboration and identifying successful approaches for local working around decarbonisation.
- Explore holistic approaches to ensuring nobody is left behind in the development of flexibility services.
- Deliver Phase 3 of the Open Maps tool project that will lead to the inclusion of Al-driven insight features and the establishment of the Future Energy Working Group. These improvements will deliver a step-change in our partners' ability to identify areas characterised by a high concentration of customers eligible for funded support and target outreach efforts to those who stand to gain the most from transition advice.
- Conduct further engagement in the context of our 'Engagement for Social Justice' innovation project. This will aim to understand the transition between customer's consideration of LCT technologies and their adoption. Further insight into the gap between these two key stages of LCT adoption will lead to a more effective programme that removes barriers and facilitates our customers' transition to Net Zero.

### Our impact over the past year

We have made strong progress against meeting our targets for supporting our vulnerable customers this year, as set out in the summary table below. We hope you can see throughout this report that this is more than just numbers as we strive to support our vulnerable customers and have a positive impact on their lives.

### Annual progress against Consumer Vulnerability Incentive performance metric targets

An independent assessment conducted by a third party for all of the DNOs has confirmed that the results presented in the tables below were produced in line with all relevant industry guidelines.

METRIC	Year 1 Actual		Year 2 Target		Year 5 Target	
METRIC	NPgN	NPgY	NPgN	NPgY	NPgN	NPgY
PSR Reach	66.7%	61.9%	70%	70%	78%	78%
Social value of Fuel Poverty Services Delivered (NPV)	£1,646,635	£1,041,566	£3.7m	£5.32m	£9.06m	£5.32m
Social value of Low Carbon Transition Services Delivered (NPV)	£319,890	-£10,763	£1.39m	£2.01m	£7.38m	£10.6m
Customer satisfaction score of Fuel Poverty Services Delivered	9.59	9.19	9/10	9/10	9/10	9/10
Customer satisfaction score of Low Carbon Transition Services Delivered	9.29	8.14	9/10	9/10	9/10	9/10

### Regulatory reported evidence

RRE	Expectations	Year 1 Actual	Year 2 Target	Year 5 Target
Frequency of PSR customer data cleanse	Every two years	100% of customers cleansed every 24 months	100% of customers cleansed every 24 months	100% of customers cleansed every 24 months
CSS score for PSR customers who have experienced a power cut	9.0 target	8.92	9.0	9.0
The volume of Fuel Poverty Services Delivered	Licenses forecast Volume of Fuel Poverty Services Delivered for RIIO- ED2]	16,484	20,000	20,000
The volume of Low Carbon Transition Services Delivered	Licensees forecast volume of Low Carbon Transition Services Delivered for RIIO-ED2	714	5,000	5,000

### Bringing to life the social impact of our programmes

### **Fuel Poverty**

We always strive to understand the drivers of value and the practical ways in which our services are making a difference for our customers.

The benefits we have reported are related to well-documented and well-understood outcomes from our partners' support. Key drivers of value include: financial gain from fuel and food bank vouchers; savings on bills resulting from behavioural change advice, the installation of energy efficiency measures (such as draught proofing, energy-efficient LEDs), and the environmental impact associated with the more efficient use of energy; and financial value of tailored income maximization advice – including accessing a wide range of government schemes, switching tariffs, and receiving debt advice support.

### **Decarbonising Homes**

Accurate and robust monetisation of social impact can only happen via a rigorous and detailed understanding of how our customers benefit from the support we deliver. Our support to 714 customers generated a gross benefit of  $\pounds$ 309,127 – this is based on a conservative range of benefits that clearly and directly stem from the support provided and was confirmed via customer engagement. The benefits reported mainly arise from the following outcomes: financial value gained by accessing funding through various government schemes; savings on bills (and the associated environmental benefits) resulting from the implementation of both large (e.g. heat pumps and ECO-like measures) and small (e.g. draught-proofing, energy-efficient LEDs) energy efficiency measures; and the financial value of customised income maximization and debt advice support.



### 2023/24 performance in summary

We're proud of the progress we've made this year but know that there is still more to come. The table below summarises our progress and performance over the past 12 months, as set out in more detail within this report.

### Northern Powergrid vulnerability commitments performance

Vulnerability strategy commitment	Description	Expected outcome/benefit (All numbers are 2028 targets unless stated)	Key milestones	RAG status	<b>Status update</b> (All numbers are 2023/24 performance)
VN1) Undertake targeted recruitment of vulnerable customers to our Priority Services Membership (PSM), contacting all PSM customers every two years to refresh our records	Provide colleagues real- time access to our PSM; develop our recruitment campaigns to reflect regional differences; give our vulnerable customers more choice in how they engage with us, including by creating a fully digitised 'one- stop-shop solution' by 2024/25	<ul> <li>78% of all eligible customers recruited to PSM</li> <li>100% Proactive contact for data cleanse every 24 months for PSM customers</li> <li>Greater reach to support vulnerable customers</li> <li>Greater flexibility for how vulnerable customers access our information and communicate with us</li> </ul>	63.9% of all eligible customers recruited to PSM by 2024/25 Fully digitised 'one- stop-solution' by 2024/25	Green	63.9% of all eligible customers recruited to PSM Engagement to inform digital one- stop-shop solution underway Data cleanse targets met and focus on customer experience of the process Colleague front-line PSM tool in development Range of contact channels operationally active
VN2) Provide enhanced support to vulnerable customers during power cuts, including temporary restoration and proactive communications (LO)	Provide enhanced customer support vehicles during planned and unplanned power cuts; deliver proactive communication during power cuts; roll out regional use of net zero-ready SilentPower mobile battery vehicles to support temporary restoration; establish a new on-site support team	<ul> <li>93.1% satisfaction of PSM customers (Broad measure of customer service: power cuts (BMCS))</li> <li>95% proactive contact of all PSM customers within 3 hours</li> <li>75% customers offered enhanced support on site for &gt;6hr power cuts</li> <li>Tailored support during a power cut</li> <li>Personalised and proactive support</li> </ul>	On-site responder team embedded (2023/24) Expanding PSM team in contact centre (2024/25) 6 new customer service vehicles in place (2024/25)	Green	<ul> <li>89% satisfaction of PSM customers (BMCS: power cuts)</li> <li>87.4% proactive contact of all PSM customers within 3 hours</li> <li>8 new contact centre colleagues</li> <li>93.7% customers offered enhanced support on site for &gt;6hr power cuts through on-site team</li> </ul>
VN3) Use data and partnerships to enhance our support for vulnerable customers, sharing information with trusted partners to access hard-to reach customers	Share and make priority services, enhanced service information and support tools available amongst trusted partners and identify additional data sources and partnerships to allow us to track and respond to new and emerging issues	Refresh our regional demographic/social indicator mapping data every 24 months Targeted support Greater understanding of our customer base	Regional vulnerability tool Open Maps in place to identify current and future trends and needs	Green	700+ partners being engaged through Stronger Together network Open Maps moving to phase 3 – increasing our insight and partner data sharing and the operational capabilities of the tool
VN4) Support customers in fuel poverty with affordability services, targeting 100,000 customers to unlock up to £40m of benefits	Extend our partnership reach to deliver a regionally-tailored, multi- faceted affordability service and work with partners to educate customers on energy efficiency and available grants	20,000 fuel poverty interventions per annum Up to £40m of benefits over the ED2 period Different forms of vulnerability addressed		Green	16484 customers supported through tailored regional fuel poverty programme £4,395,443 gross benefits realised
VN5) Work with partners to put in place initiatives that overcome barriers to the smart energy transition and support a socially inclusive transition to net zero, targeting 25,000 interventions	Work with partners to offer customers tailored support on how to benefit from the transition to net zero and ensure vulnerable customers are not left behind	5,000 customers engaged through Decarbonising Homes programme per annum Vulnerable customers supported to allow them to benefit from the low carbon transition		Amber	714 customers supported with Decarbonising Homes advice, realising £ 428,602 gross benefits Extensive research and engagement in place to understand and address customer barriers to decarbonisation and shape the future of the programme
VN6) Embed vulnerability across our business operations	Deliver enhanced, regionally focused training to colleagues every 24 months, Apply vulnerability criteria (once standard criteria has been met) as part of prioritising network investment works	100% front-line staff trained in rolling 24-month programme Enhanced support for vulnerable customers across the range of our services	All new starters trained as part of Best Welcome induction Refresher training for all colleagues every 24 months	Green	Training targets met with 262 colleagues trained this year Vulnerability built into prioritising network investment works processes through the vulnerability framework





## RIIO-ED2 Vulnerability ODI Assessment –

Table 6

01/07/2024

### **Overview of final assessment**

In alignment with Table 6, located in the 'Vulnerability Assessor – Scope of Works' document.

### Table 6

Metric	No.	Minimum requirement category	Minimum requirement criteria	Has the criteria been met? (Y/N)
PSR reach	1	PSR reach has been reported in line with the common methodology	The PSR reach actual performance is calculated in line with the agreed methodology and data provided by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE)	Y
	2	Confirmation that the licensee has attempted to contact 100% of its registered PSR customers to verify their data every 24 months	Has the licensee attempted to contact 100% of its registered PSR customers to verify their data every 24 months?	Y
			The £NPV value calculated is in line with the common Social Value Framework Rulebook	Y
Value of FP services delivered	3	Assurance that performance against the targets has been calculated and reported in line with the common Social Value Framework methodology	The £NPV value calculated is attributed to the value of Fuel Poverty Services delivered and the scope of the metric set out within Chapter 2 of the RIIO-ED2 Consumer Vulnerability Guidance document The values reported are	Y
			accurate from the calculations in the relevant SROI model The £NPV value calculated is in line with the common Social	Y
Value of LCT services delivered	4	Assurance that performance against the targets has been calculated and reported in line with the common Social Value Framework methodology	Value Framework Rulebook The £NPV value calculated is attributed to the value of Low Carbon Transition Services delivered and the scope of the metric set out within Chapter 2 of the RIIO-ED2 Consumer Vulnerability Guidance Document	Y
			The values reported are accurate from the calculations in the relevant SROI model	Y

Based on the above, we are pleased to confirm alignment with the agreed upon reporting guidelines for Y1 of NPg's RIIO-ED2 Vulnerability ODI.

Sincerely,

Alessio Villanacci Director, Sirio

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