

Summary

This section of our Business Plan is supplementary to [Technical Appendix 07 – Be responsible: Our Social Obligations](#). It sets out a vision and framework for change in the way in which Scottish and Southern Energy Power Distribution will tackle consumer vulnerability in its network areas. It also highlights the partnerships necessary to achieve such change.

We believe the best way to meet our social obligations is to keep the distribution cost of our customer's bill down whilst further improving our awareness and response to vulnerability on our networks.

Our Mission

- To provide a safe reliable supply of electricity.
- To understand the different needs of our stakeholders and customers.
- To reach out to a diverse audience and provide accessible services.

Our vision

By 2023, our fair, accessible and responsive service will champion the needs and welfare of every customer whilst providing a safe, reliable supply of electricity.

Our objectives

- To ensure our communication channels are accessible and in line with best practice by April 2016.
- To ensure that our staff are well equipped and confident enabling us to provide a fair and responsive service to all customers by April 2017.
- To gather and use research data to understand who uses our service and how we can address consumer vulnerability by April 2018.
- To provide extra help and support for Priority Service Register Customers by April 2016.
- To develop mutually beneficial partnerships/relationships with other organisations which champion the needs and welfare of our customers by April 2017.

We will deliver on this by:

Identifying and responding to consumer vulnerability

- We will increase the knowledge base of our staff so that they understand causes of vulnerability; are able to detect it during their interaction with our customers; and routinely capture this information to improve the service we offer individuals.
- We will form an expert panel on consumer vulnerability to guide us on how best to identify and address consumer vulnerability on our networks.
- If deemed appropriate to the situation, we will encourage staff to let the customer know of a third party who can help them e.g. if the customer indicates during a call that they are experiencing financial difficulty and would benefit from money advice.
- We will routinely advise domestic customers of the Energy Saving Trust website and helpline either during calls or within literature we produce so that they can access help relating to energy efficiency advice around the home; and help which is available through energy supply company or government initiatives.

Keeping the distribution costs of our customer's electricity bills down

- A central commitment of our business plan is to keep the distribution costs of our customers' electricity bills as low as we can whilst still delivering a value for money service.
- We will also work with communities, individual households and businesses to manage their electricity consumption by offering advice around energy efficiency and the use of low carbon technology. Where appropriate, we also plan to work with partners to help customers access funding to implement measures in their properties.
- Working with local authorities and housing associations to anticipate where there are likely to be large volumes of new or low carbon technology connections to our network. This will allow us to apply innovative network solutions to minimise network reinforcement costs whilst also ensuring timely connections.

Improving our service to Priority Services Register customers

- We will improve the accuracy of our Priority Services Register (PSR) customer data to ensure that we offer the support vulnerable customers need and therefore improve the services we offer.
- We will develop new strategies to support customers with communication difficulties in all customer facing information and processes.
- We will develop an escalation process which ensures that all customers are provided with the correct level of support for their needs.
- We will understand the impact of the well being gap between power loss and restoration and how we can best target our help and support.

Supporting those who become temporarily vulnerable in a power cut

- To help us to respond to vulnerability caused by power outages, we work with emergency planning groups (whose membership includes the police, fire service, NHS, local authorities, Community/Parish Councils) to develop resilience plans. These plans help communities to have strategies in place to cope with unexpected and prolonged power cuts

Integrating support for vulnerable customers into our business processes

- Each business unit across our company will have work plans at unit, team and individual level which show the role they have in delivering this strategy by April 2016. In this way, ownership and accountability for individual pieces of work will be clear.

Summary of our plans

Our target deliverables are:

To ensure equal access to our services.	<p>Formation of an expert panel on consumer vulnerability by April 2015 to help guide us.</p> <p>All customer facing staff to be trained in understanding, detecting and responding to consumer vulnerability by April 2017.</p>
To provide information everyone can understand.	Ensuring our communications and processes are accessible to a broad audience by April 2016.
Improve our service to Priority Services Register (PSR) Customers	<p>Improve the accuracy of PSR customer data to ensure we offer the support and services each customer requires by April 2016.</p> <p>To develop an escalation process which ensures customers are provided with the correct level of support for their needs by April 2016.</p> <p>For 100% of our domestic customers to be aware of our PSR by March 2023.</p>
To use research data to understand who uses our service and build partnerships to enable us to address consumer vulnerability at different points in our services by April 2023	<p>Have processes in place to address the well being gap between electricity disruption and restoration based on research findings by April 2018.</p> <p>To have 100 resilience plans in place for communities by 2023.</p> <p>To routinely refer customers to the Energy Saving Trust website or helping either during calls or within literature by April 2016.</p> <p>To have an appropriate database of third party organisations that can advise customers on non-energy related issues (e.g. debt advice or feelings of isolation) and are reputable organisations who don't charge consumers for their services by April 2018.</p> <p>To defer network reinforcement on at least one circuit by working with a community to manage electricity consumption through energy efficiency and low carbon technologies by</p>

April 2018.

Working with at least two local authorities and/or housing associations to anticipate where there are likely to be large volumes of new or low carbon technology connections to our network by April 2019.

Integration into business processes

Each business unit across our company will have work plans at unit, team and individual level which show the role they have in delivering this strategy by April 2016. In this way, ownership and accountability for individual pieces of work will be clear.

Further examples of how we are delivering on our social obligations can be found throughout our Business Plan; for example, in our papers

- [Making Innovation happen](#)
- ICT Strategy Supporting Paper
- [Getting connected](#)
- [Customer Service](#)

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Introduction

Consumer vulnerability in the context of our networks

Ofgem have defined vulnerability as “when a consumer’s personal circumstances and characteristics combine with aspects of the market to create situations where he or she is significantly less able than a typical consumer to protect or represent his or her interests in the energy market; and/or significantly more likely than a typical consumer to suffer detriment, or that detriment is likely to be more substantial”¹.

Our Priority Services Register identifies customers have characteristics which make them particularly vulnerable to loss of supply. For instance:

- A customer who is dependent on electricity to power their medical equipment.
- A customer with cognitive impairment who is agitated and disorientated by being left in the dark.

We also recognise that other customers can become vulnerable in a power cut too. For example a long power cut during severe cold weather may render a customer vulnerable if their heating system is controlled or powered by electricity and they have no other source of heating.

However, vulnerability takes other forms too including:

- A customer who finds it difficult to access information from us due to a communication need such as not speaking English as a first language; or not being able to read or hear our communications.
- A customer who finds it difficult to access quotes and compare the services of different connection providers; or to make a complaint about service they have received.
- A customer who is in fuel poverty and requires energy efficiency and/or debt advice.

This means that our response to vulnerability on our network needs to be wide ranging and is reflected in our vision statement: **By 2023, our fair, accessible and responsive service will champion the needs and welfare of every customer whilst providing a safe, reliable supply of electricity.**

¹ <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/ofgem-publications/75550/consumer-vulnerability-strategy.pdf>

Responding to customer vulnerability on our networks

Responding to vulnerability and our social obligations fits very closely with our company values. Historically, we have considered our social obligations to be²:

- To deliver an affordable, safe, reliable supply of electricity.
- To provide sector-leading customer service and respond to our customers' needs.
- To actively identify, and provide support to, customers who are on our Priority Services Register (PSR).
- To be environmentally responsible.
- To strengthen communities by offering local employment, apprentice, trainee engineer and graduate programmes.
- Providing opportunities for local businesses through Open4Business, our Responsible Procurement Charter and Prompt Payment Code.
- Supporting communities through our Community at Heart and schools programme.

We have updated our approach to include keeping the distribution cost of our customers' bill down whilst further improving our awareness and response to vulnerability on our networks. This is in response to stakeholder feedback during Our RIIO-ED1 programme of listening³; Ofgem's Consumer Vulnerability Strategy; Strategy Decision for RIIO-ED1; and RIIO-ED1 Business plan assessment and fast-tracked consultation

Increasing staff awareness of consumer vulnerability

We want to increase the knowledge base of our staff so that they understand causes of vulnerability and are able to detect it during their interaction with our customers. We want to routinely capture this information to improve the service we offer that customer – for instance providing communications in a way which is sensitive to their needs. If deemed appropriate to the situation, we will encourage staff to let the customer know of a third party who can help the customer. For example, during a call the customers could indicate that they are experiencing feelings of isolation; or that they are experiencing financial difficulties and would benefit from advice. We look out for the safety of colleagues, through our safety family, and it is a natural extension to consider our customers in this way. This contributes to our vision by allowing us to deliver a fair, accessible and responsive service which considers the needs and welfare of every customer.

² Full details on these programmes can be found on our website.

³ Full details of the findings from our programme of listening and our business response can be found on [our website](#).

Keeping the distribution costs of our customer's electricity bills down

A central commitment of our business plan is to keep the distribution costs of our customers' electricity bills as low as we can whilst still delivering a value for money service⁴. This recognises that the recent economic climate has impacted on the ability some of our customers have to pay for their bills whilst acknowledging that our customers don't want to see deterioration in supply safety and reliability or customer service.

To this end, we will work with communities, individual households and businesses to manage their electricity consumption by offering advice around energy efficiency and the use of low carbon technology. Where appropriate, we also plan to work with partners to help customers access funding to implement measures in their properties. We will also routinely advise customers of the Energy Saving Trust website and helpline⁵ either during calls or within literature we produce so that they can access:

- Advice on energy efficiency around the home including simple tips and advice on saving energy.
- Energy supply companies social schemes like Warm Home Discount scheme and energy trusts for debt relief.

The benefits of this approach are twofold. Firstly, the individual customers benefiting from advice and measures have the tools to change their behaviour and in turn reduce the amount of electricity they use and pay for. Secondly, it also allows more residential, commercial and industrial developments and distributed generation to connect to the existing network by offsetting the need for traditional network reinforcement. Traditional network reinforcement uses engineering solutions (such as upgrading substations, switch gear and conductor size) to increase the capacity of the network and tends to require intensive capital investment. Therefore the wider customer base benefits too because they don't need to pay for the capital investment required for engineering works to increase network capacity. This contributes to our vision because we are considering the welfare of every customer whilst providing a safe, reliable supply of electricity.

Delivering timely connections

We are aware of the impact of untimely connections on business, customers and wider society due to the negative impact it can have on businesses' cash flow or causing disruption to householders. If we can anticipate where customers are likely to connecting to our network, we can apply network solutions to accommodate high volumes of such technologies connecting to a particular section of the network to minimise reinforcement costs and ensuring timely connections in advance of connection applications. This contributes to our vision because we are considering the welfare of every customer by providing timely connections.

⁴ Seven out of ten (70%) respondents said that if SSEPD meets its commitment of reducing its part of the electricity bill by 10% in 2015, this will make it either a lot easier or a little easier for them to pay their electricity bill.

⁵ This approach allows us to circumnavigate any regulatory issues around supplier/distribution business separation and ensures advice that our customers receive is both independent and free from bias.

We are exploring working with social housing landlords to ensure that we know where there are likely to be lots of low carbon technologies connecting affordable energy solutions such as heat pumps and solar panels. This is because social housing landlords were early adopters of implementing energy efficiency measures on a large scale and are likely to be early adopters of affordable energy solutions too. We are also exploring working with local planning authorities to see where planning policies will encourage low carbon technology connections or large new housing or business park developments.

Improving our service to Priority Services Register customers

We want to improve the customer data held within our Priority Services Register (PSR). This will ensure that we offer the support vulnerable customers need and therefore improve the services we offer. This contributes to the delivery of our vision because improving our service to PSR customers will also benefit our wider customer base. For example:

- Considering how we can support customers with communication difficulties in all customer facing information and processes. This will result in our communications being much easier to understand and act upon for all customers.
- Developing an escalation process which ensures that all customers are provided with the correct level of support for their needs, including critical, sensitive situations involving our most vulnerable customers. This may include referring customers to other organisations for support and advice. As we become more adept at this, we will be able to apply the approach to all customers.
- Understanding the impact of the well being gap between power loss and restoration and how we can help. This will inform our resilience planning processes.

Supporting those who become temporarily vulnerable in a power cut

Customers who don't have an alternative source of power to heat their homes; or require electricity to start their heating system may become temporarily vulnerable if they find themselves without power for a prolonged period in very cold weather – even although they would not consider themselves to be vulnerable at any other time. To help us to respond to vulnerability caused by power outages, we work with emergency planning groups (whose membership includes the police, fire service, NHS, local authorities, Community/Parish Councils) to develop resilience plans which will help communities to have strategies in place to cope with unexpected and prolonged power cuts. In this way, we are considering the welfare of our customers.

What's in this paper?

This paper is part of SSEPD's Business Plan for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2023 ("the RIIO-ED1 period").

Part 1 sets out how we will improve our understanding of vulnerability, use of data and referral networks to deliver and improve service to vulnerable consumers on our networks.

Part 2 explains how we will improve customer data within our Priority Services Register. This will ensure that we are able to give them advice on how to look after themselves in a power outage based on an understanding of their needs. It also details our response to customers become temporarily vulnerable in a power cut.

Part 3 describes our approach to planning, performance, assurance and accreditation. This section shows how we will ensure that the support we offer to vulnerable consumers on our network is integrated into our business processes.

Part 1

Training, effective use of data and referral networks

Training to recognise and understand wider vulnerability

We want to take a proactive approach to identifying vulnerability in order to ensure that our customers receive the most appropriate service from us. By April 2017, all customer facing staff will have undertaken training which enables them to:

- Recognise signs of vulnerability in individuals, identify their needs and offer appropriate solutions⁶.
- Have an understanding of the Equality Act, Disability Act and Data Protection Act and understand why this affects the service we provide to customers.

This training will include raising awareness of fuel poverty issues and development of effective questioning techniques so that we are better equipped to identify vulnerable or fuel poor customers.

Our Priority Services Register and Call Centre Management teams will have more in-depth training to ensure that they have additional expertise required to assess the most appropriate solution for a customer's situation on a case by case basis. Their training will include work shadowing to ensure that they have been confronted with real life experience of vulnerability which will complement classroom training. They will spend a day work shadowing a local organisation which specialises in providing home visits to vulnerable households. This is unusual for a distribution company, but provides a first-hand view from the customers' perspective and builds empathy. The learning taken from these training days not only consolidates the management team's understanding of vulnerable customers, but also can be used in scenario-based training for advisers. Following the initial roll out of this training, staff will then be given a regular programme of training to provide updates, consolidate knowledge and share learning. This will benefit customers by improving the service they receive.

We will complement the training with an escalation process which ensures that all customers are provided with the correct level of support for their needs. It will empower staff to resolve problems efficiently, at source and avoid the possibility of customers being passed around departments.

⁶ Our training will encourage staff to adopt a very wide definition in assessing whether customers are vulnerable. Staff will be encouraged to actively seek to identify any signs of vulnerability (physical, emotional, financial and/or circumstantial) by ensuring that staff are knowledgeable and more clearly understand what vulnerability might entail. Training will be in line with the Direct Marketing Agency White Paper on Vulnerability.

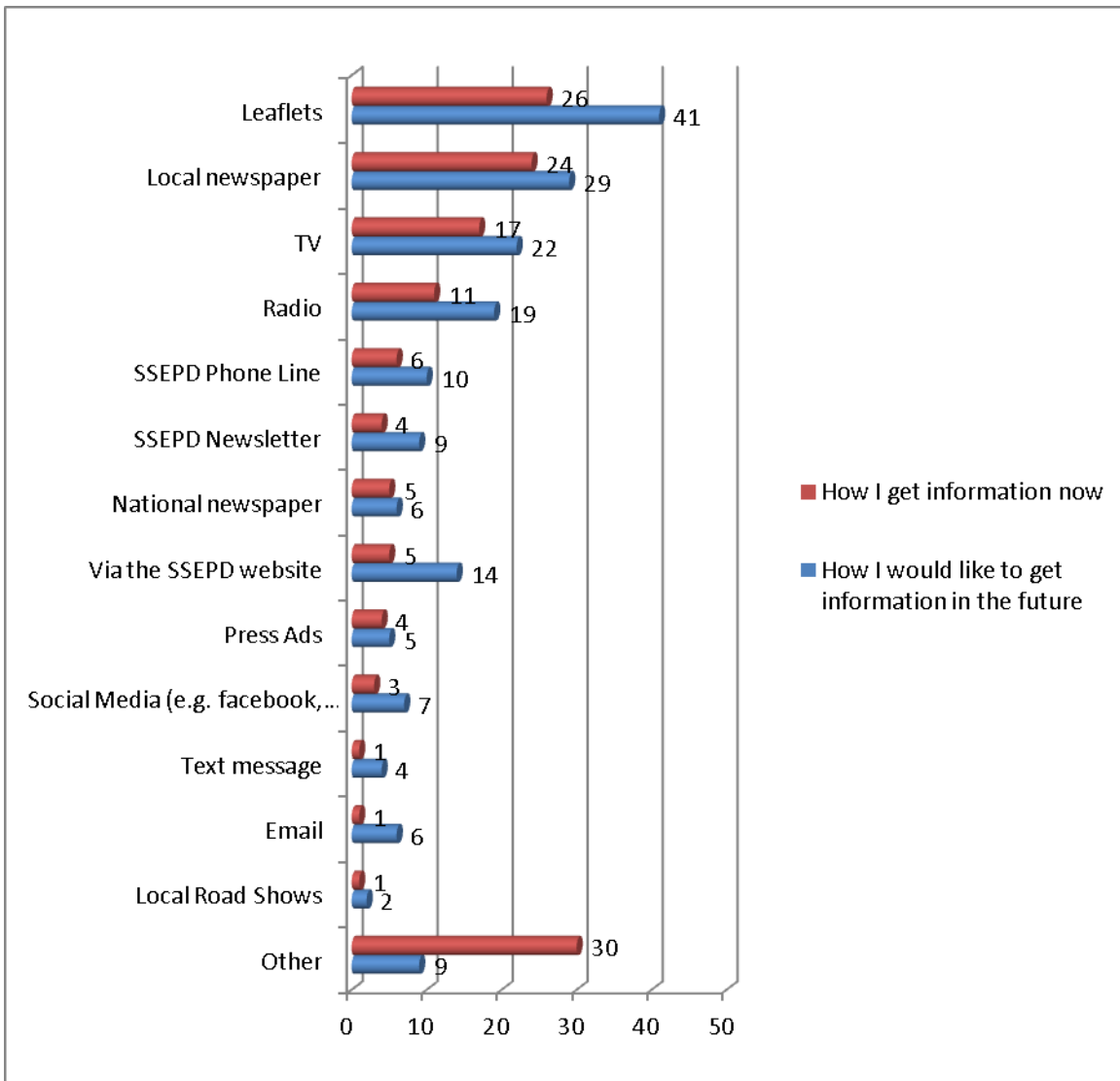
We have an existing, clearly defined and understood customer complaints process. The process is detailed on our website⁷ and we provide copies of the process in different formats (such as large print) as well as being happy to explain it over the phone or via text phone. This evidences our commitment to every customer being able to access every service we provide.

Accessible communications

We also want to produce communications which are focused, clear and easy to act upon by the widest possible audience. We have a large customer base and have asked them about their communication preferences - these differ by audience and the issue we are communication on. For instance, Figure 1 (below) shows the feedback we received domestic customers in our autumn 2013 survey when we asked how they currently get information on SSEPD as well as information on issues relating to the electricity distribution network in their area including times when there are power cuts but also how they would like to receive this information in the future.

⁷ <http://www.ssepd.co.uk/TheComplaintsProcess/>

Figure 1: Ways customers currently and would like to receive information from us



Additionally, in focus and Customer Voice Groups our stakeholders have told us that they have different requirements and preferences – some have specific communication needs (such as being deaf or blind), others don’t have internet access or are concerned about the cost of telephone calls.

To ensure barriers to our services are minimised, we believe customers should be able to communicate with us in a way that suits them and have made this central to our 12 business plan commitments⁸. We recognise that not every customer will have internet access and so will continue to use traditional communication methods. We already offer free or low cost telephone numbers and are happy to call any customer back who is concerned about telephone costs if they mention it. We also have services in place to

⁸ Commitments 3 and 8.

accommodate any special communication needs upon request. For instance, we make publications available in different languages and in different formats such as large print, Braille and audio CD.

We are redesigning our website to be in line with W3C AA Standards for Accessibility⁹ and ARIA Standards¹⁰. Creating an easy read¹¹ format on our website for people with a learning disability will also benefit those who don't use English as a first language, people with dyslexia and those with lower levels of literacy. We would like to extend the use of easy read format to all our customer facing publications. We will also try to use Plain English¹². This will mean that communications we produce will also be focused, clear and easy to act upon. This approach will reduce time and money spent explaining things in the long run – savings which can be passed on customers.

We will continually review the approach being taken to ensure that our communication channels are accessible and use recognised accreditation schemes, where appropriate, to assure our customers that we comply with best practice. However, we will adhere to principles of offering a range of ways for customers to contact us (in writing, by phone, by text phone, by email, live chat and social media channels) and continue to listen to our customers to ensure that they can contact us in a way that suits them¹³. We also want to make it easier for customers to fill in and submit forms by offering the choice of doing this online, by post, by phone or live chat¹⁴. We also provide information across a range of media (traditional print, phone, text message, internet, email and social media channels).

We aim to have an expert panel on consumer vulnerability in place by April 2015. Members will be representatives from trusted intermediaries who regularly work with vulnerable customers and consumer champions. This will allow them to guide us on how best to identify and address consumer vulnerability.

Directing customers to energy related advice

We will routinely advise customers of the Energy Saving Trust website and helpline either during calls or within literature we produce so that they can access help from:

- Energy supply companies on social schemes like Warm Home Discount scheme and trusts or other grant awarding bodies for debt relief.

⁹ <http://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG1AA-Conformance>

¹⁰ <http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/aria.php>

¹¹ Easy Read is information with words and pictures targeted at people with learning disabilities. Easy Read uses short sentences, large type, includes explanations of difficult words and uses pictures to explain ideas.

¹² Plain English is defined as text the intended audience can read, understand and act upon the first time they read it. Plain English takes into account design and layout as well as language.

¹³ During our autumn 2013 consultation on our business plan commitments, 63% were also supportive of being able to contact us in more ways that suit them.

¹⁴ During our autumn 2013 consultation on our business plan commitments, 93% of respondents are supportive of us making it easier by giving you the option of filling out forms online, by post, by phone or live chat.

- Advice on energy efficiency around the home including simple tips and advice on saving fuel.

This approach allows us to circumnavigate any regulatory issues around supplier/distribution business separation and ensures advice that our customers receive is both independent and free from bias, whilst encouraging customers to be more engaged in the energy market.

Directing customers to non-energy related help

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

Staff will be given guidelines on how and when (and when not) to refer customers to another organisation but our customer service management team will also play an important role in our process. On the occasions where staff are concerned about a customer's welfare and either feel that signposting is not appropriate or they are unsure of the next best steps to take, they raise an alert with their manager. The manager and adviser then decide next steps. This may include:

- a call from the manager
- signposting
- a visit from a local member of staff as appropriate.

An appropriate database will be maintained by the Priority Service Register team, in which contact details of selected third party organisations are contained. The name and contact details of each organisation will be listed, with a brief description of the help the organisation provides, so that staff can easily select the most appropriate assistance for their customer. All of the organisations listed will be registered charities or reputable organisations which do not charge for using their services, such as Age UK or Citizens Advice Bureau etc. The database will be updated on a six monthly basis and advisers may only signpost to the organisations on the list, so as to avoid giving the customer details of unknown organisations which may not have the customers' welfare at heart.

Keeping the distribution costs of our customer's electricity bills down

A central commitment of our business plan is to keep the distribution costs of our customers' electricity bills as low as we can whilst still delivering a value for money service¹⁵. This recognises that the recent economic climate has impacted on the ability some of our customers have to pay for their bills whilst acknowledging that our customers don't want to see deterioration in supply safety and reliability or customer service.

Offsetting network reinforcement

We have included a number of innovative solutions which deliver both network and customer benefits within our business plan. For instance, we can manage network constraints by working with communities and individual households and business to educate them to be more energy efficient (e.g. through behavioural change, increasing energy efficiency of appliances and/or the thermal efficiency of their property) or to efficiently use low carbon technology (such as smart electric vehicle charging and maximising benefits of micro distributed generation). This type of intervention offsets traditional network reinforcement which is where we use engineering solutions (such as upgrading substations, switch gear and conductor size) to increase the capacity of the network which requires capital investment. The benefit of this approach is that the customers who receive advice, from our partners, can benefit from lower electricity bills and the wider customer base benefits as they don't need to pay for the capital investment required for engineering works which increase network capacity. Details of how and where we will implement this approach can be found in the innovation paper.

Using publicly available census information, such as Scottish Housing Condition Survey and English Housing Survey or Indices of Deprivation, we can access data on demographics, housing tender, main source of heating and energy efficiency rating of housing stock, and deprivation in our network areas. We would be able to use this to inform where this project is likely to deliver most customer benefit by overlaying this data with network information which highlights where high demand loads will require network investment.

We are exploring if there are any opportunities to work with Gas Distribution Networks (particularly SGN whose networks mirror ours) to see if there are ways we can combine resources to deliver solutions for off-gas grid customers and the networks. We would also like to further develop our relationship with energy suppliers to go beyond simply sharing information on registered priority services customers; to helping them to identify households that could benefit from the Energy Companies Obligations, Green Deal and other assistance schemes. We also see an opportunity to work with government energy efficiency schemes in the same way.

¹⁵ Seven out of ten (70%) respondents said that if SSEPD meets its commitment of reducing its part of the electricity bill by 10% in 2015, this will make it either a lot easier or a little easier for them to pay their electricity bill.

Ensuring timely connections

We are aware of the impact of untimely connections on business, customers and wider society due to the negative impact it can have on businesses' cash flow or causing disruption to householders¹⁶. If we can anticipate where customers are likely to connecting to our network, we can apply network solutions to accommodate high volumes of such technologies connecting to a particular section of the network to minimise reinforcement costs and ensuring timely connections in advance of connection applications.

We are exploring working with social housing landlords to ensure that we know where there are likely to be a number of low carbon technologies connecting affordable energy solutions such as heat pumps and solar panels. This is because social housing landlords were early adopters of implementing energy efficiency measures on a large scale. We also plan to work with local planning authorities to see where planning policies will encourage low carbon technology connections, or large new housing or business park developments.

Working in partnership with local authorities and social housing landlords we can identify where energy efficiency measures and schemes may be beneficial to reducing demand load on the network delaying the need for network reinforcement but also maximise social benefits such as reducing cost to end customer but also improving the customer comfort where measures are accepted. We will work with at least two housing associations or local authorities to understand where there are likely to be new connections to a constrained network by April 2019.

¹⁶ Further details are contained in our [Connections](#) paper.

Part 2

Improving our service

A safe and reliable supply of electricity is now regarded as an essential service. We recognise that different people will experience vulnerability from a prolonged loss of supply but for very different reasons.

We all rely on electricity in our daily lives, but for some a power cut can be particularly distressing and difficult and that's why we offer extra help and priority treatment during a power cut. It helps us to help our customers if we know what extra support they may need.

Identifying Priority Service Register Customers

We identify vulnerable customers on our network when they join our Priority Services Register (PSR). Currently, 347444 customers have joined our PSR having registered by post, phone, text phone or online. Customers are eligible to join our PSR if they:

- Are dependent on electricity for home medical care.
- Have a chronic illness or short term medical condition.
- Are disabled.
- Have special communication needs.
- Have a baby less than 12 months old.
- Receive a state pension.

There are other reasons which mean customers may need extra support when they have no power and so we are keen for them to contact us to discuss their needs too. Each case will be dealt with on an individual basis. As our staff gather valuable experience in identifying vulnerability, we will expand our PSR customer categories to make our service as inclusive and as comprehensive as possible.

We actively recruit eligible customers by promoting our PSR service on phone calls with customers, at public meetings held by the Distribution and Transmission businesses, press releases, social media and through our PSR leaflet¹⁷ which details the key benefits of our free service¹⁸. The leaflet has also been distributed by

¹⁷ The leaflet was critically evaluated by Consumer Futures and Energy Action Scotland.

¹⁸ 47% of customers responding to our online survey (Dec 2012 – March 2013) were aware that SSEPD holds a list of priority services customers. We want 100% of our customers to be aware of the service by March 2023.

trusted intermediaries who we identified as having regular contact and strong relationships with customers who could benefit from registration. This includes making them available to every GP surgery; to every hospital (concentrating on units such as renal, pulmonary, remote monitoring and midwifery units) as well as through resilience and emergency planning partners in our licensed areas. We are evaluating this approach and an ongoing communication campaign¹⁹ will be developed as part of our evolving vulnerability strategy. This approach has proved hugely successful with over 21066 registrations in the first three months the campaign has been running.

Our existing PSR Service

We offer the following support to our PSR customers:

- A free 24 hour priority services phone number to make it easier for the customers or their representative to get in touch with us if the power goes off.
- If the customer would prefer not be contacted directly, they can nominate someone else for us to contact on their behalf when providing priority services. This is in direct response to some of our customers who have identified third parties to act on their behalf (for instance if they have cognitive impairment).
- A commitment to keep them or their nominated contact updated until power is restored.
- Personally contacting them or their nominated contact in advance if we need to switch off their electricity supply to carry out essential maintenance.
- We work with agencies such as local authorities, the emergency services and the Red Cross to provide extra support. Our registration process includes a consent clause which PSR customers sign to enable us to share their details with third parties to ensure that they receive the priority service.
- Specialist advice, specific to the customer's circumstances, on how to cope in the rare event that there is no electricity.
- Provide information in a format that suits the individuals communication needs; for example in Braille or by using a text phone.
- Agree a password for our staff to use when they talk to them. That way they can be safe in the knowledge that they are speaking to us. All our staff carry an identification card with their photograph on it and a phone number to call to check they are who they say they are.

¹⁹ The PSR awareness campaign will include promoting the service through trusted intermediaries; advertising in local press, in community and adult learning centres and on public transport; mail shots, radio campaign, and a winter care you tube video with a winter ready e-learning course. Campaign codes will be assigned to help us understand which methods suit particular groups best.

- Priority access to welfare vehicles to provide meals, drinks, warmth and charging points during prolonged power cuts.
- Portable generators for critical supply customers during prolonged power cuts.

On registration, our dedicated PSR Team contact customers to verify their details and ensure that we have fully understood the support that the individual requires. At this point we also offer specialist advice, based on their circumstances, around how to cope in the event that they have no power. It is essential that our PSR information is accurate as we use this to:

- Prioritise support in a power outage. For instance, we contact those whose supply is critical for life supporting medical equipment first.
- Ensure that we are sending communications to customers about their supply in the format which matches their communication needs.
- Facilitate automated guaranteed standards payments to eligible customers.

That's why we want to improve the accuracy of our PSR customer data by April 2016.

Many of the activities that we undertake for PSR customers do not incur additional costs as they are factored into our business plans already. However, there is a need to invest in technology to ensure we have an improved outage management system to enable us to do deliver these services more efficiently. More details can be found in the SSEPD ICT Strategy Supporting Paper.

Improving our understanding of vulnerability in a power cut to better target our PSR customer support

We are currently working in a partnership²⁰ to ensure that our priority service meets our PSR customers' needs. Severe weather events and consequent disruption to the electricity supply to local communities, and in particular the homes and care sites of individuals considered vulnerable (including elderly people, disabled people and people with chronic illness) can be very problematic. Whilst we have robust procedures for the restoration of the electricity supply, this can sometimes take several days, and in this period the wellbeing of individuals considered vulnerable within these communities can be significantly affected. As severe weather events become more frequent, SSEPD is developing new forms of engagement and support for communities so that the 'wellbeing gap' between electricity disruption and restoration for its customers can be effectively addressed. This will include ensuring that we give specialist advice on how to help individuals in a power cut to help themselves.

²⁰ The partnership is between SSEPD, Social Dimensions of Health Institute (SDHI) of the Universities of Dundee and St Andrews. The costs of this research project will not be passed onto customers.

The research project will consider past experiences of communities during prolonged power outages, in particular vulnerable groups and their experience of our service but also health and social care during these times. Socio-demographic models and study data will then be used to form the basis and framework necessary to develop and test the most effective solutions. This learning will benefit the wider population too.

Supporting those who become temporarily vulnerable in a power cut

Customers who don't have an alternative source of power to heat their homes; or require electricity to start their heating system may become temporarily vulnerable if they find themselves without power for a prolonged period in very cold weather – even although they would not consider themselves to be vulnerable at any other time. To help us to respond to vulnerability caused by power outages, we work with emergency planning groups (whose membership includes the police, fire service, NHS, local authorities, Community/Parish Councils) to have resilience plans in place to help communities to be prepared for such events so that they have strategies in place to cope with unexpected and prolonged power cuts. We will have 100 resilience plans in place for communities by 2023.

Our approach to resilience planning is based on the Ready Scotland model, in both SHEPD and SEPD, as we believe this to be an exemplar of best practice which we have shared with other Distribution Network Operators. The model enables us to take a standard approach whilst allowing for local circumstances such as highly rural or urban setting. It incorporates ideas such as:

- Encouraging our customers to be prepared for an unexpected power cut. For instance, keeping a torch with fresh batteries in a place where it can be easily reached; or having a battery-powered radio tuned in to your local radio station for updates on when power will be restored.
- At community level, we work with our customers and emergency planners identify cluster points where we can provide a mobile generator so that people have somewhere warm to go but also to access welfare support such as like hot food and drinks. In the future we would like to extend this service so that it allows us to create “resilient zones” which would use energy storage and active network management²¹ to ensure that the power is always available there.

We identify the best ways to cascade information for that community and create a communication plan. In a storm event, we use this to notify partners²² identified in communication plan section of the resilience plan to enable a co-ordinated response on the ground. The types of things that would be

²¹ Active network management (ANM) is a key focus area for our [innovation programme](#) during RIIO-ED1. Our programme includes the potential application of ANM to increase the resilience of network areas that are frequently adversely affected by severe weather events. The objective of this development is to maintain supply as far as possible in these network areas during severe weather events.

²² These would include local contacts in the community as well as emergency services and local authorities.

included in the communication plan are utilising good neighbour schemes where they check on neighbours and share information about expected time the power will be back on; or the use community notice boards to cascade information. In this way we can keep customers informed before, during and after the power cut in the event that other communication systems are unavailable. We also use this system to advise communities if a severe weather event may affect them so that they can be prepared.

- There are established communication protocols used between emergency responders in the Civil Contingency Act 2004 which we adhere to as Category 2 responders. This means that consistent messages are passed out to responding organisations (fire, ambulance, police) and enables us to share information to target support at the most vulnerable first (e.g. providing access to welfare services). It also means that agreed lines are taken in all media releases to avoid confused messages reaching customers.

The Ready Scotland Scheme has translated well into our southern area where our customers tell us they really appreciate the extra care offered.

We already have strong local partnerships with local authorities, emergency responders and the British Red Cross. We are looking to strengthen these through national partnership agreements to enable us to have mobile welfare vans which can reach people who are unable to leave their homes available within two hours of a power cut, access to their special radio network (known as Unimogs) which works even when mobile phone networks are unavailable; and call centre support for very vulnerable customers in need of psycho-social support. For instance if they are extremely distressed by the situation they find themselves in.

We have a number of innovations on our network which help us identify where network faults are so that we can restore power as quickly as possible. These include the use of bidoyng²³, advanced automation system²⁴, fault passage indicators²⁵ and copper theft detection system²⁶). We then interrogate fault and network management systems we can identify which customers are affected (enabling us to keep them informed) but also where the fault is on the network (speeding up restoration time). We then share this information with customers and our emergency planning partners on where the faults are and accurate estimations of power restoration times. This enables our communities and emergency planning partners to decide on how they will respond.

²³ Bidoyngs automatically close switches on the LV network to speed up restoration times to customers not directly affected by the fault because operatives don't have to be present.

²⁴ Intelliruptors which are an advanced automation system on the Isle of Wight automatically closes circuit breakers on the HV network to speed up restoration time to customers not directly affected by the fault because operatives don't have to be present.

²⁵ Fault passage indicators which help us to narrow down where the fault is on the network which speeds up fault location time.

²⁶ Copper theft detection system is a safety device which ensures the safety of operatives in our substations during switching operations as it indicates the earth is no longer available.

Looking forward into RIIO-ED1, smart meters will provide a further method of fault detection and enable automated guaranteed payments as appropriate. We also want to make it easy for members of the public to alert us to problems on our networks and are working on a new app called “Grid I View Reporter”. The app which is compatible with smart phones and tablets allows pictures of damaged lines or equipment to be taken and the GPS location will be added when they send the image to us. More detail can be found on these in the [Innovation](#) and SSEPD ICT Strategy Supporting Papers.

We have prioritised the order in which we approach communities by starting with those whose supplies are most frequently disrupted by severe weather; where there are clusters of PSR customers or where national housing surveys have identified that homes are solely dependent on electricity for heating. We promote the agreed plan in those communities so that there is a good understanding of where they can access information and support both from us and representatives in their local community during prolonged power cuts. In the longer term we would like to explore uninterrupted power supplies for customers who are dependent on electricity to power medical equipment or stair lifts etc.

In the longer term, we hope to work in partnership with other organisations to help communities create resilient zones where they can be sure there is always a source of electricity. This will involve working with local planning authorities encouraging them to adopt positive planning policies to encourage the installation of batteries and renewable energy sources which are not dependent on the electricity network. We already provide additional support to community led renewable generation projects to connect to the grid, especially where this reduces a community’s vulnerability to loss of supply²⁷ and this could be extended further so that customers in fuel poverty have the opportunity to connect to the grid without paying an upfront connection charge. We are investigating the potential of overlaying maps of our network with Indices of Deprivation to identify small area deprivation to help identify these communities²⁸.

²⁷ Further details of this scheme can be found in our [Connections](#) output paper

²⁸ <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/Info.do?m=0&s=1392631504234&enc=1&page=analysisandguidance/analysisarticles/indices-of-deprivation.htm&nsjs=true&nsck=false&nssvg=false&nswid=1276>

Part 3

Planning, performance, assurance and accreditation

Delivering on our social obligations is a key business driver which will underpin our design, planning and delivery of all services because we recognise the efficiencies it brings to our processes which helps us keep the cost of our services down; but also in terms of the social benefits we are delivering for customers. To ensure that our approach to responding to consumer vulnerability on our networks is integrated into our business process, each business unit across our company will have a role in delivering this strategy.

Planning

Each business unit across our company will have a role in delivering this strategy. As part of our business planning process, actions to deliver the strategy will be agreed within and across business units and linked into work plans at unit, team and individual level. In this way, ownership and accountability for individual pieces of work will be clear.

Performance

The monitoring of progress against the strategy will be undertaken through our performance management and reporting process which is overseen by the SSEPD Boards. Each business unit across our company will have work plans at unit, team and individual level which show the role they have in delivering this strategy by April 2016. Progress towards the overall delivery of the vision will be reported annually to the board. This will ensure that our vision becomes part of mainstream activities.

Assurance

Overall, our ISO 9001:2008 assured processes, alongside our regular training and feedback to staff allows us to anticipate and prevent potential problems; respond to customer feedback and complaints by making changes and continually review services to see where improvements can be made resulting in a holistic service with packages of assistance.

Accreditation

We will consider adopting the British Standard on Inclusive Service Provision (BSI 18477:2010) or an equivalent standard as a measure to assure our customers that our services are fair and accessible to all.