

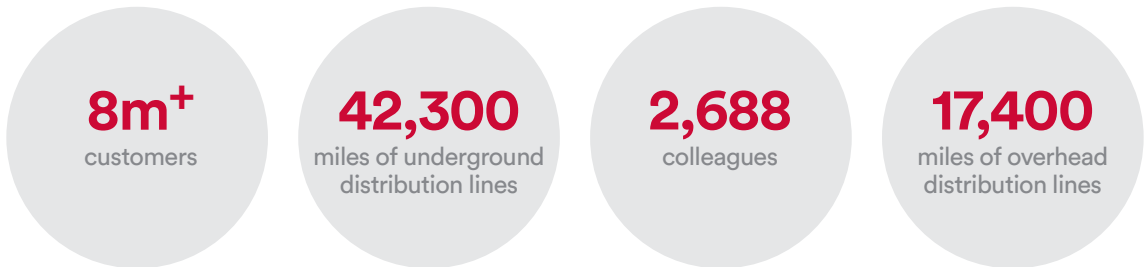


Part 3

Supporting our vulnerable customers

Welcome

We are Northern Powergrid, a business that always tries to put people’s needs first. Day and night, we maintain the infrastructure that’s keeping the lights on, heating homes, powering businesses and helping to improve the overall quality of life for more than eight million people in the North East of England, Yorkshire, and northern Lincolnshire.



This is Part 3 of our submission to Ofgem’s Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability (SECV) Incentive for the regulatory year 2019/20. We believe it shows how we’re clearly demonstrating proactivity, and a recognition of the benefits of engaging with vulnerable customers appropriately. Our submission comprises three parts:

- Part 1**
An overview of the way Northern Powergrid works, describing how our business strategy meets and exceeds Ofgem’s minimum requirements.
- Part 2**
More details of our activities this year, what we’ve learned, and how we’re continuously improving the way we engage with stakeholders.
- Part 3**
A report that explores our consumer vulnerability strategy, ensuring no-one misses the benefits of access to electricity today and that nobody is left behind during the transition to cleaner energy tomorrow.

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1 Introduction

We're all changing the way we think about and use energy. Momentum on decarbonisation is increasing but we know that as change accelerates, we must protect the rights of vulnerable members of society. Nobody should be at a disadvantage as a result of net-zero, just because they have additional needs. And the very real challenges we are facing in this time of uncertainty make it even more important to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from our services and support.

As people's lives and energy requirements evolve, we're mindful that the needs of our region and communities may also change – and that the nature of a person's vulnerability may be transient. Working in partnership with our Social Issues Expert Group (SIEG) we have refocused our consumer vulnerability strategy, ensuring we have a more refined means of identifying vulnerable customers and ensuring our services still meet their needs, with a refreshed social mapping tool and a new socially inclusive framework.

This year our focus on improving regional data and profiling is making it easier for us to target our services towards the real needs of our communities. Having a granular view of our data ensures true understanding, scalability, and efficiency – imperative for successful service development and delivery that leaves no one behind. Investing in fuel poverty data has enabled us to understand the full scale of customers impacted across our region, to target support and develop in-depth research to help combat this issue.

We've also been building on last year's success in targeting health and mental health issues, extending this approach and using the learning to develop a programme for customers experiencing communication challenges. Through a comprehensive research programme, we have gained insights about barriers to access and inclusion on our Priority Services Register (PSR), and the support services we offer. We are learning more about how we can overcome the difficulties that inhibit our most vulnerable and hardest to reach customers from accessing available support.

We've reviewed our data cleanse approach, introducing greater efficiencies whilst achieving a dramatically increased response rate and high retention on our PSR register. Following a comprehensive consultation, we have updated our consumer vulnerability strategy to include concrete objectives and actions so that our current and future plans leave a lasting social legacy and support the most vulnerable people in the communities we serve.

Neil Applebee
Director of People
and Customer Service



Identifying vulnerability in our region


We're adapting our strategies to target help where it is most needed, using local insights and our partnership network to make sure we are still focused on supporting those customers who need a helping hand. Our regional mapping tool now helps us to improve our understanding of vulnerability (page 3). This gives us more clarity about differences in vulnerability across our region.

Responding to and delivering on learnings


We are responding to feedback from expert groups; community partners; agencies; customers, stakeholders and delegates from our Future Fairness Conference. We've created an action plan to be the locus for expert stakeholders, aligning our work and learning from each other's plans. This work is defined by our Social Responsibility Management Group (SRMG) – a cross-business unit, which ran an internal conference for 70 managers to ensure all of our work is properly understood and embedded across our teams via aligned plans.

One of our key learnings was that a 'one size fits all' approach is not the way to tackle vulnerability. It's why we put individual accountability at the heart of our customer vulnerability strategy. The concept of addressing consumer vulnerability cannot be owned by one department: we need personal commitment to deliver integrated services across the company. All of our employees – and contractors – are encouraged to take the initiative and consider the impact their actions have for vulnerable customers. It's how we will fulfil our promise of **Making Every Contact Count**.

Regional snapshot - Northumberland, County Durham and Tyne and Wear


867,000
Properties


15,541
Number of Substations


944
Miles of EHV cable


6,073
Miles of HV cable



Vulnerability


284,248
Registered health conditions


289,591
Cases of rural isolation


57
Number of partners engaged

2 Our consumer vulnerability strategy

This year, in consultation with our stakeholders, we have updated our consumer vulnerability strategy to refocus more support on customers experiencing fuel poverty. We've integrated our social legacy programme in deprived areas, where we are improving network infrastructure. And, through our social inclusivity framework, we've incorporated direct actions to ensure no one gets left behind during the energy transition.



Catherine Harris
Consumer
Vulnerability
Manager

Measuring success, identifying room for improvement

We have clear methodologies to evaluate the success of our strategy and plans. We regularly report on programme impact internally and externally through our Social Issues Expert Group, Social Responsibility Management Group, and Executive Monthly Management reporting. This year, we have done even more.

Working with research partners to build on our existing model for measuring social ROI, we looked at how we can externally validate and quantify the measurable benefits of our supporting services and programmes. This included revisiting our Powergrid Cares (page 7) and Energy Efficiency initiatives, and our direct support for vulnerable customers in a power cut.

Our success can be measured in the following ways:

- Demonstrable improvements or increases (such as the number of people recruited to our PSR).
- External validation and feedback through Broader Measure for Customer Satisfaction (BMCS) scores and external audits, as shown on page 5 and 6.
- Expert assurance (such as our SIEG, SRMG and EMMM).
- Quantification of outcomes and benefits.

We also use audits and accreditations (BSI consumer vulnerability audit and international CSR assessment), to ensure our support services are fully embedded across the business.

We want to provide the best possible support and assistance for vulnerable customers, informed by a detailed understanding of their needs.

Objectives				Enablers	
Expanding our understanding	Improving access for the hard to reach	Improving services	Ensuring socially-inclusive, fair and equitable transition	Developing our people, capacity and culture	Developing partnerships
<p>This year we have...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengthened our understanding of vulnerability. ✓ Gained more insight about communication needs, challenges and barriers to inclusion in our PSR. ✓ Improved data acquisition, data integrity, and the quality of vulnerability profiling. ✓ Re-assessed our fuel poverty provisions, via in-depth research. ✓ Reviewed alternative fuel poverty support models to surface and adopt best practice. ✓ Delivered enhanced community engagement / targeted support aligned to vulnerability profiles. ✓ Developed partnerships to offer comprehensive debt and energy efficiency advice and support for individuals most in need. 				<p>This year we have...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Shared our free social mapping tool. ✓ Upgraded our data / data-sharing approach. ✓ Increased understanding of vulnerability across our business and partners. ✓ Improved our reach to vulnerable customers through partners. ✓ Re-mapped our partnership model. ✓ Reviewed our vital partnerships. ✓ Developed our people with a new customer-focused training programme. 	

External assurance

Our Social Issues Expert Group (SIEG), brings expert stakeholders together to exchange deeper insights on key social issues. Thanks to the Group's legacy (running since 2012), we can be sure of concrete, unbiased, informed support and scrutiny on our work with vulnerable customers.

This year, the SIEG played a key role in developing our social inclusivity framework and social legacy programme; our data cleanse, and departmental plans, and our conferences – internal (Vulnerability Conference, **70 delegates**), and external (Future Fairness Conference, **68 delegates**).

129,245

vulnerable customers
received direct support
in 2019/20

160,191

vulnerable individuals
have been added to
our PSR

Increased PSR registrations

Our improved social mapping tool lets us overlay vulnerability data to better reflect localised differences. It has enabled us to improve targeted recruitment to the PSR and provision of appropriate support using a larger number of data sets. This allows us to concentrate resources in those areas where vulnerable customers might be impacted by our work.

These improvements combined with an enhanced programme of community outreach, have led to broad growth in two of our key investment projects – both of which depended on 'better data' to achieve effective engagement:

**Bradford West £30 million
investment project**

22.5% growth

in PSR registrations since the
project started

**£10 million Leeds
tower blocks**

30% growth

in PSR registrations, increasing
from 679 to 886 by January 2020
(+207 households)

3 Extending our understanding of vulnerability

Since the introduction of the PSR, our role in supporting vulnerable customers has evolved. It is more important than ever to understand how different vulnerabilities are impacting our customers – to identify and use the right vulnerability ‘flags’ – so that we’re well equipped to respond appropriately.

Understanding the needs of our region

Our area is diverse in character and geography, and stakeholders tell us these differences are vitally important to the success of our service delivery for vulnerable customers. Since 2016, our regional mapping has evolved to include internal and external data. This year, we added vital new data fields from several sources, including Experian. This enables us to align our services more closely to areas of deprivation. It lets us ensure service provision and staff training meets their specific needs, area by area. The fields (each one, a ‘flag’ that can be used across the business in multiple scenarios), include:

- Social indicators on all vulnerability classifications.
- Business data (e.g. size of business, industry or sector).
- Size, scale and demographics and how this aligns to our network.
- Priority Services households.
- Fuel poverty analysis and poor energy rated homes.

As a result, we can now model which customers are likely to experience fuel poverty and identify properties with poor Energy Performance Certificate ratings – letting us promote energy efficiency messaging and guidance (via targeted media campaigns and social media video to +250,000 households). This helped to save an estimated £126 per year per household on fuel bills. With a click through rate of 0.89%, we estimate a total regional saving of £281,000 a year.

Alongside Experian, we have worked to remove the cost of the licence fee (£1,500) to enable our regional mapping tool to be freely accessible to our partners – the data is shared with Local Authorities, charities and social enterprises in a verified, open workbook (a conditional download from our website). We can track who and how this is being used. VONNE, for example, used this resource to support a successful funding bid, bringing in investment of £4m to Hartlepool and Redcar.

These free resources enable partners to benefit from our accumulated understanding of the region’s changing demographics. We have also used this data to inform our social legacy programme (Part 3, section 8) to better understand the challenges in areas where we’re investing in network development, alongside PSR registration data. This enables us to better recruit and engage customers and leads to improved long-term outcomes for these communities.

Identifying new complex needs

We have **936,631** customers on our PSR. Through regional analysis, we’ve identified areas of vulnerability that are under-represented due to either the nature of the vulnerability or additional needs. These customers experience barriers to sign-up that we must remove.

Last year, we told you about our work on a strategic PSR campaign to identify, target and recruit individuals with additional health and mental health needs. This year, we have expanded this work to include Teesside, North and East Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire, which has resulted in **95,282** additional registrations.

Category	Health conditions	Mental health
2018 – 2019	751,777	105,315
2019 – 2020	821,634	130,740
Growth	69,857	25,425
% Increase	9%	24%

Our 'good neighbours' campaign

Embedded

The challenge

Social isolation is a huge issue in our area. Associated health issues increase demand on healthcare services, but we know that – thanks to our position as a focus for the community and a locus for our stakeholders – we could help address the situation with direct, targeted engagement.

Actions and outcomes

- ✓ In partnership with the NHS, we ran a ‘Good Neighbours’ campaign – encouraging people to look out for the vulnerable, raising awareness of fuel poverty and winter warmth.
- ✓ Mostly via digital media but supported with printed packs, almost **46,000** people engaged with the campaign, which ran from November 2019 to January 2020. **84%** said the information was ‘very useful’ or ‘useful’, with **1,304** ‘helpful neighbour packs’ printed, viewed or downloaded. Our next steps are to roll this out to more NHS partners.

Communications engagement and research

Our research tells us that there is an opportunity to improve the way that we engage with those customers experiencing communication difficulties and our SIEG, having reviewed the research, has challenged us to develop a comprehensive programme that will improve the communications we put out – targeting those with additional needs (e.g. blindness), language barriers (e.g. English not as a first language) or other difficulties – across all our communication media.

Outcomes and developments

- ✓ We developed a recruitment campaign and engagement strategy in partnership

with local support networks to significantly increase PSR registrations across all groups by at least **15%** in 2020/21.

- ✓ We introduced British Sign Language versions of our online communications.
- ✓ We have established a core engagement group to evaluate all mainstream communications and ensure they are accessible to all groups.
- ✓ We are reviewing training requirements so that all colleagues are equipped to support customers across a range of communication challenges.

Communication vulnerabilities in our operating area

Vulnerability category	Population	% on PSR
Registered blind or partially sighted	42,806	14%
Hearing impaired	1,393,000	6%
English not first language (FLS)	105,061	8%
People with communication needs	1,540,867	9%

4 Managing data more efficiently

This year our focus has been on a robust data cleanse. We cannot over-emphasise the importance of this work; it has enabled us to reduce the cost but increase the effectiveness of every aspect of our work, targeting and supporting vulnerable customers.

Cleaner, smarter data

We started by rebuilding our entire approach to cleansing data. We involved stakeholders in the process, taking on board their feedback about methodologies. We removed out of date data and added new information to guarantee a more accurate view of vulnerability in our region. Key channels for that data acquisition were supplier data flows, Experian vulnerability data, social data and partner referrals.

Cross-business buy-in to PSR focus

Via each and every interaction with a vulnerable customer, data can now be vigorously checked and cleansed in an ongoing cycle of improvement. Flags on the central Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system highlight a call is coming from a PSR-registered household. Our Customer Service teams can make changes there and then to confirm ongoing PSR inclusion, and our engineers and contractors can use tools in the field to feedback intelligence that further enhances the register.

The Enduring Data Cleanse Policy will be reviewed under audit conditions, and our internal Quality Framework ensures colleagues follow a structured process. In short, we are more-effectively assessing people's needs and ensuring they get maximum benefit from our support services.

228,000

records cleansed
on our PSR

38%

response rates
have increased
from 24% to 38%

67%

of respondents
told us they want
to stay on the PSR

Using our new approach, we expect **+45,000** records to be cleansed and updated this way, every year, from hereon in. Our cost benefit analysis on this work shows we have reduced the cost of PSR-oriented contacts by **73%**. And, after each record is updated, we send out a new pack highlighting benefits of PSR inclusion.

Outcomes

- Robust data for tailored reach proactive communications.
- We hold an alternative contact for over **90%** of our customers.
- **1,055,174** proactive contacts with PSR customers.

Continuous improvement to PSR collateral

Our recruitment materials and the information provided to customers on the PSR must be clear, easy to understand and meet diverse needs. We conducted a root and branch evaluation of our materials' effectiveness, working with research partner 'Explain'.

In three focus groups, we asked PSR customers to review different concepts, designs and levels of information. The most significant learnings were over two thirds (67%) preferred live photography rather than graphics; simple designs with clear layouts; and tailored information. As a result, new redesigned PSR welcome packs have been issued to over **300,000** customers this year.

Improvements included:

- More links to external partners and **simplified descriptions** of information about available support.
- More details on **extensive energy saving measures** (in partnership with the Energy Saving Trust).
- Bespoke **welcome packs for customers who are medically dependent**; have poor mobility; mental health needs; young families; are of pensionable age; need temporary support or have alternative communication needs.

Research guiding our PSR proposition development

New

In order to encourage greater take up of our services by harder to reach vulnerable customers, it is important for us to understand the barriers they face (real or perceived) in accessing our services.

Actions

- ✓ We commissioned research with **28** customers from diverse, representative groups, in order to gather insight on customer behaviours, circumstances and perceptions of our PSR, our business and barriers to entry.
- ✓ We studied the outcomes, and applied the EAST framework in order to give us a clear view on the results and how we should respond.

E

Make it **EASY**

- Harness the power of defaults
- Minimise the hassle factor
- Simplify, for salience / engagement

A

Make it **ATTRACTIVE**

- Attract attention to the message
- Use motivating rewards

S

Make it **SOCIAL**

- People perform desired behaviours
- Use the power networks
- Encourage commitment

T

Make it **TIMELY**

- Prompt people when receptive
- Leverage costs and benefits
- Help people plan to overcome

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ The results of our research validate our understanding that hard to reach vulnerabilities are complex and do not easily fit into pre-defined categories.
- ✓ Our customers told us that they don't want to feel like a victim or burden, they need a better understanding of how the priority services work and that they always want to talk to a human rather than a machine.
- ✓ Our research outcomes also tell us that we need to offer these hard to reach vulnerable customers a tangible benefit to sign up, and create a "sense of entitlement" and need to support these customers with technical assistance at greater levels than is usual.

Our response and future developments

- ✓ We will use real life case studies to guide development of campaign messaging for these customers.
- ✓ Our PSR customers will now bypass Interactive Voice Response and receive regular communications.
- ✓ Our customer relationship management system has been enhanced to instantly recognise PSR customers.
- ✓ We are developing a "PSR membership club" and moving away from the term 'register', as customers didn't like this phrase.
- ✓ We are developing real life case studies to help customers learn more about how customers like them are engaging with our PSR services.

5 Developing our people, capacity, and culture

Making Every Contact Count is our philosophy: our business has made significant progress in embedding a holistic programme of training and support that enables colleagues to meet the needs of our vulnerable customers.

- Building on our learnings from last year, we now have **250** mental health champions and **68** mental health first aiders who've done a 2-day accredited course – giving them skills they can use to support customers and colleagues every day.
- So far, **115** contact centre colleagues have taken part in the Alzheimer's Society Dementia Friends programme, and this training will be rolled out more widely to the rest of the business over the next year.
- Customer First training is being rolled out across our entire business, and we now have **+200** internal Customer Ambassadors – people who aren't necessarily in a direct customer facing role, but do want to provide additional support when customers' needs us most.

- We've developed new tools to better support vulnerable customers during planned power cuts, real time updates, fully integrated with our CRM system and linked to our PSR – bespoke messages about disruptions and key contacts.
- Our engineers now have access to live maps showing PSR households, on their Toughbook devices, enabling them to focus and if necessary re-prioritise work – on the ground – during planned or unplanned power cuts.

Becky Robson
Head of People



Supporting vulnerable customers during planned power cuts

New

Alongside our training, we've developed new processes and tools for colleagues to better support vulnerable customers in planned power cuts.

Our actions

Following feedback from customer groups and our SIEG we've introduced new end to end processes that provides real time updates to customers experiencing a planned power cut. This is fully integrated within our CRM system and linked to vulnerable customer data, allowing us to provide bespoke messages to this customer group, i.e. to inform them of changes to disrupting their power supply and details of who to contact should needs change. These real time updates are provided through a dedicated PowerCuts app, and an improved SMS platform. They're provided directly by our front line operational teams, which prevents the need for our central teams to source the information and provide updates to customers.

Launched in February 2020, this new process ensures that our vulnerable customers are kept up to date much more effectively if our work could impact their lives. This includes new, live maps of PSR customers, available to our engineers on site through their tablet devices.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ Although still in its infancy, we have already seen a positive impact on our BMCS scores for planned power cuts. **91.1%** satisfaction in the last two months of 2019-2020, +1.7% on Q4 2019.
- ✓ Enhanced pre-outage customer communications.
- ✓ Tailoring of information for our PSR customers.
- ✓ Live planned power cut customer updates via mobile devices.
- ✓ All colleagues have visibility of our customers and their service history to enable a more bespoke conversation.

Supporting our partners through the pandemic

New

The challenge

We reached out to our charity partners in March to learn more about how we could redeploy our resources to support them in such a difficult period. They told us that they would welcome increased support from volunteers – in particular because our volunteers have been "pre-screened," saving them time and crucial resources.

Actions

- We spoke to **34** community charity partners to assess their volunteering needs.
- We redeployed some of our workforce, including apprentices (whose training had paused) to directly support the work of our partners, based on their skills, and ability to work safely – making sure vulnerable employees were protected from any unnecessary exposure.
- Duties have varied, but in particular included food parcel delivery to vulnerable customers who are "shielding" and engagement with customers at risk of extreme isolation and loneliness.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ **75 employees redeployed** to support charity partners.
- ✓ Colleagues have delivered **1,199 hours of support** over a three week period.
- ✓ **100% of colleagues** who've participated in the programme report increased morale and satisfaction.
- ✓ **85%** of participating colleagues said they would carry on volunteering with their assigned charity once the crisis ends.
- ✓ We are now currently exploring a more formal partnership with Deaf/Blind UK.
- ✓ Age UK are now actively promoting our PSR register to their members.

2019/20 highlights

228,000

records cleaned on our PSR

129,245

vulnerable customers received direct support

1,055,174

proactive contacts with PSR customers

300,000

PSR welcome packs issued to customers in our region

91.1%

satisfaction in the last two months of 2019 2020, +1.7% on Q4 2019. BMCS scores for planned power cuts

New

model for a socially inclusive DSO developed and supported by expert stakeholders

“

I would just like to thank your staff that are volunteering they are doing an amazing job helping us deliver over 350 shops a week.”

Age Concern
Testimonial

6 Improving services holistically

To make sure everyone in our business can 'Make Every Contact Count', this year we've given our teams even more skills, tools and knowledge to deliver excellence with a personal touch. As a result, we've seen significant improvement across all of our PSR commitments (reported via a monthly executive governance process, which helps us to map progress and acts as a rolling gap analysis).

Metric	2018-2019	2019-20	Improvement
Total outbound PSR proactive contacts	405,908	1,055,174	160% growth
Total outbound PSR proactive calls	25,600	43,446	70% growth
Total PSR customers bypassed IVR	16,298	21,866	34% growth
Percentage of PSR customers contacted proactively – planned power cut	93.9%	93.9%	No change
Percentage PSR customers restored within 6 hours	86.3%	87.0%	0.8% growth
Percentage PSR customers restored within 9 hours	98.1%	98.0%	0.1% drop
Planned PSR customer – minutes lost	0.5	0.3	32% reduction
Unplanned PSR customer – minutes lost	4.05	2.63	35% reduction
Planned Power Cuts PSR overall satisfaction	90.50%	92.90%	2.7% growth
Unplanned Power Cuts PSR overall satisfaction	88.30%	88.00%	0.3% drop
Combined PSR overall satisfaction	89.00%	89.40%	0.4% growth
PSR customers supported by the Customer Service Van	966	2,841	194.1%
Customers supported by a PSR service during a power cut	2,246	3,518	56.6% growth

Ensuring our colleagues have personal accountability

Our work to support vulnerable customers is collectively managed and progressed through our Social Responsibility Management Group (SRMG) which this year, supported an internal conference for 70 Northern Powergrid managers to ensure all of our work in this area is properly understood and embedded across our teams and departmental plans.

Key Ongoing ● Complete ● Embedded ●		
Business area	2019/2020 priorities	Status
Policy and markets	Develop social inclusivity model to support vulnerable customers through the energy transition	●
	Extend our reach and support for customers in fuel poverty	●
	Profile vulnerability across each of our six operating regions	●
	BSI four day audit across two operating regions	●
Asset management	Develop a sustainable process for social legacy	●
	Use Experian data to better-align vulnerable service provision	●
	Use vulnerability data score to prioritise system automation projects	●
Customer service	Develop an enduring data cleanse model	●
	Integrate all PSR data into our central CRM system	●
	Contact all customers with mental health issues within one hour of an interruption	●
	Provide mental health training to all frontline operational colleagues	●
	Deliver customer first training to all frontline colleagues	●
Field operations	Use PSR data to inform restoration strategies and effective deployment of generators	●
	Make PSR data available to all field colleagues through 'Toughbook' devices	●
	Planned power cuts - improve proactive communications for PSR customers through implementation on new mobile app	●

Gathering and responding to feedback from hard-to-reach customers



68

delegates attracted from health and social care providers



90%

of delegates thought that our approach to supporting vulnerable customers was good or excellent



20

improvement actions identified, a snap shot of actions follows

Workshop and Future Fairness conference activity

We engaged with almost 100 external, expert stakeholders, exploring the challenges our customers are facing, so that we can adapt and improve our support programmes for vulnerable customers.

Improving PSR awareness, recruitment and service proposition

What we heard

- Improve brand awareness via partners.
- Have a single PSR for all utilities.
- Customers don't want to identify as vulnerable.
- Mental health issues create data security concerns.
- Improve visibility and have clearly defined routes to provide support.
- Provide consistent non-discriminatory communication across multiple channels.

2019-2020

- ✓ CV conference will be run annually – multi-sector approach for 2021.
- ✓ NPg part of national project for sharing PSR data with water companies.
- ✓ PSR recruitment video produced to share with partners.
- ✓ Mental health training being delivered to all frontline colleagues.
- ✓ BSL interpreters added to enhance support for customers with communication difficulties.

Working together to alleviate fuel poverty

What we heard

- Be more joined up with partners to deliver messaging and improve referrals.
- Ensure we are referring customers to enable the appropriate support and sign-posting.
- Enable one stop shop across all utilities to access information and advice.

2019-2020

- ✓ Greater collaboration with Local Authorities.
- ✓ Fuel poverty research commissioned.
- ✓ Fuel poverty programmes reviewed.
- ✓ Energy efficiency leaflet and campaign in partnership with Infrastructure North.

Extending our approach to tackling fuel poverty

Enhanced

Fuel poverty affects 11% of households in England. Around 430,000 of those households are in our region. Fuel poverty is linked to low incomes, high energy costs and inefficient, usually older housing. Our current support model involves face to face direct interventions with the most vulnerable and hard to reach, via Powergrid Cares (delivered in partnership with Citizens Advice) and in-home visits through Green Doctors (Part 3, page 8). However, we need to do more.

In addition to our Future Fairness Conference we have also carried out in-depth research to gain a deeper understanding and further develop our service offering. Using our fuel poverty data we targeted our engagement in communities that experience high volumes of fuel poverty. We conducted interviews with expert groups, at local community support centres, and carried out face to face in depth immersion interviews.

Research objectives

- Understanding the need and requirements for holistic services.

- Understanding challenges and barriers to accessing services.
- Exploring opportunities to encourage self-disclosure/identification.
- Understanding what content/format/delivery would prompt positive behavioural change.
- Gauging reactions to other DNO services/alternative models.

Insights

- Interlinked vulnerabilities have a significant impact on financial vulnerability.
- Barriers to accessing support are both physical and emotional.
- Seeking help is normal when the customer has reached crisis point.
- More support services are required.
- Emotional and practical support will be vital in achieving successful outcomes.
- A variety of communications channels to deliver support required due to varying needs.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ Future Fairness Conference delivered to key partner organisations – support tools and resources shared.
- ✓ Improved communications targeting homes in fuel poverty.
- ✓ New PSR welcome pack developed to include energy efficiency measures and cost savings.
- ✓ Telephone outreach support/ intervention model being developed to trial from September 2020.
- ✓ Enduring data cleanse model includes self-referrals for customers needing more support.
- ✓ Citizens Advice partnership expanded to six additional regions.
- ✓ Citizens Advice Newcastle set up drop-in energy sessions in GP surgeries.

Vulnerability is complicated – an example from one of our customers



Laura and 2 children (single mother)

Their Home

Privately rented back-to-back terrace. Dislikes lots of steep steps (due to her health). Fairly recent move to current home.

Her Health

Laura is in a lot of pain and also suffers with her mental health/depression. She experienced domestic abuse from her ex husband and has felt suicidal. She feels her life is on hold due to her health and has been completely at a loss as to what to do to improve her situation. Also feels great responsibility being a single parent.

Her Finances

Receives Universal Credit but it doesn't cover outgoings. Also, there was a delay when it changed over and her first payment was lower after deductions (bills in arrears).

Their Energy Use

Previously had prepayment cards but new landlord did not want meters so had been receiving bills – got out of hand and in arrears.

Experience of Intervention

Reached tipping point of desperation/suicidal – didn't know where else to go but GP. Broke down at appointment, felt embarrassed / ashamed she couldn't cope. Referred for psychological therapies and debt advice. Ideal would be if utility supplier would waive her arrears so she could begin afresh.

I was embarrassed to ask for help. I broke down at the doctors basically and they referred me to an advisor. I would have buried my head in the sand if it hadn't been referred...Laura said

7 Better partnerships, stronger results

We are addressing inequality and providing targeted local support to those in need or impacted by our investment projects. We've extended fuel poverty services by partnering with key agencies (NHS trusts and organisations such as West Yorkshire Fire Service, Affordable Warmth Hull), and we've undertaken an extensive partnership mapping review, aligning with the vulnerability profiles in six operating regions. Our flagship fuel poverty programme offering fuel debt advice, support, and energy efficiency measures (Powergrid Cares), has seen a **280%** increase in energy saving services installed in customers' homes, and delivered **£1,772,249** in financial benefits – and these results have only cost **£7,000** more than the same work, the previous year.

2019/2020 developments

- ✓ Our fuel poverty work benefited from improved social mapping, feedback from partners and extensive research.
- ✓ Community partners' feedback shaped our Energy Heroes lessons, including information on climate change.
- ✓ Citizens Advice hubs in Newcastle and Leeds take more referrals, with more people being supported thanks to partnerships with other local Citizens Advice, charities, Local Authorities and the NHS.
- ✓ In Hull, our Green Doctors programme is aligning with the LA's Affordable Warmth strategy; we've added North Yorkshire and Newcastle to areas receiving this home energy efficiency advice.

Providing support at local GP surgeries

Innovative

Our challenge

Local NHS services told us people asked GPs for financial help – often energy-related.

Our actions

- Citizens Advice Newcastle hold weekly energy-focused drop-in sessions in GP surgeries.

- Citizens Advice Newcastle run outreach programmes, recruiting more energy advisors.
- We extended the contract with Citizens Advice for three years, ensuring stability in this programme, and giving us an opportunity to gather meaningful data on results.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ On average, **30 individuals per week** engaged with advisors.
- ✓ This led to **89 referrals** from agencies such as Action for Children, Shelter, Newcastle West End Foodbank and LAs.
- ✓ Training of 50 Action for Children staff to deliver advice on fuel debt, tariff switching and onward referrals for support.

Powergrid Cares

'Powergrid Cares' provides direct interventions and instant financial benefits, alongside Citizens Advice. Advisors offer support to manage fuel bills and debt; benefits checks, income maximisation; relationship issues and more.

Contact with us has increased by **57%**, online and by phone, but face to face engagement is still the most effective intervention. It lets advisors build relationships that uncover other issues – such as mental health problems, addictions, and welfare needs. These can then be addressed either by the advisor or through referrals for more direct support.

Energy Heroes - empowering the next generation

Energy Heroes is a half-day programme for primary school children, using the maths curriculum to raise standards in mathematics and increase awareness of cleaner, greener energy. An assembly leads to six weeks of lessons, challenges and actions.

Strong, far-reaching results for relatively low cost

£1.2 million

household fuel savings

31,500

pupils took part in 'Energy Heroes!' assemblies.

4,550

pupils took part in personal development quizzes.

111

schools in Yorkshire and Humber regions took part, undertaking an energy audit and committing to an energy-use action plan.

Energy Heroes has been the catalyst for household fuel bill savings of just under **£1.2 million**, school energy bills savings of **£200,000**; and cumulative savings across the 5-year programme of **+ £3.3 million** Associated CO₂ savings will be around **6,700 tonnes**.

We've targeted schools where we are doing major investment works – likely to be disruptive on families and those experiencing fuel poverty and we've provided more support to five schools in the Bradford West area.

Next steps

From September 2020, we'll take some parts of Energy Heroes online, freeing up resources to deliver in-school sessions in more areas with high deprivation (and aligned to capital investment projects where applicable).

Continuing delivery of Green Doctors

Embedded

Our work

Green Doctors is a joint-initiative with Northern Gas Networks: offering energy advice, to our most deprived communities through accredited advisors. We trained **131** advisors this year, and are developing online training that will improve the reach of our work.

Outcomes and benefits

71% of newly trained advisors feel well-equipped and supported to deliver energy advice in homes.

This work also lets us challenge unethical behaviour: Advisors noticed an Energy Company targeting vulnerable clients on the doorstep in West Yorkshire – inferring they had to switch providers. We challenged directly. The practice has not re-occurred.

	2018-2019	2019-20	Cumulative (since 2015)
Overall investment	£200,000	£207,000	£606,845
Overall beneficiaries	2,749	4,482	14,925
Overall PSR registrations	841	1,362	1,931
Overall financial benefit	£367,395	£706,630	£1,772,249
Energy saving services installed	1,522	4,275	13,151
Warm Homes Discount	20	50	70
Energy related issues	30% clients	39% clients	-

Building resilience via our Community Partnering Fund

Our Community Partnering Fund has been in place since 2014 – but we never classify it as ‘business as usual’. We merged our activities with those being planned by Northern Gas Networks in 2018 to ensure greater efficiencies.

Since the fund launched, **+120** community groups and charities have applied for funding. Prior to merging with NGN, we had around **30** applications per year. The fund, managed by Leeds Community Foundation, is closely networked with other Community Foundations across the region, ensuring the promotion is wide and varied.

This year we've widened the criteria for support, appealing more to community energy groups and those working to tackle decarbonisation, and promoted the programme to **+1,400** Parish Councils. In response to Covid-19, we have adapted our criteria to support community partners facing the challenge of surviving the pandemic.

In addition, we have renewed our commitment to ongoing support for those organisations that aren't ‘successful’ in getting funding. All **120** applicants were invited to join us at our CV conference this year; **50** individuals were invited to attend Carbon Monoxide training and Electrical Safety workshops; and we invited all **120** organisations to provide feedback on our evolving PSR collateral.

Groups we have supported with the fund:

- The Well Community Allotment Group, Sheffield, promotes renewable energy and sustainability to **200** local residents.
- A Renewable Food Project at Crookes Community Farm has renewable energy providing electricity for growing food all year round.
- Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange supports a very vulnerable hard to reach group.
- Success4All Newcastle supports **220** young people on energy efficiency for their families and local communities.
- Toranj Tuition Hull supports **300** refugee and asylum seekers in the Hull and East Riding area.

	2018-2019	2019-20
Funding	£50,000	£100,000
Groups funded	7	27
Beneficiaries supported	3,487	15,177

In the last 4 years, we've invested **£300,000** into our Community Partnering fund, supporting **48** community groups and **19,785** beneficiaries in that time.

8 Delivering a lasting social legacy

Continuous engagement tells us stakeholders want to play a broader role in enabling their own priorities, such as the decarbonisation of heat. So, we must align our network-related activity to their needs, wherever possible. To that end, we have developed a robust, new Social Legacy framework, ensuring we can support communities in the immediate and longer terms, when we are undertaking major investment works that inevitably, impact their lives. Results show this is having a very positive impact already.

Bradford West – enduring positive social outcomes

Enhanced

The work, the challenge

In October 2019, we embarked on our largest ever investment programme; a **£30m** scheme to refurbish five major electricity circuits that supply two thirds of Bradford. Inevitably, this work impacted vulnerable consumers. We had to replace 43km of fluid-filled cabling underground, which meant power outages and street-works in a traffic-heavy, culturally diverse part of the centre of Bradford. Several schools, religious centres, and major shopping areas were impacted.

Our approach

We developed an engagement programme specifically for vulnerable residents and less well represented groups: our social indicator mapping tool had showed diverse vulnerabilities. This was the most comprehensive programme of communications and engagement ever deployed around an investment programme – resulting in **22.5%** growth for registrations on the PSR between Feb 2019 and end January 2020 (89 households), and only one complaint in a 30,000 household programme.

22.5%
growth in PSR
registrations

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ We created a well-signposted animation on our website to help non-English speakers (our close partnership with the LA revealed 153 languages spoken in the Bradford area). This was over-dubbed with British Sign Language – a first among DNOs.

- ✓ We mandated our contractor to have a liaison officer answering questions on site, promoting inclusion on the PSR. We trained all of our contractors' teams how to identify vulnerable customers and what process to go through when they did.
- ✓ Meetings with Highways, Ward co-ordinators, local Councillors, transport companies and other providers ensured vulnerability-focused communications were targeted and co-ordinated.
- ✓ We promoted inclusion in our PSR constantly - at four public drop-in events (**30,000** customers were invited), and via **10,000** leaflets distributed at events/libraries/community centres and village halls/post offices/doctors surgeries along the route.
- ✓ We also put **20** monthly ads in two community magazines, door-dropped directly to **10,000** households and put up posters in libraries, GP surgeries, post offices, shops and business premises.
- ✓ Our Green Doctors / Citizens Advice partners received funding to help reach an extra **100** households in Phase 1 of the project.
- ✓ We ran targeted educational initiatives: a safety talk to pupils at Bradford Central Pupil Referral Unit, for example, plus engineering careers engagement at an after-school club protecting at-risk children aged 9-15 from becoming involved in crime. We reached another **180** Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 children through safety talks and ran competitions at four local primary schools.

Supporting women's mental health

Mental health is stigmatised for many women with a South Asian background. At the Bradford Relate workshop, a representative from 'Womenzone' told us about isolation and lack of voice for South Asian women. This led to conversations about our work – and targeted aid to help women benefit from financial and voluntary support.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ We provided **£20,000** for Womenzone to recruit five Peer Champions who could engage at least **30** women, helping them improve their mental health and wellbeing through therapeutic, well-being activities that dispel the taboos around mental health issues.
- ✓ The audience is now using our Wellbeing Hub, which offers ongoing access to multiple forms of therapy, such as culturally sensitive group counselling, mindfulness, arts, keep-fit, and volunteering opportunities.

Realigning works to support residents in tower blocks

Tower blocks often have a high proportion of residents in the top three vulnerability categories. In Leeds, inclusion on our PSR was low – we knew focused engagement could remedy this situation.

Our approach, and the outcomes

Increasing our investment from £7m to **+£10m**, we re-aligned our scope and timing to match a major installation of low carbon heating, thereby reducing disruption.

Then, engaging with all local stakeholders, we ran a support programme that included targeted PSR recruitment: while visiting **600** properties, for surveys, our contractors delivered PSR leaflets to all vulnerable customers they encountered.

16,000

residents benefited

30%

increase in PSR registrations

“ At our Fuel Poverty (Future Fairness) conference, partners and members of our Social Issues Expert Group reviewed our vulnerability proposition. Via horizon scanning in action orientated workshops, we surfaced voices and concerns from many customers who would normally be hard to reach.”

Andy Bilclough, Director of Field Operations

9 Horizon scanning

Horizon scanning is essential. We must project high level views on opportunities and barriers to better identify, share and promote examples where innovative services will provide better results, and we need to make sure we are always prepared for emergency situations - like the current Covid-19 pandemic.

Insights from our consumer vulnerability conference

Transition provides opportunities, but we must explore challenges that vulnerable customers may face as a result of the change. We wanted to get stakeholders' views on our role – what we should do and how. Our Fuel Poverty (Future Fairness) conference attracted almost **100** delegates from health service and social care providers, registered social landlords, LAs, Adult Social Services, Green Doctors, Energy Saving Trust, as well as VCS organisations. We ran sessions to collect views on:

- What transition means (focusing on heat and transport).
- Challenges for the vulnerable during the transition period.
- More collaborative work to effect change, efficiently.

Creating an equitable social inclusion model

Our actions mustn't inadvertently disadvantage vulnerable customers: we do need to adapt. In discussion with our SIEG and after extensive consultation with stakeholders, we have developed a seven-point plan that will guide our work:

Conference roundtables – stakeholders shaping our future

In-depth discussions on our approach to being a socially-inclusive DSO

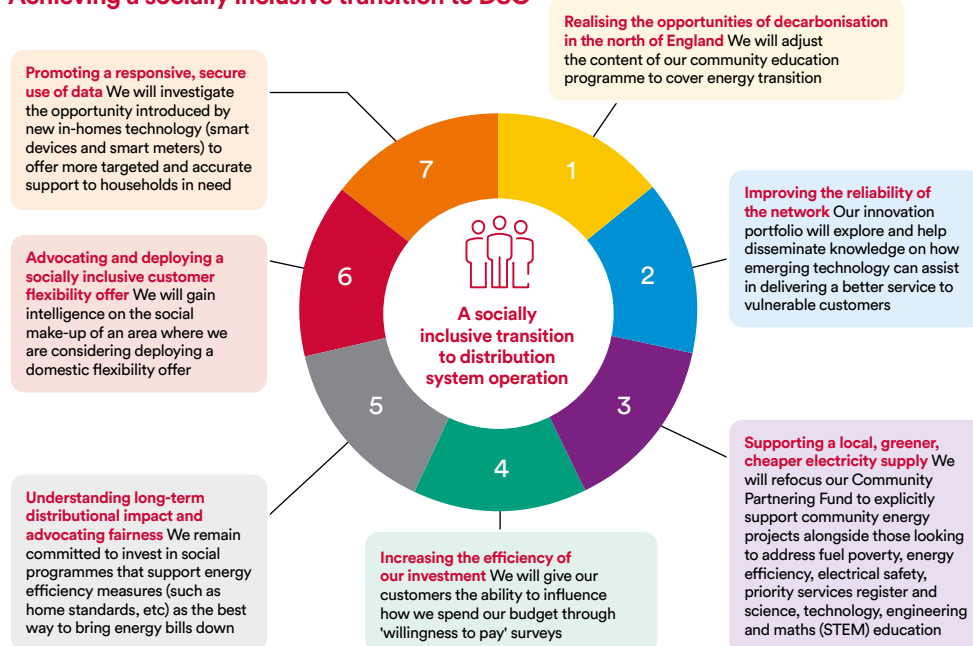
Our partners raised points:

- House ownership issues -private vs. renters.
- Help people overcome their fear of technology.
- Make new white goods and boilers attractive to the next generation.
- How will the most vulnerable benefit?
- What are the long term benefits and longevity of plans?
- How will you prevent vulnerable customers being left behind?

Actions and responses we've delivered:

- ✓ Educating customers on support and signposting in the right direction.
- ✓ Taking an advocacy role with Government and Local Authorities.
- ✓ Education programmes for young people and schools.
- ✓ Work with schools etc to create a buzz around renewable energy.
- ✓ Lobby Government around policy and decision making schemes.
- ✓ Take a thematic approach and build a wider engagement programme.

Achieving a socially inclusive transition to DSO



Resilient homes for the future

Power cuts can seriously affect the health and well-being of vulnerable customers, particularly if they rely on electrical medical equipment.

With the help of National Energy Action, this year we have completed phase one of a pilot using in-home batteries to maintain power supplies.

Our pilot has concluded this approach would have significant benefits, including lower levels of anxiety, and a reduction in transfers to alternative accommodation (often hospital), which might involve difficult journeys of +70 miles.

Phase two of the project will test the battery technology and capability in **30** homes over a 12 month period, free of charge to customers.

