

Our Annual Vulnerability Report

2025/26



There's an easier way to get
help during a power cut.





Glossary

We have abbreviated terms throughout our report, where doing so improves clarity and readability. A full list of the abbreviations and commonly used terms is provided in the glossary below.

CRM – Customer relationship management	Refers to software systems that businesses use to manage interactions with current and potential customers	ISG – Independent stakeholder group	Our panel of impartial, external experts and representatives who ensure that we consider and act on the views, needs, and rights of all relevant parties who have an interest in our operations
CSAT – Customer satisfaction	An overall satisfaction rating informed by responses to the question 'overall, using a scale of one to ten, where one is very dissatisfied and ten is very satisfied, taking all aspects of the service from SP Electricity North West into account, how satisfied were you with the service provided?'	LCT – Low carbon technology	Such as electric vehicles, electric heat pumps, smart meters, solar and wind energy
CVI – Consumer vulnerability incentive	Evaluates a distribution network operator's performance against targets set under five common out-turn performance metrics. It uses an automatic mechanism to determine whether a reward or penalty should be applied at the end of the second and fifth regulatory years of RIIO-ED2	LRF – Local resilience forum	Multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others
Digital exclusion	Digital exclusion covers 1) lack of digital skills i.e. not being able to use digital devices, such as computers or smart phones and the internet 2) lack of connectivity i.e. little or no access to the internet and 3) inaccessibility i.e. services not being designed to meet all users' needs, including those dependent on assistive technology to access digital services	NPV – Net present value	The discounted sum of future cash flows, whether positive or negative, minus any initial investment
DNO – Distribution network operator	A company licensed to distribute electricity in Great Britain by Ofgem	Ofgem - Office of Gas and Electricity Markets	The government regulator for gas and electricity markets in Great Britain
DSO – Distribution systems operations	Refers to the systems and processes needed to operate energy networks in the net zero carbon future	PSTN – Public switched telephone network	The traditional, copper-wire circuit-switched network that has carried landline phone calls for centuries
ECR – Extra Care register	The name for our Priority Services Register, and offers enhanced support to customers in vulnerable circumstances	RIIO-ED2	Electricity distribution price control period, 2023-2028
ECR reach	The total number of households registered on our ECR out of the total number of households in our distribution services area that are eligible to be registered	RIIO-ED3	Electricity distribution price control period, 2028-2033
Energy transition	The energy transition refers to the process of changing the energy system (including power, heat, and transport), from a system based on carbon intensive fossil fuels to one based on low carbon technology	SROI – Social return on investment	The monetary value associated with positive outcomes received, and costs avoided by society because of a given initiative
Fuel poverty	Fuel poverty in England is measured using the Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) fuel poverty metric, which was set out in the Fuel Poverty Sustainable Warmth strategy published in February 2021. The LILEE indicator considers a household to be fuel poor if it is living in a property with an energy efficiency rating of band D, E, F or G; and its disposable income (income after housing costs and energy needs) would be below the poverty line	Stakeholder	Stakeholders are those parties that are affected by, or represent those affected by, decisions made by SP Electricity North West and Ofgem. As well as consumers, this would for example include Government and environmental groups
		Customers in vulnerable circumstances	When a consumer's personal circumstances and characteristics combine with aspects of the market to create situations where they are significantly less able than a typical consumer to protect or represent their 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

Our report at a glance

We recognise that electricity plays an increasingly important role in our 5 million customers' lives, supporting everything from healthcare and connectivity to home working and low carbon technologies. This Annual Vulnerability Report outlines how we have continued to deliver against our RIIO-ED2 commitments, support customers in vulnerable circumstances and respond to evolving customer needs. The report begins with an overview of our strategy before exploring key areas of delivery in more detail. Each section sets out what we heard from customers and stakeholders, how we responded, the impact achieved, key learning and our plans for the future.

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To ensure our report is accessible, we have used clear formatting and a legible font style and size. We have included relevant images, charts and graphs illustrate key points. Additionally, we have used plain language whenever possible.



2025/26 engagement highlights

ECR surpassed
1 million
households
(achieving
102.6% reach)

37,143
Extra Care customers
contacted ahead
of winter and 94%
satisfaction

2,900
customers
supported through
proactive use of our
support vehicle

BSL-first
customer
journeys introduced

75%
agreed that
Take Charge makes
it easier to identify a
trusted source
of advice

£17.5m
of benefits
realised among fuel
poor customers

94.6%
satisfaction
with Take Charge
fuel poverty
support services

50
community events
reached by our low
carbon advice
service (15 last year)

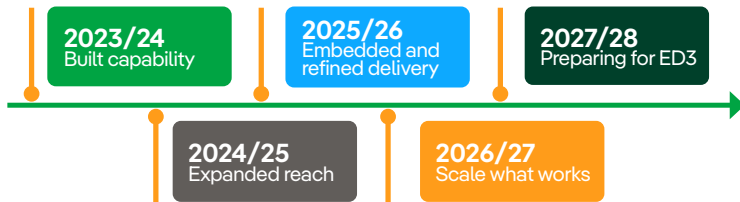
ISO 22458
Inclusive Service
Provision
accreditation
achieved for 3rd year

2,501
colleagues completed
'Switch On to
Extra Care' training

Introduction from our Chief Operating Officer

Looking back on the last year, I have found myself reflecting on just how quickly the world around us is changing.

We have made significant progress throughout the year, but this report is not a victory lap. Instead, it reflects **a year of learning, embedding and continuous improvement**. As we reach the midpoint of ED2, it has provided an opportunity to reflect on what we have delivered, what we have learnt and how we can use those insights to make the greatest difference in the years to come. At the start of ED2, our focus was on building the capability, partnerships and foundations needed to support customers in vulnerable situations. We then concentrated on expanding our reach and increasing awareness of the support available. This year has felt different; rather than growth alone, **we have concentrated on embedding what works**, improving quality and consistency, and ensuring support reaches customers that really need us.



That shift has changed the questions we ask ourselves. While reaching more than one million households through our Extra Care register (ECR) is an important milestone, **the more important question is who may still be missing out**. Our aim is to provide support that is fair, inclusive and meaningful; whether that's supporting customers who rely on electricity for medical equipment, improving accessibility for underrepresented groups, or helping customers navigate the transition to low carbon technologies.

One of the things that has struck me most this year is that resilience is built long before an incident occurs. Reliable networks and rapid restoration will always be fundamental, but resilience is also created through preparedness, trusted partnerships and giving customers the confidence to respond when challenges arise. Through initiatives such as **Communities Prepared, Open Maps**, our **customer support vehicle** and the **provision of batteries** to medically dependent customers, we are helping communities become better prepared, better informed and better supported before, during and after power cuts.

The conversations we've had with customers, partners and stakeholders this year have challenged our assumptions and helped shape our priorities. **I am particularly proud of the rebrand of our ECR this year**, which deliberately moved away from traditional imagery and language associated with vulnerability, and instead focused on empowerment, relatability and practical support.

Stakeholders have challenged us to think differently about resilience and encouraged us to invest in long-term trusted relationships. Their insights have reinforced the importance of **treating every customer as an individual**, recognising that circumstances change and that effective support must adapt accordingly.

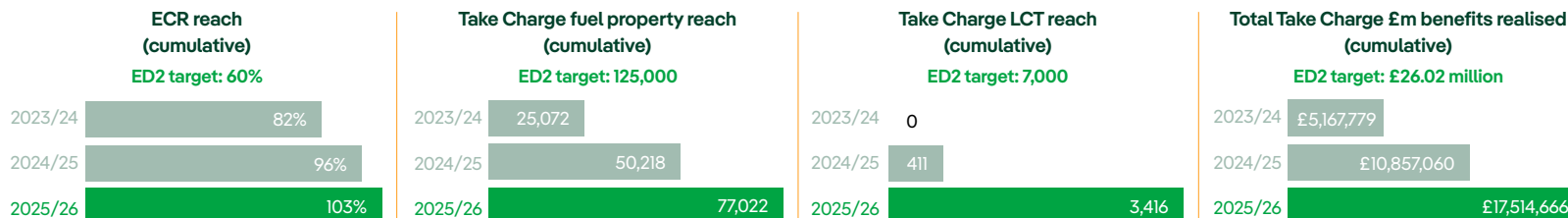
This has also been an important year for SP Electricity North West as we integrate into the wider ScottishPower and Iberdrola Group. Throughout the year we have operated as a distinct licence area, while beginning to explore opportunities **to share learning, capability and best practice** across the wider group. This includes exchanging insights on incident response, customer resilience, accessibility and support services, while working collaboratively to prepare for ED3. We remain committed to ensuring that the needs and priorities of customers and stakeholders in the North West continue to shape our approach.

There is much in this report that makes me proud: the commitment of our colleagues, the strength of our partnerships, **and the difference our services are making to customers and communities**. But there are also important reminders that customer needs continue to evolve, trust must continually be earned, and there is always more to learn.

I would like to thank our customers, colleagues, partners and stakeholders for their continued support, challenge and collaboration.

Together, we are helping build a more resilient, inclusive and supportive future for the people and communities we serve.

Stephanie Trubshaw, Chief Operating Officer



“One of the things that has struck me most this year is how resilience is built long before an incident occurs.”



1.1 Our consumer vulnerability strategy

Electricity users in vulnerable circumstances strategy: To provide an inclusive and fair service for all users of electricity in a rapidly changing world, recognising the need to maximise the reach of our services through collaborative, innovative working practices with a network of trusted partners.

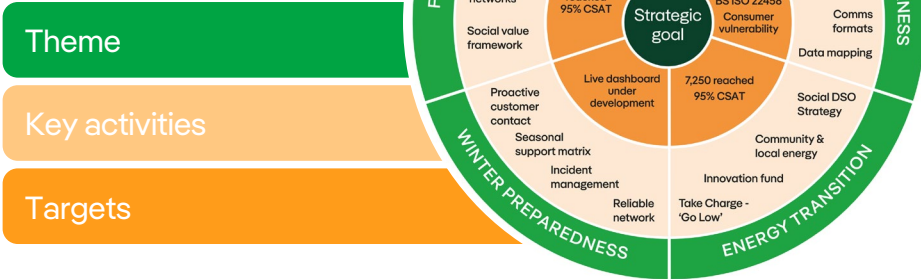
Our electricity users in vulnerable circumstances strategy continues to provide the foundation for how we identify, engage and support customers who may need additional assistance. While the context in which we operate continues to evolve, **the strategic themes established at the start of RIIO-ED2 remain highly relevant** and continue to guide both strategic decision-making and operational delivery.

The strategy wheel remains an accurate representation of our approach, bringing together **five interconnected themes**: fuel poverty, winter preparedness, energy transition, inclusion and fairness, and the ECR.

Together, these themes provide a holistic framework for supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances while helping communities adapt to an increasingly electrified energy system.

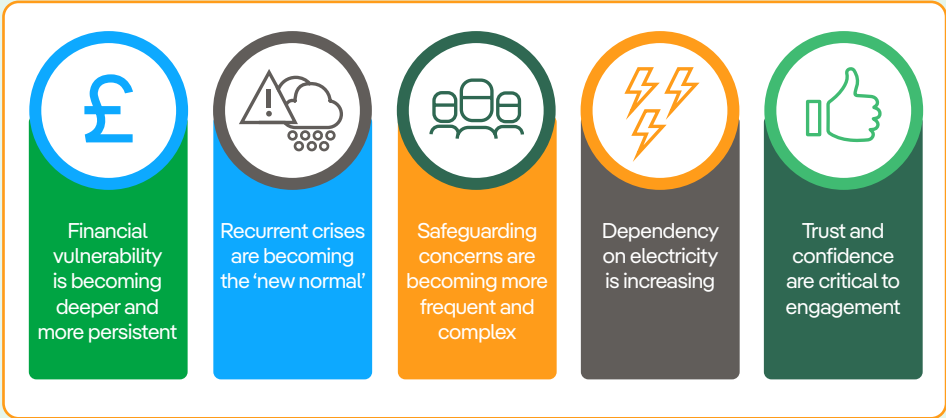
Figure 1: Our strategy wheel

- Common thread
- Customer centric
 - Data driven
 - Partnership powered



Sam Loukes, Head of Customer Inclusion, said: “One of the most significant areas of discussion this year was resilience. Stakeholders encouraged us to think beyond traditional definitions focused solely on network performance and emergency response. Instead, they challenged us to place greater emphasis on personal resilience, community resilience, preparedness, confidence and access to trusted support networks.”

Figure 2: Understanding vulnerability in today's North West



Stakeholders have consistently told us that stability and continuity matter. Rather than continually reinventing our approach, we have focused on embedding learning, refining delivery models and strengthening the effectiveness of existing programmes.

Our attention is increasingly focused on understanding impact, building evidence and identifying the interventions that deliver the greatest value for customers. This has reinforced the importance of consistency, partnership working and targeted support that responds to real customer needs.

Throughout the year, **stakeholders have consistently highlighted that vulnerability is becoming increasingly complex, interconnected and persistent.**

Many households are now experiencing multiple and overlapping challenges that cannot be addressed through a single intervention or organisation. **Cost-of-living pressures continue** to affect communities across the North West, with partners reporting deeper and more sustained financial hardship, increasing levels of borrowing for essential goods and ongoing concerns about affordability. Financial hardship remains one of the most significant barriers preventing customers from building resilience and accessing the opportunities presented by the energy transition.

Stakeholders also reported increasing safeguarding concerns. These conversations reinforced the importance of working alongside specialist organisations that can provide holistic support and address the underlying causes of vulnerability.

Severe weather events, economic uncertainty and wider societal challenges mean that many **stakeholders now view recurring crises as the “new normal”.** As a result, there is increasing recognition that support must extend beyond responding to emergencies and help to continually build resilience.

Trust and confidence have also become increasingly important. **Concerns about scams,** misinformation and declining trust in institutions were raised repeatedly throughout the year. This has reinforced the value of trusted local relationships and community-based organisations that can act as credible intermediaries, helping customers access support, understand information and build confidence in the services available to them.

Meaningful input from our stakeholders

Our Consumer Vulnerability Oversight Panel and Partnership Panel continue to play a critical role in shaping both strategic direction and operational delivery. Through **regular challenge, scrutiny and insight**, our 40 panel members help ensure our approach remains responsive to changing customer needs and emerging trends.

The panels also challenged some of the language traditionally associated with vulnerability. Conversations throughout the year reinforced that **vulnerability is often situational rather than permanent** and that labels can sometimes unintentionally stigmatise customers or reinforce deficit-based perceptions.

This learning has influenced our culture, how we design services and how we communicate with customers. Increasingly, **our focus is on empowerment, personalised support and helping customers build confidence** and independence, while ensuring assistance remains available when it is needed most.



Jenny Willis, Independent Chair of our Consumer Vulnerability Oversight and Partnership Panels and a member of our Independent Stakeholder Group, reflected on the progress made during the year:

"The start of the ED2 period presented a significant challenge in terms of increasing support for customers in fuel poverty, those unable to unlock the potential benefits of low carbon technologies, and any customer experiencing a planned or unplanned loss of power. Partners have been at the heart of

rising to this challenge alongside the team at SP Electricity North West. Now, at the midpoint of ED2 delivery, it is useful to reflect on what has been achieved while also continuing to develop plans for the future.

Advisory Panel meetings have continued to provide a valuable opportunity to discuss how best to reach members of our communities who could benefit from the various services on offer, share insights on emerging needs and trends, and exchange good practice on delivering accessible and inclusive services. One particularly important discussion this year focused on the value of working with people over a longer period of time to build trusted relationships. These relationships can help ensure that support provided during times of crisis, whatever the cause, can ultimately contribute to longer-term resilience.

As Chair, I always try to speak to new partners before they attend an Advisory Panel meeting, and a particular highlight this year was having those conversations ahead of our March meeting.

Hearing how the team at SP Electricity North West had proactively reached out to partners and worked collaboratively in ways that support partner organisations as well as deliver against customer goals was genuinely encouraging.

With recurring crises increasingly becoming the norm, partnership working is more important than ever. I hope the team continues to give this the priority it deserves."

How we responded

Feedback from stakeholders reinforced the importance of investing in long-term, trusted relationships rather than relying on one-off interventions. In response, **we focused our 2025/26 Partnership Fund entirely on strengthening and scaling existing partnerships** and delivery models.

While individual interventions remain important, it is often the long-term relationships developed with local organisations, community groups and specialist partners that enable us to identify undisclosed needs, reach under-served customers and **provide support at the moments it matters most**.

Data-driven, partnership-powered

Having achieved significant growth in customer reach during ED2, our focus is increasingly **shifting from volume to precision**. We are concentrating on identifying gaps, understanding under-served groups and improving our ability to reach customers whose needs may not be visible through traditional approaches.

This includes a stronger focus on medically dependent customers, customers with accessibility needs, situational vulnerability, resilience capability and those who may require a more tailored response.

Data plays an increasingly important role in helping us identify emerging needs, target resources more effectively and improve the quality of intervention. Developments such as **Open Maps, enhanced data sharing and improved customer insight** are helping us build a more sophisticated understanding of vulnerability, informing both business-as-usual activity and emergency response planning.

However, data alone is not enough. Data helps identify where support is needed; partners provide the local knowledge, community presence and trusted relationships needed to turn that insight into meaningful action.

The examples throughout this report demonstrate how we continue to bring these strengths together: combining evidence with empathy, data with local knowledge, and strategic ambition with practical delivery.

Through this approach, we are **helping customers navigate today's challenges and build greater resilience for the future**.

2. Progress against our Key Performance Indicators

This section of the report addresses our performance in relation to the standard metric targets established with our regulator, Ofgem, and the broader DNO community, as outlined in the Consumer Vulnerability Incentive (CVI) and RIIO-ED2 Consumer Vulnerability Guidance.

2.1 Consumer vulnerability incentive metrics

We have robustly tracked each of our five core performance metrics over the past year:

Table 1: CVI metrics – ongoing performance

Metric	Year 1 outcome	Year 2 outcome	Year 2 target	Year 3 outcome	Year 4 outcome	Year 5 outcome	Year 5 target
Priority Services Register reach	The proportion of eligible households that have registered for the Priority Services Register						
	82.4%	95.7%	60.0%	102.6%			60.0%
Net present value of fuel poverty services delivered	The net value of benefits to customers from fuel poverty services, after deducting all costs						
	£5.17m	£10.86m	£7.62m	£17.51m			£26.02m
Net present value of low carbon transition services delivered	The net value of benefits to customers from low carbon advice, after deducting all costs						
	‑£0.049m	‑£0.12m	£‑0.40m	‑£0.07m			‑£0.49m
Average fuel poverty customer satisfaction survey score	The average satisfaction rating from service beneficiaries on a scale of 1 to 10						
	95.3%	94.5% 94.8% across the 2 years	92.0%	94.0% 94.6% across the 3 years			95.0%
Average low carbon transition customer satisfaction survey score	The average satisfaction rating from service beneficiaries on a scale of 1 to 10						
	n/a	90.0%	92.0%	91.9% 91.4% across the 3 years			95.0%

We acknowledge the negative net present value (NPV) target for our low carbon transition support during the RIIO-ED2 period, where the cost of delivering these services currently exceeds the benefits to customers. While a negative NPV might seem unfavorable, it reflects the longer lead time required for these services to yield benefits. We are confident that these activities will result in a **positive NPV in Year 4**. In the case studies that follow, we provide additional narrative to accompany Table 1 which expands on the progress made and performance against targets.





2.2 Case study: Expanding reach and redefining how we communicate Extra Care

Case study

Strategic context

Based on methodology developed by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE), **978,012 households across our licence area are eligible for the ECR**. A key objective throughout ED2 has been to maximise our reach by identifying and supporting as many eligible households as possible.

At the end of 2024/25, **SP Electricity North West had the third-highest registration level in Great Britain**, reaching 95.7% of eligible households. As reach continues to increase, identifying and engaging the remaining customers becomes increasingly challenging, requiring more targeted and innovative approaches.

Following stakeholder feedback, **we rebranded our Priority Services Register (PSR) as the Extra Care register** in 2022/23 to better reflect the free support available to customers who may need additional assistance before, during or after a power cut. While the PSR was a well-established industry term, research showed it was creating confusion and acting as a barrier to engagement.

We therefore chose to adopt a different approach, **putting customer understanding ahead of industry convention**. The rebrand marked the start of a broader shift in how we communicate support, helping make the service easier to understand and access, and contributing to the significant growth in ECR membership seen throughout ED2.

The rebrand has become the foundation of how we communicate support, engage customers and **challenge traditional perceptions of vulnerability**. Over time, it has influenced our culture, partnerships, communications and service design, helping ensure customers can access support more easily and with greater confidence.

What we heard

Partners consistently reported that rebranding the PSR as the ECR had made the service easier to explain and **helped customers better understand the support available**. The name was viewed as clearer, more positive and more focused on the practical benefits offered.



Zaffer Khan, CEO, One Voice Blackburn, said: *"The Extra Care branding is of an exceptionally high standard. From social media content to print advertising, the materials are clearly well researched and thoughtfully designed to reach and resonate with all audiences. As a community-based charity representing some of the most marginalised communities, we at One Voice Blackburn see these resources as invaluable to our own winter promotional work."*

At the same time, stakeholders also encouraged us to continue challenging how people in vulnerable circumstances are perceived across the energy sector and beyond. They highlighted that **terminology and visual representation can sometimes feel stigmatising** or create barriers to engagement, particularly where customers do not identify with the label themselves or would prefer not to be defined by it.

This insight was reinforced by wider research into the portrayal of older people and people experiencing vulnerability. Traditional approaches often focus on deficits or dependency, which can unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and discourage engagement. **Stakeholders encouraged us to continue demonstrating leadership** in developing a more inclusive approach that focuses on circumstances rather than labels.

What we did

In Spring 2025, we took the next step in the evolution of the ECR, introducing a **bold, new visual identity and communications approach** designed to challenge traditional assumptions about vulnerability. At a time when much of the sector continues to rely on deficit-based messaging, our new approach deliberately focused on empowerment, independence and practical support, reflecting what customers and stakeholders told us matters most.

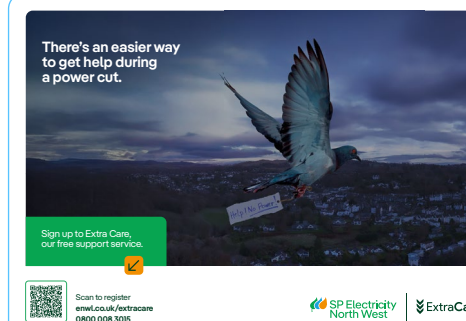
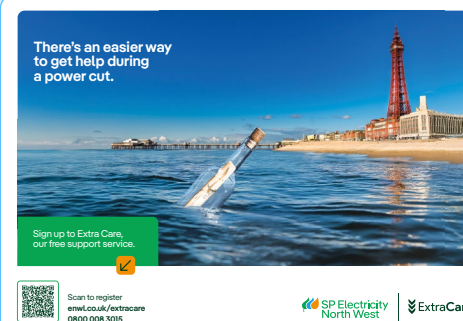


Figure 3: Communication assets were incorporated into an Extra Care partnership toolkit, providing partners with approved social media content, newsletters, campaign materials and communication resources to support consistent promotion across communities.

The approach challenged audiences to consider the lengths people might go to during a power cut to seek help, while reinforcing a simple message: **support is available and accessing it should be easy**. More than a marketing campaign, it reflects a wider organisational shift towards inclusive communications. Alongside the new identity, we continued to deliver our established five-pronged approach to ECR management and growth.

1. Targeted awareness campaigns and partnerships

We continued to target awareness activity towards communities and customer groups where analysis identified lower levels of ECR reach, including customers who are less likely to engage through traditional communications, have lower awareness of available support, or face barriers to accessing services.

Through promotion on our own channels, including social media, radio advertising and printed materials, we reached over 50,000 customers. To support this, we worked with trusted partners who already have established relationships within local communities, enabling us to reach customers through organisations they know and trust, helping build confidence and improve awareness.

Partner-led campaigns generated over 20,000 registrations, including 2,248 registrations through Age UK Lancashire and Age UK South Cumbria. We also worked with The Big Food Project to brand three delivery vehicles, providing regular visibility of the ECR to customers experiencing financial hardship and reaching an estimated 14,000 local residents each week.

Figure 4: The Big Food Project promoted the ECR on its delivery vans and directly to its network reaching around 14,000 local residents each week



Table 2: the impact of targeted awareness campaigns

	Activity	Volume this year	Volume last year
Sign-ups	1. Targeted awareness campaigns		
	Partner-led awareness campaigns	Over 20,000	11,508

Case study

Embedding Extra Care awareness into maternity pathways East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust A University Teaching Trust

Challenge

New parents can be particularly vulnerable during a power cut, however, many may be unaware of the support available through the ECR and can be difficult to reach through traditional awareness campaigns.

What we did

We partnered with NHS East Lancashire Maternity Services to embed specially developed ECR information for NHS customers within the Badger Notes app alongside other trusted health and wellbeing content, with materials available in multiple languages.

Impact

During 2025/26, 3,851 women accessed the content, generating more than 38,000 views. Survey feedback showed consistently strong user satisfaction and generated 1,843 registrations. The partnership freed up midwives' time, enabling them to focus on providing excellent care and demonstrated a scalable model for embedding resilience messaging within trusted healthcare pathways.

Case study

Reacting to situational changes affecting Asthma + Lung UK customers

Challenge

Changes in weather, air quality, seasonal illness and worsening health can all increase customers with respiratory conditions reliance on electricity-powered medical equipment and make power interruptions more challenging. As a result, customers may become eligible for support at different points in their lives.

What we did

We partnered with Asthma + Lung UK to integrate Extra Care awareness into its national helpline. Healthcare Advisors received training to identify eligible customers, explain the benefits of registration and provide follow-up information as part of routine interactions. The partnership also extended to Extra Care promotion via Asthma + Lung UK's regional support groups, and to colleague training, helping improve awareness of lung conditions within SP ENW teams.

Impact

During 2025, 517 callers from SP ENW's postcode areas called Asthma + Lung UK's helpline, creating valuable opportunities for Extra Care signposting. Additional engagement was delivered through 14 support groups, reaching hundreds more customers. 231 customers cited Asthma + Lung UK when asked where they had heard about the ECR.

The partnership has proven so successful that Asthma + Lung UK has replicated a similar approach with other DNOs and energy suppliers, extending its reach to thousands more through helpline beneficiaries and support group members nationwide.



Sarah Sleet, CEO at Asthma + Lung UK said: "Our partnership with SP Electricity North West was the first of its kind for Asthma + Lung UK and has paved the way for thousands more people with lung conditions to receive timely advice, tailored care, and reassurance when they need it most."

2. Making every contact count

Our customer-facing colleagues use every interaction as an opportunity to identify customers who may benefit from additional support and **ensure household records accurately reflect changing circumstances**.

Our ‘One in a Million’ campaign challenged us to identify and register 1 million eligible individuals for the ECR—a target we exceeded this year. Despite receiving 18% fewer inbound calls than last year (227,884 calls in total), owing to fewer and generally less severe weather-related incidents, our dedicated colleagues used proactive conversations to register or update details for 76,024 customers. While this is lower than last year’s total, it is broadly in line with the reduction in inbound call volumes, demonstrating that **colleagues continued to make effective use of customer interactions** to identify and support eligible customers. As overall reach increases, these interactions are becoming increasingly important in identifying customers who may otherwise remain unknown to us.

Table 3: the impact of ECR promotion by our frontline staff

	Activity	Volume this year	Volume last year
Sign-ups	2. Make every contact with customers count		
	Colleague customer interactions: additions	76,024	92,022

3. Proactive contact with existing members

Our commitment is to **contact all ECR members at least once every two years** and all customers who are highly vulnerable annually. During 2025/26, we exceeded this target by proactively contacting **847,693 customers**, resulting in **209,781 customer record updates**.

Table 4: the impact of proactive contact with members

	Activity	Volume this year	Volume last year
Updates	3. Proactive contact with existing members		
	Members updating contact information	209,781	205,271
	Opt-outs in response to proactive contact	(10,818)	(23,697)

4. Data sharing

Through established arrangements with energy suppliers, water companies and gas distribution networks, **customers only need to register once** for their information to be shared with participating organisations, subject to consent.

During the year, data-sharing arrangements generated **424,073 customer record updates**, supporting identification of eligible individuals (rather than households) and helping maintain accurate customer information. While the volume of updates was slightly lower than last year (428,875), the overall quality of the data received is greater, owing to enhancements to our customer relationship management (CRM) system detailed on the right.

Table 5: the impact of proactive contact with members

	Activity	Volume this year	Volume last year
Sign-ups	4. Enable a one stop shop for customers		
	Two-way data share with energy suppliers, United Utilities and Cadent	424,073	428,875

5. Data cleansing and CRM integration

Building on an earlier investment of more than £0.5 million in partnership with LexisNexis, we have embedded **automated data validation and cleansing functionality directly within our CRM platform**. Introduced in November 2025, the enhanced system automatically validates customer records, identifies duplicate registrations and supports ongoing maintenance of contact information. Potential removals are held pending verification through our customer contact strategy, ensuring no one who could benefit is mistakenly excluded.

Customer impact

Using the industry-standard methodology and the 2011 Census baseline, **ECR reach increased from 95.7% to 102.6% of eligible customers during the year**. Over the last three years, reach has increased by 30%, demonstrating the effectiveness of our multi-channel approach.

Reaching 102.6% of eligible customers is an encouraging result and reflects the **commitment of our teams and partners** to ensuring support reaches those who need it. The programme delivers wider wellbeing benefits through reduced anxiety, greater preparedness and improved resilience, particularly for customers with medical dependencies or additional support needs.

What we learnt

Early feedback suggests the rebrand is resonating with customers and stakeholders, while also contributing to wider industry conversations about how vulnerability is communicated.



Karen Hunter, Customer Learning, Development and Inclusion Manager said: *“Advisory panel feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with stakeholders describing the campaign as more relatable, inclusive and representative of the customers it seeks to support. Ninety percent of advisory panel members support retaining the ECR branding in ED3.”*

This year, **collaboration across all DNOs** focused on improving awareness and preparedness within the care sector. Through discussions with care professionals, a consistent theme emerged: many care providers lack robust resilience plans and remain unclear about what action to take during a power interruption. This insight led to the development of a new all-DNO interactive resilience guide hosted on thePSR.co.uk, providing practical advice for care providers and supporting improved preparedness.

Forward look

We will continue to share learning from the ECR evolution through industry forums, stakeholder networks and cross-sector collaboration, encouraging wider adoption of customer-led approaches that make support services more accessible, inclusive and relevant to the customers they are designed to help. Although our current reach exceeds 100% when measured against the 2011 census baseline, we recognise that population needs continue to evolve. Births, deaths, household moves and changing circumstances mean that eligibility is constantly changing, and maintaining reach requires ongoing effort. **Following certification against the 2021 census methodology, ECR reach now stands at 98.2%**, providing a more accurate picture of current performance and helping identify future priorities. The updated analysis highlights particularly strong reach among customers experiencing mental health challenges, partially sighted, hearing impairments and disabilities, while **identifying opportunities to improve awareness** amongst households with young children, customers who are blind and customers for whom English is not their first language. These groups will form a key focus for 2026/27, alongside continued work to improve understanding of emerging issues such as telephony resilience, poor mobile coverage and the transition from traditional landlines to digital communication services.

2.3 Case study: Take Charge – Energy and money advice Helping the take charge

Case study

Strategic context

Supporting customers in vulnerable situations remains a core commitment within our RII0-ED2 business plan. Through Take Charge, we committed to reaching 250,000 households by 2028 and delivering **personalised support to 125,000 households**, helping customers access practical advice on managing their energy use and household finances.

While energy prices have stabilised since the peak of the energy crisis, **fuel poverty and financial vulnerability remain significant challenges across the North West**. An estimated 9.8% of households are living in fuel poverty, compared with 9.4% nationally, with an average fuel poverty gap of £353. This represents the reduction in annual energy costs needed for a household to no longer be classed as fuel poor.

Although official fuel poverty levels have fallen since the peak of the energy crisis, demand for support remains high and customer **vulnerability is becoming more complex**. Customers are increasingly facing multiple, interconnected challenges including affordability pressures, debt, housing instability and the need for welfare support. This means that success can no longer be measured solely by the number of customers reached, but by the ability to provide holistic support that prevents issues escalating.

These challenges are particularly acute within the North West, which accounts for **16% of England’s fuel-poor households** despite representing only 13% of the population. Areas including Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley and Pendle continue to experience high levels of financial hardship and crisis support needs.^[1]

Against this backdrop, the role of **Take Charge extends beyond energy advice alone**. Customers increasingly require support with a combination of energy affordability, welfare, debt, wellbeing and financial resilience issues. As the programme has matured, the focus has shifted to an **integrated support ecosystem** that combines awareness-raising, trusted partnerships and tailored advice. This recognises that customers cannot benefit from services they do not know exist, but awareness alone is insufficient if support is not accessible and effective when they seek help.

Table 6: Target audience for Take Charge

Segment	Doing their bit	Just about managing	In fuel poverty	In crisis
Reach (2025/26 – Y3)	20% (-10%)		80% (+10%)	
Method	Above-the-line awareness campaign	Mid-depth tailored advice	In-depth ongoing tailored advice	Access to immediate support
Objective	Signpost the help available Keeping safe, warm and healthy	Reduce risk of negative budget Reduce issues escalating	Prevent disconnection Improve wellbeing	Meet basic physical and safety needs
Priority needs (in addition to ECR promotion)	Cost-of-living advice Low carbon advice Winter preparedness	Energy efficiency behaviour changes to reduce bills Income maximisation Debt prevention	Income maximisation Full debt advice (pre-requisite to most grants) Financial grants	Emergency food, energy vouchers and charitable support Listening ear service

[1] <https://www.nwnetzerohub.org.uk/warm-homes/>

What we heard

Take Charge is establishing itself as a trusted route into advice and support. Research found that 12% of a regionally representative sample were aware of the service and 7% had already used it. Importantly, more than a third said that seeing Take Charge marketing made them more likely to seek advice, rising further after visiting the website.

The service is increasingly associated with helping people save money, expertise, and trustworthiness, while 84% of website users reported that the experience exceeded expectations. 75% of respondents agreed that having a named service such as Take Charge makes it easier to identify a trusted source of advice, demonstrating the value of building a recognised and credible brand that helps customers access support with confidence.

Citizens Advice in the North West and partner organisations reported that demand for support continues to increase, while the complexity of customer circumstances is becoming more acute. Customers increasingly require repeat support and are often returning to services multiple times as their circumstances evolve. Partners also reported that many customers are exhausting traditional support routes before seeking help. Increasingly, customers contacting advice services have already accessed fuel vouchers, food banks, charitable grants or income-maximisation support. For some, advice agencies are viewed as a final avenue of support when other options have been exhausted.

The policy environment continues to evolve rapidly. Changes to welfare support, Universal Credit, the removal of the two-child benefit cap and proposed reforms to disability-related benefits create risks for vulnerable households.

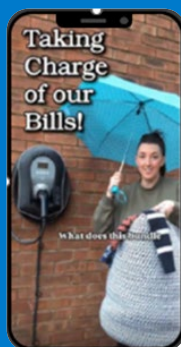
What we did

Our approach throughout the year focused on two complementary objectives: increasing awareness of available support and ensuring that support remains accessible, inclusive and effective when customers seek help.

The service delivery model continued to reflect differing levels of customer need. Customers requiring light-touch support were primarily reached through awareness activity and self-service channels, while **those facing deeper vulnerability received increasingly tailored and intensive support**. Customers experiencing crisis situations were prioritised for immediate assistance, including emergency support and safeguarding interventions where required.

Because 80% of customers access the service through self-referral, **awareness is a critical enabler of vulnerability support**. Customers cannot access help they do not know exists. Year 3 therefore focused on ensuring vulnerable households were aware of available support and understood how to access it through trusted channels.

A major development during Year 3 was the **evolution of Take Charge from a standalone campaign into an integrated support ecosystem**. Marketing activity became more closely connected to service delivery, partner engagement and customer journeys.



Dedicated landing pages were developed for customer case studies across energy and money advice, low carbon technologies and partnerships services, improving search visibility, user journeys and performance tracking. To extend reach into local communities, we also **partnered with three local influencers**, particularly in Lancashire which has high levels of financial hardship, generating more than 514,000 views and reaching over 460,000 people.

Partnership activity expanded significantly and was aligned with key national campaigns such as Energy Savers Week, Big Green Week and Carers Week. During the year we delivered 60 partner briefings, supported 154 organisations to distribute campaign materials, attended 25 events and generated 69 referrals through partner networks.

We also continued to **meet customers in trusted community settings** including libraries, food banks, GP surgeries, schools and workplaces. These locations provide familiar, accessible environments where customers can engage with support services more comfortably.

Customer impact

Collectively, campaign activity generated more than 223 million opportunities for residents to see or hear Take Charge messaging, resulting in over 115,000 digital engagements, 17,500 website users and more than 2,700 enquiries directed into Citizens Advice North West.

However, the impact of the service extends beyond traditional performance metrics. While financial benefits, customer satisfaction scores and social return calculations remain important indicators, they do not fully capture the role the service plays in supporting vulnerable households.

For many customers, Take Charge provides a vital safety net during periods of significant financial hardship or personal crisis. Advisors routinely support customers facing issues relating to debt, housing insecurity, mental health challenges, safeguarding concerns and energy affordability. In these circumstances, the value of the service often lies not only in financial outcomes but in helping customers feel safer, more informed and better equipped to navigate difficult situations.

The programme has also generated wider benefits through knowledge sharing and collaboration. This learning has been shared with organisations beyond the SP Electricity North West licence area, helping to extend the benefits of the approach and support best practice across the sector.

The Take Charge programme has significantly surpassed its year three financial and quality targets - an outcome that we are proud of (see Table 1 - CVI metrics).

26,804

customers
receiving
personalised
support this year.

75%

of customers
accessed income
maximisation
or debt advice.

17%

of customers
accessed energy
efficiency advice or
installations (ECO).

£227.40

net societal
value delivered
per customer.

76%

felt less stressed,
depressed or
anxious because of
receiving advice.

What we learnt

While SP Electricity North West colleagues are effective at referring customers who are already experiencing crisis situations, there remains an opportunity to **identify vulnerability earlier and intervene before problems escalate**. As a result, work has begun with operational and customer-facing teams to strengthen proactive identification and referral processes. Supporting vulnerable customers forms part of objectives for customer-facing colleagues, helping embed a more preventative approach across the organisation.

We also identified opportunities to broaden audience reach. While service usage is broadly representative across many customer groups, women continue to access support more frequently than men and engagement levels are still strongest in Greater Manchester. This has informed the development of **targeted engagement approaches, including workplace-based initiatives** designed to reach underrepresented audiences. We have piloted this scheme with The Senator Group, a local furniture manufacturer in Lancashire where 100+ employees learnt practical ways to save energy and money and were given personalised advice from SP Electricity North West colleagues.

Figure 5: SP Electricity North West colleagues at The Senator Group delivering personalised advice to over 100 colleagues



The Senator Group

Olivia Broughton, Group Sustainability Manager at The Senator Group:

"We were thrilled to host the team across all of our Lancashire sites as they spoke to our employees about saving energy and reducing their energy bills, and promoted low carbon technologies, using their expertise to address common concerns with a reassuring confidence. At every site we had overwhelmingly positive feedback and numerous employees signing up for a follow up personalised support sessions with the Take Charge experts."

Finally, we re-established that trusted local relationships remain one of the most effective mechanisms for reaching vulnerable customers. In an environment increasingly shaped by scams, misinformation and institutional mistrust, community organisations and **trusted intermediaries play a critical role in helping customers feel confident accessing support**.

The growing relationship between energy affordability and health outcomes is creating new opportunities for integrated support. A key development for 2026/27 will be **collaboration with Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust** to establish community-based health hubs, beginning in Wythenshawe. These hubs will provide referral routes for patients experiencing social or financial issues that affect their health and wellbeing, while also supporting self-referrals and staff referrals.



2.4 Case Study: Take Charge – Low carbon technology advice



Case study

Strategic context

The transition to a low carbon energy system is accelerating, creating new opportunities for households. Technologies such as heat pumps, electric vehicles, solar panels and battery storage are becoming more common, and the announcement of the **Government's £15bn Warm Home Plan** has already influenced how customers, installers and energy specialists think about future support.

The wider delivery environment is also evolving. Energy suppliers, installers, local authorities, housing providers and network operators all play important roles in the customer journey, yet customers are still frequently passed between organisations without clear ownership of issues. We continue to see cases where customers are directed to the DNO for matters outside our remit, highlighting the ongoing need for a service like Take Charge that can **help people navigate a complex system with confidence**.

What we heard

One of the most significant insights from this year is that **the profile of customers accessing the service is broader than initially anticipated**. While circumstances vary considerably, a common theme across many interactions is a lack of confidence.

Recent use cases include:

-  A customer proactively researching the installation of a ground source heat pump on a large rural estate.
-  An 81-year-old homeowner with newly installed solar panels who felt overwhelmed by the technology and did not understand how to maximise its benefits.
-  A homeowner who discovered ownership of solar panels had not been transferred during a property purchase, leaving them unable to access export tariff arrangements.
-  A customer concerned about unexpectedly high electricity bills who eventually discovered that a neighbour had been using an EV charger installed at the property by a previous owner.

We also heard that services must be adapted to suit different audiences. While many customers indicate a preference for receiving advice through websites and email, these channels are less effective for key groups including customers aged over 65, households who are less likely to use online services or digital tools, or people experiencing fuel poverty. These groups are also among the most likely to say they do not want low carbon technology advice, creating a risk that they are left behind during the energy transition.

Independent research with Take Charge customers reinforced the importance of trust-building and personalised engagement. **Customers consistently valued opportunities to speak directly with advisers and discuss their own circumstances.**

We also observed increasing overlap between low carbon technology enquiries and wider energy affordability concerns. This reinforced the value of presenting services through a single, integrated customer journey.

New regulations requiring landlords to improve EPC ratings by 2030 will increase installations in the private rented sector. However, advisers are already seeing technologies installed without the right fabric improvements or customer preparation, leading to higher-than-expected energy costs and poorer outcomes.

Government and **Ofgem are increasingly considering a stronger coordinating role for DNOs**, aligning network investment with retrofit programmes, local authority plans and electrification strategies. The partnerships, referral pathways, stakeholder relationships and learning developed through ED2 place Take Charge in a strong position to support this more coordinated approach, and help customers navigate the changes ahead.

What we did

The most significant change we made was an **increased focus on in-person engagement**. Rather than concentrating solely on the number of events attended, we adopted a more targeted approach focused on engagement quality and the potential for meaningful behaviour change.

During the year we **attended 50 events** including sustainability festivals, community fairs and workplace wellbeing events, providing low carbon technology advice to more than 850 individuals. For customers already interested in low carbon technologies, conversations focused on practical next steps. At broader community events, advisers concentrated on increasing visibility, addressing misconceptions and helping customers understand how technologies could benefit them.

We also introduced a more structured approach to event selection and evaluation, tracking attendance, outcomes and costs to identify where we can have the greatest impact. Incentives such as raffles and giveaways were used to encourage conversations and increase participation.

When trying to expand our reach by attending events hosted by local authorities, we discovered that often they restrict participation to approved delivery partners. Recognising the importance of these local authority relationships, **we partnered with approved partner, Cosy Homes Lancashire**, extending our reach into communities that would otherwise have been difficult to access.

Partnership working continued through Green Rose, delivering support under the Take Charge banner via telephone, face-to-face at events and in home, and more intensive assistance where required.

Recognising the overlap in customers needing energy and money advice and customers seeking low carbon technology guidance, **we launched a new integrated website** bringing these services together.

The redesigned site provides a single access point for support and includes expanded advice content, case studies, Homewise functionality, online design tool and clearer routes into adviser support.



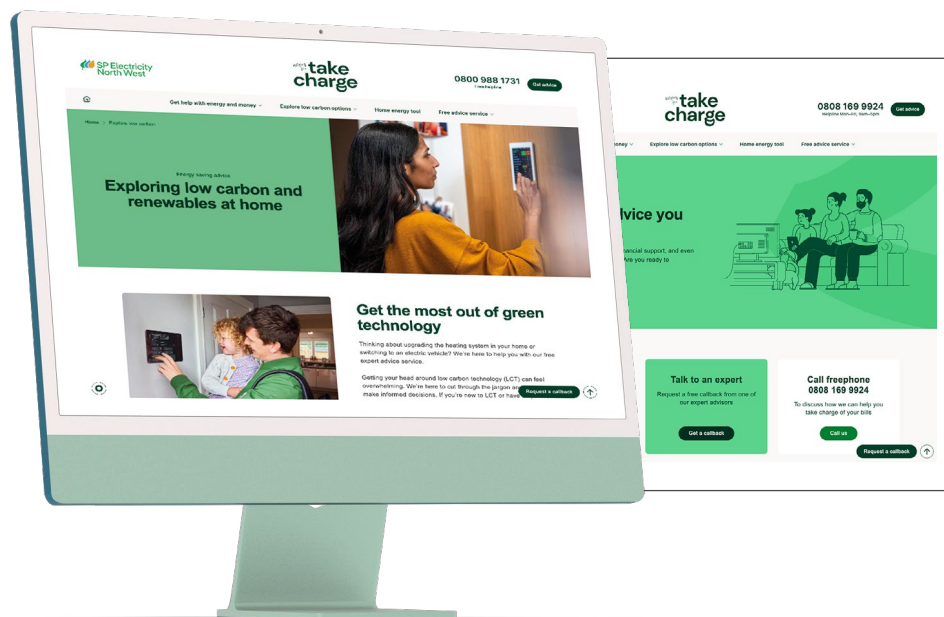


Jill Hendry, Customer Inclusion Manager, said: *"Our new integrated website combines energy-saving advice, low carbon guidance, personalised tools and direct access to expert support. We've better aligned the page and expanded the range of advice, resources and customer experiences available, to ensure customers can access the advice they need whenever, and however, they prefer."*

61.3%
improved
engagement rate

The new platform achieved an improved engagement rate of 61.3%, suggesting visitors are spending more time exploring content and available support. To reach underrepresented groups, **we expanded our work with employers**, trialling delivery with a construction workforce. Five advisers attended the site, providing personalised energy, money and low-carbon advice to employees who may not otherwise have engaged with support services. We also continued targeted **engagement with park home residents**, helping customers understand newly installed solar and battery systems, address energy efficiency concerns and access available funding.

Figure 6: Our new integrated website brings together energy and money advice with guidance on low carbon technologies.



Customer impact - The Take Charge programme has surpassed its year three financial and quality targets - an outcome that we are proud of. (see Table 1 - CVI metrics).

3,005

customers received
personalised support this
year, up from 411 last year.

61%

accessed advice on smart
meters, compared with
36% for solar panels,
17% for heat pumps and
12% for electric vehicles.

75%

report increased confidence
and likelihood to take action
following advice.



Take Charge customer: *"With three kids and our energy bills going up I started looking into solar as a way to bring our energy costs down, but once I started getting quotes it became really confusing. That's when I got in touch with Take Charge. They explained how solar works, what my options were and how batteries and tariffs fit together. Everything felt much clearer and I felt confident making the decision instead of guessing."*

What we learnt

Our previous research suggested that customers experiencing fuel poverty or financial hardship were often unable to engage with low carbon technology advice because more immediate concerns took priority. While this remains true in some circumstances, we have increasingly encountered customers accessing energy and money advice who are **ready to engage with low carbon technologies when support is delivered in a low-pressure and relevant way**.

Many customers are now moving into properties where technologies are already installed or are living in homes being upgraded by landlords. As a result, advice is increasingly required to help customers understand and use technologies they already have, rather than solely supporting purchasing decisions.

This validates previous customer journey mapping work, which identified **post-installation support as an emerging need**. As low carbon technologies become more widespread, helping customers maximise benefits may be as important as supporting adoption itself.

We also learned that assumptions about engagement channels do not always hold true. While sustainability-focused events were expected to generate the strongest outcomes, some of the most meaningful conversations occurred at broader community events where attendees had little prior interest in low carbon technologies.

3. Regularly reported evidence

This section of the report evaluates our performance concerning regularly reported evidence (RRE) across four key areas critical to achieving the CVI aims and benefits, as outlined in the RIIO-ED2 Consumer Vulnerability Guidance. Metrics one and two are reported annually, while metrics three and four are reported cumulatively. This approach ensures that the most current and accurate data from completed regulatory years is used to provide the best estimates for the volume of services to be delivered in the upcoming years.

Table 7: Year 2 RRE 2025/26 performance

RRE metric	Ofgem baseline expectation	Actual			Forecast	
		Year 1 2023/24	Year 2 2024/25	Year 3 2025/26	Year 4 2026/27	Year 5 2027/28
1. Frequency of ECR customer data cleanse (reported on an annual basis)	Network has attempted to contact all ECR customers to verify their data	100% compliance	100% compliance	100% compliance		
2. Customer satisfaction score among ECR customers who have experienced a power cut (reported on an annual basis)	9.01 target	9.00	9.18	9.17		
3. The volume of fuel poverty services delivered (reported on a cumulative basis)	Forecast volume of fuel poverty services delivered for RIIO-ED2	25,072	50,218	77,022	102,022	127,022
4. The volume of low carbon transition services delivered (reported on a cumulative basis)	Forecast volume of low carbon transition services delivered for RIIO-ED2	0	411	3,416	6,416	9,416

For metric three, it's important to note that the volume of fuel poverty services delivered represents in-depth support provided. This excludes general awareness-raising efforts, which reached well in excess of 25,000 customers in 2025/26.

The case studies in section two provide additional narrative to accompany Table 7 which expands on the progress made and performance against the year two and year five targets.

3.1 Case study: Delivering better experiences for ECR customers during power cuts

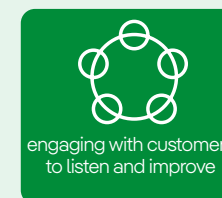
Case study

Strategic context

Our customer strategy is built around a simple ambition to deliver a safe, fair and inclusive service that customers trust and value. **The strategy is underpinned by three principles:**



reducing customer effort by making it easy to access support



engaging with customers to listen and improve



taking ownership to minimise disruption

Power interruptions can be stressful and uncertain for any customer. During these situations, customers need timely information, reassurance and confidence that support is available if required. This is particularly important for customers in vulnerable situations, but the benefits of accessible and inclusive service design extend to all customers.

By **helping customers self-serve** when appropriate and providing faster access to information, we can reduce customer effort while freeing up capacity for colleagues to focus on customers who require more personalised support.

What we heard

Around 60% of the 227,884 calls received by our contact centre relate to power cuts. Many customers continue to contact us through our main 0800 number, which routes callers through multiple menu options before they reach the information they need.

Focus groups with both ECR customers and non-ECR customers revealed **a strong preference for faster access to power cut information**. Customers consistently highlighted the 105 power cut number as a simpler and more direct route, describing it as a service that “gets you on the journey” more quickly.

However, independent research identified a significant awareness gap. **Overall awareness of the 105 service was just 23%**, ranging from 17% in Manchester to 38% in Cumbria. Encouragingly, 89% of customers said they would use 105 during a power cut, suggesting the challenge was one of awareness rather than willingness.

We also explored attitudes towards automation. Research with 300 low voltage customers who had recently reported a power cut through speaking to an agent showed broad **support for faster, more automated ways of reporting faults and receiving updates**. However, customers were clear that automation should enhance rather than replace human support.

Customers told us they wanted **reassurance that speaking to an advisor remained an option**. This was especially important for customers in vulnerable situations, those with low carbon technologies, and customers living in areas with poor connectivity.

The research also highlighted the **importance of consistency across channels**. Customers wanted simple, reliable information that aligned across SMS, online services and telephone interactions.





What we did

Increasing awareness of 105

We reviewed customer-facing communications to ensure the **105 power cut number was more visible** and easier to find. This included updates to internal literature, customer communications and our website homepage.

Figure 7: Our website homepage now highlights the 105 number more prominently



To build awareness more widely, we planned a social media campaign using the simple message:

“Save it, share it, use it.” Colleagues featured in campaign videos explaining the benefits of 105 and encouraging customers to store the number.

Recognising that some customers may feel uncertain about what happens when they make contact, we also developed supporting content explaining the customer journey when calling 105, including the information customers may be asked to provide and the support available. This was particularly valuable for ECR customers who may require additional reassurance.

Simplifying power cut reporting and updates

A new, more simple ‘report your power cut’ journey was introduced, enabling customers to access live outage information more quickly and reducing the need to contact the customer contact centre for routine updates.

We also began **expanding proactive SMS messaging** for customers connected to our low voltage network. Using postcode-based targeting, customers in potentially affected areas can now be contacted proactively and asked to confirm whether they are experiencing a power cut. This reduces the need for customers to report faults, helps us identify affected customers more quickly and improves the accuracy of our operational response.

To further improve visibility, we **enhanced smart meter integration within our systems**. Advisors can now undertake automated “ping” checks to confirm supply status and identify customers who may remain off supply after network restoration. This supports faster resolution and reduces the need for follow-up calls or site visits.

Finally, we introduced **automated post-fault summary messages**, issued within 24 hours of restoration. These communications provide customers with a clear explanation of the incident, answer common questions and help improve confidence in our response.

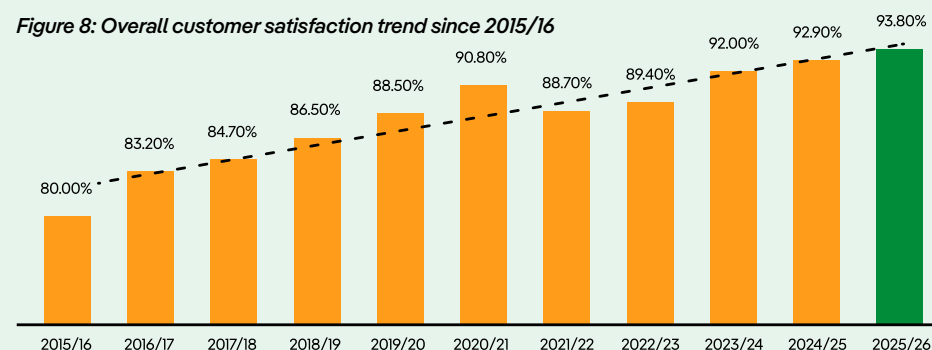
Customer impact

By increasing awareness of the 105 service and providing more direct access to outage information, customers can obtain updates more quickly and with less effort. At the same time, proactive communications and automated services are **reducing the need for customers to repeatedly contact us for routine information**. Importantly, this approach is helping preserve access to personalised support. By reducing demand for routine enquiries, colleagues have greater capacity to focus on customers who require additional assistance, reassurance or tailored support.

92.6%
of customers said they
found it easy to contact us

During 2025/26, 92.6% of customers said they found it easy to contact us, supporting our wider ambition to reduce customer effort and improve accessibility. We are also continuing to deliver **strong overall customer satisfaction**, meeting our 2023–2028 Business Plan commitment to exceed 90% satisfaction and remaining close to the maximum regulatory incentive target of 94.6%.

Figure 8: Overall customer satisfaction trend since 2015/16



What we learnt

Customers told us that **receiving too much information during a power interruption can feel overwhelming**, particularly when they are already experiencing uncertainty or stress. This was identified as being particularly relevant for neurodiverse customers, those with lower digital confidence and customers who may feel anxious during an outage.

We also heard that inconsistencies between communication channels can undermine trust and create confusion. **Customers want a clear and consistent source of information** regardless of whether they engage through SMS, online services or telephone contact.

In response, we have improved the way outage information is managed and communicated. Online power cut updates are now written directly into fault records and managed by the same team responsible for SMS messages and outbound customer calls. This helps ensure customers receive a consistent version of events across all channels.

The approach also **enables customers to choose the level of information that best meets their needs**. Customers can receive a short SMS update and, if they wish, access more detailed information online through a direct link.

Looking ahead, we will expand customer preparedness content, including new **videos explaining the support available during power cuts**. We will also continue to improve awareness of the 105 service and develop more personalised customer communications, including tailored ECR information based on individual needs.



3.2 Case study: Using the information held about ECR customers to target or prioritise support

Case study

Strategic context

Our goal is to ensure that all customers, regardless of their circumstances, receive fair treatment and easy access to high-quality information, help and support before, during and after a power cut.

During the early years of ED2, our priority was to grow the Extra Care Register, and significant progress has been made. **Our focus is now shifting from increasing registrations to making better use of the data**, particularly to enhance the support we provide to customers during power cuts.

Support requirements vary between planned outages, unplanned interruptions and severe weather incidents, while life experience can also influence the type of assistance required.

A key trend is the growing reliance on electricity to support health and wellbeing. **Around 150,000 customers across our licence area rely on electricity to power medical equipment**, representing approximately 6% of our customer base. As healthcare increasingly shifts into the home through virtual wards, remote monitoring and home-based care, the consequences of a power interruption can be more significant for vulnerable customers. This impact is often felt beyond the individual, with **many of the UK's 5.8 million unpaid carers relying on electricity to help care for family members** and maintain their independence. The ongoing PSTN transition adds a further challenge, as customers increasingly depend on powered digital communication services to contact carers, healthcare professionals and emergency support. These developments highlight the **growing importance of targeted resilience support** during power interruptions.

What we heard

Throughout the year, customer engagement, research and operational trials provided valuable reinforcing that **no single resilience solution is suitable for all customers**. Effective support requires a range of interventions, informed by customer circumstances, medical dependency and power cut characteristics.

Our research with ECR customers told us the importance of resilience support for medically dependent customers. Customers highlighted concerns about maintaining power not only for medical devices but also for phones, internet routers, medication storage, lighting and heating during outages.

We carried out research with medically dependent customers in our region who had recently experienced a planned power cut, to understand what equipment they rely on, what backup arrangements they had in place, and how they would manage during an outage. The findings indicate that approximately **20% of medically dependent customers could benefit from portable battery support** during power interruptions. Therefore, we conducted a trial of portable battery usage.

Customer feedback was positive, particularly regarding the reassurance provided by battery life indicators and the ability to maintain essential equipment. However, **the trial also highlighted practical challenges**, including battery weight, equipment tracking and suitability for different types of medical devices.

A separate **customer support vehicle trial** conducted at the end of last year demonstrated strong customer benefits when used during longer duration interruptions but identified opportunities to strengthen stock management, colleague training, operational awareness and customer communications.

Similarly, when targeting support, **feedback from operational teams** also highlighted limitations within existing support tracking processes, reliance on manual recording and incomplete data capture.

What we did

Our approach has focused on combining better customer insight (Open Maps), enhanced resilience solutions (portable batteries) and targeted welfare interventions (support vehicle) to create a more proactive and personalised support model.

A key area of focus was the **continued development of Open Maps**, a web-based platform developed through industry collaboration to help identify where vulnerable customers may require additional support.

The platform combines location, demographic, vulnerability and community support data to provide a richer understanding of customer need. We have supported its development in recent years through data sharing, collaboration and engagement with external partners.

Current functionality enables users to compare ECR coverage against census-based indicators of need, identify local support services and generate area-based insights across multiple geographies. Phase 1 of the internal rollout (March 2025 – September 2026) focuses on **improving support during long-duration outages** through better prioritisation of vulnerable customers, real-time recording of support activities, improved stock management and stronger customer outcome measurement.

However, we are not only using data to improve our own understanding of customer vulnerability; we are **enabling partner organisations to target support more effectively** within their communities.

Open Maps has been provided free of charge to two third-sector organisations, with further expansion imminent, and integrates 21 third-party datasets, including Government fuel poverty statistics, Met Office weather forecasts and DEFRA air quality data. This shared intelligence helps partners identify vulnerable populations, understand local needs and deliver more targeted interventions.

Alongside data-driven targeting, **our customer support vehicle has now been embedded into daily operational delivery** across the licence area. Equipped with solar panels, a battery bank, Wi-Fi connectivity and medication cooling facilities, the vehicle enables Customer Welfare Officers to provide practical support and reassurance during prolonged outages.

Figure 9: Our support vehicle is equipped with solar panels, charging facilities and Wi-Fi connectivity.





Figure 10: Our portable batteries deliver improved resilience to those who need it.



Following a successful trial, feedback from customers and staff showed that the original units were too heavy and difficult to track. The upgraded units are easier for teams to carry, include integrated tracking and geofencing, and have built-in impact sensors that alert us if a battery is dropped so safety checks can be carried out quickly. The new stock has been **rolled out across the region** and is jointly managed by operational and customer teams. This is a significant improvement in how we support our most vulnerable customers, and staff are proud to deliver a service that makes a real difference during power cuts.



Jill Hendry, Customer Inclusion Manager, said: *“Our portable battery service has taken a major step forward this year. We have identified an enhanced model that is lighter, safer and fully trackable. We now have over 100 batteries in daily use across the region, providing vital Extra Care to customers who rely on power for medical or essential needs.”*

Customer impact

Open Maps has enhanced our understanding of customer vulnerability by enabling teams to consider the characteristics of affected communities rather than focusing solely on network geography. The platform provides **improved visibility of customer needs** and helps target support more effectively. The customer support vehicle has become an important element of our welfare response. During 2025/26, the vehicle was deployed on 80 occasions, supporting 2,934 affected customers, including 1,351 ECR customers. A total of 1,555 properties were visited, providing practical support and reassurance during prolonged interruptions.

Across 80 Extra Care occasions, **the team delivered high value support**, including strong growth in ECR registrations, widespread use of portable power packs, extensive distribution of essential equipment, targeted medication support and on-site resolution of customer issues.

Customer surveyed after the support vehicle visited them during a power cut said: *“The back up team on the phone were very helpful and the support workers going from door to door were extremely helpful and they kept coming back to make sure we were ok.”*

Customer who received a battery during a power cut, said: *“The care service was second to none. They issued us with a battery pack for my husband’s medication and to power his CPAP machine. It’s good to know that we are on the ECR.”*

We now have over 100 batteries in daily use across the region, providing vital Extra Care to customers who rely on power for medical or essential needs.

The benefits extend beyond operational metrics. Research indicates a societal benefit of approximately £35 per customer through **reduced stress during power interruptions**, reflecting both personal wellbeing improvements and wider societal benefits. Tailored welfare provision, practical support and improved communication all contribute to reducing anxiety and helping customers cope more effectively during outages.

More widely, following stakeholder feedback, we are currently **trialling Mat Zero technology**, with 24 heated mats now available for customer use during incidents. The low-voltage mats can be powered by a power bank or battery and provide highly efficient, targeted warmth.

What we learnt

While customer feedback was overwhelmingly positive, successful deployment depends on clear governance, effective stock management and well-trained colleagues. Learning from the trial has already informed improvements to procedures and service delivery and will continue to do so.

We also learned that resilience solutions must balance customer need with operational practicality. Portable batteries can provide significant benefits for many medically dependent customers, but they are not suitable for all circumstances, for example electric heaters which work better with suitcase generators as they draw constant power. **Understanding individual customer requirements remains essential** to ensuring appropriate support is provided.

We are continuing to learn about use cases for Open Maps, which has demonstrated value beyond vulnerability support. Planned enhancements include digital allocation of field teams, real-time activity tracking, improved recording of customer support activities and enhanced incident reporting capabilities. Beyond incident response, Open Maps is increasingly being used to inform engagement and **communications planning for major investment schemes**, enabling more targeted engagement with affected communities.





4. Our benefits measurement framework

This section sets out our framework for measuring the benefits of our initiatives, including the use of social return on investment (SROI).

4.1 Case study: SROI is embedded in senior-level decision making

Case study

Strategic context

Our approach to benefits measurement reflects the CVI requirement to demonstrate meaningful outcomes for customers in vulnerable situations. While measures such as customer satisfaction, stakeholder engagement and service reach remain important indicators of performance, they do not fully capture the wider value created through our programmes.

To address this, we have **embedded SROI within our benefits framework**. SROI provides a consistent and evidence-based approach to quantifying wider societal outcomes, including financial savings, improved health and wellbeing, increased resilience and carbon reduction. It enables us to understand not only what we deliver, but the difference our services make to customers' lives.

SROI is **used alongside customer feedback, operational performance and stakeholder insights** to provide a balanced view of impact. Embedding SROI in this way helps ensure decisions are informed by outcomes and value creation, enabling us to prioritise activities that deliver the greatest benefit for customers and communities.



What we did

During the year, we continued to refine our approach to benefits measurement and strengthen **alignment with the Common Social Valuation Framework** used across Great Britain's energy networks.

To support comparability and consistency, we continue to adopt the same 2021 price base used by other network operators and **prioritise the use of common proxy values** from the shared industry proxy bank wherever possible. Local adjustments are only made where robust partner evidence demonstrates that an alternative value more accurately reflects customer outcomes.

We also refreshed the research and market

assumptions that underpin our calculations.

This included **updating success rates** and adoption assumptions to reflect the latest available evidence to ensure benefits are not overstated and continue to reflect real-world customer behaviour.

Alongside this, we worked collaboratively with other DNOs and independent consultancy, Sirio, to update the industry's shared proxy library. New proxy values introduced during the year included:

-  **Financial savings associated with damp and mould awareness interventions.**
-  **Financial savings resulting from access to Disabled Facilities Grants.**
-  **Water savings achieved through behavioural change interventions.**
-  **Financial benefits associated with switching to heat pump-specific tariffs.**

The introduction of these new proxies has enabled us, for the first time, to quantify a wider range of financial, environmental and health-related outcomes delivered through our customer support services.

As some long-established energy and money advice interventions mature, we have seen reductions in certain success rates, reflecting the fact that some customers have already accessed available support, such as fuel vouchers or benefit entitlement checks.

Rather than viewing this as a reduction in impact, **we have used SROI insights to identify alternative areas where additional value can be created**. For example, support focused on reducing other household utility costs increased its success rate from 5% to 11% year-on-year, helping ensure our advice portfolio continues to maximise customer outcomes despite changing circumstances.

Customer impact

During the first three years of the Consumer Vulnerability Incentive, our fuel poverty and low carbon advice programmes generated £17.5 million net present value (NPV) of benefits for customers and communities.

These benefits extend beyond direct financial savings and include wider outcomes such as improved wellbeing, increased resilience, reduced carbon emissions and greater confidence in managing household energy costs.

The framework also provides greater transparency and confidence in how benefits are measured and reported. By using consistent methodologies, independently developed proxy values and regularly refreshed assumptions, **customers, stakeholders and regulators can be confident that reported impacts are evidence-based, proportionate and reflective of real-world outcomes**.

£17.5 million
net present value (NPV)
of benefits for customers
and communities.



What we learnt

Working with other DNOs, we **proposed a new Social Return on Investment proxy for electric bike advice**, supported by stakeholder feedback and aligned with the Consumer Vulnerability Incentive. While the proposal did not receive sufficient industry support for adoption, we believe it could benefit customers experiencing financial vulnerability or transport poverty. We will continue exploring opportunities to provide this advice while remaining aligned with agreed industry methodologies.

We believe this activity aligns strongly with the objectives of the CVI, particularly for customers experiencing financial vulnerability, transport poverty or barriers to accessing employment and essential services.

We will therefore **continue to explore opportunities to deliver electric bike advice** within our existing portfolio while remaining aligned with agreed industry methodologies.

Forward Look

SROI is proving effective as both a measurement framework and a decision-making tool. However, there remains an **opportunity to further strengthen the consistency, governance and application of SROI across the industry**. To support this, we are actively participating in a DNO working group that is reviewing lessons learned from the ED2 Consumer Vulnerability Incentive and identifying opportunities to improve benefits measurement for ED3.

More broadly, we continue to play a leading role in developing standardised approaches to measuring and communicating value. Our objective is to provide stakeholders with the capability, confidence and credibility needed to understand the benefits delivered through network-funded initiatives.

This approach extends beyond the Consumer Vulnerability Incentive. For the past two years, we have initiated and chaired the Energy Networks Association Distribution System Operation (DSO) Collaboration Forum, leading the development of the first standardised industry approach to articulating and measuring DSO benefits.

Within SP Electricity North West, the insights generated through SROI are also helping **strengthen collaboration between our Customer Inclusion and DSO teams**. While the CVI focuses on domestic customers, the principles of benefits measurement are increasingly being applied to support local authorities, businesses, community organisations and wider decarbonisation initiatives.

Looking ahead, a modular **“Start your Flexible Energy Future” programme** covering solar, battery storage, electric vehicles, heat pumps and smart tariffs will be delivered through both digital and face-to-face channels. While the benefits generated through this activity sit outside the scope of the CVI, they demonstrate how SROI is supporting a broader culture of evidence-based decision making and value creation across the business.



5. Making strides with our business plan commitments

Following comprehensive engagement with our customers and stakeholders across the North West, we made several bespoke vulnerability strategy commitments in our RIIO-ED2 Business Plan, prior to the introduction of the CVI. These commitments reflect the specific priorities identified by our customers and stakeholders and are distinct from those made by other DNOs. We believe it is important to be transparent about the progress we are making against these commitments, and this section provides an update on delivery, outcomes and learning to date.

5.1 Business plan Commitments

Table 8 sets out for each vulnerability strategy commitment:

- A short description of the commitment;
- A short description of the expected benefit or outcome;
- The milestones involved in implementing the commitment over RIIO-ED2;
- A **red / amber / green (RAG)** status indicator of progress with its implementation; and
- An explanation for why the milestone has received its red, amber or green rating.

A red status indicator is a milestone that is at significant risk and highly likely to be missed, amber indicates progress is delayed but is likely to be achievable before the end of the RIIO-ED2 and green indicates progress against the milestone is on track. Where a commitment does not have specific milestones, an overall RAG rating is provided for the commitment progress overall.

Table 8: progress on our vulnerability strategy commitments

Vulnerability strategy commitment	Description	Expected outcome/benefit	Key milestones	RAG status	2025/26 status update
1. Collaborating more closely with other utilities	Utilities Together forum with Cadent, Northern Gas Networks and United Utilities	An enhanced and cost-effective service to support vulnerable customers, achieved through improved coordination	Active membership	Green	• Held 10 collaboration meetings during 2025/26.
			Leveraging opportunities to work together	Green	• Leading and funding the development of a collaborative, non-emergency incident support network to strengthen community resilience. • Established Communities Prepared programme, with initial phase focused on stakeholder engagement and partnership building; resilience workshops now underway (two per month) with priority community groups. • Leveraging Greater Manchester Resilience Forum relationships to expand access to local authorities and embed activity within existing resilience structures. • Automated water and energy data-share (WD0225) currently on hold pending water sector alignment; systems and processes are prepared for deployment. • Actively contributing to national DNO collaboration, promoting the PSR.co.uk and engaging care sector stakeholders through events such as the National Care Management Show.
2. Doubling investment in referral networks	£500k annual fund aiming to design and tailor services to meet the needs of our communities through a network of trusted partners	20% increase in referral networks Keeping customers safe during a power cut through ECR awareness and registration, and improved health and wellbeing by connecting customers to support services when needed	Promotion of Partnership Funding Programme	Green	• 17 partners received funding during 2025/26. • 100% of the partnership budget was awarded. • A further 20 partners received funding through the dedicated Storm Arwen Fund.
			Growth in our network of funded and non-funded partners	Green	• Increased the number of active partners we work with from 50 to 145 over the past three years, representing a 190% overall growth. • Focusing on strengthening existing partnerships and refocussing efforts on how to best support customers through lived experience training and community focus.
			Growth in the reach of customers supported via our partnerships	Green	• Supported over 152,934 individuals this year through with our partners, up from 145,000 last year and 387,934 over the past three years, surpassing the target of 90,000.
3. Expanding the reach our ECR	Register at least 60% of eligible individuals (exceeding 2021/22 levels), while striving to reach 90% by 2028	Greater resilience and improved health and wellbeing by reducing the stress and anxiety caused by power cuts	Research to identify barriers	Green	• Conducted focus groups with specific customer groups to generate more targeted, tailored insight. • Worked with expert partners to better reach and represent customers with lived experience, including those who are medically dependent on electricity or have specific communication needs (e.g. BSL users).
			Use of data to target promotion at biggest gaps	Green	• Identified the top 10 localities with the largest registration gaps, and the top five demographics underreached, including families with young children. • Continued to promote awareness of our free Extra Care service, launched our new campaign “There’s an easier way” and increased accessibility, including collaboration with funded and non-funded partners
			Growth in ECR reach	Green	• Further embedding our ethos of supporting our customers and keeping them safe when they need us led to an increase of registrants on our Extra Care service this year from 95.7% to 102.6% of those eligible in the region. We now have over 1 million households on our register.

Vulnerability strategy commitment	Description	Expected outcome/benefit	Key milestones	RAG status	2025/26 status update
4. Creating an innovation fund to ensure no one is left behind	A £200,000 annual fund to identify barriers preventing the uptake of support services and to develop solutions in collaboration with partners	A future energy system that is both smart and fair and ensures that no customer gets left behind	Research programme to identify barriers	Green	- Supported a range of initiatives through our 2025/26 Innovation Fund, including: - The eighth phase of the bi-annual DNO LCT tracker, reaching over 2,000 households to monitor awareness, perceptions and adoption of LCTs. Insights have directly informed the design of our Take Charge low carbon advice service. - The piloting of a Green Rose Energy Partnership, delivering telephone and event-based support, with more intensive assistance where required.
			Improving access to existing services	Green	Focussed on in person delivery through events and targeted in-home support, to better understand and remove the barriers to LCT uptake. Served over 3,000 customers and attended 136 events.
			Developing new solutions with partners	Green	Further embedding our ethos of supporting our customers and keeping them safe when they need us led to an increase of registrants on our Extra Care service this year from 95.7% to 102.6% of those eligible in the region. We now have over 1 million households on our register.
5. Supporting customers in fuel poverty	Work closely with trusted organisations to understand fuel poverty and deliver support services, investing £2m per year to reach 250,000 fuel poor customers by 2028	Improved health and wellbeing of customers experiencing fuel poverty	The reach of fuel poverty awareness raising (reported on a cumulative basis)	Green	- Directly supported 26,084 customers over the year and generated a social return NPV of £6.7 million. - Raised awareness among 115,108 individuals through digital engagement and achieved nearly 223 million opportunities for people to see or hear our message. - Our convening power has enabled a multi-agency approach, ensuring the service is as comprehensive as possible and that customers receive the full range of available support. - Reached 94.0% customer satisfaction with the service at the close of 2025/26.
6. Developing new customer advisory panels	An advisory panel for customers in vulnerable circumstances	Strengthening of consumers' voices in business decision-making, with improved outcomes for customers	Pilot of enhanced on-site welfare provision	Green	- Continued to deliver rich insights through both of our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panels: - Oversight Panel: Six members focused on monitoring progress against business plan commitments, providing valuable insight and critical friend assessment. - Partnership Panel: 30 members from both funded and non-funded organisations collaborating with us to reach communities with relevant messaging and support. - Both Panels share an independent chair who is also part of the Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG). - Hosted the Resilient North West Customer Summit at the start of the reporting period. Stakeholders representing academia, charities, consumer reps, housing local authorities, resilience forums, transport and wider sector attended, starting our wider engagement on stakeholder expectations for the future. - Introduced new panels to inform Social DSO Strategy and to start thinking around key priorities for ED3.
7. Home welfare visits for electricity users in vulnerable circumstances experiencing long duration power cuts	We'll proactively offer welfare visits to all customers in vulnerable circumstances who are without power for 12+ hours	Customer Welfare Officer to explain what is happening, provide reassurance and tailored support	Pilot of enhanced on-site welfare provision	Green	- Fully mobilised the customer support vehicle following a successful trial which is now being used to deliver home visits, providing targeted support to customers experiencing longer-duration outages. - The vehicle is equipped with solar panels, a large power bank and an electric cool box to store medication safely. It also includes Wi-Fi connectivity and integrated technology, enabling agents to access systems, provide real-time updates, charge devices and deliver remote support on-site.
			Rollout and monitoring	Amber	Expanded area coverage to encompass our full network footprint. A process is now in place to identify and respond to customers who have been without power for over 12 hours and have requested support.
8. All-colleague training for vulnerable circumstances and mental wellbeing	100% of colleagues trained to recognise and reduce vulnerabilities	The protection and fair treatment of customers in vulnerable situations	Education and awareness aligned to colleague roles and responsibilities	Green	- Refreshed the annual switched on to extra care training and delivered to all colleagues to help them recognise and respond to any customer circumstances that could lead to detriment. - Provided additional enhanced training to targeted groups, including lived experience workshops, with further sessions planned for 2026.



5.2 Case study: Strengthening community resilience before, during and after power cuts

Case study

Strategic context

Customers in vulnerable situations can be disproportionately affected by prolonged power cuts, particularly where they rely on electricity for medical equipment, have limited access to digital information, or lack strong support networks. Our responsibility is therefore not only to respond effectively during an incident, but also to help communities prepare before disruption occurs.

In previous years, our focus has been on improving welfare support during longer-duration outages, including proactive communication, practical assistance and tailored support for customers most at risk. This year, we have built on that approach by **moving further upstream, strengthening community resilience and improving how customers prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.**

This reflects a broader shift from a centralised model of support towards one based on shared responsibility between SP Electricity North West, local partners and the communities we serve. By combining ECR data, community knowledge, trusted partnerships and operational insight, we are developing a more inclusive and sustainable model of resilience that can support customers during major incidents as well as more routine prolonged power cuts.

What we heard

Our engagement with advisory panels, local resilience forums, local authorities and community organisations reinforced the importance of community-based approaches to resilience.

While local authorities, voluntary organisations and community groups often play a vital role during emergencies, coordination between agencies varies and smaller organisations frequently operate with limited resources. **Many partners told us they would welcome greater support, clearer referral pathways and stronger connections with other organisations involved in emergency response.**

Through our Communities Prepared pilot, we also heard that the language of “resilience” does not always resonate with residents. Customers are more likely to engage when discussions focus on practical topics such as safety, wellbeing, emergency preparedness and looking after neighbours.

Residents often place greater trust in familiar community organisations, local leaders, regular groups and informal networks than in national or institutional communications. This means that building resilience is not simply about providing information; it requires working through trusted local channels that communities already know and value.

The pilot also highlighted the continuing challenge of digital exclusion. While online tools, alerts and digital communications can play an important role in preparedness, partners in Wigan and Rochdale reported that they can also exclude customers who lack access to technology, reliable connectivity or the confidence to engage online. This is becoming increasingly important as traditional landline services are withdrawn and more emergency communications move to digital channels.

What we did

To strengthen local resilience, we continued our **two-year Communities Prepared pilot** in partnership with Groundwork.

The pilot focuses initially on Wigan and Rochdale, two areas selected because of their experiences of flooding and broader resilience challenges. The programme is supported by the Greater Manchester Local Resilience Forum and brings together local authorities, voluntary organisations, community groups, parish councillors, flood action groups and local residents.

The objective is to improve preparedness before emergencies occur by helping communities understand local risks, build stronger support networks and identify practical actions that can improve resilience.

Activities delivered through the programme include community workshops, local engagement events, emergency planning sessions, asset mapping exercises and promotion of the ECR. Particular emphasis has been placed on identifying trusted local organisations and communication routes that can be used during emergencies.

Delivery has been adapted to reflect the needs of each community. In Rochdale, the programme has combined public events, workshops, online focus groups and partner engagement to reach a broad range of residents and stakeholders.

In Wigan, engagement highlighted that digital approaches and leaflet campaigns were often less effective than face-to-face engagement. As a result, the programme has focused more heavily on community events, local drop-in sessions and working through established community organisations with strong local relationships.

Throughout the year, we have also used ECR data at lower layer super output area level to support planning and identify communities where additional support may be required. This has been complemented by **detailed community asset mapping, helping us better understand local support structures, communication channels, community venues and trusted messengers.**

Just a few examples of the events and drop-ins attended this year.

Figure 11: Family friendly events including the Feel Good Family picnics and The Herds.



Figure 12: Weathering Well: Communities Prepared workshops.



Figure 13: Conversations with the Kashmiri community on energy and climate resilience.





Customer impact

904
individuals
engaged in Wigan
and Rochdale

During the year, the programme engaged 351 individuals in Wigan and 553 individuals in Rochdale through workshops, events and community activities. This engagement has increased awareness of emergency preparedness, promoted the ECR, helped to develop emergency checklists and ensured residents have a better understand the support available during a power cut or wider emergency.

Importantly, the programme is helping us identify hidden vulnerability and better understand how support is accessed within communities. **ECR reach in November 2024 in Wigan was at 78.4%, but with these targeted events increased 18% to 96.4%. Rochdale saw similar successes, increasing from 82.3% to 99.8% in the same period.**

The programme is also creating a stronger evidence base for community-led resilience. Early findings suggest that local preparedness, trusted relationships and better coordination between organisations can help reduce pressure during incidents, improve customer outcomes and ensure support reaches those who need it most.

What we learnt

A key learning from the programme has been that **resilience must be made practical and relatable** if communities are to engage with it. Future activity will therefore continue to use accessible, human-centred language that focuses on practical actions people can take.

The programme has also reinforced the significance of digital exclusion. While digital tools can support preparedness and communication, they cannot be the sole route to engagement. **Printed materials, face-to-face conversations and community-based support remain essential** for reaching some customer groups.

In Rochdale, partners identified opportunities to improve accessibility through translated materials, printed preparedness resources and in-person support for ECR registrations.

In Wigan, engagement highlighted the importance of **community WhatsApp groups, informal care networks and trusted local organisations** in sharing information and supporting vulnerable residents.

The programme demonstrated the value of community asset mapping. **Understanding where trust sits, which venues can provide support and how information flows** through communities is critical to designing resilience arrangements that reflect how communities actually operate.

Going forward, we will also **explore opportunities to expand the approach geographically**, building on interest from neighbouring communities including Hindley, Platt Bridge and Bickershaw, where residents have expressed a desire for stronger local resilience arrangements.

Where power cuts, flooding or other local emergencies occur within the pilot areas, we will evaluate how communities respond and assess the extent to which strengthened networks, improved preparedness and enhanced local coordination contribute to better customer outcomes.



YOUR CHECKLIST FOR EMERGENCIES AT HOME

It's helpful to have a few things to hand in a safe place at home in case of an emergency. Choose a drawer or a cupboard to store your home emergency kit so you know where everything is. You can use our below list as a guide and tick off as you add items to your kit

☐ Water (about 2 litres per person for 3 days)	☐ Water purification tablets
☐ Non-perishable food (eg. tins, energy bars)	☐ Salt or sand for de-icing paths outside
☐ Tin opener	Add your own ideas here:
☐ Torch	
☐ Spare Batteries	☐
☐ Phone and phone charger	☐
☐ Wind up radio	☐
☐ Blanket/extra warm layers	☐
☐ First aid kit (plasters, wipes, pain relief)	☐
☐ Personal medicine supplies	☐
☐ Important documents in a waterproof bag	☐
☐ Baby supplies (if relevant)	☐
☐ Pet supplies (food, medication, carrier etc)	☐

WHAT TO DO...

BEFORE AN EMERGENCY	DURING AN EMERGENCY
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Figure 14: Example of an emergency checklist delivered at our events.



5.3 Case study: Embedding the protection and fair treatment of customers in vulnerable situations within our culture

Case study

Strategic context

While **Treating Customers Fairly** is an obligation within our licence conditions, our commitment goes beyond compliance. Supporting customers in vulnerable situations is a core part of our values and central to how we serve the communities that rely on us.

As our understanding of vulnerability has matured, our focus has increasingly shifted from identifying eligible customers to **tailoring support around the individuals' situational needs**. We recognise that customers have different communication preferences, varying levels of confidence and diverse support needs. Delivering an inclusive service requires more than providing additional assistance; it means adapting how we communicate, train colleagues and design customer journeys.

What we heard

Our qualitative research with customers who scored between 6 and 8 out of 10 for customer satisfaction told us that “doing the basics well, every time” remains the foundation of a 9 or 10 out of 10 experience. This includes clear communication, reliable updates and confidence that their individual circumstances are understood.

Customers also wanted greater flexibility in how they receive information and updates, with communication tailored to their needs and preferences. Emotional reassurance and providing customers with confidence and a sense of being supported was identified as particularly important during prolonged outages, for customers in rural areas with poor mobile signal, and for those experiencing repeated interruptions. **Customers also highlighted the importance of consistency**, noting that receiving updates from multiple telephone numbers can create confusion and reduce trust.



Customer who took part in our focus group said: “My grandma, she’s 92, and if she had a power cut she would be quite panicky so I would like to think emotional reassurance would be provided by the people who contacted her.”

ECR customers had higher expectations of personalised support. Some reported that they were unaware of the support available and felt they needed to actively ask for help rather than having options explained to them.

Linked to our customer research, insight gathered through our internal Elevate learning programme highlighted that colleagues remain highly committed to delivering excellent customer service, however, some reported reduced confidence in managing natural, unscripted conversations during more challenging circumstances such as delivering unwelcome news or complaints.

What we did

A new learning and development governance framework was introduced within the customer contact centre, providing greater oversight of learning activity and ensuring training remains aligned to customer needs and performance outcomes. Supporting customers in vulnerable situations was also embedded within objectives for customer-facing colleagues, reinforcing a shared responsibility across the organisation.

Throughout the year, we created opportunities for colleagues to share challenges and identify areas where additional support was needed through our Learning Loop. This approach informed targeted learning interventions, including **enhanced training on Extra Care support** and vulnerability awareness after feedback highlighted colleagues would benefit from improved confidence with additional focus in this area.



Ellie Duckworth, Customer Contact Centre L&D Specialist: “The Learning Loop was a refreshing way to capture how passionate each and every one of our agents are about delivering great customer service. They shared some fantastic ideas on how they can achieve 10/10 more consistently.”

Key learning programmes included:

- ‘Switch On to Extra Care’ training, completed by 2,501 colleagues, strengthening awareness of vulnerability indicators and support pathways.
- ‘Treating Customers Fairly’ training delivered across the organisation.
- Major incident and weather-event training, providing approximately 800 additional learning hours focused on customer contact during major incidents.
- A dedicated Elevate Learning Week programme focused on delivering monthly targeted core and soft skill development, including a script-light trial within the contact centre, encouraging advisors to use professional judgement and tailor conversations to individual customer needs while continuing to meet operational requirements.



Customer Contact Centre agent: “I love the learning sessions provided and always get something out of them - usually things I didn’t know, I didn’t know!”

We also continued strengthening governance and assurance arrangements. During the year we achieved **re-accreditation to ISO 22458:2022 Inclusive Service Provision** for the third consecutive year.

Opportunities for improvement identified through the 2024/25 ISO 22458:2022 audit included strengthening visibility of management information comparing outcomes for vulnerable and non-vulnerable customers and enhancing oversight of complaints referred to third-party partners. Both recommendations have been implemented.

This year's audit involved 43 colleagues from across the organisation and identified no non-compliances. Delivering an inclusive service requires us to understand how different customer groups experience power interruptions and access support. **During the year, we worked with specialist organisations to identify barriers faced by underrepresented communities** and develop more accessible ways for customers to engage with our services.

This year, we **partnered with The Deaf Village NW** to undertake collaborative research with 15 Deaf British Sign Language (BSL) customers. The findings show significant barriers to accessing information during power interruptions, lack of knowledge of the ECR and that written English communications, particularly text messages were often ineffective.

Additionally, around 40% of participants did not fully understand what a power cut is, reflecting barriers in access to information and education. Participants described mobile phones as a critical lifeline, with loss of charging capability increasing isolation and vulnerability during outages.

Figure 15: Screenshot of the BSL Extra Care videos



Karen Hunter, Customer Learning, Development and Inclusion Manager:
"The partnership has provided valuable insight into how Deaf customers experience power interruptions and access support services. This year, we are looking forward to expanding our work with the organisation to design communications around Deaf customers' preferred channels, including the development of additional BSL content and the introduction of a sector-first BSL QR code on our Extra Care leaflet."

Customer impact

During 2025/26, frontline **colleagues updated contact details for 209,781 ECR customers**, helping ensure support information remains accurate and accessible when needed.

A further 76,024 customers were registered through customer-facing teams, supported by operational colleagues, while 270 customers were referred into the Take Charge service for additional support.

Satisfaction with the politeness of staff handling unplanned interruption enquiries averaged 97.4%, ranking third across the 14 DNO licence areas. **Overall satisfaction across all enquiry types averaged 93.8%, ranking fourth nationally.**

Initial feedback from both colleagues and customers on the script-light approach, which gives advisors greater flexibility to use professional judgement and tailor conversations to individual customer needs, has been positive, with advisors reporting greater confidence in adapting conversations to customer needs. 10% of our advisors were included in the trial and we saw an average 0.2% increase in weekly CSAT scores.

Internal colleague feedback also indicates that the focus on customer experience and capability development is having a positive impact. Results from the November 2025 Climate Survey showed **improvement across all customer and culture-related measures**, with overall agreement reaching 85.9%, the highest score recorded to date. Colleague pride in working for the business increased from 90% to 91%, while agreement with the customer focus measure improved from 89% to 91% over the year. The statement “My team provides great customer service” remained one of the highest-scoring measures in the survey, with 94% agreement.

What we learnt

We learned that demographic changes influence both customers and employees. Communication preferences, learning styles and accessibility needs continue to evolve, requiring training and communications to be adaptable and inclusive. As a result, **training materials have been updated** to improve accessibility, including revised materials for visually impaired colleagues.

The learning generated through Elevate learning and script-light trial is now influencing wider customer service development, including training programmes, coaching approaches, quality assurance frameworks and written communications.

Additionally, our work with specialist partners reinforced the importance of co-creating services with communities rather than for them. Direct engagement with underrepresented groups continues to identify barriers that may otherwise go unnoticed and helps ensure support remains genuinely inclusive.





6. Winter preparedness strategy

During winter, customer demand for electricity is higher, especially in the late afternoon and early evening, and supply interruptions have the greatest financial and social impacts. This section of the report reviews initiatives that underpin another important aspect of our strategic framework – winter preparedness.

6.1 Case study: Preparing customers prior to the winter period

Case study

Strategic context

Now in its fourth year, our #BeWinterReady campaign provides proactive, personalised contact with customers ahead of winter to check contact details, raise awareness of available support and help customers prepare for potential power interruptions.

While we have communicated with customers in vulnerable situations for many years, #BeWinterReady goes beyond mass communications. The campaign involves **one-to-one conversations with customers, delivered by a wider population of trained colleagues**. This includes colleagues who are not typically customer-facing in their day-to-day roles, as well as those who support incident and storm response. This approach enables customers to ask questions, discuss their circumstances and receive tailored advice based on their individual needs.

Each year, we review feedback from customers and colleagues to refine the campaign and improve the experience. The objective is not only to ensure customer records remain accurate, but also to strengthen customer resilience, increase awareness of available support and build trust before support is needed during a power cut.

What we heard

Following the 2024/25 campaign, we commissioned independent research with 300 landline-only customers who had been targeted for proactive contact as part of the winter readiness programme.

The research highlighted an important challenge. While customers generally valued the contact, 20% of those who **ended calls prematurely did so because they believed the call may have been a scam**. This created a risk that some customers, particularly those who rely on landline communications, were not receiving important information about power cut preparedness, available support or the benefits of the ECR.

The findings reflected wider societal concerns around fraud and scam activity. They also reinforced the importance of **ensuring customers feel confident that communications are genuine and can be trusted**.

The research highlighted an opportunity to place greater emphasis on reassurance and verification during customer interactions, helping customers understand who was contacting them, why they were being contacted and how they could confirm the legitimacy of the call.

What we did

In response to this feedback, we refreshed the campaign approach for winter 2025/26. Between September and October 2025, we **proactively contacted more than 40,000 ECR customers**, representing a 25% increase on the previous year's campaign.

This included:



Recognising customer concerns around scams and fraud, we updated campaign materials, colleague briefings and customer messaging. Following **guidance from Age UK**, the contact was repositioned as a “reassurance call”, placing greater emphasis on customer confidence, preparedness and wellbeing.

Colleagues received updated training and peer-to-peer support sessions to help them deliver the conversations consistently and confidently. Particular focus was given to explaining how customers could verify the identity of callers and recognise genuine communications from SP Electricity North West.

The campaign also encouraged customers to think about practical steps they could take to prepare for a power cut, while reminding them of the support available through the ECR.

Customer impact

The campaign continues to deliver strong outcomes for customers. Independent evaluation found that 80% of customers felt the proactive and personalised contact was useful, demonstrating the value of direct engagement ahead of winter.



Mr Hallsworth, ECR customer of pensionable age, spoke to friends and family about the call and made a note of the 105 number after the call: *“It’s a good service. Our children live in different parts of the country so this call to us free of charge, puts our mind at rest to know help is out there, we are in our 80s. The agent went through checking our contacting numbers and checked we would know what to do, and they gave us the number to call. It was a good reminder that we are on the register.”*



Among research participants, overall satisfaction with the ECR increased to 9.4 out of 10, compared with 9.15 in the previous year, reflecting continued improvements in customer experience and awareness.

The research also showed positive outcomes in relation to customer confidence and preparedness. While concerns about scam activity remained prevalent, many customers who initially questioned the legitimacy of the contact felt reassured following their interaction with colleagues.

The campaign also contributed to **stronger customer trust and advocacy**.

91%

of customers agreed they trust SP Electricity North West to do the right thing

↑4%

increase from 2024

92%

of customers said they were likely to speak positively about SP Electricity North West

↑10%

increase from 2024



Mrs Hudson, ECR customer of pensionable age, made a note of the 105 number and gathered some items to use if there was a power cut after the call: *"It puts us at ease if we were in trouble and we had no power that we can get help, as my husband is in a wheelchair. The call is a reminder, and I feel reassured the information you have on us is been kept up to date, which is a really good thing."*

What we learnt

Following the campaign, we commissioned independent research with 300 more customers, this time with a focus on pensionable-age ECR customers, to understand the impact of the activity on customer wellbeing, preparedness and awareness.

The research confirmed that concerns about scams remain a significant barrier to engagement. Almost half of customers reported initially questioning, in their own minds, whether the contact was genuine. However, among those who continued the interaction, 84% felt reassured by the end of the contact, rising to 92% for customers contacted by telephone. This demonstrates that while trust concerns are widespread, **proactive engagement remains highly valued** when customers feel confident in the legitimacy of the communication.

The research also showed that awareness of the ECR and the support available through it was higher than in previous years. This is particularly important because customers can join the register through a variety of routes and many experience power interruptions infrequently. **Regular contact therefore plays an important role in maintaining awareness**, reinforcing preparedness and ensuring customers understand the support available should they need it.

When asked about support priorities, customers consistently ranked **proactive power cut updates as the most important service** provided through the ECR, reinforcing the value of timely and personalised communications.

Overall, the findings demonstrated that regular proactive contact helps maintain trust, strengthen awareness and improve customer confidence, while also providing opportunities to keep customer records accurate.

Future campaigns will focus on increasing the practical value of each interaction by providing customers with more actionable preparedness advice, such as emergency checklists and resilience guidance. We will also explore opportunities to reinforce key messages through follow-up communications, including SMS messages, emails and printed materials, helping customers retain information after the initial contact.

In addition, **branded caller identification has now been implemented** within the customer contact centre and will be fully utilised during future campaigns to help customers verify the authenticity of incoming calls.





6.2 Case study: Protecting customers during the winter period

Case study

Strategic context

Severe weather remains one of the primary drivers of network disruption, requiring robust preparedness, rapid response and effective coordination across multiple agencies. While network resilience remains fundamental, customers increasingly judge performance not only on how quickly power is restored, but also on the quality of communication, support and welfare provided during an incident.



In 2025, the UK Government completed assessments of all 38 Local Resilience Forums (LRFs), providing an independent perspective on how DNOs prepare for and respond to emergencies. These assessments reinforced that **resilience is about more than infrastructure**; it depends on how effectively network operators, emergency services, local authorities and community organisations coordinate before, during and after incidents.

As part of the wider ScottishPower Group, we also have opportunities to strengthen resilience through **enhanced mutual aid arrangements**, enabling resources, expertise and support to be

shared across licence areas when required. This provides greater flexibility during major incidents and helps ensure customers receive a consistent and effective response.

Figure 16: Jenny Willis, Independent Chair of our Consumer Vulnerability Oversight and Partnership Panels and a member of our Independent Stakeholder Group, presenting at the Resilience North West Summit

What we heard

We began the year by **hosting the Resilience North West Summit**, bringing together stakeholders from across the resilience community to discuss emerging risks and priorities.

A clear theme was the **growing dependence of customers on electricity in their daily lives**. Trends such as home working, digital public services, low carbon technologies, home healthcare and the electrification of transport mean that interruptions can have a greater impact than ever before. As a result, customers and stakeholders place a high priority on network reliability, rapid restoration and clear communication during incidents.

Through our wider place-based engagement, local authorities and **LRF partners highlighted the importance of strong coordination and real-time situational awareness during emergency response**. Stakeholders told us that effective incident management depends on information sharing, coordinating support and maintaining clear communication with customers and partners throughout.

Internally, our lessons learned process following Storm Éowyn identified opportunities to strengthen customer contact arrangements during major incidents. While our proactive outbound support performed well, the review highlighted a need to **further expand inbound customer handling capability** to ensure sufficient standby capacity is available during periods of exceptionally high demand.

What we did

Recommendations arising from incidents, exercises and lessons learned reviews are managed through a structured governance framework spanning storm response, emergency planning, cyber security, physical security and business continuity. Oversight is provided through the **Incident Response Steering Group**, chaired by senior leadership and attended by Executive Leadership Team members and directors.

This year, that framework has supported the implementation of several improvements designed to strengthen resilience and improve customer outcomes.

Enhancing network visibility and automation

We continued to **expand the deployment of automation** and LineSIGHT monitoring technology across the network, extending coverage to an additional 23 circuits.

These technologies improve fault visibility and enable faster restoration by automatically identifying and responding to certain network faults before customers need to report them. To support understanding of these investments, we also developed customer-facing video content explaining how automation improves resilience and reduces interruption duration.

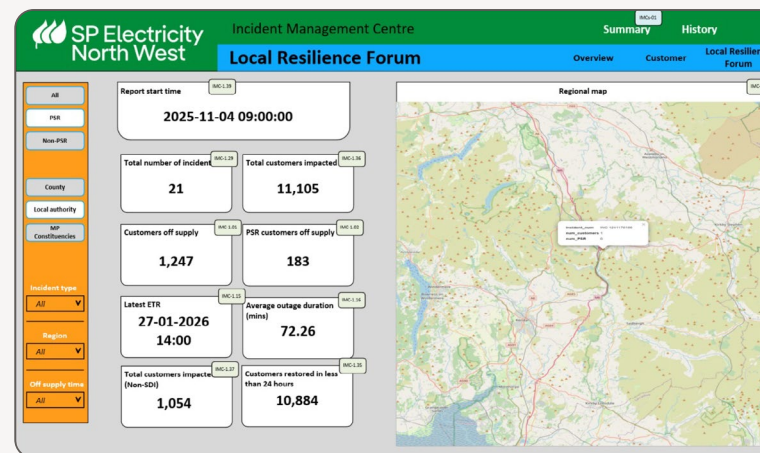


Figure 17: Our new incident management dashboard

Improving operational decision-making

We developed a **new centralised incident management dashboard** using Power BI technology, bringing together operational, customer and network information into a single near real-time view.

The dashboard refreshes every 30 minutes and is designed to support emergency response leaders with faster, more informed decision-making during incidents. User testing has now been completed, with full deployment planned ahead of the next winter season.



Enhancing mutual aid arrangements

We have strengthened coordination arrangements across ScottishPower licences, introducing greater alignment in incident response structures and central coordination through the Head Office Emergency Action Centre.



Sam Townend, Emergency Planning & Resilience Manager, said: *"We now have a more scalable and flexible response model, allowing resources such as field engineers, contact centre colleagues and welfare teams to be deployed more efficiently when required. The enhanced mutual aid process was successfully tested through pre-winter exercises and remains available should future incidents require additional support."*

Strengthening multi-agency partnerships

We continued active participation in LRFs, regional resilience groups, flood planning partnerships and severe weather forums, including the Greater Manchester Mayoral Round Table on Severe Weather.

We also **shared forecasting capabilities and best practice with partners**, including demonstrations of advanced forecasting tools such as Flood Foresight and DTN weather services. Workshops were delivered with local authorities to improve understanding of weather warnings and support coordinated response planning.

Expanding customer support capability

Recognising the importance of customer communication during incidents, we expanded standby customer support arrangements and increased training for colleagues supporting inbound contact and welfare activities. Further details of these improvements can be found in Section 5.3.

Customer impact

Network performance remains strong, with SP Electricity North West continuing to deliver the lowest power cut frequency in Great Britain outside London. This contributes to **industry-leading performance** under Ofgem's Interruptions Incentive Scheme (IIS) framework.

Resilience has been further enhanced through increased use of automation across both high voltage and low voltage networks, with **74% of customers being restored automatically within three minutes** during Storm Amy.

Customer support capability has also increased significantly. Standby resource available to support outbound calling, inbound calling and door knocking during incidents has **expanded from 360 to 750 colleagues**, strengthening our ability to deliver proactive customer contact, welfare checks and on-the-ground assistance during major events.

The enhanced mutual aid arrangements developed this year also strengthen resilience beyond our own licence area, improving the ability of network operators to **share resources** and support wider restoration efforts during significant events.

Case study

Challenge

The most significant event affecting our licence area during the year was Storm Amy. In October 2025, the storm brought wind gusts exceeding 70mph, heavy rainfall and flooding across the North West. Approximately 50,000 customers were impacted overall, with around 13,000 customers consecutively without power at the peak of the incident.

What we did

Throughout the event, we proactively communicated with customers, issuing:

41,861
SMS
messages

3,563
emails

7,780
ECR customer
contacts

Welfare support was provided where required, including alternative accommodation, food provision and targeted assistance for customers in vulnerable situations.

Despite the scale of the event, customer contact performance remained strong, with 3,740 enquiries handled and **average wait times maintained at approximately eight seconds**.

Network automation also played a significant role in reducing customer impact, restoring supplies automatically for thousands of customers and preventing prolonged interruptions wherever possible.



Impact

All customers were successfully restored within two days and the incident was formally closed on 5th October 2025.



7. Looking ahead to 2026/27

Thank you for reading our 2025/26 Annual Vulnerability Report.

As we reach the midpoint of ED2 delivery, this feels like an appropriate moment to reflect on how far we have come and where we need to go next.

Over the past three years, we have built the foundations of a comprehensive vulnerability support framework. We have expanded the reach of our Extra Care services, strengthened trusted partnerships, developed new approaches to energy affordability, resilience and inclusion, and embedded support for customers in vulnerable situations across our organisation.

However, this report highlights an important shift. Having achieved significant growth in many of our programmes, our focus is increasingly moving from expansion to refinement.

Looking ahead, we will focus on a number of priorities:

- Scaling proven approaches that have demonstrated strong outcomes for customers, communities and stakeholders.
- Using data more intelligently to identify emerging needs, improve targeting and support customers who may otherwise be overlooked.
- Strengthening resilience through preparedness, trusted local relationships and community-based support models.
- Continuing to evolve our understanding of vulnerability, recognising that customers' circumstances change and support must remain flexible, inclusive and personalised.
- Building stronger links between affordability, resilience and the energy transition, ensuring customers can benefit from a changing energy system.
- Working closely with the wider ScottishPower group and partners across the wider sector to share learning, adopt best practice and develop a coherent vision for ED3.

Above all, we will continue listening. Many of the strongest developments described in this report originated from stakeholder challenge, customer insight and operational learning. That will remain true as we prepare for the next price control period.

The future energy system will place even greater importance on electricity in people's everyday lives. Our ambition is simple: to ensure customers and communities are ready for that future.

Thank you to our customers, colleagues, partners and stakeholders for your continued support, challenge and collaboration.



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