



Together we have the energy
to transform our communities

Paul Bircham, our Safety, Compliance and Markets Director,
discussing the uptake of low carbon technologies,
with a stakeholder at our Greater Manchester
workshop on 19 September 2022.

Our Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability Strategies

1 Part One
Ofgem Stakeholder Engagement
and Consumer Vulnerability Incentive
2022/23

electricity
north west
Bringing energy to your door



As a distribution network operator (DNO) focused solely on the North West, we take pride in delivering power and extra care to 2.4 million properties and over 5 million customers.

Our Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability (SECV) submission summarises how stakeholder engagement, as a central part of our strategies, has had a demonstrable effect on our decision-making and in delivering the life-enhancing outcomes experienced by customers.

A robust strategy has seen a step-change this year in our approach to stakeholder engagement. We present a summary of our far-reaching and meaningful progress in 2022/23 in three parts and this document (**Part One**) outlines our strategic approach to engaging with stakeholders and supporting those in vulnerable circumstances.

Part One is structured to demonstrate how the components of our strategies and tactical levers interlink to deliver measurable outcomes.



2022/23 engagement highlights:



Fuel poor communities

Featured in Part Three, page nine. Dame Clare Moriarty, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice, launching a new mobile advice centre, as part of our **strategic partnership**.



Future generations

Featured in Part Two, page nine. One of the 21,000 girl guides impacted by our highly successful **engagement programme** rolled-out across Great Britain.



Businesses

Featured in Part Two, page eight. Jonny Sadler, our Strategic Decarbonisation Manager, leading a panel session at one of our new **net zero for business** events.

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Case study key:

Responding to stakeholder feedback and to ensure our reports are as accessible as possible, we have improved their readability. We have increased the font size, while making changes to suit varying accessibility requirements including, an easy read version, the use of screen readers, and QR codes to access subtitled videos. The following symbols found throughout our report highlight features of our 2022/23 activities:



New

Initiatives which were introduced this year



Innovative

Novel or leading practice, based on benchmarking, for industry replication



Hard-to-reach

Initiatives which best serve the specific interests of under-represented stakeholders



Scaled-up

Embedded initiatives that are now reaching significantly more consumers than last year



Collaborative

Outcomes positively influenced or co-facilitated by sharing of best practice and resources.

Introduction from our Chief Executive Officer

This year I joined an engaged, agile, innovative and efficient business, which is now on an accelerated trajectory of good-to-great performance, with strong outcomes for customers.

Following my appointment, I worked with senior leaders to refocus our business priorities and refine our strategy. The constructive feedback received from the SECV Panel last year sharpened our focus.

The importance of engagement to our strategy has been a constant as the world we live in, and our organisation, has changed. It has enabled many of our initiatives to come to fruition and been a catalyst for taking our culture of high performance to the next level.

In my first year, focusing the business on our license to operate has been my priority. In working beyond our regulatory obligations, we use the license we receive from our colleagues, customers and stakeholders, to give legitimacy to our work. Reinvigorating our safety culture for our colleagues and public citizens, applying learning from Storm Arwen to prepare our communities for winter and giving cost-of-living crisis support to our customers and stakeholders were our top three priorities.

Everyone has been affected by energy costs in the last 12 months, even if not equally. Our flagship 'Be Safe and Save' campaign recognises our social responsibility to provide extra care to a wider range of customers and is an example of how our focus on safety has positively supported customers. In parallel we have delivered in-depth and tailored support to those in greatest need through our partners. We have made material improvements to the way we work after learning some important lessons from customers in the aftermath of one of the worst storms in a generation, Storm Arwen. In research among (predominantly rural) communities directly impacted by the incident, customers told us that they needed more help to be better prepared for similar future events. Alongside our community resilience fund, targeted at rural communities, we now use our entire workforce – including 'back-office' teams – to help all our customers plan for and cope during incidents. We maximised the enhanced agility of our people to respond ahead of potential rota load disconnections during winter. We quickly contacted all our Priority Services customers and were the only DNO to make personal calls to 23,000 of the most vulnerable ahead of winter.

The challenging economic climate has not diminished our customers' climate change concerns. We have dispelled powerful narratives in the media that pit tackling climate change against tackling the cost-of living crisis. Through tailored advice, our Net Zero Business

Support Team have inspired businesses to **start their net zero journeys sooner or accelerate their net zero strategies.**

This year UKPN's openness to coordinating engagement that goes beyond the interests of their own customers led the creation of an industry framework and was a catalyst for collaboration and DNOs identifying priorities for joint action. Our shared ethos and work together since has inspired wider momentum towards fast-follow opportunities and collaborative initiatives. Our partnership with SSEN has also been especially productive in sharing best practice, with initiatives being replicated and rolled-out faster, of which 'PSR UK' and our Girl Guides 'People Power' programme are stand-out successes.

We are proud to have led industry collaboration and alignment to a clear and consistent fuel poverty measurement and reporting approach. Following engagement, Ofgem has advocated the ongoing adoption of the framework, so that it is embedded as part of annual vulnerability reporting during the next five-years. This will ensure services are robustly measured, consistently reported and reliably benchmarked, to deliver optimal value for customers nationally.



Ian Smyth, Chief Executive Officer

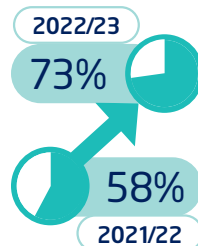


Scan the QR code to access Ian's video message

Just a few of the 2022/23 engagement outcomes we are very proud of:

Giant leap forward in Priority Services Register reach

Led by customer insight we changed the way we talk about 'priority services'; ran a successful recruitment campaign and collaborated with other utilities to promote 'PSR UK' which contributes towards ending the national 'postcode lottery'.

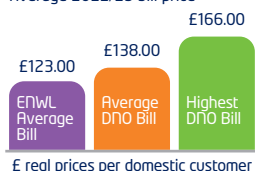


Safety is not an accident

This year we followed the three C's: **concentrate, commit and comply** to minimise distraction, reduce injury and remain vigilant when working in our communities. Promoting heating and fire safety with our partners enabled customers to keep safe, warm and well.



Average 2022/23 bill price



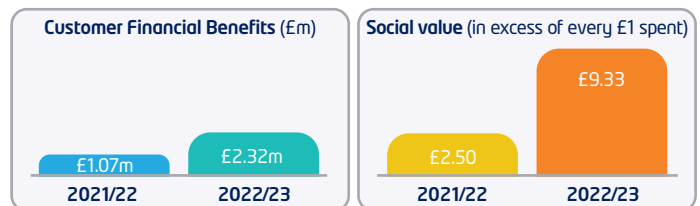
Saving our customers money by being a low-cost operator

Our focus on cost efficiency has kept our average annual domestic customer bill at £123, compared to the GB average of £138.



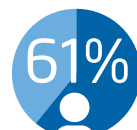
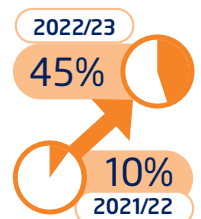
Step-change in financial benefits for fuel poor

Collaborating with our trusted partners, we scaled-up in-depth financial support to 12,362 fuel poor households, delivering an average saving of £187 per person – up from £106 last year.



Storm Arwen lessons drive enhanced asset monitoring

We widened our rollout of sensors to rural areas and strategic telecoms sites to monitor power quality, identify faults and improve our response during storms.



of SMEs likely to reduce emissions in the next 12 months following our advice



Supporting SMEs on their net zero journey

We joined forces with our partners to provide tailored advice and support for SMEs to help them on their journey to net zero.

Our stakeholder engagement strategy

Our engagement strategy creates an inclusive approach to engaging with purpose on our stakeholders' priorities, adapts to the changing environment we operate in and delivers impactful and clearly measurable outcomes.

2

Why we engage with stakeholders

Our strategy works to deliver the outcomes our stakeholders prioritise and value. It has evolved since 2016, driven each year by our desire to constantly improve.

Why?

- Identify opportunities to improve services
- Manage uncertainty and risk
- Share learning and influence
- Deliver greater value to our customers

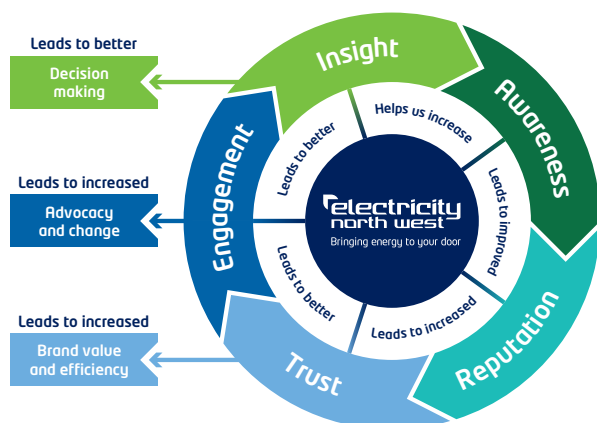
Our strategy is aligned to the [AA1000 SES Stakeholder Engagement Standard](#), a best practice framework, and the AA1000 AccountAbility Principles (AA1000AP, 2018) of Inclusivity, Materiality, Responsiveness and Impact. Our engagement approach is rooted in these principles and is independently assured on an annual basis through AccountAbility's Stakeholder Engagement Healthcheck. **Our Healthcheck performance level has increased 6% since 2021/22**, achieving 'accomplished' status.

Engagement is a catalyst to change

Building trust and collaborating are critical to delivering the outcomes our stakeholders value.

This year we **integrated our approach to corporate communications more closely with our engagement strategy**. Recognising that the first step towards change is awareness, we scaled-up signposting activities.

We are true advocates for our stakeholders and measure their trust in us through ongoing reputation tracking. Insight from engagement drives informed decision-making, to ensure we best serve our communities.



A colleague in an operational role said: "Insight, our new bulletin, allowed me to focus on those areas of feedback where my team and I can have maximum impact to better serve our communities."

We never stop learning

Engagement continually evolves, and our strategy, approach and tactics must embrace change so that we can move forward with agility.

We have learned that some aspects of stakeholder engagement are difficult to do well such as involving hard-to-reach audiences; maximising accessibility (ease of entry) and inclusivity (equal opportunity to fully participate) and engaging other networks who wish to collaborate at a different pace. These need continued effort across the business, especially as best practices evolve. Our strategy in 2022/23 responded to this learning by focusing on two key areas:

- Increasing inclusivity of engagement**
Insights are only 'representative' if they overcome barriers to engagement such as accessibility and account for diversity (the presence of hard-to-reach voices such as SMEs) and inclusion (all perspectives are valued). This gives us confidence that any resulting outcomes apply to the wider community.
- Being uncompromising in ensuring engagement influences action**
Stakeholders must see a clear link between their feedback and company decision-making. Our Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey shows that a 'golden thread' builds enduring trust and advocacy, and the relationships necessary to deliver better results.

Applying our learning

Our annual stakeholder satisfaction survey (SSAT) is a feedback tool embedded into our annual improvement plans. The key metric is how satisfied stakeholders are with their relationship with us. We [share the results with stakeholders](#), and ask for their views to inform the development and implementation of our action plans.

Changes to engagement format based on feedback

Since 2020, our SSAT has evidenced increasing digital fatigue. This has coincided with a greater **appetite for face-to-face engagement**, or at least a hybrid to give stakeholders the choice. We updated our strategy this year, making all three formats available (depending on the need) and concluded that:

- Online formats** allow for more frequent engagement, but require accessibility support, tools to increase interaction and shorter meetings to combat reduced attention spans.
- Face-to-face meetings** enable networking opportunities, increase collaboration and the quality of input, but increase stakeholders' carbon footprint and time commitment.
- Hybrid meetings** offer greater flexibility, but without careful mitigation can create an inequality in experience and, if advertised, significantly reduces in-person attendance.

Preferred method	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Virtual	75%	70%	65%
Face-to-face	41%	48%	56%
Hybrid	N/A	N/A	60%

We flexed our approach this year to ensure the right blend of stakeholder voices were represented. So, while the CEO Panel met in person, the Consumer Vulnerability and Sustainability Panels met virtually to leverage eco and time benefits, with members of both being able to meet in person at our sub-regional workshop events. Across our panels this increased average participation by 30%. **89% of stakeholders responding to our 2022 SSAT agreed that our engagement approach was accessible**, a 10% year-on-year increase.

A new framework for inclusivity

This year our stakeholders supported the idea of a **standardised framework for assessing issues which could impede engagement**. This framework has enabled us to deliver a range of mitigation strategies. Our advisory panels recognised that what might be an enabler for one cohort can be a barrier to another. Together we mapped out a range of engagement barriers and successfully applied a range of solutions, some of which are summarised below.

Barrier	Improvements we have made this year
 Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing onboarding and technical support for all our platforms with new toolkits, drop-in sessions, video tutorials and comprehensive frequently asked question pages
 Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A new induction process for panel members and 'spotlight sessions' where stakeholders share knowledge so everyone can contribute from the same starting point (see page five) - Simplifying things as much as they need to be but no simpler, as assuming no knowledge is frustrating for those who have some
 Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Targeting support to enable stakeholders to contribute in a way that they feel most comfortable, such as senior leaders facilitating 40 1-1s before and after panel meetings
 Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A new sustainable and accessible events policy which guides the selection of venues that meet a range of criteria including safety, power, waste management, travelling, catering and accessibility - Subsidising travel for customers where cost is a barrier
 Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expanding engagement via trusted partners in the spaces that groups already move in, rather than inviting them into ones we create. See our mobile advice unit (MAC) case study in Part Three, page nine.

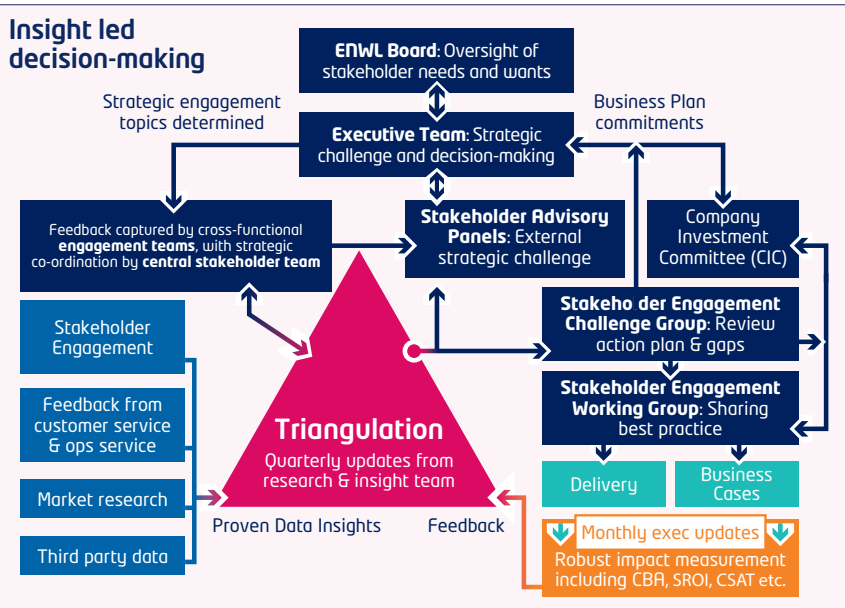
Our new 'inclusive by design' planning tool is available across the business to help our decision-makers take actions that are inclusive of all needs. As a result of our work to improve inclusivity **87% of stakeholders responding to our 2022 SSAT agreed that our engagement approach was inclusive**, a 13% year-on-year increase.

Senior management buy-in is reflected in decision-making arrangements

Over the course of the SECV incentive, we have developed 23 inclusive mechanisms to reach the 53 stakeholder groups we serve, ranging from community meetings, focus groups and surveys to expert stakeholder panels, and we continue to evolve our approach. This year we engaged 19,962 stakeholders (excluding market research) through these mechanisms. We are proud to have embedded engagement as an ongoing discipline. Like our approach to risk, it is not the responsibility of a single team, but is coordinated centrally and has senior management buy-in.

The clear message from 87 attendees attending our three stakeholder workshops this year was that the scale of the need for cost-of-living support meant we needed to pool resources with each-other to avoid individual efforts being a "hopeless endeavour". Discussion centred on breaking down organisational silos. Partners looked to us to work with them on awareness-raising campaigns combining our access to 5 million people, with their access to hard-to-reach groups.

This feedback, combined with the risks and opportunities on page six, informed our 2022/23 plans. **A holistic governance review from our new CEO strengthened our decision-making arrangements.** A clear link can be traced between these arrangements and the initiatives we delivered that exceed our statutory obligations. These include cost-of-living support, ensuring our communities are aware and prepared for potential rota load disconnections and a free service to help North West businesses reduce their energy bills. Insights are meticulously triangulated from a range of data sources, as illustrated below.



Triangulation, a way of interpreting and prioritising feedback, is carried out regularly and objectively and is sorted, assessed and then shared. Outputs are reviewed by our executive team every quarter and our board annually, and emerging tactical insights are shared with:

► Our Stakeholder Engagement Challenge Group (SECG)

SECG membership spans senior leaders across every department. Its terms of reference evolved this year to become **the essential forum for reviewing emerging insights**, identifying gaps and advising our executive team on actions to address stakeholder priorities.

► Externally with our stakeholders

With SECG guidance, senior leaders aligned 2022/23 engagement topics to strategic insights and created a dedicated space for a knowledge exchange at our regional workshops.

► Our wider colleagues

In a knowledge sharing survey 89% of our leadership team told us that **key insights should be made available to all colleagues, not just decision-makers**. We heard that it is easy to say "put ourselves in our customers' shoes" but until this is seen and felt, it is difficult for everyone to really understand what is going on. **In response we launched 'Insight', a quarterly company-wide bulletin** where insights are shared alongside a clear call to action.

Strategy in action: supporting SMEs on their net zero journey

We are open to new opportunities to go above and beyond business-as-usual standards identified through proactive engagement, where there is a genuine stakeholder need and we do not duplicate effort. We consider if we are best placed, if we can deliver efficiently and which partners we need.

► Strategic context

The UK Government has banned the sale of new diesel and petrol cars and vans from 2030. Yet, in June 2021 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that 46% of businesses were not reducing their emissions, and only 4% were electrifying their fleet. The key question we had, triggered by discussions with Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, **is what support do businesses need, and from whom, to enact net zero plans?**

► Early feedback action

In 2022, stakeholders attending our three sub-regional events validated ONS data via polling questions which indicated businesses are still planning rather than delivering decarbonisation plans. Businesses told us they recognise the importance of working towards local environment targets, but 'net zero' was unfamiliar language to them. 'Where to start and who to trust?' were common questions.

The ask was for us to expand our programme of events region-wide and look for opportunities to speak at partner events. They asked us to explain **the options and technologies involved, dispel myths, signpost to local installers and financial grants, and provide advice** about connections and how to reduce energy bills.

Before today, how much, if anything, did you know about net zero?



A lot or fair amount



A little



Hardly anything/hadn't heard

► Why we engaged further

Early engagement demonstrated businesses need extra support to decarbonise. Our work to date had confirmed a partnership-based approach was the correct one as it avoids duplication, fills gaps that cannot be filled by others and maximises the impact of our activities. We planned further engagement to **understand barriers, the help required, clarify what businesses need from us, suitable partners, resources and our target audience.**

► Who we engaged

Our Net Zero Business and Stakeholder Engagement teams updated our stakeholder mapping for this project. **Through analysis of our stakeholders' level of involvement, interest and goals they identified SMEs, landowners, fleet managers and local authorities as important groups to engage** and link to local charge point installers, fleet consultants, and vehicle dealerships.

A review of Tractivity, an information management system that was adopted after sharing best practice with SP Energy Networks, identified gaps in our stakeholder contacts. Our Sustainability Panel and a consortium of academic partners (Universities of Central Lancashire, Cumbria and Manchester, and the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change at the University of Manchester) helped to fill key gaps.

► How we engaged

No single mechanism will work for everyone, so **we provide a range of access points into our engagement programme that minimise barriers to inclusion.**

We leveraged an Experian dataset of 9,800 North West businesses of various sizes and sectors and **recruited 494** to take part in our research. We triangulated the perspectives of survey participants with targeted in-depth interviews with 38 EV charging infrastructure leaders and property landlords. Response rates were boosted via joint promotion on social media and newsletters shared by stakeholder partners, Cumbria County Council, East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce and Greater Manchester Bee Net Zero. Alongside survey work we expanded our programme of in-person events, delivered with, and tailored to, the needs of local stakeholders. 332 people attended three key events:

14
July
2022

The Electric Vehicles Experience, Manchester

Hosted by Electricity North West, with feedback used to inform subsequent events.



27
October
2022

Electric vehicles, renewables and energy efficiency, Lancashire

Delivered jointly with University of Sheffield, Chamber Low Carbon, East Lancashire, North and West Lancashire Chambers, Lancashire County Council



14
March
2023

'Leading the charge' on electric vehicles, Cumbria

Delivered jointly with Cumbria and Electric Vehicle Charging Partnership



► What we learned

Research insights quantified the need, scope and target market for the service as well as what that would ideally look like (see Part Two, page eight for more details)

► Impact measurement

In response to feedback from AccountAbility last year we **expanded the range of metrics we typically use to track the impact of engagement** (distinct from impact of outcomes). For this initiative we calculated stakeholder reach, the quality of information provided and future stakeholder intentions.



92%

were likely to attend a future Electricity North West event.



70%

attendees had improved understanding of energy and carbon-saving options.



61%

attendees were likely to reduce emissions in the next year because of the event.

Reached

1,341

businesses at 43 north west events.



Our consumer vulnerability strategy

Vulnerability is broad, transient and situational. The COVID-19 pandemic followed by the cost-of-living crisis has highlighted that, when it comes down to it, we can all feel vulnerable at any time. Our strategy is based on stakeholder-led 'pillars' driving our activities, with clear success measures and a targeted approach to reaching those in greatest need.

5

Our strategic goal



Our strategic goal is to provide an inclusive and fair service for all users of electricity, recognising the need to maximise the reach of our services through collaborative, innovative working practices with a community of trusted partners across our region.

Understanding vulnerability is important, and a key building block underpinning our goal. The strategy and pillars were created in 2021, in partnership with our Consumer Vulnerability Panel.

Build and maintain a resilient network

1

Use data to understand vulnerability challenges

2

Continuously improve customer contact data

3

Deliver tailored support to our Priority Services customers

4

Work with partners to tackle fuel poverty

5

Guiding principles
Inclusion by design using data, innovation and collaboration

This year the strategic arm of the panel helped us develop guiding principles for how we will deliver inclusive change up to 2028.

Following engagement we applied our guiding principles to our inclusive and vulnerability impact assessment (IVIA) tool to encourage inclusive thinking and create services and experiences that are accessible for all (see page eight for more detail).

This year 4,995 of our customers took part in continuous research which tracks feedback following service interruptions. From this we heard that vulnerable circumstances are intensified by a loss of power and exacerbated by resulting loss of communication.

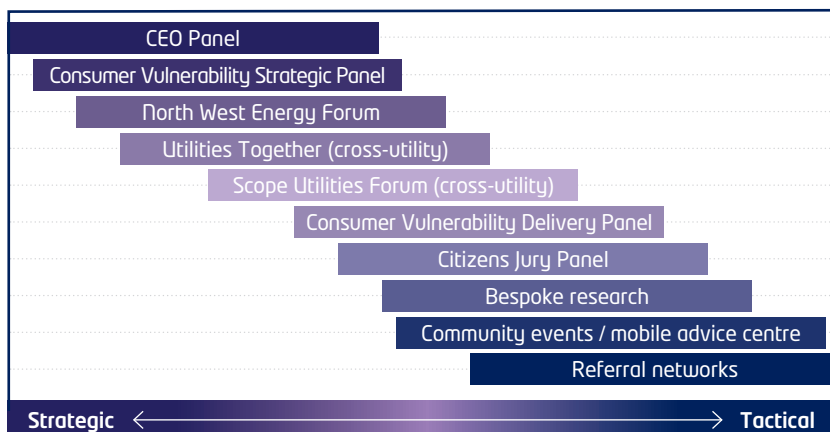
We have forged ahead deploying innovative sensing and monitoring technologies at scale (see Part Two, page four), in areas of greater customer vulnerability, to drive industry leading network reliability. In doing so we prevent interruptions occurring, while continuously engaging to improve the range, quality and accessibility of support services when they do.

We have an important role to play to ensure all customers can participate in the rapidly changing energy system. We also have a social and moral responsibility to use the daily interactions we have with customers to spot the signs of vulnerability and signpost them to trusted partners who can support.

How we facilitate meaningful strategic and tactical input from our stakeholders



Our senior decision-makers interact directly with our stakeholders and attended every Advisory Panel this year. This is one example of their sustained involvement in strategic engagement.



Engagement informed our executive team's heightened focus on safety and customer service, **improving our operational and customers' winter preparedness and extending the reach of extra care and support available to vulnerable customers** during the cost-of-living crisis. During 2022, board member Anne Baldock worked alongside our senior managers as a vulnerability champion to ensure the adoption of our strategies to maximise the impact of our work during the worsening crisis. Throughout the year the strategic and delivery sub-groups of our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel met seven times and through 13 hours of engagement their committed stakeholder members helped us turn strategy into action. Two examples of this are provided below.

Jenny Willis, Independent Chair of the Consumer Vulnerability Panel since 2019, said:

"This year strategic partners stepped up support for existing clients, while reaching the upper limit of their capacity to include people who have not needed it before.

Electricity North West stayed close to stakeholders, including running a 'state of the sector' survey to identify changing needs. Stability was found in **longer-term funding agreements** being offered. A new **'partner spotlight' exchange** at meetings has supported deeper understanding of each other's work and greater collaboration.

The panel were instrumental in supporting the rollout of 'Switched on to vulnerability' training to 100% of colleagues, not just those with customer-facing roles. This has also benefited the **rollout of the inclusive and vulnerability impact assessment for new projects**, which partners have supported with specialist experience and advice."



Graham Vernon, Chief Officer, Burnley Boys and Girls Club (BBGC) and panel member, said:

"When I first joined the panel I honestly felt like I was treading water. "I just look after kids", I thought. But, by **briefing me, stripping away the industry jargon and making the product - energy - simple** for me to engage with, I've felt empowered to rouse community interest in energy. My work with 7,800 young people aged 5-25, inspired, and latterly created a glide path for the successful Girl Guides 'People Power' scheme to morph into the most inclusive of its kind, suitable for any youth group!

This has been the year for solving as many problems as we can by working together. Following a panel discussion, we met a resource shortfall at Age Concern. With training, BBGC prevented the withdrawal of a key service which helps eligible customers fill in forms to access financial grants. We've supported 200 people so far, and anything we can't do, we refer into the wider Electricity North West referral network."



Strategy in action: responding to an unprecedented energy price crisis



► Strategic context

This year Britain faced its biggest cost-of-living crisis in decades. In October, the ONS reported that 91% of households were experiencing a higher cost of living compared to a year ago. Local partners told us that more people were experiencing hardship for the first time and more people were falling deeper into hardship. **As a socially-minded company we made it our mission to minimise the hardship felt by our customers and scale up our support.**

► What we heard

Delivery partners responding to our survey reported demand for support had increased on average by 150%, but that their funding streams had not increased proportionally. As a low-cost operator, our ability to subsidise funding gaps through bill-payers' money is limited. However, we were able to release **£560,000 of shareholder funding**. To maximise customer value the strategic arm of our Consumer Vulnerability Panel agreed that our efforts would be best spent 'working smarter' with them to:

- 1 Communicate key support already available including cost of living, Priority Services Register (PSR) and winter preparedness
- 2 Target in-depth support, using stakeholder intel and a segmented approach.

Our aim was to make a difference to peoples' lives by making them aware of the help available, inspiring users to take responsibility for energy behaviour change (where possible) and proactively working to mitigate the impact of a looming debt crisis. The latter only serves to increase the energy supply sector's debt book, which must be collected off all bill payers if not paid.

► Who we targeted for tailored support

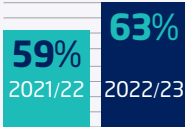
The Citizens Advice [cost-of-living dashboard](#) highlighted households who were driving increased demand for support. This included those on low incomes, with long-term health conditions, living with disabilities, living in rural areas or of pensionable age. This learning strengthened our view that these customers are underrepresented.

In consultation with our advisory panel we also reviewed our mapping of **hard-to-reach groups**, defined as: under-represented people who use or might use services and who are less likely to be heard by decision-makers. In response we **prioritised and tailored our engagement plans** to ensure we reached pre-payment meter customers and those with a medical dependency on electricity.

► How we responded

We held a cost-of-living knowledge sharing session and reflecting on intel from Scope, Citizens Advice Manchester, The Bread and Butter Thing and our Utilities Together consortium we developed a **support matrix tailored to customer personas** and used this to target partner-led support. **The matrix is the culmination of years of development of our fuel poverty programme.** We have worked with stakeholders to set up a structured framework of support that will meet a range of diverse customer needs to leave no-one behind in a time of hardship.

Vulnerable customer support 2022/23

Support matrix	North West	Just about managing	In fuel poverty	In crisis
Reach achieved	2.4m	4,913	12,362	3,708
Method	Mass media awareness campaign	Mid-depth tailored advice	In-depth ongoing tailored advice	Access to immediate support
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signpost help available Keeping safe, warm and healthy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce risk of negative budget Improve wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent disconnection Improve wellbeing 	Meet basic physical and safety needs
Priority needs (in addition to PSR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy efficiency advice Cost-of-living advice Winter preparedness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-depth energy efficiency advice Income maximisation Debt prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income maximisation Full debt advice (pre-requisite to most grants) Financial grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency food, energy vouchers and charitable support Listening ear service
Success measures	17,275 partner referrals Electricity North West Brand Awareness  10,367 PSR discussions	✓ £2.32m direct financial savings, representing an average of £187 per customer supported		
		✓ £0.52m of societal health benefits derived from financial support and £0.01m of carbon benefits from energy efficiency action		
		✓ A total net economic benefit (SR0I) of £2.56m, creating £9.33 social value in excess of every £1 spent		
		✓ 3,011 PSR registrations via fuel poverty partners		
Low cost operator	£0.10 cost to serve, per customer supported via awareness campaigns	£21.39 cost to serve, per customer reached with in-depth support services		

► How we reached target groups

We set up seven new partnerships with organisations trusted by target groups and ensured we engaged in the spaces they already 'move-in', rather than relying on them to take part in our engagement channels. This included the Royal Association for Deaf People signing the benefits of the PSR (see Part Three, page eight) using British Sign Language. We have now shared our BSL videos with other DNOs to use themselves.

Our **winter campaign was widened from the standard power cut resilience messaging to cost-of-living signposting**. We used our own channels (website, social media, leaflet, letter, new Alexa push notifications, QR codes, colleagues and contractors) and stakeholders' (radio, podcasts, blogs, newsletters, posters and events) to cast the net wide. Our new and accessible [campaign webpage](#) had more than 109,000 views and over 89,000 unique users. Our stakeholders, including GMCA and local NHS trusts, signposted the information to customers as a valuable resource (see page nine).

► An outcome we are proud of

We have built our capability and that of our stakeholders to deliver interventions that have a long-term sustainable impact, thereby delivering value for money.

Impact of advice on wellbeing (survey feedback)



Acting on stakeholder feedback

Understanding our customers' views is key to making decisions about the services we provide. We listen to customers and translate their feedback into action plans. Funding initiatives enables us to make the most of opportunities for improvement and to manage risks.

The world we live in has changed - and so have our customers' energy behaviours



Drivers of change

Energy bills twice as high as usual during a winter peak

Highest level of inflation in 45 years

Cost of living crisis, as living standards fall

Economic impacts compounded by political instability

Climate crisis activating interest in energy efficiency and renewables

The challenges customers have faced this year have changed their relationship with energy use. Our ongoing stakeholder engagement has consistently highlighted a shift in consumer behaviour. These trends have presented us with both **opportunities** and **risk**:

► Opportunities

We have responded to greater interest in energy management expressed in our customer voice surveys, regional stakeholder events, SME net zero engagement, and network connections data.

What we observed: More active involvement in energy efficiency and using energy flexibly to reduce energy costs, and a shift in the take-up of electric vehicles. Our discussions with 23 MPs markedly shifted from long-term investment to protecting vulnerable customers. Following bilateral engagement MPs such as Angela Rayner [advocated our efforts to their constituents](#).

Examples:

- As energy bills increased by 54% in April 2022, 73% of 1,000 north west customers surveyed said they intended to reduce their usage
- In December 2022, New AutoMotive's data tool reported 34% of all new car registrations nationally were fully electric
- On 23 January 2023, for the first-time, National Grid ESO incentivised households to reduce their energy use between 5-6pm.

Our response:

- Expanded energy efficiency awareness campaign, reaching 2.4m households in total, of which 12,362 households received tailored support via our fuel poverty partners, and 616 businesses received in-depth support via our Net Zero Business Support Team. This made it easier for customers to adopt energy efficiency measures and low carbon technologies, delivering £3.1m of direct financial benefits and a gross social benefit of £3.7m, or £5.28 value in excess of every £1 spent over 12 months and £23.61 over five years.

► Risks

We observed greater safety risks via our operational data and insights from Citizens Advice cost-of-living dashboard, safety records from Energy Networks Association and emergency services and our stakeholders.

What we observed: Frontline colleagues reported signs of vulnerability aligned with concerns raised by our Consumer Vulnerability Panel, including Lancashire Fire and Rescue and South Lakes Housing Association, about households using unsafe heating sources such as BBQs in their home, posing a risk of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning. Our triangulation showed a range of alarming trends.

Examples:

- | 1. Customers who can't pay... | 2. Customers who won't pay... | 3. Customers at risk from... |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-disconnections Switched to prepay meters by suppliers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protests Meter tampering Falsifying meter readings Copper theft | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsafe heating sources Reduced wellbeing Debt Scams |

Our response:

Piloted, refined and scaled-up our Utilities Together campaign, 'Be Safe and Save' – to reach 60,000 customers, representing a 100% increase in reach within the same year. This has reduced the risk of physical and emotional harm to households who are trying to save money, delivering a gross social benefit of £0.1m, or £2.98 value in excess of every £1 spent over 12 months and £5.28 over five years (See Part Two, page three).

Behaviour change

Behaviour change

Through our strategic insight, we have planned beyond winter 2022/23, to winter 2023/24 when the £400 Government Energy Bills Support Scheme will end. Our plans place greater focus on working with partners to facilitate energy debt advice and money management (See Part Three).

A sharpened focus on stakeholder priorities



This year our stakeholders said efforts to 'ensure the affordability of energy bills' is 'reductive', so we changed our focus to 'operating at lowest cost'. To embody the stewardship that our CEO Panel expect from us, colleagues took part in over 30,000 hours of safety training and followed the three Cs: concentrate, commit and comply to minimise distraction, reduce injury and remain vigilant when working in our communities. 92% of colleagues feeling the company 'puts safety first and foremost' – a 9% increase on November 2021. We recognise that there are many organisations giving cost-of-living support, but

stakeholders stressed the importance of using our unique position as a trusted network operator, encountering customers daily, to ensure they are aware of the help available.

Our 2022/23 stakeholder priorities

Keeping our customers' lives running safely (Part Two)

- Making every contact count to signpost cost-of-living crisis support
- Maximising preparedness for potential power cuts

Leading the North West to net zero (Part Two)

- Investing and innovating to build a network fit for the future
- Engaging, inspiring and supporting behaviour change
- Leading by example

Extra care for vulnerable electricity users (Part Three)

2022/23 customer contact

380,000 Customer calls received **222,060** Calls made to customers

2.4m Leaflets distributed **1,200** Colleagues working in communities

How our culture of engagement is driving tangible change

8

Engagement culture is the linchpin of our success. The characteristics of our culture are: ownership of engagement among our 50 strategic topic owners; alignment to strong governance; a focus on doing the right thing for our customers, even when it is hard; acting on stakeholder feedback and continuous improvement.

Doing the right thing for our customers, even when it is hard



In October 2022 National Grid ESO announced the possibility of emergency power cuts in its winter outlook. While not an unusual occurrence, what made this unique was the media reaction. Heightened press interest in energy prompted fear-inducing headlines of 'rolling blackouts.' Our CEO Panel were concerned that customers may not fully understand the potential impacts and therefore would not be able to adequately prepare. **Our standpoint was that no-one should be left surprised.**

While this would be a national event we take full ownership of our relationships with our North West customers and stakeholders. **We worked with the Energy Networks Association and wider industry to co-ordinate consistent messaging.** However, stakeholders at local resilience forums and local authority meetings believed the risk to our customers was not sufficiently reduced by sending a mass mailing to customers, as a number of other DNOs had confirmed they planned to do.

This year **a holistic governance review from our new CEO** strengthened the role of our Stakeholder Engagement Challenge Group (SECG). The SECG debated what was right for our customers and our executive team accepted its recommendation to prioritise our resources to:

- 1 Contact 884,298 customers on our Extra Care Register during December to reduce anxiety around the risk of rota load disconnections, and share the messages from our cost-of-living and winter readiness campaigns
- 2 Send 612,186 emails, 101,555 letters, 544 texts and make 23,013 personal calls to our most vulnerable customers, over a two-week period before 21 December.

A formal training programme underpinned our ethos to respond quickly and use all our people to help. For the second consecutive year we trained all colleagues and many of our contractors to spot the signs of vulnerability. To achieve this volume of personal calls in such a short space of time, we gave **specialist call handling training to 200 more colleagues, meaning there are now over 500 people (a quarter of our organisation, and half of our non-operational colleagues) able to make calls during an event.** Colleagues achieving a top-10 position for the volume of calls made were rewarded for their adaptability and the pride with which they served customers.

► Outcomes

In Part Two, page five, we present a range of KPIs linked to our winter preparedness campaign that demonstrate positive outcomes for our customers. These include 71% of customers taking at least one action following our contact, to prepare for potential disruption.

A customer receiving a proactive call said:

"It's very considerate of you to call my dear, but I must tell you I'm 93 and have been through the blitz, I've seen it all! Please pass on my thanks to your company; it's wonderful that you are calling round to warn people, to reassure them. I'll be fine, but I realise some people might need more help. Well done you."



Engagement culture further integrated into operational management



To embed an inclusion by design culture this year we **applied our inclusivity and vulnerability impact assessment (IVIA) to understand the potential impacts of operational activities** on different groups of customers. The IVIA helps with the design of new services, processes, policies or events. It supports fairness, helps identify any barriers to participation and promotes inclusive thinking. An IVIA is mandatory for projects that cost more than £250K and/or impact more than 25 people.

Even with comprehensive training we recognise that colleagues need to be mindful that their lived experience and perspective may not allow them to fully consider how it may impact on different groups of people. **This year submitted IVIAs benefited from consultation with 88 colleagues from our resource groups** which champion under-represented groups including armed forces, menopause, LGBT+, disability, women in STEM and ethnicity. **Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel members such as Scope also provided their perspectives** as advocates for hard-to-reach groups.



Electric Ferry

An IVIA was completed for a proposed strategic network investment of £675k to support Cumbria County Council with the replacement of an ageing diesel ferry with a modern, electric alternative and supporting EV charging facilities. Associated risks and solutions included:

Risks identified	Solutions
Pedestrians and road users not being able to read diversion signs (disability and mobility impacts).	Accessible route signs. Open day at community centre to provide information and support.
Work causing accessibility issues to local amenities and impacting SME trade.	Scheme was redesigned rather than close a key through-road which minimised disruption to local businesses.
Tourists having no access to advanced information or communication.	Engaged with Cumbria Tourism, the council, MP Tim Farron and local media to raise awareness and avoid peak season.
Noise caused by engineering work and extra parking needed for operatives.	Engaged with local community to set reasonable start and finish times.

The mitigation taken satisfied criteria C in our framework:

- A. No barriers or impact identified – proceed with activity
 - B. Evidence shows negative bias towards one or more groups of people
 - C. Evidence shows negative bias towards one or more groups of people – adapt or change the development to eliminate the bias**
 - D. Barriers and impact are identified, however after considering all options carefully, there is no other way to achieve the aim of the project – proceed with caution
- Our IVIA tool and engagement culture is ensuring that all groups of people can fully benefit from our initiatives and that we do not unintentionally leave anyone behind.

Cumbria Tourism said:

"Work will be required to make the transformation possible, but we are delighted by the approach being taken by Electricity North West to engage with businesses and minimise disruption, outside of the main visitor season."

Cumbria Tourism

Our partnerships and collaboration approach

In this section we show how we are developing close working relationships with national, local, sector and non-energy stakeholders, and sharing best practice, resources and projects to avoid duplication and responding to challenges in an efficient and collaborative manner.

9

Why we collaborate with stakeholders

We do not exist in isolation and cannot achieve everything alone, so we embrace collaboration to progress as a whole and aim to deliver the following critical outcomes:






- Expand reach, including hard-to-reach customers
- Be more cost-efficient to stretch our funds further
- Enhance the value of support provided per customer
- Sustainable growth and development in the long-term

We consider three key aspects when establishing the type and level of collaboration required:

Consideration	1 Nature of problem	2 Nature of stakeholders	3 Nature of delivery
Drivers for collaborating rather than individual effort	Tackling new or complex problems	A common or consistent approach is important	Doing it once is more efficient or mitigates stakeholder fatigue

A driving force in DNO collaboration

Collaboration is in the interests of GB customers, enabling us to deliver the 'biggest bang for the customer buck' by transferring knowledge and ensuring that promising ideas are not missed. We are the most innovative DNO in ED1, in terms of Ofgem innovation rewards, but also adopt innovative ideas from across the industry. This year at an event organised by UKPN, DNOs identified 'fast-follow' opportunities to adopt each other's successful projects. Following this event we were at the forefront of DNO collaboration and invested over 100 hours of colleague time in planning, hosting, actively taking part and progressing engagement actions. Our effort has delivered a strong matrix of outputs which we have segmented below into three groups: sharing best practice, resources and projects:

DNOs sharing	Our role	Best practice led to:	Resources led to:	Projects led to:
	Sharing	Inclusive challenge pack, drawing from Scouts and Girl Guides learning	Collaboration agreement marking our shared ethos and commitment	Replication of our flexibility services customer revenue calculator
	Adopting	An update to our low carbon technology policy	Accepting our invite for a joint presence at the NEA '23 annual conference	A review of practices to enable energy suppliers to upgrade network fuses
	Sharing	SSEN stakeholders joining our energy efficiency webinar series	Collaboration agreement marking our shared ethos and commitment	Replication of our Girl Guides youth programme in two SSEN regions
	Adopting	Our charity stakeholders participating in SSEN's wellbeing webinar series	SSEN customer relationship model informs improved welfare care (outages)	Launch of ThePSR.co.uk and our network damage reporting tool
	Sharing / Adopting	Greater focus on NHS engagement to drive hospital leaver referrals.	Two-way participation across our stakeholder events, ensuring cost-of-living insights were shared across both regions	Replication of our Girl Guides youth programme, reaching 5,000 Guides
		Sharing regional insights on vulnerable customer initiatives		Our re-branding and launch of Voltzville safety education game
	Sharing	A pan-northern collaboration group between Utilities Together (North West) and Infrastructure North (North East)	Three mentoring sessions delivered on social value and management of fuel poverty partner measurement	Adoption of our 'Water and energy in the home' cross-utility initiative (Part Three, page ten)
	Sharing / Adopting	Sharing our learning from Storm Arwen and our Community Resilience Fund (Part two, page four)	We shared resources, having achieved BSI 18477 for providing an inclusive service	We adopted JAM card - allowing people with a hidden disability to request 'Just A Minute'

We are committed to collaboration but remain competitive in our pursuit of high performance and how we apply insights, using our agility to work at pace to deliver improved services. Having recognised a similar ethos to collaboration in UKPN and SSEN, we **signed bilateral agreements** with both to bring more formality to our work. The agreements have bespoke objectives and success measures and will deliver longer-term value to GB customers.

Our regional collaboration and partnerships are tailored to local needs

As we are not always best placed to deliver the support our customers need, we work with trusted organisations to fill gaps that support our strategic plans. Each year we review the breadth and depth of our partnerships and recruit new partners where we see gaps in our reach. For example, **Kidney Care UK, Scope and Royal Association for Deaf People served as trusted agents to provide targeted support and reduce gaps in PSR membership** among hard-to-reach groups.

Our collaboration at a local level involves supporting stakeholders with engagement they lead. This is an important application of our strategy to reach stakeholders in the spaces they already move in. This year we have been active members of 35 collaboration forums, attended 1,159 engagements and have been keynote speakers at 58 events.

Whole system collaboration in action

We consider the energy ecosystem in mutually supportive ways: the whole energy and heat system; the whole transport system; and the whole customer support system. We have continued to advance our whole system wide thinking this year and Parts Two and Three highlight activities including:

- Engaged **telecoms** stakeholders following Storm Arwen to map their assets against ours and safeguarded those that do not have overlapping coverage areas or battery backup
- Partnered with **NHS local commissioning leads** and used the Care Quality Commission database to register care homes to the PSR and provide winter preparedness advice
- Influenced a policy change in all **NHS acute trusts** in our region to signpost vulnerable patients being discharged from hospital to our Priority Services Register as part of their discharge toolkit.

Measuring the impact of our engagement

10

As a business that embraces wider social and environmental objectives and adopts a performance-based culture, we measure the impact of our investments to target our resources towards initiatives that deliver maximum value and scale for our customers. We make a full assessment of the societal impact of our initiatives and triangulate this with other inputs to inform and prioritise our plans.

- ✓ Compare investment scenarios
- ✓ Prioritise allocation of resources to material issues
- ✓ Measure and monitor impacts delivered
- ✓ Determine actions, re-visit goals, and plan next steps

How we measure the impact of our initiatives

Valuation is a requirement for all business cases submitted to our company investment committee (CIC). Our CIC considers discretionary investment decisions based on set criteria, including projected benefits, stakeholder priorities and risk management. The CIC ensures financial and non-financial benefits are consistently evaluated with clear measures and leading indicators:

Measure	Leading indicator	Tools
Volume	Stakeholder reach	Dashboards that calculate reach among eligible customer base
Value	Direct financial benefits to customers and monetised non-financial benefits	Industry social value (SROI) framework (≤10-year outlook) or CBA (≤45-years)
Efficiency	Cost to serve per customer impacted	Industry social value (SROI) framework (≤10-year outlook) or CBA (≤45-years)
Quality	Customer satisfaction with the service provided and stakeholders' satisfaction with their relationship with us	Ofgem broad measure of satisfaction, stakeholder satisfaction survey, independent post-event surveys, qualitative and quantitative data
Trust	Awareness of our brand and trust in the service and advice provided	Rolling reputation tracking surveys

Social return on investment (SROI) is one of several tools we use as part of our impact measurement. While this is a useful tool for demonstrating the social value of activities, there are limitations. For example, not all outcomes can be converted into benefits. In our experience, it is most successful in developing robust estimates for activities which meet the following criteria: **Clearly defined, tangible outcomes, benefits that have delivered easily identifiable 'change' and benefits that are distinct from each other.** We have applied SROI to initiatives in our submission that meet these criteria including vulnerable customer support, fuel poverty advice, customer communication channels, reducing stakeholders' environmental impacts, reducing the length and impact of power cuts and safety awareness.

We integrate SROI alongside other impact measurement tools including Cost Benefit Analysis, the modelling of direct customer financial benefits and collation of stakeholder evidence, including qualitative data and longer-term monitoring of outcomes. This includes understanding the benefit of different initiatives well beyond our first seed funding, through ongoing monitoring and engagement.

Our benefit measurement framework in practice

Below are three examples of how measurement has informed how our initiatives evolve.

► Did not proceed

- In a discussion with The Bread and Butter Thing, a mobile food club, we spotted an opportunity to promote cost-of-living support on reusable eco-friendly shopping bags, replacing plastic bags given to their 3,000 fuel poor members.
- Success measures included reach, PSR sign-ups and energy saving advice referrals.
- At £5.50 per bag, we forecasted a low SROI of 68p in excess of every £1 spent.
- We contrasted this with an opportunity to work with the NHS Greater Manchester to distribute 15,000 thermometer cards in an area of high fuel poverty.
- We funded the NHS campaign instead because it enabled our key messages to reach a bigger audience. It delivered added health benefits by customers being able to check if their home is heated to a safe 18 degrees, and a higher SROI of £6.52 in excess of every £1 spent over 12 months.

► Changed course

- This year we looked to overcome lost savings for fuel poor customers through tariff switching by expanding the scope of financial support we provide.
- We learned that full debt advice is often a pre-requisite to financial grants, so we maximised access to this support via ten channels, including a new video service.
- We spotted an opportunity for customers to save money via social broadband tariffs, so we integrated this into our signposting and calculated a bespoke SROI proxy for direct financial savings of £250 per household.
- We guided customers on how to use their smart meters to save money.
- The proportion of fuel poor customers we supported with income maximisation rose from 34% to 69% year-on-year, with other utility bill savings accounting for 13%.
- Changing course enabled us to scale-up the SROI delivered in excess of every £1 spent over 12 months from £2.50 to £9.33 year-on-year.

► Scaled-up

- Data cleansing is crucial to tackle the large volume of customer data we receive from energy suppliers with incorrect or missing contact information.
- We worked with Lexis Nexis (See Part Three, page seven) to pilot a machine learning technique which sourced data for 77% of records with missing or incomplete information.
- The SECG (see page three), reviewed the results and recommended scaling-up its application from processing compensation payments to a full PSR data cleanse.
- We worked with Economic Insight to find proxies for the benefit of issuing compensation more quickly, customers not needing to contact us and reduced stress during power cuts, because they can access PSR support services.
- Our CIC approved a £280k business case. The need for correct data to maximise the benefit of our cost-of-living campaign and a forecasted SROI of £2.34 (and £10.89 over five-years), in excess of every £1 spent over 12 months, both played a key role in this decision.

The improvements we have made

This year we were proud to win a Community Investor Award from Utility Week for demonstrating a "clear and quantifiable benefit to the community". This recognition reflects our willingness to be open and transparent which has informed further improvements:

► Leading a common DNO approach

In response to panel feedback, **we were instrumental in achieving DNO alignment to clear and consistent fuel poverty reporting metrics** to aid comparability, supported by a common definition of fuel poverty services and consistent, independently assured application of a measurement rulebook. We commissioned Economic Insight to ensure all our SROI calculations (not just fuel poverty) align to the common rulebook, with all DNOs confirming that they would do the same. By providing worked examples, such as a detailed breakdown of the metrics and tools we use for our Girl Guides youth engagement, we made it easy for DNOs to replicate our approach.

► Improved data contextualisation

We introduced a confidence rating to our forecasts reflecting whether all the expected benefits have been measured, and the sensitivity of the results to assumptions. Where an SROI estimate is not rated green we instigate greater scrutiny of other metrics before decisions are made.

Our 2022/23 Engagement in Action



Ian Smyth joined as our new Chief Executive Officer in September 2022, and is pictured here meeting with our new apprentices intake, at our carbon neutral Training Academy in Blackburn.



Jo Crinson, Customer and Community Development Manager, sharing our Girl Guides project with colleagues at SSSEN during a collaboration day in Perth in September 2022.



Lyndsey Stainton, Head of Engagement Delivery, SSSEN, said:

“ I am delighted at the truly collaborative relationship we have built with Electricity North West this year. The ability to share learnings and insight, as well resources, has informed new ways of working at both companies in the customer and community space, resulting in the delivery of additional customer benefits. ”



Sam Loukes, Vulnerability Inclusion Manager, discussing the cost-of-living crisis with 34 stakeholders attending our Manchester regional workshop in September 2022.



Our Be Winter Ready campaign launched on 31 October 2022. We reached our 2.4m customers through a mixture of leaflets, emails, community, website views, social media and listeners via smart speakers.



Helen Seagrave, Community Energy Manager, winning a Community Investor Award from Utility Week in December 2022 for proving a "clear and quantifiable benefit to the community".



Mathew Wheatley, Head of Europe at AccountAbility said:

“ Electricity North West continues to show a strong culture of stakeholder engagement, clear at all levels and across teams. Increased senior-level involvement, investment in internal capacity building and in building partnerships has informed activities promoting the safety and safeguarding of vulnerable customers. Most notably, employees stepped up to this role during the impressive phone call campaign to 23,000 vulnerable customers. ”



Jill Hendry, Welfare Innovation Manager, sharing a stand with UKPN at the NEA Annual Conference in January 2023, and using the opportunity to collect feedback on PSR UK, prior to its launch.



Alongside Energy Advisors from Citizens Advice Manchester our Welfare Team took our new Mobile Advice Centre and its in-depth support services to the locations requested by fuel poor customers, via ongoing surveys.

**Electricity
north west**

Bringing energy to your door



A stakeholder discussing the cost-of-living crisis with peers at our Lancashire workshop on 13 September 2022.

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