

Our Annual Vulnerability Report 2023/24



Helping you take charge

Glossary

We have abbreviated terms throughout our report, where doing so improves clarity and readability. We provide the full form of an abbreviation at first use and then the abbreviation thereafter. A full list of the abbreviations and commonly-used terms is provided in the glossary below. We have included this at the beginning of our report so that stakeholders are able to familiarise themselves with key terms prior to reading the report.

BAU	Business as usual	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
At risk of being left behind	Customers who fall in scope align with the definition of 'vulnerable situation'. These customers may be in circumstances such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being eligible for, or registered on the Extra Care Register • Being digitally excluded from participating in the energy system, limiting ability to take up opportunities which will support either financially and/or allow participation in the energy transition • Financial vulnerability • Living in areas of deprivation • Having a lack of opportunity to participate • Lack of willingness to take risks on new technology • Lack of understanding of new technology • Lack of knowledge of new technology 	IOG	Independent Oversight Group – is a panel of independent individuals, with an independent Chair together with members representing each of the six advisory panels that Electricity North West Limited has established to fulfil its license obligation and ongoing stakeholder and customer input into its decision-making processes
Customer satisfaction survey score	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 [ENWL] 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, the CVI evaluates a distribution network operator's performance against targets set under five common outturn 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	NPV	Net Present Value, is the discounted sum of future cash flows, whether positive or negative, minus any initial investment
Digital inclusion	Digital inclusion covers 1) digital skills i.e. being able to use digital devices, such as computers or smart phones and the internet 2) connectivity i.e. access to the internet and 3) accessibility i.e. services being designed to meet all users' needs, including those dependent on assistive technology to access digital services	Ofgem	Office of Gas and Electricity Markets – the government regulator for gas and electricity markets in Great Britain
DNO	Distribution network operator – company licensed to distribute electricity in Great Britain by the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem)	RIIO-ED1	Electricity distribution price control period, 2015–2023
ECR	Extra Care Register, is the new name for our Priority Services Register which offers enhanced support to customers in vulnerable circumstances	RIIO-ED2	Electricity distribution price control period, 2023– 2028
ECR Reach	ECR Reach means 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	Social Return on Investment (SROI)	The monetary value associated with positive outcomes received, and costs avoided by society because of a given initiative
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	Stakeholder	Stakeholders are those parties that are affected by, or represent those affected by, decisions made by ENWL and Ofgem. As well as consumers, this would for example include Government and environmental groups
ENWL	Electricity North West Limited	Strategic partners	The relationship with a range of other companies and charities that work together through structured service level agreements to deliver funded support services to vulnerable customers. Includes, but is not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carer and medical support i.e. NHS services, oxygen providers • Charity networks i.e. Age UK, Stroke Association, Mind • Customer service networks i.e. Institute of Customer Service • Local authorities • Local business • Other utilities
		The ENA	The Energy Networks Association, the trade body that represents the electricity transmission and distribution companies in the UK
		Vulnerable customer	When a consumer's personal circumstances and characteristics combine with aspects of the market to create situations where they are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Contents

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

This is the first year of the Annual Vulnerability Report (AVR) and we are proud to present our progress and performance which shows how, through our activities, we are:

- accountable for implementing our [vulnerability strategy commitments](#)
- meeting, if not exceeding, Ofgem's [vulnerability baseline expectations](#)
- delivering tailored support services to customers in vulnerable situations

Over the last 12 months of the regulatory year we have adopted a robust strategy and made significant progress in delivering on the multifaceted commitments made in our [RIIO-ED2 Business Plan](#) and evolving our activities to meet our stakeholders needs.

Our 2023/24 report starts with an introduction and explanation of our strategy. Thereafter it is presented in five sections, each of which starts with a strategic overview. This consistent format aims to provide a solid understanding of the breadth of activity that has supported 'our numbers'. It provides the strategic context, within which the case studies that follow delve deeper and illuminate areas of best practise, iterative learning and forward plans.

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2023/24 engagement highlights

Case study key

To ensure our report is easy to read we have used clear formatting, legible font size and plain language throughout. We have also included relevant images, charts and graphs to illustrate key points.

The symbols throughout our report signify key aspects of our 2023/24 activities and serve as a visual representation of their alignment with Ofgem's four baseline expectations:



PRINCIPLE 1:

Effectively support Domestic Customers in Vulnerable Situations, particularly those most vulnerable during a loss of supply, through a sophisticated approach to the management, promotion and maintenance of a Priority Services Register (which we call the Extra Care Register).



PRINCIPLE 2:

Maximise opportunities to identify and deliver support to Domestic Customers in Vulnerable Situations through smart use of data.



PRINCIPLE 3:

Understand new forms of vulnerability, in particular by identifying blockers to participating in a smart, flexible energy system.



PRINCIPLE 4:

Embed the approach to protecting the interests of Domestic Customers in Vulnerable Situations throughout a licensee's operations to maximise the opportunities to deliver support.

01 Over 90,000 customers supported through referral networks

02 87 active partnerships, up from 60

03 82.4% registered to the ECR, a 9% annual increase

04 £8.55m of benefits realised among fuel poor customers

05 95.3% satisfaction with Take Charge support services

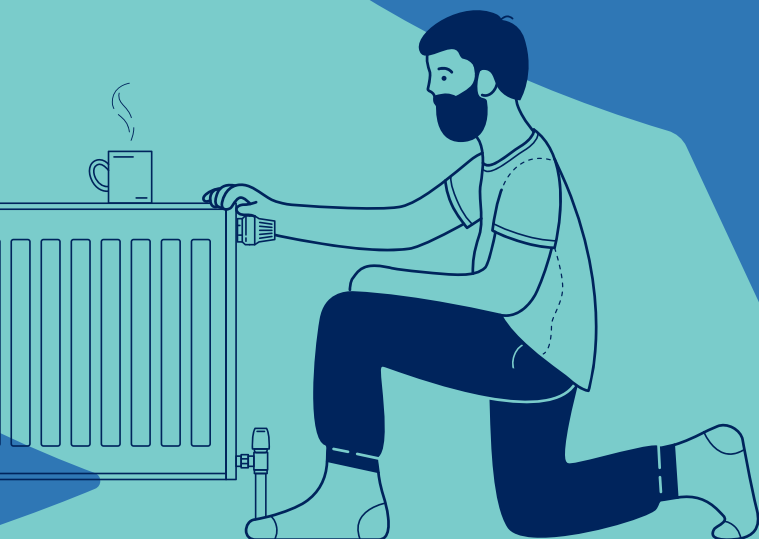
06 9% public awareness of Take Charge in first 12 months

07 100% of colleagues trained to spot vulnerability

08 ISO 22458 Inclusive Service Provision accreditation achieved

09 Over 30,000 highly vulnerable customers telephoned ahead of winter

10 50% increase in incident standby capacity



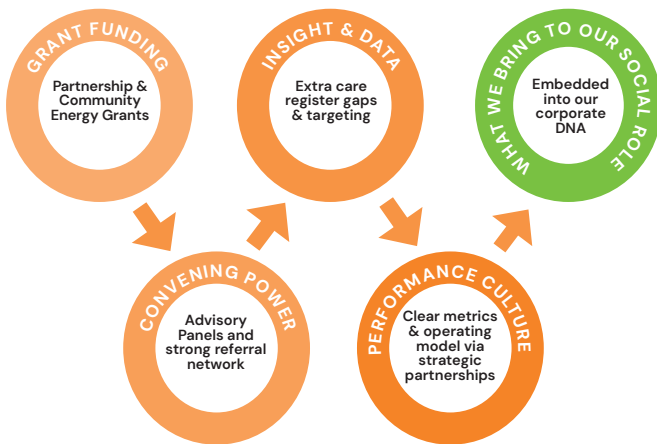
1. Introduction from Stephanie Trubshaw




I am thrilled to present our inaugural Annual Vulnerability Report. Reflecting on the beginning of the RIIO-ED2 period fills me with **pride in the accomplishments of our colleagues, partners, and stakeholders.**

Our internal Climate Survey reveals that this pride is shared across the organisation, and that there is a **collective readiness to serve and contribute even more.**

Our primary concern is the safety and wellbeing of our customers and communities. Our social role sees us working beyond our regulatory obligations. Years of engagement, research, and development have provided us with a **clear understanding of our responsibilities and how we can make a meaningful impact.**



The adverse effects of a power outage can be significantly more severe for electricity users in vulnerable circumstances. In addition to our efforts to enhance network reliability and keep bills as low as possible, we offer **a variety of support services under the umbrella name 'Extra Care'**. This name, selected by our customers, encapsulates the collective goal of our services and helps remove barriers to access.

 **Extra Care**
Extra care, extra support, extra help when you need us most.

Take Charge
Empowering customers to take charge of their energy usage and access support through the rising cost of living.

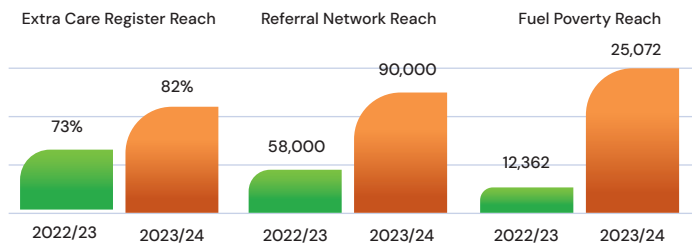
Extra Care Register (formerly Priority Services Register)
Practical support and advice for customers who may need extra support before, during or after a power cut.

Partnerships
From local charities to strategic partners our network of referral partners can also provide a little Extra Care.

Enhanced marketing, partnerships, and accessibility have **increased membership of our Extra Care Register (ECR) from 73% to 82% of eligible customers this year.** This marks the second consecutive significant improvement we've achieved. However, data quality is just as important to us as the number of members. Therefore, we are heavily focused on data cleansing and enriching existing records with detailed contact information.

This year has demonstrated that the cost-of-living crisis is far from over. In response we've maintained our **determined focus on increasing awareness of the help available,** encouraging energy behaviour changes where possible, while maximising direct financial benefits, and proactively working to mitigate the effects of the escalating debt crisis.

Through the [Take Charge programme](#), we have risen to the challenge and become the **leading DNO for fuel poverty support. We've delivered £8.55 million in realised benefits to 25,072 customers in just 12 months and achieved a satisfaction rating of 95.3%,** surpassing our targets. By systematically identifying and overcoming barriers, we've achieved remarkable growth. From 50 in-depth fuel poverty referrals in 2019, we've surged to an impressive 25,072 in 2024. This trajectory confirms that we're on the right track.



In the following section, we'll outline our five strategic priorities, supported by data and case studies. They range in maturity: Extra Care Register and Fuel Poverty have seen significant progress but face growth challenges; Energy Transition is in early stages, informed by R&D; Inclusion and Fairness is well-established; and Winter Preparedness is expanding beyond our commitments.

Whilst we have had a highly successful year, excelling across our key performance indicators and making significant strides in our business plan commitments, **there is no room for complacency.** As we move into 2024/25, we recognise that much work remains.

I would like to extend my gratitude to our entire stakeholder community for their unwavering support and the valuable time and insights they have shared, which have driven all our achievements. I look forward to building on this progress together in the coming year.

Stephanie Trubshaw, Customer Services and Connections Director

1.1. Our strategic framework

This section outlines our strategy for addressing customers in vulnerable circumstances. It identifies the challenges faced by electricity users, describes our approach to supporting the North West region, and details the principles and themes guiding our efforts.

Electricity users in vulnerable circumstances strategy

Our strategic goal is 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.

Within our organisation, several key drivers shape our thinking. These include **providing additional support during power cuts**, especially for those on our ECR and **ensuring inclusion and fairness**. We also consider circumstances that create or compound vulnerability, such as fuel poverty. Additionally, we are mindful of the impacts of ongoing societal changes, including the cost-of-living crisis, and the energy transition.

Our RIIO-ED2 strategy for the five-year period to 2028 has been informed by holistic, thorough and multi-layered customer and stakeholder engagement. It builds on the **strong foundation established during the eight years of RIIO-ED1**, where our learning informed a flourishing partnership network, efficient service delivery and frontier performance in [Ofgem's 2022/23 Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability Panel Assessment](#).

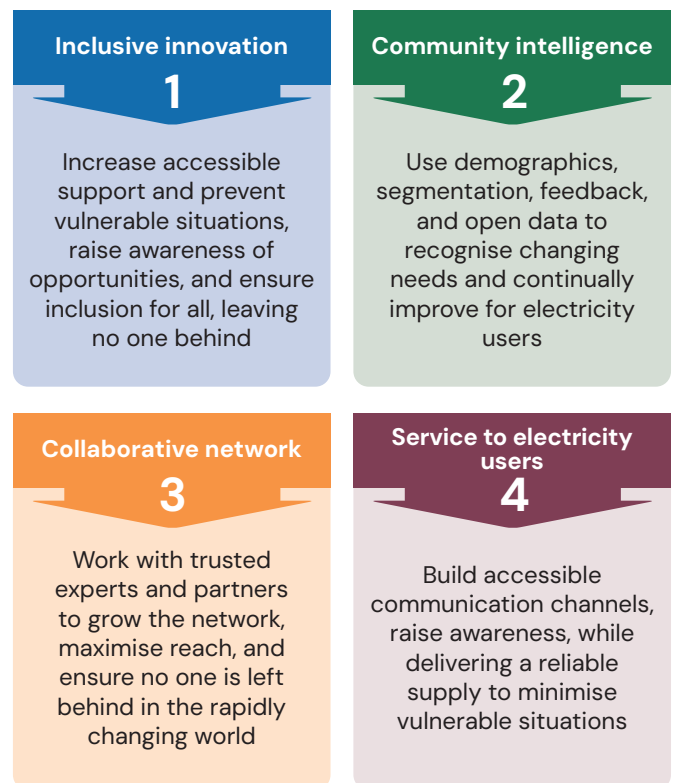
From this secure platform our strategy focuses on **consistent and continuous improvement** and responsiveness to changes in external markets and customer needs. This is important because stakeholders place their trust in us to have a strategy that not only works for them now, but also considers what the world will look like in five years and beyond.

Our horizon scanning and decision-making process is guided by **four strategic pillars**, which are central to informing our decisions about how to deliver our stakeholder-led action plans.

We conduct annual internal and external strategic reviews of these pillars to ensure they continue to meet our customers' needs and enable us to succeed in our goal.

Additionally, our strategy is underpinned by eight **principles that consistently guide our approach** and set clear expectations for our stakeholders. Principles such as accessibility, awareness and education, and collaboration were co-created with our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel. Some are unique to our [Electricity Users in Vulnerable Circumstances Strategy](#), while others—such as adaptability, best value, inclusivity, transparency and trusted—are integral to other integrated strategies, including our Distribution System Operation Strategy.

Figure 1: Our four strategy pillars are key enablers to the action we take



Sam Loukes, Head of Inclusion, said: "This year we've taken a fresh look at our strategy with stakeholders to refine our focus areas, understand any changes and emerging issues that we need to consider, and really zone in on those areas where our actions are able to have the most impact. **Our strategy wheel is an output from this refresh.** It outlines key activities and targets aligned to five priority themes, aiming to exceed Ofgem's standards and our customers' and stakeholders' expectations."

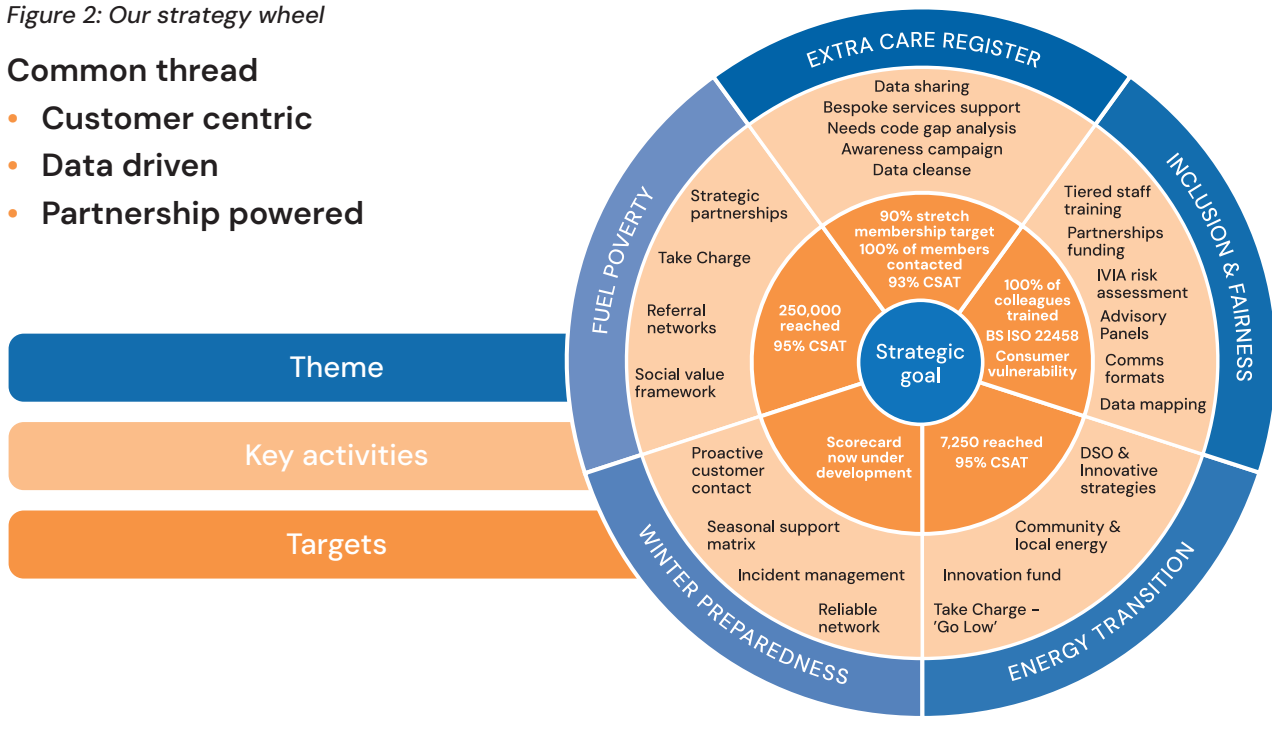


Our strategic goal is to expand the reach of our support services by identifying and removing barriers within our control through inclusive service design. We leverage expert insights and intelligence from stakeholder and community engagement to prioritise our support efforts.

Figure 2: Our strategy wheel

Common thread

- Customer centric
- Data driven
- Partnership powered



Through our company-wide insight triangulation process, we observed increasing pressure from stakeholders in recent years for **tangible progress toward achieving Net Zero**. More recently this appetite has become more polarised, due to concerns about affordability. However, stakeholders universally acknowledge that change is inevitable.

Without intervention, areas with higher levels of deprivation and low social infrastructure are likely to be disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change. Neglecting these areas not only risks leaving people behind but also undermines efforts to achieve Net Zero.

'Left-behind'

Being financially vulnerable or living in areas of deprivation, having a lack of opportunity to participate in a low carbon future, having a lack of understanding, knowledge or willingness to take risks on new technology, being digitally excluded, or eligible for the Extra Care Register.

We invest in the collection, processing, analysis, reporting and sharing of data to help us work smarter – guiding our **deployment of resources in the right areas, at the right time, to generate the best return and value from our investments.**

We triangulate our operational data with information extracted from market research, stakeholder engagement, social data mapping tools and our partners.




We recognise that our partners are often better placed than us to deliver the enhanced support electricity users in vulnerable circumstances require to make sustainable, positive changes in their lives. **We review our partnerships annually against** our plans, emerging risks, and identify trusted organisations to fill gaps.

During the cost-of-living crisis local stakeholders have emphasised the importance of us leveraging our convening power to coordinate and raise **awareness of available support services for those in greatest need**, at the lowest cost. In response, expanding local referral networks and fostering collaborative efforts between partners have become successful components of our approach.

Although our trusted partners provide direct, on-the-ground interactions with customers, we collaborate closely to **leverage extensive daily contact our frontline teams have with communities.** We equip colleagues to identify signs of vulnerability and make appropriate referrals.

1.2 Vulnerability issues prevalent in the North West

We've maintained a good understanding of the social issues associated with the scope of our role, and the prevalence of these within our consumer base.

FAST FACTS	Over 900,000 households within our region are eligible for the Extra Care Register	There are over 668,000 people in the North West with unpaid caring responsibilities	Families in the North West have been more impacted by the cost-of-living crisis
			
	By 2040, nearly one in four people in the UK will be aged 65 or over	Chronic kidney disease affects 415,000 people in the North West with over 9,000 patients relying on electricity for dialysis at home	Over 1.3 million people within our region are living with a disability

At the centre of delivering our strategy is the challenge of **identifying and communicating effectively with customers who need extra care**. As a DNO, we do not have identifying data for all 2.2 million households we serve. This limitation makes it challenging to transition from broadcasting general messages to a mass audience to **customising our awareness, education, and support initiatives** at a community or even individual household level.

To address this challenge, we have triangulated market research, stakeholder engagement, partner insights, and operational data to:

- Identify the specific issues faced by electricity users in vulnerable situations
- Understand how this knowledge can inform and enhance our targeting strategy

By integrating these diverse sources of information, we aim to develop a more effective approach to supporting our customers.

Key issue 1: energy affordability

Citizens Advice plays a vital role in supporting individuals who struggle to afford essential costs such as food, energy, and housing. Their [cost-of-living dashboard](#) provides unique insights on the national impact of the crisis on vulnerable populations. Key insights include:

- **The crisis is affecting some groups more severely**, including single parents, private renters, disabled people, ethnic minorities, the self-employed, and some mortgage holders.
- **Many people face deep and complex problems**. For example, in 2023, over 50% of those needing help with energy issues also required food bank referrals or emergency aid.

Our ongoing data triangulation has validated national trends. However, it has also revealed an **exceptionally high need for both initial and repeat support in the North West**, alongside an escalating debt crisis.

The Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) fuel poverty metric shows that **fuel poor households in the North West have the deepest levels of fuel poverty** due to a combination of having energy costs above the national median, the size of home and median energy efficiency.

Table 1: 2023/24 statistics	England	North West
Prevalence of fuel poverty	13.1%	14.1%
Consumers struggling to pay energy bills	50.0%	59.0%

This year, we continued to use **social data mapping** to identify local authorities with the highest prevalence of fuel poverty. By pinpointing the top 10 regions—ranging from 15.8% in Copeland to 19.9% in Manchester—we were able to prioritise our resources in the areas of greatest need.

To inform further refinement to how we identify, understand and classify consumers to tailor support and develop our 2023/24 awareness campaign we conducted two research studies.

Research project 1: strategic, national research

To deepen our understanding of electricity users and their diverse demographics, situations, attitudes, needs, and behaviours, we sponsored a research programme funded by Ofgem's Network Innovation Allowance (NIA) scheme. Through 10 focus groups, 50 in-depth phone interviews, and 1,100 surveys, **seven distinct low-income and vulnerable (LIV) customer personas were identified across GB.**

The research found that the support services each persona needs are strongly linked to their situations and concerns. It concluded that service uptake improves by customising engagement to each personas' inclusion needs. We shared our [insights and data sets](#) with stakeholders through a variety of dissemination events, including Utility Week.



Insight

Our communication and messages need to be tailored to people's situations rather than their personas alone.

Research project 2: tactical, North West research

With the support of Energy Saving Trust (EST) we carried out independent research which considered the views of a representative sample of over 900 North West customers. The objective was to baseline awareness of organisations that provide energy and financial advice, understand who would be most trusted, and identify motivating messages we could use to support a targeted 2023/24 campaign. Important insights included:

Awareness levels

- Almost half of all consumers do not know who to approach for advice on financial support available or for energy saving home improvements and feel disempowered.
- Aside from awareness, other barriers include embarrassment (14%).

Organisational trust

- Citizens Advice is by far the best known and preferred for money and debt advice.
- Money Saving Expert has high awareness, trust, and perceived impartiality.
- Energy suppliers are well-known for energy efficiency but are not seen as impartial.

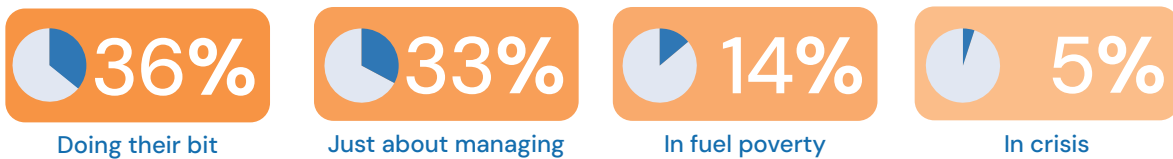


Insight

Consumers will respond better to approaches from local organisations they can trust, and they feel represent people like them.

In section two we set out how we addressed the need for awareness raising from trusted brands and leveraged these insights to empower customers to take-up support, tailored to four key situations.

Figure 3: Situations that need specific help and the number of individuals affected in each



Key issue 2: energy transition inclusion

A key issue among voters in the recent general election was the anticipated cost of the energy transition. Our research, including work by Business in the Community, polling, and a review of DNO innovation projects, revealed a common belief that the risks and benefits of climate change will not be fairly distributed. This highlights the need to **protect the most vulnerable from bearing undue costs and burdens they did not create and cannot avoid.**

To inform our research and development we have conducted collaborative research with the broader DNO community. This year, we completed the fourth wave of the independently facilitated, bi-annual low carbon technology (LCT) tracker. This initiative has reached over 4,000 households and tracks understanding, perceptions and LCT adoption rates over time.

Table 2: Average LCT ownership December 2023 and consideration (next five years)

GB all electricity users %	LED bulbs	Smart meter	Solar Panels	Electric Vehicle	Heat pumps
Ownership	62%	50%	11%	6%	3%
Considering	66%	49%	37%	31%	30%

Key insights among vulnerable North West electricity users have included:

- Only 23% stated that they feel empowered to make changes to help achieve net zero
- North West consumers have more mains gas boilers (76%) than the rest of GB (71%)
- Low income households in the North West worry they couldn't afford the initial costs (38%) or the running costs (32%) if they needed to replace their heating system
- Costs are also the dominant barriers to taking-up solar panels and electric vehicles, however in the North West these are the technologies that spark most interest.
- Only 33% are aware of the funding schemes available (e.g. Warm Homes, ECO4, Green Homes Grant and the Boiler Upgrade Scheme) and just 9% have applied to a scheme.
- Many consumers are wary of being pursued and sold to after expressing initial interest.



Insight

At risk electricity users want relevant and impartial information on LCT options and costs but want to avoid being 'pursued' and 'sold to'.

We know many customers want more than just to manage their energy demand—they're interested in new technologies. However, they need tailored, simple, and accessible support.



Key issue 3: digital inclusion

Amid growing concerns, the UK has extended its deadline for transitioning from the analogue telephone network to a digital, internet-based service from 31 December 2025 to 31 January 2027. Communication providers (CPs) are being urged to maintain a swift pace in their migration efforts, prioritising safety throughout the process.

Despite this extension, our engagement and data reveal a troubling **lack of awareness among customers and stakeholders about the digital switchover**. Among those who are aware, there is a growing fear that vulnerable customers, who rely on traditional landline phones for communication during power cuts, will be left isolated.

Table 3: 2023/24 statistics	England	North West
Aware of PSTN switch-over	57%	52%
Landline usage	80%	95% among the over 65's, 83% in rural areas, and 65% in urban locations.

In our Storm Arwen Customer Research, a key finding was that the loss of communication networks increased vulnerability and isolated customers.

Following this, our engagement with CPs revealed a surprising gap – they were unable to easily identify critical transmitters connected to our network. We discovered that **phone towers, cells, and generators are all managed independently**.

While most masts have a three-hour battery backup, some lack overlapping coverage areas. Consequently, if the battery

fails or power is interrupted for an extended period, these communities face a heightened risk. An example of this came to light in a review of our response to Storm Debi (November 2023).

It highlighted a **backup generator connected to a phone mast in Cumbria was buried in snow and had failed to operate**. This problem was only identified and resolved thanks to the local knowledge and proactive inspection by our staff.



Insight

Loss of communications is a pressing and growing concern for customers, especially in isolated communities.

This year, we focused on urging national stakeholders to address the digital switchover risks for vulnerable populations, like telecare users. We are **using our influence to also engage locally, raise awareness, and coordinate action**. We are helping Ofcom by analysing storm-prone areas and regions at risk of losing mobile network coverage during power outages. This analysis will inform resilience guidance for CPs. However, we are still very concerned about the lack of solutions for customers in areas with poor or no mobile signal to contact us during interruptions. In section five we explain how we are **investigating technology and people-based solutions to supporting customers impacted by loss of communications** during prolonged power cuts, and how this ties into a broader business plan commitment to provide home welfare visits to those most in need.

2. Progress against our key performance indicators

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

2.1 Consumer Vulnerability Incentive metrics

Of the five common metrics, we have tracked the performance of four over the past year. Our [Low Carbon Transition advice service](#), which was recently launched, currently only reflects costs for metric three without any associated benefits. Metric five has no data yet, as no customers have completed the full-service cycle. This service will become fully operational in 2024/25, enabling customers to benefit from the foundational work completed this year.

Table 4: 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
1. Priority Services Register reach (which we refer to as the Extra Care Register)	The proportion of eligible households that have registered for the Extra Care Register						
	82.4%		60.0%				60.0%
2. Social value of fuel poverty services delivered (NPV)	The net value of benefits to customers from fuel poverty services, after deducting all costs						
	£8.55m		£7.62m				£26.02m
3. Social value of low carbon transition services delivered (NPV)	The net value of benefits to customers from low carbon advice, after deducting all costs						
	-£0.0465m		£-0.40m				-£0.49m
4. Average fuel poverty customer satisfaction survey score	The average satisfaction rating from service beneficiaries on a scale of 1 to 10						
	9.53		9/10 (9.00)				95.0%
5. Average low carbon transition customer satisfaction survey score	The average satisfaction rating from service beneficiaries on a scale of 1 to 10						
	n/a		9/10 (9.00)				95.0%

We're pleased to report that many of our performance metrics are surpassing our goals. However, we recognise that the benefits of our low carbon transition support for customers will take additional time to manifest. This is evident in our net present value (NPV) target, which is currently negative when considered solely within the RIIO-ED2 time frame. Our early investment has been conservative, mirroring the necessary research and

development phase. As our programme progresses, we anticipate a gradual realisation of benefits, despite the likelihood of us continuing to report a negative NPV in the coming years.

In the case studies that follow we provide additional narrative to accompany Table 4 which expand on our performance against the Year 2 and Year 5 targets.

2.2 Case study: A sophisticated approach to the management, promotion and maintenance of our Extra Care Register (CVI metric 1)

Strategic context

Our free ECR offers extra help and support during power cuts. **Increasing membership among eligible customers is a priority for our business** and is featured on our management scorecard. However, maximising ECR reach is ineffective without robust data cleansing to correct inaccurate or incomplete customer data. Inaccurate data prevents us from providing care during power cuts.

In addition, as household circumstances change, our data must be updated. For example, about 5% of the population moves to a different county each year. **Continued customer engagement is crucial to ensure our data remains accurate**, but re-establishing contact can be challenging due to customer concerns about scams.

What we heard

Initially our bespoke target of 60% reach (CVI metric 1) was based on a baseline of 53% achieved in 2021/22. Last year, rebranding the Priority Service Register as the Extra Care Register improved customer engagement and clarified the support offered. Our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel praised the ECR for now being easier to explain to their communities. This, along with smarter targeting and aligning eligibility calculations with other DNOs, boosted our membership rates. By the end of 2022/23, the percentage of eligible customers signed up by DNOs ranged from 62% to 77%, with the North West reaching the second highest registration rate (73%). In response **our stakeholders said we should sustain the same momentum in 2023/24, taking another leap towards our revised 'super stretch' target of 90% registration by 2028.** In addition, Ofgem's 2022/23 Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability Panel urged us to continue our determined focus on the quality of our contact data over sheer numbers and to use partnerships to improve registrations among underreached groups.

What we did

We continued our mature embedded five-step approach to the management, promotion and maintenance of our ECR while adopting a continuous improvement approach.

1. Data sharing with other utilities and suppliers to create a 'one stop shop'

We continue to use our embedded processes to enable data sharing with energy suppliers, United Utilities, and Cadent. We facilitate data sharing in line with data best practice. By submitting our registration form, applicants consent to us processing their data to support them during a loss of electricity and sharing their details with their water and energy suppliers, so they only need to register once.

The data we receive through this mechanism, as presented in the table below, is at an individual level rather than a property level. We deduplicate the data to remove duplicate records and then review it at a property level. We conduct further investigative work where no contact details are provided in the data we receive (see step five).

Table 5: the impact of our ECR data sharing programme

	Activity	Volume 2023/24	Volume 2022/23
Sign-Ups	1. Enable a one stop shop for customers		
	Two-way data share with energy suppliers	243,594	191,558
	Two-way data share with United Utilities	98,010	86,958
	Data received from Cadent	5,238	3,907
	Outcome	346,842 (+23%)	282,423

2. Making every contact with customers count

Our 'we're switched on' approach ensures that our customer-facing colleagues see every interaction with customers as an opportunity to inform them about the ECR – asking if anyone in their household or anyone they know could benefit from the service. This year, we collaborated with eligible but unregistered customers to refine

universally clear, inclusive, and effective question prompts for identifying vulnerable circumstances, without labelling them as such. This is because our research has shown that stigma can prevent people from registering, on the basis that they don't consider themselves to be vulnerable.

Table 6: the impact of ECR promotion by our frontline staff







	Activity	Volume 2023/24	Volume 2022/23
Sign-Ups	2. Make every contact count		
	'We're Switched On' campaign additions	84,661 (+58%)	53,477

3. Proactive and targeted advertising of the ECR

We focus our promotion on areas with the highest need and where data shows gaps in ECR reach by location and vulnerability category. This year, **nine of the top ten locations with the greatest registration gaps were in Greater Manchester**. The top gaps in recorded

vulnerabilities, compared to national data, are among those of pensionable age, dialysis patients, oxygen users, and individuals who are blind, or have dementia. We used this knowledge to **target our funded partnerships towards filling our gaps**, some of which are listed below.

Table 7: 2023/24 partnerships targeted in specific locations to address key gaps, and estimated sign-ups achieved

Partner	Region	Target	Mechanisms used to engage	Sign-ups
 Age UK Lancs	Lancashire	Elderly	Community outreach officer Warm hubs	5,000
 Headway ESPARK	Lancashire	Trauma patients	Support package to hospital leavers	1,000
 Hidden Treasure Trust	Manchester	Families with young children	Early years play centre with pantry and advice service	1,000
 Bolton Money Skills	Manchester	Parents and carers	Workshops within schools with a high proportion of free school meals	1,920
 Stockport for Carers	Manchester	Carers (of patients)	60 new carers share information	1,500
 Asthma and Lung UK	North West	Lung patients	Callers using the national helpline	1,300

More widely, we reached out to 2.2 million households this year through a leaflet drop campaign. To aid our contact centre, we distributed the leaflets throughout the year to avoid a sudden spike in call volumes. **We tracked**

conversion rates for our digital channels (SMS and email) and have established a unique phone number, which went live in June 2024, to automate the reporting of incoming calls from our door drop campaigns.

Table 8: The impact of ECR promotion

Activity	Volume 2023/24	Volume 2022/23
3. Partnerships		
Partner-led awareness campaigns	15,746	Not tracked
ENWL website registrations	42,332	35,261

4. Proactive contact with existing members to maintain our database

We contact every ECR customer at least once every two years, and we reach out to all highly vulnerable (medically dependent on electricity) customers annually. Customers can update their details (or leave the ECR) via pre-paid mail, an online form, phone, or SMS. This year, we reached out

through **233,911 emails or SMS messages, 25,281 phone calls, and 3,171 door knocks**. We also enhanced our texting platform to send linked SMS messages that dynamically respond to facilitate updates or removals.

Table 9: The impact of proactive contact with customers

Activity	Volume 2023/24	Volume 2022/23
4. Proactive contact strategy		
Members updating contact information	+ 109,044	+ 47,171
Opt-outs in response to proactive contact	(8,567)	(11,284)

5. Data cleanse Lexis Nexis methodology

Although we make repeated efforts to contact all members on a cyclical two-year basis, we cannot always reach and get a response from everyone. To address this, we have invested in our partnership with Lexis Nexis, now in its second year. Their **machine learning and AI tools provide a secondary cleanse process for our entire ECR database.**

The second phase of data cleansing occurred towards the end of the year, following the completion of our proactive contact campaign to verify data. We cross-referenced our data with reputable sources. Our robust methodology reviewed individual records, resulting in either validation

or enhancement of existing contact information (mobiles, landlines, and email addresses) and **providing missing data for 75.6% of incomplete records.**

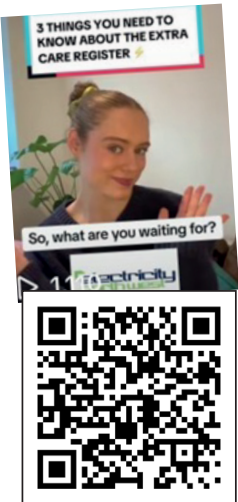
We use a stringent 49-step process to sort our data into three output categories and calculate our ECR reach.

The proportion of reviewed records removed decreased significantly from 27% in 2023/24 to just 1% this year, with a greater proportion of records retained with full confidence. This reflects the **substantial improvement in our data quality** due to the enhanced process.

Table 10: 2023/24 data cleanse – going beyond our obligations

Data cleanse output	Volume 2023/24		Volume 2022/23	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
1. Retain the record – full confidence in data	816,525	70%	631,836	51%
2. Remove the record	8,948	1%	336,047	27%
3. Retain pending further validation	341,043	29%	271,814	22%
Total (individuals)	1,166,516	100%	1,239,697	100%

What we learnt



In the North West, over 668,000 people provide unpaid care to family members. Our charity partner, Signpost for Carers, informed us that:

- Many people don't recognise themselves as carers and miss out on entitled support.
- Power disruptions create significant challenges for carers.

In response, we updated our eligibility scripts to ask, "Do you support someone who couldn't manage without you?" and updated our campaigns to make people aware that they can sign up someone they care for without a power of attorney.

We partnered with Stockport for Carers to provide carers with ECR information. Additionally,

we learned that 1 in 12 schoolchildren are young carers, so we launched a targeted TikTok campaign for this group.

Scan the QR code to watch one of our TikTok influencer campaign videos, which contributed over 31,000 clicks to our registration pages.

Our learning also centered around overcoming barriers to engagement with marginalised communities.

In Greater Manchester districts like Bury, there is a significant Jewish Orthodox community. Rabbi Grant from the Binoh of Manchester shared with us that community members usually do not engage with financial literature from third parties unless endorsed by an elder, as money and debt are considered private matters. Additionally, smartphones, internet access, text messaging, national TV, and newspapers are restricted. Most families have 8 to 10 members, communities are very isolated, and English is a second or third language for many. Based on this, **our plans for 2024/25 is to promote ECR services to Jewish Orthodox communities** through:

- Trusted community members acting as intermediaries
- The weekly free paper, Jewish Advertiser, with elders screening the messaging
- Food vouchers for kosher shops instead of a mobile catering unit during power cuts
- Using Binoh as a warm space during major power cut incidents.

Customer impact

Our ECR reach calculation follows the common methodology and includes records we have cleansed and have confidence in. **Enhanced marketing, partnerships, and accessibility boosted our ECR reach from 73% to 82% of eligible customers this year, reducing our gap to 18%.** This improvement is due to better data cleansing and enriching existing records with detailed contact information, increasing the likelihood of frequent customer contact.

Over the past two years, ECR reach has increased by 24%. However, maintaining this growth will be more challenging as the number of unregistered households decreases. Our strategy will focus on developing targeted partnerships and using our insights to personalise engagement and overcome barriers.

2.3 Case study: Take Charge fuel poverty services

Strategic context

The vulnerability issues prevalent in the North West (section 1.2) are central to our ambitious Business Plan commitment to reach 250,000 households—100%* of those in fuel poverty (2021/22 figures)—and provide in-depth support to 125,000 by 2028. **Our goal is to ensure all customers receive the highest level of professional, efficient, and consistent service, even as we scale up to operate at five times our peak RIIO-ED1 annual capacity.** To achieve this, our challenge is to refine our operating model; optimising support services, partnerships, delivery, programme management, marketing, and cost-efficiency to deliver the necessary scale without compromising on quality.

*Due to an increase in the number of people in fuel poverty, this represents 80% in 2023/24 figures

What we heard

Our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel highlighted the crucial role of funding certainty, provided by the five-year price control, in enabling partners to build capacity and provide confidence they can meet ambitious performance targets. Without assured funding, resources might fluctuate, increasing the risk to delivery. Panel members recommended contracting **strategic partner(s) to fulfil two roles: one to focus on raising awareness of fuel poverty support services and energy-saving advice and another to focus on service delivery.**

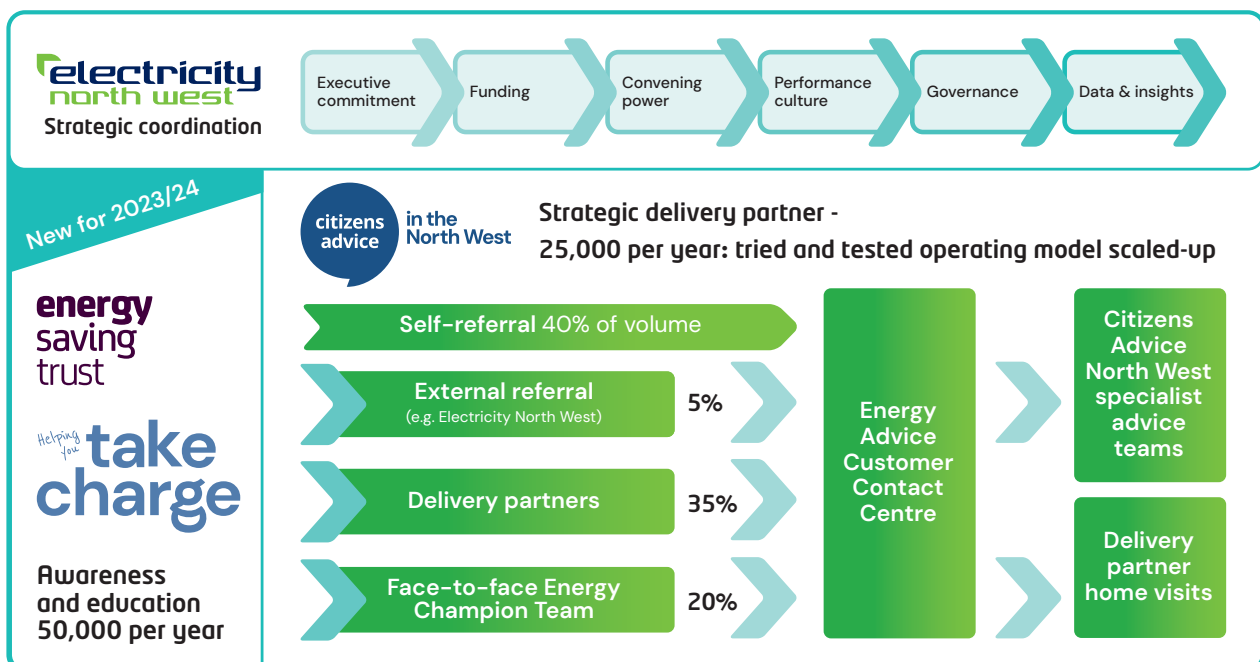
What we did

Our early market engagement, shaped by stakeholder input, led us to appoint Energy Saving Trust as our strategic awareness and education partner, and Citizens Advice Manchester (CAM) as our strategic delivery partner. While some previous fuel poverty referral partners couldn't meet the required scale and didn't tender, many were integrated into CAM's operating model as two-way referral partners.

We swiftly conducted market research with North West electricity users to assess their awareness and use of fuel poverty support services. Our findings in section one showed that many users felt disempowered and unsure where to seek help due to their varying situations. In response, **we launched the 'Take Charge' initiative, which empowers people to manage their bills and energy costs, access low-carbon technologies, and get support during power cuts.**

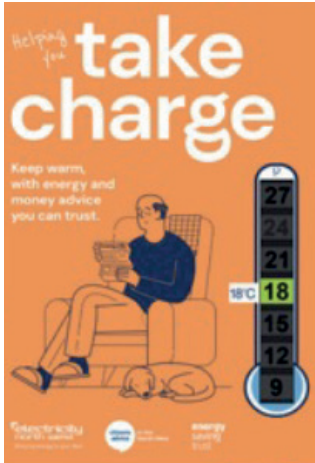
This campaign, jointly branded with Citizens Advice, EST, and Electricity North West, leverages our research insights, indicating that featuring all three brands together would enhance trust and credibility. However, we were concerned that the CAM brand might not resonate in other North West communities, especially rural areas. To address this, we created a unified Citizens Advice North West logo.

Figure 4: Take Charge operating model – coordination of awareness raising and referral pathways



Take Charge offers a cohesive campaign identity, allowing us to promote various support services under one umbrella. These services include energy efficiency, money and debt advice, and income maximisation.

To raise awareness of the support available we collaborated with EST to create seven animated characters that represent our key customer personas and their situations. We also created a range of promotional materials including leaflets, thermometer cards which can be placed in the room customers spend the most time in to help them keep an eye on the temperature and posters with QR codes to direct users to www.takecharge.today.co.uk our microsite.



Commercial radio: 1,960,000 opportunities to hear our ads on popular commercial radio stations

Out of home: 129,772,935 opportunities to see our digital ads at passenger sites and on buses across the region

Direct mail: 25,000 households in Cumbria with low EPC ratings, poor insulation, and high energy bills received leaflets

Social media: Ads about the cost-of-living crisis resonated best, with the 65+ age group generating over 9,000 link clicks

Developing our service portfolio

Our support matrix is the result of years of developing our fuel poverty programme. We have collaborated with stakeholders to create a structured framework that addresses diverse customer needs, ensuring no one is left behind during hardship. This year, we updated our matrix based on our research (section one), adding services for those 'doing their bit'.

We prioritised reaching those in greatest need, such as those in fuel poverty or crisis. While most people in crisis face food poverty, not all in fuel poverty are in crisis. This approach aligns with the strategic direction from our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel, which recommended focusing on those in crisis or experiencing fuel poverty in the first two years. In the third year, we will expand our support to those who are just about managing, recognising their limited financial resilience.

Table 11: our 2023/24 Take Charge support matrix

Fuel poverty programme support matrix 2023/24				
Situations (targeted by Take Charge)	Doing their bit – new for 2023/24	Just about managing	In fuel poverty – key focus for 2023/24	In crisis – key focus for 2023/24
Population (research)	36%	33%	14%	5%
Reach 2023/24	10%	20%	60%	←70% across these two groups→
Method	Above-the-line awareness campaign	Mid-depth tailored advice	In-depth ongoing tailored advice	
Objective	Signpost help available Keeping safe, warm and healthy	Reduce risk of negative budget Improve wellbeing	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 change 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

Focusing on impact over quantity

Our approach prioritises making meaningful changes in people's lives, focusing more on the quality of the advice provided rather than simply achieving high volumes.

We applied insights from our broader customer research programme to **carefully plan our fuel poverty customer journey**. This journey begins by ensuring customers, 'whoever you are, whatever the problem', can easily make initial contact through accessible channels, including out-of-hours availability. It **prioritises the mental wellbeing of individuals seeking help by offering a listening ear service**, as our data shows that people who feel overwhelmed when accessing advice are 60% less likely to act on it. Additionally, it **minimises the collection of personal and sensitive data during the first call** and ensures continuity of service across multiple interactions with a trusted advisor.

Our specialist Take Charge energy team have open conversations with every person they've supported about the aim of the survey and this helps to support high participation rates.

Being quick to maximise new grant funding schemes

In 2023/24, local councils offered assistance with energy and water bills, food, and essential items through the '[Household Support Fund](#)'. Each eligible household could receive one cash payment until the scheme closed in June 2024. We worked with CAM and the 10 borough councils of GMCA, including Manchester City Council, to identify the 19 boroughs with the lowest disposable income and highest negative budgets. **We established two-way referrals between Take Charge and local authority services**, using the GMCA portal to directly fund over 600 households.

What we learnt

A review of our 2023/24 referral data shows that Take Charge beneficiaries are mainly female (65%) and aged 35-64 (55%), indicating underrepresentation of males and younger generations. However, ethnic minorities are well represented, accounting for 44% of users.

Foward look

Our ability to quickly direct people to short-term funding this year has led to strong performance, but future years may pose greater challenges. Funding has since decreased as local authorities balance competing needs. As fixed-rate mortgages expire, some families on the edge of managing their finances face heightened uncertainty. We will continue focusing on reaching underserved areas and adjusting our approach where needed. For instance, due to a low response rate, we will **reduce spending on direct mail and allocate funds instead to a dedicated engagement resource** aimed at promoting Take Charge to low-income households via employers and community groups.

Customer impact – an outcome we are proud of

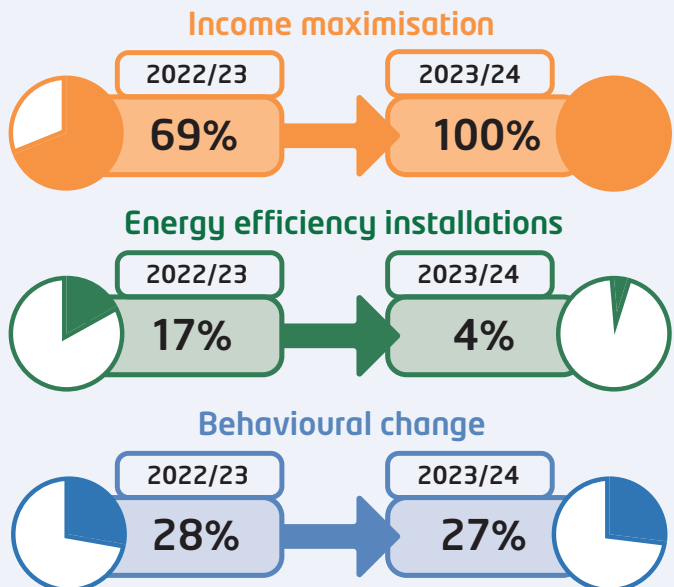
The Take Charge programme has significantly exceeded its financial and quality of service targets, as shown in Table 4 (CVI metrics).

This year, we developed an operating model to deliver large-scale interventions, focusing on three key benefit categories.

We prioritised resources to ensure every customer received at least one form of income maximisation in the first year, targeting those most in need.

At the end of 2023/24, we conducted a second phase of our fuel poverty awareness research, reaching over 900 customers. 9% were aware of the Take Charge campaign. Starting from zero, this is a promising achievement and a foundation to build on in year two.

Figure 5: proportion of households receiving in-depth support, by output





2.4 Case study: Take Charge low carbon transition services

Strategic context

In 2022/23, the DNO community agreed on a common definition for those at risk of being left behind during the energy transition. However, planned LCT interventions varied greatly across companies, reflecting the early stage of research and development in this area.

What we heard

Our customer research (section one) showed that an LCT advice service **providing impartial advice and raising awareness without selling technologies can meet the needs of at-risk customers**. Ofgem excludes DNO-funded technology installations but includes advice and support that lead to customer installations. Our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel recommended using our shareholder-funded innovation fund to apply lessons from our successful fuel poverty signposting model and **improve access to existing support, rather than inventing new technologies or services**.

What we did

A desktop review of the LCT advice marketplace and engagement with service providers confirmed the need to better define our requirements for a strategic partner.

As part of our research and development, we decided to **pilot direct involvement in delivering support** and expertise throughout the entire process. Our goal is to maximise learning, refine the customer journey, identify scalable successes, and adjust or discard what doesn't work.

In late March 2024, **we launched a free service providing impartial advice** to help customers make informed decisions about their low-carbon energy future.

All advisors are Electricity North West colleagues, trained by external partners, including 10 upskilled frontline call advisors from our Pre-Application Customer Engagement connections team. Advisors discuss product options, upfront costs, incentives, installation processes, payback periods, maintenance costs, and other FAQs.

We started small, piloting with eligible family and friends of colleagues. From April, we began **marketing under the Take Charge brand** via social media campaigns and collaborations with housing associations and local authorities.

We've also set up various communication channels to suit customer needs, including a freephone number live from June 2024, email, an online form, and a new microsite (www.golowtoday.co.uk) which launched in June 2024.

Customer Impact

While no customers directly benefited from the service in its first year, the foundational work has been completed to enable benefits in year two and beyond.

What we learnt

It is still early days, but our initial marketing and learning have shown that a 'build it and they will come' mentality is ineffective. **Simply issuing calls to action through marketing outreach is not enough to catalyse behaviour change**. We are actively engaging with local stakeholders to better position our support and encourage uptake.

Our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel advised us to focus on the behaviour change curve and during the test phase of our programme, prioritise groups with quickly addressable barriers.

Our research (section one) shows that **local authorities and housing associations are trusted brands** in local communities. We will leverage this trust by applying our successful dual-branding approach from fuel poverty advice services to our LCT services.

We aim to **engage businesses to expand our reach to the North West workforce**. We've funded an engagement manager to deliver in-person education, encouraging employers to promote Take Charge to their staff.

Forward look

Jill Hendry, Customer Inclusion Innovation Manager, said:

"The close integration of our customer inclusion and connections teams revealed an application from a housing association to connect 6,000 heat pumps in a retrofit scheme. Since we'll be doing the operational work, we can offer integrated LCT advice under the Take Charge banner. This is a new addition to our pilot programme and our goal is to **help residents maximise their new technology's benefits**, boost their confidence, and provide unbiased answers about other technologies."



2.5 Independent Assurance Providers report

Sirio Strategies independently assured DNO common performance metrics. We have published their final assessment on our website, evidencing our **100% compliance with Ofgem's requirements**.

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 inform the best estimates for the volume of services to be delivered in the upcoming years.

Table 12: RRE table – 2023/24 performance

RRE	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 PSR customers to verify their data	100% received a mailshot, 233,911 email/SMS, 25,281 direct calls and 3,171 visited at home					
2 Customer satisfaction score among ECR customers who have experienced a power cut (reported on an annual basis)	9.01 target	9.00					
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	50,072	75,072	100,072	125,072	
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	2,000	3,500	5,250	7,250	

For metric three, it's important to note that the volume of fuel poverty services delivered represents in-depth support. This excludes general awareness-raising, which reached in excess of an additional 25,000 customers in 2023/24.

In the case study that follows we provide additional narrative to accompany Table 12 which expands on the progress made and performance against the Year 2 and Year 5 targets.

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

Strategic context

Electricity users in vulnerable situations are at higher risk during power cuts. While losing power can cause concern for anyone, it can be harmful for those already facing challenging circumstances. Our goal is to ensure that all customers, regardless of their situation, receive fair treatment and easy access to high-quality information, help,

and support. We use an embedded **ECR personalisation and prioritisation system to tailor the customer journey, communication, and support** provided based on need during a power loss. The three categories of vulnerability, along with examples of corresponding situations, are:

- **High:** Reliant on medical equipment requiring electricity
- **Medium:** Hearing problems, mental disability
- **Low:** Pensionable age (without other vulnerabilities), children aged under 5.

This system enables us to efficiently provide the most appropriate support to each customer based on their specific needs, prioritising resources for those in the greatest need.

Figure 6: Support services accessible to our ECR members



What we heard

We convened several customer panels, engaging a diverse group of general customers and those eligible for the ECR, each providing unique perspectives based on their situations. All 38 participants had experienced a power cut in the past 12 months and had contacted us. The ECR group included customers medically dependent on electricity (e.g., those with breathing difficulties) and customers with children under 5 years old (including those

with neurodiversity). Customers participated in multiple meetings, allowing them to share their experiences of our communication channels and enabling us to respond with “you said, so we plan to” feedback. This iterative process helped refine our plans to ensure they are inclusive and work for all customers. Some of the key messages we heard were:

- Loss of power is an emergency for many ECR customers, and they find our phone system’s welcome message too long and overwhelming.
- They want the system to recognise them as ECR members and quickly match them to a power cut, providing essential information promptly. Additionally, they prefer that other details, such as hints and tips, be offered as opt-in options.
- Most customers want to know the average wait times to speak to our call agents, so they can decide whether to hold, call back later or use a different channel.
- Customers often call us because the power cut information displayed on our digital channels lacks a ‘last updated’ timestamp, casting doubt on its accuracy.

We also engaged 1,512 customers, colleagues and stakeholders through our established [Customer Voice Feedback Panel](#).

- In a survey of 223 members, 83% supported using an auto-dialer to provide automated updates to ECR and landline-only households. This system can reach 300 customers per minute with a recorded message, offering the option to press a button to speak to an agent. The panel helped create the optimal message content and recommended stopping the service after 21:00 and resuming at 08:00.



What we learnt

Our focus groups with ECR customers revealed that few participants had resilience plans for power cuts and were unsure about the support we provide. This included users of CPAP machines, where a sudden power loss can be life-threatening, and parents of children with autism and/or ADHD, who fear darkness and rely on a structured routine. Together, we co-created a list of simple tips to prepare for a

power cut, including a checklist of items such as battery packs to power devices, which help parents communicate with support services and aid the communication skills of people with autism.



Foward look

Over the next year, we will **update our website with extra power cut advice and tips**. We will direct customers notified of planned power cuts to this information. Our plans also include showing average wait times to speak to call agents, adding ‘last updated’ timestamps to our website information, and launching compensation payments via bank transfer.

What we did

Dedicated prioritisation process for ECR Customers operating 24/7

We maintained our dedicated phonenumber prioritisation process for ECR members, ensuring they can contact us at any time. Our system identifies ECR households by their phone number or address and prioritises them ahead of other customers in the queue.

In response to customer feedback, we streamlined our welcome message and restructured the menu options.

This allows customers to quickly receive essential information and bypass non-essential details to reach a specialist agent faster.

Recognising that updating ECR membership details is not an emergency, we have set up a separate menu option to handle these calls more efficiently.

Used the information held about ECR customers help us target, or prioritise, support

Our main goal is to ensure that our customer feels safe and supported during power cuts and that colleagues are empowered to deliver the extra care they need.

We **developed a support matrix based on customer feedback**, detailing support options for different temperature scenarios (summer/winter) and times of day (day time/night time). This framework ensures consistent and fair treatment of customers while allowing our teams the discretion to address individual customer needs with services beyond the guidelines.

Table 13: Example customer support matrix – during winter night time (reduced day light and colder temperatures)

Duration off supply (ETR or actual)	Extra Care Package (Voucher/Food)	On the go contracts (Consideration)	Potential partner support (Venue)	Catering vehicle (Cost £6k min)	Hotel accom (High ECR)	Hotel accom (Low to medium ECR)	Gym day pass
0 - 4 hours	✓						
4 - 8 hours	✓				✓		
8 - 12 hours	✓				✓	✓	
12 - 24 hours	✓	✓ 50+ customers off supply	✓ 50+ customers off supply	✓ 100+ customers off supply	✓	✓	✓
24 hours +	✓	✓ 50+ customers off supply	✓ 50+ customers off supply	✓ 100+ customers off supply	✓	✓	✓

Through Charis Shop, **colleagues issued 1,205 vouchers to households** struggling with extended power outages. When more than 50 households are without power for an extended time, we establish contracts with local cafés or community centres to serve as Extra Care hubs, providing warmth, hot drinks, and refreshments.

This approach allowed us to **tailor support to localised needs for impacted customers**, such as offering kosher food to Orthodox Jewish communities, as detailed in section two. For customers significantly disadvantaged by a power outage, we offer free accommodation. Some customers may prefer gym day passes for hot showers, and while not available everywhere, many areas do offer this option. In exceptional cases, such as bank holidays when energy suppliers are unreachable, we authorised a top-up voucher for customers at risk of disconnection due to an inability to top-up their pre-payment meter.

Multi-channel information provision during supply interruptions

Customers can obtain information about power cuts through multiple channels: by calling us (via voice or automated messaging), receiving SMS or automated voice updates, checking live power cut information on our website, or through social media networks. Additionally, our updates are often shared by customers in local WhatsApp or Facebook groups.

[We provide written information in various formats](#) to meet diverse communication needs, including braille, large print, and translations into the top 10 languages in our area. Our partner, Big Word, offers real-time translation in over 240 languages for customers who call us. Furthermore, our website can transform into 100 different languages, 35 of which include text to speech voices for anyone who would prefer to have the web pages read to them. After four hours of a power cut, >

› **we contact all highly vulnerable customers to assess their situations and needs.** This year, 47,589 of our proactive calls established contact with customers during incidents. These calls helped us identify situations requiring urgent or bespoke extra care, which we then prioritised as part of our safety-first approach. This ranged from deploying generators to customers with a medical need to coordinating with nominated carers to transition customers to a safe location.

In response to positive feedback, we **launched an auto-dialer to provide automated updates to ECR households.** This system is expected to make about 50,000 calls per year and allows customers after their initial contact to opt out or update their preferred method of receiving power cut updates, enabling us to tailor communications to their needs.

Table 14: Tiered communication with customers

Tailored service to ECR customers – exceeding baseline expectations	High category	Medium category	Low category	Non-ECR
Reach of proactive contact to refresh ECR data	100% annually	At least bi-annually	At least bi-annually	X
Reminders 6 days and 1 day prior to planned works (these are in addition to our standard written 10-day notice of planned works)	Called (agent)	SMS	SMS	SMS
Automatic prioritisation in call handling system	✓	✓	✓	X
Proactive updates during an unplanned power cut. Customers receive SMS updates as standard, and additional contact via their preferred method	Called (agent)	Called (auto dialer)	Called (auto dialer)	X
Proactive adverse weather alerts	✓	✓	✓	X



Maximising our partnerships to deliver a wide range of support during, or in relation to, a supply interruption that reflects different customer needs

We partner with organisations across our region who help us to increase customers’ preparedness for power cuts and provide **a further layer of standby support** in the event of an unplanned interruption including access to warm hubs and door knocking.

This year, we worked with the Cockermouth Householder Resilience Programme in Cumbria, an area hit hard by Storm Arwen, to **set up a new command centre and warm hub.**

This centre provides door-to-door support and offers

hot drinks and food to visitors. We also partnered with Headway ESPARK to enhance their support for vulnerable hospital patients recovering from brain injuries or major trauma by including **power cut preparedness packs.** Additionally, One Voice Blackburn produced key informational videos in Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Arabic, and English to promote safety during power cuts. These videos are essential for reaching individuals who have poor reading skills in these languages, as spoken word is the most effective way to communicate with them.

Customer impact

In the final quarter of 2023/24, we achieved our highest-ever Broad Measure Customer Satisfaction score of 92%. This reflects overall improvements benefiting all customers. We believe that with the targeted enhancements we have begun and will continue into 2023/24, ECR customers will also experience greater satisfaction with our service. Other impacts include:

- Delivering societal benefits, including minimising distress

during power cuts, making it easier to access updates, and reducing the need for primary healthcare services.

- Building trust with communities through tailored welfare provision based on need.
- Increasing individual power cut resilience for customers in vulnerable circumstances.
- Enabling a social value of £28 for every £1 spent over 12 months.

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 SROI is embedded in senior-level decision making

How we measure the impact of our initiatives

Our business 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 for our customers**. Financial and non-financial benefits are consistently evaluated.

SROI is one of several tools we use to measure impact at a programme and individual project level. We use SROI when there are clearly defined, tangible outcomes and distinct benefits, such as support for vulnerable customers, improved communication, reducing environmental impacts, shortening power cuts, and promoting safety awareness.

Where there is a use case for SROI, **particular attention is given to the direct financial benefits** that can be realised through bill savings and cash in customers' pockets.

Benefits identification is mandatory for all discretionary investment cases evaluated by our Company Investment Committee (CIC), composed of senior business leaders.

For example, last year our it approved a business case to advance our pilot with Lexis Nexis to a full cleanse of our 2022/23 ECR data. This decision was influenced by a forecasted Social Return on Investment (SROI) of £10.89 for every £1 spent over five years. Subsequently, a second cleanse was commissioned for 2023/24, following an evaluation of the benefits delivered.

Upon approval of an investment, our tracking framework allows programme and project leads to update outputs and adjust success rates. This ensures that progress is monitored against targets, facilitating discussions on maximising customer benefits and outcomes.

Why measure?	Compare investment scenarios	Prioritise allocation of resources	Measure and monitor impacts delivered	Determine actions, re-visit goals, and plan next steps

Social value guides our partnership decisions

Our [Partnership Funding Programme](#) was established in 2018/19. It invites applications from charities and organisations to help us identify North West households needing extra care during power cuts. The fund now makes available £500,000 annually, with average grants of around £21,000 and no arbitrary cap on project funding.

Since 2019/20, we have measured the social value of funded projects and used this data to refine our investment strategies. Starting in 2021/22, we began forecasting the social value of proposed projects at the application stage, incorporating these estimates and other criteria, such as strategic alignment, into our funding decisions.

The Powering our Communities Fund

The [Powering our Communities](#) Fund was established in 2018 in response to a stakeholder need to support community level action on Net Zero. **It has supported 39 local projects with £500,000 seed funding**. The aim of the fund is to ensure a just energy transition by enabling communities to take part in the development and delivery of community energy projects.

Successful projects receive between £5,000 and £15,000, with up to £100,000 available annually. For the past three years, we have **forecasted the social value of proposed projects and included this in a balanced scorecard to guide the assessment panel's decisions**. Enabling growth in community energy is a lengthy process. Since 2021/22, just seven of the thirteen projects funded have been completed. This is why we evaluate SROI over five and ten-year terms.



Helen Seagrave, Community Energy Manager, said: "A new feature for 2023/24 applications encouraged potential projects to refer to the Take Charge LCT service, to enhance their wider offering to local communities. An example of an existing project that is adopting this is the Greater Manchester Solar for Faiths project, which is using its Diocese network to promote the Take Charge LCT service to communities. Many members of this group fall into the target audience because they are underrepresented communities."

The improvements we have made this year

We have aligned our SROI methodology with the Common Social Valuation Framework, bringing greater consistency across GB networks. This alignment increased the available proxies and allowed a common approach in more cases.

The framework also extended the modeling period for case studies from 10 years to 31 years.

While some services we offer to fuel-poor customers under the Take Charge umbrella, such as education leading to >

> smart meter adoption, meet the criteria for Low Carbon Transition Services, we have ensured there is no overlap between the two programmes. Consequently, we have not included any additional low carbon benefits realised by fuel-poor customers in our calculations.

Over the past year, we have integrated our SROI tool owners (those who forecast and monitor performance) more closely with our project delivery teams. In most scenarios we model, multiple proxies are available. The challenge is identifying the most appropriate one. This collaboration helps avoid overlapping and overclaiming by carefully managing benefit stacking.

4.2 Case study: Prioritising vulnerability support services

For years, benefits measurement has guided senior-level decision-making, prioritised vulnerability support services, and informed the evolution of our initiatives. Examples include:

- ✓ **Stopping our innovative trial of using virtual worker bots** to cleanse our ECR data due to insufficient efficiency gains.
- ✓ **Integrating a new tree-planting partnership** into transforming substation sites into low-maintenance, bio-diverse spaces, increasing SROI, targeted to areas of deprivation.
- ✓ **Expanding a co-funded campaign with United Utilities and Cadent**, promoting the ECR and energy efficiency on pharmacy prescription bags, reaching 2.2 million.
- ✓ **Scaling up the Smart Street rollout to 250,000 customers**, prioritised in deprived areas, after evaluating various upsizing options. The average direct customer benefit for those receiving Smart Street by 2028 is estimated at £39.11 per year.

The case studies below illustrate how our embedded practices and learnings has informed decision-making in 2023/24:

Stepping down: Diminishing returns from early success of data cleanse

In case study 2.2, we reported the continuation of our partnership with Lexis Nexis, **investing over two years for a comprehensive data** cleanse of our ECR data. Collaborating with Economic Insight, we identified proxies for benefits such as quicker compensation, reduced customer contact, and less stress during power cuts due to better access to ECR support services. **The year one cleanse was so effective that only 1% of records needed removal in year two**, indicating that continuing this data cleanse annually would not be cost-effective.

While we will repeat the exercise in the future, we now need to focus on validating records that couldn't be checked using this methodology.



Changed course: Data sharing unlocks value

The Income and Expenditure Hub (IE Hub) became a funded partner in 2023/24. This free online tool helps customers create household budgets and identify unclaimed benefits or additional income opportunities. IE Hub aimed to achieve 1,000 ECR registrations by raising awareness among its members, many of whom face vulnerabilities beyond financial challenges.

Initially, despite being listed on their platform and included in texts and emails to existing users, our presence had to be actively searched for. This resulted in an average of only 10 registrations per month.

By working closely with IE Hub, we **implemented a data-sharing agreement allowing customers to declare vulnerabilities and consent to share this information with us**. This new customer journey, introduced at the end of December 2023, included a description of our services before users completed their requests, helping us be added to their trusted list. Since January 2024, registrations have increased to 120 per month.

Due to this success, we have increased funding for 2024/25 and expect the project to deliver £14.93 in social value for every £1 spent over 12 months, and £26.76 over five years.



Scaled-up: Take Charge income maximisation

In 2022, we anticipated a 57% uptake of income maximization support among fuel-poor customers using Take Charge services. However, our engagement revealed an **opportunity to improve access to the Household Support Fund (see case study 2.3) and increase uptake due to the growing need for this service**.

We recognised that scaling up income maximisation support would require repurposing resources. Using the social value tool, we estimated this approach would generate greater incremental value for customers than our original strategy.

Thanks to the increased focus and scale achieved this year, **100% of customers accessing in-depth support benefited from income maximisation**, with some receiving multiple, tailored financial referrals. By the end of 2024/25, this prioritisation generated an additional £5.2 million NPV compared to our 12-month target. Our strategy for year two is to build on this success by leveraging our enhanced capacity and insights to expand energy efficiency interventions, which offer longer-term benefits.



5. Making strides with our Business Plan Commitments

Following comprehensive engagement with our North West customers and stakeholders, we made several bespoke vulnerability strategy commitments in our RIIO-ED2 Business Plan before the introduction of the CVI. It is equally important to be open about our progress in delivering these commitments, which this section of the report outlines.

5.1 Business Plan Commitments

Table 15 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;
- red /amber / green (RAG) status indicator of progress with its implementation;
- an explanation for why the milestone has received its RAG status.

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 RIIO-ED2 and green indicates progress against the milestone is on track.

Doubling investment in referral networks

This year, our IOG reviewed our vulnerability strategic scorecard and recommended additional measures related to doubling investment in referral networks. To align with this, we **introduced new metrics that track both investment growth and the expansion of our partnership network**, ensuring a clear link between increased investment and improved benefits for customers.



Table 15: progress on our vulnerability strategy commitments

Vulnerability strategy commitment	Description	Expected outcome/benefit	Key milestones	RAG status	2024/25 status update
Collaborating more closely with other utilities	Utilities Together forum with Cadent, Northern Gas Networks (NGN) and United Utilities (UU)	An enhanced and cost-effective service to support vulnerable customers, achieved through improved coordination with utility providers	Active membership of forum	Green	• 8 collaboration meetings held during 2023/24
			Knowledge sharing – standing agenda item	Green	• Each company has shared its strategy and best practices
			Opportunities to work together – standing agenda item	Green	• Members co-funded a pharmacy bag campaign –promoting shared messages to 700,000 North West customers • Electricity North West and United Utilities piloted a ‘water and energy in the home project
Doubling investment in referral networks	£500k annual fund aiming to understand and design services to meet the needs of our communities through a network of trusted partners	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	• 13 partners received funding during 2023/24 • Full budget utilised • 31 partner applications received between January – March 2024 (41% from new partners)
			Growth in our network of funded and non-funded partners	Green	• 87 trusted organisation partnerships against our target of 60
			Growth in the reach of customers supported via our partnerships	Green	• Over 90,000 customers in vulnerable situations supported this year, outperforming our target of 58,000
Expanding the reach of our ECR	Register at least 60% of eligible individuals now (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 and insight programme to identify barriers	Green	• Held deliberative focus groups on barriers faced by medically-dependent people and young families • 15 key insights identified by partners such as One Voice Blackburn and Binoh of Manchester
			Use of data to target promotion at biggest gaps	Green	• ECR data identified the top 10 localities with the largest registration gaps and the top 5 needs codes underreached
			Growth in ECR reach	Green	• Reach increased from 73% to 82% of eligible customers this year
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 and insight programme to identify barriers	Green	• LCT collaborative research tracker • Needs Based Segmentation of Low Income Vulnerable Customers completed
			Improving access to existing services	Green	• We’ve adopted UKPN’s innovation ‘Power Protect’ project enabling the provision of batteries for Customers medically dependent on electricity
			Developing new solutions with partners	Amber	• £122k of budget utilised • We are still in the R&D phase but will work with partners in 2024/25 to develop solutions for our Take Charge Low Carbon Transition Advice Service

Table 15%: progress on our vulnerability strategy commitments (continued from previous page)

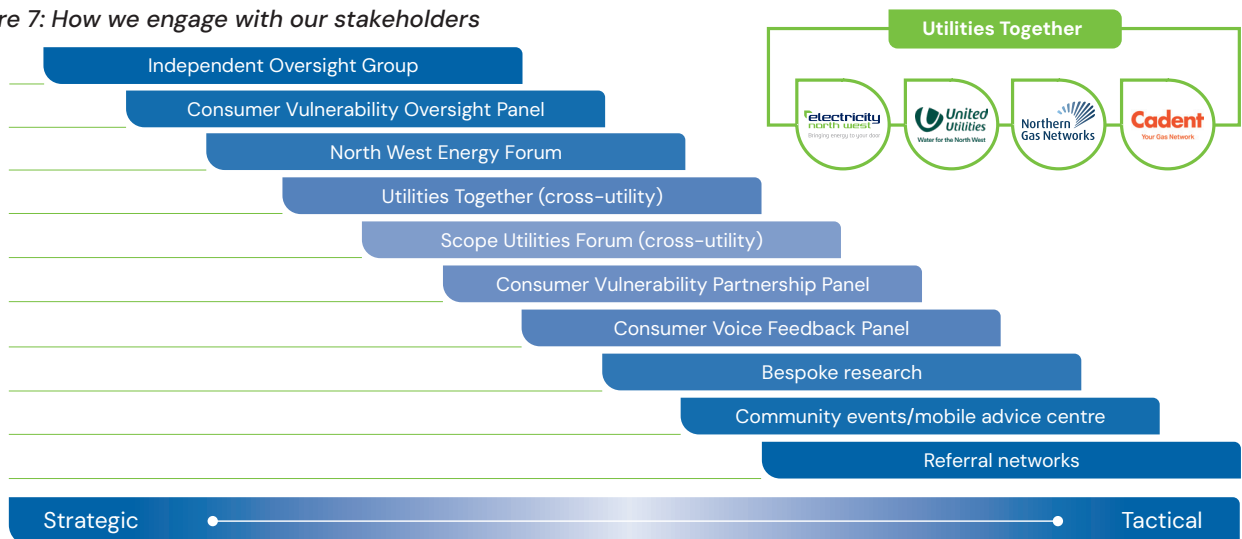
Vulnerability strategy commitment	Description	Expected outcome/benefit	Key milestones	RAG status	2024/25 status update
Supporting customers in fuel poverty	Work closely with trusted organisations to understand fuel poverty and deliver support services, investing £2m per year to reach 250,000 fuel poor customers by 2028	Improved health and wellbeing of customers experiencing fuel poverty	The reach of fuel poverty awareness raising (reported on a cumulative basis)		Conservatively reached in excess of 84,320 fuel poor customers via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25,000 direct mail • 34,248 microsite users • 25,072 service users With many more opportunities for customers to see digital and out-of-home information
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	Panel creation, membership and governance		We have two groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight Panel: 6 members focused on monitoring progress against RII0-ED2 targets • Partnership Panel: 21 members from both funded and non-funded organisations collaborating with ENWL to reach communities with relevant messaging and support • Both Panels share an independent chair who is also part of the Independent Oversight Group (IOG), which reviews our performance against all commitments
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	Customer engagement to inform design of service		• 361 Customer Voice feedback panel members and 675 customers that had recently experienced a power cut informed our proposals via surveys
			Pilot of enhanced on-site welfare provision		• Setup and delivery is continuing into 2024/25 • Vehicle, welfare provisions, resourcing, use cases, training requirements and processes agreed
			Rollout and monitoring		Rollout will follow lessons learnt evaluation in 2024/25
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		• Level 1 training has already reached 1,938 (84%) of colleagues in 2023/24 • A targeted group of 120 call agents completed level two training and 540 non-operational staff were upskilled to level three

How we facilitate meaningful input from our stakeholders

We adapt our engagement approach to fit different schedules, subjects, and the audience's level of knowledge. Through various strategic and tactical forums, our teams maintain ongoing engagement with stakeholders.

This year, we established a small strategic oversight group comprised of non-funded partners, including local authorities, independent consultants, and representation from Citizens Advice (national). Throughout the year the strategic oversight and partnership sub-groups of our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel met five times and their committed stakeholder members helped us turn strategy into action.

Figure 7: How we engage with our stakeholders



5.2 Case study: Strategic challenge from our panels

Strategic context

In response to engaging with our customers, we have made a commitment to an enhanced process for contacting and offering visits to electricity users in vulnerable circumstances during prolonged power cuts. Our goal is to explain the situation, provide reassurance, and offer tailored support.

What we heard

We explored opportunities to collaborate with our partners to fulfil this commitment. Initially, our Partnership Panel sought clarity on eligibility for extra support and the occasions when it would be available. Our research via the VOTC panel revealed that customers can generally cope well with power cut durations up to four hours, find durations up to six hours average, but struggle significantly with longer durations. This suggests that the threshold for home visits and additional support may be much lower than 12 hours (the threshold for compensation). Survey data showed variations based on customer situations. For instance, medically dependent customers need urgent assistance and prefer home visits, while families with young children are sensitive to power cut duration but prefer timely updates to make their own plans. Our Partnership Panel challenged us to **tailor solutions for those most at risk, leveraging successful practices from major incidents** that could apply to everyday faults.

What we did

This year, we introduced a new support matrix (page 17) with a customised extra care programme for customers. Additionally, we proactively contacted highly vulnerable customers after four hours of a power cut to assess their needs.

To support communities, we're piloting **a new mobile welfare vehicle** to assist in locations experiencing extended power cuts, such as neutral faults. The vehicle is equipped with:

- A portable battery with sufficient capacity to support customers with essential equipment, like oxygen machines.
- Battery power packs for phones and other communication devices.

To make the vehicle more environmentally friendly, we adopted good practice from our ground maintenance team, who have outfitted seven vehicles with solar panels on the roof, connected to a battery and inverter system. This setup allows battery-powered equipment to be used and recharged without relying on the vehicle's engine.

In RIIO-ED1, we had a small, office-based specialist welfare team that coordinated support during power cuts, guiding operational colleagues on how to best assist customers in vulnerable situations. However, this model no longer aligns with our culture of it being **everyone's responsibility to protect our customers**. With the integration of a comprehensive training programme (Case study 5.3) a core group of **call agents are now equipped to visit communities** impacted by long-duration power cuts. They will use the welfare vehicle as a base to provide support and ensure that customers in vulnerable situations feel noticed and cared for, working alongside our door knocking team of 140 individuals.



Jenny Willis, Independent Chair of our Consumer Vulnerability Oversight and Partnership Panels, said: "This year marked the transition from RIIO-ED1 to RIIO-ED2, accompanied by changes in the panel's structure to enhance partnership effectiveness while ensuring robust delivery oversight. **Members were pleased to note the ongoing rollout of staff training on vulnerability**, a key panel recommendation. They also received positive feedback on renaming the 'Priority Services Register' to 'Extra Care Register' for clearer community communication.

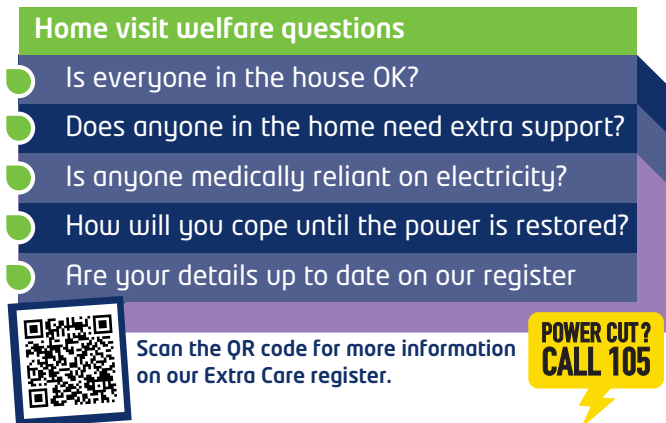
In early 2024, the partnership group delved into performance targets, specifically discussing strategies for coordinating welfare visits to those without power for over 12 hours.

The 'Take Charge' fuel poverty campaign was a focal point, acknowledging an increased need for support among individuals not previously requiring it. Proactive approaches to reaching these individuals all year-round were emphasised, moving beyond seasonal focus.

The Oversight Group, comprising both existing and new members, convened to establish **a robust framework for scrutinising ongoing performance**. Their initial session concentrated on the vulnerability 'scorecard', highlighting both statistical data and personal narratives.

Having worked independently alongside Electricity North West for five years, I am confident in the solid groundwork laid for monitoring and supporting vulnerable individuals during RIIO-ED2. Looking ahead, preparations are underway to strengthen this support within the evolving energy landscape as we **prepare for RIIO-ED3.**"

Figure 8: Questions used by colleagues making door-to-door home visits



Our on-site teams can also make use of four industrial-sized **'welfare cubes' stocked with around 1,000 assorted battery-powered radios, phone-charging cubes, thermos flasks, headlamps and lanterns.** Stored centrally, they can be deployed to any part of our region, including our welfare vehicles, within three hours and replenished within 24 hours.

We'll share insights from this pilot initiative with our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel and aim to expand successful components. Our support efforts will be tailored to individual and community needs, informed by proactive outreach and operational data. For example, we recognise that neutral faults can lead to high voltage problems, extended power outages, and damaged appliances, so our specialist team would be dispatched. Additionally, rural **and isolated communities will be prioritised.**

Customer impact

Enhancing extra care to all customers experiencing prolonged power cuts via our support matrix, and enabling customised support to individuals and communities in greatest need delivers a range of customer benefits:

- Customers find it easier to access the support they need from our vans and helpers
- Enhanced satisfaction and trust among customers experiencing prolonged disruption
- Reduced environmental impact from vehicles fitted with low carbon technologies
- An estimated social value of £15.66 in excess of every £1 spent over 12 months, with customers benefitting through reduced stress, anxiety and ill health.

Forward look

As well as initiating our resilience pilot in Bury and Rochdale in collaboration with the GMRF, our forward plan for 2024/25 includes expanding the **testing of 'last gasp' and 'ping' communication with smart meters** to identify properties without power. For at-risk customers who lose power, we will deploy door-knocking teams to ensure their safety and keep them informed about restoration efforts. In addition, we are **working closely with the Data Communications Company to understand and mitigate resilience limitations.**

What we learnt

When a **major incident is declared, Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) operate under a different legal basis to share customer data via a secure portal.** This process can also be activated during BAU in extreme circumstances, such as when Fire and Rescue urgently requests our ECR data due to a threat to life. Category one responders can access the data during the incident, but once it concludes, the portal is closed, and all data is removed.

We collaborated with the Greater Manchester Resilience Forum (GMRF), a multi-agency partnership of emergency response organisations, to explore whether this practice could be extended to BAU supply interruptions. GMRF expressed keen interest, aligning with their objective of enhancing community resilience across the region. After initial discussions, we identified Wigan, Bury, and Rochdale as areas lacking in direct support and having higher gaps in ECR registration. **GMRF engaged partner agencies and proposed an investment from Electricity North West to support data sharing, community outreach, and warm hubs** in these three areas. They also suggested that if successful, the programme could be scaled to reach all 10 Greater Manchester boroughs over two years.

Paul Morris, Partnerships & Customer Inclusion Manager, said: "Despite the substantial cost and untested nature, we recognised the importance of having emergency points of contact.

The proposed support involves going door-to-door to check on known ECR customers and identifying previously unknown vulnerabilities in other households. **I shared this proposal with Utilities Together members,** considering its potential applicability during interruptions to water and energy services. Both Cadent and United Utilities agreed to **co-fund a pilot project with us in Bury and Rochdale.** Pending analysis of customer benefits, our plan is to scale this initiative across the region."



Linked to our concern regarding the impact of the digital switch over on ECR customers being able to contact us during power cuts (section 1.2), we are deploying monitoring devices in strategic telecom asset locations. To better target our resources, we are co-funding the next phase of **development of an innovative data mapping tool in collaboration with NGN** to identify areas with reduced phone coverage and connectivity.

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

Strategic context

Licence condition SLC10AA 'Treating Customers Fairly' obligates DNOs to treat each domestic customer, including those in a vulnerable situation, in a fair way. This means we must behave and act in an honest, transparent, and professional manner, make it easy for customers to contact us, identify those in vulnerable situations, provide information which is accurate and not misleading, communicate in accessible formats, resolve mistakes quickly, and avoid an imbalance in the rights, obligations or interests of customers.

What we heard

During our business planning, customers and stakeholders unanimously agreed that **all colleagues should participate in training programmes to safeguard and treat customers fairly**. This commitment extends from their initial joining of the company and continues throughout their tenure. They acknowledged that awareness-raising and education serve distinct purposes, and that both elements are essential in a structured, role-specific programme.

What we did

We prioritise **inclusion by design**, ensuring that our services are intentionally crafted to address the needs of **all customer groups**. For the second year, we employed inclusivity and vulnerability impact assessments (IVIAs) to evaluate how operational activities might affect different customer segments. IVIAs promote fairness and identify participation barriers. For projects exceeding £250K or impacting more than 25 people, an IVIA is mandatory.

We continued our mandatory **'switched on to vulnerability' training undertaken by 100% of colleagues**, focusing on how we can safeguard and treat vulnerable customers fairly. Each year a new module is released and module three this year strengthened our culture where all staff recognise their duty of care to identify when someone needs extra support and to be able to ask the right questions using a common language to make every contact count.

Karen Hunter, Partnerships & Customer Inclusion Manager, said:

"We've established a **shared language for discussing inclusion** within our company. For example, the term 'vulnerable people' is powerful but not always positively received. It can create a division between those labelled or who identify as vulnerable and those who don't. This label sometimes diminishes individuality, reducing people to a category. Our Customer Inclusion Team has championed a shift in focus, **encouraging deeper consideration of individuals and their unique circumstances** that lead to vulnerability."



Through our 'switched on' programme colleagues recognise some customers may already have support available, they just need a little help identifying it with sensitive prompts.

My son relies on a nebuliser and it needs to be plugged in.



Is there a family member or friend you could stay with? If needed, we can fund a taxi for the journey.

I'm in my 80's and live on my own.



Could a family member or friend come and sit with you? Do you belong to any groups who may be able to help you?

In 2023/24, we implemented a **tiered approach** to ensure that every colleague is well-informed about our extra care services. We expanded beyond the general company-wide awareness (level one) with a **customised programme for frontline teams** who interact with customers daily (level two). Additionally, we **introduced an 'ambassadors' programme** (level three) for non-operational staff across depots, enabling them to engage in proactive support (such as winter readiness) and respond to incidents and storms.

Figure 9: Tiered approach to specialist colleague training



Colleagues have enthusiastically embraced our renewed focus on immersive empathy training. As part of this year's Level two programme, we organised a visit to the Centre for Independent Living's showroom in Warrington—the flagship headquarters of Warrington Disability Partnership. During this visit, **our frontline teams had the opportunity to explore realistic living environments and engage directly with customers living with disabilities.**

Expert staff provided valuable insights on mobility and independent living equipment, including practical hints and tips that we will now share with customers during power cuts.

Building on the insights gained from this exercise, we have created a comprehensive set of 'Let's Talk' guides. These resources focus on the various devices used by our ECR customers in their homes, including care lines, CPAP machines, dialysis equipment, feeding pumps, hoists, nebulisers, and refrigerated medicine storage. Our guides provide clear explanations of each technology, guidance on addressing customer concerns, and step-by-step instructions for making referrals to our partners.

As a result of our colleagues' active participation in training, we've incorporated their valuable suggestions to reinforce our extra care philosophy within our operational processes. For instance, our domestic connection quotation application forms now include a crucial question: "Is there anyone in your property who may require extra care or support while we are undertaking our works?" Furthermore, we've established **dedicated internal lines that colleagues can call to connect with an Extra Care Specialist 24/7** for urgent welfare and safeguarding guidance. For less pressing referrals, our ECR app serves as a convenient resource for front-line teams providing extra care services on the go.

What we learnt

To achieve our goal of an inclusive service for all customers, we have focused on clear and consistent processes. Our commitment to adhering to the highest standards led us to pursue and achieve the British Standards Institute (BSI) ISO 22458 Inclusive Service Provision certification this year.

Engaging over 50 colleagues—from leadership to electrical jointers—ensured representation of our business practices during the audit process. Colleagues shared valuable experiences and evidence of customer relationships. Recognising and praising good practices became an investment in our customers and each other.

The ISO key findings report from BSI highlighted our robust business management system. It effectively addresses consumer vulnerability, providing an inclusive service. **Auditors praised practices such as monitoring customer calls, vulnerable customer training, and the positive attitude of frontline staff.** They also identified an area for improvement: our complaints process, while effective in identifying trends, could benefit from directly comparing ECR complaint resolution with non-ECR performance. As a result, we've implemented this change.



Customer impact

In our November 2023 climate survey, we achieved our highest ever colleague pride score (90%). This culture has positively impacted customers:

- An increase in overall satisfaction among ECR customers (97%) and non-ECR customers (95%) with empathetic call handling during unplanned power cuts.
- An increase in our standby incident capacity from 360 to 540 staff, enabling rapid mobilisation of proactive telephone and door-to-door support to customers.
- Over 1,200 referrals made to our partners in response to colleagues more readily spotting opportunities to provide extra care services.

Forward look

We will continue to work across our business to raise awareness and embed understanding created through continuously improving our training programmes.

By keeping protection and fair treatment of customers as our compass we will continue to enhance our services.

6. Winter preparedness strategy

In 2019, our innovation project, the [Value of Lost Load](#), found that supply interruptions have the greatest financial and social impacts during winter. This is especially true for customers in vulnerable situations, including those in fuel poverty, living in rural areas, or owning electric vehicles. During winter, customer demand for electricity is higher, especially in the late afternoon and early evening.

Heating systems, lighting, and other appliances are used more frequently, increasing the disruption caused by power cuts. 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

Strategic content

Our longstanding [#BeWinterReady annual awareness campaign](#) prepares customers for winter by sharing information about how to prepare for a power cut in three simple steps 1) have a plan 2) prepare an emergency grab bag and 3) stay informed.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and its impact on global energy markets has meant winter has been more challenging than normal in recent years. In October 2022, National Grid

ESO first announced the possibility of planned emergency power cuts, called ‘rota load disconnections’ in response to national energy shortages. Heightened press interest in energy prompted fear-inducing headlines of ‘rolling blackouts’. **We became concerned that customers may not be aware of or understand the potential impacts and therefore would not be able to prepare.**

What we heard

LRFs and local authorities expressed concerns that the risk of emergency power cuts to customers was not adequately mitigated by mass mailings. They asked us to do more to help customers, without alarming them, to ensure that they had back-up plans and were aware of their rota block letter.

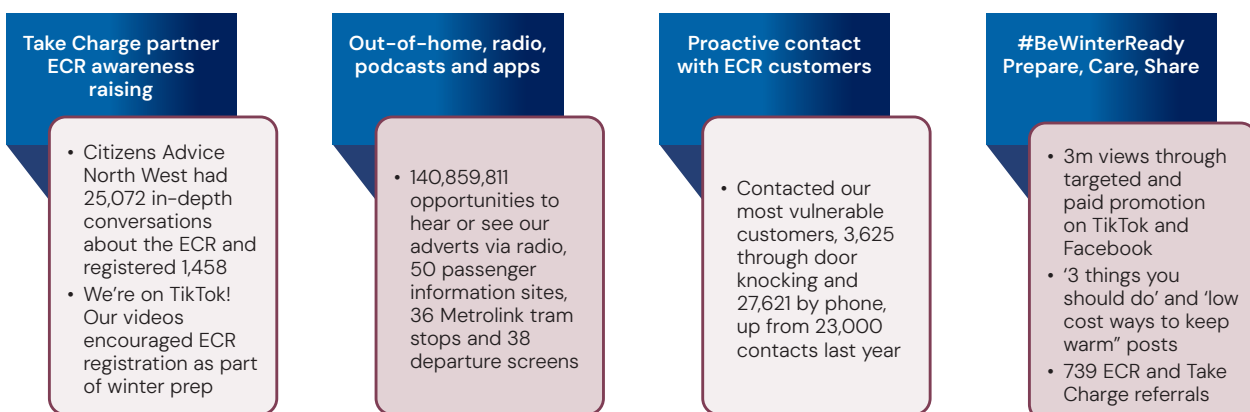
In response, **we took proactive measures: sending 612,186 emails, 101,555 letters, 544 texts, and making 23,013 personal calls.** These efforts aimed to provide information and reassurance to our most vulnerable customers, over a two-week period in December 2022.

Colleagues logged feedback from the customers they spoke to. The majority were not aware of rota load disconnections. While some were unbothered, others were worried and noted their appreciation of our contact. **Stakeholders, including our IOG, Consumer Vulnerability Panel and the 2022/23 SECV Panel urged us to embed this best practice approach in 2023/24.** Colleagues felt a sense of pride at what had been achieved but wanted greater opportunity to embed training before making calls, and an enhanced data management process.

What we did

To be a trusted and respected voice in the North West region and industry we created **a marketing strategy to raise awareness of available support services under the Extra Care umbrella.** In doing so we built on strong foundations to grow our outreach offering.

Figure 10: Letting customers know we’re here if they need extra support



Our holistic approach maximised the visibility of our campaign for electricity users in vulnerable situations. Whether they were on-the-go, out-of-home, browsing the internet, or interacting directly with our colleagues, our campaign reached them. Our strategy this year was to create authentic and engaging content, not just ads, to activate interest.

To accommodate increased scale this year, we mobilised over 600 colleagues for direct contact. Among them, 400 were upskilled to handle customer calls, and 140 were trained to visit customers at their doorsteps.

To support our teams:

- Our callers received customised training, and our 2022/23 team members shared their learnings and best practices, including a FAQ and checklist to guide them.
- We launched a new portal that simplifies call allocation for those on shift and streamlines automatic updates to call records, contact information, and household vulnerabilities in our ECR database.
- Our door knockers successfully completed a trial in September 2023, covering 700 properties in just three hours. Their training materials were well-received.

Our partners collaborated closely with us throughout the year to raise awareness. One Voice Blackburn created essential informational videos in Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali, Arabic, and English to promote safety during the winter. Additionally, The Royal Association for Deaf People developed equivalent formats using British Sign Language.

What we learnt

Our door-knocking trial aimed to understand the opportunities, limitations, and challenges encountered when providing winter preparedness guidance while attempting to recruit and update ECR information at the doorstep. **While many customers provided positive feedback, key learnings included:**

- Some customers were reluctant (or scared) to share personal information at the doorstep but were receptive to receiving literature for further reading and appropriate action.
- Certain households in areas of deprivation were less open to the visit and declined the conversation immediately, citing mistrust of energy companies or disinterest.

These insights are guiding us to think more strategically about the geographical targeting of our door-knocking efforts and our **collaboration with Citizens Advice North West—a trusted and well-known brand—in engaging low-income households for winter readiness support through the Take Charge campaign (Case Study 2.3).**



Customer impact

Proactively raising awareness and maintaining contact with our customers across the region, especially those in highly vulnerable situations, enhances their winter preparedness. This not only improves their safety but also reduces anxiety, stress, and potential health issues caused by power cuts.

Our new data portal eliminates manual handling and ensures that ECR records are promptly updated. Through our data system and feedback loops, we can effectively track outcomes:

- From 27,621 calls made, 9,645 interactions with customers in highly vulnerable situations, including 6,961 in-depth conversations about winter preparedness
- 2,170 ECR records updated, providing an accurate representation of our customers' needs and enabling tailored support services.
- In a survey conducted in March 2024, 85% of customers who registered for the ECR in the last six months expressed reassurance due to the winter guidance they received.
- 61% of existing members said they took at least one action as a result of the contact; key among them noting the freephone 105 number and preparing battery back-up packs.

6.2 Case study: Protecting customers during the winter period

Strategic content

Weather events are the most common type of network incident experienced by our business.

What we heard

Our engagement with LRFs has emphasised:

- The importance of continuous improvements in coordinating multi-agency responses during major incidents.
- That so many of the remote communities engaged have no local emergency plans and rely on informal voluntary structures for support.

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service, NHS England, and the British Red Cross emphasised that there is no single solution to increasing the capacity of local volunteer-led organisations, charities, and parish councils in crisis management.

Continuous engagement is essential to maximise resource reach, effectiveness, and address local resilience requirements. More widely our stakeholders continue to look to us to use our people, technology and convening power to protect customers before, during and after incidents and embed effective practices.

What we did

This year, our shareholder-funded Community Resilience Fund enhanced power cut support for customers with 11 new community spaces. Since 2022/23 we've awarded 27 projects applying for funding across areas most affected by storms in Cumbria, Lancashire, and Derbyshire. **These spaces and organisations provided warmth, food, and shelter to local residents during incidents, offering respite and timely updates.**

We updated our codes of practice and processes based on learnings from previous events:

- We issued guidance developed by our data protection team to help colleagues involved in incident response share personal data safely, securely, and lawfully with LRFs.
- We assigned **incident roles to all colleagues**, not just executive and senior leaders.
- Assigned roles include assessing network damage in the field, making calls to our ECR customers, and checking on their wellbeing by knocking on doors (Case Study 6.1).



Mark Mercer, Network Operations Director, said: "When severe weather is imminent, all BAU roles cease, and the second set of responsibilities are prioritised. I feel proud that we now have over 500 people, a quarter of our organisation, and half of our non-operational colleagues, able to make calls during an event."



Please scan the QR code to watch a video where you can hear from all the people involved in the response and what it means to them to serve our customers.

Between November 2023 and January 2024, our network faced a series of weather-related incidents. In a short window, we encountered seven named storms and a major snow event in Cumbria.

Storms Isha and Jocelyn caused extensive damage, affecting 96,000 customers—nearly as many as Storm Arwen. Ahead of Storms Isha and Jocelyn we issued weather warnings to all ECR customers via email and text and signposted top tips to give them a chance to prepare.

Our enhanced Network Management System minimised the disruption caused to customers through our automation technique, Fault Location, Isolation and Supply Restoration, which restored power for 41% within just three minutes.

Figure 11: Storms Isha and Jocelyn – in numbers



During the incident, we reached out to our ECR customers, especially those with medical needs, offering urgent support and coordinating with emergency services and local authorities. We held incident calls with partners pre-event, every three hours during and a post-event review. More widely, we minimised disruptions by adjusting our routine work during winter, avoiding outages after 3:30 PM, and halting them on Fridays and holidays.

What we learnt

As a key LRF Category Two agency we contributed to an independent review of Storm Isha and Storm Jocelyn. It reflected on the experiences of staff and volunteers involved in the Multi-Agency Information Cell (MAIC) response. A key learning was there is some duplication of effort with agencies contacting their known vulnerable customers, but not always being able to provide this information to the MAIC, leading to some households receiving multiple calls or visits. In response **partner agencies have agreed to share data and coordinate targeted support to vulnerable customers through Cumbria LRF's data sharing portal Vulnerable Indicators for Properties in Emergency Response (VIPER).**

This valuable lesson links to case study 5.2, introducing a pilot with GMRF, a multi-agency partnership of emergency responders in Manchester, to test whether data sharing and other practices that work well in major incidents can be integrated into BAU supply interruptions.

Customer impact

Thanks to the increased support from our colleagues, our response to Storms Isha and Jocelyn was more effective and faster than ever. Key outcomes include:

- Our standby incident capacity increased from 360 to 540 non-operational colleagues, allowing rapid mobilisation of proactive telephone and door-to-door support for customers during incidents
- We significantly reduced customers' stress and anxiety during major storms, with only 2% of impacted customers experiencing power outages lasting longer than 24 hours
- In 2023/24 our average power cut frequency was the lowest in the UK (outside of London)
- An independent MAIC report confirms overall improvement in Electricity North West's response, including power cut information at a property level, increased calls, and welfare trucks

6.3 We listen, learn and adapt

To optimise our learning process, we gather, synthesise, and prioritise input from customers through post-event surveys, as well as from stakeholders via debriefs led by LRFs. Additionally, we triangulate external perspectives with feedback from colleagues. For each incident, an Incident Manager is designated to oversee the creation of reports and action plans, which are then managed by senior leaders. Our Storm Steering Group, which includes Company Directors, meets every two months to track the progress of these actions, with 436 feedback actions recorded from 10 incidents so far.

A review of how effective our plans proved to be

Aspects that are working well

Understanding our customers' and stakeholders' needs

The introduction of formalised lessons learned incident reports and ongoing triangulation of feedback has enabled us to be more responsive what communities need from us.







Table 16: What customers and stakeholders say they need from us

Need	Preparedness	Operational response	Communications	Post-event
Examples	Tree cutting, maintenance, readiness	24/7/365, quick response, vulnerable support	All channels, proactive, honest, multi-agency	Timely, continuous learning

The network damage we saw during Storms Isha and Jocelyn presented significant engineering challenges however customers appreciated rolling updates, proactive calls and teams on the ground knocking on the doors of

customers in affected areas. A key learning that we acted on in these events was to be more honest and cautious with estimated times for power restoration. Customers sentiment supported our safety-first approach.

Figure 12: few of the many positive comments made by customers during storms Isha and Jocelyn

	"Safety of employees must come first, it is the right decision to not work at height during such awful weather"		"Correct decision to delay restoration, it is about time that companies put safety over profit"		"You are doing an incredible job restoring so many in a short time on the back of another storm and with another on the way"
	"You guys just cracked on with the job, if only other utility providers were the same"		"Well done with the live comms. So many organisations don't engage. It doesn't get us reconnected quicker, but it does show you care"		"Very good updates by text and social media"

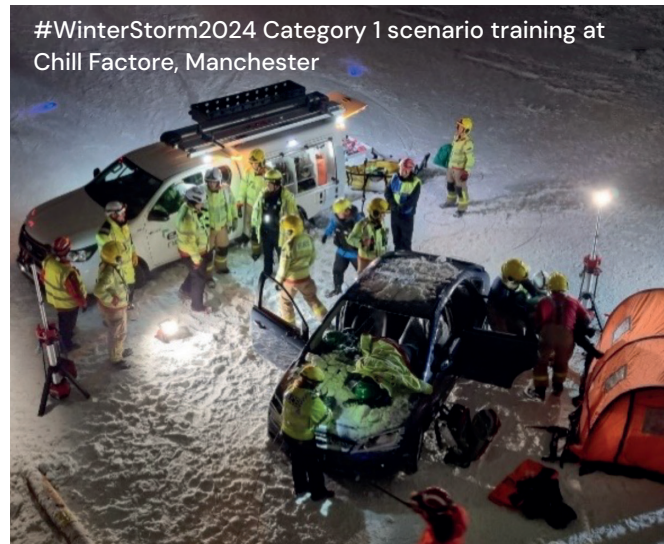
✓ Cultural change and using all our people to respond

Culture change begins at the top, where consistent tone, narrative, and actions reverberate throughout the organisation. **Our CEO, Ian Smyth, has revitalised our safety culture for both colleagues and the public.** Internally, there's no doubt that safety is our top priority. We're actively training and mobilising our entire team to prepare our communities for winter and respond effectively in times of need. Our increased standby capacity and experience with new processes have led to a significant improvement in our preparedness. It's clear that these safety practices have become second nature to our people.

• Closer links to LRFs to maximise reach

LRFs have acknowledged the improvements we've made in strengthening engagement with them, including establishing key contacts, data sharing and customer support. Throughout 2023, our joined-up preparations with LRFs continued, including our involvement in multi-agency emergency responder familiarisation training, and internally through scenario-based incident training, such as re-enacting a significant flooding event that occurred in Cumbria.

Our collaboration with Local Authorities has also stepped up. For example, the Greater Manchester Resilience Forum has shared emergency contact numbers with us to directly contact the relevant local authority emergency control centre. This is for incidents that are below major incident status but where some support may be needed.



Aspects we are looking to improve

• Further strengthening community resilience hubs and networks

We are aware of organisations like Support Cumbria who have the capacity to expand winter support but no funding. We will award further grants to expand the number of local community hubs, with projects tailored to local needs.

• Incidents are broader than the weather

Our focus on weather is right, but our business faces other risks that have customer impacts, such as network issues, major system events or business continuity including major IT loss, and cyber or malicious threats. We are looking to bring together the community of leads that require incident testing and processes embedded within one code of practice.

Sam Townend, Emergency Planning & Resilience Manager, said: Our newly formed Incident and Response Steering Group will embed best practices and lessons learned across all incident types, aligning with our established audit and incident reporting process. This enhanced governance structure will serve as a central hub for risk review, ensuring that exercises and issues are rigorously tested to bridge any gaps."



• Door knocking

We believe that going door to door to check if customers need help, especially when we have no other way of contacting them, is the right thing to do. However, we will continue to review and refine the way in which we deliver this exercise and through our work with LRFs in major incidents ensure there is no duplication of effort across agencies.

The lessons learned we are taking onboard for the upcoming winter period

For the upcoming winter, we're learning to start customer outreach earlier, beginning in summer, to better prepare for early storms. We're also launching a Focused Improvement Plan to enhance our incident management, aiming for a more efficient and collaborative approach, and introducing a balanced scorecard to measure our performance across various metrics. Additionally, we'll conduct customer surveys and independent research to evaluate the effectiveness of our contact campaigns.

7. Moving forward into 2024/25

Thank you for reading this review of our delivery during 2023/24.

Over the course of the year, we've been co-designing a detailed roadmap of initiatives for 2024/25 and beyond, many of which have been highlighted in the 'forward look' sections throughout this document.

We will continue our combined strategy of providing customer support under our Extra Care umbrella including:

- Expanding the number of registrants on the ECR and using segmentation and research to understand how to reduce our gaps.
- Ensuring Take Charge reaches the 'next level' by enabling fuel poverty support services to reach a broader audience across the North West.
- Focusing more on the development of our Low Carbon Transition Advice Service, with benefits to customers identified, tracked and realised.
- Continuing our above and beyond approach to preparing and protecting customers in winter readiness, while finding the right metrics to enhance benefits measurement.
- Embedding inclusion and fairness as a guiding compass in everything we do.



Finally, we hugely value the input our stakeholders provide on an ongoing basis, so please sign up for our newsletter using the QR code provided. By registering you will receive our latest electronic newsletter and invitations to our events.

Stephanie Trubshaw, Customer Services and Connections Director

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you **take
charge**

Ready to take control of your bills?

Take charge of your bills today, with energy
and money advice you can trust.

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Bringing energy to your door

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trust**