

Social responsibility

It is part of our sustainability strategy to play a central role in the life our communities. The new regulatory period heralds our taking social responsibility to a new level, with an ever-more sophisticated approach to data leading to a deepening understanding of our stakeholders.



Who is responsible

Suleman Alli
Director of Finance, Customer Service and Technology

Targets

- Expand the scope and reach of our Priority Services Register (PSR), delivering an overall 30% increase in registrations in the R110-ED2 period, and continue to improve the satisfaction of our PSR customers.
- Provide targeted support to a total of 500,000 fuel-poor customers over R110-ED2, investing £18m to support over 200,000 directly and 300,000 through partnership programmes.
- Provide information and help to 500,000 vulnerable customers over R110-ED2 to ensure no one is left behind in the changing energy system, at no cost to customers.
- Reduce the number of third-party overhead line and underground cable strikes by at least 20% for each year over R110-ED2 and increase our commitment to engage with the public around safety.

As a provider of an essential service, social responsibility is of the utmost importance at UK Power Networks. Being a respected, trusted corporate citizen is a core part of our vision; social responsibility is deeply embedded in our culture.

2023/24 was the first year of the new regulatory period (R110-ED2) which runs until 2028. This presented us with the opportunity to take a careful look at our social responsibility strategy and activities across the organisation to ensure that we continue to build this vital aspect of our business in the way that our customers have told us is important to them.

We are acutely aware that many of our customers are having to cope with the cost-of-living crisis, and energy costs are a significant element in that. The transition to Net Zero threatens to widen the gap between those who can afford to decarbonise and those who cannot.

Taking particular care of customers whose circumstances make them vulnerable is central to our socially responsible approach. We estimate that, across our three networks, there are currently 3.3 million households eligible for our Priority Services Register (PSR). These include those over the age of 65, people living with children under five or customers facing mental or physical health challenges. We currently have approximately 77% of households eligible registered to our PSR. We also believe there to be 1.58 million customers in our areas alone who are at risk of being left behind in the energy system transition by 2030.

Taking social responsibility to a new level

We have taken our consumer vulnerability programme to a new level, setting ambitious targets for ED2. We are investing for the long term in partnerships and making huge advances in our internal processes to drive greater support and deliver meaningful impact to support our customers and their communities.

Deepening our understanding of our vulnerable customers

We use data throughout the business and have extensive expertise in managing information to provide insights on which vulnerabilities are affecting our customers and how vulnerability differs across the communities we serve. To improve the support we provide and to be more targeted in our approach, we need a clearer view of vulnerability trends across the areas we serve.

In 2023/24, we developed a new, innovative solution called Spotlight. This tool uses advanced AI and machine learning techniques to help us understand customer segmentation and identify vulnerable customers with an unprecedented level of granularity. We can apply this information to our management of the PSR. Our interactions with vulnerable customers can not only be more specific but can also be tailored to meet customers' unique needs within identified categories of vulnerable customers. By analysing data gaps and testing different communication channels with customer groups, we are gaining valuable insights such as which ways of engaging are most effective at achieving new

registrations. By providing actionable information about customers' needs, such as what makes them eligible for the PSR and which service offerings best meet their needs, these insights are improving the way we can support vulnerable customers.

These developments will enable us to apply data-led decision-making to target customers in need and ramp up support over the coming years not only for those on the PSR, but also in identifying vulnerable customers in fuel poverty and those at risk of being left behind in the transition to Net Zero.

Sharing data with other utilities

A key achievement we made in 2023/24 in relation to building the PSR was our collaboration with water companies operating in our area. In ED1 we began data sharing with other utilities that served the same customers, putting in place arrangements with seven of the eight water companies in our area. This meant customers only needed to register once for the PSR.

This year we've gone further, becoming the first DNO to share historical data with two water companies in our region. This means that customers who registered with suppliers before our data sharing agreement was in place are registered to receive support across all their utilities without having to register more than once. This collaboration with Thames Water and Affinity Water resulted in 86,923 more registrations to our PSR.

Addressing fuel poverty and leaving no one behind

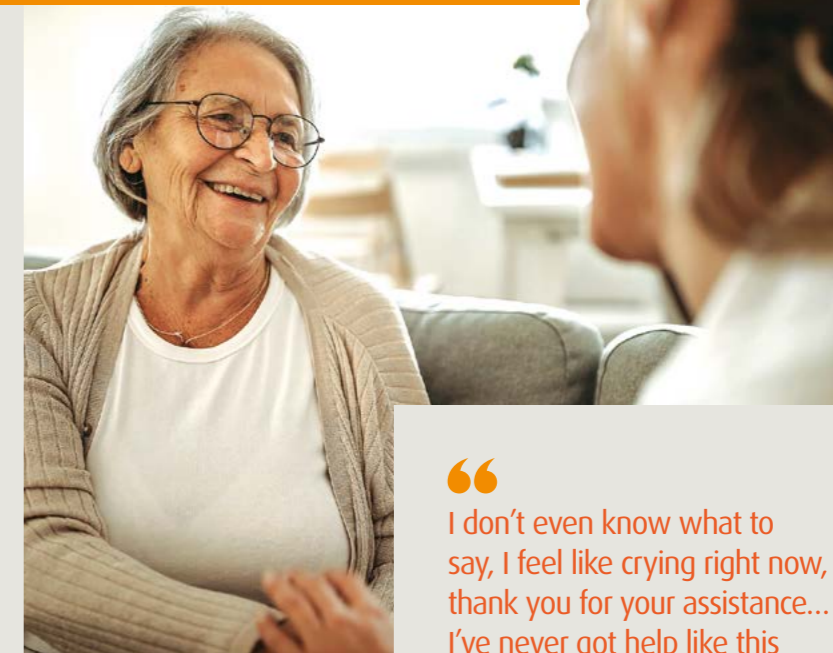
We made great strides in 2023/24 in our undertaking to support customers in fuel poverty and those who are at risk of being left behind in the transition to Net Zero. Our increasing understanding of the root causes of these two aspects of disadvantage has shown us that they often overlap. As part of our strategy, we took the opportunity to reinforce our foundations, reviewing, for example, how we use data and setting up the most effective partnership models. We are re-evaluating what we offer to customers who need extra help so we can deliver maximum value to them. We are also developing a new portfolio of services to include a greater range of offerings and formats. For example, our stakeholder engagement tells us that people want a choice in how they access help; some want to be served online in order to remain anonymous, while others value the personal approach, be that on the phone or face-to-face.

We are all too aware that many of the benefits of the transition to a Net Zero economy are more readily available to those with digital skills and disposable income. To redress this disparity, we are working to find ways to provide customers with the skills they need to engage with the energy market and use low-carbon technologies. We set up a partnership with Social Enterprise

How we are...

looking after our most vulnerable customers

OUR INNOVATION STRATEGY  



“ I don't even know what to say, I feel like crying right now, thank you for your assistance... I've never got help like this before. I don't really know what to say, I couldn't believe my eyes! Thank you again, this was literally life changing for me!”

Customer testimonial

GREAT ADVICE DELIVERED LOCALLY

Over the last year, we partnered with Citizens Advice Arun and Chichester to offer a range of fuel poverty support, including income maximisation, home energy audits and grant application support to customers.

Kent to develop Digital Skills Training, with a focus on Net Zero. The service helps customers develop the digital skills they need which will increase the likelihood of them participating in the Net Zero transition. We also partnered with Camden Council and Utilita – a power supplier specialising in pay-as-you-go meters – to promote and reward energy-saving practices in 46 social housing homes, helping customers realise the benefits energy flexibility offers to groups that are not typical adopters of such technology.

For more information about our programmes to support customers in vulnerable circumstances and the way we manage our partnerships with charities and groups embedded in the communities we serve, see our [Annual Vulnerability Report](#).

What this means for our customers

Building on our network of partnerships means we can deliver more support to more customers. Through our engagement with Citizens Advice Arun and Chichester, we were able to leverage the network of Citizens Advice branches throughout our area. Working together, we expanded the support service to work with Citizens Advice Essex as well. In total, both branches supported more than 9,000 customers.