

Memorandum: Additional evidence from UK Power Networks following December's storm



1. Introduction

- 1.1 UK Power Networks owns, operates and manages three of the 14 electricity distribution networks (DNOs) in Great Britain: London, the East and South East. Our networks operate in the fastest-growing and highest-cost area of the country, delivering electricity to 8.1 million customers via 46,500km of overhead lines and 139,000km of underground cables (across an area of approximately 30,000km²).

2. Vulnerable customers

Priority Service Register

- 2.1 Our customers are at the heart of UK Power Networks' business and we are sorry for any disruption and inconvenience that people across our network faced as a result of the storm. Following a severe weather event such as the Christmas storms there will be customers who lose power and, to our regret, this was no different. All our efforts, therefore, were focused on reconnecting power supplies in the quickest and safest way possible.
- 2.2 UK Power Networks runs a Priority Services Register (PSR) for customers who are especially vulnerable during power cuts, such as the elderly, ill or those with medical equipment powered by electricity at home. The register has recently been extended to include people who have young children aged up to two years old. An awareness of customers with additional requirements may allow us to get assistance to them more promptly.
- 2.3 Upon joining the Register, the customer will:
 - Receive a dedicated, freephone priority phone number to call in electrical emergencies;
 - Be kept updated during a power cut by a call centre advisor or via text messages; and
 - Be given extra help and support through the British Red Cross, with which UK Power Networks works in a partnership.
- 2.4 Once a person registered on our PSR experiences a power cut and we are aware of it, we contact the customer to understand their individual needs and are able to offer meal allowance for prolonged power cuts and hotel accommodation should supply be off overnight. For care and nursing homes as well as for customers with a registered dependency on electricity for medical equipment, we look to provide generators where required.
- 2.5 There are over 328,000 customers on our PSR. We continue to promote awareness of the PSR through multiple channels (e.g. website, handbooks, stakeholder sessions, etc.) and work with trusted third parties (e.g. GP surgeries, charities, British Red Cross, local authorities, etc.) to increase the number of applications to join.
- 2.6 Following a consultation with our stakeholders in Critical Friends panels and in an issue-specific focus group on ways to reduce consumer vulnerability and fuel poverty (which UK Power Networks runs twice a year), we have produced PSR Packs which contain a torch, a luminous sticker with the priority services free phone number, an analogue phone and a booklet with useful information on how to cope in power emergencies. The phone is particularly important as modern digital phones will not work during a power cut which could make the customer feel isolated. The distribution of the trial batch of 2,000 boxes was completed in early December to customers who rely on electricity for medical equipment.

British Red Cross

- 2.7 UK Power Networks have been working in partnership with the British Red Cross (BRC) since August 2008. As part of our Memorandum of Understanding, the BRC aims to provide short-term humanitarian assistance in the form of practical and emotional support to people who have been affected following an electrical power outage.
- 2.8 Where appropriate, UK Power Networks calls upon the BRC to support a local community experiencing a prolonged power cut. The BRC deploys volunteers in one of their vehicles 24/7 to provide hot drinks, flasks, torches and see to the general welfare needs of the customers.
- 2.9 During a response, the BRC door knocks to assess customer needs and vulnerability. They may identify customers with specific needs and so encourage and assist them to access the relevant statutory service support.
- 2.10 On average the BRC attend 233 incidents a year. However, this number varies significantly in years when there are severe weather events.

Customer Champions

- 2.11 Customer Champions are UK Power Networks' specially trained volunteers who attend sites to support local communities during difficult or prolonged incidents.
- 2.12 Customer champions act as focal points for the local community to provide updates on restoration progress, manage complaints and to identify and support vulnerable customers. Customer champions sometimes work alongside the BRC.
- 2.13 During a power outage if we have a large number of customers affected or the restoration may take some time to complete we will call upon champions to attend site. They are then able to liaise with the field teams and provide customers with real time updates and also support our vulnerable customers.
- 2.14 In some instances, UK Power Networks also deploys its incident vehicle, the Mobile Command Unit, which acts as a focal point for the community where customer champions can base themselves to provide updates to customers.

Innovation and vulnerable customers: Low Carbon Network Fund project in Tower Hamlets

- 2.15 UK Power Networks has been awarded money from Ofgem's Low Carbon Networks Fund to explore how "specific engagement activity" can help fuel poor and vulnerable residents in making savings whilst supporting the electricity distribution network.
- 2.16 The project is set to begin in London's Tower Hamlets next month to support tenants living in fuel poverty in the borough. We are being supported by Tower Hamlets Homes, Poplar HARCA, the Bromley by Bow Centre and a number of other partners.
- 2.17 The project will offer support to the 550 local fuel poor residents that take part in the project. It is aiming to help tenants achieve sustained energy savings by encouraging their participation in, and raising awareness of energy saving technology and time of use tariffs. The project, entitled Vulnerable Customers and Energy Efficiency (VCEE), will explore how local residents and communities, social housing providers, electricity suppliers and distribution network operators can work together to understand the requirements and tailor services to help those in need.

Preparation for vulnerable customers in the storm

- 2.18 During the preparations ahead of December's storm we made contact with key partners including the British Red Cross to ensure they were resourced to assist. They deployed to 37 locations with 91 volunteers
- 2.19 The strategy was to proactively contact all customers registered on the PSR database when we were aware there was a fault in their postcode. In addition, customers who called and then were highlighted as vulnerable where marked as this on our control system and their details would automatically appear on the call back schedule.
- 2.20 We worked with catering companies and restaurants to provide food to the worst hit areas and in total 2,393 meals were served across 49 locations. Some vulnerable customers were also offered hotel accommodation. We provided 739 hotel rooms for identified vulnerable customers including families with young children. Each booking included dinner and breakfast. This is in addition to the 2,393 meals shown above.
- 2.21 Additionally many hundreds of customers are claiming back the cost of their Christmas dinners and we are processing their claims.
- 2.22 In light of the time of year we took the decision to enhance the statutory payments. This decision was made on the 24 December. As a goodwill gesture, we introduced a payment of £75 for customers who were without power at any time on Christmas Day even though the Regulator only requires us to pay £27 if a customer is off supply between 48 and 60 hours. If they were off for between 60 and 72 hours, the payment will be £108 (double the industry standard of £54). For each further 12-hour period thereafter, an additional £54 will be paid (double the industry standard of £27) up to a maximum of £432. We have proactively written to over 20,000 affected customers, apologising for the situation they were in as a result of the storm and providing them with information about how they can claim their payments. To put these payments in context, our share of an average domestic energy bill is approximately £80 a year.

3. Working with partners

- 3.1 UK Power Networks worked with other organisations such as local authorities and other utilities during the storm.
- 3.2 We were able to use Kent County Council tree cutters. We also kept in regular contact with Southern Water and South East Water to ensure clean and dirty water infrastructure was kept running where possible. We responded to the Local Resilience Forums attending conference calls where required, however this was predominantly in relation to flooding.
- 3.3 The emergency services also attended a number of incidents where conductors were down in the highway and either stood guard or coned off the area.
- 3.4 Following consultations with local authorities, we set up a project in April 2013 to agree a notification process around power cuts. UK Power Networks now proactively contacts the emergency planning teams in the relevant councils, providing them with relevant information to enable them to assist customers, including vulnerable customers, more effectively.

4. Staffing levels: Eastern Power Networks & Southern Power Networks

4.1 The Committee has requested information on our staffing levels over Christmas 2009, 2011 and 2013. UK Power Networks was created in 2010. Therefore, we have supplied figures for 2010-2013, annually. We include figures for Eastern Power Networks (EPN) & Southern Power Networks (SPN) only as our London network was only minimally impacted.

Christmas 2013 (EPN & SPN)

	2013		
	24 Dec	25 Dec	26 Dec
Frontline* DNO staff	646	514	363
Scouts, Tree Cutters and Schedulers	344	244	203
Total	990	758	566

*Frontline staff includes Linesmen, Technicians and Engineers working and on standby (but called out)

4.2 Please note that the reduction in numbers on 25 and 26 December primarily reflects reducing resources in EPN as the incident was materially over by Christmas morning. However the continued unsettled weather in EPN prevented us dispatching all of these staff to SPN.

Christmas staffing figures 2010-2012 (EPN & SPN)

4.3 The table below shows frontline staff working only. Tree cutter and scheduler figures are not shown for prior years (in the absence of a system emergency we would not use scouts). Over all of the days below, we had 226 members of staff on standby, some of whom would have been called into work.

	2012			2011			2010		
	24 Dec	25 Dec	26 Dec	24 Dec	25 Dec	26 Dec	24 Dec	25 Dec	26 Dec
Frontline staff*	297	143	139	195	101	122	297	162	128

*Staff includes Linesman, Jointers, Engineers, Fitters, DST.

Call handling staff

	24 Dec	25 Dec	26 Dec
2010	42	42	32
2011	32	37	44
2012	58	34	38
2013	346	308	273

5. Additional issues: Smart meter roll-out

5.1 One of the issues the Committee briefly mentioned was the potential impact of smart metering on a DNO's ability to respond in a storm. We believe that smart metering will provide a number of benefits.

- 5.2 'Last gasp' signals from meters suffering outages will give us much better real time information on exactly which information on exactly which customers are off supply, before they call in or we make field inspections.
- 5.3 'First breath' restoration signals from the meters and the ability to 'ping' meters to check energisation status will be very helpful. The latter will be very useful in identifying masked faults and checking energisation rather than (or before) ringing customers to check if they are back on supply. Overall this could greatly speed up the tail-end restoration performance and help identify small groups of customers who are suffering particularly extended outages.
- 5.4 If vulnerable customers have smart meters installed early, it will allow DNOs to proactively check their supply status following storms and faults (and to receive last gasp and first breath alerts on supply failure and restoration) ensuring we can then prioritise their supply restoration and/or seek external agency help should an extended outage be likely.

6. Reviews

- 6.1 We are working with Government on their review of the Christmas storms which will focus on communications with household energy customers, necessary resources to be able to cope with widespread disruption, and the compensation process.
- 6.2 We have initiated an internal review conducted by independent, external, expert consultants. This is due to report within the next couple of months.