

Heat Network Industry Council statement: Monitoring

Heat Networks
Industry Council



Context

In response to the exceptional circumstances caused by the coronavirus pandemic, members of the Heat Network Industry Council agreed and published in early May a statement setting out how companies will go above and beyond to support customers during this difficult time.

This is a voluntary agreement and the organisations who have signed up to this agreement do so for the heat networks where they have the authority to do so.

In all cases, the statement encourages heat network companies to work with customers and be responsive to their individual circumstances.

This qualitative statement is accompanied by a confidential quantitative submission by all companies on a quarterly basis. A summary of this quantitative submission is published in aggregate by Heat Trust.



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Identifying and prioritising customers at risk

What the statement says

We will seek to identify and prioritise customers who may need additional support and consider the needs of customers taking into account that:

- Priority Service Register customers may need extra advice and support.

1. What we are doing: Engaging customers who may need to be added to the Priority Service Register [tick all that apply]

- Staff are trained to identify those who may need to be added and proactively engage new and existing customers to check on any changed circumstances
- Field staff are trained and are responding if they identify someone who may need to be added

Further information: We are reviewing the information we have held for residents and who is listed on the PSR. We are resending out registration forms or signposting residents to our website to encourage them to add themselves to the register. We are also looking into further training for our employees.

2. What we are doing: Providing additional advice and support to customers on the Priority Service Register [tick all that apply]

- Providing communication support, including for information on coronavirus, such as providing information in different languages and ensuring all information is accessible
- Providing additional support for those in vulnerable circumstances such as working with customers to nominate a bill payer, providing additional safety measures for calls to the house and signposting to impartial advice.

Further information: We are reviewing the information we currently have available and how we may be able to adjust them to any potential language barriers. We are also reviewing the information that is currently available on our website. We have written to all residents regarding coronavirus and additional measures that we are taking.

What the statement says

We will seek to identify and prioritise customers who may need additional support and consider the needs of customers taking into account that:

- Prepayment meter customers, both smart and legacy, will need specific support.



3. What we are doing: Providing specific support to prepayment customers [tick all that apply]

- Ensuring that customers on analogue prepayment meters have alternative means to top up if they cannot go to a local top-up point
- Providing access to additional emergency credit if needed

Further information: All of our prepayment meters are managed by third party providers on our behalf. We have viewed the alternative means that they have in place for top ups and believe them to be sufficient and we have also discussed with them regarding increasing emergency credit limits when required.

We will support customers who are impacted financially as a direct or indirect result of coronavirus

What the statement says

We will support customers who are impacted financially as a direct or indirect result of coronavirus. Based on individual circumstances, this could include:

- Considering reassessing or reducing debt repayment and bill payments for domestic customers in financial distress

4. What we are doing: Ensuring processes are in place to respond to customers' changing financial circumstances [tick all that apply]

- All repayment plans include an affordability assessment
- Regularly engaging with customers to respond to changing circumstances
- Providing a range of repayment plans or tailoring default repayment plans to customers' individual circumstances

Further information: We are reviewing all repayment plans when approached by a customer who has expressed concern over their current circumstances. In all cases, so far, we have agreed to reduce their plans for a period of time (normally 3 months) and have agreed with them to review it again with them after this period. For those customers who we have now reviewed we have retained them on their current reduced plan for a further 3 months.

What the statement says

We will support customers who are impacted financially as a direct or indirect result of coronavirus. Based on individual circumstances, this could include:

- Considering referring customers who are struggling to pay to third party debt advisers such as StepChange and Citizens Advice.



5. What we are doing: Referring customers to third party advisers if needed [tick all that apply]

- Proactively making referrals to organisations such as StepChange and Citizens Advice

Further information: Through both phone calls and reminder letters to residents we are providing contact details to both StepChange and Citizens Advice as normal practice. These details are also available on our website as independent parties who can advise our customers.

We will support prepayment meter customers directly or indirectly impacted by coronavirus to stay on supply

What the statement says

We will support prepayment meter customers directly or indirectly impacted by coronavirus to stay on supply. We will promote online and/or telephone smart prepayment top-up channels, where available. Where this is not available, based on individual circumstances, this could include:

- Enabling customers to nominate a trusted third party to be able to pick up discretionary credit sent to a shop on their behalf

6. What we are doing: Enabling customers to nominate a trusted third party if needed [tick all that apply]

- Proactively ensuring customers can nominate a trusted third party to pick up credit

Further information: All of our prepayment meters are managed by third party providers on our behalf. We have viewed the alternative methods (such as online/apps and phone) they have available and are happy that they are in place. We have also discussed with them regarding nomination of a third party individual if required and they are happy to do this.

What the statement says

We will support prepayment meter customers directly or indirectly impacted by coronavirus to stay on supply. We will promote online and/or telephone smart prepayment top-up channels, where available. Where this is not available, based on individual circumstances, this could include:

- Having particular regard for the regulatory requirements and the potential impact of coronavirus, when applying the 'safe and reasonable' test when considering switching a customer from credit to prepay



7. What we are doing: Having regard to how the 'safe and reasonable test' should be considered within the context of coronavirus [tick all that apply]

Reflecting the impact of coronavirus on our assessment of, for example, customers' ability to understand and operate prepayment meters and visit top-up points where needed, whether customers require a continuous supply for health reasons and whether customers have continuous access to the prepayment meter

Further information: We are regularly reviewing our prepayment customers and their consumption. Where we have concerns that someone may be 'self-disconnecting' we are reaching out to them to understand their current circumstances and working with them to get to the best outcome for that individual. Each case is dealt with on a case by case basis.

Providing information

What the statement says

We will make available information, advice and guidance to customers on what help is available, including that the energy usage of self-isolating customers may go up as a result of being at home more, and sign posting to sources of support.

This will include several different communication channels such as a supplier's website, a contact phone number for customers etc; recognising that not all customers will have internet access.

8. What we are doing: Using different communication channels for information, advice and guidance [tick all that apply]

Paper-based; including, for example, on people's bills and letters

Providing a contact phone number for customers

Providing online support and guidance

Further information: We have written to all customers and are now reviewing what further information we can add to monthly bills and statements going forward. Where applicable we are working with the relevant housing associations to request that they share our information with their residents (which has included their web pages and also local display boards within communal areas). We are looking at engaging with resident groups within some of the developments and also reviewing the information we hold on our webpages.

