

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.



Heat Networks
Industry Council

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: This is something we promote on our website and something we actively discuss on all incoming calls.

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 wrote to all customer and have information available on our website and this is something we discuss on calls; <https://www.sseutilitiesolutions.co.uk/coronavirus-heat-networks-customer-update/>

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: We can take payments over the phone 24/7. Emergency credit limits can be adjusted if required but has not been requested so far. We can also introduce friendly credit periods preventing customers from disconnecting during periods of storms or if our phone lines were to fail.

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: When setting up a payment plan we are making sure that ongoing usage is covered and we discuss affordability, offering to recover debit balance over 2 years as a maximum. If this is not affordable we can offer prepayment where a percentage of each top up recovers debt so 10%, 20% or 30% dependant on affordability.

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: This is something we have written to our customers about and have on our website: <https://www.sseutilitiesolutions.co.uk/coronavirus-heat-networks-customer-update/> we also are having these discussions with customers if they are struggling with bills and payments.

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: We have the ability to add further account holders or a third party to the account subject to data protection rules.

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: Every customer is assessed in a bespoke manner as to the suitability of a pre-payment meter being installed or switched between credit and pre-payment. Vulnerability/suitability checks are completed before any change is undertaken.

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, emailed and texted all our customers with our coronavirus letter which includes contact details such as email and telephone number. Email and telephone numbers are on every bill and customer communication. They are also clearly stated on our website and our social media platforms. A copy of our coronavirus letter can be found here: <https://www.sseutilitiesolutions.co.uk/coronavirus-heat-networks-customer-update/>

