

STRAT7



SGN

Your gas. Our network.

GD3 Research Programme – Phase X Research Panel Survey

Supporting vulnerable customers task report

Maria Colarusso and Cady Crowley

March 28th 2024





Background

Background



Objectives

- Clarify customers view on what support for vulnerable customers SGN should provide
- Understand if customers believe we should have dedicated customer liaison officers in the community
- Explore if customers believe the same level of support for vulnerable customers should be provided UK-wide



Method

We invited participants to complete a 10 minute survey related to SGN’s support of vulnerable customers, covering:

- Attitudes toward offering support to vulnerable customers
- What formal policies and procedures SGN should implement to ensure adequate support of vulnerable customers
- The kinds of support SGN should prioritise offering vulnerable customers

Fieldwork ran in w/c 18th Mar 2024



Sample

72 participants participated:

- **50 Domestic Gas Customers:**
- **9 Future Energy Customers**
- **13 SMEs**

A methodological note on the interpretation of Research Panel results

The Phase X Research Panel was set up in October 2023 with 100 informed customers who had participated in SGN's Phase A Deliberative Research. These customers were informed on SGN's business, its customer base and possible priorities and initiatives for the next GD3 business plan.

Over the last year, new panellists have been recruited to replace any dropouts from the original panel, to maintain the Research Panel sample at ~100 panellists. All new panellists are similarly informed about SGN.

This Research Panel is designed to provide a longitudinal understanding on any new issues arising from the GD3 business plan.

Whilst this panel can provide meaningful guidance for SGN on its GD3 business plan from customers (and future customers) who are informed about SGN, it is not intended to be representative of SGN's entire customer base.

And due to the small sample size (<100), the percentages shown in this report should be taken as indicative of customers views and are not sufficient to provide robust data.





Findings

Summary of findings

1

There is a great appetite for SGN to offer support and resources to vulnerable customers.

All forms of potential support SGN could offer listed in the survey was met with a majority of support. This suggests consumers have a strong desire to ensure adequate support is available for vulnerable customers (particularly in the shadow of the Cost-of-Living Crisis).

2

SGN may be best placed to offer educational and communications support.

Respondents most heavily favoured SGN taking steps to identify vulnerable respondents and offer them advice and communication support, especially when these could help mitigate serious injury or death.

3

Not everyone believes the responsibility to offer financial support or free services should fall on SGN, particularly if this incurs increased costs for other customers.

Though a majority responded positively to all possible ways SGN could support vulnerable customers, there was less support around offering free services or vouchers, and some participants felt it wasn't SGN's responsibility to offer such extensive support (particularly if it means higher tariffs for other customers).

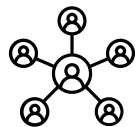
For the majority, supporting people in vulnerable situations is of high or moderate importance.

Importance of supporting vulnerable customers
% selected



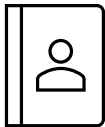
Q2 How important is supporting customers in vulnerable situations to you / your business? Base: Total sample n= 72

Many see support of vulnerable individuals as an imperative social responsibility, which extends into the corporate sphere.



Social importance

Many believe there exists a wide social responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those in need, including access to heating and electricity. Several participants mentioned higher rates of deaths due to cold and starvation in vulnerable communities during the Cost of Living Crisis.



Moral obligation

Some see businesses and corporations shouldering a moral obligation to assist those in need. Several respondents argued that doing so endows brand support and brand trust from customers.



Personal relevance

Some may view support for vulnerable communities as deeply personal given either their status as a vulnerable person, or a close relationship with a person with vulnerabilities. Further, some pointed out that they may themselves become vulnerable if their situations change, and they would like to know they are supported

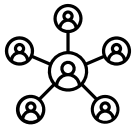


Altruism

Many respondents feel a personal obligation to support vulnerable people and wish themselves and others to contribute as and where they can. Some participants here suggested willingness to pay extra to ensure the needs of vulnerable customers are met.

Q3 Why do you say that? Base: Total sample n= 72

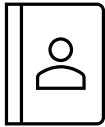
Verbatims



Social importance

It's just how I feel morally. As a society we need to do more to help and protect the vulnerable. (Domestic Gas)

As a citizen I want to see vulnerable people supported (Fuel Poverty, Domestic Gas)



Moral obligation

The business provider has a moral duty of care towards vulnerable customers. It helps the customers but also the company reputation. (Domestic Gas)

I think supporting customers in vulnerable situations is important and I believe it is fair practice to support these individuals and provide help and support where needed. I believe businesses almost have a moral obligation to help those that are vulnerable. (SME)



Personal relevance

As a disabled person myself, I understand the rigour faced by vulnerable people getting support and access to various services thus the need to prioritise the need of vulnerable people (SME)

Because I am a carer myself for a vulnerable elderly parent and know first-hand how much support they need (Domestic Gas)



Altruism

because seeing people in need is hard and I want to help (Future)

Personally, it doesn't impact us as a business, but we don't mind contributing towards helping the older & the vulnerable population so that they can survive ok (SME)



It's most important for SGN to identify customers with vulnerabilities early on, including those across a wide spectrum of potential vulnerabilities

Agree with below statements

% selected



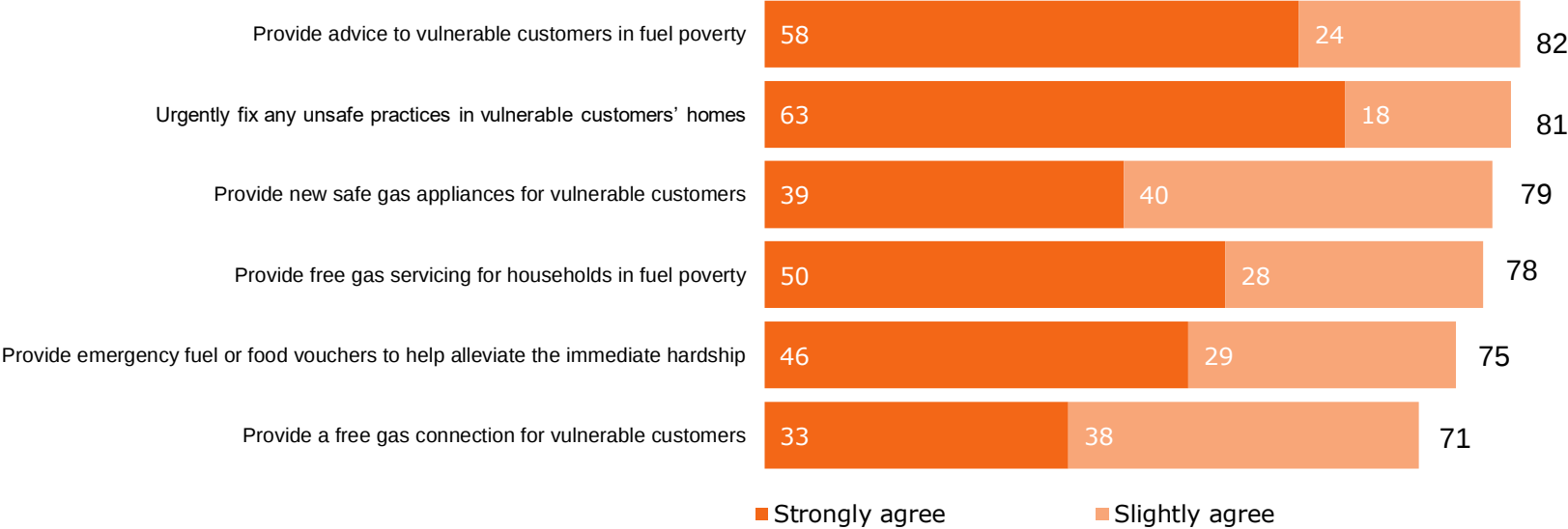
Q4. Please read the below statements and signal where you "agree" or "disagree". Base: Total sample n= 72

The most vital support SGN can offer focuses on ensuring personal safety as well as offering education and support referral...



Q5 Here are a number of ways SGN can support vulnerable customers. For each, do you agree or disagree that SGN should provide this support for vulnerable customers? Base: Total sample n= 72

...although some saw it as less important that SGN provide free servicing, appliances, fuel, or vouchers, which may be seen as beyond SGN’s remit.

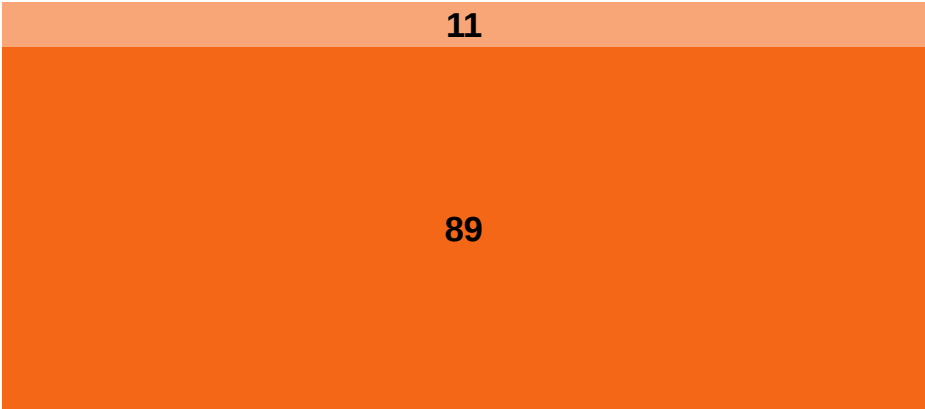


Q5 Here are a number of ways SGN can support vulnerable customers. For each, do you agree or disagree that SGN should provide this support for vulnerable customers? Base: Total sample n= 72

Many see it as imperative that any support offered is universal and does not discriminate by region or rurality.

Attitude toward all customers in the UK having the same access to support services, regardless of where in the UK they live

% selected



■ It is OK for vulnerable customers' access to support services to vary depending on where in the UK they live

■ All vulnerable customers should have the same access to support services regardless of where in the UK they live

Q7 Do you believe all vulnerable customers in the UK should have the same access to support services, regardless of where in the UK they live? (For example, in the event of a gas interruption vulnerable customers would have the same access to welfare facilities, e.g. hot meals, oil-filled radiators, heated blankets, etc.)? Base: Total sample n= 72

Verbatims



Different geographic locations require different support. Specific support should be given towards specific locations (Domestic Gas)

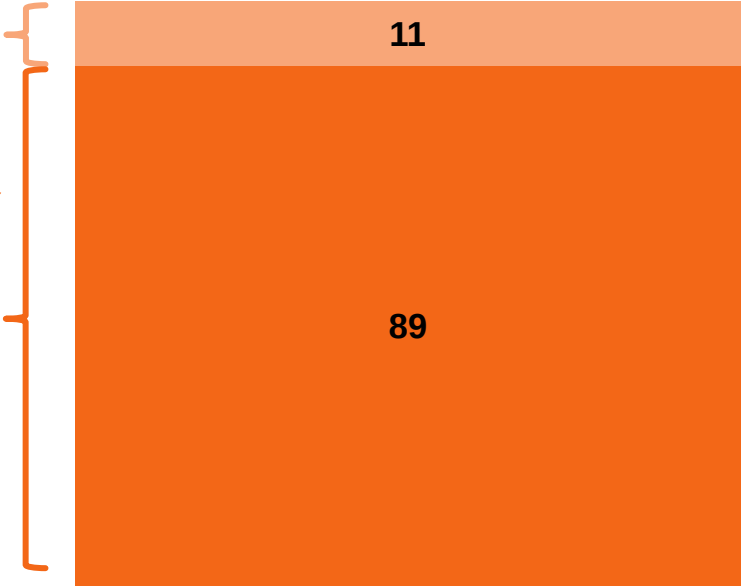
If you live remotely then you will need more support than those in say a city So concentrating more on the remote customers as in city's more help available from other sources. (Fuel Poverty, Domestic Gas)

We are one nation and rurality should not be a factor that means you get a lesser service. Rural deprivation is a huge vulnerability for people and its unfair on those living in areas that don't get equal access to services. (Domestic Gas)

It's about equality and everyone being inclusive (SME)

It shouldn't be a postcode lottery on services like these for the most vulnerable in society (Domestic Gas)

All customers are paying the daily gas standing charge. Fairness dictates that all vulnerable customers receive the same access to available support services wherever they live. (Domestic Gas)



- It is OK for vulnerable customers' access to support services to vary depending on where in the UK they live
- All vulnerable customers should have the same access to support services regardless of where in the UK they live

Q7 Do you believe all vulnerable customers in the UK should have the same access to support services, regardless of where in the UK they live? (For example, in the event of a gas interruption vulnerable customers would have the same access to welfare facilities, e.g. hot meals, oil-filled radiators, heated blankets, etc.)? Base: Total sample n= 72

SGN can also do more to ensure vulnerable customers can access the information and resources available to them



Access to resources

SGN could ensure signposting of important information on its website, as well as send online and mail-in info sheets that would help vulnerable customers find and access any available support.



Regular Check-ins

As the circumstances surrounding a person’s vulnerability may change, it is important that SGN regularly assesses the needs of its vulnerable customers. This could be conducted through at-home visits to ensure minimal communication issues and a fully assessed situation.



Greater visibility

As many participants had not known of SGN or the support it offers prior to this research, greater advertising and comms to its customer base would ensure everyone who qualifies for additional support would have access to it.



Designated contact

SGN could offer a designated phone line with support from a “real person” (as opposed to chatbot) for vulnerable customers who need additional communication support.

NOTE: Not all respondents believed the responsibility to support vulnerable customers in all the ways outlined falls on SGN, particularly if this would lead to higher tariffs or less focus on implementing and maintaining safe pipelines.

Q6 Are there any other ways you believe SGN should be supporting vulnerable customers? Base: Total sample n= 72



Access to resources

Signposting customer to what support and help is available to them (Domestic Gas)

Standard letters going out explaining what help is out there to each customer so they know that they can reach out for help than waiting to be assessed if they are in fuel poverty. (Fuel Poverty, Domestic Gas)

OUT OF SCOPE: I think even some other f these things should rest on the government/dwp/landlords heads (Domestic Gas)
I see SGN as possibly diluting their attention to getting safe pipelines faster if they start getting into this area as not really customer facing company. (Domestic Gas)



Regular Check-ins

By having home visits by trained employee who can show vulnerable customers how to do things first handedly (SME)

Just regular checks in case circumstances change. It's hard to identify vulnerable customers without regular checks (Domestic Gas)



Greater visibility

Providing customers with much clearer information as to the role and responsibilities of SGN (Domestic Gas)

I don't think most customers know SGN exist let alone the help that they can get. So maybe this needs to be advertised (Domestic Gas)



Designated contact

They could also provide a free help-line where vulnerable customers could call and speak to a 'real person' should they have an issue with their gas supply or just need some general advice / guidance etc. Some vulnerable customers might not have access to the internet and therefore they rely on telecommunication only. (SME)

Identify barriers of communication and provide a personalised service for each member dependent on their situation rather than generalising (Future)



THANK YOU



+44(0)20 7291 0810



@jigsawpieces



info@jigsaw-research.co.uk



@jigsawpiecesuk



jigsaw-research.co.uk



jigsaw-research



3rd Floor
53 Parker Street
London WC2B 5PT

