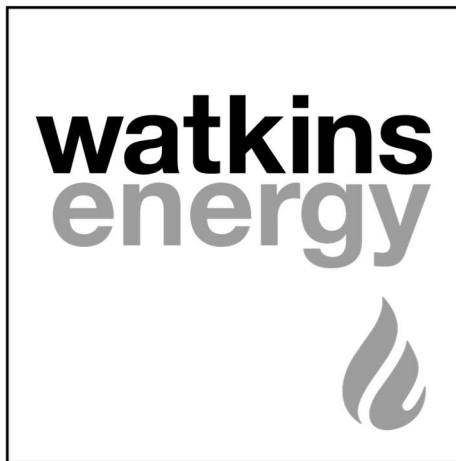




# **A Helping Hand Policy**

**Policy Statement Owner:**

Victoria Keen, Managing Director

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# Contents

|                                                                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Aim .....                                                                                | 2  |
| 2. Scope .....                                                                              | 3  |
| 3. Policy Statement .....                                                                   | 4  |
| 4. Who Do We Consider to be a Heat Customer in a<br>Vulnerable Situation? .....             | 6  |
| 5. Identifying Heat Customers in Vulnerable Situations<br>and/or with Additional Needs..... | 9  |
| 6. Priority Services Register .....                                                         | 10 |
| 6.3.1 Accessible Information .....                                                          | 10 |
| 6.3.2 Priority Support During Interruptions to Heat<br>Supply .....                         | 11 |
| 6.3.3 Password Protection and Identification Scheme                                         | 12 |
| 6.3.4 Knock and Wait Service .....                                                          | 12 |
| 6.3.5 Nominee Scheme .....                                                                  | 12 |
| 7. Registering for Our Priority Services Register .....                                     | 13 |
| 8. Heat Customers in Vulnerable Situations with<br>Payment Difficulties.....                | 15 |
| 9. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation .....                                                  | 15 |
| 10. Diversity and Inclusion .....                                                           | 16 |
| 11. Associated Documents .....                                                              | 16 |
| 12. Contacting Us .....                                                                     | 16 |

# 1. Aim

- 1.1 At Watkins Energy we put our customers at the heart of everything we do.
- 1.2 We appreciate that our customers are all different and have diverse needs and recognise that due to their personal circumstances, some customers may need a little extra help from time to time. This may be a permanent requirement or temporary.
- 1.3 Our aim is to identify heat customers in vulnerable situations and/or who have special requirements, and tailor our services to meet their needs.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 This policy sets out our approach to making sure that our services are inclusive and tailored to meet the needs of customers who are vulnerable to the cold and/or who have additional needs.
- 2.2 This policy applies to customers who own or occupy homes connected to any of the heat networks that provide heat related services to. This includes our fully managed service, standalone metering and billing services or maintenance and servicing.
- 2.3 This policy applies to all contractors and other parties providing services on our behalf. We expect them to work with us to recognise and meet the individual needs of our customers.

## 3. Policy Statement

### 3.1 We will:

- Make sure that our staff are trained and able to identify and provide the appropriate support to heat customers in vulnerable situations and those with additional needs.
- Always be respectful and treat customers fairly.
- Be approachable and understanding, making it easy for customers to notify us of any vulnerable circumstances and/or additional needs.
- Maintain a Priority Services Register so that we can quickly and easily identify customers who are vulnerable to the cold, or those with additional needs.
- Make sure that any information provided to us is treated confidentially and securely, in line with our Data Protection and Privacy Policy.

- Adapt our services to meet the needs of heat customers in vulnerable situations and those with additional needs.
- Provide the extra support needed to customers on our Priority Services Register free of charge.
- Make sure that we do not suspend heat supply during the heating season (defined as October to March inclusive) to any home occupied by a heat customer in a vulnerable situation and pre-registered with us on our Priority Services Register. Please note, this may not always apply for metering and billing customers, as we must adhere to client instructions.
- With our customer's consent, make sure that all staff and contractors working on our behalf are aware of any vulnerabilities and additional needs. This includes communication or access needs, so that we can always deliver the best possible service.

## **4. Who Do We Consider to be a Heat Customer in a Vulnerable Situation?**

- 4.1 We adopt the same definition used by both The Heat Trust and Ofgem.
- 4.2 A heat customer in a vulnerable situation is defined as someone who, due to their personal circumstances, is significantly less able than a typical customer to protect themselves or to represent his or her interests in the heat market. This includes customers who are significantly more likely than a typical customer to suffer detriment, or for whom that detriment is likely to be more substantial.
- 4.3 As a responsible heat supplier, we are particularly concerned about customers who may be vulnerable to the cold because of a medical condition, a disability, or personal circumstances. This can include a wide range of people.

4.4 When identifying heat customers in vulnerable situations, we specifically focus on customers who:

- Are of pensionable age
- Are disabled or chronically sick
- Have a long-term medical condition
- Are blind or hard of hearing
- Have a mental health condition
- Are pregnant
- Have children under 5 years old
- Are in a vulnerable situation

4.5 For customers in a vulnerable situation, we may consider:

- If someone has recently had their life changed by a bereavement
- The breakdown of a relationship
- Loss of livelihood/ low income
- If someone is recovering at home following hospital treatment

- If someone is unable to safeguard their personal welfare or the personal welfare of other members of the household

## **5. Identifying Heat Customers in Vulnerable Situations and/or with Additional Needs**

- 5.1 Our Customer Care Team are trained to identify heat customers in vulnerable situations and/or customers with additional needs, so that we can take the extra steps required to provide the support they need.
- 5.2 A customer's vulnerability may be identified by any member of our staff who has contact with customers, our contractors, by self-referral, or by an external agency or organisation.
- 5.3 Clear information will be provided to all customers in our customer welcome pack and on our website [www.watkinsenergy.co.uk/helpinghand](http://www.watkinsenergy.co.uk/helpinghand) on how to contact us to make us aware of any vulnerabilities or additional needs that may affect the services we provide.

## **6. Priority Services Register**

- 6.1 We maintain a Priority Services Register, which we use to identify customers in need of extra support. This helps us tailor our services to meet our customer's needs.
- 6.2 Customers meeting the eligibility criteria set out in Section 4 can join our Priority Services Register, free of charge. If a customer doesn't meet the criteria set out in Section 4, but has additional needs or special requirements which they think we should be aware of, we actively encourage them to get in touch with us so we can discuss this with them and do what we can to support.
- 6.3 Where appropriate, the following priority services will be made available to qualifying customers for no additional charge:

### **6.3.1 Accessible information**

For customers with special communication needs, we will make sure information, including notifications regarding planned interruptions and account and bill information, is provided in an

accessible format, for example printed copy for customers with no internet access or large print for partially sighted customers. We will agree the preferred format with the customer.

### **6.3.2 Where we are responsible for operating and maintaining the heat network, we will provide priority support during interruptions to heat supply**

In line with our Guaranteed Service Standards, we will always provide advance notice of planned interruptions to heat supply.

During any planned or unplanned interruption to the heating supply lasting longer than 12 hours, we will make sure that temporary heating is made available to customers pre-registered with us as a heat customer in a vulnerable situation.

### **6.3.3 Password protection and identification Scheme**

Our engineers will always carry photo ID with them when visiting a customer's home.

On request we will agree a password with customers, or their representatives, to be used by anyone working for, or on our behalf, to protect customers from fraudulent callers.

### **6.3.4 Knock and wait service**

For customers with a physical impairment or restricted mobility, we can make sure that our engineers are aware in advance of visiting, giving customers more time to answer the door.

### **6.3.5 Nominee Scheme**

Provided both parties agree, we are happy to arrange for communications to be sent to an authorised friend, family member, or carer, who can act on the customer's behalf to manage their account.

### **6.3.6 Meter reading**

For those unable to do so, and where we can't read your meter remotely, we'll send an engineer to read your meter quarterly to make sure you're being bill based on actual readings.

## **7. Registering for Our Priority Services Register**

7.1 Registering for our free priority services is easy. Customers can join our Priority Services Register by:

- Filling out and returning the registration form provided in their welcome pack,
- Calling us on 0330 324 0018 (local rates apply), open Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm, and registering over the phone, or
- Completing our online form which can be found at [www.watkinsenergy.co.uk/helpinghand](http://www.watkinsenergy.co.uk/helpinghand). If

choosing to register online, we may need to contact you to discuss the information you provide.

- 7.2 If a customer's personal circumstances change in the future and they no longer wish to benefit from our free priority services, they should contact our Customer Care Team and we will remove them from the register.
- 7.3 Depending on personal circumstances, we may contact customers on our Priority Services Register from time to time to make sure they still qualify to benefit from our free priority services.

## **8. Heat Customers in Vulnerable Situations with Payment Difficulties**

- 8.1 Customers are encouraged to get in touch with our Customer Care Team as soon as possible if they are having payment difficulties. We will be understanding of the situation and will work with you to create an affordable payment plan.

## **9. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation**

- 9.1 As a minimum this policy will be reviewed once a year or in response to changes to the Heat Trust Scheme Rules and Ofgem guidance for energy suppliers, or the introduction of new regulations directly affecting the services we provide.

# 10. Diversity and Inclusion

10.1 We are committed to valuing and promoting equality and diversity and will treat all customers fairly and with respect.

# 11. Associated Documents

- Customer leaflet: A helping hand when you need it most
- Priority Services Registration Form

# 12. Contacting Us

Whatever you need, we're here to help.

Get in touch today to talk to one of our friendly Customer Care Team.

- **Telephone:**

0330 324 0018 (local rates apply)

Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm.

- **Email:**

[help@watkinsenergy.co.uk](mailto:help@watkinsenergy.co.uk)

- **In writing:**

68B Ground Floor Office,

Grove Road,

Eastbourne,

East Sussex,

BN21 4UH

For more information about our services check out our website which has lots of useful information, tips and answers to frequently asked questions:

[www.watkinsenergy.co.uk](http://www.watkinsenergy.co.uk)