

Outgoing suppliers: first steps

1. Plan processes in advance

In the few days before a supplier failure, things will be moving very quickly. It is important to make sure that the processes are in place for once the failure is announced to make sure the impact on consumers is minimised. This may include a dedicated team to deal with any emergencies, or prepayment cases where customers could be at risk of self-disconnection.

2. Make staff aware as early as possible

A supplier failure announcement can prompt a lot of customer contact. Staff, who have been told that they may be imminently losing their jobs, will find the process upsetting and may feel ill prepared to deal with customer contact. Giving staff more warning may limit the impact on their ability to deal with incoming customer contact.

3. Engage with third parties as soon as possible

When a supplier failure is announced, many customers feel the need for reassurance, or may have an issue they need help with, and contact the Consumer Service and the Extra Help Unit. In the background we are making briefings for advisers to make sure that they are able to support customers as much as possible and can direct them to the right help. The Extra Help Unit will continue to support consumers with off supply cases, which can on occasion include metering faults unconnected to prepayment meters - so sustaining existing arrangements to manage EHU cases or agreeing interim arrangements while a SOLR is appointed is very important. Early contact with Citizens Advice and the Extra Help Unit will allow us to best support customers.

4. Communicate with customers

Often after a supplier customers feel the need for reassurance on a number of areas; that they will not go off supply, that they will have credit balances refunded and that existing complaints will be dealt with. Proactive communications via email and an FAQs page on the supplier's website will provide reassurance to the customer, and may reduce traffic on the phone lines, allowing resources to be diverted to priority cases.

If possible, failing suppliers should keep customer online accounts open and active so that customers can submit meter readings and download their bills. This information can be shared with the incoming supplier to help with the transition.

5. Prioritise prepayment customers and customers in vulnerable circumstances

Customers on prepayment can experience a number of issues after a supplier failure including being unable to top up as usual (e.g via supplier website), and delays in issuing or receiving new top up cards, or being unable to contact their supplier to access emergency credit. This may cause customers to self-ration or disconnect from their energy supply. It's important that suppliers maintain a phone line so that prepay customers can have easy access to the supplier to enable them to get back on supply as quickly as possible. Suppliers should prioritise customers on prepayment and those in vulnerable circumstances, and ensure sufficient resources are available to deal with these cases.

Citizens Advice contacts

Abby Jitendra: Abby.Jitendra@citizensadvice.org.uk

Connie Thorn: Connie.Thorn@citizensadvice.org.uk

Maisie Gibson: Maisie.Gibson@citizensadvice.org.uk

citizensadvice.org.uk



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