**Vulnerable people most likely to be moved onto high-cost prepayment meters**

* *Utility companies still failing to identify their most vulnerable customers*
* *82% of vulnerable people have not even been ‘asked’ if they are vulnerable by utility providers*
* *The most vulnerable in society need support, not to be placed on prepayment meters and marched into fuel poverty, says* [*Vulnerability Registration Service*](https://www.vulnerabilityregistrationservice.co.uk/)

**UK, EMBARGOED UNTIL Thursday 22 September 2022 –** While millions of UK households prepare to face a difficult winter with soaring energy bills, it will be the UK’s four million\* people on the more expensive prepayment meters, that will suffer the most.

Independent research from the [Vulnerability Registration Service](https://www.vulnerabilityregistrationservice.co.uk/) (VRS) has uncovered that the most vulnerable people in the UK are more likely to be moved onto higher cost prepayment meters – 8% of vulnerable people have been moved on to prepayment meters in the last 12 months compared to 4% of the total UK population. This is despite Ofgem banning forcible installations for the most vulnerable in 2018.

These are vulnerable people who are already at breaking point, often already facing extreme levels of debt, mentally unable to understand their finances or manage their day-to-day tasks or physically far more reliant on services from their utility providers.

The Vulnerability Registration Service (VRS), a not-for-profit company providing the UK’s first central vulnerability database, found that 11% of those vulnerable people who were moved onto a prepayment meter had low resilience and unable to cope with any kind of financial or emotional shock, while 12% had low knowledge, confidence or capability when it came to managing their money.

Despite the very clear cost-of-living challenges households are facing and Ofgem pressure to improve identification of vulnerable customers, only 18% of vulnerable people have been proactively asked by their utility provider if they are vulnerable. The good news is that once asked, 84% said their vulnerable customer status was taken into consideration and they were treated fairly.

**Missed payments and disconnections**

While energy companies have been urged to reduce disconnections and find better ways to resolve debt, 2 million (4%) people said they were still threatened with their gas or electricity supply being disconnected. Among those who were highly vulnerable this figure climbed to – 7%.

4.3 million (8%) UK adults have missed gas and electricity bill payments or gone into arrears, while 4 million (8%) have been fined for non-payment or late payment of debts. This picture is worse for vulnerable people – 15% and 15% of vulnerable people respectively.

**Helen Lord, CEO of the Vulnerability Registration Service, said:** “It is

unacceptable that people that can least afford it are paying more for their energy and being put at risk of harm. This needs to stop. It is hard enough for any person trying to get through to organisations online or on the phone. Those most in need of support shouldn’t be left to fight for it when they are often the least able.

“Utility firms need to take action to better identify and provide targeted support to their vulnerable customers – the data and resources are available to do this right now. Our VRS data can help utility firms identify right now who in their database is vulnerable, so that they can allocate their resources effectively and be proactive.

“We would also urge any vulnerable person who has not already identified themselves to their utility provider to do so. They can ask to be placed on the Priority Services Register – a register of utility customers who may require support due to their personal circumstances or characteristics. We would also urge them to register for free with the Vulnerable Registration Service so that their vulnerable circumstances can be highlighted to other organisations that should be taking their circumstances into account.”

The Vulnerability Registration Service database is a central, independent register of vulnerable people, that helps organisations to identify vulnerability and treat their customers fairly. Service providers using the Vulnerability Registration Service database are alerted if their customers are at risk through vulnerability flags so that the provider can take more appropriate steps with those customers such as those in financial distress. Vulnerable customers and their representatives can register with the Vulnerability Registration Service for free.

For more information on the Vulnerability Registration Service, visit: <https://www.vulnerabilityregistrationservice.co.uk/>

**ENDS**

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact Serj Hallam at Nellie PR. Email: serj@nelliepr.co.uk Tel: +44 (0) 7789 372 771 or Ellen Carroll at Nellie PR. Email: ellen@nelliepr.co.uk Tel: +44 (0) 1392 927746 Mob: +44 (0) 7790 631 547

**Note to editor:**

Helen Lord is available to be interviewed and provide comment about how vulnerable customers can be better identified and supported, and the need for greater data sharing across industries to protect the most vulnerable people.

\*According to Ofgem about 4 million domestic customers use prepayment meters.

The research was conducted by Censuswide, with 2,048 respondents aged 16+ in UK between 21.07.2022 - 26.07.2022. The survey was conducted from a nationally representative sample of UK adults. Quotas were applied to nationally representative proportions for age, gender and region. Censuswide abide by and employ members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles. Censuswide are also part of The British Polling Council.

**About The Vulnerability Registration Service:** [www.vulnerabilityregistrationservice.co.uk/](http://www.vulnerabilityregistrationservice.co.uk/)

We help financial services providers and utility companies to identify and ensure the fair treatment of vulnerable customers – helping to reduce debt, financial problems and harm.

The Vulnerability Registration Service (VRS) is a not-for-profit company providing the UK’s first central vulnerability database. Registering with the VRS is completely free for vulnerable customers and their representatives to help inform financial services, utility, debt collection and other organisations of their vulnerable circumstances such as financial abuse, risk of fraud, over-indebtedness, and power of attorney. The Vulnerability Registration Service is used by organisations to help them ensure vulnerable customers are treated fairly and appropriately, and that their financial and vulnerable circumstances are taken into account.