**Hello and welcome everyone to our Through the Looking Glass webinar. Thank you to all of you who have joined us today and to all our speakers. I'm Christine Tate and I'll be facilitating the webinar today. I think you are probably all familiar with Zoom and clearly you've managed to come in okay. Just a few points to cover before we start. If you would like captions on your screen throughout the session you can click on the 'show captions' on your taskbar at the bottom of your screen and choose the option 'view full transcript'. Please note that if you do use that functionality it won't recognise any acronyms or abbreviations spoken. As we promote accessibility and inclusion can I encourage all speakers to avoid using abbreviations where possible? I would like to encourage the audience to present any questions in the Q&A on your taskbar and we will do our best to answer them throughout. Any we don't get to we will respond to by email after this session. You will, will have received the agenda, hopefully you'll agree it's an exciting light-, line up, and we plan to run for three hours, finishing at 12:30, with a fifteen-minute break at 10:30. The webinar will be recorded and will be made available after today. There will be a short feedback survey, it will pop up as we come to the end of the webinar. We would really appreciate you completing that, it'll only take a couple of minutes to complete, and it will be really helpful for us when we are planning future events. So, I would now like to introduce you to Mark Hodgkinson, CEO at Scope, (inaudible 01.44).**

Thank you everyone. Hello and welcome to our Through the Looking Glass webinar today. It's a very timely meeting actually because obviously we're very aware that the Autumn Statement is out today, where I'm hoping the government will follow through on their commitment to compassion, which is something that is going to be very evident is needed here today. We-, but, of course , as part of a collective movement we can also take real leadership in this area too. So, I'm really delighted to have so many of you joining us today. I think there's over 160 on this webinar. We are all here to hopefully have a better understanding of what we can do together to address the impact of the cost of living and energy crisis for disabled people and their families. This crisis is, of course , hitting all of us but it's hitting many disabled people the hardest. Often disabled people will have increased energy usage and in many cases are least able to pay for those increases, and it's even putting lives at risk. We're fearful that many millions of disabled people will be at the sharp end of this this winter and will be at risk of going cold and hungry. Almost half of disabled people are saying they will not turn on their heating because of the cost this winter. Life was already more expensive for disabled people before the crisis.

At Scope we had previously done work that evidenced that extra costs for disabled people averaged nearly £600 a month. So, the eye-watering hikes in prices have made that clearly dramatically worse. Disabled people are often faced with impossible choices. Do I power essential equipment like wheelchairs and ventilators, or do I put food on the table this week? And they face those same choices every week, and that's going to be particularly hard and tough over the winter. Some other stories we hear are truly heart-wrenching. 'We can't afford to fill up the car to attend medical appointments,' 'We need to take medicine with food but can't afford the food to take with it.' You'll hear more about some of these stories later. Government support is, of course , welcomed and hopefully we'll hear more about that today, but alone it's not enough. Here at Scope we have been gathering the experiences of thousands of disabled people so that we can highlight the scale and impact of this crisis, and we'll be sharing more of that with you today. For our agenda today our team will update you on how we can directly help disabled people through the Disability Energy Support Service and water advice that we provide. Supporting people in managing their energy and water needs can help to make real savings.

The demand for the service has gone up fourfold this year which shows how many people are concerned, but I'm really pleased to say that through the support that you've given us we have been able to save disabled people more than £1.5 million on their bills since last year. So, my sincere thanks to all of you who help to fund this critical service, and, of course, if anyone wants to know more about how they can help too do, of course , let us know. I'm particularly grateful, as I mentioned earlier, to our storytellers here today. They're sharing a very personal and often emotional stories and we really do appreciate them taking this bold action at this critical time. We all can have a role to play in making a difference too, and today's webinar is all about partnership working. Being a movement for change and providing greater support to those who need it most. I'm really proud of the work we do together as part of the Scope utilities membership group. This membership embodies our mission at Scope to achieve everyday equality for disabled people. Many of you are already doing the right thing and providing funding for additional support, whether that's through energy vouchers, free electric blankets, energy saving devices or proactively calling customers and helping them before they get into a helpless situation such as on prepayment meters.

More though can be done. Some disabled people are being treated badly unfortunately when falling into debt and we clearly need to back each other in making sure that really does not happen. There are some frightening stories out there which we want to stop. I'm very much looking forward to having-, hearing from everyone today. We have a great group of speakers and panellists. I'm also pleased to be following this up with a key meeting with Ofgem next week. So, this just leaves me to once again thank you all for attending today, for your support in enabling the UK's 14 million disabled people and their families to live fulfilling lives and access to same opportunities as everyone else, and obviously at the moment we're just wrestling with the baseline around that. So, together we can be a great movement for change, and I now am really delighted to be handing over to our headline speaker, Caroline Flint, who is Chair of the Committee for Fuel Poverty and also ex-Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. So, I'm really delighted to hand over to Caroline and I hope you have a fantastic morning. Thank you.

Thanks very much, Mark, and thanks Christine for the support of the team in being part of this event today. The affordability of energy, fair treatment to bill payers and, and support to help those in fuel poverty and those with particular energy needs which Mark has spoken about in his introduction has always been close to my thinking. For me energy is an essential to life product, we can't live without it, and as such I've always favoured a, a managed market to deliver both fair prices, deliver energy efficiency programmes and importantly to treat customers well, and there has never been a more important time to make sure that that is happening. And I know there's a number of energy companies on this webinar today who I know they're doing a lot but there are some stories emerging-, emerging that shows that we cannot be complacent about this and more is needed. The price cap some years ago that I advocated for was to tackle the unfairness built into a system which wasn't ensuring that bill payers saw the benefits when energy prices fell or who were stuck on tariffs that weren't providing a better deal. But it wasn't really made for the unprecedented situation we have experienced in the past year. Tackling fuel poverty has been the aspiration of successive governments for over two decades and the current government's strategy was revised in 2021, but none of the discussions anticipated the events that have shaped the current energy price landscape.

Gas prices rising over 330% in twelve months, and average household's bills which were capped at £1,277 up to April being forecast to increase fivefold within a year. And for the cause, of course, it's about the Russia, Russia's invasion of the Ukraine that's led to panic buying from alternative sources and Russia being the supplier of 40% of Europe's gas is a major contributor to shortages of gas in Europe. And even though we don't import as much of that gas as other countries it is clear we have not been immune to that impact, but we can also add in to this picture the decline in UK gas storage, Centrica's closure of the Rough facility which stored nine days of supply of gas, left with the UK with four to five days supply of gas in the winter. Now, compare that to the Netherlands that has nine times that capacity or Germany that has sixteen times. The long winter of 2020-2021 and the coldest April in the UK since 1922 depleted our gas reserves, and 2021 was the least windy summer since 1961, reducing renewable electricity. One expert termed it as a wind-, as a wind drought. We could hold a seminar on each of those factors and more but the net effect has been a steady, unrelenting increase in household bills. It's been a wake-up both nationally and globally about who controls our energy supplies and our lack of resilience.

The unplanned and I would say in many respects unearned profits for both fossil fuel and some renewable energy generators has exposed the weaknesses in the way energy prices are determined by the market. It has revealed more than ever how-, clearly how leaky our homes are, with much of the money paid the keep households warm disappearing through windows, roofs, walls, floors and doors. Our housing stock is older and less well insulated than that of almost any other nation in Europe. New research across England and Wales finds that more than £10 billion could be saved on energy bills each year if leaky homes were upgraded to higher standards. For the households we monitor energy costs create a profound crisis, growing debt, rationing of meals, poorer health, not heating water for showers and ultimately for some going to the choice-, well, it's not really a choice, is it, of self-disconnection. In May we saw the largest cost of living package ever announced, around £15 billion. The government fact sheet illustrated that although there was something for everyone, for 8 million households on benefits, for pensioners and for disabled households there were weighted, weighted additional payments. But this wasn't going to be enough in the face of an ever-increasing price cap.

Now, the Committee on Fuel Poverty, which I'm proud to chair, wrote to both candidates to become Prime Minister, both Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss, with advice on tackling these soaring prices, support for low income and fuel-poor households and the need to ramp up energy efficiency programmes. We felt action needed to be taken to stabilise those rising price caps or even consider a social energy cap for those in need. The Resolution Foundation at the time suggested a tariff of about 30% discount below the cap available to lower middle income but not all households. Let us not forget though before these price surgeries-, surges during the three price gap-, cap was between £94 and £107 a month targeted cash support was still vital. Now, at £208 per month for the average family it's absolutely essential. The government's Energy Price Guarantee of £2,500 on average bills stopped the price cap moving ever upwards and brought some lessening of the mounting bills anxiety to many people. But we have experienced political and economic turmoil such that I never saw in 22 years as a Member of Parliament. We've seen a new Prime Minister replace another in just over a month, putting the present Energy Price Guarantee on notice and speculation about the additional package of targeted support, which is why we wrote to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to press again to focus on targeted financial support, increasing energy efficiency delivery, along with fair treatment of customers which includes not forcing them onto prepayment meters.

It is unacceptable that during these difficult times some customers are being moved onto prepayment meter plans which cost them more. By the end of this webinar the Chancellor will have been on his feet for an hour, so I expect later discussion will be informed by live social media reports about what's happening. The indications are the energy price guarantee will rise to £3,000, and the additional package of support will roll forward also. What we don't know yet is whether that will be increased to reflect the new energy price guarantee. What we don't know is about future plans, well into '23 and beyond, because while some recent energy price forecasts have been reduced, the evidence is that exceptional prices may be sustained well beyond 2023. The impact on fuel poverty and those with particular needs, as the stories we're going to hear about, I'm sure, today, if unchecked, is obvious. It's going to get worse if support isn't available. Well-targeted cash support should remain part of any policy response, but I'm the first to recognise the definition of fuel poverty comes under extreme stress when dealing with the present circumstances. The impact of spiralling energy bills on affordability generally, let alone for those in or close to fuel poverty levels, is major concern.

For some, high cost won't be felt whilst other families might fall back on savings, postpone changing their car or reduce their holiday spending. But recent research shows that a huge number of people in country have less than £1,000 in savings for difficult times. For others, this is a profound and frightening crisis where people choose what rooms to heat, whether to cook hot food or to heat hot water. As arrears mount, the fear is not just disconnection, which is rare, but self disconnection. People simply turning the heating off. And like extreme heat, vulnerable people living in cold surroundings are putting their health at risk. But even the best system of targeted cash support to fuel-poor households and vulnerable households isn't sustainable. If one disregards that a family in an E, F or G rated home may face bills that are 125% more than a family in the same sized home is A, B or C rated. Whilst more low-income households are social housing tenants, many living in the lowest energy efficiency homes are private tenants. In the private rented sector, you are twice as likely to be in fuel poverty than any other form of housing tenure. But still, we wait to hear from government what more they expect of landlords and how they might incentivise them.

Whatever happens to price, all future energy scenarios require a significant increase in investment for energy efficiency and energy conservation. Energy efficiency delivers bill savings year-on-year and helps reduce fuel poverty. Committing investment to warm homes should be attractive to any government because it also meets other important goals too. Improving energy security, creating jobs in every region of the UK, contributing to the journey to net zero and generating new manufacture and production and supply chains across the UK. Over three million households in England live in cold homes with an energy rating of D or below. Hard-to-heat homes exacerbate hardship, increase health risk and create greater anxiety for the most vulnerable. If you could just substantially ramp up the rate of energy efficiency programmes with the certainty of year-on-year funding streams this could help address this problem and support a growing industry. The cheapest energy is the energy you never use because a home stays warm. But for winter planning this year, more than ever, we must give every vulnerable household the confidence not to turn their heating off because of cost. This extraordinary period of energy crisis and the cost of living pressure has exposed more than ever the importance of bearing down on fuel poverty and recognising the needs of those who need energy more than many of us. Tackling fuel poverty is a journey, not a quick fix, but how this crisis evolves, the committee on fuel poverty recognise your need. We welcome your ideas, your challenge and your help on that journey. Thank you. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I've been on mute, haven't I? Oh my goodness.

**No, no Caroline. That's fine. We've all heard you clearly.**

Did you?

**Yes. Thank you. We're very honoured to have you here today Caroline, and thank you for those three important points that you've made, highlighting issues that people are faced with which we are all recognising. It would be interesting to hear later from the Chancellor to see what extent we will be, for more targeted financial support, more funding for energy efficiency in fairness to customers. If anybody wants to pose any questions to if you would put them in the Q&As now. But thank you again Caroline. There aren't any coming up at the moment, so I suggest we move on to Tom Marsland and if any questions pop up later Caroline, we'll come back to you if that's okay? So I'd now like to introduce you to Tom Marsland, Consumer Affairs Policy Manager at Scope, who is going to present Scope's research, findings and recommendations for government, regulators and utility companies to support disabled people effectively through this crises. Thank you, Tom, I'll hand over to you.**

Thanks Chris. Morning everyone. Yes, so I'm gonna talk through-, at Scope we've obviously been doing a lot of research. We've done a lot of polling, focus groups, using insight from our helpline and our Disability Energy Service as well. So this-, I'm gonna talk through what we've found, what, what disabled people are telling us about the cost of living crisis, obviously with the big focus on utilities. And then also we've, we've set out some recommendations. Recommendations we wanna see from the government, which is very pertinent given that in an hour and a half we're expecting the Chancellor to start speaking. Also some recommendations for the regulators as well, Ofgem in particular, and then also some recommendations for, for energy suppliers, water suppliers, and energy networks as well. And I'm gonna talk through here, this will be a bit of a snapshot, and then we're also releasing a big policy report on the 23rd of November, so Wednesday next week, which will set out in a lot more detail about our recommendations, about what we found as well. We were-, We were meant to release the report today, but the Autumn Statement got moved to today, so we need to do some final edits this afternoon to that report to reflect what gets said today.

So if we move to the next slide please. So to give a bit of background, at Scope we already know that life costs more if you're disabled. So this goes back to a big piece of work that Scope did, the last bit in 2019, about our disability price tag. And that found that even before this current cost of living crisis, disabled people already extra costs of £583 a month on average, just for being disabled. And for almost a quarter, so 24% of families with disabled children, extra costs could amount to over a thousand a month. And like I said, this was before this current cost of living crisis, which we know is hitting disabled people the hardest, as Mark said in his opening remarks. Energy and utilities is obviously a huge part of that. We know that disabled people often have higher energy bills and higher energy usage for lots of different reasons like, you know, for charging wheelchairs, ventilators, equipment that needs to be used. It could be things such as needing to keep your home at a certain temperature because of an impairment or condition, needing to run-, needing to make sure you've got a constant supply if you keep medicines in the fridge. And like it says there on the slide, turning the power off isn't an option. Disabled people are telling us that they can't cut down. If they do cut down it would be really detrimental and yet we are hearing that people are having to cut down. So move on to the next slide, please.

See how we've reached crisis point now, and we've been there for a while, and, you know, we're really worried ahead of this winter. So even with the government schemes that have been put in place we know that it's not-, disabled people are telling us it's no longer a choice between heat and eat. Heating or eating. Many disabled people can't do either. So over half, 57% of disabled people have told us that income doesn't, only just covers their bills. Half of disabled people say they will struggle financially this winter, unable to afford all the essentials that are needed. Over a third of disabled adults feel that their impairment or condition has an impact on how much energy they use, and yet nine in ten say people are worried about energy bills this winter. So moving on to the next slide, please.

Yes, this is going to be, again, a key part of what the Chancellor says today as well, but we know that there are many disabled people who, who aren't in work, and welfare benefit payments are their only income. But we've seen-, we know that benefit rates have seen a real terms cut due to not keeping pace with rising costs and, obviously, rising inflation. And we've that that amount can amount up to £550 in real terms as of September this year. And at Scope we know that there's an intrinsic link between disability and poverty, and the current crisis is pushing disabled people, huge numbers of disabled people, further into this. Even before this crisis more than four in ten families who rely on disability benefits were living in poverty. And we've got a quote there from, from a disabled person, says that, 'I'd say my energy bills are doubled because of my impairment, as I need to keep warm. It has a huge effect on your life. If you're worried about the costs of simple daily activities like turning the light on or running a warm bath it's devastating.' So next slide, please.

So as I mentioned at the start, at Scope we've done a lot of polling, we've done a lot of surveys, we've ran focus groups. We've also used the insight that our helpline, disability, Disability Energy Service, so we know that disabled people are telling us that they're struggling. So it's 71% of disabled people who need to use more energy for heating because of their long-term condition or impairment are concerned they won't be able to heat their homes this winter. 40% said that going without heating would cause them to be uncomfortable or in pain, and 31% said it would severely affect their health. And it's not just about physical health as well. Emotional wellbeing and mental health is also being severely affected by this. Stress about, worry about affording meals, travel, energy bills, other essentials, are really taking their toll, and this is what disabled people are telling us. Over half, 52% of disabled people told us that increasing cost are negatively affecting their mental health. So next slide, please.

And that's another quote from a-, from someone that's been part of our research. 'This autumn onwards I'm going to have to make a choice every day about foods that are safe for my illnesses, bills that I can't afford, medications I need to manage my conditions and essential repairs to my house. I'm completely overwhelmed with distress, distress and confusions about how to navigate it.' And further, later on in this webinar we'll be hearing from some Scope storytellers as well. Next slide, please.

Yes, and then the next presentation after mine is around the Disability Energy Support Service, so they go into a lot more detail about this, but this is a dedicated service that Scope have set up where disabled people can book appointments and be-, and be talked through and given support. And we've seen an almost 500% increase in the number of referrals. In September alone 44,000 people accessed Scope's cost of living advice and support. Those are our webpages, help, help and advice pages on our website, and that's a 72% increase to the same time last year. Next slide, please.

So obviously we're hoping to hear more support being announced at, at half past eleven this morning, but we-, there's already been, you know, the governments have announced cost of living support already. They've said they want to target support to those who need it the most. So that includes, you know, we've had the, the energy price guarantee. We've had the energy bill support scheme which are universal. There's been more targeted measure such as the £150 cost of living payment for, for disabled people, the £650 cost of living payment for people on means tested benefits. But disabled people are telling us that simply isn't enough. It doesn't touch the sides. So 57% of disabled people who are eligible for the £650 cost of living payment said it wouldn't be enough to cover their increases in energy and essential. And an even higher number, 80%, four in five disabled people receiving the £150 cost of living payment said it wouldn't be enough to cover their increases in energy and essentials. So we need to see a lot more from the government. We need to see that targeted financial support for disabled people ahead of this winter as well as some long-term solutions. And we also know that there needs to be more action from the regulators, in particular Ofgem and Ofwat, and energy and water suppliers and networks also have a role to play in this. Next slide, please.

So yes. So now I'm gonna talk through the recommendations that we've come up with using our research. We've also, you know, some of the recommendations for the utility companies in particular and Scope utilities membership has been really useful in giving feedback from that as well. I will say that we see we've got recommendations right at the top through, first for government. That could change depending on what's announced this morning, but these are some of the things we'd wanna see, so move on to the next slide, please.

So yeah, from government, as I mentioned, we've already seen a range of measures that the government has introduced such as cost of living payments, the energy price cap and so on. But as I mentioned, this, this isn't enough. We need to see more. And we know that last month the Chancellor announced a Treasury-led review into energy support from April, so that's when the energy price guarantee is currently expected to end. So as that review kicks off and as, you know, the government thinks more about what support is needed, these are things we want to see from the government. So the first one is to urgently establish an Energy Social Tariff for disabled customers. So this is a discounted, discounted rate for disabled people who need to use more energy and would target support to people who need it the most. We will say-, we'll be saying a lot more on this in the next few weeks, and we've been working with some other charities such as Age UK, Fair By Design, National Energy Action, about what, what we want to see, who we think should be eligible, how it could be costed, what the levels should be as well. So we'll be saying more on that in the next few weeks. We also want to see at least a doubling of the £150 disability cost of living payment, because this current payment doesn't touch the sides. That's what disabled people are telling us. Next slide, please.

We also want the government to reverse the eligibility changes to the Warm Home Discount that may have excluded a large number of disabled people. So this was originally consulted on last summer and has now come into effect, where Warm Home Discount, which is a rebate paid on qualified people's energy bills, has been increased from £140 to £150 but changes to eligibility criteria means a lot of people who are on DLA, so Disability Living Allowance, PIP, AA, are now no longer eligible, and the government's own impact assessment puts that at nearly 300,000 disabled people who were eligible for Warm Home Discount previously and now no longer are. And we want those changes to be reversed because that's a lot of disabled people who are missing out on a vital support of energy bills. Another key one is uprating benefits in line with inflation. We really need the Chancellor to commit to that when he speaks in a little while. Anything less than this would be a further real-terms cut for disabled people. We want to see at least another £325 cost of living payment to those on means-tested benefits, so those are the people who were eligible for the £650 payment. We think the government should be looking at reviewing standing charges on energy bills as a more long-term thing. Lots of customers, especially disabled customers are often unaware these charges have added to bills. They don't reflect the energy used and this particularly key for people who are on prepayment meters. As a short-term option Ofgem could step in on this but we think it probably needs the government. And then finally we think the government should provide an energy assistance payment for families with seriously ill children who are unable to access medical grants from the NHS. So NHS reimbursements or medical grants for additional energy costs of running medical equipment at home are inconsistent or non-existent. So those are the key things we wanna see from the Chancellor, from the government now. And move on to the next slide, please.

So we know the regulators have a key role to play as well, in particular Ofgem and Ofwat, and in particular a lot of these are focused-, Ofgem, we know of the vital role they have to play in protecting consumers. I think we also know that, you know, some, some suppliers would also like to see these as well, to see, kind of, universal across the sector because we know some suppliers are better than others, how they look after customers, and everyone can learn from each other. I think a key one, which Caroline also mentioned in her opening remarks, is we want to see a moratorium on the installation of prepayment meters for disabled households. So we know the risk of serious harm for disabled households of going off supply means no PPM should be installed this winter, we think. And that is particularly-, that also includes what's been in the news recently about people being remotely switched if they're on a Smart Meter as well, so Prepayment mode. The key reason there is, yes, like I said, it's disabled people going off supply can be really, really dangerous. You know, someone might need to keep medicine in the fridge, keep heating, run equipment, etc. So prepayment meters shouldn't be installed in those situations, but as we know, as our helpline is seeing, as Ofgem have seen because they've sent a letter recently to suppliers reminding them of their obligations, PPMs are being installed where it's not appropriate, even under warrant. So we think for this winter in particular there needs to be a moratorium. We also know that being on a Prepayment Meter is more expensive, so we'd like to see the high cost removed for people on prepayment meters, and often disabled customers who are on prepayment meters have the lowest incomes and also could be paying off a debt, so it's unfair that they're further penalised by paying higher extra costs. We know that for suppliers recovering debt is important but we think there are better ways to go about this. And we also need to see quicker, stricter enforcement by Ofgem and Ofwat, so it's more vital than ever in this current cost of living crisis that the regulators are ensuring that companies are not failing disabled people. We would like to see Ofgem in particular be, you know, enforced more strictly, to see more action from the regulator on this. And I know that the suppliers who are doing the right thing would like to see this as well.

And we also think that financial and affordability data of disabled households should be captured and shared between companies, so that's water companies, energy companies, networks, with the consent of the customer, of course. Because this means identifying disabled households who are struggling with bills, who are likely to struggle with bills, as early as possible can prevent debt building up and the support can be offered. You know, this benefits everyone. This benefits the disabled customer who doesn't fall into debt. This benefits the, the supplier because it means, you know, it lessens the risk of, you know, a customer building up bad debt that gets written off. And we originally, you know, said this could potentially be done through adding an extra tag to the PSR, but we know there's, you know, suppliers not as keen on that. This could be done through data matching with the DWP. We're definitely up for being part of that discussion with suppliers about how that could be done. So we move on to our next slide, please.

So yeah, and this is our recommendation for energy and water companies and the networks as well. So we know that these have a duty of care to their customers and the licence conditions that require this but we would like to see-, we would like to see more of it, because we know that when support from energy, energy and water companies and networks is vital, and when it does happen it can provide really good outcomes. But we know that, unfortunately, there are a lot of cases where this isn't happen. A lot of the times disabled people are being failed by their supplier, and our helpline has seen lots of this as well. So we've, you know, some quotes there from what we've heard. 'I've emailed and messaged my energy supplier via social media but they have never replied to me, my pleading for help with rising costs.' 'It's difficult to get through to my supplier for the correct support.' 'My supplier wasn't able to offer any practical or financial help to me, just advice on how to reduce utility costs overall, which I was doing anyway, rather than reducing charging rates.' And we know that it's a difficult time for suppliers as well, particularly energy suppliers, so at Scope we want to be a critical friend to suppliers and some of these recommendations, like I said, the Scope Utilities Membership has been really useful in helping us put those together. We definitely want to work with suppliers and networks to make these things happen. So moving on to the next slide, please.

So yeah, so our recommendations for companies. We think that they need to prioritise disabled customers who are already in-, already in debt, because we already know even ahead of this winter a worrying number of disabled households are already in debt to their energy or water supplier, often both, and then costs are only going to rise this winter. We know that more four in ten callers to the Energy, Scope's Energy Helpline were already in debt, and through our polling we found that almost a quarter, 24% of disabled adults are currently in debt with their energy supplier. We'd like to see more effective, empathetic support for disabled customers. A lot of the time interactions with suppliers with disabled people are stressful, negative experiences. That's what disabled people are telling us. But crucially when the support is right, when that support is effective, when it is empathetic, it has a really good outcome. Disabled people are telling us that too. We'd like to see water companies increase awareness of Water Sure. So this is a scheme that can provide vital support for disabled households, and that we need to raise more awareness of this. Only 33% of households with a disabled person present are currently aware of the scheme. Another one which will not be new for the companies out there is increasing awareness of the Priority Services Register. So protection and support for disabled households by being on the PSR means that as many, many eligible households as well need to be on there, not least because, you know, the, the key protection that is offered on there around the power cuts, etc, or going off supply if it's water, but also the further support that can come with it. It can be, you know, more accessible bills for example. And we know that when disabled people are on the PSR they've told Scope that they find it really useful. So it's, and, but it's key that disabled people receive that support for being on there. It's not just about the numbers of people on there. But we know this isn't-, we know that suppliers and networks also understand this point. And we'd like to see two-way signposting with a dedicated telephone number for charities. I'm sure the suppliers on the call will know, and networks, that good relationship between charities, companies, can often improve outcomes for people seeking support. It can also be really useful for the company as well. But we need to see-, we need to see more of it, and I feel like I may potentially be preaching to the converted today seeing as you're on our webinar but, you know, we'd like to see-, we'd like to see more of that. If we move on to the next slide, please.

So how can the suppliers help who are on the call? So if there are recommendations that you feel that you were essentially doing already or can voluntarily support we'd love-, we'd love to see that and commit to enacting them. We know that suppliers are, and networks are in constant contact with Ofgem and water companies with Ofwat about our recommendations or making a point, supporting some of (mw 41.25) to the regulator is always useful. The same when you're having interactions with government as well. It's really powerful when the companies are saying to government you need to give more targeted support to our customers, to disabled customers. To work with our Disability Energy Support service, who are up next, so I won't steal their thunder, and also become a member of the Scope Utilities Membership. It's been really useful in putting together this, this presentation. It's been-, the SUM has been really useful in putting together the policy report, including the research and sharing best practice as well. So I'll end with-, end with a quote. This, which, kind of, sums up the, the real worries that people have. So this is someone who's been part of our research. He said, 'I'm really beginning to panic about the cold winter months as I can see us having to be cold. It is known that cold weather adversely affects by condition but I am unlikely to be able to afford the inevitably rising gas bill and will have to choose between severe debt or being cold with increased pain.' Yeah, thank you very much for listening. Like I said, we've got our policy report coming out on the 23rd. Everyone who's on here will be getting a copy of that and my details are on there so please, please get in touch. And thank you for listening.

**Thank you, Tom. Lots of good insight highlighting the devastation for disabled people themselves and plenty of recommendations there for a-, strive for a fairer society. We do actually have a couple of questions, really interesting questions, so one's from Michael, and of your recommendations are there any that stand out to you as being absolutely critical or more urgent, i.e., it would have a disproportionately positive impact on the disabled community? Good question.**

Yeah. I think, I mean right now, I mean, I might just be saying this because it's obviously Autumn Statement day, but a lot of the government ones are really key. We know that the targeted financial support from the government is, yeah, is, is key, especially in the short-term, especially this winter. We know the social tariff is a bit more longer-term one, but that's a really key one. But for me, the-, probably the uprating benefits in line with inflation is really key. If we don't see that, people are really gonna-, people are really gonna suffer. In terms of the other ones, I think the, the better practice around prepayment meters is particularly key, especially by-, especially, you know, making sure they're not being installed inappropriately. And then in terms of from suppliers I think-, I think that prioritising customers who are in debt I think is a really key one because if that-, if that debt can only grow then it's obviously gonna be, you know, a really poor-, a really bad outcome for everyone, but also, as I mentioned before, you know, the effects that that's having around mental health, people-, that quote I just read out about people, you know, having the choice-, the choice between am I gonna get more in debt or, because I'm worried about going into debt, I'm gonna not use energy, which again has a really serious affect. But, I mean, and I would say this because I wrote them, but I think all the recommendations are important, but those are some of the-, some of the really key ones.

**Thanks Tom. There's another one here. You might be able to answer this jointly, actually. What do Scope feel they could do better themselves when working with water and energy suppliers to reassure disabled customers they are talking-, I, I think it's disabled customers that we speak to that are struggling due to the cost of living? What-, we're, sort of, helping them in getting the right support, so how can Scope work with water and energy suppliers to make sure that customers are aware of the support and they get the support that they need? You got any thoughts on that?**

Yeah, I guess, I mean, this is probably one for us both to answer, Chris, given that you work in the partnerships team. For me, from the policy side, I think it's, it's us being a critical friend to suppliers. So telling suppliers what disabled people are telling us so suppliers and network companies are aware of what are the challenges facing disabled people. But I've also find it really useful, especially through the Scope Utilities Membership, where companies have told us about schemes that they run or they're aware of, or things they can do as well, which then we can make our helpline aware of. You know, those are-, those are-, those are some of the key things for me from, from a policy side.

**Yeah. Just to add to that, most people are aware of the Scope Utilities Membership and we've got some really dedicated and committed organisations and we're speaking to some of them in the panel who have been working with us for some while and really have, you know, positive impacts. I understand in disabled people working with us to get closer to the experiences and the barriers that they face. And we also have our Disability Energy Support service with water advice and Laura is just coming online to tell you a little bit more about that, and that's a direct service for disabled people. And that gives us the opportunity to work with our funders, who we are absolutely-, which is absolutely critical and, you know, we obviously very very valuable that the utility sectors fund fully that service and it gives us an opportunity to liaise with suppliers and really, sort of, help build trust, as many of our customers come online and they're really quite frightened of ringing their suppliers and getting in touch with them and don't really know what questions to ask and how to get the best out of those services and get the best support. And this service really helps and in many cases holds a three-way discussion so that that customer is supported and builds their confidence and their trust with their supplier. There's a couple of things there. There's a few more messages coming through and a few more questions but I'm just thinking about time. (inaudible 47.58) We have to move on because I think a lot of these questions might actually get answered as we go through the webinar, but they will all get answered. If we haven't got time to get back to them today we will definitely let everybody have the responses by email. But I guess we should move on now, and what I'd like to do is welcome Laura Canning, our Contact Centre Manager and Dan Betton, our Disability Energy Support and Water Advice Manager to talk about our Disability Energy Support service with Water Advice and the impact it's having in supporting disabled people and their families. Over to you, Laura.**

Lovely, thanks Chris. Hello everyone. So my name is Laura Canning and I'm the Contact Centre Manager for Scope's helpline services. It's really good to be here today to talk to everybody. I'm going to be talking about Scope's Disability Energy Support with Water Advice service and how we're helping disabled households feel in control of their energy and water needs. So if I can go on to our first slide, please. So through working with our partners we are aiming to create transformational change for their sectors and we want to tackle issues faced by disabled people, reduce the extra costs that they face and enable them to access the support that, services that they need to. So we do want to lead by example in providing accessible and affordable utility services enabling all disabled people to live in safe, warm homes. So we would firstly like to thank our original funder, Energy Savings Trust. For funding the core Disability Energy Support service that we launched, for supporting the expansion of the service to allow more involved support and the inclusion of water advice we'd also like to thank SGN, UK Power Networks, Anglian Water Wales & West, Outfox The Market, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, Wessex Water and Bristol Water. And most recently, British Gas Energy Trust, who have just joined us to support to reach, again, more disabled people. Our funders are an integral part of our ability to increase the capacity of the Disability Energy Support service and reach more disabled people and their families when help is really most needed. We are working together during this time of unprecedented increase, extra costs, to support disabled people and the challenges that they face, to access the support they need and they support we get from our funders to do this is greatly valued. Next slide please.

So disabled people have no choice but to use energy to power vital medical equipment, keep temperatures stable, charge equipment such as things like power chair. As we heard earlier a third of disabled adults say that their disability or impairment has a significant impact on their energy costs. So the service that we offer aims to cover income maximisation and energy and water efficiency to help make bills more manageable. We look at utilising benefits calculators to check that people are in receipt of everything that they're entitled to and we also seek to signpost customers for further specialist support where it's needed. Advice can be provided by telephone or by email, and we're always looking at ways to reach more people in an-, in an accessible way to them. During our appointment some of the things that we've heard from customers relating to how improvements could be made to their journey with suppliers are things like better promotion of contact numbers. So often online options are promoted but they're not always accessible. We get a lot of feedback to say that people are on hold for, for quite some time trying to get through, which then adds to stress and anxiety in making those calls and having those conversations. Often queries can't always be resolved at point of contact so some people do tend to feel passed around a little bit and not, don't always get an answer, which again adds to the stress and anxiety of having those conversations. At times there's delays to getting responses, sometimes in emergency situations, so we have spoken to people who have had meters that were broken but they couldn't get a repair for over a month. So ideally, if there could be dedicated lines for services like ours to contact suppliers directly that would help us handle these queries as quickly as possible and prioritise those who may need extra support, especially around registering for the Priority Services Register. Scope do offer training and support for organisations to become more accessible and inclusive, so, to its customers, sorry, so that will be covered later in the webinar by Rachel and Elizabeth. Next slide please.

Thank you. So, over the last year we have seen the need for the service increase dramatically. So customers are in desperate need of financial support and they simply can't afford their bills and they're finding themselves in increasing debt. So our national helpline, over 50% of the calls we received about cost of living last month were directly related to concern over how they were going to manage their energy bills and afford to eat. In terms of the Disability Energy Support with water advice service, referrals have risen by 329% in the last three months alone. So, we've also seen a 230% increase in the fuel bank vouchers that we issued in October this year, in comparison to October 2021, and then, in the last 12 months, we've seen a rise in visits to our energy advice pages on our website, so that's a total of 182,789 individual page views of the energy advice content. Alongside the rise in demand, we've seen a large increase in the volume of safeguarding concerns that are being raised through our services, because people are needing more emotional support, so in order to support our customers in the best way that we can, we do ensure that all staff are trained on how to recognise safeguarding concerns, to be confident on how to question further and ensure that we help people to access further support. We do have designated safeguarding leads, who guide our teams through the process and offer a space for a debrief, as well, after hearing some really devastating circumstances.

Through the service today, we've supported 4,100 customers through tailored telephone and email advice, and then that is along with a total estimated saving of over £1.5 million being made for our customers, through the advice and support provided by our advisors. We also made a total estimated saving of £142,000 today, in support of customers accessing larger efficiency measures, such as first-time central heating, boiler replacement, insulation and replacement white goods. Next slide, please. So, we are working to empower customers with knowledge about their energy bills and consumption, so that they understand all aspects of their energy requirements. The top five topics that customers do request to receive advice on when registering our service are, information on applications for grants and schemes available to them, support on becoming more energy and water efficient, support managing energy and water debt, switching tariff or supplier, to reduce energy and water costs, and information on changing the type of meter that they have. So, the service does also operate as a gateway to other Scope services. So, for example, it might be getting someone into work with one of our employment services, a referral to our family services, supporting parents and carers of disabled children, or it might be further tailored benefits, advice from our benefits specialist on a helpline.

So, as I mentioned earlier, along with the increased impact financially, the advisors are hearing about how these, sometimes devastating, circumstances are impacting people's wellbeing. So, we're speaking to people at risk of being made homeless, people who've not eaten for several days, people worried about being, you know, forced-, switching to pre-payment meters when they rely on fridges to store medication, so they need a constant supply. We even heard from one person who was choosing to sit in their car during the day to avoid heating their home, while their father was out at work. I'm here to talk about what it's like to be part of the Disability Energy Support service, I'm gonna hand you over to Dan now.

Thanks, Laura. Hi everyone, I'm Dan, and I'm the team leader for the Disability Energy Support service, and prior to this role, I was an advisor on the service. So, since the energy crisis began, the demand for the service has escalated. It's becoming more and more common that we're hearing from people who are struggling to afford, not only their bills, but food as well, so they're having to face the decision on whether to heat their homes or feed their families. From first-hand experience speaking to people, it's clear that-, the impact that the crisis is having. Emotionally, they're struggling and we're having to have some difficult conversations. So, Scope partner with organisations to allow the provision of pre-payment meter fuel vouchers and insulation of larger efficiency measures, such as insulation, boiler and white good replacements. Partnership working is so important to the service, because it allows us to reach and support more disabled people and their families, at a time where help is crucial. So, as well as fuel vouchers and white goods replacement that is directly freeing up money for people, our partnerships allow us to make referrals for free carbon monoxide alarms to ensure that they're safe within their own homes, and also source funding for people whose main source of heating is not mains gas. An example, that would be oil, coal or wood.

So, to give an example of the kind of things that we're hearing day-to-day on the service, we recently spoke with a customer who had been made homeless due to their financial circumstances and they were now living in a caravan as they had nowhere else to go. So, during our conversation with him, we were able to make a referral through to the Fuel Bank Foundation for assistance with funding for heat logs, to help keep him warm in his caravan. So, although the customer had no fixed address, we were able to work, as well, with the Fuel Bank Foundation to arrange the delivery to his parents' home. He couldn't thank us enough, explaining what a massive difference it was going to make and he advised that, once he's back up on his feet, financially, he would be committing to becoming a Scope donor, to help us support others in these difficult times. Thanks everyone, and back to you, Laura.

Thanks, Dan. So, as Dan just mentioned, sadly, it is becoming more and more common, that we're supporting people who have no access to hot water or heating. There are a lot of people who can't afford to eat and they are, in fact, accessing food banks, maybe for the first time. So, to give some more examples of things that we're hearing, we recently spoke with an elderly customer who, due to his mobility issues, he relied on a stairlift to get around his home, so he was extremely concerned about his rising costs and he was on a prepayment meter and he explained that he was quite scared to go upstairs on his stairlift because he was really worried that he was gonna get stuck. So, we, we were really sad to hear that someone might feel, like, worried about getting around in their own home because of the costs that they face. We completed a full review of his energy and water and we were able to liaise with his supplier, and we did end up reducing his water bill by 50%, to help him manage his bills moving forward, we also issued a fuel voucher to offer some immediate help. So he was really, really grateful to us and he left us fantastic feedback through our service. We also, last week, spoke to a man who explained that he was supporting his wife through end of life care. He was looking for ways to reduce his energy costs and he opened up about how tough it was dealing with, not only trying to support his family under these circumstances, but the added worry of his bills on top of that.

So he was really grateful for the support that we provided and the emergency fuel voucher that we issued. It, it was going to alleviate just a small part of the stress he was dealing with but, you know, he said to us, even just that little bit of help, was helping him to focus on the things that he needed to, at that time. So, it's really important to us, to understand the impact that we can have as a service. In order to do that, we do carry out surveys at the start and the end of our service journey and we ask questions that allow us to understand people's energy and utility-based knowledge and also their wellbeing and where that is, both before and after the appointments with us. On average, 75% of our customers have reported improved energy knowledge and 83% have reported improved wellbeing following their appointments with us. Next slide, please. So, just in terms of how you can refer people to us and, also, the resources that we have available, we do have-, we have created a referral partner page. So, that page has resources that you can use to tell your customers about our support service. It includes things like our key messages and summaries of the service, energy and advice support links, logos and text that you can add to documents, information on how you can make content and communications accessible to disabled customers. So, our Disability Energy Support advice booklet is also available on our referral page and that's been designed with those customers who are digitally excluded in mind.

That can be shared with your customers and provides useful information on energy and water. There's also a printable version. The energy-, sorry, the Disability Energy Support leaflet, as well, is on there and that can be used on your website and, again, printed to be passed on, whether it's in the community hubs or inserted into direct mail. We will share the link to this page, following the webinar. We now do offer the option of tailored email advice, as well as telephone, as I touched on earlier, so our customers can choose their preferred communication channel based on their accessibility needs, but still receive the same individualised household centre advice. Referrals to the service can be made by telephone or completing our online form for appointment or by emailing us at disability.energysupport@scope.org.uk. We can make adjustments for telephone calls, such as video calls with British sign language interpreters and language interpreters for people who wish to talk to us in another language and customers can tell us about any access needs when they apply. So, thank you very much for listening today and, any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

**Thank you. Thanks, Laura and Dan, some real heart-wrenching stories and facts there and some clear points, that we're all working hard to provide effective support and where further customer service improvements can be made. It also really highlights, to me, how customer service staff need more support and training at, at this time, as the demands on them are immense, taking really difficult calls, in most cases, one after another. Thanks very much for sending all the questions through, please keep them coming. We are answering some as they're coming through online, because we know we won't be able to get through them all verbally, but now we're gonna take a break and then, coming up after our break is an opportunity to hear some of our storytellers telling their stories, and we've also got our expert-, industry expert panel coming up after the break as well. So, if we take a break now, I'm sure everybody wants to stretch their legs and go and have a coffee, and if we're back at 10:45 for a prompt start, that will be great. Thanks very much everybody, see you shortly. (silence 01.04.00-01.04:12) Welcome back everybody. I'm very pleased to introduce Edward Gamper and our storytellers, Anne and Susanne, to tell us about their experiences during this cost of living and energy crisis. Again, do raise any questions in the questions and answers tab (ph 01.04.27) and Edward will try and pick them up as we're going along. Over to you, Ed.**

Hi, just checking you can, first, hear me, before I continue speaking?

Yes, it's all good.

Good. So, I'm Edward, I'm the stories lead here at Scope and, in just a moment, you're going to be hearing from Susanne and Anne, and they're both going to speak about their experience of the cost of living and energy crisis and, after they've spoken, I'm going to invite them both to join me in a live Q&A. So, as Christine just mentioned, if you have any questions for Anne or Susanne, feel free to type them in the Q&A box and I'll be moderating those and then conducting that Q&A. You're first gonna hear from Susanne, who's been a Scope storyteller for over five years, sharing her experience of raising her daughter, Mia, and the many barriers that they face as a family. Susanne first got involved with Scope's Utilities Consortium [sic] when she spoke to us about the extra energy need and energy costs that she faces, this was before the pandemic and the new cost of living and energy crisis that's further compounded the financial challenges that she's now facing too. I'm now going to invite Susanne to turn on her camera and her microphone and to share a bit about her experience.

Hi. Oh, I'm, I'm all blurred out. Give me two seconds, otherwise I'll be ghostly. (silence 01.05.47-01.05.58) Hopefully that's better. It's one of those things you can't check beforehand, sorry about that. My name is Susanne. My daughter Mia is wonderful, engaging and sociable young woman, Mia also has profound and multiple disabilities. Mia is curious and generous, caring and happy, yet dependent on others around her for absolutely everything. She has very little control over her own life and bears this with the grace and dignity that astonishes me and fills me with admiration. Mia has ten pieces of electrical kit which need constant charging, plus other things that need to be kept in the fridge, so that also has to be on. With hoists, slings and changing pads, washing needs to be done every single day, sometimes a hot disinfectant wash, which means doing a load twice. We don't have a choice over our electricity and water usage, these are the bare necessities that it takes for us to live, and that's without heating costs and cooking meals. Mia needs two or three cooked meals a day, otherwise her weight drops and she can't control her body temperature, plus being in a wheelchair means we have to have heating for her. I don't turn it on the rest of the time, I turn it on just when she's here. Some of our bills have doubled, others have tripled.

We've considered moving house, we've seriously looked into it, but we can't afford anywhere within the area, so that Mia can get-, so that Mia can still get the same services she does now. We're completely bound here. My husband's salary doesn't go up, my carer's allowance equates to approximately 59 pence per hour. We don't have any time we can magic up to get another job to bring in more money, all we see, going forward, is the never ending cost-, increase in costs of energy, water and food. We didn't choose this life, it can happen to anybody. We were senior managers in local government, earning a fair salary. We had to give it all up, because these are the cards we were dealt. We're struggling and I can't be there for Mia unless I'm looking after myself, but it's increasingly difficult to prioritise that when you're so stressed about being able to afford the bare necessities. How do we know it's going to get better? Do we know it's going to get better? It certainly doesn't look like it at the minute. We keep getting squeezed and squeezed like a balloon, there's nowhere for it to go. Sometimes, most days, I just have yoghurt for lunch because food is the only place we can realistically make cuts. Those in power need to act. For me, in the short-term, support packages and subsidies to those who need it would really help. In the long-term, energy and other companies need to consider more ways to help customers who need it. The government must do more, but I feel it's just washing its hands of anyone, even potentially vulnerable, just hoping they go away, that's what it feels like.

**Thank you very much, Suzanne, for sharing your experience. I might ask you just now just to mute yourself and switch your microphone back off whilst we then hear from Anne Vivian-Smith, who, as the cost-of-living and energy crisis unfolded, we were-, Scope were speaking to disabled people who were talking to us about how they were being affected, and one person whose story really stood out to me was Anne's. Anne joined us as a storyteller earlier in the summer and when I first spoke to hear about the increasing challenges that she was facing with her financial situation and the energy bills that have dramatically increased. So, Anne's now going to speak to you a bit about her experience of the energy crisis and a little bit about some of the advice that she also received through Scope's Disability Energy Support service.**

Hi I'm Anne Vivian-Smith. I used to be fit and well and able to work full-time. My husband and I were never rich, but there was enough money-, sorry, I've just made my text go all wibbly and I can't move it. (audio cuts out 01.10.19), but there was enough money to cover good food, the odd treat and (mw 01.10.25) and baked goods (ph 01.10.26). But then whenever there was a big bill, we've taken second jobs and just paid our way. Then I got ill, and I got a neurodegenerative autoimmune disorder, which you have to learn to spell when you get it. Within two years of its identification, I was a wheelchair user and then I (audio distorts 01.10.54). So we now live on a combination of my husband's salary and my disability benefits. We didn't have anywhere near as much money as before, but we could still get by. Then in January, we had a news report about energy prices, whereas in, in pence rather than pounds. And this unexpected-, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Then in January, we heard a news report about energy prices rising. I checked our account and found, with no warning at all, our monthly dual fuel payments had risen from £84.22 to £145.19. Our budget is limited, and we can't absorb rises. Well, we can absorb small rises, the pence rather than pounds bit, but this, this unexpected, significant rise, is-, it's the stuff of nightmares. And, and then it, it's got worse.

We've had two more increases and our dual fuel payment is now £258.72, and it's due to go up again, but there's no money. Living with a disability costs more. As Suzanne talked about, there's, there's special cutlery, there's cooking equipment. I have an electric bed, I have two carers who help me-, I can't shower independently, so they have to help me in the shower, and that means I can't shower quickly. I'm dressed by carers, which means my clothes get yanked around a lot, and I'm really clumsy too, so my clothes need changing regularly. I use more electricity for washing, I have more laundry. I have to replace my clothes more often than non-disabled people. I use a powered wheelchair. I have ceiling track hoists that I, I can't move between my chairs or my chair and my bed without their use. I have an electric bed so that I can safely change my body position at night, and that helps me to avoid pressure sores. I have an electric door opener because I can't lean forward safely, and it works on a button. I have an, an electric loo, whose purpose I'm, I'm sure you can figure out, but all, all of these things remain on charge. So, they, they all take a little bit of money, all these little bits of money add up. And I don't know what, what do I choose to turn off? I have trouble with food, so I don't weigh much, and I'm always cold. I have immunosuppressant medication, so I'm at a high risk for an infection.

I am being forced to take a huge risk at the moment because our heating isn't dropped by one degree, it's off, because there's no way we can afford to, to put the heating on. I'm sat here in six layers today and a hot water bottle, and I usually have two blankets and a terrier, but she won't sit down today. So, I'm-, and with all that, I'm still cold. So, from the moment I wake up, throughout my day and on into the evening and the night-time, I'm worrying about money. I sit in the cold, I have no hot drinks, I have no hot food, and I'm ashamed of how I look. My clothes are dirtier than I would like, and I don't shower as often as I would like, and I don't wash my hair as often as I would like. I don't blow-dry my hair because I'm frightened to use the hairdryer. So, I, I hate that. I hate that I shower less frequently, and I feel-, I feel grubby and uncomfortable, and that, that stops me going out, really. I've clawed back money from everywhere. We've gone from nice food to own brands, to me spending hours scouring the shops comparing prices for eggs and bread and vegetables. Twelve weeks ago, spring onions were 19p a pack, today they're nine zero, 90p, and that's just spring onions. And to be fair, I row those, so I can't-, I don't buy them. Reductions of out of (ph 01.15.30) food products are no longer as generous as, as more and more people figured out when the cheaper food is put out.

The Tesco's in the city centre, people were-, have found out so often where their cooled discounted food is put out, they've had to buy the member of staff a barrier so that when he's putting it out, he can't get shoved into the cooler while he's doing it, as people are more and more desperate. And I, I can't get my wheelchair anywhere near close, so that's a, a source of cheap food that, that we don't have. All this crush of desperate people hoping to save a few pence. And I, I'd be one of those, but now, it's impossible. My husband and I are both tired ad tense and frightened. I have the additional guilt that I'm a parasite. I can't pay my way, and I feel I'm a burden on him and (mw 01.16.31) finances. There aren't very many rays of light in our lives at the moment. We've had some help though, navigating benefits and grants and registers and tariffs is a nightmare. I have an information processing disorder, and I was really struggling to get through the information which always feels like it was made deliberately as inaccessible and as obscure as possible. And I rang, in desperation, to Scope, and they pointed out to me that there's this Disability Energy Support line, and they helped me get a referral to it. So, I, I got an appointment to speak with an advisor, and Anthony. Anthony was great.

He was so patient, he got me through the, the getting muddled and where my speech stops, he was so patient and so calm and reassuring. He already understood that I would have unavoidable high energy costs, I didn't have to explain all that to him. He was trained to ask the right questions about areas of my life that would only be relevant to a disabled person, and he could present the information to me in a way that I could understand. He knew about additional support that was only targeted at disabled people. Then the follow-up was great. I received a record of our conversation and an action plan. I have memory difficulties, cognition difficulties, comprehension trouble and fatigue. So-, and, and that's not uncommon for an awful lot of disabled people. And, and it seems the answer to most questions these days is, 'It's on the website,' and that's it, with no effort to make sure that the information is easy to find or understand. Scope sent information to me in a clear font, and each topic was easily identifiable. Subjects have brief text, and then a link, and each link worked too. Tasks I needed to do were identified and allocated. I could dip into each section as I needed, go and do it, and then return easily. Just having something constructive that I could do took some of the pressure from me. It's still worse than awful, but we have made some small changes.

We now have a smart meter, which is both my enemy and my friend. It highlights some of the most expensive energy use in the house, and that turns every action into a, a transaction. If I have a hot drink, how much will it cost me? A shower, for me, costs over a fiver, the four-minute shower is just never going to happen. It's hard that my life used to be so full and has now become small, focussed on this, and really nothing else. It's harder still to know the people who could make a difference earn so much money that they don't worry about the size of their utility bills or the cost of spring onions and their groceries. It's like being collateral damage, totally helpless, just dreading what will happen next. And I just needed-, I really needed someone to hear this. Thank you for your time.

**Thank you so much, Anne, for sharing your experience and also Suzanne, and I assure you that we've all just heard your story here and it's really difficult to listen to, and very challenging. So, Anne, I might actually invite you just to switch your camera back on and stay on the chat now, because we're going to go to a live Q&A. I have just three questions to get the ball, ball rolling. So, I hope that I might invite the audience to ask questions, if you have any, too. And I might start, Suzanne, with you, and then I'll ask the same question to you, Anne. Suzanne, how supportive do you feel your energy provider has been throughout the cost-of-living crisis?**

Well, they've, they've-, sorry for the hesitation, they've-, I think my, my, my husband just, sort of, threw into a, a, a, a comment a couple of days ago that he'd been in touch with them and they'd been helpful. And it was-, it was on-, it was one of those never-ending things on my list to do. I've-, you know, like, of, of things to check and, you know, places to get support from. And because, with everything else, it does become a long list, even though everything is a priority and it's hard to know where to go, but he'd, he'd apparently done this. So, they, they have-, they have been-, are now a tiny bit supportive, I think, and that we've, we've got-, at least, we've highlighted to them. The water company has been great actually, and put us on a-, we had to apply and, kind of, almost give a pint of blood to approve-, sorry, being facetious, but that's what it feels like sometimes to actually prove your case. And-, but they, they have actually been really helpful and put us on a different tariff now, so at least we don't have to worry about the water usage, because that's-, that, that was causing us massive problems, because doing a disinfectant wash first, you have to do the disinfectant wash and then you have to check that it's actually worked and maybe do it again. So, that's-, it-, you're just using more and more and more all the time, and it-, and, you know, you've got no choice, you have to do it.

It's, it's a health and safety risk if you don't. So, you know, it's, it's, it's one of those things that you have to pay. So, it's, it's better than it, it was, but it's still-, it's still really frightening. It's still really frightening, because there is no apparent end in sight. Wages and, and benefits are not going up at all, and inflation's going through the roof, and our mortgage is coming to a-, mortgage rate is coming to an end soon and now we're really terrified about that. And we do-, I hear Anne completely. We are in a state of anxiety from the minute we wake up to the minute we go to bed, and all the way through the night, and I wake up sometimes knowing that I've had bad dreams, and my shoulders are up here. And it's, it's, it's a horrible way to live, and this can happen to anybody. It can happen to anybody, and nobody is immune from this kind of life, you know, we were in this little bubble of, of, you know, we're senior managers and it can happen to anybody. And when you get dealt these cards, it is really worrying, because what else do you do? Where do you go? You-, we don't have any time to-, like I said, we don't have any time to get more money from anywhere by getting another job. You know, because our time is already completely filled. We-, the only place we can save time is by sleeping, so I sleep less now, so I'm always tired, and I was always tired before. So, it, it's-, there is no-, it, it's really-, it's really-, yeah, it's really-, it's really difficult. Sorry, I've gone on.

**Thank you Suzanne. Sorry, could I just check that somebody's got some noise coming through on their microphone and if we could just mute it, thank you. Anne Vivian-Smith, if I might ask you the same question. How supportive do you feel your energy provider has been throughout the cost-of-living crisis?**

Not at all. They're-, they've been passive, it's not that they've been-, they've not informed us when rises have occurred, it's just happened, and suddenly there's money taken from your bank account that is more than you were banking, excuse me, on.

Yeah.

And, and that is-, that, that-, there, there's no money, so that money was allocated to something else, and it's something boring like food or rent. And the direct debit just takes it, and, and the problem is, if you go off the direct debit, then you have to go to a different tariff that is much higher. So, you're, you're stuck in this-, it's a bit like being on a train crash, and you can't do anything, it's just steaming forward and you're completely powerless at how to manage it. And we've tried ringing, they won't talk to my PAs, and my husband's at work. They're not available in the evenings or weekends, so they can't talk to him, and due to GDPR, they will only speak to me, but speaking to me is pretty much a waste of time because I mostly don't understand what they're talking about, or they (sic) have working memory loss, so that-, the information they can give me can be gone, 'cause I get tailed (ph 01.26.15) and it fell out. So, they were-, they were worse, and it has come to the point where I now obsessively check their website to see if it's gone up again, and that's, kind of, one of my morning activities, is to quickly look and check on our dual fuel thing just to see if they're gonna take more money out of us again. And that, that starts my merry-go-round of trying to keep costs down and trying to balance things and whichever.

I really hear-, we're just another, another example. We were-, we were cocky, like Suzanne, we were-, so I was a, a senior manager, Dave had a career as a buyer in the private sector. So, we both-, you know, we owned our own house, we were comfortable and never saw that this would happen. I had critical illness insurance, and when we tried to claim it, they said, 'You-, you're not eligible for it because you had pins and needles and you didn't report it, and that's an early sign of neurological disorder,' and we were like, 'How many people have woken up having laid on an arm and, and, and don't-, and, and don't think to report it for critical illness insurance?' So, it, it, it's one of those things, it smacks you upside the head and then something like this just keeps on smacking you. So, I, I-, yeah, and I'm-, I've gone off the point as well, but there is that bit that, you know, you, you couldn't have seen it coming, and you can't prepare yourself, and then it's almost impossible to get (audio distorts 01.27.49).

**So staying with you, Anne, for a moment, what do you think utility could-, utilities companies could be doing to support disabled people through the crisis? What, what do you think they could be doing?**

I think one of the things that they could do is establish a really good link with an organisation like Scope who actually knows the answers to the questions, because I, I don't expect them to be disability experts, but what I would like is, if I rang them and said, 'I'm a disabled person and I'm struggling to get through this,' they could say, 'Right, we-,' it's almost like a subcontracted service. 'We will pass you to these, and these people will work with us and, and, and we'll do it,' because I, I can't. I find it confusing enough, wading through treacle as my day goes, so if, if they were able just to take some of that from me and say, 'Right, we'll-, you have given permission for us to work with Scope, we're now going to work with them, we'll just keep you advised of how things are, are going.' And that would-, that would be so brilliant. Everything falls on my lap, and I'm worse than stupid these days, I think (ph 01.29.04). I can't get my head around things. So, if they were to, to do something that would just remove some of the weight from me and make my life simpler and clearer, I would really appreciate it.

**Thank you. Suzanne, do you-, what do you think utilities companies could be doing? Do you think there's anything they could be doing to reduce costs for disabled people?**

I'm sure, with various different, you know-, I'm sure there are-, there's, there's some way of, like, having tax write-offs or some, some kind of business process where they could give subsidies or they could do something about subsidising people, people who need it the most. For example, disabled people who do have naturally higher costs for things, as Anne and I have, have tried to explain a little bit about. Or, or, you know, just people who are in this, this dire situation, I'm sure there's some clever way. I mean, these, these are, like, massive businesses that-, and they, you know, they're, they're clever people. There's, there's bound to be a way with, you know, legal things or financial things where they could do some kind of tax deductible, something, so that it would be a win-win for them. You know, if they actually gave something to disabled people, if they gave subsidies, they could have-, like, there would be some kind of tax scheme so that they would-, wouldn't actually lose out. You know, we're, we're not expecting people to suddenly, sort of, you know, reach into their own pockets, and we know they are businesses, but I'm sure there's a way of actually helping us without them losing anything. And what we're after is a win-win, and I know that I'm, I'm, I'm assuming that what they want is a win-win as well, and I'm sure there's-, I'm sure that exists. I'm sure there's, there's got to be a way where that exists. Some kind of government support or some-, something, something with HMRC, I don't know. There's, there's got to be some way of giving us support without them losing out what, what they expect.

**Yeah, and Suzanne, you just mentioned the government, which leads onto my final question. Do you think the government are doing enough to support disabled people and families with-, who are facing extra disability-related costs?**

Short answer, no.

**I, I, kind of-, I, I felt-, I felt it was strange asking that question, I knew the answer to it. What, what more do you think they could be doing? I know that's quite a complex question that might not have an easy answer, but do you have any, sort of, thoughts of your own about what the government might be able to do?**

Again, I am sure there are win-win situations for the government as well, and, and I think there are-, there are a lot of things that they could do that would be media-grabbing headlines that would actually make everyone, like, in favour of them suddenly as well, but I, I, I know they need to do that politically. But there are things that they could do that would actually have a long-term impact. For example, the, the, the crisis that we're seeing in this country, and I was explaining this to friends who live in a completely different country and they-, who, who were saying blithely, 'If I didn't have enough money, I would go out and get a second job,' and I said, 'The trouble is, in this country, is that a normal person can go out and get three jobs and still not bring in enough money to pay all their bills going out.' So, the problem is that we are in a situation now where everyone is having-, the-, your income does not equal your outgoings. If you're-, if you're below a certain line in the-, in the income bracket, you're, you're, you know, you, you could be working all the hours you're not asleep, and you could still not bring in enough money. And that is the inequality that needs to be addressed. Wages need to go up in line with inflation, full stop, at least, because we are already really behind, because every year, months on months, we get less and less money in. So, it's basically the same as having a wage cut, and that applies to everybody. Unless you're in a-, in a situation where you can negotiate an extra salary, you know, and, and people who have a big salary or a comfortable salary maybe are in that position, but people who aren't, people-, the, the vast majority of working people in this country are not in that position.

**Yeah**

And so, it-, wages and income and benefits need to go up in-, at least in line with inflation.

**Yeah, and we know also the irony is that for disabled people, they face additional challenges, whether it's discrimination or other barriers to work. So-, and, and-,**

Yeah.

**Face extra disability-related costs, so it's this, sort of, double whammy for disabled people who are just more adversely impacted by the situation. Anne-,**

Yeah, absolutely, so that, that was just to start with.

**(talking over each other 01.34.18).**

I-, you know, there, there, there's-, if you've got twenty minutes, I have a, you know, (audio distorts 01.34.23). But that's just to start with, that's the baseline. That's the baseline that, you know, it, it needs to-, there needs to be parity, there needs to be equality. People need to be not dumbed down and, 'Oh, get another job,' or, you know, 'Just go away, go into your savings,' we've got no savings anymore. We've used them all, what do you think we've been living off? It's, it's, it gets to a crisis point where we just feel like-, I'm sure a lot of people-, I know I'm speaking for me, but I'm sure a lot of people feel like we're just being told to go away, and, you know, we exist in this country, and there is enough money to go around. It's just the money is, is not being spent where it needs to be spent. And it needs-, and vulnerable people, disabled people, need to have more than, than others, and that is equality, that is parity. That's not special treatment, we're just asking for something that a civilised country should be doing, is looking after vulnerable people.

**Yeah, completely. Anne, same question to you. Do you think the government is doing enough to support disabled people through this cost-of-living and energy crisis? And what do you think they could be doing?**

Short answer. Quick, short answer-,

**Surprise, surprise me.**

No. There we go, sorry. No. No. I think-, I don't think they have a clue. I think one of the things that bugs me every single time is that any assistance that's touted is only eligible for a really, really small proportion of people. So, it was like, during the pandemic, where people on Universal Credit received a £20 uplift and yet most disabled people weren't on Universal Credit so didn't actually get anything. And yet were-, we were kept home sooner and for a longer period of time, so we had to pay to have stuff delivered which means our costs went up straight away, and yet, there was no-, and that's where savings disappear to. So, that-, it would be really nice for recognition that lots of us have working people in our families and that immediately excludes us from absolutely everything. We, we only got the £150, the-, all the rest of the money that Rishi Sunak shouted about, which was over £1,000 more, didn't come to us, because immediately, we're excluded because Dave works. And yet, it's really important, not just for his mental wellbeing to get out of the house and stop being a (ph 01.37.13) carer, just for a bit, but it, it's, it's important for, again, boring things like food and rent, because if we were just living on, on benefits, there's, there's no way we could-, I-, we're struggling now.

And the, the two job thing is, is a really good point as well, because Dave can't work a second job because he is carer to me as soon as he's home from work. So, the-, there, there, there's nowhere to go, and I would have worked, but (audio distorts 01.37.48). So, I think the government could do some recognition of, instead of a sliding precipice that they do with the, 'Here's some money, oh, you're not eligible,' if, if there could be some sort of gradient, perhaps, that made sure that people who were working too were eligible for some assistance. That would be good. It would also be good not to just shout about Universal Credit, but to recognise others. I also-, I, I don't understand why they can't negotiate a social tariff for people with unavoidably high costs. I, I think disabled people, we're invisible. Nobody knows we're even here because we're stuck indoors, because we can't afford to get out. I have neighbours who are on oxygen, and the NHS pays an additional premium to cover the price of their machine to pump the oxygen, which I didn't know about, and that's amazing. But, the other thing I didn't know about is they're cold all the time because oxygen is cold, it's freezing, and it's going into their bodies, and they get no extra help for paying for the additional heating.

But they're not there, nobody knows about them, because they're, they're, they're indoors, they don't have access to the internet, so they, they-, so they, they don't know where. So, I think the government could do something more proactive, particularly around people who are a bit like me and tech deficient. There, there are a number of things. I think there's tax breaks that they could do for businesses that would encourage them to chuck more money at a social tariff. I think they could be negotiating the social tariff, so there would be this one thing that people would access. I think they should be supporting more organisations like Scope, so that they can signpost people directly to something that can offer assistance in a quickly-, in, in a timely manner. And I think there should be a greater recognition that, even if you're in work, you're not necessarily getting by.

**I think those are all really salient points from both of you, thank you so much. I am going to enter the experimental phase where I've been informed somebody has their hand up in the-, in the audience and that there might be a possibility we're going to attempt to switch their camera and microphone on, because I'm assuming Thomas has a question for you both. I shall wait with bated breath.**

Yes. Hello, can, can-, am I-, am I addressing the meeting? Can you hear me?

**You are, we can hear you and you're being heard out loud by everybody, so-,**

That's alright, that's alright.

**But yeah, please go ahead.**

No, I've-, I think I've put a lot of it because (audio distorts 01.40.41) when Suzanne was talking, I was, you know, I-, there was a lot of ideas being triggered in my mind, but the-, I think a lot of it is in the-, is in the chat box now. Comments about personal experience, you know, how difficult it is to contact utility companies over anything, you know, and not just energy support. You know, or you write-, you know, I mean, you know, I, I, I think writing letters seems to be gone as an option, you know, because you write a letter, you never get a respond (sic) from it. You never get anything responding for it, and even if you do, it's often by email or something like that, but the person reading-, person responding-, and I, I can speak from personal experience, they haven't actually read the letter. You know, they give you the official company response about, 'We, we-,' you know, 'We value our customers,' etc. etc. But you, you know, you still-, you still don't-, you still don't get any satisfaction. You know, the, the thing is, also, there's a more-, a very general thing, and I'm sure it affects-, I know it affects disabled people more, banks forcing people to go online and not really telling them how to do it or what to do, you know, how to-, because-, and they want everyone, they want you to-, direct debit and you're not-, you know, you're not-, you're not-, you might try and cancel it, but sometimes one of the parties makes a mistake and it-, you know, you, you spend ages trying to correct it, and I know, in some cases, you spend ages trying to get the money refunded, so that-, I mean I, I just-, it just-, it just seems to be, generally, that the consumer protection element needs to be strengthened. You know-, you know, it needs to be strengthened for, for everybody-, for everybody.

**Yeah.**

But that's all-, that's all. Thank you, thank you (talking over each other 01.43.01).

**Thank you Thomas. I, I think Thomas is raising a good point there toward the end, which is also, you know, in the, kind of, increasingly digital world where everybody talks about being connected online, how does that work when a cost-of-living crisis could switch off the internet and, and close off your communication and, and everything is entirely online? So, I think digital accessibility in-, is, is a big issue that also I'm aware-, well I'm-, very mindful that Scope also campaigns and works around that too. I'm mindful of the time, so I really want to thank Suzanne and Anne again for sharing your experience, I know it wasn't easy and you were talking about a very challenging situation you're both in, as are many disabled people. But I thank you very much for your time and I invite you both to now-, you may continue to join the webinar, or get on with your very busy days, so please do switch your microphones and cameras off, unless there's any final words either of you wanted to share with anyone on the webinar right now.**

Just thank you for inviting us, it's, it, it, it feels really important to have been able to have a voice and to be listened to and, and be heard. It, it's-, that's really, really important, so thank you Scope. Thank you for doing this, and thank you to everyone attending, and I hope it's given some insight.

**Anne, any final words or shall we just bid you-, bid you farewell?**

No, Suzanne said all the things that needed to be said and, yes, going to ditto all that.

**Thank you very much for both of you joining us today, and I'm gonna hand us back now to Christine, who's gonna take us onto the next section in the webinar.**

**Thank you Ed, and thank you Suzanne and Anne for those heartfelt comments and stories. We're so grateful for your-, for your time and really sharing those deeply personal and difficult experiences. I'd just like to read a couple of comments really from-, similar comments as they're (ph 01.45.03) coming in actually. Interesting points, just-, or have they all been answered? Perhaps they've all been answered, but, 'Not a question but just a thank you so much for sharing your lives with us. I wish so many more than just those of us on this call could hear about this because it's so powerful.' We'll make sure that people that have been invited but haven't been able to make it will at least be able to get a recording of this webinar, but yeah, I completely agree with your comments there, Kate. Carmel says, 'Thank you for sharing.' Julie says, 'Thank you so much for sharing, agree with Kate, more people should hear the impact of the cost-of-living crises and the impact it's having on people.' Michael says, 'Such powerful stories, thank you for your courage and insights today.' Thomas, 'Just a general-,' yeah, we've heard from Thomas haven't we, he made some really good points there. Yeah, so some really lovely comments coming in, and very impactful, and, and thank you so much to Anne and Suzanne and, and thank you, Edward, for facilitating that session there.**

**We're running a-, we've got three minutes, we're running a little bit earlier than we thought we might. Would everybody appreciate a five-minute break? But I do suggest it's just five minutes. If we come-, it's now 11:28, if we take 'til 11:33, I suggest, and then we kick off, but I think everybody might just appreciate a stretch of legs and, sort of, an actual break. So, let's see you all back here at 11:33 if that's okay. Thank you. (Silence 01:46:48 - 01.48.25). Hi, hopefully everybody's back now, and had a little bit of a break. So, moving onto our next session. Scope and Accenture have a strong partnership at a practical and a strategic level, and I'm delighted to now introduce you to Glenda Duggan, Managing Director at, at Accenture, who is going to chair this session. I'll leave it to you to doing the introductions, Glenda, and people on the panel include a number of people in our Scope Utilities Membership, but I'll let you do the intros Glenda. Over to you.**

**Moderator: And I, I think I'm letting them do the intros too, but thank you, Christine, and, and thank you for inviting us, this is such an important topic at such an important time, and I think, as a sector, we, we have a responsibility to work together and, and, and tackle this as a-, as a combined unit. And, and just from an Accenture perspective, I, I-, just the Scope Utility Membership has been invaluable in, in helping us in, in so many ways, Christine, so, so thank you. And anybody who isn't a member yet, please, please do join, and, and I can-, I can testify to the-, it being really, really useful. Look, what, what matters, I think we've seen through today, and some really interesting research and, and, and the work that's been going on is that we work together, which is why I'm really, really excited by this panel. Like, this is-, this is an incredible group of organisations and, and companies and projects that are going on within the utility sector to try and-, try and shift the dial on this and do something different. And we've got-, we've got network company representation, we've got water representation, we've got retail representation, so those of you-, there's a chance to talk to those in the utilities who are making it their job to, to make a difference. I will ask the, the, the, the, the panellists to introduce themselves it's-, if that's alright. I might just go round and, Kerry, do you wanna go first? And then, then I'll head to Charlotte.**

yeah, sure. So, I'm Kerry Potter, I'm the Group Social Impact and Vulnerability Lead for SGN, Gas Distribution Network, and I support gas distribution networks with their partnership with Scope as well.

**And then I think Amy was next on my screen, but maybe not.**

Yes, hi everyone, my name's Amy Wernham, I work at South East Water as their Resilient Customer Manager, and a lot of my role is very much around the partnership working with organisations like Scope and looking at how we can improve and adapt vulnerability initiatives, affordability, and water efficiency.

**Cool, and Farina?**

And I'm Farina Farrier, I'm the Social Sustainability Strategy Programme Manager at UK Power Networks, so we work quite closely with Scope. Scope is one of our key partners, you know, it's-, so, I guess, today, like, really looking forward to being part of the panel and, I guess, sharing our thoughts and views with all of you on, on the work that we do.

**Brilliant, and Kieran.**

Hi everybody. Yeah, my name's Kieran, I'm a Customer Support Executive at EDF Energy. My role, kind of, straddles a few areas, but it sits between, sort of, the, the, the debt side of things and vulnerability. So, I look after anything from partnerships to processes to regulatory change and, and how we've distributed that amongst the-, amongst the business.

**Excellent, and Charlotte last but not least.**

Hi everyone, I'm Charlotte Snelgrove, I work at Octopus. So I actually work in the marketing team but my role also involves working on some of our schemes to support vulnerable customers. So, our electric blanket scheme, we had a Winter Workout energy efficiency programme last year, and also we have some thermal camera scheme as well. I'm really happy to be here and be part of the conversation, so thank you.

**Awesome (ph 01.52.23) thank you. Let's just-, I'm, I'm, I'm keen with this, this panel to really, really start off with why. Why do we think it's important that utilities work with, with Scope and to support disabled people and, and, and what's important in that area? Kerry, Kerry I might go-, let, let's go for a network and a water company. Let's go Kerry first, what do you think?**

Yeah, I think as utility companies, be it water, gas or electricity, we, we, we get that we're essential services and that we all have an ambition and, dare I say it, an obligation to make sure the services, the customer touchpoints we provide are inclusive and meet the needs of the customers we serve. I mean, commonly, we all look to make sure that we provide a great and a reliable service for our customers, and that listening to Anne in particular earlier, that the services we offer are easy to use when they're needed. And for a utility network company, that when you-, the help is needed, that it's-, whether it be a gas emergency, a power cut or a water supply, we're, we're there. We know what-, we know what you need and we can provide that experience and support as required. You know, I started talking to Scope some time ago to better understand the needs of disabled people from the perspective of in case of emergency, and this looked at, like, challenges around accessible contact channels, whether that be inbound, outbound, digital, non-digital, but we also looked at what sort of support would be desirable, required in case of an interruption of supply. We looked at, like, safeguarding services, for example, like, the Priority Services Register, and to better understand really how we could promote the scheme, because as network companies, we like to know who's behind the front door, should there be a problem, so we can prioritise our work and our Office of Welfare Support.

But as we've progressed with the partnership, our journeys, although staying close to that route, it's become really clear to me and to the other partners, I think, in the membership that, actually, one of the biggest challenges disabled people are finding is affordability. It's, as I would call it, fuel poverty in, in my world, certainly, that actually for disabled people, and this goes back to the research that James did in 2018, 2019, on the-, on the disability price tag, I mean it was a real revelation for us as utility companies who were already working with Scope at the time, to understand how disproportionate the costs were for disabled people to be able to maintain a safe and warm home. But I think-, I think going back to that point is why is it really important? Well, it's important for us to work with Scope for, for a number of reasons actually. It's helped us to stay close to the current needs and expectations of disabled people, just purely on accessibility alone. The world changes really quickly and, you know, in terms of contact channels or ways in which people wanna communicate with us, those needs, they, they change quickly. So, you know, through our partnership with Scope, every year we look at our channel platforms and make sure what we're doing meets current expectation. But, as a partnership, it's also enabled us to do, like, relevant research, share knowledge across industry sectors.

I mean, some of the work that we're doing, Scope's been an enabler for us to talk to Octopus and Together and EDF, for example, to understand the challenges experienced by the retail side and see how we can better, better work. So, that's been a bit of a brokerage for us. But it's, it's also listening to Suzanne and, and her talking about Mia, you know, I have to thank them both actually, 'cause they helped us with their employee training. You know, through working with Scope, not only do we look at our channels, we, we look at the relationship we have with our employees and their knowledge and experience of being able to understand and provide training and support for disabled people so when they're working, doing about our, our day job, that they understand what is needed and, and how our work impacts our customers. I think-, I know we'll talk about DES, but I-, there's probably something in there as well about why it's been important for us is that we've been able to, as a collective, identify disabled people and make sure they get help via the DES service. And I'm sure that we'll talk a little bit about that, but that's been really important. And our working relationship with the DES team's quite interactive, we do work through cases together as a group.

So, from a SGM perspective, we'll identify a customer in needs that needs tailored support because of their needs, and then we'll work with DES to make sure they get that, that help, but equally, Daniel and the team will give me a call and say, 'What do you think about this?' And we'll try and work through problems. So, I think, in the main, I guess why it's important, we're essential services, we need to understand the needs of disabled people. We need to stay relevant, and we need to understand how disabled people need information provided to them, that they do take benefits of things like the Priority Services Register or services like DES, for example. I could talk forever Glenda, and I will, so, so I'll stop and I'll hand over for water, otherwise I'll just keep talking.

**No, I know, I know. Yeah, no, but, but there were just a-, just a couple of phrases I loved, the world changes, right? And Scope are really-, we hear this a lot about how they're, they're continuing to, to keep everyone up to date on how that world has changed. And I loved your collective and, and working with other-, in fact other people on this call. Because I will allow (sic) Amy, Amy, the same question, why do you think it's important to work with Scope and, and, and if Kerry hasn't given all the, the textbook answers already.**

I think-, I think for us as, as a, sort of, water company as well, which you were on about essential service, there's been a couple of comments that have been made today that have really hit home I think, and, and one of them is around that, sort of, health and safety risk. The type of conversations we're having on, on this webinar is vulnerability and, and the way we've approached this has always been a, a, you know, a core concern and, and we have strategies and, and bits in place, but I don't think anyone quite, quite anticipated these cost-of-living increases, the energy crisis, the impact of the pandemic and how disproportionately those impacts have been made and felt. So, I think when we were talking around, sort of, health and safety and, and being at that level of those decisions that-, but they're not decisions, as we've said, they're not choices. The positions that people are now being faced with, it's so crucial for us to now act and to work in partnership and to really reinforce the work that we're all doing. For us as a company, we, we did a-, we launched our vulnerability strategy in 2019, and that was really key around focussing on how we proactively support disabled customers. But not only in, sort of, a business as usual for us, but also in incidents.

So, as a company, if there is a supply interruption, and, and people can't get out and get water, it's vital that we know that information through Priority Services, through working in partnerships, local councils, to really give us that, that vital information at the time so that we can get out and get our teams out there delivering that water. But I think, as part of this journey that we've been undergoing is, we're not necessarily the right relationship as a water company to have some of these conversations, and it's working with, sort of, specialist organisations like Scope who really bring that, that voice of disabled people into the work that we do, and help us to understand and support and, and adapt the ways that we are already trying to, to promote, like our tariffs and, and Priority Services. I think as a-, as a company, we have lots of different ways that we aim to find out more about customers. We have different surveys that are in place, specifically around incidents, vulnerability. And I know Kerry touched on financial vulnerability as well, which is becoming more and more-, affordability is becoming much more to the surface for everyone, but it, you know, really, really being felt with disabled, disabled customers. So, we've been really looking at, sort of, what we're doing, but I think organisations like Scope are really crucial in helping us understand why, why our journeys, processes.

If there's a service that's not quite working, why that is the case, and understanding the different disabilities and how that all comes together, and those improvements that we can make, I think on a-, on a process level, but also on a, you know, strategic level, for us. And I think it's, it's continuing to build those relationships and understand that changing landscape that we're all referring to, it's moving so quickly, and we need to keep updating and refreshing and, and looking at the support we have in place, and making sure there is a simple process. That people aren't, you know, stuck on phones unable to fill the-, I-, one of the things that struck me was that feeling invisible, because, you know, you, you can't get out, and, and I don't think anyone should ever be feeling that way. So, it's down to us to, you know, work together to make sure that people don't, and, and, you know, we really push that support. I think one of the key areas that we have that working with Scope's really influenced recently is from-, for water companies, we have a water resource management plan and we've been working with Water Resource South East on a more regional level, to understand how we, you know, promote services and keep our future water supply resilient. And we worked with Scope because, as we launched this on the platform, we realised there were accessibility issues.

Issues around that data, people actually being able to have their voices heard. And I think-, I'm, I'm sure they'll go into more detail later, but as part of that, we did, you know, there's six water companies that were on board with that, and that, that's really, sort of, generated a lasting legacy, I think, around that accessibility and building those into the systems. So, it's pieces like that that we just need to keep doing more and more of, I feel, and that's why this webinar and this discussion is so great, 'cause we just share ideas and really work on those. Sorry, I've probably-, I've probably gone on, but-,

**(talking over each other 02.02.47) at all. I, I, I-, but, but there's so many good things that we're hearing about what Scope are doing and, and the, the, the things I love in your-, you, you, you both come from different sectors but are having the same challenges and the same conversations and, and, you know, the messages around change and the world changes so quickly, and why, why are things not landing, is, is, is common across both. And that the collective need to work together and there is no one solving, right, and, and Scope's role in helping us-, helping us link has been, been incredible. I'll go onto-, it's alright-, I'll, I'll, I'll get some more energy and, and network people there maybe. But let's have a-, I'd like to know more about the work that has made a real difference in-, on your own organisations and, and, and what has helped you support disabled people better. Maybe we'll go with Farina first and, and then Kieran second if that's okay. Farina, UKPN?**

Yeah, sure, yeah. So, I think Kerry and Amy already touched on some of the things, but I guess there's quite a few aspects of the, you know, I guess insights and support that we get from Scope that's helping us inform the work that we do across our consumer vulnerability programmes. I think firstly, like, I think some of the findings from the recent research that we saw from Scope, I think that's definitely, kind of, helped us to understand the scale of challenge that disabled people are facing. I think particularly when it comes to interacting with the energy system, I think that's, kind of, helped us to, like, I guess firstly recognise how big the problem really is, and how we, as network companies, can actually, you know, I guess help, you know, make the journey a bit easier for them in terms of their day-to-day interactions with, with the system. I think Kerry talked about some of the situations where, you know, I guess in the cases of, like, you know, power outages or more emergency situations, how we can be providing better support to them. But I think not just that, but also, just, I guess, thinking more about the cost-of-living crisis that we're in, and, you know, I guess how we can be helping those customers, like, you know, who potentially are low-income or either are in fuel poverty or at risk of it.

I think another area of support that we've actually found really helpful through our partnership at Scope is the training that they provide. So Scope have been giving us training on, I guess, the social model of disability and basically, like, helping us raise awareness on some of the challenges that disabled people face. So, that training is something that, you know, us as UKPN, we've found really useful. It's something that our executives have signed up to as well. So, I think we want to make sure that, you know, that awareness is not just there across the teams that work across consumer vulnerability but, you know, it actually goes all the way through the organisation and, you know, we, we, we, we can, kind of, fully take that on board when we're making later day decisions as well as, you know, some of our key decisions as well. I think one of the other areas of support, like, I-, or one of the other things we work quite closely with Scope on is the Disability Energy Support that we talked about earlier. I think, again, like that's, that's really played a key role for us, I mean, particularly through the cost-of-living crisis, it's been really helpful for us particularly to work with disabled customers and, and help offer them support that's personalised to them and their situations.

And, kind of, help them understand how they can navigate through this cost-of-living crisis which is basically a challenge for everyone. I think some of the stats that we saw earlier, I think this year alone, we've helped around-, we've helped over 4,000 customers. I think one of the other things we're trialling with Scope at the moment is offering fuel vouchers to those customers, those disabled customers who might be in energy debt or, or who are in need the most. I think typically, I guess these fuel vouchers have existed in the past for prepayment meter customers, but I think we're now introducing this for credit meter customers as well. So, I think it's-, we're just, kind of, starting that process, but as UKPN, we are really keen to, kind of, take the learnings from this and ramp this support up, and potentially offer more of these vouchers to customers through this winter. Yes, I think those were the main things I wanted to, kind of, touch on, but yeah.

**And I noticed two of you have mentioned the, the DES service, how many-, how many of you-, hands up for those who've, who've used it or-, yeah. I mean, I thought-, I thought I saw a cat walk past there, Cheryl (ph 02.07.19), I think it was actually your hand, I think. Oh it was a cat, sorry, I will move on. But, you know, a great service is being provided. Kieran, Kieran, the, the one man on the panel, I-, the diversity person (ph 02.07.31), so thank you.**

Yeah, I'm, I'm representing the male. Yeah, so I-,

**(talking over each other 02.07.33) but just to recap, what's the work that, that EDF is doing to support disabled people?**

Yeah, so there's, sort of, two, two elements to it and I'll-, and I'll try to keep it as short as possible, 'cause like the other panel members, you know, I'm very passionate about it and we probably could talk for a good hour each I, I guess. Like I say, we're, we're still fairly early in the days of working with Scope, and already, we've seen some great, great work that's, that's come of it and really helped us to guide some of our strategy and some of our campaigns. The, the first part to it, I would say, that the work we've made a real difference on is that, very early this year, we realised that the cost of living is, is gonna have a huge-, a huge bearing on, on how we interact with our customers. So, we almost had to go back to the drawing board and say, 'We need to change these conversations,' whereby, years gone by, maybe the, the first conversation could have been around the, the debt side of things. How do we-, how do we help the customer with the debt and secure it? From that conversation, we, we, we came up with a, a, a framework to help all our front-line staff called the, the CARE, CARE, CARE scheme. Each one has its own acronym. So, the, the C element of it is the cost. So, when we-, when we have a conversation with a customer and they talk about difficulties with payment, let's have that conversation to start off with.

Do they really understand the cost, where the costs are coming from? Do they understand their tariff, their payment method, the-, where they're using electricity or gas? And that then, kinda, helps us to lead us towards the A element, the affordability. And this is probably the biggest change within our front-line staff is, really having those difficult, sometimes awkward conversation with a customer to understand what they can afford to pay us. That's not, not always easy, not, not, not always a conversation that customers want to have, but we need to understand if there's a disparity between what they're paying us and what they can afford. Then we, sort of, move onto the R part of it, it's, it's, it's the resolution part of it. So, whenever we have this call, we, we should-, we should never be leaving a customer without a resolution. We wanna get to a point where everybody has, has something with us. Then, then we talk about the E, and this is probably where Scope come into it, is the E is the (audio distorts 02.09.29) support. So, we know as a utility company we can only do so much. We fully understand that there are experts in the field, you know, I mean that's why we fund organisations or (audio distorts 02.09.37) to help that extra support. So, we have various partners that deal with the financial side of things, now working with Scope, we know that there is an expert in the-, in the field that we can refer customers onto if we can answer those questions. The, the second element to it is then-, and is-, it's, it's part of our, our campaign. When we realised this, this cost-of-living crisis, we set aside an extra £5 million to help, help customers. Xx

We publicly committed to this. So, what we did is we used customer information that we hold on them, so, sort of-, and data you'll probably used quite a lot over the coming years ,of how we use data to support customers. Be it a PSR information, smart metering data. But we essentially targeted customers with certain priority service conditions. And based on, sort of, on how they're looking financially on their account. So, what we did is we, we looked at, sort of, certain categories, be it say somebody living alone, an OAP, someone with a disability, and we proactively contacted people to say, 'Look, get in contact with us, we want to have the right conversation with you.' 'We understand your situation, and we want to see if we can help you financially.' And, and where the Scope partnership really helped is that the, the-, I think we referenced earlier on, was a price tag report from someone at Scope Findings, really emphasises that customers with disabilities and are depending on electrical equipment use more electricity. So, straight away we realised that if there was a customer who is electricity only, has one of these conditions that we're aware of, we need to get in contact with these people, we really do. We, we still-, as an energy industry we're still, kind of, fighting this perception as the big, bad energy company, which I'm pleased to say it is narrowing, but we're still-, we're still not there.

And which is why and I think we talked about the PSR earlier on and what it can open. We're just telling people, inviting, come speak to us, we're not-, we're not here to, to criticise or whatever, we really want to help. If we can help, we have people that can help you, but, but essentially we've seen some fantastic uptake. You know, the way our communications are written, the guidance we understand that some people with disabilities, they have-, need certain tailored services and it really has helped us to, to, sort of, push that-, push that experience and we've had some great feedback from them.

**I, I agree. I think the-, what's been really-, I've worked in utilities for 27 years and what's really noticeable is how much more the utilities are starting to proactively care and try, right? I don't think we're there, right, I think there's, there's more to, to, to do, but what is exciting about this group is that these are, sort of, the guys leading it, right? They're leading the change and they're leading what's happening. And there's certainly Scope, Scope and, and Christine, although she's off, but she's done a lot of work to glue a lot of people together, it's a really impressive thing. But anyway, I won't leave out Octopus, you are there, the-, we've heard about Scope's findings, so why don't we touch on the, the, kind of, cost of living crisis in a bit more-, bit more? And just, I know Octopus are doing some, some interesting things in that space. Charlotte, do you want to tell us a bit about what's happening in that space?**

Yes, thank you. Well, I think what's, what's come out of all these discussions today, time and time again is that while the government package is, is massive compared to anything that we've seen before, it's not really touching the sides. People are either aren't getting the help that they need because they're not eligible, or what we hear a lot is that money is being paid into bank accounts already in debt. So, that's not actually going anywhere. And I think that's where, kind of, energy suppliers really come, become really important to help give customers individual support. And I think at Octopus our approach is very much we have 1,000 humans, energy specialists sat on phones and email and we have to have that human conversation. And, kind of, not have a one size fits all approach. So, you know, our-, we say our policy is that we don't have any policies. So, we really want to enable our energy specialists to have the autonomy to give the support that that individual customer needs. And just to put in perspective, kind of, how much things have changed in the last year. Last year we offered £1.5 million in, kind of, extra funding for vulnerable customers. This year it's £15 million. And, you know, I'm sure that, that's still not going to be enough to help everyone that needs help. So, and I know Anne mentioned earlier that one of the things she though Scope could help with would be, kind of, have separate conversations with utility supplier customers.

And I think they'll be-, they will be a massive help in terms of that open conversation, but I also think that with one in five people in the UK having a disability, we need to integrate that, kind of, training and compassion with all of our energy suppliers, energy specialists. So, everyone who works at Octopus has vulnerability training and one in five-, one in ten people have extra training. So, within our structure we, kind of, have eight to ten people who work in a team and all of our customers should only ever interact with those eight to ten people. And within that team, at least one should be-, have extra training on vulnerability and how to help vulnerable customers. And also to add to that, I think something that's really important is that we have, kind of, these open-, not to get into too much detail with tech, but we have open conversation channels that all of our senior leadership team has visibility of. So, they can see individual customer situations and I think that's really important. So, a lot of companies are set up to be quite siloed. Still have, like, vulnerability teams. But the marketing team, the finance team, everyone can see these individual customer interactions and it really makes sense when we're, kind of, trying to plan how to help customers better. So for example, we offer electric blankets and the reason that came about is because last year we did our Winter work out gas saving scheme.

So, the idea was to help people use less gas through energy saving tips, obviously that's not relevant for everyone and the immediate response we got from a proportion of customers was, 'I'm already sat in the cold, how dare you, kind of, ask me to use less.' And we were like, 'My God, this is-, this is a really bad situation.' So, we basically started sending out electric blankets to those people who are really vulnerable and couldn't-, you know, were immobile as well. And that's become now over 40,000 electric blankets in the last-, which will be last year and this year combined. And it's, kind of, offering that personalised help to people, so they don't feel like they're just being passed around, because there's nothing worse than ringing up and having someone be like, 'I can't-, I can't help you, I'll pass you onto someone who can.' And then that, kind of, just goes round and round. So, our ambition is always to try and have someone who answers the phone or email who they are enabled to help that person with whatever their specific scenario is, yes.

**Awesome, awesome and electric blankets, a brilliant-, a brilliant, brilliant scheme that we've, we've all been watching actually, it's really good. So, I guess that we are a bit tight on time, because I'm, I'm conscious a lot of people will want to ask you questions. Just, just to the whole panel and you don't, don't all have to-, would any-, just from today is there anything you plan to do? Anything new that you could plan to do to try and help enable better outcomes for disabled people in your-, in your areas?**

Yes, I'll, I'll pick that one up. So, I don't-, I don't necessarily think it's-, what I've heard today is it's- I think the, the, the Priority Service Register is so important. And I think it's going to be even more important, potentially in, in, in the coming, coming weeks. So, depending on what the budget announcement does today, from, you know, from what we're hearing is there, there will be some good potential updates to benefits and people who are disabled. What that might do then is it will shift the disparity to potentially a different group of people who are now become potentially vulnerable. That, that never have been in debt before. So, with the PSR, it's fantastic for the people we know about, but the issue is the people we don't know about. And some-, and sometimes we hear these stories of, say, meters being changed and what not, and it tends to be-, we tend to hear that after its happened. So, for me the one thing I really want to take away today and it's just to really continue to promote and push the PSR. Be it ourselves or with our partners, so we understand people and can interject as soon as it happens. As soon as we see something changes, so we can flag up on our system so we can-, we can get in contact with them.

**Brilliant, brilliant. I will-, I will-, unless anyone particularly wants to-, there's, there's a few of you gone off mute. But I'm, I'm really aware there were-, there's an opportunity for questions. Christine, are there any questions in the-, in the window?**

**No Glenda, there aren't actually coming up yet. So, just to the audience if you'd like to ask any questions to the panel.**

**Well I-, let me just-, I'll give a bit of a summary of what I've heard and we can give the, the audience a bit of time to ask some questions and, and if not I've got loads more, so don't worry. And, and welcome the panel's thoughts. I'm hearing the, the same really important trends, you know, the, the speed of change, I think we heard the world changed. It's going to change next week, it, it's not a static thing, right? And particularly, particularly in the, the area of those disabled, the members of the disabled community who are being impacted is starting to be disproportionately higher in, in the-, in the financial space. There were-, there were a lot of comments through the research and through, through this panel about, sort of, the disproportionate financial impact on the disabled community and, and it's really interesting and exciting that you all-, you all-, and in-, you're all in that space and that Scope is supporting that. The other thing that I keep hearing is Scope's the voice, right, and, and going back to them as the voice of the disabled community and providing training and providing, you know, the advice that you need to make things easier and simpler for, for everybody. I think-, I think almost all of you talked about connecting with Scope to simplify your processes and, and understand why things were or weren't working.**

**And I guess that, that all leads to-, I'm going to-, I'm going to plagiarise Kieran, but he talked about passion and proactivity and I think-, I think this group has passion and proactivity and it's a really exciting start point for the, the-, for-, to go back to the organisations. But, but we still have a lot more to do, right? And I don't think-, I don't think there's anybody on this panel who think it's, it will be enough and, and I'm really interested in what the-, what the audience are thinking and-, although they're going to be really shy now and not ask questions. And then what we-, what we will try and do moving forward. Christine, did I get-, did we get a question with my summary? She's gone quiet now, which makes me think there isn't.**

**So, it's just somebody that came in the Q&A and said that they'd really enjoyed the session and found it really helpful Glenda.**

**Brilliant, well look-,**

Glenda, just to-, I think one thing that would be good for us to almost show that we're going to be doing, which will impact in this Winter, is we-, with DES (ph 02.21.28) we're actually working to put together, like, a data share. So, we can-, so that the advisors will be able to directly register those customers that they're speaking to for priority services or tariffs and I think it's something that's come up very much today, around that simplification piece. There's still more we, we need to do and working with Scope is great to get that research and understand the different journeys we can almost put in place. But I think it's signposting as well, but if there's any-, as a group we-, I know there's so many different schemes going on and projects, but with something like that, it just removes, I guess a barrier. So, it's more than we can use this as well to I think work together to remove some of those barriers and, and that that step. So, just wanted to, kind of, throw out I suppose to the other panels as well, if there's anything that we could almost do together there. But, it's, it's definitely a scheme that I think will help in the Winter coming.

**Moderator: And I can also take the commitment to-, I know Accenture is involve in a few of those schemes Amy and we can connect you, that would-, that would be great.**

**Moderator: Fabulous, there is just one question that's come in and, and I think we've gone quite a way to answering this. But hearing about the finance you've done is really interesting, do you have-, have any other plans on the horizon with Winter ahead, from Genevieve. Anybody want to have a last shot at that? We're on, sort of-,**

Yes.

**Drawing a close now, time wise.**

I can take it, and one of the things that is actually one of the recommendations from the Scope research is that we're going to trial for 100,000 customers a standing charge holiday. So, I think that's something that's come out that's, like, an unavoidable cost, however little you use, you still have to pay the standing charge. So, that's something that's available at Octopus that people can apply for.

**Lovely-,**

I think also there was a, a very strong-, I know Kieran's mentioned it, but certainly from talking to people who've used and signed up the Priority Services Register, when it matters it's a really important scheme. And I think what we've, sort of, talked about as a collective was really ensuring that customers understood it's not as simple as we would hope it to be yet, but really advocating for cross sector registration. Making sure that when you sign up we're working together to make sure you know that by signing and ticking a consent to share box doesn't mean marketing. It means that all those energy participants and water participants in the scheme get access to their information. I think there's still some-, and largely from the research we've done with Scope, largely the, the target audience are all desperately trying to engage, largely don't understand how it works or even know that it's a service that they can, can utilise. And, and get-, and be safeguarded as a result for things like power cuts or gas supply interruptions or even challenges with paying your bills. So, I think the more we can do to support cross sector registration, the more we can do to encourage people to register at this time, the better. And I know Kieran, we share that ambition for sure.

I think I would just to echo on Kieran's comments as well, I think ultimately, like, across all of us, you know, the customer we're serving may be the same people. So, I think really, like, you know, kind of, coming together and working together on identifying who those people are, who need extra support, I think that definitely needs to be a joint effort.

**I agree, I think Scope would, absolutely agree to-,**

**I think we're about to go one minute over, but can I just say yes,-, can I just say a massive thank you to our panellists. These are-, these are people who are really making a difference in the utilities they work for and taking time out for this is, is really appreciated and thank to Christine. You are-, you have-, you started a few years back on really trying to make a change in the utilities sector and to get this many people dialling into a call on this topic with these experts, it's a pretty impressive place. So, I think you all for coming.**

**Thank you-, thank you Glenda and to all our panel members. As Glenda was saying earlier, we are all dealing with these big challenges and more than ever, there is a collective need to work together. So, we at Scope are really proud of our utility partnerships and the progress that we've all made together, and that's to our panel, our other Scope utilities members and also partners in the audience that we are working with. So, I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank you all for all your continuous support and your commitment for working with us to provide better support and outcomes for disabled customers. Thank you, thank you once again. We now will move onto our next session, which is around accessibility, and really how we-, we know that, that the more inclusive organisations are, the more they are going to best represent the communities that they serve. And the more trusted and successful they're going to be. We at Scope know the amount of focus you all have on your equality, diversity and inclusive strategies and Elizabeth and Rachel are going to share with you how Scope can help. Can I invite you two to join us, Elizabeth?**

Hi, yes, thank you Chris. Okay, so if we pop to the next slide, the world is acknowledging that access and inclusion for everyone is important. So, the more people who are educated on accessibility, the more inclusive the world becomes. So, our partnerships are helping Scope to make that a reality. We know that trusted and successful businesses represent the communities they serve, as Chris said, and they get the best from their people by recognising diverse perspectives and respecting and valuing differences. So, next week we are launching our new business site and this is designed to support organisations to become more inclusive for their employees in their recruitment and for disabled consumers. For the collective 14.6 million disabled people across the UK and beyond. Our goal is to use the platform to raise awareness and educate about accessibility and inclusion, to reach as many people as possible and have the biggest impact that we can have. Both for the business and for their disabled employees and customers. Our services will support you with the accessibility of your website, social channels and services, we'll help you understand disabled customers and their experiences. We can support you to create inclusive policies, processes and equality, diversity and inclusion strategies. And so importantly, to develop disability inclusive workplace cultures. Being accessible and inclusive inside your organisations benefits everyone outside it too.

So, let's take, take a look at what's available. So, we'll take you through our homepage to start. If you're not sure what support you need, we will have a quick link to a tool for finding the right products, or you can contact us directly. We have three articles and resources to help everyone learn more about accessibility, workplace inclusion, user research and lived experiences. Oh, we've moved on, sorry, can we go back to the previous slide? So, it will come to it in a minute, but we also have a wizard that will help you find the services and articles that are relevant to the support that you need. So, you can pick from one or more topics, the level that you're at and, and then we will give you access or, to all the relevant services and articles and that will come up on screen in a second. So, we have content and digital as an example, again, and then the results. If you do know what you're looking for, we will also have direct links to the services. So, under training and workshops, programmes, audits and research as well. And finally, there are more articles towards the bottom of our homepage, so you can learn more and we also have quick links to our ticketed training events on the right hand side and these run quarterly. You can also search all services and articles by topics in the top right of the navigation and this will take you to a page with all the services, articles and events related to that topic.

So, there's lots of ways that you can find support with what you're looking for. Okay, next slide please? So, what services will be available? So, under training and workshops we have seven training sessions that you can set up for your organisation. We have three workshops to support organisation with accessibility and these include introduction to accessibility, which is a 60 minute session for up to 300 people and it gives an overview of best practices. Content accessibility training and this is a one day training course for up to sixteen people and it gives trainees a more comprehensive understanding of accessibility. And then we have bespoke accessibility training that runs over two days and we use examples from your work to explain the best practices. We help you edit your work to be more accessible and we also share demonstrations on assisted technology and accessibility tools in relation to your content. Next slide please? Each service has its own page to give you more details about what's included. We start with an overview of each product. Next slide please? And then we'll go into more detail about what the product offers and those benefits, next slide? You will also get a breakdown of the session contents and the cost. Next slide please? We do also run the content accessibility training quarterly as a ticketed event. So, this helps organisations with small teams to upskill individuals. Anyone would be able to book onto this session through the website. Next slide please?

For training on disability in the workplace, we also have three sessions. So, disability, inclusion and workplace culture training and this is a 90 minute session to help staff feel more comfortable and confident with disability, and it creates a safe space to start talking about inclusion. We have employment barriers and lived experience working, which is 60 minutes to understand disabled people's experiences. It explores some of the barriers disabled people face and the impact that they have. And the session includes one of Scope's storytellers. And finally, disability and inclusion and recruitment training. So, this is a two to three hour session to help you with recruiting and hiring disabled people, and to feel confident recruiting disabled talent. Also includes information on measuring and reporting disability. Next slide please? If you're at the start of your disability inclusion journey, we also offer introduction to disability training. So, this is a 90 minute session and hosts up to 40 people. The session goes into detail about the social model of disability, inclusive language, access barriers and the legal duties. It also includes personal stories and experiences of disabled people, and this training is joint delivered by accessibility and workplace specialists, next slide? For introduction to disability we do also give organisations the option to add 30 minute taster sessions in employment and accessibility, to help further engage staff in disability inclusion.

Next slide please? Similar to the accessibility session we do run introduction to disability inclusion as a quarterly session ticketed event that anyone can join. So, for Scope Utility members, so we have heard from some of our members, we actually run free sessions of the introduction to disability and inclusion, the accessibility taster and the employment taster sessions. We run one session a month and anyone in your organisation can sign up to that through the website. Next slide please? For our SUM members, we have also recently launched safeguarding training as part of those free workshops. And more session dates will be released soon. So, there is that extra session. Next slide please? So, in addition to what our training, our services do include workplace disability and inclusion programme. So, this brings all our employment workshops and introduction to accessibility training sessions together, into one programme of work that we deliver over twelve months. The programme also includes a review of internal processes and policies and you get access to our employment and accessibility experts, as well as four tool kits. All of the details will be on the website for you to learn more about what's involved. Next slide please? We also offer accessibility audits that are assessed against the web content accessibility guidelines, or were CAG for short, 2.1.

And it tests with assistive technology. This helps you understand the barriers and there were CAG failures on your website and core customer journeys. We deliver handover workshop and report and, and an optional follow up review. Next slide please? And our last service which we have heard about today is our disabled consumer research. So, our disability research panel is made up of 1,700 panellists and we can run research to help you understand how disabled people use your products and services. All of our research is accessible, we have disability equality trained facilitators and panellists trust scope and give us their honest opinions. We'll create a plan tailored to your objectives and we will present the results after research. Next slide please? So, as shown on the homepage all of our services are supported by free articles on different topics, and these resources can support staff with accessibility in their daily work and learn more about disabled experiences and workplace inclusion. So, that is an overview of our new business site and the services that we're offering, we are here to support you on your equality, diversity and inclusion journey. Together we can start removing the barriers disabled people experience and build a more inclusive world for everyone, thank you.

**Thank you Elizabeth. No specific questions have come through as yet from the audience, but we've got a few minutes when they might do. But to the audience, do get in touch if you'd like to discuss any of these core offerings, or are interested in core producing a programme for your organisation. Finally, I'd like to introduce Paul Fuller, executive director of partnerships to bring the webinar to a close with his closing remarks. We've actually just seen an image of him, I've seen on Elizabeth's last slide. But I'm just going to transfer over now to Paul Fuller and from me, thank you so much for joining us today and for being such great participants. And we hope to run another session in, in, in the future where we'd love your participation again. Thanks very much, I'm handing you over to Paul now.**

Quite dark but then I'm blind, so that's probably a good reason. So, I am one of those 14.7 million people that they talk about, I have a disability. I, I lost my eyesight at 55, didn't actually lose it, it was taken from me, I didn't want to give it. What I particularly liked that was a bit of a surprise, even with my limited eyesight as I said to Chris, 'That looks like a guide dog in that picture,' it was me and Bolt, if it turns out, if it was. It's really easy to conclude because so much brilliant work has been shown to you all. I am almost lost for words for everything that I have seen today. I want to thank everyone that has spoken today, I want to thank all of those behind the scenes, of course going to make Christine blush by saying a special thanks to her. But there are so many people that were involved today, I want to thank all of them. We at Scope have five goals, I'm going to call out three of them, because they are so critical to us. Extra costs, you've all heard about the additional costs. The near £600 extra that it costs to be disabled and it's something really for us all to reflect on. Being disabled is not a choice and then to find that you have additional charges around that is sometimes really hard to cope with and that's why I find-, and I call them out, our two storytellers today.

Their stories are so compelling and I hope that for anyone in a corporate sector reflecting on what they might do further after today, please, please use one of our storytellers. Their messaging is, is unbelievable, it's challenging, it's frightening, but it really does hit home. We at Scope also acknowledge that there are a million disabled people who want to find a job and can't, so for all of you who employ, please, please think about disabled people when you're doing your next recruitment. It-, a third of those goals which really touches home with what you just saw is that accessibility. I'm often challenged now by websites that I simply can't work or understand, and, and to make you all feel slightly better I worked for 30 years in media, I didn't think about that then and it's only now that I want you all to reflect, if one in five people is disabled, some of you, some of you great marketers, some of you great businesses, are accidentally excluding people. And that's not what you want, and that's not what we want either. The point now of saying thank you. So you all know there is a cost of living crisis, it's frightening, and parts of what we have at Scope, our disability energy service helpline, we've grown that service this year. We've grown it for around £380,000 to £600,000 worth of support and all of that funding appears to be coming from you, the utility sector, and we are so grateful for that. So please, please thank anyone within your company that helped support that service. It's, it's really important and its continuation is my shout out to you.

Will one of you potentially consider, if you're SGN or, or, or any of the others (mw 02.42.28) anyone that this service requires significant funding and we'd really like long term support from a, a corporate partner. But for all of you as partners I want to quickly go back to the priority service register. We at Scope, on the calls, 50% of those who go on the call say, 'I'm on the priority service register and it's great.' Why is there still 50% of this same community seemingly that don't know about it? It's a great service, if we can do anything to support any of you to increase the awareness of it, again, please get in touch with us. And then finally a word of-, a word of fear. There is a cost of living crisis, there is a horrendous possibility of power cuts this winter. What are you as utilities doing to assure those who are perhaps on the priority service register and those who are not, the vulnerable and the scared, how are you going to help assure them during perhaps what will be a very bleak winter for too many? Again, thank you for all of your participation today. It's been really, really powerful, I'm really moved by it. If there is any further housekeeping I'm going to cheekily say I can't be held to account, so I'm going to hand back to Chris, if there's anything further she might like to add. But thank you so much for your time today, it's really appreciated.

**Thank you, thanks very much Paul. I think probably it just leaves us to say if you could fill the feedback sheet in for us, it will pop up on your screens in the next couple of minutes, it will only take a couple of minutes but it would be really helpful when we're organising and planning future sessions. And just as a reminder that we will send out the slides from today and we will also make this webinar available to people that would have liked to have come but weren't able to because we've been recording session. And do please contact us if you'd like to work with us, do get in touch, we'd love to work with more utilities. And thank you again, thank you to all our wonderful speakers, I think they've done a great job, and thank you to everybody that's come along and listened and participated today. Thank you.**