

Ground Source Heat Network Policy

1	Introduction
	Eastleigh Borough Council (“the Council”) is committed to delivering low-carbon, efficient and reliable heating through its Ground Source Heat Network. This policy establishes the framework under which the Council will operate and manage the network and provide heating services to customers. It reflects the Council’s responsibilities as both operator and supplier of heat. From January 2026, heat networks in Great Britain are subject to statutory regulation by Ofgem, introducing enhanced protections relating to pricing, billing, service quality, and complaints handling. This policy ensures that the Council meets these requirements while delivering a fair, transparent, and customer-focused service.
2	Scope
	The purpose of this policy is to define how the Council will deliver heat network services in a compliant, transparent and equitable manner. The Council’s objectives are to: • Comply with all applicable legislation and Ofgem regulatory requirements • Provide a reliable and efficient supply of heating and hot water • Ensure that charges and billing are transparent and clearly understood • Protect and support customers, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances • Deliver high standards of customer service • Ensure fairness is at the core of all decisions made with regards to consumers This policy applies to all customers connected to the Council’s Ground Source Heat Network across all housing tenures. All Council staff, contractors, and agents responsible for operating, managing and maintaining the heat network will abide by this policy document.
3	Legislative & Regulatory Framework
	We will operate the heat network in compliance with applicable legislation, including the Energy Act 2023 and the heat networks regulatory framework overseen by Ofgem. Introduced from 27 January 2026, these conditions are a combination of prescriptive requirements and principle-based rules, designed to protect heat network consumers and ensure they receive a service that is fair, transparent and reliable.

	We will also ensure the heat network is registered and will comply with ongoing obligations relating to consumer protection, performance, and reporting. The Council will also maintain membership of the Energy Ombudsman scheme.
4	Policy Principles
	The core principles of this policy document will ensure the following outcomes for customers (consumers) of the heat network which align with the heat networks Standards of Conduct: • Consumers will have a positive experience when dealing with us and are not put off from future engagement • Consumers receive the right information, at the right time and in a suitable format to make informed decisions • Customer service processes are accessible, transparent and responsive. Consumers' expectations are met and issues are resolved appropriately • Vulnerability is identified and considered so all consumers can make informed decisions, access information and customer service processes, and participate in engagement opportunities • Consumers have an awareness and an active voice in relevant issues regarding the operation of their heat supply
5	Customer Agreement & Acceptance Terms
	All customers are provided with the Heat Network Residential Customer Agreement, setting out the terms and conditions of service, including charges, responsibilities, customer rights and how the agreement can be terminated by either party. A copy of the agreement is available on our website. Customers are requested to review and sign the agreement when they take occupation of a property connected to the heat network. If a signed agreement is not returned, the Council will deem occupation of a property connected to the heat network, and use of the service, as acceptance of the terms and conditions, including liability for the applicable charges. This ensures continuity of service and clarity of contractual arrangements for all parties.
6	Charging & Services
	The following charges are applicable to the heat network: 1. <u>Heat Network Access</u> – the fixed daily charge which covers access to and essential maintenance of the heat network based on the number of bedrooms in the property as defined at construction 2. <u>Heat Network Admin</u> – the fixed annual charge which covers other fixed costs associated with provision of the heat network and associated administrative services

	3. <u>Heat Pump & Home Network Maintenance</u> – the fixed annual charge which covers an annual check of the heat pump, water cylinder and heat distribution system in the property Charges are fixed each year and relate to accessing the communal heating system and provision of heating services, rather than being billed based on individual consumption. There is no cost to the customer for the amount of heat taken from the network, the customer will be responsible for the electricity cost in running the heat pump in their home to their electricity supplier. In addition to owning and maintaining the heat network infrastructure, the Council retains ownership and responsibility for the heat pumps in each property. The heat pumps will be serviced annually and will be repaired and replaced as required in accordance with the manufacturer's guidelines. We operate a tenure-based charging structure: • Tenants will be charged the fixed access fee only (the cost of repairs, servicing and maintenance of the heating system is included in the rental amount for these properties) • Owner occupiers (including leaseholders and freeholders) will be charged the fixed access fee, and a fixed administration and network maintenance charge. This differentiated approach reflects the Council's obligations in relation to tenancy and leasehold arrangements, including the recovery of network operation and long-term maintenance costs in a fair and proportionate manner. In addition to these standard charges, customers may also be charged for: • Any amount added to recover underpayments or overdue charges • Any reasonable and proper costs or charges arising from damage for which the customer is responsible under the terms of the customer agreement or if they are in breach of the customer agreement in any other way • Failed appointment charge • Disconnection and reconnection charges Charges will be reviewed at least once every 12 months. An annual inflationary increase may be applied at the annual review based on the percentage increase in the consumer price index, CPI, for the preceding 12 months. We may also change the charges or their calculation as set out in the customer agreement. The Council aims to provide the customer with at least 31 days' notice of any change in the charges or their calculation.
7	Billing & Transparency
	Customers will be provided with accurate and timely bills that are easy to understand. We will issue the customer with an initial bill when they take up occupancy of the property. The opening bill will confirm the applicable charges from the date

	of occupation to 31 March in the current financial year together with all other relevant billing information including: • The billing date • Supply address • Account reference number • Bill number • Contact details for the Housing Landlord Team • Total amount due for payment • The breakdown of the total amount by the applicable charges • Payment dates and amounts • Details of all applicable charges and costs due The bill also provides information for customers on: • Contact details for the Energy Ombudsman • How to get independent advice and support including fuel poverty charities • Advice if they are struggling to pay or have queries about their bill • How to make a complaint and where to access the Council's complaints policy • The priority services register • How to report a defect or repair, including emergencies • How to view their account • Ways to pay Following the initial bill, customers will receive a single annual bill detailing the applicable charges for the following financial year together with an annual statement. The statement will show the: • Account holders name(s) • Account reference number • Supply address • Statement date and current balance • Statement period • Amounts charged for the statement period • Payments received for the statement period The bill and statement will be ordinarily be issued via email unless the customer has indicated a preferred method of communication such as letter, to a named representative. Customers will also be sent a final statement within 6 weeks of the date that their agreement comes to an end.
7.1	Payment To support affordability, customers will be offered a monthly instalment plan, allowing the annual charge to be paid in manageable amounts. The annual bill details these payment dates and amounts. Direct Debit is the Council's preferred payment method. Alternative payment methods will be made available where appropriate.
7.2	Refunds and credits

	The Council will aim to process refunds of any money owed to the customer within 10 working days. Where the customer agrees, credits can be used to offset the amount towards future bills.
7.3	Back-billing Should there be a problem with how a customer's bill has been calculated, they will be issued with a new bill for the correct amount. This is known as back-billing and will be used as a last resort and limited to 12 months except where permitted by law.
8	Account Access & Statements All customers will be provided with a customer account within 10 working days of the Council being notified of their occupancy of the property. Customers will be able to access their customer account through the customer portal. Customers will be able to view the following information from their account: • Account details • Balance • Bill summary • Recent transactions • Request history • Contact details we hold for the customer • Information about compliments and complaints with a link to raise a case Customers will also be able to complete the following tasks from their account: • Make a payment • Set up and manage a direct debit • Raise account billing queries • Complete a compensation request • Make a moving home notification • Request to be added to the priority services register • Request a refund • Raise a repair • Raise another enquiry • Update their contact details Customers can also request information about their account and statements by contacting the Housing Landlord Team. .
9	Protections for Customers in Vulnerable Situations Protecting and supporting customers in vulnerable situations is a primary aim of this policy. We use the Ofgem definition of vulnerable situations as: Where the personal circumstances and characteristics of each Domestic Consumer create a situation where they are: • significantly less able than a typical Domestic Customer to protect or represent their interests; and/or

	- significantly more likely than a typical Domestic Consumer to suffer detriment or that detriment is likely to be more substantial We use the Ofgem vulnerability definition when considering how to: - identify vulnerability - respond to vulnerability - embed consideration of vulnerability into the design and delivery of our services We will give regard to all aspects of vulnerability, including individual, situational and temporary circumstances. We recognise that vulnerability can often be complex and be transitory as customers circumstances change. We will take reasonable steps to identify vulnerable customers through our contact with them and provide appropriate support. This will include offering to include customers on the Priority Services Register (PSR).
9.1	Priority Services Register (PSR) We will maintain a Priority Services Register (PSR) to support customers in vulnerable circumstances. The register is a record of customers who have requested or been identified and agreed to be on the register, due to their personal circumstances or being in a vulnerable situation. Customers or household members of customers who may be vulnerable due to age, disability, chronic illness, mental health conditions, language barriers, financial difficulty, or other circumstances may be eligible to join the register. Customers can raise a request to be included on the register through the customer portal or by contacting Housing Landlord Service Team. customer support . Customers on the PSR will receive additional assistance, including: - Priority support during service interruptions and emergencies - Where possible, advance notice of any loss of heat supply - Tailored communication, for example large print - The ability to nominate a person who can act on their behalf and receive communication relating to their account - Setting up a password they would like engineers / staff to use when visiting their home Some customers on the PSR will be exempt from disconnection related to their qualifying reason. We will review customers circumstances that are either temporary or have an anticipated end date, to ensure we have up to date information relating to vulnerabilities, for example customers who were added to the register because they were recovering from an illness or injury. We will take reasonable steps to identify and support vulnerable customers and will promote the register through our communications, including bills and statements, the customer portal and website.
10	Debt Recovery

	We are committed to managing debt recovery in a fair, proportionate, and supportive manner. Where customers fall into arrears, we will: • Seek to engage with the customer at an early stage • Offer reasonable repayment arrangements • Provide information on available support where appropriate • Consider any potential vulnerable situations the customer may be in However, where charges remain unpaid and reasonable efforts to resolve the matter have not been successful, we may take further recovery action in line with the debt recovery process detailed in the Heat Network Residential Customer Agreement. As a last resort, and in line with applicable legislation and regulatory guidance, we reserve the right to restrict or disconnect heat supply in cases of persistent non-payment. When communicating the disconnection process to a customer we will ensure we include: • Plain and simple communications detailing that supply will be disconnected, why, and when this will take place • What the customer needs to do to be reconnected and when they will be reconnected • Signposting to further support Reconnection will take place within 24 hours once the customer has paid the relevant charges in full or have agreed to a repayment plan. The Council will not ordinarily pursue disconnection where a customer is registered on the Priority Services Register and such registration excludes their account from suspension, or is otherwise identified as vulnerable, and will take all reasonable steps to safeguard such customers.
11	Repairs, Servicing & Maintenance
	Customers are required to notify the Housing Landlord Services Team of any emergencies or faults to the heat network or heat pump as soon as possible. Contact details for reporting emergencies, inside and outside of office hours and other fault reporting is detailed on our bills, customer portal and website. We, or our contractors, will visit the customers home to investigate and resolve reported issues with the heat network or heat pump. Customers will be offered an appointment within our response times which are set out in the customer agreement. Other than in an emergency, we will give customers at least 48 hours' notice should we need access to their home. Access is required to all homes once a year to complete annual servicing to the heat pump, water cylinder and heat distribution system in the property. Customers will be contacted directly by our contractor to arrange access to their home.
12	Service Claims

	Service claims can be made by customers when there has been an interruption to the availability of the ambient heat at the heat pump and meets the requirements as set out in the customer agreement. Customers can make a claim through the customer portal or by contacting Housing Landlord Services Team. All claims will be registered and a decision made within 10 working days. A reference number will be provided to allow customers to track their claim. Claims will be assessed by the Housing Landlord Services Team in accordance with the Heat Trust scheme rules on minimum guaranteed service payment amounts and any other relevant legislation or guidance. Customers will be notified of the outcome. If a claim is rejected, the reason for this will be clearly detailed to the customer together with information on how to escalate the matter if they are unhappy with the outcome.
12.1	Payments
	Claims that are upheld will receive a payment within 10 days of the decision via a credit to the customers heat network account or a BACS payment to their bank account.
13	Complaints Handling & Dispute Resolution
	The Council operates a clear complaints procedure that is designed to be easy to use. It reflects the Ombudsman's Dispute Resolution Principles of Being Fair, Transparent, Putting Things Right and Learning from Outcomes. Our policy and associated procedures ensure fair and proportionate resolution for customers at the earliest stage. If we cannot resolve a complaint or the complaint remains open for eight weeks, a position of 'deadlock' will be reached. Customers with cases in deadlock will be issued with a deadlock letter which can then be referred to the Energy Ombudsman for independent investigation. Complaints data will be electronically recorded and performance for complaints handling will be monitored and scrutinised by the Council as part of its annual complaints reporting. The complaints policy is available to view on our website.
14	Monitoring, Reporting & Continuous Improvement
	The Council will monitor performance and compliance and will use feedback to improve services. This policy will be reviewed every two years or as required to ensure it meets current regulatory requirements.

Author	Department Owner	Effective From	Review Date
Cathy Bullen, Tenancy Services Manager	Housing Landlord Services	24 September 2026	24 September 2028

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