PRESS RELEASE

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#Project Inspire #Innovate4All @SustainFirst
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Summary: Report reveals how smart technology and innovation can improve the lives of low-income and vulnerable energy customers and urges energy companies to put these consumers at the heart of their thinking as they develop and adopt new products and services

Project Inspire: *Energy for All – Innovate for All*
Report Launch – London, Monday, January 29, 2018

Publication Data
Sustainability First is delighted to announce the launch of the Project Inspire report, *Energy for All – Innovate for All* on 29 January.

This in-depth study demonstrates how innovation, including creative use of data and smart technologies, can improve service and quality of life for energy customers in vulnerable situations and those with additional needs.

'Energy for All – Innovate for All' concludes there are pockets of effective innovation out there but these efforts need better communicating and replicating, since many energy companies are still focussed on merely getting the basics right.

Alongside innovations already in operation, the report highlights future opportunities that smart metering, data analytics and new technologies could deliver for those with additional needs and on low incomes. These include: smart pre-pay energy innovations, health monitoring and assistive living services, more affordable energy, and greater financial control and energy management.

However, the report warns we cannot take it for granted that these customer groups will be well-served by new technology – nor that they will be a priority for companies or for product manufacturers as our energy system 'smartens'.

A lack of understanding about the needs of vulnerable customers, and the benefits to business is also limiting innovation as well as out-dated attitudes towards vulnerability and inclusion.

Asking 'what does good practice looks like?' to improve the experience of vulnerable energy consumers, the report contains:

- **Four Guides to show-case standard, good and innovative practice** to help energy companies 1. Identify vulnerability; 2. Support customers on low incomes and in debt; 3. Improve safety and peace of mind; and 4. Improve access for customers with additional needs. **The Guides include 70 practical case studies, identified via our research** .
- **Eighteen practical recommendations** for government, companies, customers and the not for profit sector, that form the basis of a new framework to catalyse innovation that is focussed on the needs of *all* consumers, not just those able to pay.
- **A Sustainability First 'Vulnerability Innovation Flight Path'**, a new tool to help companies embed vulnerability and put the needs of vulnerable customers at the heart of what they do.

Sustainability First's Zoe McLeod, author of the report said:

"Millions of people in Great Britain are on low incomes or have extra needs. There are many improvements that companies could and should make to the way they identify, support and empower vulnerable customers – and this report gives them tools to do it."

Dermot Nolan, Chief Executive of Ofgem, added:

"This report demonstrates that when energy companies want to, they can innovate well for their vulnerable customers and make real improvements to their lives.

"However, as it stands, this just doesn't happen enough. We want to see a culture of innovation for all across the energy sector. We are pleased to sponsor this report and hope it will be a catalyst for change."

Sustainability First is extremely grateful to the companies and colleagues across the energy sector and more widely who co-operated on and contributed to this important study.

You can download the report and a summary here.

The day-long launch event for Project Inspire is being held on Monday, January 29, 2018. You can download the programme here. Speakers include Dermot Nolan (CEO, Ofgem), and speeches from Teresa Camey (BEIS) and Rob Cheesewright (Smart Energy GB). There will be a panel discussion featuring Meghna Tewari (Ofgem), Victoria McGregor (Citizens Advice), Adam Scorer (NEA), Oliver Sinclair BEIS, Audrey Gallacher.

You can send your feedback and views to Zoe McLeod at zoe.mcleod@sustainabilityfirst.org.uk.

Background notes:

- Sustainability First is a charity and think tank, working since 2000 to promote practical, sustainable solutions to improve environmental, economic and social well-being.
- There are millions of potentially vulnerable customers – innovation is needed to meet their current and future needs: e.g.
    - 4 m estimated UK households in fuel poverty
    - 11m disabled or long-term sick
    - 1.5m unbanked (GB)
    - 5m who lack basic reading, writing and numeracy skills (England)
    - 5m who have still never used the internet
    - 1 in 4 people who experience a mental health problem each year
- Project Inspire was set up by Sustainability First in October 2016 to help improve service and quality of life for customers in vulnerable situations. It is a ground-breaking research and collaboration Project, bringing together fifteen months of analysis, research and collaboration with more than 100 organisations – charities, disability groups, energy suppliers and network companies, academics, regulators, government decision makers, product manufacturers and service providers.
- Project Inspire was sponsored by Ofgem, EDF Energy, E.ON. geo, Scottish Power, Smart Energy GB, SGN, Toshiba, and Western Power Distribution. It was also actively supported by Citizens Advice and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). **However, the contents of the report are independent of our sponsors and all those that participated in the research and provided case studies. The views expressed are those of Sustainability First.**

There are around 70 case studies in the report including:

- **geo's hybrid home** concept which has the potential to reduce average household energy bills by *at least* a third.
- **EDF's Howz** – that uses energy data along with information from sensors to let families know that customers who are elderly or with additional needs are safe, warm and well – helping them to live independently for longer.
- **SGN's free locking cooker valve**, to prevent customers who are vulnerable, e.g. with dementia and autism, leaving the gas on and causing fires and explosions. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hx6StlBZAo
- **Utilita'**s smart prepay support which identifies vulnerable customers self-disconnecting and helps get them back on supply
- **Robobraille** – which automatically translates documents in seconds into a range of languages and formats, including audio, braille. This increases customer convenience and choice while reducing company costs.
- **nPower's** Fuel Bank support for customers who have to choose between heating and eating, which has helped more than 56,000 customers heat their homes and eat warm food. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgwDY4Ju7ts
- **CLP Power** in Hong Kong's *Power your Love – Save Energy Light Up Lives* initiatives, where customers can sign up for a scheme where some of the energy they save is indirectly given in support for fuel poor households. More than 200,000 customers took part in the scheme helping 20,000 households get financial support.

For more case studies in our Energy for All – Innovate for All report