

Entrant company name: **National Grid Electricity Distribution**

Entry title: **National Grid's Crisis Response to Storm Goretti**

Category: **Issues, Crisis or Reputation Management**

### **1. Brief & Objectives**

When Storm Goretti struck in January 2026, NGED — the UK's largest electricity Distribution Network Operator — faced an immediate reputational crisis. With 99mph winds in the South West, 25cm of snow across the Midlands, and over 1,000 trees felled, more than 165,000 properties lost power across three licence areas simultaneously — throwing NGED into the national spotlight.

NGED's Corporate Affairs department — Media, Public Affairs, Social Media and Digital — activated as a single integrated crisis team. The reputation management brief had five objectives:

- Control the narrative: ensure NGED's voice, data and framing dominated coverage, preventing misinformation from filling the vacuum
- Maintain public trust at scale: serve hundreds of thousands of customers seeking real-time information, making access to NGED support as reliable as the restoration effort
- Manage political risk: brief MPs, Ministers and devolved politicians proactively, converting potential critics into informed advocates
- Demonstrate duty of care: visibly and measurably reach the most vulnerable customers — including those not yet on the Priority Services Register (PSR)
- Protect regulatory standing: establish the response as a benchmark, not a liability, for future Ofgem scrutiny

### **2. Research & Insight**

The Goretti response was shaped by analysis of previous incidents, particularly Storm Darragh (2024). Four reputational risk factors drove the strategy:

- Lack of information leads to distrust: when customers cannot find real-time outage information, anger attaches to the NGED brand — Goretti peaked at 50,360 web views per hour
- Unchecked political casework creates narrative risk: uninformed MPs and Ministers fill information gaps independently and inaccurately, adding operational pressure at the worst possible moment
- Reactive media handling cedes narrative control: proactive engagement during Darragh demonstrably reduced critical coverage; Goretti demanded the same posture across three licence areas

- Failure to visibly reach vulnerable customers carries the highest reputational and regulatory risk: a DNO that cannot demonstrate active outreach faces lasting reputational and regulatory consequences

### **3. Strategy**

NGED adopted a single governing principle: radical transparency at pace — tell the story first, accurately and consistently, leaving no space for a damaging alternative narrative.

Four pillars, each addressing a specific reputational risk:

- Inform first: get accurate data to customers, media and political stakeholders before they sought it elsewhere — every hour of information vacuum compounds distrust
- Scale without compromise: sustain digital channels under extraordinary demand — a customer who finds a broken outage map during a power cut experiences NGED's failure directly
- Partner, don't broadcast: equip media and political stakeholders to speak accurately and positively — well-briefed stakeholders amplify trust; uninformed ones amplify doubt
- Reach the vulnerable: actively identify and support customers not on the PSR — the reputational cost of serving only those who can help themselves would outlast the storm

### **4. Tactics & Execution**

Pre-storm activation began 24–48 hours ahead — getting NGED's voice into the public domain before the crisis peaked. Digital infrastructure was stress-tested. Media lines and social content prepared. Public Affairs issued guidance to over 200 political stakeholders, asking them to share it with constituents — making partners of potential critics before landfall.

During the storm, the digital team maintained full stability as Goretta generated 1.6 million web views — the second largest web event on record — peaking at 50,360 users per hour. The media team operated proactively, briefing journalists before they sought information elsewhere and preparing leaders for broadcast appearances. Social media published major customer updates every four hours across all channels, including pictures and videos of network damage, aligned to statements provided to Government. Alongside this, the customer care team maintained a constant stream of live updates on X and posted into local Facebook groups across affected areas. They also replied directly to hundreds of individual customers across Facebook comments, X posts and WhatsApp with real-time help and estimated times of recovery (ETRs). Sentiment was monitored in real time, with 42 Facebook posts from political stakeholders amplifying NGED's reach.

Public Affairs delivered twice-daily briefings to over 200 political stakeholders until BAU was declared, routing all casework through a single mailbox — handling 150 MP casework emails in four days while protecting operational teams from fragmented pressure. As Cornwall emerged as the longest-affected area, focus narrowed to its six

MPs, including a direct call on 12 January. The Secretary of State and DESNZ Minister received nine updates in total; in the House of Commons, Government praised NGED's communications throughout.

On welfare: 94,700 PSR customers contacted; 60 welfare hubs opened; 50 generators deployed; 67 customers accepted hotel accommodation. Political casework identified further vulnerable customers not on the PSR, each referred for support including crisis packs, hot food and accommodation.

## **5. Results & Evaluation**

Reputational damage during a weather crisis is not inevitable — NGED's integrated response ensured it was avoided:

- 165,000 Properties lost power at peak
- 131,000 Restored within 24 hours
- 1,559,137 Total website views — infrastructure held throughout
- 94,700 PSR customers proactively contacted
- 60 Welfare hubs established
- 150 MP casework emails handled centrally
- 71 Media enquiries handled; 14 broadcast interviews given; 308 print and online articles published
- 99% positive or neutral media sentiment
- 836,452 social media impressions; 594,000 reach; 65% positive social sentiment
- 49 MP briefings; 700 proactive written updates; 9 Secretary of State updates

The most significant reputational outcome came in Parliament: during an Urgent Question on Storm Goretta, Ministers quoted NGED briefings directly — our narrative became the Government's official account. A subsequent ministerial roundtable saw Cornish MPs commend NGED above other utilities — unsolicited endorsements from those with the greatest cause to be critical.

Post-incident evaluation confirmed all five objectives met: narrative controlled; public trust maintained; political risk converted to advocacy; vulnerable customers demonstrably reached.

## **6. Budget**

Delivered entirely within existing team resource — no additional third-party spend. The investment was in preparation: crisis framework design, stakeholder relationships and cross-function planning. Excellence is a function of structure, not cost.

## **7. Why This Entry Should Win**

NGED operates in a sector where reputational failure is easily triggered — a power cut affects warmth, safety, food and light. With 165,000 properties without power, national media scrutiny, and an Urgent Question in Parliament, the threat was real. NGED's Corporate Affairs team changed the outcome through strategy, not circumstance.

Four integrated functions. One governing principle. Every tactical decision in service of a reputation management objective. The outcomes speak for themselves: Ministers quoting NGED in Parliament; Cornish MPs praising NGED above other utilities; 99% positive or neutral media sentiment; 94,700 vulnerable customers proactively reached — all within existing resource.