

Statement from Business and Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng on Storm Eunice

With your permission, Sir, I would like to make a statement on the electricity disruptions as a result of Storm Eunice, and set out exactly how we're working to ensure power is restored to people's homes as quickly as possible.

Storm Eunice, as everybody knows, brought severe weather, including wind gusts of up to 122mph – among the highest speeds ever recorded in England.

The Met Office took the unprecedented step of issuing a double red weather warning for Friday.

Ensuing hurricane-force winds have caused extensive damage to buildings and trees. They've also caused power outages, and widespread travel delays.

After a day of disruption caused by Storm Eunice on Friday, last night, Storm Franklin made landfall.

And it must be remembered that in this difficult time, four people have tragically lost their lives in incidents related to storms. My thoughts – and, I'm sure, the thoughts of the whole House – are with the families and friends of those who have lost loved ones.

The Met Office estimates that further strong gusts today, though not on the same scale as Storm Eunice, will occur.

Some people – particularly in the South and East of England – have been without power for more than 72 hours.

I want to reassure them that we have dedicated teams of engineers working night and day to get them reconnected as soon as possible.

Continuing poor weather conditions have hampered those efforts, but I'm pleased to say that as of now, over 98% of those affected by storms – over 1.4 million customers – have had their power supply restored so far.

However, as of 16:00 today, there are still just under 30,000 households who are without power.

Today, my Right Honourable Friend, the member for Chelsea and Fulham, has been in Sevenoaks in Kent to see the impacts of the storm and observe repairs.

This weekend, I spoke directly with leaders at Scottish and Southern Energy Networks, and today I had conversations with leading managers at UK Power Networks and Western Power Distribution. They have given me assurances, Mr

Speaker, that restoration is happening as fast as possible.

Mr Speaker, the UK has been particularly badly hit by storms this year.

But I am pleased to say that overall our network operators, government and our brave emergency services have learnt lessons about how we can improve our response, and will continue to learn those lessons.

When I commissioned the review into our response to Storm Arwen in November, I made clear that the very long delays some people faced to be reconnected were not acceptable.

I'm pleased to say that, where practical, network operators have already implemented improvements to their procedures.

Additionally, operators are sharing resources, and making sure engineers are sent to the worst affected areas.

Welfare provisions are in place for those who are most in need, particularly the vulnerable members of our community. Network operators are engaged with local partners to ensure that people are being supported.

Catering units are travelling to badly-hit areas, and smaller welfare units are providing hot water and other facilities to people who are worse affected.

I'm extremely grateful to the network operators and emergency responders who've been working very hard to keep people as comfortable as possible.

I am also very aware that in the Storm Arwen situation, we did have issues relating to the difficulty of communicating to the worst affected by the devastation.

And people are still experiencing issues today, but I am very pleased to say that if they call their network operator by dialling "105" from their mobile, there should be a speedy response.

This action will automatically route them to the right operator based on their particular physical location.

Mr Speaker, this is the first time in recorded history I believe that three named storms have come in such quick succession day after day since the storm naming convention was introduced little less than a decade ago.

It is a difficult time for many people.

But I have been reassured that operators are working extremely hard to make sure that people are reconnected as quickly as possible – and, at the latest, in the next couple of days.

And myself and my department will continue to provide that support – and apply the pressure where need be – to ensure this happens in a timely way.