

Together we have the energy to transform our communities

Our Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability Strategies

Part One

Ofgem Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability Incentive 2020/21



Welcome to our Part One submission to Ofgem's Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability (SECV) Incentive for the regulatory year 2020/21.

Electricity North West is one of 14 distribution network operators (DNOs) in Great Britain regulated by Ofgem. As the only single licence DNO we have a determined focus on the North West and are proud of serving over five million customers with excellent performance and high levels of ambition.

We champion the region we serve and are proud that our network keeps our customers' lives running by making sure the electricity flows safely for every minute of every day.

We're responsible for operating, maintaining and upgrading 13,000 km of overhead power lines, more than 44,000 km of underground electricity cables and much more across Cumbria, Lancashire and Greater Manchester. This covers a diverse range of terrain including the Lake District, parts of North Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Cheshire; to towns and cities with heavy industry and large urban populations, including the bustling city of Manchester.

2020/21 is the sixth year of the eight-year Business Plan period called RIIO-ED1. This stands for Revenue = Incentives + Innovation + Outputs (Electricity Distribution 1). It is the regulatory framework set by Ofgem which drives network companies to engage proactively with stakeholders to anticipate their needs and deliver a consumer-focused, socially-responsible, and sustainable energy service. Ofgem's SECV Incentive is an annual scheme and our response is divided into three parts:

Part 1: Our stakeholder engagement and consumer vulnerability strategies. This provides the evidence required that we have met Ofgem's minimum requirements.

Part 2: Our stakeholder engagement activity and the outcomes we have delivered.

Part 3: Our consumer vulnerability activity and the outcomes we have delivered.

Our region



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Case study key

The following symbols found throughout our report highlight our 2020/21 activities.



New

Initiatives which were introduced in 2020/21.



Enhanced

Examples of where we have improved our approach in response to stakeholder feedback.



Embedded

Holistic approaches embedded in our business.



Hard-to-reach

Initiatives which best serve the specific interests of hard-to-reach stakeholders.



Innovative

Novel or leading practice, based on benchmarking, for industry replication.



Introduction from Peter Emery Chief Executive Officer

2020/21 Engagement highlights

295 engagement outcomes for our customers and stakeholders

58,434 stakeholders engaged through 30 inclusive mechanisms

40-member Public Panel flourishing

27,444 vulnerable customers supported through partnerships

81% overall stakeholder satisfaction

This year more than ever before, stakeholder engagement has been vital to how we run our business. Whilst our strategies are mature, we do not operate in isolation, so engagement has been pivotal to us adapting to our changing environment. The COVID-19 crisis has brought about unprecedented challenges, both for people and society that will have enduring health, social and economic impacts. I am proud that as an essential service provider in the North West we have proactively engaged our networks and harnessed the expertise of our staff and stakeholders to adapt our plans and serve our communities with distinction.

At Electricity North West, we believe that **'Together we have the energy to transform**

our communities'. We aim to embody this company Purpose everyday by applying our three Principles – **we are switched on, we are adaptable, and we take pride** – which set out what we do, how we do it, and shapes our strategic goals. Our submission this year demonstrates how this Purpose is applied across our customer and stakeholder strategic focus areas which have informed our engagement topics, outputs and outcomes.

Stakeholder engagement is a commitment to developing strong relationships with customers and stakeholders, as people – not just numbers in a report. This year we directly asked our stakeholders to appraise the quality of the relationship we have with them. They told

us that our engagement is inclusive, meaningful and mutually beneficial, however, they wanted to engage with us more frequently, in shorter, topic-specific meetings. We have responded attentively and by fulfilling these changing needs we have deepened relationships and allowed for candid and often more meaningful feedback. We will continue to measure and report stakeholder satisfaction with our progress annually.

Engagement of our internal and external stakeholders enabled us to overcome the unpredictable and unprecedented challenges of 2020/21 and will continue to serve as a cornerstone of our strategy as we face the risks and opportunities that lay ahead in the energy transition and pathway to net zero carbon.

Stakeholders inform our strategic business priorities

This year as part of our annual materiality exercise we heard that **planning for the future** should be a strategic focus. This is because enabling longer-term outcomes such as net zero requires making conscious decisions now. Our 2020/21 strategic priorities, engagement topics and a selection of our key achievements are summarised below.



Our Stakeholder Engagement Strategy

In this section we demonstrate that we have a mature engagement strategy, how it delivers an inclusive approach to engaging with purpose on the most material issues to our stakeholders, how it responds to the changing environment we operate within, and how it delivers impact.

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Strategic alignment to best practice

Our stakeholder engagement strategy aims to deliver the outcomes our stakeholders prioritise and value. We aim to better serve stakeholders by understanding their current and future needs and expectations. This helps us to identify opportunities to continuously improve our services, manage uncertainty and risk and deliver greater value to our customers. Established in 2016, our strategy supports our workforce by informing decisions and improvement plans. It is embedded in the organisation and receives support from executive level management, but also continuously evolves in line with external benchmarks and stakeholder priorities. The strategy is aligned to the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (2015), a best practice framework for stakeholder engagement, and the AA1000 AccountAbility Principles (2018) of **Inclusivity, Materiality, Responsiveness and Impact**.

FIVE-STEP APPROACH TO STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



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Strategic priorities and topics are informed by stakeholders

In a changing environment it is important to continuously engage with our stakeholders to understand their shifting priorities so that we can achieve our Purpose. Strategic input from our Executive Leadership Team and internal working groups informs our materiality determination process, helps us to mitigate identified risks and leverage new opportunities. Our understanding that not all stakeholder needs are equal informs the methodology we use to prioritise our topic-led engagement.

Our supporting tools and processes

- Materiality matrix
- Annual cycle of market research
- Strategic input from Stakeholder Advisory Panels
- Engagement planning and recording templates e.g. bilateral
- Internal strategic governance meetings (see [page nine](#))

This year, we aligned the strategic priorities of our management team (n=55) to our customers' and wider stakeholders' priorities and consolidated these into our materiality matrix. To achieve this, we engaged with 2,943 stakeholders and collected qualitative feedback to identify emerging priorities. Ranking question techniques were used to quantify the importance of stakeholder priorities and a weighting applied to ensure our prioritisation balanced customers' and wider stakeholders' views.

To further develop our **materiality determination process**, our management team examined this output alongside **socio-economic and environmental risks and opportunities including financial impact, alignment to business vision, and wider societal interest in strategic topics**. This exercise informed our strategic engagement topics for 2020/21 and ensured we applied business-critical lens to issues identified by stakeholders during engagement and decision making. Our approach ensures that our programme is inclusive, focused and proportionate, and that we return value from the significant investment we make in delivering our activities, paid for from customers' bills.

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Inclusivity is a central component of our engagement strategy

Our stakeholders are...



We serve a diverse population of stakeholders who are impacted by our activities and have varying engagement interests, power and time to influence our services. Our ambition is to cast the net further to involve the widest possible range of stakeholders, including those who are **hard-to-reach**.

Our stakeholder community is split into 50 segments which cut across our diverse region. This year we

mapped our stakeholders by their topics of interest and changed our processes to capture and routinely update this intelligence. This data capture includes an improved registration process on our online engagement hub and a **new annual satisfaction survey** which identifies stakeholders' engagement preferences, risks and opportunities.

Our supporting tools and processes

- Annual review of stakeholder database
- Annual stakeholder mapping exercise
- Audit process to identify engagement gaps
- Annual stakeholder satisfaction survey
- 30 inclusive engagement mechanisms
- Support to enable digital inclusion

Identifying new stakeholders to engage with

As part of our annual review, we identify gaps in our database to inform where we need to develop stakeholder relationships. In our **leading the North West to net zero** themed engagement with County Councils, stakeholders highlighted how imperative our engagement on topics such as decarbonisation pathways is as an input to their strategic infrastructure planning. To develop our leadership role further we heard that we should expand the diversity of stakeholders engaged. **To address known gaps, we identified the top 50 stakeholders with either power to influence or interest in our strategic priority planning for the future.** Some of the stakeholder segments identified, such as political and business leaders, were time-poor and seldom heard. To ensure inclusivity, we engaged via a range of bespoke mechanisms such as MP drop-ins, bilateral meetings and a series of sub-regional 'Powering up the North' and 'Powering up Recovery' online events. 220 stakeholders participated, including many from our top 50 list (See Part Two, page eight).

Mitigating risks to inclusivity

COVID-19 introduced unforeseen risks to our engagement programme this year. As lockdown measures were introduced, our advisory panel members told us their engagement needs had changed; they wanted to engage with us more frequently, in shorter, topic-specific meetings. In response our workforce adapted quickly to digital working practices. Upskilling provided by our communications team normalised colleague engagement with stakeholders via platforms such as Zoom and elevated their confidence in using advanced functionality.

In addition, we took swift action to migrate our new 'Public Panel' of 40 household customers online and took significant steps to ensure inclusivity. The Sortition Foundation, a not-for-profit social enterprise dedicated to supporting fair, transparent, inclusive and effective deliberative processes, sent 5,000 postal invitations to join our panel to households randomly selected from the Royal Mail Postcode Address File. In addition, **we enabled digitally excluded customers to participate by providing them with smart devices, online connectivity and on-boarding one-to-one sessions** to ensure they felt comfortable using the technology.

★ INNOVATIVE

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Commitment to measuring impact

We understand, measure, manage and evaluate the impact of our initiatives on the environment, society, stakeholders and the performance of our organisation itself. We achieve this through assessing the social return on investment of our outcomes and triangulating this with a range of other qualitative and quantitative inputs (see [page eight](#)) which helps to inform decision making and identify further opportunities.

Our supporting tools and processes

- Societal benefit measurement
- Willingness to Pay valuation research
- Performance metrics e.g. satisfaction
- Monthly stakeholder newsletters
- Engagement hub with our response to past consultations

We share outputs from our engagement and the impact of our activities with our stakeholders through meeting minutes, newsletters and performance updates. We are open about the feedback that we have taken forward and provide clarity on why we do not act on every request.



Responsive to what we hear

Stakeholder feedback is received and responded to by central teams, strategic topic owners and key relationship managers, however, the wider workforce are a core component of our efforts. Colleagues use a range of tools to identify opportunities and determine actions, re-visit goals, and plan their next steps for future engagement.

Our supporting tools and processes

- Stakeholder engagement guiding principles
- Key relationship management
- Stakeholder engagement tracker (see [page nine](#))
- Continuous triangulation of stakeholder insights
- Internal governance to share and respond to key insights

Being switched-on, adaptable and taking pride are core to our Purpose and manifest daily in the engagement behaviours of colleagues at all different levels. This culture was evidenced strongly during COVID-19 (See Part Three, page three).

Developing relationships with stakeholders

As our stakeholder engagement programme continues to expand, there is a growing need for alignment across the business on how best to develop stakeholder relationships and clarity around roles and responsibilities. Our satisfaction survey results indicate that many of our stakeholders are satisfied by regular communication with a subject matter expert.

However, they also revealed an opportunity to better coordinate strategic engagement with organisations such as County Councils. These stakeholders typically engage with several points of contact about multiple topics which risks silo working. In response, we assigned coordinators to these stakeholders who bring **key relationship managers** together to share knowledge, discuss engagement plans and ensure external engagement is aligned to strategic goals. Our enhanced understanding of stakeholders' preferences means that we are not 'forcing' a 'one-size fits all' approach where one isn't needed, but ensuring stakeholders have a clear route into our organisation and access to subject matter experts. The next phase of our improvement plan is to review the impact of our coordination model before applying it to other prioritised stakeholder groups.

Our engagement through social media

25,323

TWITTER FOLLOWERS

↑ 8% INCREASE

MOST RETWEETED POST THIS YEAR
COLLEAGUES DONATE TREATS TO KEY WORKERS AT STOCKPORT HOSPITAL >

17,600

FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

↑ 16% INCREASE

MOST LIKED POST THIS YEAR
£25 MILLION INVESTMENT IN A GREEN RECOVERY >

17,597

LINKEDIN FOLLOWERS

↑ 16% INCREASE

MOST LIKED POST THIS YEAR
KEY WORKERS KEEPING THE POWER FLOWING >



The scale of our engagement this year

In a year of considerable change, the scale of our existing engagement programme has increased to be responsive to stakeholders' preferences to engage online, more frequently, on strategic priorities such as, **planning for the future** and topics such as decarbonisation and supporting customers during COVID-19. Our dynamic approach has sought continuous feedback across a wide range of open, two-way channels which our working groups assimilate and act upon quickly. The mechanisms we have used to engage with our stakeholders, the frequency with which we have activated them, their total reach and a selection of leading practice outputs are summarised in the table below.

Engagement	Mechanism		Key	Units	Total reach	Example outputs (detailed in Parts 2 and 3)
Strategic Expert strategic input	Chief Executive Panel			3	58	Green recovery strategic investments and forward-looking engagement strategy
	Sustainability Advisory Panel			13	164	Adopted the most challenging timeline to become net zero (2038), and agreed to undertake reduction of Scope 3 emissions
	Consumer Vulnerability	Advisory Panel		14	183	Change in PSR needs code prioritisation and more flexible use of partnership funding during COVID-19 to maximise social benefit
		1-1 Interviews		1	31	New consumer vulnerability strategic goal
	Incentive on Connections Engagement (ICE) expert panel			9	14	Plans to improve network information, informing our digitalisation strategy
	Industry working groups			18	324	Led the introduction of a Common Evaluation Methodology for Flexibility Services
Consultative Focused consultation to inform decision-making	Utilities Together Forum			8	48	Single PSR trial using Auriga platform
	Customer Public Panel			8	320	Expansion of referral network to alleviate fuel poverty
	Youth Focus North West			6	121	New Distribution System Operation (DSO) animated video
	Regional Stakeholder Workshops			3	56	'Go net zero' engagement hub launched
	Bilateral meetings			50	146	Regional decarbonisation pathways
	Incentive on Connections Engagement (ICE) roundtable events			76	450	Key contact and easier process for housing associations connecting heat pumps
	Community and local energy events			4	161	£75,000 funding for six new projects
	Innovation dissemination			2	55	Multiple DNOs planning to adopt Smart Street into their innovation portfolio
Involving Understanding stakeholders' priorities and preferences	Strategic Priorities Research			1	2,943	Refreshed strategic priorities and engagement plans for 2020/21
	Broad Measure of Customer Satisfaction			12	5,178	A new planned interruption card
	Stakeholder satisfaction survey			1	205	Improved key relationship management and forward-looking strategy
	Real-time customer feedback			365	26,526	90 contact centre agents undertook additional customer service training with a focus on the after-fault call experience
	Customer Voice feedback panel			6	2,021	Introduction of a new chatbot communication channel
	Willingness-to-Pay research			1	1,570	More targeted deployment of Smart Street in areas of high fuel poverty
	Other bespoke market research			16	6,984	Publication of RII0-ED2 flexibility services requirements
	Colleague feedback loops			12	2,039	Emergency credit for PPM customers during COVID-19 at risk of disconnecting
Informing Communicating our intentions and updating stakeholders	Webinars			130	1,457	Third publication of our Distribution Future Electricity Scenarios (DFES) report
	Newsletters			183	107,761	Stakeholder consultations
	Community outreach events			73	18,095	Energy Event Clubs in areas of fuel poverty
	Social media and website			698,422	1,424,867	Mental health toolkit widely shared
	Internal Chief Executive roadshows			9	772	New low carbon transport incentive scheme for all colleagues
Operational Day to day	All interactions captured on our tracker			550	2,126	Highways engagements and strategic investment projects
Responsive Supporting events and consultations organised by our stakeholders	Events include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Local Resilience ForumsSector Specific Methodology ConsultationOfgem Green Recovery consultation			699	13,369	Expansion in company-wide training on Consumer Vulnerability

Our Consumer Vulnerability Strategy

Supporting consumers in vulnerable circumstances is part of our DNA. This section explains our strategic goal and the evolving strategy we have in place to achieve it, supported by stakeholder-led 'pillars', clear success measures and a targeted approach to reaching customers in greatest need.

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Our strategic goal has evolved

Since 2016, our strategic goal has been to ensure no customer is left vulnerable during a loss of electricity, now and in the future. This year consumers in vulnerable circumstances, stakeholders, subject matter experts and our colleagues told us that we needed to adapt our goal. We heard that to **plan for the future** our goal needed to reflect the increasing importance of inclusivity during the energy transition. We also heard that it should incorporate the need to work collaboratively with trusted partners to create synergies and maximise reach through sharing data, pooling resources, innovation and best practice.

Our new strategic goal

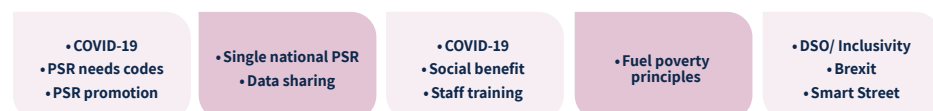
Providing an inclusive and supportive service for all users of electricity in a rapidly changing world - recognising the need to maximise the reach of our services through collaborative, innovative working with a community of trusted partners across our region.

Our iterative engagement programme tests and refines the pillars that support our strategic goal to ensure they remain appropriate, relevant, and able to meet the needs of electricity users.

Consumer vulnerability pillars



Key engagement topics this year



Key performance indicators



Customer outcomes - Inclusion in energy transition, social value measurement, satisfaction levels

Business outcomes - Alignment to Purpose, enhanced culture, reputation, financial benefit and reduced risk

Our new fuel poverty guiding principles

This year we discussed our day-to-day performance on our five pillars and the relative importance of enhanced support services with customers and wider stakeholders (including our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel). They told us that COVID-19 was impacting fuel poor customers (FPC) disproportionately and that we needed to be more ambitious in the scale of support provided on alleviating fuel poverty in the North West (Pillar 4). With their input we identified a set of guiding principles that inform enhancements to our programme:



Guided by these principles, we triangulated a range of inputs, including an understanding of social benefits.

This informed a decision to appoint a new strategic partner, **Citizens Advice Manchester**, with an additional **£250,000** investment to expand the scale of referrals made relative to the number of fuel poor customers within our network.

As we scale support to FPC throughout our region, we are cognisant of our customers' strategic priority of **ensuring the affordability of consumers' bills**. Thus, our strategy is to focus on building our capability and that of our stakeholder community to deliver interventions to FPC that have a long-term sustainable impact, thereby delivering value for money.

Providing effective support to consumers who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances means having systems, services, and partnerships in place which protect them during power cuts. This goes hand in hand with network interventions that either prevent faults occurring or enable our networks and customers' appliances to perform more efficiently. Examples of these are included in Parts Two (page four) and Three (page nine).

Increasing our understanding to continually improve support

We define "hard-to-reach" as customers or groups who our business impacts in some way, and for whom the lack of engagement could be to their or our detriment. Lack of engagement could be through limited capacity, awareness or appetite, or a belief that their participation will not make a difference.

Through mapping our hard-to-reach groups, such as fuel poor customers, identifying their unique engagement needs and developing effective support strategies, we are acting to reduce the barriers to engagement.

What we heard

In 2019/20 our partnership with the **Kashmir Youth Project** underlined the importance of expert knowledge of customers' behaviours in delivering effective interventions to Fuel Poor Customers (FPC), such as energy efficiency. This year our customer Public Panel observed that COVID-19 is likely to exacerbate the level of fuel poverty in the North West and expressed concern that FPC are unlikely to proactively reveal their financial vulnerability to us and are not identified through a specific PSR needs code.

What we did

We commenced a longitudinal research and place-based collaboration with One Manchester, a housing association, to understand the triggers, motivators and enablers of behaviour change that drive FPC to take-up support offers. 54 in-depth telephone interviews were completed with FPC within three communities and analysed by tenure, life stage, culture, income and education. **The research found two dominant mindsets; a survival segment who cannot engage with energy until their essential physiological and safety needs are met and a striving segment who are better placed to engage but lack interest.** Those striving for more find a saving of over £50 on energy bills as sufficiently motivating to engage, if supported with inclusive educational materials. Over 13 expert Community Representatives used this insight to co-design and test interventions that helped us engage with the local community and overcome the inequalities of access to information and services.

In line with our fuel poverty guiding principles we also expanded support to FPC through initiatives that do not require them (particularly the surviving segment) to actively engage, such as targeted investment to improve the reliability of our network and the roll-out of our innovative technology Smart Street. More detail is provided on all these initiatives in Part Three, page nine.

Outcome

Through adopting a targeted and sensitive approach, we've **improved accessibility to support services** among FPC that wouldn't have otherwise engaged with us and delivered alternative measures to directly benefit customers that are just about managing.

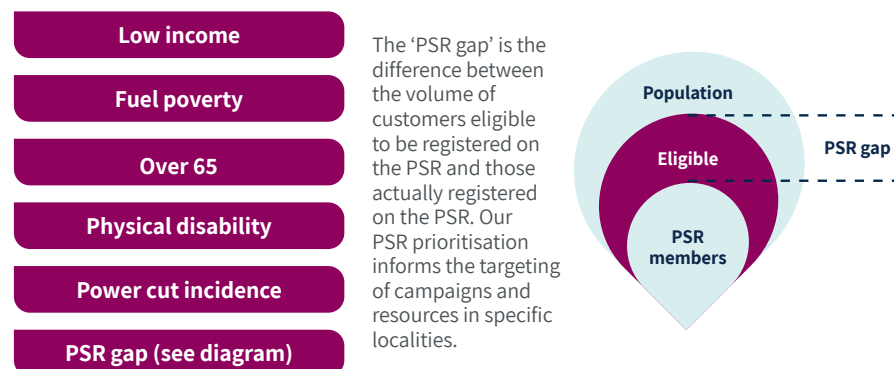
A targeted approach to reaching vulnerable consumers

What we heard

Our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel advised us to continue with our application of social data mapping to drive targeted interventions in Local Authority areas with the highest indices of vulnerability. However, they also challenged us to increase our understanding of the future vulnerability challenges of the North West so that we are better able to predict and respond to these needs.

What we did

We refreshed our social data mapping tool to rank the 34 Local Authorities in our region, according to a range of vulnerability criteria informed by our Customer Vulnerability Advisory Panel:



10 Local Authorities were found to have a relatively high prevalence of these criteria relative to other areas. To enhance our intelligence-led approach we commissioned a research study to provide insights on the anticipated longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on our customers in vulnerable circumstances, risk factors, and emerging trends and challenges in specific localities. The findings highlighted that the four most prominent COVID-19 enduring risk factors will be:

- 1 Physical health**, most starkly for those in the oldest age groups and with underlying health conditions.
- 2 Mental health** and wellbeing impacts, which are unevenly skewed towards the most deprived areas.
- 3 Economic impacts** in terms of business closures and loss of employment and incomes, especially for the low paid and young people, and extending to those who have been 'just about managing'.
- 4 Difficulty in accessing services** and support for those without digital connectivity, and for at-risk groups who rely on support, such as refugees, the elderly, and those facing domestic abuse.

We published and shared these insights with our Advisory Panel which led to the research findings being used, alongside 11 other data sets, to enrich our social data mapping (See Part Three, page five). **This data triangulation confirmed that the four key future risk factors are concentrated in the same 10 Local Authorities** from our prioritisation process, including Blackpool, much of Greater Manchester (e.g. Rochdale) and East Lancashire (e.g. Burnley, Hyndburn). These findings helped to inform our choice of partners and the nature of support interventions targeted in this list of 10 Local Authorities.

This year our Advisory Panel recommended that we broaden the activities that our partners undertake to support a wider range of vulnerable circumstances. We mapped these activities onto the expected impacts of COVID-19 to align our efforts to future needs, such as Burnley Boys and Girls Club providing mental health and wellbeing support (Part Three, page eight) and specialist training from the NSPCC to support colleagues who may be entering customers premises to spot signs of neglect or abuse (Part Three, page three).

Outcome

This year 85% of our partnership investment was allocated to 10 priority localities and we broadened the support available, aligned to key risk factors, in areas where the population had the greatest overall need for it. **Through collaborative awareness campaigns we reduced the PSR gap (by 7%) and our targeted network investment reduced the power cut incidence per 1,000 dwellings (down to 7.9 compared to an average of 11.8 across the region).** The impact of our portfolio of partnership activities, measured through our Social Return on Investment benefits tracker, was £4.01m. As our programme evolves, the longer-term impacts of our activities in influencing positive changes in the prevalence of vulnerability, are being monitored through refreshing our social data mapping.

Creating effective partnerships

What we heard

Our Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel (both strategic and delivery sub-groups) and representatives of our network of 100 partners suggested that we should adapt our strategy towards longer term collaboration with trusted partners (>24 months) to future proof investments and build enduring resilience in communities.

What we did

We triangulated stakeholder feedback with an analysis of the social benefit delivered by partners who had successfully applied for funding for two years running (e.g. Cosy Homes in Lancashire). This analysis drew on historical and forecasted outputs provided by our partners, an SROI assessment of benefits and efficiencies, qualitative evidence such as maturing knowledge and consideration of risk factors such as optimism bias (see page eight) and opportunity costs. Based on the results of this analysis, we decided to fund longer-term collaboration, such as our new partnership with Citizens Advice Manchester (See Part Three, page ten).

Outcome

In addition to adding 28 partners to our partnerships framework this year and increasing the longevity of others, our focus has also been on enhancing the quality of the relationships we have with all partners. **Our collaborative approach has increased data sharing, pooling of resources as well as technology and best practice** which has reduced organisational silos and created synergies to maximise reach. We use a partnership dashboard and our SROI tracker to measure the volume and value of referral outcomes created through this collaborative approach, and have included examples in Parts Two and Three of our submission.

Our partnerships framework has four levels:

Plus the organisations they partner with	LEVEL ONE	
	Support agency specialists	
	29	+7 this year
	LEVEL TWO	
	Local authorities, housing associations, shelters and community groups	
	19	+9 this year
	LEVEL THREE	
	Referral schemes	
	43	+8 this year
	LEVEL FOUR	
	Feedback groups	
	10	+4 this year

Stakeholders are influencing strategic decisions

In this section we highlight the key mechanisms we are using to engage with customers and wider stakeholders to drive meaningful engagement, activity and outcomes that drive benefit.

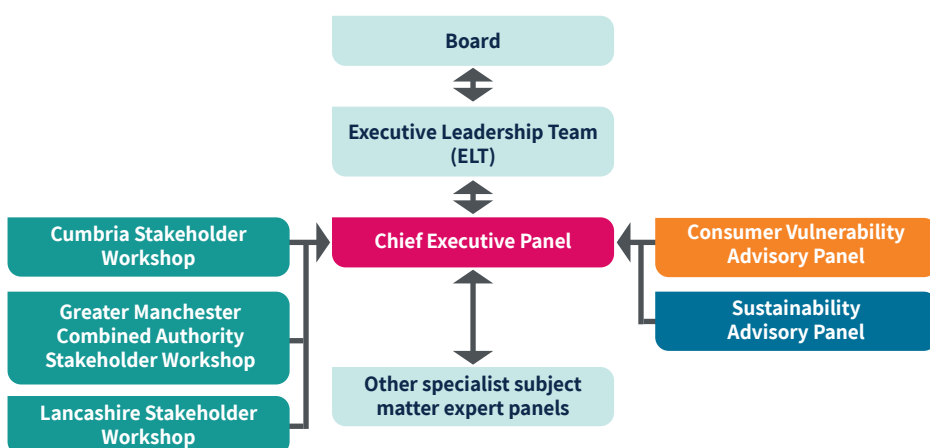
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Senior leadership commitment

Our Chief Executive Panel is chaired by our Chief Executive Peter Emery and attended by Todd Holden and Jenny Willis, who are independent chairs of our Sustainability and Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panels, sub-panels of the Chief Executive Panel. This structure allows for sharing of expert insight. Each of our Advisory Panels, Regional Workshops, and our other engagement events are attended by members of our Executive Leadership Team (ELT).

Our Advisory Panel Governance Structure



The Stakeholder Engagement Challenge Group provides internal oversight and governance of our stakeholder engagement activity. This Group is supported by an internal working group group (see [page nine](#)).

This year our ELT requested a dedicated monthly meeting on stakeholder engagement strategy, levelling up its importance with customer satisfaction performance. Consequently, **the number of meetings with a strategic stakeholder engagement topic on the agenda more than doubled**, increasing from 41 to 84. As a result, we have seen even greater senior leadership commitment to improvement plans, greater use of stakeholder engagement to solve business challenges and increased awareness of stakeholder perspectives. Our ELT, Chief Executive Advisory Panel and Board of Directors are now provided with a quarterly expert triangulation analysis of all strategic stakeholder engagement activity, enabling an ongoing feedback loop that influences strategic decision making.

Paul Bircham - Regulation and Communications Director, said:



“ELT have challenged the alignment between customers’ and colleagues’ **views and stakeholders’ priorities** and have **input into plans for improved key relationship management**. We have debated the degree to which we should influence our different County Council stakeholders on their decarbonisation ambition, resulting in a **clear strategic steer for future engagement**.”

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Continuing influence of our Advisory Panels

Engagement mechanism	Stakeholder Segments	Examples	
Chief Executive Panel	Senior executives and advisors with specialist knowledge to shape policy	Environment Agency, Local Authorities, Citizens Advice, TfGM, CBI, regional LEPs and business representatives	
Total members	Meetings	Hours engaged	Stakeholder satisfaction*
40	3	7.5	91%
2020/21 topics: Planning for the future, COVID-19, Green Recovery, Diversity and Inclusion, Business Performance			

Engagement mechanism	Stakeholder Segments	Examples	
Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria Workshops	Wider consultation with regional, social, economic and environment stakeholders	Local Government, British Red Cross, Cumbria Police, Lancashire Chamber of Commerce, Manchester Airport, Siemens, NFI, CAIS	
Participants	Meetings	Hours engaged	Stakeholder satisfaction*
56	3	7.5	78%
2020/21 topics: Sub-regional business performance and priorities, RII0-ED2 Business Plan trade-offs			

Peter Emery - Chief Executive Officer, said:

“Having recruited new **hard-to-reach** stakeholders to the Panel last year, members reflected that they were satisfied with its representation and noted the valuable contributions of the sub-panels. **The Panel challenged us to reduce the impact of transient (intermittent) network faults on our customers**. In response we expanded the roll-out of innovative smart fuse technology to detect and fix transient faults before they become permanent. We complemented this by introducing transient fault ‘first responders’ who are now strategically located across our depots to get to site quicker and minimise disruption to our customers.”



Helen Norris - Stakeholder Engagement Manager, said:

“This year our improved audit process helped us identify gaps in our sub-regional stakeholder representation that we then filled through personalised invitations and sustained recruitment campaigns. Stakeholders told us that they were impressed with our strong network performance at a time when it was more important than ever to **keep our customers’ lives running**. However, they told us that considering COVID-19 we should **look beyond the obvious and expand our societal role on alleviating fuel poverty now and in the future**. This feedback informed further engagement that has led to our new fuel poverty principles and a significant expansion in the support provided to fuel poor customers this year - with very ambitious plans underway for the future.”



*Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey December 2020, 205 participants

Engagement mechanism		Stakeholder Segments	Examples
Sustainability Advisory Panel		Senior representatives with strategic expertise relevant to sustainability activities	Community Energy England, Carbon Co-op, GMCA, University of Manchester
Total members	Meetings	Hours engaged	Stakeholder satisfaction*
41	13	20	87%
2020/21 topics: DSO transition, DFES, Leading the transition to net zero (Local Area Decarbonisation Pathways undertaken in partnership with Cadent), Community and Local Energy Plans and Environmental Action Plan			

Engagement mechanism		Stakeholder Segments	Examples
Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel		Senior representatives with strategic expertise relevant to consumer vulnerability activities	United Utilities, Cadent One Manchester, Energy Savings Trust, Scope, RNIB, Auriga
Total members	Meetings	Hours engaged	Stakeholder satisfaction*
86	14	22	93%
2020/21 topics: DSO, COVID-19, Brexit, PSR needs codes, Smart Street, Fuel Poverty			

Todd Holden - Independent Sustainability Advisory Panel Chair, said:



“Like most other forms of engagement, this year saw the Panel move to a virtual space, and while this brought with it several challenges, overall, these have been outweighed by the benefits created, most noticeably the time and carbon saved through ‘meaningless travel miles’. **This has enabled engagement with a wider network of stakeholders, both in terms of geography and the diversity of the interests represented.** This has included public, private and community sectors, some of whom previously may not have been able to attend as regularly due to competing time pressures. Moving from quarterly to topic-specific monthly meetings and creating sub-groups to look at specific issues in detail has enabled suitable breadth and depth of engagement on ED1 commitments and the development of the ED2 submission. **I see this level of commitment as a clear indication as to the value panel members get from the meetings and our collective ability to advise and influence.**

A broad spectrum of engagement also focused on the company's performance, including looking back at its progress towards achieving ED1 targets and challenging them on setting their own carbon footprint target. Following an initial discussion of the full Panel, a sub-group was setup to look at this in more detail to bring a recommendation back to the next meeting. **Because of the advice and challenge of timelines provided, Electricity North West has adopted the most ambitious timeline to become net zero** and agreed to undertake more detailed investigation and reduction of Scope 3 emissions, which was absent from its original plans. This use of dedicated sub-groups was also deployed to advise and challenge on the development of an Environmental Action Plan; across each issue, options were presented with varying degrees of ambition which the Panel advised on to inform subsequent iterations of the company's plans.”

Jenny Willis - Independent Consumer Vulnerability Advisory Panel Chair, said:



“During 2020/21 we have been all too aware of the devastating impact of COVID-19 on so many fundamental aspects of our lives and in our communities. It would have been understandable if members of the Advisory Panel had responded by focusing more on their own organisations. **However, it is my observation that the opposite has happened with members being more involved, contributing and sharing more than ever before.** The panel provides a network across the region of organisations which all have supporting people in vulnerable circumstances as their reason for being. Moving to online engagement has given the opportunity for more frequent, but shorter and highly focussed meetings. **In relation to COVID-19 the panel welcomed sight of the company's research about impacts on the North West**, which highlighted the challenge of increased future vulnerability and transient vulnerability as a key and complex issue to consider.

I have seen the company's dialogue with panel members really develop in terms of working out the intersection between energy and vulnerability in its many forms, and how it can offer support specifically in that context, but in a way which also complements the wider remit of the Advisory Panel member organisations. This was enhanced by Electricity North West investing time in a series of one-to-one discussions with members, with analysis of these 32 in-depth discussions providing invaluable insight and understanding of relevant issues from a wider societal perspective. **Last year there was a step change in impact measurement (including via SROI). My view is that this progress has been consolidated by a cultural step change in the way the company engages**, which has led to richer insights and the opportunity to really add collective value to improve the situation for people in vulnerable circumstances across the region, both now and in terms of **planning for the future.**”

★ INNOVATIVE

NEW



Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey

What we heard

As part of planning for the future, stakeholders including our Chief Executive Panel challenged us to review the suite of measures used to evaluate the performance, future risks and opportunities of our stakeholder engagement programme. In a best practise sharing meeting Northern Gas Networks said that its stakeholder satisfaction survey is a key input to measuring the quality of stakeholder relationships and informing its improvement plans.

What we did

We launched our first ever independent stakeholder satisfaction survey in December, engaging 205 participants and achieving excellent representation across our stakeholder community. The survey measured overall satisfaction, attitudes towards the relationship held, future engagement preferences and improvement areas. **The results indicated a strong correlation between the frequency of engagement, stakeholders' familiarity with our business and overall satisfaction (81%).** Satisfaction levels were 10% higher on average among Advisory Panel representatives where relationships are mature. Despite increased engagement during COVID-19 only 3% of stakeholders wished to engage less often in the future. The baseline survey highlighted five key areas of improvement and we have leveraged our agility in responding to feedback by enhancing our improvement plans to make changes quickly:

We heard	So, we have
1 Continue digital engagement after COVID-19	Committed to continuing with online engagement and blending this with ad-hoc face-to-face engagement in the future
2 Expand key relationship management	Expanded key relationship management; prioritising County Councils initially and learning from this approach before scaling
3 Provide more frequent updates	Increased the frequency of stakeholder newsletters to monthly and improved the stakeholder engagement hub on our website
4 Introduce stakeholder sub-groups on specialist topics	Refined our forward-looking engagement plans to include specialist topics requested by stakeholders, such as EVs
5 Publish an annual report on our stakeholder engagement outcomes	Became the first DNO to commit to continuing annual SECV reporting beyond RIIO-ED1 with a focus on stakeholder outcomes

Continual learning

We disseminated the results and our improvement plans with our internal stakeholder engagement challenge group, Board, ELT, survey participants, wider stakeholders and workforce. In response to colleague feedback, we will now **include the satisfaction score in our business scorecard** and report regularly on progress.

Embedding a process that drives good decision-making

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is one of several tools we use as part of our impact measurement. In this section we articulate how we have embedded an enhanced process to assess the full societal impact of our initiatives and triangulated this with other inputs such as stakeholder feedback to inform and prioritise our plans that drive value and scale for customers.

★ INNOVATIVE

ENHANCED



Using SROI in conjunction with other valuation methods

What we heard

Last year our Advisory Panel members critically evaluated our SECV performance and affirmed the Independent Panel's view that we had successfully complemented willingness to pay research with SROI to measure and evaluate wider benefits. They asked us to continue to expand our bank of social values and be more transparent by publishing the inputs used in calculations and explaining our approach to identifying and mitigating risk.

What we did

We re-commissioned economics consultancy Economic Insight to expand the literature review they undertook last year to identify environmental, health and financial benefit values for new activities. This year 100% of our case studies have been measured using social proxies, as opposed to WTP data (collected from a regional specific survey) which was primarily used to establish consumers' priorities from a financial rather than holistic perspective. **To enhance our openness and transparency we published our assumptions, proxies and sources on our website so that other networks can share our social value bank.** Our literature review was completed early in the year allowing us to forecast outcomes based on estimated outputs and track progress during the year. We also continued to monitor activities initiated last year, many of which were scaled up.

Expanding our use of data proxies



Environmental benefits
e.g. a reduction in CO₂ emissions



Health benefits
e.g. a reduction in GP appointments



Financial benefits to customers
e.g. reduction in future household utility bills

In response to the Independent Panel's 2019/20 feedback we introduced a methodology for identifying and mitigating the risk of optimism bias that can occur in overestimating the benefit values or volume of outputs anticipated and underestimating the costs. We mitigate the risk of optimism bias by completing literature reviews annually and updating the figures in the model when more relevant values become available, analysing past performance and adjusting where necessary. We differentiate between an optimism bias and uncertainty by setting a high 'hurdle' to overcome before labelling an error a systematic optimism bias (inherent bias towards returning higher benefit values). This risk-based approach is used for all initiatives and is aligned to our company's strategic risk management approach for new investments.

Decision-making

SROI is one component of the triangulation process we use in our annual business planning and continual learning and review processes to appraise the different dimensions of a decision 'in the round'. Where a conflict exists between inputs such as operational data and the strategies, priorities and intelligence shared by our stakeholders, **triangulation is used to determine which input(s) to prioritise.** This enables us to make an informed decision about whether an activity should continue in some form, even with a relatively poor SROI, as other considerations are deemed more important. We have provided some examples below of how this process has informed how our initiatives evolve; whether to scale up, change course, or even stop altogether.



Cleansing our data with 24/7 virtual workers – stopped

In last year's submission we reported that our trial of using virtual workers to cleanse our PSR data was expected to deliver a 210% efficiency gain over a one-year period. **This innovation was not delivering the benefits expected** because the bots speed of processing was slower than a human and success ratio without human intervention unacceptably low. In response we stopped the trial, saving £68,000. We have focused instead on expanding our data flows with other utilities, outperforming targets for proactive contact with members and improving the accuracy of data captured by colleagues, when they are identifying and recording vulnerability during conversations with customers. Our updated approach has enabled us to expand the volume of contacts cleansed this year by 6%.



Strategic use of back-up generation – changed course

Last year we reported that the cost of providing back-up generation to customers during a power cut exceeds the social benefit gained. This SROI evidence conflicted with stakeholder support for its provision. **We updated our policy to better target application of our generator policy towards consumers in the most vulnerable circumstances,** which our customers have told us they wholeheartedly support. To enhance the value returned to consumers we trialled the usage of higher specification 250kVA generators powered by HVO Bio fuel which can support up to 300 customers. These generators are positioned in depots and can be deployed to site more quickly, supporting a social benefit of £426,000 this year. The trial has now been expanded to the use of Battery Storage Units with a timer available that will allow day charging and night time discharge – suitable for use in noise sensitive locations to minimise disruption to our customers.



Support to fuel poor customers – new strategic partnership

96% of stakeholders taking part in our regional workshops said that alleviating fuel poverty should be a key part of our strategy and that the company should do what it thinks is fair, regardless of the cost. Billpayers told us they are willing to pay more to ensure up to 250,000 fuel poor customers are supported by 2028, if shareholder returns do not increase in parallel. Cognisant of this direction of travel we engaged Citizens Advice Manchester (CAM), who had a proven track record in reaching areas with the greatest prevalence of fuel poverty across the North West. **We measured the SROI of x18 health and financial outcomes CAM proposed delivering and developed a business case for a new strategic partnership valued at £250k per year.** The business case was reviewed by ELT in conjunction with a triangulation of stakeholder insights and a two-year trial was approved because of the compelling evidence and good fit with our company Purpose and Principles.

Outcome

Transparent and comparable SROI values have provided **a clear yardstick for measurable societal impact,** driving socially focused initiatives that deliver greater value and scale for our customers.

Continual learning

By publishing our social proxies and assumptions and **sharing best practice with other networks** we have influenced the recent development of a national Social Value Framework.

Enhancing our culture of stakeholder engagement and consumer vulnerability

We recognise that colleagues are empowered to fully execute their responsibilities when they receive consistent messaging about what is important. Our Executive team provide proactive leadership and commitment on stakeholder engagement and let our colleagues know how valued and important their contributions are. The initiatives described in this section are just some of the many we have worked hard to enhance and embed a culture of engagement within our business.

EMBEDDED



Our whole company takes part

Our internal Stakeholder Engagement Challenge Group provides **senior leadership ownership of our stakeholder engagement and consumer vulnerability activity**. It is co-chaired by two Executive Team members and includes senior leaders from every discipline within our business. Updates are shared with our Executive Leadership Team and Board in monthly meetings. Over the past year we continued to grow senior leadership participation and visibility in stakeholder engagement activities (see [page six](#)). This is evidenced by our management population, who are 12% of our workforce, representing more than a third of the entries made in our stakeholder activity tracker.

To support our Challenge Group an internal **Stakeholder Engagement Working Group ensures a coordinated, optimal and consistent approach to stakeholder engagement**. Whilst our engagement activity is not limited to this group of people, it includes colleagues from across the business who hold key facilitation and enabling roles.

Our central Stakeholder Engagement Team supports colleagues at all levels with **the knowledge and confidence they need to develop their core capability for delivering stakeholder engagement effectively**. During the pandemic the team upskilled colleagues on best practice for conducting online engagement and provided templates and coaching to empower them to engage with their stakeholders on a broader range of topics. This support significantly increased the volume and quality of bilateral engagement which has been a key input to **planning for the future**.

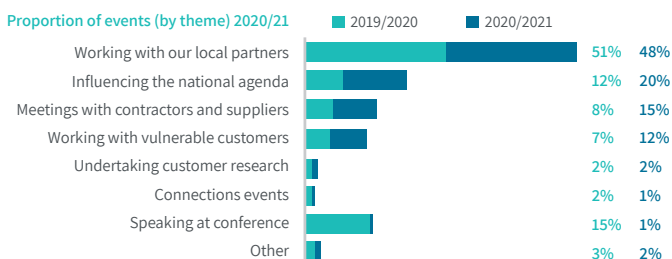
Our guiding principle is that everyone is empowered to act on what they hear. This principle has been evidenced in the behaviour of our frontline engineers and call agents who have been switched-on to spotting previously unseen vulnerable circumstances. The examples below are some of the ways in which they have taken pride in either signposting these customers to the right support or challenged our leadership teams to do something differently.

The table below demonstrates the increased scale of our stakeholder engagement since 2019/20:

Year	Number of events	Number of internal attendees	Number of external attendees	Cost of engagement* (£)
2019/20	1,073	2,515	22,800	890,943
2020/21	1,990	4,397	58,434	1,585,763
% increase	85%	75%	156%	78%

*represents the cost of our people delivering stakeholder engagement activity

In 2020/21, a majority of our engagements events were with local stakeholders



Senior-led engagement – we are switched on



Neil Stark,

Area Operations Manager said:

“On 8th January a weather-related incident resulted in a surge of power on our low

voltage network causing **appliance damage in 32 households**. In line with our policy, we deployed our rapid-response partner, Haste, to go door-to-door carrying out wiring safety checks and where possible, repairing damaged appliances. In addition, our Welfare Team arranged for customers to access refreshments in their local pub or have food delivered to their door. It soon became apparent that several meters needed replacing before power could be fully restored so we proactively contacted customers’ energy suppliers on their behalf. Some suppliers would not attend the site out of hours so to reduce our customers’ distress we fitted replacement meters as a temporary measure. **Customers couldn’t quite believe the lengths we went to help them in their hour of need.**”

Embedding stakeholder engagement – we are adaptable



Peter Barlow,

Programme Manager said:

“I engaged with GMCA who alerted me to a housing association in Greater

Manchester that wanted to **leverage funding available to connect low carbon heat pumps to 360 properties**. Southway Housing Trust was finding the complicated application process a barrier to leveraging £2m of European funding, so I held their hand through the process, reducing the amount of information required and signposting approved organisations to expedite their funding application. With the support of our ELT I engaged more widely with GMCA and joined a Low Carbon Asset Group which confirmed this was a common problem. **I am now a key relationship manager for local authorities and housing associations** which enables me to obtain early warning of schemes and roll out this easier application process - **this is what leading the North West to net zero is all about.**”

Strong principles guiding our approach – we take pride



Barbara Mackin,

Customer Welfare Advisor said:

“During the early stages of Government lockdown measures in 2020 I received

a call from a distressed customer who had had a **Pre-Payment Meter (PPM) and had disconnected their power supply** through not being able to afford a top-up voucher. The customer had attempted to contact their energy supplier already and couldn’t reach them during out-of-hours so reached out to us as a last resort. I really disliked the feeling of not being able to help this customer in their time of need, so I raised this in a Team Brief meeting. I am proud to say that our senior leadership team responded by introducing **an industry-first process for issuing emergency credit vouchers** to anyone using pre-payment meters at risk of self-disconnecting their energy supply and this has remained available throughout COVID-19.”

Collaboration, sharing and best practice

In this section we set out how we are developing close working relationships with other utilities and network operators to tackle industry-wide issues collaboratively and sharing best practices so that we can avoid duplication and respond to challenges in a joined-up efficient way.

EMBEDDED



Delivering collaborative outcomes

For many years we have committed significant resource to active ongoing participation in a range of industry forums and been transparent with others, sharing our ideas, plans, and outputs:



National engagement

The facilitation of flexible services will play a crucial role in DSO. We actively participate in the Open Networks Project hosted by the Energy Networks Association which sees all six DNOs working together along with BEIS, Ofgem and transmission companies. **We have led the creation of a Common Evaluation Methodology (CEM) and Tool** which enables companies to compare network capacity and network losses over a range of Distribution Future Electricity Scenarios scenarios to identify the most cost effective solution and optimum flexibility contract length. The tool was developed collaboratively and will be used by all DNOs from 1st April 2021.

In addition to engaging 324 industry stakeholders through Ofgem's ED2 Working Groups and encouraging wider stakeholders to take part in our own consultations, we have enabled engagement at a national level by briefing stakeholders and **making it easier for them to engage with Ofgem's Sector Specific Methodology and Green Recovery Consultations.**



Local engagement

A first-of-its-kind collaboration with gas network Cadent, quarterly strategic engagement with County Councils and frequent bilaterals with the Mayors of Manchester and Liverpool have enabled viable energy pathways to achieve ambitious net zero targets in Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cumbria. **Our local engagement is now focused on coordinating infrastructure planning and supporting the delivery of Local Area Energy Plans.** This activity has influenced SPEN working with Cadent to publish their own pathway which will allow Liverpool and Manchester to combine their plans. Andy Burnham plans to highlight this collaboration and best practice to the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow in November.

SMART STREET

Sharing best practice



Fran Ward
Bright Sparks facilitator

As part of our rollout of 'Smart Street' (Network's 2020 Innovation project of the year), our Innovation team hosted a dissemination event to share learning. Further engagement has led to SEN indicating it will now include the **scalable and rapidly deployable technology** in its ED2 Business Plan.

We acknowledge that not all the best ideas are our own! **This year we shared best practice with WPD on developing educational outreach programmes for schools.** We shared WPD's 'spot the hazard game' in exchange for our curriculum-based circuit board resources. We are also in discussion with WPD about future collaboration opportunities. We also worked with teachers and STEM professionals to create our **new online resources.**



AccountAbility's Stakeholder Engagement Healthcheck is used to assess stakeholder engagement strategies, activities and implementation against industry leading practices. This year we are proud to report having achieved **accomplished** status.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MATURITY LADDER

ADVANCED (81-100%)

ACCOMPLISHED (61-80%)

COMMITTED (41-60%)

EVOLVING (21-40%)

FOUNDATIONAL (0-20%)

Our accreditations

Institute of Customer Service



Three years ago our Customer Contact Centre training achieved the ServiceMark and TrainingMark accreditation by the Institute of Customer Service (ICS). We were re-accredited in March 2021, **achieving a distinction.** The ICS also survey 200 of our customers annually and in 2020 we achieved a satisfaction score of 87.9 (out of 100), 10.9 points higher than the Utilities sector average. The ICS concluded, "There is a clear commitment to delivering great service to customers. Evidenced not only by the increased scores in both surveys and the reaccreditation. But most importantly in how employees talk about their customers and their work – with passion, pride and genuine care."

Corporate responsibility benchmarking



We are accredited as a Living Wage Employer. This means we pay a fair salary to all our colleagues and we've also made the commitment to only work with contractors who are either already accredited, recognised service providers or are working towards this accreditation.



We became the **world's first Carbon Literate power network operator** after being awarded the accreditation from the Carbon Literacy Project for our commitment to acting on climate change.



We are independently assessed against the Business in the Community Responsible Business Tracker, a corporate measurement tool that provides gap analysis and benchmarking of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability. **With an overall score of 69% we are delivering far more in CSR than our cohort average (43%).**

Independent evaluation and audit



We continue to align our strategy and approach with the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (2015) developed by AccountAbility (see **page two**). AccountAbility has provided an independent assessment of our stakeholder engagement activity, strategy, and processes for the fifth year in succession. As part of the assessment, ten in-depth interviews were held with a range of internal and external stakeholders and provided evidence that our approach is increasingly embedded across the business.

Daniel Metzger, AccountAbility Project Director said:

A new stakeholder engagement survey, increased involvement from senior management, ongoing triangulation reports and a new engagement planning template are **notable improvements that demonstrate increased integration of stakeholder engagement** into Electricity North West's processes. Efforts to **enhance its culture of stakeholder engagement** also reflect the greater embeddedness of stakeholder engagement. This is most notable where employee-led activities, such as efforts to better understand how to spot vulnerability, are directly resulting in customer benefits.



Our response to the COVID-19 pandemic 2020/21



OUR KEY PUBLICATIONS

The following publications are available to download from our [website](#).

