

# stakeholder engagement

*at the heart  
of our business*

As an electricity network operator, Northern Powergrid has a customer base of 3.8 million customers, but serves a diverse population across northeast England, Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire of some 7.6 million people.

**We are responsible for the safe, secure and cost-effective delivery of electricity to millions of homes, businesses and communities and with that responsibility comes a duty to the millions of people our business affects to deliver a first-class service that is:**

- **Responsive to the needs of customers and other stakeholders**
- **Socially responsible**
- **Sustainable**

**We can only fulfil this promise and run a successful, customer-centric business through engagement with the wide range of different stakeholder groups with whom we interact.**

In seeking to do so, we recognise that we are on a journey. With some of our customer and stakeholder groups, we have had interactions for a long time; with them, we are seeking to improve the quality of our engagement through exchange of views, seeking feedback and benchmarking our approach against best practice elsewhere. There are a number of areas of importance where we are seeking expert advice, for example, fuel poverty. We have had little direct engagement or experience in resolving these types of issues. We are therefore developing key partnerships to assist in initiating an effective engagement process with specific groups. Through seeking the comments and opinions of our stakeholders, we can better understand their needs and change our business practices to meet them. This helps us create mutually beneficial outcomes and valued, satisfied customers.

## SERVING A DIVERSE COMMUNITY OF STAKEHOLDERS

When we talk about meeting the needs of our stakeholders, we are referencing a very diverse community, in which end-users of electricity (including not only millions of individual domestic consumers, but also housing developers, local authorities and big businesses whose manufacturing plants have massive electricity requirements) are but one group – albeit a very significant one. However, we endeavour at all times not to lose sight of the fact that the range of interest groups with which we interact is far broader, encompassing governmental organisations and regulatory bodies; our regional members of parliament, local authorities, parish councils and emergency services; our energy partners, suppliers and contractors and other electricity industry parties; environmental-interest and other lobby groups; social

welfare organisations such as Age UK, Action on Hearing Loss and British Red Cross; and not forgetting our own staff, their representatives and families and our investors and shareholders.

The scale of our interaction with stakeholders is also diverse, ranging from restoring a power cut within minutes all the way to building and connecting a wind farm that may take five years or more. The needs and expectations of these stakeholders may be entirely different and we recognise that the relationships we have built and continue to develop are also very different. Therefore, for ease of reference in the light of such diversity, this submission document is divided into sections by stakeholder group.

## Introduction

### TOP-DOWN COMMITMENT

Throughout the business there is a wholesale commitment to the principle of engagement. Stakeholder engagement and collaborative working are high on the executive agenda and permeates all areas of our business operations as this submission will outline.

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### STRUCTURE

- Our Business Promise
- Our Approach
- Responsive to Needs
- Our Business Promise
- Enhancing our Communication Channels
- Connecting Customers
- Facilitating Effective Competition
- Working in Partnership

“Our engagement strategy isn’t just plans and promises, but actual implementation, evaluation and results and we have the evidence of these outcomes to illustrate it.”

## Our Business Promise

### A NEW BUSINESS CULTURE

- We are revising our policies and processes to increase the direct interface we have with all stakeholder groups.
- We are seeking to be more 'visible' and 'open' to the customers/communities with whom we interact.
- We have an extensive stakeholder database
- We listen, respond and, most importantly, act on the feedback we collect.

All our stakeholder engagement activities are overseen by a dedicated group of senior managers who lead on Customer Service, Regulation & Strategy, Sustainability and Communication.

*'Building on strong foundations to create the power service of the future'*

During the 2011/12 regulatory year we have sought to advance and develop existing initiatives and undertaken considerable important, new activity that seeks to engage and involve our core customers/communities in shaping the future direction of our business in many different ways.

We have extended the range of stakeholder groups we focus on: starting on a new journey in some areas, such as fuel poverty and forging important partnerships in others, such as our increased joint initiatives with other utility companies, to help achieve greater, collaborative results.



## Our Approach

*"The way you have been with us has been first class. We got a very detailed outline of the whole repair job and replacement process. The meeting we had at the village hall where we were told about the project in detail was very well organised. You've also had your hospitality vehicle at the top of the village which was very good."* IAN STOTT, LOCAL PARISH COUNCILLOR, NORTHUMBERLAND

Stakeholder engagement is, and will remain, vital work in progress, enabling us continually to refocus our efforts and work to improve all the time.

As this document will show, the model and initiatives we've put in place are already delivering real results and we have big plans to extend this in the years to come.

A key leadership role in our business is to ensure that every change we intend to make in our company is challenged to see it passes the test of "your home, your business, your community".

In other words, would we be happy about the effect that the change would have on our own home, our own business and our own community?

The leadership of our business is to ensure that every change we intend to make in our company is challenged to see it passes the test of your home, your business, your community.



## Responsive to Needs

*"I telephoned your emergency number and spoke to Amanda. She was very helpful and told me that an engineer would be asked to call. She called me back a few minutes later to tell me that an engineer was on his way and would be with me in about 30 minutes. All in all, a first class service."*

CUSTOMER, HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING

*"After experiencing a couple of power cuts the other week you quickly identified and resolved what must have been a major problem. Even then you soon had the road dug up, problem solved and made good again. Also when I called your customer service centre on the Friday evening the lady who took my call was brilliant too."*

CUSTOMER, STOCKTON-ON-TEES

### CUSTOMERS

Keeping the lights on remains our core business and we continue to work at improving the ways we interact with customers when there is a power cut.

### DOMESTIC END-USERS

Staying close to the communities we serve and keeping people reassured and informed, particularly those more vulnerable customers, such as the elderly or disabled, is vital.

Based on feedback from customers we have undertaken a full review of our customer communication channels and made many significant improvements during the course of 2011/12.

### IMPROVED CALL HANDLING

Our customers want us to answer the telephones quickly and to be available during power cuts. To supplement our call centre staff, in 2011/12 we trained a team of 200 overflow call takers from around the business, who can take calls at busy times, such as during major fault incidents.

*'During 2012 to date, 33,077 calls have been handled by these overflow staff'*

### IMPROVING ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Customers also told us that they would like to receive updates during unplanned power cuts. We now call back and send text messages to customers during unplanned power cuts, providing updates such as estimated restoration times. We routinely ask customers for their mobile numbers and promote our new mobile phone application which provides information that customers can get to when they need it most during power cuts. This application will also improve the speed in which we can relay information to our customers and avoid the customer having to make a phone

call to obtain information about the power cut. In April alone, our mobile site had more than 35,000 page views and more than 12,000 visits.

We have also begun contacting customers, affected by an unplanned power cut, to follow up the next day, we do this to check that everything is back to normal with the electricity supply and to see whether the customer needs any further assistance.

### 2012 TO DATE

These figures show how the introduction of texting has improved our ability to communicate with customers

*Call backs, voicemail and text messages to customers with mobile telephones = 43.92%*

*Since the introduction of texts on 19th March 2012 = 63.05%*

From our feedback, we know our customers want straight-forward and accurate information, by listening to our customers' needs, we have put actions in place. To ensure all customers receive consistent, relevant and jargon-free information, we have appointed two dedicated trainers to support and develop all our contact centre agents and our 200 overflow staff.

Our market research company Explain assisted in investigating customer needs. Their surveys showed that customers value the estimated time when the power would be restored as the most important piece of information.

As a result, measures we have implemented include requiring that our customers are provided with an estimated time of reconnection within two hours of the fault being logged and also equipping our engineers on the ground with handheld technology to communicate more effectively throughout the cycle of the repair.

### SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Whilst we shall continue to build our relations with key stakeholders and respond to their needs, there are other areas of activity where those affected may have no effective voice, or where we have yet to develop a dialogue. In these areas, we are taking the initiative ourselves to make progress.

### HELPING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN SOCIETY

We understand that particularly in today's tough economic climate, there are certain members of society who find it hard to meet their energy bills and may have special requirements when our activities affect them. Whilst we are focused on the needs of physically vulnerable customers, we have not in the past concentrated specifically on issues of fuel poverty.

We are therefore working closely with other organisations, National Energy Action and Community Energy Solutions, to better understand how our activities affect the fuel poor and consider options for future joint working, where once again a collaborative approach will hopefully reap customer benefits. Additional actions to be taken forward in 2012.

We also know from our engagement with customers that people are concerned about the health impact of living under electric cables. To tackle this we visit people's homes to do tests for Electro Magnetic Field impact from overhead cables. High readings are very rare but we know there is a genuine fear and we want to do all we can to act on our customers' concerns.

Where necessary we will engage third parties to conduct surveys and liaise with housing developers/surveyors/planners/local authorities as appropriate.

## Enhancing our Communication Channels



Not content with simply improving our telephone operations. Customer feedback highlighted that many customers wanted to receive greater communication via web, Smartphone and social media applications. Add to that the speed, ease and efficiency conveying real-time information via these platforms, this was an area in which we strived to improve.



### SMART PHONE WEBSITE

Offering increased functionality, including postcode-driven real-time updates on power cuts, latest news and the ability to contact us on the move.

### ONLINE COMMUNITY

Launched in September 2011, our online forum already has over 450 members and we invite new customers and businesses to join on a monthly basis. Customers' discussion of topics gives a rich, additional source of information/opinion to influence future business decisions. We've set up communities for both residential customers and repeat order connections customers and they have discussed delivering a great extra high voltage quotation, Otley improvement plan, online connection service and tree trimming.

### ADDITIONAL WEB FUNCTIONALITY

In our drive to increase customer flexibility, we are starting to offer engineering services bookable through our website. Customers can now apply for, schedule, track and pay for temporary safety shrouding for overhead cables using our online self-service tool and we will offer more self-service options in the future. Since launch in September 2011, 753 customers have already used this. Likewise, our web analysis highlighted the desire for an online power cut checking service and usage statistics since this was added have demonstrated how our customers have welcomed it. Our independent survey showed 94% of customers were satisfied using this online service. Approximately 60% of all shrouding jobs are now completed online.

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Media monitoring revealed we were being mentioned on Twitter and we recognised that this was a mode of communication our customers wanted and could serve

us well in our desire to become more 'present' and 'readily accessible' to our stakeholders.

Our Twitter site: [twitter.com/#!/northpowergrid](https://twitter.com/northpowergrid) now has 183 followers (excl. staff).

We use it to inform customers that we are aware of faults in specific areas and to notify them of estimated restoration times, planned outages and local events. It has already been a key tool during a number of faults. In one incident in Sunderland, Sky News tweeted congratulating Northern Powergrid on quickly restoring supplies to its customers.

### STAKEHOLDER WEBSITE

Our dedicated stakeholder web pages feature opportunities for engagement with a dedicated email and 'Have Your Say' survey and feedback form through which we have been collecting satisfaction data. It notifies our stakeholders of forthcoming events and materials posted from past events and includes our stakeholder reports.

[www.northernpowergrid.com/stakeholders](http://www.northernpowergrid.com/stakeholders)

[www.northernpowergrid.com/stakeholder/haveyoursay.cfm](http://www.northernpowergrid.com/stakeholder/haveyoursay.cfm)

### IMPROVED ISSUE RESOLUTION

Inevitably there will always be times when customers experience problems with their electricity supply and a personal one-to-one approach is vital. Northern Powergrid takes a proactive approach to resolving customer issues, by training its team and putting the relevant business processes in place on an ongoing basis, so that fast and effective responses can be made. All feedback is then channelled back to the Customer Service Experience Improvement Meeting to drive further actions and improvements to our business processes.

Our Customer Ambassador Programme involves a group of 92 employee volunteers, trained to provide one-to-one support for customers during major incidents or for specific problems.

Through this we have identified many process and communication plan improvements that have been adopted into our ongoing business practices.

A good example was our despatch of a customer ambassador in response to a complaint from a resident in a National Park who was to be affected by an undergrounding scheme in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

This one-on-one contact resulted in a review and our development of an improved communication plan with more detailed letters and notices being sent to residents and an information meeting being held with parish councils, our staff and contractors prior to commencement of the work.

In fact we now have a customer ambassador who is a named point of contact for parish councils, he takes ownership of problem resolution for these groups and seeks to prevent community issues escalating.

We also provide a dedicated hotline for parish councils, which bypasses the main customer contact centre during major incidents.

A good example was the 'Otley Communication Plan'. In support of a major £1.2 million investment project in Otley we initiated a multi-layered communication campaign.

*This included:*

- A public information event in the town, advertised by maps, posters and display banners
- The deployment of a customer-service van and customer ambassadors at public meetings, market days and Otley Show

## Connecting Customers

A review of customer feedback with our care teams showed that some of our customers were frustrated at the level of personal contact they received back from us after raising a particular issue or concern. As a result a dedicated team of Customer Liaison Officers has been created across our five regional zones in which we operate. This team now enables us to facilitate frequent face to

face meetings and personal attention to the needs of our customers that can be lacking in telephone calls and correspondence. Our call agents and care team now have dedicated customer liaison officers who can get to the heart of any issues and ensure that we are meeting our customers' needs, particularly vulnerable customers. They have supported and resolved 700 cases where customers had complained or expressed dissatisfaction.

### CONNECTIONS CUSTOMERS

Our connections customers are those for whom we are establishing new connections, whether it be an extension to current electricity requirements or a complete new installation. They range from domestic customers to lighting authorities, and increased competition in connections has extended the range of organisations with whom we need to engage. Their engagement with us will typically be more extensive than with an ongoing domestic customer and strong, ongoing relationships are vital.

### DELIVERING IMPROVED SERVICE AND PROMOTING COMPETITION

Open and effective communication is critical for us to gain a clear understanding of the problems that our stakeholders may be encountering and to find solutions that are mutually satisfactory. We have made real strides to improve the service we offer to our connections customers, be it a single customer who needs a one-off new installation or a developer who regularly requires a number of new properties to be connected. We wholeheartedly support Ofgem in encouraging competition in connections and we set a clear plan in 2010 to extend the scope of the connections work that other connections companies can undertake on our network.

*"It's brilliant to have a main contact and we have an excellent working relationship"*  
PATRICIA POWER

Our six monthly programme of briefing seminars continues to be a great success. At these seminars we brief our customers on our performance, customer-service improvements and activities to encourage the development of competition.

We have a working action plan which has in excess of 40 actions driven by the direct feedback that we receive from Independent Connection Providers, Independent Distribution Network Operators and repeat customers.

We regularly feedback to these stakeholders on our progress at our six monthly events and in our stakeholder newsletter. Detailed below is some of the improvements that have been made. We will always take on more and maintain the action plan to provide services that meet their needs.

#### HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES:

- provision of a single point of contact or regular contacts so they could speak to the people to the right people to help them, first time; [ WORK IN PROGRESS ]
- **more flexibility around the use of email to communicate plans and drawings rather than posting hard-copy documents;** [ COMPLETE ]
- **access to more information online so it is available day and night;** [ COMPLETE ]
- **communication via a channel of their choice, i.e. website, telephone calls, seminars and newsletters;** [ COMPLETE ]
- **quicker telephone answering and improved accessibility, such as extended opening times;** [ COMPLETE ]
- **clearer information on quotations and options available;** [ COMPLETE ]
- **shorter waiting times for connection quotations and installation.**

[ WORK IN PROGRESS ]

### AS A RESULT OF THIS FEEDBACK

#### WE HAVE ALREADY:

Launched a programme of monthly surgeries, beginning May 2011, for our regular connections customers to visit us at our offices. The purpose of this was to enable face-to-face meetings with staff who have the right skills to:

- discuss options for designing new or potential projects
- provide updates on progress of existing projects
- discuss and resolve any issues to enable customers to make an informed decision before applying for a connection
- Removed the size limit on incoming emails so that customers can email plans and drawings to us;
- Increased the use of email communication rather than posting letters;
- Become more proactive in assisting customers when necessary information is missing from an application, by calling them immediately to avoid any potential delays from mail/email communication;
- Made improvements to connection application forms, including providing access to connections forms online and guidance notes on completing the forms. <http://www.northernpowergrid.com/downloads/>

*"I have had regular quarterly meetings... things have improved immensely"*

STEVEN WOODTHORPE-EVANS



## Facilitating Effective Competition

### WHAT GTC SAYS ABOUT US:

- *"They have been one of the first movers in extending contestability"*
- *"They have helped resolve some of the issues"*
- *"They have delivered a straight forward process"*
- *"They are a key player in the work to identify issues and resolving them"*
- *"They have shown an excellent commitment".*

Promotion of customer's choice of connections provider and improving accessibility of information is vital in ensuring that customers are able to make informed decisions with regard to price, quality and timescales when choosing their connections provider.

In our strides to improve the accessibility and openness of the connections markets we have kept the importance of maintaining active and positive relationships with Independent connection companies (including independent connection providers (ICPs) and independent distribution network operators (IDNOs) at the forefront of our plans. We believe this is the only way to ensure that customers receive a great service whether they choose to contract with the local distribution network operator or not. We believe that these companies have an important role in the connections and network operator markets.

### CONNECTIONS PROVIDERS

We continue to have active and positive relationships with other connections Providers. Our six-monthly briefing seminars, launched in October 2010, help encourage open, candid and mutually beneficial working relationships with our key partners and establish platforms for open debate of issues that need to be addressed. During these seminars we also update companies on our performance and explore ways that we can improve our processes and procedures to develop increased competition.

We have undertaken a range of initiatives to improve conditions in the marketplace for Connections Providers, giving them better access to information and increasing customer choice.

For example, we have enabled full access to Northern Powergrid mains records, via the internet, to independent providers and worked in partnership with independent connection provider and network operator, GTC, to pilot a streamlined process that has reduced connections lead times by 7 - 18 weeks.

- Mobilised extension of contestability project in April 2011. We produced and released our framework to partner independent providers in June 2011.
- In November 2011 GTC undertook the first extension of contestability live joint to Northern Powergrid's network.
- Introduction of connections self service at LV by extending contestability to live mains jointing and allowing self-determination of point of connection on LV schemes
- Introduction of connection self-assessment
- Simplification of our onsite quality inspection regime to remove any ratchet mechanism
- Removal of the need for a letter of authority for SLC15 applicants
- Improvement of access to relevant technical support material via website improvements
- Allowing of point-of-connection quotations to be accepted by parties other than the original applicant
- Introduction of an extended period for connection-offer acceptance from 30 to 60 days, with the flexibility to extend beyond 60 days where requested by the customer
- Introduction of electronic case management to improve timeliness of legal activities

### OUR STAKEHOLDERS TOLD US THAT THEY WOULD MOST VALUE:

- Provision of access to Northern Powergrid records systems;
- Implementation of self-connection for accredited Independent Connection Companies;
- Improved performance on wayleaves following acceptance;
- Northern Powergrid actively seeking opportunities to share expertise and develop best utility industry practice with stakeholders.

In responding to what this stakeholder group needed from us to enable them to operate more readily and freely we have undertaken a number of process and policy changes.

### THESE INCLUDE:

- providing direct secure access to our electronic records which provide the location and type of cables to enable connections providers to identify suitable points of connection to our network.
- Enabling Independent Connection Companies to self-connect onto the existing Northern Powergrid network. We have implemented a framework whereby accredited companies can make live low-voltage connections onto our existing mains and service cables, allowing them to work more freely to the timescales agreed with their customers.
- We have introduced a system of electronic case management to process and record the legal aspects of a connection job, such as applications for access to land when the cables or assets involved are on owned land.
- This system improves timeliness of legal activities and enables tracking of the progress of the legal process.



## Working in Partnership

We continue to work to improve the quality of information we give to suppliers. We hold regular quarterly calls with suppliers (known as DCP66), an initiative established by Northern Powergrid in 2008 that has been adopted by the industry as a standard. We also hold an annual charging workshop for suppliers and large end-users to explain the changes to our complex charging methodology.

### QUOTES ABOUT THE SEMINAR

*"Really informative compared to other DNO workshops (very good!)"*

*"Thank you, your colleagues and Northern Powergrid for an excellent informative presentation and for your time given today"*

*"Thanks guys. Relaxed, informative and beneficial"*

### STREET LIGHTING AUTHORITIES

We have a strong history of proactive engagement with Street Lighting Authorities. Northern Powergrid's Street Lighting Steering Group was the first in the UK to proactively introduce service-level agreements with regards to connections and fault repairs some 13 years ago and we have continued to respond to the needs of this group.

- In 2011 we have introduced a quarterly pricing review to ensure we give best possible value.
- We implemented an electronic daily fault report to keep all parties updated.

### LOCAL AUTHORITIES & EMERGENCY SERVICES

We are active members in all local emergency planning forums and work extremely closely with our partner agencies to respond to emergency situations. This ensures our responses are always executed fast, effectively and in conjunction with the other important authorities/providers.

Northern Powergrid supported a coordinated response to the potential fuel disruption that would have been caused should industrial action by tanker drivers have gone ahead during March 2012.

We have supported the set up of a regional responders' forum, called the Lifeline Service Group, to coordinate response activity from all northeast/ Yorkshire/Humber local forums.

We invited our other key utility partners in gas and water to attend the Northern Powergrid Major Incident Management seminar in 2011 and discussed a coordinated approach to business continuity in the face of severe weather or other crises.

### LOCAL AUTHORITIES

#### BEST PRACTICE IN STREET WORKS

Better co-ordination of street work between utilities and local authorities is an area of national political importance. We take an active role in moving this agenda forward.

Through the quarterly Regional Highway Authority and Utility Committee meetings the principal issues of policy determination within national HAUC guidelines are discussed specifically monitoring the effectiveness of local co-ordination arrangements and providing policy guidance on a local basis. They also facilitate local dispute resolution procedures. Performance reviews are also carried out at these meetings. Northern Powergrid's role in the group instrumental in the convergence of the Yorkshire & North of England utility groups. The groups formation and business plan was launched at the 2011 3 HAUCs' street works event.

Our aim is to be the northern voice for street works issues affecting our region, moving away from London-centric issues which may not be applicable to our region.

#### YORKSHIRE COMMON PERMIT SCHEME

6 of the Yorkshire authorities are to introduce permit schemes for street works. This affords them greater powers to co-ordinate and control works being undertaken in the public highway. The legislation was open to interpretation and utilities have been working closely with highway authorities to produce several advice notes for those involved in the design, planning, supervision and delivery of street works. Northern Powergrid led the development of a briefing package that delivers a common message to the street works community. This will be delivered to 1500+ utility and authority staff.

### SERVICE PROVIDERS DELIVERING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Our approved electrical contractors are commissioned to deliver a considerable amount of work on Northern Powergrid's behalf. They are often the direct interface between us and our end customers, therefore it is vital that we collaborate and share our insights.

- We work closely with our contractor partners to ensure that they meet our customers' needs.
- Monthly performance meetings (including safety and customers service issues)
- Measurement of performance metrics to compare contractor performance and identify specific areas where improvement is required.

A great example is the partnership working we have been doing with Morrison, our prime electrical contractor. We sought to understand how we could improve our customer experience and investigated improvements in technology, internal business processes and on the ground working practices. The understanding and recommendations generated from this initiative have now been adopted and are embedded in the ongoing business practices of both organisations.

### TACKLING METAL THEFT

Incidents of metal theft from Northern Powergrid assets have soared from 946 in 2010 to 1,622 in 2011. This has had a real impact on our customers, we are working hard to raise the awareness of metal theft and have developed partnerships with the local police and Crimestoppers to try and reduce this crime.

Northern Powergrid has developed a number of sustainable actions around stakeholder engagement including lobbying Government, liaison with the industry regulator, working with the HSE to raise awareness of the extent of the crime and joining the police on dawn raids against suspected thieves. We have a dedicated vulnerable asset manager to mitigate the impact of metal theft and ensure the safety of the public.

## Sustainability

The progress to a low-carbon economy is an area with major implications for the operation of a networks business and one where new ideas and developments are rapidly changing the way both we and our customers are operating. We therefore engage in active dialogue with customers, innovators and policy makers to find solutions to practical problems and to make sure that policy takes proper account of practical issues.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE NETWORKS

Developing out of contacts with customers, academics, installers of low carbon technology and other stakeholders, we are currently leading the largest smart grid project in the country - 'The Customer-Led Network Revolution' - into how to fulfil our energy needs of the future. Our strategic partners in this project are British Gas, Durham University and EA Technology, and we are also obtaining key inputs on fuel poverty from National Energy Action and on customer response from Sustainability First.

The project looks at how we can move towards a low carbon economy and help customers reduce both their energy costs and carbon emissions in the years to come.

As its title suggests, a key ingredient of the project is engagement with the customers involved, both individually and as part of their local community. While we were able to draw on our experience in customer and community engagement, we have gained enormously from partners British Gas and Durham University, whose knowledge and analysis of previously successful customer and community engagement projects, from around the world and in different areas, has provided essential benchmarking for our own efforts.

During 2011-12, we developed and agreed our customer engagement plan with Ofgem. We also built our community engagement strategy, combining the expertise of Durham University and our own community engagement experts. We aim in 2012-13 to use Durham University to monitor and review the success of this strategy, so that we can build the lessons learnt into our wider stakeholder engagement activities.

We initiated the community engagement process in 2011-12 in Maltby, South Yorkshire, where there is a community with a high installation of solar panels.

We worked with local councillors to explain our project and inform them and the customers concerned about a short, planned outage to install monitoring equipment at a substation. This will enable us to gain an understanding of the load differences between Maltby and a typical community and feed this information into our research data. The feedback was very positive.

### ENERGY PARTNERS & CUSTOMERS

The activities of DNOs are an essential part of the national energy and climate change policy framework. Just as our own activities are affected by national and regional energy decisions, we can also help by taking an active role in helping to develop those decisions.

We therefore regularly contribute to the development of policy and share our own experiences and responses through a variety of regional and national forums.

- Member of North East Energy Leadership Council
- CBI regional council
- North East Chamber of Commerce energy policy group
- CBI national energy policy committee

### LOW-CARBON INNOVATION

We are increasingly aware of the need for innovation and research if we are to help deliver the low-carbon economy. While our main focus has been on our own innovation projects, and especially the Customer-Led Network Revolution, we have engaged with universities in our region to assist in developing research proposals and deliver research results.

For example, we contributed to a project run by Newcastle University on developing sustainable transport. We also took part in work led by Durham University on the implications for the fuel poor of an increase in the amount of renewable energy generation.

### DISTRIBUTED GENERATION CONNECTIONS CUSTOMERS

We strive to improve the service that we deliver to distributed generation (DG) customers, whose connection enquiries are rapidly increasing as the UK develops its low carbon agenda.

As a direct result of stakeholder feedback last spring we held a microgeneration event in partnership with CO<sub>2</sub> Sense to explain how customers connect DG to our network. The event was a huge success with over 150 stakeholders in attendance and was met with a very positive response.

Our customer engagement forums and online/social media channels are all a rich source of information around this important subject area.

- We have added additional functionality to the Northern Powergrid website for DG customers including an online GDUOS calculator and generator data facility.
- We have launched a national initiative, in conjunction with training agency, Environlink and Salford University, to provide training on National Grid connections to small and medium-scale generation installers and make it easier for generators to work with DNOs.
- We are also collaborating with National Grid on a new, technical device that would in the long term allow distributed generation to be installed more quickly.