

Part 2

Delivering meaningful outcomes for our stakeholders and customers

2019 - 2020 | Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability Incentive

Welcome

We are Northern Powergrid, a business that always tries to put people's needs first. Day and night, we maintain the infrastructure that's keeping the lights on, heating homes, powering businesses and helping to improve the overall quality of life for more than eight million people in the North East of England, Yorkshire, and northern Lincolnshire.

8m⁺

customers

42,300

miles of underground
distribution lines

2,688

colleagues

17,400

miles of overhead
distribution lines

Our regional structure enables our teams to best serve the needs of our customers



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This is Part 2 of our submission to Ofgem's Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability (SECV) Incentive for the regulatory year 2019/20. Our SECV submission comprises three parts:

Part 1

An overview of the way Northern Powergrid works, describing how our business strategy meets and exceeds Ofgem's minimum requirements.

Part 2

More details of our activities this year, what we've learned, and how we're continuously improving the way we engage with stakeholders.

Part 3

A report that explores our consumer vulnerability strategy and our development of a new social inclusion plan to ensure nobody is left behind during the transition to renewable energy.

1 Introduction

Stakeholder engagement is key to our business strategy and integral to commercial success. Proactive engagement lets us find better ways to help people benefit from the energy they're using. It keeps us abreast of changing needs. However, our stakeholders are increasingly focused on tackling the climate emergency. They want more opportunities to collaborate on plans that strive for net zero and create a clean and sustainable society.

We can only achieve this by responding effectively. This year, we've been liaising with partners, adopting a coordinating role and pooling our insights and learnings. Together, we can develop solutions to benefit our customers and stakeholders, here in our region, and across the UK.

Improved, holistic engagement

A commitment to continuous cycles of improvement is something we take pride in, and we see two-way engagement – listening to peers, sharing learnings – as a privilege. Every day we engage with our customers, and our teams speak constantly to our stakeholders. This year, we have also engaged through over **100** tailored sessions. By responding to feedback, we've widened the breadth of engagement pathways, now using **26** different methods, enabling us to speak to over **450,000** stakeholders either online, at conferences, interviews, round tables or digitally. Across our business, teams have worked hard to ensure our approach is comprehensive, coordinated and holistically embedded.

From our conversations, we've improved our strategy – focusing on four strategic themes that are important to stakeholders now and for the future:



Strong, tangible outcomes

Addressing feedback from last year, we've worked hard to demonstrate positive outcomes resulting from our engagement, how it's enabling service improvements and how we are delivering more comprehensive social benefit from our investments. We know this improved strategy is working.

We review and challenge our engagement approach through our annual audit against the assessment standard of the AA1000. We have now moved to a six month review process to reflect the intensity and breadth of the RIIO ED2 engagement programme – providing close scrutiny of our approach to deliver the most comprehensive and effective engagement programme and the right business plan for our customers, and we've restructured our governance process so that it encourages greater accountability from all areas of our business.

I am very proud Northern Powergrid's work has seen us connect with so many people and businesses, in 2019/20. We've delivered **289** meaningful outcomes for stakeholders over the last year.

Collaborative working strengthens regional engagement

Momentum in our region – in terms of decarbonisation – is increasing, and we must adapt to this changing world. The transition itself influences how we engage with people, but it will also shape their perspectives of us as an operator.

So, we've taken care to improve the alignment of our strategy and objectives to mirror those of our stakeholders, particularly around concerns for climate change and fuel poverty (see Part 3). This has improved attendance at events and increased requests for us to speak at regional and national conferences, and we've seen greater levels of satisfaction from stakeholders across the board. In short, we've

become a regional locus for improvement and shared learning – connecting stakeholders to industry experts who can share important lessons and knowledge. Our long-term aim is to be an exemplar in collaborative working.

Engagement is everyone's responsibility and as part of this we have restructured our business around our regions, with a greater focus on local accountability, led by General Managers in each area with newly recruited Customer Service Managers, supporting our stakeholders where they live and work. These changes, and the increase in the scale, reach and adaptability of our engagement has seen an uplift in the number of stakeholders with whom we actively engage. Embracing more digital engagement methods, initially to respond to the needs of our time poor and hard to reach stakeholders – and more recently as a response to COVID 19 circumstances – has allowed us to strengthen relationships with previously under-represented and hard to reach groups of people.

Turning innovation into enduring benefits for our customers

A strong engagement strategy should turn pilots, small scale projects and innovative practice into business as usual, providing they are cost-efficient and can deliver scalable benefits for our customers and stakeholders.

We know keeping costs low and demonstrating value for money is important for our customers. Through effective project management that embraces stakeholder feedback, we continually strive to find ways of delivering more for less. This year, we've been pursuing innovation that will deliver much better outcomes for our customers, and innovation comes in all shapes and sizes:

- ✓ **Delivering an open-source Future Energy Scenarios Tool that supports future net-zero planning – a UK first.**
- ✓ **Working with the Federation of Small Businesses to develop a central decarbonisation portal for SMEs and micro-businesses.**
- ✓ **Co-created our AutoDesign Tool with stakeholders – shortening new connections approval times for decarbonisation infrastructure.**
- ✓ **Introduction of an enduring social legacy programme for communities that are impacted by large investment schemes.**
- ✓ **Embedded social inclusion into DSO and our energy transition plans.**

As our case studies will show, our stakeholder engagement work has never been as holistic as it is now in terms of collecting data, understanding and embedding insights into our business, with a robust cycle of continuous improvement. We are consistently, and constantly, delivering innovative practices as business as usual.

Patrick Erwin
Policy and Markets
Director



2 Our engagement strategy

While our vision to be the best energy company in serving our customers remains constant, our means to deliver on this commitment are not.

We underpin our engagement strategy with **26 core pathways**, in which our stakeholders can interact and influence our plans; empowering them to shape the future of the services we deliver to meet their changing needs and wants. And the stakes have never been higher; we are partnering with stakeholders and enabling them to achieve their **net-zero goals**, while ensuring that we deliver a **socially inclusive service for all**, with a considered focus on the vulnerable within our communities.

These pathways are long-established and mature, for example, expert panels and deliberative engagement workshops, and we are continually driving our engagement to make sure we reach out to hard to reach and under-represented groups through both established and new communication channels. This approach allows us to reach out to more

stakeholders and customers than ever before, ensuring that our service and our plans meet the wide-ranging needs of everyone in our region.

And because we use such a broad array of engagement and have strengthened our data models, we have a comprehensive understanding of customer needs and how these are changing. This understanding influences our everyday plans as well as informing and enhancing the development of our ED2 planning.

Siobhan Barton
Head of Stakeholder Relations



Increasing scrutiny and accountability of our engagement programmes

Embedded

Our expert panels (for example our External Stakeholder Panel and our Social Issues Expert Group) play an important role in holding our business to account, scrutinising and validating our engagement across the year.

Actions

We asked our panel members to review their role in holding us to account, and agreed a new approach that enables our expert stakeholders to scrutinise, validate and recommend changes to our engagement programmes and business priorities with greater authority.

Outcomes and benefits

Over the last 12 months our stakeholder panel has:

- ✓ **Extended the reach of our flexibility offer** – advising on the delivery of our e-auction process for flexibility services pilot tender.
- ✓ **Got hands on with community energy** – supported the design of the Community Energy Project in Boston Spa, recommended inclusion of major energy

users as a key stakeholder group, and advised on rollout of a successful project to areas of vulnerability in Yorkshire and the North East.

- ✓ **Rebalanced our engagement programme** – proposed a rebalance of Northern Powergrid events such as webinars and the annual summit, to include more time for discussion, challenge and networking for delegates.
- ✓ **Increased our reach** – asking for more PSR and Community Partnering Fund promotion to local Parish Councils across our regions.
- ✓ **Sustainability first** – guided an improved sustainability plan for our engagement, including more provision for delegates to travel to events by public transport, by relocating to “socially valuable” venues near to transport hubs.
- ✓ **Tackling hard to reach** – recommended a series of engagements with stakeholders at the “periphery” of Northern Powergrid’s operating area, resulting in a series of “regional network events” across Northern Powergrid regional zones.

- ✓ **Co-created** – tested our AutoDesign tool and approved for initial launch – while suggesting increased functionality through additional connection options.
- ✓ **Making it easier for our customers to navigate our processes** – requested a dedicated advice document for customers looking to install EV connections.
- ✓ **Driving our transition to DSO** – consulted on the development of two rounds of DSO strategy and advised and approved the latest engagement and communications plan for DSO.
- ✓ **Building a fit for purpose EV infrastructure for the region** – supported, challenged and co-authored our EV readiness guide, helping stakeholders with their transport decarbonisation plans.
- ✓ **Challenging our speed of decarbonisation** – requested and reviewed information on Northern Powergrid’s installation of EV charging points at depots in Yorkshire and the North East.

Removing barriers to engagement by introducing a new digital approach

New

Stakeholder feedback

Feedback in 2019 told us many stakeholders found it hard to attend events. Geographic restrictions, caring responsibilities or time pressures make it hard for many to have their say on our plans and our work. Because we want truly representative engagement, we need to do more. Specifically, stakeholders asked for conference calls and webinars, with pre-recorded sessions for later access. Our established digital approach, this year, has also enabled us to swiftly adapt our engagement programme to face the challenges of COVID-19. But engagement shouldn’t be digital-only, and we have kept traditional channels open, especially for harder to reach stakeholders.

Actions

- ✓ We asked stakeholders how they would like to engage with us, and spoke to our expert panels to get their views on improving diversity.
- ✓ Each time our business wants to consult or engage on a topic or programme, we now offer a digital engagement option for stakeholders.
- ✓ We are now using new platforms to offer training alongside consultation, supporting a wider range of opportunities for our stakeholders.
- ✓ We trained colleagues on digital engagement platforms including Zoom, StreamGo, Mailchimp and online survey tools, helping them understand our new approach.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ We held over **20** digital engagements in the last 12 months and our pre-recorded discussions have been viewed over **1,200** times.
- ✓ We’re engaging with more people. For example, a webinar supporting our EV strategy document in late 2019 attracted **+150** participants – a dramatic increase on previous, face to face briefing sessions. Similarly, **+100** stakeholders took part in our recent heat maps webinar.
- ✓ A new, dedicated website for stakeholder engagement with useful information and reports all in one place, has been developed.
- ✓ Expanded our online database of representative contacts by **100%** to **5,000** contacts.
- ✓ Introduced a new conference app that has been downloaded **174** times and facilitated **124** conversations.

3 Delivering stakeholder benefits

Recognising industry good practice, we worked with Accent and PJM Economics to review our quantification of benefits approach. With clear recommendations, we strengthened the quantification of benefits delivered by our initiatives, applying robust financial outcome quantification, where possible.

We are collaborating in the development of a common national framework for benefits measurement, currently at proposal stage, being considered by Ofgem for RIIO2. Preparing for this, we are working with Impact Utilities Analytics to build a benefits measurement model to more accurately calculate Social Return on Investment.

This model, applied at initiative level, calculates the quantitative benefit and strengthens qualitative outcome reporting. Taking project objectives, levels of investment, WTP data, outcomes and stakeholder feedback, the model triangulates the differing sources of outcomes and benefits to calculate in-year and cumulative benefits.

This is a learning process that will expand, guiding our engagement programme, ensuring we return maximum value to customers, and will also inform the national approach.

The table below illustrates a number of diverse initiative examples and their outcomes, with full case studies included across the submission.

Key Caring for our environment ● Delivering a social legacy ● Meeting and exceeding our customers' needs ● Preparing for the energy transition ●						
		Example actions and outputs	Stakeholders	Benefit to stakeholders	Investment	Benefit value
EV charger installations on NPG sites	● ●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Installation of 22 EV charging units across 10 locations. 3 new electric vans and 5 electric cars introduced to our fleet. (See page 4) 	Staff, Visitors, General Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 385 individual charge sessions at our depot chargers. Increase in colleague use of EV's, from 10 to 22. 	£93,756	5 tCO ₂ saved: £4,466 Forecast for 100 charge points: £20,300
Bradford investment programme- Phase 1	● ●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 monthly meetings with the local council. Leaflet drops, public drop in events, local advertising. Digital campaigns. Written briefings to services such as Fire service. Tree planting. Safety talks in schools. (See page 10) 	MPs, Bradford Council, Highways Team, Ward Co-ordinators and Councillors, Local Community Groups, Transport Operators, Schools, Emergency Services, Local Businesses, Road Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 22.5% growth in PSR registrations for vulnerable customers across our large investment schemes. 48,000 trees planned - carbon offsetting 3,200 tco₂ over their lifespan. Funding for 6 STEM teachers. 99.5% success rate in domestic customer cable replacements. Closer community working saved avg. 14 days of disruption on investment schemes. 	£125,302	£335,641
Leeds tower blocks programme	● ●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted PSR campaign supported by widely distributed communications explaining the work being carried out. 24hr hotline and posters in every affected building. (See page 10) 	Domestic Customers, Vulnerable Customers, Local Authorities, Members of Parliament, Civic Leaders, Community Partners, Contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 207 new PSR customers since project began (+30%). 30% fewer cancellations by customers for upgrade work. 	c. £280,000 for customer engagement	£17,995
Safety outreach campaign	● ●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness and education drive across digital and print channels, reaching 30,000 farmers. Look Up Live campaign - 6,506 leaflets. 	Farmers and Farm Workers, School Children and their Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education around safety to reduce the number of electricity related deaths and accidents. Electrical safety messaging delivered to 53,000+ school children. 	£1,200	£3,798
	● ●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 140 meaningful conversations. Gave out 8,500 leaflets Hard hitting print and digital campaign about farm safety. This led to 4,215 views on our agricultural safety page. 	Rural and Agricultural Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.5% reduction in farm deaths and accidents, 30% reduction in indirect overhead line strikes and a 24% decrease overall for all vehicle types. A 49% increase in PSR sign ups in the month of the Great Yorkshire Show. 	£23,367	£146,492
EV Readiness Tool	● ●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-creation sessions involving 22 Local Authorities and 15 LEPs to explore stakeholder needs and refine in response. Demonstrated the tool at each stage of development in a wide range of engagement settings. (See page 5) 	New Connections Customers, Local Authorities, EV Early Adopters, Businesses, Major Energy Users, LEPs, Domestic Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of cost-efficient locations for new LV network, reduction of quote time from 10 working days to minutes. Additional colour-blind indicators being developed, estimated savings of £150 per application. 100% of users have rated the tool "useful" or "very useful." Frees up our resource for more complex enquiries and dedicated support for stakeholders. 	c. £1.1m NB: Project was funded via NIA innovation fund	Year 1: £207,484 5 year forecast: £1,360,080
Community Energy Outreach Programme	● ●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using insights from smart meters and 3 local substations, we are working with the local community in Boston Spa on a pilot energy project to reduce domestic voltages. Sponsored Community Energy England's conference and discussed our plans with over 150 relevant stakeholders. (See page 8) 	Customers and Community Energy Groups, Stakeholder Panel, Social Issues Expert Group, REGEN, Community Energy England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better decision making from public organisations. A growth in community energy groups in our region. Our Boston Spa project shows initial results in the region of £40-£50 p/a for some customers. Our 2019 pilot results show potential scalability, UK-wide, for 29.7 million consumers. 	£10,000 for pilot Scaling up to c. £600K	Pilot: £245,700 NPg: £64,258,199 GB: £445,989,726
Future Energy Scenarios	● ● ●	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 100+ stakeholders engaged in early adoption of the modelling tool. Partnered with ODI (Open Data Institute) Leeds to build on industry best practice. Promoted the tool via a direct campaign and consulted via 6 co-creation workshops to design and test the platform and gather feedback. (See page 8) 	ODI, Local Authorities, Developers, LEPs, Community Partners, Other DNOs, Element Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scenarios allow stakeholders to greatly improve future system planning for low carbon technologies. Scenarios help vulnerable customer stakeholders accurately predict where changes in future energy make up could impact fuel poor customers. 	c. £140,000	N/A* *Future Energy Scenarios underpin better decision making which at this stage cannot be quantified.

4 Caring for the environment

We are in a climate emergency and the pace of change in the UK energy system must accelerate to match this challenge and the changing needs of our customers and stakeholders. We are already responding to stakeholders' concerns by coordinating plans and strategies and developing a collaborative commitment to conserving biodiversity.

To make sure we're also playing our part, we have a strong internal focus in this area and we are making plans and delivering actions that will reduce the environmental impact of our business. We have audited our business and discovered how we can practically offset the CO₂ we produce while we take action to bring down emissions over time. We're using vehicle telematics dynamically, helping to reduce our mileage by **25%** over eight years, we've replaced **over 200km** of oil-filled cable to date and we will shortly plant **48,000** trees in the Great Northern Forest – saving **3,200 tons** of CO₂, with plans to dramatically expand our planting programme.

Effective engagement enables the UK's first ever EV charger powered farmers' market

New

Stakeholder feedback

We're proactively talking to Local Authority partners about their EV and decarbonisation plans. Hambleton Council told us they were eager to provide on-street charging in their towns and villages, particularly in Thirsk, which hosts a weekly market in the town's ancient cobbled square – providing a much-needed economic boost for market traders and rural residents.

Having co-developed a way to cleverly disguise chargers using street bollards in keeping with the picturesque local street furniture, on-street charging also creates a new revenue stream for the Council by selling electricity to traders to power their

market stalls and will improve air quality as the chargers replace polluting, noisy diesel generators.

Actions

- ✓ To support this roll-out, we acted quickly to adapt our internal processes in order to support non-postcoded connections.
- ✓ By entering an open dialogue with the Council, we identified the need for modernisation of the connections approach and implemented company-wide changes to reflect this requirement.
- ✓ System upgrades have now been made and all connections requests can now bypass the postcode element.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ EV charging bollards have powered Thirsk's farmers market since September 2019 – making it the UK's first farmers' market to be powered by EV infrastructure.
- ✓ A scalable solution that will be installed in nearby market towns.
- ✓ EV infrastructure removes the need for polluting, noisy diesel generators, improving local air quality and reducing noise pollution for residents.
- ✓ Micro-businesses and SMEs are being supported in their decarbonisation efforts.
- ✓ Enabling the creation of new energy markets and revenue streams for rural Councils.

Using quick drying eco-paint to improve environmental performance.

Replicable

Stakeholder feedback

Our stakeholders tell us that the reliability of our network remains their top priority and they also want us to look for further ways to reduce the environmental impact of our work. As part of our sustainability approach, our asset managers have worked with a new paint supplier on a new coating for our sub stations and other materials which is water based (an industry first), quick drying and saves carbon due to its unique formula. Following a successful trial in 2019, we are now deploying the new paint network-wide across our regions.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ We expect the new paint to reduce asset down time by **166 days** (4,000 hours) a year as assets can be painted more quickly and come back online faster, improving reliability for our customers.
- ✓ **Reduced asset downtime** increases network resilience while also cutting the costs involved in asset protection to enable better value for money for customers.
- ✓ If rolled out across the UK electricity industry, the eco-paint could save more than **5.5 million tonnes** of Volatile Organic Compounds from being emitted into local air.
- ✓ The new paint needs a much thinner coat to deliver protection, **reducing raw material use by one third**, supporting stakeholder environmental priorities.

Enhanced

Partnership working to actively address the impact of flooding

Stakeholder feedback

Our stakeholders are increasingly invested in climate change adaptation and look to us as a key partner in enabling this work. Calderdale in West Yorkshire has been particularly badly hit by flooding in recent years. 2020 was the third time that Hebden Bridge experienced widespread flooding in five years, heavily impacting people's homes and businesses and local stakeholders asked us to develop a plan to improve local resilience and maintain power supplies during future bouts of extreme weather.

Actions

- ✓ As a result of a strong partnership with Calderdale Council, we brought forward our **£200,000** investment programme by 12 months, replacing four flood-prone substations in Hebden Bridge with a new one built on higher ground.
- ✓ Substation replacement activity must be carried out before the clocks change at the end of October each year, so we worked with Calderdale Council through summer 2019 to secure permissions and consulted with local customers on the needed changes – delivering them all on time and, thankfully, before the unexpected flooding in early 2020.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ Completing the work last summer has meant the town's power supply was unaffected by February's devastating flooding across the Calder Valley.
- ✓ No substations were impacted, and electricity supplies were maintained, meaning the clean-up and restoration of homes and businesses was much quicker than in previous flood events.
- ✓ We have expanded our business plan target to defend **156 sites**, by an additional **98 sites** by the end of 2021, providing more resilience, ahead of schedule.

Delivering decarbonised support to vulnerable customers

Embedded

Stakeholder feedback

Stakeholders told us that our diesel generators are not a long-term option if we are serious about addressing our environmental commitments.

Our Social Issues Expert Group also challenged us to move faster in deploying our battery generators with a particular focus on rolling them out to vulnerable customers.

Actions

- ✓ Accelerated the development and deployment of Silent Power, a green mobile alternative to diesel generators.
- ✓ Consulted with our Expert Panels to create a definition of medical dependency and circumstantial conditions to guide the deployment of Silent Power.
- ✓ Scaled up Silent Power with an initial fleet of 3 vans in 2019. We have plans to expand this fleet across 2020.
- ✓ Shared knowledge and performance assessments with other DNOs through reporting documents and live demonstrations of the new technology.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ Up to **3 homes or 1 community centre** can be powered by one Silent Power van for up to 24 hours delivering green energy using battery generators without noise or pollution.
- ✓ If rolled out across every power outage in our region this would save **300 tonnes CO₂** a year.
- ✓ During the Covid-19 emergency, one of our Silent Power Vehicles was **assigned to support a local pharmacy** in Sunderland during an unplanned power cut.
- ✓ Shared learning is enabling greater use of battery support generators for vulnerable customers in other DNO operator areas where they have previously used older or larger, less flexible solutions.

Supporting the delivery of rapid charging infrastructure for the North

New

Stakeholder feedback

In preparation for the decarbonisation of transport, we're exploring how we can enable the expansion of rapid charging infrastructure for electric vehicles with the Office for Low Emission Vehicles (OLEV).

Actions

- ✓ Engaged with OLEV and BEIS on barriers to rapid charging technology and the Government's ambitions in this area.
- ✓ Set up a working group with motorway service companies to understand their plans and set out areas of convergence.
- ✓ Proactively assessed our network and developed a heatmap of spare, cost-efficient capacity on our network for the provision of rapid charging stations.

Outcomes

- ✓ The work we've done is enabling OLEV to **better understand the real costs of installing rapid charging** and the potential capacity available to support the rollout of rapid charging at key strategic locations and future costing options.
- ✓ We have identified **110 MW** of spare capacity on our network – with the potential to install over **1,000** rapid charging stations at service locations.
- ✓ Our **heatmap** gives service station companies a clear view on the cost efficiencies of rapid chargers which will support future business modelling.

Stakeholder-led tool helps to accelerate EV uptakes

Innovative

Stakeholder feedback

Local authorities are installing EV chargers as a response to the climate emergency.

It used to take up to 10 working days to discover if there was enough capacity on the LV network for a charger via our previous application process and there was a £150 fee for some applications.

Our Local Authorities tell us they are looking for practical steps to accelerate the EV transition, so we have developed AutoDesign – a free, online tool that gives near-instantaneous answers about charger capacity and indicative connection costs.

Actions

- ✓ Hosted a series of co-creation sessions involving **22** Local Authorities and **15** LEPs to explore the needs of our stakeholders in this area.
- ✓ Demonstrated the tool at **each stage of development** in a wide range of settings, including our Connections Customer Forums, ICP seminars, Stakeholder Summit, dedicated webinars, Local Authority forums and Expert Panels - with insights fed back to the design team to shape functionality and usability.
- ✓ Launched our new tool in January 2020 at our Local Authority Forum with **29** stakeholders and direct communications to initial users in the public sector.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ Helps **identify best locations for new LV network EV chargers** in terms of capacity and connection cost.
- ✓ Uses a universally understood traffic-light system.
- ✓ **Reduces time for indicative quote** from 10 working days to minutes.
- ✓ Frees up our resource for more complex enquiries and dedicated support for stakeholders - through face to face and new Webex surgeries.
- ✓ Will be rolled out for wider connections stakeholders (i.e. housebuilders) following successful uptake by Local Authorities.
- ✓ **100%** of users have rated the tool "useful" or "very useful".
- ✓ Calculated financial benefit in year 1 of **£207,484**, and a five year financial benefit of **£1,360,080** for our region.

Enabling SME decarbonisation with a new online portal

New

Stakeholder feedback

Last year we reported on our work supporting SMEs with energy efficiency advice. Feedback from SMEs has demonstrated the need for a central portal of advice on decarbonisation – led by a neutral, trusted party that can reach out to this historically "hard to reach" group.

Actions

We approached the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) – already members of our expert stakeholder panel – to find out how we can understand more about SMEs' specific needs and whether they are willing to support the development of a centralised advice portal as a "neutral" party.

Via workshops and scoping sessions with the FSB, we're creating an online tool to provide expert advice. Easy to access, it will focus on practical advice and will be hosted by the FSB – with support from wider partners in energy, water and infrastructure.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ Once complete, the portal will provide guidance to **+160,000** FSB members on areas of carbon literacy and practical advice on how they can do more for the environment.
- ✓ Enabling SMEs to make **wiser investment decisions** to sustain business activity during the transition to net-zero.

5 Meeting and exceeding our customers' needs

Across our business we continually use insight from our customers to understand how we can improve our customer experience and truly **Make Every Contact Count**. We're always striving for greater improvements, and 2019 was a year focused on accountability and ownership of customer relationships as well as broadening customer participation in shaping services for the future.

To ensure we have embedded personal ownership, accountability and a customer first culture, we developed and rolled out our 'Customer First' training for delivery to all colleagues. We also recently launched our Consumer Panel, with over 60 customers representing all areas of our region, and Future Consumer Panels – helping us to shape services and our long term thinking.

Testament to the team's progress are our best ever customer satisfaction scores which reflect our achievements and commitment

to our customers. Additionally, at the National Customer Service Awards our team won in three categories, achieving '**Best Medium Sized Contact Centre, Best in Sector**' and our colleague Laura Tumelty, was named '**Best Customer Service Agent**' – providing a valuable measurement of our training capabilities.

Louise Lowes
Customer Service
Improvement Manager



Embedding the delivery of high-quality customer service through 'Customer First' Training

New

Stakeholder feedback

We know making every contact count is important, particularly for vulnerable customers, and feedback from customers and stakeholders across all services tells us that they want to see improved communications standards.

16% of customers who suggest improvements to our service, specifically ask us to improve communications.

It is essential that all our colleagues and contractors know how to respond to the diverse needs of those we serve – from our contact centre to our frontline staff.

Actions

- ✓ We developed a programme of training for all our colleagues to improve customer service standards – responding to customer feedback.
- ✓ In the last 12 months we've rolled out 'Customer First' training across our business.
- ✓ An e-learning package provides information about the behaviours and skills needed to consistently deliver high levels of service and an excellent customer experience.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ Over **700** frontline colleagues trained with our new model in the 2019/2020 regulatory year.
- ✓ Training planned for all **2,800** Northern Powergrid colleagues in 2020 and pilot for contractors and partners working on our network assets.
- ✓ General improvement in customer satisfaction of **2.2% to 89%**.

Improving real time communication with our customers through our planned power cuts app

Stakeholder feedback

Customers want accurate, specific communications around power cuts – with clearer timings and information on how it will impact daily routines. In the 12 months to December 2019, **7.1%** of customers polled wanted more information about our work and **4.5%** wanted more accurate timings from us.

Actions

- ✓ We brought together colleagues from across our business to better understand the timeline of a planned power-cut and how we could improve our customers' experience.
- ✓ We documented the optimum customer journey and tested this with a range of customers including PSR customers.
- ✓ We developed a bespoke, in-house app that enables immediate text messaging communications to our customers, providing real-time progress updates to tell them if we are on track and when we will complete.

- ✓ We also identified an opportunity to use our CRM to improve all customer communications, which were moved onto the system, giving our colleagues a centralised view of direct engagement for each household and customer in our region.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ **70%** increase in proactive contact of PSR customers before and during power cuts.
- ✓ **1,048%** increase in proactive contact to our most vulnerable PSR customers during all power cuts.
- ✓ **1.7%** improvement in BMCS Planned Power Cut satisfaction since the launch of the app.
- ✓ **42%** reduction in customers requesting more updates during the course of a power cut.
- ✓ To date we have updated **22,000** customers, and sent over **37,000** texts in support of over **600** outages.

Online service for SafeDig applications

New

In 2018-19, customers told us we could improve the turnaround time for SafeDig applications.

So this year, we developed a new online self-service application to enable our customers to identify when it was safe to dig near our assets.

The new application gives immediate access to our online records, creating a better experience for our customers, instant completion of applications, and has resulted in a **2.5%** increase in customer satisfaction scores relating to the speed of service.

Improved connections application process

Enhanced

Our regular connections customers asked us to simplify the small works connections application process. We worked with them to develop a simplified, more intuitive application form that can be completed online, and launched a 'quote on site' service for customers.

This has resulted in a **15%** improvement in the quality of applications received, and supported faster decision making. Excellent feedback received includes; **"the application seems great, straight forward and covers everything we need."**

Deploying new technologies to enhance our support for customers in emergency situations

Innovative

Stakeholder feedback

Late 2019 saw large scale flooding across our region, with the village of Fishlake particularly badly hit. Though most of our electricity assets were already protected from the flooding, one substation was affected and stakeholders in the area asked us to make our services available to support the wider recovery effort.

Actions

- ✓ Deployed remote monitoring drones to assess our network assets and the wider situation – sharing our feed with emergency partners to support wider response efforts.
- ✓ Posted permanent colleagues on site as a point of contact for residents and rapid response repairs once flooding receded.
- ✓ Assigned a customer service vehicle to support local vulnerable customers and act as a hub for the armed forces and emergency service response.

- ✓ Distributed over **100** laminated safety leaflets to ensure local residents were aware of our response at all times.
- ✓ Instituted an “end to end” onsite service for affected customers, making sure engineers worked with local residents personally, until the point of resolution.
- ✓ Coordinated repair work across utilities to make sure they took place simultaneously for domestic customers.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ **Cut the number of disruptive interventions** by utilities for domestic customers from four to one, saving time during the recovery period.
- ✓ Gold Command meeting attendance is now mandatory for Northern Powergrid – recognising the effectiveness of our response in Fishlake.
- ✓ **Drone monitoring** is now embedded as a standard technology in our flood response protocols and we have shared our learning in this area with emergency response, utility partners and others.
- ✓ The use of drones **improved our response times** – allowing us to assess an otherwise inaccessible situation from the air, in real time.

Maximising outcomes: supporting rural stakeholders in a time of unprecedented challenge

Enhanced

Stakeholder feedback

Following 2018/19's unusually harsh weather, which contributed to a rise in agricultural vehicle accidents, representative groups asked us to expand our safety engagement in partnership with the NFU, in order to grow our reach amongst this often isolated group of stakeholders.

Actions

- ✓ Distributed **6,000** safety information leaflets inside the British Farmers and Growers magazine.
- ✓ Set up a series of face to face briefings at local NFU meetings and spoke directly with **80** farmworkers about keeping safe around our assets.
- ✓ Introduced free farm safety signage for agricultural workers. We have distributed over **1,000** signs in 2019/20.
- ✓ Working with Colleges including Askham Bryant and Bishop Burton, we reached **2,000** students with direct safety messaging.
- ✓ Hosted a farm safety workshop at the **National Farm Safety Forum**, engaging industry leaders in discussions about the work we're doing to make our network safer for agricultural workers.

- ✓ Improved safety messaging at the Great Yorkshire Show with **8,500** leaflets sent out to all Yorkshire Agricultural Society (YAS) members, **2,000 Look Up It's Live** flyers and **four 30 second adverts** on screens throughout the grounds.
- ✓ Created an **interactive advert** with a direct link to safety messaging on our website for the YAS e-newsletter.
- ✓ Worked with **Hectare Agritech** to place **safety adverts across their suite of websites** that facilitate cattle and feed trading over a period of 12 weeks.
- ✓ Partnered with WPD to extend our reach to peripheral areas of our region, ensuring that all areas of our network are covered with safety messages.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ **6.5% reduction** in farm safety incidents on our network over the last 12 months.
- ✓ **30% reduction** in indirect overhead line strikes from farm vehicles.
- ✓ **24% drop** in overall line strikes on our network.

Ensuring rapid response to customer feedback

New

We survey a proportion of our customers daily, deriving real time insights to help us improve our services. This year, we launched a new programme of real-time text message feedback, supporting rapid improvements and implementation of key learning points. As soon as a job is complete a text message goes out to our customer. We ask them to rate the service received on a scale from 1-10 – if the service ranks 8 or below, a request is auto generated to a dedicated customer care team to reach out to:

1. Understand any issues;
2. Offer resolution;
3. Learn from our customer's experience;
4. Look at future service improvements.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ **110,000** texts sent and **12,186** customers engaged.
- ✓ Worked in support of our overall customer service improvement programme which has delivered over **40** service improvements identified on the back of customer feedback.
- ✓ Increased focus on positive feedback as well as improvements with over **6,500** compliments received, and a **15.1%** improvement in satisfaction from initially dissatisfied customers.
- ✓ We established a new, CEO-led process for any feedback scores that grade us under 3 - ensuring that important lessons can be learned and shared with senior leaders and frontline colleagues.



Best Medium Sized Contact Centre and Best in Sector at the National Customer Service Awards

700

colleagues and contractors trained using new Customer First approach

+1,048%

increase in proactive contact with our most vulnerable PSR customers during HV interruptions

6.5%

reduction in farm safety incidents

Embedded

Drone monitoring embedded in our flood defence protocols

“

Our teams take genuine pride in delivering an amazing customer experience, and our new regional structure is enhancing our already fantastic service.”

Andy Bilclough
Director of Field Operations

6 Preparing for energy transition

The energy transition is becoming a reality now. We've built on our DSO strategy to reflect changes and developed practical tools to help stakeholders work with us to deliver real change.

We have worked with partners to responsibly share data in a radical new approach for the industry – and designed a tool that lets them easily interpret and build on this data. Together, we can better model options for decarbonising our region – improving long term network planning and efficiency. We've also explored how we might roll out flexibility solutions to futureproof our network using local generation and storage. And we have engaged in a deeper way with community energy groups, understanding their needs and barriers to entry so we can support their growth.

Through all of this, we have never lost our focus and commitment that “nobody should be left behind”. Our work on DSO and our customer vulnerability strategies have converged. We have consulted

stakeholders extensively to explore the challenges of social inclusion, and we're collaborating now on solutions.

Michelle Cummings
Social Responsibility Manager



Big data unlocking the potential roadmap to our energy transition

Innovative

At our 2018 Stakeholder Summit, feedback from stakeholders suggested we should improve the usability of our reports on future energy scenarios.

Our response was a game-changing online resource – transforming our annual Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES) into a visual tool with open-source data availability. **This is an industry first, with UK-wide scalable benefits.**

The potential future uptake of low carbon technologies like electric vehicles, heat pumps, rooftop solar PV generation and energy storage have been mapped and made publicly available. We engaged widely, calling for all Local Authorities, academics and renewable energy project leaders to review the data and share any initiatives or projects they are working on that will impact on the underlying planning assumptions. This will help to ensure efficient network planning and effective collaboration across the region as all stakeholders in the region collaborate to collectively tackle the pressing challenge of decarbonisation.

For the project we partnered with ODI (Open Data Institute) Leeds. The visual tool models future energy forecasts for an area (such as a Local Authority) across four scenarios aligned to those used by National Grid and the other DNOs. We promoted the tool via a direct campaign and hosted **6 co-creation** workshops to design and test the platform. Partnering with Durham City Council for the pilot, we hosted two training webinars and workshops for users, securing **+100 attendees**. Feedback was excellent. Stakeholders can model 14 different parameters (such as EV adoption or the use of renewable energy sources and heat pumps) and their impact in four scenarios.

Andrew Spencer, System Planning Manager at Northern Powergrid added:

“We know there is a powerful patchwork of plans across our operating area. With more than three quarters of Local Authorities across our region having declared a climate emergency, this patchwork will be growing into a rich tapestry in the coming months and years. This is the time for us to enter into a proactive dialogue with our regional stakeholders to help us get the local infrastructure right, ensuring that our network is built on a clear evidence-based consensus that meets evolving local needs, while supporting the regional and national decarbonisation pathway.”

Anyone can download this data and use it to add more value to their own, and we'll be maintaining this open dataset going forward.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ DFES allows us to **greatly improve our future system planning** by giving us access to a wider range of intelligence data on growth of low carbon technologies – allowing us to manage risk for our customers and make smarter, more cost-effective investment decisions.
- ✓ Using DFES, Local Authorities and other relevant stakeholders can see the scale of required support or adaptation needed in their own future plans.
- ✓ DFES outputs are **useful to consumer vulnerability organisations** as it shows where changes in future energy may potentially impact fuel poor customers.

Improving our strategy and approach to community energy

Enhanced

Stakeholder feedback

Building on our 2017 Community Energy Engagement Strategy, local community groups told us that we needed updated processes to support the growing sector – in particular they asked us for greater representation on our expert panels and a dedicated communications pathway to support more joint working and faster problem solving.

Actions and outcomes

- ✓ Our Stakeholder Panel invited Community Energy England and a local community group rep to sit as new permanent members.
- ✓ We are working with local groups to establish a **training programme** on our business and the wider energy system.
- ✓ We delivered **four workshops** focusing on carbon reduction and new business models for community energy.
- ✓ We introduced a **new quarterly newsletter** for community energy groups, validated by our stakeholder panel.
- ✓ We expanded our Community Partnering Fund to encourage **more seed-core funding** for newly emerging groups.
- ✓ We updated our Community Energy Strategy and **interviewed 22 local groups** to ensure it reflected real world experiences and the current energy landscape.
- ✓ Supported the **State of the Region Report** in partnership with Community Energy England, feeding directly into the Government's future planning in this area.
- ✓ Supported and promoted the **Catalysing People Project** in partnership with Sheffield Hallam, with lessons on barriers to growth taken from **20 Community Energy Groups**.

Supporting greater flexibility for our stakeholders

New

Stakeholder feedback

Our stakeholders – including our regulator and elected representatives – tell us that they would like to see an approach to flexibility that reflects our commitment to the transition and seeks to futureproof our network. We've responded with the introduction of our Restore Flexibility programme, an upgraded approach that seeks to maintain reliability and keep investment costs low on the network by exploring future flexibility options.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ In 2019 we announced plans for a reverse e-auction – “Restore Flexibility” – to procure **100MW flexibility** from local customers – the first of its kind in our industry.
- ✓ We engaged with local business stakeholders and customers that have electricity generation and storage capability – those who can be agile with their consumption, in exchange for financial compensation.
- ✓ Developed with extensive stakeholder input, our plans envision a future where everyone benefits from reliable and affordable power. Our **e-auction** will take place later in 2020, and we are currently registering customer interest.
- ✓ The revenue streams obtained from us procuring customer flexibility will **help existing and future users of the network** build sustainable business cases for new developments.

Reshaping our energy transition plans to reflect customer and stakeholder priorities

Enhanced

Stakeholder feedback

Feedback from our Expert Panels and wider stakeholders in the third sector told us that our DSO plans needed to be reshaped in order to set out clearly how we are ensuring a socially inclusive approach is taken across all seven “themes” of our plan, as we make the transition to DSO.

Actions

- ✓ We revised our DSO plans and engaged widely with interested stakeholders on our Social Issues Expert Group, National Energy Action, and others to develop a “social inclusion model” for our strategy.
- ✓ We wrote this model into our plan across all seven themes and tested them at a dedicated workshop for experts, our 2019 stakeholder summit and a special session of our Social Issues Expert Group – engaging almost **100** stakeholders in all.
- ✓ We hosted a DSO webinar, welcoming over **150** sign ups to our live presentation – **84%** of participants fed back their approval of our new guiding principles.
- ✓ Upon review, these stakeholders validated our new plans and we published the revised **DSO** approach.

Outcomes and benefits

Following our engagement in 2019, we revised and re-launched our DSO plans, and also reshaped our engagement plans with the support of our stakeholders.

Specifically:

- ✓ We have delivered a focused engagement agenda on electric vehicles (issuing a strategy document, and holding educative events), in line with the clear need that emerged from our conversations with stakeholders;
- ✓ DSO plans reflected a desire for a stronger commitment to principles of neutrality and transparency in the roll-out of flexibility, and laid out a series of tangible steps to deliver on;
- ✓ We implemented and promoted the principles of open data for our Distribution Future Energy Scenarios to 2050, addressing calls for longer visibility;
- ✓ We developed, in close collaboration with concerned, expert stakeholders, a **vision for a socially responsible transition to DSO**, to satisfy theirs and our desire for clarity for the future of our consumer vulnerability strategy.

Shared learning to support the energy transition

Embedded

Stakeholder feedback

Stakeholders tell us that more work is needed to understand the balance of generation and storage needed to deliver net zero. To support this work, we collaborated with partners to explore how smart home batteries can form part of the solution.

We previously updated the panel on our now-completed pilot project, and we have taken our findings and shared them with stakeholders.

Actions

- ✓ Our DS3 pilot – using batteries to support customers in sheltered housing developments – concluded in 2019. We've engaged stakeholders and customers throughout and there has been very high interest in the results.
- ✓ We shared our finalised reports and findings with expert partners at LCNI in Glasgow and CIRED in Madrid. Key learnings were also presented at the Electricity Innovation Forum 2020.
- ✓ We shared learnings with other DNOs and utilities using a dedicated forum and invited a response from Councils through our Local Authority Forum.
- ✓ We tailored a Findings Report specifically for community energy groups and third sector partners at our CV conference.
- ✓ We published the findings on our website and have promoted these through our regular communications channels to make sure that they are seen by the widest groups of interested stakeholders.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ Trial findings show that energy storage systems could reduce the impact of domestic solar on the network by **20%** and customers could save up to **£60** off their electricity bills a year by storing free solar energy.
- ✓ The batteries are expected to retain **80% capacity after 10 years**, enabling customers to continue saving on their energy bills well into the future.
- ✓ Feedback from expert stakeholders has rated the trial “very useful” or “useful” in **100%** of cases.

Boston Spa - Putting our new strategy into practice, in collaboration with our customers

Innovative

In the Boston Spa area, we're putting our new community energy strategy into practice, supporting the development of a pilot programme that could reduce energy usage.

We are using insights from Smart Meters and three local sub-stations to reduce the level of voltage by an average of 2% overall. The entire project came about in response to an insightful stakeholder – Keith Jackson, a retired engineer and member of our Stakeholder Panel.

Our 2019 pilot results show achievable scalability, for **29.7 million consumers**. If trials continue as projected, then the next phase, scheduled for Q4 2020 could deliver in the region of **£40 to £50** savings per year per household, and a financial benefit value of **£245,700** for the participants.

7 Delivering a social legacy

Customers tell us that supporting communities should be one of our top priorities and this year we have accepted this feedback and embedded a programme that lets us be a force for good. Our £30m, Bradford-based, Fluid Cable Care project is a good example of our approach to broadening our engagement to develop a social legacy in partnership with our communities, demonstrating our commitment to deliver innovation as business as usual.

Bradford West – A pivotal change in our approach to social legacy and communication

Enhanced

Our Bradford project has been the largest of its kind we've ever undertaken. We have +800km of high voltage cable underground here, and we had to replace 43km of main cable circuits in the middle of the city to maintain their reliability, replacing older assets with more environmentally friendly materials.

Through an intensive period of community outreach, in partnership with local stakeholders we designed an engagement programme in a way to minimise the level of disruption for local people and maximise the project's lasting social legacy.

However, 153 languages are spoken in the city, and there are higher than average levels of deprivation in the project area.

By initially holding four open events for the community, we gained early sight of customer priorities. Instead of starting with "this is what we must do", we engaged stakeholders with an open agenda. "You're the experts in an area affected by this, how can we work better together?"

Actions and outcomes

- ✓ We toured the area to build a database of stakeholders and sent **30,000** leaflets to affected homeowners.
- ✓ **Four drop-in centres** were set up along the works' routes.
- ✓ By request, we **funded/trained six STEM primary school teachers**, alongside the

Teach First initiative, and gave school safety and energy efficiency talks.

- ✓ With the support and at the suggestion of local MP, Naz Shah, we engaged with women's groups and made a commitment to **Womenzone**, a mental health programme for South Asian women in Bradford.
- ✓ **Data from Ground Penetration Radar surveys, costing £100k, was shared with Northern Gas Networks** – securing ongoing savings for us both.
- ✓ We ran workshops with contractors, promoting our PSR. As a result, we saw **22.5%** growth in registrations on the PSR in the area.
- ✓ Works were highlighted at 'Drivetime' on **Bradford Community Radio**, and we ran geo-targeted, digital campaigns on Facebook and Google at key points in the programme.
- ✓ We held '**blue light briefings**' – sharing road closure information with Fairweather Green Fire Station, Bradford Royal Infirmary, Yorkshire Ambulance Service and Northern Gas Networks.
- ✓ Local Councillors asked us, and we agreed to plant **48,000** trees in Bradford offsetting the emissions from the entire project.

Enduring collaborations

- ✓ **Utility collaboration** – Stakeholders highlight the importance of utilities

working together. We demonstrated this through regular engagement with Northern Gas Networks to share our plans and discuss areas of overlap. We have agreed a **reciprocal arrangement** whereby we are sharing the outcomes of our GPS surveys – an example of industry best practice that is saving both organisations time and money. These are also being shared with Bradford Council.

- ✓ **Transport operator collaboration** – We proactively invited transport operators to attend our monthly Communications and Engagement meetings with Bradford Council's Highways team. Information was then added to our customer letters, stakeholder updates and media releases about changes to bus timetables and impact to bus stops.

Bus operators also extended our reach through information in their own communications channels, including posters at bus stops, leaflets on buses, update on their websites.

“Great approach which is helping reduce impact on bus passengers.”

Mohammad Raja - First Group

“The most comprehensive approach ever experienced.”

Andrew Dille - Highways Team

Reducing disruption via collaboration and enhanced engagement in Leeds

Embedded

In Leeds, we've been running a tower blocks improvement programme and we updated the panel last year on improvements to network infrastructure in these most deprived areas. Network reliability is acute here. This year we've embedded a programme of enhanced engagement, based on feedback from customers and partner Local Authorities. Our aim was simple: to improve communications, specifically with a targeted campaign to encourage inclusion on our PSR. Throughout the year, our operational teams have delivered:

Actions

- ✓ An area-wide, targeted PSR recruitment campaign – we briefed contractors on how to identify vulnerable customers and we provided literature to every household about the benefits of inclusion on our PSR – who was eligible, and how to sign up.
- ✓ Widely-distributed reading materials – we created a four-page leaflet in plain English, in partnership with the community. It explained why and where we were working, what would happen in each building, how long people's power would be turned off for, and what to do in a power cut.
- ✓ We wrote letters to all customers – we created simple letters

that contractors could issue to customers, announcing the work, confirming the survey date and works' date, and explaining what would happen with missed appointments, cancellations, and additional work.

- ✓ We set up a 24-hour phone hotline – we published contact details via all communications channels and on posters in every affected building.

Outcomes and benefits

- ✓ We've experienced a **30%** increase in the area's PSR registrations over the last year.
- ✓ Leeds City Council has confirmed our efforts resulted in **30% fewer cancellations** than usual for this type of work, with a financial benefit value of **£17,995**.
- ✓ Leeds City Council has confirmed that our efforts resulted in a **99.5%** success rate in getting surveys of customers' properties booked in – **20%** above average performance.
- ✓ To reduce customer disruption we worked with telecoms providers to coordinate on upgrading broadband at the same time as our work.

