

Stakeholder Engagement Incentive Scheme Submission 2019/20 Part 1

What you can find in this document

This document sets out how we engage with our stakeholders to ensure that our business continues to deliver outcomes that they value.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of this document

This document forms the first part of our submission to Ofgem's Stakeholder Engagement Incentive Scheme. It sets out our approach to engagement with our stakeholders during 2019/20. In particular, it covers:

- Our strategic approach to engagement and how we use stakeholder insight to drive improvements in our business
- How we have engaged with stakeholders this year
- How we embed an engagement-led approach into the culture of our business
- How we monitor the effectiveness of our engagement

The proof of our strategy is in the outcomes we have delivered to our stakeholders as a result of our engagement. Part 2 of our submission covers this in full and should be read alongside this document.

1.2. An ever-evolving approach

It's been another strong year for engagement here at Northern Gas Networks, as we have continued to embed our proven engagement strategy. Throughout the year we have built on areas of strength and adapted our approach in areas where there is room for improvement.

Our highlights for this year include:

- **Strengthening accountability in engagement planning**
 - building on our business-wide engagement planning process, our senior leadership team have developed their own directorate engagement plans - reaching further across the business than ever before. Read more in part 2.2.
- **Improving understanding of our stakeholders**
 - we've invested in new systems that give us better, smarter data on our stakeholders and help us to better target our engagement. See part 2.2.
- **Delivering sector-leading engagement mechanisms**
 - we've established our Citizens' Jury as an enduring mechanism, the first of its kind in the utilities sector. Read more about this in part 3.3.
- **Harnessing the engagement power of our operational teams**
 - through new operational engagement targets embedded across each of our patches. See part 4.2.
- **Seeing positive feedback from our independent observers**
 - including new independent benchmarking, our independent external audit and our Customer Engagement Group. See part 5.

1.3. Highlights of our year

Over **190,000** voices heard



Over **6,000** vulnerable customers engaged

Over **24,000** stakeholders engaged through strategic engagement mechanisms



10,000 interactions with our Together online engagement hub

First to establish an enduring **Citizens' Jury**



79% customers engaging for the **first time**

7.6/10 average stakeholder satisfaction



9.1/10 average rating for our stakeholder workshops



The Institute of Customer Service

88/100 Institute of Customer Service (ICS) score – an independent UK benchmarking programme

2. Our engagement strategy

This section sets out our strategy to deliver meaningful, inclusive and iterative engagement, designed to give stakeholders a stronger voice and put them at the heart of the decision-making process. Specifically:

- Our strategy for engagement and the guiding principles of our approach
- Our approach to detailed engagement planning
- Our approach to programme and risk management

2.1. Our strategic framework

Our longstanding engagement strategy, owned by our leadership team, sets the overarching framework for engagement with our stakeholders.

The objective at the heart of our Engagement Strategy is that ***“insight into our customers' and stakeholders' values, preferences and ideas drives business planning and change”***.

Our strategic approach has been guided by three core principles:

- 1. Meaningful:** rather than us defining the agenda, we ask customers and stakeholders to tell us what they want to talk about and how they would like to engage with us. This allows us to focus on the material issues most important to them, where there is real opportunity to influence our priorities and how we deliver them.
- 2. Inclusive:** our engagement is designed to reach all groups of stakeholders and customers, through 10 core mechanisms and a range of bespoke and ongoing channels. Through a targeted and sensitive approach, we have reached traditionally hard-to-reach and seldom-heard voices – ensuring our findings are representative of our whole community.
- 3. Iterative:** our integrated approach ensures that every contact counts, triangulating day-to-day feedback, third-party insight and specialist engagement. We deliver a flexible engagement process that continually evolves in response to insights gained, allowing us to iteratively test our proposals and calibrate across different groups.

2.1.1. Our cycle of engagement: ensuring every contact counts

Our overall approach is outlined in figure 1 below. Whilst this is visualised as a sequential process, in practise this framework is used iteratively; testing and retesting proposals at each stage of the design.

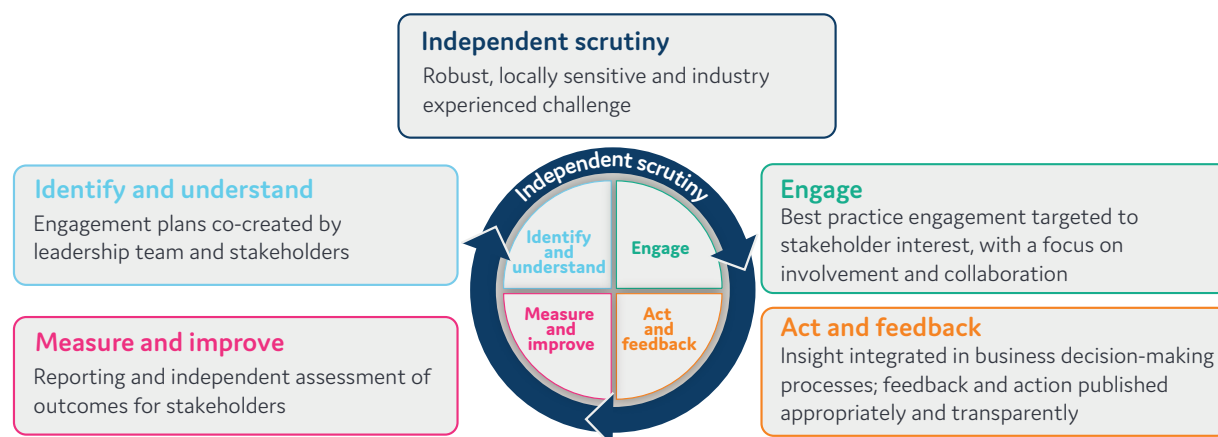


Figure 1: NGN's strategic framework for engagement

This document is structured around these four phases of engagement and in Part 2 we have showcased the outcomes achieved during 'Act and feedback'.

Underpinning our strategic framework is a dedicated commitment to the principle that every contact with our stakeholders counts. To ensure this, we triangulate insights from a variety of sources:

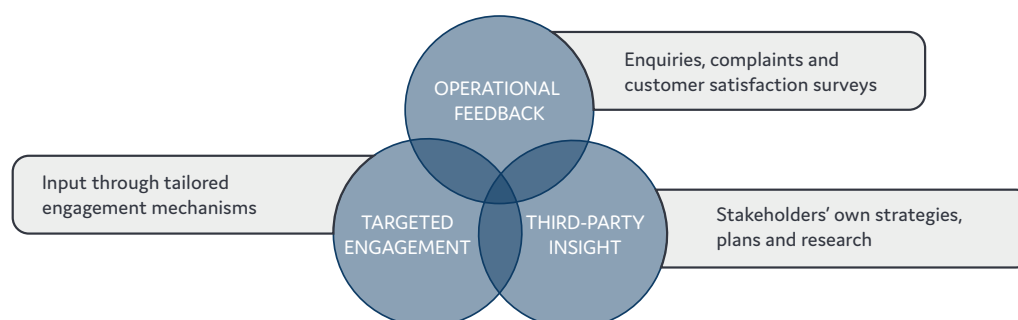


Figure 2: Combining operational feedback, targeted engagement and third-party insight

- **Operational feedback:** utilising the wealth of information from our business as usual operations – over 14,000 enquiries, 32,000 customer satisfaction surveys and 2,200 complaints this year. Analysis of this data, and trends over previous years, has allowed us to identify hotspots or key points of interest for our customers – allowing us to effectively target our deeper engagement.
- **Third-party insight:** reviewing and considering the strategies, plans and priorities of stakeholders right across NGN's geography, together with best practice guidance from national stakeholders. This work included an extensive analysis of place-based economic and energy priorities by reviewing the plans and strategies of local and sub-regional bodies such as Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Combined Authorities.
- **Targeted engagement:** building on what we already know through our gap analysis and triangulation of other sources, our targeted engagement with over 24,000 people through strategic engagement mechanisms has used a tailored mix of qualitative and quantitative channels designed to ensure that everyone can have a voice through the mechanisms that work for them.

2.2. Identify and understand

We serve a large population of customers and wider stakeholders, each with varying interests and power to influence our services. This section sets out how we identify, map and plan engagement to ensure it responds to stakeholder needs and reaches the right people, on the right issues.

2.2.1. Stakeholder mapping

What do we mean by 'stakeholders'?

Wherever we reference 'stakeholders', we allude to our entire stakeholder community, split into four broad categories – National Policy Shapers, Local Place Makers, Customers and Wider Workforce and Supply Chain.

To ensure that a comprehensive range of voices are heard, we need a solid understand of who our stakeholders are. We map existing and emerging stakeholders using four categories – National Policy Shapers, Local Place Makers, Customers, Wider Workforce and Supply Chain – divided into 45 customer and stakeholder segments.



Figure 3: Customer and stakeholder segmentation

Understanding that not all customer and stakeholder needs are equal sits at the heart of our engagement strategy. We recognise that there are variances in interests, knowledge, engagement preferences, relative importance and legitimacy. To fully understand the implications of this, we map our stakeholders to help us better identify the relative power and interest of different groups.

Ultimately the impact of this work is an ability to prioritise and rank customer and stakeholder engagement, to link this to a prioritised set of engagement themes and to design tailored communications to ensure an appropriate approach to each group, to thereby obtain outputs that would have the greatest benefit to customers and wider society.

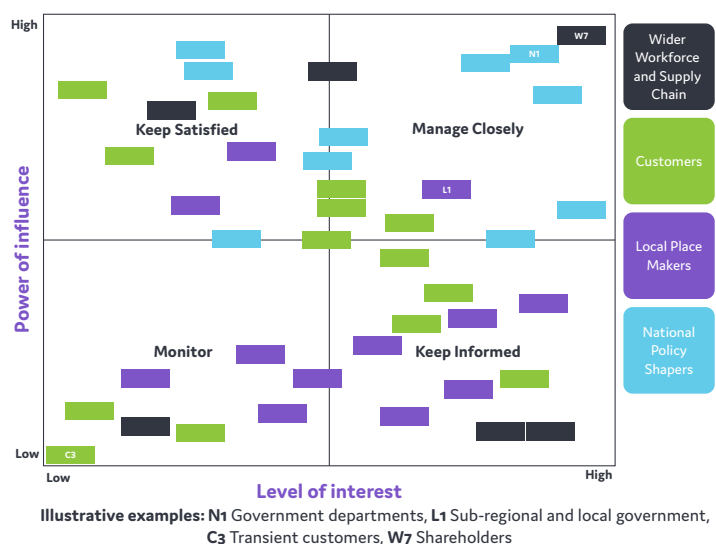


Figure 4: Customer and stakeholder power/interest mapping

"NGN has established a detailed methodology for profiling stakeholders and mapping them according to their interest in core strategic themes and power to influence outcomes. This provides an improved framework for the business and contributes to determining engagement levels and methods. All activities reviewed showed evidence of profiling of stakeholders, and of review and revision of stakeholders through the life of projects."

(SGS, Internal Management Report for Northern Gas Networks 2020)

2.2.2. Improving stakeholder data

This year, we have invested in two new systems that enable us to better manage stakeholder data and target stakeholders effectively.

Mapolitical: Our Mapolitical system provides us with up-to-date stakeholder data on our local political stakeholders including councils, parish councils, MPs, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Combined Authorities. As well as supporting key account management and strategic engagement, the system's ability to identify stakeholders quickly in a sub-local area has been particularly useful in improving our engagement at a tactical level, for example during incidents.

Stakeholder database: We have upgraded our stakeholder database to a new system that helps us to much more effectively track relationships and trends with (largely non-customer) stakeholders and ensure our engagement is targeted towards the right people. As part of the rollout of our new system we undertook a significant cleanse of our stakeholder database, which will inform a further project in 2020/21 to identify emerging gaps in representation.

2.2.3. Key issues mapping

Each year, we undertake analysis of all the insights we have heard in the previous year and throughout the RII0-1 period, to understand the issues on which our stakeholders most want to engage. We speak directly with our stakeholders to understand the issues that are important to them, and how they want to engage. For example, we held a half-day session with our Citizens' Jury to understand their priorities for the coming year and how they wanted the group to operate.

This year, this culminated in the production of two mechanisms that have informed our engagement plans for 2020/21:

- **Stakeholder Insights Report:** a synthesis of the key issues that were raised by our stakeholders, including their preferences for how we engage in the future
- **Directorate 'what we've heard' reports:** breaking insights down to key business areas and forming the basis of directorate engagement plans

2.2.4. Planning and risk assessment

The final stage of our 'identify and understand' process is the development of our annual engagement plans. This year, we've strengthened accountability in our planning process by moving from a single engagement plan to individual departmental plans, developed and owned by each member of our executive team, supported by our central engagement function. To ensure that we take a consistent approach, the executive team came together to present, challenge and support each other on their draft plans.

Within each engagement plan, directors identify:

- The key issues raised by stakeholders
- How they intend to respond to these issues throughout the year, both in terms of new initiatives and ongoing engagement
- Risks, both to effective engagement and delivery of changes in response to stakeholder feedback
- Cross-directorate links and areas for joint working

2.3. Acting: the golden thread from stakeholder feedback to our strategic objectives

We have embedded stakeholder engagement into our core decision-making processes. We regularly take temperature checks to ensure our overarching strategic priorities continue to be relevant to our stakeholders. And in delivery of those objectives, we work directly with impacted groups to co-design changes to our services and approach. Critically, we ensure that each of our decisions has clear 'golden thread' to our business' strategic priorities, as shown in Figure 5.

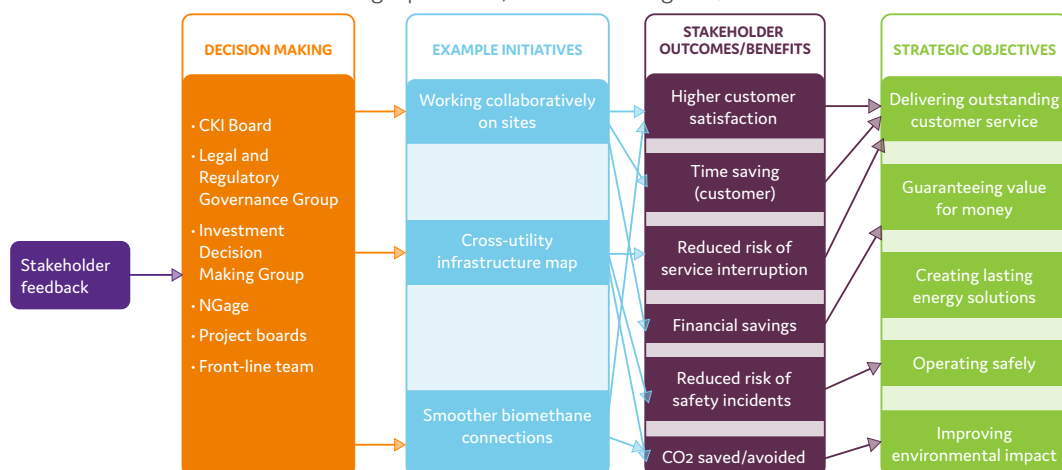


Figure 5: The golden thread: from stakeholder feedback to our strategic objectives

2.3.1. Understanding stakeholder impact: the Value Framework

Our Value Framework underpins our benefits analysis tool that helps us to understand the potential social value of changes to our existing services or new initiatives. Analysis through the Value Framework is embedded into our business decision-making process, allowing us to understand and compare the benefit impact pathways from our activities to the outcomes experienced by a range of different stakeholders. Figure 6, below, demonstrates how the Value Framework is used to identify individual benefits and their recipients. In Part 2, we have included further detail on how the Value Framework has been applied to specific projects.

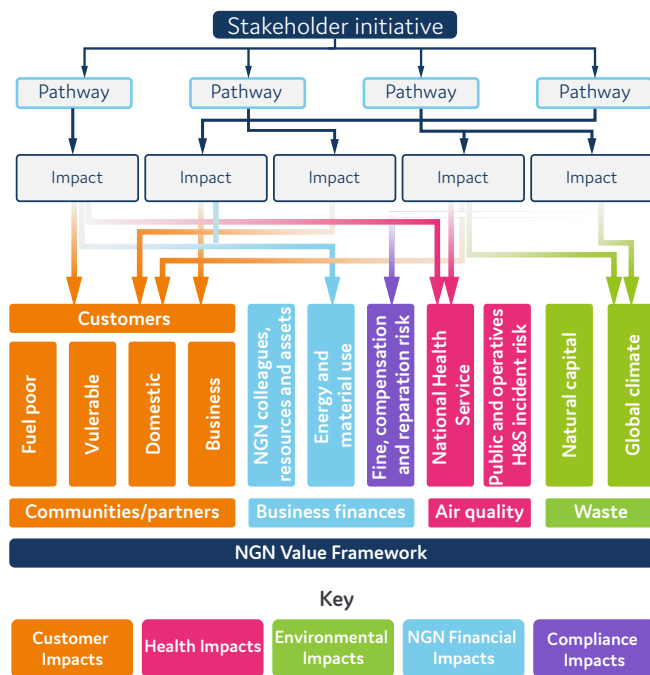


Figure 6: Indicative macro view of benefits mapping

2.4. Closed projects

In Part 2 we set out the stakeholder-led initiatives that we have progressed this year. However, it's not always possible to respond to stakeholder feedback in the ways they have suggested and on occasions, even when we do act, despite our best intentions, we either don't get it right or things don't have the positive impact we hoped. As such there are several initiatives that we have paused this year either because they weren't effective in their current execution

Action in 2018/19	Outcome	Decision
Asking councils to promote our pipe alteration service to prevent built over pipes	Little take up, impact not trackable	Close – rescope focusing on future collaboration with councils
Training Age UK phone staff to promote the Priority Services Register	Following a successful pilot with Gateshead Age UK, further investigation found that regional teams are all set up differently and the approach wasn't replicable	Close
Developing a map identifying opportunities for CNG connections with intention to develop into digital and interactive version in 2019/20	Stakeholder feedback on the map was that functionality would not meet their needs	We will engage with stakeholders to retest whether a 'self-service' or key account management approach to CNG meets their requirements and redesign our services in line with feedback

2.3.2. Incorporating customers' Willingness to Pay

Wherever possible, we use the Value Framework to quantify the potential benefits of different decisions, providing us with a monetary value that can be used to compare between different options.

The values sitting behind this analysis are drawn from nationally recognised sources, such as the Treasury Green Book. However, this year, we have invested significantly in our own research to understand the values that our customers place on different levels of service.

This year, our Willingness to Pay (WTP) research identified 10 areas of potential benefits that could be achieved through different interventions, where national data was not available. These values have been incorporated into our Value Framework, giving us the confidence that our decisions are based on our customers' own values.

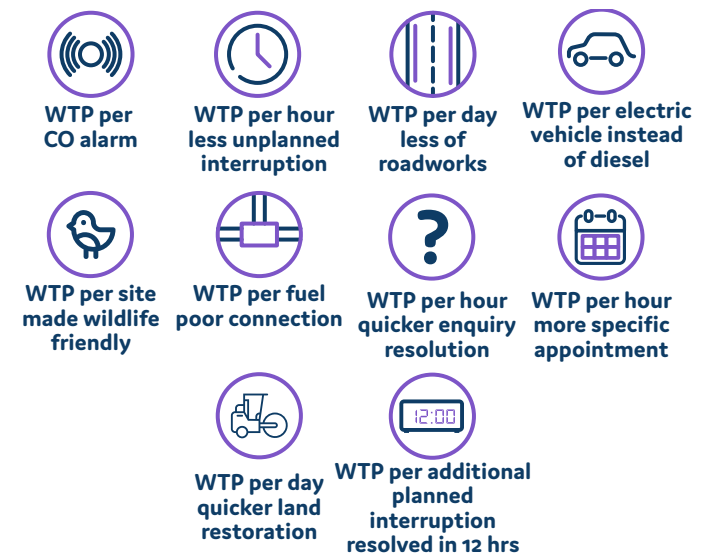


Figure 7: Our Willingness To Pay values

or we weren't able to deliver them in a meaningful and impactful way.

Our cyclical engagement means we can return to stakeholders to review our actions, assess their impact and review against their priorities; this helps us to learn lessons and either devise alternative approaches or rescope to make sure we are delivering social value.

3. Engage: our approach

3.1. Iterative and multi-channel engagement

Engaging with stakeholders isn't straightforward. It involves issues that they are often not aware of or have not experienced. Good engagement requires a dynamic, multifaceted approach which seeks continual feedback across different pathways and levels which we can assimilate and act upon quickly. As such, our engagement programme spans four levels of engagement, reflecting Citizens Advice best practice guidance; giving opportunities for stakeholders to engage in the way they want and for relationships to grow and build over time.

"This year has seen an expansion of the range and depth of engagement levels and methods used by NGN. This reflects the company's increased confidence in its ability to plan and deliver engagements, and the greatly expanded range and number of groups engaged."

(SGS, Internal Management Report for Northern Gas Networks 2020)



Figure 8: Core engagement mechanisms

3.2. Hard-to-reach engagement framework

To make the right decisions for our stakeholders, we need to ensure that everyone is heard. We consider customers 'hard to reach' who, for whatever reason, experience isolation and whose voice is less likely to be heard without us going the extra mile. Our **hard-to-reach engagement framework**, below, addresses the key drivers of engagement isolation and our commitments to help overcome them.



Technology

We will always offer alternatives to online engagement for customers, such as 1-1 at home or telephone interviews.



Language

We will always provide translation services for our engagement.



Health

In line with our vulnerability strategy, we will collaborate with partner organisations to identify and engage with customers whose health acts as a barrier to engagement.



Lack of information

We will proactively use all our contact points with customers, from social media, our relationships with community groups and our front-line engagement, to educate customers about the business and raise awareness of opportunities to engage.



Transport

Wherever possible, we will host engagement events at familiar venues within local communities. Where we cannot, we will pay for or arrange transport.



Emotional

Working with trusted intermediaries, we will create engagement routes, such as our Citizens' Jury, that allow for trusted relationships to develop over time, celebrate diversity of views and clearly demonstrate the business's commitment to act in response.

Figure 9: Our hard-to-reach engagement framework drivers and commitments

3.3. Engagement in action: case studies

The case studies below explore in further detail what activity has been taken across each of our core mechanisms over the course of this year.

"There is evidence of bringing together stakeholders with differing views and priorities, to better understand the nuances, conflicts and contradictions between stakeholder views. This has helped to develop new collaborations and approaches in addressing challenging issues such as Willingness to Pay, and the role of the business in supporting fuel-poor customers."
(SGS, Internal Management Report for Northern Gas Networks 2020)

3.3.1. Hot topic surveys

We use online surveys to target stakeholders who are time poor and to give us an initial 'temperature check' on key issues before embarking on more deliberative, face-to-face engagement. This year we've run 14 online surveys. We've heard from over 22,000 stakeholders, 71% of which were customers. We've used our surveys to take our annual check on our stakeholders' pressing priorities, as well as get detailed feedback on issues spanning every part of our business including customer experience, supporting vulnerable customers, the future of energy and the environment.

3.3.2. Footpath Feedback

Introduced last year, we've continued to build our Footpath Feedback programme to improve understanding of how customers view our presence in their communities. Customers and NGN colleagues take a walk around a work site, with customers then asked to rate several categories including safety, site tidiness and staff behaviour. This year 68 customers and colleagues took part in the programme. In addition, we expanded the programme to Yorkshire Water and Northern Powergrid – with members of their teams visiting and feeding back as a means of sharing best practice. Our average site score from colleagues was 9.31 and customers rated our sites 9.88.

3.3.3. Willingness to Pay

Our Willingness to Pay research helps us to understand the value that stakeholders place on different elements of the service. These values are incorporated into our social return on investment model, helping us to holistically assess the benefits of different initiatives before we act. This year, we undertook Willingness to Pay research on 13 different service offerings, with over 2,200 stakeholders taking part in the research.



Willingness to Pay roadshow

3.3.4. Targeted roadshows

Many of our local policy maker stakeholders have existing committees and partnership arrangements in place. Wherever possible, we seek to engage with these committees to ensure the best use of stakeholders' time and help 'join the dots' across our network. This year we've expanded our relationships with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Combined Authorities, meeting with over 60 stakeholders through discussions at their board meetings on issues relating to highways, growth and social inclusion.

3.3.5. Bilaterals

For high interest/high influence stakeholders (see figure 4), particularly those who are time poor, we have an ongoing programme of bilaterals that focus on the key issues that have been identified by that organisation or individual. We met with 65 stakeholders through bilateral meetings, which has allowed for full, frank and detailed discussion and are critical in building trust, rapport and ongoing relationships.

3.3.6. Citizens' Jury

Our Citizens' Jury brings together 50 domestic customers broadly representative of the population within our network. Over this year, the independent group came together for face-to-face discussions on three occasions for detailed and constructive conversation about the services they value from a gas network, aided by presentations from key NGN colleagues and a range of interactive activities for participants.

While the Citizens' Jury was initially established last year as a mechanism for business plan engagement, this year the Jury evolved to deliberating on business decisions for RIIO-1. The Jury has guided the business on whether to roll out and embed our 'Every Contact Counts' customers support framework, as well as helping us design and agree to early delivery of our Hardship Fund (see Part 2, Section 5).

Support for continuation of the Citizens' Jury by its members has been high throughout the year, with over 90% of participants indicating a willingness to be involved. In discussion with them, we agreed this year to establish the Citizens' Jury as an enduring mechanism that will continue through RIIO-1 and into RIIO-2.



Citizens' Jury

How Citizens' Jury members feel about their experience – in their words:

"Results – respect – real – the three 'Rs'"

"Knowing what we said is being listened to, implemented and fed back on i.e. result"

"Like to have an input and hear how it has made an impact"

"Because of shaping and influencing business"

"Feel we have been listened to"

"Good for NGN to be policy driven by their customers"

"We're giving views and seeing what happens – valued, not token"

4.2.2. Operational performance targets

During 2019, our patch leaders, known as Business Operational Leaders (BOLs) took on new performance objectives related to stakeholder engagement, alongside their existing objectives for customer service, safety and efficiency. Quantitative targets were set both for engagement undertaken and initiatives delivered in response to stakeholder feedback. By the close of the year, 95% of targets for the year had been met and many of the stories in Part 2 of this submission have been driven by the activity undertaken by our operational teams. In 2020, we are building on this momentum by focusing on the quality of engagement and aligning our approach to operational and strategic-led engagement.

4.2.3. Ngage stakeholder forum

Formerly the Stakeholder Engagement Management Group, Ngage is our internal committee tasked with monitoring engagement across the business, sharing and considering stakeholder insight and advising on how the business should respond. Meeting fortnightly, membership has been reviewed this year to ensure all areas of the business are represented. During the year, teams have shared feedback heard from their engagement initiatives and agreed over 80 actions to better understand, progress or stop initiatives during the year.

"A new format for the senior managers' stakeholder engagement group has been established this year. The Ngage meetings now provide a more structured forum for sharing ideas and learning, and for challenge and continuous improvement of engagement across the business. The range of departments represented and the senior level of those involved demonstrates the commitment to integrating engagement into governance, strategy and management across the business."
(SGS, Internal Management Report for Northern Gas Networks 2020)

4.2.4. Engagement Toolkit

Our Independent Audit for 2018/19 concluded that there was room for improvement in our Engagement Toolkit; our internal online engagement resources. This year we kicked off a programme of work to refresh the toolkit; making it more accessible and relevant for colleagues than ever before. Starting with internal engagement at all levels across the business, colleagues identified 12 requirements for the new toolkit which are now being designed and tested. Further developments to the toolkit will continue, ensuring it remains an up-to-date source of guidance.

4.2.5. Colleague training and support

As our strategy continues to focus more upon deliberative engagement techniques, we have needed to develop new skills and capabilities in our teams. Working with our Citizens' Jury partners Involve, we have rolled out deliberative workshop facilitation courses to 35 colleagues working across nine locations. Rather than using external contractors, our alumni are now acting as facilitators for our engagement events – often giving them exposure to parts of the business that they would not normally encounter.



Facilitation training

5. Monitoring and evaluation

From analysis of performance data, to independent reviews and external audit – this section sets out how we use opportunities throughout the year to monitor how well we are performing against our stakeholder strategy.

5.1. Survey monitoring

Regular surveying of our stakeholders provides us with an important temperature check on the quality and effectiveness of our engagement. We use two key survey mechanisms:

- Customer satisfaction: an industry standard, regulated survey of customers who have received planned and unplanned works.
- Stakeholder satisfaction: a non-regulated survey of our broader stakeholder community, addressing a range of engagement-specific indicators.

Both methods are used to identify areas of challenge and improvement in our relationship with our stakeholders and communicated across the business through digi-signage, regular 'customer calls' and our Ngage group (see 4.2.3).

Source	Indicator	Score (max 10)
Customer Satisfaction Survey	Customer satisfaction	9.15/10
Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey	Overall stakeholder satisfaction	7.6/10
	Satisfaction with frequency of engagement	7.7/10
	Satisfaction with methods of engagement	8.1/10
	Satisfaction with relevance of engagement	8.1/10
	Satisfaction with workshops	9.1/10

5.1.1. External benchmarking

Independent benchmarking allows us to assess the quality of our engagement inside and outside of our sector. We have been benchmarked through the Institute for Customer Service for the last eight years; consistently scoring a rating amongst the top quartile of organisations taking part in the scheme. This year, following a survey of planned work customers (who are, in comparison to the other service areas of emergency and new connections, the least satisfied as per the regulated surveys), we scored 88/100, compared to a UKCSI index average of 77.10/100.

This year, we also took part in BITC's nationally recognised Responsible Business Tracker scheme, which allowed us to understand how our broader engagement programme compares, inside and outside of sector.

Indicator	Measures how well we...	Benchmarking Group Average	NGN Score
Policy Engagement	Identify solutions that create value for society alongside the wider economic opportunity Engage in policy dialogue that upholds the interests of society Work with other businesses to influence positive policy change Are transparent and proactive in approaching public policy activities	71%	75%
Stakeholder Collaboration	Identify and consider the business's stakeholders and understand how operations affect them, to find solutions that maximise value for all Actively identify opportunities to collaborate with a range of stakeholders	80%	90%

5.2. Independent scrutiny : the Customer Engagement Group

Throughout this year our engagement has been followed closely by our Customer Engagement Group (CEG), an independent board established to assess how well we have understood our stakeholders' needs and reflected these within our RIIO-2 Business Plan. In December 2019, the group submitted its independent review of that engagement, concluding that: "It is our opinion that NGN designed and delivered an exceptional engagement programme."

Within the RIIO-2 Plan, we committed to establishing an enduring role for the CEG to challenge the company's performance and its responsiveness to stakeholders' needs throughout the RIIO-2 period. This year, we have supported the group to establish a transition programme during 2020/21. During this period the CEG will independently review and challenge the business on whether we have prepared effectively to deliver our RIIO-2 commitments and engaged effectively to ensure its approach meets stakeholder needs.

Working collaboratively with our CEG, we have established a work programme for the coming year that will focus on six 'Readiness Challenges' for the business. The CEG will review the company's performance against these challenges, with a focus on how stakeholders' needs and preferences have been designed into and driven the decisions we make.

RIIO-2 Readiness Workstreams 2020/21- Overview



Figure 10: CEG Readiness Work Programme

5.3. Our independent audit

Each year our engagement is externally assured against the internationally recognised AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (SES). Throughout the year, the auditor attends a range of external and internal events, to get a first-hand view of the degree to which engagement is embedded into our everyday operations and strategic thinking. Alongside this observation, the auditor undertakes interviews with colleagues from across our business and supplements this with a comprehensive document review.

This year, the audit concluded that:

"NGN has consolidated its learning from previous years, and now demonstrates leading practice in many areas of its engagement strategy and delivery. NGN's strengths remain in its leadership commitment to engagement, the mandate it gives those at all levels of the company to engage, and a culture of engagement which recognises the benefits of engagement for strategy and governance. However, this year those strengths have been accompanied by significant improvements in engagement planning, identifying and mapping stakeholders beyond the usual suspects, learning from engagement, capacity building and exploring new methods for engaging." (SGS, Internal Management Report for Northern Gas Networks 2020)



Citizen's Jury



Footpath Feedback



NGN annual engagement awards



Stakeholder facilitation training



Sustainable procurement workshop






NGN volunteer at Solutions for the Planet schools programme



together
**we are
the network**

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