

RIO-2 Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement Guidance – Version 1

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Overview:

This document provides guidance on the enhancements we are making to the stakeholder engagement that will underpin RIO-2.

This will be a live document and we will update it from time to time as appropriate.

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Executive Summary

Stakeholder engagement is a core element of RIIO¹ - our approach to setting price controls for the monopoly network companies that operate the gas and electricity networks. By stakeholders, we mean individuals, organisations or communities that are impacted by the activities of the network company. This includes existing and future consumers.

We want companies to respond to changes in how their networks are used, and this requires an understanding of stakeholder needs to be at the heart of the way companies run their businesses.

We first implemented the RIIO framework in 2013.² The enhanced emphasis on engagement has led to better engagement between network companies and their stakeholders. However, we want to see further improvements to ensure the companies' plans for the future are aligned with consumer needs in a rapidly changing world. To do this we want to strengthen the role stakeholder engagement plays in the process of setting the next round of price controls.

In March 2018³ we published our consultation on the framework for the next set of price controls (RIIO-2). Here we outlined our intention to build on the progress that has been made and on good practice in other sectors.

For RIIO2 we are introducing different models of stakeholder engagement. These will involve companies and Ofgem establishing Groups that will challenge the business plans proposed by the network companies for the next round of price controls.

- In distribution, this will be through a Customer Engagement Group
- In transmission, this will be through a User Group, who will also provide direct input to elements of the plan.

In addition, we will be establishing a RIIO-2 Challenge Group. This Group will look at the plans proposed from companies in both sectors and will operate in parallel with the Groups established by the companies.

A key feature of these models is that these Groups are independent, both from the companies and from Ofgem. Because the Groups are independent, they can offer robust challenge to company proposals, and their views can help us to understand the extent to which the business plans reflect and will meet the needs of stakeholders.

¹ Revenue = Incentives + Innovation + Outputs ("RIIO"). RIIO is our¹ framework to setting the revenues recovered by the monopoly companies who run the gas and electricity networks in Great Britain.

² RIIO price controls for Gas Transmission, Gas Distribution and Electricity Transmission run from April 2013 - March 2021. The price control for Electricity Distribution runs from April 2015 - March 2023

³ [RIIO-2 Framework Consultation, March 2018](#)

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to stakeholders on the roles, responsibilities, membership and governance of all the parties involved.

As this is a new engagement model, we expect there to be a degree of 'learning by doing' and we will provide further clarification on issues as they arise. Therefore, this is a live document and we will update and amend it from time to time, as appropriate.

We are currently consulting on separating the electricity System Operator (SO) price control from National Grid Electricity Transmission's Transmission Operator (TO) price control, as well as on our approach for regulating the electricity SO. As we clarify the model for this, we will further develop our expectations for incorporating stakeholder engagement into the SO price control.

1. Engagement models for RIIO-2

Chapter summary: This chapter explains the engagement models for RIIO-2. We also set out the purpose of this document.

Background

- 1.1. We designed RIIO⁴ to give stakeholders greater ability to influence how network companies plan, operate and develop their networks.
- 1.2. Successful companies in well-functioning markets, where consumers are empowered and have choice, must understand and respond to shifting consumer needs; otherwise they may go out of business. Consumers of energy network services do not have choice over their network provider. One of the ways we try to mimic the outcome of a competitive market is by requiring these companies to engage with a range of different stakeholders, and incentivising them to do it well.
- 1.3. A stronger emphasis on stakeholder engagement in RIIO-1 led to an improvement in the range of stakeholders involved in the process and the quality of engagement that took place.
- 1.4. However, we think engagement needs to be enhanced for RIIO-2 due to the scale and pace of change taking place across the energy system. How consumers interact with the networks, and who will need to interact with networks will also change. For example, many homes already have solar panels, generating electricity both for their own use and to sell to others - and this is projected to increase. Through our Regulatory Sandbox⁵ we are already supporting trials of peer-to-peer local energy trading platforms. The rollout of smart meters and regulatory change will enable new kinds of business models, while new technologies such as batteries (including those in electric vehicles) could increasingly provide flexible and inexpensive storage to smooth out peaks in demand during the day. While consumer needs will change, there will also be an increasingly wide range of options available to meet these needs, including more alternatives to traditional network investment solutions.
- 1.5. This is an exciting prospect, but understanding these changes and the implications they bring for networks requires much deeper engagement than we have seen previously. Companies need better

⁴ https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/sites/default/files/docs/2010/10/decision-doc_0.pdf, RIIO a new way to regulate energy networks, 2010.

⁵ <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/about-us/how-we-engage/innovation-link>

insight on the changes taking place around them, and more challenge to their assumptions on how best to respond.

- 1.6. The quality of stakeholder engagement that companies have undertaken will be a key consideration for us when we review the business plans that companies submit for RIIO-2.

The RIIO-2 model for enhanced stakeholder engagement

- 1.7. Our approach to enhancing stakeholder engagement for RIIO-2 has been informed by:
 - Responses to our open letter on RIIO-2⁶
 - Stakeholder workshops held in October 2017 and January 2018⁷
 - A range of bilaterals with interested parties
 - Lessons learned from RIIO-1 and the engagement approach in other sectors.
- 1.8. We are introducing different models for enhanced stakeholder engagement. This will involve the establishment of Groups, by the companies and by us, that will provide additional challenge to network companies' business plans.
 - In **distribution**, each company will be required to establish a Customer Engagement Group. These Groups will provide challenge on whether the company's business plan addresses the needs and preferences of consumers.
 - In **transmission**, each company will be required to set up a User Group. These Groups will challenge the company's business plan proposals, and provide input to the plan.
 - We will also set up an independently chaired RIIO-2 Challenge Group that will assess the business plan proposals in both sectors and will provide a report to us on their findings. Through their interaction with us during the development of sector methodologies, the RIIO-2 Challenge Group will also be able to consider and feed back to us their views on our approach.

⁶ In July 2017, we issued an open letter inviting views on our approach to RIIO-2.

<https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications-and-updates/open-letter-riio-2-framework>

⁷ RIIO-2 Framework review workshops <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications-and-updates/riio-2-framework-review-workshops>

1.9. All of the Groups will be:

- **independent**, operating at an arm's-length from both the network companies and from us
- capable of providing rigorous **challenge** to companies
- providing **their views** to Ofgem in the form of reports that we will receive alongside the final business plan submitted by companies.

1.10. The role of the company Groups in both sectors is similar, in that they will provide challenge to the companies' business plans, and ultimately provide us with reports detailing their views on the plans. There is a difference in the composition of the Groups. This reflects the characteristics of each sector, especially the range of stakeholders and their capability to provide challenge and direct input to company proposals.

1.11. We are also proposing to hold "open hearings" once we receive the business plans. Areas of contention that these Groups have flagged could provide the focus for these hearings. These would then allow us to listen to arguments from the companies, the Chairs of each Group and from other interested stakeholders in favour of, or against company proposals. This could enable us to gain better understanding of issues in a transparent and public manner. We are consulting on this approach and we will provide further detail on this in due course.

1.12. We are also consulting on potentially separating the electricity System Operator (SO) price control from the price control for National Grid Electricity Transmission, and considering the case for alternative models of regulation for this. If our decision is to separate the SO, then we will need to develop further the role that enhanced stakeholder engagement could play a role in the SO's framework.

1.13. If we implement a separate framework for the SO, then we would expect the approach to stakeholder engagement to be broadly consistent with the models we have set out for network operators. We would expect engagement with a wide and representative range of stakeholders to inform its business plan, and that this should be subject to appropriate scrutiny and challenge. However, given the potential for differences in how we will regulate the SO, it is not sensible at this time to commit to a model.

How the new model will strengthen the consumer voice in RIIO-2

1.14. We consider that the introduction of these arrangements will strengthen the consumer voice in the following ways – including but not limited to:

- **Raising the bar for engagement and quality of business plans**

One of the benefits of this approach is that it allows stakeholders to bring expertise, new insights and engagement skills that will be complementary to that of the company. Members of Groups for example could challenge a company's internal assumptions (including raising expectations of what good looks like), and ensure the companies keep pace with the latest thinking both nationally and internationally and ultimately improve the quality of business plans prepared by the companies.

- **Support Ofgem's business plan assessment**

The reports the Groups will provide could provide us with additional evidence and inform our assessment of the business plans. Being close to a company, but at an arms-length, these Groups are well placed to identify any disconnect between a good 'sales pitch' and the extent to which proposals genuinely reflect consumers' current and future needs. We expect these Groups to provide a view on the degree to which a company has explored different options, considered different viewpoints and properly reflected these in its final plan. We also expect the RIIO-2 Challenge Group to feedback on our emerging policy for setting price controls for these sectors and we will take account of this in our decision-making.

- **Enable more flexible regulation – reflecting regional differences**

If appropriately constructed, these Groups may be able to consider network activities that are particularly relevant to specific regions, or sub-sets of stakeholders. This could result in business plans that better reflect a local context, priorities, expectations and needs. This may be particularly important in an increasingly decentralised energy network.

Purpose of this document

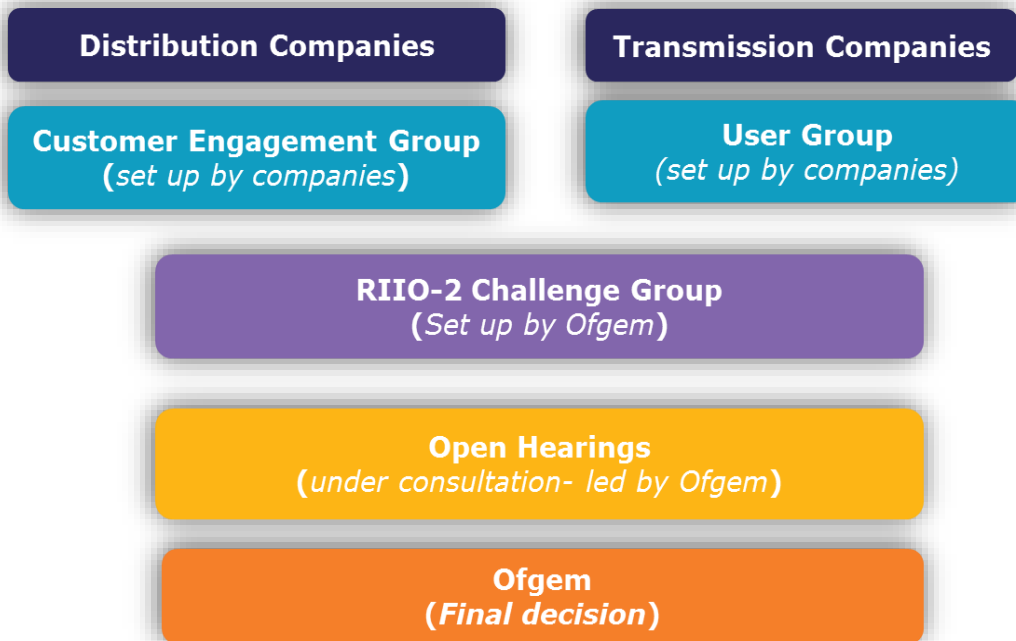
1.15. The gas and electricity transmission and gas distribution network companies will need to submit their RIIO-2 business plans to us in 2019. Companies therefore need to put these models for engagement in place as early as possible to ensure that stakeholders can play an effective role in the process.

- 1.16. We will consider the detailed policy issues that relate to each sector as we develop the methodology for each sector price control. We will consult on these in Q4 2018. As part of the process of developing the methodology, we will update this guidance to provide further clarification where necessary on the role of these Groups, specific areas we would like them to focus on and our expectations for the reports that they will ultimately submit to us. We will also provide more detail on how we intend to use the outputs from these Groups in our assessment of business plans.
- 1.17. Our role is to provide guidance on the application of this model for enhanced engagement, but companies must remain responsible for their engagement. For instance, we will not prescribe which stakeholders a company should engage with, nor the format or frequency used for engagement. The responsibility for this sits with the companies.
- 1.18. **Chapter two** of this document explains the roles, responsibilities, membership and governance of the parties involved.
- 1.19. **Chapter three** sets out the next steps.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Chapter summary: This chapter explains the roles and responsibilities of various Groups, Ofgem and network companies in the enhanced stakeholder engagement process. It also sets out the membership and governance arrangements for each of the Groups.

Figure 1: RIIO-2 enhanced stakeholder engagement model



Role and Responsibilities of all parties in the process

Role of transmission and distribution companies

- 2.1. Each company will be responsible for (including but not limited to):
- designing and running its own programme of engagement with their stakeholders and demonstrating that they have done it well
 - having in place an independent Customer Engagement Group (for distribution companies), or User Group (for transmission companies). Companies with more than one licensee will need to decide whether to have a single Group covering all of their licensed areas, or a separate Group per region. Whichever decision they take they will need to justify their approach, and ensure their broader engagement activities allow for appropriate regional representation and national consistency

- recruiting a Chair that acts in an independent capacity (rather than representing a particular organisation, or group of stakeholders). We expect companies to ensure Chairs and members are recruited with sufficient capacity to dedicate the time required for the role
- ensuring the Group is appropriately resourced eg by providing the necessary secretariat support, training/induction for Group members
- ensuring the Group has access to relevant data including information on past performance, totex forecasts and out-turn performance (and reasons for the variation)
- providing the Group with access to comparative data from other network companies and other background data to inform the Group's decision making
- ensuring timely access to staff to enable the Group to perform their role. The company's Board will be expected to be fully engaged with the Group and this should be reflected in the governance arrangements
- ensuring their business plans are available with a reasonable amount of time for the Groups to review and comment on, before companies submit their business plan, and the Group submit their reports to both the RIIO-2 Challenge Group and to Ofgem.

Role of the Groups established by the companies

Customer Engagement Groups – Distribution sector

- 2.2. The Groups will provide independent challenge to the distribution Company and views to Ofgem on whether companies' business plans address the needs and preferences of consumers.
- 2.3. The **focus of the Groups** should be to challenge the company on the following areas (including but not limited to):
 - the company's overall priorities and approach, for example at a strategic level does the company understand the range of changes happening within and to the energy system that could impact its activities. The company's approach to sustainability and resilience, including for example consideration of the future of gas and implications for network services associated with the energy system transition
 - proposed outputs and associated total expenditure ("totex") budgets (including level of cost efficiency improvements) for example has the company demonstrated whether its proposals for expenditure efficiency/service quality improvement are sufficiently stretching? What evidence has the company provided to allow them to assess how the output targets and expenditure proposals:

- compare to historical levels of performance?
 - compare to other network companies?
 - compare to other industries?
- the quality of stakeholder engagement the company has undertaken to inform their proposals, including whether their business plan proposals demonstrate value for money by taking account of any willingness to pay research
 - the approach and support provided to vulnerable consumers
 - the company's approach to innovation, including incorporating innovation into business as usual, and including innovative approaches and initiatives from leading global network companies
 - the range of scenarios the company has considered to anticipate future network requirements and the company's approach to managing uncertainty and associated risks. This should include testing the business plans against more extreme scenarios (both significantly lower and higher demand) to ensure the business plan remains robust in the face of unforeseen changes
 - what alternatives to the investment proposals has the company considered, including from parties offering alternative and non-network based solutions
 - any issues of particular relevance to a local region – including any significant investment choices in their area, and provide challenge to decisions made by the company when considering competing interests and perspectives
- 2.4. The primary function of the Groups is not to provide direct advice or information to the company. If a member of the Group, because of their specialist expertise, is requested to do so then this must be done transparently. If a member of the Group is engaged in this capacity then it must not interfere with the effective functioning of the Group. We would expect all members of the Group to consider if this in any way compromises the ability of that member to continue to sit on the Group, and what additional steps need to be taken to preserve the independence of the Group.
- 2.5. The Groups will meet with Ofgem periodically (collectively and through the Chair as appropriate) to provide regular feedback to Ofgem on the progress made by the company, and on the process itself.

User Groups – Transmission sector

- 2.6. These Groups will scrutinise and provide input and expert challenge to the transmission company's business plan.
- 2.7. The **focus of the Groups** will be on the following areas (including but not limited to):
- the company's overall priorities and approach, for example at a strategic level does the company understand the range of changes happening within and to the energy system that could impact its activities
 - direct input to identifying investment requirements and outputs representing desired performance levels and service quality improvements
 - associated totex budgets (including level of cost efficiency improvements) for example has the company demonstrated how its proposals for expenditure efficiency/service quality improvement are sufficiently stretching? What evidence has the company provided to allow them to assess how the output targets and expenditure proposals:
 - compare to historical levels of performance?
 - compare to other network companies?
 - compare to other industries?
 - the stakeholder engagement the company has undertaken to inform their proposals
 - the company's approach to innovation, including incorporating innovation into business as usual, and including innovative approaches and initiatives from leading global network companies
 - the range of scenarios the company has considered to anticipate future network requirements and the company's approach to managing uncertainty and associated risks. This should include testing the business plans against more extreme scenarios (both significantly lower or higher demand) to ensure the business plan remains robust in the face of unforeseen changes
 - what alternatives to the investment proposals has the company considered, including from parties offering alternative and non-network based solutions
 - any issues of particular relevance to a local region – including any significant investment choices in their area, and provide challenge to decisions made by the company when considering competing interests and perspectives
- 2.8. The Groups will meet with Ofgem periodically (collectively and through the Chair as appropriate) to provide regular feedback to Ofgem on the progress made by the company, and on the process itself.

The reports prepared by company Groups

- 2.9. The output from each company's Group will be an **independent report** to both us, and to the RIIO-2 Challenge Group. This should be submitted alongside the company's business plan. This means in developing their business plan we expect companies to ensure they share early versions of their plan with their Group and can receive and address comments in subsequent iterations.
- 2.10. In their report, the Groups should highlight areas of agreement and disagreement, including how the company has responded to challenges that have been raised through this process. The report should also highlight where there is disagreement amongst members of the Groups. This is so we can have visibility of a range of views, and the choices that the company has made. The report will provide us with independent evidence that we will consider alongside other relevant considerations in our assessment of business plans.
- 2.11. We will make the reports we receive from the company Groups publically available.
- 2.12. We will provide further detail on the timetable that these Groups will operate within when we publish our decision on RIIO-2 framework in summer 2018.

What is out of scope for the company Groups?

- 2.13. We do not expect the company Groups to discuss or review financial topics, such as the cost of capital, treatment of debt or the level of gearing in the company.
- 2.14. The Groups will not have decision-making powers and neither do we expect them to jointly 'own' the business plan that the company submits. The ownership of the business plan sits entirely with the company. Engaging with these Groups is not a substitute for a Company's engagement with its end users or other stakeholders.

Membership of the Groups established by the companies

- 2.15. An independent Chair will head up each of the Groups. The company will recruit the Chair. The Chair must act as an individual and not as a representative of a particular organisation, or Group of customers. In appointing a Chair, we expect companies to consider candidates that have a strong track-record of demonstrating leadership at a senior level. We expect candidates to have a proven record of challenging opinions, assumptions and vision. Experience of operating in the energy, or other regulated utility sectors would be desirable, but not essential. All candidates should be required to declare any actual, or potential, conflicts of interest that may arise from acting as Chair. Companies must share with us their shortlist of Chairs (explaining how they meet the above criteria) in advance of appointing one. We will highlight any concerns we have and we expect companies to consider these carefully before proceeding with an appointment.
- 2.16. For the distribution Customer Engagement Groups, we do not intend to prescribe the organisations or bodies from which membership should be drawn. Individual companies and Chairs should jointly consider the appropriate membership of their Groups by taking into account regional requirements, the future needs of the energy system as a whole and how to reflect the interests of existing and future consumers in their challenge to the business plan.
- 2.17. We expect membership of the transmission companies' User Groups to include users of the network such as shippers, suppliers, generators, distribution networks, large users and from new business models that challenge and provide an alternative to traditional network functions. These parties can sit alongside consumer representative bodies and other stakeholders capable of providing the necessary challenge and input.
- 2.18. The Groups in all sectors could also include members who have specialist knowledge and skills that will provide additional input and challenge to the companies.
- 2.19. As well as offering challenge to the company's proposals in terms of their projections of cost efficiency and service quality improvements, we expect members to also have expertise in certain topics or the ability to call upon expertise in these areas, for example in non-traditional business models, innovation, fuel poverty, community energy, consumer research etc. This will ensure that the company proposals are subject to robust challenge across a range of topics.

2.20. Members should act in an independent capacity as far as practicable and not solely as a representative of a particular organisation, or group of customers. Chairs may want to recruit members from existing stakeholder panels as this may allow those who already have knowledge of the company and the sector to continue to provide valuable input. However, such members will need to understand that by joining the Group they will be acting in a different capacity than they have done previously.

Governance arrangements and transparency of the Groups established by the companies

2.21. It is important that the Chair and the Groups are, and are seen to be, independent from the companies. The risk of capture is real, particularly given the high level of contact between the company and members. To build trust and legitimacy, appropriate governance arrangements must be put in place to ensure transparency and to provide assurance that the Groups are operating at arm's-length from the company. This will provide more confidence in the outputs of the Groups with stronger and more transparent governance processes in place.

2.22. We will take account of the level of support provided to each Group, and their ability to act independently, in our assessment of business plans and the corresponding report from each Group.

2.23. We do not intend to prescribe detailed processes for establishing the Groups (for example, prescribing who needs to be involved in the appointment of members or fixing levels of remuneration). Companies and stakeholders should have flexibility to establish arrangements that work effectively, while maintaining independence in a transparent manner.

2.24. We do however expect companies to provide us with a detailed report of the arrangements they are putting in place to ensure independence, and we will highlight any concerns that we may have. We are likely to consider the following (including but not limited to):

- how companies have recruited and remunerated particular members of the Group
- what checks have been carried out to ensure any potential conflicts of interest have been highlighted and managed
- what other resources or information have been made available to Groups, including comparative information on Company performance
- what access Groups have to staff including non-executive members of the company Board

- 2.25. We expect the company to establish the appropriate remuneration package for the Chair role. We want visibility of the proposed remuneration package of the Chair and members alongside the shortlist of candidates for the Chair.
- 2.26. We also expect the company to provide detail on its terms for changing or terminating their contract with the Chair. We expect the contract for the Chair to keep them in position at least until we have issued our draft determination. During this period, we do not expect the company to be able to dismiss the Chair without first notifying both members of the Group and us. We would expect an opportunity to seek further information on the reasons for dismissal, including through direct contact with the Chair and other members of the Group, before the company should proceed.
- 2.27. We would also expect the company and the Chair to consider other features of the governance processes (including but not limited to):
- the meeting frequency of the Group, and the extent to which the Group will meet without the company being present
 - maintaining and monitoring a register of member interests.
- 2.28. Groups should also have their own page on the company's website which shows (including but not limited to):
- the membership of the Groups, how this was decided and a code of conduct on any conflicts of interests
 - its terms of reference, governance arrangements and ways of working
 - minutes of meetings (anonymised/redacted if information is commercially sensitive) and other documentation, such as a log of challenges raised and the company's response.

Role of Ofgem

- 2.29. Our role is to inform, enable, encourage, challenge and incentivise good quality engagement. We will do this in a range of ways (including but not limited to):
- organising regular Customer Engagement/User Group Chairs meetings –to share information and learning
 - providing a point of contact for the Chairs of each Group to use and make ourselves available for bilateral engagement
 - keeping this guidance up to date as appropriate
 - providing guidance to Groups on the required content of their report

- identifying and sharing good practice as required, so Groups are clear of the benchmarks against which they can assess companies.
- 2.30. We will also establish the RIIO-2 Challenge Group by summer 2018, for which we will recruit an independent Chair and members and set up appropriate governance processes. We will also provide secretariat support to this Group. The role and remit of this Group is described the next section.

Role and membership of RIIO-2 Challenge Group

- 2.31. The RIIO-2 Challenge Group will **focus** on the following areas (including but not limited to):
- assess, scrutinise and challenge the business plans from the view of existing and future consumers, with a focus on sustainability, affordability and the protection of vulnerable consumers
 - consider how companies might respond to the overall price control framework once it is set. This will help us to understand the risk that some elements could have a stronger/weaker impact on company behaviour than we might anticipate
 - consider our policies for regulating each sector and whether they are likely to drive outcomes that are in the interests of existing and future consumers.
- 2.32. We expect this Group to engage with the companies from the outset and in parallel with the engagement that companies will be undertaking with their Customer Engagement/User Group. We expect the RIIO-2 Challenge Group to receive and provide feedback on early drafts of business plans, to allow companies to update their plans before final submission to us.
- 2.33. An independent Chair will head this Group, who we will recruit. As with the company Groups, the Chair will act as an individual and not as a representative of a particular organisation, or group of stakeholders. We expect the Chair to have extensive experience in operating as a leader at a senior level, with proven record of challenging opinions, assumptions and vision. We will recruit the members of the Group, who will be a mixture of independent individuals with expertise in relevant topics and those representing particular organisations. We will provide secretariat support to this Group and access to Ofgem resources, if requested to do so by the Group.
- 2.34. We require this Group to provide an **independent report** to us following their scrutiny of each Company's final business plan. It is important that the Group highlight in their report areas where they

have challenged the company, and how the company has responded, and any parts of the business plan that they disagree with. This will inform our assessment of companies' business plans.

- 2.35. We will make the report we receive from the RIIO-2 challenge Group publically available.
- 2.36. We expect the Group to remain in place at least until we have issued our Draft Determination for each sector price control.
- 2.37. We will provide further detail on the timetable, in particular when the companies should submit their business plans and Groups should produce their reports. We will do so in our decision on the RIIO-2 framework in summer 2018 and will update this guidance accordingly with the timetable.

3. Next Steps

Chapter summary: This chapter explains next steps.

- 3.1. In this version of the document, we have explained the background to enhanced stakeholder engagement for RIIO-2 and provided guidance on roles, responsibilities, membership and governance of all parties involved.
- 3.2. We will consider in detail the policy questions for each sector when we consult on the methodology for each sector price control in Q4 2018. As part of this process, we may provide further clarification on the role of these Groups, including specific areas we would like them to focus on and our expectations for the reports that they will submit to us. We will also provide more detail on the methodology for assessing business plan quality and the role that the outcome from this engagement will play in our assessment.
- 3.3. Annex 1 in this document includes an indicative plan of the high-level milestones for developing the sector specific price controls (for gas distribution and gas and electricity transmission). We will produce a detailed timetable to show the key points of the process for the input of the Groups in summer 2018 when we make our decision on the framework for RIIO-2.
- 3.4. We will continue to work with the companies and with the Chairs of these Groups to provide the clarity they need to best fulfil their role for RIIO-2 and update this guidance from time to time as appropriate.

