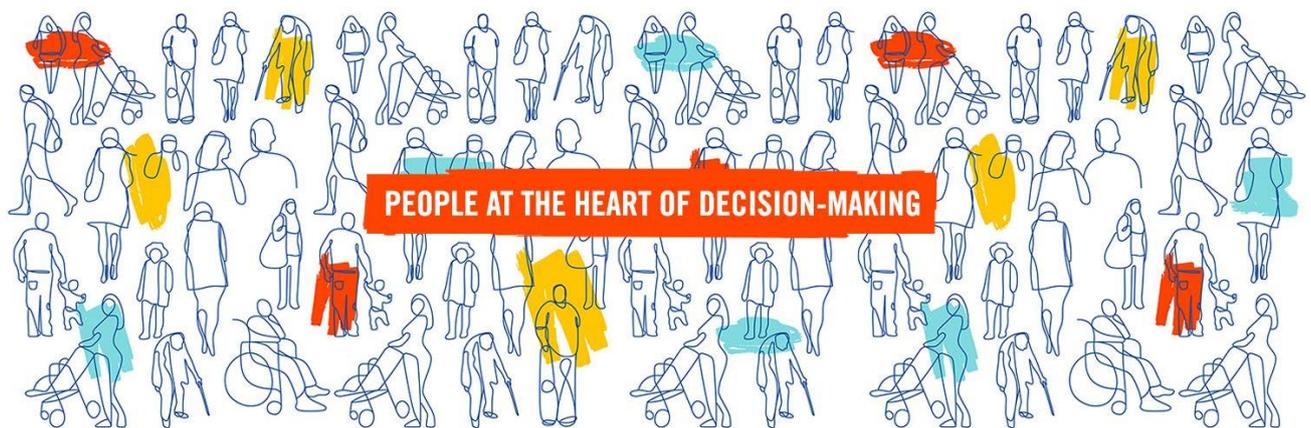




# NGN Public Panel

## Engagement Report



## Contact details

**EMAIL:** [Kaela@involve.org.uk](mailto:Kaela@involve.org.uk)

**WEBSITE:** [www.involve.org.uk](http://www.involve.org.uk)

**TWITTER:** [@KaelaJS](https://twitter.com/KaelaJS) / [@involveUK](https://twitter.com/involveUK)

# Foreword

Involve has been pleased to have this opportunity to work with NGN to design and deliver their first NGN Public Panel: a new approach to engagement for the company that brought together a 'mini-public' from across the network area for a 3 day deliberative process. This is, to our knowledge, the first time an energy company has used a deliberative mini-public like this as part of their Business Planning activities, and we welcome NGN's willingness to try something new in their efforts to embed customers' perceptions and priorities in their strategic business planning.

There is a growing recognition among policy and decision makers across the country of the value and legitimacy that bringing a diverse and representative sample of the population together for a process of learning and deliberation like this can bring to consultation and engagement activities: something attested to at the moment by the calls for citizens' assemblies on climate change and brexit that have been appearing in the media over recent months. There is also an increasing understanding of the fact that the public are quite capable of effectively engaging with complex and technical issues, when given time to learn, consider evidence, and balance up priorities before drawing conclusions.

Deliberative engagement processes like these provide a company with a different type of evidence on customer opinion than most other forms of engagement, as they deliver an informed and considered view. The idea is that this can be extrapolated to reflect the likely views of the wider customer base, if they too had been given the opportunity to really learn, discuss and evaluate the options.

The importance of the learning aspect in this cannot be over-emphasised. We would like to thank the many staff from NGN who worked with us to develop the material presented to the Panel and gave so generously of their time and knowledge at the meetings to ensure members were able to give the issues their contentious consideration. Without this support and involvement, the Public Panel would not have been the success it has been.

Finally, we hope that the results presented in this report (when considered alongside the findings from the wide range of other engagement activity NGN has undertaken in the development of their Business Plan) give the company new insight into the aspects of the company's performance and operations that their customers value most and the expectations they hold for NGN moving forward.

Kaela Scott  
Head of Democratic Innovation, Involve

June 2019

# Table of contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>01. Purpose of the NGN Public Panel</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>02. Engagement Methodology</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>03. Participants in the NGN Public Panel</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Recruitment methodology .....	7
Attendees.....	8
<b>04. Overview of the 3 meetings of the NGN Public Panel</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Meeting 1 – 23rd March 2019.....	11
Meeting 2 – 7th April 2019.....	12
Meeting 3 – 27th April 2019.....	12
<b>05. Performance area 1: Safety</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Pipe replacement programme .....	13
<b>06. Performance area 2: Reliability</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>07. Performance area 3: Environmental Impacts</b> .....	<b>17</b>
NGN’s Environmental Strategy.....	17
Adding Value to NGN’s Environmental Strategy .....	22
NGN’s proposed environmental outputs .....	25
<b>09. Performance area 4: Customer Service</b> .....	<b>27</b>
The ‘customer journey’ during planned interruptions .....	28
The ‘customer journey’ during unplanned interruptions .....	31
Complaints Handling .....	33
Enquiries Handling .....	36
Connections .....	37
<b>10. Performance area 5: Social Initiatives</b> .....	<b>40</b>
Defining Vulnerability.....	40
NGN’s core obligations.....	40
<b>11. Priorities for performance improvement across NGN’s 5 performance areas</b> .....	<b>45</b>
Acceptability of the costs of performance improvements being passed on to customers .....	48
<b>12. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>Annex 1: Participant Evaluation of the experience of being part of the NGN Public Panel</b> .....	<b>53</b>
<b>Annex 2: Output report from meeting 1 of the NGN Public Panel</b> .....	<b>57</b>
<b>Annex 3: Output report from meeting 2 of the NGN Public Panel</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>Annex 4: Output report from meeting 3 of the NGN Public Panel</b> .....	<b>83</b>

# 01. Purpose of the NGN Public Panel

The NGN Public Panel was one of several key strategic engagement activities undertaken by NGN between November 2018 and June 2019 to enable customers and other stakeholder groups to contribute to the development of the company's Business Plan for 2021 - 2026. Through this NGN was seeking to ensure that stakeholders' values, preferences and ideas were genuinely reflected in their business planning cycle in a meaningful way.

The overall approach to engagement during this time was to ensure that research was undertaken cumulatively, with each phase building upon knowledge gained in previous phases. Thus key findings from other Business Plan engagement mechanisms were utilised to identify content and objectives for the Public Panel. Further it is intended that the insight derived from the Public Panel will support the screening of business plan options presented to customers as part of the Willingness to Pay (WTP) engagement mechanism.

## Why convene a mini-public?

The Public Panel was brought together to focus on the 'knotty' question that is at the heart of NGN's business plan:

- **How does NGN find the right balance between price and service which is fair for everyone and which meets customers' aspirations for the company?**

The objective was to gain clarity on domestic customers' investment preferences; measure the importance placed upon different performance areas, measure support for different business plan options, understand where consensus exists and also capture dissenting views.

In choosing to convene the NGN Public Panel as a 'mini-public' the focus was on ensuring that the company engaged, in depth, with a wide variety of customers, including specifically those who did not generally interact with the company. By actively recruiting people from across the region who were not already engaged with the gas network, or necessarily even interested in it, the Panel members can be argued as representing a true cross-section of NGN's customer base.

This was seen as particularly important for aspects of the company's planning where there are no simple 'right' decisions, but instead decisions involve making a trade-off between different priorities. Decisions like these are a particularly appropriate focus for deliberative work with representative mini-publics as they benefit from participants being given time, access to balanced and in-depth information about the issues, and the opportunity to discuss their opinions with other customers before drawing conclusions.

The purpose of the NGN Public Panel and members' role within it, i.e. to contribute as individuals who, collectively, are representative of the customer base, was explained to the participants at the outset of the first meeting, and reiterated throughout.

- At the end of the first meeting of the NGN Public Panel 80% of participants agreed that they understood the purpose of the Panel and their role within it.
- By the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Panel this had increased to 98%.

## 02. Engagement Methodology

The NGN Public Panel was convened to use an intense, long-form deliberative methodology to involve a representative sample of customers from NGN's network area in the consideration of key aspects of the company's developing Business Plan for the next price control period.

Given this was a new approach for the company Involve (the UK's leading specialists in deliberative engagement), were contracted to design and deliver the process. This was led by Kaela Scott, Head of Democratic Innovation at Involve, and supported by a team of 6 facilitators (from Involve's core team and associate pool) experienced in developing dialogue among diverse groups and encouraging effective deliberation.

### Process Design

The principles that underpinned the process design were that deliberative methods offer a distinctive approach to public engagement, which differ from other forms of consultation, because they are fundamentally about giving participants time to learn about and discuss issues in depth before coming to a considered view. As such they can:

- give decision-makers a detailed understanding of informed public opinion on complex issues and/or value-laden and controversial questions; and
- open up the space for revealing consensus, wherein trade-offs have to be made, and a solution that respects the constraints of the policy and practical environment can be found.

The defining characteristic of a deliberative engagement process is that it brings together a group of people, selected to be broadly representative of the demographics of the population (i.e. a mini-public), to deliberate on a significant community or policy issue. This will, by definition, involve a 3 stage process:

- **A dedicated learning phase:** A central feature of this approach is the learning component wherein participants are able to develop an understanding of the issue based on unbiased information and/or the clear presentation of arguments from different perspectives. Throughout this phase information can be presented in a variety of ways including presentations from experts, written information and through facilitated discussions.

In this case the learning phase was spread across the 3 days of the Panel's deliberations. At each stage more detailed information was presented for discussion and questioning to enable Panel members to build up an understanding of the scope of the company's operations and the challenges it faced when determining areas of performance to allocate resources for improvement.

- **Discussion focused on developing dialogue:** To enable this, participants tend to work for most of the time in small groups, supported by highly skilled facilitators to engage in dialogue about the topic. This allows time for people to develop and test opinions on issues that are new to them (and on which they do not have a pre-existing opinion), explore their pre-existing opinions in light of what they have heard and encourages a wider understanding of the opinions of others.

The importance of subject experts being available to respond to participants' questions during this phase cannot be understated, and was key to the success of the way this phase of the deliberative process was delivered during the NGN Public Panel meetings.

- **The deliberation phase:** This stage of a deliberative engagement event involves participants coming to some conclusions based on what they have learnt, through a process of public reasoning. While consensus based decision-making processes are the ideal, at this

stage voting systems will often be used, as was the case in the NGN Public Panel meetings to ensure clear outputs are attained at each stage.

Central to the success of a deliberative process like this are the variety of exercises and techniques used throughout the sessions. In this case the process was specifically designed to support all participants to engage with complex information and feel able to put their opinion forward on their own terms. Therefore each of the meetings were designed to include a range of ways for members to participate including:

- facilitated table discussions;
- written exercises including questionnaires;
- plenary discussions;
- group ranking/negotiation activities;
- time for individual reflection and note taking;
- opportunities to question the speakers (at tables and in plenary);
- live interactive polling to instantly gauge the sentiment within the room on key discussion points;
- tasks in groups of 2-3; and
- individual ballot papers.

This variety within the process design is important to ensure that all participants are able to contribute in ways that suit them best – verbally (in pairs, in small groups and in plenary), through written inputs, and through time for reflection.

Each of the meetings of the NGN Public Panel was designed to adhere to these principles and this led to high levels of engagement from participants, sustained attendance and the production of clear outputs useful to decision makers, as presented in this report.

## 03. Participants in the NGN Public Panel

Members of the NGN Public Panel were selected to be a representative sample of the overall population of the region i.e. a mini-public. As far as possible the selection of members was undertaken to mirror the demographics of the area, as recorded in the most recent census.

### Recruitment methodology

The rationale behind the Public Panel approach was to engage a broad cross section of domestic customers from across the region, including those who have had no reason to engage with NGN previously and who may have given little thought to how their gas network operates. Membership of the Panel was therefore determined through a process of stratified random selection to (as closely as possible within a group of this size) match the demographic characteristics of the geographical area.

Recruitment of participants was undertaken by the Sortition Foundation - a not-for-profit social enterprise dedicated to promoting fair, transparent, inclusive and effective deliberative processes by ensuring accurate representative and random sampling during recruitment. The method they used was based on the idea that, in principle, every resident in the area should have an equal probability of receiving an invitation to take part.

5000 invitations to participate were sent to households randomly selected from the Royal Mail Postcode Address File (PAF) - the most complete and up-to-date address database in the UK. The invitations were issued in a specially designed, attractive and informative envelope (with NGN branding) to draw attention to the contents, and included a FAQ sheet, background information relating to NGN and an individual registration code. The invitation letter also included the offer of a £60 cash thankyou gift per meeting (a total of £180) to encourage those who might not otherwise be interested in the initiative and ensure a diverse range of people were motivated to apply.

Potential participants were given two easy ways to register their interest: online or over the phone. Upon registering their interest socio-economic and demographic data was gathered to enable stratification and relevant exclusions (e.g. people whose homes were not connected to the gas network).

From the pool of interested respondents a second, stratified random selection was performed, matching the latest UK census data on six dimensions: age, location, gender, ethnic background, disability and occupational grade. Where the level of interested respondees did not meet the number required for the stratified sample additional targeted recruitment was undertaken via advertisements on job boards and location specific on-street recruitment.

Once the selection of members was completed an invitation was sent out to the selected group containing more details of the events. Intention to attend was also confirmed by phone before the details of the representative sample of 55 people were sent to Involve to continue the on-boarding process. This included arranging accommodation the night before the meetings (if participants were traveling more than 1.5 hours to attend), arrangements for reimbursing travel expenses and any dietary requirements or access support participants may need.

## Attendees

- 48 participants attended the 1<sup>st</sup> session (from a recruited sample of 53).<sup>1</sup>
- Over the 3 sessions this dropped to 43 participants completing all 3 engagement events due to a combination of illness, lack of engagement (i.e. deciding the process wasn't for them) and changes in circumstances (e.g. family demands).
- Overall this represents a retention rate of 90% of the initial attendees participating in the final meeting.
- Most of the members who pulled out of the process were among those that had the furthest to travel.

### Demographic categories used during recruitment

Gender	Census figures	Recruited sample	Attendees <sup>2</sup>
Female	51%	47%	50%
Male	49%	53%	50%

Ethnicity	Census figures	Recruited sample	Attendees
BAME (Black and Ethnic Minority)	14%	24%	29%
White	86%	76%	71%

Age	Census figures	Recruited sample	Attendees
18 - 29	20%	18%	20%
30 - 44	25%	36%	31%
45 - 59	26%	25%	27%
60+	29%	21%	22%

Geographic Spread <sup>3</sup>	Census figures	Recruited sample	Attendees
Bradford - Leeds Central	37%	56%	60%
North	39%	25%	23%
East	24%	19%	17%

<sup>1</sup> The target group size was 50, and Involve had over-recruited to try and allow for last minute cancellations. Unfortunately 5 participants, despite having confirmed their intention to attend in the days before the event, did not arrive.

<sup>2</sup> These figures are drawn from the attendees at the first meeting. Percentages are used throughout this report for comparative purposes only. In a group of this small size percentages carry little statistical significance and it is worth remembering that a single person accounts for over 2% of the sample size.

<sup>3</sup> Despite targeted, supplementary recruitment being undertaken in the North and the East it should be recognised that it was always going to be more difficult to attract participants who would have to travel significant distances to take part. Further, of the 5 who did not attend on the day without notice, 4 were from the North and East areas.

Occupation Status <sup>4</sup>	Census figures	Recruited sample	Attendees
Not working	38%	33%	37%
Services	17%	24%	21%
Skilled or Elementary	17%	27%	23%
Professional	28%	16%	19%

Disability	Census figures	Recruited sample	Attendees
Have a disability	23%	18%	19%
Do not have a disability	77%	82%	81%

### Vulnerability Characteristics

Once in attendance, participants were asked to self-identify whether a set of ‘vulnerability characteristics’<sup>5</sup> supplied by NGN applied to themselves or members of their household.

41% of participants indicated that at least 1 of the ‘vulnerability characteristics’ applied to themselves.

- 13% stated they were on low or unstable incomes
- 11% reported that they had a serious or chronic illness
- 7% reported they were of pensionable age
- 7% reported having children under 5 in their household
- 7% indicated they were blind or partially sighted
- 7% reported another physical impairment
- 7% reported having a mental health condition

A further 15% of participants indicated that within their household there was someone else that these ‘vulnerability characteristics’ applied to.

- 9% highlighted living with someone with a mental health condition
- 7% highlighted living with someone with a serious or chronic illness

Further, in the same survey, 20% of participants strongly agreed that their household frequently had difficulties paying their energy bills (with a further 24% agreeing), suggesting a substantial proportion of participants could be expected to live within ‘fuel poor households’.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In the recruitment process greater focus was given to ensuring age and gender balance, and trying to ensure a geographic spread, accounting for the variance in occupational status (resulting in the recruitment of less people from a professional background than would match the census figures).

<sup>5</sup> The ‘vulnerability characteristics’ used by NGN reflect those set out within Ofgem’s Vulnerability Strategy and the Priority Services Register’s Common Set of Needs Code.

<sup>6</sup> Fuel Poor Households are defined as those wherein over 1/3 of the household’s disposable income goes towards fuel payments.

## Participants' experiences and understanding of the gas industry

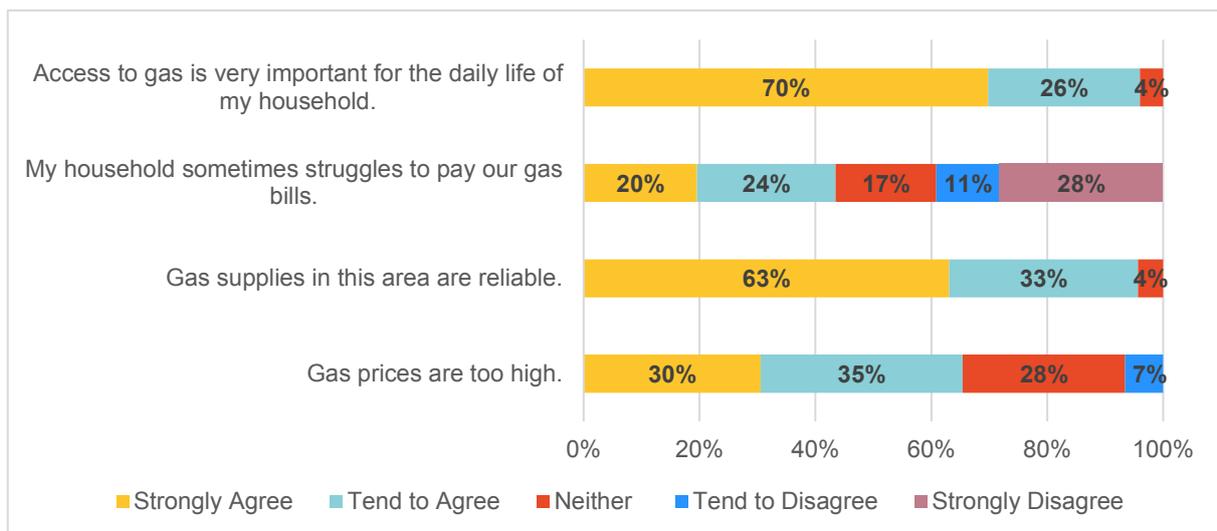
Before discussions at the NGN Public Panel began, members were asked to complete a survey establishing baseline understandings, experiences and opinions regarding the gas industry.

Members were asked, "Before being invited to take part in this Panel had you heard of Northern Gas Networks?" Responses showed a high level of awareness of the company, with 76% responding that they were aware of NGN and only 4% stating that they had definitely not heard of the company.<sup>7</sup>

Members were also asked about their awareness of the fact the network company responsible for the distribution of gas across the area was a different company to their gas supplier. In response to this, answers were more mixed:

- 28% - Very aware;
- 37% - Somewhat aware;
- 20% - Not really aware;
- 15% - Definitely not aware.

A range of questions were also asked at this stage to establish some baseline opinions about gas prices and gas supplies across the area to establish the range of opinions and experiences in the room. The results of these questions are displayed below.



Further, 30% of members of the Panel reported they had experienced a gas supply interruption. Of those:

- 57% reported their gas had been cut off for a few hours;
- 29% reported a loss of supply for less than 1 day;
- 2% reported it had lasted 1-2 days.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the percentages used to illustrate the findings throughout this report are provided for comparative purposes only and are not statistically significant in a group of this size (where 1 person's response counts for more than 2% of the total). Throughout this report percentages have been calculated based on the number of responses received to each question, rather than the number of people eligible to vote.

<sup>8</sup> While this may seem very high given NGN's record on reliability it is important to note that not all of these reported experiences had occurred within the NGN area, or even within the UK.

## 04. Overview of the 3 meetings of the NGN Public Panel

This section of the report provides an overview of what was covered at each meeting of the NGN Public Panel and demonstrates how the learning and understanding of Panel members was built up over time.

### Meeting 1 – 23rd March 2019

At the first meeting of the NGN Public Panel, time was taken in the morning to:

- Explore the purpose of the NGN Public Panel and how it would operate over this, and the next 2 meetings;
- Promote discussions among members about their experiences with using gas and the value they placed on gas supplies; and
- Establish a common understanding of the role of NGN as a distribution company within the wider gas sector.

The focus then turned to introducing Panel members to the 5 performance areas NGN uses to evaluate its service delivery to customers, and evaluating the relative importance of each.

In the afternoon the focus of the Panel meeting was on safety – specifically on what NGN should do to improve their safety performance record (and whether it should improve).

#### **Co-creating the focus of future meetings**

Finally, before leaving, Panel members were asked which areas they would like to focus on in subsequent sessions – considering both which performance areas were most important to them and which performance areas they felt customers should be able to have the most impact on. This was an important feature of this first day as it allowed the members to co-create the focus of the next 2 meetings and identify the information they felt they needed in order to be able to have an informed conversation on the topic.

In these discussions sustainability and the environmental impacts of gas, and the company more broadly, were identified as the top areas of interest by Panel members. Key points and questions raised were:

*What are you doing now to be sustainable?*

*Gases and alternatives – What [NGN] is doing / planning?*

*How much power [does NGN have] to influence other parts of the energy system?*

Understanding more about how NGN identified and supported customers in vulnerable circumstances, and why this was something NGN would be involved in, was also an area identified for future focus – both by those with an interest in learning more about the range of activities undertaken and those who believed this was outside NGN's remit, and therefore that customers should have more say over what were reasonable expectations in this performance area.

*Who is classed as vulnerable? What does the NGN staff training cover? Would like more details about the criteria. Are NGN really meeting people's needs?*

*[Need to] Balance between customers and the company bearing the cost*

There were also a range of other specific questions and points of focus which were brought together under the broad heading of Customer Service:

*More information about how [NGN] can work with other services and co-ordinate*

*How do you communicate with customers [about a gas leak]?*

*How do [NGN] compare with other distributors?*

## Meeting 2 – 7th April 2019

Building on the interest members showed during the first meeting in how NGN approached mitigating their environmental impact, this was the focus of meeting 2. Meeting 2 also used an online polling app to reflect regular readings of the opinions in the room, given what they had learnt and evaluated in their table discussions, back to the Panel for further discussion.

A small proportion of time in the morning was also used to clarify the role and responsibilities of gas suppliers in response to members' outstanding questions from meeting 1.

## Meeting 3 – 27th April 2019

The third and final meeting of the NGN Public Panel focused in the morning on whether there were improvements needed in different parts of the customer journey, including planned and unplanned supply interruptions, and the process for arranging a new connection.

In the afternoon, the focus moved to looking at the social initiatives in place for supporting customers in vulnerable situations, including what support there was for new initiatives that could add value to NGN's work in this area.

Finally, in order to bring the work of the 3 days together, participants were asked to use all they had learned and considered to identify priority areas for performance improvement for NGN.

## 05. Performance area 1: Safety

NGN's performance in relation to safety was the key focus during the first meeting of the NGN Public Panel.

Participants were presented information about two statutory obligations NGN has targets for in responding to gas leaks:

- 97% of uncontrolled gas escapes attended within 1 hour
- 97% of controlled gas escapes attended within 2 hours

They were also provided with performance information showing that in 2017/2018 NGN met these targets 99% of the time, comfortably ahead of the statutory requirement.

Overall participants were very impressed by both the high targets and the performance levels, as illustrated by quotes from the discussions.

*Expect safety – and have exceeded expectations*

*NGN performance in this area is impressive. Good to know that the targets are so high.*

*Is it realistic to hit 100%?*

### Pipe replacement programme

NGN's pipe replacement programme was introduced to the Panel as a key part of how NGN was improving the safety of the network. They were also informed that it was a requirement imposed by the Health & Safety Executive that most iron pipes within 30m of any property would be replaced by 2032.

Participants were presented with NGN's assessment of the benefits of the pipe replacement programme:

1. **Increased safety** – noting that between 2005 and 2018 the pipe replacement program has delivered a 62% reduction in risk on the network.
2. **Reduced Interruptions** – Reducing the likelihood of unplanned gas supply interruptions.
3. **Environmental impacts** – Fewer emissions from leaking gas pipes and preparing the way for low carbon green gasses.

Panel members were also informed that the costs of NGN's current pipe replacement programme account for:

- around 30% of NGN's annual costs
- around 30% of NGN's component of a residential customer's gas bill
- around 6% of a residential customer's total gas bill

With this information members were asked to consider the acceptability of proposals by NGN to accelerate delivery of the pipe replacement programme, given that this would increase the amount of disruption in the short term as work took place and was projected to increase customer bills by around £0.10 more per year.

## Accelerating the pipe replacement programme

Following discussions at their tables, 5 of the 6 groups reached agreement that they supported the idea of NGN investing in over and above mandated levels of pipe replacement in order to achieve improved safety, reduced environmental impacts and increased reliability more quickly. Comments from the discussions included:

*Cost on bills is not much, but need to make bill payers aware of why*

*Acceleration - as long as it's planned and efficient it would be better in the long term*

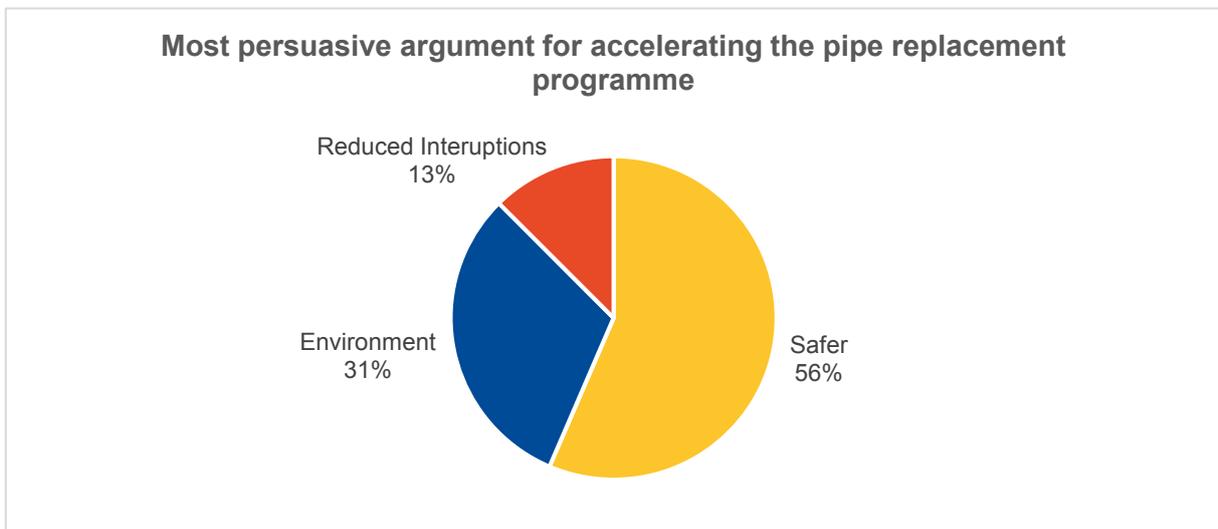
*Would make us ready for green gasses much quicker*

*10p a year worth it if company can deliver in future proofing*

The 1 table that did not agree were not however against the idea of acceleration as such, but were concerned that the planned plastic pipe replacements might not be the best long term option. They expressed concerns therefore about the risk of moving too quickly and having to redo work as technologies improved. Similar concerns were also expressed at a number of the other tables. There were also concerns that any cost increases to customers may not be reduced once the work had been completed.

## Most persuasive reason for doing this

Following discussions about the relative importance of the different benefits of pipe replacement, Panel members were asked to rank the 3 identified benefits in order of which was the most convincing argument to them personally for increasing investment in the pipe replacement programme. The results of this preferential vote are displayed below.<sup>9</sup>



Looking at the breakdown of the votes it can be seen that:

- **82% of Panel members gave their first preference vote to 'safety'** as the most persuasive argument for the pipe replacement programme;

---

<sup>9</sup> The results have been calculated using a standard Borda count method to attribute relative weight to 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> preference votes.

*Safety is super important when gas can be so dangerous*

*Safety is paramount for every customer's peace of mind*

*Nothing in this case is more important than people's safety from gas leaks and explosions - especially when thinking about my family*

- **18% of participants chose environment** as being the most persuasive rationale for the pipe replacement programme;

*167000 tonnes of Co2 is a massive impact which can be cured relatively cheaply compared to other alternatives*

*It is not worth damaging the environment now and suffering later. We should be more proactive especially with dangerous substances*

*Moving ahead to the future making steps so everything is in place for new methods of gas*

*Future of the planet and future generations*

- **Increasing reliability and minimising disruption** received the lowest proportion of the vote overall (with no first preference votes and only 14 second preference votes).

*It of course makes people angry when a service is disrupted but safety and environment are more important*

*If safety and environment are taken care of then interruptions are reduced*

*Interruption doesn't really matter. We can live without gas for a while but we can't bring back life*

## 06. Performance area 2: Reliability

While reliability is, of course, intrinsically linked to the pipe replacement programme the focus of discussions on this performance area during the NGN Public Panel meetings was on NGN's performance on reinstating gas supplies during planned and unplanned disruptions.

In introducing this performance area, Panel members were told that, across the NGN area, an average household was likely to be affected by:

- **A Planned Interruption** (where prior notification is given to the customer that their gas supply will be interrupted, usually in connection with work planned by NGN like pipe replacement) **once every 40 years.**
- **An Unplanned Interruption** (where no prior notification is given to the customer in case of problems with the network including leaks, damage by third parties or water ingress) **once every 200 years.**

### Importance of Reliability

During the first meeting of the NGN Public Panel, once members had been introduced to NGN's 5 performance areas and had the opportunity to discuss their relative importance, members were asked to identify individually the 3 areas that were most important to them in relation to NGN's ongoing performance.

- **57% of members included reliability in their top 3 priorities.**

Many of the comments about why they had chosen reliability were strongly linked to safety.

*Safety and reliability = if these are 100% then the other 3 are less important*

At several of the tables however the discussions that led to reliability being identified as a priority focused on planned service interruptions, and specifically how NGN communicated to their customers about these.

*Communication is important but the means of communication more so – letter, door-knocking, texts, posters*

*Re planned interruptions – positive that they tell customers and communicate in advance, but needs to be a personal addressed letter sent to the house (not something that seems like marketing which might just go in the bin) i.e. not just 'homeowner'*

*Positive that staff go door to door 10 days before if planned and on the day if unplanned*

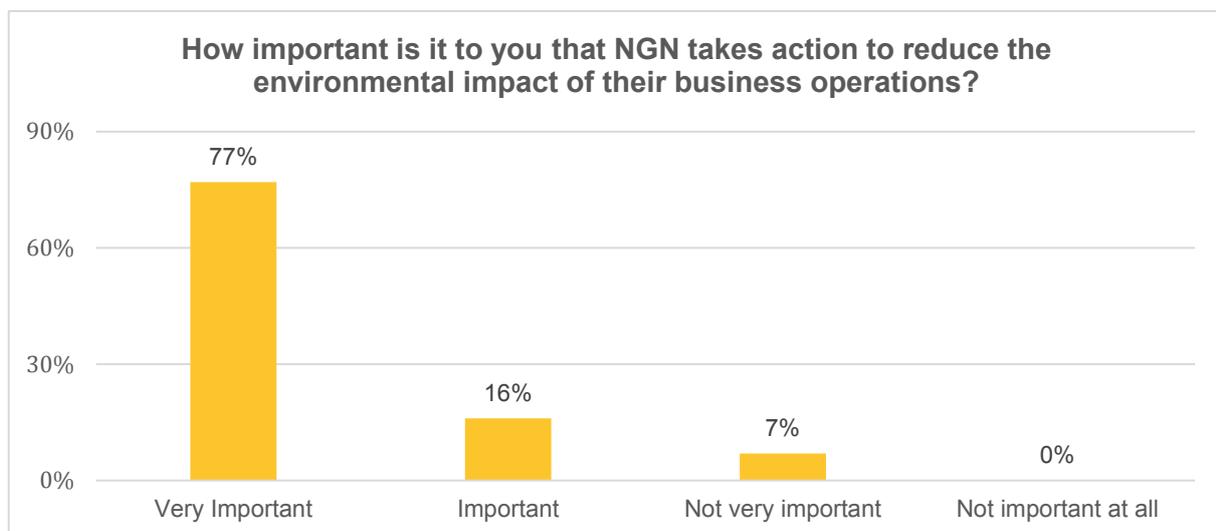
*If planned should be posters in the street – as not everyone opens unsolicited mail*

This performance area was not explicitly returned to throughout the subsequent meetings of the Panel as, in the discussions to co-create the programme for these meetings, the members expressed high degrees of satisfaction with NGN's performance on reliability and also that they felt they had little more to add to the views they had already expressed. Considerations relating to reliability however did help inform discussions about environmental impacts (see section 7) and customer service (see section 8).

## 07. Performance area 3: Environmental Impacts

At the first meeting of the Panel there was considerable interest shown by Panel members in exploring further what NGN was doing, and could be doing, to mitigate the environmental impacts of the company – both in relation to the direct environmental impacts of gas leakages into the atmosphere and also in how the company addressed this through their wider operational choices.

72% of participants included the environment as one of their 3 priority performance areas at the first meeting. Building on this interest, the majority of the second meeting of the Panel was therefore devoted to discussing the company’s environmental impacts and options for NGN to improve their performance in mitigating these.



One of the first questions asked of Panel members at the second meeting was about the importance of NGN taking action to reduce the environmental impacts of their business and, as the graph above shows, 93% rated this as ‘important’ or ‘very important’.

*Very IMPORTANT – all businesses live in society and should minimise negative impacts*

*We are all more aware now of impacts – do what we can, but big companies can do more!*

*All about reducing impact – for us and for future generations*

### NGN’s Environmental Strategy

NGN’s presentations at the second meeting began by highlighting the range of environmental impacts that the company has, including:

- Emissions due to leakage from pipes;
- Waste from business operations (offices and site work);
- Emissions from NGN’s fleet of vehicles;
- Company use of energy in offices and depots;

- Noise pollution as work is delivered in communities;
- The visual amenity of NGN's assets and work sites;
- The environmental impacts of NGN's supply chain.

NGN were also clear in saying that 95% of the company's environmental impacts came from gas leakage and shrinkage. When asked, however, whether the company should just focus on this 95%, the members of the panel were clear (with an 84% agreement score) that they expected NGN to also focus improvement efforts on reducing the environmental impacts of the company's wider operations.

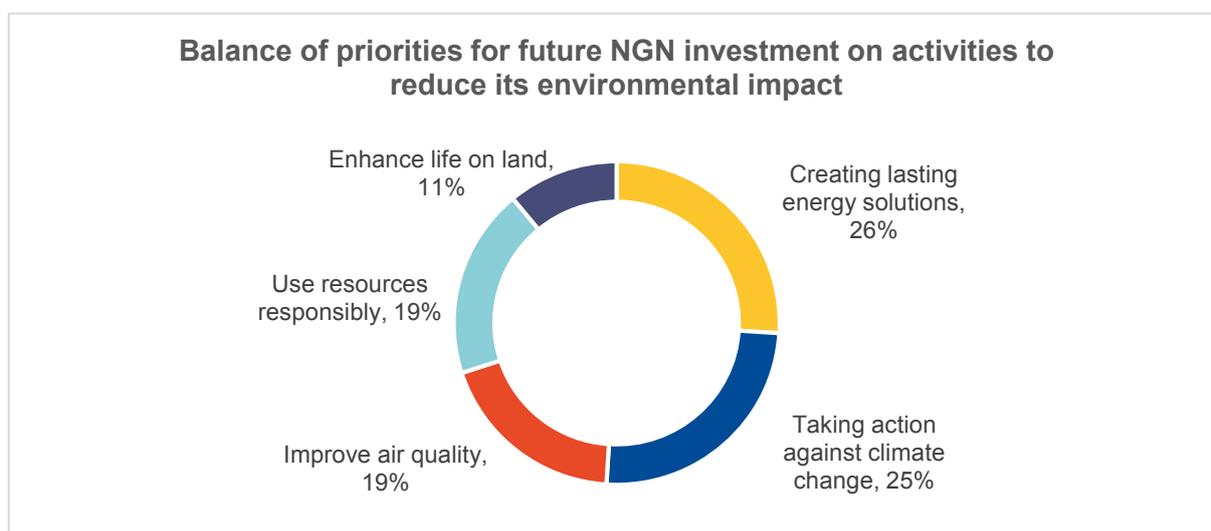
Members were provided with information about the 5 strands of NGN's environmental strategy (which are closely tied to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals):

- Improve air quality
- Take action against climate change
- Enhance life on land
- Create lasting energy solutions
- Use resources responsibly

Following time to discuss and absorb this information at tables, and ask questions from the NGN team present at the meeting, Panel members used an online polling tool to indicate which aspects of NGN's environmental strategy it was most important to them for NGN to take action on. This poll showed that, while there was an average level of importance of 8.5 (out of 10) given to the need to take action across all of the strands, there were aspects of NGN's environmental strategy that members placed more importance on. These are presented below in the order in which they were prioritised:

1. Creating lasting energy solutions was seen as most important by members – average value 8.9 (out of 10);
2. Taking action against climate change – average value 8.8;
3. Using resources responsibly – average value 8.6;
4. Improving air quality – average value 8.4;
5. Enhancing life on land – average value 7.7.

In order to further explore the 'importance' weightings given to each of these strands of the Environmental Strategy the Panel members were also asked what proportion of a pot of hypothetical resources they would allocate to ensuring NGN made performance improvements in each of these areas. The results of this are shown in the graph below.



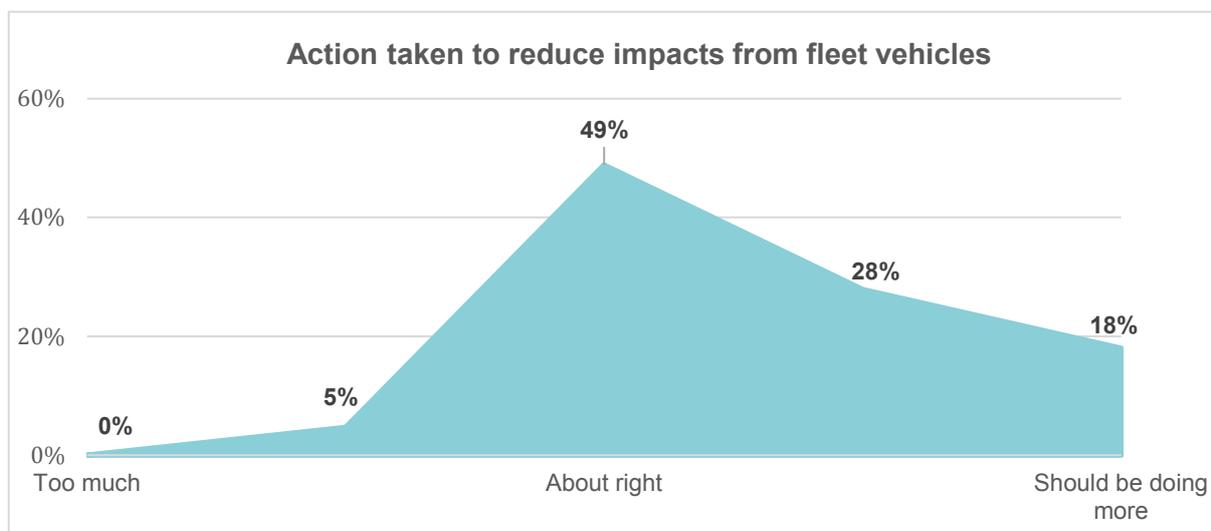
It is also useful to note that the Panel member's responses to this question are consistent with the responses given to the question of 'importance', although more weighting is given to their top 2 priorities.

### Action on fleet replacement

Throughout the second meeting of the Public Panel, NGN presented a number of their current activities designed to reduce the environmental impacts of the company in line with their Environmental Strategy. One of these examples was the approach NGN was taking to reduce the environmental impact of their vehicle fleet, contributing to improving air quality and taking action against climate change. This was selected as an example of where NGN was 'following the pack' in the approach to managing environmental impacts (i.e. keeping up with technology and sector assessments of good practice).

Panel members were told that NGN have around 750 fleet vehicles, which cover around 10 million miles per year and that their contractors have additional, significant fleets as well. NGN estimated that, in total, these vehicles account for around 50% of NGN's non-shrinkage emissions. They were also informed that, going forward, NGN's intention is to replace their vehicles with diesel vehicles with a Euro 6 (or above) emissions rating as this was an approach that balances cost, environmental impacts and practicalities (e.g. charging facilities for EVs).

Following time to discuss this approach at their tables, and ask questions of the NGN staff present, the members were asked to vote on whether they felt NGN was doing enough to reduce the environmental impact of their fleet vehicles. The results of this vote are shown in the graph below.



The graph shows that, overall, 49% of Panel members thought NGN's current activities to reduce the environmental impact of their fleet were 'about right'. The reasons given for this mainly related to the pace of technological improvement in this area, and a related recognition that the company needs to balance improvements with costs since the vehicle market is rapidly changing.

*NGN are consistently doing their bit to reduce impact of fleet – it's enough*

*What real alternatives are there for their existing fleet – at this present moment they are doing enough*

*Technology not available at the moment to go fully. Limited to other markets e.g. hydrogen being in infancy so they can't do much more*

*At the moment EV, hydrogen cars etc. are new. It's a big commitment to change fleet but they can still trial a small amount of them*

46% of Panel members did however feel that NGN could be doing more. This was particularly expressed as concerns in relation to the 'like for like' replacement approach NGN was undertaking at present (focused on Euro 6 diesel replacement).

*They tend to go for diesel but we know hybrid is more environmentally friendly based on road tax... I'd like to know why?*

*Like for like is not a strategy – but is an acceptable stance. They need to be looking for how they can move to cleaner alternatives. At present there are cleaner methods but the cost/effect calculation needs to be looked*

*Euro 6 is not an improvement on CO emissions levels from the previous standards. There is a 50% reduction in NO4 though, which helps air quality*

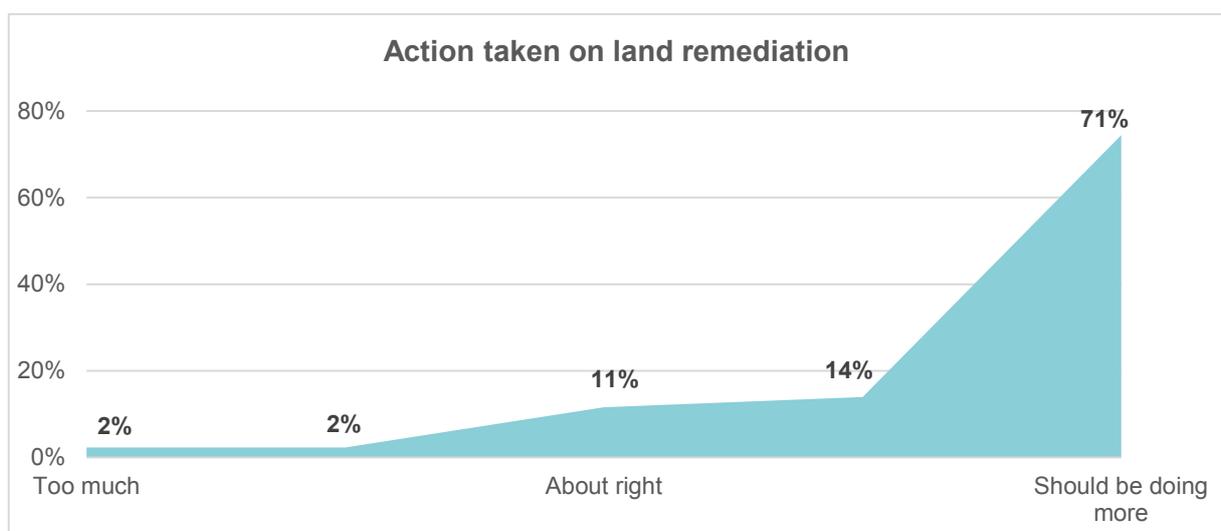
*Could be replacing all vehicles except vans with hybrids NOW*

### **Action taken on land remediation**

Another example of the types of activity NGN was focusing on that was presented to the Panel members was in regards to land remediation. It was explained to the Panel members that NGN was obligated to make sure that contaminated land (from Town Gas days) was made safe for the environment and people who may have contact with it. It was acknowledged that, despite NGN having received awards for best practice in this area, they are mainly delivering land remediation work at a baseline compliance level (rather than leading the field).

NGN noted that while (to date) they have spent almost £4m on land remediation programmes (equating to around £0.30 per customer, per year, since around 2013) they could be doing more. Examples of additional investment cited included planting trees on sites to encourage wildlife or bringing sites back into community use. These types of performance improvements would, however, come at a cost which NGN acknowledged would need to be passed on to customers.

In considering this example of NGN's activity, 85% of the members of the Panel thought that NGN should be doing more in relation to land remediation.



Reasons given for expecting more from NGN on this aspect of their approach to mitigating the environmental impacts of the gas industry included:

*Surely industries must shoulder responsibility for areas they have spoilt?  
These underground tanks are a risk – deal with it. It's [NGN] land, stop putting a  
sticking plaster on in*

*Only 47 sites so cost is capped! – do full restoration*

*Most of these sites will be in populated areas, do you not have a duty of care to  
fully clean these areas rather than just have a containment programme?*

There were a wide range of ideas and questions raised during the table discussion about how this work should be funded:

*Are there any land/assets that NGN can sell off to help pay for this work to speed  
up the clean-up process?*

*You can afford to do more!!!! If you don't do it (gas land remediation) who would  
do it? It's part of your legacy so 'suck it up, buttercup'*

*NGN should do more to actually treat and clear the land which can be used for  
other things. What is the overall cost difference?*

### **Action taken on energy futures**

The third example of the types of activity NGN was focusing on presented how the company was investing in energy futures and ensuring the distribution network was fit for purpose for future energy transitions.

NGN explained to Panel members that, currently, they were primarily focused on 2 low carbon gas options (biomethane and hydrogen), noting that there are already 10 biomethane connections feeding into the network. They explained further that there is significant long-term potential for gas networks to convert over to 100% hydrogen which would contribute to meeting climate change targets in a cost-effective manner (using the existing plastic replacement pipes). Panel members were told that, to date, the gas industry has spent around £34 million on investigating the potential of hydrogen, which equates to around £0.25 per customer, per year. Further they reported they are currently testing whether they can blend small percentages of hydrogen with natural gas, into the current network infrastructure. It was however acknowledged that some organisations are questioning whether as a nation we should continue investing in gas networks, or just convert gas customers over to electricity.

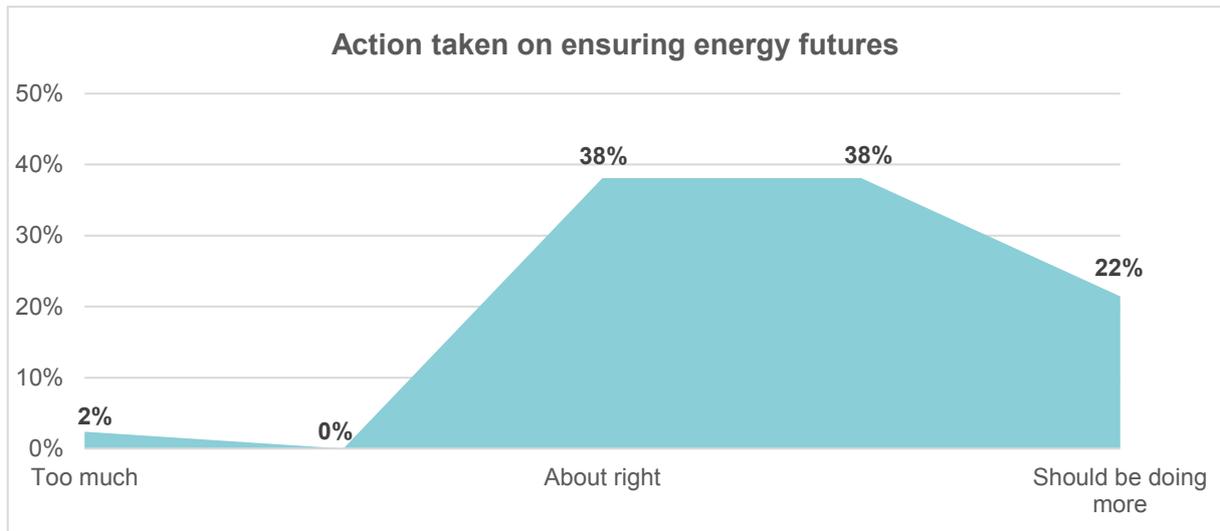
Given that this was the aspect of NGN's Environmental Strategy that was most strongly prioritised by Panel members earlier in the day it is unsurprising that, despite NGN identifying that the work it was involved in was sector leading, the graph below shows that 60% thought they should be doing more.

Comments from Panel members who believed NGN should be doing more tended to focus on the overall environmental challenge of sustainable energy:

*As a gas company they should be doing everything they can be to be going green  
– thinking more ahead for the future*

*You are doing a lot! BUT there is a big demand for future solutions for new energy  
/ green solutions*

*Not enough is being done to introduce Hydrogen into the network fast enough. I  
would happily spend a lot more per year on my bill to speed up its introduction.*



Despite the calls for NGN to do more on this aspect of their environmental performance 38% of Panel members supported the level of activity that NGN was currently undertaking regarding energy futures. Comments from those who felt NGN was doing 'about right' included:

*To be fair to NGN it's using resources in finding a solution to greener gas based on what they have budget wise/ resources*

*They are doing quite a bit. Love the forward planning with the hydrogen – good investment. (and they have options - don't have all eggs in the same basket)*

*We feel NGN are doing as much as viably possible within laws and guidelines and infrastructure*

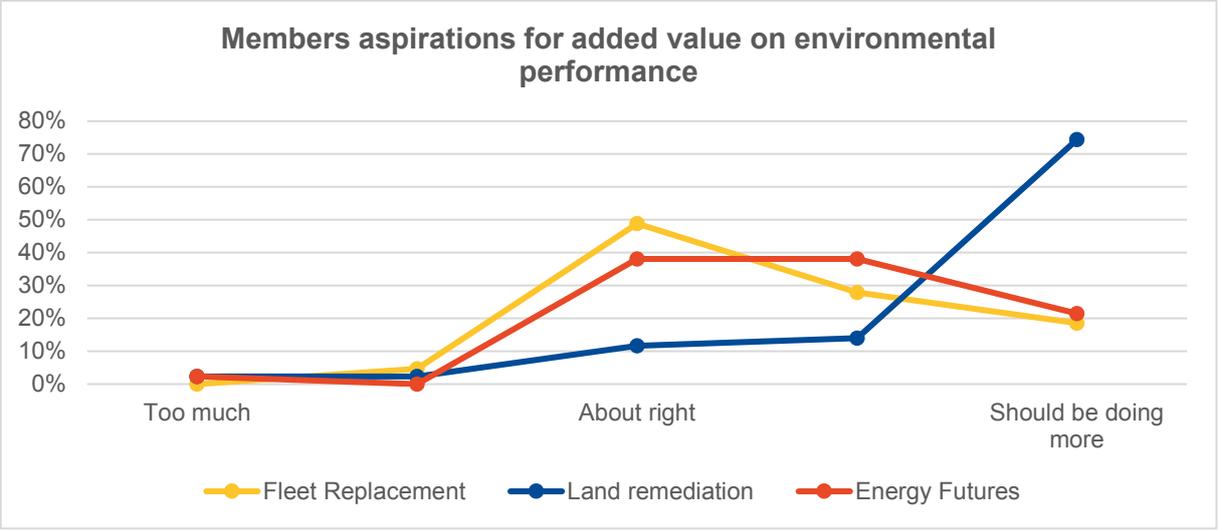
*Doing what they can within restricting parameters – investigating a range of pilots in a wide range of places – GOOD*

*Going in the right direction – appreciate you can't bang us all onto hydrogen in 5 mins!*

*The relative cut given to customers given the importance of the work is nothing – 25p to potentially help save the planet – PRICELESS!*

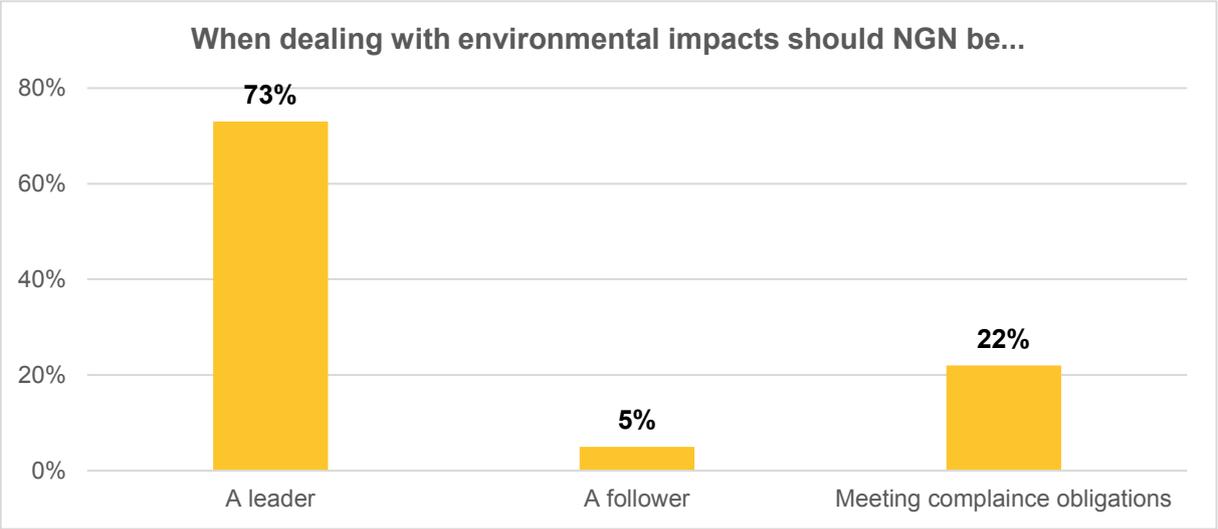
## Adding Value to NGN's Environmental Strategy

Taken together, the discussions within the Panel about NGN's Environmental Strategy reveal that there is a clear aspiration among Panel members for NGN to do more overall to manage its impact on the environment.



The next phase of discussions during the second meeting of the Panel were designed to determine whether, in relation to their activities to reduce their environmental impact, the members wanted NGN to:

- play a **sector leading role** (as currently the case in the example presented relating to energy futures) but which could/would be more expensive to consumers;
- **be a follower** (keeping up with technology and good practice as in the approach to fleet replacement); or
- just make sure that they **meet compliance obligations** (as shown in the land remediation example) and minimise costs to customers.



Comments from participants about their aspirations for NGN to ‘do more’ and be ‘a leader’ in the field included:

*Given this is NGN’s area – welcome their pushing the boundaries / doing more  
Very important for them to do more than is required as this is a crisis where time is  
of the essence for energy and environment and health*

*We need a market leader – if everyone does the bare minimum then in 54 years time we will not have any gas to worry about. Likewise if they don't work on the environmental impact then we will not have any safe places to live or work*

*It is important to try not only to mitigate the damage caused but reverse it*

*Gas has done a lot of damage to the environment – everyone involved should do more to improve it. NGN have done really good so far*

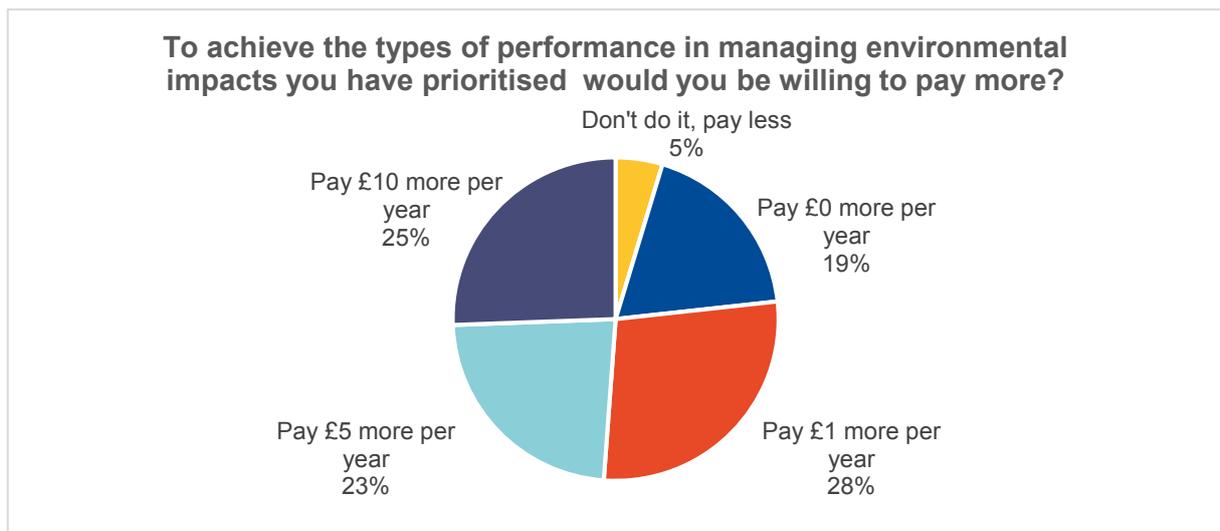
Panel members who thought that NGN should be concentrating just on meeting their compliance obligations in terms of managing their environmental impact tended to focus not only on cost implications, but where the responsibility should lie:

*Is the regulator's requirement at fault here / are Ofgem requiring enough?*

*Could do more, but if Ofgem / Govt not more demanding then NGN must protect shareholder value – it's not their 'fault' it is Govt / Ofgem's 'fault'*

*NGN is doing its part already... but I think the Govt should do its part to give more and not just regulate*

Ultimately, the purpose in presenting this information, and asking about the Panel's aspirations for leadership was to determine whether, despite valuing the work undertaken to manage the environmental impact of NGN's business operations and wanting to see more achieved, customers would be willing to pay more for performance improvements.



- 76% of the panel members indicated that they would be prepared to pay £1 or more extra per year to see NGN make greater progress on delivering against their aspirations for managing the company's environmental impacts.
- 25% of participants indicated they would be prepared to pay substantially more (£10 per year) if they knew this was what their money was going towards.

Despite these strong levels of support for NGN to invest in reducing its environmental impacts there were, however, concerns raised about whose responsibility it is to fund this type of activity, and whether costs should be passed on to customers.

*Costs should be borne by industry (across the board – from suppliers through to producers) not extra on the bill - Because they are a monopoly and public have no choice*

*NGN are a company that don't have normal competitive challenges / pressures and therefore [should be] well placed to innovate*

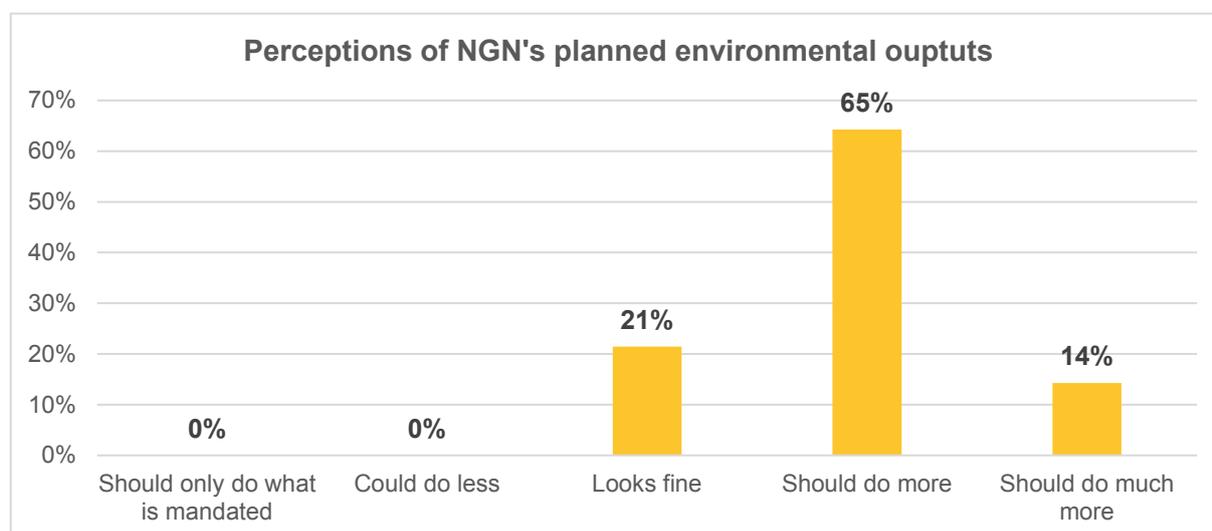
## NGN's proposed environmental outputs

In the final session of the second day participants were presented with the 5 current proposed environmental outputs to be included in NGN's business plan for submission to Ofgem. These are reproduced below.

Strategy Area	Output
Taking action against climate change	1. Reduction in gas shrinkage
	2. Reduction in gas leakage
	3. Reduction in business carbon footprint
Use resources responsibly	4. Reduction in virgin aggregate used in reinstatement
	5. Reduction in excavation spoil sent to landfill

The question asked of the Panel members was, focusing specifically on the 5 proposed outputs that addressed 'taking action against climate change' and 'using resources responsibly', should NGN be doing more?

- 79% of participants expressed the view that they wanted NGN to do more



NGN also shared the wider list of potential environmental outputs that could be considered for inclusion in the Business Plan, following NGN's Environment Workshop with industry stakeholders.

Strategy Area	Output
Taking action against climate change	1. Reduction in gas shrinkage
	2. Reduction in business carbon footprint
	3. Quantity of electricity produced from renewables
Use resources responsibly	4. Reduction in plastic pipe waste

	5. Reduction in virgin aggregate used in reinstatement
	6. Reduction in excavation spoil sent to landfill
	7. Reduction in office and depot waste
Improve air quality	8. Reduction in diesel used in vehicles
Enhance life on land	9. Plant fruit trees
	10. Create homes for nature
	11. Land remediation

Priority areas that members of the Panel focused on for increased activity included:

*Should have a mandated % of green gasses by the end of the price control period*

*Targets for land remediation – need not just capping but full cleaning*

*Target for complete removal of old infrastructure to be returned to local communities – parks and food gardens*

*Need to specify reductions in diesel*

*Need to include office and admin targets as well as focus on vehicles [in using resources responsibly]*

## 09. Performance area 4: Customer Service

At the first meeting of the NGN Public Panel, once members had been introduced to NGN's 5 performance areas and had the opportunity to discuss their relative importance, they were each asked to identify the 3 areas that were most important to them in relation to NGN's ongoing performance.

- Only 24% of members identified customer service within their top 3 priorities, in part because they had never had to (or expected to have to) deal directly with NGN as a customer.

While customer service, as such, was not specifically prioritised by the majority of Panel members, during the co-creation activity in meeting 1, many of the issues and concerns they did identify as priorities for discussion fall within NGN's corporate delineations as 'customer service' concerns. For this reason Customer Service therefore became a key focus of the third meeting.

### Customer Service Performance

At the first meeting, as part of the introduction to NGN's 5 performance areas, the Panel were presented with information about how NGN's customer service performance compared with other gas distribution network companies and to the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) Benchmarking standards. Most members were impressed with the performance information presented to them.

*Coming from a customer service/complaints working background, regulated by FOS who give an 8 week timescale for complaints, your figures are outstanding*

*Good customer service record for this industry – but is it overly done!*

*Nice to see they are the best. What strategies exist to keep improving?*

*Trust in company is ultimately impacted by their customer service*

When considering whether there was a need for overall improvement in this area, given the lack of interactions most participants had had with NGN, most of the table discussions in the first meeting focused on what made for good customer service in general. Key points included:

1. Making customers feel valued;

*Good customer service makes you feel appreciated*

*Customers should be involved in regular surveys*

*Well-trained staff – offering a human touch*

2. Making it easy for the customer to make contact and resolve enquiries, complaints etc.;

*Being able to deal with one person – getting something solved first time; not having to repeat issues to different people; being dealt with in a personal way, not via a script; being genuinely listened to; someone who cares for your issue*

*Make it easy for people to contact the company - Convenient call-back / easy website / chat make all the difference*

*Not using premium telephone numbers*

*Not too much automation – e.g. pressing lots of numbers on the phone; option trees don't always suit the people calling*

### 3. The importance of feedback.

*Good customer service gives you (individually) feedback on callouts – getting a response will encourage more reports of leaks*

*Want to be told clearly what actions will be taken after I call to make a complaint*

*Need to be told what will happen with my complaints if I had one*

#### **Opportunities for performance improvement**

The morning of the third meeting of the Panel focused on 5 aspects of the customer journey in dealing with NGN:

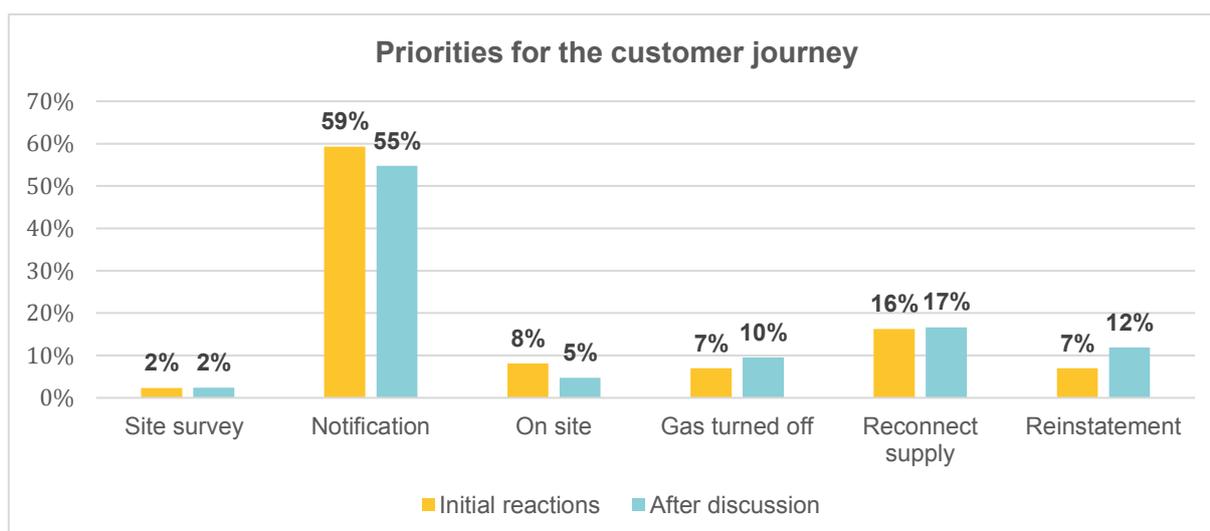
- A. The ‘customer journey’ during planned interruptions to gas supplies;
- B. The ‘customer journey’ during unplanned interruptions to gas supplies;
- C. Customer complaints;
- D. Customer enquiries;
- E. Customer connections,

## The ‘customer journey’ during planned interruptions

When the topic of planned interruptions was returned to in the third meeting of the Panel the members’ focus was again on the effective notification of customers.

#### **The customer journey: priorities for planned interruptions**

The Panel was introduced to 6 stages of the customer journey in relation to planned interruptions – from the site survey through to reinstatement. At the beginning of the presentation, participants were asked for their ‘gut-reaction’ opinion about which aspect of the customer journey in a planned gas interruption NGN should focus their efforts on most. This question was repeated at the end of the discussion. The results of this are shown below.



The clear focus for participants initially, and after learning more about NGN’s performance across the different aspects of the customer journey, remained on effective notification, echoing the points made in the discussions during the first meeting.

Reconnection was also considered important, particularly in winter, and it was noted there is a need for clear timelines for re-connection so that residents can make sure that engineers are able to access their property: *'important to be reconnected when they said it would be to help planning around work'*.

NGN provided the Panel with information about their performance levels across the different stages of the customer journey, highlighting that reinstatement of site excavations was an area that they recognised as needing performance improvement. Despite this, it remained a relatively low comparative priority for members after the discussion, although its proportional vote did almost double.

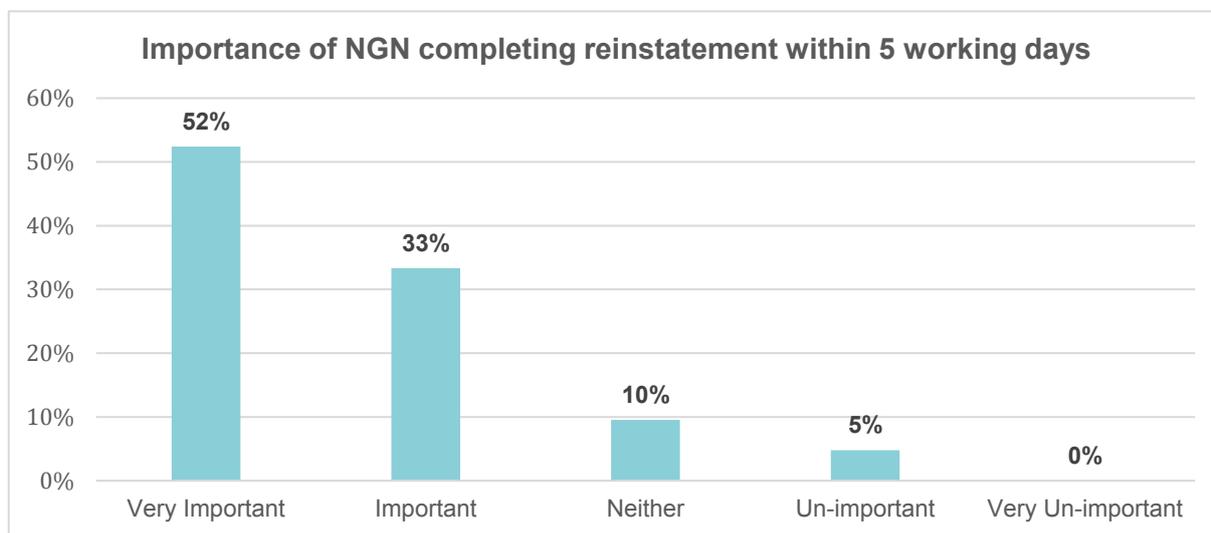
### Reinstatement of excavations

Reinstatement refers to NGN putting footpaths, roads, driveways back to the condition they were in before they arrived on the scene. Currently they have an obligation to ensure reinstatement is finished within 5 working days of completing the work required on the network.

Panel members were told that:

- NGN currently meet the reinstatement target of within 5 working days, around 97% of the time;
- 16% of complaints relating to planned works related to reinstatement;
- Reinstatement receives one of the lowest customer satisfaction scores after planned works.

To explore the value customers placed on improving performance in this areas Panel members were asked to consider how important it was to them that reinstatement work was completed within the 5 working day target.



85% of the members agreed that this was important, for the reasons quoted below.

*Whilst people understand works are necessary, people would like their properties/area to be returned to the previous state ASAP*

*It is a hazard for anyone especially for small kids and elderly. It looks unsightly, it dangerous and just not very nice. Should be done straight away. YOU DIG IT THEN IT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO FILL IT ASAP*

*It causes disruptions for both drivers and residents living in the area as well as being an eye sore as no one wants to see road works just laying there*

*5 working days is a reasonable amount of time - any more could cause serious disruption to day to day activities*

For some participants however the timescales themselves were less important than ensuring that the work was completed to a high standard.

*Not an issue much rather it done correctly*

*You can work around the work as long as you are informed and you stick to your timetable.*

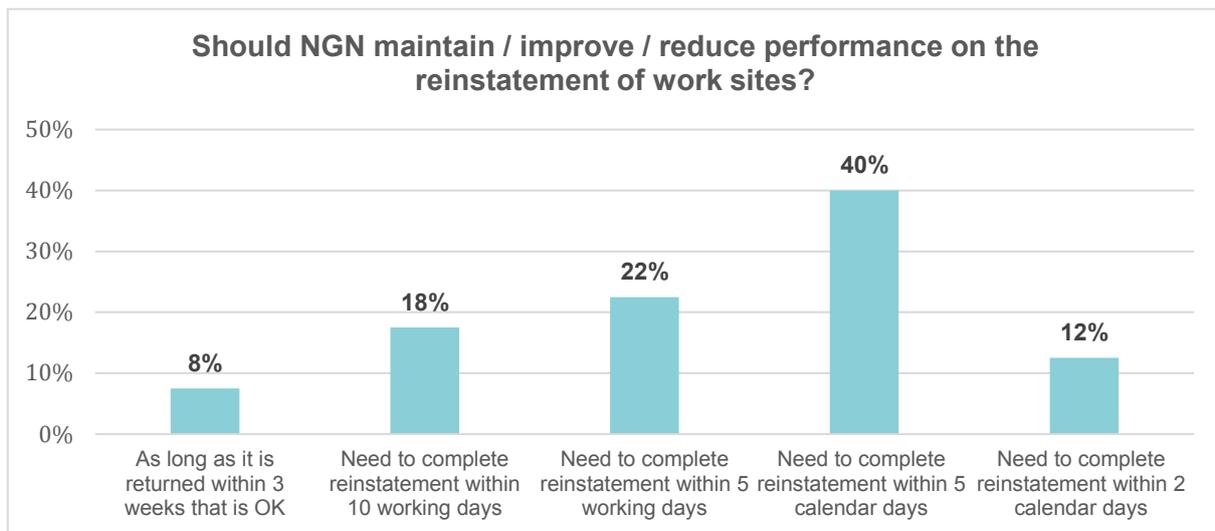
*It's more important that jobs should be done well rather than hurriedly*

One option presented to the Panel as a way NGN could improve customer satisfaction in relation to reinstatement work would be to adopt a 5 calendar day target (rather than the current target of 5 working days). When asked specifically about the need for performance improvements in this way:

- 52% agreed that a shorter target was important;

*For inconvenience purpose and why wouldn't they be able to do the work, within this timescale*

*The 5 calendar days seems (to me) as fair time to resolve the issue*



- 22% indicated they were happy with the current standard;

*I don't think people working outside on a weekend is necessary/expected and could disrupt nice weekend plans. Having the option to work weekend if required could be possible but inform people as they wouldn't expect it and want a quiet lie in.*

*5 working days is reasonable. Any less may be unrealistic, any more may cause disruption to daily activities*

*Their current level of performance is satisfactory and investment could be better used in different areas*

- 26% thought that the performance target could be reduced.

*I prefer the job be done safely and thoroughly rather than set a time limit*

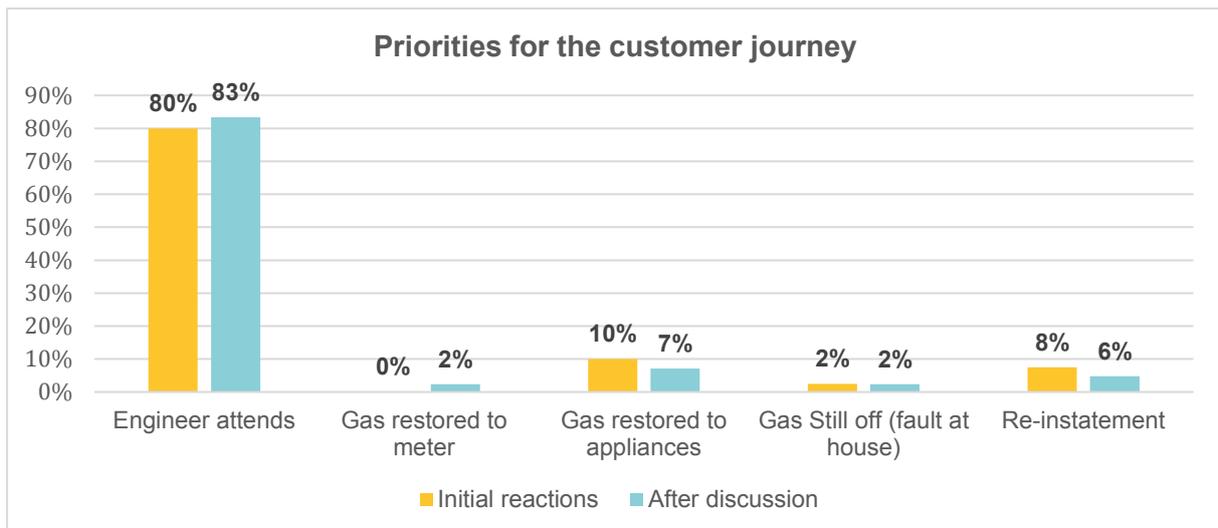
*As long as notified I will accept however long it takes*

*I think 10 working days is a reasonable amount of time to get the job finished as you have to consider the weather, size of the job, location of work being carried out etc.*

Concerns were also raised that moving to a calendar day, rather than a working day, standard would lead to noise and disruption to people’s weekends, and may actually cost customers more to cover penalty rates of pay.

## The ‘customer journey’ during unplanned interruptions

The stages of the customer journey regarding unplanned interruptions to supply was also presented to the Panel at the third meeting. Again members were asked for their ‘gut-reaction’ opinion on which aspect of the customer journey in an unplanned gas interruption NGN should focus their customer service efforts on most. This question was repeated at the end of the discussion on unplanned interruptions. The results of these votes are shown below.



An engineer attending quickly and making the gas leak safe was a clear top priority for the participants. Reasons given included:

*Panic sets in when there is a gas leak. It's a fear factor. Attend as soon as possible keeps homeowner calm as it is someone with experience*

*Isolating and identifying the issue(s) is imperative for safety*

NGN presented information to the Panel about their performance in an unplanned interruption, with a particular focus on restoring gas supply, not just to the meter, but to the appliances, noting:

- The current focus of performance monitoring is how quickly gas is restored back to the meter by the repair engineers;
- NGN’s repair engineers are not skilled to get appliances back working (purge and relight);

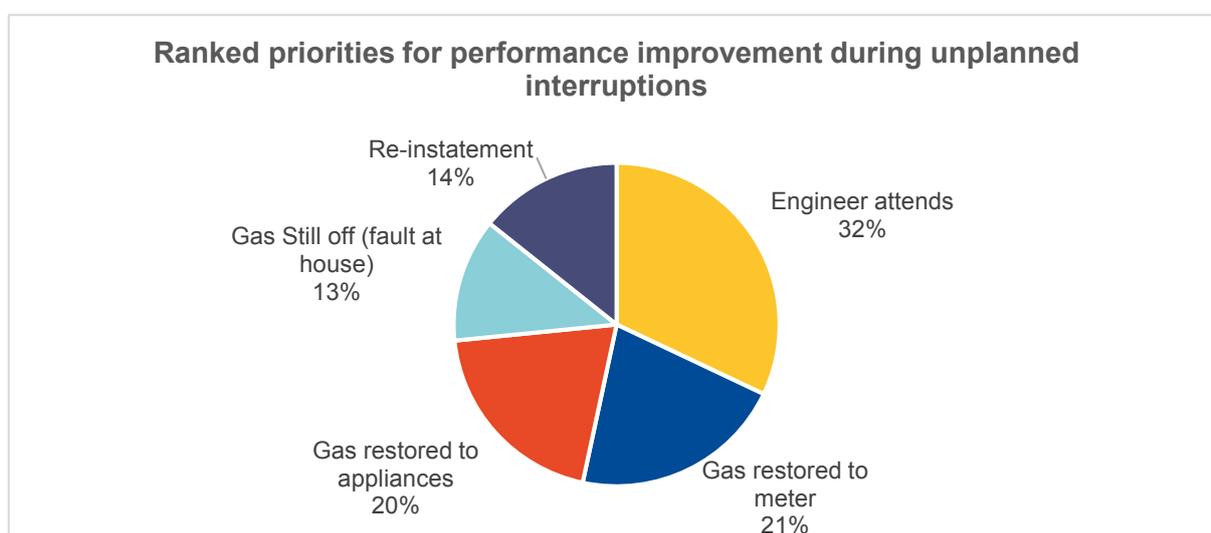
- Engineers who are trained to do this, follow up the repair engineers to do this;
- There are currently no standards to measure getting gas back to appliances, only getting gas back to the meter;
- NGN perform well with restoring supply to customers' meters (81% in under 8 hours), but not so well with restoring supply to appliances (70% in under 8 hours).

While there was little difference in participants' top priorities for NGN to focus improvement work on after receiving this information (as shown in the graph above) once the weighted results of the preferential vote conducted at the end of the discussion are considered a much more balanced spread of priorities becomes evident. The relative importance overall given to gas being restored to the meter and appliances is shown in the graph below.

*The main thing you're worrying about once gas is fixed is using it.*

*My first priority is for it to be usable again asap*

*I want them to ensure the house is safe and all appliance are functional*



### **Restoring Connections to Appliances**

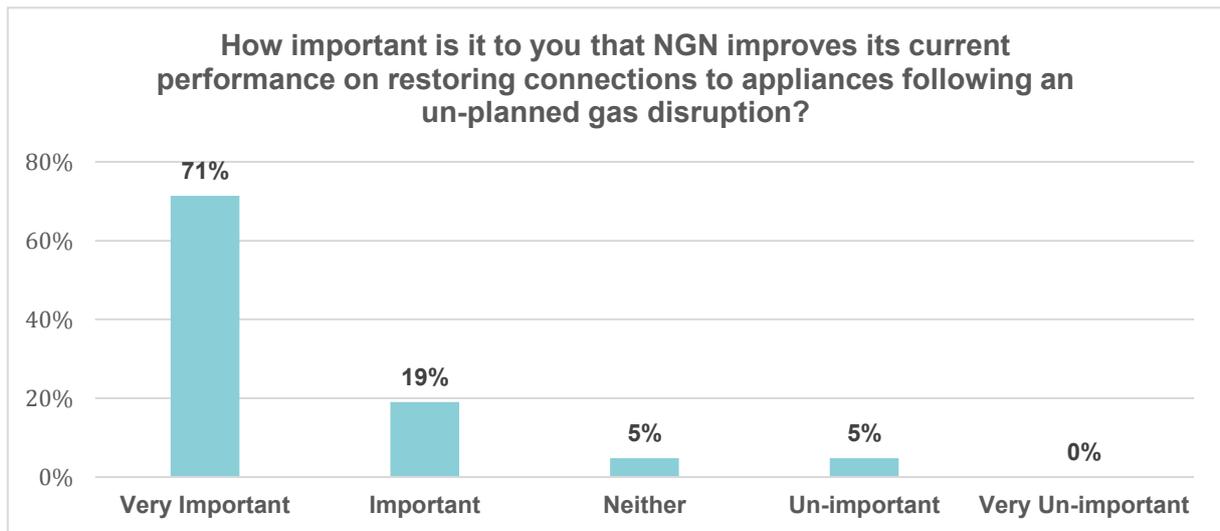
When directly asked whether NGN should improve, maintain or reduce its current performance in restoring connections to appliances:

- 81% of Panel members thought that performance should be improved;
- None of the participants thought any reduction in performance was acceptable;
- Further, 71% also later stated that they thought it was 'very important' that NGN focused on this aspect of their performance.

*Stats show there is a problem. I would complain if gas only restored to meter, not appliances*

*Doesn't matter if its planned or unplanned the customer wants to be able to use appliances ASAP*

*Because the job is not complete (as far as the customer is concerned) until connection to appliances are restored*



One option for improving performance that NGN presented to the Panel was training the staff who respond to emergency situations to be able to restore gas supply to appliances. NGN told Panel members that they expected this would cost around £200,000 to do and would then avoid the need to send out a separate crew to restore supply to customers' appliances. Across the tables there was considerable support for investing in this idea.

*I think it is in your best interest to provide training to the first team, as you are paying compensation after 8 hours*

*I think they should pay the engineers to do the job, cos once someone comes it makes sense to be able to get the whole job done.*

*The safety is a key factor for me, so NGN can improve on the "one person" per job and not pass on responsibility to another*

*It's like getting on a bus with no driver. If it's attached but not working, that's not fixed. Train them up to complete the job.*

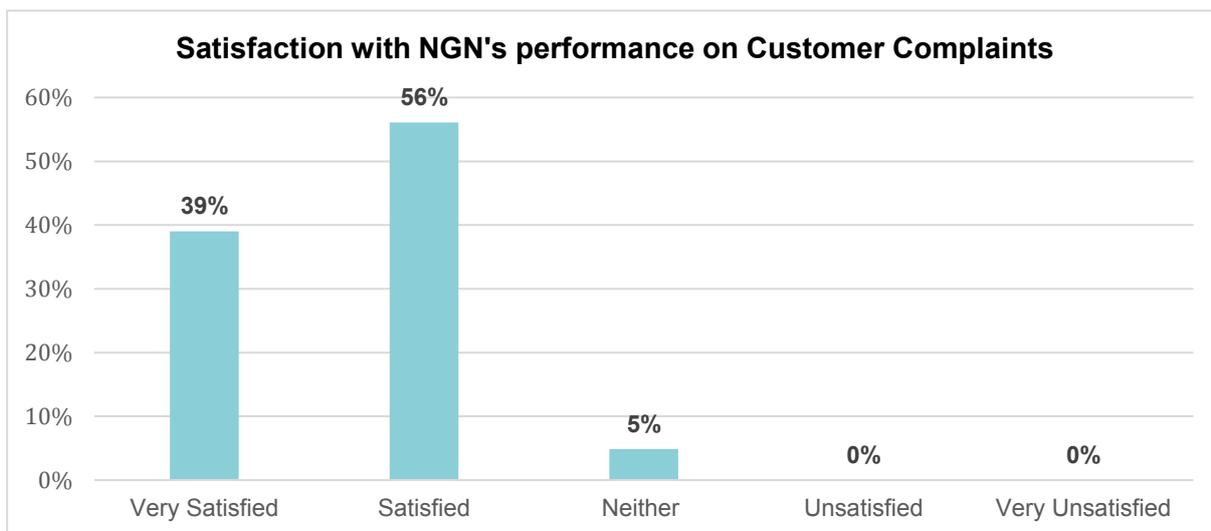
## Complaints Handling

When specific aspects of customer service were returned to in the third meeting of the Panel, members were given specific information about NGN's performance in relation to customer complaints handling. Information on the 4 key performance areas Ofgem requires to be monitored showed that in 2018/19:

1. 85% complaints were resolved within 1 working day of receipt;
2. 98.5% complaints were resolved within 31 working days of receipt;
3. NGN received 6 repeat complaints (out of 1850);
4. There were no Ombudsman findings against NGN.

An additional measure used by NGN to track performance on agreeing a resolution showed that in 2018/19 a resolution to 78% of complaints was agreed within 1 hour.

Members of the Panel demonstrated very high levels of satisfaction (95%) with NGN's performance on handling customer complaints as shown in the graph below.



*This is a high performing area - credit is due*

*I think NGN are doing a grand job*

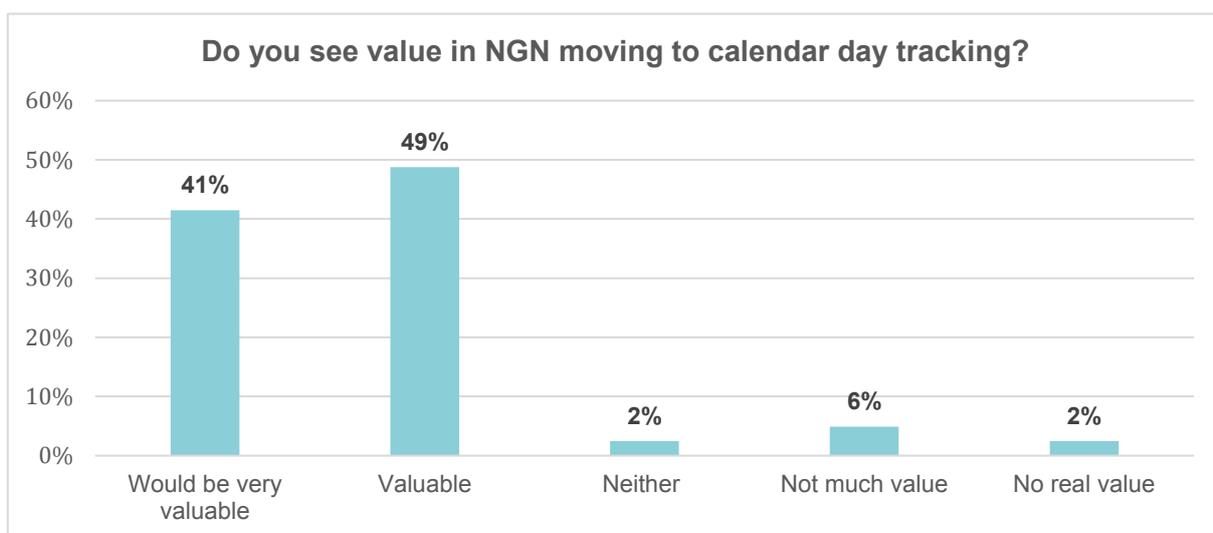
*Timing seems very impressive for addressing complaints*

*Current standard is very impressive, especially when compared to other companies*

**Potential areas for performance improvement**

NGN presented Panel members with two potential ways in which performance targets could be strengthened in the interest of improving overall performance:

- to measure performance against all standards on calendar days instead of working days;
- to introduce an output to agree resolution to complaints within 60 minutes.



When Panel members evaluated the option of moving to calendar day tracking, in excess of what is required by Ofgem, there was general agreement that this would add value to NGN's complaints handling procedures.

- 90% of participants saw value in moving to calendar day (as opposed to working day) tracking of performance on customer complaints.

*Sticking to working days just seems like an excuse not to do work immediately*

*Calendar days in common standard now*

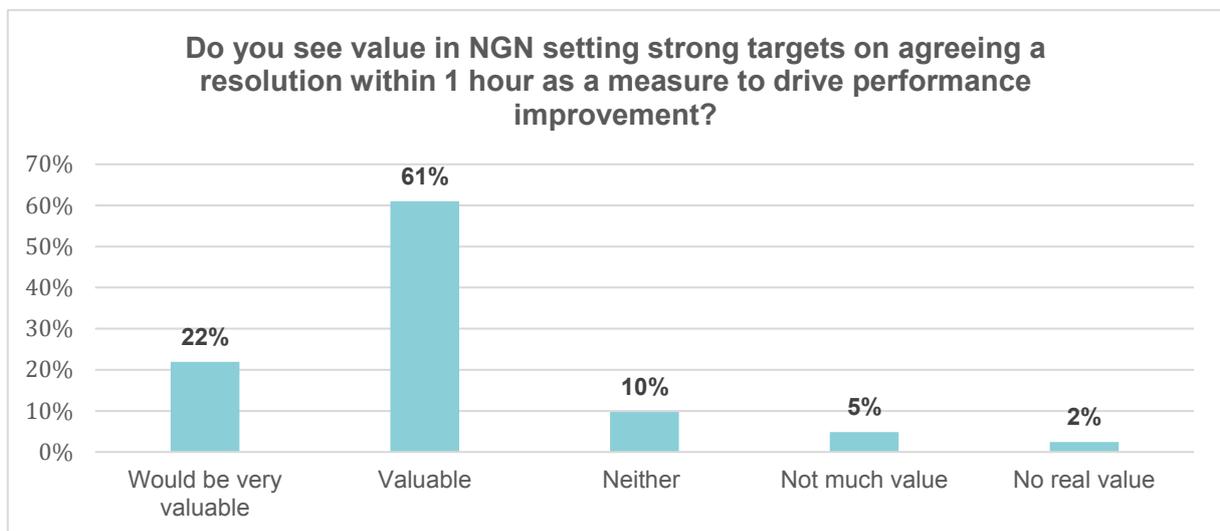
*Why should I wait longer cause my complaint comes up on a Saturday?*

Panel members then considered the option of introducing a 1 hour standard to agree a resolution to complaints. While 83% agreed there was value in doing so, many of the discussions between members questioned whether it was really worth doing, particularly achievable or expected by customers.

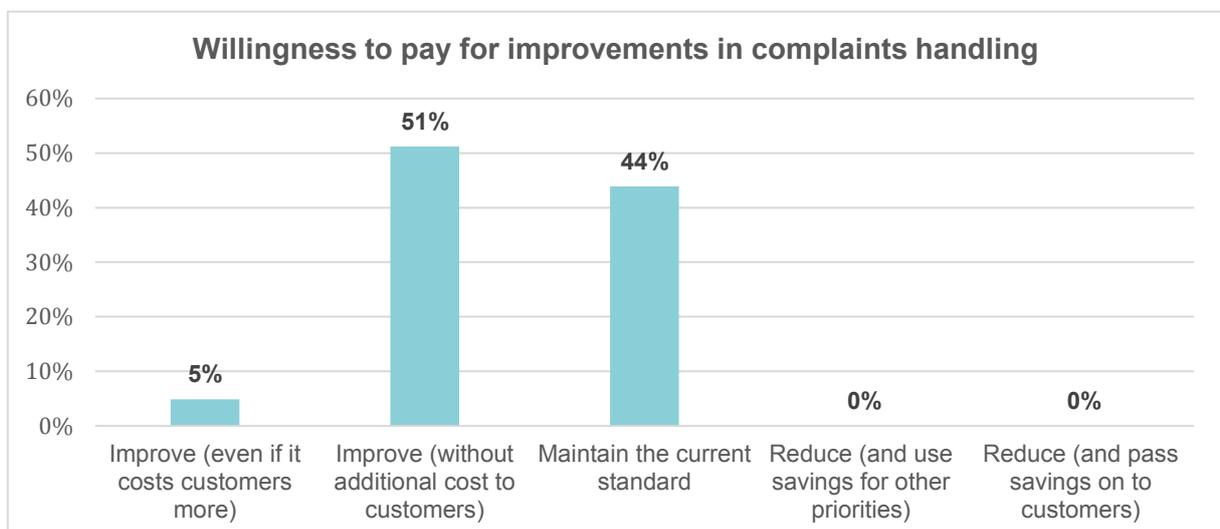
*One hour is a high standard*

*Do you think its achievable?*

*This is worth having but have to accept the time may be affected by the issue*



While the majority of members of the Panel had indicated that they saw value in the mechanisms to drive performance improvements that were suggested by NGN, only 5% saw this as something they would be willing to pay more to achieve.



Further, the existing high levels of satisfaction with NGN's performance of customer service were again reflected here, with 44% voting that no improvement was necessary.

*[NGN's] performance seems adequate when benchmarked to other sectors*  
*You are doing exceptional in complain handling, above most companies. I think maintaining is best as you are already doing brilliant*

## Enquiries Handling

NGN explained to Panel members that there are currently no internal or regulatory targets for how quickly the company should respond to customer enquiries. The focus of this discussion, therefore, was on the fact that, although NGN typically receives an average of 50,000 customer enquiries each year, they don't monitor these enquires through to conclusion (like they do with complaints).

Many participants expressed surprise that this was something that was not already recorded and monitored by NGN.

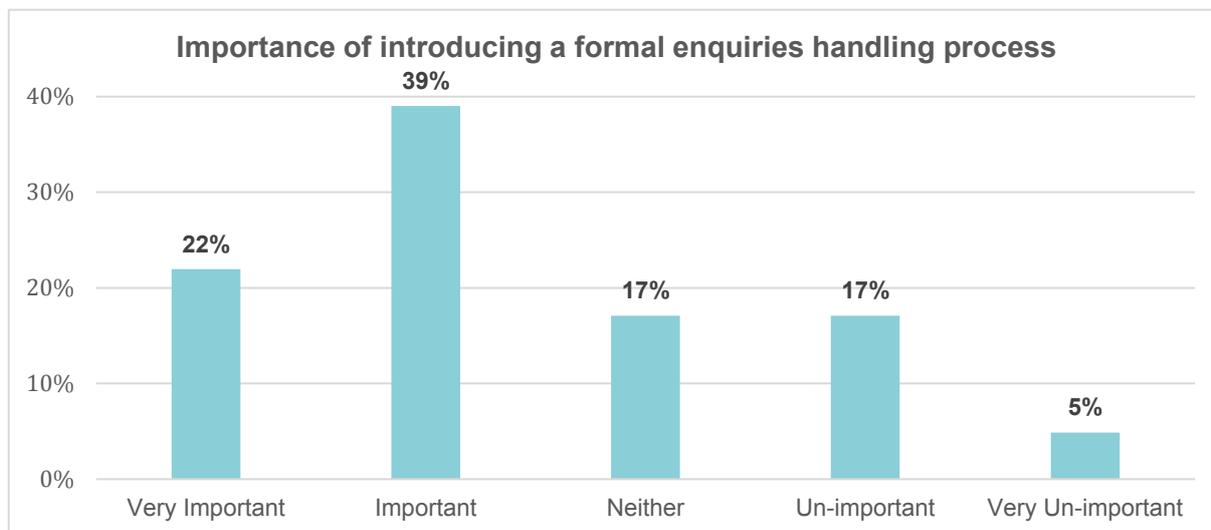
*I can't believe they don't already have a formal system in place*  
*I was of the assumption they would already have one in place and I am quite shocked they don't*  
*Done by other organisations, so why not NGN*

### Potential area for performance improvement

NGN identified a number of ways that they thought performance in this area could be improved:

- introducing the same process that they use to monitor complaints; or
- introduce *some* metrics to improve enquiry performance (something they estimated could be delivered by hiring additional employees for around £150,000 in total cost).

When Panel members considered whether this was something that it was important for NGN to do the results were much more split than they had been in relation to complaints handling, as illustrated by the graph below.



Of those who thought it was important the reasons given mainly focused around the potential benefits that this could have to avoid unnecessary enquiries, including:

*With a formal process you will learn more about needs and spot patterns.*

*If it is found that some enquiries are common, steps could be taken to deal with the cause of those enquiries and perhaps reduce/eliminate them*

*If you can't measure it you can't manage it - you don't know if you're doing well / badly and will be missing out on opportunities to cheaply improve service and even remove inbound call drivers e.g. FAQs on website or better comms*

Of those who thought it was not important the reasons given tended to focus on that there were other performance areas where improvement would be more valuable.

*Doesn't seem to be an issue currently so why divert funds*

*Enquiries as so diverse in nature, it would be hard to formalise responses. Money would be best spent elsewhere*

*Feels unnecessary to pump money into it [but] I do think you should record enquiries in case of follow ups*

There was also a clear indication from participants however, that while they may like to see improvements in how enquires were tracked and monitored by NGN, this was not something that customers should be expected to pay more for.

*If you want to be the best it should be done at no extra cost, it will help improve customer service.*

*It is not a big cost to the company to implement and absorb to improve service*

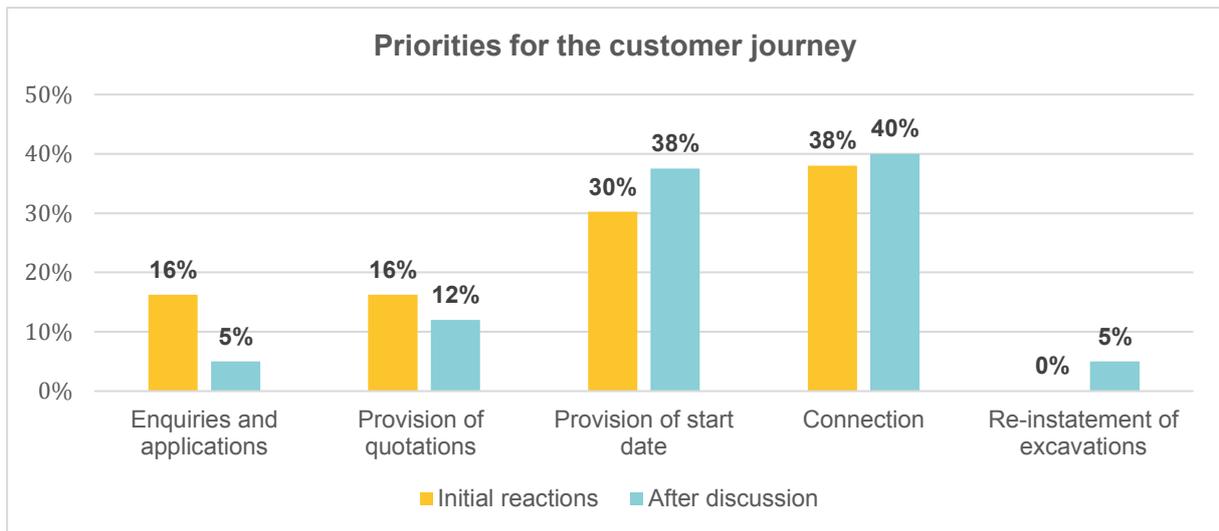
*As with all things, improvements cost. I don't think all the costs should be passed to the customer, NGN should absorb some of the costs*

## Connections

A final aspect of customer service performance was introduced to participants at the third meeting of the Panel. This related to the customer journey to secure a new gas connection to a property.

In their presentation on the connection process NGN noted that while there is a requirement that once a customer accepts the quote (i.e. makes payment) for a new connection the company must agree a start and completion date within 20 working days, there is no requirement to actually deliver the new connection within a certain timeframe. They further highlighted significant differences in delivery timeframes in different parts of the network area.

At the beginning of the presentation on connections, once the stages of the customer journey had been outlined, Panel members were asked for their 'gut – reaction' opinion on which aspect of the customer journey NGN should focus their customer service efforts on most. This question was repeated at the end of the discussion. The results of these votes are shown below.



Prior to the discussion 32% of participants focused their priorities on traditional customer service factors, like the process of handling enquires and applications and securing a timely response from the company regarding quotations.

Following the discussions, and after learning more about where NGN identified the areas of lower customer satisfaction with their performance, participants were more likely to prioritise the need to improve performance times in providing a start date for the work and delivering the connection.

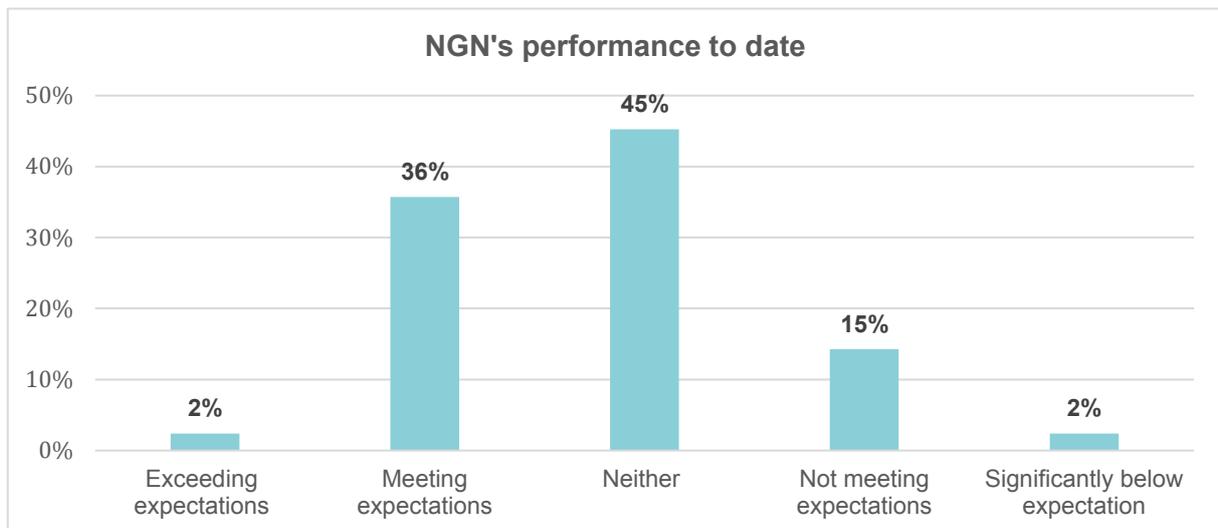
*The time between application and connection is too long. Think should be measurable metrics for delivery date - with a regulated deadline.*

*NGN have a monopoly - customer cannot go elsewhere*

*If customer paying for new connection he's expecting everything to go fast and smooth. So it's important to do job fast*

### Opportunities for performance improvement

When asked directly about how satisfied they were with NGN's current performance on connections 38% reported that NGN was meeting or exceeding their performance expectations.



*I think NGN are doing best they can and meet expectations*

*I think the timeframes are acceptable, especially in comparison to similar providers (i.e. telecoms) timescales*

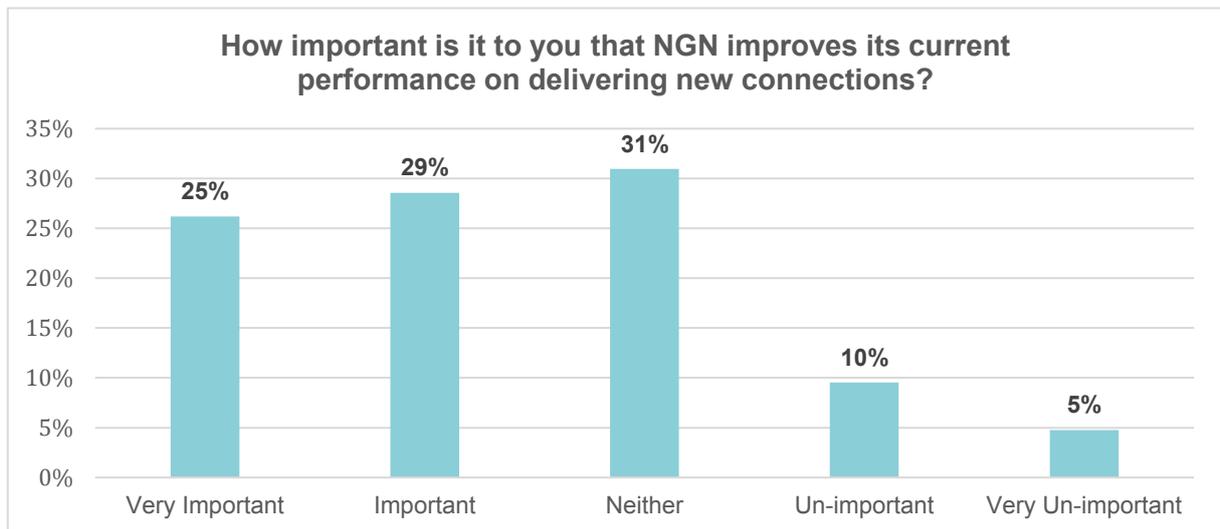
Many participants, however, struggled to make an assessment on this question, as it was significantly outside their field of experience, or their expected future experience. Despite this, concerns were raised about the high level of variance between different areas.

*Important to look at variation between areas as most are good but one or two aren't so good*

*They need to have more consistency in the number of days they perform to all cities and treat all customers fairly.*

*I understand that there's a lot of different factors when laying new applications with council and provisions etc. Managing customer expectations is the most important they have already paid and want work done on time so they can plan ahead.*

Views were also quite mixed on whether it was important to improve performance on this aspect of customer service and those who reported it was important tended to do so on the basis that continuing improvement in all aspects of customer service is important.



# 10. Performance area 5: Social Initiatives

NGN's work to support customers in vulnerable situations was the final performance area the Panel looked at in detail. This was selected on the basis that, at the first meeting, there were quite divergent views expressed about NGN's activity in this area: with some Panel members interested in exploring why NGN was involved in identifying vulnerable customers (and whether this was something NGN should be doing at all), while others were keen to find out more about the range of activity NGN was undertaking to providing support to customers in vulnerable situations, and whether it was enough.

## Defining Vulnerability

The characteristics of vulnerability used by NGN were shared with the Panel, as well as the idea of temporary vulnerability. Members of the Panel noted that it was a very comprehensive list and, given its breadth meant that any customer has the potential to be described as vulnerable at some point. Feedback on the list showed many people felt it was potentially too broad.

*Not sure about including 'people of pensionable age' as vulnerable as only some of them will be*

*Broad terms cover people who may not be vulnerable e.g. 'chronic conditions'*

Others however were able to identify groups that they felt should also be explicitly included, such as people in rural areas, those with literacy issues, people with substance abuse issues and consideration given to the type/age of peoples' houses e.g. Victorian terraces needing insulation.

When the Priority Services Register (PSR)<sup>10</sup> was introduced most of the Panel members expressed surprise at its existence. While the majority agreed that this was a valuable initiative there were also concerns raised about how people were supposed to know to register on it and how it is kept up to date.

*Need to make sure it is easy to apply for PSR – need to raise awareness of the scheme*

*If someone is not on the list how can they get help?*

## NGN's core obligations

Information was presented to the Panel about what NGN was currently doing as part of its social initiatives programme and how this relates to their core obligations. Specific focus was given to:

1. The number of fuel poor connections delivered
2. Carbon monoxide awareness raising activities
3. The 'Warm Hubs' community project
4. The Community Partnering Fund

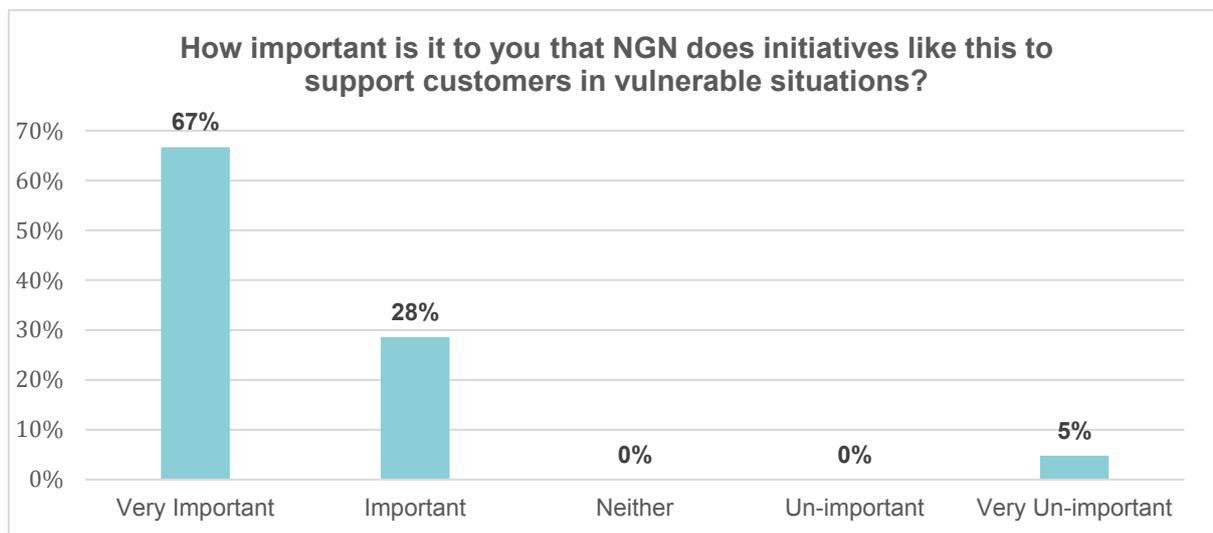
---

<sup>10</sup> The Priority Services Register is a register of people in vulnerable circumstances maintained in order to be able to identify those who may need additional support during interruptions to gas supplies.

Many participants expressed surprise that NGN were undertaking such initiatives and overall the response from Panel members was very positive.

*A caring approach*

*Good to share profits in this way*

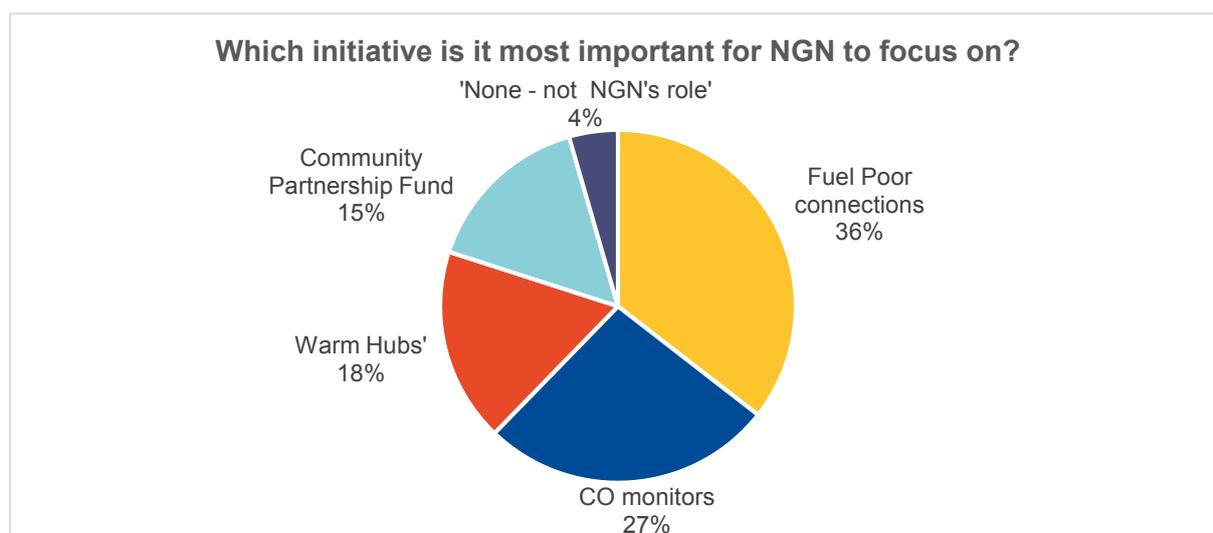


Despite the skepticism expressed during the first Panel meeting about whether this was something NGN should be involved in, by the third session where the programmes were discussed in more detail, there was evidence that a growing number of participants now felt NGN should, and could, be doing more.

*NGN trying to help vulnerable people but they could do more – it’s their role – they have a responsibility to their customers*

*NGN, as a monopoly, have a social and moral role to do this*

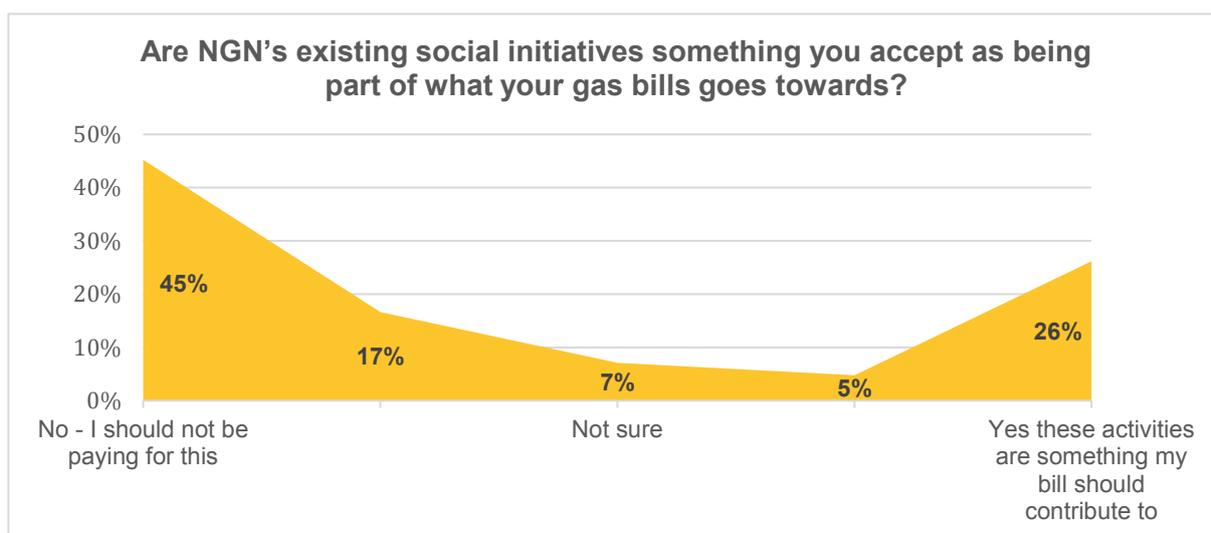
When the Panel members were asked to evaluate which, if any, of the 4 initiatives described seemed most important for NGN to focus on, the results were quite split across the group.



- **37% selected Fuel Poor Connections** as the initiative they felt was most important as it was *‘most related to core business’* and offered a *‘longer term solution’*.

- **27% selected carbon monoxide awareness raising initiatives** as the most important initiative. The main reason given was *'people die of this so it's important'*.
- **Warm Hubs** were viewed as the most important initiative by **18% of the Panel**, and were described as a *'great idea for getting advice and getting warm'*. Some Panel members however thought that, instead, NGN should be focusing on actually extending the gas network to more rural and remote areas.
- **15%** of members saw the **Community Partnering Fund** as the most important of the initiatives discussed, reasoning that by partnering with the community and voluntary sector money could be targeted where it was needed most. Some participants however were quite against this initiative as they felt that *'customers should not be paying for a company to give to charity'*.
- **4%** of members however retained the position that this was **not NGN's role** and did not support any of the initiatives highlighted.

While, overall, Panel members were very supportive of the social initiatives that NGN was undertaking, when it came to whether it was acceptable that this was part of what their gas bill went towards, views were much more mixed. The majority however felt that this was not something they accepted the money they paid to NGN being used to fund.



### Potential new initiatives

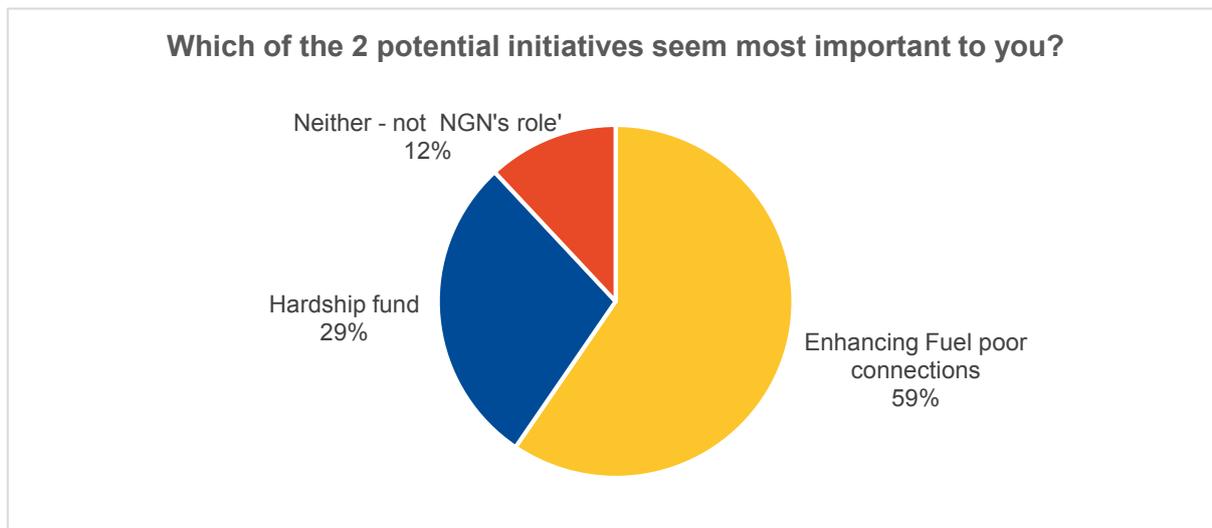
NGN presented the Panel members with the 2 possible initiatives that would go above their core obligations in relation to supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances:

1. introducing a new Hardship Fund, with around £30,000 funding available each year;
2. enhancing the current target for delivering fuel poor connections, by having to demonstrate that the connections actually deliver real benefits to customers.

While most people agreed that there was intrinsic value to each of these potential initiatives many participants questioned whether it was NGN's responsibility.

*Not worthwhile for NGN, but worthwhile  
Shouldn't everyone in society be helping with this*

When the Panel members were asked to evaluate which, if either of the potential new initiatives seemed most important for NGN to focus on there was a clear preference expressed towards enhancing their current approach to fuel poor connections.



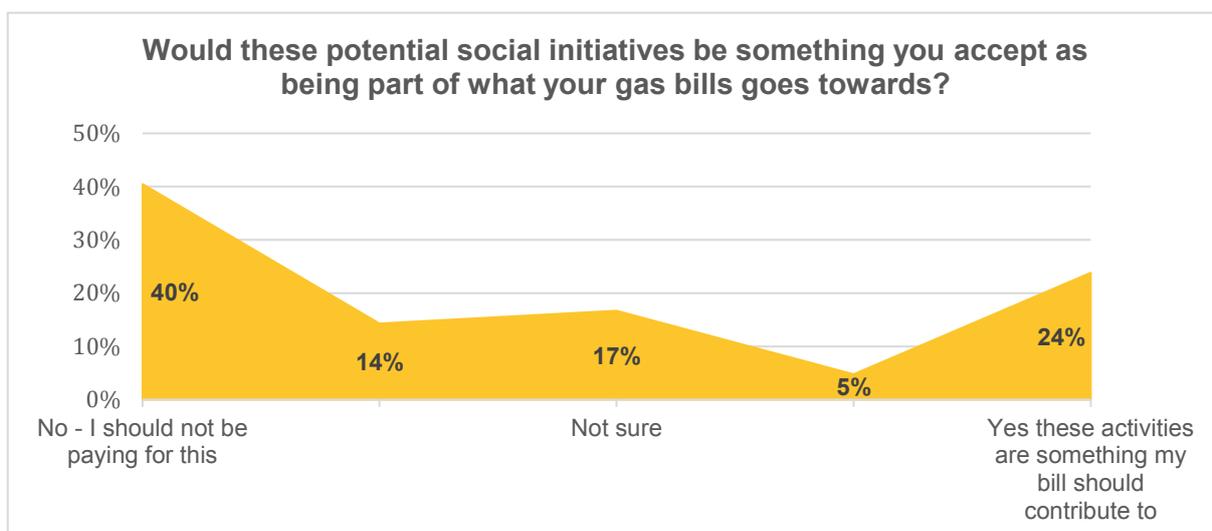
- **Enhancing work on fuel poor connections** was the most popular initiative among Panel members, mainly because it was seen to be most connected to NGN’s core business.
- The proposed **Hardship Fund** met with quite a mixed response. Some people saw it as a key way to ensure support went directly to those most in need. For others, however, the idea of a Hardship Fund came across as *‘too little, too late’*.

There were, however, again concerns raised that addressing these issues this was not NGN’s responsibility.

*Whose responsibility is this really?*

*I’m happy to pay but prefer through tax*

*Basically doubt whether NGN should be doing this full stop!*



Finally, despite more people stating that these potential initiatives were not NGN’s role, when it came to voting on whether they were something that they accepted part of their gas bills would go

towards, fewer people objected (54% in this vote, compared to 62% in the vote on current initiatives). There was also considerably more uncertainty expressed in this vote. This makes it difficult to draw any further conclusions on this result.

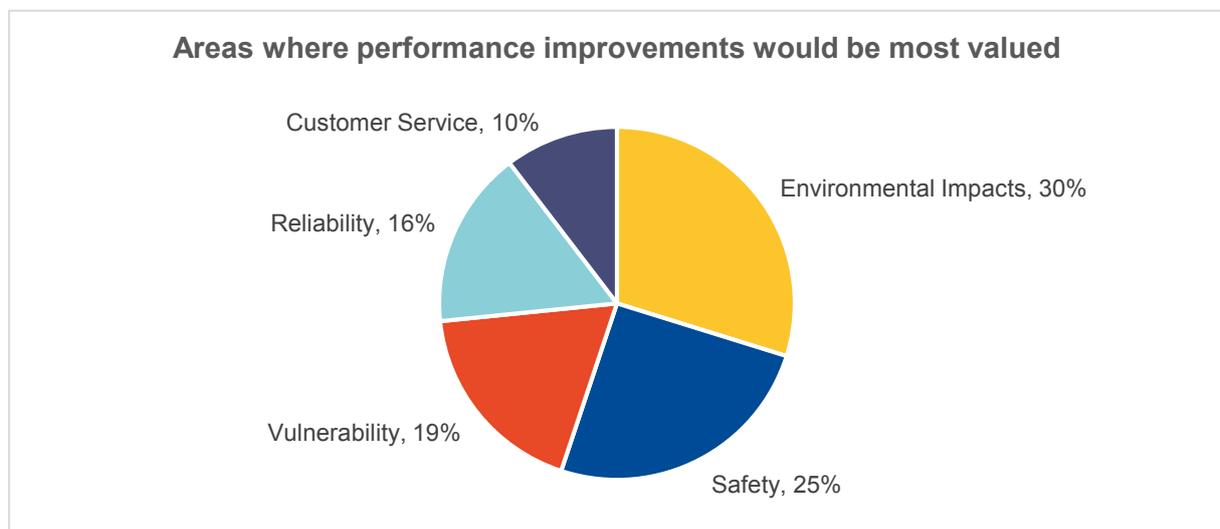
# 11. Priorities for performance improvement across NGN's 5 performance areas

In the final hour of the Panel the members were asked to reflect back on everything they had learnt and considered over the 3 meetings and identify where they felt investment in performance improvements was most needed.

The results reveal that, when Panel members were asked for their top priority only:

- 51% of Panel members prioritised mitigating environmental impacts as the most valuable area for performance improvement;
- 35% of Panel members indicated that improvements in safety performance was their top priority;
- 7% thought that initiatives to support vulnerable consumers was the main area needing performance improvement;
- 0% thought that the need to improve performance on customer service or reliability was the type of improvement they would value most;
- 7% stated that there was no need to improve NGN's performance across any of the 5 areas.

When the results of a preferential ranking of the performance areas were taken into account<sup>11</sup>, however, the overall relative value given to performance improvements in each of NGN's performance areas becomes more widely spread. The overall order of priority however remained broadly the same, although this vote did show that improvements in reliability were given more value than improvements in customer service.

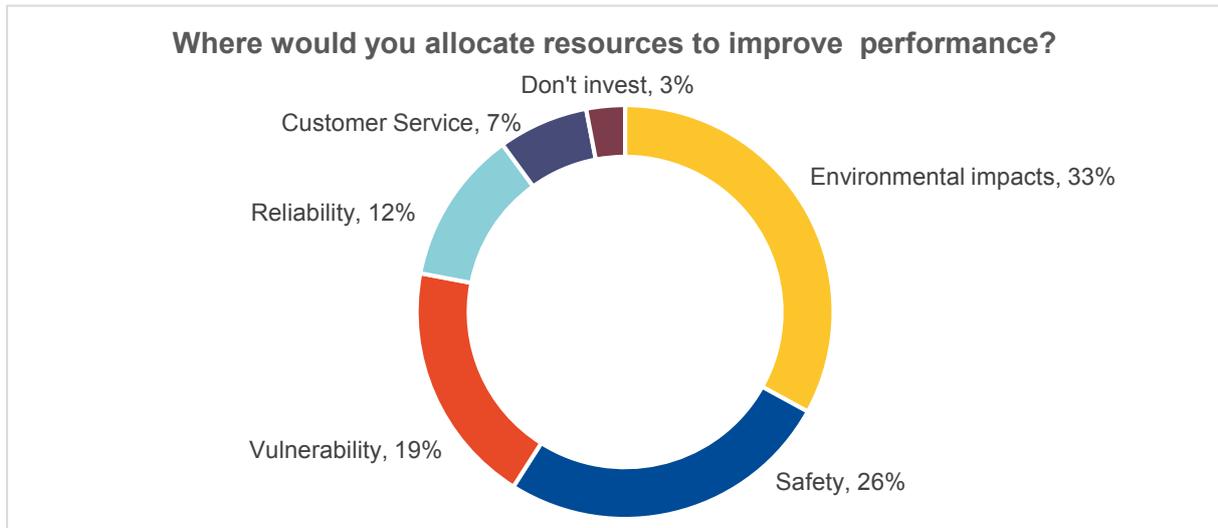


To further test the relative importance given to NGN achieving performance improvements across different aspects of the business, the Panel members were asked to allocate a hypothetical pot of resources towards investment in improvement in each of NGN's performance areas. They were also explicitly given the option of not making further investment, on the basis that no improvement was needed and savings could be passed on to customers.

---

<sup>11</sup> Using a standard Borda count method to attribute relative weight to 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> preference.

Working in groups of 2-3, Panel members negotiated how they would distribute their 'resources' (10 sticky dots) across the 5 performance areas, with the additional option of not investing at all if they felt no further improvements were needed.



Improving NGN's performance on managing the company's **environmental impacts** was allocated the greatest share of resources by Panel members during this exercise. Across the 15 small groups negotiating the allocation of resources, every group allocated at least 20% toward this performance area, and one group allocated 70% of their resources. Reasons given for allocating significant resources included:

*Environment is such an important issue for us and future generations.*

*NGN well placed to do something as they are not competing with other companies*

*[Need] investment in cleaning up past environmental impacts and to reduce current and future uses*

*Future proofing – both for the environment and the future of the company*

A number of specific improvement areas were also identified during the process of allocating resources including:

- Investing in alternative energy solutions;

*The future isn't fossil gas so invest in alternatives*

*Fuel futures is a problem so hydrogen investment is a good idea*

- Improving NGN's approach to land remediation;

*The old gas tanks need dealing with on your land – deal with the problem, no sticky plasters*

- Air pollution;

*Focus on pollution – you have an air quality responsibility*

*Speed up fleet vehicle transitions*

- Accelerating pipe replacement as an environmental measure to reduce gas leakage and allow for the introduction of 'green gasses';

*Costs more now but long-term will benefit with plastic pipes in place*

Improving NGN's **safety performance** received 26% of the available resources. Although NGN's exceptional performance on safety was widely recognised by the Panel members it was considered such an important issue that anything that could be done to improve performance here was valued. Thus all of the 15 groups allocated some of their resources to improving NGN's performance on safety.

*Already doing well – but it's so important*

*They are already at 99%. Don't need to invest much – but this is very important as gas is dangerous.*

*That 1% could be hugely damaging (so need to avoid the 1%)*

*Never be too complacent - you have to aim for 100% on safety*

Improving the way NGN supports **customers in vulnerable situations** was allocated 19% of the resources. Here the way groups divided their resources was quite mixed (with 6 groups allocating only a single unit to this performance area). This clearly reflects the earlier discussions where some of the Panel members continued to question whether interventions to support customers in vulnerable situations, beyond additional support during gas supply interruptions, was something NGN should play a role in.

For groups that prioritised the need for improvements in this performance area the reasons given tended to focus on this being a corporate social responsibility.

*It is a duty of care and we need services like those discussed for the vulnerable*

Those groups that gave this performance area less priority for improvement gave reasons that included:

*Not NGN's responsibility – but keep existing services going*

*Need a coherent strategy and work with other organisations, suppliers and providers to help those in need*

Improving performance in regards to **reliability** was allocated only 12% of the resources. 4 groups allocated no resources to this performance area, arguing that the current performance was very good already: *'Interruptions are very rare anyway and no need to improve further.'* Within the groups who did allocate a portion of their resources to improvements in reliability the reasons included:

*This is the main part of their job. It links with safety – reducing gas leakage and shrinkage.*

*Rare, but when it happens we want efficiency*

*Customers and wider public are effected every time there is work or a gas leak – a nuisance, time is money*

Specific aspects of performance that Panel members highlighted for improvement were:

- Speed of reconnection to appliances;

*More investment in staff – improving the service by training staff*

*Important for customer satisfaction (Time is money – train those engineers)*

- Accelerating the pipe replacement programme.

*When pipes are in place won't need as many interruptions in the future  
Customers and wider public are effected every time there is work or a gas leak – a  
nuisance, time is money*

Investing in improvements in **customer service** received only 7% of the resources available, and 7 of the 15 small groups allocated no resources to it at all. This was primarily on the basis that participants thought that performance was already very impressive.

*Already good – no need to further invest*

*Not a priority to improve further in comparison with other areas*

When resources were allocated there were some specific aspects of the customer service experience that people wanted to focus on:

- Enquires handling

*Track enquires better – otherwise good service, 1hr response*

- Keeping customers informed during interruptions to their gas supply

*[Improve communication] so people are more aware of what is going to happen*

- Complaints handling

*Generally 90%+ was impressive but small improvements to be made*

A similar question was asked of individuals as part of the research survey undertaken at the end of the third meeting – **'Imagine you had £100 of NGN funds to invest in performance improvements. How would you distribute the money?'**<sup>12</sup>

Overall the results were very consistent, although:

- Delivering improvements in NGN's Environmental performance received marginally more of the available resources (36% compared to 33%);
- Safety received marginally less (20% compared to 26%);
- More Panel members chose not to invest the money and pass the savings on to consumers (7% of the available resources, compared to 3% in the group exercise).

## Acceptability of the costs of performance improvements being passed on to customers

At the conclusion of their deliberations Panel members were asked about their anticipated impacts of making the types of performance improvements they had been prioritising on customer bills.

- 45% said they expected achieving these types of improvements would lead to an increase in their bills.
- 38% said they expected their bill would stay the same.
- 10% answered that they anticipated that their bill would go down.

---

<sup>12</sup> This question was intentionally framed as 'NGN funds' so as to not be about needing to pay more. A random figure of £100 was selected to allow participants to easily make proportional allocation decisions.

- 7% reported they ‘did not know’ what they expected the impact on their bill to be.

Panel members were also asked whether, to achieve the types of performance improvements they had identified as important, they would accept an increase to their gas bills.

- 45% reported that they accepted that their bill might go up.

*When a company has to invest or improve or inject funds into anything it normally affects the customers financially. I would accept a tiny increase on bill.*

*We all have to take responsibility for what happens and what is a small increase to contribute to this*

*I feel strongly about improvements that I would be willing for my bill to increase slightly to accommodate.*

- The same proportion, 45% thought it was most acceptable for their bill to stay the same.

*I think NGN should work on high performance, but I don't like idea of paying more for my gas bill because it's already high*

*NGN already make a good amount of money and use it well, whatever they do should be from their own pockets or the suppliers.*

*I think this is a main problem for the business rather than the customer. The customer shouldn't suffer.*

- 5% however thought that as performance improvements are made their bill should go down.<sup>13</sup>

Many of those who accepted that their bill might go up were clear however, that this was only acceptable if funds were allocated to specific types of improvements, particularly those related to safety and mitigating environmental impacts.

*I would be happy to pay more to speed up adoption of cleaner fuels*

*For safety and the environment, I would expect my bill to increase slightly*

*I would like to know that any increase were for service development for 'future proofing' and not corporate top tier bonuses.*

### **Prioritise for improvement that would justify bill increases**

These priorities are demonstrated clearly in the table below where greater investment in ensuring energy futures, improved safety performance and improvements in land remediation were, in line with the priorities identified throughout the Panel meetings, all seen as ‘very acceptable’ reasons for an increase in bills by more than 1/3 of Panel members.

	<b>Very acceptable</b>	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>Not Acceptable</b>	<b>Improvement not needed</b>
Improved safety performance	35%	35%	18%	18%
Improved reliability (less unplanned disruptions)	17%	38%	26%	19%

<sup>13</sup> The remaining 5% stated that they ‘did not know’.

Improved reinstatement times of landscape after necessary gas works	19%	36%	33%	12%
Improved re-connection times to appliances in your home after gas interruptions	20%	44%	29%	7%
Greater investment in ensuring energy futures	37%	41%	20%	2%
Improvements in land remediation – making land safe for other uses	34%	27%	29%	10%
Improved environmental performance in NGN's business operations (reduction of resource use by NGN – e.g. vehicles, aggregate use, buildings etc)	28%	38%	33%	3%
Improved handling of customer complaints	10%	28%	38%	25%
Improved handling of customer enquiries	8%	23%	38%	31%
Improved connection times for new customers	13%	38%	30%	20%
Greater investment in social initiatives to support customers in vulnerable situations	24%	51%	20%	5%

## 12. Conclusions

Across the 3 meetings of the NGN Public Panel the members had the opportunity to learn a considerable amount about the operations of NGN, the company's existing priorities and performance record, and the opportunities for future improvement in these areas. Through this process their confidence and capability in assessing the value and importance that should be placed on different aspects of the company's operations, and evaluating the need for performance improvements across these areas, also developed and matured.

This report has traced how the opinions of Panel members has evolved throughout the process. Now, in conclusion, it presents the considered balance of opinion of the NGN Public Panel on how NGN should best find a balance between price and performance, in ways that are both fair to customers and also meet their aspirations for the future of their gas network provision.

Safety was a key priority for the members across the 3 meetings, alongside the linked performance area of reliability (particularly in relation to unplanned interruptions). Maintaining high levels of performance in these areas were seen to be vital to any business plan decisions, as they are absolutely central to NGN's core business. Overall, however, members of the Panel were consistently impressed with the company's performance record on these areas.

Despite recognising that there was limited scope for performance improvement, the real and inherent risks associated with gas escapes meant that investing in those areas where improvements could be made was supported by almost all members at the conclusion of the Panel meetings. This links back to the earlier support given to accelerating the pipe replacement programme (primarily for safety reasons) and the related assessment that, while the likelihood of an uncontrolled gas leak causing injury was low, the impacts could be serious enough to warrant doing all that the company could.

The standout performance area prioritised for improvement by the Panel, however, was NGN's work to mitigate its environmental impacts – with over half of the members stating this was the most important area for performance improvement, and all members identifying this as an area where they would value additional investment. This remained a consistent priority for the members and something that, at a number of points throughout their meetings, they indicated was something that they would be willing to pay more to see delivered.

There were however clear priorities identified within Panel member's expectations for improvements in mitigating NGN's environmental impacts at the conclusion of the Panel's meetings. These focused on:

- Greater investment in ensuring energy futures, which was identified as an acceptable reason for bill increases by 78% of members;
- Improving the overall environmental performance of NGN's business operations (i.e. the reduction of resource use by NGN including in fleet vehicles, aggregate use, buildings etc.) agreed by 66% as an acceptable reason for bill increases;
- Improvements in land remediation of old gas sector sites, which was seen by 61% as an acceptable reason for bill increases.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> While at an earlier point in the Panel's deliberations 81% of participants expressed the view that NGN should be doing more on land remediation, there appears to have been less consensus that this was a cost that it was fair to pass on to customers as it was a direct legacy issue from the way the sector itself had operated.

There was, however, a clear difference between this call for more environmental responsibility from NGN and the response Panel members had to the social initiatives presented by NGN to demonstrate their corporate responsibility towards supporting customers in vulnerable situations. These initiatives split the members more than any other topics covered throughout the Panel meetings.

While there was general agreement across the Panel that these initiatives were important, particularly those that were perceived as strongly tied to NGN's core business (like delivering fuel poor connections and raising carbon monoxide awareness), many members were not entirely convinced that this was NGN's role. This was particularly the case when it came to the question of whether improvement in this area was something that should be prioritised for investment. When asked directly about whether the current and potential social initiatives presented to them were something they accepted that their bills should go towards, more than half of the Panel members in each case stated that this was not something they felt they should be contributing to.

Finally, while good customer service was valued by the Panel members they tended to be already quite impressed with NGN's current performance in this area overall. Although they recognised that there were improvements that could be made, particularly in relation to enquiries handling and ensuring customers in all parts of the network area received equally prompt levels of service, there was very little priority given to investing in performance improvement in these areas. Correspondingly, there was very little appetite for any investment made to improve performance in these general aspects of customer service being a cost that would be passed on to bill payers.

Panel members did, however, value investment being made to improve the customer experience and minimise disruption during gas supply interruptions – including effective customer notifications / communications, being mindful of working on weekends in residential areas and reinstating groundworks in a timely manner. One proposal for investment that members were particularly supportive of was ensuring the reconnection of gas to appliances after an interruption was done quickly and efficiently (with 81% of members agreeing that performance should be improved here). To this end there was considerable support given to investing in training the staff who respond to emergency situations to be able to restore gas supply to customers' appliances, avoiding the need to send out a separate crew. Here 66% of members even agreed that this was an acceptable reason for small bill increases.

These conclusions show that, as a result of a process of intense and cumulative learning and deliberation, the members of the NGN Public Panel were able to make quite nuanced distinctions between the importance they placed on NGN maintaining high levels of service delivery across their different performance areas and the need for investment in performance improvements. As such, these conclusions, and the evidence presented throughout this report relating to the rationales behind them, provide NGN with a valuable source of evidence on the informed and considered views of customers that can help ensure that customer values, preferences and ideas are able to be genuinely reflected in the company's Business Plan for 2021 – 2026 in a meaningful way.

# Annex 1: Participant Evaluation of the experience of being part of the NGN Public Panel

An evaluation form was distributed at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> sessions to assess overall satisfaction with the process. An overview of the results are presented below.

- At the final meeting 42 evaluation forms were received from 43 participants – a response rate of 98%

## How would you rate the experience overall?

- 98% positively rated their experience of participating in the NGN Public Panel as a whole at the 3<sup>rd</sup> session
  - This compares to 85% of the group that attended on the first day rating positively their experience of participating in the NGN Public Panel.

Comments about the overall experience of being part of the NGN Public Panel from the third meeting, and what motivated members to maintain their attendance, are presented below:

*Very informative. Fun people. Relaxed but productive days*

*The ability to understand what NGN do and what their goals are. Also meeting new people.*

*Nice people, food, money, fun*

*How we all worked together as a team. Great atmosphere*

*It was interesting meeting and talking to a range of people I don't normally come across in my normal daily life.*

*Able to give opinion and influence business planning*

*Making a difference. Meeting people and people from NGN*

*££££ - yes the money. But honestly, I was also very encouraged by the concern my peers have for the environment.*

*I liked the process of discussing the subject areas with people from diverse perspectives*

- 100% rated the facilitators positively at the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the NGN Public Panel
  - This compares with 89% at meeting 1.

*[Liked] the format, how efficient and on the ball the facilitators were*

*The table and facilitators were very friendly and open*

*Facilitators did good moving convo on, though sometimes too quick*

*I think the format works well, it was clear and well run.*

## Approval rating regarding key criteria of success:

- 91% of participants at the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting agreed, overall, with a range of statements designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the process.

- This compares with 90% agreeing overall at the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting.

	<b>Session 1</b> Average score out of 5 (with 5 = strongly agree)	<b>Session 3</b> Average score out of 5 (with 5 = strongly agree)
I understood the purpose of the Panel and my role	4.3	4.7
The information presented was clear and easy to understand	4.3	4.5
Information was presented in a fair and balanced way	4.2	4.3
I learnt a lot about the subject	4.4	4.6
There was enough time to discuss the issues properly	4.0	3.8
I was given enough information to form opinions on new subjects	4.0	3.9
I felt I could ask questions	4.4	4.6
I felt comfortable taking part in the discussions	4.5	4.6
I felt my opinions were listened to	4.6	4.6
I was given enough opportunity to express my views	4.5	4.5
My views changed or developed through listening to others	3.9	4.1

### **I understood the purpose of the Panel and my role**

While most people recognised that they were entering a new experience and were prepared to 'go with it' there were a limited number of people that continued to question the role of the Panel throughout the first meeting, as illustrated by the comment below:

*[Need] to identify the real purpose of the panel - NGNs motive and if it fits for the company or the people*

This, however, is not unexpected as the experience of being part of a process like this is very new to most people. By the end of the process, however, participants were much clearer about the purpose of their involvement:

*I like the idea of a cross section of people having a chance to make informed choices / decisions in conjunction with professionals*

### **The information presented was clear and easy to understand**

At the first meeting of the Panel some members were genuinely overwhelmed by the amount of information presented to them:

*Lots of new information to make sense of quickly*

*There were times when more info/jargon busting glossary could have helped*

For others however the learning process was far too slow:

*It was too dumbed down / simplistic with made it painfully slow at times.*

*[Too slow] because I don't have the IQ of a pot plant*

Balanced against this was the concern raised by some participants that, in the early stages particularly, they were not being given enough information by NGN to develop informed opinions:

*There was a lack of details provided which affected my ability to make opinions*

*There was some time constraints and a lack of detail - maybe a little ambitious to cover all the areas with proper information*

This, in itself, serves to emphasise the diversity of the Panel members, and reminds organisers of events like this of the need to strike a balance between making sure everyone has a baseline understanding of the issues under discussion, and the fact that some people will be naturally more informed than others.

### **The information was presented in a fair and balanced way**

During the first meeting of the Panel some members expressed concern that NGN was using the event to 'showcase' their success, rather than really present the Company's challenges to participants:

*Obviously NGNs success was highlighted but to be expected, I guess  
Sometimes I felt I was missing a piece of the puzzle - so could not form full  
opinions*

As the meetings move forward, and NGN relaxed into the process and participants developed the confidence and knowledge to ask questions of the staff present, there was a general consensus that NGN had become very open with the information they provided, and that the staff present had become a valuable resource for providing fair and balanced information to Panel members.

*[Liked] the atmosphere and how professional the experts were open to challenge  
and ready to answer questions*

*Experts very approachable*

*Great how we all worked together as a team.*

### **I learnt a lot about the subject**

### **I was given enough information to form opinions on new subjects**

### **I felt I could ask questions**

There is evidence from the evaluations that the Panel members agreed they learnt a lot about the subject as the process went on and that they were given enough information to develop opinions on new subjects.

Even those who believed information had been over simplified in the first meeting agreed that, as the meetings progressed they learnt more about NGN and the company's activities and priorities. The participants were particularly impressed with the way the NGN staff present at the events shared their knowledge and were open to questions. The key things that people valued in this regard are expressed below:

*Always someone there to answer questions  
Understanding what NGN do and what their goals are.  
Learning about how NGN works and what the gas structure (business) actually  
entails*

### **There was enough time to discuss the issues properly**

Here it is particularly relevant to notice, notice not only the change in opinions between the first and third meetings of the Panel, but the reasons why

At meeting 1 most of the comment relating to time were made on the basis that the Panel meeting was too long:

*Too long - it went on and I went through many emotions [including boredom]*

*Introduction, too much information*

*Too long and too high level - [would] shorten and ask for quicker group answers*

At the third meeting however the evaluation responses show that, as the complexity of the information intensified, and people were asked to balance up the relative weight of different priorities, the opposite emerged. Following the third session most of the comments regarding the time allocated to the deliberations focused on the need for more time to have been given:

*Maybe some areas were glossed over and time constraints affected the learning potential*

*At times felt rushed and conversations not completed*

*Allocate more time/days and make smaller groups*

This is typical of deliberative processes as, the more time participants spend learning about a subject, the more they realise there is more that they can learn. This can, at times, lead participants to feel the constraints of their existing learning when it comes time to making decisions.

**I felt comfortable taking part in the discussions**

**I felt my opinions were listened to**

**I was given enough opportunity to express my views**

That people felt comfortable in taking part in the discussion, felt that they were given the opportunity to express their views, and that these opinions were listened to is an essential part of the success of any deliberative process.

*Made to feel welcome*

*Yes it went on, but I feel listened to*

*[Liked] meeting new people and feeling valued*

*[Valued] the ability to provide my opinion and know that it is being listened to*

The high scores achieved here relate specifically to the facilitation of the deliberative process, and it is heartening to see that the average agreement rate improved (or at least remained stable) across the meetings of the NGN Public Panel. This attests to the veracity of the process and the skill of the facilitators.

**My views changed or developed through listening to others**

The subjective assessment of this, by participants, is something that should always be considered in light of the outputs of the process overall and the experience of acquiring new information and understanding of the topic. As expected, throughout any deliberative process, the rate of agreement increased between the first and third survey as participants more fully immersed themselves in processes that were designed to reveal and foreground the experiences of others. That said, the quotes by participants suggest that the experience of being exposed to each other's viewpoints had an impact on their final opinions:

*I liked the process of discussing the subject areas with people from diverse perspectives*

*It was nice there were so many backgrounds and points of view*

# Annex 2: Output report from meeting 1 of the NGN Public Panel

## Introduction

The NGN Public Panel brought together a broadly representative sample of people from across the company's catchment area to learn, discuss and deliberate on key aspects of NGN's performance in order to help provide public input to the business planning process. The Panel met over 3 Saturday's in March – April 2019.

This Findings Report was prepared after the first sitting of the NGN Public Panel to provide a summary of the direct outputs from the session. The results are presented in the order that the topics were discussed. It was primarily intended as an interim record of the process to assist with planning the subsequent sessions.

## Overview of Session 1

The first meeting of the NGN Public Panel took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2019 at the Hilton Leeds City Hotel. The session ran from 10am – 5pm.

Members of the NGN Public Panel were selected to be a representative sample of the overall population of the region i.e. a mini-public. As far as possible the selection was made to mirror the demographics of the area, as recorded in the most recent census.

- **48 participants attended the 1<sup>st</sup> session** (from a recruited group of 53).<sup>15</sup>

When participants arrived they were directed towards pre-allocated tables to ensure that all discussion groups were mixed in terms of age, gender and place of residence.

The Panel meetings were facilitated by [Involve](#) and consisted of a mixture of presentations from NGN staff, facilitated discussions in small table groups (average 8 people), and written exercises to record clear findings.

The programme for Session 1 is reproduced below.

9:30am	Arrival and registration (tea and coffee available)
<b>10am</b>	<b>Welcome and introduction to the NGN Public Panel</b>
10:30am	<b>Who are Northern Gas Network?</b> Presentations and group discussions
11:20am	Break – tea and coffee
11:30am	<b>NGN Key performance areas</b> - Safety - Interruptions

<sup>15</sup> The target group size was 50, and Involve had over-recruited to try and allow for last minute cancellations. Unfortunately 5 participants, despite having confirmed their intention to attend in the days before the event, did not arrive.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Customer Service</li> <li>- Environment</li> <li>- Vulnerability</li> </ul>
<b>1pm</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
1:50pm	<b>Which Services do the public value most?</b> Group discussion and deliberation
2:30pm	<b>What is NGN's pipe replacement programme?</b> Presentations and group discussions
3:15pm	Break – tea and coffee
3:30pm	<b>Investing in the pipe replacement programme – what are the options?</b> Group discussion and deliberation
4:15pm	<b>Setting priorities for Session 2</b> Group discussion and deliberation
<b>5pm</b>	<b>End of day 1 of the NGN Public Panel</b>

## Baseline survey

At the outset of the day participants were asked to complete an initial research survey, using an anonymised number, which can be used to track changes of opinion etc. over the 3 sessions. At the end of the process this will allow further analysis to consider, for example, any significant differences in opinion between older or younger participants, male or female participants, or participants on lower incomes.

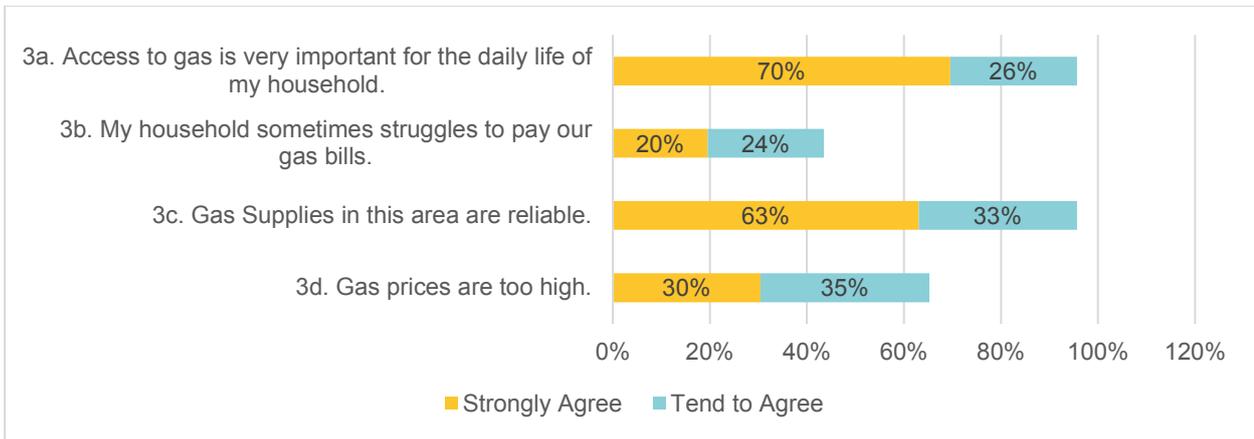
### 1) Before being invited to take part in this Panel had you heard of Northern Gas Network?

- 52% - Yes, definitely
- 24% - Yes, I think so
- 20% - I don't think so
- 4% - Definitely not

### 2) Before being invited to take part in this Panel, were you aware that a different company was responsible for Gas Distribution than your gas supplier?

- 28% - Very aware
- 37% - Somewhat aware
- 20% - Not really aware
- 15% - Definitely not aware

### 3) Views on gas and gas supplies

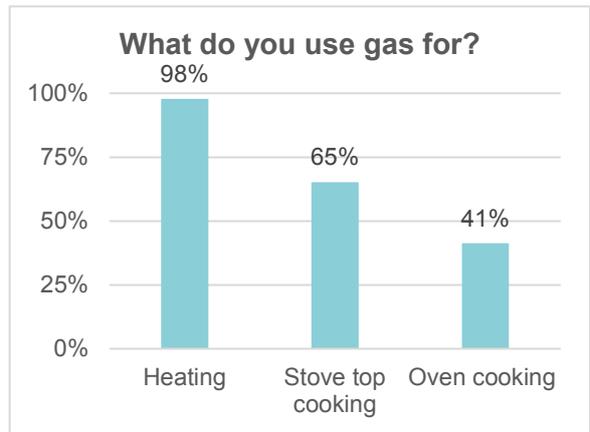


#### 4) Experience with gas

- All participants reported using gas as part of their heating and cooking options within the home
- 30% of participants reported they had experienced a gas supply interruption

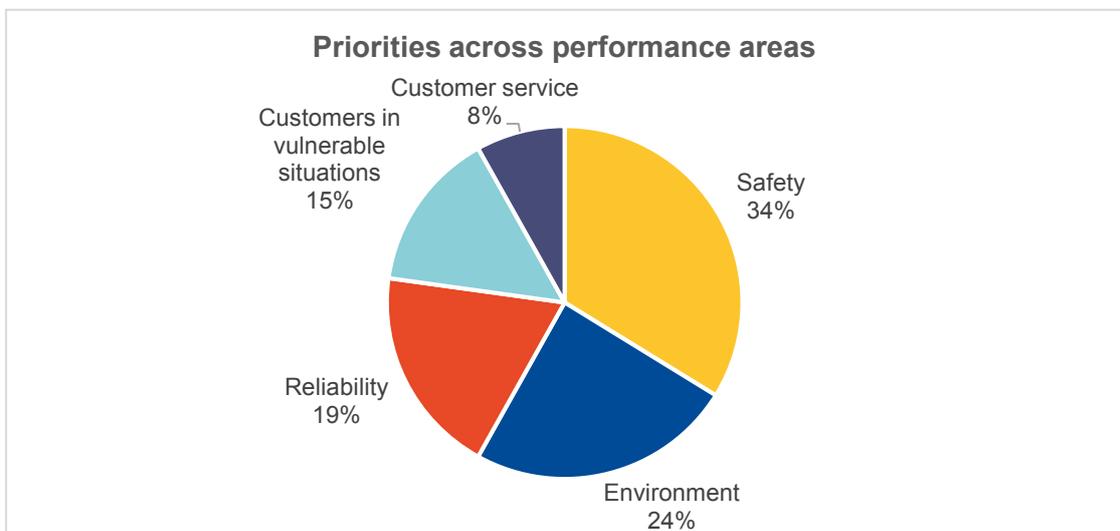
Of those:

- 57% reported their gas had been cut off for a few hours
- 29% reported a loss of supply for less than 1 day
- 2% reported it had lasted 1-2 days



## Priorities across performance areas

After introductory presentations and discussions on each of NGN's 5 performance areas participants were asked to identify the 3 areas that were most important to them in relation to NGN's ongoing performance.



## Safety

**100% of participants included safety within their top 3 priorities.**

Comments regarding the importance of safety included:

*Overall – it's a given, you assume safety in place*

*Impresses by the response rate on the spot – determine whether immediately dangerous and deal immediately – if not, go to next priority*

*'our home is safe' is the expectation*

*Vital – life or death*

*Expect safety – and have exceeded expectations*

*NGN performance in this area is impressive. Good to know that the targets are so high.*

There were however a number of customers that were less impressed with NGN's performance to date noting that *"fixing leaks is the bare minimum – I'm not patting you on the back for that!"* This led to a conversation at some tables regarding the value and realism of NGN aiming to exceed its 97% performance rate.

*How do you get above 97% performance?*

*What about the 3%? - What is the cost of hitting 100%?*

*Is it realistic to hit 100%?*

## Environment

**72% of participants included the environment as one of their priorities across the 5 performance areas.**

Overall customers were broadly supportive of NGN's approach to minimising its impact on the environment, although some did note it was what they would expect from a 'responsible' corporation.

*We're all going greener*

*All about reducing impact – for us and for future generations*

*NGN's approach to the environment exceeds my expectations*

*It is important to consider the environment and reduce NGN's impact on the environment*

*Need to be thinking of the future; looking positively for different methods that are eco-friendly.*

*Gas distribution and supply affects the environment greatly. They should do more than others at being green.*

*NGN seem to be considering a number of options in relation to reducing their impact on the environment*

*Sounds good. They're trying to reduce emissions to reduce environmental impact (by providing less diesel cars and more electric)*

The group discussions around the environmental impact did however raise a number of further questions, including:

*Can more off-setting be done e.g. tree planting?*

*Will new pipes support alternative gasses e.g. methane?*

*Are plastic pipes ok in terms of reducing environmental impact?*

*What about subcontractors – Do they follow the same environmental standards?*

*'Sustainability of green power- is the future Hydrogen?*

*Fracking – how will that effect the environment? Is shale gas comparable with existing pipes?*

*Is it 100% of vehicles that will be replaced? – is there a national standard for replacing vehicles?*

*Should there be / is there a national standard for recycling spoils?*

*What can NGN do to help customers be more energy efficient?*

*Gas futures – What is the responsibility of NGN to prepare the public for no gas?*

## Reliability

**57% of participants included reliability in their priorities.**

Many of the comments regarding reliability were strongly linked to safety.

*Safety and reliability = if these are 100% then the other 3 are less important*

*Reliability - if you know it is a company you can rely on all the other factors will be peace of mind*

*Very impressed by the service*

*Surprising how rarely there are interruptions*

*If it all works, and get the service, then happy and won't need to complain*

*[NGN] are in charge of distribution, so this should be priority number 1*

*More reliable than expected*

*Can't complain about once in 40 years?!*

*Knowing there is standards help expect levels of performance*

At several of the tables however discussions about reliability focused on planned service interruptions and how NGN communicated to their customers about these.

*Communication is important but the means of communication more so – letter, door-knocking, texts, posters*

*Re planed interruptions – positive that they tell customers and communicate in advance, but needs to be a personal addressed letter sent to the house (not something that seems like marketing which might just go in the bin) i.e. not just 'homeowner'*

*Positive that staff go door to door 10 days before if planned and on the day if unplanned*

*If planned should be posters in the street – as not everyone opens unsolicited mail*

*Need easy clear message – but letters can look like circulars and could be ignored*

*How do you communicate if things are overrunning? – keep customers updated*

## Customers in vulnerable situations

**33% of participants included support for vulnerable customers within their top 3 priorities.**

Overall the discussions around this theme were much more mixed, with some participants praising NGN for taking action here and others questioning whether it really was their responsibility.

*Great that [NGN] do this – but is it the responsibility of the supplier?*

*Really important issue in north Yorkshire – many people live in rural isolation, often with oil for heating on low incomes*

*Good approach to supporting vulnerable customers*

*Surprised so much invested in people*

*[NGN]’re acting responsibly*

*£50K not a lot – could be more*

*For vulnerable people this is very important – and as a neighbour*

*Who funds this spending? Should it be the customer or should it come out of general taxation?*

*Does this cut across supplier territory? Why does NGN get involved here?*

Many people had also not heard of the Priority Service Register and were keen to know more about it – including how are people supposed to know about it, how often it is updated and what type of additional supports are offered.

*Need to make sure it is easy to apply for PSR – need to raise awareness of the scheme*

*[NGN] should provide carbon monoxide monitors for vulnerable customers*

*If someone is not on the list how can they get help?*

*Could [NGN] refer vulnerable customers to grants? – new boilers, insulation etc.*

*How often do [NGN] find out about vulnerability? How often do [NGN] update the list?*

*How do [NGN] react to challenging customers who are not ‘vulnerable’ – how are all customers treated fairly?*

## Customer Service

**Only 24% of participants identified customer service within their priorities**, in part because they had never had to (or expected to have to) deal directly with NGN as a customer.

*With luck we will never have to deal with NGN*

Most however were impressed with the performance information presented to them.

*All sounds good – particularly dealing with complaints within an hour*

*Very impressed with scores*

*Sounds impressive but never had dealings with NGN*

*Coming from a customer service/complaints working background, regulated by FOS who give an 8 week timescale for complaints, your figures are outstanding*

*Good approach to customer service – processes in place for improvement*

*Good customer service record for this industry – but is it overly done!*

*Nice to see they are the best. What strategies exist to keep improving?*

*Trust in company is ultimately impacted by their customer service*

Given the lack of interactions most participants had had with NGN, many of the table discussions focused on what made for good customer service in general. Points included:

*Good customer service makes you feel appreciated*

*Good customer service gives you (individually) feedback on callouts – getting a response will encourage more reports of leaks*

*Customers should be involved in regular surveys*

*Being able to deal with one person – getting something solved first time; not having to repeat issues to different people; being dealt with in a personal way, not via a script; being genuinely listened to; someone who cares for your issue*

*No jargon! It's all about understanding for the customer*

*Not having to wait too long for your call to be answered – I would want NGN to answer my call within a minute. Or ideally less*

*Don't rush dealing with customers, in order to meet a target*

*Keep your promises*

*Bear in mind that the company's policies may be at fault*

*Well-trained staff – offering a human touch*

*Not too much automation – e.g. pressing lots of numbers on the phone; option trees don't always suit the people calling*

*Not using premium telephone numbers*

*Make it easy for people to contact the company - Convenient call-back / easy website / chat make all the difference*

*Looking at root causes of the issues and the impact on consumers*

*Need to be told what will happen with my complaints if I had one*

*Want it to be a UK contact always*

*Want to be told clearly what actions will be taken after I call to make a complaint*

# Benefits of the pipe replacement programme

Participants were presented with NGNs assessment of the benefits of the pipe replacement programme:

- A. Safety – Making the network safer
- B. Reduced Interruptions – Reducing the likelihood of unplanned customer disruptions
- C. Environment – Fewer emissions from leaking gas pipes

Following this participants were asked to rank which of the following 3 benefits was the most convincing for them individually.

- **82% of participants chose safety** as the most persuasive argument for the pipe replacement programme

*Safety is super important when gas can be so dangerous*

*It should be the baseline for every operation*

*Safety is paramount for every customer's peace of mind*

*If it's not safe then it kills fock and fock are the customers*

*When all else is considered life is more important than not having a shower*

*Gas can be very dangerous and it is everywhere running underground*

*Without safety the other points do not matter so much*

*Concerns everyone in the area which you live*

*I don't want to be blown up into pieces and buried in a closed coffin because my corpse is a smoothie*

*It is very important to me to feel safe in the house and everywhere*

*Nothing in this case is more important than people's safety from gas leaks and explosions - especially when thinking about my family*

- **18% of participants chose environment** as their first preference rationale for the pipe replacement programme

*Because none of the others matter if this isn't fixed soon*

*No planet = nothing to blow up!*

*It is not worth damaging the environment now and suffering later. We should be more proactive especially with dangerous substances*

*Moving ahead to the future making steps so everything is in place for new methods of gas*

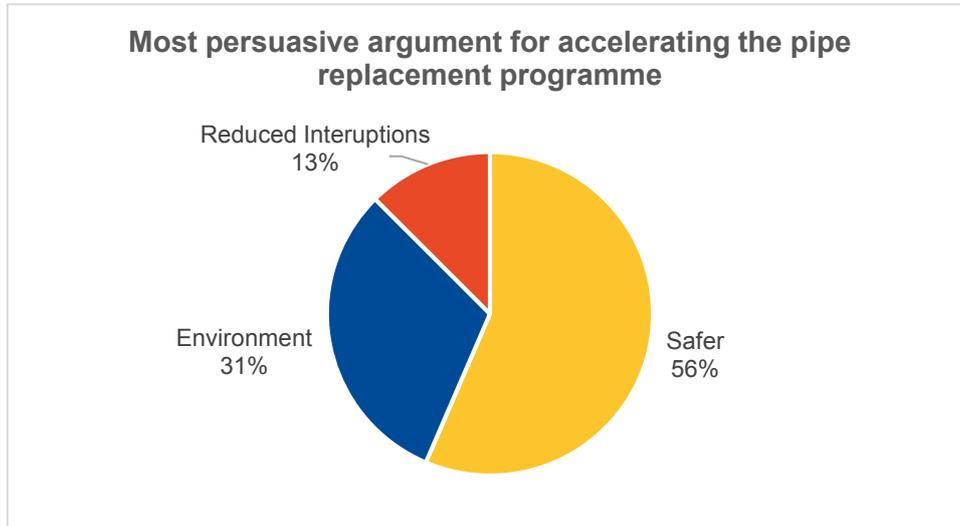
*Future of the planet and future generations*

*Breaches in safety obviously can result in death in extreme cases, but whilst this is obviously horrible for the individuals and families, only really critical if widespread loss of safety*

*Improvements for the future so fewer leakages*

*167000 tonnes of Co2 is a massive impact which can be cured relatively cheaply compared to other alternatives*

When preferential votes were taken into account the balance shifts slightly – with environment recording a larger share of the overall scores (picking up a high number of 2<sup>nd</sup> preference votes).



**Increasing reliability and minimising disruption** received the lowest proportion of the vote overall (with no first preference votes and only 14 second preference votes).

*It of course makes people angry when a service is disrupted but safety and environment are more important*

*If safety and environment are taken care of then interruptions are reduced  
Interruption doesn't really matter. We can live without gas for a while but we can't bring back life*

*There will always be interruptions and so long as they are communicated in advance whenever possible, we can cope and make alternative arrangements*

*I would have ranked this highest but having heard information today that interruptions are only once every 40 years I now feel this is less relevant given the provided statistics*

*A one in 40 year occurrence isn't important*

When reliability was prioritised by participants it tended to be for economic and customer service reasons.

*Long interruptions may be disadvantageous to the local economy*

*An interruption is an inconvenience. Time is money - needs to keep businesses running effectively.*

*Time = money = stressful*

*Fewer interruptions = less wasted gas = less harm to the environment and more satisfied customers*

# Accelerating the pipe replacement programme

The final substantive discussion in session 1 focused on the acceptability of investing in over and above mandated levels of replacement (i.e. the trade-off between more and/or potentially longer levels of disruption in the short term to reach improved safety, reliability and environmental targets earlier).

## Level of agreement

5 of the 6 tables reached agreement that they supported an accelerated programme of pipe replacement in order to achieve improved safety, reduce environmental impacts and increase reliability more quickly.

*Get on with it now for longer-term benefit*

*Cost on bills is not much, but need to make bill payers aware of why*

*Acceleration - as long as it's planned and efficient it would be better in the long term*

*Would make us ready for green gasses much quicker*

*10p a year worth it if company can deliver in future proofing*

*We can all put up with disruption if we are kept informed*

*But importance to co-ordinate with other services to minimise impacts*

The 1 table that did not agree were also not against the idea of acceleration as such, but were concerned that the planned pipe replacements might not be the best long term option and therefore the risk of moving too quickly and having to redo work as technologies improved. Similar concerns were also expressed at a number of the other tables. There were also concerns that any cost increases to customers may not be reduced once the work had been completed.

*Shouldn't the big energy companies be paying? They make a lot of profit.*

*BUT will cost savings be passed on to the consumer once infrastructure work is done?*

*Overall conclusion - don't speed up because 'ambivalent' - not enough info on what disruption would look like and uncertainty about the technology.*

*Don't put 'all eggs in pipe replacement basket'*

## Co-creating sessions 2 and 3

In the final part of the day participants were given the opportunity to help shape the content of the next 2 sessions by identifying which of the performance areas they would most like to focus on.

To initiate this discussion a series of touchpoints between NGN customers and the pipe replacement programme were presented:

1. **Gas emergency services** – how do you want us to respond to gas leaks and keep you safe when you're off gas unexpectedly?

2. **Minimising disruption** – what service levels do you expect when we're working in your street? (e.g. how quickly we fill in holes outside your home)
3. **Customers in vulnerable situations** – what extra services can we provide to customers in vulnerable situations?
4. **Sustainability** – what can we do to help improve the environment?

As part of this discussion there was also the opportunity for participants to identify any other information etc. they felt they needed to enable them to have an informed conversation.

### **Sustainability**

Sustainability was the top priority for 4 of the 6 tables, and was considered an important aspect to focus on by all but one of the groups. Key points and questions raised were:

*What are you doing now to be sustainable?*

*Gases and alternatives – What [NGN] is doing / planning? Or is it all 'airy fairy'?*

*Hydrogen – what is the thinking? Do the pipes work for it?*

*What are your plans when gas runs out?*

*How much power [does NGN have] to influence other parts of the energy system?*

*Pipe materials – are they recycled?*

*Engagement with schools – what else are NGN doing to engage?*

*NGN's role in lobbying government for wider policy change.*

*Unless we look to the future and fix our ways on energy and pollution we won't have a future to worry about the other topics*

### **Customers in vulnerable circumstances**

Understanding more about how NGN identified and supported customers in vulnerable circumstances, and why this was something NGN would be involved in, was also an area identified for future focus.

*Better education on what's available*

*Free home safety checks and free carbon monoxide monitors*

*Who is classed as vulnerable? What does the NGN staff training cover? Would like more details about the criteria. Are NGN really meeting people's needs?*

*Links to disruption*

*People on this panel can help here*

*Balance between customers and the company bearing the cost*

One table however did not see this as a priority for discussion, concluding that there was '*Less need to come back to this – getting a lot for £130 a year – good value!*'

### **Minimising Disruption**

This topic received a middle ranking at most of the tables. Most of the comments relating to areas that Panel members wanted to explore further related to how NGN communicated information during planned and unplanned disruptions and whether there was a way that NGN could better co-

ordinate with other services to minimise repeated disruption (e.g. roads being dug up) by different types of services.

*More information about how they can work with other services and co-ordinate*

*How do you communicate with customers [about a gas leak]?*

*What provision do you have in an emergency? Is there a definitive list of support?*

*Wider traffic issues – how do [NGN] notify?*

*Definitive time frames for digging up roads*

### **Gas emergency services**

There was very limited appetite across any of the tables to spend more time focussing on NGNs response to gas leaks or safety concerns.

*Don't talk about emergency services – doing a good job now. The system works.*

*Why put energy into tweaking*

*We've covered this already?*

*NGN are smashing their performance targets already*

### **Other themes and questions**

A range of other themes and topics were raised during this session (some more relevant to the process than others):

*Pricing / regulation / profit*

*Influencing Ofgem.*

*Understanding the whole energy system – the role of suppliers on some of these questions?*

*Cost implications for bill payers after replacement work is done? Will bills come down?*

*Implications of political factors, e.g. Brexit, on vulnerabilities*

*How much profit did NGN make last year?*

*What is NGN's policy on high rise buildings? Do they have 10 year surveys?*

*How do [NGN] compare with other distributors?*

*What happens if [NGN] were to lose their licence?*

# Annex 3: Output report from meeting 2 of the NGN Public Panel

## Introduction

The NGN Public Panel brought together a broadly representative sample of people from across the company's catchment area to learn, discuss and deliberate on key aspects of NGN's performance in order to help provide public input to the business planning process. The Panel met over 3 Saturday's in March – April 2019.

This Findings Report was prepared after the second sitting of the NGN Public Panel to provide a summary of the direct outputs from the session. The results are presented in the order that the topics were discussed. It was primarily intended as an interim record of the process to assist with planning the subsequent sessions.

## Overview of Session 2

The second meeting of the NGN Public Panel took place on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2019 at the St Georges Centre in central Leeds. In response to participant feedback about the length of the previous meeting this session ran from 10am – 4:30pm.

45 of the 48 participants involved in the 1<sup>st</sup> session returned for session 2.

- This represents a return rate of 94%
- 2 of those who did not return, without notice, were among those who had the greatest distance to travel (the 3<sup>rd</sup> had a 'family emergency' on the Friday evening)

The Panel meeting was facilitated by [Involve](#) and consisted of a mixture of presentations from NGN staff, facilitated discussions in small table groups (average 8 people), on-line polling and written exercises to record clear findings.

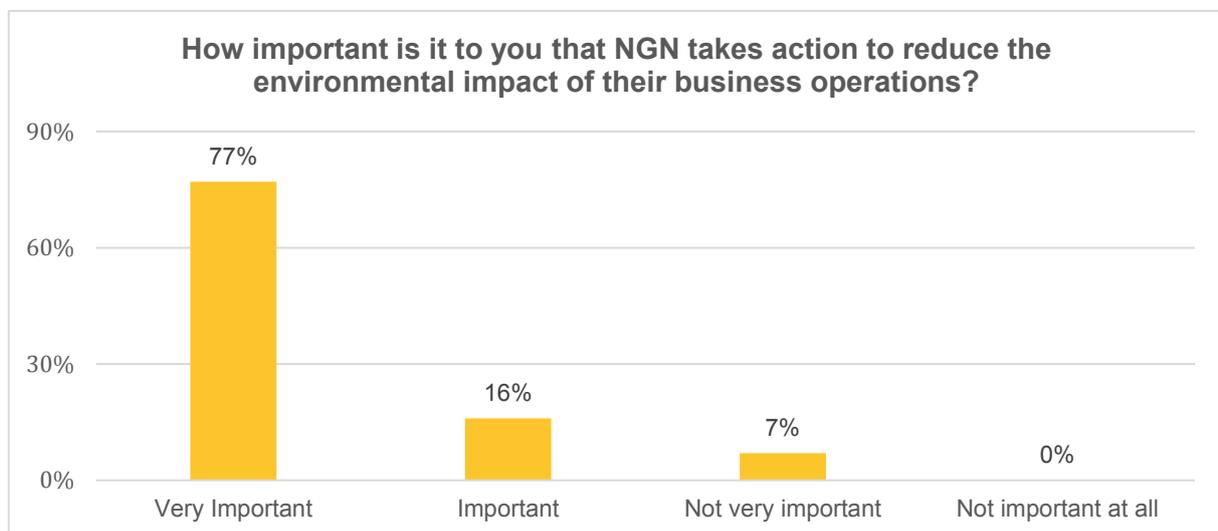
The programme for Session 2 is reproduced below.

9:30am	Arrival and registration (tea and coffee available)
10am	<b>Welcome and introduction to the NGN Public Panel</b>
	<b>Revisiting who is Northern Gas Networks and their role in the supply chain</b> Presentation and Q&A
11:00am	Break – tea and coffee
	<b>Sustainability in NGN's operations</b> Presentation, group discussions and online polling
	<b>Future of the NGN vehicle fleet</b> Presentation and group discussions
12.55pm	<b>Lunch</b>
1:40pm	<b>Land Remediation</b> Presentation and group discussions
	<b>Green Gases</b>

	Presentation and group discussions
	<b>Managing environmental impacts</b> Group discussion, deliberation and online polling
<b>3:10pm</b>	Break – tea and coffee
3:25pm	<b>NGN's Environmental Outputs</b> Presentation, group discussions and online polling
<b>4:30pm</b>	<b>End of day 2 of the NGN Public Panel</b>

## Taking action to manage the environmental impact of the company's operations

Overall, reducing the environmental impact of the company's operations was reported as being very important to participants.



*It's good to know someone is there for us<sup>16</sup>*

*Very IMPORTANT – all businesses live in society and should minimise negative impacts*

*Important for future generations that action is taken now*

*We are all more aware now of impacts – do what we can, but big companies can do more!*

<sup>16</sup> The comments presented in this report have been selected to represent the range and balance of comments received during the Panel meetings.

# Priorities within the NGN Environmental Strategy

Participants were presented with the 5 aspects of NGN's environmental strategy (closely tied to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals):

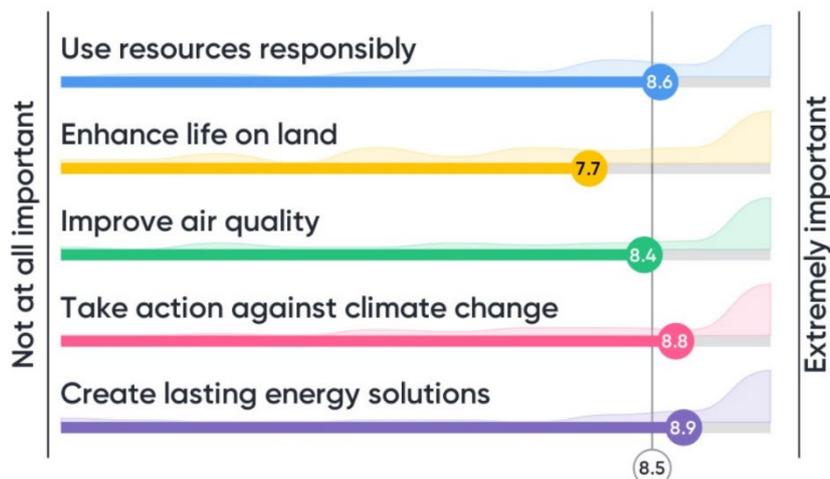
- i. Improve air quality
- ii. Take action against climate change
- iii. Enhance life on land
- iv. Create lasting energy solutions
- v. Use resources responsibly

## How important is it for NGN to take action to...

Participants were then asked to indicate which aspects of NGN's environmental strategy were most important to them. This question was presented via an online polling tool and used a 10 point sliding scale (where 1 = not at all important and 10 = extremely important).

The results of this online poll are presented below (with the light coloured space along each line illustrating the spread of the votes cast). This shows that the participant's top 3 priorities were:

1. Creating lasting energy solutions – average value 8.9 (out of 10)
2. Taking action against climate change – average value 8.8
3. Using resources responsibly – average value 8.6



The discussions that proceeded this vote focused on the relative importance customers place on activities undertaken by NGN to reduce their environmental impact.

The most consistent positive response was on the need to take action regarding creating lasting energy solutions.

*This is for the future of the planet*

The importance of 'taking action against climate change' was a close second, with comments including:

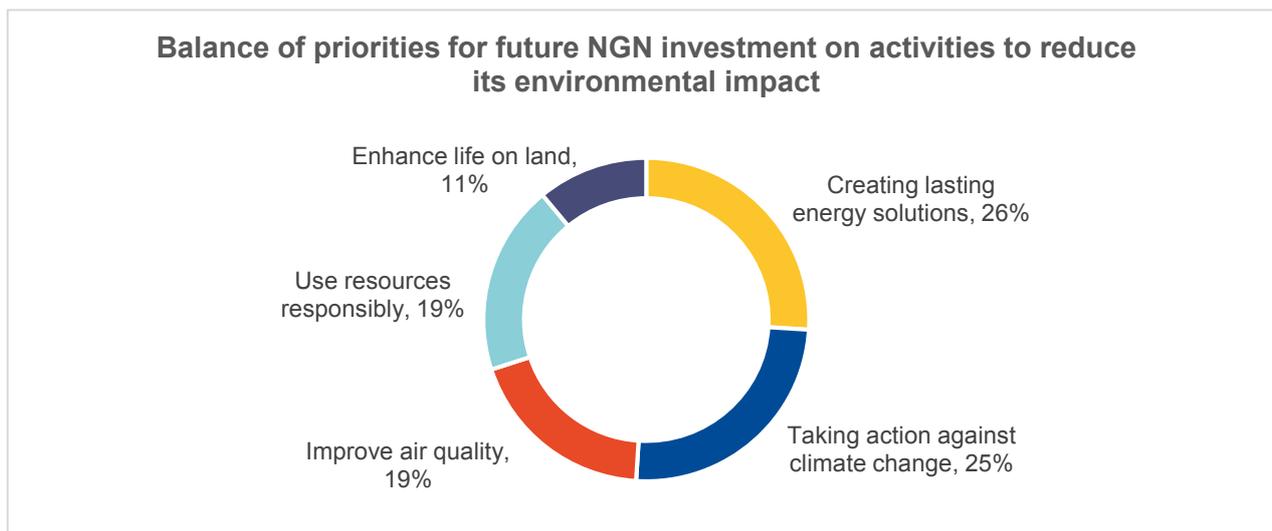
*It is important for future survival of the human race*

*We are more aware now of impacts – do what we can but big companies can do more!*

*If [we] solve / focus on climate change then other areas will follow*

**Imagine you had £100 of NGN money to spend on environmental action, how would you split it?**

The purpose of this question was to ask participants to consider the relative weight they would give to the different aspects of managing NGN’s environmental impact.<sup>17</sup> The way they collectively chose to allocate this ‘budget’ is illustrated below.



It is useful to note that participant’s responses to this question are consistent with the responses given to the previous question, although more weighting is given to their top 2 priorities.

## **NGN activity – Example 1: Fleet replacement**

One of the examples of the types of activity NGN was focusing on to reduce their environmental impact that was presented to participants was regarding the replacement of their vehicle fleet.

- Overall 49% thought NGN’s activities were ‘about right’ to reduce the environmental impact of their fleet

*NGN are consistently doing their bit to reduce impact of fleet – it’s enough*

*They’re doing what they’re doing for the future*

*Limited commercial alternatives*

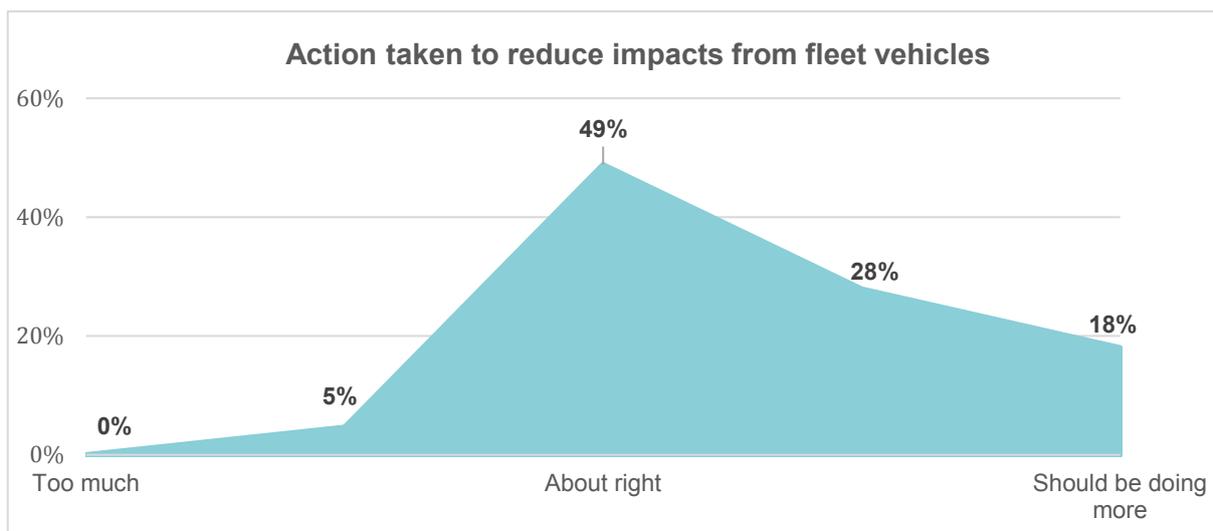
*Changing the fleet to the cleaner diesel and have plans to go further and do more in the future*

*What real alternatives are there for their existing fleet – at this present moment they are doing enough*

---

<sup>17</sup> A random figure of £100 was chosen to allow participants to make proportional allocation decisions. This £ amount was chosen on the basis that, for most people, it would ‘feel’ big enough to be significant (thus the reason for not choosing £10) but relatable (thus not £100K).

*I don't see what more they can possibly do. They already seem to be doing a lot  
Because business wise they can't replace all at once  
They could do more but are replacing vehicles in a more economical way (like for like)  
Think there is more important things to focus on I think they are doing their best, hopefully they change when new available  
Technology not available at the moment to go fully. Limited to other markets e.g. hydrogen being in infancy so they can't do much more  
Infrastructure not in place for electric – charging points?  
At the moment EV, hydrogen cars etc. are new. It's a big commitment to change fleet but they can still trial a small amount of them  
After hearing the reasons and costs to replace sooner I think they are doing what they can in the here and now  
Tech advances can be used as they come along so it is better to replace fleet gradually or they could be stuck with an out of date fleet.  
In terms of research and development it's about right – more can be done but is restricted by development and cost*



Concerns however did emerge relating to whether the ‘like for like’ approach being undertaken at the moment (Euro 6 diesel replacement) was enough:

*NGN boss said like for like – they tend to go for diesel but we know hybrid is more environmentally friendly based on road tax... I'd like to know why?*

*Like for like is not a strategy – but is an acceptable stance. They need to be looking for how they can move to cleaner alternatives. At present there are cleaner methods but the cost/effect calculation needs to be looked*

*Euro 6 is not an improvement on CO emissions levels from the previous standards. There is a 50% reduction in NO4 though, which helps air quality*

*Could be replacing all vehicles except vans with hybrids NOW*

Those who were hesitant about the approach tended to focus on the fact that technology regarding vehicle emissions was still developing:

*The present progress is fine however there are a few concerns regarding what is the best option to swap to. Also what if there are newer vehicles available later on the market?*

*Not tried and tested yet*

*Not looking forward enough into the future with regards to adopting new fuel standards*

*Can't rush – don't want to waste money if it is the wrong solution*

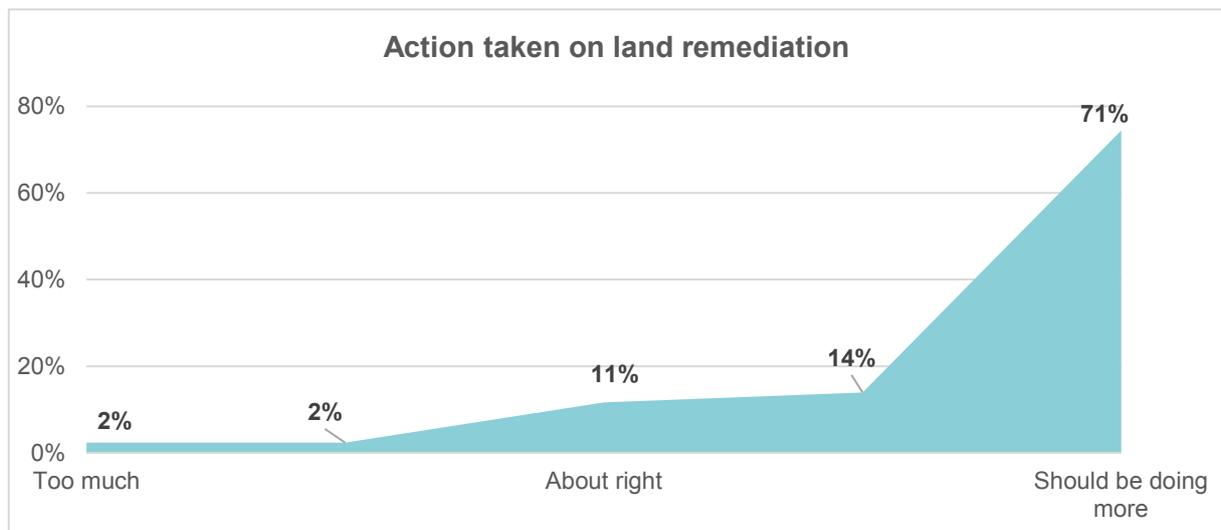
There was also concern expressed that there was a need for a wider transport policy, rather than a fleet only policy:

*Is there are car sharing / bike use or public transport passes policy?*

## NGN Activity – Example 2: Action taken on land remediation

Another example of the types of activity NGN was focusing on was in regards to land remediation (where they were largely 'doing what was mandated').

- 85% of respondents from the Panel thought that NGN should be doing more in terms of land remediation



Comments on this included:

*If they are just doing what they need to do then they could do more, therefore they aren't doing enough*

*Should do more – but at minimal cost to consumers*

*Surely industries must shoulder responsibility for areas they have spoilt?*

*These underground tanks are a risk – deal with it. It [NGN] land, stop putting a sticking plaster on in*

*Only 47 sites so cost is capped! – do full restoration*

*Happy to pay more for NGN to do more (not enough now)*

*Should fully fix the sites over time – do more! If the minimum has done now the site will probably need more work at a later date, So do it once and do it right!*

*Pay more but on the condition that consumers have a say on the use of land*

*I think they need to make sure everything is safe for atmosphere. More money from profit should go to remediation projects.*

*Most of these sites will be in populated areas, do you not have a duty of care to fully clean these areas rather than just have a containment programme?*

There were a wide range of ideas and questions on how this work should be funded across the table discussions:

*You can afford to do more!!!! If you don't do it (gas land remediation) who would do it? It's part of your legacy so 'suck it up, buttercup'*

*Whose was the land / why did NGN end up with contaminated sites?*

*Are there any land/assets that NGN can sell off to help pay for this work to speed up the clean-up process?*

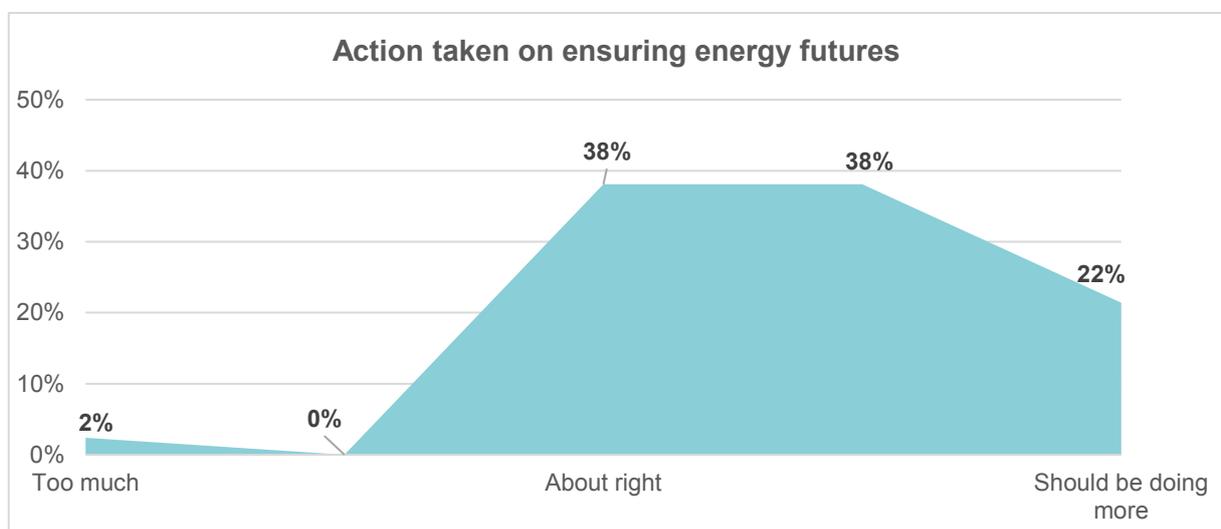
*Maybe NGN consider capitalising on the value of cleaned up land – savings for customers*

*NGN should do more to actually treat and clear the land which can be used for other things. What is the overall cost difference?*

*Should use some profits to doing more, also gas is a pollutant so the company should put something back!*

## NGN Activity – Example 3: Action taken on ensuring energy futures

Another example of the types of activity NGN was focusing on presented how the company was investing in energy futures and ensuring the distribution network was fit for purpose for future energy transitions.



- While 38% of the Panel members thought that NGN was doing about right in regards to investing in ensuring energy futures, still 60% thought they should be doing more.

Comments from those who felt NGN was doing 'about right' included:

*About right! Doing what they can with what they have.*

*Green gas has to be a large part of the answer*

*They are open to change and different ideas*

*To be fair to NGN it's using resources in finding a solution to greener gas based on what they have budget wise/ resources*

*Are NGN and other transmission companies the only people involved – are the gas supply companies contributing enough as it's their future business as well*

*They are doing quite a bit. Love the forward planning with the hydrogen – good investment. (and they have options - don't have all eggs in the same basket)*

*We feel NGN are doing as much as viably possible within laws and guidelines and infrastructure*

*Doing what they can within restricting parameters – investigating a range of pilots in a wide range of places – GOOD*

*The schemes in place are already looking into a lot of different avenues to improve*

*Going in the right direction – appreciate you can't bang us all onto hydrogen in 5 mins!*

*The relative cut given to customers given the importance of the work is nothing – 25p to potentially help save the planet – PRICELESS!*

Comments from those who believed NGN should be doing more tended to focus on the overall environmental challenge of sustainable energy:

*Need more investment and faster (not enough)*

*As a gas company they should be doing everything they can be to be going green – thinking more ahead for the future*

*You are doing a lot! BUT there is a big demand for future solutions for new energy / green solutions*

*If less energy was used then there'd be less emissions therefore use less energy and influence others to use less*

*Not enough is being done to introduce Hydrogen into the network fast enough. I would happily spend a lot more per year on my bill to speed up its introduction.*

Other members of the Panel tended to focus on how advances were paid for, questioning primarily whether this is something that customers or companies should be paying for:

*Should be doing more – customers are paying more then NGN are taking all the credit*

*Why is the funding coming from customers not from profits?*

*Customers are paying for the innovation*

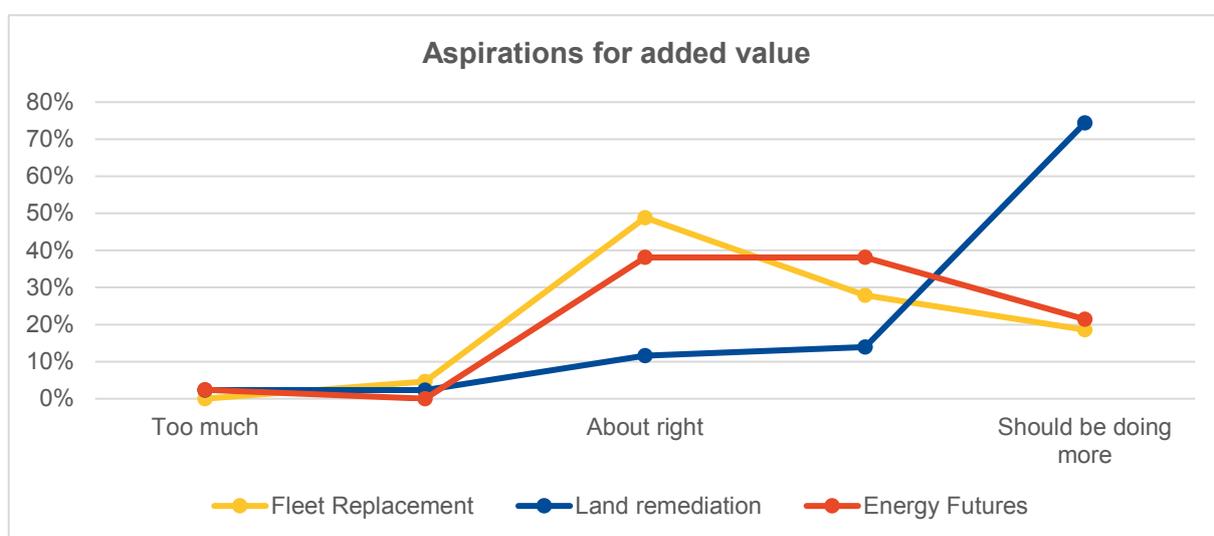
*Issue of vested interests of a company that expects gas to have a continued role – country might go all electric. Is NGN in denial?*

*Green gasses are a producer problem to make safe and cost effective. [Should do less] because it is the customer who is paying for this not NGN out of their profits, so you are making yourself look good but doing it out of customer money*

*Are NGN and other transmission companies the only people involved? – are the gas supply companies contributing enough as it's their future business as well?*

## Adding Value

Taken together the previous discussions revealed a clear sense that Panel members wanted NGN to do more overall to manage its impact on the environment.

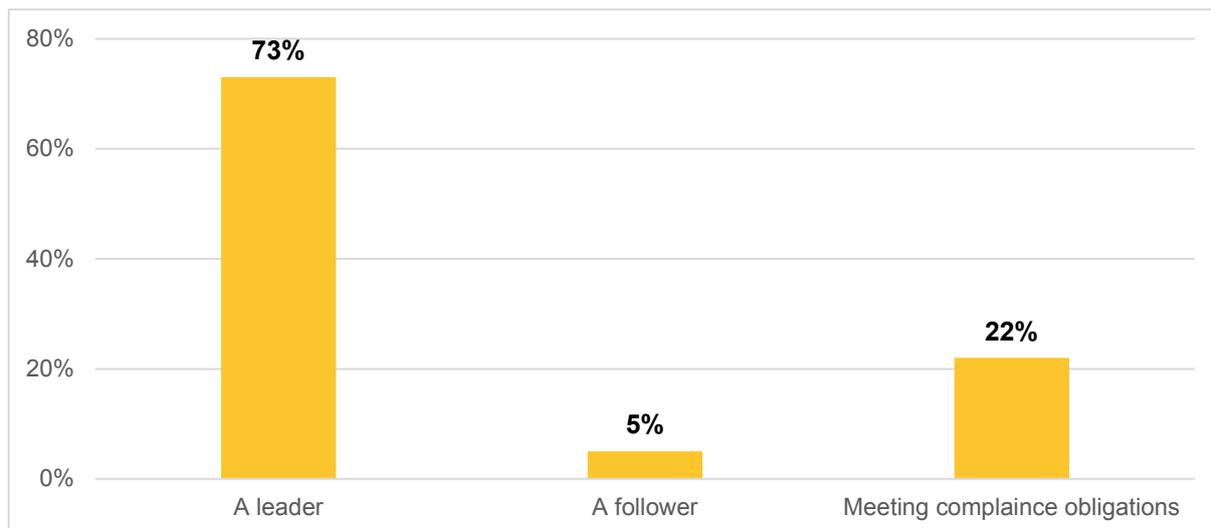


The purpose of this next section was therefore to identify whether participants in the Panel want NGN to:

- play a **sector leading role** (as currently the case in the examples presented relating to energy futures) but which could/would be more expensive to consumers;
- **be a follower** (keeping up with technology and good practice as in the approach to fleet replacement); or
- just make sure that they **meet compliance obligations** (as shown in the land remediation example) and minimise costs to customers.

Ultimately the goal was to determine whether, despite valuing the work undertaken to manage the environmental impact of NGN's business' operations and wanting to see more achieved, customers would be willing to pay more for it.

## What do you think NGN's role should be regarding dealing with environmental issues?



Comments from participants about their aspirations for NGN to 'do more' and be 'a leader' in the field included:

*Given this is NGN's area – welcome their pushing the boundaries / doing more  
Responsibility on industry to do more*

*Not just onus on individuals – big business should be leading*

*It is very important because if they do not look after the environment now and work towards helping the renewability of gas what happens. Also they need to think about 30-40 years into the future rather than short term*

*Very important for them to do more than is required as this is a crisis where time is of the essence for energy and environment and health*

*NGN need to do more for this area – air quality*

*It is paramount that they do more to bring in renewables – as impact on environment and gas will not last forever.*

*We need a market leader – if everyone does the bare minimum then in 54 years time we will not have any gas to worry about. Likewise if they don't work on the environmental impact then we will not have any safe places to live or work*

*Find new solutions to replace gas, use other sources of energy which will be safer and cheaper for customers.*

*Consider remediated sites as community space- trees, play areas*

*It is important to try not only to mitigate the damage caused but reverse it*

*There is never a time when enough is enough – 'do not rest on your laurels'*

*Good, better, best – never rest till your good is better and your better best!*

*This is very important – we can see / feel effects of climate change*

*Gas has done a lot of damage to the environment – everyone involved should do more to improve it. NGN have done really good so far*

*Do seem to be practicing what you are preaching i.e. When it comes to fleet cars / company cars go to electric where it is possible*

*Doing Ok but could do better – get more customers involved*

*Should try to do more than is strictly required – good PR*

*NGN can reach out more to consumers to do more for the environment the money can be invested with no extra £*

Panel members who thought that NGN should be concentrating just on meeting their compliance obligations in terms of managing their environmental impact tended to focus not only on cost implications, but where the responsibility should lie:

*Is the regulator's requirement at fault here / are Ofgem requiring enough?*

*But NGN needs to do same as other distributors nationally*

*In £130 the costs of [work for] the environment and alternatives about right*

*Could do more, but if Ofgem / Govt not more demanding then NGN must protect shareholder value – it's not their 'fault' it is Govt / Ofgem's 'fault'*

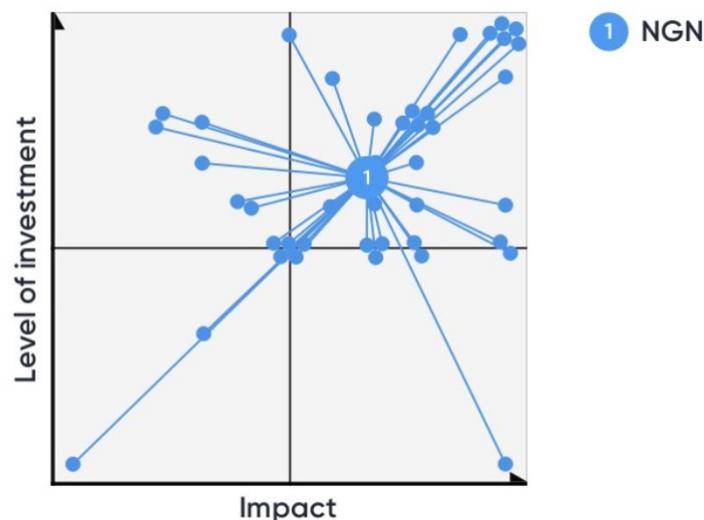
*NGN is doing its part already... but I think the Govt should do its part to give more and not just regulate*

*Given NGN's role as a transmission [distribution] organisation they seem to be doing a lot – How much are suppliers / producers doing?*

*They should focus on the basic leaks issue government and other companies in the industry need to take more responsibility and do more*

### **Should NGN be doing more than it is required to do to reduce the environmental impact of its business operations?**

When asked to consider proportionally the level of investment needed and the impacts they expected to see, the majority of participants remained consistent in their expectation that NGN should do more.



**To achieve enhanced environmental outcomes would you be happy to pay more on your bills?**

- 76% of participants in the Panel indicated that they would be prepared to pay more to see NGN make greater progress on delivering against aspirations for environmental management
- 25% of participants indicated they would be prepared to pay substantially more if they knew this was where their money was going.

Once again however there were concerns raised about whose responsibility it is to fund this type of activity, and whether costs should be passed on to customers.

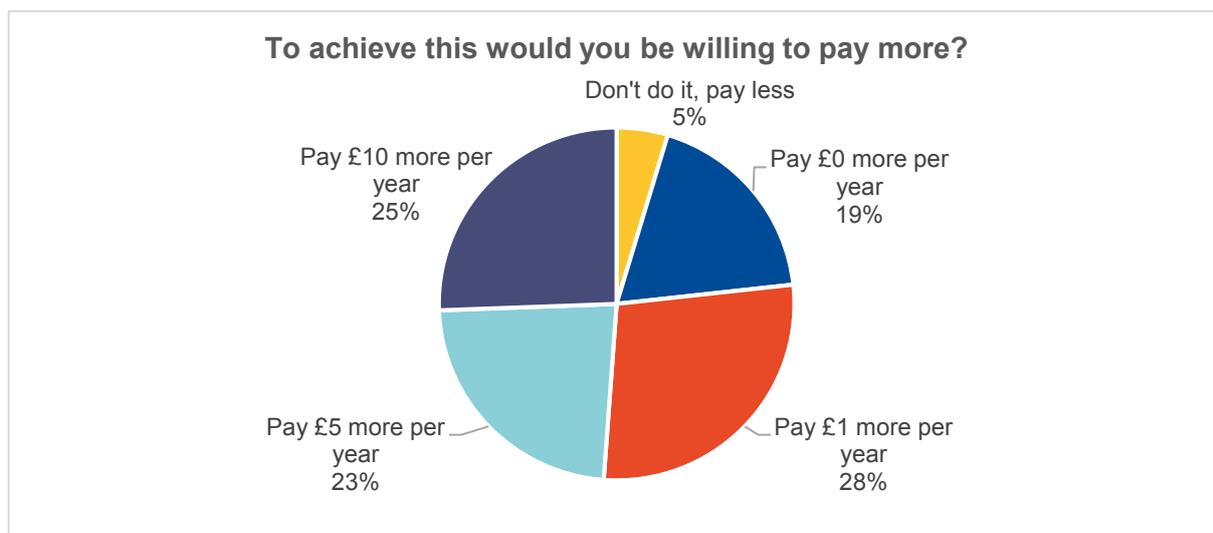
*On balance of who funds – [put a] cap on profits? / some shared funding*

*£ should come from profits*

*NGN are a company that don't have normal competitive challenges / pressures and therefore they are well placed to innovate*

*They are entitled to keep their profits – they do a good job*

*Costs should be borne by industry (across the board – from suppliers through to producers) not extra on the bill - Because they are a monopoly and public have no choice*



## NGN's proposed environmental outputs

In the final session participants were presented with NGN's 5 current proposed environmental outputs. These are reproduced below.

Strategy Area	Output
Taking action against climate change	1. Reduction in gas shrinkage
	2. Reduction in gas leakage
	3. Reduction in business carbon footprint

Use resources responsibly	4. Reduction in virgin aggregate used in reinstatement
	5. Reduction in excavation spoil sent to landfill

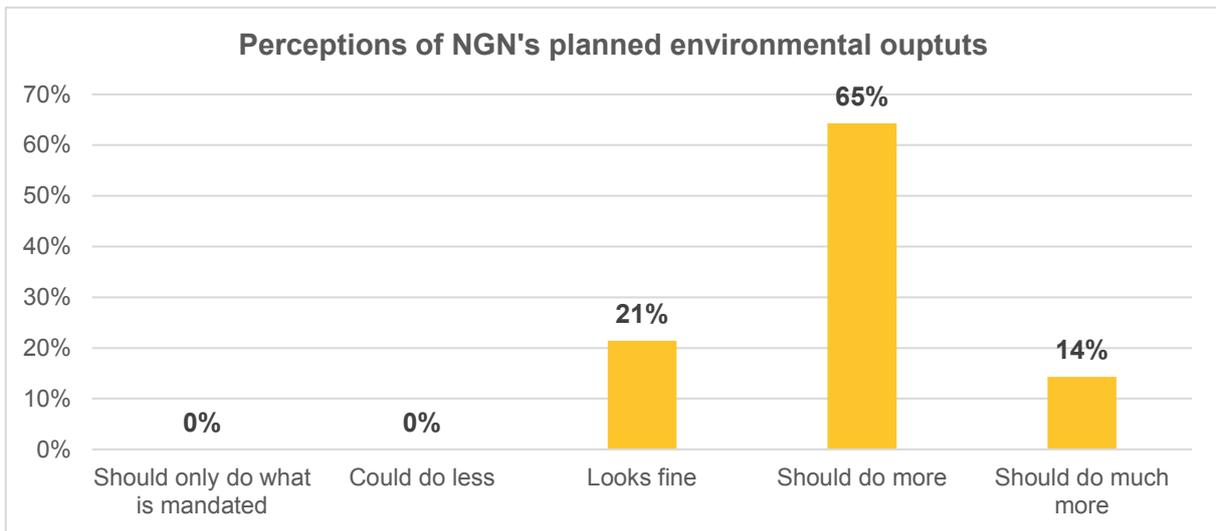
NGN also shared the wider list of potential environmental outputs, following NGN's Environment Workshop with industry stakeholders.

Strategy Area	Output
Taking action against climate change	1. Reduction in gas shrinkage
	2. Reduction in business carbon footprint
	3. Quantity of electricity produced from renewables
Use resources responsibly	4. Reduction in plastic pipe waste
	5. Reduction in virgin aggregate used in reinstatement
	6. Reduction in excavation spoil sent to landfill
	7. Reduction in office and depot waste
Improve air quality	8. Reduction in diesel used in vehicles
Enhance life on land	9. Plant fruit trees
	10. Create homes for nature
	11. Land remediation

**What do you think of NGN's planned environmental outputs?**

In answering this question participants were asked to focus specifically on the 5 proposed outputs that addressed 'taking action against climate change' and 'using resources responsibly'.

- 79% of participants expressed the view that they wanted NGN to do more



Priority areas focused on by participants were:

*Should have a mandated % of green gasses by the end of the price control period*

*Targets for land remediation – need not just capping but full cleaning*

*Target for complete removal of old infrastructure to be returned to local communities – parks and food gardens*

*Need to specify reductions in diesel*

*Needs a focus on greener gasses and for NGN to ensure that their network can transmit the new gasses*

*Need another output about finding greener gasses*

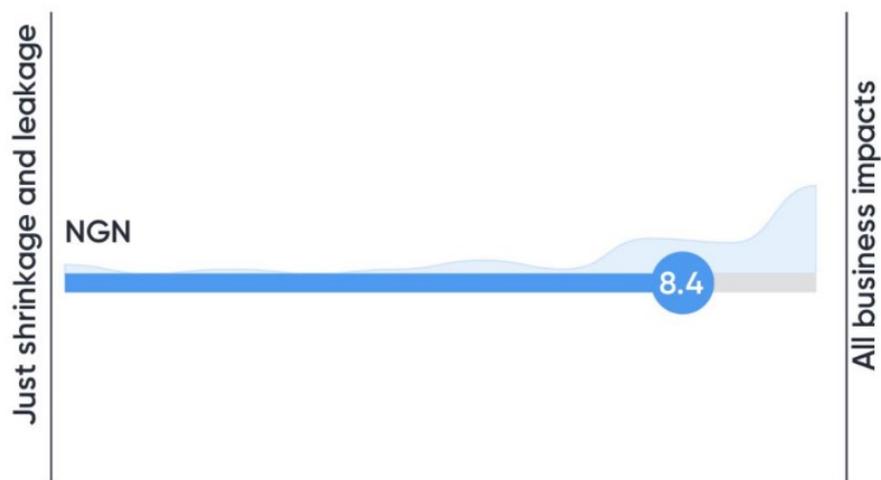
*Need to add using petrol vans not diesel until a solution is found to improve air quality*

*Need to include office and admin targets as well as focus on vehicles [in using resources responsibly]*

**On balance, do you think NGN should just focus on reducing shrinkage/leakage or should they focus on reducing environmental impacts from their business operations too?**

Participants were asked to indicate where NGN should focus its activity via an online polling tool. The choice was presented along a 10 point sliding scale (where 1 = 'just shrinkage and leakage' and 10 = 'all business operational impacts').

The results of this poll are presented below (with the light coloured areas along the line illustrating the spread of the votes cast).



# Annex 4: Output report from meeting 3 of the NGN Public Panel

## Introduction

The NGN Public Panel brought together a broadly representative sample of people from across the company's catchment area to learn, discuss and deliberate on key aspects of NGN's performance in order to help provide public input to the business planning process. The Panel met over 3 Saturdays in March – April 2019.

This Findings Report was prepared after the final sitting of the NGN Public Panel to provide a summary of the direct outputs from the session. The results are presented in the order that the topics were discussed. It is primarily intended as an interim record of the process.

## Overview of Session 3

The third meeting of the NGN Public Panel took place on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2019 at The Studio in central Leeds. The session ran from 10am – 4:30pm.

The Panel meeting was facilitated by [Involve](#) and consisted of a mixture of presentations from NGN staff, facilitated discussions in small table groups (average 8 people), and written exercises to record clear findings.

43 of the 48 participants involved in the first meeting returned for the final meeting.<sup>18</sup> This represents a retention rate of 90% overall.

When participants arrived they were directed towards pre-allocated tables to ensure that all discussion groups were mixed in terms of age, gender and place of residence. As much as possible the tables were also designed to give people the chance to work with different people and different facilitators.

The programme for Session 3 is reproduced below.

9:30am	Arrival and registration
10am	<b>Welcome and introduction to the NGN Public Panel</b>
	<b>Customer Service</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Planned interruptions</li><li>• Unplanned interruptions</li></ul>
11:20am	Break
	<b>New Gas Connections</b> What should the customer experience look like?
	<b>Customer complaints and enquiries</b> What should the customer experience look like?
12.55pm	<b>Lunch</b>

---

<sup>18</sup> Of the 3 participants from the second session who did not attend the final event one contacted the organisers to apologise that she was ill, one was asked not to attend to safeguard his own well-being following an attack on his character during session 2 and one was an unexplained non-attendance.

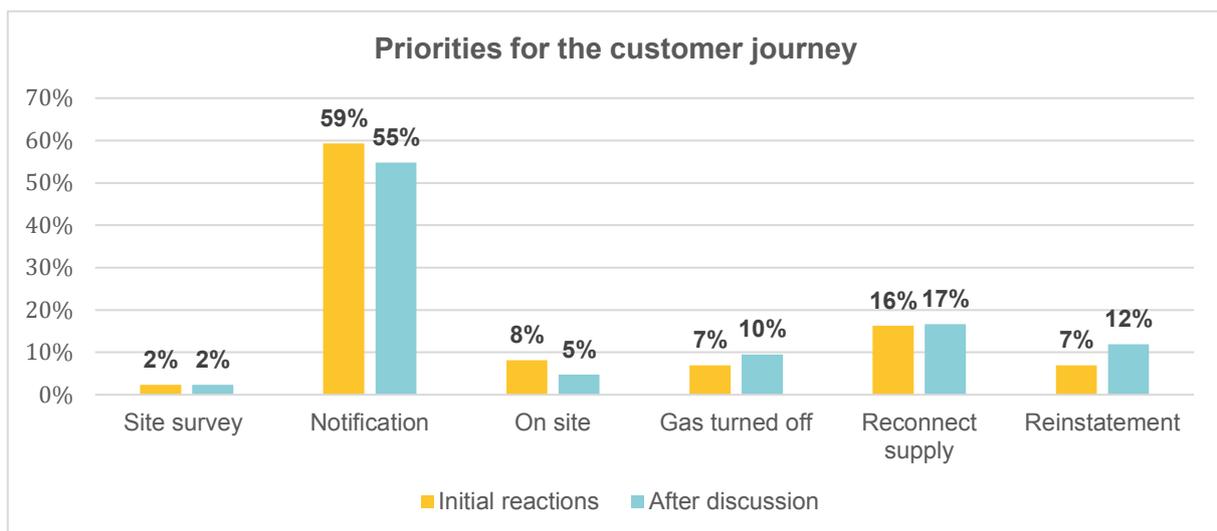
1:40pm	<b>NGN Social Initiatives</b> Supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances
<b>3:00pm</b>	Break
3:15pm	<b>Balancing priorities for improvement across the 5 performance areas</b> Where would you invest to improve performance?
<b>4:30pm</b>	<b>End of the NGN Public Panel</b>

## Customer Service: Planned interruptions

The first presentations and discussions focused on the customer journey during a planned interruption to gas supplies.

### Which component of the customer journey re: planned interruptions would you prioritise / want to see NGN focus their efforts on?

At the beginning of the presentation participants were asked for their ‘gut – reaction’ opinion on which aspect of the customer journey in a planned gas interruption NGN should focus their customer service efforts on most. This question was repeated at the end of the discussion. The results of this are shown below.<sup>19</sup>



The clear focus for participants initially, and after the discussions, was on effective notification.<sup>20</sup>

*Important to be pre-warned*

*Week before would be good*

*Alternative methods of notification*

*Not everyone answers the door especially vulnerable people*

*What if people are on holiday or working away from home?*

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that percentages throughout this report are provided for comparative purposes only and are not statistically significant in a group of this size (where 1 person’s response counts for more than 2% of the total). All percentages presented in this report are calculated on the number of responses received to each question, rather than the number of people eligible to vote.

<sup>20</sup> The comments presented in this report have been selected to represent the range and balance of comments received during the Panel meetings.

*Yes they can embrace modern methods e.g. twitter etc.*

*Should be done with consideration for users (enough time in advance)*

*Can prepare yourself*

*Need to know re heating / being somewhere warm while work done*

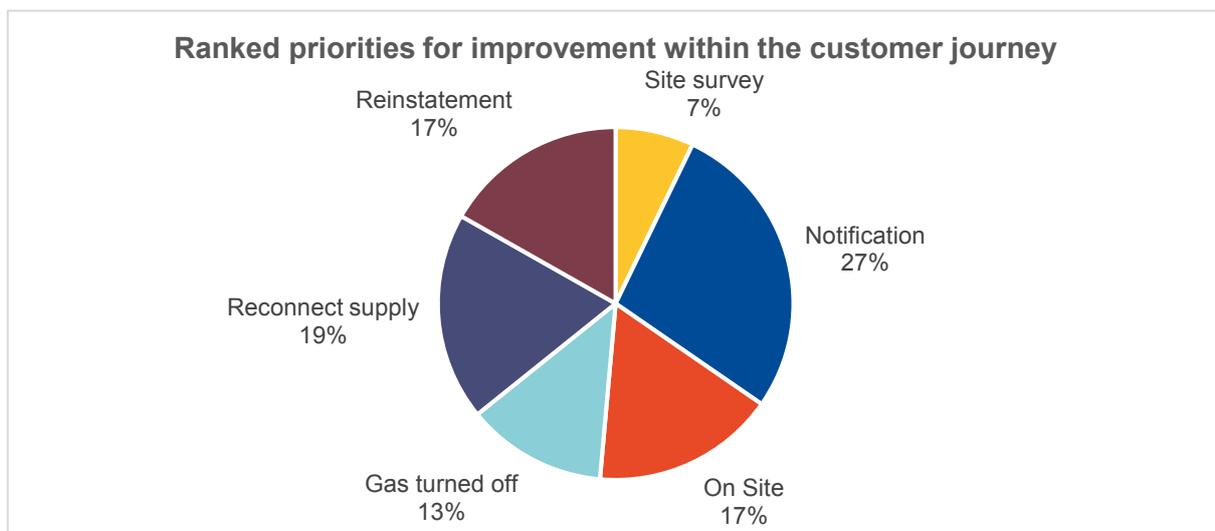
Reconnection was also considered important, particularly in winter, and it was noted there is a need for clear timelines for re-connection so that residents can make sure that engineers are able to access their property: *'important to be reconnected when they said it would be to help planning around work'*

Despite reinstatement being highlighted during the presentation as the area of the customer journey NGN had identified as needing improvement, it remained a relatively low priority comparative priority for members after the discussion, although it's proportional vote did almost double.

**Please rank, in order of importance the component of the customer journey re: planned interruptions you would want to see NGN focus their improvement efforts on?**

When the full results of the preferential vote taken at the end of the discussions is taken into account the relative importance given to reinstatement is greater than the previous figures suggest, as it picked up almost 25% of the 2<sup>nd</sup> preference votes.

- Overall 17% of the weighted priorities of participants were allocated to the need to improve performance on reinstatement.<sup>21</sup>



## Focusing on reinstatement

**How important is it to you to complete reinstatement within the current target of 5 working days?**

The graph on the next page shows that 85% of participants felt that it was important for NGN to complete reinstatement works within the current target of 5 days.

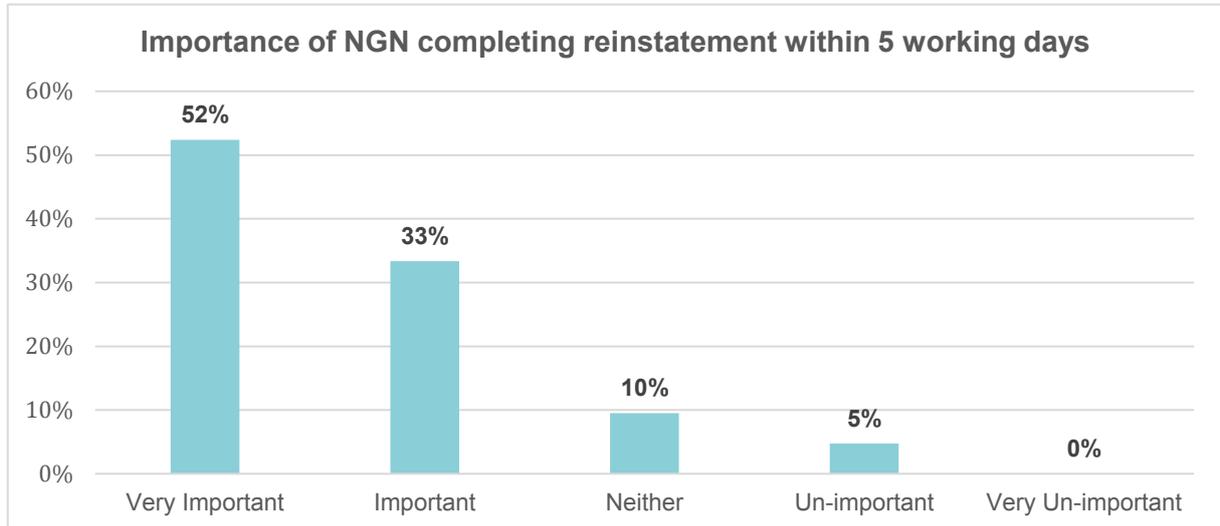
---

<sup>21</sup> Using a standard Borda count method to attribute relative weight to 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> preference.

*Whilst people understand works are necessary, people would like their properties/area to be returned to the previous state ASAP*

*It is a hazard for anyone especially for small kids and elderly. It looks unsightly, it dangerous and just not very nice. Should be done straight away. YOU DIG IT THEN IT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO FILL IT ASAP*

*This is highly important as this gives the outcome of the complete customer journey. This would indicate if NGN is compliant.*



Most of the comments about the importance of reinstatement related to minimising disruption.

*Long disruption (i.e. road traffic problems) causes pollution, costs money, is frustrating etc.*

*It causes disruptions for both drivers and residents living in the area as well as being an eye sore as no one wants to see road works just laying there*

*5 working days is a reasonable amount of time - any more could cause serious disruption to day to day activities*

*Any interruptions and inconvenience kept to a minimum*

*People will need to plan for the disruption and should have confidence that what they have been pre-advised is correct*

*It's good to have a reasonable and realistic target - 5 days. I've ranked importance on where interactions with customers would be ... but priority on comms and tidying.*

*If we are told a certain time scale we expect it to be kept to minimise disruption*

For some participants however the timescales themselves were less important than ensuring that the work was completed to a high standard.

*Not an issue much rather it done correctly*

*If the job takes more time than originally planned so be it - it must need to be done?*

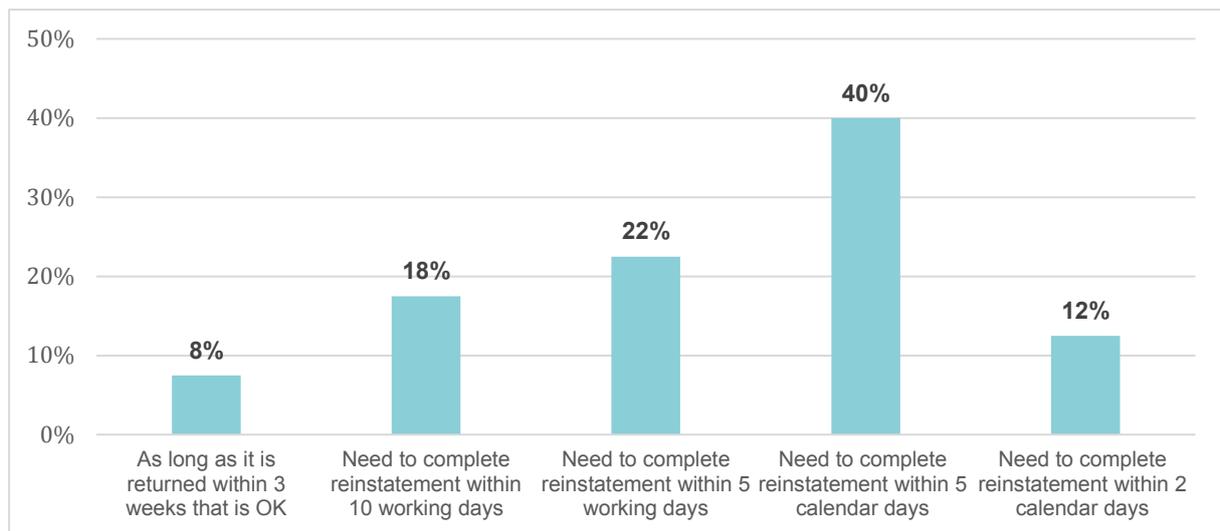
*As long as people are aware, many won't mind if it's 5 days or longer. As if they are aware they can prepare. The site survey should highlight how long it will take and some jobs may take longer*

*I personally realise it is not realistic to expect this*

*You can work around the work as long as you are informed and you stick to your timetable.*

*It's more important that jobs should be done well rather than hurriedly*

### **Should NGN maintain / improve / reduce performance on the reinstatement of work sites?**



When asked specifically about the need for performance improvements:

- 52% stated that NGN should improve its performance targets for reinstatement

*If you have any consideration for your customers - you must improve this beyond your current scale. It ruins your reputation with the general public*

*For inconvenience purpose and why wouldn't they be able to do the work, within this timescale*

*The 5 calendar days seems (to me) as fair time to resolve the issue*

*I think NGN should improve as this has a lasting impression on customer. I also think the quality of reinstatement important*

- 22% indicated they were happy with the current standard

*I don't think people working outside on a weekend is necessary/expected and could disrupt nice weekend plans. Having the option to work weekend if required could be possible but inform people as they wouldn't expect it and want a quiet lie in.*

*5 days seems reasonable, more than that seems too long. I would rather have quality of work rather than you rush*

*It shouldn't take more than a week to excavate and lay a pipe and reinstate.*

*If the target gets too short then quality may suffer. Better to take a little longer and do a good job*

*5 working days is reasonable. Any less may be unrealistic, any more may cause disruption to daily activities*

*Their current level of performance is satisfactory and investment could be better used in different areas*

- 26% thought that the performance target could be reduced.

*I prefer the job be done safely and thoroughly rather than set a time limit*

*As long as notified I will accept however long it takes*

*10 days is a realistic time scale*

*Given time for work completed satisfactory standard*

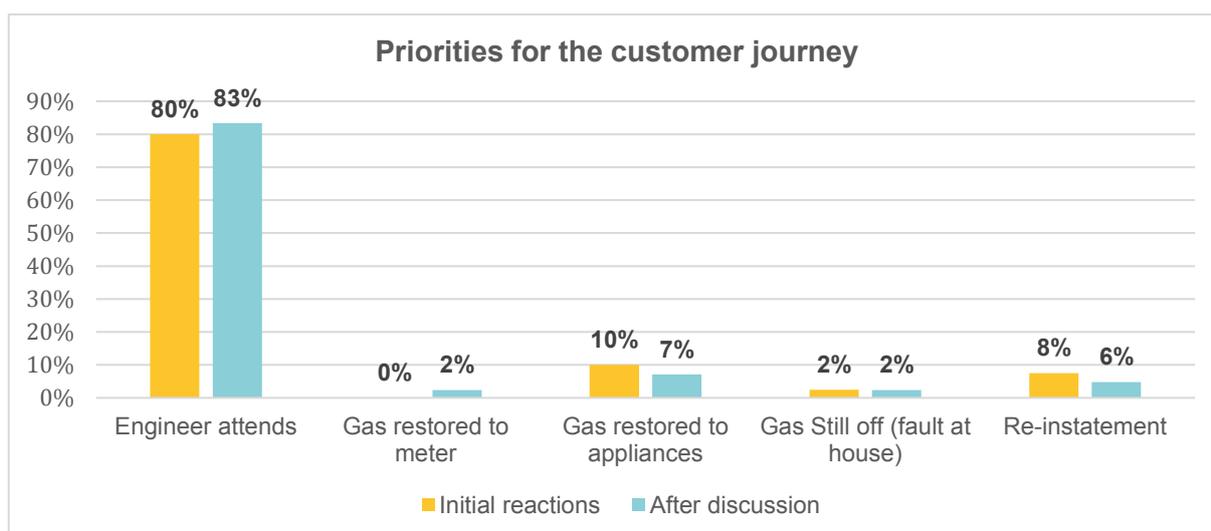
*I think 10 working days is a reasonable amount of time to get the job finished as you have to consider the weather, size of the job, location of work being carried out etc.*

Concerns were also raised that moving to a calendar day, rather than a working day, standard would lead to noise and disruption to people's weekends, and may actually cost customers more to cover penalty rates of pay.

## Customer Service: Unplanned Interruptions

**Which component of the customer journey re: unplanned interruptions would you prioritise / want to see NGN focus their efforts on?**

At the beginning of the presentation participants were asked for their 'gut – reaction' opinion on which aspect of the customer journey in an unplanned gas interruption NGN should focus their customer service efforts on most. This question was repeated at the end of the discussion. The results of these votes are shown below.



An engineer attending quickly and making the gas leak safe was a clear top priority for the participants. Reasons given included:

*Want someone asap after a call!*

*Would put your mind at ease to know if you're safe*

*Panic sets in when there is a gas leak. It's a fear factor. Attend as soon as possible keeps homeowner calm as it is someone with experience*

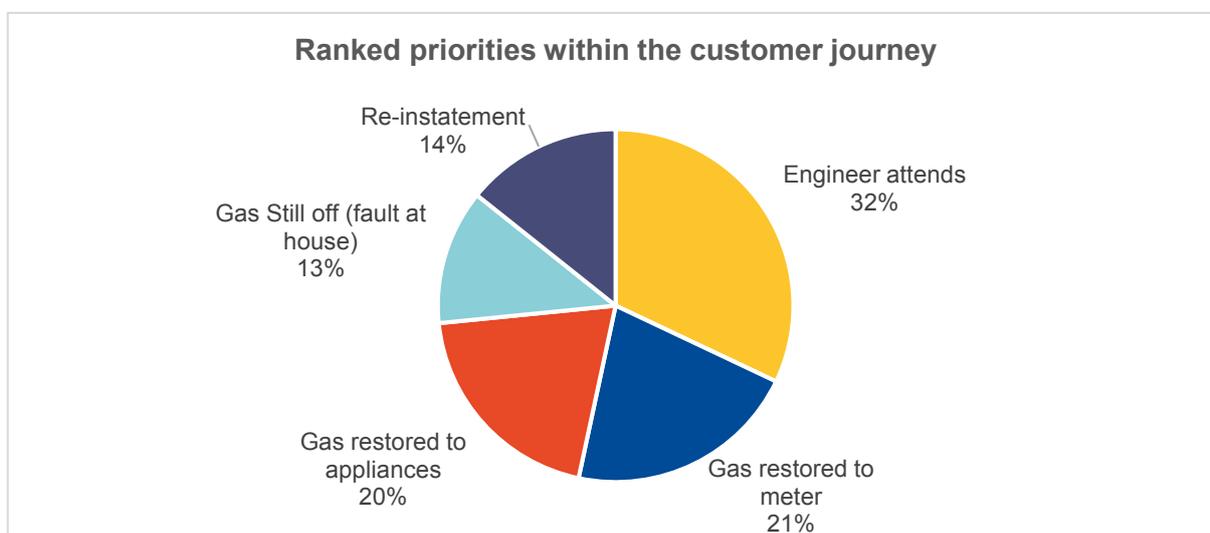
*Engineer attends - urgency /professional assessing the problem*

*Isolating and identifying the issue(s) is imperative for safety*

**Please rank, in order of importance the component of the customer journey re: planned interruptions you would want to see NGN focus their improvement efforts on?**

While there was little difference to participant's top priorities after the discussion, once the weighted results of the preferential vote conducted at the end of the discussion are considered a much more distinct spread of priorities becomes evident.

The relative importance given to gas being restored to the meter and appliances is shown in the graph below.



*The main thing you're worrying about once gas is fixed is using it. But you want the peace of mind of someone coming over to fix the leak as it's dangerous*

*My first priority is for it to be usable again asap*

*I want them to ensure the house is safe and all appliance are functional*

*It is an essential part of everyday life*

## **Focusing on improving performance in restoring gas supply to appliances**

During the presentation participants were told that, while NGN performs well on restoring supply to customers' meters (81% within 8 hours) there was a big difference in the performance rates relating to restoring supply to appliances within the same time.

**Should NGN improve, maintain, or reduce its current performance on restoring connections to appliances during un-planned gas disruptions?**

- When directly asked whether NGN should improve, maintain or reduce its current performance in this area 81% of participants thought that NGN should improve its performance.

*Stats show there is a problem. I would complain if gas only restored to meter, not appliances*

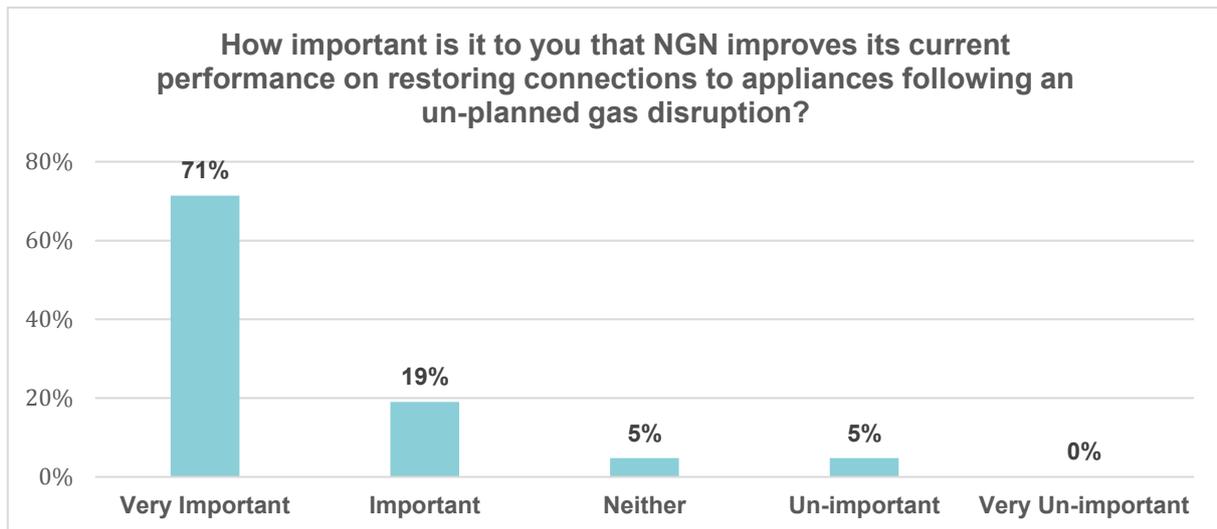
*Doesn't matter if its planned or unplanned the customer wants to be able to use appliances ASAP*

**How important is it to you that NGN improves its current performance on restoring connections to appliances following an un-planned gas disruption?**

- 71% of participants stated that they thought it was very important that NGN focused on this aspect of their performance

*Because the job is not complete (as far as the customer is concerned) until connection to appliances are restored*

*It's important as some households rely on gas especially in winter or elderly disabled people, people with small children etc.*



Across the tables there was also considerable support for the idea presented that NGN could train the staff who respond to emergency situations to be able to restore gas supply to customers' appliances.

*I think it is in your best interest to provide training to the first team, as you are paying compensation after 8 hours*

*I think they should pay the engineers to do the job, cos once someone comes it makes sense to be able to get the whole job done.*

*The safety is a key factor for me, so NGN can improve on the "one person" per job and not pass on responsibility to another*

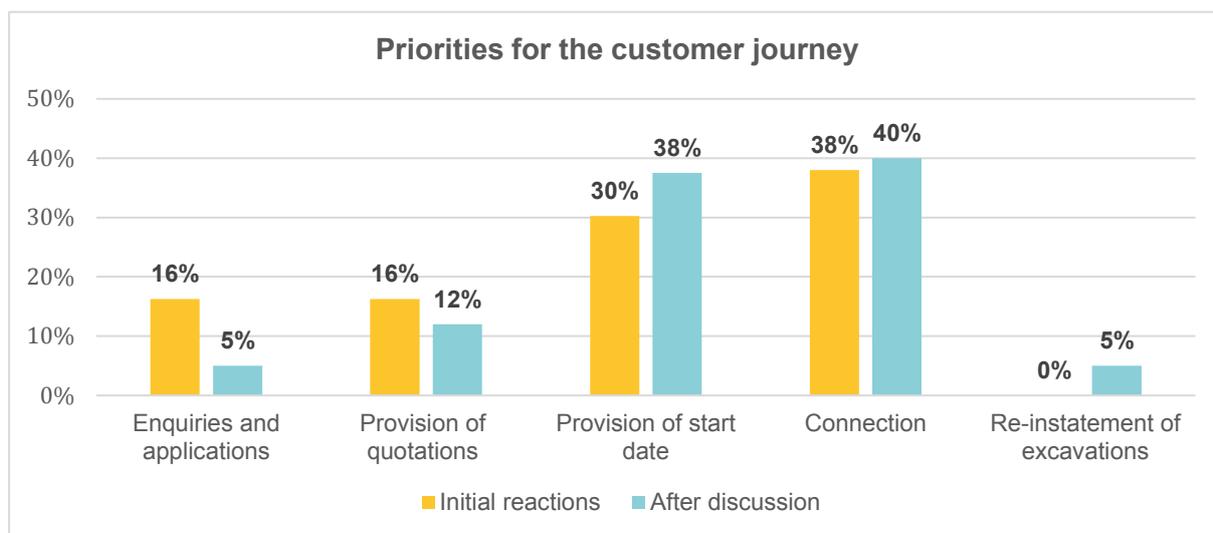
*It must be annoying waiting for someone to switch things off when gas is back to the meter.*

*It's like getting on a bus with no driver. If it's attached but not working, that's not fixed. Train them up to complete the job.*

## Customer Service: Connections

### Which component of the customer journey re: connections would you prioritise / want to see NGN focus their efforts on?

At the beginning of the presentation on connections participants were asked for their 'gut – reaction' opinion on which aspect of the customer journey NGN should focus their customer service efforts on most. This question was repeated at the end of the discussion. The results of these votes are shown below.



Prior to the discussion 32% of participants focused their priorities on traditional customer service factors, like the process of handling enquires and applications and securing a timely response from the company regarding quotations.

Following the discussions, and after learning more about where NGN identified the areas of lower customer satisfaction with their performance, participants were more likely to prioritise the need to improve performance times in providing a start date for the work and delivering the connection.

*The time between application and connection is too long. Think should be measurable metrics for delivery date - with a regulated deadline.*

*NGN have a monopoly - customer cannot go elsewhere*

*If customer paying for new connection he's expecting everything to go fast and smooth. So it's important to do job fast*

### What do you think of NGN's performance to date?

- 38% of participants reported that NGN was meeting or exceeding their performance expectations in regard to new connections

*I think NGN are doing best they can and meet expectations*

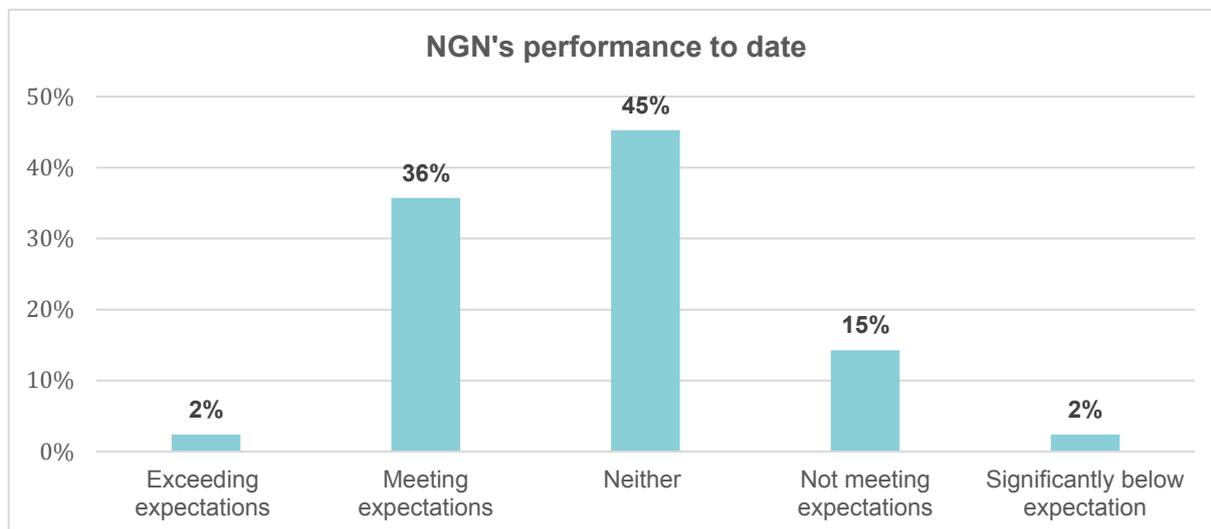
*I think the timeframes are acceptable, especially in comparison to similar providers (i.e. telecoms) timescales*

Many participants, however, struggled to make an assessment on this question, as it was significantly outside their field of experience, or their expected future experience

*Don't think I will need a new connection any time in my lifetime*

*I have no direct experience of not living on gas mains. The only context I can visualise are new builds.*

*This can only be commented on by people in this situation*



Despite this, concerns were raised about the high level of variance between different areas.

*There seems to be a big variance between districts, I can't see why there is such a large difference between Leeds and Bradford for example*

*Important to look at variation between areas as most are good but one or two aren't so good*

*They need to have more consistency in the number of days they perform to all cities and treat all customers fairly.*

*I understand that there's a lot of different factors when laying new applications with council and provisions etc. Managing customer expectations is the most important they have already paid and want work done on time so they can plan ahead.*

### **How important is it to you that NGN improves performance on installing new connections?**

Views were also quite mixed on whether it was important to improve performance on this aspect of customer service.

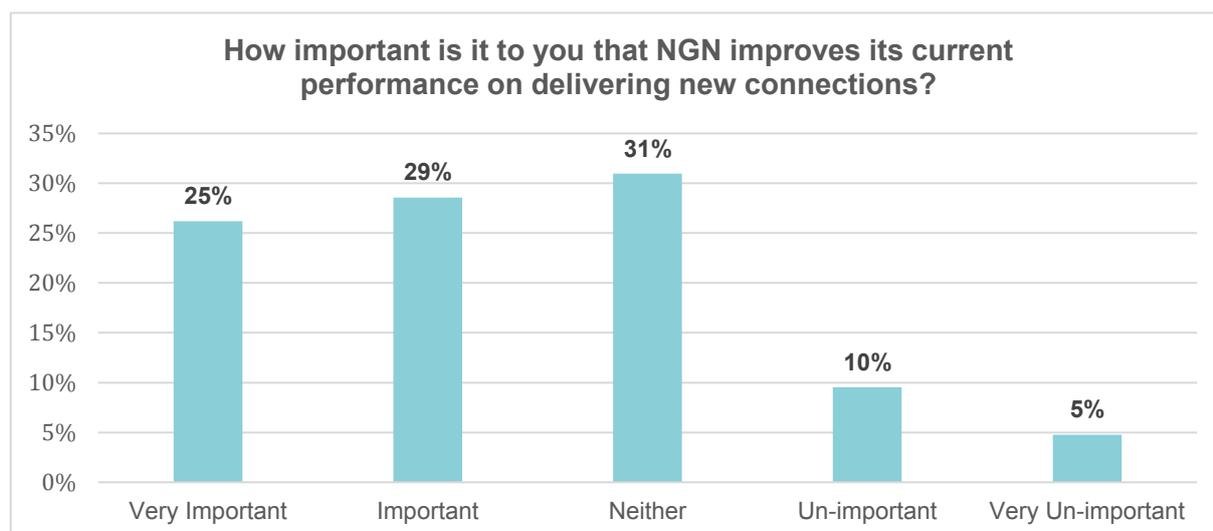
*In some locations it's good. Elsewhere it's poor. But is it NGNs fault or LPA?*

*Connections seem a little 'hit and miss' according to area. Wonder what the performance of other gas networks is in this area of work?*

*Presumably if NGN doesn't constantly improve, it won't survive (and quite right too)*

*It's always important to be improving - but definitely let the customers know what are the delays - more information and communications*

*I feel that this is not a priority as much as other issues, like safety and vulnerable customers*



## Customer Service: Complaints

Participants were presented with information about NGN's performance in relation to Ofgem's required 4 key areas of performance measurement and an additional indicator used by NGN.

Ofgem performance indicators	Performance 2018/19
% complaints resolved within 1 working day of receipt	85%
% complaints resolved within 31 working days of receipt	98.5%
% repeat complaints	6 out of 1850
% Ombudsman findings against NGN	0
NGN performance indicator	
% complaints agreed resolution within 1 hour	78%

Proposals to introduce more focus on agreeing a resolution to complaints within 60 minutes and/or measuring performance against all standards on calendar days instead of working days were also presented.

### How satisfied are you with NGN's performance on Customer Complaints?

Participants demonstrated very high levels of satisfaction (95%) with NGN's performance on handling customer complaints as shown in the graph below,

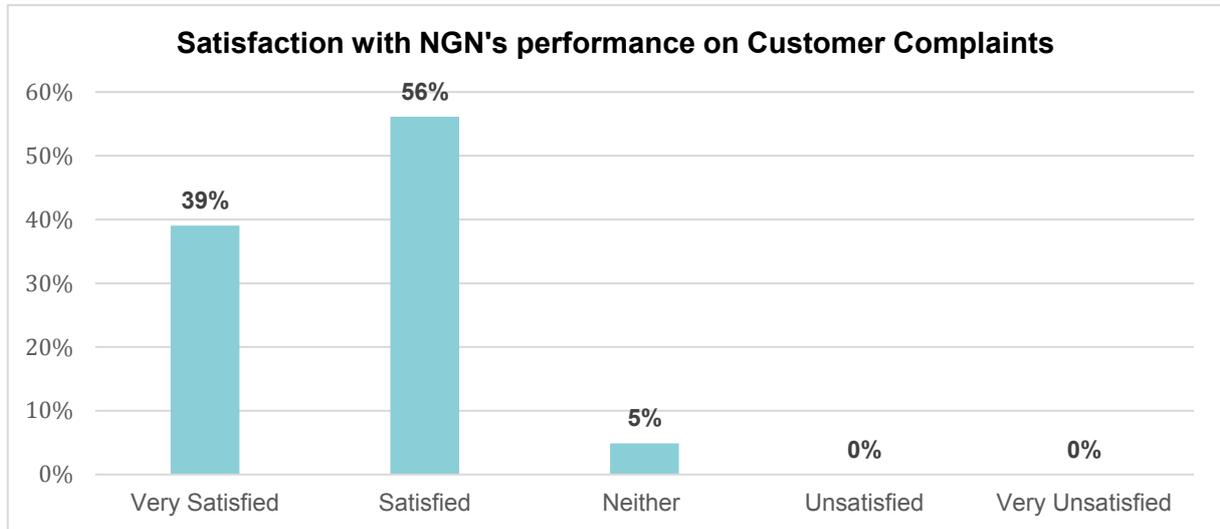
*This is a high performing area - credit is due*

*Managing expectations and being clearer with what is being asked in questionnaire feedbacks will improve [performance scores]. You guys seem really nice and should be smashing the performance*

*I think NGN are doing a grand job*

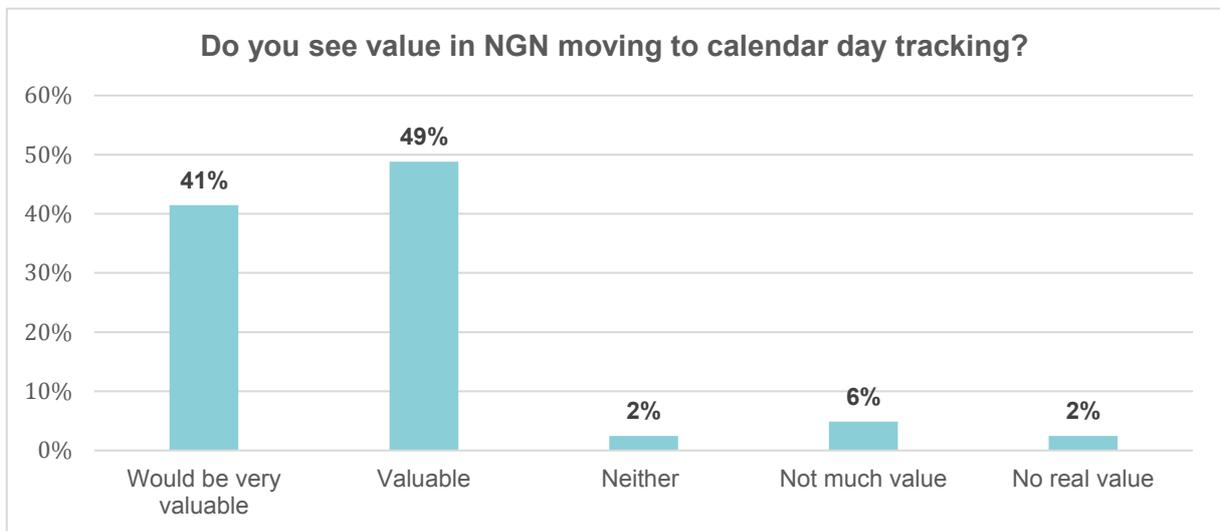
*Timing seems very impressive for addressing complaints*  
*Current standard is very impressive, especially when compared to other companies*

*Performance is good but there is still room for improvement*



**What does good/bad complaints handling look like?**

2 specific options for improving performance in complaints handling were presented to participants for evaluation.



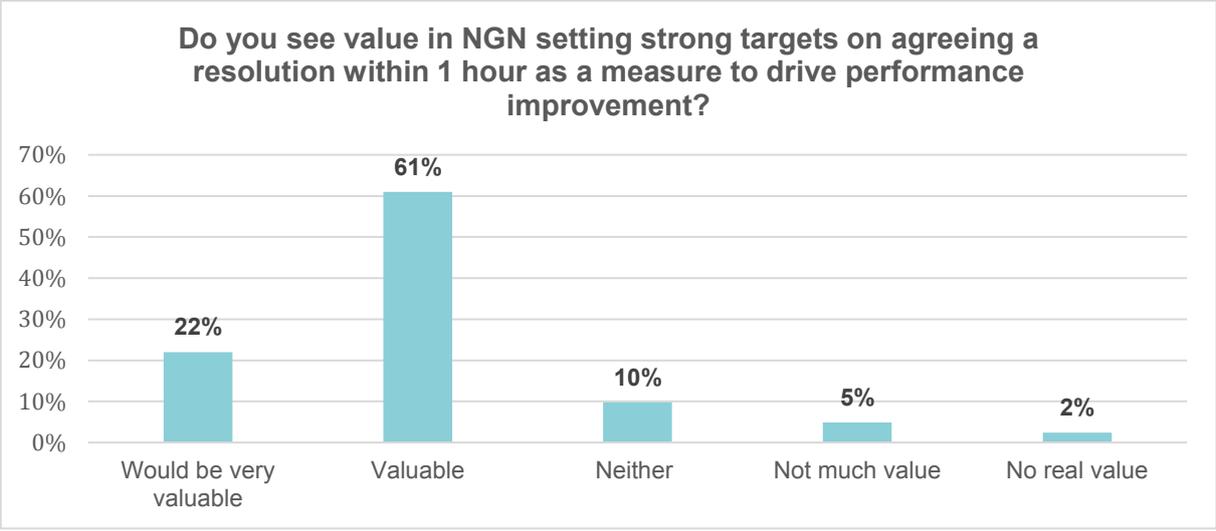
90% of participants saw value in moving to calendar day (as opposed to working day) tracking of performance on customer complaints.

*Sticking to working days just seems like an excuse not to do work immediately*

*Calendar days in common standard now*

*Why should I wait longer cause my complaint comes up on a Saturday?*

There was however the question of whether a '7 day (calendar) week [would] incur a higher rate for staff which would be passed to customers'

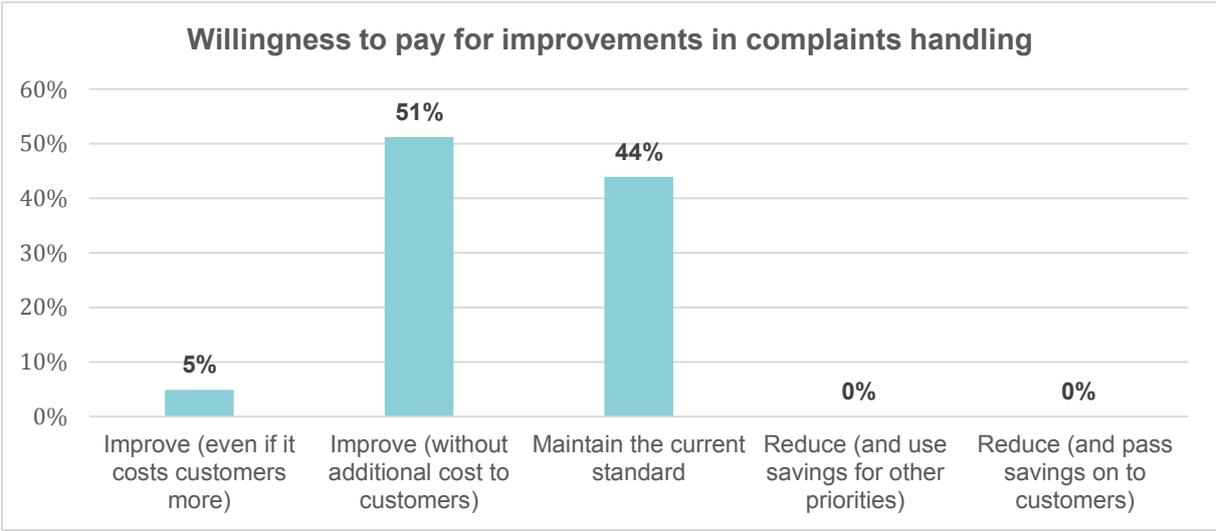


*One hour is a high standard*

*Do you think its achievable?*

*This is worth having but have to accept the time may be affected by the issue*

**Is performance improvement in this area something you'd be willing to pay for?**



High levels of overall satisfaction with performance were reflected in the results here, with 44% voting that no improvement was necessary.

*[NGN's] performance seems adequate when benchmarked to other sectors*

*Don't get better anywhere else*

*You are doing exceptional in complain handling, above most companies. I think maintaining is best as you are already doing brilliant*

That said, over 56% of the participant's still favoured improvements in customer service, although only 5% thought the costs of this was something that should be passed onto customers.

*Doing a good job, when comparing to other companies is similar/other sectors, but on the flipside improvement should always be the goal*

*They are doing very well at the moment, but if they want to maintain and improve then they should at no additional cost*

*Improved customer service should not be charged for*

*We are willing to pay more for environmental improvements but not for things that are the fault on NGN*

*Why should customers pay more for an NGN failure?*

*If the complaint is as a result of poor service, the cost should be on the business, not the customer*

*If it's possible to improve work they should, but without any additional cost to customers*

*It would cost some money to improve these levels, from experience it's the last few percentage points that cost the most*

## Customer Service: Enquiries

NGN explained to participants that there are currently no internal or regulatory targets for how quickly the company should respond to customer enquiries. The focus of this discussion, therefore, was on the fact that, although NGN typically receives an average of 50,000 customer enquiries each year, they don't monitor these enquiries through to conclusion (like they do with complaints).

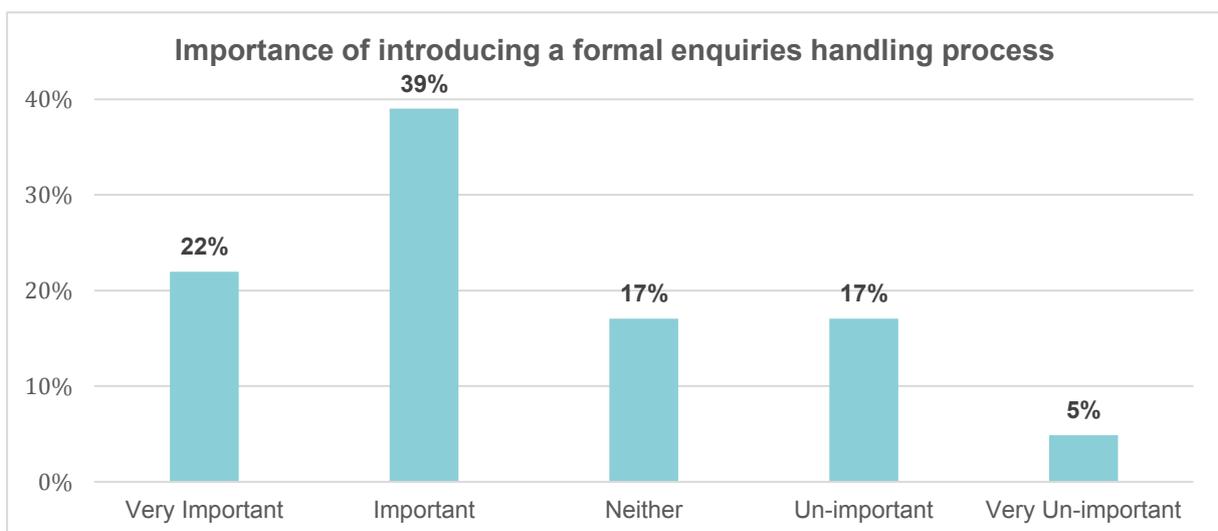
Many participants expressed surprise that this was something that was not already recorded and monitored by NGN.

*I can't believe they don't already have a formal system in place*

*I was of the assumption they would already have one in place and I am quite shocked they don't*

*Done by other organisations, so why not NGN*

### How important would it be for NGN to introduce a formal enquiries handling process?



While 61% of participants indicated that they felt it was 'very important' or 'important' for NGN to introduce a formal enquiries handling process, expectations were much more distributed than the responses given in relation to complaints handling.

Of those who thought it was important the reasons given included:

*Track enquiries so you have a good idea what you could improve on  
In order to repeat on success/failures of the service. Use information learned to  
improve service overall*

*You need to know what percentage of enquiries turn into complaints so you can  
improve*

*If you don't measure your process how do you know if you are improving or  
getting worse? Good call handling software will give you the metrics to handle this*

*With a formal process you will learn more about needs and spot patterns.*

*If it is found that some enquiries are common, steps could be taken to deal with  
the cause of those enquiries and perhaps reduce/eliminate them*

*It would be useful to monitor what the enquiries are so to avoid any repeat  
questions and set up / improve info / comms.*

*If you can't measure it you can't manage it - you don't know if you're doing well /  
badly and will be missing out on opportunities to cheaply improve service and  
even remove inbound call drivers e.g. FAQs on website or better comms*

*Enquiries should also be monitored, not as extensively as complaints, and should  
be quality assured too for exemplary customer service*

*So that people can feel satisfied their enquiries are being handled appropriately*

*You need to monitor the time taken to respond*

*To have the same quality as complaints process in order to treat all customers  
fairly*

Of those who thought it was not important the reasons given included:

*Doesn't seem to be an issue currently so why divert funds*

*No point. Don't collect statistics unless there is a significant benefit.*

*What time wasters are phoning you? I can't see why random enquiries are  
important. Obviously enquiries need to be responded to - but I'm not that  
passionate about the time scale. If it's not an emergency or complaint - they can  
chill out.*

*Is this work for work's sake?*

*Cost probably not worth the effort*

*Don't change what isn't broken. Spend the money on things where improvements  
could be made i.e. engineers to have training to be able to do the full job*

*Enquiries as so diverse in nature, it would be hard to formalise responses. Money  
would be best spent elsewhere*

*Because if it's on your website, on twitter - why are people phoning for answers to questions that are already have access to - they should stop being lazy and find the information yourself*

*Feels unnecessary to pump money into it [but] I do think you should record enquiries in case of follow ups*

### **Is performance improvement in this area something you'd be willing to pay for?**

There was a clear indication from participants however that, while they may like to see improvements in how enquires were tracked and monitred by NGN, this was not something that customers were willing to pay for.

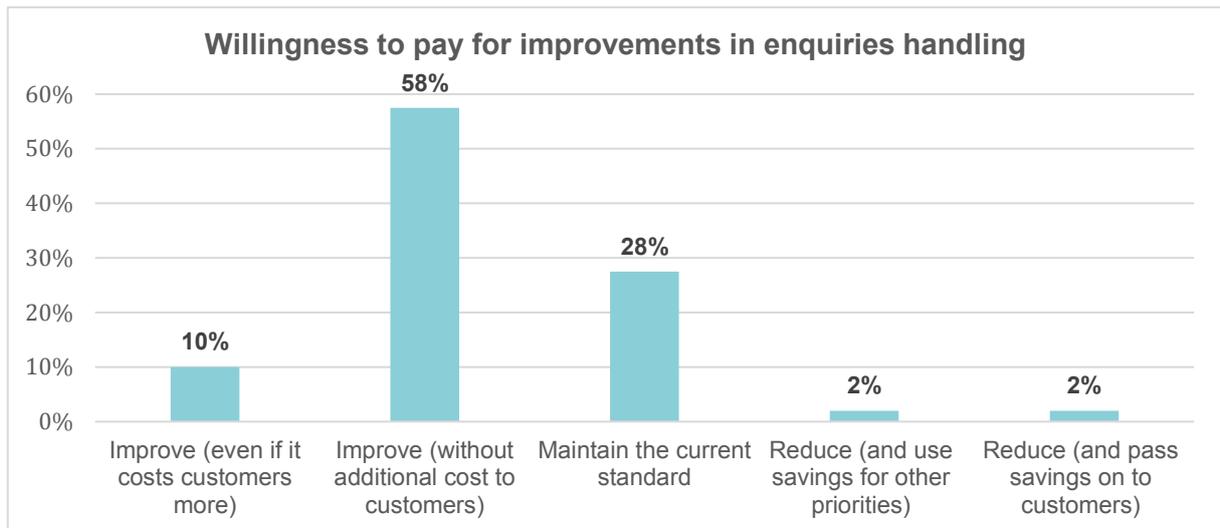
*If you want to be the best it should be done at no extra cost, it will help improve customer service.*

*It is not a big cost to the company to implement and absorb to improve service*

*A lot of the monitoring should be able to be automated*

*In the longer term, costs might be reduced by the reduction of some common enquiries*

*As with all things, improvements cost. I don't think all the costs should be passed to the customer, NGN should absorb some of the costs*



## **Social Initiatives**

NGN's work to support customers in vulnerable situations was the final performance area the Panel looked at.

### **Defining Vulnerability**

The definitions of vulnerability used by NGN were shared with participants, as well as the idea of temporary vulnerability. It was acknowledged that, given the breadth of this list, any customers have the potential to be in a vulnerable situation at some point.

Participants noted that it was a very comprehensive list and, given its breadth meant that any customer has the potential to be described as vulnerable at some point.

*NGN's vulnerability list is very extensive and well covers a lot of vulnerabilities which some wouldn't*

*A caring and inclusive approach*

Feedback on the list showed many people felt it was potentially too broad.

*Not sure about including 'people of pensionable age' as vulnerable as only some of them will be*

*Broad terms cover people who may not be vulnerable e.g. 'chronic conditions'*

Others however were able to identify groups that they felt should also be explicitly included, such as people in rural areas, those with literacy issues, people with substance abuse issues and consideration given to the type/age of peoples' houses e.g. Victorian terraces needing insulation.

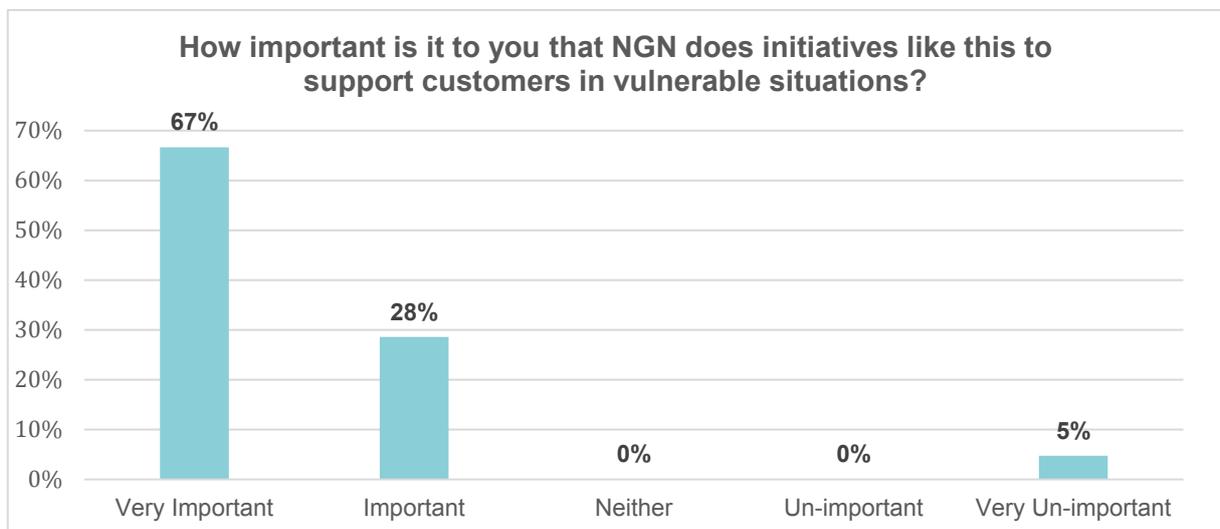
## NGN's core obligations

Information was presented to the Panel about what NGN was currently doing as part of its social initiatives programme and how this relates to their core obligations. Specific focus was given to:

5. The number of fuel poor connections delivered
6. Carbon monoxide awareness raising activities
7. The 'Warm Hubs' community project
8. The Community Partnering Fund

### **How important is it to you that NGN does initiatives like this to support customers in vulnerable situations?**

Many participants expressed surprise that NGN were undertaking such initiatives and overall the response from Panel members was very positive.



*A caring approach*

*Good to share profits in this way*  
*Overall doing more than required*  
*Definitely doing really well at going above and beyond*  
*NGN definitely do enough when it comes to covering vulnerability*  
*Amazing cos they are not social services*

There were however a number of participants that felt NGN should, and could be doing more.

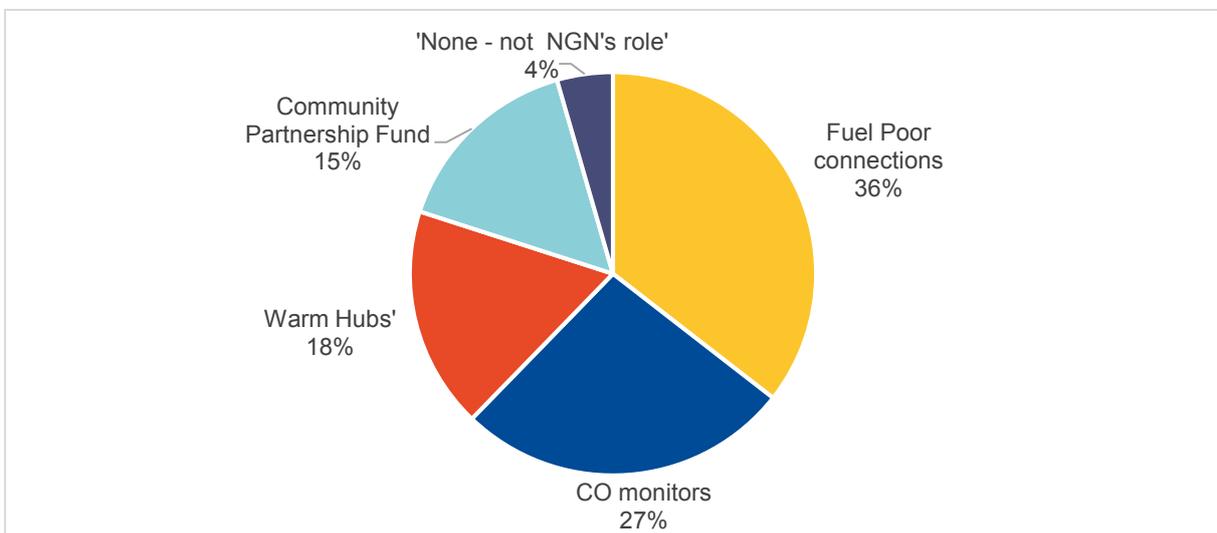
*NGN trying to help vulnerable people but they could do more – it's their role – they have a responsibility to their customers*

*NGN, as a monopoly, have a social and moral role to do this*

*Should do more but no prices going up*

*50K charity support OK*

**Which of the 4 activities highlighted seem most important to you?**



**37% selected Fuel Poor Connections** as the initiative they felt was most important. The reasons given for this included:

*Most related to core business*

*More relevant*

*More bang for buck*

*Longer term solution*

**27% selected CO initiatives** as the most important initiative. The main reasons given was *'people die of this so it's important'*.

There was however a clear sense from participants that they felt NGN (and others across the gas sector) could and should be doing more to raise awareness of CO and uptake of CO detectors.

*Young people don't know about this*

*Need more education in schools about the dangers of CO*

*Could be more national advertising about CO awareness – tv ads – but is this central govt role, or all networks, or Ofgem?*

*Suppliers could do more to increase CO awareness by putting leaflets in with bills*

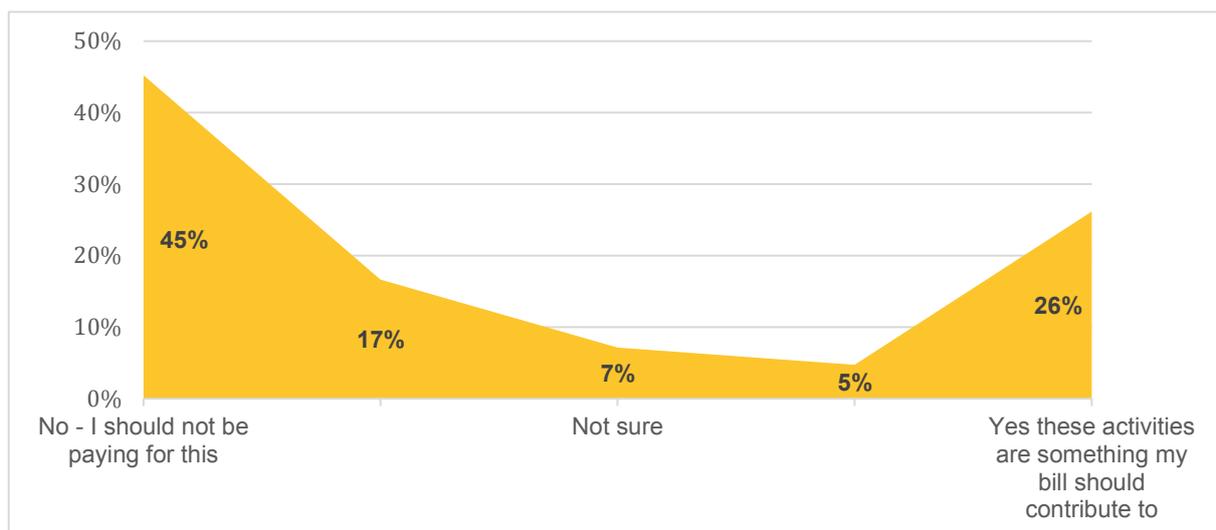
*Encourage people to look into CO detectors, maybe advertise them? Produce vouchers to purchase them?*

*Advertise the health risks of CO more to make more people aware*

**Warm Hubs** were viewed as the most important initiative by 18% of the Panel, and were described as a *'great idea for getting advice and getting warm'*. Some Panel members however thought that, instead, NGN should be focusing on actually extending the gas network to more rural and remote areas.

15% of participants saw the **Community Partnering Fund** as the most important of the initiatives discussed, expressing that by partnering with the community and voluntary sector money could be targeted where it was needed most. Some participants however were quite against this initiative as they felt that *'customers should not be paying for a company to give to charity'*.

### **Are NGN's existing social initiatives something you accept as being part of what your gas bills goes towards?**



Views on this question were quite mixed, although the majority felt that this was not something they accepted the money they paid to NGN being used to fund.

*NGN need to contribute not just customer*

*Prepared to contribute but not fully*

*Could donation to charity via the bill be an optional extra? As in Amazon?*

## Potential new initiatives

NGN presented the Panel members with the 2 possible initiatives that would go above their core obligations in relation to supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances.

1. introducing a new Hardship Fund, with around £30,000 funding available each year

- enhancing the current target for delivering fuel poor connections, by having to demonstrate that the connections actually deliver real benefits to customers

**Do you think there's value in NGN broadening its remit?**

While most people agreed that there was intrinsic value to each of these potential initiatives many participants questioned whether it was NGN's responsibility.

*Though there is value in the initiatives – but should NGN be doing it*

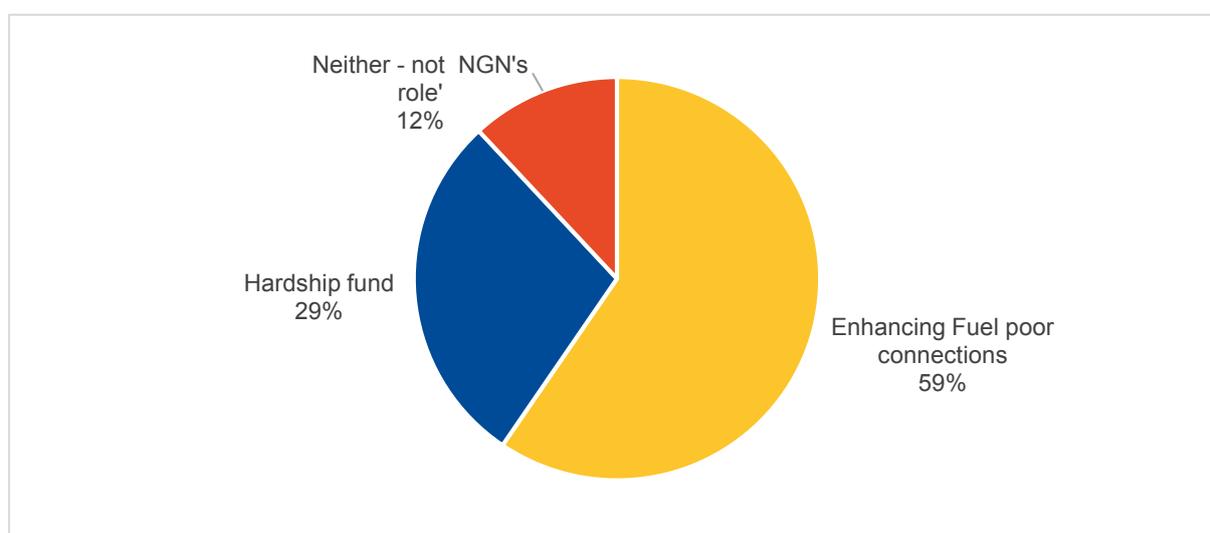
*Not worthwhile for NGN, but worthwhile*

*Shouldn't everyone in society be helping with this*

*Should work across all the utilities – don't work as NGN alone*

*Focus on 2 or 3 things and do well – don't scatter – relate these to the core work*

**Which of the 2 potential initiatives highlighted seem most important to you?**



**Enhancing work on fuel poor connections** was the most popular initiative among the Panel – again mainly because it seemed most connected to NGN's core business. There were however concerns raised about *'why make new connections if the [gas] business is in long term decline'*. A number of tables also questioned whether tackling fuel poverty should be funded through general taxation, rather than initiatives like this.

The proposed **Hardship Fund** met with quite a mixed response. Some people saw it as a key way to ensure support went directly to those most in need.

*Send money where it is needed [to be] allocated more diversely*

*Can't believe this has not been done before*

*Partner with community groups / local charities, CAB, social services who can determine need*

For others however the proposed Hardship Fund came across as *'too little, too late'*.

*Happy to pay for real help – not £30K*

*Far too little*

*£30K not enough*

*The hardship fund is a sticking plaster on a societal problem – it needs doing but is a bigger problem*

There were again concerns raised that this was not NGN's responsibility.

*Whose responsibility is this really?*

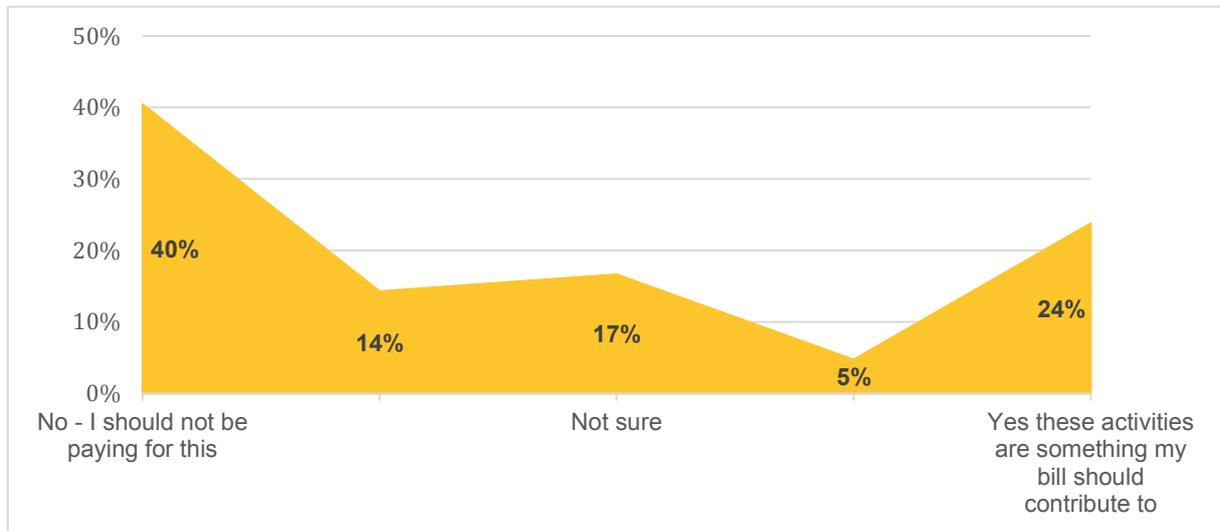
*There is a social responsibility for a hardship fund though should [it be] suppliers do this?*

*Ok if gas bill pays for hardship if it comes from suppliers' [share]*

*I'm happy to pay but prefer through tax*

*Basically doubt whether NGN should be doing this full stop!*

**Are these potential new initiatives something you accept as being part of what your gas bills goes towards?**



Despite more people stating that these potential initiatives were not NGN's role, when it came to voting on whether they were something that they accepted part of their gas bills would go towards fewer people objected (54% in this vote, compared to 62% in the vote on current initiatives). There was also considerable more uncertainty expressed in this vote.

## Focus for performance improvements

In the final hour of the Panel the participants were asked to reflect back on everything they had learnt and considered over the 3 sessions and identify where they would give priority to investing in performance improvements.

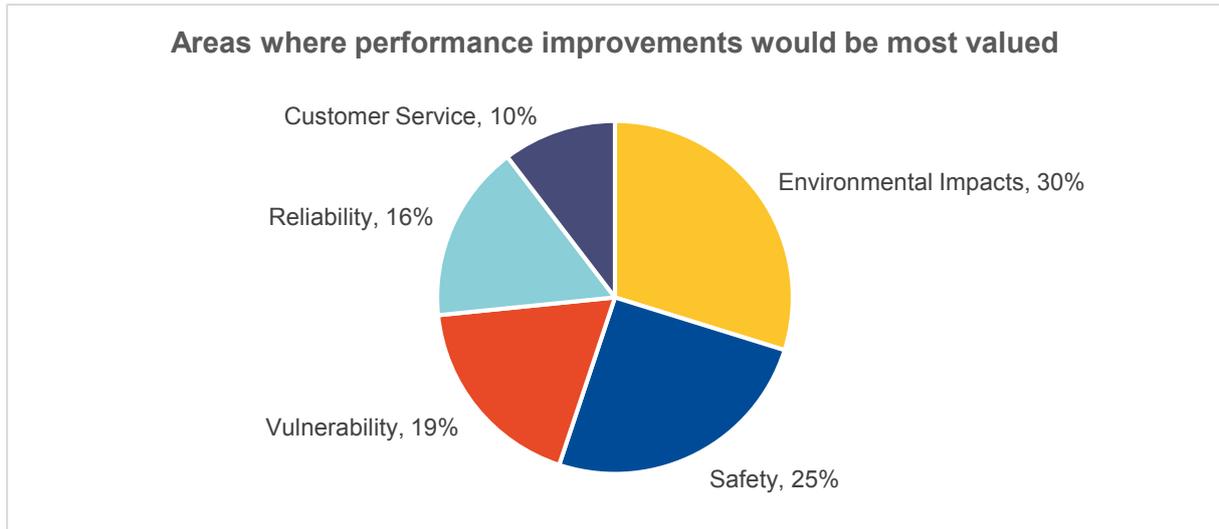
**Please rank NGN's performance areas in order of how much you'd value an improvement in performance**

Results from the final research survey show that, when considering first preferences only:

- 51% of participants prioritised environment as the most valuable area for performance improvement
- 35% of participants indicated that improvements in safety performance was their top priority

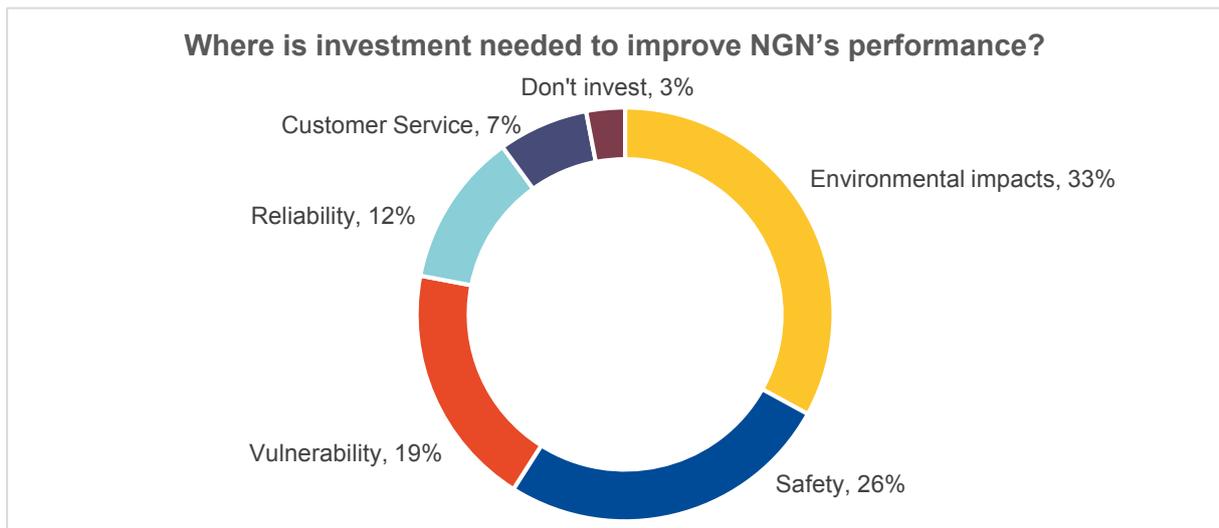
- 7% thought that initiatives to support vulnerable consumers was the main area needing performance improvement
- 0% thought that the need to improve performance on customer service or reliability was the type of improvement they would value most
- 7% stated that there was no need to improve NGN's performance across any of the 5 areas

When the overall weight of participants' rankings were calculated<sup>22</sup> the relative value given to performance improvements in each of the areas becomes more widely spread, although the overall order remains the same.



**Where would you invest most to improve NGN's performance?**

Working in groups of 2-3, Panel members negotiated how they would distribute their 'resources' (10 sticky dots) across the 5 performance areas, with the additional option of not investing it all if they felt no further improvements were needed.



Improving NGN's performance on managing the company's **environmental impacts** received the greatest share of resources. Across the 15 small groups negotiating the allocation of resources

<sup>22</sup> Using a standard Borda count method to attribute relative weight to 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> preference.

every group allocated at least 20% toward this area, and one group allocated 70% of their resources.

*Environment is such an important issue for us and future generations.*

*NGN well placed to do something as they are not competing with other companies*

*[Need] investment in cleaning up past environmental impacts and to reduce current and future uses*

*Future proofing – both for the environment and the future of the company*

Key areas identified for focus on improving performance included:

- Alternative energy sources

*Accelerate alternative fuel use such as hydrogen*

*The future isn't fossil gas so invest in alternatives*

*Fuel futures is a problem so hydrogen investment is a good idea*

- Land remediation

*Clearing and reinstating old gas sites*

*Clean up old gas tanks – make safe*

*The old gas tanks need dealing with on your land – deal with the problem, no sticky plasters*

- Air pollution

*Focus on pollution – you have an air quality responsibility*

*Speed up fleet vehicle transitions*

- Accelerating pipe replacement as an environmental measure to reduce gas leakage and allow for the introduction of 'green gasses'

*Costs more now but long-term will benefit with plastic pipes in place*

Improving NGN's **safety performance** received 26% of the available resources. Again all of the 15 groups allocated some of their resources to improving safety, although the spread was quite mixed (1 - 4 with an average allocation of 2.6 stickers).

*Already doing well – but it's so important*

*They are already at 99%. Don't need to invest much – but this is very important as gas is dangerous.*

*That 1% could be hugely damaging (so need to avoid the 1%)*

*Never be too complacent - you have to aim for 100% on safety*

Improving the way NGN supports **customers in vulnerable circumstances** was allocated 19% of the resources. Here the way groups divided their resources was quite mixed (with 6 groups allocating a single unit to this performance area).

For groups that prioritised improvements in performance in this area the reasons given tended to focus on this being a corporate social responsibility.

*Doing a good job, it's a caring activity for a company*

*This isn't NGNs role abut should still do as much as they can, especially improve register and CO awareness*

*Should be aiming to reduce the number of people who are vulnerable*

*The customers are the only reason the business is open so look after them.*

*It is a duty of care and we need services like those discussed for the vulnerable*

Those who gave this performance area less focus for improvement gave reasons that included:

*All society has a responsibly including NGN*

*Not NGN's responsibility – but keep existing services going*

*Not their main job but still should do more*

*Need a coherent strategy and work with other organisations, suppliers and providers to help those in need*

*A problem with society – NGN aren't experts and require help from others*

Improving performance in regards to **reliability** was allocated only 12% of the resources. 4 groups allocated no resources to this performance area, arguing that the current performance was very good already.

*Interruptions are very rare anyway and no need to improve further*

For those groups who did allocate a portion of their resources the reasons included:

*This is the main part of their job. It links with safety – reducing gas leakage and shrinkage.*

*Should focus more on reliability. I think they're doing a great job on the other sections*

*Rare, but when it happens we want efficiency*

*Customers and wider public are effected every time there is work or a gas leak – a nuisance, time is money*

Specific aspects of performance that Panel members highlighted for improvement were:

- Speed of reconnection to appliances

*More investment in staff – improving the service by training staff*

*Important for customer satisfaction (Time is money – train those engineers)*

*Invest in staff training for a better service (same person able to do the whole job)*

- Accelerating the pipe replacement programme

*When pipes are in place won't need as many interruptions in the future*

*Customers and wider public are effected every time there is work or a gas leak – a nuisance, time is money*

Investing in improvements in **customer service** received only 7% of the resources available, and 7 of the 15 small groups allocated it no resources at all. This was primarily on the basis that participants thought that performance was already very high.

*Already good – no need to further invest*

*Not a priority to improve further in comparison with other areas*

*Already a good, functioning service*

*Doing a good enough job already i.e. number of complaints are low*

When resources were allocated there were some specific areas people wanted to focus on:

- Enquires handling

*Investment in measurement of enquiries service*

*Track enquires, otherwise good*

*Track enquires better – otherwise good service, 1hr response*

- Keeping customers informed during interruptions to their gas supply

*Priority is to keep people informed during disruptions*

*[Improve communication] so people are more aware of what is going to happen*

*Customer information and more focus groups*

- Complaints handling

*Generally 90%+ was impressive but small improvements to be made*

*Impressive – only small improvements required*

*They are already good at this so don't need to invest much more*

A similar question was asked in the final research survey – **'Imagine you had £100 of NGN funds to invest in performance improvements. How would you distribute the money?'**<sup>23</sup> – this time to test individual responses following the final discussions and also to ensure that the individual views of participants (who may have had to compromise in the negotiated group sessions) were heard.

Overall the results were very consistent, although:

- Delivering improvements in NGN's Environmental performance received marginally more of the available resources (36% compared to 33%)
- Safety received marginally less (20% compared to 26%)
- More participants chose not to invest the money and pass the savings on to consumers (7% of the available resources, compared to 3% in the group exercise)

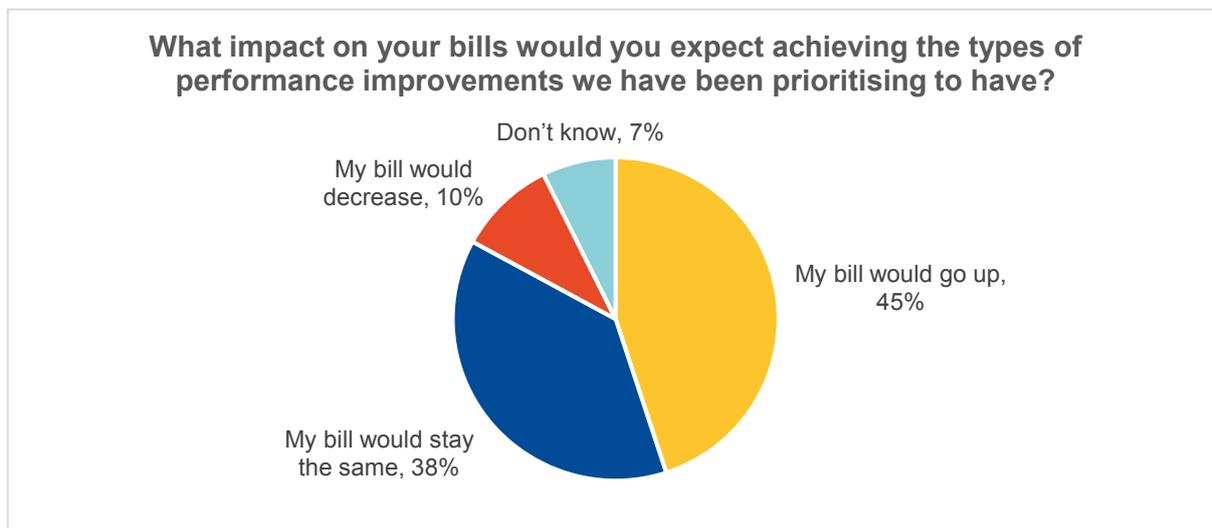
---

<sup>23</sup> This question was intentionally framed as 'NGN funds' so as to not be about needing to pay more. A random figure of £100 was selected to allow participants to easily make proportional allocation decisions.

**What impact on your bills would you expect achieving the types of performance improvements we have been prioritising to have?**

In the final research survey, completed at the end of the day, participants were asked about anticipated bill impacts of making the types of performance improvements they had been prioritising.

- 45% said they expected achieving these types of improvements would lead to an increase in their bills



*I expect my bill to go up but I would like it to stay the same*

*Bound to go up - inevitable but would prefer for them to remain the same (at the least)*

**What impact on your bills would you accept to achieve the types of performance improvements we have been prioritising to have?**

The research survey also asked about the type of impacts participants would accept to achieve the desired performance outcomes. Here the results were largely the same.

- 45% accepted that their bill might go up

*All those areas require money spending on them. That has to come from somewhere*

*When a company has to invest or improve or inject funds into anything it normally affects the customers financially. I would accept a tiny increase on bill.*

*A minimal increase to set stuff up but it should go down again later*

*We all have to take responsibility for what happens and what is a small increase to contribute to this*

*I feel strongly about improvements that I would be willing for my bill to increase slightly to accommodate.*

- 45% thought it was most acceptable for their bill to stay the same

*I don't have money to pay more*

*I think NGN should work on high performance, but I don't like idea of paying more for my gas bill because it's already high*

*NGN already make a good amount of money and use it well, whatever they do should be from their own pockets or the suppliers.*

*I think this is a main problem for the business rather than the customer. The customer shouldn't suffer.*

*Should come out of [NGN] profits*

*The business makes enough profit to be able to solely invest in improvement / performance*

*NGN has a monopoly and as a society we should ensure balance of investment i.e. may mean reduced operating surplus*

- 5% thought their bill should go down

*Bills should go down as improvements are made*

### **How acceptable would a small bill increase be to achieve different types of performance improvements?**

Many of those who accepted that their bill might go up were clear however, that this was only acceptable if funds were allocated to specific types of improvements.

*I would be happy to pay more to speed up adoption of cleaner fuels*

*For safety and the environment, I would expect my bill to increase slightly*

*Happy to pay more to help environment etc*

*Happy to pay more - However NGN should also contribute. Marketing done to communicate what NGN doing and more marketing / education on bills and TV adverts to increase awareness of safety issues and environmental issues*

*I would like to know that any increase were for service development for 'future proofing' and not corporate top tier bonuses.*

These priorities are demonstrated clearly in the table below where greater investment in ensuring energy futures, improved safety performance and improvements in land remediation are all seen as 'very acceptable' reasons for an increase in bills by more than 1/3 of participants.

	<b>Very acceptable</b>	<b>Acceptable</b>	<b>Not Acceptable</b>	<b>Improvement not needed</b>
Improved safety performance	35%	35%	18%	18%
Improved reliability (less unplanned disruptions)	17%	38%	26%	19%
Improved reinstatement times of landscape after necessary gas works	19%	36%	33%	12%
Improved re-connection times to appliances in your home after gas interruptions	20%	44%	29%	7%
Greater investment in ensuring energy futures	37%	41%	20%	2%

Improvements in land remediation – making land safe for other uses	34%	27%	29%	10%
Improved environmental performance in NGN's business operations (reduction of resource use by NGN – e.g. vehicles, aggregate use, buildings etc.)	28%	38%	33%	3%
Improved handling of customer complaints	10%	28%	38%	25%
Improved handling of customer enquiries	8%	23%	38%	31%
Improved connection times for new customers	13%	38%	30%	20%
Greater investment in social initiatives to support customers in vulnerable situations	24%	51%	20%	5%

## Final messages to NGN

In the final research survey participants were invited to give an open ended response covering any final points they wanted to make the NGN. These 'messages' are reproduced below verbatim and in no particular order.

*NGN are doing very good from what I have heard, improvements and investments should come from other parties but a small increase for the future and safety is acceptable.*

*Very interesting. My views have changed.*

*I am pleased to see a corporate business show signs of social responsibility, you should make more of your stance and shame others to follow you.*

*Work more with governments? You guys are nice. It's great to have improved gas supply, but if you've no electricity / food / etc., it's not solving the problem.*

*Very informative*

*Thank you for opportunity to take part in this research*

*Surprisingly high levels of service and interesting development of business activities (e.g. hydrogen test, etc.)*

*NGN already doing good job, however doing more is always a good thing*

*Improved safety performance is what I'm already paying for. Hello? Extinction Rebellion / End fuel poverty / Re-nationalize utilities / reduce carbon / stop ripping off pre-pay customers. (linking from 'Improved connection times for new customers:.) What you expect me to subsidise some posh twat building a bungalow? NO.*

*Help with energy efficient appliances*

*I like NGN's sense of responsibility and going the extra mile*

*They are doing a great job, carry on getting better*

*Could you as an organisation put pressure on gas suppliers (along with government) to also contribute to social and environmental responsibilities*

*Prices are too high and customers are not getting value for their money. Suppliers should deal with in the home problems and it should be included in the bill. Why do suppliers gain so much for nothing? Why is this allowed?*

*You go above and beyond what is required of you which is nice to hear. I'm happy to see you as a leader in most areas, but would like to see better leadership in introduction of alternative fuels and environmental protections*