

Supporting our customers in vulnerable situations Report



7th February 2020

together
we are
the network

Thank you



Thank you again to those of you who joined us for our annual Customers in Vulnerable Situations workshop

Tom, Jill, myself and Steve got a great deal out of the session, seeing familiar faces and meeting new ones.



We recognise that the agenda was action-packed, and that we asked a lot of you in terms of conversation, ideas and feedback. We were delighted with the level of engagement and energy around each of the topic areas, from the strategic direction we are taking, to specific initiatives, through to what your emerging issues are.

We are now working hard together as a team, to make sure that we bring to life the ideas that we heard, and to also make certain that our future engagement plans are structured around your priority areas.

I'd love to hear what you think of the next steps that we have proposed. If you were unable to make it on the day, and would like to share your views, it would be great to hear from you.

Best wishes

Eileen Brown
Director of Customer Experience
Northern Gas Networks

Tom Bell
Head of Social Strategy
Northern Gas Networks

Jill Walker
Social Strategy Project Manager
Northern Gas Networks

Steve Dacre
Customer Experience Development
Manager
Northern Gas Networks

Purpose of the workshop

Since we last met in February 2019, we have been working hard to develop our strategic approach and commitments, in line with the feedback that you provided.

We have refined our approach by using additional feedback from our engagement routes. The purpose of this annual workshop is to make sure that the strategic direction we are taking is still broadly in line with our stakeholder preferences, to hear challenge and feedback specifically on a number of new initiatives, and finally to understand any emerging issues which can help us develop our engagement plan for the next 12 months.

The sessions for the workshop were split into:

- **Closing the Loop** – Feedback on changes that we have made since the last workshop in February 2019.
- **Our commitments** – What our commitments are to support our Customers in Vulnerable Situations, and how we should be prioritising these.
- **Colleague training** – What our plans look like, and how you can get involved.
- **Innovation funding** – What are your emerging issues, and how can we reflect/prioritise these to make best use of available funding.
- **On-going engagement** – How regularly should we meet, and what our focus should be.

“Excellent discussion and opportunity to hear from others, and how we can support each other as well as NGN. Hearing about NGNs future plans and 5 new outputs for BP 2021-26”

“Very useful, different organisations and views, working together - connecting. Well organised, fun and informative.”

24

delegates

9.6

overall satisfaction with the event (out of 10)

Acting on your feedback – our commitments

The feedback you gave us during this workshop is helping to shape the way we work both now and in the future:



What we'll do now:

Prioritise our commitments based on your feedback, focussing on setting up the hardship fund, and formalise our framework for training partner organisations. We will look to get these both in place in 2020 – 2021.

Our engagement plan for the next 12 months will be focussed on addressing the emerging issues that you identified, and how you prioritised these:

June 2020- Future energy scenarios, the role of gas, and how we can look after our customers in vulnerable situations, through the energy transition. (This received the highest number of votes from our emerging themes session, and came up frequently as a current theme through the roundtable discussions)

September 2020 - Understanding how to reach and engage effectively with vulnerable customer touchpoints (this received the second highest number of votes from our emerging themes session), and how can we innovate to make a difference.

February 2021 - Annual review, and strategic plan for next 12 months. We will provide you with more regular updates about our business performance. We do issue a stakeholder newsletter towards the end of every month, so we will make sure that your contact details are up

to date in our stakeholder database and add you on to the circulation list. We have taken on board your view about the Customer and Vulnerability Competency Framework and have:

- Set up a pilot session to cover the basic, mandatory element with operational colleagues to be held in March 2020. Through this we can co-design the content, fully assess the time involved, and make sure that colleagues have the relevant and appropriate support in place.
- Requested training material in existence from our partner organisations, so we can check for best practice.
- Working with partner organisations to arrange lived-experience sessions, with the potential to build these into the patch and indicator specific training elements.

What we'll do during 2020/21:

During the final year of RIIO 1 we will focus our efforts on:

Testing our approach to the hardship fund, based on feedback that you provided. This will involve formalising 4 partnerships to help support delivery of the fund, these are:

- Communitas Energy
- British Lung Foundation
- Gas Safety Trust
- National Energy Action

We will take action to address some specific areas of concern, for example:

- Developing a strategic partnership framework
- Developing a self-help first aid package to help customers who are rurally isolated

Next steps:

We want to keep the conversation going. Aside from the engagement activities that we have planned, we welcome your ideas on any aspects of our business, and the work that we are doing together.

Feedback on this session. Have you had further thoughts on some issues raised during this session? Or a great idea of things we should be doing in response to your feedback? We'd love to know. Please contact us directly on stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk

Our commitments – What our commitments are to support our Customers in Vulnerable Situations, and how we should be prioritising these.

Following the broad introduction into our strategic approach, we then talked through in detail the commitments that we are making for the GD2 period (2021 to 2026).

GD1 – 2013 to 2021	GD2 – 2021 to 2026	Of which
3 Outputs to support our customers in vulnerable situations	10 Outputs to support our customers in vulnerable situations	5 are activities that we have been carrying out in GD1, and will continue into GD2 5 are NEW commitments

Business as usual Commitments	Volume
Fuel Poor Connections	1,000 per year, with a stretch target of 2,000 per year
Priority Services Register	5000 registrations per year
Carbon Monoxide Awareness Sessions	10,000 per year
Energy Efficiency Advice	1,000 visits/referrals per year
Community Partnering Fund	£50,000 per year

Enhanced Commitments	Volume
Hardship Fund	£150,000 per year
Customer and vulnerability competency framework	
Train community partners in carbon monoxide awareness, priority services referrals, energy efficiency advice, supporting fuel poor	100 per year
Dedicated 24/7 PSR (additional support) hotline	
SAP assessment of community-based fuel poor schemes, measure against 3-point SAP increase	Assess 100% of all fuel poor community scheme.

We asked for your feedback on these commitments

Hardship Fund

'Needs to be both organisations and individuals that can apply.'

'There needs to be mechanisms in place for longer term help for vulnerable customers, not just crisis management.'

'Develop an 'Elite team' – workers given the skills to recognise vulnerability, and can act as a triage service.'

'Make sure there is capacity to deliver once people have been trained and can follow through with referrals.'

Customer and vulnerability competency framework

'NGN colleagues– do the right teams in NGN have the right knowledge?'

'Invest in upskilling teams such as the Connections team, and engage with Communitas Energy more.'

Dedicated 24/7 Priority Services Register hotline

'Use this route to provide CO and Energy Efficiency advice.'

Training 100 community partners

'Is this people or training sessions?'

'The number seems low if this is people. You should cascade through organisations and partners.'

'You should also be sure to measure the social impact of this activity.'

'Could we include training for GPs and front line health professionals?'

'Could we include training for housing associations?'

SAP assessment of community-based schemes

'Housing associations and local authorities can help with SAP target'

We also asked you to consider if there were any gaps in our commitments

There were several themes that came through in the gaps:

How we are making our services more visible and accessible.

'Leaflets and general information and advice in community centres, GP surgeries, post offices, LA receptions'

'Education/communication within the vulnerable community – leaflets at foodbanks'

How can we consider broader health implications of our customers living in vulnerable situations

'Health – cold related ill-health'

'Low level CO related illness'

Each participant was given 5 coloured dots, and a matrix on which to indicate those initiatives which you felt should be prioritised. The scale ranged from 1 – low priority to 5 – high priority. The collective results from the 5 tables show

You provided clear direction through the 'dot voting' about which initiatives we should be prioritising for 20/21, from highest priority to lowest priority:

- Train 100 community partners
- Hardship fund
- 24/7 PSR Hotline
- Customer and Vulnerability Competency Framework (CVCF)
- SAP Assessment of Fuel Poverty (FP) Community schemes

Table Totals	1	2	3	4	5	Total points	Red Dots
Hardship Fund	0	0	1	4	15	94	8
CVCF	0	1	5	3	11	84	5
Train 100 Community Partners	0	0	1	7	16	111	7
24/7 PSR Hotline	2	2	6	5	9	89	2
SAP Assessment of FP community Schemes	1	4	6	9	2	73	1

We also asked you to think about priority in a slightly different way. You were each given 1 red dot and asked, if we were to only start on one initiative in 20/21, which one would you pick. The results of this slightly differ from the '5 dot' priority exercise.

- Hardship fund (8 Dots)
- Train 100 community partners (7 Dots)
- Customer and Vulnerability Competency Framework (5 Dots)
- 24/7 PSR hotline (2 Dots)
- SAP assessment of FP Community Schemes (1 Dot)

“Dedicated 24/7 Priority Services Register hotline.”

Colleague training – What our plans look like, and how you can get involved.

All our colleagues have a business-critical requirement to make sure that they have the correct Safety and Technical Competencies. At our workshop in Feb 19, you told us that customer and vulnerability skills should be treated with as much importance as these Safety and Technical Competencies, ideally supported by a robust framework. Since then, we have been working with both the Institute for Customer Service and National Energy Action, to develop a Customer and Vulnerability Competency Framework

The CVCF framework modules will cover areas such as:

- ✓ Recognising and dealing with aspects of vulnerability
- ✓ Fuel poverty and energy efficiency
- ✓ CO awareness
- ✓ PSR
- ✓ Dealing with difficult situations

It will also:

- Deliver bespoke training relevant to job role and geographical location – using independent social indicator research conducted in April 19.
- Be delivered using a mix of face to face, inhouse/external, on-line – computer-based refreshers.
- Be externally accredited and measured on a series of success criteria.

We asked you if this was the right approach?

‘Framework is the right way to go – great if it is embedded’

‘Framework means that training is formalised rather than ad-hoc’

‘Yes – the approach is right! Keep at high level!’

‘Yes! As long as colleagues are well educated, supported, and given plenty of feedback when their actions have made a difference.’

‘Framework is good – can’t train everything though, so have a clear referral path’

‘Good to have a bit of knowledge about a lot of things’

You asked us to make sure that we were considering how our colleagues are supported through both the training and the delivery of actions/referrals with our customers

‘Make sure we have the right support for our engineers’

‘Need to ensure that engineers are given time to do this effectively. Time commitments are needed’

‘Be careful with how much you load on the engineers’

We asked you what support stakeholders can give?

You told us that using lived experiences could really help to deliver meaningful training, and that we should draw on the strength of our existing partnerships. You also said that key to the success of the training would be to have a comprehensive list of referral pathways. You provided advice that vulnerability is complex, and that it might be difficult to reflect this in the framework.

“Framework is the right way to go – great if it is embedded”



We asked if there are any best practices that we could learn from?

You signposted towards the following organisations that provide training already:

- Fire service
- NICE guidelines
- Broadacres Housing
- NEA Fuel Poverty Awareness
- Local councils – specifically carbon literacy and safeguarding

You said that we should include mental health, suicide awareness and gambling within the framework.

Finally, you said that using videos was a great way to reach operational colleagues, and that we should

‘Have a supportive culture, especially for front line colleagues’

“Make sure we have the right support for our engineers”

Emerging Issues



In GD2, Ofgem are targeting the Network Innovation Allowance (NIA) in two key areas:

1. Customer vulnerability
2. Energy systems transition

We should use this money to fund:

- New/innovative projects - not been done before
- Usually includes research aspect
- Not part of business as usual

We have defined three key areas of focus for the vulnerability NIA

- ✓ Creating solutions to reduce impact of our day to day activities on vulnerable customers;
- ✓ Developing enduring solutions for customers with vulnerability beyond day to day activities;
- ✓ Using whole systems and smart grids to reduce fuel poverty.

Ofgem are also introducing a 'Use it or Lose it' allowance

Our plan is to use this fund to:

Scale up and roll out projects that have been researched and tested through either:

- ✓ Vulnerability Network Innovation Allowance OR
- ✓ The Community Partnering Fund

In order to make best use of the funding available, we need to understand **what your emerging issues are, and how we can prioritise these.**

In the workshop, you described a wide-range of emerging issues, which have been grouped into the following categories (the number in brackets denotes the number of votes that theme received):

Future of energy - (13)

Relationship between energy and people is distant:

- Issue for understanding energy transition – future of network.
- Climate crisis
- Alternative heating in communities
- Involving communities – building understanding/education/community regeneration
- Energy futures – ensuring vulnerable customers are not left behind

Not just domestic customers, we need to consider SMEs and community organisations

- SMEs/Community organisations in inefficient buildings
- Reduce costs through efficiency
- Energy audits on community buildings
- Behaviour change – simple measures
- Supporting beyond the audits
- SMEs run from homes

Greener equipment to be more accessible

Understanding how to reach and engage effectively with vulnerable customer touchpoints - (14)

- Clashes with existing service provisions in local areas – no central place bringing this together.
- Increasing diversity – local landlords/ language
- Empowerment of minority groups who might not usually get this information – e.g. women
- Creating cohesive communities

Access to funding - (5)

- Eligibility criteria for fuel poor – low income/high cost
- Warm Home Fund – what happens when it stops. Is it being replaced?
- Warm Home Discount – final year
- Policy challenges – how will we tackle?
- Helping NGN to align policy objectives

Health - (5)

- First aid training for our engineers
- SAP – poor quality homes, linked to ill-health
- Mental health – disengaging with organisations. Mistrust.
- Self-help first aid
 - Training people in isolated areas to administer first-aid e.g. if someone alone thinks they are having a heart-attack miles away from an ambulance, what can they do to try to preserve life? In Rural areas? Basic understanding of how to help yourself. Reaching thousands of people, potential to save lives.

Social media platform / technology - (3)

- Use social media to communicate issues. Expand knowledge about technology and technology futures.
- Is it dangerous to assume that everyone has access to WiFi?
- New technology – proactively support adoption of things such as smart meters – help for customers to have them installed.
- Is there a potential to have an alert system set up on meters i.e. triggers of inactivity?
- Alexa updates/alerts
- Hard to get customers engaged, how do we get people to change their behaviour?
- How can we integrate technology more in an increasingly tech world? What about rural customers without the technology?

Complex / multiple vulnerabilities - (1)

- Hoarding / compulsory buying / money management
- Anti-social behaviour

Fuel poor awareness - (1)

NGN staff retraining, website – own area. This has been going for 10 years, and there is still low awareness. People could have a gas connection for free if they do qualify. This will help people with illnesses due to cold.

Smart metering and off-grid communities - (1)

People won't have them as they think energy companies are ripping them off, negative press. There are 3000 properties that aren't even connected to electricity.

Event Evaluation and Future Engagement

Summary: Customers in Vulnerable Situations Workshop		Friday 7th February
Event Evaluation		
Q1	Did you find the workshop useful, and why?	Key themes - useful for networking, hearing about NGN strategy and future plans. Good cross section of attendees. Group discussions worked well, and pace about right
Q2	Overall, how satisfied were you with the event?	9.6
Q3	How would you rate:	
	The roundtable discussions	9.6
	Event content and speakers	9.7
	Network opportunities	9
Q4	Is there anything you think could be improved / changes for future workshops?	Key themes - would have been useful to have more time and opportunity to network. Moving attendees between the tables for the different discussions would have made better use of the expertise in the room. A future event needs to cover the future role of gas, and the transition to greener energy. Could the list of attendees be shared, along with their contact details.
Q5	Is there anything else you would like to tell us?	Key themes - overall, great event. Could work more closely together day to day. Would be happy to share existing training materials.
Q6	Thinking of yourself as a stakeholder of NGN, how satisfied are you with the relationship that you have with NGN	8.8
Q7	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
	NGN keeps me up to date on their business plans	8.1
	NGN provided me with clear information about their business performance	7.6
	NGN provided me with opportunities to give feedback on the topics that interest me	8.4
	NGN allows me to give feedback through my preferred method	8.4
	NGN makes it clear how they have used feedback to change their business plans	8.4

Summary: Customers in Vulnerable Situations Workshop		Friday 7th February
Future Engagement		
Q1	How often should this group meet to discuss overall plans - please select 1 option	
	Annually	17%
	Twice Yearly	26%
	Quarterly	57%
Q2	We would love some help with co-creating solutions around specific challenges. Please indicate which are of interest to you, and where you would like to work with NGN more closely - select all that are of interest to you	
	Sharing key messages and training with others (external to NGN)	69%
	Training and internal capacity building (within NGN)	69%
	Innovation and best practice sharing	82%
	Supporting off-grid communities	56%



Tell us what you think

Thank you for reading this report. We welcome any further feedback, thoughts or ideas you have. Please drop us a line on at stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk

For further information contact:
stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk

together.northerngasnetworks.co.uk

