

# Supporting our customers in vulnerable situations Report



10<sup>th</sup> July 2020

*together*  
we are  
the **network**



# Thank you

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

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

We recognise that the format was different to our previous workshops however, in the short time we had, we wanted to ensure that:

- We provided an update from the last workshop
- We gave an insight into a recently completed research project
- Introduced you to our InTEGRel site in the north east

Secondly, we wanted to take some time to discuss the current situation around Social Mobility / COVID-19. In particular, the emerging issues, as a result of this challenging time. We were delighted with the level of engagement around the two questions in relation to COVID-19, which were:

1. What has been the impact on the pandemic on hidden vulnerability?
2. How has the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support customers in vulnerable situations?

You provided some invaluable feedback in relation to the emerging issues around the pandemic, which we will use as the foundations for our next steps. We are now working hard together as a team, to make sure that we have another session booked in prior to October, to revisit the feedback you gave at this workshop and also, to have further discussion around the third area we

were unable to cover at the workshop:

*How can we better reach customers in vulnerable situations, impacted directly or indirectly by the pandemic?*

I'd love to hear what you think are the next steps, especially around COVID-19 and associated challenges. Please also feel free to give us thoughts on how we can engage better between our workshops – what conversation tools you have used, which ones work well, or don't work well!

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

**Jenny Wilkinson**  
Stakeholder Manager  
Northern Gas Networks

# Purpose of the workshop

Since we last met in February 2020, we have continued 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 the interim 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 new initiatives and finally to understand any emerging issues, specifically around Social Mobility / COVID-19, which can help us revisit our focus areas and further develop our future engagement plan.

The agenda for the workshop was as follows:

- You Said / We Did – feedback from the last workshop
- Greener Energy / Energy Futures – Putting the consumer at the heart of 'Net Zero'
- Connecting Homes for Health – update on cold related ill health research project
- InTEGRel – introduction to Customer Energy Village (CEV)/ potential research projects/ideas
- Social Mobility / COVID-19
- Feedback

'I think NGN work hard and are effective in engaging with their stakeholders. Perhaps more on an individual or small group basis to give specific input and perspectives on NGN topics closely linked to our area of work.'

'I really enjoyed it. I am aware that gambling is quite emotive for some people. One delegate had an opinion about how gambling progresses and maybe it would be interesting to do a small education piece on gambling in the next session.'

'Thank you for pulling this together and making such a good job of using the on-line forum. Looking forward to the next session.'

# 28

delegates

# 8.2

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

## What we'll do now:

Following your feedback, we are now planning to hold an additional session to specifically discuss issues around COVID-19 and social mobility. We will aim to do this during August.

Therefore, our amended engagement plan for the next 12 months is:

**\*Additional session\*** August to discuss - how can we better reach customers in vulnerable situations, impacted directly or indirectly by the pandemic?

**October 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 in February) and how can we innovate to make a difference.

**February 2021** - Annual review, and strategic plan for next 12 months.

We have taken on board your view about the CEV research and will:

- Connect interested stakeholders with the CEV team, so that they can input into the development of ideas / research. Some of the main themes that emerged from the workshop were around:

- Behaviour change / testing new technologies
- Engage with SME's /other organisations – able to influence customers
- Involve customers (including vulnerable) in research
- Education around energy transition and impacts – different ages, schools, community groups
- Gambling – link community groups with Sky Betting & Gaming to understand the issues surrounding gambling
- Food poverty – key emerging theme. Work with our 9 Strategic Partners to develop our role in helping with this issue

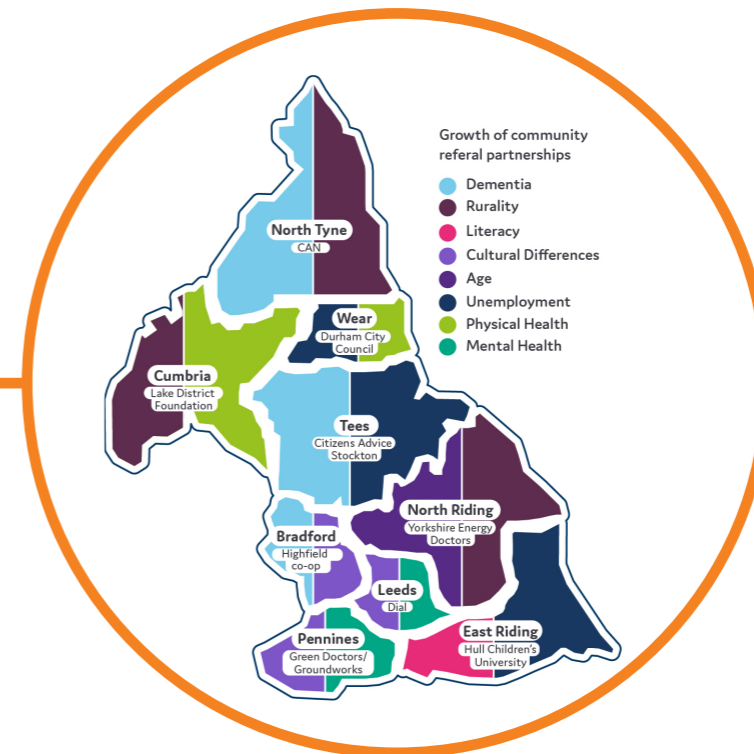
## Next steps:

We want to keep the conversation going

Zoom is being considered as an alternative platform to MS Teams. We are also looking at how we can interact better in between sessions by using break out discussion sessions and mentimeter.com.

Aside from the planned engagement activities, 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](mailto:stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk)



# Closing the Loop – Feedback on updates from the last workshop in February 2020

You Said	So we've
Engagement Plan – Future Energy was identified as an emerging issue	Included a future energy overview and scenarios in this workshop
We should consider an emerging issue that is becoming more prevalent – gambling	Engaged with Sky Betting & Gaming to get an insight into the training they deliver to their staff
Establish Strategic Partners – formalise a framework for training partner organisations	Established 9 partnerships with:  Green Doctors, Yorkshire Energy Doctor, Community Action Northumberland, Lake District Foundation, Highfield Co-op, Stockton Citizens Advice, Durham County Council, Hull Children's University, DIAL Leeds
Focus on setting up a Hardship Fund	Formalised partnerships with:  Gas Safety Trust, Communitas Energy & progressing partnerships with NEA and British Lung Foundation
Customer Vulnerability Competency Framework to be progressed	Progressed the development of training modules, initial pilot session completed (mandatory session), material being further tested on colleagues, more bespoke training material being considered

**Greener Energy** - Feedback in February was that the relationship between energy and people is distant. Comments from the session delivered by David Gill:

- How to ensure a just transition & equitable access to new infrastructure systems for vulnerable households in rural areas - off grid?
- What sort of jobs and employment strategies do you need to prepare for 2050 and can these opportunities be targeted at people who are in fuel poverty?

- I like the movement towards community micro energy generation projects
- Use It or Lose It (UIOLI) Opportunities** - Commitment to commence 1 to 1 session with 9 Strategic Partners. These are currently being scheduled.

## Customer Energy Village (CEV)/ InTEGRel – comments from the session delivered by Keith Owen

- Is there an opportunity to widen the research in the final bullet point to include the impact or increase of vulnerable customers or those in fuel poverty as a direct result of all the changes? David reassured us NGN has an eye on this, but research is always helpful
- Behavioural change/advice will no doubt be a challenge alongside the advanced technology
- Behaviour change is a challenge
- We've found these issues with ground source heat pump conversions - also with incredibly well insulated homes & damp mould condensation issues
- And over-heating problems for some older people when homes are so well-insulated!
- Yes there are a lot of issues to be addressed and it would be great to engage with these to find the right solutions for decarbonised heat
- Agree there will be a challenge around behavioural change/advice re maximising the efficiency of new technologies. Also important to 'take people with you' and engage households at all stages in the process from proposed change to installation
- Please engage with Agility Eco in the development of CEV. I think we could bring a lot of insight

## CEV Ideas poll - What ideas do you have for how we could use the CEV?

- Behaviour Change
- Demonstrator
- Has there been much done in rural communities? Think could be interesting in farming areas
- Use the site to engage SME boiler engineers and fitters' companies as they are highly influential with customers and will need to prepare their companies for transition. Very hard to change cohort
- Researching impacts of energy changes on homes of various ages and the customers who occupy them
- Education-range of groups, schools and vulnerable groups
- Have customers involved - lay members not experts, including vulnerable customers
- Testing both technology and behavioural change

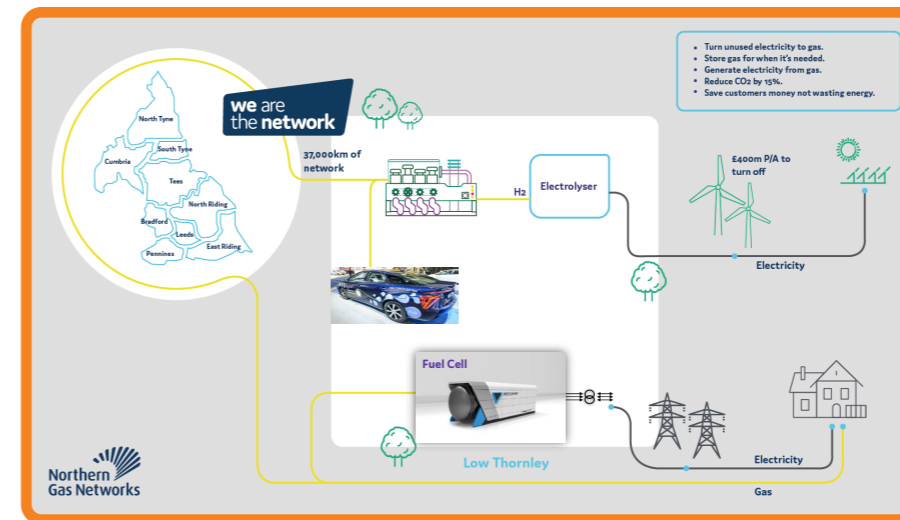
## New emerging Issues - Social Mobility / COVID-19

Question 1 – What has been the impact of the pandemic on hidden vulnerability?

Question 2 – How has the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support customers in vulnerable situations?

### Main themes emerging from above

- Mental health issues – anxiety around pandemic/debt/financial instability/ isolation/redundancy/worried about letting workmen / carers into property
- Increase in financial advice – related to above
- New vulnerabilities never visible before ie debt cases – never been in difficulty before
- Change in energy demand / being at home
- Food poverty and fuel poverty increasing
- Lack of support that was there pre-CV-19 / issues going undetected
- Complex needs – no recourse to public funds / not eligible for mainstream support
- Long term impact of CV-19 – many areas affected
- Increased community engagement/ volunteering
- Partnership working has helped achieve more
- Increase in online gaming due to suspension of sport
- Language barriers when engaging with people on phone (unable to home visit)
- Child safeguarding – increase in calls from children due to being at home
- Lack of support from energy suppliers/ only dealing with emergencies
- Increased fraud and scams
- Increased self-isolation (PP meters) / more emergency top up's and delay in getting appliances serviced due to lack of money
- Older volunteers shielding – impact on some support services / food banks
- Demand has created alternative models of delivery / more flexible approaches



# Event Evaluation and Future Engagement – 22 responses (MS Forms feedback)

Summary:	Customers in Vulnerable Situations Workshop	Friday 10th July
<b>Event Evaluation</b>		
Q1	What do you want to get out of today?	Hear stakeholder views. Hear about what's happening/ been happening since February. Networking. Learn about everyone's approach to vulnerability. Understand work that's been done around fuel poverty. Impact of COVID-19. NGN plans for GD2. Listen to everyone's ideas. Learn about CEV. To listen and learn. Adaptations to service energy advice delivery following C19. Listen to everyone's ideas. Hear from others about what they have been up to and how they are responding to COVID19 and how it is changing the nature of vulnerability. Understand how we can engage with the network and next steps for local projects
Q2	Choose 2 words from this list below to describe this event	Insightful, interesting (useful was third) <b>Key themes</b> - useful for networking, hearing about NGN strategy and future plans. Good cross section of attendees. Group discussions worked well, and pace about right
Q3	Overall, how satisfied were you with the event?	8.23 (overall)
Q4	How would you rate the discussions?	8.14
Q5	How would you rate the event contact and speakers?	8.82
Q5	How would you rate the networking opportunities?	5.0 (Delegates commented that low numbers were given to this question due to the digital arrangements)
Q7	Is there anything you think could be improved / changes for future workshops?	<b>Key themes</b> - Would have been useful to have more time to explore the issues and opportunity to network (appreciate virtual meeting limitations) Maybe use a 'Whiteboard Tool'/ group breakout discussion sessions. Slido comments disappeared too quickly to read. Q&A had most value but insufficient time. Send out more pre-reading prior to event. Try mentimeter.com

Q8	Is there anything else you would like to tell us?	<b>Key themes-</b> Good messaging. Keep doing these, good to be involved. Interesting content. Good job in delivering on-line forum. Really helpful to hear about NGN's plans for the future. Lots of food for thought. In future suggest having alternate virtual and face to face events
Q9	Thinking of yourself as a stakeholder of NGN, how satisfied are you with the relationship that you have with NGN	9.0
Q10	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
	NGN keeps me up to date on their business plans	Strongly agree – 3 Agree – 13 Somewhat agree – 2 Neither agree/disagree – 2 Disagree – 1 Strongly disagree – 1
	NGN provided me with clear information about their business performance	Strongly agree – 5 Agree – 9 Somewhat agree – 2 Neither agree/disagree – 5 Disagree – 1
	NGN provided me with opportunities to give feedback on the topics that interest me	Strongly agree – 5 Agree – 12 Somewhat agree – 2 Neither agree/disagree – 2 Strongly disagree – 1
	NGN allows me to give feedback through my preferred method	Strongly agree – 5 Agree – 12 Neither agree/disagree – 4 Strongly disagree – 1
	NGN makes it clear how they have used feedback to change	Strongly agree – 5 Agree – 11 Somewhat agree – 2 Neither agree/disagree – 3 Strongly disagree – 1

## Future Engagement

Q1	How else would you like to engage with NGN in future?	Would love to visit the CEV. I like current methods of engagement. Keep engagement as-is. This format is great, avoids travel. Would like regular workshops. More face to face hopefully in future. Just started to engage so looking forward to a fruitful relationship. Thank you for maintaining engagement and opportunities to hear from you and others during such a difficult time. Perhaps more on an individual or small group basis to give specific input and perspectives on NGN topics closely linked to our area of work. Potential for joined up and collaborative working with partners to get a cohesive cross sector strategy in place
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# 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](mailto:stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk)

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