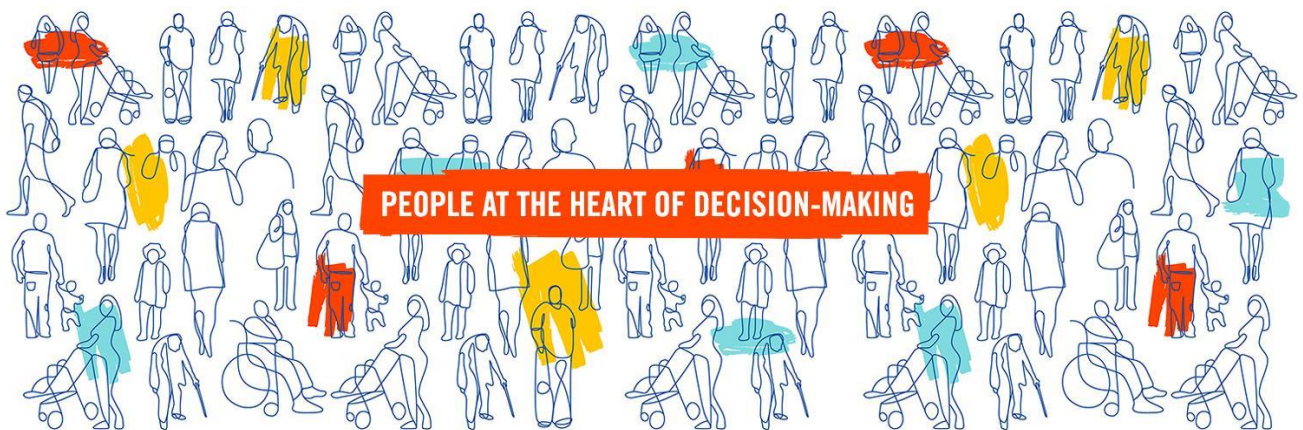




# NGN Citizens Panel

## Session 7: Findings Report



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# 1. Overview of Session 7

The seventh meeting of the NGN Citizens Panel (and the third meeting online) was held on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2021. It brought the group together to consider two specific aspects of NGN's work on inclusion planning:

1. Diversity and inclusion in the workforce; and
2. Inclusive engagement

Members met for 2 hours in the morning and 2 hours in the afternoon. The panel meeting was facilitated by [Involve](#), with three NGN staff members working alongside Involve's staff as table facilitators. The session consisted of a mixture of presentations from NGN staff, facilitated discussions in small breakout groups (average six - seven people) and written exercises to record clear findings (including a post-workshop worksheet to collect individual written comments and quantitative findings).

45 members of the panel (from a possible 51) attended this meeting. Members were supported to be able to participate online including, where needed, the provision of hardware and data packages to enable their participation. Support staff were also on hand to aid members who struggled with the technology on the day and ensure everyone was able to participate in all aspects of the workshop. All members were given a thank-you gift of £75 for their participation in the meeting.

The outline programme for Session 7 is reproduced below.

10:30am	Welcome <b>Presentation and discussion</b> - Update on how feedback from the previous Panel meeting has been used by NGN
11:00am	<b>Presentation</b> - What NGN means when they talk about inclusion
11:10am	<b>Panel Discussion</b> – What does inclusion mean to you?
11:50am	<b>Presentation</b> - Workforce Inclusion: where is NGN now and their vision for the future
12:00pm	<b>Panel Discussion</b> – Are NGN heading in the right direction?
12:30pm	LUNCH BREAK
2:00pm	Welcome back <b>Presentation and discussion</b> - Engaging in an inclusive way
2:45pm	<b>Presentation and discussion</b> – Engagement during Covid and the risks of digital exclusion
3:10pm	<b>Panel Discussion</b> – Future engagement with the Citizens Panel
4:00pm	Meeting closed.

## 2. What does inclusion mean to you?

Following a short video introduction – [Inclusion starts with I](#) - members were invited to share their own perspectives on what inclusion means. Here several members also took the opportunity to share personal examples of feeling excluded [JW1].

*I am a really slow reader and I found that the video moved really quickly. There's an irony that the video was about inclusion but with an invisible disability like dyslexia I struggled to watch it*

*The feeling that as a disabled person I am not relevant as I find stairs difficult. I have been asked not to attend meetings because the meeting was upstairs. Left a bitter taste in mouth. They should've moved it or given advanced warning.*

*It's hard for Muslim women, particularly wearing the Hijab and I often feel nervous going out because people look at me for what I wear.*

*I come from South East Asia and during the peak of the pandemic people confused me with being Chinese and would turn their back on me when I walked past. It was a physical act of exclusion.*

*I've been bullied in my workplace, and suffer from depression and poor mental health. I had to move to a different store in the end; it shouldn't have been for me to do that, the problem should have been dealt with by my employer.*

### Key features of inclusion

Across the group discussions a range of key features and behaviours that led to feelings of inclusion were repeatedly raised by members.

- **Being respected**

*Being part of the panel has made me feel equal and respected regardless of age, race, etc.*

*Being taken seriously. Not being "humoured".*

- **Not being judged**

*Not being judged for who I am or what I'm going through*

*Accepting me for who I am, faults and all*

*Where you are not treated differently because of your skin colour, or what you wear, or what you think*

- **Fitting in**

*Feeling wanted and like I belong.*

*Feeling like I could be myself and that people accepted me for who I am*

- **A level 'playing field'** - Although in some groups there was debate about whether this meant everyone being treated equally or whether it was really about the equity and the ability to achieve equally.

*Where everyone has an equal opportunity to do what they want*

*Being able to take part in something if that is something that you want and/or are able to do*

## **Inclusion in the workplace**

Panel members also discussed what factors, from their own work-life experiences promoted inclusion in the workplace. Key themes that emerged were:

- **Having a valued voice**

*I like the idea that everyone has a voice and it does get heard*

*Working in a place where you are encouraged to give an opinion*

*Being in a workplace where you feel changes can be made and you can share your ideas freely, even if it won't always be taken forward*

*Asked what your opinion is, given an opportunity to speak*

*Where it's obvious that different views are respected including by more senior people*

- **When there are clear and effective mechanisms to challenge non-inclusive behaviours**

*Need to have an easy and supportive way to report discrimination or something of similar nature*

*Staff meetings/surveys where everyone is confident to answer questions about inclusivity honestly and feel action will be taken, without witch hunts, and progression being adversely affected.*

*Somewhere discriminatory behaviour was appropriately challenged, where all people also had some training on equal opportunities*

- **Feeling part of a team**

*Teamwork – based on trust, shared goals and individual contributions*

*Good communication, shared success and a good team spirit.*

*Ensure that managers and team leaders make their team members feel that they are equally important in achieving the company's goals.*

*I've been with the same employer for many years and have had some bad experiences. I recently moved to a new office and I've been struck by the very positive, inclusive attitude of the young people I work with.*

- **Leadership from the top**

*When managers and senior people are modelling inclusive behaviours, and calling out bad behaviours, then you know that it's not just about lip service or having a policy on paper.*

*Ensuring managers and people in power positions have been trained on discrimination issues and that they lead by example. Too often, new or peripheral people in an organisation are tasked with these 'non core' business tasks and the people who really hold power either don't care or hold/participate in discriminatory behaviours. Create systems where everyone is accountable, regardless of their position in the hierarchy and make a commitment to the value of anti-discrimination central to decision making at every level.*

*A CEO with whom I worked could be rude, aggressive and bullying towards staff at all levels in the organisation, sometimes this was in public during meetings. To someone who questioned something she retorted "That was a career limiting comment" Unsurprisingly, this became legendary. The upshot of this was that it ultimately didn't matter that we had numerous policies in place or that Directors and Senior Managers tried to do all the right things, people knew that the CEO didn't value or respect staff and this impacted on engagement, morale and retention.*

- **Equality of opportunity**

*People are judged by the work they produce not the people they are.*

*Everyone should be treated equally. Businesses work best when they do this.*

*No favouritism, everyone should have the chance to prove their worth and not be overlooked for opportunities.*

*Managers treat everyone with equal worth. You sometimes have to treat people differently because of their circumstances but should value everyone equally.*

- **Where diversity is valued (not just accepted)**

*Everyone is different and brings different strengths - look at people's strengths, not their weaknesses. Bring out the best in people. This adds value to the organisation.*

*An environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, where the talents and skills of different groups are valued.*

*People are free to be themselves and don't have to pretend to be someone they're not in order to fit in.*

- **Recognition of your contribution**

*To be included is to be praised, told you are doing well and giving inspiration to do better*

*Acknowledged that you've done a good job and being credited for it*

*Everyone getting the recognition they deserve.*

- **Flexibility**

Many groups noted that to be truly inclusive the workplace, where possible, should be flexible to enable people to contribute in different ways and accommodate the other demands on their time, for example, as working parents.

*Being given the opportunity to feedback to team discussions within a team meeting e.g. following up by email and giving people time to think and write down ideas if they don't feel comfortable sharing in the group setting*

*Flexibility important - people have different demands on their time. I once had to fight to get a meeting rearranged from 9 to 9.30 so I had time to get back from the school run. People are happier and more productive if they have flexibility.*

*Think about staff wellbeing - taking a lunch hour, for example, but not being obliged to take it at specific times because everyone has different needs*

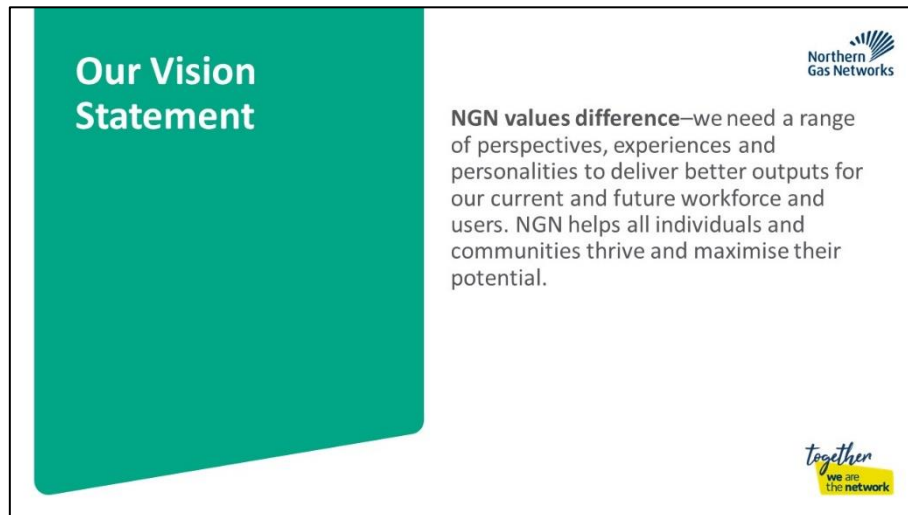
There was however debate in one group about whether flexibility actually promoted inclusion, with at least one member arguing that it was fairer when everyone started and finished at the same time.

*Now with flexible hours there is pressure to be first in and last to leave and to do longer and longer hours - it becomes a competition - fairer when everyone knows they are leaving at 5 and can plan the rest of their life around that.*



### 3. NGN's vision for an inclusive company

NGN outlined some of the work they have been doing to help improve and monitor inclusion and diversity across the company, including their draft vision statement for an inclusive workforce.



When asked, most members were very positive about the statement and felt that it clearly expressed NGN's goal to be an inclusive company.

*A good vision for the future for the NGN workforce.*

*Very good statement. Will be brilliant if NGN can make the statement a reality.*

*It's easy to follow and gets to the point*

*Says everything in a nutshell*

In the post workshop worksheet however, several members did suggest wording changes that they felt would make the statement clearer, with 5 suggesting changing the word 'outputs' to 'outcomes'.

*"Outcomes" is better than "outputs", we are not machines.*

*It's good, but I think "...for our current and future workforce and users" would be better simply "...for our workforce and users"*

*"NGN aims to help all individuals and communities thrive and maximise their potential"- fixes this line :)*

A few members also suggested that there were additions that could be made.

*Could include that you welcome all ethnicities, religions and backgrounds?*

*We are investors in people of all walks of life, age, gender ethnicity and religion*

*It should be clearer than NGN upholds diversity and equal opportunities across the workforce and it should list the core criteria: All workers and job applicants must be treated equally and be given the same set of opportunities regardless of their age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, disability, culture or anything other personal characteristic that might be discriminated against.*

*Add in... WE learn from yesterday to know what to do today for a better tomorrow*



Several members also took the opportunity to comment that, while they supported the vision overall, that the journey to become an inclusive company must be considered to be an ongoing one.

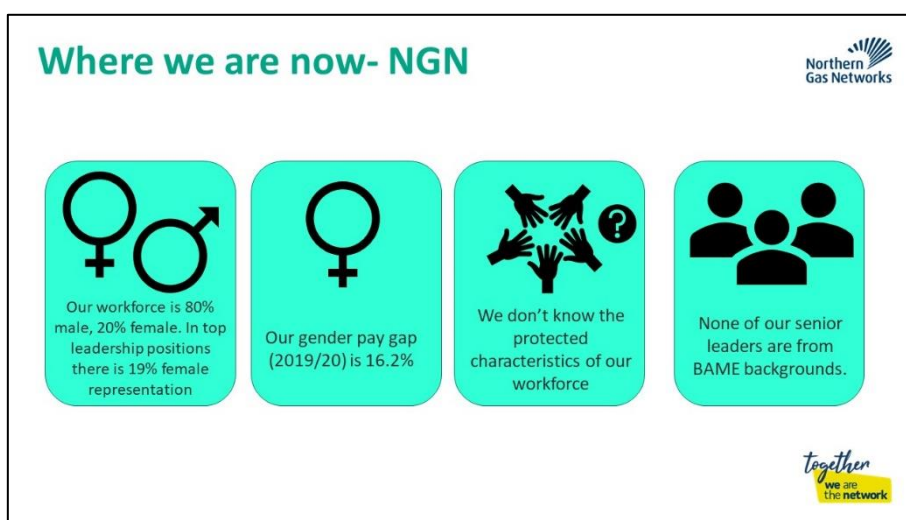
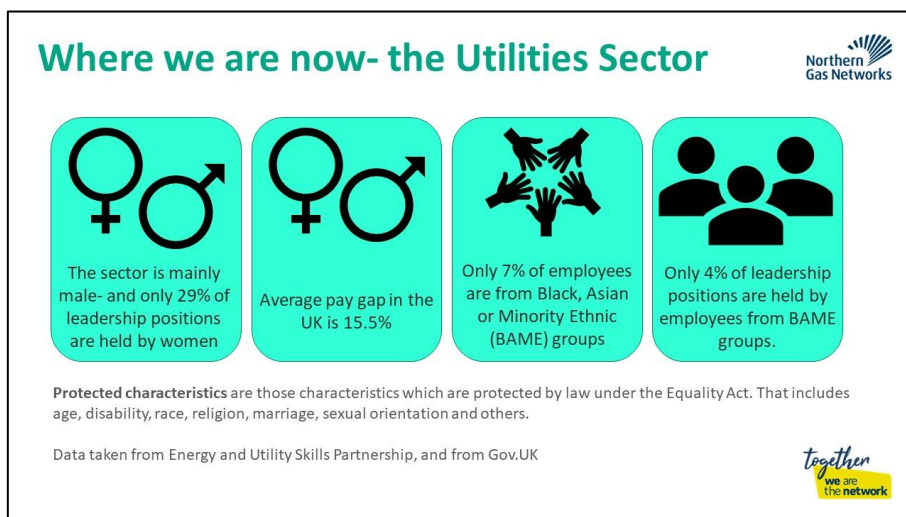
*Inclusion is a live process with ups and downs, not a finished 'tickéd box' statement*

*Whilst it is right that it is aspirational, it needs to reflect that you will always be working towards inclusion, it should be an ongoing process and that that in itself is a positive thing.*

*Inclusion is a moving target, and so the vision statement will probably need to be updated at regular intervals.*

## Equalities characteristics and the utilities sector

NGN presented Panel members with information that showed that the diversity of the workforce in the utility sector doesn't match up to the representation levels in the wider UK workforce. The presentation also acknowledged gaps in NGN's knowledge about the characteristics of its own workforce.



## Publicly reporting on equalities within the NGN workforce

From the comments collected in the post-workshop worksheet it can be concluded that most people were supportive of the idea that NGN should proactively publish all of the equalities information it has access to in order to demonstrate its commitment to being an inclusive company.

*All protected characteristics should be discussed openly and reported under an Inclusion heading on the website (at least if put into search link), making clear the policy, strategy and actions.*

*All of it, if you are doing it, report it, the good and the bad, reporting the bad can show there's an ongoing commitment to change and learn. Many companies give an air of 'we got this' when it comes to the complexity of discrimination and inequality. I think better organisations show how difficult this work is and reveal that price of meaningful equality is constant vigilance and keeping anti-discriminatory practices at the fore of ALL aspects of the business.*

When asked which aspects of inclusion they felt were particularly important to see publicly reported on by NGN:

- 45% of members focussed on the percentage of women in the workforce and the gender pay gap
- 38% emphasised they would expect to see information about the proportion of staff from a BAME background
- 28% stated that information on the age profile of employees would be important to them, both in terms of opportunities being provided to young people and also older employees as pension ages are rising
- 22% highlighted that NGN should be reporting publicly on the percentage of staff with a disability

What was noticeable however in the responses was that people were not simply interested in the numbers but wanted to understand the reasons for disparities, particularly in relation to the pay gap and differences in representation at management levels.

*My priority would be gender representation in general and in senior roles, % of staff that are BAME, pay gap (and an explanation of the structural, work pattern and role-based factors that contribute to the current gap).*

*I'd expect to see the % gender and BAME in different roles compared to industrial norm and regional population.*

## Preference to not report equalities information

There were also a small number of members that stated that they did not believe NGN should be reporting on these characteristics, for a variety of different reasons:

- That the nature of the company's business meant that it should not be expected to have a workforce that reflected the characteristics of the wider population.

*Publish the %of staff with relevant (STEM) qualifications. The misapplication of pseudo statistics to suggest that a selective population from a larger population should match the makeup of the larger population is mathematically and ethically wrong.*

*I feel this can get to be a bit of a sticky wicket here. People will naturally go more for some roles than others - there are male dominated roles and female dominated roles. This can just be about who applies for which role. It's not always an issue that needs solving.*

- That the company (or any company) should not be expected to work towards having a workforce that was representative of its customer base, but rather should focus on ensuring the 'best person' for the job was employed.

*I don't mind so much about the public reporting, it is more important to ensure everyone is given the same opportunities to work for NGN and the most qualified person gets the job. To commit to that is more important than to commit to a figure.*

*People should be employed on merit, no one wants to go to work and feel like they are in the workplace to make up the numbers (e.g. to be the token black person)*

- That the publication of statistics like these actually harmed the goal of equality and inclusion across society.

*[Publish] absolutely none. The more that people or companies publicly announce what they are doing to benefit people described as BAME, the longer it will take for everyone to accept that everyone is the same. The best way to address the pay gap is to close it.*

## Importance to customers

- 78% of Panel members voted individually that NGN focusing on ensuring inclusion and belonging within the workforce was important to them as a customer of the company.
- Only 4% indicated that it was not important to them, with 18% reporting ambivalence.



Those that voted that it was important to them gave a variety of reasons:

- **That it is the morally and ethically right thing to do**

*Important because we are all in this fight together. NGN is well placed to be a leader in these areas. BE A LEADER*

*As a customer (not a Panel member) I am primarily interested in receiving a good level of service from NGN but I would also expect (as public money) equal opportunities to be observed.*

*I wouldn't like to deal with a company who discriminates or treats its staff unfairly.*

- **That it will increase productivity for the company**

*Because if employees are feeling good at workplace they will do a better job*

*Alienation is ethically wrong. It is also counter to quality and productivity. In the worst case it can lead to breakdown in the service to me as a customer.*

- **That it will lead to inclusion being a focus for how they treat their customers**

*A company which cares about employees will probably show similar concerns for customers. Besides, we should expect nothing less nowadays.*

*Because inclusion is a big passion of mine because of my needs*

- **That it will improve customer service**

*If they can treat staff well they will treat customers well too*

*Happy, included staff will give their best effort to their job role thus benefiting me as a customer.*

- **To enhance reputation and/or avoid reputational risk**

*Because of my involvement with NGN now, and the visibility of this issue. I wouldn't want to be associated with a company where the staff don't feel respected.*

*I agree with the vision statement that diverse companies produce better outputs and from a societal perspective if I'm paying for a service, I want the workers delivering it to be happy in their work.*

*It promotes that NGN is a forward-thinking company where their employees are valued.*

Of those who did not think it was important the reasons were simply that service and performance were more important, regardless of who was involved in the delivery.

*Customers will have other issues which they consider more important – like a safe and reliable gas service.*

*Because as a customer as long as that person can do their job. That's all that matters to me regardless of their colour, creed or sex.*

*All I care about is that when I interact with the company, I interact with someone who is qualified and capable of doing their job, irrespective of their background, etc.*

## **How would customers know that NGN is a company that embraces inclusion?**

The most consistent message from the members was that, for NGN to demonstrate that it valued inclusion, then the Vision Statement must be backed up by action.

*By deeds rather than words*

*It's just about doing it rather than pretending you're doing something*

*Do not approach this as a tick box exercise.*

Most members also agreed that becoming a more inclusive company would be a process of culture change, that may take time, rather than a single action.

*It's about embedding the values in the way everyone behaves, through leadership, through valuing people for who they are and letting them know that they can bring their whole self to work.*

*The work place vibe can be a problem if staff don't feel it's safe to wear certain items of clothing. Tattoos, piercings and jewellery are all ok at work. Work should be about conduct not looks and appearance.*

*Policies, practices, procedures and conversations internally need to reflect people being themselves and being comfortable with themselves at work.*

There were also a variety of comments made that suggested that it was more important for the staff to recognise that the company valued inclusion than it was to demonstrate this to customers.

*Be mindful that it's hard not to look un-genuine when pushing the diversity and inclusion message - it's more important that staff are comfortable than getting the message that they are comfortable out there.*

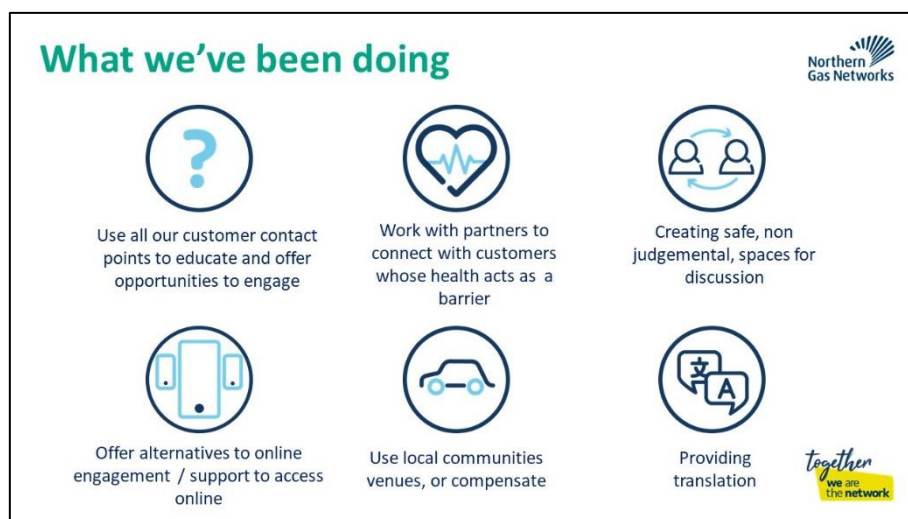
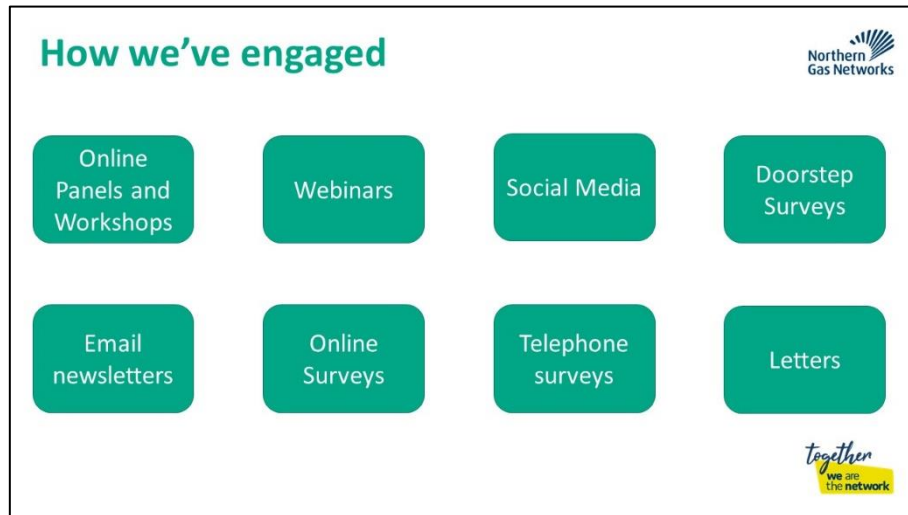
*It is hard to **show** how a Company is embracing inclusion genuinely - if a Company is faking this it will show. But if it is done in the right way it will show without the Company needing to do anything.*

A few specific suggestions were made to help NGN demonstrate to staff, and prospective staff, that they valued diversity, including:

- *Get employees to attest how they have been included and new employees may be encouraged to join*
- *Utilise independent questionnaires to reflect how the workforce feel and then release the results and how NGN have acted on these.*
- *There should be someone whose job it is to sit on every interview panel to oversee that D&I are taken seriously and get away from 'jobs for the boys'*
- *I'm thinking they should provide a prayer place for people who want to stay connected with the daily prayers.*
- *Think about the images they use to promote the company. In the presentation there were 3 people sitting - 2 were covered in mud and obviously meant to have been involved in digging a hole, the 3rd had long blonde hair and makeup. It was patronising.*
- *When advertising for employee put posters with white and BAME workers alongside working together*
- *Establish an on-site creche. I worked for a company that had this and it was attractive with women at work and over 80% returned after maternity. Wasn't just the women that used the creche though, men did too as their partners who might not work for the organisation could benefit. Would also overcome challenges for single parents. Brought a lot of good will.*

## 4. Inclusive engagement

NGN presented members with information about how they had been engaging with customers and other stakeholders over the last year, particularly in the context of the lockdown measures imposed by the pandemic. They also highlighted some of the things they had been doing to ensure that the engagement they were undertaking was as inclusive as possible.



In their discussions the members emphasised the importance of engagement by NGN cutting across the community and stakeholders to enable the company to understand, to the best of its ability, the needs and preferences of all of its customers.

*[Customers] are the business and our voices, that highlight our needs, should shape the business.*

There was also hope expressed that NGN would continue to engage with the views of customers in a variety of different ways – from on the door-step surveys, through their complaints procedures, meetings with stakeholder and community-of-interest groups and, particularly, the Citizens Panel itself.

*This panel is diverse and important that this group features members from all of the groups identified in the slide deck.*



*This is a good way to engage - we are here voluntarily without axe to grind - fairly accurate cross section of customers. If you only focus on, or only rely on complaints [the information will be] skewed cos only people who are really pissed off will engage.*

Members further highlighted that, despite the enforced move towards more digital / remote engagement, maintaining a variety of communication channels between customers and the company was important.

*So many people are now able to communicate digitally but there are still those who do not have that facility or knowledge. Therefore, the company needs to be able to communicate with all these customers to give them the same engagement as digital customers. The world is becoming more digital based but it is still important to be able to reach non-digital customers.*

### **Harder to reach groups**

It was generally agreed to be good practice for NGN to actively reach out to those who may be 'harder to reach', or 'more seldom heard', to ensure the diversity of the voices being taken into account. Some of the groups identified for special focus, and who may need additional measures put in place, included:

- Young people
- People for whom English was not their first language. It was specifically highlighted by several members that while some people can speak English well, even if it's not their first language, many struggle to read or write English. This means that while online conversations and group discussions may work, there are additional barriers to engaging with written material or responding in writing.
- People with other language barriers, e.g. deaf, vision impaired, people who can't read or write
- Older people
- People made financially vulnerable by the pandemic
- People shielding during the pandemic who may be nervous about engaging face-to-face
- People with dementia who may be living alone
- People who do not have the ability to use modern technology / don't own laptops/tablets
- People in geographically isolated and rural locations (particularly with no / limited broadband access).

There was also a sense expressed by Panel members that the voice of the customer (and organisations representing segments of the customer base) needed to be able to feed into all aspects of decision making within NGN.

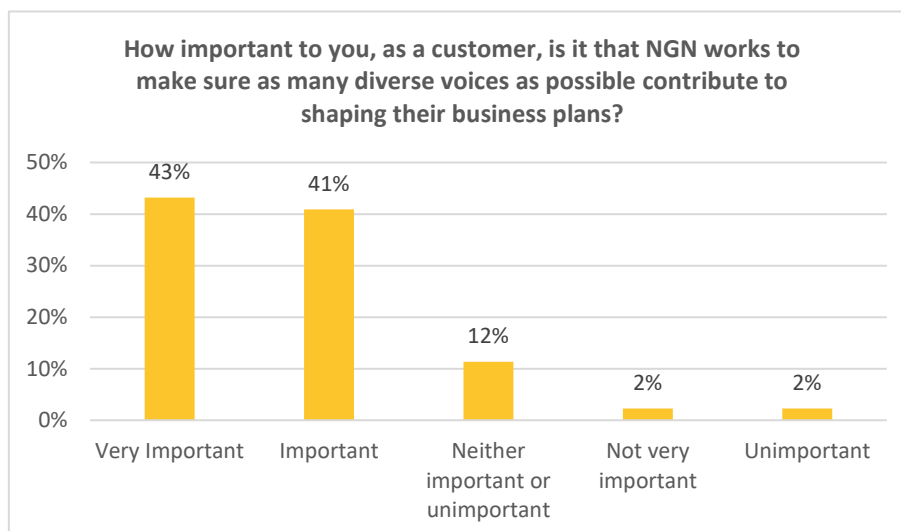
*Representation of the customer base should have a voice in board meetings and CEG Group along with delegates from specialist 'inclusivity' organisations to ensure leadership understanding and planning.*

### **Importance to customers**

- 85% of Panel members voted individually that it was important, to them as a customer, that NGN ensured that it engages with a diverse cross-section of the community when developing their strategic plans.



- Only 4% indicated that it was not important to them, with 12% reporting ambivalence.



The reasons members gave for their votes can be broadly grouped into three categories:

- **Because better decisions are made when multiple perspectives are considered**

*Everyone brings something and we learn from everyone*

*I believe better decisions are made in all aspects of decision making when diverse voices are heard. This can ensure that decisions reflect the needs and aspirations of the diverse communities NGN serves.*

*So that the correct answers can be derived from the wealth of experience thereby discovered. The correctness has to be borne out by analysis though, not democracy.*

- **To adequately reflect the needs of the diverse community NGN serves**

*So you can tailor your business to keep everyone informed and continual improvements*

*To properly understand the needs of their customers, it is important to gather as many voices as possible, rather than only a select few, even if they are the majority. To have a voice and be listened to, rather than just for data gathering purposes, or to be seen to be doing the 'right thing'.*

*NGN doesn't have just one set group of customers that are using their service, it has a diverse amount of people from all walks of life. By having diverse voices it helps get a more broader understanding of the customer needs and wants as well as what NGN are doing well to help them shape business plans.*

- **Because it is NGN's responsibility as a monopoly supplier**

*If customers don't have any choice about who they are paying for their gas transmission, you at least have to give them the respect of being listened to*

*You have a monopoly in your area, it is incumbent on you to reflect your customer base*

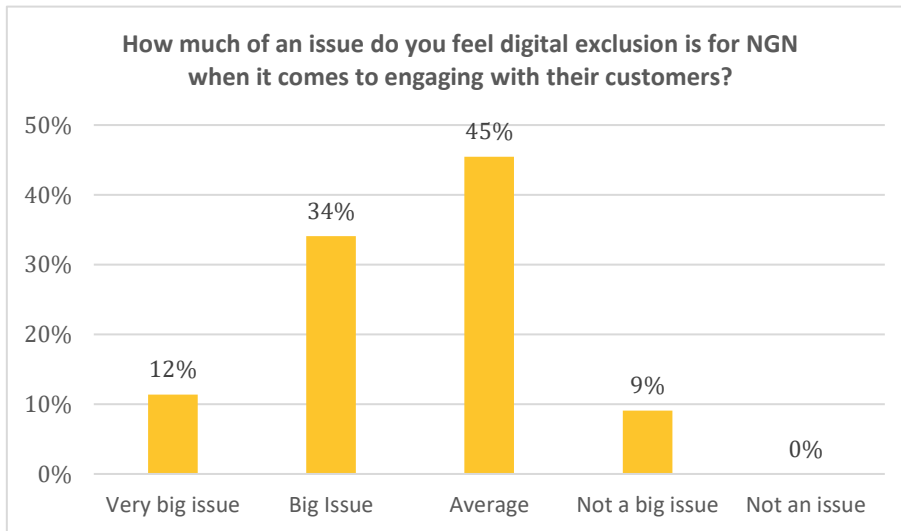
For the small number who disagreed that it was important the reasons were:

*There are two old sayings. One says that too many cooks spoil the broth. The other says that a camel was created by a committee of diverse voices.*

*Because it's a stunt - pure virtue signalling*

## Digital Inclusion

- 45% of Panel members voted that they thought that/or felt that Digital Exclusion was only an 'average' issue for NGN when engaging with their customers.



For the majority of these members the reasons given related to the fact that the last year, and the limitations on other forms of communication caused by lockdown, has resulted in more and more people becoming active online. They did however tend to note in their comments that, just because digital capacity was on the rise, traditional means of communication should still be available to customers who choose not to, or are unable, to engage this way.

*Increasingly the population is digitally connected so this must be a naturally diminishing issue?*

*Much less after a year of pandemic. However traditional methods of communication should be available if requested, at no extra cost, as it will be a reducing cost each year, for obvious reasons.*

*I believe for most people it is okay but for the people who may struggle with technology, may find it hard to communicate. This is why i believe it is important to still have simpler or easier forms of communication still available to customers for customer engagement*

*I can only speculate that the pandemic has forced some 'late adopters' of communication technology to 'finally join the 'party' (woohoo, welcome to the club, pal!). However, I think it's important that NGN doesn't assume that everyone is now digitally engaged and keeps using older avenues of communication to speak to its customers, particularly the elderly*

- 46% of Panel members voted however that they still believed Digital Exclusion was 'big' or 'very big' issue for NGN when engaging with their customers.

For the majority of these members the reasons related to either cost or capabilities (particularly for older and more vulnerable customers).

*We only have to look at how many children were disadvantaged by not having a laptop or a tablet during the pandemic when schools were closed. There are too many organisations and companies ignoring the fact that not enough people are equipped with either the knowledge or equipment necessary. This has been the case for some time and is likely to remain so for some time yet.*

*This is an important issue that I think was relevant even before the pandemic. Older people who may struggle anyway with communications from NGN in normal times are now being left behind by the proliferation of new technology.*

*Vulnerable and people in poverty who cannot afford laptops etc. Also, older people struggle with technology and some have no support.*

# 5. Future engagement with the Citizens Panel

In the final session of the afternoon the members were invited to reflect on their ongoing involvement with the Panel, the success of the on-line meeting format, and the aspects of the business they would like to discuss in future Panel meetings.

## Continuing with the Panel

- 100% of participating members stated that they wanted to continue their involvement with the Citizens Panel into 2021/22.

Member's responses to the morning session when they heard feedback from NGN about how their input had been used by the company, gives a sense of why this might be the case.

*Nice to hear that things we discussed were put into practice*

*They've really looked into the feedback and taken it on board*

*Great to see they are listening to us and making change*

*As a group I feel like we've become part of the NGN family*

## Additional responses to 'You said... So we've' feedback

There were three specific topics of discussion by the Panel where information was provided to demonstrate how they had influenced NGN decisions in recent months.

### **The Hydrogen House**

NGN reported that they had listened to the Panel's preference for the house to look and feel like the houses people are living in now. They also noted that, in response to the views expressed by many of the members, the second house would be developed as an ultra-modern smart home. They further informed members that they had responded to their top 3 'must haves' -an in person guide has been appointed and interactive displays and 3D virtual tours were under development.

Most members seemed pleased that these developments were underway, although there was still a significant minority of the Panel who questioned the value of the Hydrogen House as an investment, particularly in its current location.

*Still don't see why people would give up a day to travel to see some house.*

*A prototype might be a good start - have to start somewhere then monitor the footfall and take a chance on it.*

### **Education Strategy**

The response to NGN's moves to focus their Education Strategy on post-16 learners, STEM activities and STEM ambassadors and creating employment opportunities for young people was also largely positive, particularly in relation to the apprenticeships already created.

*27 apprenticeships! - great to see so many jobs with training opportunities*

Some members however continued to question the focus on young people within the Social Mobility Pledge activities.

*Older people should be able to get apprenticeships too, not just young people, as they also struggle to get jobs.*

*I think its not fair on people my age. I'm still on furlough and will probably need to retrain, but schemes are often not available to me.*

## Green Transition Bonds

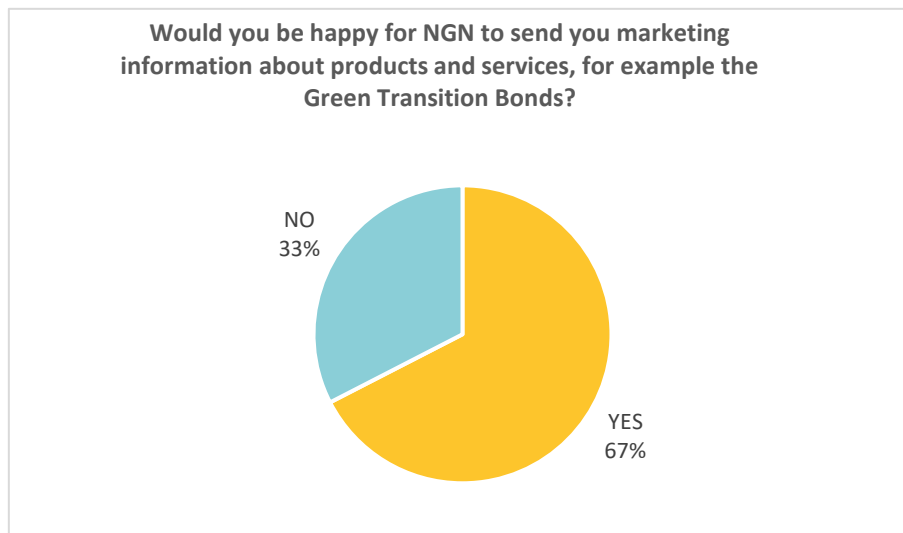
Members were generally very pleased to hear that the bonds had been introduced and were available for people to purchase for quite a minimal investment. Some however continued to question the length of the investment and what they perceived as a low rate of return.

Interestingly however the most repeated comment was that they would have liked NGN to have informed them directly about the release, indicating that members feel they have an ongoing relationship with the company.

*I'm surprised the shares have launched already. It would have been nice to be told about it when it launched given we felt so strongly about it and helped get it to happen*

*Not much promotion for the green bond to raise awareness - didn't know about it until [the] presentation (where was it advertised?)*

After reiterating that the release had only taken place that week, and that NGN do not actually hold the contact details of Panel members, an opportunity to provide NGN with their contact details to receive further information about the bonds was included in the post-workshop worksheet.



## Future Panel Meetings

Members were reminded of the topics that had been covered by the Citizens Panel over the 6 previous meetings and given the opportunity to propose topics or aspects of the business that either:

- they believed the Panel could most valuably contribute to;
- would like to challenge NGN's performance on; and / or

- they would like to revisit and learn more about the progress that had been made.



Some of the general comments made by members related to the fact that they believed NGN should set the agenda by identifying where the Panel would provide the most valuable insight.

*It shouldn't be up to us to choose what is interesting. NGN should make the best use of our time to help them with decisions.*

*We don't know enough about the real issues for the company to make good choices here.*

There were also a few comments made by members that suggested they wanted to get into greater depth on topics within the Panel discussions,

*Feel that recent sessions have been very general and not covered specifics.*

*We need to be able to really dig into the details, particularly about money and accountability, otherwise we are just giving general views.*

*We've learnt lots about the company and the Business Plan. You should use our knowledge more rather than asking about things that we don't know much about.*

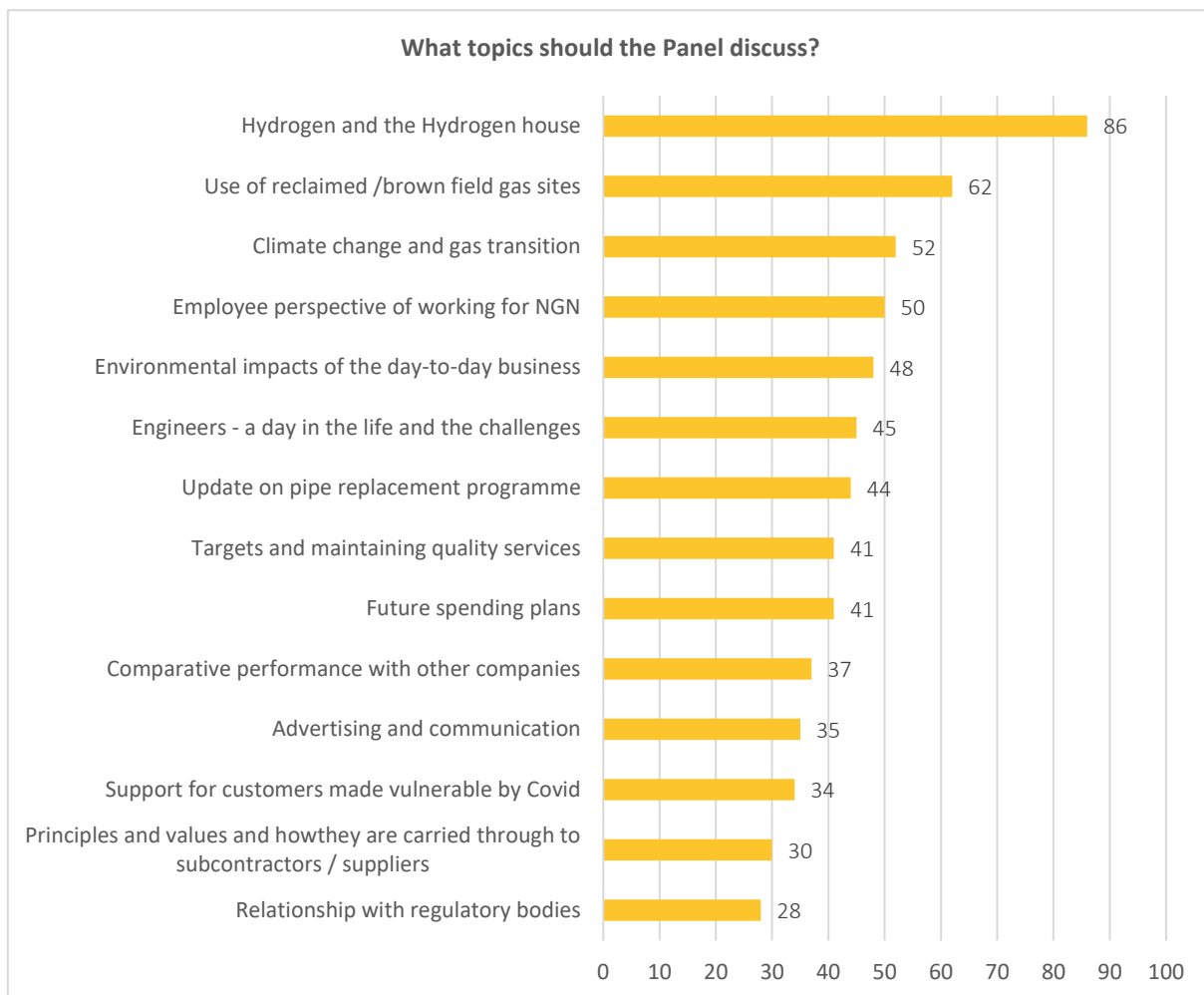
## Priority topics

Following an open brainstorming session, where members could individually propose anything that interested them, the groups prioritised topics for consideration by the whole Panel. When making their selection Panel members could choose up to six, in order of interest.<sup>1</sup>

Four of the top five ranked topics all relate to aspects of the environment, climate change or energy transitions, suggesting this is a key priority for members overall.

*I think it is important to concentrate on helping the environment which has been and is being destroyed over the last century*

<sup>1</sup> Graph created using preferential weightings.



## Hydrogen and the Hydrogen House

This was the most highly prioritised option presented to the Panel as a whole. For many Panel members the introduction to the Hydrogen House has opened up many questions about the potential to use Hydrogen as a gas replacement fuel, and the practicalities and impacts of doing this. The members in general appear keen to understand more about this and its viability.

*All have some depth to debate but hydrogen may be the future*

*Hydrogen is the future that will affect everyone*

*Just my sense of future energy*

Some of the key questions members were still asking in the discussions were:

- Is hydrogen really safe?
- When will it take over from gas?
- When will the conversion happen?
- What would be the cost of hydrogen for customers?
- How much it will actually reduce the use of gas?
- How is the hydrogen being produced?
- What is the process of moving over to hydrogen?

## Use of reclaimed / brownfield gas sites



This was discussed at one of the early Panel meetings and was reintroduced by members during the discussions. At the time there was a lot of interest in how sites were being regenerated to have positive environmental impacts, particularly in relation to biodiversity, as it was seen that the positive use of these sites should be part of NGN's commitment to mitigating the long-term environmental impacts of the industry.

*I want to talk more about gas holders and their removals - specifically as they are being sold and many are turned into housing rather than helping the environment*

*Brown sites have to be used first to allow green spaces for the future*

## **Climate change and energy transition**

*The environment, and how the company responds to the crisis, will be the most important thing for the next 10 years*

For many of the members understanding NGN's role, now and in the future, is key to their interest in the Panel. This not only relates to the transition to cleaner and greener forms of gas (for example the transition to Hydrogen), but in some cases a lack of understanding what role there may be for the company in the future.

*Meeting climate change targets presents an existential threat to NGN.*

*Want to know how it will be achieved and what it will mean for NGN when the gas network is switched off*

*[Would be] interesting to learn about gases intentions of expanding the market for natural gas or hydrogen so dependence on electricity is reduced.*

*The biggest issue for me is your glideslope to oblivion in 2050 (net zero).  
Financial, structural, asset disposal. Alternatively, your plans to revoke the net zero legislation to continue the business.*

## **Environmental impacts of the day-to-day business**

This was primarily discussed in terms of it being a wider corporate social responsibility to minimise environmental damage in the operation of the business as a whole. Members who were part of the earlier Panel meeting that looked at sustainability were particularly keen to revisit this topic and review, and potentially challenge, progress.

*Even though been covered before think it's worth going back to. We need to know its not just been 'ticked off' in the Business Plan then forgotten.*

*Technology changes all the time so [this is] something that needs a regular update on.*

## **Employees perspective of working for NGN**

### **Engineers – 'a day in the life of' and the challenges**

Much of the interest in hearing more about an average employee's experience of working for NGN came from the focus on inclusion and diversity in the Panel meeting that day. While people were generally impressed with the principles and values presented to them, there was an interest in hearing more about how that translated in the culture of the workplace.

*It would be good to hear from NGN employees who are not in the senior management team to know more about what its really like to work for them*

In a few groups it was also noted that the members have only been hearing from the customer service and engagement side of the business, rather than the people at the 'coal-face'. This was particularly the case from newer Panel members, who were not part of the earlier conversations about the pipe replacement programme, safety and the work to ensure reliability.

*We want to hear from people who are involved in the real work of the company and what they think the issues are.*

### **Update on the pipe replacement programme**

Longer term members of the Panel were particularly interested to hear about progress, especially in the context of Covid having had impacts on where engineers were able to work. This was emphasised by them as being the core business of the company and vital for both energy transition and reducing the impact of gas leakage on the environment overall.

### **Targets and maintaining quality services**

#### **Comparative performance with other companies**

There was interest from Panel members in having a better understanding of how NGN performed against other network energy companies, and how performance targets were set, monitored and extended.

*I'm interested in understanding how you measure your business performance, how you are doing against these targets and what areas you intend to focus on improvements*

*How are NGN held accountable? What do they report on and the results? What level of satisfaction from customers?*

*Interested in how targets are tracked - once a target has been hit will NGN move on and forget about it?*

For original Panel members this would be a case of revisiting previous discussions, but several of them clearly saw value in that.

*Want to ensure NGN is maintaining what they've achieved*

*Interested to hear about general progress against the business plan and an update from the CEG*

*It's important mainly for the group to keep giving feedback and holding NGN to account and challenge them on things.*

### **Future spending plans**

#### **Relationship with regulatory bodies**

There was interest from some members in better understanding how the company's budget was distributed across the range of services it provides. Part of this appears to have come from a desire to understand how much autonomy and influence NGN has in regards to its spending priorities, and how much of the 'softer' work undertaken by NGN is driven by external influences.

*Understanding NGNs relationship with regulatory bodies because a lot of conversations have been customer focused but it would be good to know if NGN have the potential to influence government or what is imposed upon them*

*Want to understand more who influences NGNs decisions e.g., govt, shareholders, Ofgem etc.*

*Would be good to know what is forced on them or what they are doing because it is good - e.g. apprenticeships (offered because that's good or offered because gov will fund?)*

*We have looked at NGN itself and customers so I think it's important to look at [the role of] other stakeholders too.*

### **Advertising and Communication**

The rationale behind this being prioritised was the members' growing awareness of the work that NGN does, and the sense that they company is not recognised for it. Through their involvement in the Panel it seems that members have begun to feel an affinity with the company and want to see its profile raised.

*I don't think that NGN have a really high profile, or appreciated for doing what they do*

*Could NGN advertise through partnerships with well known brands to raise awareness of what NGN does? Maybe sponsor a northern based festival for visibility of the brand.*

*Never heard of NGN before this - there is a profile issue - most people don't know of the organisation and the good things that you do*

### **Support to customers made vulnerable by covid**

This potential discussion topic was not widely supported, although there was general acknowledgement in the discussions that the support provided by NGN to people in vulnerable circumstances was valuable. Notes from the discussions suggest that many members felt quite a lot of the Panel's time recently had been spent discussing how NGN supported communities and their customers. There was however, some interest in looking at what NGN is and could be doing to support those made newly vulnerable by the pandemic, particularly in relation to their ability to pay and any increase in bills that other investments would cause.

### **Principles and values and how they are carried through to subcontractors / suppliers**

This was a discussion that emerged in one of the groups and was put up for consideration by the whole group. For the small number of people that this was important to, the reasons given were:

*I wanted to choose them all, difficult choice, but interested in company values as a whole*

*If you use a lot of subcontractors to perform works then need to ensure that they are upholding your values, same with suppliers. How closely are they upholding your principles?*