



# Northern Gas Networks Citizens' Panel Workshop Report

**March 2024**



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# Overview of the day

The sixteenth meeting of the NGN Citizens' Panel was held on Saturday 23rd of March 2024, and was attended in person by 37 members. NGN and Involve colleagues worked as impartial group facilitators with small groups of seven to nine members. All members who took part were given a thank-you gift of £100 for their participation in the meeting.

The meeting looked at two areas: gas services and NGN's values, purpose, and principles.

The morning session included a series of presentations and small group discussions on gas services that NGN are considering submitting to Ofgem in their next 5 year business plan, (2026 - 2031). Panel members reflected on each proposal, considering whether this was NGN's role and whether associated customer costs were justifiable. Members then voted for or against each proposal to be included in the business plan.

In the afternoon, members were introduced to NGN's core values, which have led to the formation of their purpose and 'purpose promise statement' and a set of principles. Members reflected on whether these statements and principles feel right, as well as show NGN's principles could be measured and upheld.

Summaries of the discussions and conclusions reached by the panel are detailed below.

# 1. Gas services

## Introduction

Members looked at proposed gas services across the business including:

1. Implementing a voluntary target of repairing gas escapes within 7-28 days;
2. Additional training for some of NGN's workforce to restore gas supplies after a gas leak;
3. 'Services beyond the meter' - services that go beyond NGN's traditional role as a Gas Distributor.

After hearing presentations on each proposed service area, members were initially given time to reflect on the areas of focus and ask any questions. The details of these questions are included in Appendix 4.1. Members then considered whether the cost associated with each service was justifiable to customers, whether this is NGN's role, and if there are risks associated with going ahead / not going ahead.

## Summary of members discussions

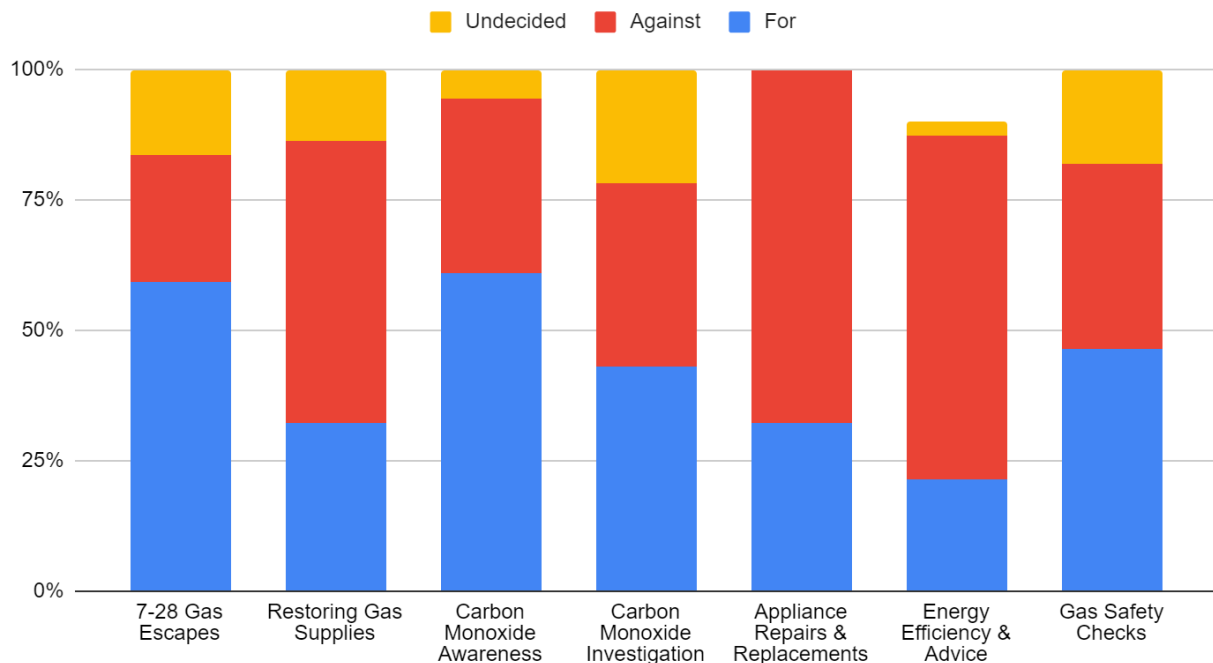
Member votes outlined below indicate that members were clearly in favour of the 7-28 day gas escapes target and the carbon monoxide awareness service. Members were clearly against training NGN workers to restore gas supplies; training to do appliance repairs and replacements; and offering direct energy efficiency advice when called out to emergencies. Members' views were more mixed in relation to expanding NGN's workforce, upskilling to investigate and isolate suspected Carbon Monoxide and offering free gas safety checks to customers on the Priority Services Register.

The table and graph below shows the number of votes for and against each topic proposal for inclusion in NGN's 5 year business plan (2026 - 2031). Where not all participants voted, percentages have been adjusted according to total number of votes rather than total number of participants.

Votes Per Topic	7-28 Gas Escapes Target	Training to Restore Gas Supplies	Carbon Monoxide Awareness	Carbon Monoxide Investigation	Appliance Repairs & Replacements	Energy Efficiency & Advice	Gas Safety Checks
Yes	59.4%	32.4%	61.1%	43.2%	32.4%	21.6%	46.4%
No	24.3%	54.1%	33.3%	35.1%	67.6%	65.7%	35.7%
Undecided	16.2%	13.5%	5.6%	21.6%	0%	2.7%	17.9%

**Table 1:** Summary (in %) of votes for / against each proposal for inclusion in NGN's 5 year business plan (2026 - 2021).

## For, Against and Undecided



**Graph 1:** Visual summary of votes for / against each proposal for inclusion in NGN's 5 year business plan (2026 - 2021).

## 1.1. Discussion on 7-28 days gas escape target

### What is the proposal from NGN?

In this session members explored whether NGN should advocate for their voluntary target of repairing gas escapes within 7-28 days (89% for 7 days and 98% for 28 days) to be a national performance target, with penalties for poor performance and rewards for exceeding targets. The proposal aims to reduce the environmental impact of gas leakage, improve service reliability and keep bills as low as possible. NGN wouldn't raise customer bills in relation to this proposal.

### Is it NGN's role to advocate for driving up standards across the industry?

#### Votes

Overall, members voted for this measure to be included in NGN's business plan. 37 members voted - 22 members (59.4%) voted for, nine members (24.3%) voted against and six members (16.2%) were undecided.

#### NGN has a vested interest in driving up standards

This was seen as both a reason for and against this being NGN's role. There was agreement amongst some members that standards should increase and that NGN having a vested interest and examples of good practice in this area could therefore be a positive in them advocating for this. However, others put forward that this should be done by an impartial body and NGN having a vested interest negates this. There were also questions on and concern over NGN's incentive to lead on this measure.

### **It is a shared responsibility**

Some said that it is a shared responsibility and it may be NGN's role to advocate for higher standards, with better performing networks like NGN bridging any gaps by "buddying up" with poorer performing networks to encourage higher standards.

**Ofgem holds the responsibility** - Many members put forward that they would expect this responsibility to lie with Ofgem.

### **Considerations in favour of this proposal**

#### **Environmental protection is a positive**

More efficient and effective response to repairing gas escapes could mean less gas leakage, which would reduce the potential environmental harm.

#### **It could have a positive knock-on effect on other standards**

NGN raising standards could create positive competition amongst other companies, which in turn could help to raise standards in other areas, leading to better services and customer service overall.

### **Considerations against this proposal**

#### **Concerns over cumulative/hidden costs**

Though outlined that this measure wouldn't add more to customer's bills, some members were concerned that it could lead to cumulative costs and higher charges in the long run.

#### **Is it the right target?**

Some members felt that the targets of seven and then 28 days shouldn't be so far apart.

Some members put forward that NGN should be measuring how much gas is released in total, rather than how quickly they're responding to the leak.

Others suggested it is important to put preventative measures in place, like checking the pipework more often.

### **Additional Considerations**

Some members asked whether NGN customers are paying more for a better service than other areas. When participants were asked in response to this if they would rather pay less and possibly get a poorer service, they said they would prefer a better service overall and are already paying for that anyway.

#### **Fairness**

Members feel that economic development varies across the UK, which affects people's ability to pay for their service, so NGN should be aware of this when driving up standards:

*"Not all [of the] UK have [the] same economic development. NGN needs a feasible business plan in order to ensure that discrepancies between regions would be minimal... if they [NGN] want to impose this standard can they make sure that it would be proportional?"*

## 1.2. Discussion on Restoring Gas Supplies

### **What is the proposal from NGN?**

In this session, members discussed NGN's proposal to introduce additional training for some of NGN's workforce to restore gas supplies after a gas leak. NGN have already trained some of their workforce to restore gas supplies after a gas leak, making it possible to ensure safety of the gas meter supply as well as reconnecting to appliances reliant on gas. This means what usually requires two visits can be done in one visit, and gas can be restored to customer's appliances within two hours of reconnecting to the gas meter. NGN propose to scale-up this workforce training and therefore service availability. This would add a minimum of 50p to the average annual bill.

### **Votes**

Overall, members voted against this measure. 37 members voted in total - 12 members (32.4%) voted for, 20 members (54.1%) voted against and five members (13.5%) were undecided.

### **Is the cost justifiable to customers?**

Some members felt that 50p across the year is a small amount, so it feels affordable. Others were concerned over the cumulative cost if you don't personally need this support. Some members said they have had gas for 25 years without getting cut off and "that's a lot of 50p's".

Some members said it depends on:

- What the issue is and how much it costs in relation to the workforce needed.
- Whether you're on a low income and that for some customers this may not be ok in relation to other rising costs associated with the cost of living crisis.
- As long as the costs are kept low and costs are all inclusive.
- Whether there are other alternatives to consider.

### **Is it the customer's responsibility?**

Some participants felt it is unfair to expect customers to pay for the upskilling of staff and wondered if NGN could fund this project using their own profit. Some members questioned why NGN would need to charge customers, as they believe that 'NGN should save costs through this measure halving the workforce needed to respond to a gas leak'. These members were concerned that this felt like a "hidden tax".

## 1.3. Discussion on Services Beyond the Meter

### **What is the proposal from NGN?**

In this session, members explored services beyond NGN's traditional role as a Gas Distributor, in response to Ofgem encouraging networks to become more active in providing Carbon Monoxide safety advice and offering funding to provide 'services beyond the meter'. Some are new services and some would be expanding on services NGN already has in place. These are:

## 1.3.1. Carbon Monoxide Awareness

### **What is the proposal from NGN?**

This proposed service would expand NGN's existing carbon monoxide awareness programme. This would incur a cost of up to 10p on the average annual bill.

### **Votes**

Overall, members voted for this measure. 36 members voted in total - 22 members (61.1%) voted for, 12 (33.3%) voted against and 2 (5.6%) were undecided.

### **Is this NGN's role?**

Some members felt that this is NGN's role as their central position could be an advantage.

Some members put forward that this is a shared responsibility and though it may be partially NGN's role, perhaps the government should lead on this, with energy companies also contributing to the funding, given their profit margins:

*“Gas provider profit is obscene therefore should funding be used for new initiatives like this?”*

Other members did not feel it was NGN's role as there are already other bodies that do this work, like the fire service, health visitors, councils, schools & community groups. Some members felt that pressure should be placed in particular on health services to take responsibility for raising Carbon Monoxide awareness. Some members pointed out that Carbon Monoxide is caused by the customer's appliance and this is therefore the customer's responsibility.

### **Is the cost justifiable to customers?**

Many members felt the cost was justifiable given the safety factors and that they were willing to pay to protect people more vulnerable to Carbon Monoxide exposure. Some members didn't feel didn't feel the cost was justifiable as they would personally benefit and it is only likely to happen once in 44 years. Some members didn't feel they had enough quantifiable knowledge on how much it would cost.

### **Are there risks associated with not doing this?**

Members pointed out that there's a risk to life if NGN were not to implement this measure, particularly for vulnerable people and young families. There is also a risk of leaving customers without heating during winter.

## 1.3.2. Carbon Monoxide Investigation

### **What is the proposal from NGN?**

This proposed service would expand the upskilling of NGN's workforce to investigate and isolate reports of suspected Carbon Monoxide, avoiding the need for a certified Gas Safe Registered engineer (saving of £350). This would incur a cost of 11-50p on the average annual bill.



## **Votes**

More members voted for this measure than against it, however some members were undecided, therefore less than 50% of members voted for this measure. 37 members voted in total - 16 members (43.2%) voted for, 13 members (35.1%) voted against and 8 members (21.6%) were undecided.

### **Is this NGN's role?**

Some members felt that it should be NGN's role as they are there anyway, so it is convenient for them to take this on.

As with Carbon Monoxide awareness, some members felt energy companies and suppliers share the responsibility and should also be contributing to the cost. It was also reiterated that Carbon Monoxide is caused by the customer's appliance and this is therefore the customer's responsibility to maintain.

Some members didn't feel it was NGN's role, however they would still be happy to support this measure.

### **Is the cost justifiable?**

As with Carbon Monoxide awareness, some members felt safety is an important consideration, and therefore the costs are justifiable. Others felt the cost felt high for training 5% of engineers, though they did feel that some engineers should be trained.

### **Are there risks associated with not doing this?**

Some members pointed out that engineers are in a difficult position if they don't have the training to support customers. Others were concerned that not having NGN engineers trained to support might mean you might lead to a rogue trader doing the work instead, which could leave customers more vulnerable.

### **Could it go further?**

Some members felt that the target to scale up training to reach 14% of their engineers doesn't go far enough. Others put forward that NGN's training should go further as they believe the training should be certified and engineers should also be able to check connections to the meter.

## **1.3.3. Appliance Repairs and Replacements**

### **What is the proposal from NGN?**

This proposed service would expand workforce upskilling to repair / replace gas appliances for customers who can't afford to do the work themselves (an estimated minimum of 20% of NGN customers). This would incur a cost of 11-50p on the average annual bill.

## **Votes**

Overall, members voted against this measure. 37 members voted in total - 12 members (21.6%) voted for and 25 members (67.6%) voted against.

### **Is this NGN's role?**

The majority of one group felt that yes, this is NGN's role to fund the repair/replacement of gas appliances for eligible customers who cannot afford to do the work themselves, for all the reasons outlined in the proposal brief.

Some members felt that it may be beneficial for NGN to play this role as it would support continuity of customer support.

Some members did not feel this is NGN's role and the responsibility instead lies with Ofgem and energy suppliers, with Ofgem holding responsible for putting pressure on energy suppliers to play this role. Other members felt that it is not NGN's role as charities already support more vulnerable customers in this area. However, some members did feel that it is NGN's role to signpost or refer customers for support.

### **Are there risks associated with not doing this?**

Though the majority of members voted against this measure, some participants pointed out that some people may fall through the cracks if they are only referred for support.

### **Is the cost justifiable to customers?**

Many members across the different groups didn't feel the cost should be placed on customers. Some members in one of the groups put forward that energy suppliers should fund this measure.

## **1.3.4. Energy Efficiency and Advice**

### **What is the proposal from NGN?**

Currently NGN signposts customers to energy efficiency advice where needed. This new service would go beyond this by NGN 'First Call Operatives' offering direct advice to customers when called out to gas emergencies. This new service would incur a cost of up to 10p on the average annual bill.

### **Votes**

Overall, members voted against this measure. This measure received the least amount of support across all measures. 37 members voted - eight members (21.6%) voted for, 28 members (65.7%) voted against and one member (2.7) was undecided.

### **Is this NGN's role?**

Some members felt this is NGN's role and that it should be general practice.

Others said it may be NGN's responsibility if the customer is vulnerable and doesn't have access to support. However, they would need to be mindful not to overstep boundaries and to check first if the customer would like the support.

Many members did not feel this was NGN's role. Some members felt that it is the customer's individual responsibility to be proactive in finding this information out themselves or getting support from friends and family. Some members felt that there is already enough information out there to access, that it is well covered by other agencies and that people are easily able to access these

services. Others felt the responsibility lies elsewhere with the government and energy suppliers, but that it may be NGN's responsibility to lobby for this.

### **Is the cost justifiable to customers?**

Many members felt that the cost wasn't justifiable, as it is too high for what it is. Some said this is because only 900 customers would be reached. Others felt the cost seems too high a figure for training costs. A suggestion was made that a relief fund should be created from contributions by energy providers, appliance manufacturers, government and customers to help fund this.

## **1.3.5. Gas Safety Checks**

### **What is the proposal from NGN?**

This would be a new service, offering free gas safety checks to customers on the Priority Services Register, where identified through the course of their day-to-day work. This would be a preventative measure, to support safety and heating for vulnerable customers. This new service would incur a cost of 11-50p on the average annual bill.

### **Votes**

Overall, members voted for this measure. 28 members voted - 13 members (46.4%) voted for, 10 members (35.7%) voted against and 5 members (17.9%) were undecided.

### **Is this NGN's role?**

Some members said it is NGN's role as it is a matter of safety and this is their responsibility, particularly if someone is vulnerable.

Some members felt it is only NGN's responsibility if the customer is on the Priority Service Register.

Other members felt it is not NGN's responsibility as the appliance belongs to the customer, so it is their responsibility to maintain and that many people already have their boiler serviced regularly, which is sometimes covered by insurance or the council if in a council property.

### **Is the cost justifiable?**

Some members felt that customers shouldn't have to pay for gas safety checks, with many saying it should be for everyone, not just the most vulnerable. Some members felt that they would be willing to pay as long as it is offered to all customers, as everyone's safety is important.

### **Could it go further?**

Some members suggested that NGN should also check the gas meter as it is an NGN appliance.

# **2. Values, purpose and principles**

## **Introduction**

After lunch, members were introduced to NGN's core values, which have led to the formation of:

## 1. NGN's 'Purpose' Statement:

*"Our team work underground and overground to bring a warm glow to the North of England. Whether we're keeping our network safe and reliable, or pioneering cleaner, sustainable forms of energy, we're proud to ensure everything we do delivers value for our customers and benefits for communities."*

(Supported by the tagline: *'we are the network' and 'together, we are the network'* for engagement).

## 2. NGN's 'Purpose Promise' statements:

**Purpose promise one:** *"To energise everyday life and connect the North to a greener, cleaner future"*

**Purpose Promise two:** *"To keep people safe, warm and well and connect the North to a greener, cleaner future"*

## 3. NGN's purpose principles (the behaviours that customers want NGN to demonstrate):

Sustainable, Efficient, Accountable, Innovative, Digitalised, Collaborative, Inclusive, and Fair.

# Summary of members discussions

### On NGN's Purpose and Purpose Promise Statements:

NGN sought panel members' views on these statements and principles, to ensure they clearly articulate NGN's values, align with customers' views, and build an effective narrative for their business plan going forward.

Overall, many members felt that NGN's purpose statement was too wordy and some members felt that it would be better to keep to the key words. Some members preferred the first purpose statement, however other members felt that aspects of this statement didn't make sense. Some members felt that the second purpose promise statement sounds patronising and is an overpromise. However, others said the phrase "keeping people warm" sounds homely, which was seen as positive.

### On NGN's principles:

Members discussed which overarching principles they want to see from NGN as an organisation being demonstrated throughout the business plan and beyond; if there is anything missing in the principles and their definitions; what standards of practice they would want to see to know these principles are being upheld and how each principle could be measured.

Some members said that more than six principles is too many and that any more than eight would get complicated. Overall, **'sustainable'** and **'efficient'** and **'accountable'** seemed to stand out as core principles, with one group also viewing 'efficient' as a core principle.

Some members felt that 'innovative' and 'collaborative' could be combined. Others felt that 'digitalised' is more of an action than a principle, and that this action could come under the

combined 'innovative/ collaborative' principle. Some members suggested this principle could be named 'pioneering'. Some members also felt that the 'inclusive' and 'fair' principles are similar, so should also be combined into one principle.

Many members suggested '**transparent**' should be included across the principles or acting as an additional, standalone principle. Members spoke of transparency being about access to information, trust, morality and legal accountability. They also spoke of transparency linking to the 'Fair', 'Inclusive', 'Efficient', 'Sustainable' and 'Accountable' principles. Some members also suggested that 'positivity' could be an additional principle.

Further detail on member discussions on NGN's purpose statement, purpose promise statements and principles outlined below.

## 2.1. Purpose and Purpose Promise Statements

Members were asked the following questions in relation NGN's purpose and 'purpose promise' statements:

1. How do these statements make you feel about NGN?
2. How does this balance with NGN as a gas transporter

Their responses are summarised below:

### 2.2. On NGN'S purpose statement

***"Our team work underground and overground to bring a warm glow to the North of England. Whether we're keeping our network safe and reliable, or pioneering cleaner, sustainable forms of energy, we're proud to ensure everything we do delivers value for our customers and benefits for communities."***

(Supported by the tagline: '*we are the network*' and '*together, we are the network*' for engagement)

**"a warm glow"** - some members thought this "*feels a bit twee*" and that it would be better to stick to the key words like "safe and reliable" highlighted in the purpose statement. They also felt this would give more balance in relation to NGN being a gas transporter. Some suggested an alternative phrase was - "*we undertake complex engineering projects*" - with some members feeling this would be more professional.

**"forms of energy"** - some members suggested it would be better to say "*sources*" of energy.

**Alternative tagline suggestion** - could be "*We Deliver Gas*".

### 2.3. Comments on Purpose Promise One

***"To energise everyday life and connect the North to a greener, cleaner future"***

Some members felt this promise is a bit *“snappier”* and *“better on the eye”*. However, other members didn't feel this statement made sense.

**“energise everyday life”** - some members felt this doesn't make sense and that the word “energise” sounds like a gym, battery, or energy drink and makes you think more of electricity than gas. Some alternative suggestions were to use the word *“fuel”* or *“deliver”*.

## 2.4. Comments on Purpose Promise Two

*“To keep people safe, warm and well and connect the North to a greener, cleaner future”*

**“warm and well”** - there were differing views on the use of this phrase. Some members felt this sounds patronising and is also an overpromise as NGN cannot directly benefit people's health. However, others said keeping people warm sounds homely, which was seen as positive.

## 2.5. Comments across both purpose and promise statements

### **Less is more**

Many members felt both the purpose statement and purpose promise statements could be shorter and more direct, keeping to the core message of NGN's purpose statement.

**“connect to the north”** - some members said this makes you think of trains, railways or the internet. Alternative suggestions were to use the word *“supply”* instead, to change the word “to” to *“with”*, or to use an alternative phrase that includes NGN in it like *“from the North, for the North”*

**“cleaner”** - some thought this makes you think of cleaning rather than a gas company.

### **Do the statements reflect NGN's core values?**

Some members put forward that neither statement makes you think about NGN specifically. However, of the two, purpose promise 1 feels *“a bit more NGN”*.

**Reliability** - some members felt that neither promise brings across the idea of NGN as reliable.

**Safety** - some members preferred purpose promise 2, as they felt it put safety first. However, another member thought NGN could put across more that they are improving the overall safety of the grid and making suppliers responsible and accountable.

### **Alternative suggestions**

In addition to the suggestions outlined above, some members suggested other words that may better reflect NGN's core values and what their service requires:

- *“Value”* could be included, due to the cost of living crisis.
- *“Efficiency”* could also be included.

## 2.6. Principles

### 2.6.1. Sustainable

**NGN Definition:** “NGN operating in a responsible way, to ensure that our natural environment, people and communities can thrive for the long term.”

#### **What are the standards of practice that would show this principle is being upheld?**

Members discussed different aspects of sustainability, including:

- **Sustainability of infrastructure**

This principle made some members think of building and home safety. Replacing all ageing pipelines was an example given of a measure towards sustainable infrastructure. Some members emphasised the importance of the sustainability of infrastructure in relation to building safety incidents like the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire in London.

- **Environmental sustainability**

Members discussed that this could look like NGN working towards being a net zero company by being environmentally friendly and using sustainable products, vehicles and services. Some members said that environmental sustainability is the key part of the ‘sustainable’ principle. Some members questioned whether gas is environmentally sustainable full stop, and whether other, more sustainable sources of energy should be used - like wind, solar and hydrogen. Other members felt that the government pledge of being Net Zero by 2050 wasn't feasible and should be repealed or pushed further back and that NGN should be more flexible on this.

**Financial sustainability** - Members spoke about this looking like NGN being a financially sustainable business.

#### **Future proofing**

Members spoke about the importance of NGN ‘future proofing’, so that they are an overall sustainable gas network that keeps running into the future. This included having an early intervention, preventative approach.

#### **What could NGN measure for this principle?**

Members discussed potential measures for the ‘sustainable’ principle looking like:

- Measuring targets and stretching / changing these to go further.
- Measuring responses to call outs.
- Measuring customer feedback.
- Measuring growth and forward movement
- Continually checking in on performance
- Doing an Annual Environmental Report, that includes statistics on lost gas and leaks.

## 2.6.2. Efficient

**NGN Definition:** “Achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense, without compromising the high standards of service that customers expect. By running our networks efficiently, we can deliver cost savings which are passed back to customers through a reduction in their bills”.

Many members felt this was an important principle. One group viewed this as a primary principle.

### **What are the standards of practice that would show this principle is being upheld?**

Members spoke of the ‘efficient’ principle being about NGN being the best they can be and ensuring they complete the jobs they say they will do. Members spoke about different aspects of what being efficient could look like:

**Efficient use of workforce** - Some members spoke of the balance of considering cost versus efficiency - for example it may be more expensive to use contractors versus staffing a service in-house, however this may balance out as it may be more efficient to get the job done using contractors.

**Efficient use of resources** - for example efficient use of raw materials and less wastage.

**Planning** - for example, pre-planned maintenance schedules would be an efficient preventative measure.

**Awareness and learning** - if it looks like NGN is not being efficient, it is important for them to be aware to learn why and make things more efficient.

### **What could NGN measure for this principle?**

Members discussed potential areas to measure for the ‘efficient’ principle being:

- Value for money
  - Time versus cost
    - Is the time taken to get jobs done leading to the best possible cost for customers?
    - Look at percentages, callouts and time getting to people.
- Customer bills - if NGN is being efficient this should result in bills coming down.
- Customer satisfaction
- Continuity of customer support
- In relation to wastage, measuring how much gas is lost (leakage and shrinkage) across how many miles are covered by the pipeline.



### 2.6.3. Accountable

**NGN Definition:** "We will take responsibility for our actions or decisions, and these will be backed up by evidence and justification."

Members spoke about the following aspects of what the 'accountable' principle means to them:

**Trust and transparency** - some members spoke about the importance of being open and transparent, with this also being linked to trust.

**Benchmarking** - meaning having a clear idea of what good looks like.

**Being held to account** - NGN being open to question and scrutiny and being accountable for 'outcomes'. NGN may not always be right, but the important thing is to 'hold their hands up' and apologise if they are wrong, explaining why something has happened, and taking control, fixing problems and putting preventative measures in place.

**Holding Ofgem to account** - some members felt that NGN has been impressive in holding Ofgem to account so far and they should continue to do so, as well as stressing that this is paramount to their customers.

#### **What could NGN measure for this principle?**

Members discussed potential measures for the 'accountable' principle being:

- Looking at positive feedback, for example through customer opinion polls
- Publicising what is going well and what is not and having penalties / fines in place for poor performance.
- NGN being independently assessed on their performance - however some members weren't sure who would make sure this would happen and expressed that they would need to know who would be checking.

### 2.6.4. Innovative

**NGN Definition:** "We are always exploring new ways of doing things, using the latest technology and innovations to address challenges and improve the way we work."

Members spoke about the 'innovative' principle meaning being the best at what you do, being smart, efficient and forward thinking, and being open to and keeping up with new ideas.

This could include keeping up to date with technology research and development and could mean seeing changes in how things are done, for example switching to electric vehicles.

#### **What could NGN measure for this principle?**

Members considered NGN:

- Looking at case studies
- Evaluating timescales

## 2.6.5. Digitalised

**NGN Definition:** “We will use technology to enhance our services, maximising the potential of positive impacts and mitigating against negative ones.”

Members spoke about NGN being digitalised looking like:

**Being digitised** - for example having a mobile app and using less paper.

**Up to date technology** - for example engaging employees in new ways to do things and making sure pipelines are updated, maintained and completed.

**Non-digital options** - some members pointed out that not everyone has digital means, so it is important to have different ways to connect with people, including face-to-face interaction and customer service. This would also show that NGN wants to engage with their customers.

**Quality assurance** - for example keeping registers up to date for those who need checks.

**Being streamlined** - for example using one person instead of three for a job.

### **What could NGN measure for this principle?**

Members discussed NGN looking at the following:

- Systems analysis
- Customer satisfaction

## 2.6.6. Collaborative

**NGN Definition:** “We can achieve more together. We will work together with our industry partners and experts outside of the sector to enhance the services that we provide.”

Customers discussed the ‘collaborative’ principle looking like:

**Teamwork** - NGN working together as a team.

**Customer collaboration** - some members felt NGN should also collaborate and engage with their customers, for example holding open groups where all parties can collaborate, like the NGN panel itself. This could also include educating the public, via social media, TV, leafleting or introducing “family days” to raise awareness and educate children.

**Acting on feedback** - Some members spoke about the ‘collaborative’ principle including NGN listening to, sharing and taking feedback on board.

**Managing difficulties** - some members said that working together can be difficult. They questioned whether NGN will be able to work together and also didn't feel that NGN hadn't said what this should look like or how they should be working together.

### **What could NGN measure for this principle?**

Members discussed NGN measuring feedback from those they are collaborating with.

## **2.6.7. Inclusive**

**NGN Definition:** “Ensuring all our colleagues, customers and communities have an equal chance to succeed, regardless of background or personal circumstances.”

### **What are the standards of practice that would show this principle is being upheld?**

Some members felt this principle “*should now be a given*”.

Some members put forward the idea that NGN could uphold the inclusivity principle by investing in charities, towards those who need it the most.

Some members spoke of this principle looking like NGN:

- Being welcoming
- Being inclusive in relation to gender and race
- Having affordable services
- Creating inclusive recruitment opportunities - to encourage equal representation across their staff, whilst also ensuring they have the right people in place for the job.
- Supporting their staff in an inclusive way - like upskilling their staff in areas they may not otherwise be able to afford, for example teaching staff to drive and ensuring the gender pay gap is met and tackled. This could mean staff feeling more valued, which could lead to better staff retention, showing that NGN invests in people.

### **What could NGN measure for this principle?**

Members discussed potential areas to measure for the ‘inclusive’ principle being:

- Feedback from staff surveys and performance reviews
- Customer feedback surveys

## **2.6.8. Fair**

**NGN Definition:** “We will treat everyone equally and ensure that no one is disadvantaged due to background or personal circumstances.”

**Equitable** - some members felt that this would be better to say than using the word ‘equal’, to expand this principle to have a broader meaning. Rather than treating people the same regardless of their background or personal circumstances. NGN would instead look at what disadvantages people and treat them differently according to their specific circumstances and needs, for example introducing means testing for support and interventions.

Some members wondered how feasible being fair and accessible to all is in practice .

## What could NGN measure for this principle?

Members discussed NGN looking at:

- Asking people if they feel they are being treated fairly.
- Whether they have good customer service, with external verification of NGN achieving this.

## 2.6.9. Possible Amendments

### Is anything missing, or should anything be removed or combined?

Some members said that some principles could be combined, or excluded. Many members referred to the 'transparent' either being included across principles or acting as an additional, standalone principle. Some members said that over 6 principles is too many principles and that any more than 8 would get complicated.

## 2.6.10. Possible Additions

### Transparent

Members spoke of transparency meaning and being related to:

**Access to information** - information being easily accessible in a practical sense, with factual explanations preferred over excuses. Members spoke about the importance of being able to access any information they made need, for example information on:

- Whether NGN are meeting their targets
- NGN specific data, for example on gas leaks, percentage of customer complaints versus satisfaction, costs

**Trust** - Having transparent access to information also links to trust. Members want to be able to trust the information being presented to them.

**Morality** - members spoke about the moral importance of being transparent, open and honest, particularly when targets aren't being met.

**Legality accountability** - Members spoke about transparency being an important part of being held to account in terms of legal accountability.

**Links to other principles** - members discussed links to transparency across many of the other principles, including:

- **Fair** - as being transparent is a moral obligation to the customer.
- **Inclusive** - this links to the importance of information being presented in accessible and digestible ways, for example having a clear website or presenting information in alternative formats, like using graphics in reports.
- **Efficient** - some members gave the example of the importance of transparency on staff turnover, as this links to efficiency of the service and therefore customer support and satisfaction.

- **Sustainable** - some members spoke about needing transparent information to be able to believe the numbers being presented to them on sustainability.
- **Accountable** - some members felt that transparency is an important part of being able to hold NGN to account.

### **Positivity**

Some members spoke about this being an additional principle, reflected through more marketing and involving the community - for example through family days.

## **2.6.11. Possible Combinations**

### **Innovative, Collaborative and Digitalised**

One member suggested that this combined principle could be named 'pioneering' instead.

Some members felt that 'innovative' and 'collaborative' as words are overused and too long winded and that they would expect NGN to be working collaboratively already. Others felt that 'innovative' meets their expectations and is what they would expect.

Some members felt that 'digitalised' is more of an action than a principle, that could come under this combination.

### **Inclusive and Fair**

Some members felt that the 'inclusive' and 'fair' principles are similar and should be combined into one principle. Important to customers within this principle would be:

- Inclusivity and fairness for all customers
- Having different ways to contact NGN and access support, with NGN having empathy and talking to people in the right way
- Feeling listened to and respected.

This principle could be measured by looking at customer complaints versus positive feedback.

## **3. What happens next**

The first version of the draft business plan will be produced in June 2024. NGN will continue to work with the Panel over the coming months to understand what the contents and commitments within that plan should be from a customer perspective, the final business plan is produced in December 2024.

## 4. Appendix

### 4.1. Questions asked during session

**Please note:** NGN will provide answers to any unanswered questions below as soon as possible.

#### **Questions on 7-28 gas escapes:**

1. Is it possible to mention this in every gas bill from whichever provider? I.e OVO, Scottish Power etc.
2. What's the increase for and for whom?
3. Are other poorer performing networks making greater profits?
4. What rewards would NGN get if standards were improved?
5. What are the pipework standards?
6. Do higher standards mean higher charges? Will it lead to higher bills for customers?
7. Who pays for the wasted gas currently? Is it making bills more expensive?
8. How do you define the best? How do you prove that NGN rates the highest?
9. Why does the East rank lowest?
10. What is the 1.6% not done in 28 days?
11. Is the 98.4% in 28 days for all issues or are 98.4% left from the 91.7%?
12. Is the 5 year plan done once every 5 years? Should this be reviewed annually and reported to this group?
13. Why didn't Ofgem support this?
14. Is it unsafe to leave them like this? [Participants were reassured after hearing the answer that this wasn't an issue].
15. What is the total leakage in each area – is this like for like? And are NGN quicker at responding but maybe have higher leakage overall? Is it therefore not as good as it seems?
16. If incentivised – who gets the benefit? NGN or the customer?

#### **Questions on Restoring Gas Supplies:**

1. **Question:** How does NGN compare against what Ofgem are asking them to do?  
**Answer:** there is no target at the moment.
2. What happens to the 50p pot of money if not used?
3. If meeting targets at 60%, how long are the other 40% waiting?
4. What happens now? For purge?
5. How often does this happen?
6. If reducing the amount of people needed, why does it cost the customer more?
7. How many households are impacted on average per instance?
8. How often does gas actually get cut off?
9. What is the standing charge that this 50p is being added to?
10. How many engineers are there?
11. Is this just a bit more training?

**Questions on Carbon Monoxide Awareness:**

1. **Question:** Should gas suppliers contribute to funding new initiatives?
2. **Answer:** NGN do combined programmes. NGN do ask if it should be their role to solve problems or if they should do more lobbying of providers.
3. What do engineers do otherwise when they visit customers?

**Questions on Carbon Monoxide Investigation:**

1. Will anyone else do it if NGN doesn't?
2. How do NGN select the households (66 were stated)?
3. Are NGN creating more problems?

**Questions on Energy Efficiency and Advice:**

1. Who will be targeted?
2. What is the total cost from all these initiatives? If we did them all what would that cost be on an annual bill?

**Questions on Gas Safety Checks:**

1. Can the cost be brought down?
2. Can we scrutinise checks for efficiency (how long does it take)?
3. Can it be done quicker?
4. How are records kept for who requires the checks – is there a system in place?
5. Do we need more quality assurance or to build a record/register?
6. Why does the cost always fall on customers?

**Questions on the purpose promise?**

1. Is it an efficient use of time to be discussing the purpose promise?

**Questions on the principles:**

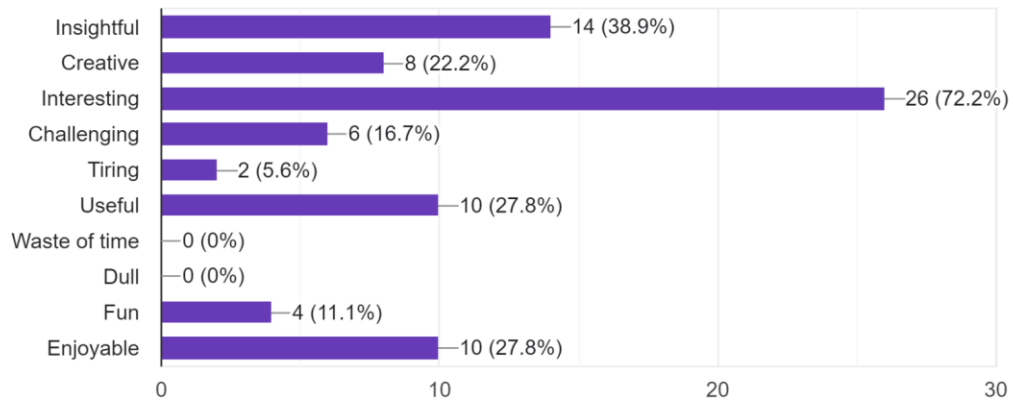
1. Do all the principles relate to the workforce as well as customers?
2. Collaborative - Who does 'industry partners' mean. Does this include e.g. charities etc? - It should include them, but sounds like it is just to do with business.

## 4.2. Session evaluation

Members were asked to evaluate the session through the following questions:

Choose 2 words from the list below to describe the workshop on the 23rd March

36 responses



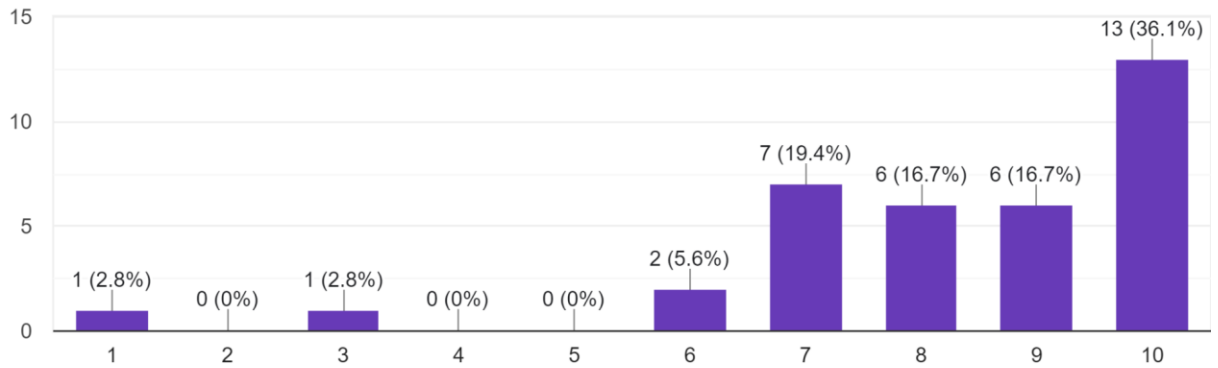
Please add one extra word of your own:





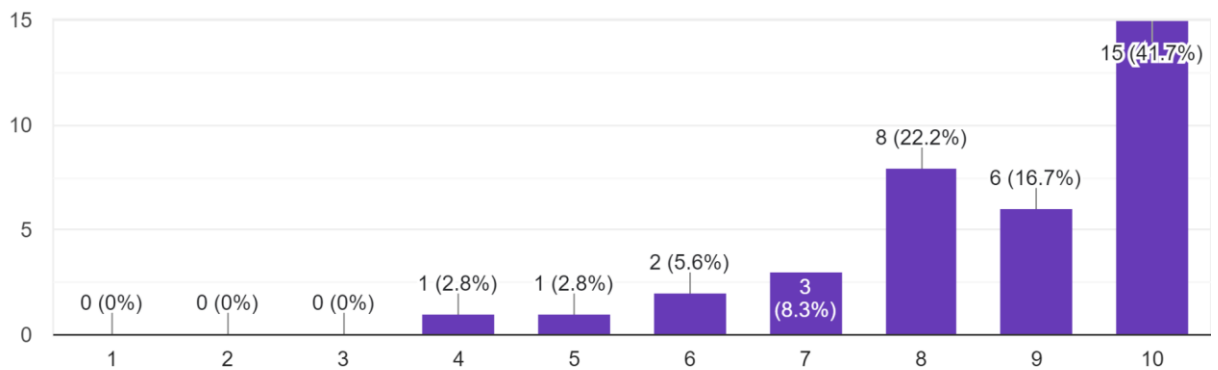
### Overall, how satisfied were you with the workshop?

36 responses



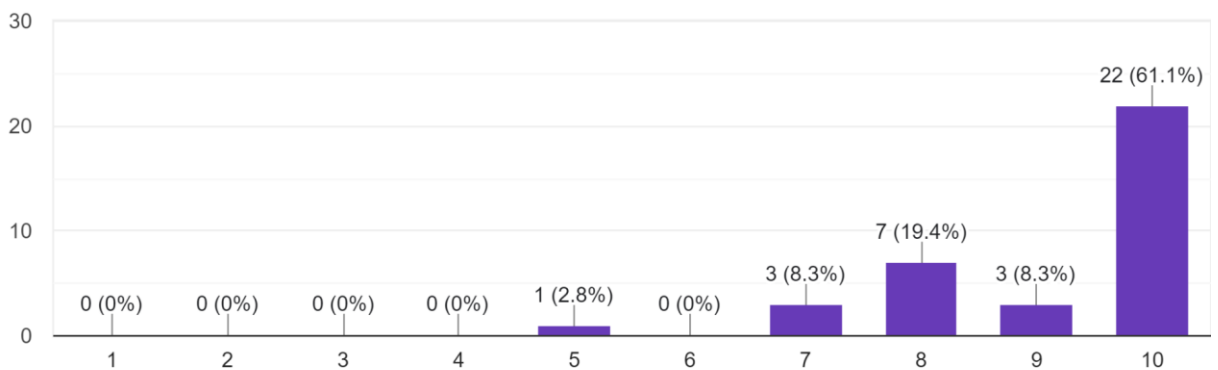
### How would you rate the discussions?

36 responses



### How would you rate the speakers / content?

36 responses



### How would you rate the group facilitator?

36 responses

