

Northern Gas Networks

Young Innovators Council



Session 4: Vulnerability Strategy

July 2024

Facilitated and written by Solutions for the Planet

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1. Executive Summary

Session 4 of Northern Gas Networks' Young Innovators Council (YIC) took place on Wednesday 3rd July 2024. The YIC session covered the theme of: **Supporting customers with additional needs.**

After briefly exploring what comes to mind when they hear the word 'vulnerable', and after a more detailed explanation of Northern Gas Networks' work with vulnerable customers from our Expert Witness, the Panel explored different forms of vulnerability, the issues faced, and the support needed.

For those who have experienced **a recent job loss**, the YIC emphasised that people might be in a short-term but financially strained situation. An anonymous and direct way to communicate with Northern Gas Networks would be useful. For those with **physical disabilities**, the Panel were optimistic that the issues faced will decrease due to technological development. For **non-visible disabilities**, there were plenty of ideas about the accessibility of information for neurodivergent individuals, and for **rural customers**, the Panel considered the compounded effects of physical exclusion, digital exclusions, and elderly customers.

The YIC were asked to consider **the future; will there be different vulnerabilities?** Unsurprisingly, the role of AI appeared at this point and the Panel compared the positives e.g., better interaction with rural customers with the negatives e.g., hard to engage with such technology. It was highlighted by a large proportion of the Panel that NGN should start planning for an increasingly elderly population. Thoughts around climate change and politics also arose here.

The Panel were also asked if they could **think of a more appropriate word to use rather than vulnerability.** Throughout the Session, panellists had provided insights on the advantages and disadvantages of using this word, and there were some strong opinions at both ends of the spectrum. Whilst no one conclusion was reached, this report offers some useful guidance to Northern Gas Networks on how to better use the word or perhaps find an alternative.

2. Overview of session

Background

2024 marks the fourth consecutive year of Northern Gas Networks' Young Innovators Council (YIC). The YIC continues to be the voice of young people at Northern Gas Networks (NGN). It provides young people's perspectives and Northern Gas Networks ensures these young peoples' thoughts and opinions are put at the heart of the business' decision making. Each session agenda is co-created by S4TP and Northern Gas Networks, influenced by the YIC's input on what topics they want to talk about. The aim is for meaningful and relevant engagement which provides a real opportunity for the YIC members to influence decision-making at Northern Gas Networks.

YIC 2024 Session 4: Supporting Customers with Additional Needs

Total length: 1 hour 45 minutes

People involved: 2 S4TP facilitators, 4 NGN facilitators, 1 NGN witness, 1 observer

Date and time: Wednesday 3rd July 2024, 5.15pm-7.00pm

Panel attendance: 16

Apologies: 14

Did not attend: 9

Objectives:

- To understand what 'vulnerability' and 'most at risk' means for future customers
- To understand what 'being a customer in a vulnerable situation' looks like
- To help identify what future areas of vulnerability might look like for this generation of consumers
- To test NGN's vulnerability strategy with future customers and stakeholders and identify where NGN need to amend or adapt their thinking to reflect future customers' expectations and needs.

Prior to the session the YIC were asked to read the following introduction to the session, and watch the accompanying videos:

- Video outlining NGN's work with vulnerable customers:
<https://youtu.be/qUBtUuR7UBM?si=VtIpgRe05dk18Kap>
- Further reading on NGN's Customers in Vulnerable Situations Strategy:
<https://www.northerngasnetworks.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Customers-in-Vulnerable-Situations-updated-strategy-June-2022.pdf>

Witness: Laura Ratcliffe, Vulnerability Lead, NGN

Proposed Agenda:

Time	Activity
5:15	Welcome
5:20	You said – we did
5:26	Activity 1- Word Cloud: What words spring to mind when you hear the word vulnerability or vulnerable situation.
5:36	Witness 1: Laura Ratcliffe, Vulnerability Lead, NGN to explain OFGEM requirements and NGN’s response & strategy in terms of categories & complexity of vulnerability.
5:46	Activity 2 - A day in their shoes: Empathy exercise. In break out rooms each group explores a different vulnerable situation. Loss of job, physical disability, non-visible disability, rural vulnerability? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of support, information, issues they may face. • Would you identify yourself as vulnerable? Are we disengaging this generation by using that term? (Some YIC members to co-facilitate) – Feedback to main group.
6:00	Feedback
6:10	Activity3 - Looking forward: Imagine we are in the future will there be different vulnerabilities? Global changes/climate change/ digital exclusion/AI/isolation etc. Discuss in a plenary session .
6:30	Activity 4 – Word cloud 2: Thinking about NGN’s vulnerability strategy can you think of a more appropriate/accurate word to use rather than vulnerability?
6:40	Final questions & FINISH

3.Attendees

Young Innovators Council

Amiee	Lincoln
Anish	Lizzie
Basmala	Luce
Dhanayus	Orla
Ellie	Ralph
Ethan	Rosie
Fran	Toby
Kelly	Wil G

Solutions for the Planet

S4TP facilitators

Claire Fitton

Lauren Gupta

Youth Insights Manager

Youth Insights Coordinator

Northern Gas Networks

NGN facilitators

Alex Brightman

Energy Futures and Net Zero Educator

Eleanor Glyn-Smith
Hollie Scott
Kati Sexton

Asset Risk and Strategy Analyst
Stakeholder Engagement and Project Coordinator
Customer Care Officer

NGN witness
Laura Ratcliffe

Social Strategy Programme Manager

Other

External observer
Carole Pitkeathley

Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG), NGN

4. Key discussion points

You said...so we have...

Hollie, Stakeholder Engagement and Project Coordinator at NGN, ran through some of the actions that the business has taken since the Panel provided insights at the last session.

Net Zero Awareness

You said...

Education is a key enabler to just net zero transition, and NGN has a role to play in this space.

So we have ...

Created bespoke proposals around the skills, education and training agenda for the GD3 period. We have been testing the proposals with our wider stakeholders and intend on sharing the proposal with our Citizen's Panel on 13th July.

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Vulnerability word cloud

Before diving in a little deeper, the YIC were asked: **‘What words spring to mind when you hear the words ‘vulnerability’ or ‘vulnerable situation’?** The Panel Members shared their thoughts in a Slido word cloud.



The Panel identified **different types of vulnerabilities**, such as neurodivergent and elderly, but they also pulled out some of the **emotions** associated with being in such situations, such as lonely and scared.

Some additional insights were also shared in the Post-Session Feedback Form. Some highlights are shown in the table below, and more details in Appendix 1.

Feedback Form Insights: 'What does customer / consumer vulnerability mean to you?'
The idea that businesses have to familiarise themselves with different vulnerabilities to assure that every customer / consumer gets the exact same treatment and so the business can build trust with the consumer / customer.
It makes me think the business consider the consumer as high risk and is concerned on whether they will be able to pay their bills to the company.
It makes me think of somebody who is going through a tough time and may need some extra help or support.

Expert Witness

NGN's Social Strategy Programme Manager, Laura Ratcliffe talked through the expectations of the regulator, Ofgem, and then went into more detail on the 10 vulnerability characteristics NGN have identified. This section was finished off with some examples of how NGN are supporting vulnerable households.

Supporting vulnerable customers



What Ofgem ask us to do

- Support fuel poor and vulnerable customer groups across our network
- Manage a large vulnerability allowance to assist with the above
- Support registrations to essential services including the Priority Service Register
- Engage with partners and stakeholders to ensure our work is well informed
- Ensure inclusivity and accessibility for support - reaching those who need it
- Measure, monitor and report a series of metrics, and showcase our work annually

How Ofgem see our role

- Collaborating with local and national partners including other gas networks and utilities to provide the right support
- Develop projects that provide wide reaching and impactful support to vulnerable households within our network
- Understanding and responding to the needs of customers across our network
- Raising awareness of PSR and Carbon Monoxide awareness to keep people safe and warm in their homes
- Ensuring that vulnerable customers are not left behind amidst energy changes and the transition to net zero



Vulnerability characteristics



We recently modified our categorisation for vulnerability from 5 broad themes to 10 bespoke themes which cover a more diverse group of characteristics to describe the types of customers across our network. We use this to understand how best to target our efforts and funding for vulnerability projects. The themes are often interlinking and overlapping.



How we support vulnerable households



Example 1 - Off Gas Warmth

- What is it?**
- Support to obtain first-time central heating
 - Funded through our Customer Support Fund
- Who is it for?**
- Eligible vulnerable households (low income, fuel poor, health conditions, low energy efficiency)
- How does it help?**
- Households not already on the gas network
 - Gas central heating is no longer generally supported by government funded schemes, yet sometimes, gas is still the most appropriate option for some households
 - Majority of those helped are elderly, often remote/rural, living in cold, hard to heat homes
 - Can reduce carbon footprint (for those moved from coal or oil central heating) and energy costs
 - Can support health and wellbeing - many supported have health issues which are worsened by the cold

Example 2 - The Carens Room

- What is it?**
- Online resource/website
 - Funded through the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMMA)
- Who is it for?**
- Supports Carers (carers of parents) who are the largest group of unpaid carers in the UK (c.4m)
- How does it help?**
- Support is available around the clock, and reaches those who have barriers to accessing advice/support - may be remote, time poor, and unable to otherwise access services during normal hours
 - Helps carers to feel less isolated, supported and empowered to navigate their parenting role - includes an online community of support from others in a similar situation
 - Access to advice related to caring role, as well as Priority Services Register information, Carbon Monoxide awareness, energy



A day in their shoes

An empathy exercise was undertaken during the breakout session. Panellists reflected on the issues faced and the kind of support and information might be required by people in different vulnerable situations:

- Loss of job
- Physical disability
- Non-visible disability
- Rural vulnerability

The YIC were also asked to discuss two reflective questions:

- Would you identify as vulnerable?
- Are we disengaging this generation by using that term?

The key discussion points are below, with full reflections in the Appendices.

<p><u>Loss of Job</u></p> <p>When someone loses their job, they will be facing financial challenges, and this might be compounded by the fact they lost a job due to an illness or disability.</p> <p>In this scenario, customers may not want to admit what has happened as it could affect their sense of pride. So, could there be some anonymous and direct way for these customers to communicate with Northern Gas Networks?</p>	<p><u>Non-visible disability</u></p> <p>Non-visible disabilities cover a range of possible situations e.g., neurodiversity, mental health, hearing impairments, speech impairments, colour-blindness...</p> <p>The Panel spoke very clearly and strongly about the need to make communications accessible to all. For example, the option of a detailed document, a shorter document with images, a flyer-style document, or offering larger text options. The YIC noted that using appropriate fonts and different coloured paper would also help those with dyslexia.</p>
<p><u>Physical disability</u></p> <p>The Panel thought that this characteristic could include those in wheelchairs / with mobility issues and include the elderly.</p> <p>Positively, they thought that the barriers faced by this group may well be decreasing thanks to improved technology.</p>	<p><u>Rural vulnerability</u></p> <p>Rural vulnerability refers to a few different factors: being geographically isolated, digital isolated due to poor internet connection, lack of post offices or banks, and often there are more elderly people in these communities who face further barriers.</p> <p>The Panel suggested that Northern Gas Networks prioritise those in rural communities because they might not have the option to meet in-person, go out and ask for help, or access stable internet.</p>

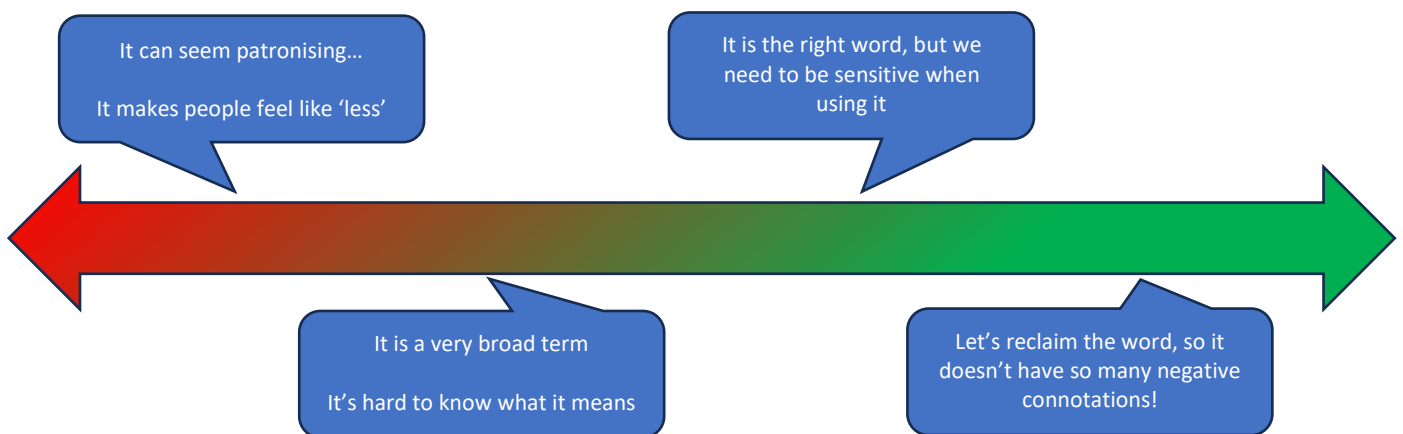
Would you identify yourself as vulnerable?

Some of the Panel bravely shared their personal experiences of ADHD, autism, physical disability, and the recent loss of a family member. They thought that these situations could make them more vulnerable.

One break out room began discussing the idea of ‘vulnerable households’ rather than vulnerable people.

Are we disengaging this generation by using that term?

There was a range of opinions on this question; some panelists thought it was completely the wrong word, whilst others thought it could work with a bit of further consideration. Specific comments can be found in the Appendix 4, but the graphic below summarises this diversity of thought.



Further reflections were also captured on the **empathy exercise** in the survey. A selection of insights is shared in the table below and more detail can be found in Appendix 6.

Other vulnerabilities, what are the issues faced and the support needed?

Bereavement, if a household happens to lose a major income earner they could be left vulnerable at a tough time, needing mental, emotional, and financial support.

Mental health vulnerability, perhaps not so obvious as physical disability which isn't always seen too – but help with managing money and bills can be linked to mental health and lack of confidence.

Digital vulnerability, this may be when someone is unable to access the internet or struggles to communicate and use technology which can lead to them being vulnerable as they are unable to access the information or help they need to solve important problems e.g., financial problems.

Vulnerability in the future

During the plenary discussion activity the whole group discussed the question: **Imagine we are in the future, will there be different vulnerabilities?** The points brought up by the Panel and in the Post-Session Feedback Form largely fell into the four categories below. Full details can be found in Appendices 7 and 8.

<p><u>Climate Change and Global Warming</u></p> <p>Sea level change is likely to affect many people – not just in coastal regions but also in other low-lying areas.</p> <p>Climate change, more broadly, will continue to impact on people’s lives e.g., heatwaves, and so this needs to be considered as a future vulnerability.</p>	<p><u>Political Change</u></p> <p>Government policy can impact the levels of vulnerability people might face.</p> <p>One Panel member gave the example of banning diesel cars which, whilst beneficial from an environmental standpoint, may well increase someone’s financial vulnerability in the short-term.</p> <p>Another example given in the conversation was Labour’s plans to nationalise energy. What will the effects of this be?</p> <p>Some panelists noted that there is an ongoing cost of living crisis, and therefore this is something to keep in mind for the ‘future’ as well.</p>
<p><u>Technological Development</u></p> <p>Technological advancements will help to reduce some vulnerabilities.</p> <p>However, we must ensure that rural areas are benefitting from these developments, otherwise there is the risk that they become more isolated.</p> <p>As we move into a more digital society, some people might fall behind depending on the phone / computer / model they have or don’t have.</p> <p>Panelists also mentioned the rise of AI and potential risk of cyber-crimes and online security.</p>	<p><u>Demographic Change</u></p> <p>We have an ageing population and so this group, who already have a range of vulnerabilities, is only going to get bigger and NGN need to be prepared for that.</p>

Is there a more appropriate word to use rather than vulnerability?

Having discussed different types of vulnerabilities, the use of the word, and the future, we finished this Session by asking the Panel: **Thinking about NGN's vulnerability strategy, can you think of a more appropriate word to use rather than vulnerability.**

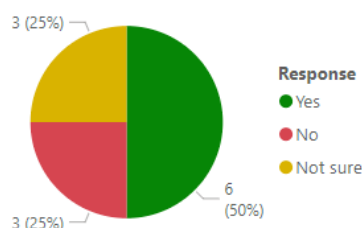


Based on the earlier conversation around whether we are disengaging people by using the word 'vulnerable', we already knew that some panellists thought the word *was* suitable and that NGN should try to use it more regularly, more openly, and reduce the stigma attached to it.

Other panellists thought a new way of describing these customers was needed. Based on the word cloud above, we can see a few themes emerging. Using a word like **'time'** or **'temporary'** reduces the feeling of permanence attached to a situation. **'Difficulties'** and **'issues'** describe something that is happening to a person, rather than a person themselves. Finally, the word **'support'** appears multiple times and perhaps reflects the action provided by NGN rather than the action needing to be done by the customer.

We also picked up some interesting reflection in the Post-Session Feedback Form. The Panel were asked **'Do you think that 'vulnerable' is the correct term to use when discussing this topic?'**; the pie chart below shows the responses. They were then able to follow up with suggestions of different language, which is shared in the table below.

Do you think that 'vulnerable' is the correct term to use when discussing this topic?



I would prefer susceptible because I feel [vulnerable] has negative meanings or connotations in a world where we are conditions to be independent and able to make our own choices.

I think that it would be of greater benefits to use a variety of terms for different vulnerabilities as it makes it easier for consumers to understand who is eligible and would make it easier to avoid offending anyone.

I cannot think of a better “catch all” term for vulnerable people, any options will depersonalise the problems each vulnerable person is experiencing.

Disadvantaged people.

Customer support / Support customers.

5. Key Reflections for Northern Gas Networks

With so much deep reflection, there’s a lot to digest from Session 4 of the Northern Gas Networks’ Young Innovators Council 2024! This section of the report aims to pull out the most salient points that the business might want to consider as they progress with their Vulnerability Strategy.

1. **Talking about communication with vulnerable consumers / customers**, the Panel put forward a variety of ways in which communication could be made more accessible. From detailed communications to more visual information, and from increasing font size to in-person communication with isolated individuals.
2. **Talking about how vulnerable consumers / customers connect with Northern Gas Networks**, the Panel suggesting having a more direct line of communication with the business. Rather than having to be passed from caller to caller or waiting for a return call. They also thought that anonymity was important for individuals to feel confident to come forward in times of need.
3. **Talking about how vulnerability might change in the future**, there were plenty of situations that the Panel felt Northern Gas Networks should be preparing for.
 - **Political Changes** that may push people into further financial difficulty or uncertainty about what changes mean for them.
 - **Environmental and Climate Changes** that could push people into vulnerable situations as a result of rising sea levels and extreme weather.
 - **Technological Changes** should also be kept in mind. The Panel did think that there may be a reduction in some vulnerabilities because of such changes, but that it could increase vulnerability for others such as those in more rural areas who do not have access to the technology needed.
 - **Demographical Changes** were mentioned by multiple Panel Members. In particular, they were concerned for the ageing population and needs that the elderly community have.

4. **Talking about the language used to refer to consumers / customers in vulnerable situations**, there was no clear consensus but plenty of insights that Northern Gas Networks should consider as they move forward with the Vulnerability Strategy.
- ***Some felt that the word was not at all appropriate*** and that the business should consider using a less negatively interpreted word such as ‘susceptible’ or ‘disadvantaged’. They also thought that including words like ‘temporary’ or ‘currently’ would make people more comfortable to seek help at a time of need.
 - ***Some felt that the word was too broad*** not only made it difficult for people to identify themselves as ‘vulnerable’ but also risked people mis-using the benefits available to them. They suggested breaking down the characteristics more specifically.
 - ***Some felt that the word was a good choice*** but that Northern Gas Networks could do some work around ‘reclaiming’ it as something positive and something to be proud of. They suggested that the way in which the business communicates the word could be changed to make this happen.

6. Conclusion

This brings to a close a successful Session 4 in our 2024 partnership with Northern Gas Networks. The panel approached this sensitive topic with great maturity and have provided plenty of food for thought for the business to consider.

It was clear that supporting vulnerable customers is important to the Young Innovators Council 2024, and they felt that there are ways of continuously improving how Northern Gas Networks do this work. What was also clear is their concern for future customers, and the range of ways in which our changing world will affect them. Their discussion of the terminology used was very interesting and, whilst it didn’t point Northern Gas Networks to a specific answer, it should certainly prompt further reflection in the business.

We’d like to finish by thanking our brilliant Young Innovators and our Business Partners at Northern Gas Networks for another intriguing Youth Insights Session!

7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Feedback Form Responses for 'What does consumer / customer vulnerability make you think of?'

It makes me think the business considers the consumer as high risk and is concerned on whether they will be able to pay their bills to the company.

Someone in need of support.

Consumer - someone who uses a service. Vulnerable consumer- someone that requires help to access the services.

Customer support with issues regarding complaints and lack of information perhaps, or providing a more sustainable means of payment.

Consumers who are mentally/ physically unwell and unable to engage with the business at a more complex level.

Financial, physical or perhaps even mental health issues.

Weakness and hardship with any problem that they have, mental health problems (like depression or bipolar disorder), someone that needs more help, disabilities (like wheelchair users or people who have neurodivergent issues).

Customers who require more support than others.

Risk towards customers due to a business' decision, or think of at risk customers (eg, financially or physically vulnerable).

It makes me think some customers may have more needs than others, or need extra support in things. They may not access things like others do so may struggle, making them more vulnerable in society.

The idea that businesses have to familiarise themselves with different vulnerabilities to assure that every customer/consumer gets the exact same treatment and so the business can build trust with the consumer/customer.

It makes me think of somebody who is going through a tough time and may need some extra help or support.

Appendix 2: Detailed comments from the ‘a day in their shoes’ exercise, where the panel explore different vulnerable situations.

Loss of Job – Issues Faced	Loss of Job – Support Needed	Loss of Job – Other Comments
<p>A loss of job could mean poor finances and someone unable to pay their bills.</p> <p>Someone might have lost a job due to a disability, which further complicated their situation.</p>	<p>Could there be a way for someone to contact NGN anonymously for help?</p> <p>NGN should advertise that ‘warm spaces’ are not just for elderly customers, but for anyone.</p> <p>The Panel members asked if there was any emergency funding that NGN has access to that could support customers, and if there was an application that could be put in place for such a fund. But they also debated whether this is NGN’s responsibility or not.</p>	<p>People don’t want to lose their pride and might be afraid to share, but how else would they get help?</p> <p>There should be a more ‘direct’ line to support, rather than being passed around from caller to caller.</p>
Physical Disability – Issues Faced	Physical Disability – Support Needed	Physical Disability – Other Comments
<p>Physical includes wheelchair users, the elderly etc.</p>		<p>Due to the increasing use of mobile phones / online systems, physical disability is becoming less of an issue.</p>
Non-visible Disability – Issues Faced	Non-visible Disability – Support Needed	Non-visible Disability – Other Comments
<p>This includes mental health, sight / hearing loss etc.</p> <p>They might not have the confidence to communicate with NGN, or they might have a speech impediment.</p> <p>Someone might be colour-blind. And so, ‘our barriers are yellow’ might not mean they understand or can recognise.</p>	<p>Neurodiverse people may want shorter, less complicated snapshots of information whilst others may want very detailed information. NGN needs to be adaptive to these different needs.</p> <p>The Panel mentioned the example of party manifestos having one large, detailed document, one easy-to-read document with larger font</p>	<p>There may be a concern of being labelled as ‘disabled’ so the term might cause people not to reach out for support.</p>

	and pictures, and then one post-style summary. This varied-communications approach was reiterated by multiple panel members.	
Rural vulnerability – Issues Faced	Rural vulnerability – Support Needed	Rural vulnerability – Other Comments
<p>Some of the issues faced might be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not being physically connected e.g., lack of buses, post offices, banks - not being digital connected e.g., poor internet connection - poorer housing conditions - fewer job opportunities - higher elderly population 	<p>NGN should find ways to prioritise these people even though they are further away and less connected.</p> <p>People might want to know about the environmental impact of any changes happening.</p>	

Appendix 3: General comments from the ‘a day in their shoes’ exercise, where the panel thought about the support vulnerable people / people in vulnerable situations might need.

It is non-linear. Different things may make someone vulnerable to a greater or lesser extent depending on other factors / circumstances.

Perhaps a scoring system could be used to determine how vulnerable someone is?

There is a positive aspect; that technology advances will reduce some vulnerabilities.

Engineers visiting households could suggest to NGN that assistance might be required, rather than marking customers as vulnerable or disabled.

Could there be a survey sent out across the network to better understand the range of needs, the level of need and also to identify if there are vulnerabilities specific to certain areas.

Could there be a variety of options for people to ‘self-diagnose’ their situation as a given time in a kind of ‘self-serve’ support area?

The Panel thought it was fine for NGN to ask about assistance needed, but not to dig into too much detail with a customer.

There was some debate around NGN improving advertising around the support available so that customers can come to ask help...but on the other hand customers still might not reach out even if there is advertising.

A lot of people who are vulnerable feel that asking for support is admitting defeat. So, we need to figure out ways to break down that wall.

One of the Panel members suggested a 3-month 'free energy' incentive to encourage those who are reluctant to sign up.

Appendix 4: Students reflect on whether they would identify as vulnerable

One panelist explained the vulnerabilities that they felt they had and added that disadvantaged is a better word to use.

Another panel member shared that they, themselves, do not consider themselves vulnerable, but they would say that they live in a vulnerable household.

Some panel members shared that their experiences of ADHD and autism can be a barrier for communicating.

Another shared that the recent loss of a family member has caused a temporary vulnerable situation due to lack of understanding of billing / payments.

Appendix 5: Detailed reflections on the question 'are we disengaging this generation by using that [vulnerable] term?'

Yes, we are disengaging	No, we aren't disengaging
<p>People don't like to appear vulnerable; it might make them feel like 'less'.</p> <p>The word itself can appear as cold.</p> <p>It has such a large range of meanings and can be applied to different things so it's hard to determine what we mean by vulnerable.</p> <p>It can seem patronising and there are negative societal values attached to the word.</p> <p>Some Panel members had concerns that the term is also too broad and therefore some people might take advantage of the support available.</p>	<p>It doesn't disengage everyone because it does get used in a wider context, beyond NGN.</p> <p>It could even be used more broadly and cover wider contexts of vulnerability.</p> <p>NGN should work to remove some of the stigma around the term vulnerable so that customers are more comfortable using it.</p> <p>It is the right word, but we need to be sensitive when using it.</p> <p>The word doesn't need to be seen as negative. We should feel proud to ask for support, and NGN should be proud to offer support to people.</p>

<p>Some people might be at risk / vulnerable for a short period of time, so might not think about themselves as 'vulnerable'.</p>	<p>How can we reclaim the word so that it doesn't hold those negative connotations.</p>
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Appendix 6: Feedback Form responses for 'Other vulnerabilities, the issues faced and support needed'

<p>Loss of a relative. If a relative was the person that was organizing the Gas for the household. The sudden death may put them in a very vulnerable position.</p> <p>Locational vulnerability- climate change has varying affects on different locations. E.G. Coastal areas from sea level change.</p> <p>Young family - parents may have had to give up work to look after child. This can cause financial difficulties.</p> <p>Bereavement, if a household happens to lose the major Income bringer they could be left vulnerable at a tough time, needing this like mental emotional and financial support.</p> <p>Economic vulnerability: unable to afford basic needs (food, water, hygiene products). May need care packages/ discounts, these people might want job security and steady income.</p> <p>Mental health vulnerability, perhaps not so obvious as physical disability which isn't always seen - but help with managing money and bills can be linked to mental health and lack of confidence.</p> <p>Mental health conditions: listen to what they need.</p> <p>Short/long term illness .</p> <p>Social disability (eg people who live alone/older less technologically able people etc...). May need in person support or additional help.</p> <p>Those with learning difficulties, they could be illiterate or could just struggle with communication as a whole, they might need support in how things work and how to access the services ngn can provide safely.</p> <p>Digital vulnerability, this may be when someone is unable to access the internet or struggles to communicate and use technology which can lead to them being vulnerable as they are unable to access the information or help they need to solve important problems e.g. financial problems.</p>
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Appendix 7: Students discuss what **vulnerabilities there may be in the future**

Some Panelists thought that more people could become increasingly digitally isolated e.g., those in rural areas.

Sea-level change is likely to affect many people. And, not only is there sea level rising, but land levels are changing as well e.g., land is moving down in London. This could then also impact the infrastructure in those areas.

We are probably going to see new vulnerabilities, but we also might see a reduction in others. Over time and with improvements in technology, certain vulnerabilities would become less of a problem. They won't vanish, but they could get better e.g., technologies making access to information easier over time.

Banning diesel cars could cause vulnerability to customers who are reliant on those types of vehicles. So, thinking about when things are decommissioned or banned, this could push people into vulnerable situations. Even though the 'aim' is to do something good, it could cause some vulnerability.

Political change is also likely to influence vulnerability in the future as policies will change with those governments which could have unintended impacts on people. For example, the Labour party are talking about nationalising energy in the U.K., so what impact will that have?

The elderly are going to become a bigger group in the future because we have an ageing population and so we need to be prepared for that change.

Global warming and climate change are going to keep getting worse, even with the work we are starting to put in, and these will have impacts on communities.

Appendix 8: Feedback Form responses on what **vulnerabilities there may be in the future**

I think there will be new forms, but this will be made apparent as they happen, and NGN should not part focus on the current state of vulnerable people still in the north.

Yes, policy changes, climate change and a reduction of resources.

NGN could look into alternatives to natural gas (which it is doing) and plastic if the pipes need replacing as oil has a limited supply. NGN could work with policy makers and other companies to help reduce vulnerability and give help where needed.

I think there will be some change for instance the aging population is an increasing problem meaning there will be an increase in vulnerabilities related to older people. Changing climate will likely change the areas that are most at risk.

Yes, changes could be caused by anything from net zero campaigns to climate change. NGN will have to take a more flexible approach to different situations as vulnerability will differ across different areas.

I think there will be a lot more economic/ financial vulnerability. The cost-of-living crisis may cause these changes, as prices of necessities (such as food, toiletries, petrol) are increasing at an almost exponential rate and many are becoming financially vulnerable because of this. I think NGN may need to tackle this by providing affordable heating and gas options and ensuring customers are not being excessively up charged. I think NGN should be open about the costs of gas, and discuss alternative options for consumers who are unable to afford gas. NGN should be making conscious efforts to consider vulnerable customers whenever/ if prices increase.

AI will affect all aspects of our lives and this will be the next form of susceptibility, through cybercrimes or cyber help which is fake (like deep fakes already).

Asking people what they need and then just being able to give it to them, for example:

- Bigger texts for people that are visionally impaired or have dyslexia
- Different font and paper colour for those who have colour-blindness and dyslexia
- Online messages for those people that have dyslexia
- Asking people if/when they are struggling with things like gas and heating
- Talking louder if/when talking to a hearing-impaired person and older generations
- Talking quietly if/when talking to autistic people if they don't like loud noises

Anonymous surveys in areas to see how many require support, referral scheme for people to refer themselves to.

Yes, current social and political changes are changing the country and modern developments including aging populations are changing the demographics of the country. May need to set aside more time/finance towards resources for other vulnerabilities.

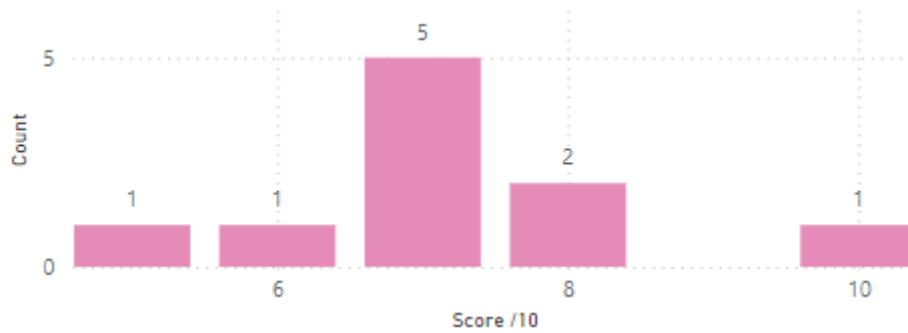
I think there may be different forms of vulnerability as we head into the future, advancements in technology etc. may cause these changes and NGN could get to know those higher priority customers to fit their needs as a person, making their services as accessible as possible.

Yes there definitely will be different forms of vulnerability especially as we go more and more into a digital society where people might fall behind depending on whatever phone they have or whatever technology they have at home however I don't think NGN can do anything necessarily right now to help tackle these issues as these issues aren't one that you can plan ahead for these issues will be dealt with when they are more apparent in society.

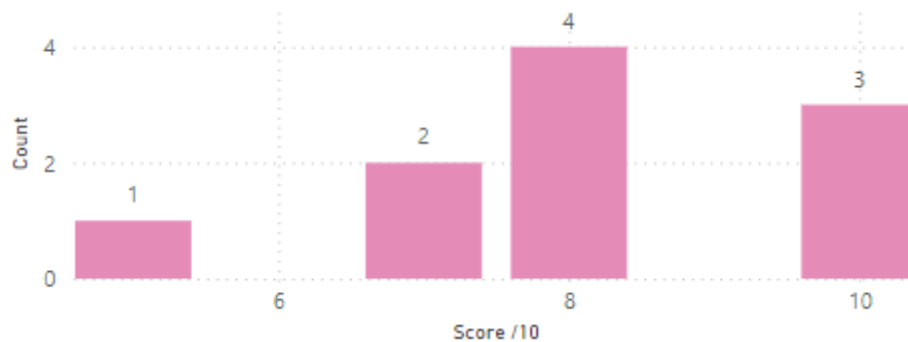
I definitely think moving forwards, with the development of things like technology more forms of vulnerability will be introduced, and NGN will need to be aware of this in order to

help support customers correctly and efficiently. This may be holding technology classes in order to help customers find information and use technology to their benefit.

Appendix 9: Feedback Form response for **'In this session, NGN was honest about its future choices and what my engagement will influence.'**



Appendix 10: Feedback Form response for **'I felt that I had the opportunity to contribute to the discussions in this session.'**



Appendix 11: Feedback Form response for **'It is clear to me how my ideas and insights are used to change NGN's business plans.'**

