

# Northern Gas Networks

## Young Innovators Council



# Session 1: Getting to know you and NGN's priorities

February 2026

Facilitated and written by Solutions for the Planet

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# 1. Executive Summary

As in previous years, Session 1 of Northern Gas Networks' (NGN) Young Innovators Council was primarily a 'getting to know you' session. It was important that the young people who could attend were given the chance to interact informally with each other as both old and new members, and the staff they'll be working with across the next year. They could also gain a basic understanding of NGN, and the motivations and running of the Young Innovators Council itself. Of the 42 YIC members for 2026, 33 of the young people attended this session in person, travelling from across NGN's footprint. This is such an exciting start to the year for this panel.

The panellists heard from John Richardson, Chief Operating Officer at NGN. John attended in-person to talk to the young people about why the Young Innovators Council came into being, some of the insights and recommendations that have already been gathered and embedded from previous years of the YIC, and the importance and impact of youth voice within the business. He was open about how crucial this year of the YIC will again be to NGN's business planning, recruitment and staffing at NGN, future-proofing of policies and processes. It is always invaluable for the panellists to hear from the senior leadership team at NGN, and they were grateful to be joined by John this year, and have the opportunity to ask him questions.

Another part of Session 1 this year were demonstrations of operational technology from NGN engineers. This engagement was a huge success because it showed the young people some of the work that is integral to the day-to-day work of NGN and gave them a glimpse of some of the job roles and their experience. They were also introduced to different members of NGN staff from different departments to those facilitating the YIC sessions, and so broadening their exposure to and interaction with the business.

The relationship-building activities were integral to Session 1. When introducing themselves in smaller groups, the panellists were asked to share what one skill they think they will bring to or develop on the panel this year, and continuing panellists were invited to offer one piece of advice to the new members. The 'Egg Drop Challenge: network edition' was the team-building exercise for this session, and it proved an enormous hit with everybody present. This activity was about communication and teamwork skills, as well as problem-solving in order to get extra resources. And after a few attempts off-target, every egg dropped without breaking!

In group discussions around NGN's nine prescribed business priorities, providing a safe service and creating sustainable opportunities for local communities appeared to be the strongest shared priorities among. When it came to ranking all nine of the priorities again *individually*, the data shows that providing a safe service once again emerges as the top priority for this group of young people. Interestingly, keeping bills as low as possible also placed consistently at the top, where it hadn't to the same extent in the group rankings. This highlights the importance of listening to individual viewpoints amongst this representative group. Supporting vulnerable people and a fair net zero transition follow closely behind.

Some of these patterns were echoed in the group discussions about NGN's sustainability priorities, where the young people overwhelmingly prioritise affordable, decarbonised energy and equitable access, as they did again when ranking them anonymously.

## 2. Overview of session

### Background to the Young Innovators Council

2026 is the sixth year of Northern Gas Networks' Young Innovators Council (YIC). The YIC continue to be the voice of young people at Northern Gas Networks, and the business ensures that these young people's thoughts and opinions are put at the heart of decision making.

This year starts with 42 YIC panellists, 15 of whom are continuing from last year and the remaining 27 are new to the YIC. This balance of retention and renewal is positive, as a number of long-standing members from previous years have outgrown the age group for this panel. It ensures sustained engagement with youth voice and relevance to the current climate and their unique perceptions.

### Background to the Session

The in-person session has become a highly-valued part of the Young Innovators Council's year. Both Solutions for the Planet (S4TP) and Northern Gas Networks leads can introduce the organisations and the relationship between them. It also means that the young people and the facilitators can interact face-to-face. Whilst the online delivery of YIC sessions is integral to access and the geographical breadth of the panellists, this allows for a slightly more flexible session delivery to help break the ice at the start of the YIC 2026 - especially with so many new members this year.

### YIC 2026 Session 1: Getting to know you and NGN's priorities

**Date and time:** Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2026, 11:30am - 3:30pm

**People involved:** 2 S4TP facilitators, 6 NGN facilitators, 1 NGN senior leadership team, 5 NGN operational technology demonstration engineers

**Panel attendance:** 33

**Apologies:** 9

### Objectives:

By the end of the session, panellists will:

- Understand Northern Gas Networks' role in the energy system and why youth insight matters to the organisation.
- Feel confident, comfortable, and part of the Young Innovators Council.
- Co-create how the panel works together.
- Gain a first-hand glimpse of the technologies and innovations used in NGN's day-to-day work and meet the people who use them.
- Provide early youth insight on NGN's business and sustainability priorities.

## Agenda

11:30 - 11:45 15 minutes	11:30 - Welcome: Who are Solutions for the planet & Skills Builder Partnership
11:45 - 12:00 15 minutes	Introductions to the panellists & hear from continuing panellists
12:00 - 12:10 10 minutes	Why the YIC matters to NGN
12:10 - 12:25 15 minutes	NGN overview: What we do and why it matters
12:25- 12:55 30 minutes	Egg Drop Challenge: Network Edition
12:55 - 13:25 30 minutes	Lunch: Informal networking & group photos
13:25 - 14:25 1 hour	Operational technology in the gas industry: demonstrations & try-outs
14:25 - 14:45 20 mins	YIC 2026 Group Agreement
14:45 - 15:05 20 mins	NGN's business planning
15:05 - 15:25 20 mins	NGN's sustainability priorities
15:25 - 15:30 5 minutes	3:30 - Wrap-up & next steps

# 3. Attendees

## Young Innovators Council

Aarshiya	Jamari
Akorede	Joe
Akshat	Josie
Alice	Kat
Anna	Liam
Ashford	Louis
Ayesha	Maryam
Divya	Mojisola
Dylan	Natalya
Ellie	Sophia
Ethan	Tahar
Florence	Toby
Grace Elvis	Vallerie
Hiba	William
Nora	Zahra
Isabelle	Zinedine
Ismail	

## Solutions for the Planet

Claire Fitton	Youth Insights Programme Manager
Fran Isherwood	Youth Insights Programme Coordinator (Maternity)

## Northern Gas Networks

Jack Cannon	Operational Response Engineer
Rebecca Croft	Net Zero Educator
Joseph Foxton	Technical Trainer
Mariusz Jastrzebski	Totex Technician Lead
Jarred Knot	Project Manager – Energy Futures
Alex Lawson	Net Zero Educator
Dave Owen	First Call Engineer
John Richardson	CCO
Hollie Scott	Engagement Coordinator
Kati Sexton	Customer Care Officer
Adam Spence	Operational Response Engineer
Jenny Wilkinson	Stakeholder Lead

## 4. Key Discussion Points

### Group Agreement

During the session, the YIC were introduced to the idea of creating a group agreement for this panel, with the aim of managing expectations, showing up for themselves and each other, and clarity between the young people, the facilitators and NGN. The young people were asked to reflect on this throughout the session, and then share their expectations in a feedback form. Solutions for the Planet has collated the YIC 2026 Group Agreement as follows:

#### What do I expect of other panel members?

##### Respect and inclusion

- Treat everyone with kindness, consideration and empathy.
- Listen actively to all ideas without judgement.
- Make sure everyone feels welcome, valued and able to contribute.

##### Participation and commitment

- Engage fully, contribute meaningfully and put in consistent effort.
- Be punctual, prepared and focused on the task.
- Follow through on group decisions, even when they differ from your own.

##### Collaboration

- Work together supportively and share credit fairly.
- Be open to new ideas, creative thinking and different perspectives.
- Communicate honestly, help each other out and aim to improve things as a team.

#### What do I expect of myself?

##### Openness and self-awareness

- Listen actively and consider different perspectives and backgrounds.
- Be kind, understanding and avoid being unintentionally rude or judgemental.
- Stay open-minded, empathetic and willing to learn from others.
- Respect others' ideas while confidently sharing my own.

##### Effort and growth

- Engage fully in discussions, activities and teamwork.
- Contribute ideas, ask questions and communicate clearly.
- Try my best, persevere and work hard throughout the sessions.
- Build confidence, deepen skills and embrace opportunities for personal growth.

##### Reliability and preparation

- Attend sessions, be punctual and come prepared.
- Be a reliable team member who includes others and works well with new people.
- Use leadership skills thoughtfully and support the group's progress.
- Compare ideas, appreciate different viewpoints and help create a positive team dynamic.

## What do I expect of S4TP and Northern Gas Networks?

- Create an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome, valued and able to participate.
- Share knowledge about your work and the organisation, helping young people understand the bigger picture. Communicate this clearly, openly and professionally, ensuring information is easy to understand.
- Listen actively and respond to contributions with honesty, respect and visible action.
- Provide opportunities for discussion, debate and breakout conversations that allow all voices to be heard.
- Support learning and growth, including employability skills, problem-solving and understanding the sector.
- Offer equal opportunities for involvement, contribution and leadership.
- Be open to ideas and genuinely consider young people's perspectives, solutions and feedback. Take feedback seriously and show how young people's ideas influence decisions and plans.
- Champion innovation and industry-changing ideas, especially those that support inclusion and sustainability.

### NGN's business priorities

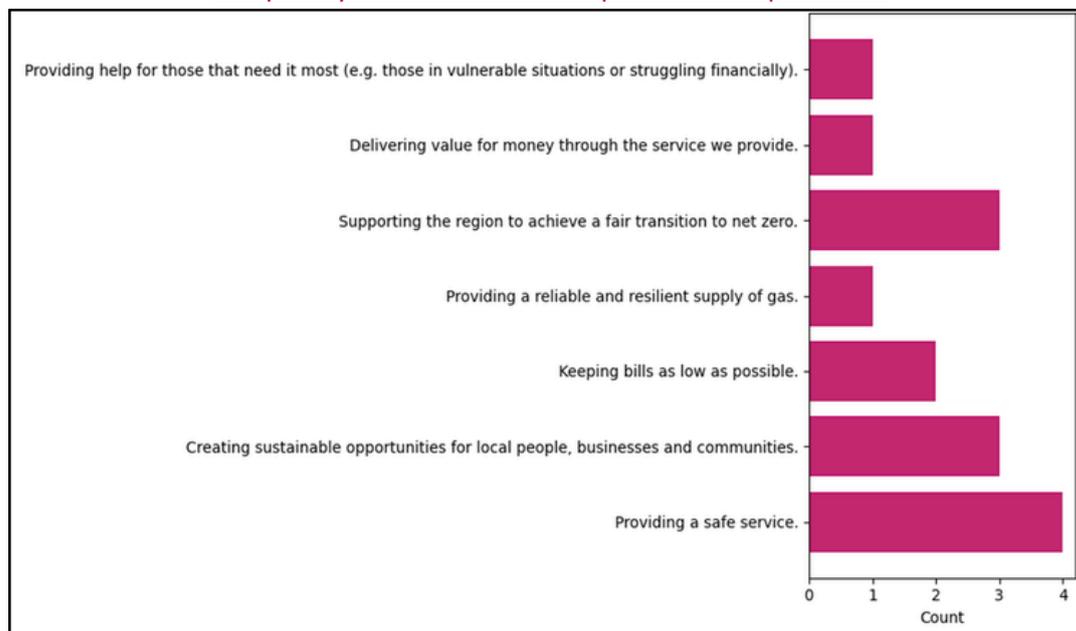
Jenny Wilkinson, Stakeholder Lead at Northern Gas Networks, then explained that NGN are always considering and looking at what is important to customers and consumers. She talked through the 9 priority areas for the business, as follows in no particular order:

- Supporting the region to achieve a fair transition to net zero.
- Keeping bills as low as possible.
- Delivering value for money through the service we provide.
- Providing a reliable and resilient supply of gas.
- Providing help for those that need it most (e.g. those in vulnerable situations or struggling financially).
- Creating sustainable opportunities for local people, businesses and communities.
- Supporting a thriving environment by minimising NGN's impact on the environment.
- Providing outstanding customer experience.
- Providing a safe service.

The panellists were then asked in their groups to decide and feed back on the **top 3 priorities** they think NGN *must* get right. Then, of those 3:

- 1 priority they would protect even if it costs more.
- 1 priority that they think might affect young people the most.

### Frequency of choice within top 3 business priorities



Within their groups, safety, community and transitioning to net zero appeared most often in the top 3 priorities. Having said that, almost every group chose a different ‘protect at all costs’ priority, with two votes going to providing a safe service:

- ▶ **Providing a safe service [listed twice as top priority].**
- ▶ Supporting the region to achieve a fair transition to net zero.
- ▶ Keeping bills as low as possible.
- ▶ Providing help for those who need it most.

Closer consensus emerged when the panellists reflected on which of the 9 priorities is likely to affect young people the most:

- 2 of the 5 groups chose **Creating sustainable opportunities for local people, businesses and communities.**
- 2 of the 5 groups chose **Supporting the region to achieve a fair transition to net zero.**
- 1 of the 5 groups chose **Providing help for those that need it most (e.g. those in vulnerable situations or struggling financially).**

The YIC were then asked to individually and anonymously rank each of the 9 priorities from most important to least important to them [Appendix 1], and once again providing a safe service came out on top, being ranked 1<sup>st</sup> 19 times out of the 33 panellists who voted. Affordability and supporting vulnerable people were also placed near the top.

**Safety is non-negotiable for the YIC: the young people expect NGN to prioritise it above everything else.**

**Cost pressures are being felt: keeping bills low and supporting vulnerable customers matters to the YIC.**

**Net zero matters: it is important to the young people, but only in line with safety and vulnerability concerns in so far as it supports those priorities.**

### NGN's sustainability priorities

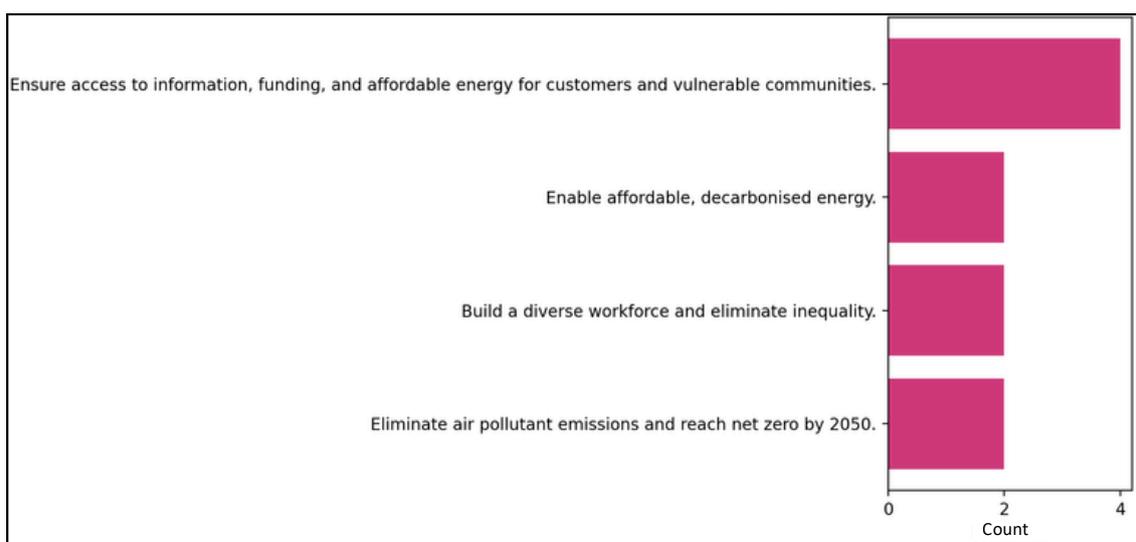
The YIC were then taken through a similar exercise with discussions around NGN's sustainability priorities. Jenny Wilkinson explained that Northern Gas Networks has committed to a sustainable future and has identified 8 'commitments' or actions that will ultimately enable it to be a sustainable company, as follows in no particular order:

- Enable affordable, decarbonised energy.
- Manage our land to benefit the environment.
- Produce less waste and recycle it all.
- Eliminate air pollutant emissions and reach net zero by 2050.
- Enhance access to opportunities and fair jobs.
- Enhance colleague safety and wellbeing.
- Build a diverse workforce and eliminate inequality.
- Ensure access to information, funding, and affordable energy for customers and vulnerable communities.

This time the panellists were asked in their groups to decide and feed back:

- Which two matter most to people your age?
- Which one do you think businesses focus on too much?

#### Frequency of choice within top 3 business priorities



From NGN's sustainability priorities, the YIC prioritised affordability and equity, even more than net zero goals. This chimes with the patterns from the business areas prioritisations, and perhaps reflects that cost of living is very much a concern.

When it comes to which priority the YIC believe businesses focus too much energy on, they mentioned eliminating air pollution and reaching net zero, managing land to benefit the environment and building a diverse workforce. This suggests that there could be a gap in the values between young people expecting support and affordability, whilst they perceive some businesses to be overemphasising emissions messaging.

Having said that, it is worth noting that in every case, the young people highlighted that it's not that these shouldn't be the focus of a business' sustainability goals - but rather that they should be inherent to the running of a responsible business today.

The YIC were again asked to rank the 8 sustainability priorities on their own using an anonymous form [Appendix 2]. In line with those from the group discussions, when ranked, the top 2 priorities were:

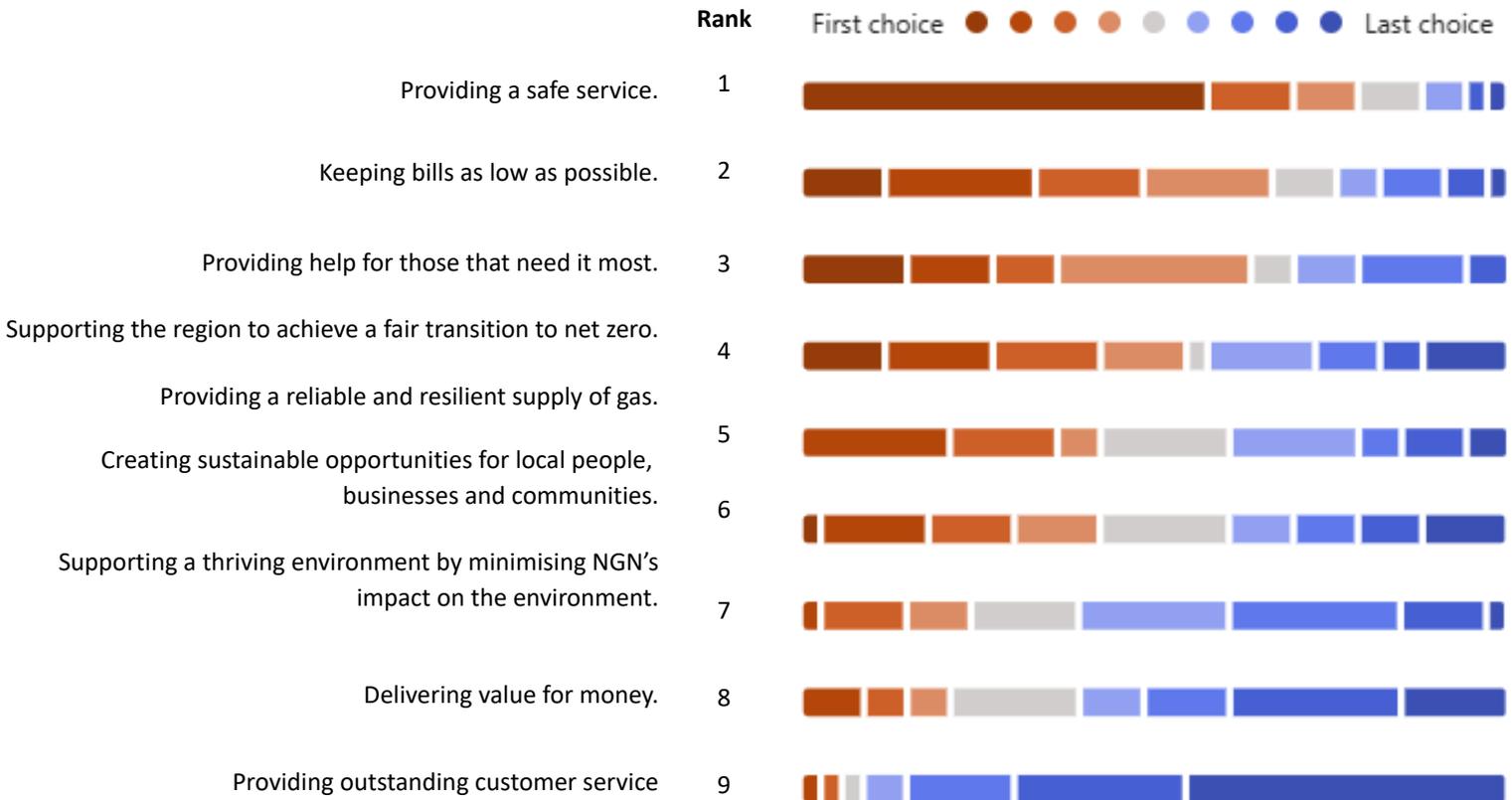
▶ Enable affordable, decarbonised energy.

▶ Ensure access to information, funding, and affordable energy for customers and vulnerable communities.

Eliminate air pollutant emissions and reach net zero by 2050 received an equal number of votes for most important priority as it did for least important priority, suggesting it remains a polarising priority for the young people. Given that 'decarbonised energy' is a key factor of one of their top priorities though, and that produce less waste and recycle it all ranked third, it's worth considering that the young people continue to value tangible environmental action.

# 5. Appendices

## Appendix 1: Results of individual ranking of NGN's business priorities



## Appendix 2: Results of individual ranking of NGN's sustainability priorities

