SSEN DISTRIBUTION

Annual Stakeholder Workshops

Virtual Events SOUTH

Full feedback report

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INTRODUCTION

On 23 and 30 September 2020, SSEN hosted two online workshops aimed at gathering feedback from its stakeholders in its central southern England licence area on the following five topics: delivering stakeholder-led projects; adapting services to meet changing consumer needs; helping the UK meet its net zero carbon emissions targets; maintaining a reliable and resilient network; and building a smart, flexible future network.

The workshops took place online and were hosted on the event platform Speakeasy. Each workshop consisted of five presentations given by SSEN representatives, each followed by discussion sessions in virtual breakout rooms. Stakeholders were also invited to participate in electronic votes throughout the workshops to provide their views on the issues at stake.

SSEN instructed EQ Communications, a specialist stakeholder engagement consultancy, to independently facilitate the workshops and to take notes of the comments made by stakeholders. Every effort has been made to faithfully record the feedback given. In order to encourage candour and open debate, comments have not been ascribed to individuals. Instead, notes have been made of the type of organisation each stakeholder represents.

The full presentation can be found here, with the agenda for the day on slide 7.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SESSION ONE: DELIVERING STAKEHOLDER-LED PROJECTS

The first presentation of the day was given by Graeme Keddie, Director of Corporate Affairs, Regulation and Stakeholder Engagement. He outlined SSEN's five core themes, as informed by stakeholders: driving improvements in core services; delivering in the public interest; enabling the net zero transition; supporting safe and resilient communities; and collaborative action on consumer vulnerability. Under each theme, he outlined specific examples of innovations and initiatives that SSEN had introduced, such as the launch of customer support via WhatsApp under the 'core services' theme; championing Fair Tax and the living wage under 'delivering in the public interest'; and supporting local authorities to have greater influence on network development through data sharing and Local Plans under 'enabling the net zero transition'. He then shared SSEN's thoughts on how further improvements could be written into RIIO-ED2 and asked for stakeholders' perspectives and ideas on ways to drive this change.

- According to the electronic vote by stakeholders, the most popular of SSEN's five core themes was 'enabling the net zero transition', with a score of 3.92 out of 5.
- This was reflected in the discussions, where many delegates affirmed that they had attended the workshop to find out more about how SSEN were leading the drive towards net zero, with a particular focus on storage, renewables and capacity for carbon-neutral projects on the grid.
- Stakeholders advocated greater communications and engagement across all five core themes, with many stressing the need for SSEN to broaden its focus to encompass education, training and engagement, as well as engineering.

SESSION TWO: ADAPTING OUR SERVICES TO MEET CHANGING CONSUMER NEEDS

Lisa Doogan, Head of Customer Service and Stakeholder Strategy at SSEN, presented the second session of the day, which focused on customer service. She introduced the six guiding principles of customer service strategy at SSEN: consistency; clear communications; making it easy; behaving responsibly; ensuring best practice; and enabling choice for customers. She then detailed some of the ways in which SSEN has adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring the workforce was kept safe and resilient while attending to the changing customer needs precipitated by lockdown.

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- Overall, 56% of stakeholders ranked SSEN's customer service between 8 and 10 (where 1 indicates 'very poor' and 10 indicates 'excellent').
- The largest proportion of stakeholders – 36% – went for option 10 (strongly agree) when asked to vote on whether improving customer service should be a priority for SSEN at this time.
- The pressing need for clear communication was raised throughout the workshops. This was reflected in the results of the vote on how important it was for SSEN to ensure that all of their materials meet the standard of Plain English, with 51% opting for 'very important indeed'.

SESSION THREE: SUSTAINABILITY – HELPING THE UK MEET ITS NET ZERO EMISSIONS TARGETS

Shirley Robinson, Head of Sustainability Strategy, presented the third session of the day, which focused on the ways in which SSEN is enabling net zero. She introduced the proposed five sustainability core themes, developed with stakeholders over the course of 2019: the net zero transition; enhancing local environments; inclusive service provision; investing in people; and serving the public interest. She went on to explain the use of science-based targets and the development of SSEN's Environmental Action Plan, devised to eradicate carbon emissions across all areas of its business. In all cases, she sought stakeholder feedback on how ambitious the zero carbon targets should be and asked for their views on Ofgem's minimum requirements.

- In the electronic voting, delegates indicated which elements of SSEN's Environmental Action Plan should have accelerated targets. 'Business carbon footprint' was the most popular element, with 4.56 out of 5 (with 5 as the most important), closely followed by 'supply chain management' and 'nitrous oxide, air quality and noise', both on 4.45 out of 5.
- Delegates expressed concern over leadership from both central government and the energy industry on reaching net zero carbon by 2050 and urged a step change in strategy and implementation in the next price review period.
- Stakeholders were clear that they wanted SSEN to be as ambitious as possible with its net zero targets and Environmental Action Plan and did not feel that Ofgem's requirements were in line with the country's target to meet net zero by 2050.

SESSION FOUR: MAINTAINING A RELIABLE AND RESILIENT NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE

Mark Kelly, Head of Asset Data at SSEN, introduced the fourth segment. Mark revealed the ranking of resilience and reliability priorities according to feedback from business and domestic customers, which had placed 'restore supply as quickly as possible in the event of a power cut' as the top priority. He

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went on to explain how SSEN were focusing on ensuring reliability and resilience for the future, reinforcing the network to cater for greater electrification and distributed generation. It was explained that this approach informs the company's work on investment options, with four different paths which measure increased costs against greater reliability and a network that supports net zero and is fit for the future.

- Restoring electricity supply as quickly as possible in the event of a power cut was the most important priority for stakeholders under network reliability, scoring 7.47 out of 9, where 9 was the most important.
- Delegates were most keen to discuss how resilience and reliability could, and should, be improved to prepare the network for more renewables. This was reflected in the electronic voting, where the priority 'maintain continuous supply as electricity demand increases' scored 7.43 out of 9.
- Stakeholders advocated the most accelerated options (C and D) regarding investment in future reliability, urging ambition in increasing grid capacity to reach net zero.
- In the vote on the factors that would most affect reliability going forward, transport decarbonisation came out ahead, with 3.31 out of 4, where 4 was most important.

SESSION FIVE: BUILDING A SMART, FLEXIBLE NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE

Stewart Reid, Head of Future Networks at SSEN, presented the final session of the day. He outlined SSEN's participation in the Open Networks Project, explaining how collaboration between DNOs and other expert bodies, such as the Centre for Sustainable Energy, was driving the creation of smart networks to enable net zero through technology and innovative services such as flexibility, smart grids, superfast electricity and storage. He stressed that any transition had to be smart but fair, leaving no customers behind, and highlighted areas of the UK where uptake of these services was predicted to be slow. To mitigate this, SSEN intended to propose a market stimulation fund to Ofgem, which would enable investment to create markets for innovative services in specified, targeted areas.

- Delegates agreed that SSEN should follow the recommendations of the Open Networks Project, stressing the critical roles of research, development, collaboration between DNOs and an evidence-based approach in building a smart network.
- Stakeholders advocated wider engagement with other partners on the project, including small-scale innovators and businesses, fuel poverty charities, local authorities and international experts.

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- Stakeholders were supportive of a market stimulation fund, particularly if it could drive take-up of flexibility services among domestic customers and enable more community energy projects.

WRITTEN FEEDBACK

After the workshops, stakeholders were asked to complete a short feedback form. Some of the key findings are shown below:

- 90% of attendees who filled out a feedback form told us that they found the workshop either 'very interesting' or 'interesting'.
- 90% of stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed that they had an opportunity to make points and ask questions, and 80% of attendees agreed that the right topics were covered on the day.
- 60% thought EQ Communications' facilitation was 'very good', whilst 35% opted for 'good'. No stakeholders chose 'poor' or 'very poor'.
- 75% of stakeholders either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the online workshop format was easy to use and accessible, while 10% disagreed, strongly or otherwise.

SESSION ONE: DELIVERING STAKEHOLDER-LED PROJECTS

SUMMARY

Delegates attended the workshop with a range of interests and concerns. Representatives from the charity and NGO sectors were particularly keen to discuss vulnerability and forging new partnerships that could encourage people to sign up to the Priority Services Register (PSR). Many also recognised the need to educate consumers on energy efficiency, especially in the light of the energy transition. Renewables and the push for net zero were also high on the agenda, with some stakeholders urging greater data sharing between different sectors with a view to enacting decarbonisation through collaborative methods. Others expressed concern about a lack of capacity on the grid to support their renewable projects and initiatives, particularly regarding storage and the wait time for new connections.

During the conversation on driving improvements in core services, there was a broad consensus that communications and engagement needed to become a core part of SSEN's business as the drive towards net zero gathers pace. The point was made that while a linear approach with one-way power flows was used in the past, the picture was now more like a Venn diagram, with customers needing power, access to power and, if they so choose, the ability to generate and store power. This means shifting the focus from engineering to encompass greater engagement and education. From this point, delegates stated that SSEN could no longer limit its role to that of a neutral facilitating party, but must become a key driver, with a leadership role. Others emphasised the importance of driving improvements in connections and constraints, suggesting that better partnerships with local authorities could achieve this and improve education in this area, and advocating a wholesale investment programme to improve SSEN's current asset base.

Stakeholders once again highlighted the importance of communications and engagement as the discussion moved to delivering in the public interest. Stakeholders urged greater transparency and more dialogue with local authorities, with many recognising the increasingly complex nature of the energy landscape and advising SSEN to respond by providing education and customer support moving forward. Other delegates suggested introducing more apprenticeship schemes to get younger people into work, as there were concerns around a recession post-Covid.

Communication was again viewed as a key area during the discussion on enabling the net zero transition, with engagement seen as critical in terms of developing a practical approach to driving

change in planning structures with regard to energy provision and generation in future-facing towns and cities. On this note, delegates suggested that SSEN should partner with local authorities and parish councils, in addition to local energy groups, LEPs, developers and other DNOs. Planning and relationship building were also seen as crucial to supporting safe and resilient communities, with many delegates calling for urgent action around collaborating with local authorities and communities in order to build resilience. Attendees stressed the need for a key technical contact within SSEN to enable partnership working and business planning on a granular level. Another key point related to the complexities of resilience planning with parish councils, often staffed by elderly members of the community who are now shielding as a result of the pandemic, changing our understanding of what is meant by 'resilience' as we learn from and adapt to the changes brought about by Covid-19.

1. Why have you attended today?

- "I'm the partnership lead in the vulnerability sector at Thames Water. My interest today is to give as much input as I can because we work very closely with SSEN in order to build links around our PSR." Utility

- "I'm representing a small climate change charity. We campaign and advocate for a net zero vision. I chair a renewable energy action group. We're trying to do something about the poor contribution of our district to decarbonisation." Environmental group

- "I have a passion for transforming local government, particularly through data sharing between different sectors. My interest is the mix of energy models, the net neutral, and as we move over to electric vehicles, how we're going to manage the amount of new connections. Also, how we'll make sure we don't leave people behind in this transition." Business representative

- "I develop solar facilities. One problem I've got is that we are right at the end of the line and many of my projects have been halted by a lack of capacity on the grid." Community energy group

- "I'm particularly interested in connections. SSEN's reputation with connections falls far behind other DNOs in the UK." Community energy group

- "I'm particularly focused on electric vehicles and the transition. I think additional engagement is needed in the proactive integration of energy storage. We need to reduce the need for increased capacity. At the moment it's still a postcode lottery for development capacity availability. It's currently a 12-week wait to get a quote, and this is a barrier to us delivering energy infrastructure as a council." Local authority officer

- "I'm a researcher at Oxford University, as part of their engineering and power group. I am working on Project LEO, an Innovate UK funded project. General interest in planning for a

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future generation system. Focused on looking at flexibility markets as a way to avoid large investments in the network to cope with larger technologies coming on to the grid." Academic

2. Driving improvements in core services: what should our future focus be? What type of initiatives and partners should we work with to deliver this?

- "Communication with the public and customers. Make sure that we don't go too much towards the internet so that we don't digitally exclude people. The alternatives need to be genuine alternatives." Charity / non-profit

- "At the moment everything is done in a linear fashion, but it's actually more like a Venn diagram. For example, core services making sure people have power and access to power. All of those things come together in terms of how a DNO is going to access all of these things. Make them accessible and user friendly. It's not really clear how we're going to bring the core services together. We need a much stronger system. It's going to be a big investment, but I can't see a roadmap of how you get from one point to the other." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "You asked if SSE is the neutral party in facilitating. No, they have to be the driver. They are the ones that are driving these things. That is the challenge, as far as I can see." Business representative

- "That is a huge step change for any DNO. They have always been up the engineering end, more with providing power rather than having the engagement with the public. They need to move more to the engagement side." Business representative

- "We want a continuity of supply. We just want to make sure that SSEN continue to work hard on making sure they know where their customers are if there are any issues." Charity / non-profit

- "I think SSE should be focusing heavily on how it's going to be supplying all of this electricity throughout their system. Projections are increasingly high. The industry will have to take on twice as much power as possible. So, making sure that is a priority over anything else." Developer / connections representative

- "In our efforts to encourage renewables, very often the main constraint is the proximity of the site to a good connection." Environmental group

- "More needs to be done with local authority planning departments looking at local and regional growth." Business representative

- "We're told we can't put digital assets on unless there is new demand, so I think we need to start looking at smart grids, storage, which would be complementary in terms of resilience and reliability. If we electrify heat and transport, the DNO has to invest in a smart grid or grid

reinforcements. We cannot cope with the additional load. So, it's a strategic investment. The time for demonstration projects is gone." Developer / connections representative

- "We can't get the developers to build because they can't connect. So if they can't upgrade, maybe microgrids is a short-term solution to get decarbonisation to particularly new developments." Local authority officer

- "The starting point for SSEN should be putting right lots of basic things on the asset base and ensuring that basic power supply can be delivered to our area. Work on a major scale will be required to help us catch up during RIIO-ED2." Business representative

- "The new technology being rolled out is exciting, but it's hard to feel that way when the basic assets on our grid are out of date." Business representative

- "WPD do a really good voltage-mapping system called Flexible Power, which shows where the network is weak. This data can be used by developers for strengthening the network and providing opportunities for adding new assets." Infrastructure / engineering representative

3. Delivering in the public interest: what should our future focus be? What type of initiatives and partners should we work with to deliver this?

- "I think as we transition from DNO to DSO, there has to be a higher engagement in an effective way." Business representative

- "Local authorities need more support. It's the wrong way around in terms of asking us where our development is going to be. Maybe more discussion is needed. We're not energy experts and need more support to know what's achievable." Local authority officer

- "That is key to your business, really. You've got to deliver and get the public on board and understanding what things cost. It's about getting the engagement from the experts with SSE, because whilst SSE has the responsibility to deliver it, there are a number of experts out there that can help deliver these network alterations if necessary." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "If I were outside of the system, I wouldn't know. Educating people to understand how we can get to net zero could be a good role for SSEN. It could lead to more adoption. I think more engagement such as workshops, hand holding and case studies would be great. Get down to the basic ways of communicating." Developer / connections representative

- "You could educate people on how much CO_2 they're using, and a website like Carbon Intensity lets you see when in the day you can make your electricity greenest. With small changes, you can make a big difference, but it's not publicised." Environmental group

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- "I was quite interested in the energy advisors for Citizens Advice. I know a lot of local authorities and community groups have lost financial support and your role could be to keep their heads above water and their staff employed." Charity / non-profit
- "Covid affects people very unequally: some people have been fine, but others have lost their job with no prospect of getting another. SSEN needs to be flexible and be prepared for a range of eventualities." Developer / connections representative
- "In light of recession and unemployment, the biggest people that will be hit are of the younger generation. Look at apprenticeship schemes." Infrastructure / engineering representative

4. Enabling the net zero transition: what should our future focus be? What type of initiatives and partners should we work with to deliver this?

- "The question is more about how we develop our planning structure in terms of incorporating renewables and microgeneration. This way, you can feed back to the grid where appropriate." Infrastructure / engineering representative
- "Local authorities down to parish council level need to understand what they can do in terms of connections. We have a climate emergency in several local authorities. I don't understand how a five-year plan will allow for enough flexibility." Community energy group
- "Local energy archetypes and partnerships are important going forward and they don't particularly involve the DNO. You don't need to build more pipes and wires; trying to work towards a smarter network is more important. An important stepping stone to this is information availability. Have you considered a technology partnership?" Business representative
- "I think you need to push for more interaction, more information being exchanged and more collective thinking because you won't be able to do a transition to net zero on your own. Ideally all of the respected DNOs need to form joined-up thinking to achieve net zero." Developer / connections representative
- "The main thing for me is green energy production and that more users have the ability to use such energy. Local groups supplying their own energy for their own needs is important and SSEN should make a commitment to put this above profit. Think about an iDNO model." Local authority officer
- "Given the intense shift towards smart technologies, SSEN may need to think about working with broadband providers to ensure that the infrastructure is in place for this smart energy transition." Local authority officer
- "We want certainty when we're looking to build solar farms so that we can be confident about capacity. It should be solutions based." Developer / connections representative

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- "There is a debate between local authorities and network providers in terms of who will lead in the transition to net zero. There needs to be more focus there." Business representative

- "SSEN needs to look at plans in a smarter way, particularly with heat pumps and electric vehicle chargers being placed on houses. There needs to be more flexibility in planning these assets into networks." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "There needs to be engagement with every developer out there, surely." Infrastructure / engineering representative

5. Supporting safe and resilient communities: what should our future focus be? What type of initiatives and partners should we work with to deliver this?
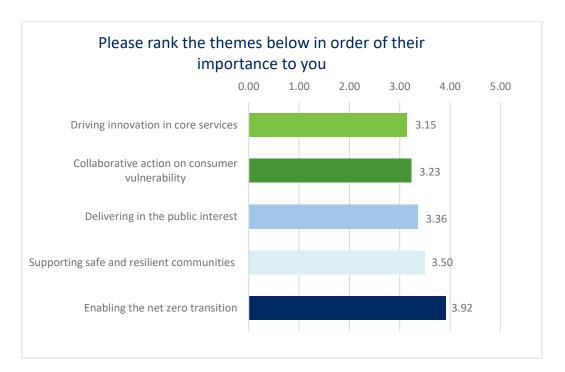
- "I think education is key for integration into the planning process. When we allow new development, it must be considered in light of the electrical landscape as well as the physical landscape." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "We have to ensure that new communities are resilient, but old ones need to be too. As long as we can ensure that the transition doesn't leave anyone behind." Community energy group

- "I think we need to have someone we can go to all the time within your organisation about all these issues. We don't have a person high enough in your organisation to sort things out and bring the right people in at the right time. We talk very much in these conversations in abstract terms, but we never really get around to our place and what we are going to do in our market towns and how we can work together on a more granular level." Business representative

- "I would second that on my end. I appreciate the user account managers on the new connections side, but there are instances where a direct relationship with a technical person would be way more efficient." Developer / connections representative

- "I think what local communities have learned is that, especially when you go to a parish council, although they have great resilience plans, they are managed and owned by people who are elderly and need to shield. Resilience is changing as we progress through this pandemic and preparing for it is increasingly difficult." Utility

6. Collaborative action on consumer vulnerability: what should our future focus be? What type of initiatives and partners should we work with to deliver this?

- "The LEP is funding a smart cities project, a lot of that is aimed at vulnerable people. We are working with social housing in Reading and using smart tech. Could SSEN be more proactively involved? It could be mutually beneficial." Business representative

- "The plans for net zero are fab, but I worry about the very vulnerable households who can't string together enough to get through the week. If we don't get it sorted, the gap is going to become wider and wider, so I think we need to make sure the building blocks are in place today." Charity / non-profit
- "There's a charity on the Isle of Wight which specialises in fuel poverty called the Footprint Trust. I don't know whether you've worked with them. They do amazing work." Community energy group
- "The vulnerability map would be very helpful." Elected councillor
- "It's all about partnerships with frontline organisations. Local authorities can help with our social media. But we need to be clearer with what the offer of support is. What is SSEN going to do with these people? Inform, or something tangible?" Local authority officer
- "SSEN has a PSR containing vulnerable people who will be more vulnerable as a result of the effects of Covid. SSEN should look to see whether there are additional opportunities to reach out to these people and check to make sure that they are all right and whether they need further services within their community." Environmental group
- "I think that's great, but we can also provide people with domestic battery systems. Can SSEN do something about this? Medical equipment is key." Local authority officer

ELECTRONIC VOTING RESULTS

Please rank the themes below in order of their importance to you

Theme	Value
Driving innovation in core services	3.15
Collaborative action on consumer vulnerability	3.23
Delivering in the public interest	3.36
Supporting safe and resilient communities	3.50
Enabling the net zero transition	3.92

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SESSION TWO: ADAPTING OUR SERVICES TO MEET CHANGING CONSUMER NEEDS

SUMMARY

Stakeholders voted electronically on how they would currently rate SSEN's customer service. Overall, 15% rated it 10 out of 10 ('excellent'), 11% opted for 9 out of 10 and 30% gave it 8 out of 10. Delegates broadly agreed that the six guiding principles for customer service were correct, although some delegates felt that 'speed of response' was missing. Stakeholders suggested another principle in relation to more proactive communication within communities, along with a commitment to improving the grid, which would have a positive effect on customer service in general.

There was consensus that improving customer service should always be a priority for SSEN. This was borne out in the discussion, when delegates singled out their communications with engineers on the planning side, praising their attention to deadlines and welcoming the dedicated point of contact. Stakeholders felt that it was important for the company to understand the customer and their needs when interacting with them, ascertaining, for example, whether they are vulnerable and need to be referred to the PSR.

Discussing how SSEN could enhance the experience that customers receive, many stressed communications as key, from keeping customers informed on improvement works to educating and informing them on the transition to net zero. The point was also made that greater efforts to encourage participation in the storage market would increase uptake of renewables. Improvements in the connections process were sought, with calls for more substantial support on quotes and applications, shorter wait times and greater promotion of tools such as heat maps.

Delegates suggested that in order to improve in this area, SSEN should look to emulate the communications strategies of a number of different companies, with WPD cited for their dedicated support team on planning and connections applications, and Wessex Water, Octopus Energy and First Direct for their proactive customer service and responsiveness. It was felt that the website could be more accessible, with some stakeholders reporting that they often found it confusing and difficult to retrieve the information that they need. Stakeholders mooted instant chat functions on the website, as well as more online access to workshops for community energy groups and a modification to the 'voice to voice' grid requirement for distributed generators to communicate an outage to SSEN.

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Delegates discussed how SSEN could build trust, and many felt that the company could do more to promote the good work they were doing around fuel poverty and its approach to supporting customers and ensuring a robust network during the lockdown. It was felt that achieving more awareness of this would be a trust-building exercise in itself. Others pointed to the engineers and maintenance teams out on the road as the 'ambassadors' of SSEN, with many confirming that they were polite, well informed, helpful and knowledgeable, which all helped to build trust in the communities they serve.

1. Do you broadly agree with the six guiding principles / is anything missing?

- "The one that is missing for me is speed of response." Developer / connections representative
- "Nothing that says what is a timely response, which will be different for different areas. For example, if we're transitioning to a local energy system, we need to do that quickly. So, what is the necessary lead time for that? And different lead time for someone having an outage." Charity / non-profit
- "Should it be one of their principles that they are being more proactive in the community?" Infrastructure / engineering representative
- "I totally agree with those. Anything that allows me to plug in my generator without 27 new pieces of paper to fill out is great. We may have an emerging problem with customer care, especially as people's cars will become high tech. If there's a problem, they won't know what it is or who to call." Business representative
- "There's nothing about improving the grid there, is there?" Community energy group
- "SSEN are progressing and making every change possible to suit customers' needs, whether during Covid-19 or not." Business representative
- "They are highly honed, and I like them." Business representative
- "Most organisations say things about putting customers at the heart of everything they do, but it's about how you demonstrate that. The principles are sound, though." Charity / non-profit

2. Do you think that improving customer service should be a priority for SSEN at this time?

- "SSEN should always keep trying to improve customer service." Business representative
- "Many of the most vulnerable customers are not so digitally savvy, so we must not leave them behind. Customer service needs to stay a top priority, particularly with so many people stuck at home." Environmental group

- "I normally speak to engineers. They take everyone into consideration. Clear and concise communications, from my initial enquiries, and they keep to deadlines. They're always available to call. They give names out of engineers, too." Business representative

- "Accessibility to very limited channels for customer service is very important because we depend so much on those. They should be the best they can be. You need to make it easier to reach people who need a voice, whether that is through community partnerships or data sharing with water. Customer service should be a priority." Utility

- "Communication is key in the transition. People need to be updated on what is happening and need to understand how they can get involved." Local authority officer

3. What more do you think SSEN could do to enhance the experience their customers receive?

- "If you can create opportunity for your customers, for example, to play a role in the storage market, that will help further uptake of renewables." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "All the DNOs are chasing the scores on customer satisfaction. I'm not sure whether that's sustainable or favourable for consumers; I think it needs to move to something different and take best practice from other sectors. There's a concern that consumers aren't treated in the way they should be." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "My experience has been that SSEN can be a bit standoffish with regard to engagement, they could be more forward-leaning with regard to support. Things like quotation processes aren't easy to engage with. For example, no one at SSEN mentioned heat maps to me. The perception is that the monopoly is a problem. If you come to them with an idea or opportunity, I don't get a sense of urgency." Developer / connections representative

- "We wanted to get somebody to look at our system to avoid putting the electricity services at risk. But it hasn't seemed to come off. Being able to log in to a portal and see what facilities are active would be good to improve." Business representative

- "Going back to connections, just having that easy communication and having a clearer route into SSEN. I think at any large company, it is always easier to deal with something when you have a single contact." Local authority officer

- "One thing that all DNOs have challenges with is connections. There is always criticism about the length of quote time and dealing with lower-value connections. It's interesting to see that SSEN is working towards localisation in running the network to meet local people's requirements." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "Work may be subcontracted when digging up roads for SSEN's projects, so it's important that the communications focus remains down the chain." Parish / community council

4. What more could SSEN do to ensure that their communications are clear and accessible?

- "It did intrigue me, we had an outage last year, they were asking me all the questions and then I realised that they were putting me on PSR. I don't consider myself vulnerable, but it's quite nice to know that they're trying to understand the person on the other end." Business representative

- "If you understand your customers better, then you'll be able to provide services to the customer that meet specific demands. Better to be active than passive." Business representative

- "There are companies out there, especially DNOs, that apply a more customer-friendly approach to this. For example, WPD have multiple contact points with the customer. You can have direct links to planning engineers to discuss queries about applications. You could have greater flexibility with regard to payments for acceptance as well." Developer / connections representative

- "A company I think is very good are Octopus Energy. They have superb customer service. They're not very good for generators, but they're brilliant for consumers." Community energy group

- "I think that SSEN should look to Wessex Water, which always seems to lead the way with customer service. They are robust and very customer-focused." Business representative

- "I'm not suggesting nationalisation, but a unified strategy involving SSEN to communicate to the public at large would be helpful. This would make the changes involved with the transition tangible." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "The sheer weight of literature you translate into different languages is impressive. From my view, you are leading the way." Utility

- "The more you can use social media, you can be more proactive in sharing information. First Direct's customer service is second to none, because they're proactive and supply their customers with what they need." Business representative

- "There need to be better communication structures and channels for contacting the right departments and people. In the past, when I have been trying to use the website for finding out this contact information, it has been like going around Hampton Court Maze. SSEN should be open and accessible on this front." Business representative

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- "It would be nice to know which of the local nodes are full. There's something on the website, but it's not the easiest website to navigate." Community energy group

- "I wonder if when the website opens, there could be an instant chat so you could immediately get taken to the right place." Local authority officer

- "The capacity maps are not detailed enough, especially with regard to price. If that information was at our fingertips, it would help us understand where we level our interest." Local authority officer

- "I'm aware of the surgeries, but they were always in places that were inaccessible to me." Community energy group

- "There's another tier of communication: as a distributed generator, there is a grid requirement that it has to be voice to voice, we find it frustrating that if we have an unscheduled outage, we have to talk to the control room and relay that message verbally. Why can't we have SMS or email?" Developer / connections representative

- "It would be nice to have someone you can talk to easily. If you could have a menu of people to talk to about various things, whether its connections or whatever, it would be really nice to pick up the phone and talk to someone." Community energy group
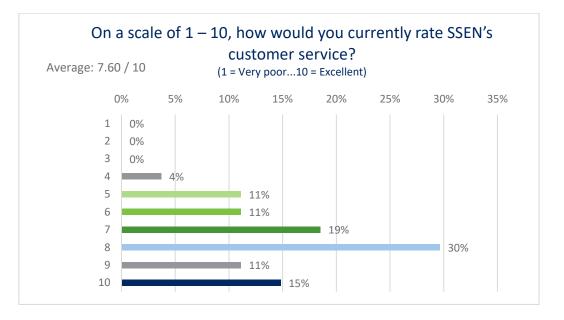
5. What other steps do you think that SSEN, as a utility provider, could take to gain customers' trust?

- "I think it's always good to promote good news. For example, the work you did during the pandemic with communities is an amazing bit of PR and I think promoting that would go a long way to building trust with customers." Utility

- "I was impressed by the work you're doing for fuel poverty, and it would be nice for you guys to broadcast that a bit more widely." Community energy group

- "Using social media can be a good way of demonstrating what SSEN does for the public. This could hit different demographics." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "SSEN should attempt to get other customers' viewpoints about why they view SSEN as they do. It should ascertain why and how it has built up customer trust and broaden that out into a strategy." Environmental group

- "The presence of your workers and vans is key to this strategy, as they are your best ambassadors." Business representative

- "I would agree that the presence of SSEN workers on the road is key. Whenever I go and talk to them, they are always polite, and I learn a lot from them." Parish / community council

6. How do we need to change the service we provide for our customers in response to the Covid-19 pandemic?

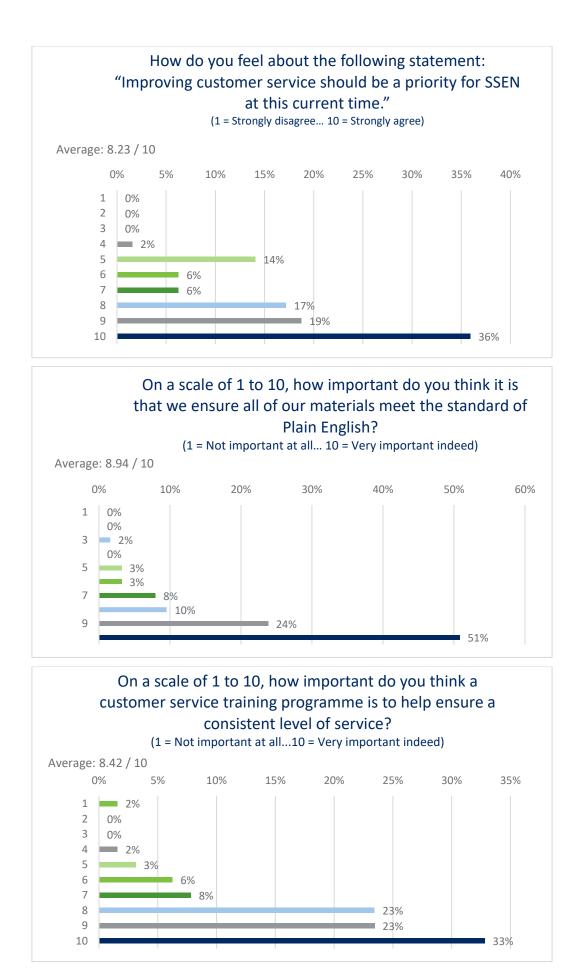Scottish & Southern
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- "I think the time of day is a key consideration for planned service interruptions. This is important with so many people working from home." Local authority officer

- "There have been numerous studies about how electricity changed when we went into lockdown. There was a big drop in demand at first. I think it's so challenging to understand what the long-term effect will be. At some point, those industries and the commercial sector will have to ramp up again. I think the uncertainty itself is a challenge that SSEN will have to work with." Academic

- "In a factory that is using a lot less power now, there should be a change in their ability to reserve power. We could be putting this reserve power elsewhere. At the moment, it's all locked in a commercial agreement. We need more flexibility in the network." Business representative

- "I would say that signposting future energy technology coming over the horizon is important to the green recovery. SSEN needs to provide clear advice in simple language so that people can understand whether their projects are viable." Business representative

- "From the council's point of view, it's now shifting thought about how we include the carbon footprint of people working from home, how will that impact us mapping our way forward as a community as well as a council, what support have we given, how can we continue conversations in support of homeowners and support education on efficiency. Through the winter, how can the DNOs support that work?" Local authority officer

ELECTRONIC VOTING RESULTS

On a scale of 1 – 10, how would you currently rate SSEN's customer service?
(1 = Very poor...10 = Excellent)

Average: 7.60 / 10

Rating	Percentage
1	0%
2	0%
3	0%
4	4%
5	11%
6	11%
7	19%
8	30%
9	11%
10	15%

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How do you feel about the following statement:
"Improving customer service should be a priority for SSEN at this current time."
(1 = Strongly disagree… 10 = Strongly agree)

Average: 8.23 / 10

Score	Percentage
1	0%
2	0%
3	0%
4	2%
5	14%
6	6%
7	6%
8	17%
9	19%
10	36%

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important do you think it is that we ensure all of our materials meet the standard of Plain English?
(1 = Not important at all… 10 = Very important indeed)

Average: 8.94 / 10

Score	Percentage
1	0%
2	0%
3	2%
4	0%
5	3%
6	3%
7	8%
8	10%
9	24%
10	51%

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important do you think a customer service training programme is to help ensure a consistent level of service?
(1 = Not important at all...10 = Very important indeed)

Average: 8.42 / 10

Score	Percentage
1	2%
2	0%
3	0%
4	2%
5	3%
6	6%
7	8%
8	23%
9	23%
10	33%

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SESSION THREE: SUSTAINABILITY – HELPING THE UK MEET ITS NET ZERO EMISSIONS TARGETS

SUMMARY

In the electronic voting, opinion was fairly evenly split as to which features of SSEN's Environmental Action Plan should be prioritised. Business carbon footprint edged ahead, with 4.56 out of 5 (where 5 was the most important), closely followed by supply chain management and nitrous oxide, air quality and noise, both on 4.45. The least important element was deemed to be visual amenity, with 3.71.

Stakeholders felt that the proposed core themes under sustainability could place more emphasis on efficiency and creating a circular economy. Furthermore, delegates stressed an enabling aspect of SSEN's work, explaining that making the uptake of renewables easy and accessible for customers should be a priority. In this sense, delegates advocated education for all, not just the vulnerable, as creating a broad, confident knowledge base would strengthen SSEN's ability to enable the uptake of renewables on the road to net zero.

Many delegates confirmed their confidence in science-based targets and reported their own organisations' commitments to follow the science on reaching net zero. Stakeholders did, however, express concern over leadership, particularly from central government, questioning whether the implementation of renewables such as electric buses, which will obviously require substantial investment, would receive financial support. Many highlighted the need for a coherent strategy that would enable developers, infrastructure planners and local authorities to push ahead with their plans to reach net zero by the established deadlines. A key comment from this discussion related to the need for a 'step change' in sustainability strategy over the next price review period.

With regard to SSEN's Environmental Action Plan and how ambitious it should be, the overriding impression was that it needed to be as accelerated as possible with a view to reaching net zero by 2050 and demonstrating leadership and best practice. Delegates stressed that SSEN should leverage its power and influence within the industry and with central government in order to meet ambitious climate targets. There were suggestions around cross-industry collaborative working to bring down business carbon footprints across the board, and stakeholders alluded to more practical projects such as electric tipper trucks and semiconductors in the creation of smart grids. Delegates from the business sector wanted to see reports on heat losses, with the ability to then recover those losses for

the future. Lifecycle assessments of assets were suggested under supply chain management, with delegates stating that providing this information should be a prerequisite for procurement of suppliers. It was felt that, as the company sits between the supplier, end user and supply chain, SSEN clearly has a responsibility to use its position of influence to ensure sustainable practices and lead by example.

Stakeholders were very clear that they wanted SSEN to be as ambitious as possible in its net zero targets and sustainability strategy, urging the company to work alongside other DNOs and LEPs to lead the way. In a similar vein, delegates did not feel that Ofgem's minimum requirements went far enough or kept pace with ensuring net zero by 2050. While there was consensus on the need for accelerated, ambitious change, some sounded a note of caution around costs and affordability and urged a cost–benefit analysis to openly and transparently demonstrate what the trade-offs might be in terms of investment in the network, expanded capacity and reaching net zero. Others pointed to the opportunity for growth in green technologies, which could be used as a way to justify the upfront investment needed.

1. What do you think of SSEN's proposed sustainability core themes?

- "The circular economy needs to be highlighted. The other part of it is in terms of enabling, it's enabling connections of renewable technologies." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "I think maybe there could be a little bit more on efficiency. There's no mention of insulation of houses. There doesn't seem to be an emphasis on driving energy efficiency through smart technology that would optimise power usage." Parish / Community Council

- "I like the reference to the Sustainable Development Goals. I think that's really important because it shows that SSEN are thinking holistically and externally rather than internally. It's really important to not just make a superficial link to the Sustainable Development Goal target, but to really challenge yourselves." Charity / non-profit

- "It's not always about the technology, it's sometimes about the educating. Maybe it's possible to move to a broader area rather than just educating the vulnerable. SSEN could employ people like me to educate people on being energy efficient. Or whilst you're putting in big projects to help efficiency, we could be the educating interim." Charity / non-profit

- "I would like to add the importance of training. All these new techniques, training for staff to service and maintain." Developer / connections representative

- "SSEN are purely a facilitator. You do not own assets. The assets that you do have, primary and secondary substations, are limited. You don't actually have a lot of assets to decarbonise.

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Instead, your focus should be on wielding your power and influence over developers and government." Business representative

2. Does your organisation have science-based targets and, if so, do you think they are the right approach?

- "I like the use of science-based targets, particularly when our current Government routinely ignores science, meaning that it is hard to trust the basis of some of its policy in this area." Environmental group

- "You've got to admire the amount of modelling you've done against the science-based targets." Local authority officer

- "We have science-based targets in my parish and are using them to move towards net zero for 2030." Elected councillor

- "Yes, we do have a wide range of science-based sustainability targets." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "The bus companies that I provide advice to are having to hit science-based emissions targets in terms of zero emissions. The problem is that the Government does not have a coherent strategy in terms of how these targets can be achieved and whether companies working to implement the technology will receive any financial support. It is achievable, but the Government needs to put together a proper strategy." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "I think everything should be science-based, but of course the UK Government set a target of 2050 for net zero, and Scotland for 2040, and London set a different target. I think that makes it difficult as you're trying to meet the same target but at different timescales in different areas. Maybe you will have a differentiated level of service because you have different targets. You are trying to manage two businesses that are geographically spread about hugely." Charity / non-profit

- "We need really clear guidance about what is required from us so that we can achieve SSEN's targets. A lot of talk has happened, but not enough has been done to get there. This next review period is a good time for a step change." Infrastructure / engineering representative

3. How far do you think SSEN should go on the following areas of their Environmental Action Plan? Do you have ideas for any other projects they should do?

Business Carbon Footprint

- "As part of the energy industry, you should be setting examples and pushing past what the general zeitgeist is." Business representative

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- "Our business is also reducing their carbon footprint and recording it, which is the first step. In the Netherlands for new homes, they have to be net zero. Properly insulated and be connected to new technologies – this is an area where industries need to work together and put pressure on one another." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "The whole plant side of things needs to be pushed to electrify their vehicles, such as tipper trucks. A lot of construction goes on at your sites and a lot of polluting." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "I think because there is no need to adopt this equipment to create a smart grid adapted to the integration of renewable energy and load, at the same time it would be beneficial that this equipment is at a lower carbon footprint and better efficiency. If you can provide a lead and pointers to the whole electronic industry in terms of high efficiencies." Developer / connections representative

- "With its business carbon footprint, SSEN needs to be realistic about its targets and always prioritise what it can do itself." Local authority officer

- "With its business carbon footprint, SSEN needs to have an idea of the individual projects that will help it to achieve its wider goals for each of these areas." Local authority officer

Losses

- "There's no excuse for a loss in my view." Business representative

- "It should be a general rule to reduce losses. Other countries don't suffer with the same losses we do, so it certainly can be done better. No excuses." Community energy group

- "Your primary loss is heat. We should be able to report and recover your heat losses for the future." Business representative

- "With losses, it depends on which impacts you're targeting. You need to aim for the big stuff." Community energy group

- "It needs to be realistic about loss reduction in its Business Plan to Ofgem. It needs to strike a balance to ensure that customers do not end up paying too much." Environmental group

Supply chain management

- "I have to produce a policy for net zero and I have to sign something to say that my supply chain has signed up to the same thing. Does the 'no' role you play involve saying you won't sign up to work with certain suppliers?" Business representative

- "You have a lot of subcontractors working for you. You should make your targets apply to them as well." Developer / connections representative

- "Don't know if you impose this on the supplier, but as a useful exercise: look at the full lifecycle. If you book your transformer, do you ask for this kind of credential for the supplier to do an

end-of-life lifecycle assessment? I would say be more aggressive – signpost the importance of this criteria to encourage change in the industry." Developer / connections representative

- "I want to echo the idea of not looking just up- or downstream. The position of sitting between suppliers and the supply chain and end user means you've got a huge amount you can influence, probably far bigger than your own carbon footprint, so it's about how you leverage that to encourage change. Doesn't seem like an easy win, but I think we need to be leading the way." Charity / non-profit

SF6

- "From memory, I don't think that SF6 leakages are very high to begin with, so maybe it needs to be less of a high priority from the others listed." Environmental group

Flood resilience

- "Flood resilience is quite fundamental in terms of protecting its infrastructure. If it fails due to flooding, it will have a massive impact. This needs to figure heavily in the Business Plan." Local authority officer
- "Flood resilience is the first thing that people notice in terms of climate change, as that is the thing that affects us the most. It is a hugely important factor that needs to be considered." Local authority officer

Biodiversity and / or natural capital

- "We're very keen to approve biodiversity, it's essential, and if there's anything that we can be doing to help SSEN, please let us know." Business representative
- "I think that fitting new infrastructure is quite resource intensive and that will have a knock-on effect with managing waste, so biodiversity needs to be considered here. SSEN needs to be on top of this as part of their role as a good network operator. They should be looking to go beyond the Paris Agreement requirements." Local authority officer

4. How ambitious do you think SSEN should be in terms of its sustainability strategy and net zero targets?

- "Because you're in the energy industry, you have to set an example and go for the most ambitious targets." Community energy group
- "It must be ensured that the UK is a leader in climate change." Local authority officer
- "Covid has actually served to accelerate timelines; this should be the case for you too." Elected councillor

- "I think they should go as far as possible. The Government's stated policy of 2050 is far too late. SSEN should take any action they can to help make that quicker." Community energy group

- "I think you should ignore Ofgem because they don't seem to have a firm view. We need to get to net zero as soon as possible, and someone needs to lead the charge. SSEN has the opportunity to do that because the UK Government isn't giving much lead. I saw something about 10 million EVs being provided for, but I think there are only 300,000 electric vehicles in the country at the moment because the Government isn't giving any leadership on it." Community energy group

- "There needs to be a cost–benefit analysis here because if reaching certain targets by certain dates means that the customer has to pick up the cost, you need to be upfront about that. You and the other DNOs need to be leading the way." Developer / connections representative

- "I think we should do as much as we can, but a lot of people are struggling financially so we shouldn't invest in the green revolution prematurely of our targets if it's going to have a detrimental impact on the more vulnerable in our society, unless there are support mechanisms in place to help those people out." Charity / non-profit

- "Prices may go up, but renewables is the sector where the growth is. Create space for growth in terms of the network, be as ambitious as possible. You know the direction will be distributed network. We need more capacity." Developer / connections representative

- "I don't think all the onus is on SSEN, there are partners they should work with, such as LEPs. There should be a more collaborative approach to push a more ambitious agenda." Business representative

- "Don't neglect economic forces; they dictate how we move forward. I think we should opt for a realistic, process-based change, changing mindset and overcoming inertia. Behavioural and thought change is required just as much as technological change." Developer / connections representative

- "There are some key statements we can support, certainly around the supplier code. All businesses need to pick up the challenge. It's down to everything that we do: the sorts of vehicles we have, what we buy. It needs to be joined-up thinking." Infrastructure / engineering representative

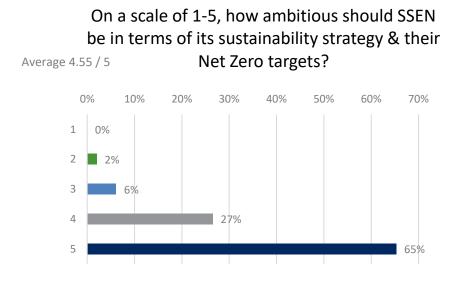## 5. What is your view about Ofgem's minimum requirements?

- "Ofgem's minimum requirement doesn't seem to be going far enough or keeping pace. I think SSEN have the responsibility to take this forward as fast as possible. I think we're going to be
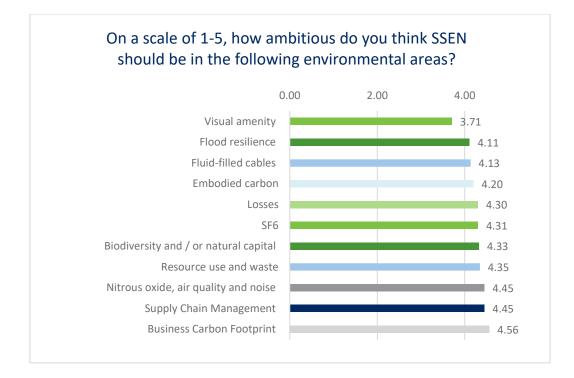
paying the money now, but we'll get the benefits later. To do it half-heartedly is not going to save us money or efficiency in the long run." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "I don't think they're going far enough. Until you have hard measures on achieving targets and penalties imposed, then I think they're not doing it right." Business representative

- "Ofgem appear not even to be meeting the Government's 2050 target. Energy is the industry that will get us out of this mess." Community energy group

- "Carbon budgeting is kind of the answer. About Ofgem, government policy is driven by economic growth, and the oil and gas industries are the biggest providers. There is no benefit to those industries for renewables. You need to use your clout to change government policy and don't wait around for Ofgem, as they're in the hands of oil and gas." Environmental group

- "The need should be obvious in terms of investing ahead of need. Look at the science and trends, they show a need." Developer / connections representative

- "The point of local climate declarations is for local communities to be able to move forward together as fast and far as they can. I worry that SSEN might only go as far as Ofgem requires." Infrastructure / engineering representative

ELECTRONIC VOTING RESULTS

On a scale of 1-5, how ambitious should SSEN be in terms of its sustainability strategy & their Net Zero targets?

Average 4.55 / 5

1	0%
2	2%
3	6%
4	27%
5	65%

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On a scale of 1-5, how ambitious do you think SSEN should be in the following environmental areas?

Area	Score
Visual amenity	3.71
Flood resilience	4.11
Fluid-filled cables	4.13
Embodied carbon	4.20
Losses	4.30
SF6	4.31
Biodiversity and / or natural capital	4.33
Resource use and waste	4.35
Nitrous oxide, air quality and noise	4.45
Supply Chain Management	4.45
Business Carbon Footprint	4.56

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SESSION FOUR: MAINTAINING A RELIABLE AND RESILIENT NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE

SUMMARY

There was a good deal of discussion on the order of priorities under network resilience. Some felt that safety needed to be the top priority, as the value of a life should always come above anything else. Others stated that they did not have enough context to comment on the issue of outages, calling for greater transparency in data to show regional variations in reliability. For most delegates at the workshops, the most pressing and widely discussed issues related to the future resilience of the network, especially in regard to more renewables coming on to the grid, and increased demand for electricity in the drive for net zero. Stakeholders from local authorities, charities, non-profits and the infrastructure sector all stressed that it was vital to their long-term plans to have confidence in the capacity and resilience of the network and in its ability to cope with all types of growth.

Delegates were relatively unsurprised that the priority to strengthen the network where service is still relatively unstable came low on the list, as competing needs and disparities in SSEN's area were always going to be factors. Some wondered whether there was an equity piece to consider, where the wealthier south of England faced fewer interruptions than Scotland, and asked what SSEN could do to mitigate this. Similarly, given that these workshops represented the south of SSEN's patch, delegates felt that reliability was good, even 'too good' in some cases, with some stating that without experiencing frequent outages, customers simply could not comprehend the importance of reliability, particularly as we move towards net zero.

There was widespread consensus that SSEN needs to be investing in resilience now for future performance. Delegates wanted to see SSEN push Ofgem harder for a coherent investment and communications strategy that would educate consumers on efficiency, storage and the possibility of prices going up as a result of increased investment. They also wanted to see regulation that would mandate developers to provide sustainable buildings and projects that would deliver on net zero, with transparent costings on reinforcement and reliability of supply that might change the priorities around new developments from 'more kitchens and bathrooms' to houses that emit zero carbon. Others pointed to the importance of storage in terms of resilience, urging a change in how storage projects are classified. Many felt that classing storage projects as 'generators' was unhelpful and prohibitive to storage projects which import energy and could provide support and backup in terms of resilience. Urgency, investment, true change and a new direction of travel were advocated across the board.

Given the strength of feeling around this, it was perhaps unsurprising that delegates pushed for either option C or option D, which both entail higher costs for investment in future reliability, on the options-based approach to investment. Those who favoured option D cited the urgent need for digitisation to prepare the network for DSO, as well as the need for a rapid response in line with getting the country to net zero for 2050. For those advocating option C, there was a question around affordability, and who, precisely, would pay for the most ambitious investment programme. They urged SSEN to provide a clearer affordability metric, so that they could join SSEN in lobbying the Government for the funding needed to kickstart an accelerated investment programme. Others said that option D was too 'pie in the sky', and that option C was a more realistic and achievable choice.

1. Do you agree with the order of priorities? Why/why not? Which are the most important ones for you?

- "I would consider the first three to be the absolute baseline of what you do as a DNO. These should go without saying. I'm not sure how useful it is to ask stakeholders where they rank resilience and keeping the lights on." Local authority officer

- "If something is fatal, it should be number one, not five." Community energy group

- "It would be good to know the regional differences in numbers. There needs to be more long-term data visibility." Community energy group

- "How big is the problem of outages? I'm not sure how big they are as issues and therefore whether we should concentrate on them. I'm missing that context." Business representative

- "The thing that I find strange is that further down the list, 'maintaining the network for future generations' is only 12.2%. That's maybe partly to do with educating the general public. More often than not, the actual capability of the network is up to its max." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "In rural areas, disruption is quite a problem. The thing that worries me is about how we balance the grid with more and more renewables. Because the impact of zero carbon where we're getting a lot of cars changing over to electric, how's the grid going to stand, and how are we going to generate the extra energy that we need? Maintaining supply as demand increases is more of a priority." Elected councillor

- "It is an extremely important subject, but fundamentally, if you haven't got a reliable network, people will find it hard to move across to a society where you're reliant on electricity for everything, including mobility. We need to ensure that the network can respond to that growing need. It's tight, but I think you should start with that reliable network." Local authority officer

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- "There's nothing there about actually improving the grid to increase capacity in existing areas. Improving the ability to connect renewables to the grid in existing areas is important." Community energy group
- "My patch is Oxfordshire; we need more renewables on the grid, which we need to do sixfold to achieve net zero. That is going to need some quite significant changes to the network and a solar park takes several years of planning and development, so knowing the grid will be ready as those come on stream is important." Charity / non-profit

2. 'Strengthen the network where customers currently experience more frequent power cuts' was not included in the top five priorities by either domestic or business customers. As a stakeholder, do you agree with this?

- "I think the feedback is as you'd expect. They want their electricity to be there. People aren't used to having power cuts or sharing the power, the message hasn't really got out in the mainstream. As we expand the network, it's going to come down to a lot of choices. Having to think about your electricity isn't something that the modern generation are used to." Infrastructure / engineering representative
- "As you mentioned, with locations, the south is wealthier and so they have less power outages, whereas the Scots have it harder because the funding isn't there in the rural space. I wonder whether something could be done considering equity in terms of outages and how that can be managed in a more equitable way." Charity / non-profit
- "There is always the issue of competing needs with the priorities." Local authority officer

3. Does our current reliability performance meet your expectations as stakeholders?

- "It's too good." Business representative
- "If people were experiencing power outages, then they'd have more of an understanding of how it is. People don't understand because our reliance on it has increased, and so people don't think they need to know." Infrastructure / engineering representative
- "SSEN's current reliability performance is fine, but I fear that more heat pumps and more EV chargers will put huge strain on the grid in its current form." Infrastructure / engineering representative
- "SSEN is very reliable in my eyes, but I would like to see data about how reliable individual patches are so that we can compare." Infrastructure / engineering representative
- "Our county can't add more renewables, and the community can't add. That suggests that it's completely overloaded. When we want to move forward, it's in a really bad state." Environmental group

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4. How important is it for you to be investing in reliability now for current and future performance, and why?

- "The problem is the network can't stay in its existing format. The investment has to take place in terms of its reliability." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "We cannot ignore that we have to get rid of gas systems in the house. This means that the demand for electricity would go up." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "We have to invest to stand still. It's just having the right model from Ofgem to make that happen. We need to ensure as an industry that the public and stakeholders understand the complete shift." Business representative

- "This is crucial for moving forward and ensuring that the network is ready for future generations." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "SSEN should have the power to lean on the regulator as to how they address the issues. Battery storage could be a good solution for the reliability problem. One of the key issues is how the projects are assessed by network companies; they're assessed as generators in general. But they are both importing and exporting, and they might consider them being on zero MW, effectively, contracts. They can provide support when asked on the network. Maybe that's part of bringing in the DSO model. It's about changing their approach to how they consider different technologies, not having a one-size-fits-all approach." Business representative

- "SSEN needs to act as an enabler and try and think about the future as far as possible. If you do the work and charge the consumer, in theory, it will make things better for them in the future. However, with the various range of needs for the consumers, will affordability become a major concern?" Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "It might be that you protect the resilience of your network by educating the construction community on what their options are, so they adopt those options. Because doing what we've always done will get us what we've always got." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "What developers need to know to get their heads out of kitchens and bathrooms to sell houses is how much it is going to cost to reinforce the network in future. That can give me a driver to look at solutions even if it's not SSEN's responsibility. If it can't educate the industry, the very least it can do is give us visibility of cost increase from a reinforcement point of view when we come to you with a particular supply." Infrastructure / engineering representative

5. We have outlined an options-based approach that will inform our investment in network reliability. Do you think this approach is the right one? Why/Why not?
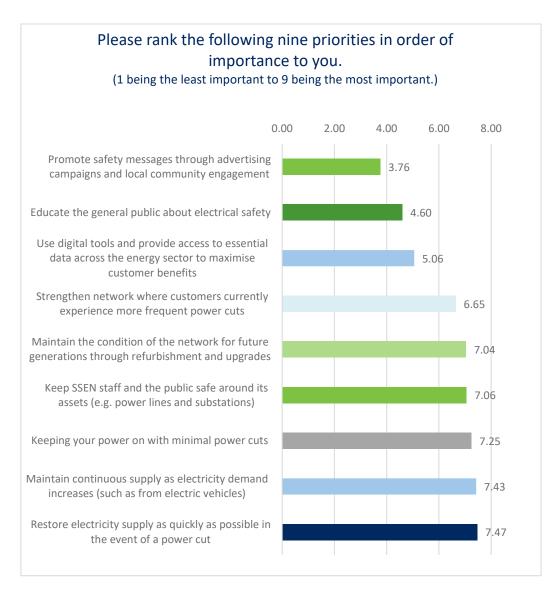
- "Absolutely. An awful lot needs to happen in terms of digitalisation, a lot of smartness that needs to be put into a network that is nowhere near where we should be. It was OK for 10 years ago. Got to be option D." Business representative

- "It's option D, and we have got to prepare now. We can't just wait to the last minute to do this. You have such a crucial way to influence and facilitate other people, the sooner you are ready, the sooner you get everyone ready." Charity / non-profit

- "I want another option: reliability today and supporting net zero." Community energy group

- "There is an affordability issue. Where's the measure of affordability in here? We need more metrics, more specifics, in order to tackle these issues." Business representative

- "As an LEP, we would support you in approaching the Government to get funding to kickstart this programme, but you would need a more specific metric on the affordability issues." Business representative

- "Option C as more of a definite than Option D, which is a bit pie-in-the-sky. Option C is more of a realistic achievement. Yes, it's higher cost, but you're getting that futurisation of the network. ED2 has got to be moving forwards to future proofing and creating a high resilience in the network and improving reliability." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "I think there's a certain amount of innovation that needs to be brought into the equation. The electricity industry is very stuck in its ways. You still have to actually climb on to pylons to inspect them. There are certain things out there, like artificial intelligence, that could create easier and more health and safety oriented ways of doing things. You could work with small companies with great ideas but who lack investment." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "We know there are hundreds of billions of pounds wanting to invest, you're constrained in investing by Ofgem, so why not set up something that funnels the investment? If a community group needs investment, instead of asking them to pay to connect, why not funnel through yourself, get the grid upgraded. Think outside the box!" Environmental group

- "Yes, you need to bring in private investment." Developer / connections representative

6. We outlined some other key considerations: innovation, efficiency, data, transparency, transport decarbonisation, heat decarbonisation, climate resilience and post-Covid societal changes. Which of these factors do you think are the most significant? What other factors should we be considering?

- "Efficiency is key. A holistic approach to energy and utilities is very important to consider. You can play a huge role in the approach to whole systems thinking." Business representative

- "You have a certain amount of ideas for innovation that need to be developed, but actually if you've not got efficiencies within your business, you can't do that. Efficiency is key, with data and innovation close behind and transparency as a given." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "We are looking at trialling heat pumps in a rural village in Oxfordshire. We are looking at heating and air conditioning in larger buildings and how this can be flexible. I think starting to think of the efficiency of electrification is really important." Academic

- "I like the fact that climate resilience is increasingly important. There are trade-offs and there are big potential financial benefits in understanding and investing to protect from the increasing impact of climate change. You should be doing more to present to people what the impact would be of not doing these investments." Local authority officer

- "I would encourage you to not think 'post-Covid' but 'industry 4.0'." Business representative

- "As long as the DNO stays completely neutral with open-access data, the other innovators will drive these things. All SSEN have to do is remain completely impartial and open and the smart network will create itself." Business representative

- "Post-Covid as a concept is far too general. You need to be smarter than planning for something 'post-Covid'." Business representative

- "If we go down the line of another lockdown, we could be working at home until we have a vaccine. The most demand would have been for high-rises and offices in cities, but now demand might be more spread out." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "Where are the KPIs relating to distributed generation? We need to be able to see how the network is doing in terms of accessibility to connections." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "Communication with the public needs to be legislated by the Government or Ofgem. Most people I know don't even understand that electricity can't be stored. They have no clue about currents going different directions. I am sure that there is a simple way of linking it to the climate change agenda, and then you can put this on an overall message to go out." Charity / non-profit

- "At the moment, we've dug ourselves into a hole in which it's assumed that renewable energy connections will cost more. If that's the truth, there should also be penalties in connection costs for connecting non-renewable developments." Local authority officer

- "It's about valuing what's most important; making the most money isn't a sustainable business. We begin to look at different values, with sustainability at the top of the chain, rather than economic value." Local authority officer
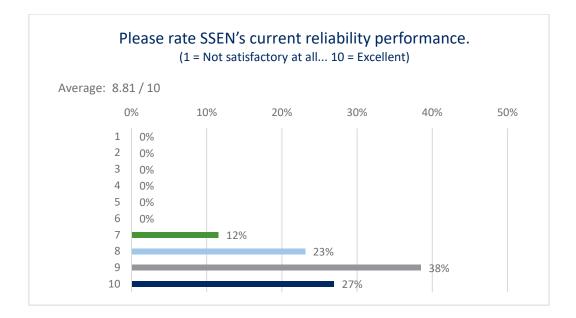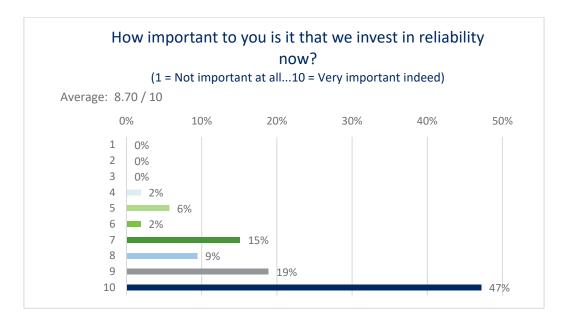
- "Very important that we make the grid accessible for technology when it gets on. We need to push the green agenda extremely hard. It's hard to get buildings built to a new standard when the Government doesn't want to get that achieved." Elected councillor
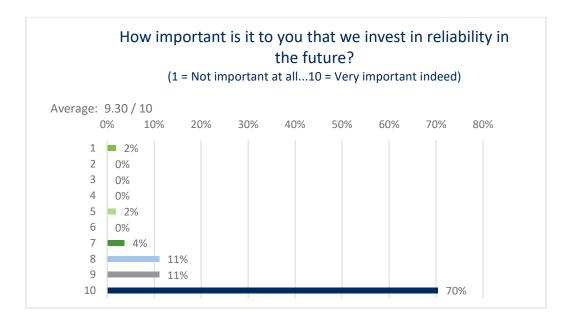
ELECTRONIC VOTING RESULTS

Please rank the following nine priorities in order of importance to you.
(1 being the least important to 9 being the most important.)

Priority	Value
Promote safety messages through advertising campaigns and local community engagement	3.76
Educate the general public about electrical safety	4.60
Use digital tools and provide access to essential data across the energy sector to maximise customer benefits	5.06
Strengthen network where customers currently experience more frequent power cuts	6.65
Maintain the condition of the network for future generations through refurbishment and upgrades	7.04
Keep SSEN staff and the public safe around its assets (e.g. power lines and substations)	7.06
Keeping your power on with minimal power cuts	7.25
Maintain continuous supply as electricity demand increases (such as from electric vehicles)	7.43
Restore electricity supply as quickly as possible in the event of a power cut	7.47

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Please rate SSEN's current reliability performance.
(1 = Not satisfactory at all... 10 = Excellent)

Average: 8.81 / 10

Rating	Percentage
1	0%
2	0%
3	0%
4	0%
5	0%
6	0%
7	12%
8	23%
9	38%
10	27%

How important to you is it that we invest in reliability now?
(1 = Not important at all...10 = Very important indeed)

Average: 8.70 / 10

Rating	Percentage
1	0%
2	0%
3	0%
4	2%
5	6%
6	2%
7	15%
8	9%
9	19%
10	47%

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How important is it to you that we invest in reliability in the future?
(1 = Not important at all...10 = Very important indeed)

Average: 9.30 / 10

Rating	Percentage
1	2%
2	0%
3	0%
4	0%
5	2%
6	0%
7	4%
8	11%
9	11%
10	70%

Please rank these external factors in terms of the impact you think they will have on network reliability
(1 = least important... 4 = most important)

Factor	Score
Post-COVID societal changes	2.42
Climate resilience	3.08
Heat decarbonisation	3.08
Transport decarbonisation	3.31

SESSION FIVE: BUILDING A SMART, FLEXIBLE NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE

SUMMARY

Delegates mostly agreed that SSEN should follow the recommendations of the Open Networks Project, with many recognising the importance of using an evidence-based approach with regard to creating a smart, flexible network. Similarly, assembling the experts needed to undertake this work, including research and development, was seen as the correct approach. Stakeholders did identify a few issues, however, with some pointing out that a more devolved approach would be needed to enable DNOs to collaborate moving forward, and doubts were raised over whether Ofgem would be amenable to this shift in practices, particularly in terms of funding. Others reported that they had found using flexibility services frustrating, with some delegates from solar farms calling for more investment in the grid itself, and others maintaining that flexibility services were complex enough without considering the different approaches taken by different DNOs. In this sense, seeing DNOs working in a more holistic, unified way was only seen as a benefit.

Stakeholders wanted to see more engagement with customers in fuel poverty and organisations representing them, such as Citizens Advice, particularly on incentives and efficiency measures. Others urged more engagement with local authorities, small businesses, business associations and parish councils, while some pointed to the need for greater international engagement, particularly with partners in Norway. Stakeholders representing infrastructure and developers wanted to see more high-level engagement, particularly on future energy sources such as hydrogen, with a view to giving generators a clearer, localised picture of the types of energy needed in specific locations. At all points, the critical role of education was stressed, with stakeholders stressing the need for clear, simple language around complex processes such as smart grids and flexibility services.

Most delegates approved of a market stimulation fund, particularly if it encouraged innovation and greater take-up of flexibility on the domestic side. Some emphasised the positive, viewing the UK as a possible world leader in decarbonisation, with the potential to unlock forms of innovation through a stimulation fund. The community energy perspective was also highlighted, with many reporting that it is difficult for these groups to invest heavily at the outset of a project for uncertain long-term gains. As a result, any mitigation that could be offered in the form of this kind of funding would only be of benefit, not only to these individual groups, but to the communities they aim to serve, and ultimately to the country, on the road to net zero.

1. Do you agree with the approach of following the recommendations and outputs of the Open Networks Project?

- "I guess they're the experts in the field, so they're the best-placed people to do it." Local authority officer

- "In this region we've had the news that the nuclear power station has been pulled. The more people you can get to take part in things like this, the more evidence there is for the decisions you make." Business representative

- "It's research and development. And who ignores their research and development?" Business representative

- "I think it's the right way to go. By working together and sharing ideas, you achieve a lot more." Business representative

- "It would be nonsensical not to. One area may have a different way of operating, it would be bedlam, and it would be so varied." Local authority officer

- "What you need is a strong leadership approach, where everyone adds their networks in. We don't have time to do things by committee." Environmental group

- "Localised networks are a great idea, but are they achievable when it boils down to new connections and keeping it local? I agree that it's ideal to have everybody trying to sell electricity back to the grid, but the more people generating themselves, the less price you'll get back for it, so is it worth it?" Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "I've got experience of one of these flexible connections, which means SSEN can turn off the solar farms whenever they feel like it, and it's not a very good way of operating a solar farm. It would be better to upgrade the grid." Community energy group

- "Engaging with flexibility services is difficult enough as it is, but if there are ways within each DSO system, I think it would be mind-blowing for some people. If there could be more consistency, I think it is an admirable approach." Charity / non-profit

- "Networks need to work together to change behaviours by consumers towards energy use. If everyone doesn't move towards flexible usage, we will be in a situation where the network will break down." Developer / connections representative

- "The key is moving to a unified approach on DSO. There is a move towards localisation, who the go-to person is. It's a pressure to consider moving towards a more devolved arrangement, which would mean the DNOs not being what they are at the moment. There are currently 13 regulated networks. Ofgem doesn't want the industry to throw loads of money at it, it wants focused spending, particularly with district heating." Infrastructure / engineering representative

2. Are there any aspects of this project that you think warrant additional engagement? If so, which ones?

- "Engagement with local authorities and parish councils is key." Community energy group

- "I don't think it's easy for small innovators to get involved with networks. We're doing stuff that is very innovative with regard to smart charging, but Open Networks has no idea, as it's not easy for small companies to get their foot in the door. It was presented to me as a closed shop as far as innovation and new technologies go. Ofgem has encouraged innovation through regulation, but my fear is that they'll ask you to put the brakes on innovation funding. We need that funding to reach a zero-carbon future." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "When you're a small business, it's hard to have influence in the DNOs' innovation teams." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "There's no communication between you guys as network planners and local authorities as town planners." Business representative

- "There was no mention of the Norwegian collaboration. There is a need for more international engagement." Elected councillor

- "The rate of fuel poverty is above the national average in Wiltshire. We have to engage with those who can't afford to pay. We identified the chilling effect on the inability to have flexible connections to the network. If you can build us a network that we can plug in and out of, then business investment in our area will rise." Business representative

- "Citizens Advice and the price of energy are critical for engagement. We need to be thinking about incentives. The price of electricity is only going in one direction and although that's not technically SSEN's problem, you should be seen to be tackling it." Business representative

- "There needs to be a lot more information put out to the public to help them understand what the smart grid is all about." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "We've had engagement in the past with regard to hydrogen manufacture. Are you considering ways of avoiding reinforcement by having storage? Are you mitigating by advising generators what kind of energy form you need locally?" Developer / connections representative

- "It doesn't look like commercial end users are on there. It might be so obvious that it's an omission, but it's worrying that I don't see that here." Local authority officer

3. Do you agree with our proposal to ask Ofgem for a market stimulation allowance? If so, what types of activity do you think this could/should fund?

- "Government grants don't cover 100% of the costs of projects. The latest grant covers 75% to reduce energy demands. Assisting or topping up the funding from government would hugely increase uptake." Local authority officer

- "Making the flexibility market open for everybody is a key part of this. It comes down to the domestic level, choosing how you interact with the grid and increasing the option to participate. There's a financial option in it for the public." Infrastructure / engineering representative

- "If you can encourage innovation and have more of your supply chain involved, that would be excellent." Business representative

- "Absolutely, you should do this. We have the potential to become a world leader in energy. If you guys can stimulate this kind of innovation, then our economy as a whole can massively benefit. This is an important point to make to the Government." Business representative

- "Your ambition has got to be around innovative ways to create an open-access, whole systems service. We are decelerating to zero carbon faster than anyone else. We've nearly got the lowest carbon network in the world. Push this. See yourself as a world leader and fund for innovation." Business representative

- "I would also argue in favour of an innovation fund. Less affluent households are less likely to engage with demand-side technology and these people cannot be left behind. Sadly, there doesn't seem to be any innovation fund available for this at present." Environmental group

- "Ofgem's innovation pot is good, but most of it currently goes towards insulation. There needs to be a wider scope." Environmental group

- "I think it would be very welcomed by community groups to have that funding, as there's so much risk to put this into practice for early adopters. But the challenges you will still need to face are upfront costs. Even at that setup phase, if you're setting up something with a long payback period, you're asking the community to personally invest in new changes and approaches to things; it's having the mid- to long-term security of income. It's how you incentivise that risk, but still give them comfort that it's still going to be worth doing." Charity / non-profit

- "I think you were touching on RIIO ED2 and making sure that those longer-term pricing signals are ones which will support rather than go against flexibility services in the future. The thing that trips up community groups time and time again is how we invest individuals' money in very long timeframes but have no secure long-term income, it makes it so hard." Charity / non-profit

- "We need to change perception of the self to stimulate flexibility and demand. District heating in Scandinavian countries, can we learn from that? We're too individualistic. Can we take that civic responsibility forward so that we have collective energy demand and schemes rather than individual households?" Developer / connections representative

APPENDIX 1: ATTENDEES

A total of 109 stakeholders attended both workshops, representing 92 organisations. The organisations represented at the events are shown below:

Aberdeenshire Council	Dummer Parish Council
Abington Town Council	East Northamptonshire Council
Achilles	East Hampshire District Council
Aggreko UK ltd	EDF Energy
AMT-Sybex Ltd	Eneida.io
Balfour Beatty	Energy Assets Networks
Barra & Vatersay Wind Energy Ltd	Energy Saving Trust
Barratt David Wilson Homes	Engas UK Ltd
Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council	Engenius Limited
Berkshire Healthcare NHS FT	EV Express
Blackbird Leys Parish Council	EV HUB LTD
Capgemini	Freedom Group
Centre for Sustainable Energy	Fundamentals Ltd
Cherwell District Council	GAP Group
Chichester District Council	Gosport Borough Council
Citizens Advice	Granite Engineering Ltd
Connected Response Ltd	Groundwork South
Convenimarket & Federation of Small Business	Hampshire County Council
Country Land and Business Association	Haste Ltd
CSA Catapult	Hilson Moran Partnership
Dorset LEP	Hive Energy

Hoare Lea

Infinis Energy

Isle of Wight Council

ITPEnergised

JBM Solar

Lachmann Consultants Ltd

livos group

Longcape Ltd

Low Carbon Hub

LSTC

Lucy Electric

Miller First

MOD

National Energy Action

Network Rail

Omexom

Oxford City Council

Oxfordshire County Council

Partnerships for Good

PE Systems Ltd

Persimmon Homes

Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils

Power On Connections

Power System Partners Limited

Powerline Technologies Ltd

Prysmian Cables & Systems

PSC Consulting

Reading Borough Council

Rowlands Castle Parish Council

Rushmoor Borough Council

Schneider Electric

Scottish Power

Siemens

Solesco

South Somerset District Council

Spark Assessment Services ltd

Swindon Borough Council

Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Thames Water

TLI Group

TUSC Ltd.

Welsh Government

Wessex Solar Energy

West Solent Solar Cooperative

Wiltshire Council

Winchester Action on Climate Change

Winchester City Council

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Wokingham Borough Council
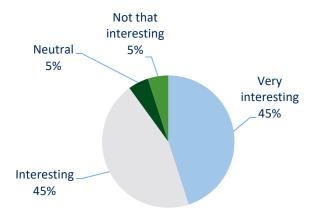
Wood

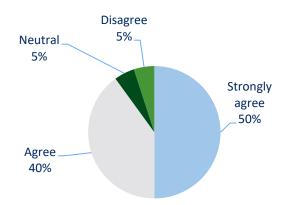Scottish & Southern
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APPENDIX 2: WRITTEN FEEDBACK

After the workshop, stakeholders were asked to complete a short feedback form. The feedback was as follows:

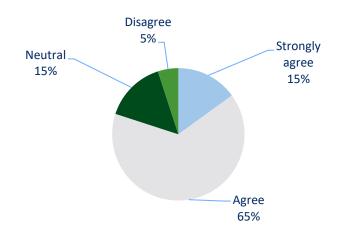## 1. Overall, how interesting did you find the workshop to be?

2. Did you feel that you had the opportunity to make your points and ask questions?

Comments:

- "Best event I have attended for organisation, IT and participation during lockdown."

- "My group was well managed and the participants listened and worked well together."

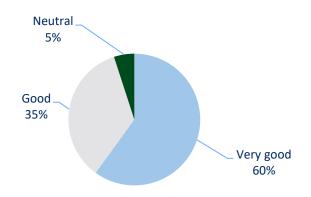- "Our group was well facilitated throughout each breakout session."

3. Did we cover the right topics for you on the day?

Comments:

- "Topics [were] clearly set out through the agenda."

4. What did you think of the way the workshop was chaired by your facilitator?

Comments:

- "The facilitator was good, welcoming, encouraging and keeping to time. [They] gave a fair hearing to people."
- "The facilitator did well at getting good outcomes from the sessions."
- "Made sure everyone was able to have their say."

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5. Did you find the online format accessible and easy to use?

Pie chart showing:
- Strongly agree 15%
- Agree 60%
- Neither agree nor disagree 15%
- Disagree 5%
- Strongly disagree 5%

If it went well, what did you like about it?

- "I liked going into the breakout rooms with people from all sectors as it brought a rounded perspective."

- "Virtual meeting made it easy to attend."

- "Good use of presentations and meeting rooms to discuss issues raised."

- "It was well managed and held to time very well."

- "Fantastic to have a Scottish islander in the same room as a southerner, really great UK coverage."

If it went poorly, what challenges did you experience?

- "Couldn't flip back to the agenda without disconnecting from the workshop."

- "Any application that depends on a specific browser is suspect in my view."

- "The links between sessions were a bit clunky. Three hours was a long session. I was mentally tired at the end."

6. If you have used any other platforms for this type of event, are there any you would recommend?

- "This one worked slightly better than most."

- "Zoom is the only one that I am relatively comfortable with."

- "This was the best platform I have encountered."

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7. Any other comments?

- "Good session. I find it more difficult to recall the sequence of events and areas covered compared with a physical meeting, where coffee breaks and the layout of the room provide landmarks to anchor one's memory."

- "You are doing a good job [and] moving in the right directions."

- "In most ways, you successfully simulated the physical workshop experience, except for knowing who was 'at the next table'."

- "Very impressed you had independent scribes taking notes in the breakouts."

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