

NATIONAL GRID ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION

ELECTRICITY FUTURES WORKSHOP 2: SUPPORTING REGIONAL AMBITIONS

FEEDBACK REPORT

16 NOVEMBER 2023



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INTRODUCTION

On 16 November 2023, National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) hosted a virtual stakeholder workshop for local authorities and those with an interest in local and regional energy planning. The purpose of this workshop was to seek feedback on how NGED can improve the support it offers to those with a responsibility for local decarbonisation, with a particular focus on Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs).

The workshop was the second in a series of four to engage on future actions for the Distribution System Operator (DSO) strategy as part of their wider stakeholder engagement programme, 'Electricity Futures'.

The theme of this workshop was 'Supporting Regional Ambitions', and most of the invited stakeholders were involved in the development of LAEPs. The workshop sought to obtain feedback on a number of deliverables that form part of the DSO's strategic commitment: "We will collaborate and coordinate across the whole system to help stakeholders achieve their decarbonisation plans".

The workshop was aimed at achieving the following three aims:

- To understand regional views on how NGED currently coordinates across local area energy planning.
- To identify local requirements in the future so NGED can evolve its approach.
- To discuss the value of system working and what this can achieve as we accelerate towards Net Zero.

Each session was introduced with a short presentation, followed by facilitated discussions in breakout rooms. These were complemented by plenary feedback to the main room and interactive electronic voting sessions, using the polling platform Slido.

NGED instructed EQ Communications, a specialist stakeholder engagement consultancy, to independently facilitate the workshop and to take notes of the comments made by stakeholders. Every effort has been made to faithfully record the feedback given. 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.](#)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 80 stakeholders participated in the workshop, representing 54 organisations.
- 55% of attendees who filled out a feedback form told us that they found the workshop to be 'very interesting', with another 45% opting for 'interesting'.

SESSION 1: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

The workshop opened with an introductory talk by Ben Godfrey, Director of DSO at NGED, who explained the aims of the workshop and set the scene for the day.

In the first discussion session, stakeholders were asked to share their involvement and progress in the development of their LAEPs, and state any challenges or issues that they had faced

- Many participants were actively involved in the development of LAEPs. It is clear that progress is being made and that there is a significant appetite for delivering on Net Zero projects and plans.
- However, the point was made a number of times that progress is being hampered by a lack of resources (both financial and in terms of staffing), along with issues relating to network capacity. In addition, the point was made that clarity about long-term plans is needed to properly understand what is possible and where projects can and should be delivered.

SESSION 2: WORKING WITH LOCAL AND REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS – SUPPORT FOR LAEPs

Hayley Burden, Head of DSO Strategy and Stakeholder Engagement, introduced the second session of the morning: working with local and regional stakeholders. This covered the DSO's commitment to supporting local authorities with their LAEPs, the role of the Strategic Engagement Officers and how the DSO supports the development of LAEPs.

Participants were asked for their feedback on how NGED's DSO currently supports LAEPs, how useful and effective the data is that is currently provided, what data and information would be useful, and how this could best be presented.

- Communication with NGED is generally seen as positive and improving, albeit against a difficult background of low resources, which adds to feelings of anxiety around progression.
- The potential role for NGED as a stakeholder convener was seen as one that would be helpful in progressing plans, building relationships and sharing information.
- There is a mixed picture of how data is being used and by whom. Some local authority officers do not have the capacity, skills or confidence to interpret the data, and would like further help with this. To

address this, training sessions were suggested. However, it was noted that others have outsourced much of the LAEP planning to consultants which, of course, comes at a cost.

- Those who were using the data often felt it was helpful, but not always sufficiently communicated. To address this, direct engagement was seen as helpful.
- Suggestions were made for how data sharing could be improved, although much of this related to clarity around connections and capacity to help projects progress.
- The Strategic Engagement Officers were consistently singled out as providing excellent support.

Following the discussions, three guest speakers presented case studies about their approaches to energy planning. These presentations were given by: Emily White, Senior Climate Change Officer from Bristol City Council; Huw Lewis, Programme Lead at the Welsh Government; and Michael Gallagher, Head of Midlands Net Zero Hub.

SESSION 3: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE – STRATEGIC PLANNING

For the final session, Oli Spink, Head of System Planning at NGED, presented on the evolving role of the DSO in the energy transition, particularly around supporting whole system collaboration and coordination. Participants were asked for their feedback on strategic planning, including what successful strategic planning looks like, how stakeholders want to be informed, and what other activities would support stakeholders and their own plans.

- The issue raised most frequently was around the difficulties in turning plans into deliverable projects due to the lack of information about connections and capacity. More information about this, provided in a proactive and timely way, was cited as the main enabler to securing investment and taking projects forward.
- In terms of communication, more whole system coordination at regional level was suggested, along with improvements in NGED's internal communication and better communication with external stakeholders.
- Information that is understandable by wider audiences was repeatedly requested. It was felt that information should be shared that is easily digestible for local communities, officers and elected members, including those from non-technical backgrounds.
- Stakeholders offered suggestions about improvements to communication, including regular updates, surgeries and more stakeholder engagement events.

CLOSING PLENARY SESSION

The final plenary session took the form of an expert panel discussion, where the audience asked questions of the panel which included NGED's Ben Godfrey, Hayley Burden and Oli Spink.

The audience asked questions about flexibility and demand, streamlining data sharing processes, building network resilience and climate resilience, and equitable acceleration of EV charging.

METHODOLOGY

A select group of stakeholders representing local authorities and regional planning bodies from across NGED's distribution area were invited to the workshop. These stakeholders were sent several email invitations for the engagement events to ensure they were given the opportunity to participate. The first invitation was sent on 12 October, which provided stakeholders with over four weeks' notice. As is standard practice ahead of any workshops, all stakeholders who had registered were reminded about the event via both telephone and email in order to maximise participation.

PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

The workshop comprised three short presentations, each followed by discussions in breakout rooms discussions in smaller groups to enable stakeholders to provide verbal feedback. Relevant slides from the presentation were shared in the breakout rooms to ensure that stakeholders had sufficient information in front of them to participate.

If stakeholders did not answer a question, facilitators asked them to confirm whether their silence indicated tacit approval or whether they felt unable to respond.

SESSION 1: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

Session 1 was introduced by Ben Godfrey, Director of DSO at NGED. Ben began by setting out the purpose of the workshop before talking stakeholders through NGED's DSO Charter which includes the DSO vision: To enable and coordinate a smart, flexible energy system that facilitates local decarbonisation for all customers and communities the right time and lowest cost. He went on to highlight NGED's proposed activities under the following three headings: Flexibility Market Development; Network Operation; and Planning and Network Development.

In the first discussion session, stakeholders were asked to share their progress in the development of their LAEPs, along with any challenges or issues that they had faced.

SUMMARY

Many participants were actively involved in the development of LAEPs. It was noted that a good deal of progress is being made by many and that there is a significant appetite for delivering on Net Zero projects and plans. However, the point was made that progress is often hampered by a lack of financial resources and skilled personnel. Issues relating to network capacity were widely cited, and it was added that greater clarity about long-term plans was needed in order to properly understand what is possible and where projects should be delivered.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK: INTRODUCTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Overall, there is a keen appetite among stakeholders for listening, learning and collaboration. The feedback received reflected varying levels of maturity, both in terms of LAEP progress and also in terms of individual knowledge and resources. There is a clear commitment to the LAEP process and decarbonisation more generally, but this is sometimes being led by people who do not have a background in energy planning or many, if any, resources to progress the plans as they would like. It was noted that officers and councillors were often holding diverse and complex portfolios, and it is clear that resources are thinly spread.

Partnership working at a local level was evident, both between local authorities and communities, although much of this work is being driven by a number of very engaged and passionate individuals. There is clearly enthusiasm and excitement for innovative local projects which are being proposed and planned, but there is also a certain amount of frustration at how difficult these are to implement.

In the discussions, it was clear that there is also frustration around the difficulties of moving from planning to delivering on ambitions. Issues related to connecting to the grid were cited, as well as those around visibility of long-term plans which could illuminate where local authorities should focus on projects and innovation. A level of anxiety was expressed as local authorities are keen to progress projects but are hindered by connectivity and capacity issues.

Challenges were identified around local commitments to LAEPs, and a lack of funding for these led to questions about whether there are alternative approaches. The challenge of keeping the LAEP as a 'live' and agile plan, without the resource for ongoing work, was also raised.

There was a degree of confusion around the energy sector and how the relevant parties interact. This is unsurprising with officers who may be new to the role and have roles that encompass a wide number of responsibilities. However, there is a strong interest in the sector and an appetite for greater collaboration.

The complex role of councillors in the process is also clear, who may be juggling conflicting responsibilities such as planning for decarbonisation while also representing the concerns of their communities. For example, they have to weigh up concerns about the need to develop new energy infrastructure such as pylons with the impact this might have on local communities.

Concerns were raised about long-term progress in Wales, but it was also acknowledged that Wales is putting resource and commitment behind LAEPs. Wales is perceived to be 'ahead of the game' in comparison with local authorities in England.

The contributions of NGED's Strategic Engagement Officers in supporting local authorities was appreciated and highlighted repeatedly by stakeholders.

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Progress and challenges

- “The council has declared an ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030, but some of our pilot buildings are encountering issues. The way to have a Net Zero building is to plaster it with solar, but then there's nowhere to put the solar because of the grid. So, what we're interested in is the speed with which the grid can meet us in our aspirations as there's a definite appetite to do this. We'd like to understand where the blockages are and the priorities.” Local Authority Officer
- “We're also developing new schools and new-build developments, which we're maxing out with solar to be Net Zero in operation and we're already hitting some obstacles with export limitations on the new developments. This sets a theme for us where we seem to be restricted. We're in the heart of doing our LAEP and setting out our ambition to decarbonise the borough, but it's going to be a challenge with all these restrictions.” Local Authority Officer
- “I'm concerned that the local authority and NGED's views are different. We get the impression that the DNO wants lots of incremental information which just helps it to build up a picture of its connections and its next plan, whereas we want to decarbonise and decentralise our whole system in a long-term, strategic way.” Local Authority Officer

- “I’m here to learn about where is the right place to put projects.” Local Authority Officer
- “I’m keen to keep on top of everything going on. It’s exciting that there are lots of LAEPs coming together in our region, but we need to keep speaking with National Grid.” Net Zero Hub
- “We’re doing an LAEP at the moment, and I’m scared about the amount of renewables being put forward. If we haven’t got the capacity now, how can we meet this demand in the future?” Local Authority Officer
- “LAEPs are a huge expense and resource without government funding. Our councillors and senior managers are trying to understand what the options are. If we don’t go down the route of LAEP, what is Plan B, and how do we still engage with stakeholders like NGED?” Local Authority Officer

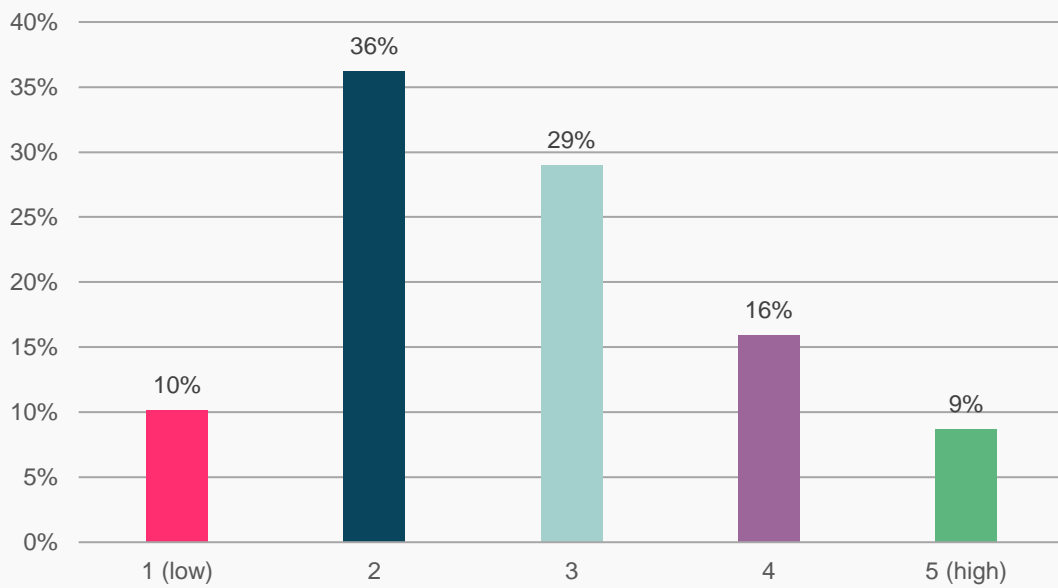
ELECTRONIC VOTING

Following the first discussion session, participants responded to a series of questions via electronic voting.

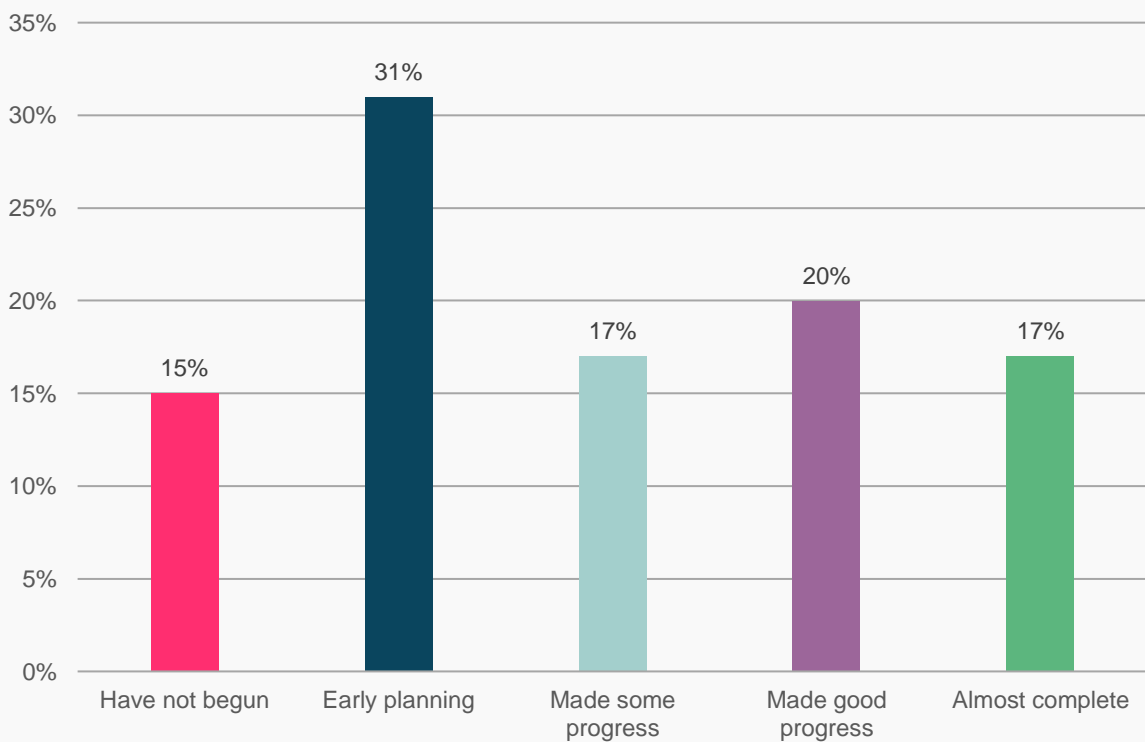
1. What would you like to get out of this event? (92 responses from 60 participants).



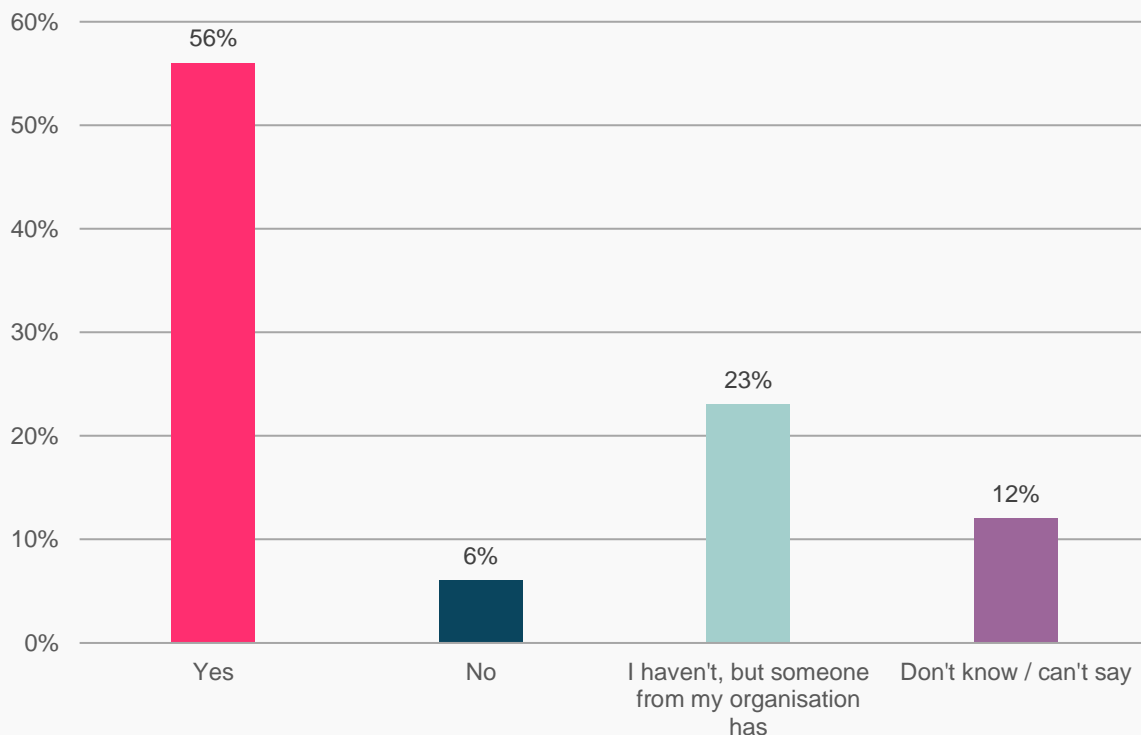
2. How would you rate your understanding of how NGED's DSO helps facilitate local energy planning?



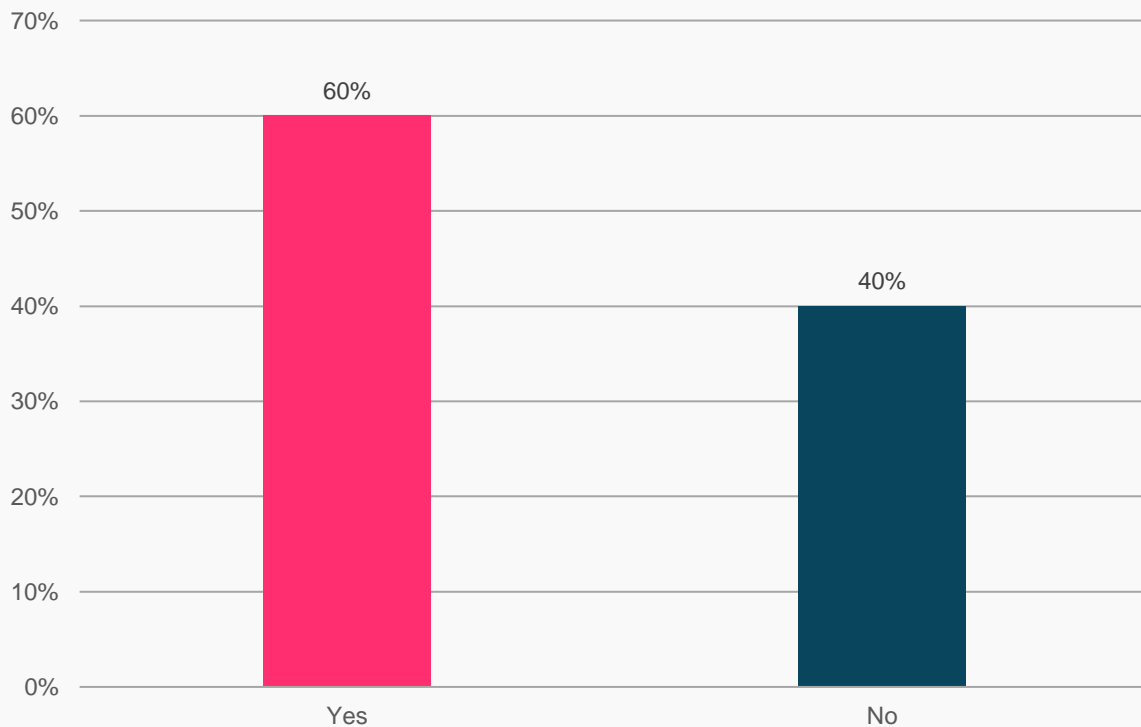
3. What stage are you at in your LAEP?



4. Have you engaged with us before as part of your LAEP?



5. Would you know who to talk to at NGED's DSO?



SESSION 2: WORKING WITH LOCAL AND REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS – SUPPORT FOR LAEPs

Hayley Burden, Head of DSO Strategy and Stakeholder Engagement, introduced the second feedback session with a presentation on working with local and regional stakeholders. This covered the DSO's commitment to supporting local authorities with their LAEPs, the role of Strategic Engagement Officers and how the DSO supports the development of LAEPs.

Participants were asked for their feedback on how NGED's DSO currently supports LAEPs, how useful and effective the data is that is currently provided, what data and information would be useful, and how this could best be presented. After the second discussion session, there were presentations given by three guest speakers. They outlined their work to date, highlighting some of the challenges they had faced and how they had overcome these. The guest speakers were:

- Emily White, Senior Climate Change Officer at Bristol City Council, who presented on the council's approach to decarbonisation.
- Huw Lewis, Programme Lead at the Welsh Government, who presented on how Wales is approaching the energy transition through building on LAEPs to produce a National Energy Plan.
- Michael Gallagher, Head of Midlands Net Zero Hub, who spoke about the role of the Net Zero Hub in supporting organisations to identify and develop local Net Zero and energy strategies and projects.

SUMMARY

It was apparent that many local authorities are still getting to grips with both the internal and external communication needed to progress LAEPs. Communication with NGED was generally seen as positive and improving. However, it is clear that a number of local authorities have low or no resources, which is adding to feelings of anxiety around progression, on their part. The potential role for NGED as a stakeholder convener was seen as one that would be helpful in progressing plans, building relationships and sharing information, and the appointment of the Strategic Engagement Officers was consistently singled out as providing excellent support.

In terms of the data provided to stakeholders, there was a mixed picture of how this is being used and by whom. Some Local Authority Officers do not have the capacity, skills or confidence to interpret this data, and would like further help with this. Training sessions were suggested. Others have outsourced much of the local area energy planning to consultants, and so did not engage with the data themselves.

Those who were using the data often felt it was helpful, but not sufficiently detailed or always giving the full picture, and therefore direct engagement was viewed as more helpful for them. Suggestions were made for how data sharing could be improved, but much of this related to clarity around connections and capacity in order to help progress projects.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

NGED's support for LAEPs

Overall, those who have engaged with NGED reported back positively about their experiences and were appreciative of improvements to the stakeholder engagement.

The Strategic Engagement Officers were singled out for their proactive involvement and support, which is clearly helping local authorities to progress their LAEPs. Having a single point of contact was appreciated. Regular meetings and ongoing contact were also given as examples of good practice. One local authority gave an example of having created a place for NGED on their LAEP steering group.

One stakeholder said that their contact at NGED had been off sick for some time. Another was concerned that NGED may need more resources in the East and West Midlands area, due to the number of LAEPs that are likely to be required. Some stakeholders felt that they had received conflicting messages from different NGED staff and felt that NGED's own internal communication could be improved at times.

Examples were given of other positive engagement with NGED, including developing local datasets to map NGED's coverage and network capacity to inform a local area energy map.

Stakeholders flagged a mismatch between the expectations of different stakeholders, and a need for clear communication and shared vision across local authority teams (such as planning and climate) and also external stakeholders (such as investors and national government). The need to align plans in order to move forward was emphasised as a critical barrier. Questions were raised about how the LAEPs interact with regional and national plans, in terms of both upward and downward sharing of information.

There was recognition and a real appetite to engage with NGED, but some local authorities were at an early stage in their energy planning journey and are still learning how the sector works and who they need to contact. Many officers are new to the role and are therefore not aware of who to contact. It was also noted that local authorities do not always know who their contact at NGED should be, and there was caution that external enquiries often go missing into generic mailboxes.

VERBATIM COMMENTS

NGED's support for LAEPs

- "This should all be led by the grid, bringing in all the stakeholders to work towards achieving a decarbonised, decentralised grid by a certain date. That would be the logical way of doing it rather than individual little conversations happening with different motives." Local Authority Officer
- "The fact that they have dedicated people in place to support with local energy planning now is a very positive step in the right direction." Net Zero Hub

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- “We have had really good engagement with National Grid throughout the development of our LAEP. We had five workshops, and they attended every one. Your colleague was very proactive in asking for regular progress updates.” Local Authority Officer
 - “I see the LAEP as a misnomer. It’s not one defined plan, it’s more like several scenarios. It grates a bit when people call it a plan. So many stakeholders and interactions are required that merited doing the LAEPs, but it’s not clear to me which one of those scenarios, if any, is going to happen. Interaction with NGED was good and reassured us that people are thinking about what needs to be done. How that filters down to my level in the council, I’m not quite sure. The targets and challenges are huge.” Local Authority Officer
 - “In terms of general engagement with NGED, with local planners and design system engineers, it’s always fantastic. There is an interesting time when you do get different responses, or policies interpreted in different ways, depending on who you speak to. But it’s not normally a show-stopper scenario. It’s normally resolved by having multiple conversations and bringing people into the fold.” Local Authority Officer
 - “We have Sharon as our contact point. That’s made our lives easier and she’s so nice to talk to.” Local Authority Officer

Current data provision

Stakeholders were asked for their views on the current data that is provided by NGED, how useful and effective this was and how stakeholders were currently using the data.

Some felt that the data was 'very thorough' but there was a lack of capacity to interpret and interrogate the data in order to make it useful for LAEPs. Some stakeholders felt that whenever they had needed data, they had been able to access it. However, others felt that they lacked the skills or confidence to use and understand the data in order to make it useful for them when putting together their LAEPs. In addition, others were unaware of what data is shared, or said they felt 'in the dark' about what data was available.

Some local authorities were mainly using consultants to develop their LAEPs, so did not have direct experience of accessing the data themselves. However, they felt that their consultants had not experienced any problems.

It was felt that the Welsh model of a templated LAEP was more helpful than having different formats in different areas being written independently by consultants. This would enable NGED to provide data that was tailored to the needs of LAEPs.

The point was made that local authority footprints don't always reflect the DNO's own licence area or depot boundaries, and therefore data at different levels may be needed, for example, where a local authority is planning at a regional level and taking into account multiple local authorities.

A need for more visibility of data and transparency around energy planning was raised, as well as the need for greater collaboration between stakeholders. There was enthusiasm to move forward with practical projects, but it was commented that this is often stymied by a lack of capacity and understanding of which areas may be best targeted for projects, such as solar farms.

Suggestions for improvements to NGED's stakeholder support included more visibility around data, in particular digital tools. The NGED website was cited as a source of information that was useful for low output areas but could be improved for industrial users. It was noted that industrial data is often aggregated due to commercial sensitivity, but this limited its usefulness.

Connected sites: Some felt that the data around connected sites was incomplete. For example, when looking at heat pump planning, some were unable to find which properties were connected to transformers. The main information that stakeholders were keen to understand was network connections plans and where there will be an opportunity for additional generation, as well as specific information for individual projects. The lack of firm connection offers was described as a 'massive risk' to projects.

Network capacity map: Stakeholders felt that being able to check capacity maps was very useful, particularly if they had data at a granular level. It was felt that this would be useful for councils or community groups who were planning where renewables should go. Some felt the data was out of date and therefore not always useful. Others felt it was useful as a guide for infrastructure planning (such as for EVs) but that more detail was required than was available on the maps. Therefore, realistically, direct engagement with planners and distribution managers was still going to be needed.

Some felt that there was a risk that projects in red areas were abandoned due to lack of capacity. However, that may not reflect the full story and further work can increase the capacity.

Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES): Stakeholders appreciated the improvements to the DFES data, but again it was felt that when planning activities, it was more helpful to engage with planners and the DNO directly.

Stakeholders said that they wanted data that was:

- Digital
- Granular
- Agile/dynamic
- Manipulable
- Digestible

-
- Accurate and up to date
 - Accessible and available to other stakeholders
 - Detailed
 - Open source
 - Standardised

Stakeholders suggested a variety of sources of information that they felt were not currently available, but which would be useful for developing plans. Many of these suggestions centred around more visibility in terms of connections and capacity in order to better understand area demand. These suggestions included:

- The number of connection applications for renewable generation/EV charging that have been received and the number of projects which have not been able to be provided with a connection.
- What opportunities in a given part of the network are available for community energy projects.
- Which areas are priorities for network upgrades.
- Which areas have capacity for renewables to be built, particularly in rural areas where there are supply challenges.
- Detailed maps that show where the grid is up to capacity.
- Data on infrastructure upgrades: where they are happening and where they are needed.

Other information that was suggested included:

- Capacity and costs required for solar farm connections.
- Clear plans around decarbonising rural transport and connectivity for this.
- Longer-term predictions around capacity.
- Maps with a time slider that show, given current infrastructure planning, what capacity might look like in five, ten, 20 years' time.
- Layering of maps of housebuilding and EV charging.

It was also suggested that SSEN had a useful digital tool that NGED could look at emulating, the Local Energy Net Zero Accelerator (LENZA), which shows live capacity mapping.

Stakeholders were asked how data can be presented in a way that is helpful. Feedback included:

- Raw technical data, not just GIS data or high-level mapping.
- Downloadable data e.g. in spreadsheet format.
- Layered data, e.g. areas of deprivation.
- Visually presented data.
- A flow chart to show the various order of processes and services required, and average costs.
- Interpretation of data.

Stakeholders also suggested **training sessions** on what data is available, and interpreting and using that data.

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Data and information

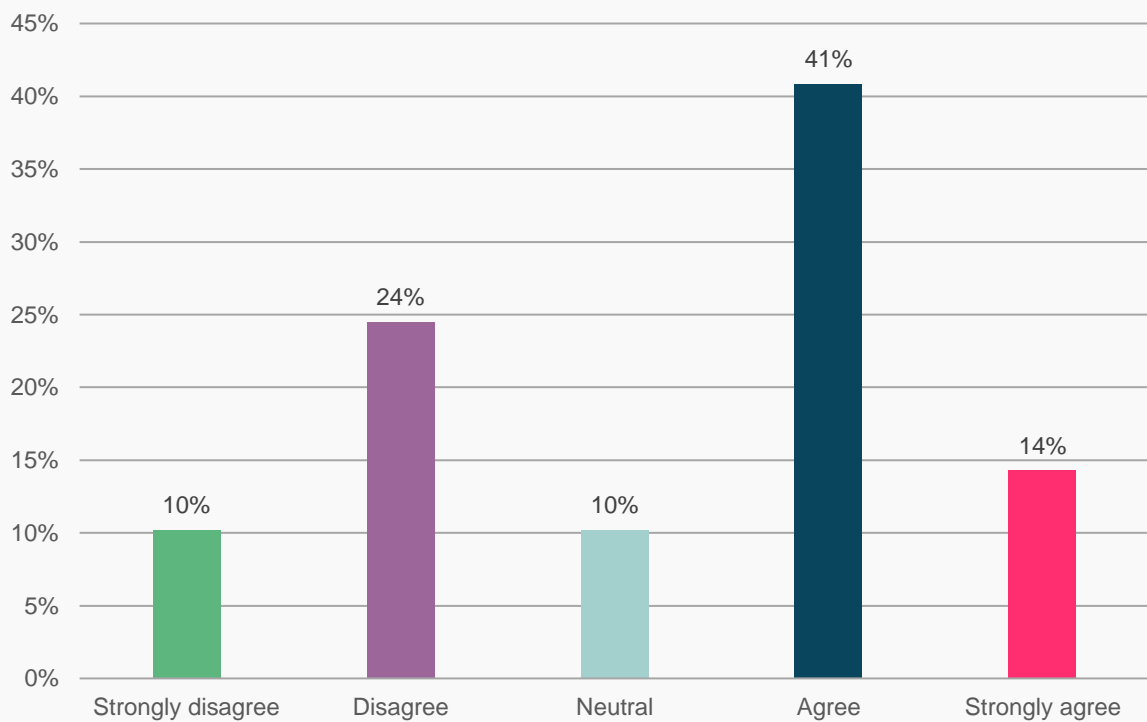
- “There is a disconnect because it’s difficult for those putting together the LAEP to understand the data presented to them. As we don’t feel confident using the data due to our level of expertise, it would be helpful to be provided with the tools to do so.” Local Authority Officer
- “It would be really helpful if NGED could interpret the data for us. This space can be confusing and there’s a lot of detail. It would be good to have back to basics, a bit of handholding. It would be good for this to come from NGED, not extremely expensive consultants. We need a better understanding of what the data actually shows us and how we can use it.” Local Authority Officer
- “If we’ve got ten sites for solar farms, which is the easiest one? We’re not seeing that real sense of urgency, we’ve got to start now. I’m worried it’s going to take another few years before we get to anything like that situation. What’s OK to do today?” Local Authority Officer
- “The website information that NGED has is great, but detail is scarce, for instance low voltage data. We’ve been working on a data sharing agreement with NGED for eight months, and it’s still not signed. These agreements must be ready.” Local Authority Officer
- “We want clarity of communication in terms of work, such as when works are happening. The information is very disparate, and the process frustrating. It’s like wading through mud.” Local Authority Officer
- “We appreciate the improved DFES in terms of drilling down. Some of our analyst teams have produced some graphing on that and it has improved over the years. But when developing or scoping activities, we engage with DNO function and planners directly.” Local Authority Officer
- “The online data is good for members of the public and local community. For us, the raw data is invaluable so we can filter and put those additional layers onto the pieces of work we’re doing as well.” Local Authority Officer
- “We need NGED data to map against things like areas of deprivation so that we can focus on them to make improvements. To be usable, we need to extract NGED data and use it alongside things like population data, where housing and industry are.” Government
- “We need an approach at local level where we can look at supply and demand, and energy flows over shorter distances. There are many different bodies involved that are not visible to each other, and this represents a real lack of transparency in the process.” Academic institution

- “If you could simply enter your local authority and get all the local authority data related to your area, that would be great.” Local Authority Officer

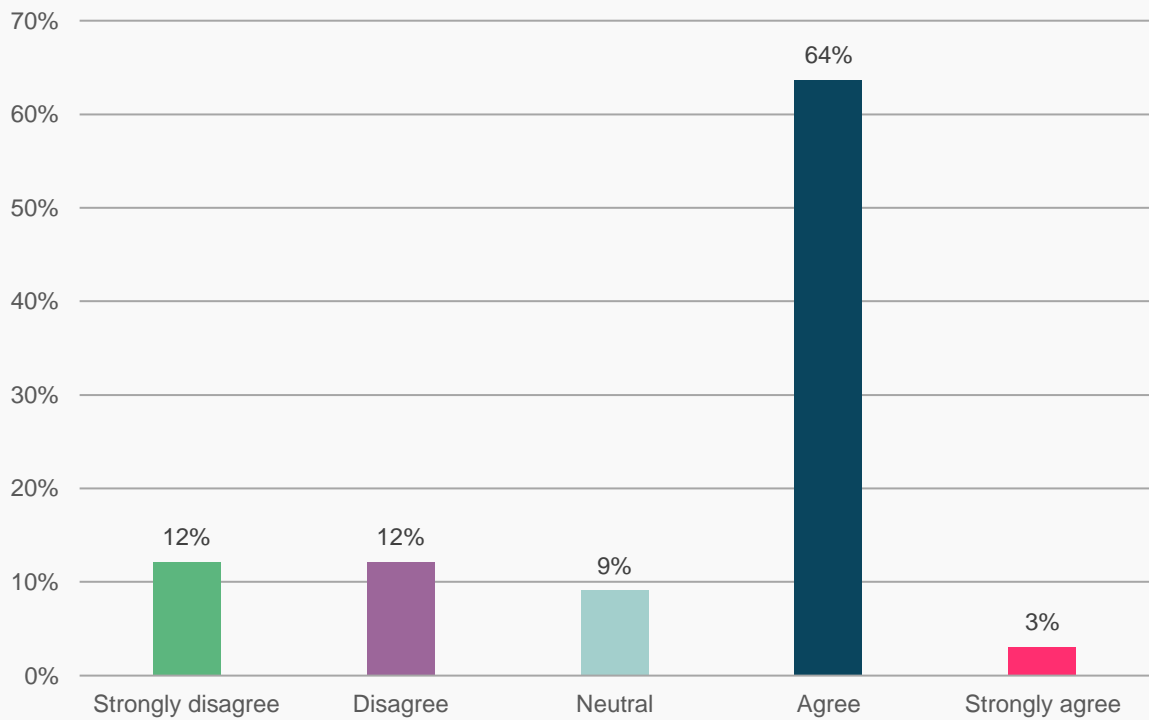
ELECTRONIC VOTING

Following the second discussion session, participants responded to a series of questions via electronic voting.

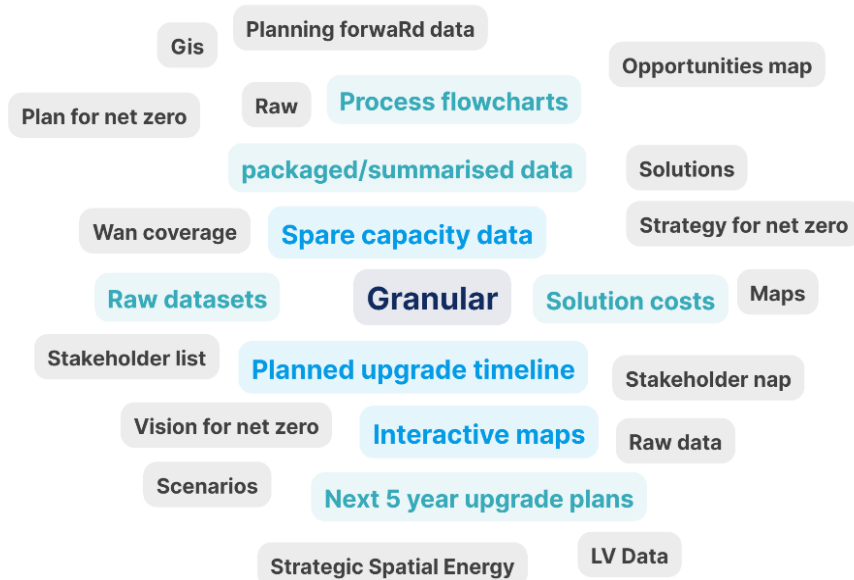
6. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “NGED’s DSO currently provides me with sufficient support to enable me to develop my LAEP.”



7. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “NGED’s DSO currently provides me with sufficient data and information to inform the development of my LAEP.”



8. Are there any additional datasets/information that you would like NGED’s DSO to publish?



SESSION 3: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE – STRATEGIC PLANNING

In the final session, Oli Spink, Head of System Planning at NGED, presented on the evolving role of the DSO in the energy transition, particularly around supporting whole system collaboration and coordination.

Participants were asked for their feedback on strategic planning, including what does successful strategic planning look like and what outcomes would it produce; how do stakeholders want to be informed about the network development plan and investment; and what other activities would support stakeholders and their plans.

SUMMARY

The issue that stakeholders raised most frequently was around the difficulties in turning plans into deliverable projects due to the lack of information about connections and capacity. More information about this, provided in a proactive and timely way, was cited as the main enabler to securing investment and taking projects forward.

In terms of communication, more whole system coordination at regional level was suggested, as well as improvements in NGED's internal communication and communication with external stakeholders.

Information that is understandable by wider audiences was requested, so that it is easily digestible for local communities, officers with non-technical backgrounds and elected members. Stakeholders also offered suggestions about improvements to communication, including regular updates, surgeries and more stakeholder engagement events.

STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Connections

Overall, there was agreement that better and more timely information would assist decision making around planning and investment. To do this, it was felt that NGED should strive to reform the connections process and give local authorities more up to date and clearer information about capacity, timelines, processes and plans. It was felt that this would result in better decision making, confidence for investors and more projects being delivered efficiently and in a timely manner.

Suggestions included publishing annual capacity reviews, and more two-way information being shared with local authorities, rather than relying on applications being submitted so they can be told there is no capacity.

Delivering capacity in geographically unconstrained areas (in terms of the least impact on ecology) where renewable power generation can be more easily built, rather than building renewable power on sites that

are less appropriate due to availability of connections, was cited. It was felt that this would minimise the impact on the natural environment, rather than resulting in developers 'chasing connections'.

A digital tool was suggested to map short, medium and long-term planning, with plans by defined geographical areas, in order to match potential generation projects to demand sites. Examples were given of councils needing to upgrade their fleets to EV, and needing more information about which depots can be used for charging, or whether there are areas where local community renewable energy solutions could be built and used to support such charging projects.

For local authorities involved with public sector and educational building projects, the balance between developers' realistic energy requirement estimation, and the burden of reinforcement costs if they give up capacity, was flagged as a risk for new projects. Stakeholders asked for reassurance around such reinforcement costs.

Stakeholders also asked for prioritisation for connections that are low carbon or for education or public sector building projects. Stakeholders mention tensions between different demand-side customers, such as energy generators and food producers, and feel that a strategic plan would help prioritisation.

Communication and engagement

Support for both delivering LAEPS and coordinating LAEPS on a regional level was suggested. It was felt that governance structures that allow strategic planning across local authority areas but also whole system planning - including transport, development, economic developments and gas networks - would be of benefit.

Clearer and improved communication was also requested, both out of NGED but also between NGED's internal teams, to avoid conflicting or outdated messaging. Faster response times from NGED were requested, in terms of responding to information requests and data sharing.

More sharable data or digital tools to share data were also requested, in order to enable stakeholders to increase engagement across their organisations and to build on the developing interest in this area. Stakeholders also asked for clarity around what opportunities there are for engagement, at both regional and national level.

Bringing communities on side by ensuring that they benefitted from new generation projects, rather than just exporting into the national network, was seen as a way that would help with wider engagement and communication, and foster greater local buy-in.

A good practice example was given of where a collaborative approach is working well in South West Wales, where stakeholders are working with NGED to implement the local energy development plan around significant generation plans, which is of benefit to all stakeholders, including investors.

Practical support

Local authorities flagged the challenges they are having in terms of funding and other resources. In terms of practical support, a focus on the demand side was suggested including support for initiatives such as retrofitting social housing.

For local authorities involved with public sector and educational building projects, the balance between developers' realistic energy requirement estimation, and the burden of reinforcement costs if they give up capacity, was flagged as a risk for new projects. Stakeholders asked for reassurance around such reinforcement costs.

Stakeholders asked for regular updates from NGED and greater clarity on connections prioritisation. They also said that they appreciated having a single point of contact with specific regional knowledge along with future events and surgeries held in their own areas.

Suggestions for communications about strategic planning

Stakeholders put forward the following suggestions around communications about strategic planning:

- Quarterly local updates, such as maps showing any changes, that stakeholders can contribute to. An example given was grants awarded to 30 sites owned by social landlords.
- A quarterly newsletter and mailing list with updates.
- Website updates with email notifications of updated information.
- A clearer understanding of regional or national plans, so that local authorities can realistically plan to align with priorities that are achievable.
- Central leadership.
- Clarity around connections prioritisation.
- Surgeries.
- Stakeholder events with information to take away, such as PowerPoint packs.
- Information presented in a way that is easy for a layperson to understand, so it can be shared with communities and elected members.
- A regional single point of contact with regional knowledge.
- Events that are held in areas other than London, and online events, as many local authorities will not have the budgets for people to travel.
- Providing networking opportunities between local authorities.
- A pan-Wales workshop to develop a strategy.

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Strategic planning

- “Is it too simple to say that the desire is to dramatically cut the connection queue and create a space where we can deliver projects?” Government
- “Confidence. We want to push renewables, and we want to make sure that the capacity will be there, especially when we have confirmed a certain project. I am not going to say that funding is not an issue, but the biggest barrier is the green capacity. We are developing plans for 2025 and 2030, and we want to be realistic, so we need the capacity to deliver those projects.” Local Authority Officer
- “We’ve more or less given up as a community energy group, and as a council we’ve got limited capital, so we need viable projects that we can invest in. We’ve only got one energy officer who works part time. We therefore need more help from the DNO.” Local Authority Officer
- “When people are developing projects for us like schools, the designers will come up with a capacity that is often two or three times what is actually needed. We are quite reticent to give up the built capacity because we might start more vehicle charging or move to a heat pump, and need additional capacity. The fear is that if we give up that capacity and end up actually needing it back, it will cost a lot of money in reinforcements. One side is getting developers to actually make better estimates on what capacity they need, but the other is reassurance that if people give up capacity, they won’t be stuck with reinforcement costs if they need to get it back.” Local Authority Officer
- “The public doesn’t understand that if they’re having a solar farm next to them, or transmission infrastructure through their area, why they then have connection problems. They don’t understand the difference between the different bodies responsible for different things. It would help us deal with the public and community if there was a way to link it up and say, ‘Yes there’s a solar farm next to you and these are the benefits in terms of the energy you can use.’” Local Authority Officer
- “I’m struggling to keep up with what’s going on. I’m speaking to planners at NGED on the ground who are also struggling to keep up. Speaking between three offices, you can get three different interpretations of a strategy document.” Local Authority Officer
- “On a strategic level, we want to be able to work out provision that we need in the future, and where we should be located. For example, we are getting loads of requests for PV’s installation. Tension is rising between the energy and the food producers. We are one of the biggest providers (if not the biggest) for food in the UK. But we have problems finding available and suitable spaces. We would like a clear answer regarding certain issues, such as where do we have to install PV vs heat pumps, or what comes first and in what order? All in all, a more robust strategic plan.” Local Enterprise Partnership

- "It's complex information, so we need to understand how to share this in short, snappy, easy to digest reports." Local Authority Officer
- "Networking with other local authorities is really helpful. Elected members like to see how we benchmark alongside other local authorities. We feel a little disconnected on this. Whether it's NGED's role or another role, a stakeholder convener would help us to connect with others who are doing the same thing." Local Authority Officer

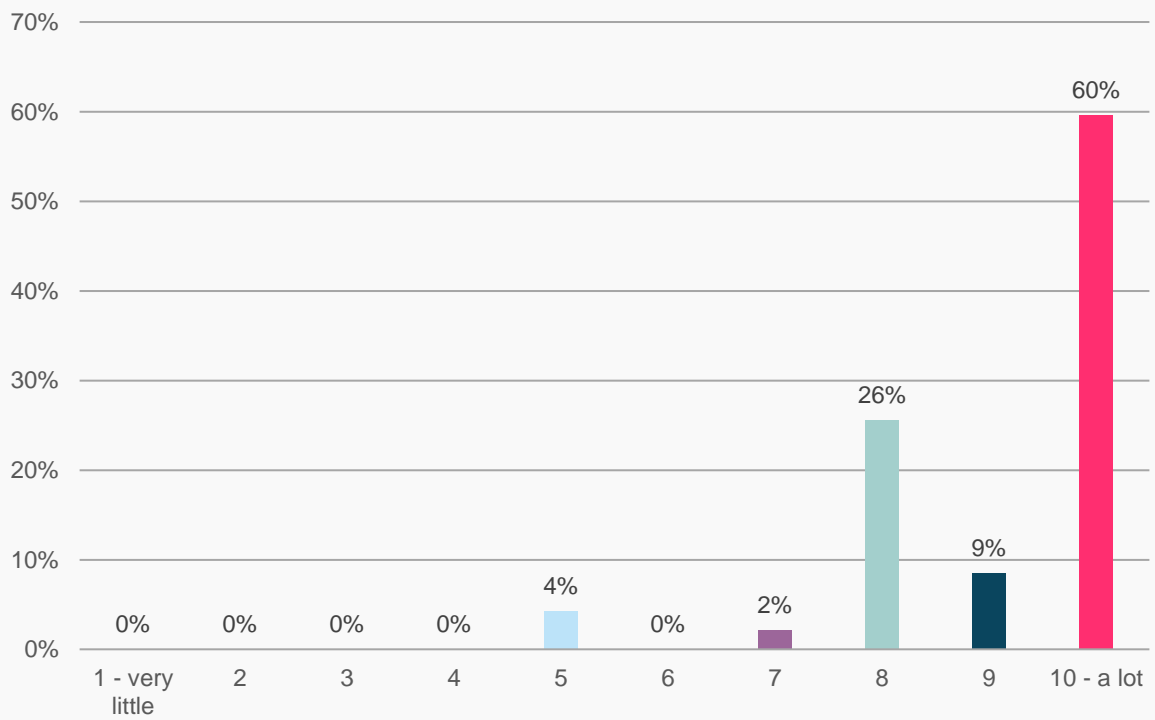
ELECTRONIC VOTING

Following the third discussion session, participants responded to a series of questions via electronic voting.

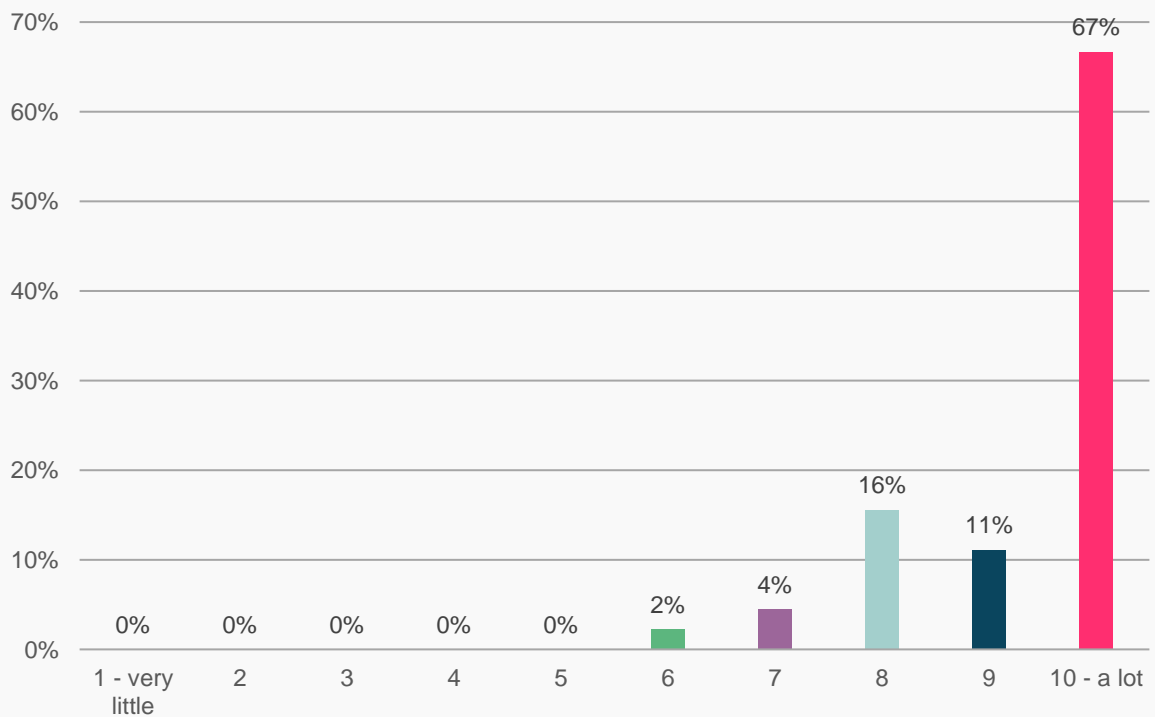
9. What does successful strategic planning of our network look like to you? What outcomes would this produce?



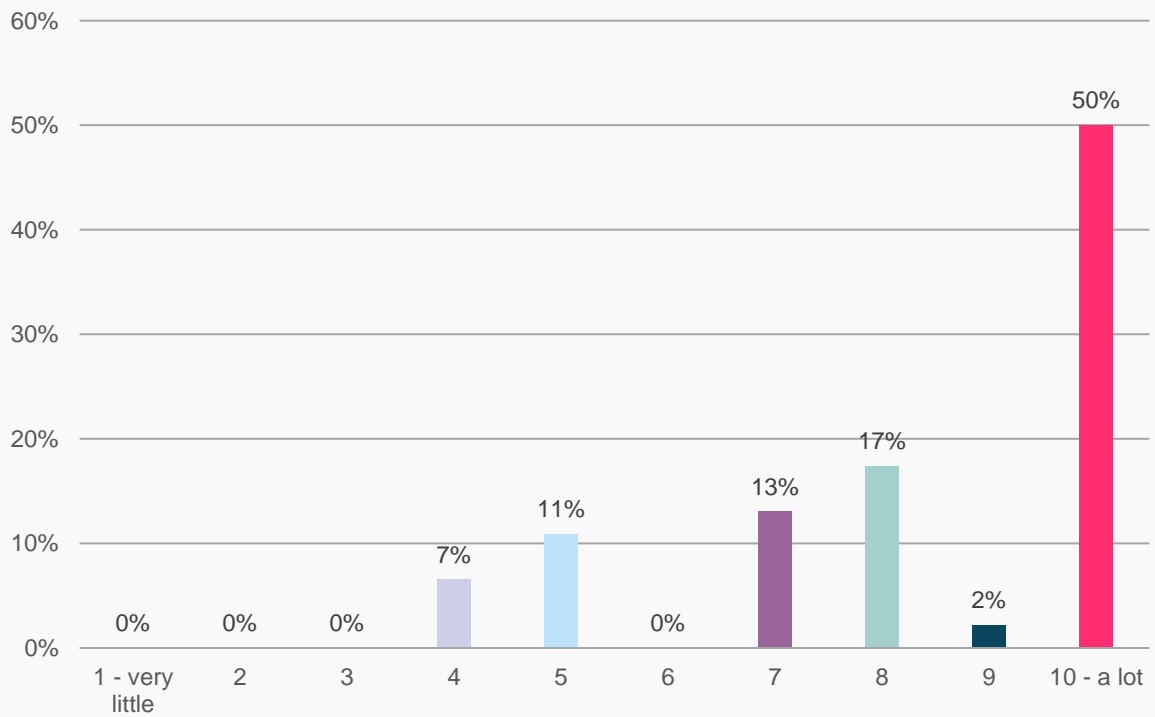
10. How much would digital tools and support help with your local energy planning?



11. How much would greater cross-vector collaboration help with your local energy planning?



12. How much would NGED playing the role of a stakeholder convener help with your local energy planning?



EXPERT PANEL

A panel session was chaired by Ben Godfrey, Director of DSO at NGED. The panel members were:

- Ben Godfrey, Director of DSO, NGED.
- Hayley Burden, Head of DSO Strategy and Stakeholder Engagement, NGED.
- Oli Spink, Head of System Planning, NGED.

SUMMARY

The audience asked the following questions of the panel:

- “I wanted to ask about flexibility and demand response to help ensure that we are using energy most efficiently. Is there a requirement put on all renewables and energy storage to help us meet Net Zero more quickly.” Local Authority Officer

“I would like to ask about providing access to some of the data that’s not openly available on the website, setting out clearly your internal processes for what can and can’t be shared for data protection, and on what basis. What is required to have the right processes in place to enable sharing that data, so things are more streamlined for setting up data agreements and interactions with your data team?” Local Authority Officer

- “Alongside decarbonisation, using intelligence and smart grids and so forth to get to that decarbonisation position is building extra network resilience, probably extending the technology that’s already there in terms of batteries etc. Looking a bit further, we’re going to have more and more extreme weather events coming down the line because of climate change and will have to look at this issue. What are your thoughts?” Academic institution
- “Transitioning to electric vehicles is a key way to address the biggest source of carbon in the UK, which is transport. Around 30 to 40% of homes don’t have off-street parking, so will be reliant on public charging. How can the DSO, the local authorities and the charging industry a) accelerate that slow process, and b) make sure that it’s equitable? There’s a vast difference in the cost of ownership. I have off-street parking and it costs me £6 to fill up for 300 miles, but it will cost my unlucky neighbour with no off-street parking five times more. That seems to me to be about accessibility, affordability and what we do as an industry.” Local authority elected member

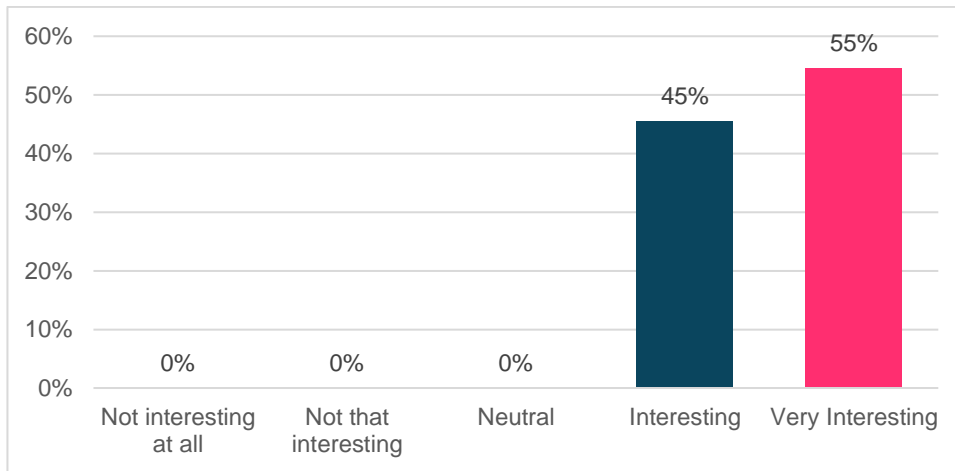
APPENDIX 1: ATTENDEES

A total of 80 stakeholders attended the workshops, representing 54 organisations. The organisations represented across the workshops are shown below:

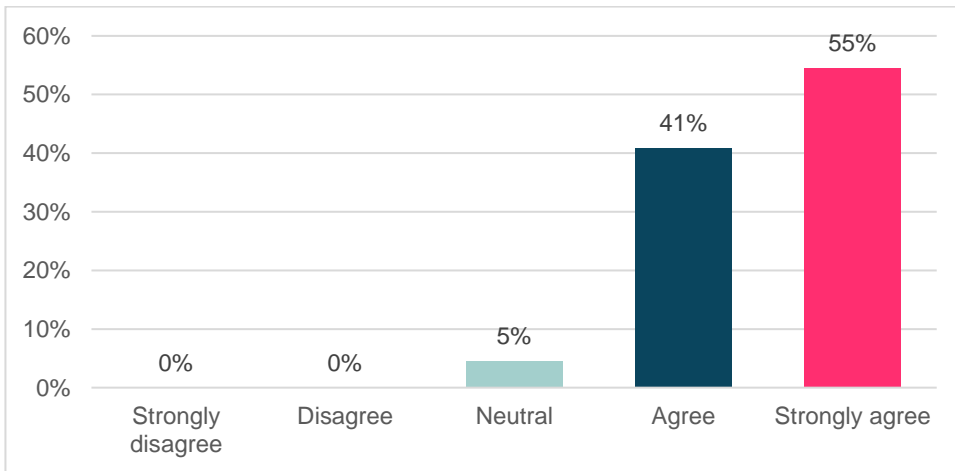
Bath and North East Somerset	Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	Leicestershire County Council
Bristol City Council	Lincolnshire County Council
Bristol Energy Cooperative	Monmouthshire County Council
Buckinghamshire Council	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Caerphilly County Borough Council	Newport City Council
Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Office	North Lincolnshire Council
Cardiff Council	North Somerset Council
Carmarthenshire County Council	Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
Ceredigion County Council	Ofcom
Charnwood Borough Council	Oxford City Council
City of Wolverhampton Council	Oxfordshire County Council
Cornwall Council	Pembrokeshire County Council
Cotswold District Council	Plymouth City Council
Derby City Council	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Derbyshire County Council	Somerset Council
DfT - Midlands Connect (STB)	Staffordshire County Council
East Midlands Freeport	SW Net Zero Hub
Economic Development Service Manager - Wiltshire Council	Swansea Council
ElectraLink	Torfaen County Borough Council
Emeren Group	University of Dundee
Geo Green Power Ltd	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Greater Lincolnshire LEP	Welsh Government
Growing Mid Wales	West of England Combined Authority
Harborough District Council	Western Gateway
Heart of the South West LEP	Wiltshire Council
Herefordshire Council	Wolverhampton Council

APPENDIX 2: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

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



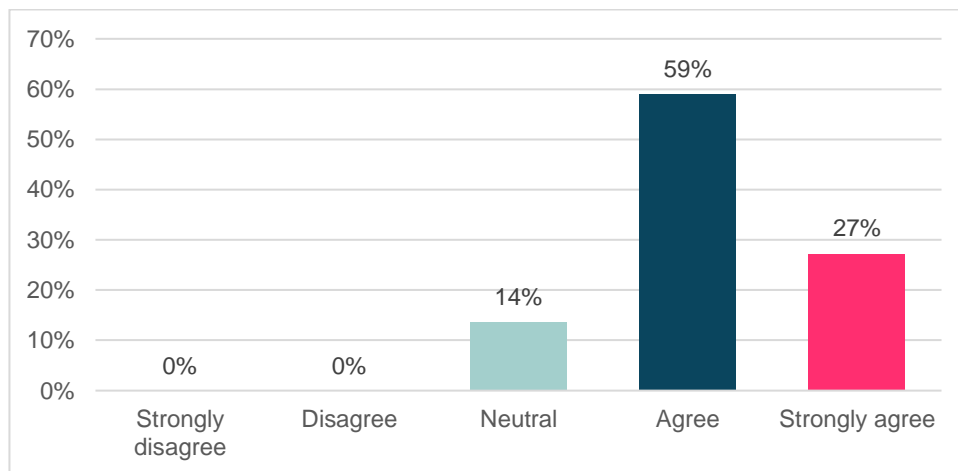
2. Did you feel that you had the opportunity to make your points and ask questions?



Comments:

- “It was great to have the opportunity to raise detailed points in the breakout sessions. Really valuable discussions there.”
- “It would have been useful to expand on the Slido voting with some commentary. The breakout room discussions were quite short so it was hard to get all thoughts across.”
- “Discussion sessions were a little rushed and questions limited the flow of conversation.”
- “Really well coordinated with a good number of people from different backgrounds in the rooms.”
- “Very well planned meeting with lots of opportunities to interact.”

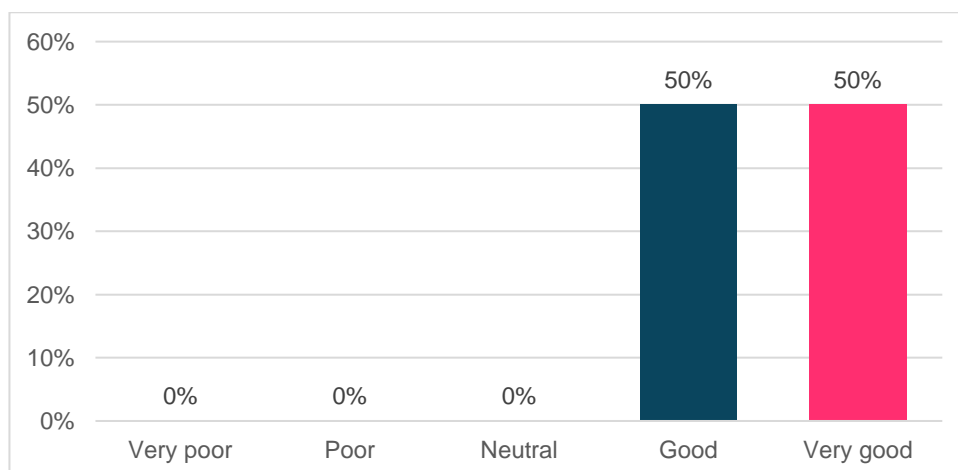
3. Did we cover the right topics for you on the day?



Comments:

- “Mostly - though we need confirmation and reassurance that the energy network will be able to help us meet our aims for Net Zero by 2030 or closer to this date.”
- “Understanding of how we can work with NGED to unlock flexibility services and smart local energy systems.”
- “Would like more of Ofgem announcements regarding RESP [Regional Energy Strategic Planners] roles but realise not directly NGED and new.”

4. What do you think of how the workshop was chaired by your facilitator?



Comments:

- “It was very well facilitated. I would welcome an ongoing engagement.”

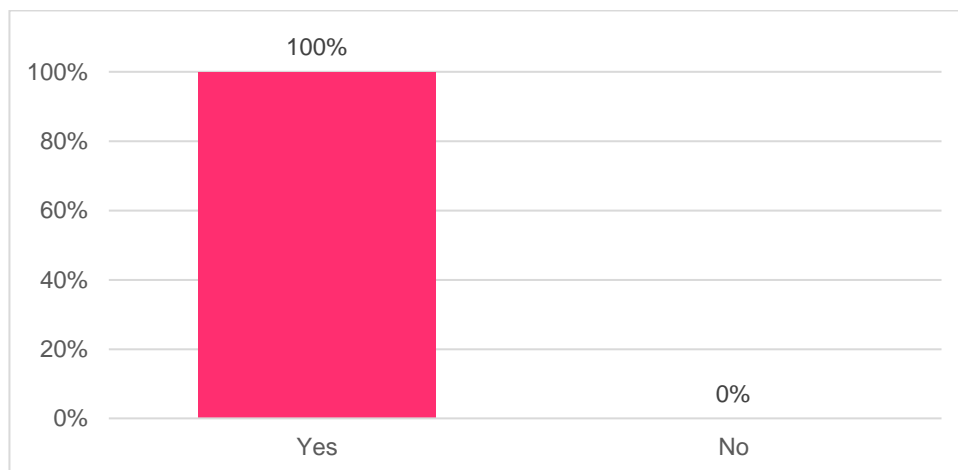
5. Do you have any other comments on the workshop itself?

Comments:

- “The workshop came across that LAEPs were normal for a local authority to have or already be in the process of developing. LAEPs are still nice to have for many local authorities who can't afford them and don't have funding to develop one. This should be acknowledged in future sessions.”

- “It was enjoyable too.”
- “Would have been better to have enabled people to access the Teams session without having to be let in as was very distracting for the first session. And would be good to know when we could have follow-up meetings and support for LAEPs/renewable energy mapping (though we now have Emily Taylor in the stakeholder meetings) as well as reducing the barriers to connect in our community. Plus it would be good to do more collaboration on flexibility and mapping supply and demand.”
- “In terms of NGED being the lead convener of stakeholders, I worry that there is a lack of trust between businesses and community energy groups and the network operators. Therefore, NGED could support local authorities/regional government (who many say could act as a more impartial stakeholder). NGED could provide resource but shouldn't necessarily lead it.”
- “Would love to learn more about the digital tool in development, similarity to LENZA (as raised by others), and if Gloucestershire can input into this development in any way at all.”
- “Super helpful and useful, thank you NGED.”
- “Please share more information on topics discussed e.g. datasets, how to engage in DFES etc.”

6. Would you be willing to meet with us again in the future to keep the conversation going?





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