Stakeholder consultation 2009

Stakeholder workshops

More than 70 people attended the stakeholder workshops while we held individual sessions with other organisations such as Yorkshire Forward, One North East and the North East Chamber of Commerce. The range of people attending was wide – from house builders, supermarkets and steelmakers to councils, the WRVS and the Darlington and Teesdale Naturalist Field Club.

To get a flavour of what stakeholders made of our consultation process, here are comments from two delegates who attended our workshops and two whose organisations had one-to-one sessions with us.

John Drage is the Senior Traffic Signal Officer for North East Lincolnshire Council, based in Grimsby. “I look after 90 sets of traffic lights so, if there is any interruption to our electricity supply, I have a problem,” he commented.

John, who attended the workshop at Brigg, said: “I found the experience very informative and very worthwhile. The process was handled in a thoroughly professional and efficient way.

“It filled in a lot of gaps in my knowledge of what CE Electric UK does. I hadn’t appreciated about the age of some of their assets. What came across to me loud and clear was their commitment to keeping the lights on, to looking after their customers and to upgrading their network. I found that comforting.”

David Lacey of Community Energy Solutions attended the workshop in Darlington. His organisation was set up by One North East and the then Department for Trade and Industry to help reduce energy costs for communities in the North East without mains gas supplies, in particular for those in fuel poverty.

“The workshop was very successful and very interesting. I learned that CE Electric UK have a very big job on their hands - you could almost call it a monumental job - to cope with the challenges ahead in the next five years,” he said.

He is particularly keen to see a greater use of heat pumps in communities without town gas and believes this could be one potential solution to helping those in fuel poverty, as the heat the pumps produce uses much less energy (and therefore costs much less) than conventional heaters.

Tony Sarginson is the External Affairs Manager for EEF, formerly known as the Engineering Employers' Federation, which represents around 450 manufacturing businesses in the North East. He and about 20 members of EEF's regional council had a consultation session in Washington during one of their routine meetings.

"Our members were keen to use the opportunity to stress the need to maintain a secure supply of electricity without interruptions or changes in frequency. The good news was that no-one had any real complaints about the way things operated at the moment."

Finally, Yorkshire Forward had a consultation session at the June meeting of its Regional Utilities Group which includes Yorkshire Water, BT Open Reach, Northern Gas Networks and the Homes and Communities Agency.

Jane Hunt, Senior Development Manager, said: "The consultation document we received in advance was very good and we had a constructive discussion about how we could work together more closely in the future."

Yorkshire Forward's Head of Strategic Development and Property, David Custance, was also present at the meeting after which he submitted a written response to the consultation document.

"We are keen to work with our partners to ensure that the objectives of the Regional Economic Strategy are delivered and perceive collaborative working in this way will help to facilitate this," he wrote in a covering letter.

The main issues for Yorkshire Forward were about the need for greater energy efficiency and local generation, how to reduce the region's dependence on fossil fuel, and continuity and security of supply.

Responses to the consultation process were not limited to the representatives of industry and commerce. Among others who provided feedback as part of the consultation were Dr Ashok Kumar, MP for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, the Friends of the Peak District, the New and Renewable Energy Centre, and the Colne, Holme & Dearne Valleys Society for the Blind.

Key findings from the six workshops based on feedback form comments.

- 72% found the consultation very or quite useful
- 61% found the content very or quite relevant to their job
- The most interesting aspects were ranked as discussions about the environment and climate change, network resilience and customer service.

These are explained in detail below.

Key priorities and discussion points from each workshop

	Business customers	**Domestic customers**
Brigg workshop		
Key priorities		
	Keep power on	Keep power on
	Keep power on cheaply	Keep power on cheaply
	Communicate better with us and partners	Communicate better with us
Other discussion points		
Environment & climate change	Negative towards wind farms. Government should look at increasing use of tidal rivers	Negative towards wind farms. Government should look at increasing use of tidal rivers
		Lack of resources and impact of industrial action
		Visual amenity is important
		Undergrounding versus overhead lines
		Utilities digging up and damaging footpaths
Network resilience	Maintenance versus restoration and repairs	Standards for urban and rural areas
	Priority should be resilience, not prettifying areas	
Customer service	Consider streaming business and domestic customers to the Customer Relations Centre (CRC)	Vulnerable customers need to talk to a person in the CRC
	Use plain English	Use plain English

	Consider one point of contact who deals with traffic lights and CCTV	
Newcastle workshop		
Key priorities		
	Communicate better with us and partners	Communicate better with us
	Achieve right balance between undergrounding and overhead lines	Achieve right balance between undergrounding and overhead lines
		Vulnerable customers
Other discussion points		
Environment & climate change	Increase communication with climate change partners	Negative view of wind farms and issue of visual amenity
		Utilities digging up and damaging footpaths
Network resilience	Streetlighting replacement and metering issues	Copper theft
	Shrinkage problem with public lighting	Impressed with improvements to rural supply
	Load growth management	
Customer service	Severe weather and increased partner communication	Increase awareness of priority register of vulnerable customers and share/obtain information from partners
Other	Smart meters	Smart meters
Darlington workshop		
Key priorities		
	Improve how people get new electricity connections	Vulnerable customers
	Improve resilience	Improve resilience
	Achieve right balance between undergrounding and overhead lines	Achieve right balance between undergrounding and overhead lines
Other discussion points		
Environment & climate change	Consider using other substances for oil-filled cables	Vegetation management

Network resilience	Delays in streetlights being repaired	
	Participate in more local resilience forums	
	Continued investment in Scarborough	
Customer service	Better liaison with utilities over street works	Increase awareness of priority register of vulnerable customers and share/obtain information from partners
	Share information more openly	
Other	Brand confusion	Brand confusion
	Meter ownership and smart meters	Meter ownership and smart meters
York workshop		
Key priorities		
	Increase renewable energy but not at an increased cost to customers	Increase renewable energy but not at an increased cost to customers
	Focus on network resilience initiatives outlined in consultation document	Focus on network resilience initiatives outlined in consultation document
	Improve communication with public lighting departments	Increase awareness of priority register of vulnerable customers and share/obtain information from partners
Other discussion points		
Environment & climate change	Communicate more with environment groups	Communicate more with environment groups
	Only proceed with 'green' projects which have benefits for customers	Only proceed with 'green' projects which have benefits for customers
Network resilience	Issue surrounding planning timings, acknowledged as a national problem	
	Suppliers and generators should be prepared to pay to ensure the resilience of the network is at its best	
Customer service	Traffic and street lights take too long to connect	Increase communication with ward councillors

	East Riding of Yorkshire Council and Corus feel they get a good service	Work more with Social Services on priority customer register
Leeds workshop		
Key priorities		
	Change approach towards renewable generation connections	
	Improve speed and efficiency of new connections	
	Improve relationships and communication with key connections customers	Improve relationships and communication with customers
Other discussion points		
Environment & climate change	Engage with customers more and provide solutions to alternative renewable generation connections	
Network resilience	Consider more focus on urban centre initiatives	
	Need for more joined-up thinking with local authorities	
	An increase in automatic re-routing devices is a good idea	
Customer service	Consider promoting the positive power interruption statistics	Consider promoting the positive power interruption statistics
	Improve communication with public lighting departments	
	Provide more advice to business customers on renewable energy options	
	Communication with Yorkshire Water needs to be improved but it has come a long way in the last four years	
	Ensure all customer letters have a direct dial number on them	

Barnsley workshop		
Key priorities		
	Liaise with Yorkshire Water regarding vulnerable customers data	Improve communications
	Make internal standards available publicly	Keep any increase in costs to a minimum
	Improve timescales for streetlighting repairs	
Other discussion points		
Environment & climate change	Consider using other substances for oil-filled cables	
	Positive to wind farms, but not in 'own back yard'	
Network resilience	Continue to maintain flood defences	Maintain flood defences
	Keep any cost increases to a minimum	
	Review capacity for growth within Sheffield city centre	
Customer service	Ensure contractors follow the company's customer promises	Reduce time spent on hold for callers to the CRC
	Use more automated services to reduce timescales	Raise awareness of work for vulnerable customers

Customer surveys

Key findings from the survey of domestic customers

- 51% said they didn't want to pay any more than they do now to have electricity delivered to their homes.
- After a series of costed options had been put to them, the average amount people said they would be prepared to pay for them (including those who said they did not want to pay anything more) was £2.10 a year in the Yorkshire area and £3.29 in Northern.
- Supply reliability issues emerged as important and, in general, people were more prepared to pay for improvements in this area. Other priorities emerged as undergrounding overhead lines in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and improving flood defences.

Key findings from the survey of business customers

- 56% would be happy to pay a 1.7% increase that would deliver all the improvements in the costed options.
- The findings were broadly in line with those from the survey of domestic customers but with slightly more emphasis on environmental issues.

The costed options put to the customers

	Domestic cost (per year)	
	Northern	**Yorkshire**
Encourage low carbon electricity generation in the distribution network near the point of electricity demand ie. local renewable generation and supply	£2.58	£1.05
Improve resilience to long duration interruptions arising from extreme weather events	£1.75	£0.50
Improve security of supply to key city centre districts	£0.50	£0.50
Reduce the number of vulnerable overhead line sites in areas with public access such as recreation areas and fishing spots to reduce the incidents of deliberate interference/accidental contact with high voltage wires	£0.40	£0.40
Reduce electrical losses from our network which, in turn, would reduce the amount of electricity required to be generated and hence reduce CO2 emissions	£0.30	£0.30
Reduce the environmental impact of fluid-filled cables	£0.30	£0.30
Reduce the number and duration of interruptions for urban customers	£0.25	£0.25
Underground selected overhead lines in National Parks and designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) to reduce the visual impact	£0.16	£0.16
Improve the reliability of electricity supply by installing flood defences at major substations likely to be affected by floods	£0.10	£0.10
	£6.34	**£5.46**