

NGED CUSTOMER PANEL - Minutes

15 June 2023 (remote)

Attending (Customer Panel):

EC - Ellen Cox, Cadent
RH - Richard Hellen (part)
RL - Ron Loveland, Welsh Assembly Govt (part)
GM - Gabby Mallett (Chair)
SN - Synne Nesboe, The British Red Cross
BR - Bob Radford, Kirklington PC (part)

KR - Kate Robbins, Wessex Water
AS - Alex Spreadbury, B&Q
CT - Cathy Tibbles, customer representative

Attending (NGED):

RA - Richard Allcock
NJ - Nicki Johnson

Gabby Mallett welcomed the group and provided the Chair's update.

Discussion: Following the update on the Smart Energy Action Plan (SMEAP) surgery, RH made some observations.

- Given the time it could take to offer and provide SMEAPs, local agencies/organisations could be part of this, e.g. link with education could allow 'training whilst doing'?
- RH noted patterns of possibility will lead to data that can be used with algorithms and behavioural economic analysis to characterise the likely and productive contact point. RA agreed we are using existing models too so we will be getting data to feed in and grow and improve the service as we go.
- Linking with other regional activities, such as a retrofit program in Gloucester (which might link to the innovation project that looks at peak demand), must connect clearly and strongly with linked activities (PSR relevant) to offer/promote SMEAPs in relevant settings. RA mentioned a joint project with another DNO to set up self-service for those customers who opt for a digital version. CT noted that a digital option would be great but would need the option for customers to get physical help if they got part-way through the SMEAP and needed assistance.
- Energy storage is an element that needs to be grasped.

GM talked about this year's spotlight report and it was agreed GM would include a 'focus on the Panel members' page in the spotlight report. Members considered whether three meetings a year (with more surgeries and sub-groups) would be better than four. It was noted that the report should include reference to the Rednox project. Six of the members present would prefer three meetings and only two present would prefer to have four meetings. Remote meetings are a way of the business world so it was discussed that it is hard to get the balance right. People want some face to face meetings but diaries don't always allow this. The group also talked about a new process allowing members to report interactions with NGED in a brief/simple form so feedback can be viewed by relevant NGED teams who would also have the opportunity to respond.

Actions:

1. Members to email GM with anything they want to see added to the Spotlight report.
2. Members to send GM their logos (where allowed) to demonstrate the kind of organisations the Panel represents and, if interested in being included in a section of member biographies, send GM a short paragraph detailing their experience, interests and a little about their interaction with the Panel.
3. NJ and GM to develop a simple reporting form to be developed for Panel members to complete when they have an interaction with NGED
4. First draft of the 'interaction report' to be trialled by AS (who experienced a loss of supply incident recently and has some feedback on NGED's online information/reporting accessibility).
5. CT to also consider completing an 'interaction report' following a recent solar panel connection.

Richard Allcock updated the group on the delivery of NGED's fuel poverty programme in 2022/23.

Discussion: CT fed back that the outcomes are incredible and savings are so crucial to so many customers. GM asked if numbers are based on the whole PSR. RA explained we only report on customers who have had a one to one service from a fuel poverty partner. This process has been built in to ED2. RH noted the 'Hope4U' case study is interesting and shows how adaptable the model is. RH asked how NGED recognises partners that could be aligned and could improve their offering with collaboration. RA explained the differentiating factor is that we have a contractual agreement with the partners meaning we have confidence of a consistent, quality standard and partners are accountable for providing value for money and detailed reporting. This also gives partners security, resources and comfort in having funding over time. Energy Affordability funding enables NGED to publish a call for support and we also commission a Horizon Scan every two years to find partners. CT said the Hope4U case study really struck a chord. Young people can be vulnerable, potentially hidden and don't know who to get help from. Poor literacy and access to technology can be an issue and NGED help is so valuable given resource issues facing partners coupled with the greater need. The Panel members present endorsed the Hope4U project and encouraged more like it.

EC mentioned that it would be useful to collaborate to publicise good news stories like this.

It was noted contact centres are dealing with some really extreme circumstances on a day to day basis, rather than this being an exception.

Nicki Johnson talked to the group about the Panel Terms of Reference and a skills audit.

Actions:

6. NJ to share skills and stakeholder segment matrices for members to complete
7. Members to email thoughts about the Terms of Reference and any missing skills/interest areas or stakeholder segments to NJ
8. Members to complete the final matrices (issued 22.06.23) by Thursday 13 July 2023.
9. NJ and GM to prepare an updated draft Terms of Reference for the group to consider.

Paul Morris from the Innovation team talked to the group about innovation at NGED.

GM noted that RH and BR both expressed an interest in 'buddying' with Paul on innovation.

Paul covered a number of projects

- **Equinox** seeks to demonstrate the benefits available to the network through smart dispatch of heat pump load. We might be able to automatically control heat pumps or get people to manually adjust their use to help us manage demand.
- **Defender** – a tool that models household load profiles for archetype domestic building fabric, allowing us to explore household peak demand based on energy efficiency performance
- **Prefix** – planned to help us avoid HV faults by understanding signals from HV assets such as overhead lines and HV cables which can give us insight on their performance.

Discussion: GM asked how NGED assess projects prior to choosing. PM explained NGED identifies strategic outcomes first using stakeholder engagement. We want to identify the solutions we'd like to get to in three years. We are implementing an innovation Board at NGED to consider priorities and proposals. PM then spoke to the panel about four potential ideas to obtain feedback.

AS noted he supports NGED improving speed of connections but noted influential factors from transmission, asking if we interact with transmission about how to speed up connections between distribution and transmission. PM explained dialogue continues on innovation and conversations are ongoing between NGED and other DNOs/the Energy Networks Association.

AS also noted in ED1 there was far more focus on pushing the load index of assets and optimising the health index, asking if, given the reliance on electricity, technology is the only solution here? Should there also still be precautionary preparation by not pushing the load index too far or waiting until the 11th hour with the health index to ensure a more reliable network. PM explained that to achieve that aim we have to convince Ofgem that we'd need to address these issues with investment. The group talked about financial performance of assets and getting value from assets and PM confirmed those indices will continue to impact and track how we invest.

AS mentioned charging at the services was a significant investment and asked about plans to scale this to other locations. At Christmas many articles in the press detailed queues for charging impacting traveller journeys and it could be argued there is a long way to go. PM confirmed the new innovation process discussed earlier will include our project and design groups considering scale up. NGED is considering demand and doesn't want to hold up plans to roll out chargers in more locations. AS agreed we are going in the right direction.

CT felt the priority should be a resilient society. Covid-19 highlighted many disparities for local communities. Within 3-4 days CT's Parish Council had 60 volunteers handing out prescriptions but to the other extreme people had no schooling/internet. There are people who don't have digital skills/access. Some are hungry and poor and they can make poor choices. PM agreed we want to help people make better decisions. The group talked about how EVs could be used to provide power during storms.

GM considered the ideas in turn noting most could be impacted by economics. For example, people could pay more to improve speed of connections, it could be cheaper to use energy at times of high demand, etc. so her preference would be a project looking resilience (though that encompasses the other areas).

AS noted a critical part of the solution is storage, asking if the changing and evolving landscape means more storage solutions and innovation in this area are ahead. PM explained that flexibility is a big success story, many people are queueing to connect storage and we may develop products in the future using storage. In Scotland they are also looking at battery storage for use in storms. AS asked if companies evolving battery technology/designing hardware are talking to DNOs about the potential to engage (e.g. solid state battery technology). PM confirmed the NGED roadmap includes an interest in battery storage and we plan to explore the options.

Actions:

10. Members to send any further comments on innovation ideas to NJ/GM
11. NJ to offer panel surgery to Paul Morris in the future

AOB

AS asked for an update on the CEG and RA confirmed the (provisionally named) ED2 Monitoring Group will continue to monitor Business Plan commitments. We have retained a selection of members with appropriate skills and are revisiting terms of reference.

The group asked whether accidents are increasing and noted it was good to see the contractor split. Post-meeting NJ checked with the safety team who confirmed that no real pattern has been identified for the cause of the additional accidents - other than an internal focus on reporting and encouraging everybody to ensure they do report accidents so we can learn lessons from them. In response, we are monitoring trends and sharing the additional learning with the wider business to help raise awareness of causes/learnings.

The group also asked about the drop in overall satisfaction (e.g. connections have always been max reward and wasn't for 2022/23). RA explained we are working with much higher volumes and higher expectations from customers for services like EV charger connections – it is also worth noting that targets in ED2 are tougher.

Action:

12. GM/NJ to invite Duncan McCombie, CEG chair, to the next meeting.

Next meetings

- October 2023 – tbc
- 22 February 2024
- 20 June 2024