SSEN DISTRIBUTION

Consumer Vulnerability Virtual Workshop:

Full feedback report

SEPTEMBER 2020

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INTRODUCTION

On 10 September 2020, SSEN hosted a virtual workshop focused on consumer vulnerability aimed at gathering feedback from its stakeholders on the following topics: reshaping SSEN's priorities in the light of Covid-19; addressing under-representation on the Priority Services Register (PSR); and creating a future energy system that is fair, inclusive, sustainable and affordable.

The workshop took place online, using the Speakeasy event platform. The event consisted of three presentations given by SSEN representatives, each followed by discussion sessions in virtual breakout rooms, and featured a keynote speech from the Centre for Sustainable Energy.

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: SSEN'S NEW PRIORITIES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The first presentation of the day was given by Lisa Doogan, Head of Customer Service and Stakeholder Strategy. Lisa outlined SSEN's new priorities in relation to Covid-19. She then explained SSEN's core themes in relation to consumer vulnerability: driving forward PSR provision and promotion; ensuring services are inclusive and accessible now and in the future; expanding on fuel poverty and energy efficiency activities; and widening SSEN's partnership network and collaborative activities. Lisa then went on to explain how SSEN has adapted to support both the network and vulnerable customers during the pandemic and outlined how the changing priorities and initiatives resulting from Covid-19 could work going forward.

- Stakeholders came to the workshop keen to discuss a number of issues, most prominently: fuel poverty; the decarbonisation of the energy system and how to ensure vulnerable customers are not left behind; community energy; and increasing sign-ups to the PSR.
- Delegates felt that expanding the range of registration channels and platforms would increase sign-ups to the PSR, and urged SSEN to remember that many of those eligible for the PSR were not 'digitally native'.
- Stakeholders gave examples of collaboration between councils, local resilience groups and other relevant actors, some of which illustrated how collaboration had increased in light of Covid-19. This joint working was seen as vital for tackling issues such as fuel poverty.

SESSION TWO: ADDRESSING UNDER-REPRESENTATION ON THE PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER

Simon O'Loughlin, Stakeholder Engagement and Consumer Vulnerability Strategy Manager at SSEN, presented the second session of the day, which focused on SSEN's measures to address under-representation on the PSR. He explained that there are 32 'needs codes' within the PSR, and outlined four groups where SSEN were working to increase registration numbers: people who use electrically powered medical equipment or who have recently left hospital; people with hearing loss; people with mental ill health; and diverse communities where language can be a barrier.

- To better reach those with mental ill health, stakeholders suggested closer partnerships with health agencies, GPs, housing authorities and local councils.

- To engage more closely with communities where English might not be the first language, stakeholders suggested identifying a trusted voice within particular communities in addition to diversifying SSEN's own workforce to bring in more voices from diverse backgrounds.

- Delegates prioritised speed when engaging with people being discharged from hospital or with those who are reliant on electrically powered medical equipment, arguing that support should be offered immediately to provide the reassurance those customers need.

- For people with hearing loss, stakeholders felt that more visual communications, including animations, would help to reach those customers more effectively.

KEYNOTE SPEECH AND Q&A: SMART AND FAIR – EXPLORING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE FUTURE ENERGY SYSTEM

Simon Roberts, Chief Executive of the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE), delivered a keynote speech entitled 'Smart and Fair – Exploring Social Justice in the Future Energy System'. Simon described the CSE-led research programme investigating fairness in the provision of energy and the barriers and problems this will entail as energy becomes decarbonised, digitised and decentralised. He outlined the Smart and Fair Capability Lens, which groups potential barriers into capability clusters: energy tech and usage; dwelling and local area; financial; digital tech readiness; and personal and social. It was followed by a Q&A, in which the following questions were asked:

- What are the interventions?
- What are the impacts of scams in energy efficiency?

SESSION THREE: CREATING A FUTURE ENERGY SYSTEM THAT IS FAIR, INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE AND AFFORDABLE

Graeme Keddie, Director of Corporate Affairs, Regulation and Stakeholder Engagement, presented the fourth session of the day, which elaborated on the themes of Simon Roberts' keynote address. He explained that SSEN is focused on ensuring that the transition to DSO is truly inclusive and outlined the methods the company intends to employ to achieve this. As well as introducing stakeholders to the barriers to participation that vulnerable customers might face in a more digitised, 'smart' energy system, he also asked delegates to consider what the benefits of the energy transition might be for these customers.

- Stakeholders recognised that the benefits for vulnerable customers in the energy transition could include more agency and control over energy consumption; the chance to engage with new technologies (via a supportive education programme); and a better quality of life thanks to housing and insulation upgrades.

- Delegates expressed concern that slow broadband and limited 4G capability would leave some customers behind, and that, similarly, prohibitive installation costs for low carbon technologies would be most likely to affect those who are less well off.
- A key comment was that existing inequalities and vulnerabilities would be "magnified" by the smart energy transition. Stakeholders urged closer partnership working with network providers, social housing organisations, local authorities and community energy groups with the aim of identifying where gaps would be most keenly felt and mitigating the impacts of this magnification effect.

WRITTEN FEEDBACK

After the workshop, 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'.
- 80% of stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed that they had had an opportunity to make points and ask questions, and 90% of attendees agreed that we covered the right topics on the day.
- 80% thought EQ Communications' facilitation was either 'very good' or 'good'.
- 70% of stakeholders either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the online workshop format was easy to use and accessible, while 20% disagreed.

ATTENDEES

A total of 57 stakeholders attended the workshop, representing 50 companies. The companies represented on the day are shown below:

Action Hampshire	Hebridean Housing Partnership
ALIenergy	Highland Senior Citizens Network
Argyll and Bute Council	Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust
BayWa r.e.	Millerfirst GLOBAL
bouygues-es	Nadder Community Energy
British Red Cross	NHS Highland
Cadent Gas	Oxford City Council
Caithness Renewables Ltd	Oxfordshire County Council
Centre for Sustainable Energy	Paragon Housing Association
Cherwell Council	Portsmouth Water
Citizens Advice East & Central Sutherland	Reading Borough Council
Citizens Advice Hampshire	Regen
Citizens Advice Scotland	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Community Energy Scotland	Scottish Government
Country Land and Business Association	Scottish Water
Deaf Scotland	Southern Housing Group
Dementia UK	Sovereign Housing Association
Dundee City Council	SP Energy Networks
ElectraLink Ltd	Stantec UK Ltd
Electricity North West	Test Valley Borough Council
Energy Assets Networks	THAW Orkney
Energy Saving Trust	University of Bristol
Frazer-Nash	University of Southampton
Gosport Council	University of Warwick
Grampian Housing Association	Wessex Water

SESSION ONE: OUR NEW PRIORITIES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

SUMMARY

Delegates attending the workshop represented a diverse range of organisations, including local authorities, parish councils, NGOs and charities, the housing sector, the emergency services and utilities. As it was a virtual workshop, geographical attendance was equally diverse, with stakeholders from Orkney to Hampshire in attendance.

Unsurprisingly given the wide range of geographical locations and organisations represented at the workshop, stakeholders attended the event with a large variety of interests and issues in mind. Many shared a deep concern over fuel poverty, particularly as they recognised that it would only increase as the full socioeconomic effects of Covid-19 start to become apparent. While some expressed concern around the digitisation and decarbonisation of energy and the resulting costs being passed on to the consumer, others explained that they were working to make the energy transition fairer and more inclusive, and urged more collaborative working to bring this to fruition. Many delegates were keen to learn more about the PSR and how to drive sign-ups as an increasing number of working practices migrate online. Community energy projects, inclusive communications and working together to improve emergency responses were other key topics from the discussion.

Discussing how to raise awareness of the PSR, many delegates suggested increasing the number of sign-up channels. Further attention was given to the shifts in working practices and day-to-day life as a result of Covid-19, for example, fewer people attending doctors' appointments in person will result in less exposure to hard-copy literature advertising the PSR. For this reason, many stakeholders pointed out that the platforms used to drive PSR registration would need to change. Other suggestions included using local radio stations, clear written communications and more collaboration with local councils and community groups to identify those who are hard to reach more effectively.

Partnerships were heavily emphasised as a route to becoming more inclusive and accessible, and as a way to tackle financial constraints and fuel poverty. Delegates stressed that many

vulnerable and older customers were not 'digital natives' and that special care was needed to ensure that all services were also available offline. Stakeholders from Citizens Advice explained how they were making their services more accessible; something that they also urged SSEN to consider. Partnerships were also seen as critical in terms of identifying areas of fuel poverty, coupled with community engagement to better support those in need.

Delegates shared some of their experiences following Covid-19, particularly in relation to partnership working within communities, and suggested how these new priorities might become long-term considerations. A pertinent example was given from rural Scotland, where councils came together to tackle as a collective the impact of lockdown on communities, with the suggestion to create more such combined groups to solve wider problems across SSEN's regions. Others pointed out that Covid-19 had revealed inequalities that had previously been obscured and felt that addressing them should be a matter of priority, along with concerted efforts to green the recovery, focus on climate change and truly emphasise the local.

1. Why have you attended today?

- "I'm a city councillor and I'm here today because I'm concerned about fuel poverty, which is only going to increase massively. I am interested to hear about what you're doing there, as I'm not aware how you protect people who are particularly vulnerable during a power cut." Local authority

- "I'm on the front line of seeing the effects of fuel poverty. I see how people are priced out by initiatives that pass on the financial brunt of clean energy to the consumer." Housing

- "I have worked to tackle fuel poverty for over 15 years and absolutely nothing has changed. It's difficult for people to admit they're struggling with bills as much now as when I first started." Charity / NGO

- "We've got a responsibility to the fuel poor and our residents and recognise that there are a lot of fuel-poor people even in a well-off borough. Understanding how we can reach those people, who are often exceptionally hard to reach, is our real challenge." Local authority

- "I'm from the British Red Cross on the emergency response team, and I'm here to share my learnings and find out things from others that could help improve our operations." Charity / NGO

- "I work for Oxford City Council as an energy advisor. Prior to Covid, we were conducting home visits for fuel-poor consumers, but now have to do things remotely. We also get involved with signing people up to the PSR and want to know how that process will develop in the current climate." Local authority

- "I work for a tech, engineering and software development consultancy. We recently conducted a network innovation allowance project aiming to improve services to PSR customers. As part of that, we're developing an app for gas services to use." Other

- "We are working on a project we call Warm House, which is addressing social isolation, energy efficiency and fuel poverty, mostly in rural areas. Hopefully, after today we can have some input about what's been going on there." Charity / NGO

- "My portfolio is housing. Since lockdown we have had an influx of sofa-surfers, and we now have 30 pods in a car park to cope with the influx. Some you can help and some you can't, and that's where my interest lies." Local authority

- "I'm on a mission to transform the energy system to make it more democratic and decentralised. I am interested in how you are working with the PSR to encourage more community energy organisations to do home visits and support those organisations financially, because other DNOs do." Charity / NGO

- "In my organisation we look into community-focused energy projects. We want to see the ways in which we can connect community energy projects to fuel poverty initiatives." Energy / utility

- "Within public health I've worked very closely with SSEN and I would like to see that relationship further develop. The only way to avoid duplication is for us to communicate better in the event of the emergency, both in preparation and response." Emergency services

- "We've got a specific interest in inclusive communication, working across language and making sure communications are accessible for everyone." Charity / NGO

- "In my experience, SSEN's PSR sign-up route is very quick and accessible, as it's easy to understand and there's no complicated jargon. One thing that I would suggest is increasing the range of sign-up channels, as not everyone will be online or feel comfortable on the phone." Local authority

- "In the past, you've obviously had leaflets in health centres, but people aren't seeing that now, so in terms of visibility of campaigns and messaging, the platforms will have to be different this year. We did research which showed that in Scotland – possibly because of the historical nature of utility industries – people tend to conflate suppliers and distributors. You need to make the difference more visible because it's possibly something that consumers don't consider. This year, in particular, that conflation might present a challenge." Energy / utility

- "SSEN should highlight the advantages of being on the PSR and throw the spotlight on themselves as a contact point for vulnerable customers." Local authority

- "We looked at this two or three years ago. One of the things we considered was passing our information on to SSEN, but GDPR blocked that. What we did instead was send details of the PSR to individuals in the hope that they could register themselves, it's a start, but not fantastic." Local authority

- "One thing we have found in Hampshire, in a project on health inequality, is that local radio stations are great for getting messages out. Different radio stations target different groups, such as older people or other community groups." Charity / NGO

- "Send the information directly to councils. If we get one that we can print off, we can then include that when we send things out. A dual approach to make people aware." Local authority

- "From our perspective, a million Scots are affected by deafness, which is 20% of the population, so we may not always be aware of what is happening, we don't pick up information verbally or by radio, or common sources where things are happening. It might be best not to assume that everybody is picking up the information as well as they might." Charity / NGO

- "Something fairly clear, almost in animation, and that notion of easy read being the best way of getting things across to everybody rather than making them overcomplicated." Charity / NGO

- "More letters sounds really boring, but more of the old-fashioned communication is important because that gets into the homes of people we most need to get into." Local authority

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- "I would like to see where you have succeeded with those data sharing agreements and how we can reinforce those. There's a need somewhere to have a national database for that data to be held, as cumbersome as that might be. For us, certainly as an emergency planner, I'd like to see where you share those success stories, share the data sharing agreement type stuff." Local authority

2. Are there any recommendations to be more inclusive and accessible as a network operator?

- "I'm disabled and have been on every single list. We've gone through lockdown and come out the other side, but the support has fallen away. I'm being told to shield due to immunity problems. The problem is that the support network I relied on, such as community groups and Tesco's priority service register, have all disappeared. Support for disabled people has completely stopped, but people haven't stopped being disabled." Charity / NGO

- "I would say that creating the right partnerships on a local level is extremely important to make these services accessible. For example, in Hampshire, there is the Home and Well service, which has been set up as a collaboration between the council, NHS and other local bodies." Charity / NGO

- "Citizens Advice has also had a scheme during the pandemic which has involved supporting people through phone and webchat. We have been placing tablets in hospitals and training people to use them, so that they can access the support and advice that they need. We're taking the technology to people." Charity / NGO

- "Quite interested to know about the plain English guide that is being introduced at the moment. We are currently developing user handbooks. We are quite conscious that we are making sure the instructions are right and accessible." Energy / Utility

- "There are challenges of provision. 'Not digitally native' is a phrase I heard recently and this presents a challenge because you're not interacting as much with more traditional media and I'm not sure how delighted people are about that. SSEN have done a lot of work and big improvements have been made [to make it more inclusive and accessible], but this year in particular will present some challenges in terms of making sure that the message gets to the right people." Energy / utility

- "I know a lot of our residents aren't online. We're trying to support them to get online, but the interest isn't there and the confidence isn't there. They want things put through the door rather than going online. There always seems to be a barrier. The residents who are still working are all online, but it's the people who are in their 80s that you need to capture. You need different formats of information. You also need plain English communications because people don't always need so much information. It can be overwhelming for people." Housing

- "I used to get a phone call once a week asking if I was okay and needed anything but that stopped without any warning." Charity / NGO

- "You need to work with some of the community groups very closely. They know the best way to get messages out to their communities, and it may not be in the ways that you think are obvious. Sometimes a leaflet just doesn't do it." Charity / NGO

- "Word of mouth is by far the strongest way to get the message through. Unless people are reminded to look, some people will never look. I used to work for a big charity, and we found that about a third of people could only be reached through word of mouth." Local authority

3. **With financial constraints expected to become tighter in the coming months, what other steps should we be taking to tackle fuel poverty?**

- "Partnerships are really important and we're creating them with environmental bodies and utilities to highlight ways for vulnerable customers to benefit from reduced tariffs. We have pointed people towards social tariffs for water, for example. We're trying to do as much as we can in partnership to solve the problem." Charity / NGO

- "Partnerships are key. With focus groups we can find out what we can do in local areas. We're one nation but needs change according to geography." Charity / NGO

- "Going back to your customers and asking what that looks like and understanding what their needs are. Rather than having a strategy and going with it, get customer feedback to see if you can improve the service you're already giving." Local authority

- "There are occasions with people in fuel poverty or people who are just struggling generally where there's a lot that DNOs could do through partnership. For example, they

could provide blankets or meal vouchers or just mitigate people's concerns about paying their energy bills." Other

- "Fuel poverty is higher in Scotland and those who are off the gas network are more likely to experience fuel poverty, so perhaps you should concentrate on them." Energy / utility
- "There is additional funding from Foundation Scotland to support these kinds of community-connected initiatives." Energy / utility

4. Should we be focusing on other partnerships to improve the support we can provide to customers?

- "We make a lot of referrals from Home Energy Scotland. It works really well, linking up vulnerable households. I would say that the concern we have is with the people that are harder to get hold of. Traditional communication channels don't always reach. Partnerships and local organisations within the community are the best way." Charity / NGO
- "I would say that the fire service is a big one. They do a lot of prevention work now with their home visits. They can be used to identify situations of vulnerability." Charity / NGO
- "Going through the Covid situation, councils in rural areas in Scotland were communed to battle the effects of the pandemic together. By creating collective groups, people could look to tackle issues at a wider level in a community. For example, a health worker would be visiting a home and maybe take photos if a situation of vulnerability is detected. These could then maybe be referred to utility networks." Charity / NGO
- "I agree with focusing on engagement at community levels. Third-sector interfaces have been invaluable and seem to have large capacities, so they can play an effective role." Charity / NGO
- "Getting more involved with local government and collaborating with the local residential forum." Charity / NGO
- "With regard to your welfare vans, which provide hot meals for vulnerable people during long power cuts, what about partnering with food banks when the welfare vans are not in use? I wonder if you've thought about this as a community initiative for elderly people who haven't seen people for weeks. Is that something you could organise?" Housing

- "There are smaller community organisations that you should be partnering with. You are partnering on the larger level but not at a micro level. I think you need to do more partnering at that level to reach the hardest to reach. We are talking about poverty and that's a really difficult thing to tackle, and it needs to be tackled in a holistic way. You are trying to lower energy demand at peak times, but I think you should be out there helping people to insulate their homes to reduce that peak demand. Treat the problem, not the effects." Charity / NGO

- "We have a small project where we have a member of the team who goes around to people's houses when they're behind on their rent, who gives them specific advice on how to reduce energy usage, such as turning the thermostat off or wearing a jumper. We have about 7,000 council houses and you could consider working with the councils to help fund an officer to do that." Local authority

- "I'm shocked by the considerable savings that can be made through tariff switching. I know there is ongoing work to address that, but I think the energy market is so confusing for people. The communication between all the providers is poor, that needs to be improved. Sometimes the customer is the most vulnerable person and they don't know how much they're paying, or they can't access their electronic bills." Charity / NGO

- "The self-service portal sounds good. Easy access is important. The priority assistance fund, it's not huge and it's limited in numbers of people, but not many people are aware of it. We could do leaflet drops through the PSR. It would be good to pass on such a helpful service." Charity / NGO

5. Following Covid-19, should our focus change? And are there new priorities for our customers?

- "Covid-19 has shown you need grassroots relationships. This situation may present new opportunities in terms of relationships with food banks and resilience groups. The high-level stuff is great for equality of access, but maybe some investment in local resources on the ground could be good. The time for going local is here." Charity / NGO

- "Priorities may have changed. I'm very glad that this has all gone further up the chain and vulnerability is a bigger priority." Local authority

- "Focus on a green recovery and supporting people that are the most severely affected by this, which is people in poverty. Partner up with councils and other organisations that have similar ambitions to address energy efficiency and fuel poverty to get more bang for your buck. We have to be creating local jobs and new ways of living, and there's a huge amount of work that needs to be done insulating homes. If that was a bit more joined up, we could have some real impacts there." Charity / NGO

- "The focus has to be on climate change. We may not have jobs, but we'll be underwater if we don't make climate change the priority." Charity / NGO

- "With regard to climate change, different councils and groups talk about very different timescales. It is no use having one council bordering another but having different goals. They need to work together, regardless of political differences." Local authority

- "I think we need to learn from what has happened, where the vulnerabilities are. We need renewed focus on where those inequalities have been revealed, as they may not be what we thought they were before the pandemic." Charity / NGO

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SESSION TWO: ADDRESSING UNDER-REPRESENTATION ON THE PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER

SUMMARY

Stakeholders discussed the ways in which SSEN should be promoting the PSR to reach under-represented groups. For people who have mental ill health, stakeholders suggested establishing partnerships with health agencies, GPs, community groups and housing authorities to increase sign-ups.

Stakeholders commented that, when looking to reach people with mental ill health, engaging with trusted partners on the ground was often the best way to spread information. Similar suggestions were made for people who have recently been discharged from hospital or who rely on electric medical equipment, with partnerships suggested between ambulance services, post-hospital care agencies and NHS doctors and nurses. Others pointed out that, while it was painstaking work to build those one-on-one relationships, the rewards were enormous and long-lasting.

Discussing how to reach those from diverse communities where English may not be spoken, delegates stressed the importance of a trusted voice within the community, for example, the local imam. Others suggested diversifying SSEN's own workforce, bringing in voices from those communities who would be well placed to speak to them about these issues. When discussing people with hearing loss, stakeholders urged greater investment in accessible communications and better partnership working with the NHS.

Next, stakeholders considered which partners would be best suited for collaborative work with SSEN to serve these under-represented groups. Delegates suggested using advice agencies as 'signposts' for those with mental ill health, particularly as health workers become more and more overstretched. Occupational therapists, care agencies, fire and rescue services and housing associations were all mooted as partners for reaching those being discharged from

hospital. Stakeholders also called for greater data sharing on the types of illnesses people had, with a view to enabling specific support networks to reach individuals when they are discharged. Housing associations were also cited as potential partners for achieving diverse community outreach. Stakeholders suggested a number of potential NHS partnerships to serve those with hearing loss, such as Orkney Health and Care and the Health and Social Care Alliance in Scotland, which are well placed to make connections across community health groups working to a common purpose.

Delegates went on to discuss how SSEN could make things easier for people with these specific needs. 'Buddying' systems were suggested for those with mental ill health, along with funding resources for help with daily life and engagement with local resilience groups as auxiliary support on the ground. With those relying on electrically powered medical equipment and those recently out of hospital, it was felt that support needed to be offered in a timely manner to build trust and provide reassurance. With regard to diverse communities, stakeholders were concerned that the focus on forms to sign up to the PSR could be a barrier given literacy and language levels, and asked whether alternative channels could be made available. This was also raised in the conversation around people with hearing loss, as delegates urged SSEN to produce more visual communications that utilise different channels of communication.

Benefits and services suggested that greater resilience for those who rely on electrically powered medical equipment should go hand in hand with the transition to DSO, particularly with regard to storage and flexibility. Key PSR benefits that could better serve those living in diverse communities included enquiring as to a customer's preferred language, using services like Google Translate and employing people who speak other languages in addition to English. This would also apply to services and technologies like push notifications, which many saw as a huge benefit, but were currently restricted by the Government for commercial purposes.

1. Where do you think SSEN should be promoting the PSR to reach people who have mental ill health?

- "We do a lot of work with GPs, using them as an initial signboard for wider problems that are linked to mental health problems, such as debt. It can be more difficult to engage with

these types of people, depending on the severity of their mental health problems, so health agencies can be good intermediaries." Charity / NGO

- "People who come to Citizens Advice Bureaus with one problem often have many others, meaning that we can play a big overlapping role." Charity / NGO

- "I think that SSEN needs to find the right partner to deliver on its behalf. For example, I am talking to an NHS body on behalf of the whole of Hampshire and am involved with a community mental health project in Southampton." Charity / NGO

- "The key aspect to focus on is making connections between bodies that can provide solid advice and provide these people with help on practical everyday issues, which can improve things for them in terms of their health and will help them move along with their lives." Charity / NGO

- "Talking to someone about their mental health issues is an uncomfortable thing. SSEN should use the Warm Home Discount process to contact people and build a rapport. People need to be made to feel comfortable about talking about their struggles." Local authority

- "A collaborative social media campaign with partners shows communities that you are working together." Charity / NGO

- "We have been trialling having a mental health worker in our housing team, which is very expensive but actually a saving in the long run. Coming back to word of mouth, with someone with mental health issues, it's especially important that they trust that person, so work with community groups that are already engaging with them." Local authority

- "I reiterate that you should work with community groups. Although they are expensive, you probably get a big return because they are working on the frontline, talking to people whose lives may be more chaotic than normal, and who may be struggling with rent arrears." Charity / NGO

2. Where do you think SSEN should be promoting the PSR to reach people who have recently been discharged from hospital or who use electrically powered medical equipment?

- "GPs, nurses and anyone involved in the discharging of patients." Energy / utility
- "Ambulance staff, if they are taking patients home." Energy / utility

- "In Wales, they do a similar poverty programme with ambulance services. The challenging thing is how busy hospitals are. We would often go into dialysis wards and talk to them during their dialysis. But that takes a lot of time to build up relationships with the hospitals for them to invite you in. The most successful approach is engaging with those who are working with patients when they're at home and settled." Charity / NGO

- "We might be able to put information on the NHS inform website. Only relevant in Scotland, not sure what the equivalent is in England." Energy / utility

- "Another avenue is Adult Social Care Reform Scotland." Energy / utility

- "Have you considered working directly with the hospitals that patients are being discharged from? You could be in touch with local hospitals and get them to pass information on, so have a discharge pack or something like that." Housing

- "What about people who volunteer to take people to and from appointments?" Housing

- "Is there scope to involve the manufacturers in this? For example, can you partner with stair lift manufacturers and get SSEN to provide something small like a sticker with every stair lift?" Energy / utility

- "Is there scope for hospital radio? I'm just thinking about what you can do while people are actually in hospital." Energy / utility

- "There are local radio stations, too. Some of our areas have local radio stations and that does really get out to the community. We've found that in villages, people do tend to listen to their village radio station. That would be a really good initiative." Housing

3. Where do you think SSEN should be promoting the PSR to reach people from diverse communities where language can be a barrier?

- "We have quite a large population of other ethnicities, and quite a good spread of our councillors too, so we are easily able to tap into different communities. Word of mouth is so important. If you can get someone to go into a mosque and ask the imam to put the word out, that's very powerful. Use your local authorities because the councillors will often have ways into different groups. Also, diversifying the workforce and bringing new people in." Local authority

- "You can print in as many languages as you want, but you need that trusted voice saying to the community that this will actually work for you, and then you start to get engagement. I was working for a charity trying to get messages out to lots of different communities, and word of mouth was the only way to do it. It's a lot of work but it's an important return." Local authority

4. Where do you think SSEN should be promoting the PSR to reach people with hearing loss?

- "I would suggest through the charities." Local authority
- "If they set up their service for the 20% of people that have barriers, everybody would benefit. Just now, lots of services are set up and we're having to argue adjustments for people, and it feels that we're trying to get something extra where we've not really been getting the basics. We've been trying to turn that notion of accessible communication on its head to get people to think a bit differently." Charity / NGO
- "Partnership working, especially with the NHS. Maybe with the local newspaper. Especially pensioners, who don't even read their mail. They do read the local newspaper." Charity / NGO

1. Which partners should SSEN approach to ensure they are able to reach and better serve people who have mental ill health?

- "I think that it's good to work with advice agencies on the ground and develop a rapport with community workers and local authorities, as people on the ground often take more initiative." Charity / NGO
- "It would be great to work more closely with health workers, but they often have their own priorities, so we don't want to give them another thing to think about. Instead, at Citizens Advice, we are just trying to act as a signpost and want to establish ways to lighten the load." Charity / NGO
- "Trusted intermediaries such as charities that are working in communities could be useful allies." Charity / NGO

- "What about the post office and delivery services? They see people every day and are trusted intermediaries." Charity / NGO

2. Which partners should SSEN approach to ensure they are able to reach and better serve people who have recently been discharged from hospital or who use electrically powered medical equipment?

- "It's whoever does the follow-up appointment. The care in the community. The outreach group. They are often the ones who do the electrical equipment assessment, so they should be the first port of call." Other

- "Fire and rescue service. If they pick up anyone whilst they do community checks in houses, then they do promote the PSR." Energy / utility

- "What about occupational therapists? I don't know how it would work at the moment, but they usually go out to assess people's needs. Seeing as they're out and about and visible, they could be used to provide information." Housing

- "You could partner with care agencies, too. Sometimes when people are discharged, they are assigned a hospital care agency for a few weeks and then a local care agency." Housing

- "I think it's worth considering why people are going to hospital in the first place. Just looking at hospital visits, you could look at the most common reasons for people on the PSR going to hospital. I don't know what these are, but to hazard a guess, it's likely to be people with dementia or elderly people who have had falls. If you had that data, then you could hone in on and partner with specific organisations like dementia charities." Other

- "People are reliant on charging mobility scooters, so perhaps there's a way in there through the suppliers." Energy / utility

- "We did a lot of work on getting all our eligible over-55 residents registered. Perhaps you could work with other housing associations. When our residents get to the stage when they have to go into a care home, it means we get new people coming in, so it's about capturing those people. You do need to keep on the ball with it. We have a few months where we really push for sign-ups, but we need a way to capture every eligible new

resident. There's a lot of moving in and moving out, so we're probably missing some people. We need sustainable processes in place." Housing

3. **Which partners should SSEN approach to ensure they are able to reach and better serve people from diverse communities where language can be a barrier?**

- "Working with housing associations is absolutely vital for promoting the PSR in these communities. Putting a leaflet through someone's door is a completely different thing to hearing about it from a person they know and consider a trusted authority." Housing
- "SSEN needs to find partners who are already engaged with the city's communities to raise its profile." Charity / NGO

4. **Which partners should SSEN approach to ensure they are able to reach and better serve people with hearing loss?**

- "Probably the main one is NHS partnerships and doing more data sharing with them." Charity / NGO
- "In Scotland there are a couple of different things I can refer to, the community planning partnerships where there are multidisciplinary groups, normally convened by the council, and I think that would be a good area to be looking at contacts." Charity / NGO
- "There are people within the councils who are sensory leads, and there's a group of them coordinated through an organisation called The Alliance in Scotland. That would be a strategic way to get across a whole lot of people and organisations to make good communication links." Charity / NGO
- "I'm not convinced there is a high enough level of engagement with our social care team, our sustainability and energy officer, so I think that might be a gap worth plugging." Local authority
- "I know in Orkney we have a partnership between the local council and the health board. It's Orkney Health and Care, so the local authority would be key, but here because we have so many smaller outer islands, probably community development trusts and linking in that, but that would be more charitable bodies." Charity / NGO

1. How do you think SSEN could make it easier for people who have mental ill health to access the PSR?

- "If people are anxious about getting things done, they put it into a basket of 'I can't do it'. I had a friend with loads of parking tickets, the bailiffs came around and she just hid. It's that thing of worrying until you can't do anything anymore. It gets to a point where you have to sign up on people's behalf." Energy / utility

- "Training first responders to assist people with mental ill health is key." Charity / NGO

- "We're missing face-to-face sign-ups at the moment. As a local resilience group, we tried contacting SSEN ahead of lockdown to identify extremely vulnerable people. There are barriers, but they were able to share some information with us. If people know there's a lack of take-up in their area, it prompts a positive reaction involving local organisation. This has some kind of currency as you can use it to forge a campaign of some kind." Charity / NGO

- "There are a lot of buddying systems, such as the one at Highland Hospice. I wonder whether this sort of thing presents an opportunity. You almost need someone to stand beside the person to make the bridge over the hump. This could be via a postcard campaign, for example." Charity / NGO

2. How do you think SSEN could make it easier for people who have recently been discharged from hospital or who use electrically powered medical equipment to access the PSR?

- "I think that with people recently discharged, there is more of a time pressure for them to receive support – act quickly to provide that early reassurance." Charity / NGO

- "Individual situations are changing so quickly. I can see the big challenges in making sure that customer data is up to date. Requirements that need to be updated should be done and make it relevant for the customer." Energy / utility

- "Partner with the Health and Social Care Alliance; they support people with long-term conditions." Energy / utility

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3. How do you think SSEN could make it easier for people from diverse communities where language can be a barrier to access the PSR?

- "By constantly using forms for PSR sign ups, it does potentially exclude this whole block of people. Try to find other sign-up channels." Local authority

- "Tenancy managers are the best option, as they will know tenants better than anyone else. I think that creating a really easy pathway for people working with tenants to move the process forward quickly is key. For example, with Thames Water, you have an Excel spreadsheet to fill in to access support." Local authority

- "Literacy levels may be quite low in populations, so having a leaflet to fill out may not make sense. You need that trusted individual to actually sit with individuals at a lunch club or whatever it is and go through the process with them. There will be a lot of people who are keen to get those PSR registrations up in their communities, so you could create a training service to enable volunteers or other individuals to take on that role." Charity / NGO

- "I think that it's difficult to reach the Roma communities. You just need to build trust at a local level." Charity / NGO

- "Could there not be a way to unify PSRs? It's so tricky to get people to keep up, which is exacerbated when they have issues with speaking and understanding English." Charity / NGO

- "If you could send leaflets of every language to the councils, we would welcome that." Local authority

- "A recent example involves a Covid outbreak in a food factory. We put out some guidance in English but very quickly became aware that there was a large non-English-speaking Romanian community that the information wasn't reaching." Local authority

- "People I work with would be happy to talk to me in church and bring up these massive issues, but if an anonymous person called them on the phone, they would not be willing to talk to them." Charity / NGO

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4. How do you think SSEN could make it easier for people with hearing loss to access the PSR?

- "Make sure that you've got different channels for information going out and that that information is quite visual. Not overly visual and complicated, but accessible in that sense. We always recommend things like animations; most people have got gadgets these days." Charity / NGO

- "There's quite a drive to get people online, but I would agree that sometimes it's about getting a basic leaflet that's not too complicated that explains what it's about." Charity / NGO

- "To get to those people that can be more challenging, you maybe need to work through other parties like community groups." Charity / NGO

1. When registered, what benefits or services should SSEN provide specifically for people who have mental ill health?

- "I was doing a resilience project with SSEN funds pre-Covid, and all the places we'd have been putting our information were decimated in one fell swoop. Libraries and energy / utility trusted intermediaries just closed down. Libraries are a source of information that vulnerable folks gravitate to. Slowly, library services are returning. Small mental health charities, libraries and small leisure centres can make contributions. Bookmarks signposting the PSR in every book could be of interest." Charity / NGO

2. When registered, what benefits or services should SSEN provide specifically for people who have recently been discharged from hospital or who use electrically powered medical equipment?

- "A level of flexibility depending on the customers. A one-way approach is never the way to go." Local authority

- "What you're already doing, such as providing hotels, is definitely a good thing." Other

- "It depends on the device, really. If it's a ventilator, then it means people are housebound, so I guess you could provide anything that's useful while you're stuck at home, like food

packages. You need to draw up the matrix there between what the device is and what the service is." Other

- "Perhaps this is looking too far into the future, but we do get into resilience for the future. What does that look like? Is it going to tie into the DSO transition? Who should be involved? Some of this PSR equipment is critically reliant on power, so it's whether SSEN could run some sort of trial on a resilience service in terms of improving resilience at home. It might be looking at moving away from mobile generation on an emergency basis to looking at network areas that are especially vulnerable. What are the opportunities there? Could you come up with an allowance? I know there's a scheme at the moment in Dumfries and Galloway to see whether professional storage heaters can be made compatible with tariffs. It's a case of bridging the interruption of off-peak periods. Whether DNOs will be allowed to play a role in that, I don't know." Energy / utility

3. When registered, what benefits or services should SSEN provide specifically for people from diverse communities where language can be a barrier?

- "If it is not possible to amalgamate PSRs, could their support at least be standardised? The scope is so broad across utilities, people get confused and don't know what to expect." Charity / NGO

- "You could ask them what their preferred language is when sending out information." Local authority

- "Having a real translator is preferable, but if you need to act quickly, Google Translate can help with sending information out." Local authority

4. When registered, what benefits or services should SSEN provide specifically for people with hearing loss?

- "I know there are alarms for gas leaks, but could you have an alarm tailored to people with hearing loss, such as alarms which have a flashing light, to let them know that the power has gone out?" Energy / utility

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- "It's a shame we can't do push notifications. The technology is there to send out a message in a postcode to any mobile phone in that area, but we're just not allowed to use it by the Government for commercial purposes." Local authority

SESSION THREE: CREATING A FUTURE ENERGY SYSTEM THAT IS FAIR, INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE AND AFFORDABLE

SUMMARY

Delegates discussed the opportunities presented by low carbon technologies for vulnerable customers. The most prevalent suggestion was the chance to use energy monitoring to change usage and behaviour, ultimately saving the customer money. Others saw an opportunity for these customers to engage more with new technologies and to have more control and agency over their energy consumption. Better quality of life was cited as another opportunity, as housing and insulation standards must improve as part of the move towards the electrification of heat.

When discussing the issue of energy tech and usage and digital readiness, stakeholders expressed concern about broadband speeds and access to 4G, particularly in the Highlands, and suggested that without this infrastructure in place, customers without rapid, reliable digital access would be left behind. Other suggestions for greater inclusivity included subsidising and investing in battery storage, heat pumps, insulation and PV for vulnerable customers. However, some delegates warned that technology was not a panacea, and that real work was required to address the wider issue of poverty, educate and engage vulnerable customers on energy, and work with local and central Government to improve housing quality and living standards.

Stakeholders suggested that SSEN should engage with network providers, microgrid operators, social housing organisations and battery storage installers to help overcome the barriers resulting from widespread low levels of trust in relation to adopting low carbon technologies (LCTs). They also urged SSEN to lobby central Government to provide greater support for clean energy in terms of return on investment.

Delegates felt that SSEN should be engaging with trusted community groups on the ground to engage and educate vulnerable customers on the benefits of LCTs. There was widespread consensus that greater digitisation would adversely affect those who already had limited access to the internet and could not afford to switch to different tariffs or invest in LCTs.

A number of stakeholders warned that existing inequalities and vulnerabilities would be magnified by the smart energy transition. Stakeholders gave examples and referred to case studies where smart meters had been installed in the homes of vulnerable customers, many of whom had received little education on how to use them, and had resulted in the residents switching off their heating. Others highlighted the education opportunity represented by the installers themselves and urged SSEN to do more to engage with people entering residences to install LCTs with a view to reaching these vulnerable groups.

On the financial side of the equation, there was widespread agreement that those least able to afford the installation of LCTs stood to benefit the least from the energy transition. Stakeholders called for a clearer innovation funding strategy from the energy companies and expressed concern that central Government may offer less support in terms of grants and tax breaks post-Covid-19. Some delegates wanted to see SSEN working more closely with local authorities and community groups on the ground to fund local projects and urged the company to consider whether the overarching priority should be social justice rather than profit. Engaging with landlords, housing authorities and developers was seen as paramount to successfully removing some of the barriers around access to LCTs, where constraints were both financial and tied to dwelling and local area. Another key point raised under the financial 'capability cluster' related to network constraints, with stakeholders pointing out that in some areas, such as Orkney, enough renewable energy was being generated to supply vulnerable and fuel poor customers, but the grid could not provide the necessary capacity.

Before we look at the barriers, what do you think are the underline opportunities for customers in vulnerable situations through accessing low carbon technologies?

- "One opportunity presented by the remote areas of Scotland is the long-term acceptance of dynamic storage heaters among consumers, which dates back as far as the 1990s. Now SSEN needs to start migrating these consumers over to the new technology." Local authority

- "The northern islands can also be a great place to trial new initiatives, as the residents there are used to power cuts anyway." Local authority

- "These things encourage people to think about their usage. Maybe that will help in the long run in terms of behaviours and resource use." Energy / utility

- "Having the chance to monitor usage can allow you to consider changing your lifestyle to save money." Energy / utility

- "I think there is an opportunity to make savings on energy costs. Barriers of the upfront costs aren't too great. I think there needs to be a lot more education for people. They need help on how to learn technologies. With smart meters, there is a lot of misinformation. I think there is potential, but there needs to be work done alongside that to realise their potential. There is a big role for organisations to inform the public. Combination of information campaigns to raise awareness and accessing where people can get talked to." Other

- "Opportunity for people to learn to use technology." Energy / utility

- "Great opportunity for households who were on a previous stricter tariff; they now get more control. Particularly with heating around their homes. Hopefully, they'll cut savings there as well. That's a big focus." Energy / utility

- "That conversation has to be tied into wider conversations about technology. Particularly for those off gas, many people aren't that satisfied with the quality of that heat. Regarding the research I did, we did a heating satisfaction survey and people on electricity were half as satisfied as those on gas or heat networks. There is a huge opportunity here to increase people's satisfaction and quality of life, but it's just not a tech issue. You need to get the basics right first, like insulation. There have been some well-meaning interventions over the past few years, but it's sometimes been to our detriment because investment decisions have been taken without proper information. People need the most appropriate heating system for them, and we need to get the fabric of the building right before anything else." Energy / utility

- "Vulnerable people are often described as under consuming energy services. So we need to bridge the gap between the desired level of energy consumption and the actual level of consumption. Supply needs to be more responsive. It shouldn't be that only more well-off customers can access responsive energy services. The group set to benefit most from smart technologies is the vulnerable group." Academic

ENERGY TECH AND USAGE AND DIGITAL TECH READINESS

1. Where do you feel SSEN should focus to help customers overcome the types of barrier mentioned above?

- "I worry about whether the Highlands would be ready for this digital technology. It's impressive on the surface, but it is heavily reliant on online services. Standard broadband is a big enough deal in some parts of that area, so that needs to be factored into SSEN's thinking." Local authority

- "Some people will not be receiving broadband or 4G or 5G in the next five years. We need to be more realistic. How do we ensure that these people can access these smart services with their current set-up? This is a legitimate concern for people." Local authority

- "There are a few organisations working across Scotland on the digital readiness of households. Connecting Scotland is one. We have a few local organisations trying to increase digital uptake with free devices. If you're going to a family with a free device, you can also include information." Charity / NGO

- "Compatibility doesn't seem to be too much of an issue. I wonder if there's an issue around connecting with energy. There are so many tech suppliers and companies using different tech. Bringing all that together for users in a residence is a challenge. SSEN and other energy providers will need to work through this to find the best solutions for customers. At the moment, we just have pockets of technology here and there." Energy / utility

- "It's always easier to find the barriers. Upfront cost is the biggest barrier. Then there is the use of the kit. Installing batteries and new tech, those things go wrong occasionally. That

is a real barrier for new tech. But then, it's a good opportunity. Massive amount of work here, but it needs to be done well." Other

- "The report we're going to publish touches on these issues. One thing we've talked about is the role of DNOs in the DSO transition. It looks at non-build solutions to network constraints. There will be lots of areas that aren't constrained now but will be in the future, and it's about finding the most cost-effective way of resolving that. We need to think about the ability of DNOs in this. Heat pumps are great, but if you don't have flexibility, then it's an issue. Could batteries be subsidised to resolve this? It's about finding the most cost-effective solution that can be rolled out. We talk about lowest cost and most sustainable. Also, whole system means different things to different people. It's about bringing in non-financial benefits, too." Energy / utility

- "DNOs get too focused on technology and innovation and putting in new kit, but the quick, easy and low-cost wins are around proper insulation, education and engagement with vulnerable customers. Technology can't solve everything. Those in fuel poverty often have high levels of disability, mental illness, financial challenges, debt, all of those things, so you can't just go in and talk about insulation when they're struggling to buy food. I think it is easy to get sidetracked and talk about electric vehicles and putting PV on everyone's houses because Boris Johnson thinks that will make him look good, but it is not the right thing to do." Charity / NGO

- "If you are in poverty, you can't afford solar panels or an electric vehicle. To get to most vulnerable people you'll need to interact with councils or social housing providers like Catalyst. Our council has put solar panels on our council houses, which helps decrease fuel bills. We have also made a new block of council housing effectively car-free, with just one car parking space for an electric car, and all tenants have become members of the EV club." Local authority

- "We are very focused on the economically disadvantaged in society, but I think a bigger challenge are those described as 'JAMs' (just about managing). They don't have their own groups to express their frustration and find ways of accessing things for them, like those who are more socially disadvantaged do." Local authority

- "We should be looking at energy use reduction. We have homes that are heating all year round, whilst others are putting on jumpers. We have a twisted system in which the more

energy you use, the cheaper it is; you're penalising people for reducing their energy." Charity / NGO

- "I would suggest this almost needs to go to the planning stage. So any new builds or houses, or any retro build has to include some sort of renewable energy, so that cost is being picked up by the ones who are making money out of it, so the developers, the builders and the landlords. So, they have got to invest in their properties once that stuff is done." Local authority

- "Maybe there's a project there for whoever the energy suppliers are, or maybe for yourselves, to look at investing in that technology now for the long-term gain on social housing, for instance. The amount of infrastructure that local authorities must have that you could put panels on roofs at whatever shared cost, for the longer-term saving. There's not a council tenant who is going to complain about having solar panels being put on their roofs if it's for the greater good." Local authority

- "I think energy poverty goes hand in hand with a lack of digital connectivity. I work with community energy groups with outreach champions, and they report that people in fuel poverty are often in digital poverty. They can't access the information to improve their situation." Academic

- "The cost of smart technologies is a barrier. They are easier to think about. Of course, there's digital connectivity, skills and knowledge, but what isn't mentioned is time poverty, which is a problem for those on lower incomes." Academic

- "Research in Bristol offered people free smart white goods, and struggled to find households to accept. The reasons are unclear, but there is an amount of reluctance among vulnerable customers to cede control of technology to organisations they don't know about and potentially don't trust. So if it's desirable to roll out such technology, it needs to be done through a range of trusted organisations. There have to be champions within communities. Visible first movers. So community engagement is important." Academic

- "I agree. We've had similar experience with subsidised home insulation and people were very sceptical. Trust is an issue." Academic

2. Which organisations should SSEN engage with to do this effectively?

- "SSEN needs to work with microgrid operators, particularly those involved with renewables and EV charging, as their projects can cause poor load balancing. It could maybe work with them to rebalance this using smart-grid technology. This will improve grid reliability in these areas." Local authority

- "I suppose they need to work with network providers, that'll be key to laying the groundwork for any smart technologies." Energy / utility

- "I would say the Centre for Sustainable Energy would be relevant as they understand the product and are able to fund these things." Other

- "Social housing providers." Local authority

- "The problem is there's no financial support or safety net from the Government. It's a big upfront investment for something like solar panels and a lot of people don't feel safe making the investment; they can't trust that they'll see a return on their investment. SSEN's role should be to lobby for Government support in clean energies." Local authority

- "One of our partner projects is to rent battery storage to households. The mutual benefit is that the customer gets a reduced bill and we own the excess energy to sell back to the grid, so it's mutually beneficial." Local authority

- "The Department for Work and Pensions, because they hold a massive database and most of our vulnerable clients who are on the priority register will be on benefits. So, could you link it with benefit entitlement so that it's automatic, so if you're entitled to a disability benefit, there was automatic data sharing with the utility provider?" Charity / NGO

- "I'm certainly interested in Highlands and Islands community ownership and schemes that help to make things affordable and accessible." Charity / NGO

- "SSEN should know a lot about this, they've done a research project about trusted organisations. Often the answer is that it's community led, best done by the community but facilitated. They've got research on the processes and organisations, but it's a multi-stakeholder approach with different providers across gas, water and electricity, stacking cost savings and reducing the burden. Having a single point of contact is important." Academic

- "A single point of contact is a very important approach. Working with gas networks is important. They have to approach things in an even more sophisticated way as they're less well known. SGN have an emphasis on social value creation, as this is the only way they can reach out to people if they have a structured approach to social value. There's probably a lack of standardisation. A framework can be provided for the organisations to find common ground to reach out to vulnerable customers and ensure there isn't too much repetition and people aren't worn out." Academic

3. How should SSEN help engage vulnerable customers who are not convinced of the benefits or have barriers owing to trust or mindset?

- "Existing vulnerabilities will be a magnifier. Demand response happens with people who have the technology; it's about affordability." Academic
- "We have to continue to extol the benefits and value of technology that the market is moving towards. It's an education, engagement with customers at a local level and showing them hands-on how tech works and can benefit them in the long run. This will take some time and planning." Energy / utility
- "For a lot of individuals this tech seems very unknown. Easier to engage with those who are embedded in the community to shine a light on those who don't understand. They would be more trusted, I feel." Energy / utility
- "I would say that it could lead to people being left behind owing to the heavy reliance on internet for this technology. Vulnerable customers might not be able to afford WiFi and the technology will not work properly for them, exacerbating their situation." Local authority
- "People who are experiencing poverty and in deprivation are always going to be impacted more by these changes, as they'll find it more difficult to switch to new technology. There needs to be more access to organisations that can help and support them." Charity / NGO
- "SSEN have done a lot of work on consumer engagement. Where SSEN lead on something, we've found in our research that you don't get much pull from consumers. It's more effective if community organisations that are already trusted on a local level take the lead.

Part of that is that a lot of people don't know who their DNO is. There's definitely a role for SSEN to explain the changes, why they are necessary and the impact they will have on people." Energy / utility

- "I heard about a woman who had a smart meter put in, and now she won't put her heating on because she can see pound signs coming up. She didn't understand how the technology itself worked, so a more holistic approach is needed to ensure people understand." Charity / NGO

- "Smart meters aren't actually working. We are doing a trial in Manchester, and we are not able to get the right data to be able to participate in a smart energy system. It has been going on for years. Until the Government make sure that smart meters work and don't turn off when you switch suppliers, we can't get the data we need to participate in and benefit from any of these markets." Charity / NGO

- "I had a smart meter installed a few months ago and the guy who came and installed it was brilliant at explaining how to use it and why. Good training for the people who install them is crucial. It's that word-of-mouth thing, they might be able to give customers a few tips on how to use them sensibly." Local authority

- "There's a lot of power in case studies. When I've knocked on doors to ask if people need help, people are responsive to me telling my own personal story about my struggles with fuel poverty. Particularly older people feel ostracised by things like solar, but meeting someone relatable in their community who has put solar panels in makes them realise it can be for them." Housing

- "It's about having the advice come from someone who people trust in their community. If you had someone who was a single point of contact from within the community, you'd have a lot more trust in the process. Can you fund a person within local communities to be that point of contact? Maybe SSEN could provide training to someone who is already within a community." Energy / utility

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FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

1. Remembering that SSEN do not bill customers for energy, where do you feel SSEN should focus to help customers overcome the types of barrier mentioned above?

- "I think you've got two games to play. You've got a short-term game plan and a strategic one. The strategic stuff is lobbying Government with other utility providers for that central investment and some sort of combined plan with other utility providers. And then you have the short-term PSR-type game, where we need to work with charities to make as robust a register as possible." Local authority

- "SSEN doesn't bill customers directly, but it is responsible for the disparity in costs in different areas of the country. If SSEN could find a way to try to rebalance these costs, that would be useful. It should not be the case where the poor end up paying for technology that is being used by the more affluent." Local authority

- "SSEN should lobby to make sure that the costs can be spread for transmission more fairly at a wider level. Costs are distributed very widely and that means that people can pay for things that they don't use." Local authority

- "I work for a housing association, so we would look into installation or encourage tenants to take up things if it was beneficial to them financially. However, with smart meters not working properly at the moment, it's not something that you feel is a necessity for them. Sometimes, technology comes in for a short period of time and is then thrown out for something else, so it's difficult to recommend something to someone when you don't know if it will help them." Housing

- "The generators of power should pay for enhancements to be put into consumers' homes. Part of the generation commitment to wind farm owners, etc. should be to support the integration of smart technologies in homes." Local authority

- "We're trying to stop the poverty divide getting wider, and these smart-grid technologies have a lot of potential to leave people behind if the end user is made responsible for upgrading their own homes accordingly." Charity / NGO

- "It's an observation that if we were having this conversation six months ago, we might be talking about loans and grants from the Government. I'm not sure what impact Covid will

have on this kind of funding, therefore financial support from the energy networks is more vital than ever." Local authority

- "There's a bias against electrification. We need to get rid of that. We have a fossil fuel bias; if we could take extra cash from oil subsidies and give it to wind and solar initiatives, we would close that dependence on fossil fuels for capacity." Local authority

- "I think the key thing you've got is an excellent dataset and the analysis, interpretation and use of that database is quite important for me. If we can evidence a case for a different way of working, it would make sense to everybody. It feels to me that a lot of the money [from funding] just gets distributed randomly to be seen to be doing something in the moment, and in that effort, a lot of the money is wasted. So, something more strategic would be really helpful." Charity / NGO

- "I think there's a bit about what is your role and purpose, and how do you work with authorities and the delivery agents to be as cost efficient and community facing as possible. As a strategy, part of it is dependent upon whether social justice is your main goal, or profit is." Charity / NGO

2. Which organisations should SSEN engage with to do this effectively?

- "We are working on electric heating meters to aggregate their capacity and that can be fed back into the grid. This will enable households to have more control over their tariffs." Charity / NGO

- "Engaging with landlords for smart meter installation would be helpful. Grants and financial support could be one way of doing this." Charity / NGO

- "It's difficult with private landlords who are looking to turn a profit. This may change with regulatory changes." Local authority

- "Engaging with local authorities to coordinate smart meter installations en masse can be helpful." Local authority

- "I think Citizens Advice has a big role to play in this. I would also suggest some local organisations. Especially, we need advocacy organisations to provide specific support to people with specific needs. This gives a reminder that there are other areas and other

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barriers, for example, if there are mental health issues, then they need to be referred to a mental health organisation. A blended approach is more appropriate." Other

- "We are concerned about those in private/social housing not being able to access the smart technology. Maybe it's up to SSEN to get in touch with local authorities and housing developers, so that it can remove the initial barrier." Energy / utility

- "The same organisations we have been speaking about: national governments, local governments, probably just all the accessibility ones that you're already speaking about and community-wide. There are so many community projects going on like smaller projects, so bringing all that together, I would say, and other network providers. I know you're a business, but competing together, is it of use to the customer?" Charity / NGO

- "A lot of community energy groups are quite well placed and try to do work around fuel poverty, but other organisations have a different embeddedness. It could be social housing, local authorities, charities. But it depends on the geographical area." Academic

3. How should SSEN help engage vulnerable customers who are not convinced of the benefits or have barriers owing to trust or mindset?

- "SSEN should play a role in signposting these customers towards suitable tariffs to ensure that they can feel comfortable that they can access this new technology." Local authority

- "I think to identify the issues, you have to link people up to the appropriate support. There are a lot of companies out there that just don't signpost, which often doesn't turn into actions. Referring people on is needed." Charity / NGO

- "Raising awareness and funding projects." Energy / utility

- "I think SSEN could definitely engage with housing associations to understand why residents are struggling and why they can't afford to put their heating on. Residents generally don't call out for help, so we don't always get to know until we go into the properties and do servicing and things like that." Housing

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DWELLING AND LOCAL AREA, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL

1. Where do you feel SSEN should focus to help customers overcome the types of barrier mentioned above?

- "With EVs, most council tenants cannot afford them, but in more affluent areas, they'll install a cable run for charging. There's no guaranteed on-street parking. Here we've had batteries tested as they've become available. The scheme will come and go but at times tenants can feel like they're being used as guinea pigs. This can cause resistance for future initiatives." Local authority

- "This is another important area. There's an interesting piece of work around time of use and network capacity to do with how vulnerable certain households are to network constraints at different times of the day and how they can respond. If households are restricted at times of the day, then surely there's a demand on the DNOs to mitigate that." Academic

- "Reduction in energy usage is not just about the scale of demand, but network capacity. We have a problem with energy demand in the Orkney Islands and people are told to reduce their energy, but we're generating enough energy to support these people, it's just that the grid can't carry the capacity needed." Energy / utility

2. Which organisations should SSEN engage with to do this effectively?

- "Local authorities if they have declared a climate emergency; DNOs are well placed to work with that." Academic

- "EVs, electrification of heat, so organisations involved in that." Academic

3. How should SSEN help engage vulnerable customers who are not convinced of the benefits or have barriers owing to trust or mindset?

- "The people we are working with are in receipt of benefits, so basic affordability is a problem. So being able to have cheaper energy in the longer run means they need to benefit from some sort of initiative that allows that change for them, because they're not
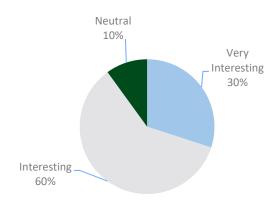
going to be able to afford it themselves. So that is either through housing associations or councils, but it has to be bigger and initiative-led." Charity / NGO

- "I think something that should be acknowledged is that a lot of time is required to get people engaged towards something. It will take a lot of time to formally agree to heating controls and receive support for their own benefit. This cannot be seen as an overnight change and SSEN needs to realise that this is a long-haul mission." Charity / NGO

- "We were talking about who you can connect with. Potentially, if you are talking about dwelling, it would be good to pre-emptively talk to developers about how these new developments can include these smart technology designs." Local authority

- "One issue we see in Orkney is network constraints and capacity available locally. This is something that is out of control of the householder compared with other things that we could have some control over. SSEN could give some support towards this." Energy / utility

- "A lot of people perceive connections as complicated, if you can simplify that for people." Other

- "You must have an idea of where your areas of deprivation are, i.e. the people who are not paying their bills, so maybe that's a way of identifying fairly quickly where there's the greatest need and whether or not that would help." Local authority
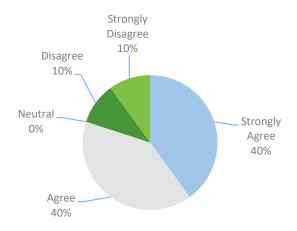
WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

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?

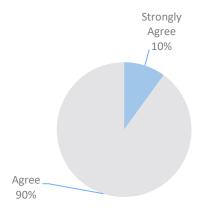## 2. Did you feel that you had the opportunity to make your points and ask questions?
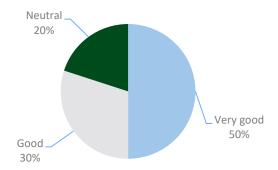

Comments:

- "The breakout sessions were very well organised and well umpired to allow for open discussion."
- "This is only due to my connection being poor, and the software platform disconnecting."
- "The breakout discussion groups were excellent and allowed everyone to have a discussion."

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

Strongly
Agree
10%

Agree
90%

4. What did you think of the way the workshop was chaired by your facilitator?
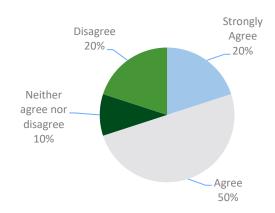
Neutral
20%

Good
30%

Very good
50%

Comments:

- "[EQ Communications] did a brilliant job of moving the conversation in the right way so we covered everything with everyone getting to say how they felt."
- "The breaks in between each session felt a little unnatural and it was tricky to get into the flow of it."
- "I had to use the webchat as there was a problem with my microphone… Using the webchat worked well for the 2nd and 3rd workshop, but I missed the first one trying to fix this – it would have been even better if we'd gone straight to use webchat on the 1st workshop."

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

Strongly Agree 20%

Agree 50%

Disagree 20%

Neither agree nor disagree 10%

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

- "First time I have used this particular format and once I became familiar with joining each of the agenda items, it worked very well."
- "Simple once you got the hang of it, very well put together interface."
- "It looked visually appealing."
- "That it worked so easily and well most of the time (for an unknown reason my microphone didn't work) for me, when I'd not used this platform before."
- "Very user friendly and sessions not too long."
- "The timings were accurate from the agenda."
- "Reasonably easy to use, although some screens can be bit busy/visual noise. Presentations were helpful."
- "Able to participate in discussions and view presentations."
- "Everything was on time and well organised."

If it went poorly, what challenges did you experience?

- "I couldn't get into any of the discussion groups, it felt very distanced and not a conference feel, it also wasn't easy to tell if you were on mute and video on/off."
- "I missed [a] presentation as I didn't realise it had started – not sure if I didn't click on something, but it wasn't obvious that it had started."

- "Lots of text/instructions, not able to pin speaker to screen in order to lip-read, sound was variable, which didn't help."
- "Some technical issues in joining on a tablet, had to use alternative device."

6. **If you have used any other platforms for this type of event, are there any you would recommend?**
   - "This is definitely the best format I have seen for this type of event."
   - "For the way this particular workshop worked, I don't believe other platforms would offer the same diversity of tools and accessibility."
   - "I think Zoom calls, if managed well, work really well and still get the feeling of being in a conference/meeting."
   - "I have used Zoom in the past and would recommend it."
   - "We use Zoom. Issues are to do with accessibility. Unfortunately, huge variation in microphone pickup from PCs/phones (mostly good) and laptops (mostly poor) affects sound. Facility to pin screen helps both lip-reading and Sign/other language interpreting."

Any other comments?

- "No, was pleased to be invited. Happy to be involved and we can work at accessibility."
- "Format is very dependent on good facilitation, in which case [EQ Communications'] was first class."

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