

Report on Northern Powergrid's Customer Engagement Group meeting in April 2020

Summary

The Customer Engagement Group¹ held its third session looking at Northern Powergrid's early work on developing its business plan for Ofgem's RII0-ED2 price control process. This is the plan that will cover the 5 years 2023-2028.

At this meeting we focused on Northern Powergrid's plans for **environmental protection**, its **corporate social responsibility** plan, and how it intends to **develop its workforce**.

In view of the current restrictions on travel and face to face gatherings as a result of **Covid-19**, we also discussed how Northern Powergrid's modified plan for engagement activities is progressing and whether it is still able to gather stakeholder views effectively.

Environmental Protection

This aspect of Northern Powergrid's (NPg) business plan is all about reducing the impact of NPg's work on the environment. It includes a range of issues from preventing oil spills from cables to replacing overhead lines by underground ones in beauty spots. NPg intends to consult people on potential levels of expenditure for this type of work.

We asked NPg to be really clear about the different benefits associated with each possible level of expenditure, and about the trade offs between expenditure on different types of work. We also asked them to take into account indirect impacts of work, such as on air quality and traffic congestion.

As a big company NPg can influence the suppliers it buys products and services from, and we asked them to consider a systematic approach to ensuring that their suppliers operate to high environmental standards. We also asked them to consider developing local environmental action plans for each of their main sites.

Corporate Social Responsibility

We heard that NPg takes its social purpose seriously and is committed to 'doing the right thing' for the communities it serves. Its work in this area is based on three

¹ If you want to find out more about the role of the Customer Engagement Group look here:

<https://www.northernpowergrid.com/custom/news/about-the-customer-engagement-group>

To find out about the members of the group look here:

<https://www.northernpowergrid.com/custom/news/about-the-customer-engagement-group>

pillars - vulnerability, education and employability – and it has a programme of local projects designed to leave a positive legacy in communities.

We encouraged the company to make sure that all its actions are consistent, and asked for more information about how it works with its suppliers to increase its influence. We discussed the company's response to COVID-19 and encouraged it both to support its local partners, such as charities, which are suffering drops in income and to help both the local economy and future bill payers by pulling work forward if possible.

Workforce and Skills

NPg has an ageing workforce and needs to keep attracting people with the right aptitude and skills to keep their network safe and reliable and to provide a good service to their customers. The company has a well established recruitment programme that has enabled them to recruit enough people over the last few years, and they work closely with local further and higher educational establishments. But they have been less successful in attracting a diverse range of applicants, or people from all the areas that they serve.

We encouraged the company to look closely at what other successful organisations are doing to attract recruits from a diverse range of backgrounds. We also suggested that they should articulate a vision for the future workforce which will attract a more diverse spread of candidates: this could encompass the environmental aspects of the company's future work, the broader range of skills needed in the future, and reflect the 'keyworker' status of NPg highlighted during COVID-19. This will help them to attract applicants from a more diverse range of backgrounds.

COVID-19 and Stakeholder Engagement

We heard that there have been changes to the method of stakeholder engagement in light of COVID-19, so that everything is now done remotely without the need for face to face contact. But this has had minimal impact on the engagement programme itself, and stakeholders have been very receptive to the changed approach adapting quickly to the current circumstances.

We asked for assurance that NPg is keeping track of factors such as balanced representation of stakeholders and inclusivity with the revised approach to engagement, and that it consider how responses received might be being impacted by the situation regarding the pandemic. We also asked the company to maximise the opportunity to gather feedback from staff, who are representative of a significant part of the population.

Further Information

If you would like further information about the topics covered in this note, or about any other aspect of the Customer Engagement Group's work please contact us at ceg@northernpowergrid.com