

AI Opportunities for Consumer Centric Engagement

Discovery Phase Consumer Insights Report

AI Opportunities for Consumer-Centric Engagement

Ofgem Strategic Innovation Fund – Round 5 Discovery C4

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Executive Summary

This report explains how stakeholders were identified and engaged and summarises insights from 22 interviews, 5 survey responses and 24 public reports. The purpose is to set out current best practice in consumer and community engagement, highlight the main challenges to delivering meaningful and inclusive engagement, and outline practical ways to address them. Evidence shows that National Gas and National Grid Electricity Transmission run structured, standards-aligned programmes, yet three system-level issues persist: throughput, consistency and reach. Large volumes of information are made available through engagement, and substantial feedback is generated that informs design and connections planning. Accessibility of complex information is challenging if not centrally searchable, and reach can be uneven when traditional formats and large volume of information can make it hard for people to see what a proposal means for them and their community. The findings indicate practical opportunities to improve efficiency and accessibility, informing a roadmap to test carefully governed, human-led digital and AI tools that accelerate intake and triage, retrieve referenced answers from approved sources, and present clearer, more usable information to the public, while publication cadence continues to follow statutory, environmental and engineering change-control processes.



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1 Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

The transition to net zero will require significant changes to the energy transmission network, with significant infrastructure change and expansion proposed. For these changes to be delivered effectively, it is vital that infrastructure delivery is underpinned by strong public trust, clear communication, and meaningful consumer engagement.

Traditionally, approaches to consumer engagement are often challenging for linear infrastructure that spans disparate and diverse communities across multiple regions. It is often resource intensive and challenging to engage the large volume of stakeholders and communities and encouraging them to participate in consultations to capture the diverse range of public perspectives necessary for equitable decision-making.

Funded through Ofgem's Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF), this project aims to explore how novel technologies and innovative engagement processes can help National Gas (NG) and National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET) strengthen public understanding, build support, and deliver wider community and environmental benefits as the UK transitions its energy transmission infrastructure.

1.2 Purpose of the report.

This report aims to summarise the findings from a series of stakeholder interviews and surveys conducted as part of Work Package 2. These engagement activities aimed to capture insights on current consumer engagement best practices, current and emerging challenges to meaningful engagement and opportunities for improvement. In addition to stakeholder insights, the report draws on relevant desktop research and existing consumer engagement studies to provide a comprehensive review of the current landscape.

The findings will be used to inform the development of a roadmap for adopting and developing new digital and AI-enabled engagement tools. These tools aim to build public trust, promote transparency, and strengthen consumer support for future infrastructure projects.

Ultimately, the report seeks to ensure that the needs and perspectives of key consumer groups are represented in the design of future engagement strategies, providing both behavioural and technical insights to guide the responsible and effective use of AI in public engagement.

2 Stakeholder Selection and Methodology

This section outlines how stakeholder groups and then specific organisations were identified, engaged, and analysed through a mixed-method approach that combined interviews and short surveys to capture diverse perspectives. The selection and methods were designed to ensure that insights reflect both internal priorities within National Gas and National Grid Electricity Transmission and the needs and experiences of consumers and communities, so that future work is consumer centric and maximise consumer benefit.

2.1 Stakeholder Selection Criteria

Stakeholder groups were selected to capture a balanced mix of those who deliver engagement, those who experience it, and those who represent people who are often hard-to-reach.

1. Relevance to Consumer Engagement

Stakeholder groups were selected for their direct experience planning and delivering engagement for major infrastructure. This ensured access to practical best practices and a clear view of operational challenges from teams that design and run consultations, outreach, and customer journeys.

2. Accurate Representation of Consumer Opinions

Stakeholder groups were also chosen to reflect the full range of consumer perspectives so that design remains genuinely consumer centric. This included voices from households and businesses across different regions and circumstances, with a specific focus on groups that are often under-represented or harder to reach.

3. Diversity of Perspectives

The selection aimed to capture a wide range of views across consumer types, sectors, and geographies. This included organisations representing vulnerable or digitally excluded groups, commercial energy users, academic experts and local authorities.

2.2 Stakeholder Mapping

After stakeholder groups were selected, they were then mapped according to their perceived influence on project outcomes and the impact of the project on their work or those they represent. This mapping is shown in **Figure 1** and was used to inform the prioritisation of interview and survey participants.

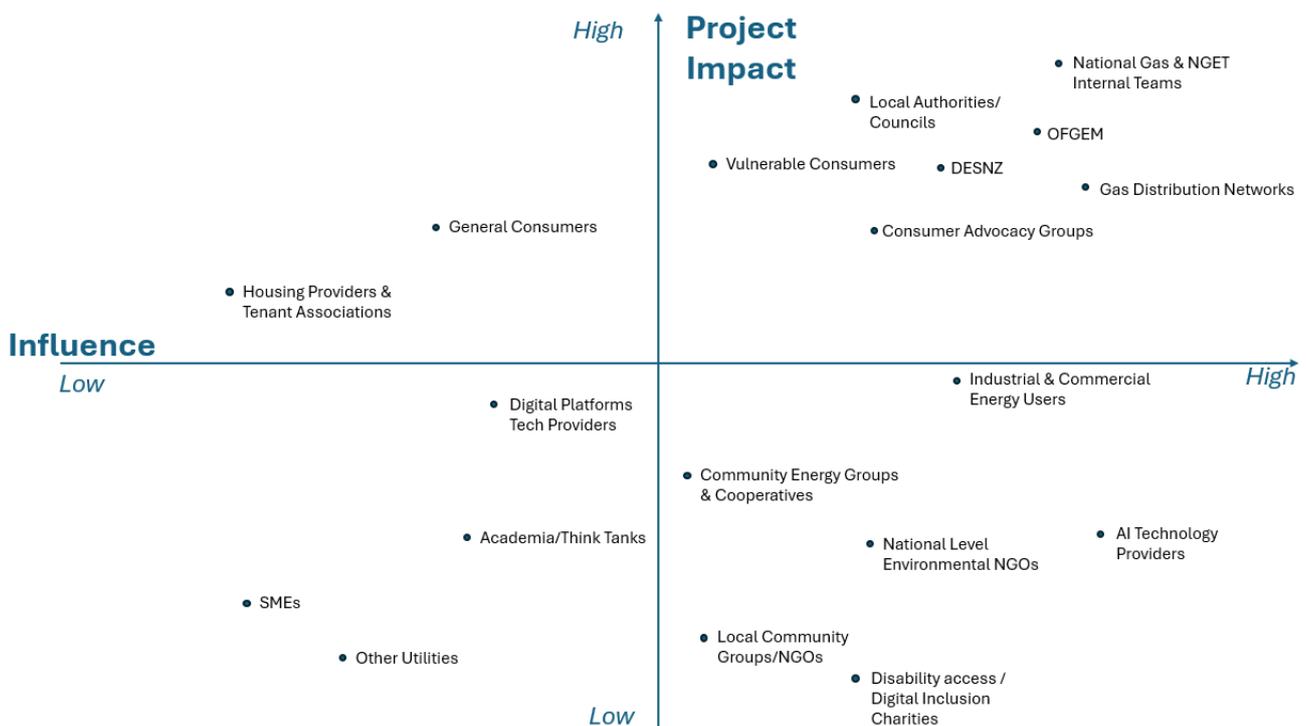


Figure 1: Stakeholder Group Mapping.

Based on this process, six key stakeholder groups were prioritised for engagement:

1. National Gas internal teams
2. National Grid Electricity Transmission teams
3. Gas Distribution Networks
4. Consumer Advocacy Groups and Those Who Represent Vulnerable Consumers.
5. Industrial & Commercial Energy Users
6. Local Authorities, Councils and Regional Partnerships
7. Academic Experts.

2.2.1 Stakeholder Prioritisation Matrix

Desktop research and internal consultation were then used to identify relevant organisations within these stakeholder groups, shown in Table 1. Note that stakeholders are mapped into priority and secondary groups and internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are defined as those that are part of the consortium.

Table 1: Priority Stakeholder Matrix

Priority Stakeholder Group	Organisations/Teams
National Gas Internal Teams (internal)	<i>Teams focused on public and stakeholder engagement.</i>
National Grid Electricity Transmission Teams (internal)	<i>External Affairs teams.</i>
Gas Distribution networks	<i>Cadent Gas and Northern Gas Networks</i>
Consumer Advocacy Groups and Those Representing Vulnerable Consumers (external)	<i>Community Energy England, Citizens Advice, National Energy Action, Green Rose, Home Wise Society, Scope (Disability Charity)</i>
Industry Representatives and Engagement Consultancies (external)	<i>Copper Consultancy, Renewable UK, Pipelines Guild, Future Energy Networks</i>
Local Authorities, Councils, and Regional Partnerships (external)	<i>Portsmouth City Council and Frome Town Council</i>
Secondary Stakeholder Group	Organisation Organisations/Teams s/Teams
Academia (external)	<i>University of Edinburgh (Institute for Government; UKERC)</i>

**Smaller Community Groups
(external)**

*Northeast Energy Friends, Community Energy Pathways and
Buckinghamshire Community Energy*

2.2.3 Role of Consumer Advocacy Groups

Engagement with consumer advocacy groups was prioritised to ensure that insights brought the consumer side of engagement into focus. These stakeholders provide first-hand evidence of what consumers understand, what they find challenging, which engagement channels they typically use and what engagement outcomes actually matter to them. These perspectives help to understand whether current engagement practices are inclusive and meaningful.

The selection of consumer advocacy groups aimed to cover a broad distribution of consumer needs, geographies, and demographics to ensure findings reflected those who are well understood by the networks and those who are often hard-to-reach. The selected groups span households in fuel poverty, people with disabilities, digitally excluded residents, time-poor families, older people, and community energy participants across urban and rural areas.

To understand this, each identified organisation is listed below along with the consumer groups and perspectives they help us to understand:

- **Community Energy England:** residents involved in community energy and local retrofit projects, including rural and small-town communities; perspectives on trust in local intermediaries and place-based delivery.
- **Citizens Advice:** wide cross-section of the public seeking independent advice on energy issues, including people under financial or time pressure.
- **National Energy Action:** households in or at risk of fuel poverty, including prepayment and pay-as-you-go users; perspectives on digitally inclusive journeys and assisted routes.
- **Green Rose:** vulnerable and digitally excluded residents needing in-person guidance and aftercare; perspectives on post-installation handover, confidence with new technologies, and outcome measures such as comfort, bills and complaint reduction.
- **Home Wise Society** (with local partners such as Rossendale Valley Energy): older residents and households needing trusted, local, face-to-face support and simple pathways to action.
- **Scope (Disability Charity):** households and consumers with disabilities and diverse access and inclusivity requirements across web, phone, paper and in-person channels.

Involving these organisations ensures that insights and any future use-case development put customer needs first. Their input highlights barriers in formats and channels, shows which assisted routes actually work, and defines success in terms that matter to people such as comprehension, comfort, cost, independence and the ability to act without relying on others. This improves the likelihood that proposed solutions will be usable, trusted and equitable in real settings.

2.3 Engagement Methods

A structured, mixed-method approach was used to engage stakeholders and gather insights across all key groups. The process began with targeted desktop research to identify relevant individuals and departments within each organisation, using publicly available sources such as company websites, annual reports, LinkedIn, and press releases. Where contact details were unavailable, outreach was

conducted via information lines, contact forms, or through introductions from existing contacts within National Gas and National Grid Electricity Transmission.

Primary stakeholders were contacted directly by personalised email invitations outlining the project's purpose, its connection to the Ofgem Strategic Innovation Fund, and the value of participation in shaping future engagement strategies. These emails requested a short (30–45 minute) interview and highlighted how the project aligned with the stakeholder's work or organisational mission.

Where interviews could not be scheduled, or for secondary stakeholder groups (e.g. local energy partnerships and community organisations), a short online survey was distributed instead. The survey mirrored key interview themes, allowing participants to share insights on engagement challenges and opportunities in a concise, flexible format.

Overall, the outreach achieved strong participation with the majority of primary stakeholders agreeing to interviews, representing all major categories. This combined approach ensured broad representation across sectors, delivering both depth through interviews and breadth through survey feedback.

2.4 Interview Approach

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to explore three central themes:

1. Current best practices in consumer and stakeholder engagement.
2. Existing and emerging challenges to delivering meaningful and inclusive engagement.
3. Future approaches and opportunities to improve engagement effectiveness.

Where time permitted, discussions also included a short exploration of digital and AI-enabled tools that could enhance engagement, including reflections on current examples that have worked well or less effectively, in practice.

The interview format was designed to allow flexibility and depth. A core question framework ensured consistency across sessions, while conversations were encouraged to flow naturally. Interviewers used follow-up and probing questions to explore related topics or tangents that offered valuable context or insight.

2.5 Supplementary Survey Outreach

To complement the interviews and broaden representation, an online survey was distributed to stakeholders. The survey aimed to gather concise, structured insights aligned with the same three focus areas. Respondents were also invited to reflect on the use of digital or AI tools in engagement, sharing examples or opinions on their potential value.

The survey questions were:

1. From your perspective, what does 'effective consumer or community engagement' look like in practice?
2. Can you describe the existing tools that make up best practice in stakeholder/consumer engagement?
3. In your experience, what are the main barriers that prevent meaningful participation or understanding among consumers?

4. Which groups or communities do you feel are hardest to meaningfully reach or are least represented in current engagement practices? And why?
5. Looking forward, how do you see engagement needing to change as the UK transitions and develops its infrastructure?
6. Can you think of or have you seen any digital tools or AI solutions that may address some of the key barriers to effective engagement?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about consumer engagement for large infrastructure projects?

Survey responses were analysed thematically alongside interview data to identify shared perspectives, differences across sectors, and opportunities for innovation. This dual approach combined qualitative depth from interviews with broader coverage through survey responses, ensuring a balanced and representative evidence base for subsequent analysis.

2.6 Data Handling and Analysis

All interview and survey data were managed in accordance with GDPR best practices. Participant responses were anonymised, with identifying details removed from transcripts and survey records unless individuals provided explicit consent to be cited directly.

Transcripts and survey responses were stored securely on a GDPR-compliant database accessible only to the research team. Once transcription and verification were complete, recordings were deleted to maintain confidentiality.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, reviewing responses across interviews and surveys to identify recurring patterns, emerging insights, and points of divergence between stakeholder groups. These themes were then synthesised to inform the findings presented in this report, ensuring all insights reflect aggregated, anonymised perspectives rather than individual views.

3 Interview Findings and Insights

This section consolidates findings from stakeholder interviews and survey responses into a single evidence base. Insights are organised under the three following headings in Table 2.

- **The Current Landscape**
 - What does best practice look like (distinction between current techniques and what best practice ideally looks like)?
 - What tools are currently used?
 - What does meaningful engagement result in/how is it measured?
 - What is the current use of digital tools (consumer facing, back-end)?
- **Gaps and Challenges**
 - What are the key challenges to provide meaningful engagement?
 - What processes could be streamlined?
 - What is the affect/impact of the challenges on projects and consumers?
- **Opportunities and Future Directions**
 - What would the impact of solving these challenges be?
 - Use cases - Stakeholders aspirations for these?
 - What tools could be used to solve these challenges - Stakeholders aspirations for these?
 - How can engagement be made more inclusive, meaningful and impactful?

- What does best practice look like ideally going forward?

Each entry in Table 2 aims to convey a concise but sufficiently detailed insight and where helpful includes a short, anonymised quote or statistic for cross reference.

To supplement interviews and surveys, key public reports were also analysed. These are listed in Appendix – List of Key Reports with each report given a unique reference code. Sources are shown in square brackets at the end of each bullet: [interview], [survey], or [report CODE] (e.g., RNG4, RNGET3). Note that when the same sentiment appears across sources, they are listed together (e.g., [interview, report RNG5]). Insights from reports that were not seen in interviews or survey responses are listed in 4 Additional Insights from Key Reports.

Note that for National Gas interviews, insights are split into those relating to industrial/commercial energy users and public/community end users. This decision was taken due to there being two separate engagement strategies for these to end user groups.

Table 2: Stakeholder Interview, Public Report and Survey Insights

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
<p>National Gas (National Gas Internal Teams)</p> <p>Public/Community (End Users)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured, early and ongoing engagement with independent assurance: Major projects undertake early route options conversations, non-statutory consultation and statutory consultation, with consultation reports and ‘we heard / we did’ published following consultations [interview]. Corporate governance includes external challenge (Independent Stakeholder Group) to scrutinise plans and engagement quality before and through business planning. [interview; report RNG4; report RNG5] Layered, place specific formats and channels: Engagement is delivered via various channels that includes broad awareness through campaigns and regional explainer content, progress to public consultations, local briefings, drop ins and parish level touchpoints. Online information is paired with paper copies in libraries and inspection locations to avoid digital exclusion, and each scheme maintains a plain English narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statutory consultation and evidencing duties: The Planning Act 2008 and Gunning principles require thorough and legally compliant public consultation; capture responses, coding, consideration, response and publication. This can be resource intensive. [interview; report RNG5] Inclusion at scale (seldom-heard groups) : Engagement can span hundreds of kilometres through multiple council boundaries and diverse demographics (language, age, disability, caring responsibilities, socio-economic). Traditional channels (e.g., evening town halls) can be unrepresentative. [interview; report RNG2; report RNG5] Opposition dynamics, fatigue & siloing: Overlapping gas/electricity and other infrastructure projects can create event/consultation fatigue; if comms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘We heard / we did’: Published project- and portfolio-level report that demonstrates issues to changes made/not made with reasons; linked entries to ISG/independent challenge notes to demonstrate accountability. [interview; report RNG4; report RNG5] Institutionalise the engagement toolkit: Take the strategy’s ‘how we engage’ sections and hard-wire them into project packs and templates for plans, venue/accessibility checklists, translation triggers, data-handling standards, and response SLAs. [interview; report RNG4] Stakeholder-centric CRM + unified consultation platform: Integrate all intake (events, emails, letters, forms). Use the CRM to power consistent, answers and effective outreach. [interview]

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	<p>alongside access to technical documents. [interview; report RNG4; report RNG5]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-the-ground delivery model + specialist capacity: A central team sets standards and partners with specialist community-relations agencies to deliver local letters/letter-drops, village-hall drop-ins, and site visits. [interview] Digital (current & emerging) : Live project websites and consultation platforms (market leaders under evaluation) host materials and feedback forms. VR/AR and map tools can help residents visualise projects and system scale (e.g., showing corridors, access routes, construction footprints. [interview] Corporate information: reliability, safety, fairness/inclusion Community information explains network operation and project delivery with principles around fairness and inclusion (explicit attention to vulnerable consumers and local benefit in corporate reporting/strategy). [interview; report RNG2; report RNG5] Scope caveat (who the 'customer' is) : As a transmission operator, National Gas has limited direct consumer engagement 	<p>are uncoordinated, confusion arises, attendance drops and objections rise. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical opacity 'what does this mean for me?' : Residents can struggle to find personalised information in technical reports and drawings and long reports. They want to know what it means for me and my home [interview] Timeliness vs. accuracy: Providing bespoke, reliable answers often takes time. For many organisations under the FOI Act projects have 20 working days to respond. That cadence clashes with fast social-media narratives, risking misinformation taking hold. [interview] Expectation management for unavoidable impacts: Even with best-practice engagement, some outcomes (e.g., CPO, environmental effects) will leave stakeholders unhappy; this requires transparent rationale and visible mitigation commitments. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retrieval-first AI (not interpretation) + authoring for AI-readability: AI assisted authoring human review. Future technical reports should be authored with consistent indexing/coordinates, effect radii, asset IDs, so tools can reliably answer 'what about my property?' [interview] Visualisation + accessibility-first content: Use VR/AR/maps to show project and construction phases; pair with plain-English/Easy-Read formats, BSL/large-print where needed, and translated materials in relevant locales. [interview] Transparent outage comms: Set expectations early on traffic, noise, dust, access during outage windows; keep two-way channels open (hotlines, drop-ins, FAQs). [interview] Cross-industry narrative to reduce fatigue: Jointly with electricity partners, explain whole-system need and 'why here vs. elsewhere' using aligned messages and shared visuals; reduces contradictory

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	(much household-facing activity sits with GDNs). [interview]		narratives and duplication. [interview]
<p>National Gas (National Gas Internal Teams)</p> <p>Commercial/Industrial (End-Users)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent, target-linked customer satisfaction (CSAT) with visible governance: CSAT is administered by an independent third party: triggers follow significant interactions (not routine emails), using a 1–10 question via Qualtrics. Results can be anonymised per customer preference and closed-loop follow-ups occur where re-contact is permitted. Internally there’s a monthly CSAT forum of ‘champions’; teams have targets and stretch goals [interview; report RNG5; report RNG1] Stakeholder forums/panels embedded in account engagement: Active mechanisms include the Independent Stakeholder Group, alongside customer-led agenda sessions and reciprocal site visits (host and visit). These provide regular playback of ‘what’s working’ and surface specific asks by segment. [interview; report RNG5] Stakeholder-shaped planning with formal playback: Business plan content is ‘shaped by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From many inputs to decision-ready intelligence is still hard: Even with forums and surveys, turning large, multi-channel input into consistent, comparable insight across projects/years is a heavy lift. [interview; report RNG5; report RNG1] CRM adoption & data hygiene: Inconsistent CRM use across business units limits a single view of accounts; leads to gaps, duplicate contacts and mixed narratives, slowing decisions. [interview] Manual horizon scanning & segmentation at scale: The scanning takes time and is largely manual, slowing timely tailoring. [interview] Tool transferability limits: Some internal tools built in GDN/consumer contexts don’t translate well to transmission’s B2B needs. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Codify the playback loop: Make ‘what changed and why’ a standard feature of customer communications. Show how feedback influenced plans, including updates between regulatory periods such as RIIO-T2 to RIIO-T3. [interview; report RNG4] Use forum cadence & segmentation as KPIs: Treat forum frequency, coverage by region/molecule/process, and attendee mix as reach/representativeness KPIs, aligned to programme scales reported in corporate docs. [interview; report RNG4] Forum-driven tailoring + feedback to ops: Use segment forums as testbeds to iterate messages and artefacts (e.g., capacity outlooks, outage planning packs) and feed learnings back into CRM reports. [interview]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<p>stakeholders' through structured programmes with draft, feedback and playback stages (RIIO). This is positioned explicitly in corporate materials and mirrored in B2B engagements. [interview; report RNG1; report RNG4]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliability and supply-chain governance as the trust narrative: B2B engagement emphasises network reliability, safe outage planning and supplier/contractor charters (compliance, safety, ESG) as part of the value proposition to commercial customers. [interview; report RNG5] Account-level practice & back-end operations: Teams combine desktop research with ongoing 1:1 relationships and reciprocal site visits to build shared context. Stakeholder CRM is used for continuity, internal routing/planning tools support delivery (not public-facing). [interview] Where insight sits & how it's reported: Insights team foc on direct connects customers, supporting programmes incl. Project Union, BLEND, biomethane, CCS. There's a weekly horizon scan, monthly reviews and quarterly synthesis across NG [interview] 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep independent survey administration for credibility, and standardise re-contact scripts, root-cause codes and dashboards that link interaction, survey results and actions taken. Publish periodic 'you said / we did' updates, including for business customers. [interview] Strengthen the CRM operating model (single image, light-touch for field): Increase adoption while keeping field teams light-touch; integrate CRM with weekly/monthly/quarterly reporting; link CSAT outcomes to interaction logs. [interview] AI for language/insight operations: Apply LLMs to summarise, cluster and tag unstructured corpora (CSAT qual comments, liaison notes, market intel), enabling fast cuts by segment/geography/molecule - with human review for accuracy and value. [interview] Self-serve 'connections & works' hub: Publish where/when, indicative steps/costs, timelines and standard artefacts so customers can progress

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
			<p>decisions asynchronously without waiting for meetings; reduces duplicate asks. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earlier route/capacity visibility: Provide early, scenario-based views of viable connection points and constraints so producers/users can shortlist optimal locations sooner. [interview] • AI-assisted synthesis & evidence management: Use AI (with governance) to compile consultation/engagement evidence and to produce decision-ready packs that align customer asks, technical constraints and regulatory requirements. [interview] • Curated FAQs with clear ownership (and chatbot guardrails): If using chatbots, ensure fresh, accurate content with named owners; stale or inconsistent answers erode trust quickly in B2B contexts. [interview] • Customer profiling/grouping to anticipate needs: Group customers by process/plant characteristics and likely asset changes to present tailored

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			technical guidance and connection pathways early. [interview]
<p>National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET Internal Teams)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assured, annual stakeholder programme: A structured, AA1000-style/independent-challenge programme underpins planning and engagement, with external assurance providing credibility. [web RNGET5; report RNGET1] Whole-system framing as default: Engagement is positioned in whole-system terms (ESO/DNO/partner coordination) to explain the need, options and trade-offs from the outset. [report RNGET4] Formal connections listening loop: A repeatable cycle of survey, analysis, agreed actions and publication is used for connections customers, aligned to a 'we heard / we did' approach. [report RNGET2] Layered, accessible information architecture: Project sites provide plain-English summaries, newsletters, and technical docs (options, corridor/routing studies), with interactive maps to 'co-locate' properties; video explainers and even 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representativeness and volume management: Large portfolios generate heavy feedback volumes to classify and route, mirroring interview-flagged workload. [report RNGET2; report RNGET1] Cross-programme alignment and knowledge-sharing: Maintain consistent messages and artefacts across regions and programmes, and strengthen cross-industry collaboration (e.g., joint consistency work with other TOs on social-value measurement) so communities hear a coherent whole-system story rather than fragmented project-by-project narratives. [report RNGET4] Variable webinar and youth engagement: Parish-council webinars can be sparsely attended; youth-focused events (colleges/youth groups) have not had a good turnout. [interview] Responding to mis-information and campaign group activity: Can consume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portfolio-level discoverability of 'you said / we did'. Continue publishing per-stage consultation feedback reports; additionally, consider an indexed, portfolio-level landing page that collates links to each project's published "you said / we did" so the audit trail is easier to find in one place, and connect it to the connections listening cycle. [report RNGET2; report RNGET5] Whole-system engagement journeys: Coordinate messaging and visualisation with partners (ESO/DNO, etc.) to seed the regional narrative, then localise by place/impact. [report RNGET4] Scale visualisation for comprehension and focus: Expand VR/AR/3D so residents can 'see' real impacts, reducing noise and focusing on truly affected properties. [interview] AI-accelerated consultation analytics (human-in-the-loop):

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	<p>AI-generated avatars have been trialled (e.g., Western Marsh → East Leicestershire). Paper copies go to libraries/inspection points for non-digital audiences; parish/public/elected webinars and village-hall events provide live channels. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaigns approach with early regional framing: Shift from piecemeal, project-only comms to campaigns that start earlier, explain who NG is, and seed the regional narrative before proposals land; work is run at local (directly impacted) and regional (business/education advocates) layers. [interview] • Audience profiling & message banks: Socio-economic mapping and a political audit inform channel and message choices; for example, older or rural audiences respond to homegrown power and protecting the local environment via traditional channels, while younger audiences are reached through WhatsApp, webinars and other modern platforms. [interview] • Targeted outreach at scale: Geo-targeted social campaigns (formally signed-off strategy) plus paid social via agency; cross-channel 	<p>time/resource addressing mis-information; an ‘underground everything’ narrative persists despite cost/environment trade-offs (undergrounding is a lot more expensive). [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation workload at scale: Larger schemes can attract thousands of pieces of feedback, making manual reading/coding time-consuming. [interview] • Timing pressure & scope churn: Changes in customer connection requirements (e.g., multiple customers at a substation) push timelines and squeeze comms windows. [interview] • Seldom-heard groups remain hard to reach: Young people are potential advocates but transient/hard to reach; channels/content need optimisation. [interview] • Back-end digitisation limits: Venue suitability still requires in-person checks (many parish venues lack online info), so AI won’t speed this step. [interview] • Portfolio-scale synthesis risk: System-level schemes generate very large consultation volumes leading to 	<p>Accelerate the pipeline from intake and Tractivity capture through topic classification to change-request triage, with human assurance for accuracy and auditability. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth engagement & modern channels R&D: Research ‘what good looks like’; test TikTok/WhatsApp or other youth-native channels; keep tone plain-English but less dry. [interview] • Strengthen targeted outreach and publish metrics: Maintain paid social (more effective than organic) and publish campaign analytics for transparency and learning. [interview] • Accessibility upgrades and translation pathways: Continue AAA optimisation; formalise translation in multi-lingual urban areas; retain the Welsh-first leadership model as best practice. [interview] • Author for ‘findability’ and AI-pointing: Structure page anchors, map layers, FAQs so residents can answer ‘what

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	<p>reinforcement via newsletters, local press and parish networks. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion and accessibility by design: Venue risk assessments, accessibility checklists, a Welsh-first materials model led by a six-person team; ad-hoc translations in multi-lingual areas (e.g., Sheffield); AAA web accessibility tooling under trial. [interview] • Tightly governed agency model: A framework of ~10 community-relations agencies adds capacity but must use NG tools/processes - treated as a managed extension of the team. [interview] • Success metrics and funnel logic: A healthy pattern can be very large outreach to smaller event turnouts to smaller formal feedback volumes (awareness/reassurance filtering to those truly affected). Success can also include people leaving still opposed but feeling respected and informed. [interview] • Data capture & coding discipline: Online feedback flows to Tractivity; handwritten forms are typed; items are read/coded (topic; change-request vs. sentiment) and routed to 	<p>delayed insight back to network design/connection planning if not accelerated. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome measurement still developing: Positive qualitative feedback (e.g., education/STEM) but limited quantified impact - hence the push to new tools. [interview] 	<p>does this mean for me?' and AI tools can point to exact sections. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI-assisted evidence handling and consistency knowledge base: Use LLMs to cluster/tag feedback (by geography/theme/asset) and to triage change requests; build a secure corpus of historic responses (consultations, regulator Q&A, stakeholder letters) to pre-populate replies and enforce consistency with human approvals. Pre-population of responses and consistency are the key gains. [interview] • Pattern mining for regulatory efficiency: Detect repeated regulator questions across projects and adjust documentation templates/Options Reports proactively. [interview] • Operationalise Open Maps: Scale internally (and with partners) so socio-economic + operational + sentiment layers guide targeting, mitigation design and support prioritisation for vulnerable groups during works. [interview] • Social-value platforming: Procure a platform that couples

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	<p>technical/environmental/land engineering for review. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical community engagement flow: Campaign set-up + audience profiling to channel plan (paid/organic) to layered info (online/offline) to webinars + in-person events to feedback capture/coding to publish 'we heard/we did'. [interview] • Customer definition and scope dynamics: 'Customers' = those connecting to the network (DNOs, generators, etc.). Changing connection requirements or multi-customer nodes can extend scope/timelines, affecting engagement schedules. [interview] • Regional stakeholder layer for advocacy: Maintain relationships with Chambers of Commerce, CBI-type bodies, heritage/environment orgs to build and sustain regional advocacy for system benefits. [interview] • Programme scale and resourcing model: Very large delivery footprint (e.g., ~200 projects in one directorate; 17 ASTI projects for offshore wind) is handled by internal teams with the agency framework. [interview] 		<p>local-needs analysis + stakeholder mapping so regional plans and 'we heard / we did' evidence tie to quantified outcomes. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital-inclusion playbook (shareable): Co-design channels, formats, venues for digitally excluded users and publish recommendations for sector adoption. [interview] • Document automation to free front-stage time: Use AI to draft repetitive sections (with guardrails) so staff spend more time in public-facing dialogue. Document production is the largest consumption of time, AI can support production while people stay in front. [interview] • Sustain internal coordination: Keep the regional stakeholder forum to unify engagement insight pipelines across teams before analysis/AI ingest. [interview]

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair transition & unheard voices principle: Process design aims to hear beyond the loudest via a blend of in-person, formal consultations and consumer-insight research. Make sure we're capturing... those unheard voices. [interview] • Social-value measurement maturing: Moving from qualitative stories to a quantitative social-value framework (tooling being procured) to track outcomes and inform decisions. Looking to strengthen our transparency and reporting around outcomes and impact. [interview] • Open Maps (cross-network) developing: Socio-economic layers (IMD, fuel poverty) overlaid with operational data (asset proximity) and - next - an AI sentiment layer for stakeholder/customer signals. [interview] • Digital exclusion project: Human-centred research to map how digitally excluded people access information, co-design new approaches and share recommendations across networks. [interview] • Internal coordination upgrade: A regional stakeholder engagement forum brings public affairs, 		

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	<p>corporate/external affairs, and others together to pool insights and reduce duplication. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth voice channel: A youth panel is being set up to bring younger people directly into engagement/insight loops. [interview] • Policy frame shift (community benefits): New community benefits guidance mandates engagement and folds into regulatory reporting, raising the bar on evidence. [interview] • Technical engagement artefacts for planning: For DCO-type schemes, technical leads ensure an Options Report sets the electrical need, alternatives, and impacts in a stakeholder-facing format; regulator engagement includes reports then Q&A meetings. [interview] 		
Gas Distribution Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement is planned around the topic and the local area, with clear research goals and audience mapping that shape the channels and materials. [interview] • People lead the conversations for sensitive topics, with named staff at events and follow-ups after sessions. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is hard to identify and recruit people in vulnerable situations because many do not self-identify, which makes balanced sampling difficult. [interview] • Data limits make it difficult to re-contact households and over-reliance on intermediaries slows follow-up. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a privacy-safe recruitment guide that combines trusted local partners, open data signals and specialist panels so seldom-heard groups are included reliably. [interview] • Give complex cases a single named owner so residents have

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mix of channels is used, including drop-ins, community briefings, parish sessions, webinars and accessible online pages. [interview] • Independent researchers and review groups are used to check quality, inclusion and credibility of findings. [interview] • Early mapping and segmentation are done so the approach fits the technology, the place and the user journey rather than using a one-size-fits-all plan. [interview] • Topic experts and trusted local partners join sessions so answers are practical and relevant. [interview] • Materials are layered so people can start with a simple overview and move to detail, with printed packs and accessible formats where needed. [interview] • Communications teams monitor stories online and correct false claims when they appear. [interview] • Local community teams deliver place-based work, supported by central standards that keep quality high while allowing local adaptation. [interview] • Consultation comments are processed in a structured way and the results feed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening on social media often skews negative and does not represent the whole community on its own. [interview] • Getting quick answers and getting accurate, legally checked answers can pull in different directions and slow responses. [interview] • Insights are scattered across teams, projects, suppliers and tools, so joining them up is manual and slow. [interview] • It is hard to coordinate messages and timing with other utilities and local works, which confuses residents about who to contact. [interview] • Big system ideas like hydrogen or biomethane can feel abstract and far from everyday concerns. [interview] • Building balanced research samples takes a lot of time and usually needs several recruitment routes to avoid bias. [interview] • Residents want one accountable contact for complex queries, but handoffs between teams can break trust. [interview] 	<p>one person who coordinates experts and keeps them updated. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring digital listening, independent research and field notes into one view so teams can cross-check signals and respond consistently. [interview] • Use tools that surface exact approved wording, numbers and pages for staff to adapt, keeping human review for sensitive replies. [interview] • Build a governed knowledge hub that links feedback, research outputs, online listening and field intelligence with clear audit trails. [interview] • Coordinate planned works and messages with other utilities so communities see one clear story about timing, impacts and mitigations. [interview] • Produce layered explainers that connect system changes to everyday effects for households and businesses, with simple routes to local details. [interview]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<p>into formal decision and reporting cycles. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events are offered at different times and in different venues so more people can attend. [interview] • Simple maps, photos and short videos are used to make proposals easy to understand. [interview] • Briefs for internal teams and agencies emphasise inclusion, clarity and a clear record of how feedback influences changes. [interview] • After each engagement phase, teams share back what was heard and what will happen next so people can see the outcome. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When several projects consult in the same area at the same time, people become tired of being asked for views and are less likely to take part. [interview] • Some people expect instant answers on fast channels, which can outpace careful, referenced replies. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain audience profiles and message templates tied to common concerns so teams can start with language that fits each group and then adapt. [interview] • Use end-to-end case handling for high-anxiety queries and set internal response targets so subject experts reply quickly. [interview] • Share outreach calendars across neighbouring projects and align consultation windows so communities are not asked the same things by different teams at the same time. [interview] • Prepare referenced answers to common questions in advance so responses are fast, consistent and evidence-based. [interview] • Expand use of simple, property-relevant visuals and short videos that explain what will happen, when it will happen and how it affects people. [interview]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardise a clear “you said, we did” log at project and portfolio levels so changes can be tracked and published easily. [interview] • Publish a short, plain-English “what changed and why” summary after each stage and link it to the underlying evidence for transparency. [interview]
<p>Consumer Advocacy Groups and Those Representing Consumers in Vulnerable Circumstances (external)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Door knocking by trusted local community energy organisations using their own branding often outperforms operator-branded visits due to local trust, local knowledge, and training quality. [interview] • Engagement is more meaningful when people see real influence or ownership; local or shared ownership is a practical route that increases willingness to participate. [interview] • Use plain language that matches everyday goals. Phrases like “home energy makeover” or “warmer, cheaper to run homes” can land better than technical labels. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust deficits persist because of widely reported poor-quality insulation or retrofit and ongoing negative narratives; local success stories are under-amplified. [interview] • Capacity and skills shortages across coordinators, assessors and installers increase costs and risk mis-sizing, which undermines performance and satisfaction. [interview] • Process fragmentation leads to repeated surveys, duplicated admin and mis-sequenced works; a significant share of total cost can be overhead or rework. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an integrated local delivery model that uses one high-quality property survey shared across a single multi-skilled team to remove duplication, reduce overheads and compress timelines. [interview] • Use shared or community ownership for larger assets to signal real local influence and deliver tangible returns, supporting longer-term trust. [interview] • Scale site-screening and visualisation tools and add standardised, open grid-capacity layers so feasibility

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical consumer-facing tools in regular use include open homes and site visits, interactive local impact maps and carbon mapping, simple solar or heat estimation tools, and moderated online peer forums. [interview] • Back-office practices include persona and demographic overlays for targeting, LiDAR or thermal imaging for street-level focus, and CiviCRM for advice cases, volunteers and share registers. [interview] • Deliberative tech such as ML-assisted dialogue tools can surface consensus and disagreement to support transparent “what we heard/what we’ll do” loops. [interview] • A typical place-based sequence maps the area and people, works through trusted intermediaries such as community groups and GP/NHS partners, runs tangible experiences like open homes and kit demos, keeps feedback loops via forums or CRM, and closes the loop with visible local benefits or ownership. [interview] • Digital tools help when paired with wrap-around support; online portals or smart-meter apps work best when 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited visibility of distribution grid capacity and long connection queues delay otherwise viable local renewables. [interview] • Volunteer energy-champion models vary when training, support and remuneration are insufficient, limiting proactive outreach. [interview] • Generic messaging can miss key segments; framing benefits to match personas is often needed. [interview] • Community organisations hold rich house-level data that is not systematically used in network or local planning due to funding, format and sharing barriers. [interview] • Persistent digital exclusion means purely online journeys underperform for high-need groups without accessible alternatives. [report RCAG3] • Data-sharing constraints and uneven internal rules complicate warm introductions and targeted outreach. [report RCAG3; survey] 	<p>checks happen earlier and faster. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend ML-assisted consensus mapping with clear public “we heard/we did” reporting to maintain legitimacy during contentious phases. [interview] • Build inclusion and reach through trusted routes and “show, don’t tell” tactics such as open homes, house visits, blower-door tests and thermal imaging. [interview] • Explore AI-assisted pathways for first-pass heat-loss modelling, triage with accessibility-first UX, and signposting to accredited local installers or training routes. [interview] • Design digitally inclusive journeys with assisted setup, alternative channels, plain steps and proactive follow-up so vulnerable users benefit in practice. [report RCAG3] • Provide plain-English transparency on bills, charges, rights and protections. [report RCAG3]

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	<p>assisted routes exist for vulnerable or digitally excluded users. [report RCAG3]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement methods should fit the audience and purpose. Younger, more affluent groups may respond to social, apps or email; older or vulnerable households often need intensive one-to-one support through a trusted introduction. [survey] A blended outreach mix is common: workshops, drop-ins and talks at existing meetings, backed by letters of introduction; social media, email, posters and leaflets still help for some audiences. [survey] Segment beyond demographics by life situation, tenure and digital access to choose the right channel and ask. [survey] Council-facilitated networks of voluntary, faith, health and community groups are effective because the conveners are known, trusted and practically useful. [interview] Keep asks to partners light-touch and quick; simple, low-time requests work best for busy GP practices and similar partners. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If cost socialisation is not designed with protections, low-income households may pay more while benefiting least. [report RCAG2] Variation in consumer protections and price-cap mechanisms can complicate expectations during price spikes. [report RCAG3] Rural dispersion and weaker social ties make engagement harder and raise delivery costs. [survey] Partners may be unavailable or not sufficiently trusted; co-branding is not always effective. [survey] Marketing agencies can be costly and may miss priority groups without very tight briefs and guardrails. [survey] High-touch methods are effective but expensive, and they can still miss vulnerable households if not designed with equity in mind. [survey] Navigating NHS structures is complex; progress often depends on a single local champion to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use place-based health and social pathways so clinicians and social prescribers can refer households directly into support, converting advice into completed actions. [interview; report RCAG1] Use trust-first pathways such as warm introductions from landlords, schools and faith groups, then book assisted appointments so people do not have to self-navigate complex processes. [survey] Establish lawful data-sharing with consent frameworks and MoUs so pre-consented warm-intro letters and audience targeting are possible under GDPR. [survey] Invest in rural engagement models such as mobile pop-ups at rural hubs and employer-hosted sessions, and cultivate local champions where social ties are thin. [survey] Budget for high-touch methods where they are needed, with equity guardrails so those who cannot attend events or use

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use trusted venues such as health centres and libraries rather than generic high-footfall sites where intent may be misunderstood. [interview] • A proven approach is GP-branded text messaging paired with a simple tablet-based flow for quick eligibility checks and plan creation. [interview] • Place-embedded champions who already serve the community accelerate trust compared with parachuted teams. [interview] • Plan stakeholders pragmatically: tier by priority, group by sector, record preferred contact routes, and nurture statutory services and funders. [interview] • For energy advice, start with people's priorities around warmth and bills, not abstract goals. [interview] • Multi-tier advice models combine phone support, in-home visits for vulnerable residents, extra support for very vulnerable families, fuel-poverty advice, and local hubs with hands-on kit. [interview] • Navigation support with aftercare improves outcomes: help with grants and 	<p>open doors and sustain momentum. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral drop-offs to delivery partners force charities to pick up stalled cases, which demoralises advisors and harms trust. [interview] • It can be difficult to secure attention before works start; interest often rises only when disruption begins. [interview] • Fears about disruption and cost reduce willingness to participate, especially for older residents or time-pressured families. [interview] • Some delivery organisations have paper-heavy processes and underused case systems; going paperless brings accessibility and change-management needs. [interview] • In contentious settings, late-stage consultations can be perceived as predetermined, and communities may prefer neutral conveners. [interview] 	<p>digital tools are not excluded. [survey]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use marketing agencies selectively with precise audience definitions and quality benchmarks, and measure coverage gaps to avoid missing priority groups. [survey] • Scale the GP text plus simple tablet triage model with clear data-sharing and opt-in scripts so clinicians can help without extra workload. [interview] • Institutionalise local conveners with a durable cadence such as monthly online touchpoints, quarterly themed in-person sessions and a community bulletin. [interview] • Invite beneficiaries to tell their stories to persuade the sceptical middle. [interview] • Train community advocates for contentious schemes so trusted locals front meetings and maintain an ongoing presence. [interview] • Use neutral facilitation and stage-by-stage transparency

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	<p>retrofit, then post-install visits to explain systems and solve snags. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships with networks can widen the conversation on heat pumps, EV charging, smart meters and LEDs. [interview] Channels for digitally excluded residents include Dementia cafés, food banks, veterans' groups, community centres and GP surgeries via social prescribers. [interview] Build community capacity by training frontline workers as energy champions so trusted intermediaries can give basic advice and signposting. [interview] Use census/IMD data with local intelligence from schools or frontline organisations to spot trends like displacement and target support. [interview] Short, simple digital explainers can outperform leaflets for phone-first users; snackable, game-like content helps where attention is limited. [interview] Follow-through matters: correct use of new tech after installation, fewer complaints, and more grant completions with satisfaction are useful indicators. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital exclusion and a sense of lost control have grown as services moved online. [interview] Poor technical handover, especially for heat pumps, leaves users confused; incorrect operation can increase bills and reduce comfort. [interview] A “volume over quality” bias can favour light-touch phone advice over labour-intensive support that works. [interview] Top-down chains from policy to utilities to contractors can feel like things are done to people, not with them. [interview] High-touch support is resource-intensive, and reliance on partners for accessibility training can leave gaps. [interview] Ill-health, poverty and stress reduce headspace for long materials; search results are often sales-led rather than independent. [interview] Systemic digital inaccessibility is common; real assistive-tech testing is often missing. [interview] 	<p>for major infrastructure so people understand each step. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modernise delivery organisations with lightweight, inclusive case-management so frontline effort shifts from admin to engagement. [interview] Invest in trusted local advisers with added disability and accessibility training to build neighbour-to-neighbour confidence. [interview] Fix technical handover with user-first manuals and post-install tutorials so usage is correct and bills fall. [interview] Make it easy to verify installers and offers; surface independent, non-sales guidance early. [interview] Keep face-to-face for complex or sceptical cases, and use short videos or micro-interactions for time-poor but phone-literate users. [interview] Use AI in the back office to compile notes, categorise issues,

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement journeys should be digitally inclusive by design, with assisted setup, alternative phone or face-to-face routes, clear plain-English steps and proactive follow-up so vulnerable users benefit in practice. [report RCAG3] Provide clear, plain-English transparency on standing charges, rights and protections to support informed choices. [report RCAG3] Place-based delivery via health and social partners can convert advice into completed installs or services when clinicians and social prescribers refer households at risk. [interview; report RCAG1] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offline materials frequently fail colour contrast or readability, and some door-knockers lack disability awareness. [interview] The legal duty of “reasonable adjustment” lacks specificity, so many organisations stop at the minimum. [interview] PDF forms often exclude; web or Word forms tend to be more accessible, and popular design tools may lack strong accessibility checks. [interview] Contact centres often lack disability training; scripts rarely support BSL, interpreters or simple communication aids. [interview] If people must rely on others to navigate online billing, it creates safeguarding risks; independence requires accessible end-to-end journeys. [interview] Because barriers block access, datasets under-represent excluded groups, skewing evidence toward those who found a way in. [interview] Engagement is frequently done to people rather than co-produced 	<p>spot recurring problems and target support, while keeping humans as the resident-facing interface. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain two-way referral loops with GP practices, social prescribers and schools so new needs are spotted early and support continues beyond one-off campaigns. [interview] Apply just-transition guardrails so no household ends up with higher bills or lower comfort after installations; provide follow-up support and fixes. [interview] Track outcomes that matter such as correct system usage, bill trends, comfort scores, complaint reductions, scam prevention and successful grant completions. [interview] Make accessibility non-negotiable: build to WCAG 2.2 AA (aim AAA), test with assistive tech before launch and after updates, and publish accessibility statements with routes to report issues. [interview]

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		<p>with them; disabled people are rarely present when decisions are made. [interview]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design for independence with Easy Read, large print, BSL video and audio alternatives, keep phone routes open, and ensure venues are physically accessible. [interview] • Shift power through co-production and universal design so solutions are designed with disabled people; everyone benefits from inclusive design. [interview] • Create regulator-level participation routes such as board-level observer slots and accessible focus groups so lived experience shapes decisions upstream. [interview] • Embed accessibility in contact centres with training, interpreter pathways, communication aids and clear escalation for reasonable adjustments; include accessibility in QA. [interview] • Provide pragmatic tooling guidance that prefers accessible web or Word forms over PDFs, uses WCAG checklists and hands-on testing, and publishes per-project

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			access statements and remediation SLAs. [interview]
Industry Representatives and Engagement Consultancies (external)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start early, keep visible named people front-and-centre, and make dialogue two-way rather than one-way broadcasting. [interview, report RRUk2; report RRUk3] Adapt methods, channels, and messages to local context across England, Scotland and Wales; use place history and demographics to shape the plan. [interview, report RRUk2; report RRUk3] Begin with an insight phase that maps audiences and uses socio-economic, political and census data, then add local practitioner knowledge to tailor messages and channels. [interview] Use community benefits as a practical anchor for dialogue; onshore wind developers commonly allocate about £5,000 per MW into a community pot and may pair this with local discounts or other direct benefits. [interview, report RRUk1; report RRUk2] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many programmes revert to bare-minimum compliance once statutory pressure, risk and cost increase; innovation and legacy commitments need organisation-level backing, not one-off pilots. [interview] The same vocal cohorts often dominate events; seldom-heard groups need tailored outreach, out-of-hours slots, childcare and non-standard venues. [interview] Misinformation spreads quickly if accurate material is not published early; striking visuals and memes can go viral and set the narrative. [interview] Organised opposition groups are using AI to generate large volumes of near-duplicate submissions during consultations; each submission still needs logging and response, creating severe workload spikes and inflating the appearance of opposition. There is no agreed industry standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead with a clear, outcome-first narrative that sets measurable local commitments on jobs, skills, amenities and comfort or bills, and report progress openly. [interview] Design national guidance with clear principles and fairness tests while allowing flexible local delivery, so engagement and benefit distribution can reflect community needs and fund size. [interview, report RRUk3] Build and maintain an automated, quality-checked database of community benefit schemes that pulls data from developers, third-party fund managers and community reports, so communities can see relevant options without manual hunting. [interview] Use segmented messaging templates linked to audience insights on jobs, childcare,

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match channels to who participates and who is missing; combine digital listening with door-knocking, drop-ins, surveys and other in-person touchpoints to reach those not online. [interview, report RRUK2] • Segment by life stage and priorities when discussing benefits, for example jobs for younger people, childcare and clubs for working-age parents, mobility and home measures for older residents. [interview] • Brief MPs, councillors and parish leaders early so they can share accurate information and help reduce misinformation later. [interview] • Use digital for clarity, not novelty: plain-language pathways through long documents, interactive maps and visuals that show “what this means here,” while keeping people as the visible interface. [interview, report RRUK1; report RRUK3] • Maintain structured “insight to plan to playback” loops that show what changed and why, to build credibility over time. [interview] 	<p>response beyond manual processing. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discoverability and accessibility remain weak in many places; residents struggle to find official channels or to get property-specific answers inside long technical packs. [interview] • Parish-level processes can concentrate influence among a few voices; relying on these forums alone can skew legitimacy. [interview] • Maintaining reliable registers of community benefit funds is difficult because data sits with developers, third-party fund managers and communities, and updating it takes significant manual effort. [interview, report RRUK1; report RRUK3] • National guidance must balance consistency with local flexibility; rigid rules can block place-specific choices and miss parts of the community. [interview, report RRUK3] • Regions differ in familiarity and acceptance; messages that work in areas used to infrastructure can 	<p>mobility and home measures, then adapt locally with on-the-ground evidence. [interview, report RRUK2]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a proactive misinformation playbook: continuous social listening with tools and human review, early briefings for political and community leaders, rapid publication of accurate visuals and FAQs, and a visible “source of truth” role. [interview] • Keep AI behind the scenes with guardrails: cluster, route and deduplicate near-identical submissions; surface prior approved answers with citations; and require human and legal review for public-facing content. [interview] • Create a shared RIIO-3 problem–project map across networks that links each problem statement to active projects, shows gaps, prevents duplication and shares learning through a simple searchable dashboard. [interview]

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		<p>land poorly where assets are new. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee-based collaboration across networks can slow joint decisions and delay consistent messages; when multiple projects address the same problem, there is no single shared backlog to avoid duplication and track learning. [interview] • Engagement with sectors such as farming and brewing is still exploratory, so there is limited evidence on which messages and incentives convert interest into action. [interview] • Consumer segmentation for options beyond heat pumps (for example biomethane and hydrogen) is uneven, which makes it harder to provide clear, plain-English explanations of benefits, costs and safeguards. [interview] • Inclusion is resource-intensive when teams run general public activity, targeted workshops for seldom-heard groups, political briefings and continuous monitoring in parallel. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-produce short engagement playbooks with cross-network groups covering accessible materials, assisted routes and inclusive venue checklists, and publish them as templates local teams can adapt. [interview] • Build an independent reference pack that compares consumer-facing options beyond heat pumps, explaining benefits, risks and safeguards in plain English for use in briefings and public materials. [interview] • Add light-touch analytics to track which themes, sectors and channels generate useful submissions and relationships, so future engagement concentrates on what works. [interview]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmission community-benefit expectations can exceed the size of available pots, leading to heavy administrative processes for limited funds. [interview, report RRUk3] • Trade bodies sit one step removed from project delivery; responsibility can look fragmented to the public when guidance is separate from on-the-ground engagement. [interview] 	
<p>Local Authorities, Councils, and Regional Partnerships (external)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-venue, pop-up engagement (markets, community centres, schools): Regular advice pop-ups run in varying places i.e the market, at other events, local community centres, with a new strand at schools around drop-off times to reach parents. [interview] • Health and community routes in parallel: Engagement happens at a local medical practice, a community hospital, and via the ‘Pantry’ (a low-cost shop model linked to a food support programme), to meet different needs and reduce stigma. [interview] • Pantry model builds relationships over time: Six-month membership, repeat visits, and a more ‘empowering’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma and stress reduce engagement in some settings: Food bank sites were very difficult to engage because visitors were stressed and wanted to get in and out quickly; medical settings can be a little bit tricky for similar reasons. [interview] • Discoverability problem: Often people just don’t know that they are here and that they can help, despite posters, social media, and local press. [interview] • Whole-house retrofit is hard and slow: Residents need a lot of support and hand holding through assessments, grants, and contractor choices; the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place-based, repeat-touch models: Scale the Pantry-style, six-month relationship model in other areas to normalise support and reduce stigma; treat it as a standing channel, not a one-off event. [interview] • Outdoor, proactive outreach as a pattern: Prioritise street/market-side approaches where feasible (with safeguarding) to maximise first-contact rates. [interview] • School-gate engagement for time-poor families: Expand after-school drop-off pop-ups as a reliable point of contact with parents. [interview]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<p>experience enable follow-up conversations about energy support; staff report able to connect with quite a lot of people through that. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-home visits after first contact: Pop-up conversations are followed by home visits to tailor advice to the property. [interview] • Whole-house retrofit pathway with aftercare: Free whole-house assessments delivered with CSE, a report of recommended measures, help to understand the report, and later check-ins to track progress and barriers. [interview] • Partnership delivery with technical professionals: Joint events with groups like the 'Neighbourhood Toolbox' (architects/designers) provide two-pronged advice (building + energy/retrofit). [interview] • Neighbourhood ambassadors and 'Green Open Homes': Recruiting local retrofit ambassadors and planning open-home events to provide peer-to-peer proof and connect residents with local installers. [interview] • Volunteer capacity supports scale: Trained volunteers underpin advice delivery and home visits. [interview] 	<p>grant system can feel like a minefield. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusted supply chain visibility: Councils need stronger links with local installers/contractors to make trustworthy referrals as demand grows. [interview] • Capacity limits and coordination load: Running pop-ups across many venues, following up at home, and sustaining partnerships ('there's a lot') strains small teams. [interview] • Channel/venue effectiveness varies: Inside-venue events underperform compared to outdoor approaches; finding the right mix by place/audience takes iteration. [interview] • Fuel-poverty signposting skills: Partners (medical/services) need clear guidance on 'signs of fuel poverty' and referral pathways to avoid missed opportunities. [interview] • Maintaining momentum after assessment: Even with positive reports, residents can stall without practical next steps, social proof, and light-touch follow-ups. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured follow-through: Bake in default home-visit follow-ups after pop-ups; track outcomes (measures installed, complaints avoided, bills/comfort). [interview] • Peer proof at scale: Run Green Open Homes regularly and recruit 'neighbourhood retrofit ambassadors' to build social proof and accelerate adoption. [interview] • Two-pronged clinics (building + energy): Repeat the Neighbourhood Toolbox model to provide practical, co-located advice from building professionals and energy advisors. [interview] • Partner training and signposting: Create simple fuel-poverty recognition guides and referral scripts for GPs, community nurses and service desks to widen warm-intro pathways. [interview] • Trusted installer maps and guided choice: Maintain a locally-verified directory of contractors, with Q&A checklists residents can use to avoid poor installs and ask the 'right questions.' [interview]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor, proactive outreach works better: Teams find people are more likely to talk when approached outside, versus inside venues. [interview] Ongoing education about quality/control: Advisors emphasise helping residents ask the right questions of installers because sometimes measures are not installed correctly. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venue and timing sensitivities: Some spaces (e.g., doctors' surgeries) bring stress/time pressure that suppresses engagement; scheduling around these realities is essential. [interview] Awareness among frontline services: Need to increase awareness of what it is we can do across community/medical professionals to boost warm referrals. [interview] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Light-touch CRM + RAG tracking: Use simple tracking for each household from first contact to install/aftercare, highlighting who needs a nudge and where bottlenecks occur. [interview]
Academia (external)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizen-first framing (not just 'consumer'): Treating people as citizens with agency improves legitimacy and participation. [interview, report RAC4] Intermediaries amplify seldom-heard voices: Engagement is most effective via trusted third-sector bodies, schools/colleges, and community orgs to reach younger people and people under strain. [interview, report RAC2] Engagement is uneven across the UK: Who gets heard is shaped by resourcing and remit; best practice blends institutional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thin, fragmented public-engagement capability: Government/official capacity to plan and coordinate high-quality public engagement is limited and dispersed. [report RAC1] System change ≠ one household at a time: Heat/efficiency transitions can't be delivered via isolated 'consumer choices' alone; require plan-led, coordinated system design. [report RAC2] Centralised governance lowers local agency: Compared with federal contexts (e.g., Germany), UK centralisation reduces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start wide, then narrow (national to local): Run whole-population narratives on the 'why,' then funnel to place-specific engagement tailored to local priorities/demographics with cross-sector delivery (science, third sector, industry). [interview, report RAC2] Normalise deliberation in policy design: Embed citizens' assemblies/juries, co-production, and scenario workshops as standard - not pilots - to build mandate and

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<p>surveys/segmentation with place-based, deliberative work (scenario workshops, local futures). [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence already exists (use it first): There's substantial usable data in public datasets and 'grey' literature (Citizens Advice, NEA, third sector) that should be synthesised before new fieldwork. [interview] Data/insight operations are evolving: Emerging practice uses big-data/social-media mining and LLMs to map attitudes/narratives, feeding findings into campaign/consultation design (human-in-the-loop). [interview] 	<p>perceived influence (e.g., ~one-fifth in Glasgow think they can influence the council), undermining participation. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk-averse politics leaves a narrative vacuum: Policy backtracking on decarbonisation (to avoid conflict) cedes space to polarising narratives on infrastructure need/trade-offs. [interview] Consumer-only lens narrows outcomes: Treating people purely as bill-payers limits techniques to surveys/segmentation and sidelines civic participation. [interview] Trust deficits toward utilities/government: People tend to trust independent bodies (e.g., Energy Saving Trust/HES, Citizens Advice) more than utilities or central government; they 'want honesty and integrity.' [interview] Digital-first reach is overrated: Anyone could click and give a view, but most never discover those opportunities; representativeness of online focus groups is uncertain. [interview] 	<p>surface trade-offs transparently. [report RAC1]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen participative democracy: Local participative structures grow civil-society capacity and accelerate action (e.g., municipal roles, community mandates). [report RAC4] Coalitions of the willing + ambassadors: Sequence early adopters (e.g., tenants piloting district heat), then use credible local ambassadors to build momentum ('people asking when they're getting this'). [interview] Evidence-first workflow: Add a mandatory synthesis step (public trackers, CAB/NEA/third-sector evidence) before commissioning fresh research to avoid duplication and speed learning. [interview] AI for back-end acceleration (with checks): Use LLMs for horizon scanning, narrative/sentiment mapping, and coding of consultation feedback by

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hydrogen for building heat is over-sold: Independent evaluations don't look at all credible for widespread domestic heating; industry-led narratives can mislead expectations. [interview] • Cost of division: If polarisation isn't managed, expect more fossil reliance despite declining basins, dirtier/more expensive energy, and rising distrust/social division. [interview] 	<p>geography/theme/asset - with human assurance for accuracy/legitimacy. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be transparent on system trade-offs: Explain costs/benefits (e.g., undergrounding, grid expansion, timelines), who pays, and why now - ideally fronted by independent voices. [interview] • Plan credible gas-network transition: Treat decommissioning scenarios seriously; coordinate with the regulator and trusted intermediaries to communicate realistic futures (avoid over-promising on hydrogen for domestic heat). [interview]
Smaller Community Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with a defined place and build a full partner map across local authorities, agencies, utilities, private firms and community organisations, engaging at the right level and copying strategic leads so delivery teams respond. [interview] • Adapt language and style to each partner's culture so momentum and trust are maintained across 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some utilities and delivery partners are hard to reach and may have subcontractors with different incentives, which slows or stalls action. [interview] • Cost shocks and supply bottlenecks can halt works and risk missing grant windows, which undermines confidence locally. [interview] • Policy changes that reduce obligations or funding remove resources from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codify a place-based playbook that standardises partner mapping, two-level engagement with strategy and delivery leads and participatory appraisal kits, with a single owner who spans strategy and delivery. [interview]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<p>commercial companies, councils and community groups. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use participatory and visual methods rather than long written packs. Practical tools like models, maps, photo boards, tokens and live clustering of inputs help people express priorities. [interview; survey] • Maintain a regular, visible presence in familiar venues so staff become known and trusted. Weekly drop-ins with named faces build confidence. [interview] • Make the offer compelling and easy to accept. Where feasible, design bundles that feel like obvious wins and create visible parity so everyone benefits. Social proof supports full take-up. [interview] • Deliver high-touch, person-to-person support. Local champions and peer leaders who show and coach in real homes are more persuasive than one-way information. [survey] • Target people's immediate priorities such as warmth, comfort and bills, then introduce wider climate goals once trust is established. [survey] • Use delivery channels that reach time-poor households by working 	<p>deprived areas and weaken long term programmes. [interview]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-reliance on letters and long written material does not work well; many residents need visual, verbal and one-to-one support. [interview] • Partnerships are fragile. If a single partner slips on their task, upstream delivery can fail, especially when funding is time-boxed. [interview] • Working people often do not attend community events. Engagement requests can feel like an extra burden for time-poor households. [survey] • Motivation and opportunity are limited for some audiences, so light-touch communications rarely change behaviour without human scaffolding. [survey] • Digital tools alone do not persuade. People tend to act when a trusted human expert supports them directly. [survey] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the local offer hard to refuse by bundling fabric measures with solar and visible amenity upgrades, and by designing schemes so everyone on a street can benefit where feasible. [interview] • Reuse rolling-capital mechanisms so councils can front-load works and recover costs over time, and publish practical guidance that helps authorities adopt the model. [interview] • Plan for system co-benefits from the start by aligning network upgrades with street improvements and sustainable drainage so multiple funders can justify joint delivery. [interview] • Invest in trust infrastructure with budget for weekly drop-ins, local facilitators and continuity of named staff throughout the programme. [interview]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<p>through frontline community venues and trusted intermediaries rather than relying on evening town halls. [survey]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After trusted one-to-one onboarding, help residents use simple apps or portals to stay engaged between visits. Short, clear digital content can complement face-to-face support. [interview; survey] • Show how success will be measured. Indicators include uptake via trusted referrals, correct use of installed measures, completion of grants without snagging and visible neighbourhood upgrades. [interview; survey] 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide practitioner-ready tools. A participatory toolkit that captures and clusters inputs live, AI-assisted triage that routes issues to the right organisation and a funding-stack advisor that maps local priorities to grants and obligations can speed decisions. [interview] • Engineer for time-poor households by taking engagement to workplaces, schools and GP surgeries, compressing advice, eligibility checks and bookings into a single visit and offering evening or weekend slots. [survey] • Formalise peer leadership with micro-grants, simple scripts and referral loops, and measure peer-led uptake compared with broad communications. [survey] • Use digital to support rather than replace human

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
			<p>outreach. Short video explainers and message templates can amplify people-led work, while the persuader remains a trusted person. Track success by coverage of time-poor households, conversion from first contact to completed install, repeat contacts per household and reasons for drop-off. [survey]</p>

4 Additional Insights from Key Reports

Table 3: Additional Insights from Key Reports

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
<p>National Gas (National Gas Internal Teams)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Public/Community) Engagement is explicitly standards-aligned: National Gas references the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard and documents how its 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Public/Community) Despite standards and toolkits, consistently including vulnerable audiences requires tailored channels/formats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Public/Community) Operationalise the 'How we engage' toolkit as mandatory templates/checklists (Easy Read, venue accessibility, translation pathways) to drive consistency. [report RNG4]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<p>approach has evolved between RIIO periods (T2 to T3). <i>This provides a benchmarked, auditable baseline for project teams and agencies.</i> [report RNG4; RNG6]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Public/Community) There's a written 'How we engage' toolkit (channels, contact routes, governance) that can be lifted directly into project packs and SOWs for consistency across regions and agencies. [report RNG4] • (Public/Community) Corporate reporting frames community contribution as part of core success (not a 'nice-to-have'), signalling that engagement plans should link to measurable community outcomes. [report RNG2] • (Public/Community) Programme scale is evidenced: the strategy cites broad campaign + deep-dive formats with 'over 3,000' attendees in series, indicating National Gas can mobilise at scale when needed. [report RNG4] • (Commercial/Industrial) Business planning is explicitly 'shaped by stakeholders,' with structured surveys and playback stages (e.g., Qualtrics infrastructure documented in plan summaries). [report RNG1; RNG4] 	<p>and portfolio-scale evidence. [report RNG2; RNG5]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Public/Community) Consultation evidencing remains labour-intensive (statutory processes, Gunning/Planning Act) and must be tracked to audit standards. [report RNG5] • (Commercial/Industrial) Consolidating multi-channel inputs (forums, surveys, bilaterals) into comparable, decision-ready evidence year-on-year is still hard. [report RNG1; RNG5] • (Public/Community & Commercial/Industrial) Assurance/consistency risk: without a central corpus of prior answers/rationale, contradictions across projects/filings can be exploited. [report RNG4; RNG5] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Public/Community) Publish auditable 'we heard / we did' logs with ISG challenge notes to increase legitimacy across RIIO-T3 schemes. [report RNG4; RNG5] • (Commercial/Industrial) Adopt RIIO-GT3 'engagement focus areas' (connections, resilience, decarbonisation pathways) as a taxonomy for agendas, tagging and KPIs. [report RNG4] • (Commercial/Industrial) Broaden B2B dashboards beyond CSAT to include participation & influencing, mirroring external reporting. [report RNG5] • (Public/Community & Commercial/Industrial) Anchor digital/AI rollout to the Innovation Strategy and ISG model: retrieval-first, human-approved workflows with portfolio-wide consistency checks (no public 'AI oracles'). [report RNG3; RNG4; RNG5]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Commercial/Industrial) Participation & influencing is reported alongside CSAT, broadening the definition of 'good engagement' in B2B contexts beyond satisfaction alone. [report RNG5] • (Public/Community & Commercial/Industrial) The Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG) role is codified as challenge + assurance on whether plans are genuinely stakeholder-led - creating an external check on the engagement pipeline. [report RNG4; RNG5] • (Public/Community & Commercial/Industrial) The Innovation Strategy commits to applying digital/AI across business functions (including engagement/insight ops) under a governed, human-in-the-loop model. [report RNG3] • (Public/Community & Commercial/Industrial) Earlier materials formalise stakeholder categories and dialogues with regulators/consumer bodies - useful lineage to evidence a mature engagement system. [report RNG6] 		

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
<p>National Grid Electricity Transmission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG) / external challenge: formal role to scrutinise plans and engagement quality before/through business planning. [report RNGET5; report RNGET1] • SEIS/AA1000 used as steady baselines for maturity and benchmarking (helps define ‘what good looks like’). [report RNGET5; report RNGET1] • RIIO-T3 documentation hub provides a public ‘single front door’ for supporting evidence you can deep-link to from consultations and FAQs. [report RNGET6] • Output Delivery Incentive linkage (ODI): performance outcomes (reliability, environment, etc.) are tied to engagement-relevant objectives, giving a clearer line from engagement to outcomes. [report RNGET3] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedding engagement as BAU (culture/operating model): moving from good events to an always-on practice across the org is still in progress. [report RNGET5] • Prioritisation tension: stakeholder workshops elevate reliability and value-for-money as top priorities, which can crowd out investment in better engagement design unless ring-fenced. [report RNGET5] • Traceability across filings: without a centralised record of prior answers/rationales, contradictions across projects/regulatory docs can be surfaced by third parties. [report RNGET1; web RNGET6] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forward look of engagement milestones. Publish a simple “forward look” for each region (e.g., planned webinars, drop-ins, statutory/non-statutory consultation windows) and where to find the subsequent feedback report, to increase predictability for stakeholders. [report RNGET5] • Deep-linkable evidence for AI/FAQ tools: use the RIIO-T3 hub as stable anchors for ‘answer with a reference’ [report RNGET6] • Broaden success metrics: incorporate participation/engagement-journey KPIs alongside traditional satisfaction and ODI outcomes to reflect the fuller value chain. [report RNGET2; report RNGET3] • System-wide visualisation: pair whole-system maps/scenarios from strategy materials with localised overlays so residents can locate themselves in the story (supports ‘what does this mean for me?’). [report RNGET4]
<p>Consumer Advocacy Groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NEA’s strategic advocacy pillars (esp. NI): push for a statutory fuel-poverty target, a new Fuel Poverty Strategy, minimum energy-efficiency standards (notably PRS), and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of regressive impacts from socialising network connection/reinforcement costs: Without safeguards, low-income households could pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted affordability mechanisms: Social tariff and Warm Home Discount-equivalents in NI to protect high-need groups and create headroom for

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<p>sustained financial support for low-income/vulnerable households. [report RCAG2, RCAG3]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with consumer bodies/regulators (e.g., Consumer Council NI) is a formal part of NEA's model, shaping tools, campaigns, and evidence routes. [report RCAG3] 	<p>more while benefiting least (e.g., no EV/HP). [report RCAG2]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nation-specific protection gaps (NI): No GB-style price-cap effects in winter; higher heating-oil reliance - both complicate engagement and expectations-setting. [report RCAG3] Limited visibility on PPM harms: Insufficient data on self-disconnection/rationing, accessibility, PayPoint reliability - makes targeting and safeguarding harder. [report RCAG3] 	<p>engagement/behaviour change. [report RCAG2, RCAG3]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fair design for any socialised costs: Build in exemptions/progressive structures and update nation-specific regulations (e.g., NI 1992 connection-charges regs) so costs align with benefits. [report RCAG2] PPM harm monitoring & data sharing: Common definitions, safe data routes, and rapid-response protocols with regulators/industry to enable proactive outreach. [report RCAG3] Distributional-impact assessments (NI-tailored) + stronger complaint audits/consumer-rights education to track who pays/benefits and improve protections. [report RCAG3]
<p>Industrial & Commercial Energy Users/Representatives (external)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use independent, community-led grant panels with published scoring criteria and conflict-of-interest rules to allocate community benefit funds, with annual impact summaries for transparency. [report RRUk1] Ring-fence portions of funds for priority themes such as fuel poverty, skills, transport access and biodiversity, and publish eligibility rules in plain English and Easy Read. [report RRUk1] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community benefit expectations can exceed available pots on transmission schemes, creating disappointment without early framing on what is feasible. [report RRUk3] Volunteer grant panels face heavy administrative load and variable capability, which can slow decisions and reduce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a national or devolved register of community benefits with standard data fields and APIs, so schemes, recipients and outcomes are searchable by location and theme. [report RRUk3] Provide standard templates for community benefit statements, panel terms of reference, scoring rubrics and monitoring frameworks to reduce administrative friction. [report RRUk1; report RRUk3]

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up long-term governance through local trusts or third-party fund administrators so benefits continue through construction and operation, not just at consent. [report RRUk1] • In Wales, provide bilingual engagement and materials and align community benefit statements with Local Development Plans and well-being goals to improve legitimacy. [report RRUk2] • Offer structured community ownership or shared revenue options alongside traditional benefit funds, with clear advice on legal and financial models. [report RRUk2] • For transmission projects, tailor benefits to be proportionate to the asset and deliver a mix of in-kind measures such as traffic calming, visual screening and community facility upgrades. [report RRUk3] • Publish a simple annual report on benefit commitments, spend, recipients and outcomes to build trust and reduce speculation. [report RRUk3] 	<p>consistency across rounds. [report RRUk1]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data on community benefits is scattered across developers, fund managers and local groups, which makes it difficult for residents to see who gets what and why. [report RRUk1; report RRUk3] • Subsidy control, taxation and procurement rules can be confusing for small community bodies and can delay delivery if not explained upfront. [report RRUk1; report RRUk3] • Where multiple projects overlap, communities struggle to understand cumulative impacts and how benefits from different developers fit together. [report RRUk2; report RRUk3] • In Wales, inconsistent bilingual provision and limited local capacity can reduce participation and perceived fairness. [report RRUk2] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate multi-project or regional funds where appropriate so small pots can be combined for visible local outcomes such as transport links, skills pipelines or energy advice hubs. [report RRUk3] • Expand options beyond cash grants to include bill discount schemes, local energy vouchers and targeted support for vulnerable households with clear eligibility and data-sharing protocols. [report RRUk2; report RRUk3] • Use simple dashboards to show commitments, spend, beneficiaries and measured outcomes over time, with downloadable data for local scrutiny. [report RRUk3] • Provide bilingual, plain-language toolkits and training for community panels and parish clerks, including refreshers on subsidy control and basic fund administration. [report RRUk2; report RRUk3]
Academia (external)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single front door for advice and action: A national/regional 'one- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Missing centre of gravity in government: Call for Cabinet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National strategy for public engagement: Make engagement an

Stakeholder (Group)	The Current Landscape	Gaps and Challenges	Opportunities and Future Directions
	<p>stop' entry point (web/phone/social) that clearly states requirements, timelines, costs, and routes to finance, linking to specialist support. [report RAC2]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Showcase & leadership: Consistent narrative backed by political leadership and visible 'before/after' homes across typologies to normalise retrofit. [report RAC2] • Market segmentation for domestic audiences: Practical segmentation typologies (e.g., 'cost is king,' 'actively green,' 'control seekers') to tailor comms and target early adopters. [report RAC2] 	<p>Office (or BEIS predecessor) to coordinate net-zero engagement, set standards, and build capability; lack of ring-fenced budget undermines consistency. [report RAC1]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is siloed: Success needs mapping and sharing cross-sector knowledge (households, attitudes, finance, install supply chain); explicit lines of responsibility and review cycles. [report RAC2] • Civil-society capacity is contingent: Formation and durability of strong civil actors depends on governance/market institutions; initiatives are vulnerable to political/economic shocks. [report RAC4] 	<p>explicit, resourced part of the net-zero strategy, with roles, methods, and inclusion plans specified. [report RAC1]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted early-adopter pathways: Use segmentation to identify 'willing' groups, align network upgrades, and seed knowledge for later area-based roll-outs. [report RAC2] • Institutional design that empowers civil society: Governance enabling local decision-rights (e.g., binding referendums/municipal ownership windows) correlates with stronger citizen-led energy transitions (Hamburg case). [report RAC4]

5 Summary of Insights

Across National Gas (NG) and National Grid Electricity Transmission (NGET), teams describe a broadly similar engagement workflow (See Figure 2) and a common set of challenges: **throughput**, **consistency** and **reach**. Large programmes can generate thousands of comments to consultations that must be captured, coded, analysed and reported as well as numerous FOI Requests and EIRs which then need to be answered within a specific deadline (EIRs). Manual triage slows feedback back into engineering and connections planning and responding to customers and stakeholders. Consistency suffers because past answers aren't centrally searchable, so wording can drift across projects - creating confusion and risk. Reach is also uneven: formats such as evening town halls skew who turns up, and long technical PDFs are hard for many people to use.

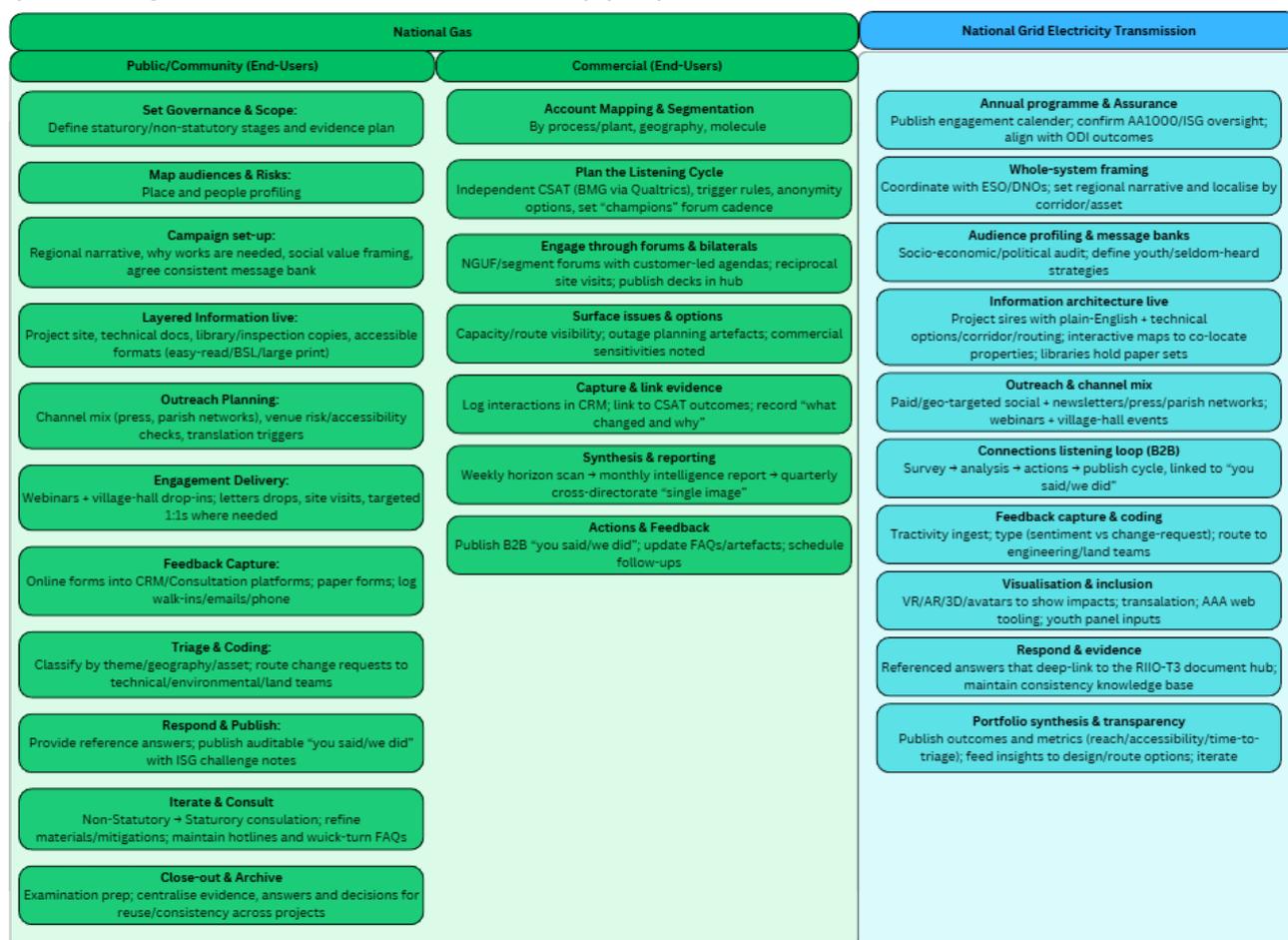


Figure 2: Typical Engagement Workflow

External stakeholders reinforce these themes and add practical detail on inclusion. Community organisations, local authorities and smaller groups emphasise that trusted humans, place-based delivery, visual and experiential methods, and warm introductions through health, education and faith partners are the most reliable routes to participation. Digital channels help with clarity and scale when they are paired with assisted options, accessible formats and clear next steps. Disability advocates underline the need for WCAG-compliant journeys, assistive-tech testing, non-PDF forms, and operational readiness in call centres. Consumer groups point to affordability pressure and limited headspace, which makes plain English answers to "what does this mean here and now" essential. Industry bodies and consultancies highlight early political briefings, practical visualisation, and a proactive approach to misinformation. Community benefits are widely used as a practical anchor for

dialogue. Stakeholders value visible local funds and bill or tariff discounts that fit local priorities, and they note two improvements: clearer transparency about how money is allocated and delivered over time, and flexibility so benefits reflect the scale and type of different assets. Where multiple schemes overlap, communities benefit from a single view of cumulative benefits rather than project-by-project fragments, yet maintaining reliable registers is difficult when data sits across developers and fund managers.

Internal teams mainly want technology to speed the back office: faster ingest/coding/triage of consultation feedback; quick retrieval of approved text with exact citations; and controlled evidence assembly, all with human SME sign-off for anything public-facing. External groups are receptive to tech that improves comprehension and access - plain-language summaries, translation/BSL captioning, clearer 'findability' in long reports, accessible forms - but they are clear that it must not replace trusted local humans. Put simply: NG/NGET need to move information through the system faster and more consistently, while external stakeholders need that information to be understandable, accessible, and delivered by people they trust. If we do both, the public will see clearer, easier-to-navigate materials and more transparent 'you said / we did' playbacks at the appropriate consultation stage. Internally, teams may gain faster synthesis and stronger consistency, reducing rework and planning risk, even where statutory and engineering change-control timelines set the overall pace.

In summary, through the engagement outlined in this report, the following are seen as the key challenges for improving consumer engagement:

- **Too much to process in too little time.** Large-scale consultations create thousands of items that require capture, coding, analysis, evidenced responses and publication.
- **Answer consistency.** Lack of a single, searchable reference of prior rationales, citations and decisions across projects to support consistency where appropriate, while preserving case-by-case nuance in new replies.
- **Uneven reach and discoverability.** Standard formats miss many audiences. People often cannot find personalised answers inside long documents.
- **Inclusion and accessibility.** Many journeys are not fully accessible in practice. Assisted options, non-digital routes and operational readiness in contact centres are not uniformly available.
- **Coordination across programmes.** Overlapping gas and electricity works create confusion about who is responsible, compress available engagement time and contribute to consultation fatigue.
- **Misinformation and volume spikes.** False narratives spread quickly if accurate material is not published early. Organised campaigns can flood consultations with near-duplicate submissions that still require individual handling.
- **Data and tooling gaps.** Under-adopted CRM, fragmented records make it harder to ensure engagement with all groups, re-contact residents and maintain a single view of stakeholders.
- **Skills and capacity.** High-touch, effective methods require trained people, consistent partners and time to follow through, which can be difficult to sustain.
- **Community benefit transparency.** Residents need a clear line of sight from fund policies to decisions and delivered outcomes, supported by reliable, up-to-date registers.
- **Cumulative activity.** When several projects arrive together, communities need joined-up communication on combined impacts, mitigations and benefits, not separate streams by scheme.

6 Next Steps/Recommendations and Conclusion

Solving the core problems - too much to process, too little time, uneven access, and inconsistent information and answers - creates value on two fronts. For the public, it means clear, trusted, and precise information about local impacts, delivered in formats people can use (plain English, Easy Read/BSL, accessible forms) with visible 'you said / we did' outcomes. For NG/NGET, it shortens the loop from consultation to decision, reduces repeat queries surges, and lowers risk by tightening consistency across projects.

Stakeholders pointed to two complementary directions. First, **back-end acceleration** for internal stakeholder groups that can help to:

- Ingest and cluster large volumes of consultation feedback, tag themes, and direct requests to the right specialists.
- Retrieve approved information with exact citations to the page/figure in published documents.
- Assemble evidence (e.g., auditable 'you said / we did' logs, consistent Q&A packs).

External stakeholder groups were open to tools that provide **consumer-facing clarity at speed**: the ability to turn long, technical materials into audience-ready, location-specific answers, with plain-language summaries, clear navigation to the exact section that applies, and visuals that help people understand local effects. This combination tackles throughput and consistency for internal teams while giving the public fast answers to 'what will this mean for me?'

Interviews consistently noted that AI could power these capabilities but only as **human-led, behind the scenes tools**. Visible 'AI bots' risk mistrust, especially on contentious schemes or for vulnerable users. The expectation is to use AI to accelerate analysis, retrieval and drafting, with named humans reviewing, approving and fronting all external communication. To do this safely, stakeholders want clear guardrails: retrieval-first answers that cite only approved sources; human approval for anything public-facing; privacy by design (minimal personal data and DPIAs); traceability and version control to avoid contradiction-mining across projects; and accessibility by default (WCAG 2.2 AA+ with assistive-tech testing before and after updates). Secondary stakeholders were explicit: AI may explain and translate, but it must not replace trusted local humans. These principles should anchor any pilot.

Appendix – List of Key Reports

Table 4: List of Key Reports

Stakeholder	Report Reference Number
National Gas	<p>[RNG1] – Business Plan Overview Summary and stakeholder engagement (2025)</p> <p>[RNG2] – Annual report and accounts (2025)</p> <p>[RNG3] – Innovation Strategy (2025)</p> <p>[RNG4] – National Gas Customer and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy for RIIO-GT3 (2025)</p> <p>[RNG5] – Our Performance (2023/24)</p> <p>[RNG6] – Stakeholder Engagement (2019)</p>
National Grid Electricity Transmission	<p>[RNGET1] – Giving stakeholders and consumers a stronger voice (2025)</p> <p>[RNGET2] – Incentive on Connections Engagement (2023/34)</p> <p>[RNGET3] – Output Deliver Incentive (2023)</p> <p>[RNGET4] – Whole System Strategy (2022)</p> <p>[RNGET5] – Listening to our Stakeholders (2017)</p> <p>[RNGET6] – Supporting Documents (2025)</p>
Consumer Advocacy Groups and Those Representing Vulnerable Consumers (external)	<p>[RCAG1] – National Energy Action Impact Report</p> <p>[RCAG2] – National Energy Action Consultation Response Increased Socialisation of Connection Costs in the Electricity Distribution Network</p> <p>[RCAG3] – National Energy Action Consultation Response Consumer Council for Northern Ireland</p> <p>[RCEE1] – Community Energy England Community Engagement & Diversity</p> <p>[RSDC1] – Disability Energy Support</p>
Industrial & Commercial Energy Users/Representatives (external)	<p>[RRUK1] – Community Benefit in Action Case Studies from the Onshore Wind Section</p> <p>[RRUK2] – Onshore Wind in Wales How our Sector Works with Communities</p> <p>[RRUK3] – Community Benefits for Electricity Transmission Networks Infrastructure (internal)</p>
Academia (external)	<p>[RAC1] – IfG Public Engagement and Net Zero (2021)</p>

[RAC2] – National Public Energy Agency Public Engagement in Scottish Heat in Buildings Strategy and the Proposed (2022)

[RAC3] – [UKERC An Observatory for Public Engagement with Energy and Climate Change \(2022\)](#)

[RAC4] – UoE Civil Society Action Energy (2025)

Appendix – List of Key Challenges

- Back-office acceleration:
 - Automated clustering & tagging: Group thousands of free-text comments by theme, location, asset, and sentiment to cut manual coding time and surface hotspots early.
 - Smart routing & SLAs: Auto-route tagged items (e.g., land, environmental, engineering) to the right SME/team with clock-start timestamps and escalation paths.
 - Stakeholder-aware responses: Pull in stakeholder attributes (e.g., location, vulnerability flags, role) to tailor draft replies and standard packs without retyping the basics.
 - Referenced retrieval: Answer internal and external questions with extracts that cite the exact page/figure/paragraph in approved documents (RIIO hubs, DCO packs, FAQs).
 - Consistency knowledge base: Maintain a log of prior positions, regulator Q&A and consultation replies to pre-populate responses and prevent cross-project contradictions.
 - Change-request triage: Distinguish ‘requests for change’ from general sentiment; track their lifecycle from receipt to assessment to outcome with decision rationales.
 - Auditable ‘you said / we did’ logs: Auto-compile evidence trails linking comments to consideration to decision to published change (or reason not to change).
 - Regulatory pack assembly: Generate draft annexes and submission tables (e.g., Gunning/Planning Act evidence schedules) from the tagged corpus, for human review/approval.
- Front-end comprehension and access:
 - Plain-language summaries: Provide easy-read and short-form explainers for each major document and milestone, written to answer ‘what does this mean for me?’
 - Inclusive formats at source: Offer web pages and Word forms (not PDF-only), with WCAG 2.2 AA+ checks and tested screen-reader/keyboard journeys.
 - Translation & access support: On-demand translation, BSL captioning/video, large-print and audio alternatives; publish accessibility statements and fix routes.
 - Deep-linkable navigation: Design long reports and project sites with anchors, TOCs and copyable section links so users (and staff) can jump to the exact section referenced.
 - Personalised visualisation: Property- or area-level views of routes, timelines and impacts using maps, short videos, AR, 3D where helpful, plus printable equivalents.
 - Topic-led FAQs: Curate living FAQs with named owners; each answer links to the authoritative source and is date-stamped for currency.
 - Assisted channels by default: Keep phone lines, drop-ins and outreach in trusted venues for higher-need users; digital tools support, not replace, in-person engagement.
 - Aftercare & handover: Post-decision/installation tutorials and follow-ups (e.g., heat-pump settings, traffic management timelines) to reduce complaints and rework.