



Community Energy
Engagement Strategy

2023-2025 >

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Foreword



Foreword

Community energy organisations are key in making sure the energy transition works for everyone, and that the economic benefits are translated to social and environmental benefits in communities. To us, community energy organisations are a critical partner in shaping the energy sector to work better for increasingly active customers.

Our vision is for a thriving community energy sector, supported by strong networks that link the voluntary sector with expertise in the energy sector, anchor institutions, local governments, and others. We are therefore pleased to refresh our Community Energy Engagement Strategy for the next two years, up to 2025. Since 2020, when our first Community Energy Engagement Strategy was published, we have seen a lot of change, with a significant increase in local organisations forming and exploring community energy projects, as well as groups seeking to play an active role in tackling the climate emergency in their local communities.



Stakeholder consultation

64 community and local energy stakeholders consulted through an online survey, Community Energy Forum and Community Energy Stakeholder Panel to get views on this strategy.

In 2020, our Community Energy Engagement Strategy set out 26 commitments to support the sector from 2020 to 2023. Three years later, the increased activity and feedback have meant we are delivering even more support. While we see more community energy organisations coming forward, the pace at which new projects are being delivered is slower. It is important that policymakers, the energy sector and other key actors understand the key barriers that community organisations face and work together to resolve them.

As a key anchor organisation in our region to facilitate net zero, this strategy sets out our vision for supporting a thriving community energy sector over the next three years. We are already making efforts to address some of the barriers faced by the sector – by offering additional support to help new organisations access expertise and capacity through our Net Zero Community Energy Fund, and through engaging and linking up with other community organisations in their area, which they can find through our ‘Put your community on the map!’ campaign.

There is also more work ongoing with partners and community energy project funders to bring our engagement programmes and resources together, helping organisations navigate the information and resources available, and collaborate with each other. As we enter our next business plan period up to 2028, ‘RIIO-ED2’, we’re shifting the needle in our approach to local decarbonisation, proactively encouraging community energy projects through a new team of community-based energy advisors and rolling out innovative solutions to a smart, low carbon energy system, suggested and trialled by local community energy organisations.

In this strategy, you will find our commitments – both continuing and refreshed – for community energy in our region, as well as a snapshot of what’s been achieved so far and how the sector is looking in the North East, Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire.

Louise Lowes

Louise Lowes
Director of Customer Service



Louise was appointed as Director of Customer Service in 2023 after being Head of Customer Services and a member of the Executive Team since 2021. Louise joined Northern Powergrid in 2018 as Customer Service Programme Manager, having previously held senior roles in both the public and private sectors focused on Customer Service, Shared Services, Operational Leadership and transformational change.

Louise has overall accountability for our customer experience and customer satisfaction, and she leads the way in driving change to ensure that our customers are at the heart of everything we do.

As Director of Customer Services, Louise’s remit includes Customer Service – incorporating our priority service customers, Customer Care, Customer Relationship Management and Performance and Insight.



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Community Energy in our region



Community Energy in our region

Our region has seen a significant increase in local organisations forming and exploring community energy projects, as well as groups seeking to play an active role in tackling the climate emergency in their local communities.

We have commissioned two regional studies to support our work, in 2019 and again in 2021. These were in-depth analysis of community energy across the North East, Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire. This research was conducted by Community Energy England, Scotland and Wales as part of their annual Community Energy State of the Sector UK research project.

The enthusiasm for locally-led action on energy issues remains, and those driving the sector are highly engaged and committed to exploring new opportunities.

Over the course of the Community Energy Engagement Programme from 2020 to 2023, the community energy sector in the North East, Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire has grown and diversified the range of activities it delivers. Whilst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the removal of subsidy support had impacted its progress, the sector continued to flourish.

	2019	2021	% change
Total number of organisations	20	66	+230%
FTE employed	15	55	+267%
Organisations involved in low carbon transport projects	7	11	+57%
Organisations involved in electricity generation projects	13	14	+8%
Total solar generation capacity	1.8MW	2.6MW	+44%
Total generated	1.78GWh	3.3GWh	+85%
Organisations involved with energy efficiency projects	9	21	+133%
Funding accessed	£8,000	£378,000*	+4,625%

*£350,000 was provided by the Rural Community Energy Fund.



Net Zero Community Energy Fund Case Study: Northallerton Methodist Church

Northallerton Methodist Church, in North Yorkshire, was awarded funding to pay for development costs associated with gaining permission from planning authorities for solar PV, thermally efficient windows and heat pumps in four churches across the district. They are keen that this project helps them to demonstrate that Net Zero is possible for church buildings.

“This funding is enabling us to plan the best pathway towards fulfilling our Net Zero ambition. We look forward to sharing our learning with others.”

Adele, Northallerton Methodist Church



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GREEN DOCTOR

Speak to Rachel Mallon
Rachel.Mallon@groundwork.org.uk
for design guidelines.



Community Energy in our region

Just under 30% of all newly registered community energy organisations in the UK were formed in the Northern Powergrid region in 2021.

State of the Sector data from previous years showed that community energy activity in the Northern Powergrid area had been lower than in the rest of the UK, so this is a positive sign that awareness of the benefits of community energy is increasing, and communities are actively mobilising to deliver these benefits.

Based on the installed capacity, the amount of electricity generated by community energy projects across the region in 2021 is estimated to be around 3.3 GWh – equivalent to the

electricity demand of 1,100 UK households (assuming Ofgem's annual average usage of 2,900 kWh).

Northern Powergrid were the first DNO to set up a Community Energy Seed Fund in 2014, and in 2018 they merged funds with Northern Gas Networks to create the Community Partnering Fund. In 2022, Northern Powergrid launched a new, additional Net Zero Community Energy Fund aimed primarily at capacity building and support for organisations at the early stages of developing projects. We have run this Fund again during 2023. In total we have given out £100,000 of funding to directly support 15 communities with their net zero goals.



Net Zero Community Energy Fund Case Study: Humshaugh First School Governors

Humshaugh First School Governors applied for funding to contribute towards the costs associated with installing air source heat pumps to replace the existing oil boiler at Northumberland-based Humshaugh First School. As a result, the air source heat pumps are now installed and heating the school effectively.

“The funding from the Northern Powergrid’s Net Zero Community Energy fund has been invaluable in realising the decarbonisation of the primary school by replacing the existing boiler with ASHP – which now heats the school very well.”

Herbie Newell CBE, Chair of Governors, Humshaugh CoE (Aided) First School

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Community Energy and ED2

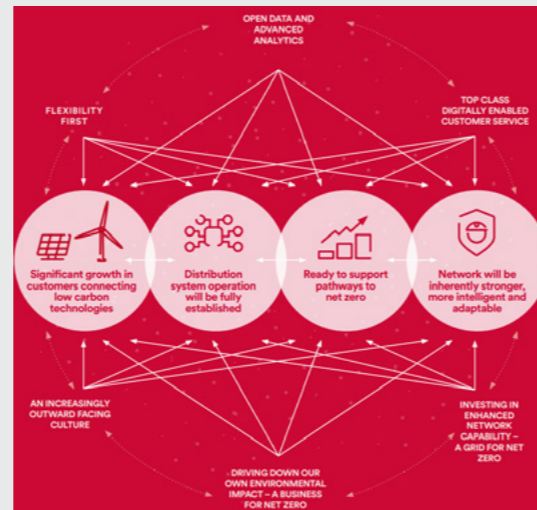
Northern Powergrid, as the network operator, is responsible for employing people and investing and maintaining the electricity infrastructure in the North East, Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire.

Electricity networks are known as 'regulated monopolies'. Ofgem, as the regulator, sets out how much we can spend, and on what, over a period of time called a price control period (typically spanning five years). These costs are then passed through energy suppliers who add it to customers' bills.

We develop business plans for these periods which are reviewed and agreed by Ofgem. The plans set out how we will efficiently deliver value for customers through investment and innovation to deliver a low carbon energy system with stakeholders at the heart of this process and the decision-making. For more information, see Electricity Network Association.

We have now agreed with Ofgem our business plan for the price control period (called ED2) between April 2023 and 2028.

Climate change and the cost of living are critical parts of our new business plan, which means changing how we run our business. We will be taking a leading role in enabling our region to play its part in meeting the UK's target of reducing carbon emissions by almost 80 per cent by 2035. We know our network will be instrumental in facilitating this change, as it sits at the heart of a decentralised, low carbon energy system. We will be working across that whole system to find innovative ways to deliver on that target.



Community Energy and ED2

We are an anchor organisation in our region, and we will always be there to support our communities. We want to have a positive social impact on communities in which we also live and work.

In our new business plan, we will be taking an increasingly active role in encouraging and facilitating communities and businesses in our region to be part of a just transition to net zero, as well as helping them be more resilient to the impacts of a changing climate.

This is not just one way; we know that we increasingly need to work together with our communities. That will be enabled by a significant increase in investment, centred on enabling customers and communities to participate in finding flexible solutions that make for a more efficient transition to the lower carbon world.

The future presents an opportunity to power our region with sustainable, long-term investments that unleash the potential of innovation, digitalisation and our people to:

- lead the drive towards decarbonisation
- operate a highly reliable and resilient network
- delight our customers with outstanding service
- provide remarkable value for money
- ensure world-class levels of safety and security
- be a force for good throughout our region and beyond.



Net Zero Community Energy Fund Case Study: Grimsby Community Energy

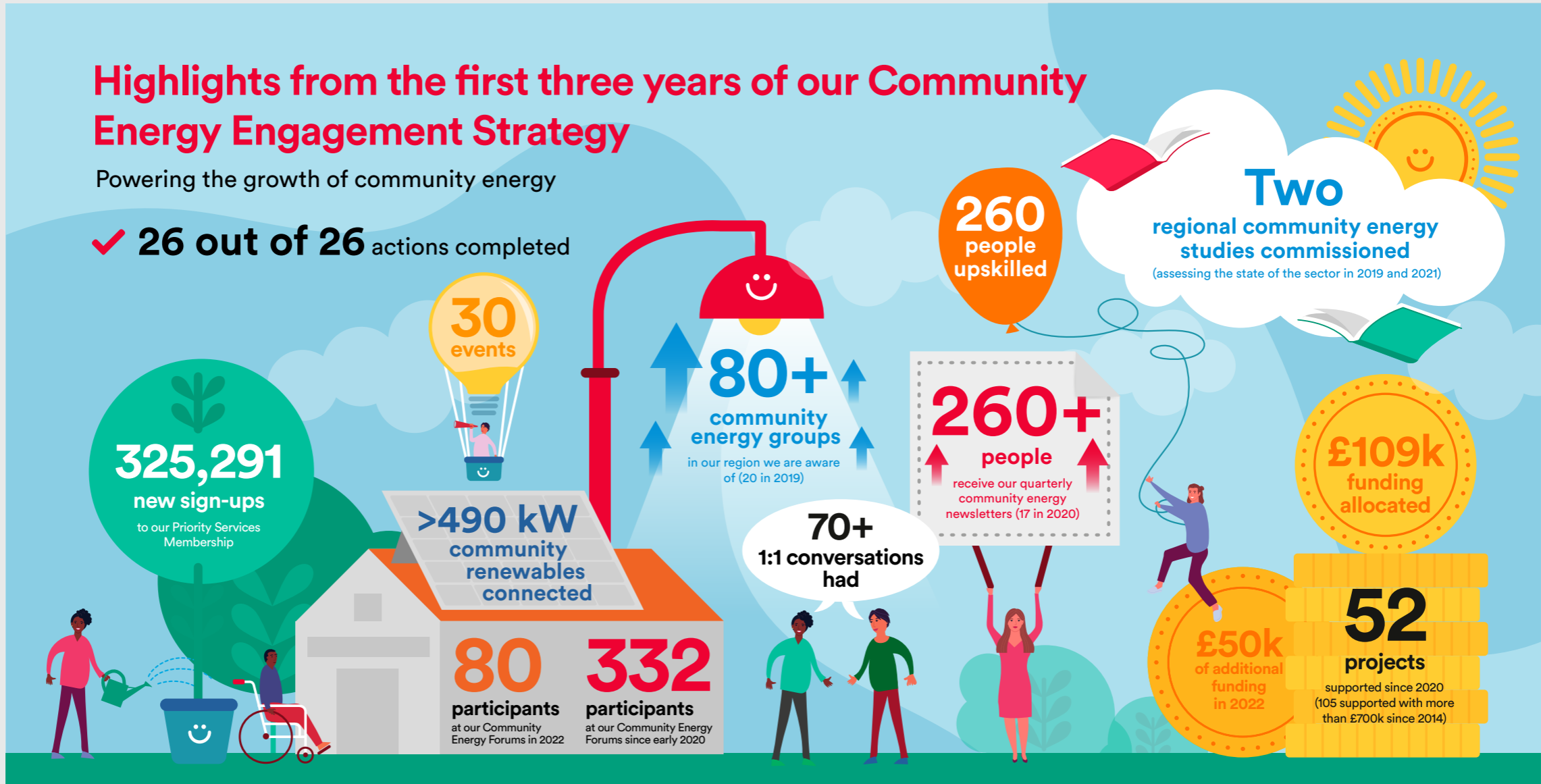
Grimsby Community Energy is an energy cooperative which focuses on renewable electricity generation and raising awareness around energy issues. They applied for funding to develop community-owned solar panels on the buildings of local organisations that had expressed interest, including a school, an apprentice centre and a housing charity.



Highlights from the first three years of our Community Energy Engagement Strategy

Powering the growth of community energy

✓ **26 out of 26** actions completed



Over 10,000 interactions with community energy stakeholders since early 2020 – insights shared with BEIS, Ofgem, Environmental Audit Committee, and local governments



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Engagement plan 2023-2025

We delivered all 26 of the 26 actions we committed to in the past three years of our community engagement programme. We have made a new set of 26 commitments

in our 2023-2025 engagement plan build upon the work we have done, show our renewed commitment to the sector, and will enhance the supportive foundations that we have created.

LISTEN

The views of our community energy stakeholders have been crucial to understanding the sector in our region, growing the programme and tailoring our support accordingly. We will continue to listen to communities through ongoing engagement.

You said	No.	Action/commitment	Method	Start date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
Listen to us	1	We will continue to be led by community energy group feedback in selecting the appropriate actions to support them, improving our engagement programme, choosing topics to cover in our events, and their asks we can communicate to the wider energy sector and policymakers.	We will gather feedback at all our community energy events, asking stakeholders what they need support with and which topics they would like us to cover. We will seek to conduct another regional community energy study in 2024/2025.	April 2023	Our engagement events rated at least 7/10 on average by stakeholders.
	2	We will work with regional partners such as local authorities and the North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub to identify additional community energy organisations in our region and bring them into a joined-up Community Energy Engagement Programme.	We will promote our events, funding and resources with other regional partners to increase their reach and make community energy stakeholders who are not yet engaged aware of our CEEP.	February 2023	A 10% increase in the number of community energy stakeholders we engage in our CEEP compared to last year.



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INFORM

We have embraced delivering on our public commitment to support community energy, including establishing communication channels to keep communities informed. We are reaffirming our commitment and setting out our plans to continue to communicate through our now-established channels, with additional communication plans through our Community Energy Advisors (CEAs).

You said	No.	Action/commitment	Method	Start date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
Tell us what Northern Powergrid want and how communities can help	3	Re-affirm our commitment to community energy in this strategy, say why community energy is important to Northern Powergrid and how they can engage with us throughout RIIO-ED2.	In this strategy, we have set out why Northern Powergrid wants to support this sector and signposted other relevant strategies and parts of our RIIO-ED2 business plan for community energy. We will continue to seek engagement from community energy stakeholders throughout RIIO-ED2	February 2023	Strategy published online.
	4	Give at least six opportunities for community energy organisations to feed into our views or research, including responses to potential policy or rule changes. This will include keeping you informed of and involved in the development of the DSO and wider energy market developments. For example: new policies, services and data.	We will engage community energy organisations in relevant research or engagement exercises where we need to hear from stakeholders to help shape our approach or views. We will communicate complex developments in an accessible way that improves understanding and encourages participation.	June 2023	At least six opportunities presented, either at events or online consultations.
Keep us up to date via email	5	We will continue to send out quarterly email updates via email tailored to community and local energy stakeholders.	Our community energy mailing list will be maintained by our CEAs, who will work with Regen and other partners to ensure content is relevant to the sector.	February 2023	Grow our community energy mailing list by 20% each year and aim for 50% open rate on each newsletter.
	6	We will keep the community energy page on our website up to date with relevant news, events, documents and other features.	Our CEAs will monitor our community energy webpage to ensure that content is up to date.	June 2023	At least one new piece of news, an event or a document published on the website each month.



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ENGAGE

Over the past three years, we have provided tailored support for communities. We recognise that this support, alongside direct engagement with our team, can unlock opportunities for our community energy stakeholders. We will continue to provide this support through the ongoing engagement.

You said	No.	Action/commitment	Method	Start date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
We want a named person/point of contact for communities	7	As per our RIIO-ED2 business plan, we will recruit a team of Community Energy Advisors, who will act as a point of contact and resource. These will be based across our licence area, representing our areas of the North East, Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire. They will deliver direct advice and support to communities, partners and local authorities, and maintain our community energy mailbox.	Our CEAs will make themselves known to community energy stakeholders in our region, attend community energy events run by us and other organisations, and signpost stakeholders to resources and teams within Northern Powergrid.	June 2023	Engage with at least 100 community and local energy stakeholders each year through 1:1 meetings, events and presentations.
We want more face-to-face engagement	8	We will continue to participate in the wider energy system transformation debate, including partnering and participating in regional energy and climate change events.	We will hold at least two in-person and two online community energy events per year, and participate in four external community energy or climate change events.	April 2023	Participate in at least eight events per year.
We want events specifically designed for us	9	Our community energy events will be participatory and include plenty of networking time and time for communities to talk to us about their specific projects and ideas. These events will focus on subjects that matter to communities, and we will invite feedback face-to-face.	All our community energy events will include breakout discussions and feedback on what participants want to cover at future sessions.	April 2023	All community energy events to include a topic that has been mentioned in stakeholder feedback.



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EMPOWER

We will continue to empower and build the capacity of community energy organisations to participate in and contribute to our changing energy system, to make sure it is democratic and benefits those less able to engage.

You said	No.	Action/commitment	Method	Start date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
We need financial support for community energy	10	We will continue to support community energy organisations through our dedicated Net Zero Community Energy Fund each year, to help new and existing organisations to build capacity, access expertise, explore feasible project ideas in the early 'at-risk' stages of project development, and support emerging community energy organisations with start-up costs.	We will open our Net Zero Community Energy Fund for a three-month window to give community organisations enough time to develop their proposals.	July 2023	Five new community projects funded each year through the Net Zero Community Energy Fund.
	11	We will seek alignment and collaboration with other community energy funders in the region to ensure that financial support we provide is as appropriate as possible for the sector.	We will partner with other organisations in the region to ensure funding criteria are not duplicating other funding available.	July 2023	At least three other funding organisations partnered with.
We would like training on how the network and our energy system works	12	Through our Community Energy Forums, training sessions, newsletters and other documents published on our community energy webpage, we will continue to provide accessible technical support, energy sector insight and training tailored to community energy stakeholders. As part of this, we will engage with you to understand your specific areas of interest and needs.	Through tailored focussed sessions at our Community Energy Forums and training sessions, our expert colleagues will provide opportunities for in-depth discussions around developing policies, services and data. We will also continue to provide relevant resources on our community energy webpage and newsletter.	April 2023	At least 100 community energy stakeholders engaged with forums and training sessions.



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EMPOWER

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You said	No.	Action/commitment	Method	Start date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
We need resources for fuel poverty outreach	13	We will continue to provide resources and advice to organisations working on the frontline in the energy crisis through community energy training sessions, PSM and working with partners such as Green Doctors.	We will review and tailor the resources and advice we provide for fuel poverty outreach to respond to the energy crisis and continue to develop our relationship with partner organisations in this area.	April 2023	At least one event per year focused on fuel poverty.
Support us with energy efficiency activities to reduce demand	14	We will provide communities with energy efficiency advice through our Community Energy Advisors and continue to use our community energy training sessions to provide project-specific guidance, such as household retrofit.	We will partner with expert organisations to deliver training and advice tailored for community energy organisations to support them in delivering energy efficiency projects.	April 2023	At least one event per year focused on energy efficiency.
We need financial support for fuel poverty outreach	15	The Net Zero Community Energy Fund will be supplemented by our Community Partnering Fund to support fuel poverty outreach.	We will review and tailor resources and advice we provide for fuel poverty outreach to respond to the energy crisis and continue to develop our relationship with partner organisations in this area.	March 2023	At least two fuel poverty projects funded through the Community Partnering Fund.
	16	We will provide resources and information about the Priority Services Membership (PSM) to help community energy organisations and representatives raise awareness of the services offered.	We will promote the register at relevant community events and forums.	February 2023	Number of community energy organisations requesting resources or being official referral organisations.



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EMPOWER

We will continue to empower and build the capacity of community energy organisations to participate in and contribute to our changing energy system, to make sure it is democratic and benefits those less able to engage.

You said	No.	Action/commitment	Method	Start date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
We'd like more community energy innovation projects that help us develop new business models at scale	17	We will continue to offer support and guidance to communities on how they can develop innovative project ideas and seek to partner with community energy organisations in our region on network innovation projects.	We will hold innovation breakout discussions at our Community Energy Forum, discuss project ideas through our CEAs and signpost via our newsletter and webpage when relevant innovation funding streams are open.	July 2023	One innovation breakout group at each Community Energy Forum.
Support us long term to address climate change	18	In addition to running our Community Energy Programme on an annual basis and funding the Energy Heroes education programme, we will offer professional development support and resource to community energy organisations with Northern Powergrid staff volunteer days via our corporate social responsibility scheme.	We will invite community energy organisations to nominate themselves to host Northern Powergrid staff volunteer days, and advertise community energy opportunities through our social responsibility scheme	June 2023	Community energy organisations receiving at least four staff volunteer days.
	19	We will explore how we can best support a regional community energy umbrella organisation to provide long-term capacity building and funding support to communities throughout the region.	We will continue dialogue with the North East and Yorkshire Energy Hub, local and combined authorities and other community energy support organisations to explore the best way to achieve this.	December 2023	Develop options to support regional community energy organisation when developed.



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CONNECT We will continue to help community energy organisations connect low carbon technologies to our network.					
You said	No.	Action/commitment	Method	Start date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
We need technical support to get new network connections	20	Through our Community Energy Advisors, we will have pre-application conversations with communities to find solutions and facilitate constructive conversations with our network engineers, to help identify viable and affordable network connection sites for local energy projects.	Our CEAs will be the first point of contact for community energy organisations who want to obtain a network connection.	June 2023	All first-time community energy connection applicants to speak with the CEAs at the pre-application stage. At least 20 community energy organisations provided with technical support.
	21	We will increase our open data offering and share network data in an accessible, user-friendly format to help community energy organisations plan their projects.	Open data will be signposted on our community energy webpage and newsletter, and we will share information on open data at our Community Energy Forums, invite feedback and flag relevant datasets to stakeholders, explaining how and when to use them.	February 2023	At least 15 community energy stakeholders accessing our open data.
	22	We will work with community energy organisations to help them understand the changes in policy including Ofgem's Network Access Significant Code Review, and what they mean for local energy projects connecting to the network.	Our CEAs are the first point of contact for community energy organisations who want to obtain a network connection.	June 2023	All community energy projects applying for a network connection understand the impact of new policies.
We want to have conversations to find viable solutions, before filling in a form and spending money	23	Our Community Energy Advisors will work proactively with community energy representatives to support projects at the early 'at-risk' stage.	Our CEAs will keep track of community energy activity in our region, promote our Net Zero Community Energy Fund when appropriate and link community energy projects with teams at Northern Powergrid that can support their project.	June 2023	At least ten community-owned low carbon projects connecting to our network each year.



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ADVOCATE

Building on work of our previous strategy, we will continue to amplify the voice of communities as outlined in the community energy engagement strategy 2023-2025.

We're updating this commitment to include more engagement with the local authorities in our region, as it is clear that these partnerships can enable a flourishing community energy sector.

You said	No.	Action/commitment	Method	Start date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
Help us have a voice with government and Ofgem	24	We will use our industry position to provide feedback to DESNZ and Ofgem on what community energy organisations say they need to thrive and influence policy and energy system developments positively for community energy organisations, working alongside national partners such as Community Energy England on key messages.	We will have regular conversations with Community Energy England and other community energy support organisations to advocate and develop key messages on community energy for DESNZ and Ofgem.	December 2023	CEAs to have one meeting per year with local energy team at DESNZ and reflect community energy feedback.
Include communities in your business planning	25	As part of our Community Energy Forums, we will explain the relevance of RIIO-ED2 to community energy stakeholders and set out how they can engage with and influence us over the next five years.	We will discuss RIIO-ED2 at our Community Energy Forums and explain its relevance to community energy.	July 2023	RIIO-ED2 discussed at two Community Energy Forums.
Help us to engage our local authority	26	In addition to our Community Energy Forums to connect community energy and local authority stakeholders, we will raise awareness about community energy amongst our local authority contacts, work further to connect these stakeholder groups, and work with national organisations like Community Energy England to help local authorities and community energy organisations to collaborate.	Our new Local Authority Energy advisors will facilitate collaboration between our local authority contacts and Community Energy groups. We intend to host a breakout discussion on community energy-local authority collaboration at each Forum.	July 2023	At least ten local authority representatives at each Community Energy Forum.



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> **Net Zero Community Energy Fund**

Net Zero Community Energy Fund



Net Zero Community Energy Fund

As part Northern Powergrid's commitment to Empower communities we are providing financial support to community energy groups through the Net Zero Community Energy Fund.

We offer community organisations the opportunity to apply for in-kind support or grants of between £1,000 and £10,000 to support communities across the North East, Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire on their net zero journeys.

The purpose of this fund is to support projects at the early stages, explore feasible project ideas, enable access to the right expertise, and encourage new and existing community energy organisations to develop their project ideas. In 2022 and 2023, we have awarded more than £100,000 to 15 organisations in our region.



York Community Energy

York Community energy is a community organisation that aims to reduce York's carbon emissions. This includes, among other things, conducting energy assessments of residents' homes and providing advice and support to those in fuel poverty. They are using the funding to pilot an extension of the existing Warmer Homes York assessment service, to turn it into a One-Stop-Shop for residents who are able to pay for low carbon retrofits.

“Thanks to the funding, we have been able to purchase a thermal imaging camera to carry out heat loss surveys with, as well as provide energy advice and install energy-saving measures for people in fuel poverty.”

Tom, York Community Energy



LILAC

LILAC is an award-winning community housing project in Leeds that stands for Low Impact Living Affordable Community. They are using the funding to pay for one year of in-depth feasibility work with a local housing energy expert organisation, to support the transition of community-led housing to net zero. The feasibility work will specifically explore what community-level and multi-home solutions are feasible that can enable the transition to net zero homes in a way that is affordable and replicable.

“The funding from Northern Powergrid provides our housing coop with an important stepping-stone to undertake future energy use planning.”

Lara – LILAC member and project lead



