

**Electricity
Distribution**



**‘Switched on’
Local authority
stakeholder
workshop**

Feedback report

November 2024

nationalgrid DSO

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Introduction

On 2 October 2024, National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) held a virtual stakeholder workshop for local authorities and those with an interest in local and regional energy planning. Hosted by the Distribution System Operator (DSO), the purpose of this workshop was to provide updates on the work carried out to date as the organisation evolves the role of DSO.

The workshop provided an opportunity to demonstrate how the DSO has acted on stakeholder feedback over the past year, as well as enabling local authorities to share their progress on their Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs), and for DSO to understand what could be done to better support them with their plans to decarbonise.

The workshop, titled 'Switched On', brought together stakeholders involved in the development of Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs). It provided an opportunity for attendees to hear from a representative of the Welsh Government about the work Welsh local authorities have done in developing their LAEPs, and to learn about the types of data that the DSO team can provide to support their planning.

The workshop aimed to achieve three key objectives:

| | | |
|--|---|---|
|  <p>To demonstrate how the DSO has listened to and acted on stakeholder feedback over the past year.</p> |  <p>To bring local authorities together to share progress on their energy plans and to hear from those with more developed plans.</p> |  <p>To gather feedback from stakeholders on what more the DSO can do to support local authorities with their LAEPs, and which datasets are most useful to them.</p> |
|--|---|---|

The workshop featured a series of presentations, with two sessions followed by discussions in breakout rooms. These discussion sessions were followed by electronic voting using the Slido platform.

The DSO team instructed EQ Communications, a specialist stakeholder engagement consultancy, to independently facilitate the workshop and capture stakeholder comments. Every effort has been made to accurately record the feedback provided. To encourage openness and candid discussion, comments have not been attributed to individuals, but rather to the organisations they represent.



Executive summary



75

A total of **75 stakeholders** participated in the workshop, representing **65 organisations**.

Session 1: How to use our data

The workshop opened with an introductory talk by Cathy McClay, Managing Director at the DSO, who outlined the aims of the workshop and set the context for the day.

Ben Godfrey, Director at the DSO, then provided stakeholders with an update on the company's progress over its first year as a DSO.

Emily Taylor, Strategic Engagement Officer, introduced the first discussion session, explaining the types of data that the DSO provides to support local authorities with their planning.

Stakeholders were invited to share how they would use these datasets and to vote on which datasets were most useful to them.

- Many participants indicated that they **found a number of the datasets beneficial in their roles**. When asked to vote, **47% either agreed (41%) or strongly agreed that the DSO currently provides sufficient data and information** to inform the development of their LAEPs.
- There is a **clear interest in incorporating these tools into planning efforts**. However, engagement levels varied, with some stakeholders just starting to explore the available resources, while others raised concerns about data accuracy. The Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES) map and the network capacity map were voted as the most useful datasets, with **average scores of 4.34 out of 5 and 4.19 out of 5, respectively**.
- However, participants frequently mentioned that **progress is being slowed by a lack of resources, both financial and skilled personnel**. The complexity of the data and the need for more granular, accessible, and up-to-date information were also noted as challenges in fully leveraging the datasets for planning.

Session 2:

Updates on our work to date

Kathryn Thomas, Strategic Engagement Officer, introduced the second discussion session: LAEP and Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESP) feedback. This session covered the DSO's Network Development Plans (NDPs) and included a case study on Welsh LAEPs and RESPs, as Welsh local authorities have made significant progress with their planning.

Participants were asked to provide feedback on the progress of their LAEPs over the last year, thoughts on how the DSO was supporting this progress, what additional support they needed, and the challenges and opportunities related to introducing the RESPs. However, only 36% of stakeholders rated their understanding of RESPs as above 5 out of 10.

Progress of LAEPs over the past year

- Local authorities reported **varying levels of progress in developing their LAEPs**, with some just starting the process and others already working on implementation.
- It was repeatedly noted that **progress is hindered by limited resources**, both financial and staffing, and there were concerns about regional disparities in funding and support.
- **27% of stakeholders reported that their LAEP was almost complete**, a 10% increase from 17% when asked the same question in February. However, 15% said they had not yet begun.

DSO's support for LAEPs and suggested activities for further support

- There was general satisfaction with the support received, with **82% of stakeholders stating they had previously been in contact with their dedicated Strategic Engagement Officer**. However, there was a call for clearer guidance and communication, particularly for local authorities just beginning their LAEPs.
- Suggestions for improvement included **providing more detailed data, additional guidance, and technical expertise** to help local authorities better integrate LAEPs into their broader energy strategies.

Challenges and opportunities with introducing the Regional Strategic Plans

- A key concern raised was the **challenge of aligning local and regional energy planning efforts with evolving national energy targets**. Clear communication and consistent guidance were seen as essential to ensuring the successful integration of local and regional strategies.
- Stakeholders recognised the opportunity for these plans to **offer a clearer, more structured approach to energy planning and their potential to drive investment and create a cohesive energy vision across regions**. However, it was acknowledged that implementation could be difficult given the diverse needs and varying stages of development across different regions.
- **Over a third of stakeholders (36%)** rated their understanding of the Regional Strategic Plans as 6 or above out of 10.

Closing panel session

The final panel session took the form of an expert panel discussion, where the audience asked questions of the panel, which included:

- Ben Godfrey – DSO
- Huw Lewis – Energy Delivery Manager at Welsh Government
- Kieran Highman – RESP Manager at National Energy System Operator (NESO)
- Ray Arrell – Associate Director at Regen

Methodology

A select group of stakeholders, representing local authorities and regional planning bodies from across the DSO's four licence areas, were invited to the workshop.

These stakeholders received multiple email invitations for the engagement event to ensure they had the opportunity to participate. The initial invitation was sent on 7 August 2024, giving stakeholders more than eight weeks' notice. As standard practice for workshops, all registered stakeholders were reminded about the event through both telephone and email to maximise participation.

Providing accessible information

The workshop included six presentations and two discussion sessions in smaller breakout groups, allowing stakeholders to share their verbal feedback.

If stakeholders didn't respond to a question, facilitators checked whether their silence indicated agreement or if they felt unable to comment.



Session 1: How to use our data

The workshop began with an introduction by Cathy McClay, Managing Director of DSO, who outlined the objectives of the session. She then passed over to Ben Godfrey, Director of DSO, who highlighted the progress the DSO had made in its first year.

He explained how stakeholder feedback had been instrumental in shaping the company's plans. Ben then introduced Emily Taylor, Strategic Engagement Officer at DSO, who provided an overview of the datasets available to stakeholders. These included the network capacity map, the EV capacity map, the Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES) map, the embedded capacity register, and Clearview Connect. She also demonstrated how the maps hub and the connected data portal offer a convenient way for stakeholders to access this information.

Stakeholder feedback: How to use our data

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | Results 2024 | Results 2023 | Avg 2024 | Avg 2023 |
|---|------------------------|-------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| How do you feel about the following statement? | | | | | | |
| "DSO currently provides me with sufficient data and information to inform the development of my Local Area Energy Plan." | 1 Strongly disagree | 0 | 0% | 12% | 3.24 | 3.34 |
| | 2 Disagree | 10 | 29% | 12% | | |
| | 3 Neutral | 8 | 24% | 9% | | |
| | 4 Agree | 14 | 41% | 64% | | |
| | 5 Strongly agree | 2 | 6% | 3% | | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 19 | | | | |

Overall, there is clear enthusiasm among stakeholders about the datasets provided by DSO. 89% of stakeholders found the network capacity map useful or very useful, while 86% found the DFES map useful or very useful.

These two datasets also had the highest average ratings, at 4.19 and 4.34 out of 5, respectively. However, the feedback received reflected varying levels of engagement and understanding across local authorities and organisations.

While some local authorities have integrated the data into their planning efforts, such as using the EV maps for installations, others were only just beginning to explore the resources available, though there were concerns about the accuracy of the information they had access to.

Challenges were also evident in accessing and interpreting the available data. Local authorities mentioned having to rely on consultants to understand and use the data effectively, highlighting a lack of in-house expertise. 52% of stakeholders stated that they were more confident using the datasets compared to this time last year, while 14% said they were either not confident at all or not confident using the datasets.

Local authorities also stated that they had resource constraints, and so emphasised the need to reinforce internal capabilities to make better use of the datasets. There was an understanding that the datasets were important, but local authorities commented that they often found themselves lacking the staff and resources to implement their plans in full.



Session 1: How to use our data continued

There were also concerns about the level of information available. For example, it was suggested that perhaps a more granular level of detail would be required in the data to support local authorities and organisations in developing their plans more effectively.

Stakeholders also highlighted opportunities for improvement. Feedback included suggestions for making the data more user friendly, particularly for non-technical users.

Interest was also expressed in peer collaboration, with a suggestion that local authorities that were further ahead in their energy plans could share best practices with those that had not made as much progress.

There was a suggestion that DSO could clearly set out the opportunities available at a particular phase or area, especially in those areas controlled by them.

There was an appreciation for the role that DSO's data and engagement efforts play in supporting their work. However, stakeholders emphasised the importance of continuous updates and improvements to the data's accuracy to help futureproof plans and achieve Net Zero targets.

Progress and challenges

- "I've used a couple of things. I was actually just looking at the EV map you mentioned in the presentation. I have found with other maps that the information on these doesn't match with what the engineers say when we get in touch. I think it's out of date, but it's a useful tool." **South Kesteven District Council**
- "The Welsh Government commissions consultants to look at various LAEPs, and my understanding is that the consultant would have been using your datasets to look at all the LAEPs. My understanding is that local councils don't have the ability to access and understand the datasets, so we need to know how to use them moving forwards and get more out of them." **Bridgend County Borough Council**
- "We've used some of the EV street facilities. We've used some mapping as we divest the overly expensive buildings under our authority. Strategically the information is going in the right direction. It's not just the data, it's the ability to engage with other stakeholders. Everybody has their own plans so the data about the queue will be useful. It doesn't tell us what the movement is and that's going to be difficult. It's going to be difficult to tease out stakeholder engagement. Energy storage too will impact on business development, especially in consideration of competition. We have to focus more on how we get a better understanding of how it looks in 5 and 10 years. Having a more granular vision of the future is important. We need a vision of a particular area, such as a local authority level, or at the level of towns or the urban environment, if we're going to have decentralised planning rather than just market-driven planning. Then we will need to build these plans up from a local authority area. Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be emerging so far." **Energy manager**
- "I think being able to look at what's coming in the pipeline in certain areas is very useful. Great dataset overall and I think it will be a great resource." **Wychavon Town Council**
- "When I shared the tool with colleagues, some were aware of using it in the past but for them, the previous systems weren't kept up to date and it became a bad experience. To bring them back into the fold, keeping everything up to date would really help. I think that as we aim for futureproofing to meet Net Zero in 2050, this data will be useful." **Neath Port Talbot Council**
- "It's having that relationship with somebody in the council that's leading on data. We're running out of money and running out of staff and it's feeling quite desperate. I want to know how we can bolster our capabilities moving forwards." **Somerset Council**
- "Using datasets is a skill on its own. There is a tacit understanding that it's on councils to produce the socioeconomic data and identify areas of need, but there's also a sense that due to the complexity of them, and the fact that they are outside of the capacity of local councils, the LAEPs might be a useful training seat for AI. You're looking at large-scale merging activities, and we could use AI to merge the socioeconomic data with the network information, to see what the training outcomes are and what there is to be done. I'm concerned about local councils' ability to do that work at the resource level and the lack of expertise to carry it out at the scale required." **The Schumacher Institute**
- "From a layperson's perspective, the data we get is presented by officers. If you are looking for it perhaps you won't be able to find it. The added complication in our county is that only half the county's data is here because it is split north and south between two DSOs. Do other areas have similar data maps?" **Ceredigion County Council**
- "I would agree it has not been very user friendly. It is kind of going round the houses to eventually find the connections stuff, and it's not user friendly when you get there either, so it would be good to improve that." **Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

Session 1: How to use our data

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | % | Avg |
|--|------------------------|-------|-----|-------------|
| How useful is the following to you, in your role? | | | | |
| Network capacity map | 1 Not useful at all | 2 | 5% | 4.19 |
| | 2 Not useful | 0 | 0% | |
| | 3 Neutral | 3 | 7% | |
| | 4 Useful | 21 | 49% | |
| | 5 Very useful | 17 | 40% | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 8 | | |
| EV capacity map | 1 Not useful at all | 2 | 5% | 4.16 |
| | 2 Not useful | 0 | 0% | |
| | 3 Neutral | 5 | 11% | |
| | 4 Useful | 19 | 43% | |
| | 5 Very useful | 18 | 41% | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 5 | | |
| DFES map | 1 Not useful at all | 1 | 2% | 4.34 |
| | 2 Not useful | 0 | 0% | |
| | 3 Neutral | 5 | 11% | |
| | 4 Useful | 15 | 34% | |
| | 5 Very useful | 23 | 52% | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 5 | | |

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | % | Avg |
|--|------------------------|-------|-----|-------------|
| How useful is the following to you, in your role? | | | | |
| Embedded capacity register | 1 Not useful at all | 2 | 7% | 3.89 |
| | 2 Not useful | 0 | 0% | |
| | 3 Neutral | 3 | 11% | |
| | 4 Useful | 17 | 61% | |
| | 5 Very useful | 6 | 21% | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 18 | | |
| Clearview register | 1 Not useful at all | 1 | 5% | 3.74 |
| | 2 Not useful | 0 | 0% | |
| | 3 Neutral | 4 | 21% | |
| | 4 Useful | 12 | 63% | |
| | 5 Very useful | 2 | 11% | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 28 | | |

| Poll Question | Average/5 |
|--|-------------|
| How useful is the following to you, in your role? | |
| DFES map | 4.34 |
| Network capacity map | 4.19 |
| EV capacity map | 4.16 |
| Embedded capacity register | 3.89 |
| Clearview register | 3.74 |

Session 1: How to use our data

| Poll Question | Count |
|---|-------|
| What additional datasets/information do you want DSO to publish? | |
| Renewable capacity | 3 |
| Centralising data in one part of the website rather than all over it | 1 |
| How to find the data | 1 |
| Renewable capacity and any restrictions on input to the grid (times of the day) | 1 |
| Wind energy – best target areas. Large-scale solar – best target areas | 1 |
| Total storage | 1 |
| Simple DUOs charges information | 1 |
| Link up with gas/utilities so we can see mix | 1 |
| LA breakdown for embedded capacity register | 1 |
| Make more publicly known how to access this data on the website, as it's really helpful but hard to access on the website | 1 |
| Wayfinding of how to find data | 1 |
| A 'one-stop shop' | 1 |
| Connections pipeline dashboard showing ECR data displayed at LA level | 1 |
| Constraints data | 1 |
| Industrial demand | 1 |
| Strategic opportunity areas for additional growth | 1 |
| High-resolution consumption data | 1 |
| How network capacity correlates with regional growth and housing plans and where the gaps in supply capacity are | 1 |
| Need for flexibility and capacity growth by area | 1 |
| Target areas for strategic partnership projects; e.g. flexibility | 1 |
| 11kV and LV mapping to make the placement of EV chargers more efficient | 1 |
| Are there future expected/planned limits to RE or storage in a given area? | 1 |
| Demand and supply data by technologies showing how these are trending with updates | 1 |
| Energy connection for dummies | 1 |
| Possible solutions | 1 |
| Details of air source heat pumps | 1 |
| Ideal locations for early/easy projects (capacity) | 1 |
| Renewable generation <50kW | 1 |
| Supply line locations | 1 |
| Rate of capacity being made available for decarbonisation delivery | 1 |
| Reliable data/tools without anomalies | 1 |
| I suppose, as much as possible really so we know as much as possible | 1 |
| How-to video guides | 1 |
| Planned upgrades and what is being done to smarten grid, either area-based or local level | 1 |
| Can't say till we start LAEP | 1 |
| Process flow chart – best practice (for EV) | 1 |
| Constraint data | 1 |
| Heat pump connectivity data | 1 |
| Secondary substation headroom | 1 |
| Cross-boundary data | 1 |
| Domestic demand | 1 |

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | % | Average |
|--|------------------------|-------|-----|-------------|
| If you are using the data, how confident are you in using the datasets compared to this time last year? | 1 Not confident at all | 2 | 7% | 3.30 |
| | 2 Not confident | 2 | 7% | |
| | 3 Neutral | 9 | 33% | |
| | 4 Confident | 14 | 52% | |
| | 5 Very confident | 0 | 0% | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 19 | | |

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | % | % | Average | Average |
|---|---------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-------------|-------------|
| How would you rate your understanding of how DSO helps facilitate local energy planning? | 1 No understanding at all | 2 | 5% | 10% | 3.05 | 2.78 |
| | 2 A little understanding | 9 | 23% | 36% | | |
| | 3 Some understanding | 18 | 46% | 29% | | |
| | 4 A lot of understanding | 5 | 13% | 16% | | |
| | 5 Full understanding | 5 | 13% | 9% | | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 2 | | | | |

Session 2: Updates on our work to date

Kathryn Thomas, Strategic Engagement Officer, and Peter Gaskin, DSO Engineer, led the second feedback session with a presentation on Network Development Plans (NDPs) and the Strategic Investment Process.

He explained how stakeholder feedback had been instrumental in shaping the company's plans. They emphasised how DSO is incorporating stakeholder feedback to shape NDPs and guide future investment decisions.

Cathy McClay then introduced the discussion session, providing participants with context on the development of Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs), which will be delivered by the newly formed National Energy System Operator (NESO).

Following this, Huw Lewis, Energy Delivery Manager at the Welsh Government, discussed the collaborative work with the 22 Welsh local authorities to plan energy requirements across four economic regions. He shared the challenges encountered and the measures taken to address them.

Participants were invited to share feedback on the progress of their Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs), discuss how DSO could better support these efforts, and consider the challenges and opportunities associated with the introduction of RESPs.

Progress of your LAEP over the last year

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | Results 2024 | Results 2023 | Avg 2024 | Avg 2023 |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-------|--------------|--------------|----------|----------|
| What stage are you at in your LAEP? | 1 Have not begun | 6 | 15% | 15% | 3.03* | 2.93 |
| | 2 Early planning | 10 | 24% | 31% | | |
| | 3 Made some progress | 2 | 5% | 17% | | |
| | 4 Made good progress | 1 | 2% | 20% | | |
| | 5 Almost complete | 11 | 27% | 17% | | |
| | - Complete* | 11 | 27% | | | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 5 | | | | |

*In 2024's workshop, a number of stakeholders reported having finished their LAEP planning, in the 'chat' function of the online platform. These stakeholders' votes have been recorded as "Complete". This was not the case in 2023.

The progress of Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) varied significantly across local authorities, with levels of engagement and advancement differing widely. During the electronic voting, 27% of stakeholders indicated their LAEP was nearly complete, while 15% had not yet started. Some local authorities, such as one stakeholder whose LAEP was only commissioned three weeks earlier, were still in the early stages of gathering stakeholder input and GIS data.

Resource constraints were cited as a major challenge for many authorities, with some reporting that they lacked a formal LAEP altogether.

Concerns were raised about disparities in resources across councils, with worries that only better-funded authorities would make progress, potentially leading to inequalities in regional development.

This was echoed by others, who noted that the need to collaborate with neighbouring authorities was causing delays and complications.

There was optimism about regional collaboration, with some stakeholders sharing positive experiences of working with regional energy teams.

While some authorities faced difficulties in initiating their LAEPs, others were making notable strides.

However, concerns were expressed regarding the uneven distribution of support, particularly in rural areas, where stakeholders were unsure whether the full benefits of LAEPs would be realised.

For example, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council had received cabinet approval for their LAEP, although they anticipated significant challenges in implementation.

Despite these challenges, stakeholders remain committed to moving their LAEPs forward.

Similarly, Ceredigion County Council had developed its LAEP but acknowledged the difficulties in securing funding to carry it out.

There was a shared understanding that while the process would be complex, collaboration with DSO and sharing information would be essential for success.

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | Results 2024 | Results 2023 |
|---|--|-------|--------------|--------------|
| Have you engaged with us before as part of your LAEP? | 1 Yes | 17 | 65% | 56% |
| | 2 No | 2 | 8% | 6% |
| | 3 I haven't but someone from my organisation has | 5 | 19% | 23% |
| | 4 Not relevant for my organisation | 2 | 8% | 12% |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 9 | | |

- "I'm concerned that only rich councils have the resources to move forward with their plans, and the impact that will have on regional development, because the transition needs to happen as an entire network where we feed into each other's plans and resources. The South West has similar geographic and financial restrictions to Wales, so maybe we should be working together to learn from them." **Somerset Council**
- "Effectively our local energy plan was commissioned three weeks ago so we've literally just got the ball rolling, currently collecting stakeholder information and GIS data." **Rushcliffe Borough Council**
- "It's definitely bidirectional. Information should find its way from local authorities, government, and projects back to the network, and that's already happening, but we probably need to discuss this in more detail. It should also go the other way around, though." **Regen**
- "Our LAEP development has gone relatively well, it has been a huge piece of work, problem now is delivery and funding it! As far as support from the DNOs, that has been great throughout, we've really developed an excellent relationship with both DNOs (DSO & SPEN)." **Ceredigion County Council**
- "We have a county-wide energy group which meets every six weeks. The work we've done at each district will have its own energy plan. It's in the early stages. The work will be done in flights so different groups will start at different times. The first starts in November." **Mansfield District Council**
- "We developed our plan working with City Science as consultants. It was signed off and presented as information only. It was presented to our local council as the plan that's been developed, but we're not the only stakeholder responsible. There are other public sector and industry bodies. It's a complex action plan, and we're at the early stages. Without access to significantly more finance we are not going to deliver this plan by 2050. It's an aspirational goal, but we are not going to deliver it as things currently stand. Hopefully that changes in the next 18 months." **Swansea Council**

Session 2: Updates on our work to date

Thoughts on DSO's support for LAEPs and suggested activities for further support

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | Results 2024 | Results 2023 | Avg 2024 | Avg 2023 |
|---|------------------------|-------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| How do you feel about the following statement? | | | | | | |
| "DSO currently provides me with sufficient support to enable me to develop my Local Area Energy Plan." | 1 Strongly disagree | 2 | 8% | 10% | 3.50 | 3.25 |
| | 2 Disagree | 2 | 8% | 24% | | |
| | 3 Neutral | 8 | 31% | 10% | | |
| | 4 Agree | 9 | 35% | 41% | | |
| | 5 Strongly agree | 5 | 19% | 14% | | |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 8 | | | | |

Stakeholders expressed overall satisfaction with the support received from the DSO team, especially appreciating the accessibility of representatives and the strong stakeholder engagement.

In a voting session, 65% of participants confirmed that they had previously engaged with DSO as part of their LAEP process, while 19% noted that although they personally had not, someone within their organisation had.

Some local authorities, however, pointed out gaps in the initial guidance and communication from DSO.

A stakeholder from a West Midlands council mentioned that one of their main challenges was understanding where to begin with the LAEP process, emphasizing the need for clearer guidance from the outset.

Despite these early challenges, the same stakeholder complimented the online workshop for its usefulness.

Several participants praised DSO's proactive approach and highlighted the significance of continued involvement in stakeholder meetings, noting these interactions as essential for LAEP progress.

A stakeholder from Somerset Council added that although DSO had been supportive, they believed local authorities should not bear the sole responsibility for delivering LAEPs.

Suggestions for improvement focused on the need for additional resources and expertise to aid in LAEP development and implementation.

A representative from Plymouth City Council noted their dependence on external bodies, due to a lack of in-house expertise and capacity to handle the complexities of LAEP development.

Collaboration and coordination among local authorities were also areas identified for improvement. Stakeholders suggested that DSO could help address regional challenges by facilitating engagement across councils and fostering a more strategic approach at the county level.

Regarding data and technical support, stakeholders called for more granular information and clearer guidance. They suggested that more detailed data at the local level would help to identify specific opportunities and challenges.

Additionally, stakeholders felt that ongoing technical support from DSO would be beneficial, especially concerning certain complex aspects of their energy strategies.

Overall, the feedback highlighted the importance of DSO continuing to provide clear guidance, technical expertise, and opportunities for collaboration to support LAEP development. Stakeholders stressed that the next phase of work would require more detailed planning, regular communication, and practical support to ensure that local authorities can effectively implement their energy plans.

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | Results |
|--|------------------------|-------|---------|
| Have you had contact with the dedicated Strategic Engagement Officer for your region? | 1 Yes | 27 | 82% |
| | 2 No | 2 | 6% |
| | 3 Not sure | 4 | 12% |
| | - Don't know/can't say | 2 | |

- "Probably the biggest problem we've had, as we are at the beginning of the curve, is knowing where to start and having the guidance. I've been to a few of these events, and it hasn't really started from basics, but today you have so that's great. For example, we didn't even know who our strategic contact person was until today." **Dudley Council**
- "I've had meetings with them and I know they are always at the end of an email ready to help." **West Northamptonshire Council**
- "The interactions have been so important. Stakeholder engagement is key for these activities." **Neath Port Talbot Council**
- "We have engaged with the engagement officer; we have a little group of three local authorities who meet quarterly to discuss infrastructure. It was decided that it would be better to engage with a more strategic countywide policy group. That hasn't happened yet, but that's how we've directed the engagement officer, to that group." **Bolsover District Council**
- "We are quite advanced in our local energy plan. Throughout the process one of the most positive outcomes has been the relationship we formed with the DSO, and that's a credit to Kathryn and her team, which made sure we got the most out of those meetings. We had eight local authorities all together, which was quite a lot to cover but it was a positive process." **Cardiff Capital Region**
- "I think there might be something around bringing all the districts together across the wider county. A more strategic countywide policy group would be beneficial." **Wyre Forest District Council**
- "We are being supported in our plans by the South West Energy Hub because we do not have capacity to take this on. It's not in the absence of loads of other stuff going on, it's just the lack of expertise in-house. We have a report from University of Exeter about how our vision translates with local access to heat pumps and other local renewable sources, and I'm hoping that stakeholder engagement is the golden nugget that helps us unlock this." **Plymouth City Council**
- "Devil is in the detail. We need a huge amount of additional data about supply and demand in specific areas. The LAEP will give you general demands but doesn't nail locations, best models etc., but without that phase it counts for nothing." **Cardiff Capital Region**

Session 2: Updates on our work to date

Challenges and opportunities with introducing the Regional Energy Strategic Plans

| Poll Question | Poll Option | Count | Results 2024 | Avg 2024 |
|--|-------------|-------|--------------|----------|
| How would you rate your level of understanding of RESPs? | 1 | 3 | 9% | 4.56 |
| | 2 | 3 | 9% | |
| | 3 | 6 | 18% | |
| | 4 | 2 | 6% | |
| | 5 | 8 | 24% | |
| | 6 | 6 | 18% | |
| | 7 | 4 | 12% | |
| | 8 | 2 | 6% | |
| | 9 | 0 | 0% | |
| | 10 | 0 | 0% | |

Stakeholders identified both opportunities and challenges in the introduction of Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs). Many welcomed the possibility of a clearer, more structured vision for energy planning.

It was noted that having a comprehensive strategy, alongside the necessary support, could provide much-needed clarity for local authorities in guiding their projects.

This optimism was reflected in a vote, where 36% of stakeholders rated their understanding of RESPs as higher than 5 out of 10.

One of the main concerns voiced by multiple local authorities was the difficulty in aligning local efforts with regional and national ambitions, especially when faced with shifting strategic objectives and timelines.

A representative from Somerset Council expressed frustration over the slow progress in delivering renewable energy projects, emphasizing that changing national targets made it challenging for

local authorities to meet their goals. Similarly, a representative from Teignbridge District Council underscored the need for better coordination across regions to prevent disparate outcomes.

Another prominent challenge was the need for clear and consistent communication across all levels of governance. Stakeholders pointed out that communication about the role of RESPs

must reach all relevant bodies, including district councils and local authorities, in a clear and coordinated manner.

There was also recognition of the potential for RESPs to drive investment and support future energy development. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of future modelling as a key tool for attracting funding. However, concerns arose regarding the lack of a clear methodology for integrating local and regional plans. Some stakeholders debated whether to wait for regional plans to be finalised or to move forward independently.

The diverse geographic needs and varying stages of development across different regions presented additional challenges. Regen noted that RESP planning must account for the complexities of coordinating gas and electricity systems in regions with vastly different characteristics.

Other stakeholders raised concerns about the potential impact of future housing growth targets on energy planning.

Despite these challenges, there was broad agreement that RESPs offer a critical opportunity to integrate local and regional energy planning more effectively. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of ongoing support, communication, and clear guidance from both national and regional bodies. Collaboration between local authorities and Distribution System Operators (DSOs) was seen as essential to overcoming obstacles and ensuring the successful implementation of RESPs.

Challenges and opportunities with introducing the Regional Energy Strategic Plans

- “Leading on to strategic planning, it’s one thing knowing where we are today and another thing how we get to 2050. As the goalposts are moving, it’s very difficult to make progress. We’re exasperated that it’s so slow to make progress on local energy plans. There’s a real frustration about the missing opportunity to deliver renewables more quickly. As the ambition is being driven from the top, it’s hard to know how to progress in line with that.” **Somerset Council**
- “I agree that the RESPs are critical, and it would be great to have an explanatory picture for those councils that are playing catchup with their plans. The future modelling is also a very important tool for us as a driver for funding in our local area, as it shows investors where capacity will be in the future.” **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**
- “I think there are a lot of challenges in that this is a new function, and it’s very geographically diverse. There’s also the need to plan for both gas and electricity. So, while it’s encouraging to see the actual entity come together, the realities and practicalities of it are where the challenges lie. The detailed design will be key in determining how it plays out and we’re going to need more insight as we move forward.” **Regen**
- “The synergy between the local and regional. Getting buy-in at a senior level is going to be challenging. I’m unfamiliar with how it works in England but if people are working to different targets it’s trying to align those to inform the regional plan.” **Swansea Council**
- “I’m wondering about future demand, particularly in terms of housing and development, and how that feeds into everything we’ve been discussing with the LAEPs. Given the government’s future growth targets, we’re going to be tasked with building hundreds of thousands of houses over the next few years, so understanding how that fits into the regional energy strategy is crucial.” **Leicester City Council**
- “We have three councils working together planning a new town, and that has a huge impact on energy, and these regional plans aren’t coming out till 2026. We are trying to get a local energy plan rather than regional right now. It’s the strategic thinking that we need to get right.” **Wychavon District Council**

Session 2: Q&A

The workshop concluded with a Q&A session where stakeholder could ask questions of a panel comprising: Ben Godfrey, Director of Distribution System Operator (DSO); Hue Lewis, Energy Delivery Manager (Welsh Government); Kieren Highman, RESP Manager (NESO); and Ray Arrell, Associate Director (Regen). The questions asked, along with a summary of the answers is shown below.

Question:

"We produce a Somerset area investment plan with Regen, which is a form of local area energy plan for our ambitions to meet net zero by 2030. And what we discovered is that national infrastructure is not going to enable us to put in renewables and battery storage within that timeframe.

So, with that, and the new government also having ambitions to have a net zero electric supply by 2030, what is going to be done to reduce those barriers more urgently, so we can meet net zero, for our ambitions by 2030?"

Answer:

It was explained that there has been a move towards greater coordination across the energy sector due to the new Labour government committing to sourcing clean power by 2030 and the recent formation of the National Energy System Operator (NESO).

It was added that clear governmental directives are anticipated and that greater collaboration between electricity networks and local authorities will also help to smooth this process.

Question:

"It is all to do with the clarity of structure and process or organisation and process, and some form of operational model would be really helpful, because then the local authorities, and indeed all of the actors in the chain, can recognise whether or not they've got a deficiency and what is indeed expected of them. What's the format? What's the protocol?"

You get so many different silos and people going off doing what they think is the right thing, and, in fact, that is because of the lack of central coordination, they're wasting effort and wasting money. So, it's really important, in my view, to have this clarity of organisation and process, even if it's not perfect.

Perfection is the enemy of the good in this case, so we need to get something there pretty damn quickly, so that people aren't flailing around doing their very best, but in not a coordinated way".

Answer:

In answer to this point, it was explained that collaboration is vital among multiple DSOs, DNOs local authorities, and other stakeholders to enhance regional energy strategic planning.

This collaborative approach is highlighted in the Ofgem consultation, which sets out the planning framework and suggests establishing regional strategies to avoid duplicating efforts by sharing and leveraging existing work across regions. DSO and other stakeholders are focused on aligning local housing plans, planning data, and development projects with broader regional energy strategies to integrate bottom-up analysis with top-down planning.

This process includes very local analysis, extending to low-voltage substation levels, which helps ensure that the outputs are aligned with broader strategic energy plans.

Question:

"The concern or the issue that I think we've got as a local authority is trying to understand the roles and responsibilities for delivering the new supply cables into the region from the sources of generation.

The concern is, from our perspective, that if the burden in terms of funding that is put onto the developers, a lot of the development sites will just be totally unviable financially; they won't happen. So, we will not meet the housing targets that we need. So, what is the sort of overarching strategic plan for that? I'll give you an example. If there's a transport authority, and we've got an area that we want to develop in terms of housing, we would put roads into that area and then developers would build onto it and connect to it.

I see a similar picture with the electricity supply network. And I just wonder how that's going to be taken forward and how we can get those conversations because we've got big sites that we want to get off the ground.

But basically, there isn't the power capacity coming into them".

Answer:

It was explained that the energy sector is shifting towards proactive planning to meet anticipated energy demand.

This strategy, adopted by DSOs, in partnership with local authorities, aims for forward-looking energy management rather than a reactive approach.

It was added that there has been a shift recently in how development costs are managed. These costs, which were once the responsibility of developers, are now increasingly shared among consumers.

It was highlighted that NESO is pioneering a new initiative to examine the broader energy system to integrate various energy vectors, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall energy system.

Question:

"There are imaginative solutions, I think, to be had with the wider use of battery energy storage systems to overcome short term constraints, not just buying flexibility in the market. I really think that needs a very strong focus".

Answer:

It was explained in answer to this point that the funding rules for infrastructure development changed in April 2023, allowing or greater financial allowances to be used for customer benefit.

The main focus is on ensuring that the right infrastructure is built in appropriate areas, similar to road construction for new developments which is part of ongoing network development plans. The importance of working with local authorities, sharing updates and receiving feedback to align with their spatial planning was stressed as this collaborative approach is critical to successfully meeting the 2030 target.

Appendix 1: Attendees

A total of 75 stakeholders attended the workshops, representing 65 organisations. The organisations represented across the workshops are shown below:

- A**
AECOM
- B**
Bath and North East Somerset Council
Baye House
Birmingham City Council
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Bolsover District Council
Bridgend County Borough Council
Bristol City Council
BT Internet
- C**
Cardiff Capital Region
Cardiff Council
Carmarthenshire County Council
Ceredigion County Council
Cheshire East Council
Chesterfield Borough Council
Cornwall Council
Coventry City Council
- D**
Derby City Council
Devon County Council
Dudley Council
- E**
East Lindsey District Council
Exeter City Council
- F**
Forest of Dean District Council
- H**
Holding the Space
- I**
IBM
- L**
Leicester City Council
Lincolnshire County Council
- M**
Mansfield District Council
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Mid Devon District Council
Milton Keynes City Council
- N**
Neath Port Talbot Council
Newport City Council
North Northamptonshire Council
North Somerset Council
North West Leicestershire District Council
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council
- P**
Plymouth City Council
- R**
Regen
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Rushcliffe Borough Council
- S**
Shropshire Council
Solihull Council
Somerset Council
South Gloucestershire Council
South Kesteven District Council
South West Devon Council
Staffordshire County Council
Stroud District Council
Swansea Council
- T**
Teignbridge District Council
Telford and Wrekin Council
Tewkesbury Borough Council
Torbay Council
Torfaen County Borough Council
- U**
UK Research and Innovation
- V**
Vale of Glamorgan Council
- W**
Warwick District Council
West Lindsey District Council
West Midlands Combined Authority
West Northamptonshire Council
Wiltshire Council
Wychavon District Council
Wychavon Town Council
Wyre Forest District Council

Appendix 2: Workshop feedback

| Poll Question | Answer choices | Count | Responses |
|---|-------------------------------|-------|-----------|
| Overall, did you find this workshop to be: | Not interesting at all | 0 | 0% |
| | Not that interesting | 0 | 0% |
| | Neutral | 1 | 14% |
| | Interesting | 4 | 57% |
| | Very interesting | 2 | 29% |

- “A very useful session that provided information/ details of information that will be useful across our local authority.”
- “Appreciate the willingness of DSO to put these workshops on. But 2.5 hrs is quite a commitment. Not sure it needed to be that long.”

| Poll Question | Answer choices | Count | Responses |
|---|--------------------------|-------|-----------|
| Did you feel you had sufficient opportunity to contribute to the discussion and ask questions? | Strongly disagree | 0 | 0% |
| | Disagree | 0 | 0% |
| | Neutral | 2 | 29% |
| | Agree | 2 | 29% |
| | Strongly agree | 3 | 43% |

- “The breakout sessions were helpful, however due to time available, did feel a bit rushed.”
- “Could do with more discussion time – had to be cut off a few times to allow everyone to contribute.”

| Poll Question | Answer choices | Count | Responses |
|--|--------------------------|-------|-----------|
| Did the range of topics discussed meet your expectations? | Strongly disagree | 0 | 0% |
| | Disagree | 1 | 14% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 0% |
| | Agree | 3 | 43% |
| | Strongly agree | 3 | 43% |

- “As far as I could tell (there was a lot going on at my end so I missed quite a bit) the topics were what I need to know”.
- “It would have been interesting to hear what role you anticipate local authorities to play at a RESP level/within new NESO-led planning. Wanted to be able to ask questions about the LAEP. Wasn't really time to do that. Felt like we were largely there to help DSO rather than the other way round. But appreciate all was with good intention.”

Appendix 2: Workshop feedback

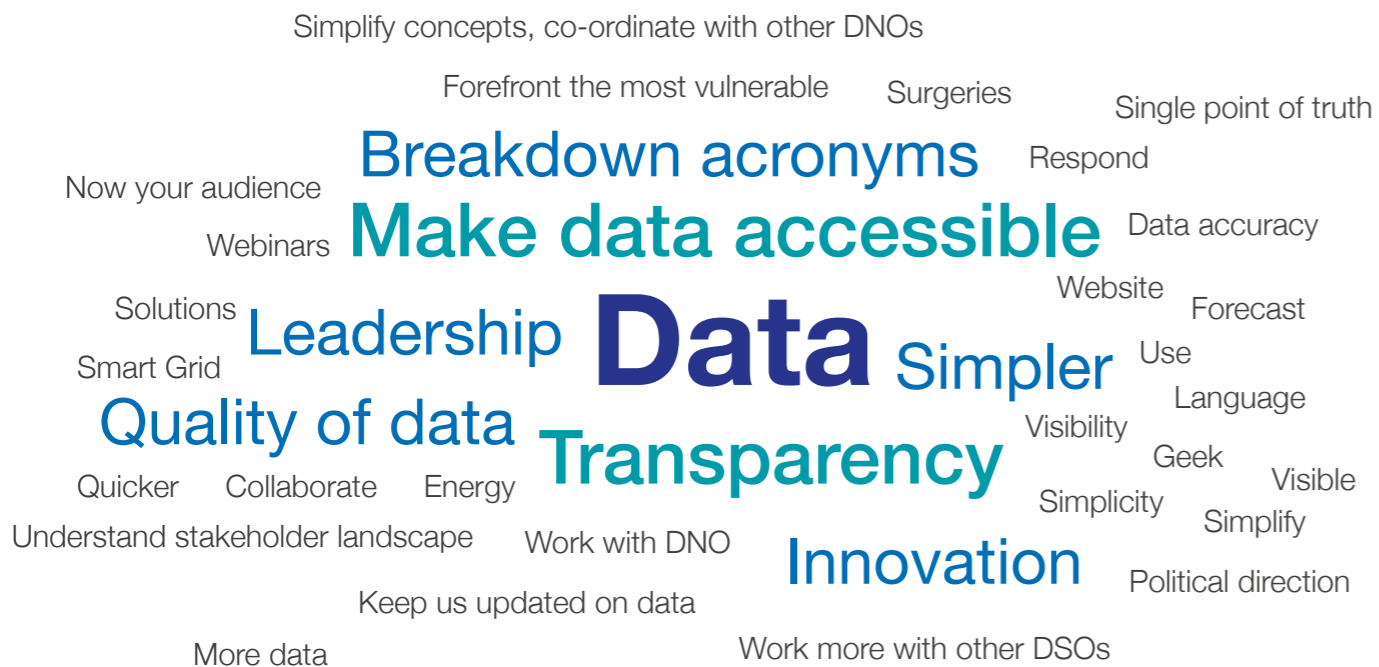
| Poll Question | Answer choices | Count | Responses |
|---|----------------|-------|-----------|
| What's your assessment of how the workshop was chaired and facilitated? | Very poor | 0 | 0% |
| | Poor | 0 | 0% |
| | Neutral | 0 | 0% |
| | Good | 2 | 29% |
| | Very good | 5 | 71% |

- “Chair of overall event plus breakout facilitator was very good and gave everyone a chance to be involved.”
- “Clear and concise. All [were] given [an] opportunity to chat.”

What could we do to improve future events like the one you have attended today?

- “Bit longer for breakout sessions so not so rushed.”
- “More time for discussion. Was trying to keep track of the questions and comments at the same time which was distracting. Some of the proposed questions in Slido I wanted to check as don't know if DSO is facilitating or one of a number of stakeholders engaged with by LAs to look to facilitate action on more rapidly decarbonising energy for our communities.”
- “Feedback of side comments! All very insightful.”

What additional datasets/information do you want DSO to publish?



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