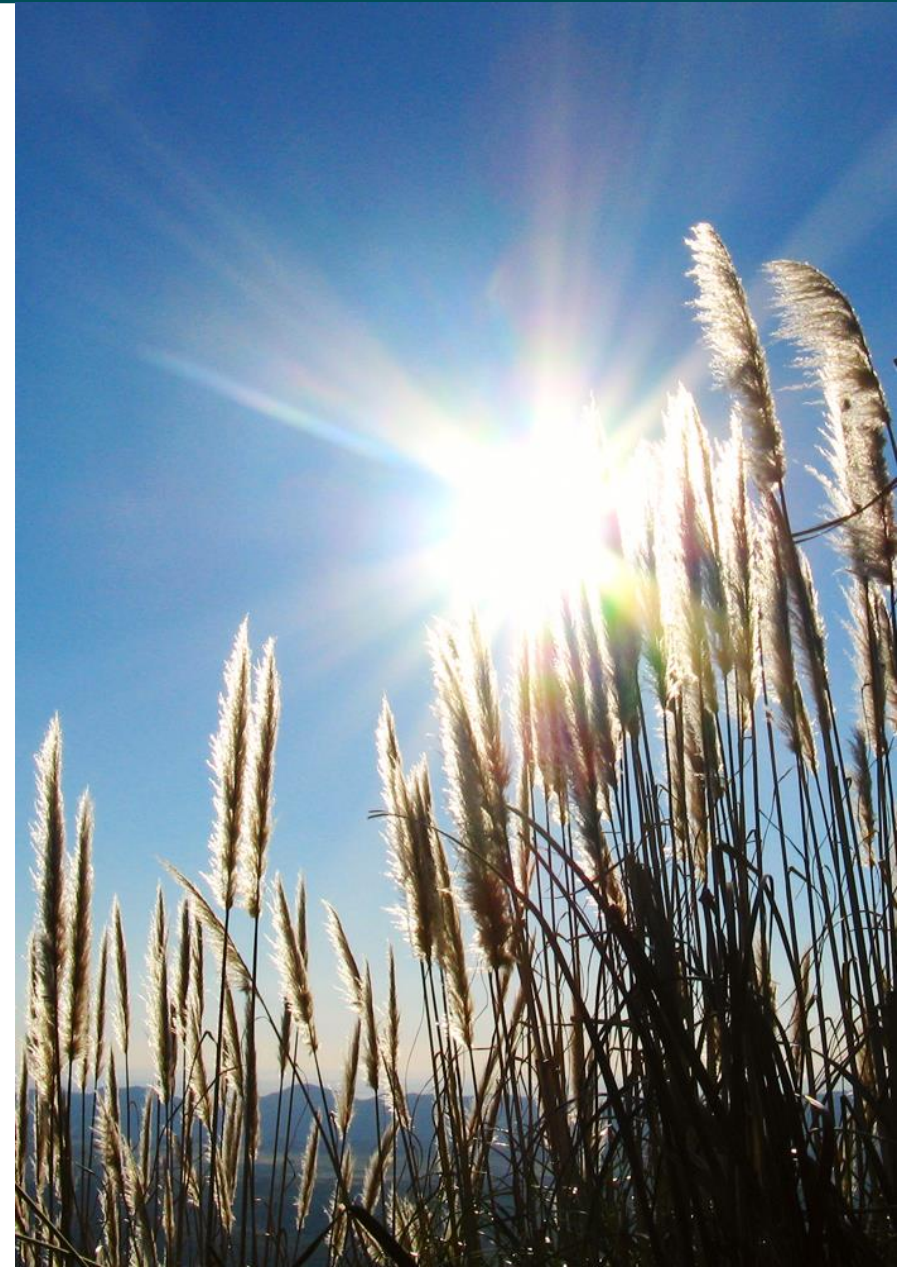


Stakeholder engagement report

Summary of feedback from focus groups and interviews on how network operators can support local net zero plans

October 2023

- Executive summary 3
- Overview of engagement 6
- Engagement results 11
- Recommendations 18
- Appendix 20



Rate how satisfied you are with the conversations that you are having with the energy networks where 1 is not satisfied and 10 is very satisfied

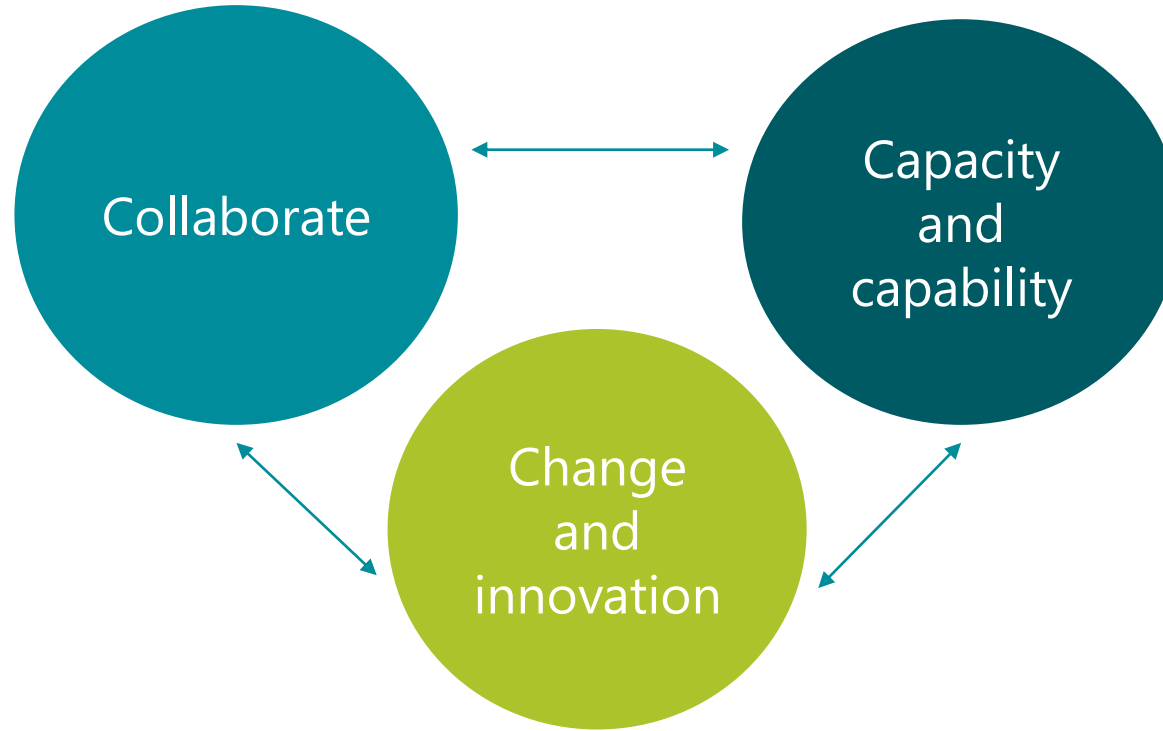
4.3

Conversations between networks and local authorities are improving but there is a way to go.

This Menti captured 11 local authority respondents – voting during the focus group on Wednesday 20th September.

There is a growing sense of collaboration and strengthened ties between local authorities and the networks.

We recognise that there's nothing more valuable than fostering these strong relationships and rapport – these discussions are shaping how local net zero develops.



Skills are being developed across both parties but there is still a need to share and support new skills and capability.

Local knowledge and technical expertise are needed to enhance the capabilities of both networks and local authorities. This includes effectively handling data, both input and output, and improving spatial analysis and visualisation.

Networks and local authorities are evolving together, and plans are subject to change over time. Ongoing and dynamic conversations and shared language is critically important to engagement moving forwards.

Networks need to understand local ambitions, targets and plans with varying levels of confidence, and it's equally important for local authorities to understand the challenges that networks face. This understanding will enable better alignment of local plans with the necessary infrastructure to make them a reality.

Areas to develop for ENA working group

Theme	Area of development or possible ENA commitment
Collaborate	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Data sharing. Developing standard data sharing agreements and draft contracts to be used in LAEPs and other processes between local authorities and electricity & gas networks, including at a low voltage level.2. Standardisation. Bringing together/coordinating/standardising data provision across DNOs and GDNs so datasets can be accessed and collated nationally. This has potential links to future Regional System Planner (RSP) role.
Capacity and capability	<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Signposting support and advice. Consider providing GIS expertise as a technical resource for local authorities, or providing tools that might replace the need to have GIS skills.4. Training and guides. There is a need for basic guides or potentially in-person training for local authorities and other public sector organisations to facilitate network conversations. An easy access language guide, key questions to ask, how to find the answers with data etc.5. Guides to regional investment. More detail on how local actors can influence network investment, building on the report's WHY, WHO and WHAT diagram and how LAEPs and other energy plans sit in these flows.
Change and innovation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Visualisation and digital tools. Further innovation is needed in visualisation and ability to interrogate network data. This would need to build on existing innovation projects.7. Inputting and integrating local information. Need to develop new processes around local authorities gathering and submitting local information to networks outside of connection requests, as well as networks receiving and integrating local data and information (also linked to RSP). (Linked to point 2 and 6 above.)








Overview of engagement

This report summarises outputs from the following:

- Three local authority or combined authority interviews
- Two 2-hour focus groups held on:
 - Tuesday 19 September:
 - 17 local authority representatives
 - Wednesday 20 September.
 - 17 local authority representatives

- This report outlines the results from interviews and focus groups held with local authorities during September 2023.
- The focus of the engagement was to explore the relationships between energy networks and local authorities.
- Participants were presented with a pre-read table that summarised the areas of interactions between local authorities and energy networks. This table was developed from the draft report produced by the ENA and approved by the working group.
- Participants were asked about how well the table captured the various roles and responsibilities, along with issues and challenges with those interactions.
- Interviews were transcribed. At the focus groups, notes were taken by Regen and information was captured via Mentimeter.
- The outputs have been organised in this report thematically based on the different conversations, supported by pertinent quotes or examples.
- To note that one further interview will be held to obtain feedback on this report and findings of the engagement.

The table of interactions shared with participants

Area of interaction	Local authorities' role	Network operators' role	ENA standardisation/ new process
1. Named contact 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and build relationships with local network operators. Attend regional engagements and provide feedback to network operators where possible, e.g. on DFES (for DNOs). 	Provide named contacts for local authorities at both: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A local level (project by project). A strategic level to inform on regional issues. 	
2. Open data 	Use network data to understand current and future projections for decarbonisation and reflect in local decision-making.	Provide open data and enabling tools (e.g. visualisation tools) for local authorities to access and understand network information including DFES (for DNOs).	Facilitate collaboration and whole system strategy development.
3. Connecting local projects/plans to the network 	Provide updated and specific information on plans or projects that require additional energy infrastructure, e.g. volumes, location, commissioning dates, funding status, stakeholder support, governance structure.	Be transparent about input requirements as well as outputs from network processes, including materiality and confidence assessment. Work iteratively with local authorities to provide network that supports their needs.	Work with and between electricity and gas systems and the Electricity System Operator and potential Regional System Planner.
4. Network input into local authority planning 	Engage early and involve network operators and whole system thinking in net zero planning, local plans or regional economic plans.	Respond to local authorities' enquiries regarding energy planning. Tailor resources and support to facilitate the development of net zero plans by different local authorities.	
5. Local authority planning input into strategic network investment 	Provide required input and work collaboratively with network operators to engage with Ofgem about network investment plans, including reopeners/uncertainly mechanisms and business plans.	Provide accessible and relatable information to local authorities on network processes. Work iteratively with local authorities, Ofgem and RSP to develop business and other investment plans, e.g. RIIO business plans.	

The local authority interviews were used to validate, verify and test the information in the table (see slide 8) and questions ahead of the focus groups. We asked the following questions to interview participants.

- What are the key interactions between local authorities and networks?
- What are the respective roles and responsibilities in that relationship?
- What do you need from the networks to better enable your local net zero planning processes?
- What do you need from the networks to better deliver your local net zero plans?
- What do you think the networks need from you as a local authority to better enable their infrastructure and investment planning?
- How does that relationship between local authorities and electricity networks work from your perspective at the moment – what do you find useful from the current process and what do you find challenging?
- How does that relationship between local authorities and gas networks work from your perspective at the moment – what do you find useful from the current process and what do you find challenging?
- What are the key differences between engaging with different networks?
- How – in your view – could engaging with the networks become a more consistent process?
- What are the key barriers or areas that might need standardisation or development.
- What role do you see the ENA having in maintaining a consistent or standard approach?

Interviews were with:

1. Martin Robertson, East Dunbartonshire Council
2. Andrew McMunnigall, Greater London Authority
3. Sean Owen, Greater Manchester Combined Authority.
4. Steve Keating, Pembrokeshire (TBH)

Focus group agenda and participants

Tues 19 Sept attendees:

- 17 local authority representatives

Wed 20 Sept attendees

- 17 local authority representatives

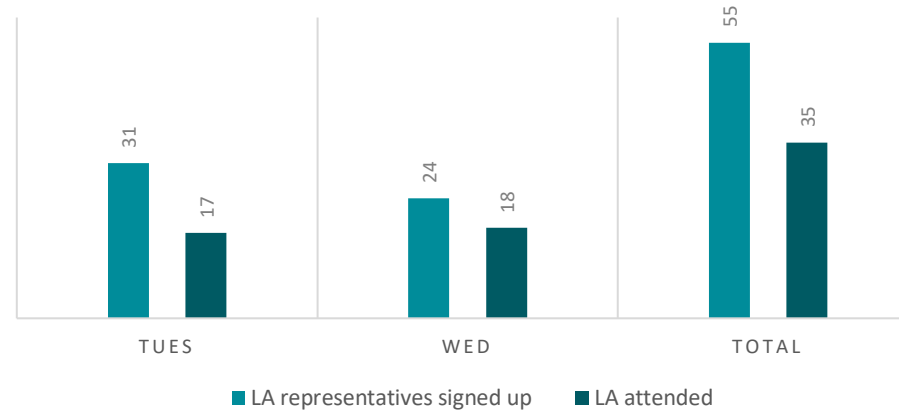
Speakers:

- Katie Privett, North Yorkshire LEP (Tues)
- Ei-Lyn Chia, GLA (Wed)

Network representatives:

- Lizzie Boyes – NPg
- Andrew Wainwright – SSEN
- Ben Faulkner – Cadent
- James Whiteford – ESO
- Ivan Bolotkov – ENW
- Colin Thomson – SGN
- Lynne McDonald – UKPN
- Venus Tam - UKPN

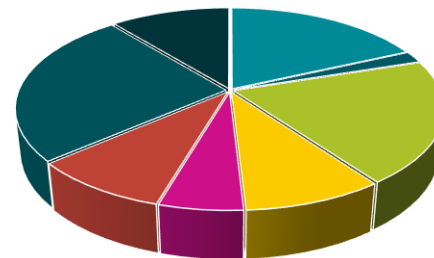
LOCAL AUTHORITY SIGN UPS VS. ATTENDANCE



There was a drop out rate of 36% across the two sessions.

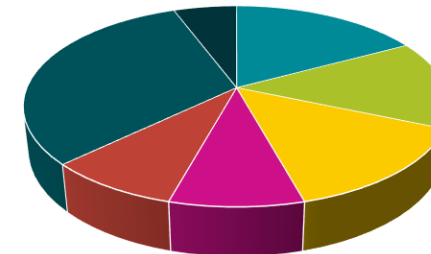
This suggests online event fatigue.

Focus group sign ups (55)



- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- North West
- Yorkshire and North East
- Midlands
- London and East of England
- South & South West
- South East

Attendees to focus groups (34)



- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- North West
- Yorkshire and North East
- Midlands
- London and East of England
- South & South West
- South East

There was a good locational spread of both sign ups and attendees.

However, there was a gap in Wales. This will be addressed with a further interview with Pembrokeshire.



Engagement results

Key themes of the discussion

The discussions followed three key areas



Discussion 1:
Ability to have a conversation



Discussion 2:
Sharing and using information



Discussion 3:
Having the right conversations

Other areas of feedback included:



Comments and additions to
the interaction table



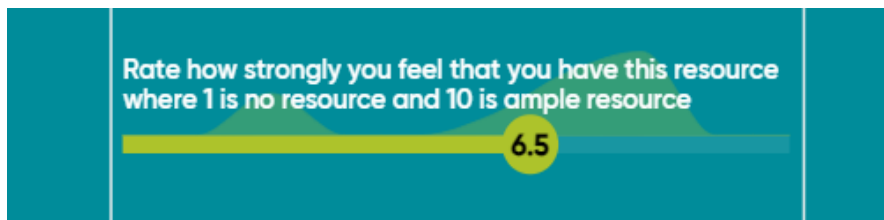
Experiences and feedback
on LAEPs

Yellow highlighted sections = areas for ENA working group

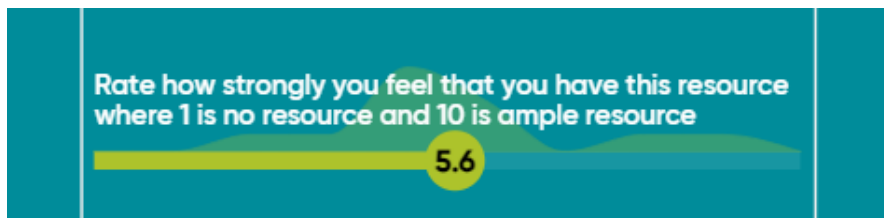
Discussion 1: Ability to have conversation

Participants were asked whether they felt they had the capacity and skills to be able to have a constructive conversation with their energy networks.

- There was a range of feeling on whether local authorities had the capability. Some felt they did, but others had very little experience or expertise. (see Menti responses).
- One local authority had developed a strategic energy partnership to address their skills and capacity gap and now felt they had the capacity available.
- Some local authorities don't necessarily know the questions that they need to be asking.
- They also recognised the language differences between the parties. Understanding of acronyms but also their understanding of terms such as 'whole system' is also different.
- Participants agreed that a key gap in skills was GIS skills and energy expertise to make use of the data that networks provide. **Support idea: Guides and training for local authorities on network engagement including for early-stage local authorities.**



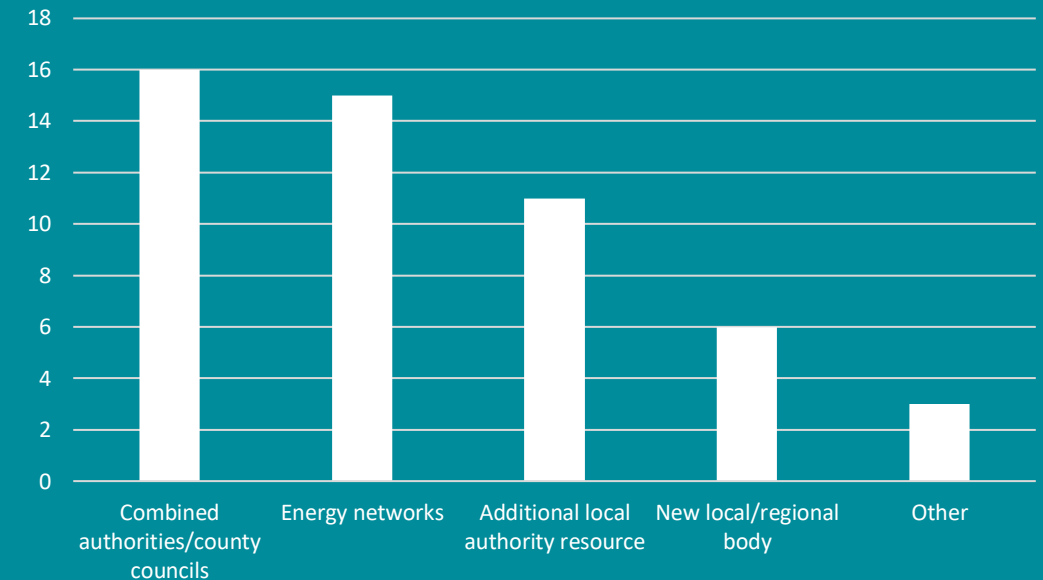
Tuesday session



Wednesday session

Interview quote: "The positive and collaborative approach of our DNO's team, demonstrated their commitment to optimising solutions and benefiting both the client and local authority. It's about looking beyond the project."

Who should help bridge that skills gap?



The graph shows collated responses and both the votes and discussion indicated that there were a range of actors that could help local authorities improve the capacity and skills to have energy conversations.

- A key role was with combined authorities and county councils (although noting county councils had fewer resources than combined authorities).
- Energy networks were seen as having a core role in helping local authorities, getting closer and being more proactive in their support.
- It was also recognised that local authorities should themselves be resourced to do this, but also that the budget and skills for this was hard to 'ring-fence' as it is not a statutory role.
- The establishment of a Regional System Planner function was welcomed, but it was noted responsibility also needs to sit with LAs and energy networks.

Discussion 2: sharing and using information

Participants discussed how network information was accessed by local authorities in the form of open data

One local authority raised that they wanted a consistent, national provision of data – so the access and answers are the same across licence areas. This was particularly an issue for those with more than one DNO.

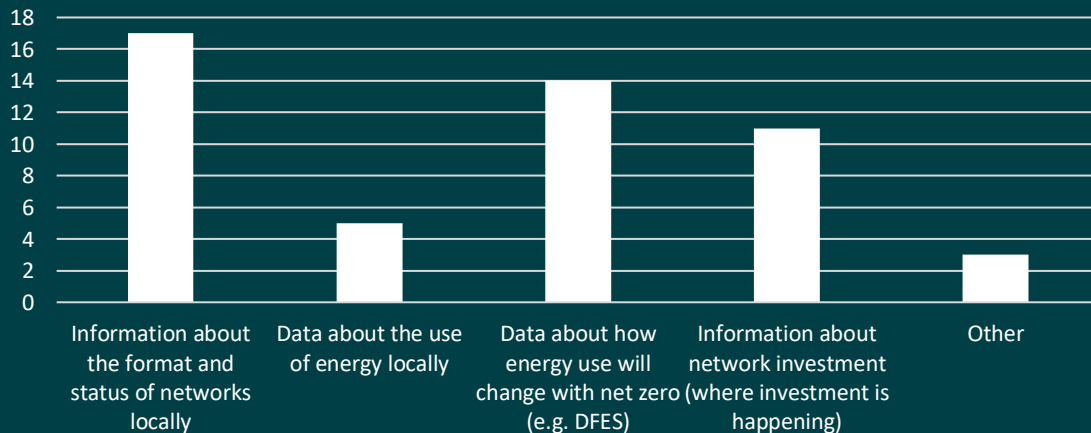
An interviewee noted that open data was valuable for decision-making, but the data needs to be accurate and up-to-date for effective planning. The constraint/electricity network heat maps were mentioned as often inaccurate.

It was noted that there was an obligation in network operators licence conditions, that data was easy to get hold of but also understandable. More could be done on this aspect.

Discussions and interviews mentioned the following data portals:

- One participant noted the UKPN Open Data Portal is helpful, and particularly the function of being able to incorporate the local authority's own data into it.
- GLA LAEP Portal which is looking to provide energy information consistently to the boroughs. They are exploring whether this portal could be 'two way' with information from the boroughs.

What data do you access from networks?



The second part of the discussion was about how networks collected and integrated information from local authorities into their plans and processes.

- The conversation noted that it was not clear how information should be submitted to networks and how it would be used if it was.
- One network noted they were not always ready or able to process the data offered by local authorities e.g. on energy efficiency.
- Information was mainly being provided project by project or via a connections process.
- One LEP area had sent a word document to their network including information on local large energy users, future plans and projects. This was informal and one off.
- Without a mandate for local authorities on net zero, only those that had done processes such as LAEPs and LHEEs would be able to influence their networks – this could cause greater disparity.

There was discussion that Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES) offered a process for feeding into the network's annual processes. However, feedback from the focus groups noted that:

- Awareness is low, with participants not aware for example that it was an annual process.
- DFES use in LAEPs is patchy. Though some noted they were trying to engage more with the process.
- Local authorities felt that DFES was an electricity network process and not reflecting LAs needs. They weren't aware of the independence of the process.
- One felt that DFES isn't really asking the right questions – e.g. networks were not interested in retrofit and only wanted very specific and certain answers. They also noted that they could not deal with uncertainty.
- DFES is not seen as a conversation that we value. Seen as top-down process and don't feel it reflects local ambitions. **Innovation area: Local authority submissions to networks**

Discussion 3: having the right conversations

The local authorities were asked whether they were having the right conversations with networks.

The results were spread and relatively low with an overall score of 4.3 (noting that this Menti question was asked only in the Southern and Wales session). This indicated that many felt their interactions could be improved.

- Some felt that many of their conversations were 'transactional' and not iterative. One attendee felt that their DNO had not 'got their head around net zero responsibilities'.
- Another felt that the networks were monopoly businesses and therefore had very different interests and responsibilities to local authorities.
- When asked if they were joining up conversations internally – the main answer was 'somewhat' indicating that more could be done to join up internally within local authorities.

'Brown field site problem'

It was felt that networks were not able to sufficiently reflect uncertainty that local authorities inevitably have in their plans. An example of a brown field site was raised in one of the interviews and used to prompt discussion in the focus groups.

Interview example: One local authority was having a conversation with the networks about redeveloping a brown field site. The DNO wanted to know what network capacity might be needed, but the local authority did not have foresight about which businesses may locate there. There was a 'chicken and egg' problem because the availability and size of the network connection would influence what businesses sited there.

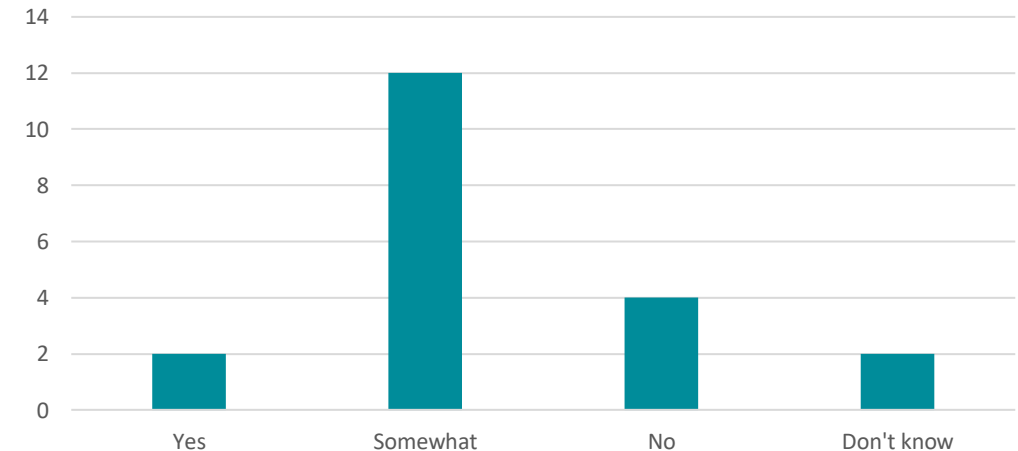
In the focus groups it was agreed that to solve the 'brown field site problem' both parties needed to reach a middle ground and it would require iterative conversations. This needed resource on both sides to reach this compromise.

It was recognised that early engagement was important in these situations to get the right outcomes.






Rate how satisfied you are with the conversations that you are having with the energy networks where 1 is not satisfied and 10 is very satisfied

4.3

Are LAs joined up internally on engaging networks?



Comments on interactions table

Area of interaction	Local authorities' role	Network operators' role	ENA standardisation/ new process
 Named contacts	Establish and build relationships with local network operators Attend regional engagements and provide feedback to network operators where possible e.g., on DFES (for DNOs)	Provide named contacts for local authorities at both: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A local level (project by project) 2. A strategic level to inform on regional issues 	
 Open data	Use network data to understand current and future projections for decarbonisation and reflect in local decision-making	Provide open data and enabling tools (e.g., visualisation tools) for local authorities to access and understand network information including DFES (for DNOs)	
 Connecting local projects/plans to the network	Provide updated and specific information on plans or projects that require additional energy infrastructure, e.g., volumes, location, commissioning dates, funding status, stakeholder support, governance structure	Be transparent about input requirements as well as outputs from network processes including materiality and confidence assessment. Work iteratively with local authorities to provide network that supports their needs	Facilitate collaboration and whole system strategy development. Work with and between electricity and gas systems and the Electricity System Operator and potential Regional System planner
 Network input into local authority planning	Engage early and involve network operators and whole system thinking in net zero planning, local plans or regional economic plans	Respond to local authorities' enquiries regarding energy planning. Tailor resources and support to facilitate the development of net zero plans by different local authorities	
 Local authority planning input into strategic network investment	Provide required input and work collaboratively with network operators to obtain Ofgem's sign off for network investment plans including reopensers/uncertainty mechanisms	Provide accessible and reliable information to local authorities on network processes. Work iteratively with local authorities, Ofgem and RSP to develop business and other investment plans	

The focus group participants and interviewees were broadly happy that the table reflected the key areas of interaction.

Comments on omissions included:

- One interviewee noted that the table should also reflect **Innovation** where they needed to work together with networks. This could be added potentially as a cross cutting theme.
- The focus group noted that there needed to be reflection that the local authority acted as a **broker and convenor of communities and other public sector organisations** in their areas and their net zero plans. This could be reflected as an extra line.
- Another noted that local authorities also engage with networks on **priority services and vulnerable customers**. This could be added as part of the broker role above.
- There was also a conversation about how timescales for network connection are too long and do not align with local authority short-term funding timescales. Having both sides understand and work to resolve this could be reflected in the row on Connecting local projects/plans to the network.

Presentations on LAEP processes were delivered by Katie Privett, North Yorkshire LEP on Tuesday and Ei-Lyn Chia, from GLA on Wednesday.

Discussion points from presentations included:

- The data sharing contract between DNO and GDN for the North Yorkshire work took a long time to discuss and agree. **Potential ENA work area.**
- There was benefit in using networks' existing citizen's panels as part of a LAEP process.
- In conducting a LAEP, local authorities needed different types of support from networks, including strategic lead (to attend meetings etc.) and technical support (to help provide and scrutinise data). Noting this could be a significant level of resource. **Potential ENA work area.**
- The GLA noted that working across boroughs was important to not miss opportunities for decarbonisation and this has implications in areas with more than one network, for example making sure data and processes can work across boundaries. **Potential ENA work area.**
- The GLA combined authority has taken on a role providing support and data to boroughs on net zero planning and delivery. They see this as a key role for a combined authority.

Focus group discussions on LAEPs. Areas of discussion about innovation areas included:

- Importance of interactive planning in LAEP to be able to change, flex and replan. The discussion noted the RESOP project in Scotland looking at visualisation of LHEES.
- There is currently availability of some data via tools that allow interaction but more needs to be done on this. **Innovation area: Visualisation and interrogation of net zero data.**
- A number of councils on the call were doing early stages of LAEPs as a more affordable step than the full process.
- Other local authorities were taking alternative approaches – such as strategic partnerships or different types of studies.
- Recognition that there needs to be more work in making energy plan outputs implementable – both the skills and knowledge in a local authority, as well as influencing the network and energy infrastructure.



Recommendations for further exploration

Areas to develop for ENA working group

Theme	Area of development or possible ENA commitment
Collaborate	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Data sharing. Developing standard data sharing agreements and draft contracts to be used in LAEPs and other processes between local authorities and electricity & gas networks, including at a low voltage level.2. Standardisation. Bringing together/coordinating/standardising data provision across DNOs and GDNs so datasets can be accessed and collated nationally. This has potential links to future Regional System Planner (RSP) role.
Capacity and capability	<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Signposting support and advice. Consider providing GIS expertise as a technical resource for local authorities, or providing tools that might replace the need to have GIS skills.4. Training and guides. There is a need for basic guides or potentially in-person training for local authorities and other public sector organisations to facilitate network conversations. An easy access language guide, key questions to ask, how to find the answers with data etc.5. Guides to regional investment. More detail on how local actors can influence network investment, building on the report's WHY, WHO and WHAT diagram and how LAEPs and other energy plans sit in these flows.
Change and innovation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Visualisation and digital tools. Further innovation is needed in visualisation and ability to interrogate network data. This would need to build on existing innovation projects.7. Inputting and integrating local information. Need to develop new processes around local authorities gathering and submitting local information to networks outside of connection requests, as well as networks receiving and integrating local data and information (also linked to RSP). (Linked to point 2 and 6 above.)



Appendix – detail on participants

Local authorities signed up and attended

Number	Tuesday 19 September 2023	UK region	Attended?
1	Aberdeen City Council	Scotland	Yes
2	Aberdeen City Council	Scotland	Yes
3	Bristol City Council	South West	Yes
4	Calderdale MBC	Yorkshire and North East	Yes
5	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council)	Scotland	Yes
6	Cumberland Council	North West	Yes
7	Cumberland Council	North West	Yes
8	Dundee City Council	Scotland	Yes
9	Newcastle City Council	Yorkshire and North East	Yes
10	Plymouth City Council	South West	Yes
11	Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	Yorkshire and North East	Yes
12	Stirling Council	Scotland	Yes
13	Stirling Council	Scotland	Yes
14	Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council	North West	Yes
15	Trafford council	North West	Yes
16	West Yorkshire Combined Authority	Yorkshire and North East	Yes
17	York & North Yorkshire Local Enterprise Partnership	Yorkshire and North East	Yes
18	Aberdeenshire Council	Scotland	No
19	Dunbartonshire (Assisting Success Limited)	Scotland	No
20	Belfast City Council	Northern Ireland	No
21	Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	North West	No
22	Cambridgeshire County Council	London and East of England	No
23	Climate Emergency West Cumbria	North West	No
24	Cumberland Council	North West	No
25	Dundee City Council	Scotland	No
31	Perth & Kinross Council	Scotland	No
32	Perth and Kinross Council	Scotland	No
33	South Ribble Borough Council	North West	No
34	Stockport Council	North West	No
35	Westminster City Council	London and East of England	No
36	Westmorland and Furness Council	North West	No
37	Wigan Council	North West	No

Number	Wednesday 20 September 2023	UK region	Attended?
1	Bath and North East Somerset Council	South and South West	Yes
2	BCP Council	South and South West	Yes
3	Cambridgeshire County Council	London and East of England	Yes
4	City of London Corporation	London and East of England	Yes
5	Cornwall Council	South and South West	Yes
6	Coventry City Council	Midlands	Yes
7	Devon County Council	South and South West	Yes
8	Essex County Council	South East	Yes
9	Forest of Dean Council	South and South West	Yes
10	Greater London Authority	London and East of England	Yes
11	Herefordshire Council	Midlands	Yes
12	Isle of Wight Council	South and South West	Yes
13	Nottingham City Council	Midlands	Yes
14	Somerset Council	South and South West	Yes
15	South Gloucester Council	South and South West	Yes
16	West Sussex County Council	South East	Yes
17	Wiltshire Council	South and South West	Yes
18	Bath and North East Somerset Council	South and South West	No
19	Brighton & Hove City Council	South East	No
21	Cornwall Council	South and South West	No
24	Oxfordshire County Council	South and South West	No
27	Somerset Council	South and South West	No
29	Surrey County Council	South East	No
30	Surrey County Council	South East	No

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Analysis and report by:	Poppy Maltby, head of cities and regions, Regen Mollie Atherton, local authority lead, Regen
Approved by:	Hazel Williams, associate director, Regen
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