



Emotionally  
Intelligent  
Communications

**WALES & WEST UTILITIES**

**GD3 BUSINESS PLANNING  
STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP**

**FEEDBACK REPORT**

**30 NOVEMBER 2023**



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## INTRODUCTION

On 30 November 2023, Wales & West Utilities (WWU) held a stakeholder workshop to start to understand stakeholders' high-level priorities for its upcoming GD3 Business Plan, serving as an initial step on the engagement journey for this plan. In particular, the workshop was seeking feedback on the company's proposed actions across four different themes that will act as key pillars to the Business Plan, ranging from carbon reduction to innovation funding.

The workshop was run in a hybrid format, hosted simultaneously in-person at the International Convention Centre Wales in Newport and remotely on Zoom. Each session consisted of a short presentation given by one or more WWU representatives, followed by facilitated group discussions at roundtables or in virtual breakout rooms where feedback was noted down by scribes. In addition, attendees were asked to provide feedback via the Slido online voting platform.

The event was divided into five sessions:

1. Providing a safe and reliable service
2. Sustainability and net zero
3. Protecting the environment
4. Supporting customers and communities
5. Delivering value for money: innovation and priorities

63 stakeholders attended, representing 49 organisations from a range of different stakeholder groups including charities, business groups and utilities. A significant number of the attendees already had experience of working in partnership with WWU on various initiatives, particularly charities and vulnerability groups.

WWU instructed EQ Communications, a specialist stakeholder engagement consultancy, to independently facilitate the event and to take notes of the comments made by stakeholders. This document summarises the feedback received. Every effort has been made to faithfully record the feedback given. To encourage candour and open debate, comments have not been ascribed to individuals. No differentiation has been made between feedback gathered from the virtual and in-person elements of the workshop.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A summary of the major themes of the feedback provided from each session and the results from the event feedback form are provided below.

### PROVIDING A SAFE AND RELIABLE SERVICE

- Most stakeholders supported WWU extending services beyond its licence obligations during carbon monoxide (CO) emergencies within the GD3 business plan, with 88% of Slido respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing with this proposed initiative.
- The proposed gas safety services were well received. Customer callbacks following CO emergencies and a one-stop emergency service were particularly favoured for their potential to streamline support. However, opinions were mixed around WWU's role in appliance repairs: some saw merit in emergency repairs, such as boiler fixes in winter, while others felt that it could be better to replace broken domestic fittings with eco-friendlier technology.
- Attendees were split in their views on who should be entitled to additional CO emergency services. Some argued for universal accessibility, while others suggested prioritisation based on income, age or benefits. At the same time, there was also an appetite for targeted support for different communities, with some calling for prioritisation of households based on vulnerability beyond just financial capability.
- There was division among participants over whether WWU should subcontract CO support services or train its own engineers to perform them. Many favoured contracting local engineers to support local economies and reduce WWU's workload. However, concerns were raised about logistical challenges and regulatory obligations. Alternatively, some argued for in-house service provision for efficiency and cost-effectiveness, suggesting a focus on broader environmental and safety issues.
- Stakeholders acknowledged the severity of gas theft and were inclined to support proactive measures to address it during the next business plan, with 79% of Slido voters agreeing or strongly agreeing to this proposal. Some felt that this was vital in light of safety and financial considerations, whereas others were concerned about an overly punitive approach taken towards customers who simply cannot afford their bills.

### SUSTAINABILITY AND NET ZERO

- Stakeholders agreed that WWU should take a key role in the transition to net zero and cleaner energy, with Slido voting suggesting that its role should focus in particular on 'collaboration', 'leadership' and 'transparency'. There were calls for deeper partnerships with local authorities in support of local energy plans and more work to address consumer confusion and apprehension about this transition.
- There was a general view that WWU's current operational targets to the early 2030s lack ambition, with opinions divided between independence from government directives and the benefits of

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government-led strategies. The readiness of the government for significant changes by 2030 was questioned, stressing the need for flexibility in adopting alternative energy solutions, such as air-source heat pumps.

- Attendees were concerned about the levels of ambition for using hydrogen and biomethane in their regions. 54% of Slido voters strongly disagreed or disagreed that there was high ambition for the former, while just 37% of voters indicated that there was high ambition for the latter. Concerns about consumer costs and practicality of transitioning to green gases were raised, emphasising the need for a compelling narrative from WWU to engage consumers.
- A preference emerged for targeting strategic or industrial sectors for the hydrogen roll-out, with concerns raised about the suitability of hydrogen for domestic use and the need for public education. The geographic distribution of hydrogen plants and existing gas networks was seen as key in determining feasibility, particularly in industrial applications.
- There was broad support for increasing biomethane capacity in WWU's next business plan, as it was seen as a practical and economically viable solution. However, others thought that technical challenges needed to be overcome for it to work as effectively as hoped, with others merely viewing it as a transitional solution within the wider hydrogen roll-out.

## PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

- Attendees were not hugely convinced that WWU was showing enough ambition on waste reduction, with just 31% of Slido voters agreeing that this was the case when asked.
- During discussions, stakeholders expressed a desire to see more innovative approaches taken within the waste management plan and were concerned about the practicality and scope of the proposed waste efficiency coordinator's role. The waste reduction approaches were thought to align with many organisations' plans, in light of corporate sustainability trends driving many organisations' planning.
- Participants did not feel that there was sufficient ambition in the company's carbon reduction plans, with 27% of respondents on Slido agreeing with this idea.
- While the principles of the Carbon Reduction Plan were praised, some questioned how feasible it would be to roll out transportation powered by clean fuel in the near future. At the same time, others stressed that the company must also address shrinkage when measuring business carbon. Synergies with other companies' strategies were identified, particularly around exploring clean transportation.
- Stakeholders took the view that WWU was not being ambitious enough in its natural capital plans, with 3% of Slido voters strongly agreeing or agreeing with this statement.
- A number of participants voiced worries that the current actions did not sufficiently cover the regional specificity of environmental needs and were not sufficiently transparent. Therefore, WWU was urged to undertake more collaborative partnership work and ensure that its calculations of the added value of its environmental improvements were meaningful in order to win customer buy-in and stave off accusations of greenwashing.

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## SUPPORTING CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES

- The majority of stakeholders (65%) agreed or strongly agreed that the services provided by WWU through the VCMA fund were sufficient for the next business plan during voting. There was similar endorsement for the ambition of these services, with 61% of Slido voters agreeing or strongly agreeing that there was enough ambition displayed through them.
- Stakeholders were divided on which should be the main areas of focus for VCMA funding for the next business plan, with suggestions ranging from fuel poverty vouchers and financial assistance to funding community care more widely. There were also numerous calls for a more tailored regional approach to allocating the fund to projects, in order to ensure that geographic and community specific needs are covered.
- Attendees suggested a wide array of areas where its services could add further value. These ranged from targeted efforts to address the needs of vulnerable rural residents to providing training on cleaner energy sources as part of efforts to support the transition towards a more sustainable network. In particular, there were strong calls for WWU to double down its efforts to get its support out to hard-to-reach communities.
- Participants put forward a number of potential partners for work to support its customers and communities, principally revolving around educational engagement initiatives, awareness-raising campaigns and fuel poverty support. Some championed localised partnership work while others advocated more comprehensive and holistic engagement strategies.

## DELIVERING VALUE FOR MONEY: INNOVATION

- Discussions highlighted a consensus on the need for innovation funding, particularly for projects advancing net zero goals and reducing energy consumption. There was particular support for innovations that directly benefited customers but did not heavily financially burden them. However, concerns were raised about an overemphasis on net zero projects potentially overshadowing other innovative areas, given the perceived innovation funding constraints in the GD2 business plan.
- The majority of stakeholders took the view that WWU should fund and deliver net zero-related activity as part of the next business plan, with 75% of Slido respondents indicating their endorsement of this during online voting. Suggested uses of this funding included collaborative work on vehicles powered by clean fuels and sustainable local energy planning strategies in coordination with other utilities and local government bodies.
- Attendees also supported the idea of rolling out innovation funding to projects unrelated to net zero, with splits in opinion on whether short- or long-term innovations solutions would be preferable.
- When invited to give feedback on their key themes for the next business plan, the main responses from stakeholders were “vulnerable customers” (11 mentions), “net zero” (9 mentions) and “collaboration” (8 mentions).
- Across the four themes put forward by WWU, “supporting customers and communities” was the only one where stakeholders unanimously supported prioritising all of the actions during these current

difficult economic times. Some attendees questioned whether money should be spent on at least one specific action within the other three themes.

- Stakeholders believed that actions under all four themes delivered good value for money. However, there was a general reluctance to accept bill increases to pay for them, due to high costs already affecting customers during the cost-of-living crisis. WWU was therefore urged to be smart and efficient in its spending across all four of these themes.

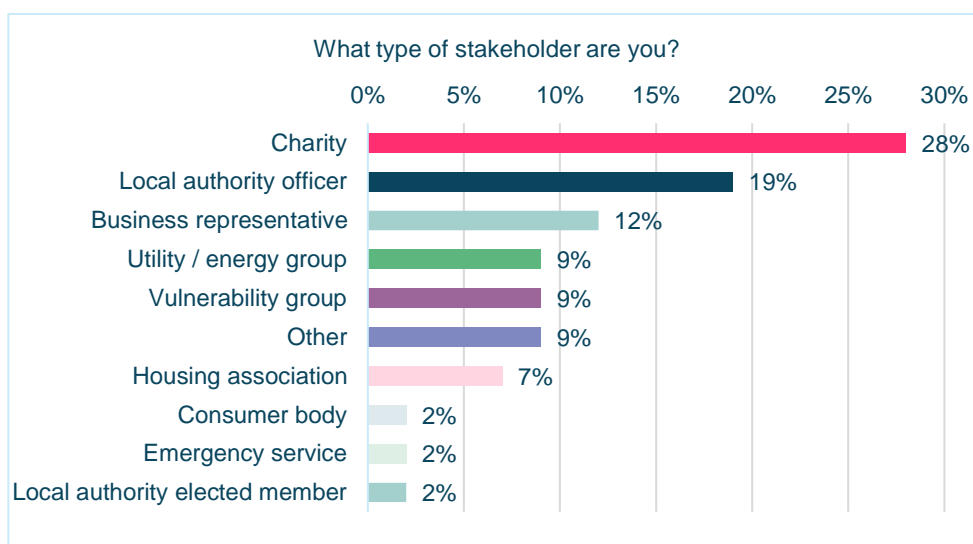
## WRITTEN FEEDBACK

After the workshop, stakeholders were asked to complete a short feedback form. Some of the key findings are shown below. A full breakdown of the feedback can be found in Appendix 1.

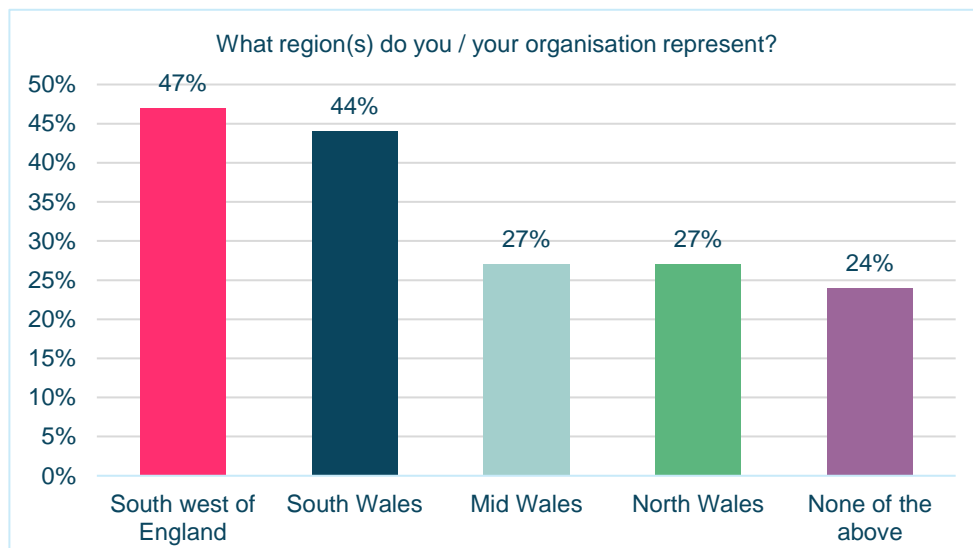
- 96% of attendees told us that they found the workshop either very interesting or interesting.
- 90% strongly agreed that they'd had an opportunity to make points and ask questions.
- 62% agreed and 21% strongly agreed that the right topics had been discussed on the day.
- 100% of attendees thought EQ Communications' facilitation was either very good or good.

## PARTICIPANTS

A total of 63 stakeholders participated in the workshop (online and in-person), representing 49 organisations. The most prominently represented stakeholder group was charities, which accounted for 28% of attendees. A full list of organisations that attended the workshop can be found in Appendix 1.



The most relevant region to attendees was the South West of England, as expressed by 47% of Slido voters. However, South Wales was also of nearly equal importance to them, with 44% of respondents stating that their organisation represents this region.



## SESSION ONE: PROVIDING A SAFE AND RELIABLE SERVICE

The opening presentation was delivered by Martin Cook (Head of Health and Safety) and focused on the first proposed theme of the GD3 business plan: 'Maintaining a safe and resilient network'. He first discussed WWU's gas safety initiatives, outlining the company's support to customers in the event of a mains and services gas emergency or a carbon monoxide emergency. Martin explained that WWU is only legally required to 'make [a property] safe' after a CO emergency, but noted that gas distribution networks (GDNs) are trialling more comprehensive training for engineers on CO emergencies to improve customer service. He then moved on to discussing theft of gas, explaining that while WWU does not currently proactively investigate it, new data and resources would enable the company to do so in future. This would be beneficial to customers as the money recovered from illegal users could be passed down to them through reductions in their portion of the bill.

Participants were then asked to introduce themselves and provide feedback on WWU's gas safety plans during the discussion session.

### INTRODUCTIONS AND KEY AREAS OF INTEREST

All discussions began with introductions. Attendees represented a broad range of stakeholder groups, including local authority members, housing associations and consumer bodies. A diverse range of areas of interest were expressed within the different groups, with charities and vulnerability groups particularly interested in fuel poverty and local authority officers keen to discuss sustainability. A significant number of the organisations represented already worked in partnership with WWU and wanted to see how they could



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further their efforts, while several others wanted to learn more about WWU's initial plans for GD3. These different interests and reasons for attending highlight the challenge ahead for WWU in creating policies that are both comprehensive and sensitive to the varied needs of different stakeholder groups.

### 1. Who do you represent and do you have any particular areas of interest for this event?

- “We’re a fuel poverty charity and deliver the measures programme for WWU. If a vulnerable person goes off gas, we send out a gas-safe engineer to assess the situation.” Charity
- “I’m chair of growth and regeneration for my council.” Local authority elected member
- “I work on the climate change team at Bristol City Council, so my interest is in net zero and sustainability.” Local authority officer
- “I chair a community council. I’m interested in the hydrogen aspect.” Local authority elected member
- “I’m asset manager of the housing association. Your input has been valuable on the vulnerability side for people living in our properties.” Housing association
- “I’m from a community interest company focused on providing affordable warmth for homes and alleviating fuel poverty in Wales. We deliver a lot on behalf of WWU.” Vulnerability group
- “I’m a chartered surveyor representing the Country Land and Business Association. We are a membership organisation for rural businesses, farmers and landowners.” Consumer body
- “I’m from Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service. We have partnerships with WWU to fund carbon monoxide detectors in the homes of vulnerable residents.” Emergency service
- “I’m from Carbon Capital Regions and represent the ten local authorities in South East Wales. I’m currently involved in local area energy planning and from March 2024 will also be working on strategic development planning.” Local authority officer
- “I’m an energy and benefits advisor. In Wales, a lot of homes are off-grid and not currently covered by any of your proposals. I don’t know what the provisions are for off-grid homes.” Consumer body

## GAS SAFETY

### *Customer support during CO emergencies that goes beyond WWU’s licence obligations*

There was support among the majority of stakeholders for WWU looking to deliver services beyond its licence obligations in relation to CO incidents within the GD3 business plan, with 33% on Slido strongly agreeing and 55% agreeing. The suggested potential services were seen as vital, as they prioritised customer safety and wellbeing, particularly among vulnerable groups. However, this support was not universal, with some expressing concerns about the potential legal and financial risks involved in this approach. This divergence of views underscored the complexity of balancing safety, financial viability and legal responsibilities in expanding gas distribution services.

Many participants took the view that addressing safety concerns was a critical aspect of GDN operations and were generally supportive of measures such as CO source checks. The idea of customer callbacks following such incidents was particularly favoured, as it was seen as a way to ensure ongoing support, especially for customers who might struggle with communication or understanding the issues at hand. The

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idea of WWU acting as a one-stop emergency service, as suggested by a business representative, resonated with many, highlighting the need for a streamlined approach to emergencies, especially given the general lack of public awareness about who to contact.

By contrast, there was a more nuanced view on WWU expanding into appliance repair. While some saw merit in doing so, particularly in emergencies such as boiler repairs in winter, others suggested that it might be better to consider installing eco-friendlier replacements as a more cost-effective and sustainable solution. The cost-of-living crisis was also acknowledged as a factor exacerbating this problem for WWU, with several attendees noting that people are neglecting appliance maintenance due to financial constraints. This raised the need for WWU to provide a fallback in emergencies, particularly for those struggling financially.

However, there were concerns about the financial implications of extending WWU's services. Some stakeholders, including those from a utility/energy group and local authority, raised questions about the legal and financial risks of WWU expanding its services. They pointed out that beyond the license obligations, any additional service might increase costs for all customers and pose legal challenges if repairs went wrong.

#### *Entitlement to the proposed CO support services*

During discussions, no clear consensus emerged on who should be entitled to these additional carbon monoxide emergency services. This underscores the complexity of balancing broad accessibility and targeted support for vulnerable groups.

There was a prevailing sentiment among charity representatives that the CO safety services should be universally accessible. They highlighted that CO can affect anyone, irrespective of their financial or health situation, with one suggesting a 'use it or lose it' policy for all customers, not just the vulnerable. However, while supportive of these services being broadly available, others felt that factors such as income levels, benefit levels and age should be used to prioritise who really is most in need of these resources. Despite this general support, concerns were raised about how a utilities company could justify increasing customer bills to pay for this service in the current economic climate, especially in the context of its large profits.

However, stakeholders from vulnerability groups argued that WWU should be looking to target communities with specific needs, such as the deaf, who were thought to be less likely to have the financial resources to afford home upgrades to avoid CO emergencies. Some suggested prioritising high-risk properties, such as older buildings or homes with pregnant women, as newer properties with updated infrastructure might not require immediate attention. Additionally, they pointed out the administrative costs and hurdles involved in means testing or assessment criteria, arguing that these could detract from the funds available for direct customer support.

Consumer bodies also largely echoed the sentiments of vulnerability groups, emphasising the importance of prioritising more vulnerable households, particularly those unable to navigate multiple agencies. They suggested that vulnerability should not be seen solely through the lens of financial capability but also through the ability to manage these complexities. The idea of starting with customers on the priority services register was proposed as a potential solution.

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*Who should deliver these CO support services?*

Attendees were also noticeably divided on whether WWU should subcontract these additional CO support services or train up their own engineers to deliver them, underscoring the need for a strategy that balances economic, logistical and social considerations.

Many were in favour of WWU contracting external tradespeople to undertake this work, with the use of local engineers emerging as a common ask. This was seen as a mutually beneficial approach: it would help to support local economies in WWU's operating area, would provide work to local residents during a difficult economic period and would relieve pressure on WWU. Therefore, it was viewed as a win-win, benefitting both parties.

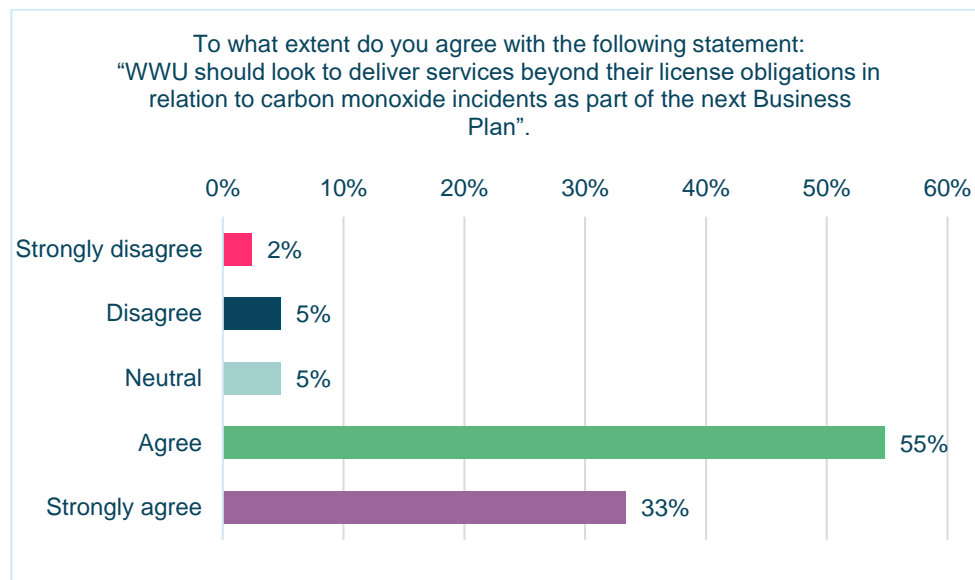
However, concerns were voiced about the logistical challenges posed by using third-party engineers. One attendee pointed out that WWU has specific regulatory obligations, such as attending emergencies within a two-hour window, which could be compromised if engineers are tasked with additional responsibilities such as operating on boilers. Another also mentioned the financial considerations of outsourcing this service rather than keeping it in-house, emphasising the need for a balance between GDN responsibilities and customer costs.

At the same time, others were strongly in favour of this service being carried out by WWU engineers and wanted to see more trained up to do so. There was a feeling that outsourcing would be a wasteful expenditure and that keeping the services in-house would make it possible to simultaneously perform other safety checks, thereby providing a more comprehensive service. This view was supported by suggestions to consider broader environmental and safety issues, such as carbon monoxide detection.

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## 2. Should we be funded to allow us to invest more into providing services beyond our license obligations to support customers? What do you think of the potential options listed below?

- Carry out the CO source checks (CMDDA1)?
- Carry out repairs to appliances?
- Customer callbacks following a carbon monoxide / gas safety incident?
- Provide additional support for identified customers following the callbacks?



- “Fixing someone’s cooker is great, but it’s better to replace it with an eco-friendlier appliance if that’s more cost effective.” Vulnerability group
- “WWU should have more funding to do this. I would absolutely welcome providing services beyond the current licence obligations.” Utility / energy group
- “If engineers identify a leak, there’s a responsibility to do some work, but I don’t think you should be fixing appliances. I know you do boiler repairs when you don’t want to leave individuals cold. But it’s debatable whether there should be long-term funding for fixing appliances.” Vulnerability group
- “Callbacks are a good idea, as not everyone’s very eloquent on the phone. If people have vulnerabilities, I think that’s a useful thing to see if things aren’t working.” Consumer body
- “People who are most affected won’t have the insight that we have now after receiving that presentation, even in terms of who you call in an emergency. A one-stop shop on who to reach out to in an emergency would be good.” Business representative
- “Safety is important, particularly for vulnerable residents. We have a lot of our own housing stock so it’s important for us to ensure that safety measures are implemented.” Local authority officer
- “People are cutting back and not maintaining appliances. It would be great to have a fallback if that results in an emergency for those people, ideally delivered by WWU.” Vulnerability group
- “Property disrepair has gotten worse over the last few years. General maintenance is so bad that insulation can’t be installed and the funding doesn’t cover repairing the property.” Vulnerability group

- “If there is a risk of CO exposure, then it’s financially worth researching. Customers would accept the extra cost if it meant living healthier and longer. It’s important to see the data on this and then carry out further research if necessary. The health issue of pregnant women is definitely a sign that we should be researching this.” Vulnerability group
- “WWU must focus on license obligations. Legally, if they fix it and it goes wrong, is that adding risk? If WWU are increasing their services, is that increasing cost for everyone else?” Utility/energy group
- “WWU should invest in free and independent advice that would assist customers in need.” Charity

### 3. Who should be entitled to those services?

#### ➤ Those that can’t afford to pay for a gas engineer?

#### ➤ Our most vulnerable customers?

#### ➤ All customers (whether they pay for the service or not)?

- “I’m concerned that you have a ‘use it or lose it’ allowance for this planned work which only applies to vulnerable customers. It should apply to all customers. Anyone can be vulnerable to CO.” Charity
- “Eco-related services should be means tested.” Charity
- “Vulnerable customers. We do activities called ‘beyond the meter’ where, if a customer is vulnerable, we’ll keep them on gas and help support fixing appliances. But how far do we go, because of competition law and the fact that there are local engineers who could do the work if they’re not in a vulnerable position. So the question is: who should do that?” Utility / energy group
- “In the deaf community, people tend to be poor and lack the resources to cover upgrades. We can mitigate this by identifying high-risk properties. An additional urgent factor would be if there were pregnant women inside the property.” Vulnerability group
- “More can be done, but it’s difficult in these times to know how much is enough.” Vulnerability group
- “Vulnerable households, who are less able to deal with talking to multiple agencies. So, for someone who is coordinating the safety aspects, these households should be the priority.” Consumer body
- “Means testing is one aspect, but it’s more about capability. People who are on the priority services register are already defined as vulnerable, so that may be your starting point. It’s not a question of money; they may have money but they’re unable to deal with multiple agencies.” Consumer body
- “The issue with means testing or some form of assessment criteria is that it adds an additional administration cost, reducing the amount that can be spent on the customer.” Vulnerability group
- “In an emergency, running through eligibility criteria before providing assistance is an unnecessary hurdle.” Local authority officer
- “Services should be for everyone. When justifying costs, it’s difficult when Welsh utilities have made millions in profit. For Welsh utilities to ask customers to pay for more services is difficult to justify. Customers will assume that the upgrade costs are included in the existing service and price.” Charity
- “Factors to consider for entitlement of services would include, but not be limited to, low income, disability benefit and age.” Charity

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#### 4. Who should we be working with to deliver such services?

➤ **Should we subcontract the services out to a third party?**

➤ **Should we train our engineers to deliver this?**

- “Engineers for WWU are probably already stretched and there’s a whole network of local installers, so utilise third parties. Everybody is struggling for work, so use them, rather than retraining engineers. Build the local economy and relieve pressure on WWU. It’s win-win.” Vulnerability group
- “As a regulated business, we’re obliged to attend within two hours. If our engineers take another two hours operating on boilers, that puts pressure on our licence obligations.” Utility / energy group
- “There’s a balance to be struck in that the supplier has a duty of care. The customer is paying the supplier, not just WWU. We only make up 18p of every pound in the bill.” Utility / energy group
- “Local tradesman and others would miss out if this was kept in-house. I wonder whether the solution should be more about working with local service providers rather than WWU taking it on. But, at the same time, there are vulnerable customers who need help there and then.” Business representative
- “Providing carbon monoxide detectors should be the suppliers’ responsibility.” Vulnerability group
- “Carbon monoxide detectors should be the householder’s responsibility, although I appreciate low-income households might struggle with that.” Environmental group
- “For rural areas, there may need to be subcontracting. The ideal situation would be to upskill the workforce so they can deliver the services themselves. WWU would need to identify at which level the service would be provided based on the needs of given areas.” Vulnerability group
- “WWU engineers can do this work. It would be a waste of money trying to find an external party and tendering.” Vulnerability group
- “Keep things in house. You can check safety at the same time.” Charity
- “I think there’s scope to look beyond CO just from boilers, such as log burning, as well as other quality issues. We’re looking at sensors that can pick up a wide range of issues. Could there be a single sensor and app where you could read everything in one place?” Local authority officer
- “A more joined-up approach would be welcome. We often deal with clients where there is an issue with the meter or supply, and they’re having to deal with the landlord, the distributor, the energy company etc. Who is responsible beyond your current legal responsibility? You need to work with the energy companies to come up with that vision.” Consumer body

#### **THEFT OF GAS**

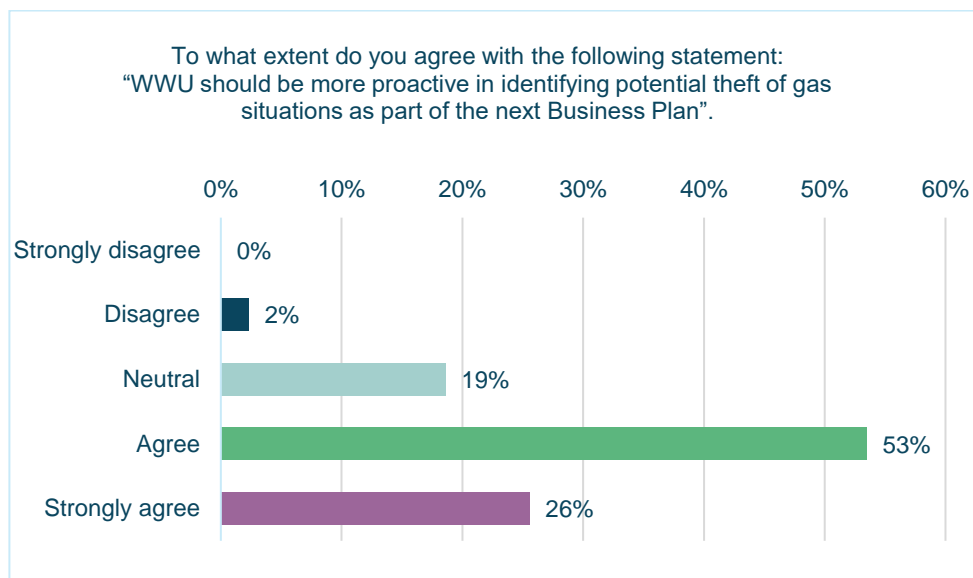
Participants acknowledged the complexity and severity of the challenge faced by WWU on theft of gas, with varied degrees of emphasis placed on safety, legality and the socio-economic factors involved. There was a clear trend in favour of WWU taking more proactive measures: 26% of Slido voters strongly agreed and 53% agreed to this suggestion. However, the divergence of perspectives within discussions underlined the multifaceted nature of the issue, encompassing legal, ethical, financial and humanitarian considerations.

During the discussion sessions, many highlighted the need for proactive measures in this area. Attendees discussed the dangers associated with bypassing gas meters, particularly inside homes, and stressed the importance of public awareness about the risks of these kinds of actions, including potential emergencies and explosions. However, some of the support for WWU rolling out a public awareness campaign was caveated, with one stakeholder apprehensive that such a campaign could inadvertently promote methods for bypassing meters. At the same time, others were impressed by the pilot use of AI to detect unusual usage patterns that may indicate gas theft, and urged WWU to explore this further.

Others supported WWU's intended approach on the grounds of the financial impact of gas theft on other customers. A number of representatives from vulnerability groups expressed their shock at the bill impact of this trend on others and suggested that the scale of the issue warranted more proactive measures. Other discussions around the financial implications of this approach revolved around responsibility for addressing gas theft, with opinions divided between those who saw this approach as a necessary investment and others who viewed it as an undue burden on law-abiding citizens.

By contrast, others – although in favour of more proactive work to address gas theft – pushed back slightly on taking an overly punitive approach to gas theft as a blanket tactic. One individual pointed to the range of reasons for stealing gas and distinguished between criminal activities, such as cannabis cultivation, and the plight of those unable to afford their heating bills. This perspective was shared by others, who would prefer WWU to focus on understanding and assisting those driven to theft by necessity and desperation, rather than pursuing prosecution.

## 5. How proactive should we be in identifying potential gas theft situations in our next business plan period?



- “How are people bypassing the meter? They are likely doing so inside the house, which makes it more dangerous and difficult to perform the modification.” Local authority elected member
- “Is there data on emergencies and explosions caused by meter bypass? This data should be made public.” Local authority elected member



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- “A campaign around safety could be useful, but don’t highlight the fact that people can do it. There’s a big difference between bypassing meters for growing cannabis and bypassing it because you can’t afford to heat your home.” Charity
  - “We work with vulnerable customers who seem to be using a lot less than they should be, and we don’t have the capacity to support in identifying theft. I want to know what you would do to help us find these customers that are perpetuating this theft of gas.” Utility / energy group
  - “We have to supply a CP12 certificate and report anything that seems suspicious, so others should be doing that too. We use AI to pull the information we need.” Housing association
  - “I’m surprised it’s not more proactive to be honest.” Business representative
  - “To law-abiding citizens, stealing something is abhorrent. Why should people get away with it? I think you guys really need to step up to deal with that.” Consumer body
  - “It’s incredibly dangerous so there should be some kind of responsibility, but understand the legal remit and who is going to fund it because ultimately, it’ll be billpayers that’ll be funding any proactive work.” Local authority officer
  - “Bringing in the use of AI is definitely sensible.” Business group representative
  - “I’d rather see more information about what theft of gas can lead to, rather than seeking out people who have done it for prosecution purposes. They may be doing it as they have nowhere else to turn, so it is worth engaging with those people.” Charity



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## SESSION TWO: DELIVERING AN ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE NETWORK: SUSTAINABILITY AND NET ZERO

The second presentation of the day was given by Matthew Hindle (Head of Net Zero and Sustainability) and focused on some of the actions underpinning the second proposed theme for WWU's business plan: delivering an environmentally sustainable network. He began by outlining the company's planned long-term strategy to support an affordable and secure transition to net zero for customers. With this in mind, he then took attendees through the important role of gas network infrastructure to support this transition and set out targets as far as 2050 to ready its assets and operations for low-carbon gases, such as hydrogen and biomethane. He also outlined WWU's efforts to test and more widely deploy domestic hydrogen heating systems and to connect more biomethane production sites in order to incorporate them more prominently in operations as part of the next business plan.

Stakeholders were then asked to provide feedback about the role that WWU should play in delivering net zero and how ambitious it should be in facilitating the roll-out of low-carbon gas systems more widely.

### NET ZERO AMBITIONS

#### WWU's role in delivering net zero

While there was a general consensus on the need for WWU to play a leading role in the transition to net zero and cleaner energy sources, opinions diverged on how it should pursue this agenda in practice. One key theme throughout discussions was the need for WWU to adopt a proactive and collaborative stance towards net zero to support the transition. However, there was also a strong feeling that it needs to be transparent in the steps it's taking to enable better partnership work. This was largely reflected in the Slido voting. When asked to indicate what WWU's role should be in helping the net zero drive, the most prominent replies among respondents were "collaboration" (7 mentions), "leading" (4 mentions), "proactive" (3 mentions), "transparency" (3 mentions) and "affordability" (3 mentions).

During discussions, there was a noticeable appetite for stronger collaboration with a range of different groups. There was a feeling that there was greater scope for WWU to adopt a more granular, proactive approach to local energy planning and work more closely with county councils to fulfil local residents' needs. By contrast, one stakeholder felt that electricity would play a far larger role in the drive to net zero than gas distribution, and thereby urged the company to work with electricity networks to ensure that its plans do not hinder the electrification of heat, given the immediate goal of carbon neutrality by 2030.

Many attendees took the view that WWU should harness its expertise to build a hydrogen knowledge base and make this publicly available in order to tackle customer mistrust towards clean gases as part of its efforts to deliver net zero. Representatives from utility and business organisations suggested that WWU should not only be a leader in advocating for net zero objectives, but should also actively contribute to building an evidence base for hydrogen. These stakeholders acknowledged the significant role of hydrogen,

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alongside other energy sources like wind, solar and biomethane, in a balanced approach to decarbonisation, but also underscored the importance of collaborative leadership, involving Ofgem and the government, to mitigate potential distrust when energy companies promote such transitions.

Providing clear public information was a key ask of other attendees, who emphasised the need for clarity and guidance in the face of consumer confusion about hydrogen's impact on existing infrastructure, such as boilers. This viewpoint intersected with a charity representative's concern about the need for education and greater transparency, given the apprehension among homeowners in hydrogen test areas.

Several stakeholders also took the view that WWU should ensure a just transition to net zero for all of its customers. Questions were raised about the costs of the green domestic technology involved and how customers could be part of this transition if they did not have the financial resources available. This pointed to a desire to see inclusivity as an important factor to consider in WWU's sustainability plans.

### **Operational ambitions up to the early 2030s**

There was general consensus that the current targets lacked sufficient ambition, and that WWU should proactively lead the charge, independent of government directives. This view reflected a broader sentiment that WWU must not be constrained by government timelines or policies, especially considering the likely impending change in central government in the next 12 months. However, this view was not unanimous, with some taking the view that government-led strategies and funding would be hugely beneficial. The differing perspectives emerging from the discussions reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of energy transition, where economic, technological and regional factors all play critical roles.

Some expressed reservations about the government's readiness to implement significant changes by 2030 and therefore felt that cross-sector work was needed in order to take a flexible approach that incorporated a range of alternative green solutions, such as air-source heat pumps if they proved more feasible than hydrogen. This pragmatic approach to the energy transition underscored local authority commitments to precise targets and adaptability in the face of evolving technologies and government policies. Building on this idea, housing associations noted that the current net zero policy limbo posed major issues for them, as they found themselves fitting various types of energy systems, including hydrogen-ready boilers and air-source heat pumps, while awaiting clear government directives. Therefore, WWU was urged to promote hydrogen through collaborative evidence building, thereby influencing policy decisions.

By contrast, some took the view that the government should be taking the lead on net zero, while there were also calls for a clear government strategy and funding. Some stakeholders, including local authority officers and business representatives, asserted that energy policy and infrastructure should be centrally managed due to their national significance, while others suggested that transport-emissions mandates should also be primarily handled by central government.

At the same time, local authority officers and business representatives, in particular, stressed that WWU should be exploring localised solutions and tailoring its energy strategies to specific regional needs and technological advancements. This approach was seen as essential for adapting to the rapidly evolving landscape of energy technologies over the next decade. Despite these changes, others noted that heavy

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industries in regions like South Wales would continue to be reliant upon gas for certain processes, regardless of any decisions around heating decisions.

Finally, others highlighted the pressing issue of energy affordability, noting the recent regressions in living standards and the increasing reliance on food banks for many customers. They stressed that end users, who are primarily concerned with bill affordability, would be indifferent to the type of energy used for heating their homes as long as it remained cost effective. This perspective brought to the forefront the need for educating end users about energy transitions while ensuring that such transitions remain economically accessible.

### **Hydrogen and biomethane connections**

Stakeholders provided a range of perspectives on the demand for hydrogen and biomethane connections, focusing on needs, challenges and the pace of change in adopting these green gases. The data provided from Slido voting suggests that they did not think there was a great deal of ambition for using hydrogen or biomethane in their area. 16% strongly disagreed and 38% disagreed that there was high ambition for using hydrogen in their region, with just 19% agreeing and 9% strongly agreeing. The picture was slightly better for biomethane, but still not hugely convincing: 38% of voters indicated that they were neutral as to whether there was a high ambition for its use in their region, compared to 8% strongly disagreeing, 17% disagreeing, 29% agreeing and 8% strongly agreeing. Discussions underscored the complexity of transitioning to green gas solutions, reflecting the diverse stakeholder interests and the multifaceted nature of the challenge ahead for WWU in this area.

Representatives from vulnerability groups and charities were particularly concerned with consumer costs and the practicality of transitioning to green gases for their clients. Therefore, they emphasised the need for WWU to adopt a compelling narrative encompassing innovation, environmental benefits and cost savings in order to engage consumers and increase demand. These stakeholders expressed concerns about potential unexpected costs for customers in the short- and medium-term, and championed the proposed blended hydrogen target for the next business plan in order to avoid extensive and disruptive infrastructure changes, as well as extra bill costs.

Others noted how regional strategies and sustainable sourcing may influence the demand for industrial hydrogen. WWU's clustering strategy was generally endorsed, but it was felt that it should be tailored to fit different areas' needs, such as the electrification plans in Bristol and the hydrogen schemes in Port Talbot, indicating that industry demand will drive a lot of decisions. Others emphasised the importance of obtaining sustainable sources of biomethane, with calls for WWU to prioritise biowaste over crop-derived methane due to environmental concerns.

Finally, questions were raised about the feasibility and scale of hydrogen production, with some viewing the government's targets as insufficient for resilient domestic heating. Therefore, they anticipated the need for subsidised hydrogen production and the development of a liquid hydrogen market. At the same time, a developer also raised concerns about the resource intensity of replacing fossil energy with green hydrogen,



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because we would need about 14 new nuclear reactors. Hydrogen will definitely play its part, especially in heavy industry. We need a real balanced approach and hydrogen is one vector along with wind, solar and biomethane.” Utility / energy group

- “Take it further than just thought leadership. WWU should be (and are) involved in innovative projects to build the hydrogen evidence base. They should continue this.” Business representative
- “My major concern would be if it’s a cost to an individual at the end of the day. We’re putting in new technology and systems, but what does it cost the individual at the end of the day? What happens if they actually can’t afford it?” Vulnerability group
- “In terms of WWU’s position, they own the infrastructure, so they’ve got to be a market leader and pursue net zero and be involved. It’s a no brainer.” Vulnerability group
- “The safety of existing installations clearly needs to be looked at in terms of what the implications of this is. However, you only have to look at the rapid development of hydrogen fuel cells for cars, trucks, trains and even planes to try and prove that hydrogen fuel cells are as safe as anything else.” Parish councillor
- “They need to have a role in terms of giving people confidence to undertake a blended gas network before you go to a full gas network. And that very much is the role that people have got to do, which is to tell them that it is safe, and therefore you will reassure people to embrace it.” Parish councillor
- “There’s a need for a more granular approach, with communications with county councils. That seems to be driven by the public sector. It would be nice to see more of a push from utilities companies in terms of plans and see more of a proactive approach from them around local energy plans.” Local authority officer
- “WWU should be highly involved in decarbonising the energy system. The fact Ofgem is looking to include electric and gas in their FSO suggests that WWU as a gas network operator needs to be completely involved and have ambitious targets.” Group representative
- “WWU should take a leadership role but with a view that it’s a collaborative approach in terms of Ofgem and the government. There’s a risk that when it is an energy company that is promoting it, there can be distrust.” Utility/energy group
- “For homeowners, households and developers to know how to prepare for the infrastructure change with regards to hydrogen and biomethane is something that will prevent problems further down the line.” Local authority officer

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## 2. How do you think WWU should be operating by the early 2030s? How ambitious should we be?

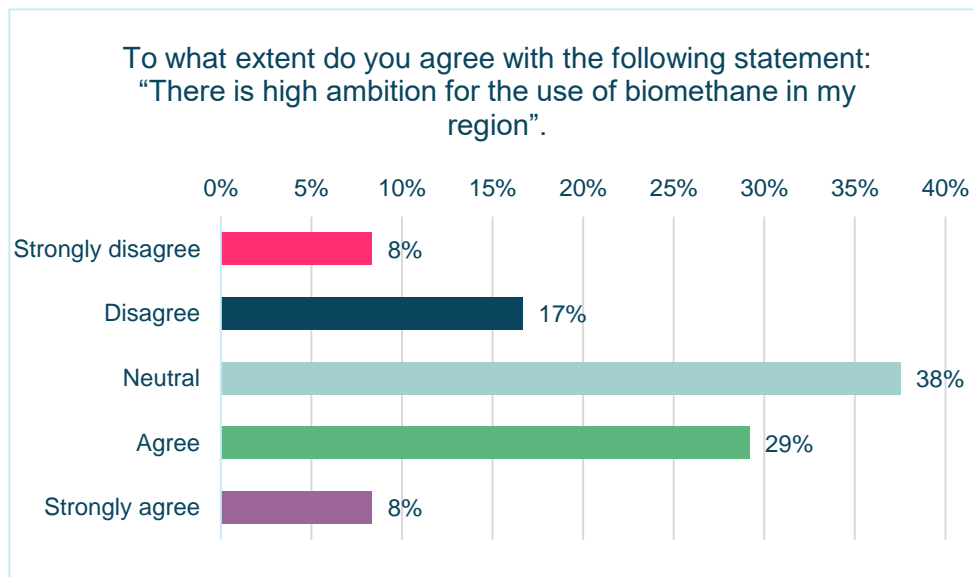
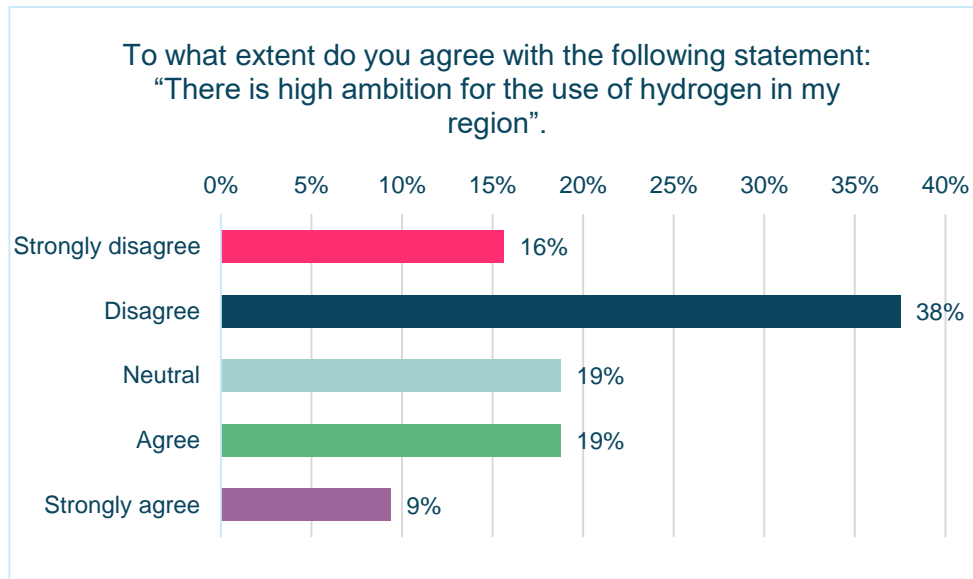
- Should we be delivering hydrogen to different customer types / delivering hydrogen to industries in cluster areas / feasibility plans in place / none of the above?
- Should we be driving a significant number of biomethane connections?
- How should this be led? Should the UK government be doing this rather than the local area energy plan?

- “The 2050 net zero target is not ambitious enough by far. WWU must be more ambitious and not be led by government.” Local authority elected member
- “Work with local authorities. We’re very exacting in terms of targets. Hydrogen may be in our plans, but the issue is the government isn’t ready to deliver anything by 2030. If what is deliverable happens to be air-source heat pumps, so be it.” Local authority elected member
- “People are mostly interested in what they can afford. At the moment, it’s like we’ve gone back in time in terms of living standards, energy poverty and the use of food banks. They wouldn’t notice the difference in switching around a boiler as long as they’re getting heat out of it. It’s about educating the end user.” Housing association
- “You guys are almost on a hiding to nothing as you’re mandated by the government to reduce emissions, but in many ways transport emissions are more important. This should all be done via central government.” Vulnerability group
- “I think it should be more localised, with different solutions for different places. We need to see how technologies emerge over the next ten years and adapt our strategies accordingly.” Local authority officer
- “From a business perspective, if WWU want to continue to exist in future then they’ve got to move with the times. If they don’t, then we all suffer. But WWU ceases to exist because it doesn’t have a reason to be there.” Business representative
- “We’re in limbo. We’ve got the likes of Worcester churning out hydrogen-ready boilers which we’re fitting. We’re also fitting air-source heat pumps, but we’re still doing our replacement boilers with gas, so we’re dependent on the government decision.” Housing association
- “The safety evidence can continue to build while waiting for a policy decision, winning the hearts and minds. It’s about the use-case for hydrogen. WWU can do a lot to really promote hydrogen and work across industry. Building evidence in a collaborative way is key.” Utility / energy group
- “There are other uses around South Wales, particularly heavy industry, who won’t be able to do some of their processes without gas. Regardless of the decision on heating, we will still need gas.” Business representative
- “We need government strategy and direction. The key to it is funding.” Local authority officer
- “It should be government led. It’s national policy, national infrastructure and of importance to the whole country, so it has to be central government that creates that policy.” Business representative

### 3. How much demand is there for hydrogen and biomethane connections?

➤ What are your needs or challenges that will impact the pace for change?

➤ Are you aware of people who want to connect green gas onto the network?



- “We work a lot with Cadent. I’m always on the side of the consumer, and cost always comes up in terms of the boiler itself and the conversion to hydrogen. As a benefits and money advisor, I’m always aware of this. We must mitigate the fear families have.” Vulnerability group
- “If you can tell a story to people that captures innovation, environmental benefits and cost savings, that will help as a total package.” Vulnerability group
- “The key government focus is air-source heat pumps because this is what’s available. Hydrogen is behind because it’s such a big thing.” Charity
- “Customers will get X money for something, and they end up needing more, including secondary heating. We need big-picture thinking where we don’t silo things off to the GDNs and beyond. The consumers will suffer the most.” Charity



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- “For me it would be crazy not to use the asset that’s in the ground. There’s a naivety of saying ‘just switch to electric and dig up all the roads again’. I think it’ll be a blend. When you go beyond the meter, it’s worrying what could happen downstream of this in people’s homes.” Vulnerability group
  - “If we think short/medium term, it seems like WWU are doing this clustering. In Bristol, electrification is more viable so that could be a cluster, and then somewhere like Port Talbot would be a different cluster of hydrogen. Industry will be the driver of this. For a RIIO period you might not be looking 100 miles from Port Talbot, but that can be done in the next period.” Business representative
  - “There’s definitely a way to go in terms of supplying air-source heat pumps.” Local authority officer
  - “There are two different sectors, the domestic and the industrial. In domestic, there’s no provision of hydrogen for ECO4 and that’s the main source for property stock across the UK. There’s a massive disjoint there straight away.” Vulnerability group
  - “We also need to be realistic about how much hydrogen is going to be available. The government target of 10GW production sounds a lot, but in the whole ecosystem it’s a fraction. If we’re talking about domestic heat then you need resilience, and that requires a lot of production. It will need to be subsidised production. We will need a liquid hydrogen market by that point.” Utility / energy group
  - “It depends how the methane has been derived. In Somerset, we’re supportive of food and farm biowaste, but not biomethane derived from crops. I think there is more capacity for increasing collection from biowaste. We have food waste collection in Somerset, but some areas don’t. We’re also not tapping into industry food waste. All of this is about infrastructure. We need to collect it from the correct waste streams and not virgin crops.” Local authority officer
  - “Not sure there is a domestic role for hydrogen, but there could be for biomethane if production can be ramped up.” Vulnerability group
  - “Even if we replace fossil energy with green hydrogen, this will take more resources than we have. We have to ensure we have greener electricity first, and then apply hydrogen to that existing infrastructure.” Developer

## HYDROGEN

Overall, attendees seemed to indicate a general preference for targeting strategic or industrial sectors for the roll-out of hydrogen. However, this was not a universal stance, with some stressing that specific sectors and geographic areas should be targeted as part of a more balanced approach. This underscores the complexity of implementing hydrogen as an energy solution, highlighting the need for tailored approaches that consider both regional specifics and the varying needs of different stakeholder groups.

Industrial properties and facilities were seen as the priority targets for WWU to support around hydrogen use – industrial customers were likely to be the primary drivers due to the complexities and safety concerns associated with domestic hydrogen use. The unfamiliarity with technical aspects of hydrogen systems among the general public was also a concern raised, indicating a gap in public knowledge and acceptance.

However, others stressed that hydrogen might not be universally suitable, suggesting that it could be used far more efficiently by some specific sectors and regions than others. The geographic distribution of



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hydrogen plants, biomethane facilities and existing gas networks were noted as critical factors in determining where hydrogen could be feasibly implemented, particularly in industrial applications in areas like South Wales.

At the same time, some called for a cautious exploration and a balanced approach to hydrogen networks, underlining the need for strategic partnerships with industry partners to advance hydrogen use. They also raised concerns about the lack of a national strategy and the inefficiencies in producing green hydrogen. Others spotlighted the significant lack of education and awareness about hydrogen and biomethane in their communities, stressing that the primary concern for people was cost, not sustainability or decarbonisation. This view was supported by a local authority officer who suggested that focusing on immediate benefits like comfort, reduced bills and wellbeing might be more effective than emphasising decarbonisation, which can be perceived as a complex and distant concept.

#### 4. Thinking about the potential use of hydrogen in the future, which (if any) areas do you think we should prioritise?

##### ➤ Strategic or domestic sectors?

##### ➤ A particular geographic region?

- “It’s not going to be suitable everywhere. So, depending on which sectors are going to use it, that might influence where you’re going to put production. And that’s just a single factor. There are other things to consider, such as where will your biomethane and hydrogen plants be, where your water is and where the most suitable sectors are. If you’re going down a non-domestic route, you might only see hydrogen used in certain areas of South Wales. And some places just aren’t on the gas network. Are you going to start building pipes to go to those houses?” Business representative
- “It’s harder to store hydrogen, so you need geographic features to give some form of storage.” Utility / energy group
- “We are working with other gas distributors and the general feeling is that the industrial side rather than the domestic side will drive this.” Business representative
- “The domestic side has a safety aspect and vulnerable customer aspects. There’s also unfamiliarity with the more technical aspects.” Business representative
- “It needs discussion with industry partners.” Local authority officer
- “I see a total lack of education around biomethane and hydrogen in my area. The ideas of sustainability and decarbonisation are lost on the people I deal with. Their priority right now is cost.” Vulnerability group
- “Mentioning decarbonisation will often put customers off as they don’t understand or don’t care. So sometimes it’s best not to mention it, as it’s just an added benefit. It’s actually about what can we do to make people more comfortable, reduce their bills and improve their wellbeing. Decarbonisation is big and scary, and not really relevant to customers sometimes.” Local authority officer
- “It should be done locally, as there is a role for local authorities to do it on a regional basis where there are different opportunities.” Local authority officer

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## BIOMETHANE

During discussions, there was a general consensus leaning towards increasing the capacity for biomethane in WWU's next business plan. However, there were also nuanced disagreements on how the company should approach this, reflecting the multi-faceted challenge around rolling out biomethane more widely, encompassing environmental, economic, practical and strategic dimensions.

A range of stakeholders – including charities, environmental groups and local authorities – straightforwardly agreed with WWU's biomethane proposals on the grounds of practicality and economic viability. One environmental group pointed to the large number of biomethane plants in Germany as a potential example of its successful implementation and took the view that it is a valuable resource to harness.

Despite this broad support, other attendees highlighted potential technical challenges resulting from increased biomethane capacity, pointing out the need for precise control mechanisms to ensure that it is integrated into the gas network in sync with demand. Similarly, a consumer body representative raised concerns about off-grid homes that rely on fossil fuels, suggesting a collaborative approach between gas and network distributors and companies supplying fuel to these homes. They proposed that an integration of greener gases into these supply chains, such as biomethane or hydrogen, would be beneficial, advocating for a holistic and coordinated strategy.

At the same time, the integration of greater biomethane capacity was not broadly welcomed, with one business-group representative viewing biomethane as a transitional solution, while waiting for hydrogen to be mainstreamed. This view framed biomethane not as an end goal, but as a step towards a more comprehensive shift in energy resources.

### 5. Should we be actively making more capacity on our network for biomethane as part of our next business plan?

- “If all the numbers add up, then yes, they should.” Charity
- “Absolutely. In Germany there are substantially more biomethane plants than in the UK. If it is economic to connect the plants, then it is a resource that should be used.” Environmental group
- “The gas is not always connected into the network when the gas is required, so quite a fine control mechanism is needed to feed into the network itself.” Business representative
- “A lot of off-grid homes will require fossil fuels for the foreseeable future, but they need greener fuels as well. Why can't gas and network distributors work with companies who deliver fuels to off-grid homes? If you're going to have greener gas, blended with hydrogen or biomethane, that should be a joined-up approach with companies providing fuel to off-grid homes by lorry.” Consumer body
- “Yes, it's an interim measure before hydrogen comes along and a decision is made in 2026.” Business group
- “Definitely.” Local authority

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## SESSION THREE: DELIVERING AN ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE NETWORK: PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

The third presentation was given by Rhodri Hughes (Sustainability and Environment Manager) and Stacy Griffiths (Corporate Environment Lead). It focused on the environmental actions within the ‘Delivering an environmentally sustainable network’ theme. To begin, Stacy introduced WWU’s Environmental Action Plan (EAP), which sets out the company’s environmental ambitions across a range of aspects, such as sustainable procurement and its business carbon footprint. She then took stakeholders through WWU’s high-level ambitions to the 2030s around waste to landfill, as well as its planned actions from 2026 to 2031 within the GD3 business plan to underpin. Rhodri then similarly outlined its ambitions and planned actions for carbon reduction and natural capital.

Attendees were then invited to provide feedback on WWU’s proposed actions around waste to landfill, carbon reduction and natural capital.

### WASTE TO LANDFILL

#### Appropriateness of the proposed actions

Attendees largely did not express huge confidence around the proposed waste management actions. When asked to indicate their opinion on Slido on the statement “WWU’s targets for waste reduction are ambitious enough”, 49% of respondents were neutral, compared to 31% who agreed, 13% who disagreed and 8% who strongly disagreed. A common theme during discussions on these actions was a desire to see more detailed and innovative approaches to waste management.

There was a sense of scepticism among some towards presenting waste management and reduction as a forward-thinking strategy, with many seeing these kinds of initiatives as standard responsible business practices. One local authority officer criticised the term ‘waste to landfill’ and described it as “well out of date”, reflecting the feeling among some that any initiatives proposed need to be spelled out clearly as practical measures, moving beyond perceived buzzwords. The comprehensive waste reduction plan, which WWU intends to implement during the GD3 business plan period, was similarly described as “old school”, illustrating an evident demand for more ambitious approaches among some attendees.

Similarly, some concerns were raised about the practical feasibility of the waste efficiency coordinator, with one vulnerability group representative questioning how much value a single coordinator could deliver for the entirety of Wales. This concern pointed to a need for more information and possibly a more localised approach to coordinating waste efficiency.

By contrast, others were more supportive of the two waste to landfill proposals. One representative saw parallels between WWU’s approach and Cadent’s Waste Reduction Plan, and felt that both were needed for each company’s GD3 business plans. Likewise, a business representative was supportive of the waste

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efficiency coordinator, arguing that coordination with local councils would be vital for achieving efficient waste management.

### **Comparisons with other stakeholder initiatives**

WWU was generally commended by stakeholders for dovetailing its waste to landfill actions within the broader trend of reducing waste and promoting sustainability followed by other organisations. This type of approach was viewed as a natural progression for most companies, including WWU, highlighting an ever-growing consensus around the importance of companies operating in an environmentally responsible way.

There was generally a strong level of alignment between WWU's approach and the efforts undertaken by representatives from local authorities and vulnerability groups, who noted that their efforts had focused on recycling and the use of sustainable materials and packaging. However, a representative from a utility group noted that they had concentrated their efforts on exploring energy conservation through better insulation of depots and phasing in the full use of digital documents by removing printers from their offices, pointing to new areas that WWU could explore to further their efforts.

### **Opportunities for collaboration**

Stakeholders identified a number of possible collaboration opportunities around managing waste across a range of different groups, illustrating the huge potential value in this area.

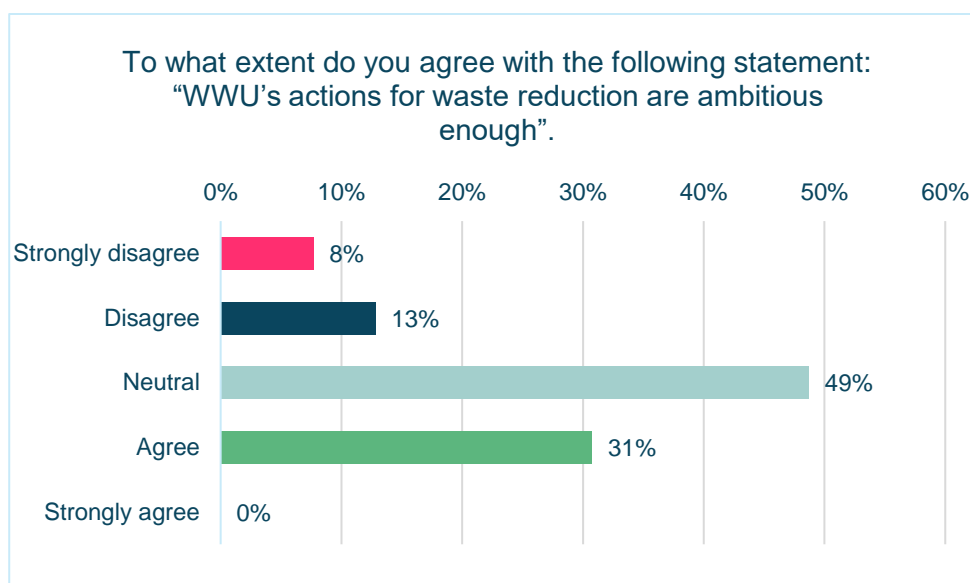
A local authority elected member emphasised the importance of liaising with local authorities and involving them as active participants in recycling initiatives as part of a proactive approach towards reducing the volume of waste destined for landfill. A local authority officer also felt that WWU could work with their council on handling office and landscaping waste. They expressed a willingness to engage in conversations about recycling and reusing waste within their county, indicating an openness to collaborative efforts at local government level.

At the same time, one representative from a utility group illustrated potential cross-sector synergies on roadwork and infrastructure projects. This could involve using innovative methods, such as using circular saws rather than digging up trenches, and undertaking multiple utilities projects on the same hole. Their perspective was grounded in practical, operational concerns, looking at collaboration as a means to enhance efficiency and reduce environmental impact during essential utility work.

### **Glaring omissions**

The only glaring omission identified focused on pipe removal and replacement. Questions were raised about what happens to any pipes and other equipment removed during upgrade work, and specifically whether they were recycled or reused.

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “WWU’s targets for waste reduction are ambitious enough”?



2. Do you think WWU’s actions in this area for the next business plan are the right ones?

➤ What do you think about the ‘Implement a comprehensive waste reduction plan’ action?

➤ What do you think about the ‘Appoint a waste efficiency coordinator’ action?

- “I’m not sure how different the comprehensive waste reduction plans are to what should be being delivered in GD2 currently. Waste reduction has been part of the EAP since it was brought in at the start of GD2 two years ago and involves identifying where waste is and having an effective plan to reduce it. I don’t see how this is any different.” Consumer body
- “Looking at what WWU is doing, I think it’s quite close to the Waste Reduction Plan going on with Cadent. But, again, I’m not in the detail within that. But I think both of these actions are definitely needed for the GD3 business plans.” Business representative
- “The term ‘waste to landfill’ is well out of date, as there isn’t a lot of landfill anymore. I think that needs more clarity. I want to see how they’re going to implement that, rather than just seeing buzzwords.” Local authority officer
- “It feels very old school to be talking about this. We’re way beyond waste reduction commitments. We expect this to happen anyway. We need to be bigger and better.” Local authority officer
- “My concern is that you’re going to appoint just one coordinator for all of Wales. I would need more information about the coordinator role and how it applies to the region.” Vulnerability group
- “In terms of how, making sure you’re efficient in your efforts and contacting the appropriate people in the council.” Business representative
- “I think it’s good. The first thing you need to do is reduce but you also need to think about what you’re producing in terms of waste and where it goes. Reuse and recycle are mentioned in there but I imagine there is waste that can’t be recycled so you need to be more innovative about what you do with that waste.” Local authority officer

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### 3. How do they compare to what you are doing / planning?

- “We were the first council to declare a climate emergency. We ensured energy efficient buildings and that items sold in canteens were recyclable. It’s the little actions that contribute.” Local authority elected member
- “We are looking at heat waste. How do we better insulate our depots?” Utility / energy group
- “We’ve a new building with no printers at all. Everything’s PDF or docu-signed. If the temptation’s not there, you’re forced to send it as a PDF etc.” Utility / energy group
- “Like most companies, we’ve all tried to drive down our waste. It’s a natural progression. Our experience is that WWU is on the right track.” Business representative
- “We are focusing a lot on recycling, sustainable materials and packaging.” Vulnerability group
- “The council delivers the waste services. We’re looking at the potential of a circular economy, a food waste piece. Collection points that then feed into private operators that have the AD facilities to inject into existing biomethane points. There’s potential for some work around that to highlight the benefits of circular economy.” Business group

### 4. Can you see any opportunities for collaboration?

- “The local authorities must get on board with recycling what’s taken out. This will reduce what’s sent to landfill.” Local authority elected member
- “Transporters are digging up the road a lot. How do we collaborate on that with other utilities companies, in term of the time we need to be on site? We have a circular drill, like a plug, rather than digging a big trench. The Streetworks Act encourages us to do that, to collaborate.” Utility / energy group
- “In terms of best practice, we have a waste management team and we are heavily guided by Welsh government guidance. We report back to them on an annual basis.” Local authority officer
- “I think there would be scope for collaboration with our council. The waste we produce is office waste, grass cuttings etc. We’re conscious that whatever we produce is recycled or reused within the county. We’d be happy to have conversations around that for sure.” Local authority officer

### 5. Are there any glaring omissions from what we are proposing?

- “Concerning actions that are missing, I would like to know what happens to the pipes and the materials that are taken out after upgrading pipe work. Do you take everything out or reuse and recycle materials?” Housing association

## CARBON REDUCTION

### Appropriateness of the proposed actions

Participants did not give a wholehearted endorsement of the level of ambitions to WWU’s proposed measures around carbon reduction. When asked to indicate their level of agreement to the statement “WWU’s actions for carbon reduction are ambitious enough” on Slido, just 27% of voters agreed, with 24% opting for neutral, 41% disagreeing and 8% strongly disagreeing. There was a general feeling that WWU

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needs to go further in order to significantly reduce its carbon emissions, with more comprehensive overarching approaches.

The proposed 'Improve our analysis and measurement of business carbon excluding shrinkage' action was supported by a number of stakeholders. One suggested that this action should consider the origins and lifecycle of products used by WWU, such as plastic pipes, and that this should be a national and international focus within the gas distribution industry. However, by contrast, another took the view that it needed to be expanded to include shrinkage, as this was thought to contribute substantially to GDNs' carbon footprint. Therefore, it was stressed that addressing the business carbon footprint would effectively hinge on tackling shrinkage in an economical and efficient manner.

The principle of rolling out hydrogen-powered industrial vehicles within the planned Carbon Reduction Plan was broadly supported, due to the large carbon footprint of transportation and the resulting need to take action in this area. However, concerns were raised about the feasibility of clean transportation (whether electrified or gas-powered) due to range anxiety among stakeholders. This suggests that there is more engagement and educational work required from WWU to overcome public fears about these types of transportation systems. The expansion of solar PV within this plan was also supported, with some urging WWU to engage with local landowners to explore opportunities to place solar farms on available land.

However, it was also felt that the Carbon Reduction Plan needs to contain clear, measurable goals and specific milestones, which detailed the targeted percentage reductions and the timelines for achieving them. At the same time, it was emphasised that WWU clearly reports its carbon emissions, particularly in light of the challenges associated with reducing Scope 3 emissions. Echoing this sentiment for measurable and credible targets, a member of the consumer body underscored the need for WWU's actions to be more than mere 'greenwashing', emphasising the importance of tangible carbon reductions.

### **Comparisons with other stakeholder initiatives**

Participants largely acknowledged that the aims of WWU's plans aligned with their own initiatives, but some noted that they were taking different routes to achieving these shared goals.

Representatives from local authorities felt that their own carbon reduction plans, which enjoyed significant support from senior management and dedicated teams, mirrored WWU's structured approach, suggesting a shared understanding of the importance of organisational backing in implementing environmental strategies. Similarly, representatives from utility groups noted the similarities between WWU's plans and their own, particularly around adopting electric and hydrogen-powered vehicles and integrating Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations more prominently in corporate decision-making processes.

Conversely, the challenges faced by smaller organisations in engaging with carbon reduction were highlighted. Due to their limited capacity and scale, their focus on carbon reduction was not as pronounced, underscoring the resource constraints faced by some organisations, which might limit their ability to implement more comprehensive carbon reduction programmes.



## Opportunities for collaboration

Stakeholders identified a number of collaboration opportunities, particularly revolving around increasing public awareness of its efforts to reduce carbon emissions in order to open up further collaboration.

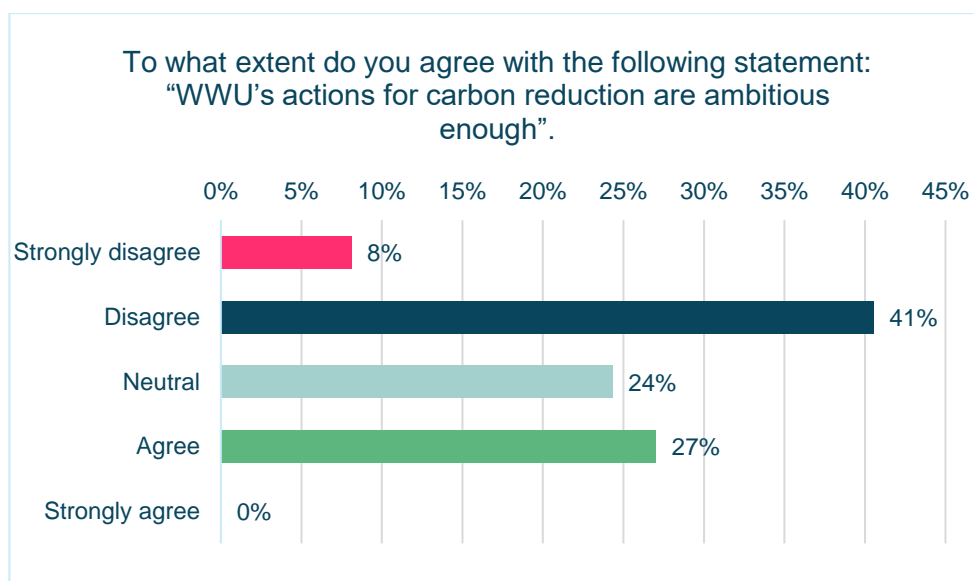
A number of stakeholders bought into hydrogen's potential as a clean fuel source for vehicles, but also acknowledged the wider public apprehension about its use in this area, despite the potential carbon reduction benefits. Accordingly, WWU was urged to build a strong case for hydrogen, thereby contributing to a broader understanding and acceptance of diverse sustainable energy sources, which would unlock further collaborative opportunities.

At the same time, several representatives felt that there was scope for WWU to increase public awareness about various environmental projects. They suggested that WWU could play a pivotal role in enhancing community engagement by providing clear information on different initiatives stakeholders could participate in. This approach is seen as a way to deepen community involvement and foster a more collaborative environment for carbon reduction efforts.

## Glaring omissions

Attendees identified two potential omissions around carbon reductions. While WWU's efforts to roll out hydrogen-powered industrial vehicles within the Carbon Reduction Plan was praised, it was felt that the company was missing a trick by not converting its own fleet to either electric or hydrogen-powered vehicles. The second potential area was wider public engagement. A number of participants encouraged WWU to use its expert position to roll out an information campaign for its general customer base in order to empower them to reduce their own carbon emissions. However, it was stressed that this would need to be expressed in simple terms in order to get the furthest reach and achieve its desired effect.

## 6. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "WWU's targets for carbon reduction are ambitious enough"?





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## 7. Do you think WWU's actions in this area for the next business plan are the right ones?

- What do you think about the 'Improve our analysis and measurement of business carbon excluding shrinkage' action?
- What do you think about the 'Develop a carbon reduction plan' action?
- What do you think about the 'Improve our knowledge of the embedded carbon in products we use regularly and at scale' action?
  - "Transport is a huge footprint. Ensuring WWU vehicles aren't sat around idly is key. The issue is also that your vehicles aren't necessarily good candidates for electrification because you're unsure how far you'll travel." Local authority elected member
  - "Shrinkage contributes around 90% to the carbon footprint of gas distribution networks and the issue is more about the operation of the system and leakage. So my view would be that you effectively can't deal with the business carbon footprint unless you deal with shrinkage, where it's economical and efficient to do so." Consumer body
  - "The shrinkage action seems to be about the products you're using to achieve your goals, and where they're from. This should be a national and indeed international consideration. If you're moving towards plastic pipes, what's the lifetime?" Local authority elected member
  - "I'd rather you were just concentrating on pipe replacement. I don't see WWU as a crucial part of the carbon reduction picture." Utility / energy group
  - "The community engagement on the land is great. If you have plots of land, you could have solar farms on there too. You could lead the way with this best practice." Vulnerability group
  - "You'd need to have two carbon 'champions' because of the size of the area you cover." Housing association
  - "We have a carbon reduction team in place to look after the energy and we are all part of the same team to support that plan, with help from senior management." Local authority officer
  - "It'd be good to have some milestones in there. What percentage reduction are you looking to do and by when? It tends to be when you report your carbon emissions you split them into Scopes 1, 2 and 3. Scopes 1 and 2 are things you control, Scope 3 is everything that you buy in and outsource. That's a harder thing to reduce." Local authority officer
  - "I think from a public point of view, it's got to be credible, so it's got to be measurable. It can't just be greenwashing. It's got to be real measurable targets." Consumer body

## 8. How do they compare to what you are doing / planning?

- "These actions are very much in line with what we have in place in Swansea." Local authority officer
- "We have a carbon reduction team in place to look after the energy and we are all part of the same team to support that plan, with help from senior management." Local authority officer
- "We're very similar. Our engineers do have electrically powered vehicles in the city centre. I agree hydrogen powered would be good for a much larger fleet." Utility / energy group

- “Shrinkage is the big one, too. We are continually trying to focus on shrinkage.” Utility / energy group
- “Your shareholders focus on ESG, the same as us. That’s comes in a very top-down way. We’re owned by Macquarie. ESG is right at the top of everything.” Utility / energy group
- “What we have works for us and different organisations can cherry pick what works from them, but you definitely need top-level support to drive these plans through.” Local authority officer

### 9. Can you see any opportunities for collaboration?

- “We did an exercise previously with WWU about what would happen to the bills if we spent an extra 20p per customer in any specific area, so that customers see where the money from their bill goes to. It would be good to repeat that exercise.” Housing association
- “I suppose if you’re digging up a rural road and you’ve got construction machinery, that needs to be considered as well in terms of EVs.” Business representative
- “Something in place to show stakeholders the different projects they can get involved in would be good. By increasing awareness, WWU can engage with communities in a more meaningful way.” Local authority officer

### 10. Are there any glaring omissions from what we are proposing?

- “It would be good to see an electrification of the business fleet prioritised, especially those used for meter readings and non-demanding journeys.” Local authority officer
- “WWU need to be informing households as to what they can be doing to reduce carbon emissions, and in turn looking at ways they can use energy smarter.” Charity
- “An easily digestible educational campaign using infographics, for your average customer. It just needs to be a couple of pages and easy to understand.” Local authority officer
- “I think WWU could roll out hydrogen-powered industrial vehicles.” Academic

## NATURAL CAPITAL

### *Appropriateness of the proposed actions*

Stakeholders were not fully convinced by the level of ambition shown in WWU’s natural capital actions. When asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement “WWU’s actions for natural capital are ambitious enough” on Slido, 56% were neutral, with 25% agreeing, 14% disagreeing and 6% strongly disagreeing. The discussions reflected the perceived importance of partnership and collaborative work in order to achieve natural capital goals among many attendees, who felt that the company could go further in this area.

At a broader level, a number of representatives praised the package of measures in light of their perceived potential community benefits, particularly in terms of regeneration and biodiversity gains. It was thought that they could potentially serve as a template for other local bodies to follow, underlining the importance of achieving visible, tangible results from these initiatives. This view suggests a desire for WWU's actions to have a demonstrable and positive impact on communities, potentially fostering a broader culture of environmental responsibility and regeneration.

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However, concerns were raised that the natural capital measures, on the whole, may not capture regionally specific environmental concerns, such as phosphate mitigation and CO2 emissions from new constructions in Somerset, as suggested by one stakeholder. Therefore, WWU was urged to incorporate strategies like wetland and tree planting to lock in carbon as part of its local strategic planning. This viewpoint reflects a more technical and region-specific approach to environmental challenges, highlighting the need for WWU's actions to be adaptable and responsive to local environmental issues. Echoing this call for more geographic inclusivity, others took the view that these environmental initiatives must benefit both rural and urban communities within its licence area equally.

Others were also concerned about the potential financial impact of WWU's proposed natural capital initiatives. Therefore, they stressed the importance of effective messaging and the balance between sustainability goals and consumer costs. This perspective highlights the need for WWU to communicate the value and rationale behind their actions clearly, ensuring public understanding and support, particularly if these initiatives result in increased costs for consumers.

This need for clear public communications also came through during discussions about the 'Improve the biodiversity on and around our buildings and assets' action, with concerns raised about the lack of transparency about how this would work in practice. Therefore, the company was urged to be clear about how it intends to achieve this in order to win customer buy-in. At the same time, while there was some support for the 'Calculate the added value of our expenditure on environmental restoration and improvement' action, it was emphasised that any calculations or assessments would have to be meaningful, rather than tokenistic efforts. By doing this, it was hoped that WWU would be able to make better decisions and therefore have a better environmental impact.

#### *Comparisons with other stakeholder initiatives*

No feedback was provided by stakeholders on this area.

#### *Opportunities for collaboration*

Many attendees voiced the view that greater partnership work around natural capital was needed, so it is somewhat unsurprising that a number of collaboration ideas were put forward. Many attendees were eager to establish partnerships to forward natural capital goals.

Environmental groups pointed to their ongoing collaborative work in this area with other sectors and pinpointed Tesco's local grant programme as a good potential option for expanding the reach of environmental initiatives. By contrast, a local authority officer brought a regulatory and strategic perspective to discussions, as they felt that WWU could work with them on identifying strategic locations for nature recovery within the local nature recovery strategies developed by local governments. This spotlighted the potential in aligning WWU's efforts with local planning strategies to increase the results.

Academic settings were also seen as a good place for collaboration. One academic saw potential synergy with educational institutions, such as the University of Cardiff, envisioning partnership work that could leverage academic research and resources for mutual benefit. At the same time, another stakeholder took

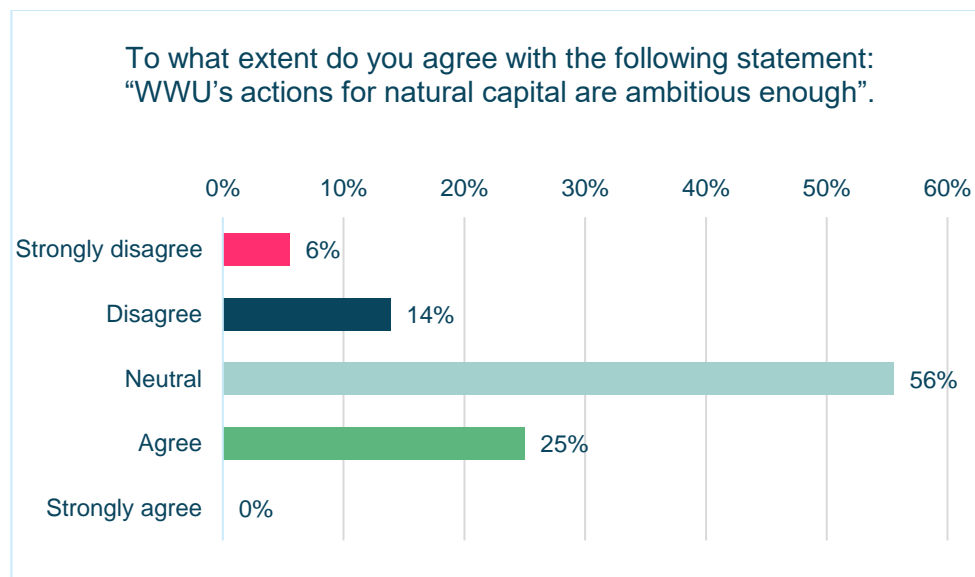
the view that it could be worthwhile embedding initiatives into schools in order to instil environmental consciousness from a young age.

A charity working with the deaf community in Great Britain presented a unique perspective, linking environmental initiatives to social return on investment. They saw opportunities for involving the deaf community in hands-on environmental work, thereby fostering inclusivity and societal value.

### *Glaring omissions*

Only one omission was put forward during discussions. It was felt that more needs to be done around societal behavioural change in order to achieve some of the natural capital goals set out. Therefore, WWU was urged to incorporate public educational communications pieces more prominently into its natural capital actions.

## **11. To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “WWU’s targets for natural capital are ambitious enough”?**



## **12. Do you think WWU’s actions in this area for the next business plan are the right ones?**

- **What do you think about the ‘Deliver environmental net gain through strategic partnership and collaboration’ action?**
- **What do you think about the ‘Calculate the added value of our expenditure on environmental restoration and improvement’ action?**
- **What do you think about the ‘Improve the biodiversity on and around our buildings and assets’ action?**
  - “If we see the community benefits brought by WWU in terms of regeneration and biodiversity gain then that can be inspiring for others, so it’s important to see this happening.” Local authority officer
  - “I don’t quite understand what ‘Improve the biodiversity on and around our buildings and assets’ means exactly. Does it mean growing nice gardens around your business properties, bee hotels and that kind of thing, or what? A bit more info for the public on that.” Charity

- “Here in Somerset, we have an issue with phosphate mitigation as part of building development. And as such, every new house built will generate phosphates and every new boiler installed will generate CO2. But somewhere, carbon needs to be locked into the ground, so being able to identify and use wetland, trees etc to lock in carbon has got to be part of the strategic plan.” Parish councillor
- “The main thing for me is that we’re not just calculating things for the sake of calculating things, but that we’re actually doing it in a way that means we’re making better trade-offs where the greatest value lies.” Consumer body
- “There is a lot taking place in urban regions. If there is scope and possibility for them to be spread around the geographic location and to move into rural areas as well, that would be great.” Charity
- “There can be net gain even in rural areas. It’s especially important to involve people in understanding the importance of nature and how habitats work.” Charity
- “Urban environments are an easy way to create net gain by going to an unused depot and taking it back to nature. It’s less simple in rural areas to produce that net gain.” Charity
- “Environmental net gain and biodiversity is a no-brainer. I’d assume this whole thing would be rolled into a wider ESG strategy. But it’s also about messaging. I’d be grumpy if my bills are going up but you’re planting some trees. I think a lot of people would react that way so it’s being able to articulate why this is important and what it’s got to do with WWU.” Business representative
- “This is all well and good, but a balance needs to be struck between sustainability goals and people’s bills.” Vulnerability group

### 13. How do they compare to what you are doing / planning?

- No feedback provided

### 14. Can you see any opportunities for collaboration?

- “We’d be willing to collaborate as much as we can to assist in spreading these actions to rural areas.” Charity
- “This is very much the area we work in, and we do that collaboratively and with support especially from supermarkets. We’d welcome the opportunity to collaborate with WWU.” Environmental group
- “It’s a core part of the way we work, and we’d want to continue that.” Environmental group
- “Tesco runs small grant programmes for community organisations around the UK, and we’d have capacity and experience to assist WWU with that.” Environmental group
- “Local authorities have to develop and deliver a local nature recovery strategy by September next year, which is mapping our areas, where nature corridors are and how we can increase nature recovery. So I think you should be working with local authorities on collaborating on those in terms of identifying strategic locations for nature recovery.” Local authority officer
- “Thinking about the future, there are projects that go into schools and educate.” Vulnerability group
- “Engaging with residents and community groups to focus on collaboration, reducing their climate footprint, supporting behavioural change and raising awareness.” Local authority officer
- “There’d be overlap for collaboration at the University of Cardiff, which is big.” Academic

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- “I work with the deaf community across Great Britain. There are opportunities there for people to get involved in community work, to help out to develop these sites. This ties to social return on investment, and social value calculations.” Charity

**15. Are there any glaring omissions from what we are proposing?**

- “Behavioural change is going to be crucial, as well as educating the public on the environmental benefits of doing things differently.” Local authority officer

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## **SESSION FOUR: MEETING THE NEEDS OF CONSUMERS AND NETWORK USERS: SUPPORTING CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITIES**

The presentation for the fourth session was given by Nigel Winnan (Customer and Social Obligations Manager) and focused on the third proposed theme for the GD3 business plan: 'Meeting the needs of consumers and network users'. He began by providing an overview of the different types of priority customer served by WWU and the standard services and measures in place to assist them. After outlining the company's commitments in this area in the current GD2 business plan, Nigel explained that the company wishes to go further, particularly through its Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) funding to provide vital support to customers in need through a huge range of projects. After presenting some of WWU's current VCMA partnerships, Nigel finished by presenting a case study of its work with the charity SCOPE.

Attendees were then asked to provide feedback about the VCMA fund and how WWU could advance it in future.

### **THE SCALE AND AMBITION OF THE VCMA FUND**

The majority of stakeholders took the view that the range of services provided by WWU to its vulnerable customers through the VCMA fund was sufficient for the next business plan. When asked to vote on Slido, 59% of respondents agreed that it was and 6% strongly agreed. At the same time, 16% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed, while 16% were neutral. There was a similar level of endorsement for the ambition of these services in the next business plan during the Slido voting too, with 58% agreeing that it was sufficient and 3% strongly agreeing. Meanwhile, 18% disagreed and 21% were neutral. However, during discussions, there was a feeling among a reasonable number of participants that, although the scale of the services was commendable, there was still room for enhancement and more targeted approaches. This diversity of opinions reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of the issues at hand, underscoring the challenge WWU faces in balancing broad objectives with targeted, effective interventions.

The value of VCMA funding was widely acknowledged by many stakeholder groups, who praised its impact on community support. In order to build on the successes thus far, WWU was encouraged to expand the funding to address broader issues, such as furniture poverty, which affects a significant number of children in the UK. Conversely, there was also a call to expand the scope of the funding beyond the current defined vulnerability criteria in order to include retrofitting for all, in response to the cost-of-living crisis and climate emergency.

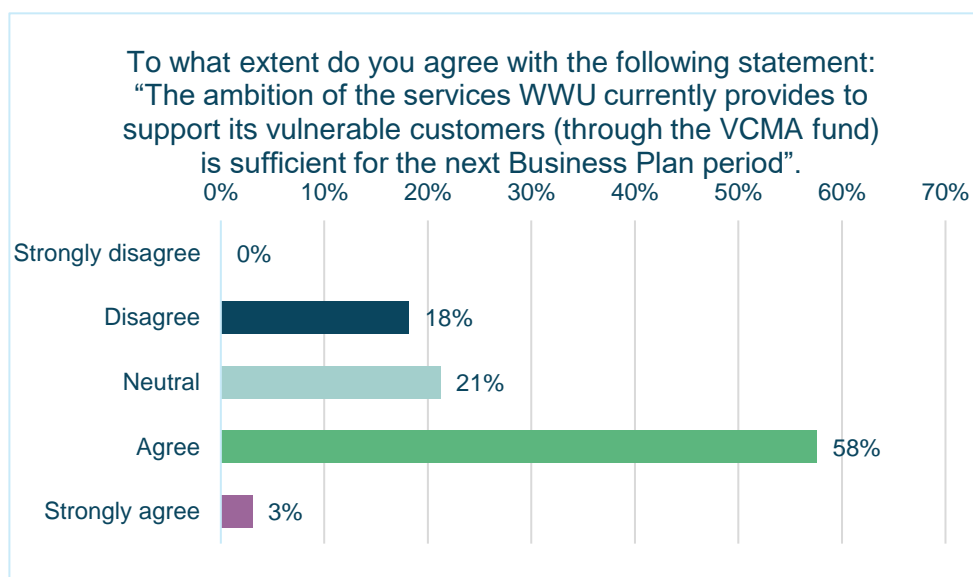
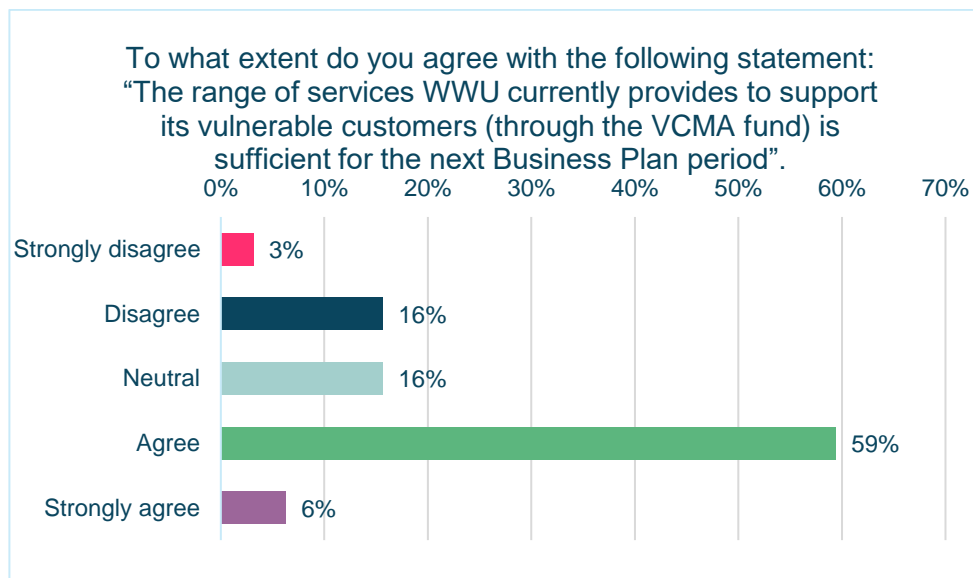
Within the specific areas of focus already covered by the VCMA funding, stakeholders were divided in which was most appropriate to target for the next business plan. While some, like a consumer body representative, emphasised the importance of fuel vouchers and fuel-poverty advice, others pointed to the need for more resources, such as additional advisers and an appeals worker for carers dealing with negative DWP

decisions. The idea of prioritising carbon monoxide awareness and food vouchers post-COVID was also brought up.

With so many potential areas of focus, many stakeholders quite logically highlighted the importance of adopting a tailored regionalised approach to allocating funding in order to meet diverse regional and local needs of communities. A charity representative suggested that while the overall offer was good, more directed efforts, especially for those on the Priority Services Register (PSR), could be beneficial. This view was echoed by a local authority elected member, who emphasised the significance of support in essential services like boiler servicing and reconnection, reminiscent of the services once offered by the Gas Board.

### 1. Is the scale and ambition of services that WWU currently provides through the VCMA fund sufficient for the next business plan period? Is anything missing?

- Are we straying away from our core objectives? Is this our role?
- Should we be spending more / less on this? Should we be more / less ambitious?





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- “You don’t need a ‘one size fits all’ approach here. Across the piece, it’s a good offer because regional and local support is good. But it could be more directed. You could do targeted work with people on the PSR.” Charity
  - “Support where needed is an important part of your role, for instance where someone can’t afford to get a boiler serviced. It would be great if WWU could step in to help with reconnecting. It would be a step back in time to when the Gas Board used to do that.” Local authority elected member
  - “We think the VCMA funding is fantastic. For instance, we get it for customers requiring kidney care. The size of it allows multiple touchpoints with communities. I think it could also extend to furniture poverty. 700,000 children in the UK currently don’t have a bed. The national coverage would be great and have a positive community impact.” Vulnerability group
  - “In the past, we met with various groups and National Energy Action did energy forums. Now they’re online and it’s not quite the same as you can’t grab a coffee and work out ways to work together. I got involved with WWU through NEA, as all the different suppliers would be there and it was all combined with housing associations. That’s what is missing and we need them to get up and running again.” Housing association
  - “The need in urban areas is different to the need in rural. It’s important for WWU to partner with the correct networks so that it is pan-Wales, to ensure no local areas are left out. It’s about picking the right method for the right region as part of a strategic, joined-up approach.” Vulnerability group
  - “On advice provision, there needs to be a cross-sector strategy that brings funding together, because there is a clear, very high demand for advice.” Consumer body
  - “45% of households are at risk of fuel poverty, so there’s a massive need for the VCMA fund. WWU’s role is vital, as without their funding that figure will increase substantially. Sincerely, I think it is going in the right direction. The next step is to make sure it’s being delivered correctly.” Vulnerability group
  - “Some of these things shouldn’t just be for the defined vulnerability criteria. With the cost-of-living crisis, and in terms of the climate emergency, this needs to be about everyone that WWU engages with. There should be support for retrofitting for everyone, which would be much better than giving out fuel vouchers.” Local authority officer
  - “For me, the most important parts of the offering are aspects like fuel vouchers and fuel poverty advice. There’s a huge duplication of effort across the network space.” Consumer body
  - “Demand outstrips supply. We could easily employ more advisers and that’s where the limitations come in. In terms of innovation, it would be great if we could have what we call an ‘appeals worker’ as our carers need support and expertise to plough through the appeals process for negative DWP decisions. The scope is great, but more resources and more workers would always be gratefully received.” Vulnerability group
  - “I would prioritise raising awareness of carbon monoxide and providing free monitors, along with education for all on the issue.” Local authority officer
  - “Access to food vouchers is critical post-COVID, which has been compounded by the cost-of-living crisis. We would endorse more funding but do not want to pass the cost of that on the customer as we are concerned with protecting the most vulnerable.” Local authority officer

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- “Fuel poverty is not going away, so it should be a priority area.” Utility / energy group
  - “When it comes to safety, we can definitely be more ambitious.” Charity
  - “With fuel poverty now, we should reach people from all areas, not just low incomes.” Charity

## **ADDING VALUE THROUGH WWU SERVICES**

During discussions, stakeholders expressed a variety of perspectives on how WWU's services could be enhanced to deliver more value, both to individual consumers and to the broader community, reflecting the broad range of considerations that it must balance to enhance the value of their services across diverse communities and sectors.

One prominent viewpoint throughout discussions was a desire to see WWU go even further from a welfare perspective in delivering its services. One housing association representative emphasised the need for WWU to play an active role in emergency situations, especially where private landlords might not be socially obliged to intervene. This perspective highlighted the importance of WWU in bridging gaps in support during crises, underscoring a responsibility towards societal welfare beyond their immediate customer base.

There were also multiple calls for the company to reach even further out into its communities to ensure that support was available for all customers. Charity representatives highlighted the unique challenges faced by rural dwellers, who often rely on a limited number of contacts for welfare assistance and may not access broader support systems. This insight underscored the need for WWU to develop targeted approaches to connect with and understand the vulnerabilities of people in rural locations, ensuring that these communities are not overlooked. This was also echoed in calls by representatives from vulnerability groups to engage with marginalised communities, many of whom choose not to reach out for support as they do not feel that they need or deserve it. Therefore, it was suggested that WWU should invest in targeted engagement initiatives to ensure that their services are inclusive and are accessed by all segments of society.

Finally, by contrast, others felt that the company could add value by providing training to its staff and other industries on clean forms of energy as part of efforts to diversify away from fossil fuels. This was seen as a crucial step towards sustainability, with a specific focus on preparing workforces for shifts towards alternative energy sources, such as hydrogen.

## **2. How can WWU make sure their services add value?**

- **What measurements should we put in place?**
  - **How can they add value to the individual?**
  - **Beyond individual customers, how can they deliver wider social value?**
- “Even private landlords don't have the social obligation on that side, so it's important that people are aware how you step in when the emergency is there.” Housing association
  - “We find that some people abuse the services we provide, but others stay on the fringes of society and think they don't need or deserve the support. We need to work on engagement with hard-to-reach communities.” Vulnerability group

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- “Training needs to be put into place to support those industries to diversify. They should put some money and funding into training for businesses not reliant on gas and support training to diversify away from fossil fuels. If they are going to move into hydrogen, where are the people who are going to do this work coming from?” Local authority officer
  - “Understand how and when people in rural locations might become vulnerable.” Charity
  - “Quite often small villages or homes in the middle of nowhere tend to make do or rely on close contacts without linking to other opportunities for help.” Charity

## **POTENTIAL PARTNERS FOR FUTURE WORK**

Attendees urged WWU to work with other partners across a variety of areas, including education and fuel poverty. There were also calls for the company to adopt holistic approaches as part of comprehensive strategies in order to undertake this work.

Education and awareness emerged as a key area for partnership work during discussions. Representatives from a utility company were in favour of extending educational outreach to secondary schools, building on the successes experienced in primary schools. Another attendee, from the charity sector, suggested that WWU should partner with GPs, reinforcing the idea that the company should leverage trusted community figures to disseminate information about available services.

The other key area where it was thought that partnership working could add value was fuel poverty, as underscored by the recommendation of a housing association representative to collaborate further with National Energy Action (NEA). It was noted that they already disseminate fuel vouchers to customers and could therefore be a good partner expanding into other areas. This suggestion was aligned with the views of a local authority officer who emphasised the need for closer cooperation with local authorities, particularly their housing teams, to better support vulnerable populations.

More broadly, attendees strongly felt that any partnership working must address the varied needs of the different demographics in WWU’s customer base, which spans both urban and rural areas. This perspective was complemented by suggestions from local authority elected members, who proposed partnerships with specific entities like a debt advice centre in North Bristol and community councils, as exemplified by Newport City Council. These suggestions underscored the significance of localised, community-focussed approaches to some stakeholders.

At the same time, a holistic approach was advocated by several stakeholders. A local authority officer suggested integrating discussions on various issues, including adult education, as part of a comprehensive strategy. Charities also supported this view, recommending partnerships with local community-based organisations down to the parish council level.

### **3. What are the types of organisations WWU should work with in the future?**

- “I hope this funding will continue. A lot of the learning must come from projects on the ground. This is a continual process. Demands in urban areas will differ to more rural areas.” Vulnerability group
- “You could partner with a debt advice centre in North Bristol.” Local authority elected member

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- “Collaboration with community councils will be beneficial.” Local authority elected member
  - “More outreach into secondary schools.” Utility / energy group
  - “The NEA should be the first port of call for WWU, because they are the fuel poverty charity. They’ve promoted WWU grants in the past so they’re a logical place to go.” Housing association
  - “GPs are the go-to people if you’re feeling unwell, so they might be a good place to find out extra information and you can link with those.” Charity
  - “Local authority housing teams, who are linked in with vulnerable people.” Local authority officer
  - “Work with councils. Do everything holistically. Talk with consumers about a variety of matters and wrap them all together. Adult education is just as important.” Local authority officer
  - “Local community-based organisations, right down to parish council level.” Charity

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## SESSION FIVE: DELIVERING VALUE FOR MONEY: INNOVATION AND PRIORITIES

The final presentation of the event was delivered by Sian Rowlands (Innovation and Funding Manager) and focused on the final of the proposed themes for the next business plan: Delivering value for money. Sian first introduced the Network Innovation Allowance (NIA) and the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF), which are external funding pots to finance innovation projects, and also noted that WWU self-funds business as usual innovation to increase operational efficiencies. She then presented case studies of successful innovation projects to support net zero (NextGen Electrolysis - Wastewater to Green Hydrogen) and vulnerable customers (StreetScore2), demonstrating their value to customers.

Stakeholders were invited to provide feedback around the level of ambition for innovation funding in the GD3 business plan. They were also asked to give their thoughts on which actions under the four proposed themes for the next business plan discussed over the workshop would provide best value for money.

### INNOVATION

#### Specific funding for innovation projects

During discussions, there was a broad consensus across stakeholders on the need for innovation and the potential benefits of funding it. However, differences emerged around which projects should be prioritised and concerns were raised about the financial implications of providing funding for these kinds of projects.

An overarching theme across all discussions was the broad endorsement of pursuing innovation projects by attendees, particularly in the context of reducing energy consumption and making advances towards net zero goals. A local authority elected member emphasised the importance of innovation in reducing energy use and enhancing smart energy practices. Representatives from vulnerability groups and charities also supported this approach if it directly benefited customers and did not adversely affect them financially. With this in mind, the NextGen Electrolysis project discussed during the presentation was praised.

However, a number of participants were more sceptical and raised concerns that there is currently too much emphasis on net zero projects, thereby squeezing innovative ideas for other areas out of the picture, as no funding would be provided to them. At the same time, there was also apprehension about the perceived tightened funding and increased restrictions for innovation in the GD2 business plan, with one attendee taking the view that these restrictions were possibly misplaced.

In addition, some attendees were worried that innovation funding could be used for pursuing unobtainable ideals. Therefore, it was stressed that innovation projects should be grounded in reality and aim for achievable goals and solutions required by the market. This concern about how any innovation funding pots might be spent was also echoed by some stakeholders from the charity sector, who expressed a sense of caution about the long-term financial implications of funding innovation. Questions were posed about

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whether these investments would translate into future savings or result in ongoing financial burdens for consumers.

### **Funding and delivering net zero innovation related activity within the next business plan**

A strong majority of attendees endorsed WWU's proposals of funding and delivering net zero innovation-related activity as part of the next business plan. When asked to indicate on Slido whether they agreed with such an approach, 48% of respondents agreed and 27% strongly agreed, while 12% strongly disagreed, 3% disagreed and 9% were neutral. However, splits emerged during the discussions as to the differences to the approach taken and the areas of focus.

Some argued strongly in favour of sustained and long-term innovation funding for reaching net zero, arguing that any reductions in funding resources would impede progress towards decarbonisation. Additionally, there was a call for WWU to adopt a broader view of net zero, encompassing social, economic and business model innovations in order to ensure a just transition across communities and demographics. These perspectives highlighted a desire for an approach that prioritises long-term thinking over immediate results across a broader range of areas than technology alone.

Others also supported this drive from WWU, particularly in light of the higher start-up costs associated with net zero innovations. Against the backdrop of the volatile political environment for the decarbonisation transition and a lack of new energy legislation forthcoming, the company was urged to take the lead with this type of innovation funding, but also liaise with the government to try to establish a clearer direction of travel towards net zero. Additionally, some attendees suggested new areas of investment for funding, such as collaborating with companies focusing on heavy goods and commercial vehicles powered by clean fuels. This pragmatic approach suggested targeting specific, tangible challenges within the net zero framework.

However, some participants felt that this funding alone would not be enough and took the view that WWU would need to collaborate with distribution network operators (DNOs), water companies and local authorities as part of planning efforts. This collaboration was thought necessary to untangle the current muddled approach to energy network planning.

#### *Innovation funding and delivery beyond net zero within the next business plan*

During discussions, stakeholders put forward a number of different non-net zero target areas for innovation funding during the next business plan period. However, splits emerged in whether to target immediate practical issues or look towards longer-term strategic innovations.

In terms of more immediate practical solutions, some stakeholders underscored the significance of addressing rural digital poverty, highlighting that improving digital access could dispel wider myths around digitalisation and open new avenues for exploration. This view was rooted in the belief that better information dissemination is crucial for community engagement and awareness. Others identified another immediate issue that could be addressed through innovation: the rising cost of energy. It was noted that for many people, the pressing issue was not future innovations like hydrogen or heat pumps, but rather the looming

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challenge of affording energy bills in the short term. Therefore, WWU was urged to explore any innovations that would reduce gas costs for customers.

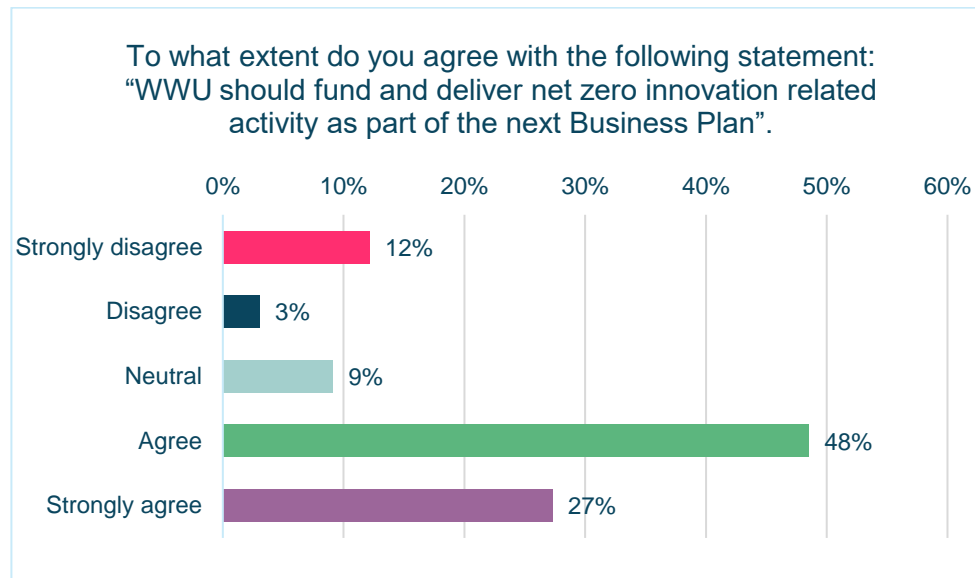
Looking over the longer term, it was thought that cross-sector innovation could deliver some of these savings. A parish councillor noted the success of their community's solar panels and battery storage systems, as it had reduced its reliance on gas, and argued that cross-sector innovation at a larger scale could drive efficiency and create value for customers. A business representative echoed this sentiment, advocating for operational efficiency as a crucial area for innovation investment. They suggested that this would not only reduce bills but also contribute to carbon emission reductions.

### 1. Should WWU be allowed to access specific funding for innovation projects?

- “I’m all about innovation and how you can reduce energy use or be smarter. I’m interested in how people can reduce their energy consumption.” Local authority elected member
- “I’m in favour of funding if it’s not to the detriment of the customer. The wastewater project, for instance, is fantastic.” Vulnerability group
- “The open mindset is key. You only know what you know, but there are organisations with answers to questions we didn’t know we had.” Charity
- “Regarding the GD1 growth for innovation, as a stakeholder it feels like it’s gone too much down the net zero path. If you haven’t got a net zero product to approach WWU with, then there doesn’t seem to be that drive to do things. Things won’t get funded, or it’ll be entertained by them and then the cost will be borne by the SME. In GD2 the purse strings have been strictly tightened, and it seems like the restrictions have been put into the wrong areas.” Utility / energy group
- “I do think innovation has to be useful, something that has a real chance of coming to market, having real measurable benefit, of being the next step to part of a bigger project.” Utility / energy group
- “It’s about how that innovation can be delivered in partnership and support an ongoing benefit for the greater good. Some of the communication is very geographical. It needs not to be done in isolation. There are opportunities to change the system.” Local authority officer
- “I can’t possibly see why not. The way the regulator has carved up funding in the past has been a bit artificial. You want to fund the best, most innovative project. And yes, collaboration and learning. If something is centrally funded, the learning should be available to everyone. The way the system is funded, people don’t often talk to each other.” Utility/energy group
- “It’s the people factor as well. Collaboration, training, enabling people to feel knowledgeable and skilled, and doing that in partnership, not isolation. We’re all having to speed up the transition towards net zero and we all need to be working across boundaries.” Local authority officer
- “If it means saving in the long term, then investing into these sorts of things is beneficial. My concern is that it wouldn’t translate to a reduction down the road, as you’d end up having to continually pay for it. £133 is an awful lot of money for some people. I’m supportive but hesitant.” Charity



## 2. To what extent do you want WWU to fund and deliver net zero innovation related activity as part of the next business plan?



- “I used to work for Innovate UK. There is plenty more to do. If we stop now, we’re not going to get to net zero. We have everything that we’re close to implementing plus next-gen tech that we’ll see rolled out by 2050. They need innovation funding, and for the long term. I agree it needs to be useful, but there also needs to be some kind of mechanism for long-term thinking. The problem with some innovation funding is that it does force some quite short-term thinking.” Business representative
- “When we think of net zero, we typically think technology based. But we should also be thinking in terms of social and economic innovation, or business models that make things work. How do we have a just transition across different communities, different demographics? There’s more than just getting the tech to work and that’s what people forget.” Business representative
- “Regarding the net zero issue, we need to work in collaboration with the district network operators on energy planning. This includes the entire energy sector. Collaborative thinking about how to support local authorities is vital. It’s currently a muddled picture.” Local authority officer
- “Innovation is a priority, and you need the funding. Using wastewater is a great idea. Collaboration between water services and electricity suppliers is a good idea. There needs to be more planning about the theft of gas and the impact on cost. There needs to be more planning and consideration about those not putting their gas boilers on.” Housing association
- “Net zero is an important topic, but there will be higher startup costs to these things. Who is going to fund the innovation initially? We’re all still waiting for some of the new energy legislation to come out, the goalposts are being moved throughout all of the political changes. The industry needs to take leadership, but the government also needs to direct for net zero.” Utility / energy group
- “Some money towards working with companies who are looking to electricity HGVs and commercial vehicles. Try and find the solution and work with the motor industry.” Housing association



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### 3. What other areas (outside of net zero) would benefit from innovation funding and delivery in the next business plan?

- “Get the right information to people digitally to dispel myths. There is still rural digital poverty. This would open up a whole new world of exploration for them.” Vulnerability group
- “We need to see more collaboration between the networks, particularly ways that innovation can be rolled out faster. Successful products or techniques take years to deploy.” Consumer body
- “Shrinkage. The GDNs have been relatively accepting that they’re not making very fast progress on shrinkage in GD2. Are there other ways that they can reduce shrinkage, which is more economical than replacing pipes, which may or may not be needed in ten or 20 years’ time?” Consumer body
- “In order to overcome the environmental challenges faced by gas companies, we have installed a system of solar panels and batteries, significantly reducing our gas dependence. On that basis, we would encourage cross-sector innovation within the utilities to deliver greater efficiencies and value. There is also scope for using innovation to demonstrate the safety of hydrogen.” Parish councillor
- “My view would be that they should put more trust in the network. Have the net zero things in there for sure and look where else you want to invest to balance your portfolio. One thing that jumps out operational efficiency. If you can bring innovation in around this, then it’ll be good for bills and save carbon emissions.” Business representative
- “WWU needs to work with multi-disciplinary teams, for instance, the NHS as they often don’t know about the PSR at all.” Vulnerability group
- “It starts with WWU supplying the network. There’s only so much you can do from the network, but it all helps. It’s harder to allow our properties to meet net zero. It’s good to share this with other industries.” Housing association

## PRIORITIES

### Most important topics for the next business plan

Overall, when asked to indicate which topics were most important to them in the next business plan on Slido, ‘vulnerable customers’ and ‘net zero’ were the most popular with 11 and 9 votes respectively. The importance of these topics was further highlighted through similar references to them given by stakeholders, such as “vulnerability”, “fuel poor” and “net zero by 2030”. Reflecting the themes of previous discussions, “collaboration” also emerged as a key focus for WWU among attendees, as it was mentioned eight times.



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## 5. Which services / investments would you value the most / least / are indifferent to?

- “From my perspective, customers care about safety and cost.” Vulnerability group
- “I’m concerned about the potential double-funding by customers for gas theft investigations, as suppliers are legally required to conduct them anyway. The challenge lies in determining the most efficient party for the job, considering suppliers have direct access to smart meter data. It raises questions about the role of energy networks in providing services and meeting consumer needs efficiently.” Consumer body
- “I struggle with the concept that ‘theft of gas costs x amount every year so we’re going to charge you more to stop it’. I’d rather have somebody steal it and keep my bills lower. Education is key, people need to know why they shouldn’t be doing it.” Charity

## 6. Which services / investments would you be prepared to pay more for?

### ➤ Is that a little, a lot, no increase or a decrease?

### ➤ What does this look like in £?

- “If you do catch someone stealing gas due to fuel poverty, could you then assist them so they’re no longer in this position? This essentially decriminalises the desperation of it. We also need a full circle of support so people can actually use the appliances they have.” Vulnerability group
- “I imagine that the costs of what WWU is providing is increasing, so I guess that’s restricting what you’re able to do in the future.” Local authority officer
- “I’m surprised by how little investment has gone up since the last workshop.” Utility / energy group
- “We pay more for our LPG. As a charity, we can’t access any help for businesses and charities on the grid. We just have to pay for the LPG ourselves. We would definitely pay a little more if it was possible.” Vulnerability group
- “Safety is a main focus.” Local authority officer
- “It is down to individual circumstance. Just because one person is willing to see an increase on a bill, it does not mean that others want or even can manage the increase in cost – which increases the need for those needing support.” Local authority officer

## 7. Are there other topics that are important to you as part of the business plan?

- “You need an integrated approach to get to a more sustainable position. Energy prices are clearly too high for some people. A social tariff could help a wider range of customers in the interim period as you’re moving towards more sustainable prices.” Consumer body
- “If we’re going to do anything proactive around gas theft, we must acknowledge that people are acting out of desperation and should approach it from this angle.” Vulnerability group

## Delivering an environmentally sustainable network

Looking through the lens of bill increases and rising fuel poverty, some attendees questioned whether the hydrogen and biomethane heating commitments, as well as some of the natural capital actions (particularly ‘Improve the biodiversity on and around our buildings and assets’), necessarily provided good value for

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money at present. For the former, it was argued that some customers would be unaware of the benefits of net zero and would therefore be unwilling to give up their gas boilers. As a result, WWU was called upon to roll out an information campaign to address this by others, who were in favour of greater investment towards net zero now to bring down bills later. The latter was simply seen as a nice extra and not something that should result in higher bills for customers at this time.

It was felt by some that those with deep knowledge of the benefits of net zero would tolerate the increase in bills for this investment. However, it was thought that some kind of breakdown on how customer costs were invested for their benefit would be needed to get them to accept a rise in their bills. Irrespective, attendees were of the view that WWU needs to do everything that it can to deliver this as cost-effectively for customers as possible.

Other suggested areas that participants encouraged WWU to explore under this theme included providing home insulation and rolling out communications campaigns to encourage more sustainable behaviour and generate greater understanding of the decarbonisation options available.

#### **8. Which services / investments would you value the most / least / are indifferent to?**

- “Most customers want to stick with their existing boiler and don’t want to switch to newer forms of heating system.” Utility / energy group
- “Sustainability is vital and will eventually bring the costs down.” Vulnerability group
- “While consumers think the environment is important, I’m wondering whether they don’t want to fund it themselves. There’s a view that in order to be greener it’s going to cost more.” Utility/energy group
- “It comes down to ‘what’s it going to cost me?’ If we’re talking about making buildings more biodiverse and I’m already struggling to pay the gas bill, I’m not going to care about plants while I’m sat at home freezing.” Business representative
- “Raising awareness of the environmental benefits is key. Communities on the ground are confused about the right thing to do. Education needs to be invested in to combat misinformation. Engaging communities more will help the other three pillars and we can find out more about what consumers and industry want to better deliver on all four pillars.” Local authority officer
- “There is value in supporting customers to reduce energy consumption. Most households can make reductions and it’s good value for customers and communities, and society in general, so we would definitely be supportive in investing heavily in that area.” Environmental group
- “The majority of the general public don’t necessarily know what net zero actually means.” Charity

#### **9. Which services / investments would you be prepared to pay more for?**

- **Is that a little, a lot, no increase or a decrease?**
- **What does this look like in £?**

- “People who understand/appreciate it may tolerate a marginal cost increase.” Environmental group
- “They need to show a breakdown on their bills, like you get with tax. I’d like to see how each pound from my bill is distributed.” Housing association

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- “When people see how their money is spent, some might be more likely to accept increases in bills. Clearly demonstrate how their money is being spent.” Housing association
  - “An annual statement to the customer that breaks down how their money is spent on core and extra services.” Housing association

#### **10. Are there other topics that are important to you as part of the business plan?**

- “Anything we provide has to be done in a cheap way and we have to innovate to determine how we can do that. It’s on everyone in the sector to work out how this can be done as cheaply as possible. Net zero needs to take place alongside engagement. People are going to become more vulnerable and more will be fluxed into poverty. It’s good that WWU is showing interest, but there needs to be brutal honesty about the situation’s gravity.” Local authority officer
- “We are on this decarbonisation journey, and with the cost of living we need to understand our options and what it will cost us.” Local authority officer
- “Energy behaviours and insulation should be a priority.” Local authority officer
- “Looking at making it affordable to homeowners.” Charity

#### **Meeting the needs of consumers and network users**

Attendees unanimously supported increased funding for the actions under this theme, in light of the severe cost of living and the need to remove stigma around not being able to pay gas bills. In particular, it was felt that any targeted support should first go to customers highest on councils’ indices of deprivation. Despite this support for increased funding, there was also a noticeable reticence to charging customers any more for these services, due to the already high costs of bills and food. This pointed to a difficult balancing act for WWU to fund this extra support. It was also stressed that WWU must work in greater collaboration with other organisations to deliver services under this theme to as many vulnerable customers as possible. In addition to this, education and advice to vulnerable customers was voiced as a good cornerstone to work in this area, through proactive efforts to reach out to these customers before they fall into serious crisis.

#### **11. Which services / investments would you value the most / least / are indifferent to?**

- “I would certainly put more funding into this.” Vulnerability group
- “The shame of not being able to pay a bill needs to be removed.” Local authority elected member
- “All councils have indices of deprivation. Go for the red areas first.” Local authority elected member
- “Every single vulnerable customer should have their needs met.” Charity
- “The cost of living is affecting people so badly at the moment and that’s what they’re going to focus on.” Vulnerability group

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## 12. Which services / investments would you be prepared to pay more for?

### ➤ Is that a little, a lot, no increase or a decrease?

### ➤ What does this look like in £?

- “From a rural perspective, some people are struggling heavily with the cost of living, so they would be reluctant to spend more.” Charity
- “It's a balancing act of where that money comes from and where it's charged, and what other costs pressure people are experiencing at the time.” Charity
- “People who are struggling now lack the capacity to understand or care about how innovation will assist in the future. They are struggling to buy food and heat their house at the moment.” Charity

## 13. Are there other topics that are important to you as part of the business plan?

- “Collaboration is key.” Local authority officer
- “In terms of energy advice to vulnerable customers, how much of this goes towards advice on how to use gas efficiently?” Local authority officer
- “Education, because then you reach people before they get to a crisis point.” Vulnerability group

## Delivering value for money

Stakeholders were split on whether innovation actions provided good value for money and should be prioritised. Some were very keen for WWU to target this area in the next business plan, with particular support for net zero innovation action expressed. However, others thought that innovation was nice to have and should only be heavily pursued if it brings down customer bills. With this in mind, some were against any bill rises to pay for these services, as they were not felt to offer sufficient value for money in the current climate, whereas others took the view that they may be needed to fund innovations to support net zero, which were viewed as a priority for many. Cross-sector collaborative innovative work was identified as an additional area within this theme that was felt worthy of inclusion in this area of the business plan.

## 14. Which services / investments would you value the most / least / are indifferent to?

- “My worry is that net zero becomes less of a priority for people under the current economic crisis. There has to be a change, we have to move to net zero. How do we explain to the customer that that doesn't have to mean more expensive?” Business representative
- “Innovation, unless it brings down the cost in utility bills, is the lowest priority. Utility bills for carers are higher than average as they spend more time in the house than most.” Vulnerability group
- “People do also recognise the importance of innovation to get a better product going into the future, along with a sustainable network.” Charity
- “The vast majority would be around meeting the needs of consumers and networks users, particularly with how things have been over the past year and will be for a while. The lowest priority is probably innovation unless you can demonstrate a tangible benefit.” Local authority officer

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## 15. Which services / investments would you be prepared to pay more for?

➤ **Is that a little, a lot, no increase or a decrease?**

➤ **What does this look like in £?**

- “I think it depends on your perspective. The average customer wants to have reliable energy, but they might not realise why it’s so cheap. You pay almost nothing for the energy coming into your home considering how complex it is. You can’t forget the other stuff because in the long term we do need to get to net zero.” Business representative
- “No increase. All services should have good value for money.” Local authority officer

## 16. Are there other topics that are important to you as part of the business plan?

- “Take learnings from other local areas and government to make sure there is a fair and consistent approach.” Local authority officer



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## APPENDIX 1: ATTENDEES

A total of 63 stakeholders attended the workshop, representing 49 organisations. The organisations represented are shown below:

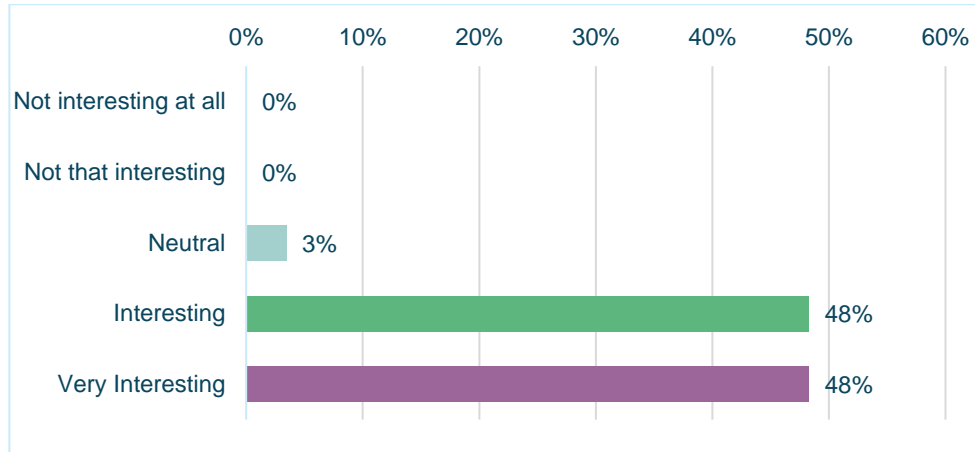
Accent	Fuel Bank Foundation
Age Cymru	Gas Safe Charity
Age UK	GFirst LEP
Arup UK	Groundwork North Wales
Auriga Services	Hope 4 U Limited
BAME Voice	Monmouthshire Housing Association
Bishton Community Council	NEA
Bridgend Carers	North Devon and Torridge District Councils
Bristol City Council	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Cadent Gas	Rural England
Cardiff Capital Region	Shelter Cymru
Cardiff Capital Region City Deal Office	SMS Energy Services Ltd
Care & Repair Cardiff and The Vale	Somerset Council
Centre for Sustainable Energy	South Gloucestershire Council
Ceredigion Citizens Advice	Swansea City Council
Citizens Advice	Swansea Council
CLA Cymru	The Royal Association for Deaf People
CO-Gas Safety	Tower Group
Dangerpoint	University of South Wales
DWFRS	Warm Wales
Energy Saving Trust	West Monkton Parish Council
Englobe	West of England Combined Authority
Fifth Sense	Wiltshire Council
First Choice Housing	WLEP
Frazer-Nash Consultancy	



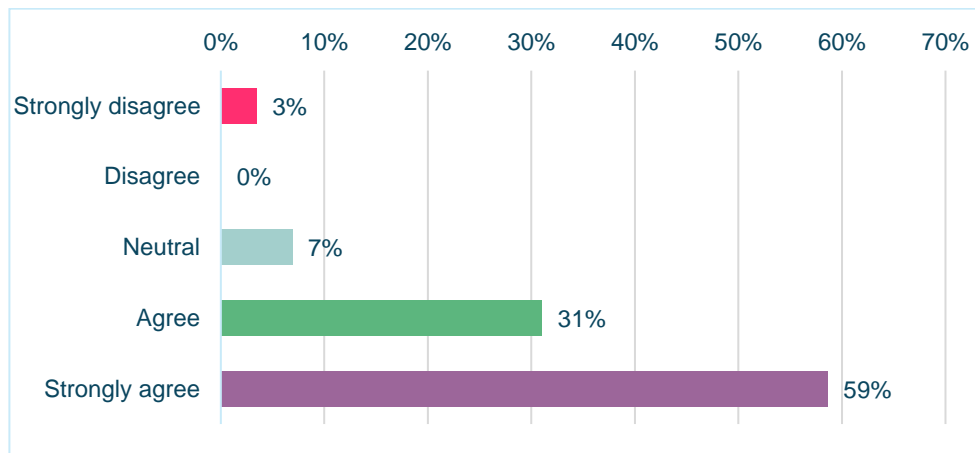
## APPENDIX 2: WORKSHOP FEEDBACK

After the workshop, stakeholders were asked to complete a short feedback form. Some of the key findings are shown below.

### 1. Overall, did you find this workshop to be:



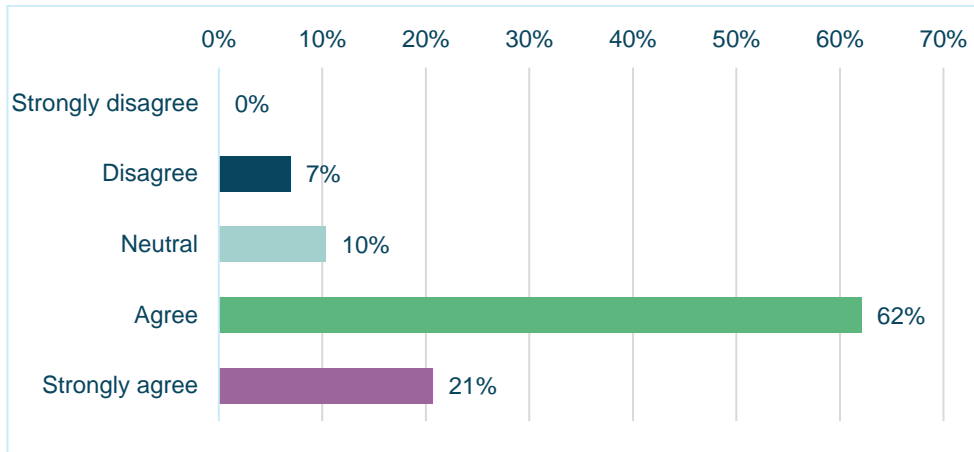
### 2. Did you feel that you had the opportunity to make your points and ask questions?



#### Comments:

- “It was well run and I was particularly interested in hearing the comments from other online attendees.”
- “More time was needed for the breakout sessions.”
- “An open and honest conversation with a range of opinions.”
- “Breakout groups were carefully chaired to allow all attendees to provide input. However, there wasn't much time left for us to ask questions.”

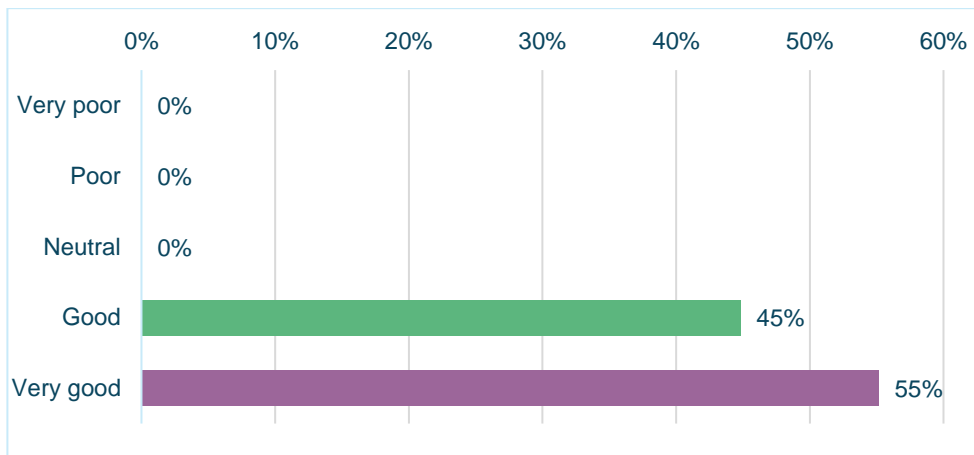
### 3. Did we cover the right topics for you on the day?



#### Comments:

- “No mention of community heating systems. This would have been welcome.”
- “Perhaps more focus on interaction with other providers in off-grid areas (74% of homes in Ceredigion) would have been good.”
- “I’m happy that WWU shaped the workshop to allow stakeholders to respond to what was needed for them to shape the business plan.”
- “You should consider covering data in future sessions.”

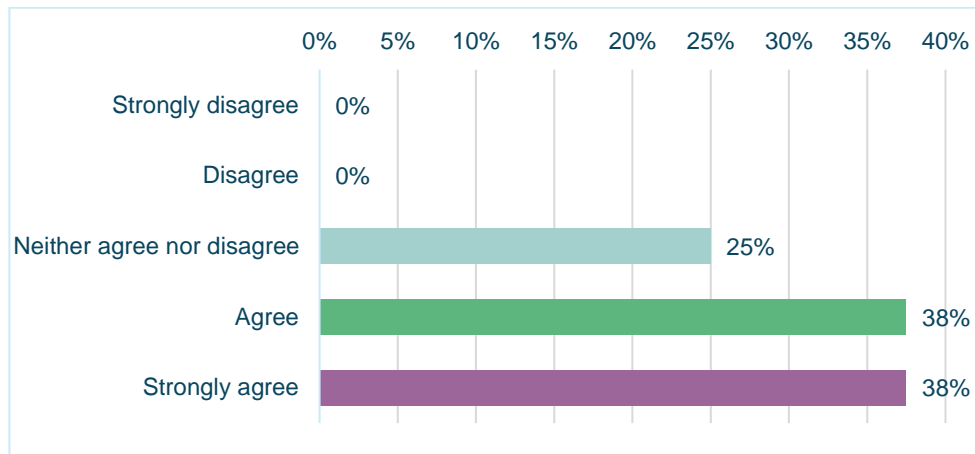
### 4. What did you think of the way the workshop was chaired by your facilitator?



#### Comments:

- “My facilitator was inclusive and patient.”
- “My discussion group was carefully chaired to give all attendees time to input.”

## 5. If you attended online, did you find the format accessible and easy to use?



## 6. Do you have any other comments?

- “It was an interesting overview into the business plan.”
- “Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to input into this process. I'm very reassured that such a focus was given to supporting vulnerable customers throughout, this is really welcome.”
- “A good first (for me) meeting. Look forward to joining future meetings to develop conversations and priorities further.”
- “A really informative session. I was interested in other participants' experiences and approaches, and felt my voice was valued. Thank you.”
- “It would have been nice to have had long to consider the areas. It felt a bit rushed.”



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