Involving stakeholders in the future of our business
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This document sets out how SSEN seeks to engage with stakeholders. It’s informed by the views and expectation of our stakeholders, whom we engage with regularly throughout the year, presenting some of the key areas of focus for our business over the coming years, and how we will continue to collaborate externally as we face fundamental changes to the way in which electricity is managed at a local level.

Get in touch
We would be happy to hear from you if you would like to discuss any of the content included in this strategy. Please email – stakeholder.engagement@sse.com

Get involved
To register and receive regular updates on our business performance and opportunities for future engagement, please follow this link to sign up.
Introduction

Stakeholder engagement isn’t just the right thing to do; it’s essential to the long-term success and sustainability of our business. We know from the most successful companies that good performance is inextricably linked to effective engagement. It helps us to understand our place in society; holds us to account; ensures we can adapt to the rapidly changing external environment in which we operate; and ultimately improves the services we offer our stakeholders and the decisions we take on their behalf.

We’ve been refining our approach to stakeholder engagement over many years, and although our strategies are robust and embedded, we can, and must, do more to successfully deliver the electricity networks of the future.

Our industry is facing its biggest shake-up in recent memory as Distribution Network Operators make the transition from operating predictable networks to taking on system operator roles in which we are accommodating new low carbon technologies and changing consumer behaviour on a local level. Predicting with confidence exactly what that transition will look like is an almost impossible task, which is why we are engaging extensively to define the strategic direction of our networks over the decades to come. Stakeholder engagement has never been more important as we attempt to facilitate the future of the low carbon economy at an acceptable cost.

This strategy outlines SSEN’s approach to stakeholder engagement within our two electricity distribution licence areas, helping to drive our business forward and deliver meaningful outcomes for our stakeholders and for the communities and society in which we operate. So that we focus on the most pressing issues facing our company and the wider industry, it has been produced in conjunction with our stakeholders and approved by our board, our most senior and strategic decision-making authority.
It is vitally important that we are switched on to the outside world to help inform our plans, and ensure we can continue to provide a safe and reliable supply of electricity. This is especially true since we do not have customers in a traditional sense who can change their electricity distributor.

Benefits of stakeholder engagement

Benefits to stakeholders

• Opportunity to influence SSEN’s plans
• Ability to have their issues heard – more open lines of communication
• Increased accountability of SSEN to ensure it honours its commitments and addresses relevant issues
• Increased understanding of SSEN’s business objectives
• Early identification of issues, encouraging collaboration to achieve positive outcomes

Benefits to SSEN

• As a monopoly business, external input helps to validate the actions we take and ensures we invest bill payers’ money in the right way and at the right time
• While we may like to think that we do from time-to-time, we don’t have all the answers to our problems. Stakeholder engagement can help us unlock solutions
• Nurturing positive working relationships helps to build trust
• Able to help key stakeholders understand the challenges facing our business and industry, and the reasons behind them
• Effective engagement ensures better decision-making
Our approach to stakeholder engagement

To ensure our approach to stakeholder engagement adheres to best practice in the energy industry and beyond, we have been working with the standards firm, AccountAbility.

In successfully benchmarking ourselves against the AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard, we have shown that our engagement activities have effective governance, policies and strategies in place, that we are transparent in accounting for our performance to stakeholders, and that we respond innovatively and sustainably to issues that matter most to stakeholders, both now and in the future. This has resulted in the adoption of a six-point approach to stakeholder engagement which underpins how we operate.

1. Identify stakeholders

We recognise that a broad range of stakeholders are impacted by our activities and we need to consult with them and include them in our decision-making. We routinely review our existing stakeholder contacts and identify any new groups or individuals. We recognise that one size does not fit all, and we can’t engage with everybody at the same time. Therefore, we categorise stakeholders based upon their interest, knowledge and influence on our activities.

2. Identify material issues

Naturally, not all stakeholder groups will be interested in or affected by every aspect of our activities. Our targeted engagement programme focuses on the most pertinent issue/s for each stakeholder group to encourage active participation and ensure meaningful feedback.

We regularly engage with our principal stakeholder groups to identify the key issues facing that organisation or company to make sure our engagement is as inclusive and responsive as possible. We then seek to understand how we can work together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

3. Plan engagement

Once we have identified our stakeholders and material issues, we endeavour to find the most effective tools to inform, consult or collaborate with them. Because each stakeholder is different, we offer a range of ways to engage with us, using only the most appropriate mechanism/s. We regularly review the suite of engagement methods which our teams can use as we look to adopt new techniques that better support our aims and objectives.

4. Engage with purpose

Having a clear purpose is key to achieving successful outcomes. We make sure that all parties have a clear understanding of what we are trying to achieve to ensure the engagement process is meaningful and inclusive for all involved. To integrate the views of different stakeholder groups, we often triangulate engagement methods so that the robustness of the conclusions we draw from engagement activity can be reliably corroborated by other sources.

5. Share feedback

In the interests of transparency, following robust analysis, we summarise and share feedback received from the engagement process to evidence what stakeholders have told us. Where stakeholders have consented under the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) principles, we send feedback directly to contributing stakeholders or publish reports that are publicly accessible on our website.

6. Act on learning

We commit to being responsive and acting transparently on material issues where we have the ability to deliver positive outcomes. On occasion, there may be circumstances when we are not able to act on stakeholder feedback. Where this is the case, we will always look to explain the reasons for not doing so.
Our strategic themes for engagement in 2019-20

Informed by our engagement in 2018-19 and shaped by our panels, our strategic themes have been developed in line with SSEN’s business strategy so that stakeholders can clearly see how they are shaping our approach to strategic issues.

CORE PURPOSE

To deliver safely and reliably the electricity that powers communities, now and in the future.

VISION

To be the leading network owner and operator, enabling the transition to a net zero world

Collaborative action on consumer vulnerability

We are committed to engaging with consumers in vulnerable situations, and the trusted organisations who represent them, to deepen our understanding of complex vulnerability. We will work in partnerships to deliver a wide range of services that targets support where it is needed most.

Driving innovation in core services

From our engagement with customers we know that they expect and value improvements to core services. We are committed to working with stakeholders to develop smart solutions that deliver benefits now or provide a platform for the future.

Delivering in the public interest

As monopoly providers of an essential service, utilities are judged to a higher standard of conduct. We will always seek to understand and improve public legitimacy and take bold, collaborative steps to demonstrate delivery in the public interest.

Enabling the net zero transition

We have a key role to play in enabling the transition to net zero, which will change the way customers interact with energy. Early, proactive engagement with our stakeholders in ED1 will help shape better outcomes and ensure no customer is left behind.

Supporting safe and resilient communities

We know that we need to play an integral role in our communities to deliver continued resilience and safe outcomes. We are looking beyond our obligations to deliver leading initiatives that meet the needs of both communities of place and communities of interest.
Engagement is embedded throughout our organisation

Approaching engagement on three levels aligns with our business’ structure, with seven semi-autonomous regions, four in our Southern Electric Power Distribution (SEPD) area, and three in our Scottish Hydro Electric Power Distribution (SHEPD) area, being responsible for service delivery in their area.

Stakeholder engagement happens on a daily basis and touches every part of our operations. The central stakeholder team provides the necessary training, tools and expertise, allowing colleagues to take genuine responsibility for their own activity.

Embedding responsibility for engagement across our organisation at all levels means that we can understand the changing and evolving needs of those in receipt of our service. This understanding is possible because we listen to what we are being told and we use that feedback to change and continue to build our business to reflect what our stakeholders need.

We have developed a strong governance structure so that stakeholder feedback is formally integrated into all aspects of SSEN’s operations, from the strategic decisions taken by senior managers down to the day-to-day tasks we undertake to connect customers to our network on a local level.
Our governance structure

Our governance structure ensures clear lines of responsibility for engagement across all levels and in 2019-20 we have improved the focus and links between our defined governance groups.

With strong communication loops, we ensure that our most senior colleagues have the ability to influence, and be influenced by, engagement at the operational and organisation level in addition to the strategic level. These feedback loops also mean that our frontline colleagues are empowered to influence strategic engagement without a complex process.
Consumer vulnerability strategy

Our core vulnerability strategy has been developed with stakeholders and is now firmly embedded into our business plan, our systems and our processes.

To ensure we are moving forward at pace, and keeping our strategic objectives relevant, we developed five strategic objectives allowing us to improve the efficiency of our service and widen the scope of our activities.

1. Addressing consumer vulnerability is at the heart of our business strategy, our culture, our policy, and all our services

2. Identifying and responding to consumer vulnerability promptly and with empathy

3. Keeping the distribution costs of our consumers’ electricity bills as low as possible

4. Delivering an accessible and empathetic service to our Priority Services Register (PSR) customers

5. Supporting those who become temporarily vulnerable during a power cut
We understand that vulnerability issues are complex, and that there are many ways in which consumers can be vulnerable. Despite this complexity, our main objective can be summed up simply – to make our services accessible and suitable for all consumers, particularly those needing extra support.

In order to define the various work streams, projects and measurements that make up our strategy, we have engaged with a number of external stakeholders, particularly consumer organisations, which has resulted in the creation of our vulnerability strategy wheel.
Useful links

- **Stakeholder Engagement Publications** – ssen.co.uk/Library/StakeholderEngagementPublications
- **Priority Services** – ssen.co.uk/PriorityServices
- **Events** – ssen.co.uk/stakeholderevent/basicsearch
- **Community resilience fund** – ssen.co.uk/Resiliencefund

Keep in touch

Whether you have comments, queries, requests for information or would like to be our partner on one of our many projects, feel free to contact or follow us using the channels below:

- /ssencommunity
- @ssencommunity
- /ssen
- /ssencommunity
- stakeholder.engagement@sse.com
- ssen.co.uk/StakeholderEngagement/HaveYourSay