

# Annual Stakeholder Report

2023



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# About us

We own and maintain more than 35,000 kilometres of gas pipes and supply gas to around 2.5 million households and businesses, serving a population of around 7.5 million people. We don't sell gas; instead, we use our extensive network of pipes to transport gas throughout Wales and the south west of England.

Our customers trust us to respond to gas emergencies and keep their communities safe, connect new homes and businesses and upgrade the gas network so it stays safe today and is ready to transport green energy in the future.

We work with a range of stakeholders and communities to develop sustainable, innovative and affordable energy solutions. Part of our role is to contribute positively to the quality of life and wellbeing of our customers and the communities we serve. That's why we work around the clock and invest in our gas network to successfully deliver gas to homes and businesses, offering the very best service for our customers now and for generations to come.

## Our priorities

### Doing all we can to provide sustainable energy

We are working to achieve net zero targets and deliver reliable, greener energy for heat, power and transport.

### Driving outstanding service

We strive to exceed customer expectations by offering fair, inclusive, quality services while looking after those in need.

### Demanding safety always

We never compromise on the safety, wellbeing and health of our colleagues and customers and continuously improve standards.

### Designing our future

We're building a skilled, resilient, diverse team to work with stakeholders and help our communities and society thrive.

### Delivering value for money

We always spend and invest money wisely, working smarter to offer affordable services that give value for money.

# Introduction

With the cost-of-living crisis still in full force, albeit with some stabilisation of energy prices, the wellbeing of our colleagues and customers is a top priority. To that end, we make sure safety is at the heart of everything we do – receiving our 10th consecutive RoSPA Gold Award this year as well as the coveted President's Award is testament to our efforts.

This year we also launched our first stand-alone sustainability strategy, which articulates our long-term sustainability ambitions, delivery of which is focused into discrete five-year price control periods. Stakeholder insight was critical in defining this dynamic strategy, which will flex to reflect the challenges we face as we look to play our role in decarbonising energy and achieving net zero. This strategy underpins our priorities and enables us to take the most appropriate actions to deliver our mission of keeping people safe and warm. This report contains many examples of how that plays out in practice.

**Graham Edwards OBE**  
**Chief Executive**





## Launch event

This year, we launched our **Sustainability Strategy**. This builds on our commitment to sustainability in our current price control Business Plan, published in December 2019. It translates the big idea of sustainability into the specific actions we are taking across every part of the business for our customers, colleagues and local communities.

Developed to align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the goals set out in The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, this ambitious strategy has benefited greatly from the input of our customers and expert

stakeholders. Their insight has been key to developing our strategy. We worked with our Customer Engagement Group (CEG) and Citizens Panel to make sure the plan was fit for purpose and meets the needs and expectations of our customers.

As part of this engagement process, we hosted a launch event, inviting stakeholders to take part in interactive discussions in person and online so we could gather more feedback and further shape our approach. These sessions covered themes from the strategy that included:

- ▶ plans to become a “hydrogen ready” network
- ▶ how the company can support customers in vulnerable situations
- ▶ delivering a “just transition” to net zero
- ▶ building an equitable, diverse and inclusive team with skills for the future
- ▶ how the company can support biodiversity and deliver environmental net gain.

# Demanding safety always

Safety is consistently a top priority for external and internal stakeholders and is a key focus for our business.

Being awarded a 10th Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Gold Award and a RoSPA President's Award for our work in this area, reflects the importance we attach to safety and wellbeing

We continued to promote safety among the public and we were proud to once again have a national winner of the Energy Networks Association (ENA) carbon monoxide competition in our area, which encourages sharing gas safety messages.

Elliot Bowen-Churchill with his winning design

**LET'S LEARN ABOUT CO**  
Carbon Monoxide  
Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas (CO)  
You wouldn't believe it but you can't see it, hear it, smell it, taste it or touch it

**How to spot a CO problem**  
Your gas cooker flame is floppy or yellow/orange  
If your boiler light blows out or the flame is yellow/orange  
Remember a healthy flame should look blue!  
If you have a fireplace check for soot or yellow/brown stains on it  
If you see excessive condensation on the windows in the same room as the boiler or fire place

but remember it can still be very DANGEROUS

Look inside to **Stay SAFE**

**The symptoms of CO poisoning are ...**  
Headaches  
Dizziness  
Nausea  
Collapse or loss of consciousness  
Breathlessness

If you suspect a carbon monoxide problem or smell gas move to fresh air and call **0800 111 999**

<https://thecocrew.co.uk/know-the-facts>

If you suspect a carbon monoxide problem or smell gas move to fresh air and call **0800 111 999**

Leaflet designed by Elliot B-C

## Our safety-related sustainability headlines:

- ▶ To maintain the safety and security of our assets to keep customers and communities safe
- ▶ To promote the safety of our workforce
- ▶ To look out for the wellbeing and health of our colleagues.

## Supporting the wellbeing of our colleagues

Many of our stakeholders are affected by the cost-of-living crisis and our engineers and other customer-facing colleagues are seeing the impact of it every day.

During the past year, we have released podcasts on the support we make available for colleagues as well as about how they can recognise the signs of people struggling and what they can do to support them.

We have also continued publishing our internal wellbeing newsletter, which is full of advice on how colleagues can take care of themselves and others.



## CASE STUDY

# Game Over for carbon monoxide

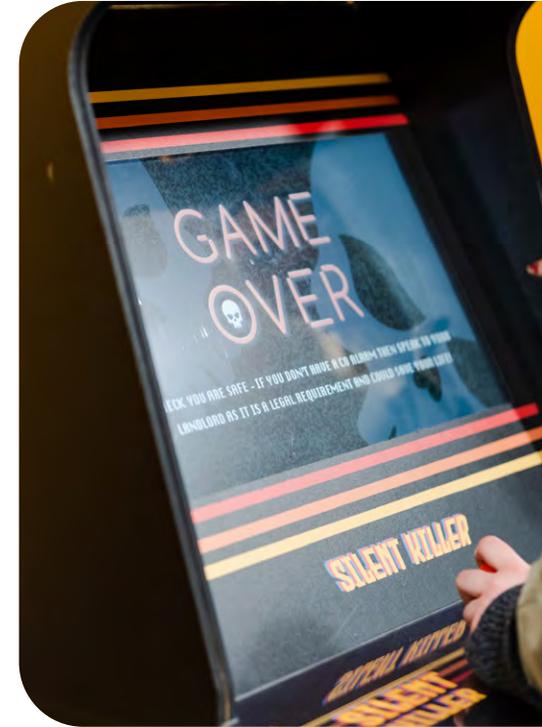
Stakeholders expect us to be proactive in spreading the safety message and research shows young people in their early 20s are challenging to engage when it comes to safety.

With that in mind, we launched **Game Over**, which builds on our successful pilot creative media campaign targeting young people with carbon monoxide awareness messaging through social media ads on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, ITVX, All4, Spotify, DAX and Octave Audio.

Game Over saw five social media influencers spreading the message about the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning via TikTok and Instagram, while we worked alongside fellow gas network SGN to recruit student ambassadors from 16 universities in England, Scotland and Wales who ran events and shared content and merchandise among fellow students.

The campaign also featured a bespoke retro arcade game based on the “silent killer”, which toured five university campuses across all the gas distribution networks areas.

We also created a dedicated website (UKGDNS.com) to host further information on carbon monoxide, including where it comes from, the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, how to stay safe and the number to call in an emergency.

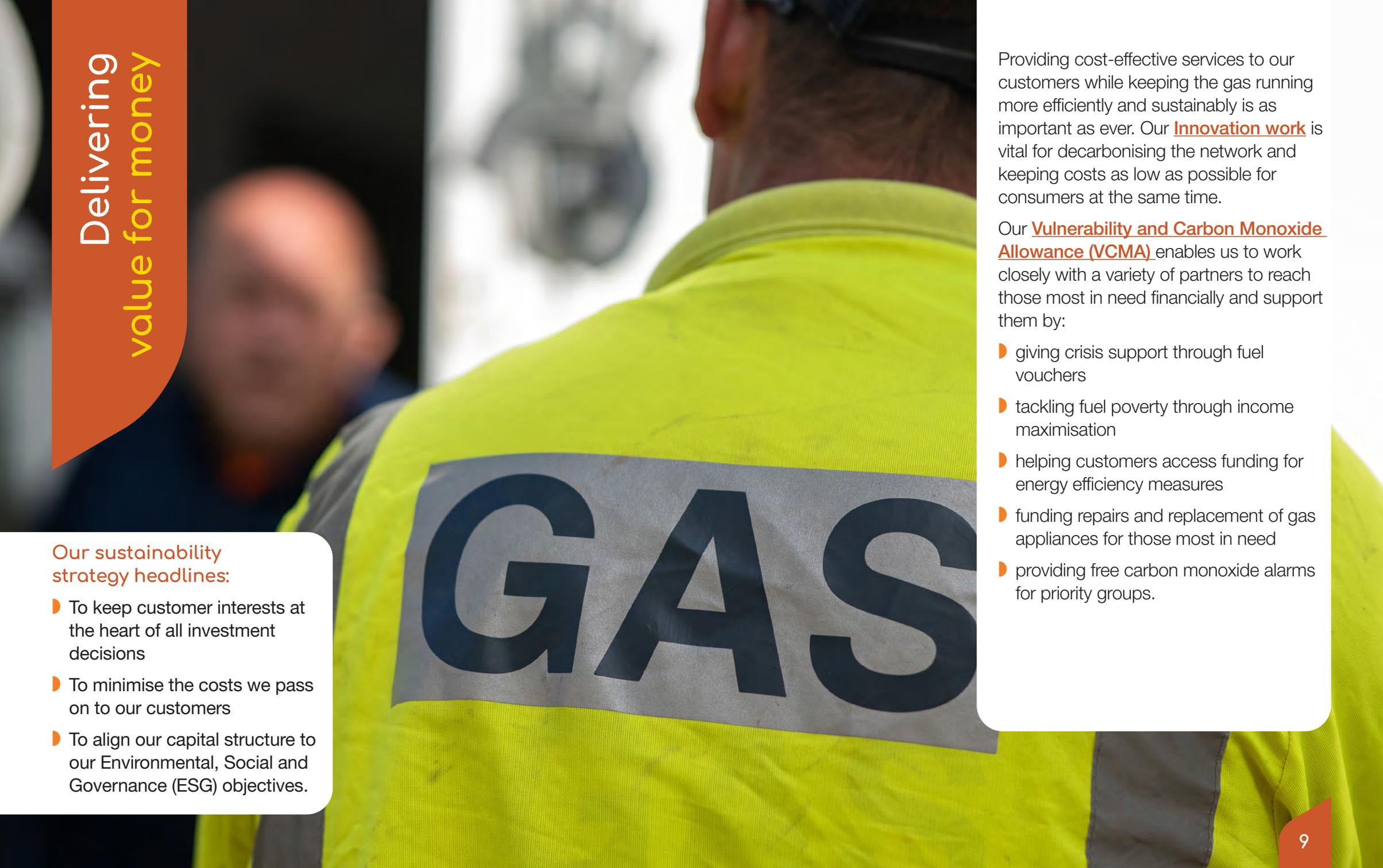


Key achievements for this campaign so far:

**1.19 million** 16 to 24-year-olds reached across social media

**5,000+** students reached over the five-day university tour

**10,732** Social media likes for influencer carbon monoxide content.



## Delivering value for money

### Our sustainability strategy headlines:

- ▶ To keep customer interests at the heart of all investment decisions
- ▶ To minimise the costs we pass on to our customers
- ▶ To align our capital structure to our Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) objectives.

Providing cost-effective services to our customers while keeping the gas running more efficiently and sustainably is as important as ever. Our **Innovation work** is vital for decarbonising the network and keeping costs as low as possible for consumers at the same time.

Our **Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)** enables us to work closely with a variety of partners to reach those most in need financially and support them by:

- ▶ giving crisis support through fuel vouchers
- ▶ tackling fuel poverty through income maximisation
- ▶ helping customers access funding for energy efficiency measures
- ▶ funding repairs and replacement of gas appliances for those most in need
- ▶ providing free carbon monoxide alarms for priority groups.



## CASE STUDY

### A pathway to greener gas

In June 2023, we co-hosted the Hydrogen Gateway event at the International Convention Centre in Newport, bringing together industry, business, Government and the public sector to see how we can work together to overcome the current barriers to decarbonisation.

At the event, we launched the [Hydrogen Delivery Pathway report](#), which draws on our previous work on the Regional Decarbonisation Pathways study and our Pathfinder Toolkit. The report – a result of co-operation between city regions, local authorities, businesses, and academics under the Western Gateway partnership – explores the major opportunities the region could enjoy if hydrogen were used as part of the UK's energy system.

The report also details how the area could become an innovative hub for net zero aviation and rail innovation as well as helping the UK lead in decarbonising major industry such as steel production in south Wales.

## CASE STUDY

### Holistic help for vulnerable customers

Working with Citizens Advice, we have co-designed an energy safeguarding programme that expands on the charity's existing service to help more low-income households across England and Wales at a time of exceptionally high demand.

Citizens Advice provides free and independent advice to millions of people in England and Wales each year, over the phone and in person. The charity's Energy Advice Programme helps vulnerable people access expert energy advice, get better energy deals and improve their household income.

Through our partnership and VCMA funding, we are also addressing a knowledge and skills gap in the organisation to help its energy advisors raise awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide.

For each Citizens Advice client provided with energy and carbon monoxide advice this year, support has led to an average income gain of £835. Over the entire 15-month programme to date, Citizens Advice has supported 20,488 clients and achieved an income gain of £7,056,535.

This holistic approach to support is improving the mental and physical health of thousands of households across the country – 69% of clients reported the programme has had a positive impact on their health and/or improved their confidence and ability to manage their issues.

## FACT FILE

**16,800** Households reached

**6,904** Energy advice sessions

**4,933** Carbon monoxide alarms provided

**16,800** Carbon monoxide awareness conversations

**7,173** Priority Services Register (PSR) registrations

**9,584** Benefits advice

**48** Locking cooker valve (LCV) referrals

# Doing all we can to provide sustainable energy

As the energy system transitions to net zero, local and regional decisions play an increasingly key role in the shaping of our infrastructure. We are exploring how energy system innovation can support local areas in realising decarbonisation goals for their communities and businesses.

Our Pathfinder 2050 modelling tool will help local areas understand how the gas network is used, future planning for the net zero transition, the deployment of renewable electricity generation and the use of biomethane and hydrogen.

Innovation can help underpin this understanding by investigating novel ways of solving challenges.

We have a range of projects in our innovation portfolio aimed at aiding the transition to net zero. These include HyLine Cymru, which looks at introducing a new hydrogen pipeline to support the South Wales Industrial Cluster, a hydrogen village project at Redcar (alongside Northern Gas Networks) and a town pilot that's currently in the planning phase.

We are also in the process of building a demonstration retrofit home in 2023 (pending work with partners and relevant approvals). Other areas of focus for our innovation projects include microgrid technology, connection into the network, rurality and "grey" wastewater to hydrogen.

## Our sustainability strategy headlines:

- ▶ To innovate and choose greener technologies
- ▶ To ready our assets and operations for low-carbon gases
- ▶ To work with and support our customers during the transition to net zero
- ▶ To improve the health of our environment





## CASE STUDY

### Hello Hydrogen

We know reducing emissions is important to our stakeholders, so we are encouraging the Government to commit to hydrogen for home heating, which could cut carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions by 20 million tonnes a year – equivalent to the emissions from 12 million cars a year.

We also understand that, to successfully roll out hydrogen for home heating, we will need to provide information for our customers so they can make informed choices about their home heating set-ups.

To that end, we have joined forces with some of the biggest names in the UK energy industry to raise awareness of hydrogen and to urge the Government to commit to a hydrogen future.

The “Hello Hydrogen” campaign aims to educate people about hydrogen’s potential for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and spread the word about new “hydrogen-ready” boilers that could be used to heat homes in the future.

## Working on what's possible

Feasibility studies play an important role in our net zero future by analysing the likelihood a project will be successful and often involve working with a variety of stakeholders. Some of the most exciting feasibility studies currently in progress include:

### Wastewater

We have partnered with global hydrogen company Hydrostar to assess ways of producing low-carbon hydrogen from wastewater.

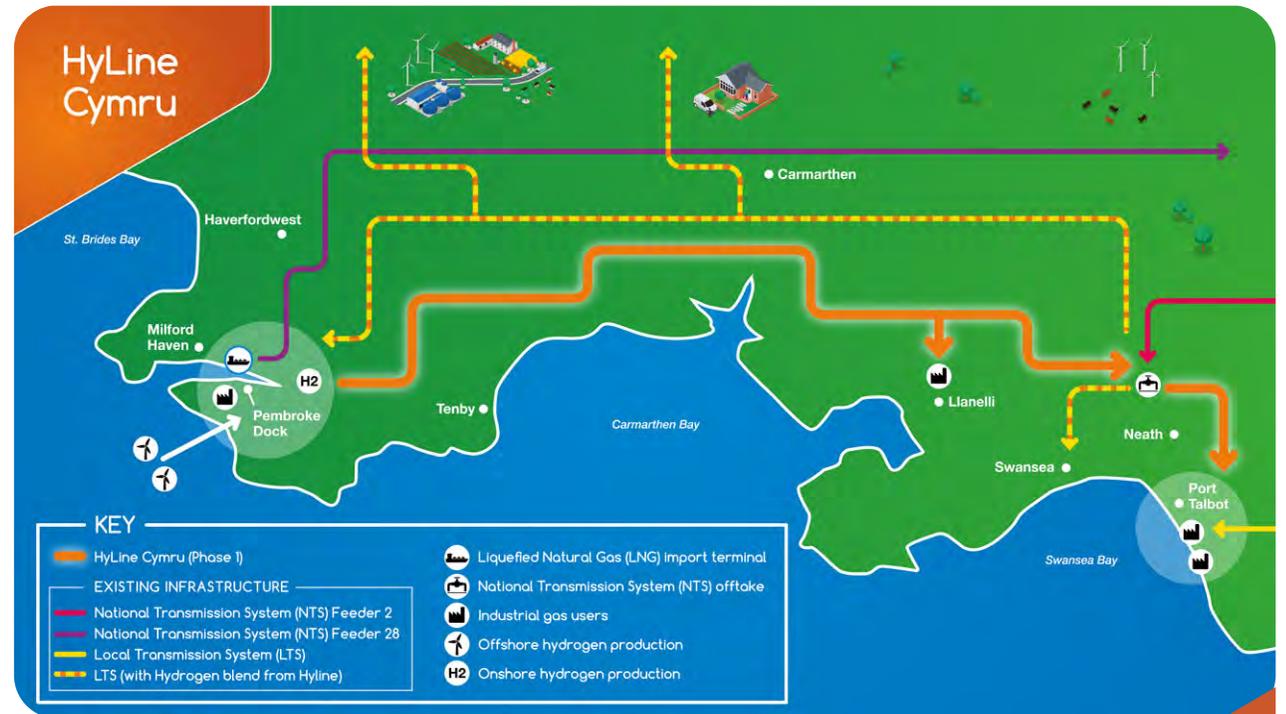
Our partnership will study the feasibility of a low-carbon electrolyser system that uses lower quality water than usual – primarily recovered rainwater – to produce green hydrogen, which we believe will play a crucial role in decarbonised energy, transport and heat provision.

Green hydrogen is currently produced through electrolysis, which usually requires purified water and green electricity. Successful conclusion of the study, funded by the Strategic Innovation Fund, could bring many benefits, including cost reductions and water and carbon savings.

### HyLine

HyLine Cymru explores building a hydrogen pipeline that would connect the source of the low-carbon gas in Milford Haven to the industrial centre of Swansea Bay, where it would be used to power industry.

Another element of our contribution to helping the UK achieve net zero by 2050, the proposed pipeline will pave the way for commercial-scale hydrogen production while also providing infrastructure for industrial and domestic customers to switch to the low-carbon gas.





Delegates at the ADBA event

**CASE STUDY**

## Bringing on more biomethane

We are committed to bringing more green gas into our network to decarbonise heating, which is in line with our stakeholders' wishes.

In partnership with the Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association (ADBA), we arranged a stakeholder workshop in Cardiff aimed at helping more biogas operators connect to the grid.

Delegates discussed the development of the biogas-to-grid market and opportunities for new and existing biogas plants, while Wales & West Utilities' colleagues spoke about the process and what we can do to support small biogas operators.

## Designing our future

It is vital we prepare the next generation of colleagues to become adaptable and innovative energy professionals capable of meeting the demands of the future energy system and tackling emerging challenges.

To achieve this goal, we need to continue engaging with our future workforce to find out what they expect from “employers of choice”. We have already begun research into this and we have also appointed a dedicated Resourcing Business Partner. This new role is tasked with building relationships with a network of schools, colleges and further education institutions to attract talent into the industry.

### Our sustainability strategy headlines:

- ▶ To build a skilled, resilient and hydrogen-ready team
- ▶ To improve the diversity, equity and inclusion of our team
- ▶ To engage with our supply chain and industry partners on sustainability.



Children attend a GSA session

## CASE STUDY

### More gas safety messengers

Spreading the gas safety message among our younger stakeholders is incredibly important as they frequently share at home what they have learned in the classroom.

We have recruited and trained additional colleague Gas Ambassadors, who visit schools to deliver our carbon monoxide safety sessions.

These drive home the simple steps children and their families can take to stay safe from carbon monoxide. This year, we have expanded the content ambassadors deliver to cover gas and site safety as well.

Working with a Cardiff primary school, we redesigned the sessions and take-home materials so the message is delivered in a fun and informative way, with children taking a participative role. As part of the sessions, ambassadors explain what gas does in the home and

how it gets there before detailing what we do to make sure people continue to receive a safe and reliable gas supply.

Ambassadors also spend time explaining the actions people should take if they were to smell gas or suspect carbon monoxide poisoning and encourage youngsters to learn the national gas emergency number. In 2023, we will have delivered sessions to more than 4,800 children across our network.

But we are not stopping at this achievement and have contacted more schools to book visits for the next school year into 2024, actively targeting places most at risk such as:

- ▶ socially deprived areas
- ▶ carbon monoxide hotspot areas
- ▶ areas where we are carrying out planned gas pipe replacement work.

## Becoming an employer of choice

In an ever-changing operational landscape, it's essential we embed a culture of engagement with our current and future employees, to make sure we can attract and retain the talent we will need to succeed.

This year, working alongside nine other major employers in our area, we provided local schoolchildren with vital careers information as they made their future GCSE choices. We organised a careers event for more than 100 year 9 pupils from schools in Newport, south Wales, which featured jobs workshops and bespoke support and advice about the options available.

We are also working with the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Learning organisation to see how they can help us develop links between people working to improve STEM education and co-ordinate volunteering opportunities for our colleagues.

Engaging our current workforce is also important to our future and, earlier this year, we published our Inclusion, Diversity & Equity Strategy. This aims to create a working environment in which all colleagues feel valued and supported to contribute to their full potential.



## Driving outstanding service

We are committed to providing outstanding customer service and the fact we are among the first organisations to be awarded the BSI (British Standards Institution) Inclusive Service Kitemark reinforces our commitment to exceeding customer expectations. We also gained a Service Mark ICS (Institute of Customer Service) distinction this year and our customer service scores have remained high.

This year, we also partnered with SignLive to provide a free 24-hour online interpreting service for British Sign Language (BSL) users when calling us. Customers can now download the SignLive app and use it to have a video conversation with a BSL interpreter, who will then translate the discussion and relay it to our engineers and customer service teams.



### Our sustainability strategy headlines:

- ▶ To provide excellent customer service
- ▶ To support customers in vulnerable situations
- ▶ To support our communities in the transition to low-carbon energy.

## Spotlight on customer service

Our colleagues genuinely care about our customers and continue to go above and beyond to help those in need and put a smile on the faces of those they serve. Our customer service team frequently receives positive feedback about our operatives. This year, two stories stood out:

### All washed up

Earlier this year, we had to turn off an elderly woman's gas overnight while carrying out mains replacement work during the heatwave.

Our team leader Jake kept the customer updated on the progress of the work and, before leaving that evening, noticed the customer boiling the kettle to wash the dishes. Seeing she was unsteady on her feet and looking tired, Jake offered to do the dishes for her.

The following day, a member of our social obligations team spoke to the woman's daughter, who was incredibly happy with the service Jake provided, saying he had gone "above and beyond" to look after her while she had been without gas.

### Reassuring service

When our mains replacement work was likely to affect a man with Alzheimer's who lived in one of the homes nearby, his son contacted our engineer Lee, who was overseeing the work.

Lee outlined when access to the property would be required and, because the man was easily confused and uneasy about letting strangers into his property, agreed to call the son beforehand. Lee also confirmed he would make sure the boiler was operating as normal once the work had been completed and the gas had been switched back on.

In the email we received after the works, the customer said: "I am so grateful for the reassurance and information exchange prior to and on the day of the works. Will you please pass on my gratitude again to the engineer for the support and assistance provided. We are going through such a difficult time in trying to ensure my dad continues to live as independently as possible and the service we had was just first class. Thank you."





## CASE STUDY

### Easing the hydrogen switch for vulnerable customers

Our customer-first approach to the energy transition is the driving force behind our report [Switching Vulnerable Customers to Hydrogen](#).

The report, carried out by independent experts at the Energy Systems Catapult, is based on engagement with a range of industry experts and consumers in vulnerable situations. It explores the practicalities of converting energy customers in the UK from natural gas to hydrogen – with a particular focus on consumers in vulnerable situations.

Unlike other potential solutions to helping the country reach net-zero carbon emissions, switching homes to hydrogen should not require significant changes to people's homes. However, there are still challenges to be overcome. Our report identifies these and lays out the key steps that could be taken to minimise the impact on consumers in vulnerable situations.

Findings from the report will support planning for Hydrogen Village Trials, informing their customer engagement strategies. They will also be shared with the other UK gas networks and organisations interested in converting homes to decarbonised heating to help inform their customer engagement strategies.

## Contact us

To find out more or contact us at:  
[engagement@wwutilities.co.uk](mailto:engagement@wwutilities.co.uk)



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