



SONI Forward Work Plan 2024-25

Appendix 6 Stakeholder Engagement

Northern Ireland
September 2024

Section 1

Stakeholder engagement

SONI Forward Work Plan 2024-2025

Stakeholder engagement is one of the four SONI outcomes and an important criterion by which SONI is assessed as part of the Evaluative Performance Framework.

The Evaluative Performance Framework Process for the Forward Work Plan 2023-2024 provided valuable feedback for SONI.

This appendix sets out SONI's Stakeholder Engagement process in terms of how we engage, why we engage and what we use the stakeholder information for. We will also detail the stakeholder segmentations that we work with through each of the four SONI TSO roles and set out our planned engagement activities for the period October 2024 to September 2025 across each role.

SONI's Response to Stakeholder Feedback

SONI received feedback during the assessment phase of the Forward Work Plan 2023-2024 Evaluative Performance Framework from:

- ❑ The stakeholder submissions provided to, and published by, the UR in their call for stakeholder submissions on the SONI Forward Work Plan 2023-2024
- ❑ The stakeholder event which was held on 23 November 2023
- ❑ Queries received from the independent panel during their evaluation process.
- ❑ The panel's publication of their Evaluative Performance Report published on the Utility Regulators website on 25 January 2024
- ❑ The Utility Regulators determination on the assessment of the SONI Forward Work Plan 2023 – 2024.

In this document, the section "How Feedback Shaped SONI's Forward Work Plan" collates the feedback received across key areas such as KPIs, deliverables, and assessment criteria during the previous phases of the Forward Work Plan and highlights the improvements that SONI has made in the 2024-25 Plan to address these points.

SONI Stakeholder Engagement

Overview

This section will focus on how SONI engages, why we engage and what we do with the feedback we receive during the engagement process.

Since the publication of the Forward Work Plan 2022/23, SONI has undertaken a comprehensive Stakeholder Needs Assessment. This assessment exercise informed the development of SONI's first public Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

Following the completion of the Stakeholder Needs Assessment in October 2023 and an extensive desk-based review of approaches taken by other comparable organisations, SONI published a 'Call for Views' based on proposals for our first public Stakeholder Engagement Strategy in February 2024. This was underpinned by reviews of two further core enabling strategies: our Public Engagement Model; and our Landowner Charter. The rollout of our Landowner Charter is included as a project within this year's Forward Work Plan.

The Stakeholder Engagement Strategy was detailed in the Forward Work Plan for 2023/24 and the strategy was published in June 2024. The Stakeholder Engagement Strategy 2024-26, has been designed to enable our engagement for the remaining years of SONI's current five-year Strategy (Strategy 2020-2025), Business Plan and Price Control period represents the culmination of this extensive consultation and engagement process.

This multi-year strategic framework will be supplemented by shorter, more succinct SONI Stakeholder Action Plan which will be published alongside our Forward Work Plan and reported on through the annual Performance Report.

Stakeholder engagement is a core theme of the Evaluative Performance Framework, runs through all roles and is important for the successful achievement of the four SONI outcomes, as well as holding its own pillar within our Shaping Our Electricity Future roadmap.

We will develop a new Stakeholder Engagement Strategy to support the delivery of SONI's forthcoming new Strategy 2025-2031, Business Plan and Price Control period.

Why We Engage

SONI believes that truly successful engagement is making informed decisions utilising all available insights. It takes place in every team and every level of our organisation, and it is a fundamental enabler of our mission.

We set out to ensure that those who are affected by activities and plans are afforded the opportunity to have an input into the process and to understand how their contributions have been taken on board, resulting in better outcomes for all.

While not everyone will agree with the decisions made, everyone should have an equal chance to have their say, to understand why decisions are made, and to feel that decisions are made in a fair and open way.

In SONI's new Stakeholder Management Strategy, we have set out new principles and values to drive our approach to engagement.

Engagement Principles



Inclusivity

We will seek to engage as widely as possible on our plans at the earliest possible stage, use accessible terminology and utilise methods of engagement proportionate to the needs of our stakeholders.



Transparency

We will seek to be open and transparent, act with integrity and be clear on the parameters of influence throughout our engagement. We will be clear about the need to balance the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders in addition to our legal and licence obligations



Consistency

We will seek to be consistent in both the quality and quantity of our engagement.



Responsiveness

We will seek to be proactive and receptive to the needs of our stakeholders and respond in a timely manner



Impact

We will seek to prioritise the areas that matter most to our stakeholders, proactively identify opportunities to co-develop balanced solutions and meaningfully incorporate input where possible.

Our Commitment to Stakeholders

As an organisation, SONI is engaging with our key stakeholders every day, at multiple levels and across almost every team and workstream – it is a core part of our business-as-usual activity. For example, between October 2022 – March 2023, we assessed that over 600 engagements took place between SONI and our key stakeholders.

This section details the work we have already undertaken to respond to previous feedback and our plans for the future.

Given the scale of stakeholder engagement that takes place and as our work to support the delivery of the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy has intensified, we identified the requirement to better understand the needs of our stakeholders in order to be able to assess our effectiveness in delivering against those needs at a strategic level. This assessment exercise informed the development of SONI's first public Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

To develop this understanding, SONI commissioned an independent Stakeholder Needs Assessment project in May 2023 as part of our Forward Work Plan 2022/2023. The outcomes of this project informed the development of SONI's first public Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

In recent years we have reviewed and transformed our public and stakeholder engagement in relation to transmission grid infrastructure. We have developed a framework for decision making which puts accessible communications, digitalisation, outreach with communities and stakeholders at the heart of our approach, and we are committed to further improvements. We will also continue to invest our time and resources in a strategic and transparent approach to regulatory engagement. The UR is a principal stakeholder in our new focus on decarbonisation.

How Stakeholder Views Formed SONI's Forward Work Plan

In preparation of the Forward Work Plan 2024 – 2025, SONI reviewed and considered the stakeholder submissions provided, and what actions we can take to demonstrate improvements in the areas called out in these submissions. In the section below, we specify some of this feedback. Further information will be provided in the Performance Report 2023-24 which is scheduled to be published in December 2024. Written feedback was provided on three occasions:

- Stakeholder Submissions requested by the Utility Regulator on the Forward Work Plan 2023 – 2024 published in November 2023
- The EPF (Evaluative Performance Framework) Panel Report which was published on the Utility Regulator's website on 25 January 2024, and
- The Utility Regulator's decision on the SONI Forward Work Plan 2023 – 2024 published on their website on 25 January 2024.

Stakeholder Submissions to the 2023-2024 Forward Work Plan and SONI's response

Whole System Approach

Both the UR and Mutual Energy raised points relating to a whole system approach. Mutual Energy requested the **“addition of a new work plan item regarding the need to establish, and subsequently deliver on an ongoing basis going forward, a suitable joint system planning approach across gas and electricity.”** The Utility Regulator stated: **“We would welcome SONI taking the opportunity within this FWP to identify any proposed collaborative / collegiate work with gas networks.”**

SONI Response

As mentioned in SONI's Mid-Year Performance Report on the 2023-24 Forward Work Plan, SONI acknowledge the increasing interdependence between the electricity and gas networks. As a result of this SONI has formalised our approach to stakeholder engagement with Gas TSO's in 2024 and are proactively engaging with Gas TSO's. Further information on this engagement can be found in SONI's Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

Business-as-Usual (BAU)

The UR stated that: **“The EPF is not intended to focus on the delivery of SONI Business-as-Usual (BAU) activities. We expect SONI to perform well on the delivery of BAU. We expect the EPF to set out how SONI plans new activities and initiatives which will comply with new obligations, additional market demands and enhance the quality of the service it already provides.”**

SONI Response

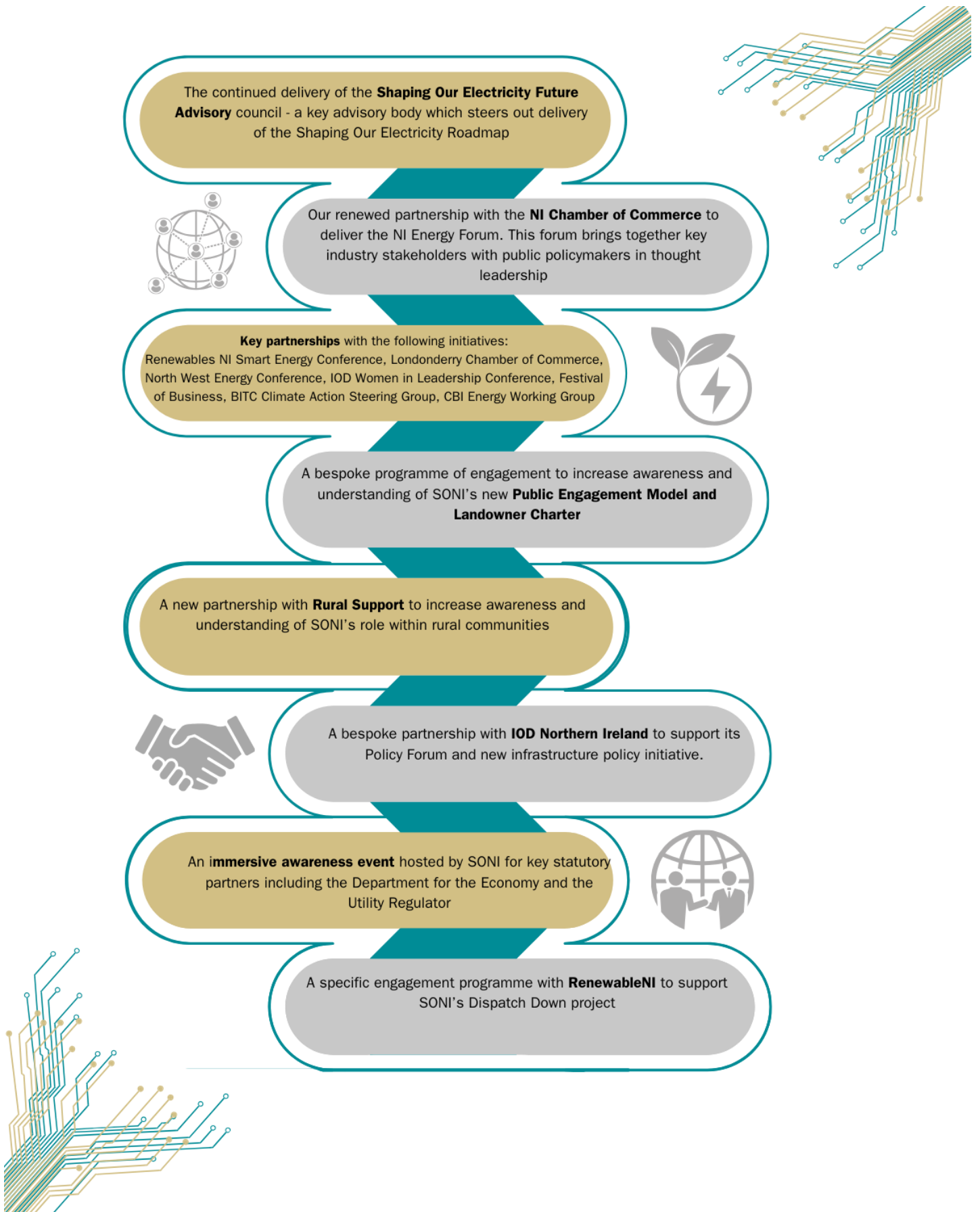
After reviewing the projects included in the plan, SONI developed criteria to distinguish between business-as-usual (BAU) and non-BAU activities. Although the projects identified as BAU involve established processes, there is a substantial amount of additional work that goes beyond BAU, which justified their inclusion in the 2023-24 Forward Work Plan. However, based on the newly developed criteria, SONI have now removed all BAU projects from the plan to focus on innovation.

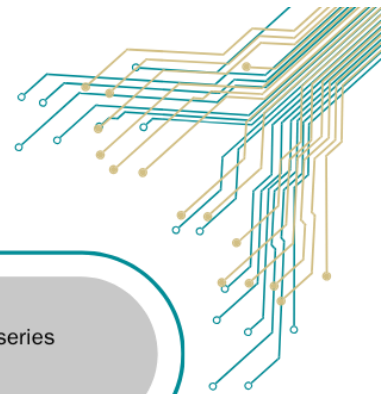
The projects identified as BAU from last years FWP are listed below:

Project ID	Project Name
FWP004	Capacity Auctions Schedule
FWP012	End of Life Assets – System Refresh
FWP013	End of Life Assets – EMS Upgrade
FWP23-15	SONI Mid-Year Performance Review
FWP022	Publish SONI's 2024/25 Forward Work Plan
FWP021	Balancing Market Principles Statement
FWP019	Annual Innovation Report
FWP23-22	Security of Supply Publications
FWP23-28	Connection Offer Applications

Planned Engagement over 2024 - 2025.

Further details of our planned engagements can be found in our Stakeholder Management Strategy, however we can confirm the following strategic engagements for 2024-25:





A programme of briefing sessions on **SONI's Winter Outlook** with key stakeholder groupings.

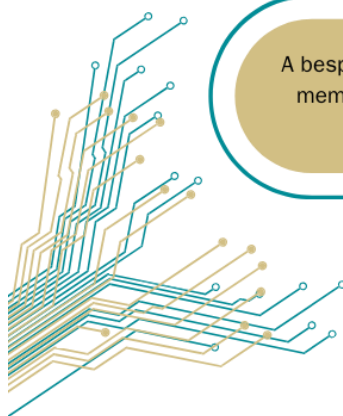


Delivery of SONI's **Annual Energy and Business** event series

A vast programme of **community and landowner engagement** to support the delivery of SONI's infrastructure projects



An extensive three-phased programme of engagement to support the development of SONI's **SRP26 Business Plan** including a series of bi-lateral engagements with key partners, the administration of an Advisory and Challenge Group and a workshop series.



A bespoke partnership event with **IOD Northern Ireland** and its members on SONI's role in supporting the energy transition