

Supporting our customers in vulnerable situations

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Workshop



15th June 2021

together
we are
the network

Thank you

Thank you again to those of you who joined us for our VCMA workshop on Tuesday 15th June.

Myself, Jill, Steve and our facilitators thoroughly enjoyed seeing you all again. A special thank-you to our guest presenter Ainsley Rowe from our partner organisation, Foundations Independent Living Trust (FILT), for an excellent insight into the repair and replacement of appliance element of NGN's Hardship Fund.

"Keep doing these they're great"

"Found the session very positive, engaging and I learnt a lot"

Purpose of the workshop

16

delegates

9

overall satisfaction with the event (out of 10)

- **You said / we did** – update from annual strategic workshop in April
- **Hardship Fund (shareholder funded)**– overview & themes, including next steps
- **Foundations Independent Living Trust (FILT)** – spotlight on Hardship Fund partner / repair and replacement of appliances
- **VCMA** –criteria to consider, including gaps and hotspots
- **Breakout session – VCMA** - helping us to design a new service around repair and replacement of appliances

Hardship Fund - overview, themes and next steps

- £150k per annum / shareholder funded
 - 4 themes were built from stakeholder feedback, and address gaps that exist in funding support for our customers in most need
 - 4 themes relating to hardship - all partners appointed
 - **Causes of hardship** – benefits advice (Groundwork)
 - **Repair/replace appliances** (Foundations Independent Living Trust)
 - **Health-related** (British Lung Foundation)
 - **Circumstances** (Communitas Energy / CE)
 - All projects currently being progressed
- Next steps**
- Name change being considered
 - Regular reporting from partners - quarterly
 - All partners will be reviewed after year 1
 - Establishing eligibility criteria to address gaps in FPNES funding streams (circumstances element)
 - Outputs from year 1 will be shared with partners

Foundations Independent Living Trust (FILT)

Spotlight session from Ainsley Rowe, Grants & Programmes Officer

Ainsley provided an overview of FILT. NGN has provided £25,000 funding to FILT (in partnership with Gas Safe charity) who support Home Improvement Agencies (HIA's). The aim of the fund is to support owner-occupiers, in the repair and / or replacement of gas appliances and has been provided to address a shortfall of HIA support in NE of England / Yorkshire. Households who are supported will not have had any interaction with NGN.

FILT slides were incorporated into the slide deck for the whole workshop when they were circulated.

Questions & Answers session (including chat questions)

Really interested in the hospital discharge scheme just seeking more info about which hospitals, how it happens at ward level and who is eligible.

- If Occupational Health are dealing with a customer, they will survey the house. HIA will also undertake a gas safety check from Gas Safe funds as standard on discharge from hospital. Referrals can be made directly to FILT.

This would also be a good opportunity to promote Priority Services to patients who may need support in the short term

- FILT have already issued a PSR leaflet to HIA's to get customers signed up. FILT are awaiting feedback from HIA's. PSR sign up is highlighted every time FILT interact with the HIA's

How do you define level of low household income?

- Informal arrangements are in place and this is not defined. The HIA's know from visiting the properties (owner-occupiers) and regular interactions if the household are living with hardship / have finance challenges. HIA deems the low-income indicator. No proof of benefits is required.

Are respondents given these options to choose from, or do you allow them to respond freely then bring them together?

- This is dependent on individual HIA's.

Two options available - completion box to tick or free text box to comment. Great data gets collected. FILT encourage customers to provide all feedback. FILT have a lot of data gathered without much effort. A simple question to respondents allows a lot of information to be gathered.

These outcomes are brilliant. Have you also measured the social return on investment of the project e.g. reductions in hospital visits?

- FILT have undertaken some research. Something FILT are considering focussing on in future, specifically around Gas Safe funding. NGN are also developing a simple partner SROI toolkit which will be shared.

How do you monitor and collect data on outcomes - is it standardised across the service?

- HIA's share a spreadsheet. There is standard data collection from each HIA (c50 in UK). Each HIA has responsibility for collecting their own data/own login to the spreadsheet. Documents are uploaded by HIA and data is checked by FILT each month.

Could you tell me a bit more about what a Home Improvement Agency is? who funds them? runs them etc? is there one for each council area?

- Not one in every council area. There is

also the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) if a home needs adapting due to change in circumstances. DFG is managed through HIA (HIA handyman services can undertake small adaptations). Adapt My Home website also has lots of information. Find My HIA link will be circulated with workshop slides

Are the monies / adaptation tied to the property or customer?

- Some agencies do ask to have the money paid back. Information on the above websites will detail this

Is there any indication on what the low household income limit is? Does it vary depending on number of occupants within the household?

- HIA work with these households on a regular basis so will know and understand if they are on low incomes / in hardship through conversations. They never question low income. FILT trust HIA's determination of low income and customers living in vulnerable situations.

When the fund was set up we knew there was a gap in funding in NE and Yorkshire. Why is there a gap and are there any others across the UK?

- Not sure. Possibly down to individual HIA's. Some areas have not had HIA's. There are known gaps in Scotland. Some customers do not have mains gas. Also depends on HIA's own policies. Lack

Break-out session – new service design

of awareness in some areas and work slightly different in certain areas, hence sometimes there are gaps. FILT are going to survey what people do know about HIA's and identify / close gaps in 2022. Happy Energy is HIA in south of England. To qualify as a HIA, you need to be able to give energy advice.

VCMA – key criteria to think about

- **What need/issue is the project addressing?**
- **How does it link to the broad categories of vulnerability within the NGN's Vulnerable Customer Strategy?**
 - Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space
 - Mental wellbeing
 - Temporary vulnerability, inclusive of bereavement, job loss, impact of COVID 19
 - Rural vulnerability, including off-grid communities
 - Financial hardship, including benefits advice, help for small businesses
- **How does it link to the key outcomes that NGN need to monitor?**
 - Raising awareness of carbon monoxide
 - Addressing fuel poverty
 - Registering eligible customers on the Priority Services Register (PSR)
- **How can the project continue beyond NGN funding?**
- **Does it deliver a positive social return on investment (SROI)**

VCMA – gaps and hotspots (current)

Current VCMA projects – key themes by allocated spend for year 1.

- Financial – 65%
- Rural – 20%
- Mental – 9%
- Temporary – 5%
- Physical – 1%

Gaps

- Geography – no specific projects - Newcastle/Sunderland/West Yorkshire
- Refugee communities (Bradford only) - identify other projects to offer similar support
- CO/PSR research – currently awareness is rated lowest in north-east post codes
- As detailed above, projects around mental, temporary and physical themes
- Anything else we could expand on?

VCMA provides funding for essential gas appliance servicing, repair and replacement (following NGN's work).

Essential gas appliances are gas fuelled heating systems (including gas boilers and gas fires and gas cookers)

In order to qualify as a VCMA Project, unsafe pipework and essential gas appliance servicing, repair or replacement must meet the following criteria:

- a. a GDN has to isolate and condemn unsafe pipework or an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role;
- b. the household cannot afford to service, repair or replace unsafe pipework or the essential gas appliance; and
- c. sufficient funding is not available from other sources (including national, devolved or local government funding) to fund the unsafe pipework or the essential gas appliance servicing, repair or replacement.

We need your help

In order to design this service for our directly impacted customers, we need your help. Please could you discuss:

- What we **must** consider as part of this process
- What we **should** consider as part of this process
- What we **could** consider as part of this process

Designing repair & replace service

What the service **MUST** do

- Training support for FCO's – how to assess low income? Is it their role? Is it a follow up call from the office?
- Need to be smarter – follow up call not necessarily the engineer but don't miss anybody
- Eligibility – benefits to be considered asset rich/but still in poverty. Single workers / families. Indices by post codes to be considered
- When condemning something must sign-post customers / pictograph (if English not 1st language). Need to update the customer on what's happening
- Clear referral pathway
- Local stakeholder mapping needs to happen
- Share awareness with other utilities – water issues, struggling to pay water bill, signpost to the other utilities
- Not limited to a one-off interaction

What the service **SHOULD** do

- How are customers reached in the first place? Group were advised when NGN attend gas emergencies / mains replacement
- Need to look at person's circumstances – to ensure right process in place, also which specific appliance links into the fund
- Have we spoken to engineers? SPOC / get opinions (business chats / new targets). Need their support in designing this.
- Establish what are the most common

- appliances disconnected
- Onus on engineers – train them and then they can give information on a leaflet / signpost
- Should we look at things that already exist?
- All tenure
- Look at individual house-holds circumstances e.g. private landlords
- Leeds Directory – for service users. Could NGN link into this service?
- Identify common things engineers come across
- Partner should be network wide so needs to be linked in with more local projects / knowledge. To understand about the best route to follow
- Offer holistic support - could give other advice not just repair the appliance

What the service **COULD** do

- Automatic referral process / mindful of consent issues
- Need to look at what we currently do in those situations
- Offer follow up call
- Recognize some customers may think they don't need to replace/ repair appliance too proud / embarrassed). Train engineers on what to say / sensitive situations (especially affordability conversations)
- Don't limit dialogue with customer – English second language / sight & hearing difficulties
- PSR referrals – Northumbrian Water Ltd use 3rd parties to refer to this. Could NGN do this? They contact individual to say they've be referred

Event Evaluation and Future Engagement – 8 feedback responses

- Don't leave it to the customer to contact us – some won't
- JAMS (just about managing) – they may not make contact for the service. We need to engage and follow up as much as possible
- Got to get something workable but as it's around affordability it's a sensitive subject

Other considerations raised

- How many customers need this service?
- Does PSR feature in this?
- Everyone jumps to the human response what can we do? How much more can we do? Need to think what the process shouldn't or doesn't do and set expectations with customers
- Caps on support / intervention - limited to 1 household

Live poll was undertaken to decide on an alternative name for Hardship Fund

Suggestion	Number of votes / %
Customer Support Fund	10 votes / 53%
Helping Hands Fund	4 votes / 21%
Network Support Fund	3 votes / 15%
Helping Hands	2 votes / 11%

Summary:	Customers in Vulnerable Situations VCMA workshop	Tuesday 15th June 2021
Event Evaluation		
Q1	What do you want to get out of today?	
Q2	Choose 2 words from this list below to describe this event	Interesting, useful
Q3	Overall, how satisfied were you with the event?	9
Q4	How would you rate the discussions?	8.9
Q5	How would you rate the event contact and speakers?	9
Q6	How would you rate the networking opportunities?	7.9
Q7	Is there anything you think could be improved / changes for future workshops?	More time to discuss I would have liked the breakout rooms to be longer and with a bit more briefing about expected outcomes Keep doing these they're great Maybe a slide with what your break out group should be discussing to make it clearer
Q8	Is there anything else you would like to tell us?	Found the session very positive, engaging and I learnt a lot. Highly valuable for sharing information and learning about other initiatives.
Q9	Thinking of yourself as a stakeholder of NGN, how satisfied are you with the relationship that you have with NGN	9.1

Q10	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?		
	NGN keeps me up to date on their business plans	Strongly agree	3
		Agree	2
		Somewhat agree	1
		Strongly disagree	2
	NGN provided me with clear information about their business performance	Strongly agree	1
		Agree	2
		Somewhat agree	1
		Neither agree/disagree	1
		Strongly disagree	2
	NGN provided me with opportunities to give feedback on the topics that interest me	Strongly agree	3
		Agree	3
		Neither agree/disagree	1
		Strongly disagree	1
	NGN allows me to give feedback through my preferred method	Strongly agree	3
		Agree	3
		Neither agree/disagree	1
		Strongly disagree	1
	NGN makes it clear how they have used feedback to change	Strongly agree	5
		Agree	2
		Strongly disagree	1

Future Engagement

Q1	How else would you like to engage with NGN in future?	
		In person
		Seminars and stakeholder meetings
		Through the existing 'Utilities Together Group'
		No immediate ideas!
		If any further questions arise from the session - they could be emailed to our organisation to discuss with others in our team so we can help you further.
		More opportunities to share best practice and introductions/matching up with other stakeholders where we work in a similar space. It would be useful to have these intros made rather than spotting a stakeholder on a call and then personally following up with them after.

Future engagement sessions

September 14th, 10am to 12pm – Topic Workshop 2

November 16th, 10am to 12pm - Topic Workshop 3

January 25th, 10am to 12pm (2022) – Topic Workshop 4 (optional)

March 22nd, 9.30am to 1.30pm (2022) - Annual Strategic Review & and Planning Workshop

Tell us what you think

Thank you for reading this report. We welcome any further feedback, thoughts or ideas you have. Please drop us a line on at stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk

For further information contact:
stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk

together.northerngasnetworks.co.uk

