

## Energy Confident

<b>Funding GDN(s)</b>	<b>Northern Gas Networks</b>
<b>For Collaborative VCMA Projects:</b>	Role of GDN(s) N/A
<b>Date of PEA submission:</b>	July 2021
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<b>Total cost (£k)</b>	*detailed separately
<b>Total VCMA funding required (£k)</b>	*detailed separately

## 1. Problem(s)

*This should outline the problem(s) which is/are being addressed by the VCMA Project*

Access to many individual case work services are becoming increasingly difficult and this has been compounded by the pandemic. Especially for those living with physical disadvantage, who may also be shielding. As a consequence of the pandemic there is a gap in user-friendly peer support for individuals and households experiencing fuel poverty, health and personal safety risks. Other vulnerabilities linked to disability and long-term health conditions, create further problems for this group. There are barriers in their ability to access, understand or act on information / advice through mainstream channels. The Energy Confident project with DIAL Leeds will help address these issues.

### 1.1 The solution

DIAL Leeds are a Disabled People's User Led Organisation (DPULO) providing empowering peer support for disabled people in a safe and positive environment, both remotely and face to face. This project will enable DIAL to provide personally tailored customer support and casework, based on individual needs, to resolve any energy related problems and in particular, for those living in fuel poverty. This project will support people with physical and sensory impairments, learning disabilities and / or long-term conditions including mental health issues, to confidently work through their issues and concerns on a one to one basis. Due to the nature of the organisation, DIAL will be able to access those customers that are hard and often impossible to reach.

## 2. Scope and Objectives

*The scope and objectives of the VCMA Project should be clearly defined including the benefits which would directly impact customers on the participating GDNs' network(s), and where the benefits of the VCMA Projects lie.*

Objectives - the project objectives are to increase confidence, self-esteem and resilience which in turn, will lead to increased physical and mental health and wellbeing. Overall, the aim is to empower people to prepare for emergency situations that could help to save lives.

In summary, DIAL's specific objectives are to provide support in achieving the following:

- PSR awareness raising and sign-up
- Warm Home Discount applications
- Benefits health checks and income maximisation
- Gas, electricity and fire safety including carbon monoxide (CO) awareness and what to do in the event of an emergency

### 2.1 Scope

- Assistance with monitoring energy usage and billing/budgeting issues including smart meter take-up and accessing best tariffs from current or other suppliers
- Energy debt advice and assistance
- Energy trust fund supported applications
- Accessing financial and practical support for energy efficiency measures

- Geographical area of Leeds

### **3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA**

*This should include an explanation of why the VCMA Project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria. This is a requirement*

This project qualifies under the criteria for the VCMA funding, as it will support customers in vulnerable situations, in particular, customers living in fuel poverty and general financial hardship. This project specifically provides assistance to support customers with physical and sensory impairments, learning disabilities and long-term conditions such as mental health issues. DIAL is in direct daily contact with people living in poverty, as a result of complex and multiple barriers to health, economic and social wellbeing. These themes all align to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy. DIAL offers holistic support to empower vulnerable, disabled people, to change their lives for the better, in the short and longer terms. This DIAL project has been designed, developed and delivered by disabled people, who are representative of project beneficiaries.

There will be no collaboration from other GDN's nor other funded sources.

#### **3.1 Eligibility criteria**

- This project has been calculated as having a positive SROI
- Energy Confident will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the physical challenges and financial hardship themes. As well as addressing mental health challenges prevalent in the Leeds area, as highlighted through social indicator mapping
- Has defined outcomes as required (see outcomes section)
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms

### **4. Evidence of stakeholder/customer support**

*This should provide information of the customer engagement that has taken place in the development of VCMA Projects where appropriate. If there is no evidence of stakeholder engagement or customer support, this should justify why it was not appropriate to engage with stakeholders and customers.*

Within the Northern Gas Networks region, we serve 2.7 million gas-using households. The socio-economic characteristics of our region, mean that we operate in many communities that are amongst the most economically deprived in the whole country. This was a key factor in our prioritising engagement with vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups of customers, telling them about our services, about what we do and how we could improve. DIAL is NGN's strategic social partner in Leeds and social indicator mapping shows that this area has a high prevalence of mental health issues, which this project will help address.

Each year, we undertake analysis of all the insight we've heard in the previous year to prioritise those issues our stakeholders most want to engage on. Over the past 12-18 months, we've done this in a number of ways.

#### **4.1 Customers in vulnerable situations (CIVS) Workshops 2019 – 2020**

Asking our stakeholders what's important – using our wide range of engagement mechanisms from strategic workshops to customer perceptions, we asked stakeholders to prioritise what is most important to them (including digital engagement in light of CV-19). During 2019-2020 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders on the subject of customers in vulnerable situations. During our August 2020 workshop, stakeholders discussed new emerging key themes, this was as a result of our post CV-19 research being shared with them in our July 2020 workshop. The August 2020 workshop focused on issues due to Covid-19, what the impact of the pandemic has on hidden vulnerability and how the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support CIVS. Our stakeholders told us that disabled people's mental health was significantly impacted due to lockdown and isolation. Another key issue highlighted in the workshop, was that additional needs and new vulnerabilities were emerging.

For those with vulnerabilities and complex needs, people spent more time at home. In particular, over the winter months and this resulted in fuel bills significantly increasing. For those already suffering financial hardship and living in fuel poverty, this scenario had a significant detrimental impact.

Stakeholder engagement through 2020 has told us that access to many individual case work services are becoming increasingly difficult and this has been compounded by the pandemic. Especially for those living with a physical disadvantage, who may also be shielding.

#### **4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)**

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support our customers in vulnerable situations. Checking we've got it right – using a range of engagement mechanisms to assess and challenge our response to stakeholder feedback, ensuring we are responding in the right way. This has offered us robust challenges into how we deal with customers in vulnerable situations, which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

#### **4.3 Social Indicator Mapping & Covid 19 Research**

Academic research social indicator mapping took place in 2019 and further research around CV-19 impact was undertaken in July 2020. This was shared as part of our stakeholder engagement. A new Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT) has been demonstrated to stakeholders to highlight any vulnerability gaps we have on our network. The system allows you to add multiple factors of vulnerability together to create a heat map for where factors combine to create areas of highest need. This has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues. Feedback from our social indicator mapping research indicated that the Leeds area has a high proportion of people living with limited day to day activities.

Covid 19 specific research in June 2020, showed that across factors and groups considered, these were the most marked impacts:

- Physical health impacts and much greater risk of death from Covid-19, most starkly for those in the oldest age groups and with underlying health conditions
- Mental health and wellbeing impacts which are unevenly skewed towards the most deprived areas and are impacting on those who already struggle or are at higher risk
- Economic impacts in terms of business closures and loss of employment and incomes, especially for the low paid and young people, and extending to those who have been ‘just about managing’
- Difficulty in accessing services and support for those without digital connectivity, and for at-risk groups who rely on support

#### **4.4 Vulnerability Strategy AAA Framework**

Within our vulnerability strategy we have developed, with the help of our stakeholders, the ‘AAA’ framework. This helps us support our customers in vulnerable situations. Awareness, Accessibility and Action. By adapting this principles-based approach into our AAA framework, we will ensure that all customers are treated fairly and consistently. The themes of fuel poverty and physical disability as part of this project, align to NGN’s vulnerability strategy.

### **5. Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria**

*Details of the VCMA Project outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these, interim milestones and how the Funding Licensee will evaluate whether the project has been successful. Each action should have a proportion of the funding allocated.*

Project success will be measured through both quantitative data on beneficiary numbers, financial values and other direct measurable factors within the various areas of support. Qualitative outcomes will be measured in terms of the difference it has made to an individual’s quality of life, health and wellbeing. The support programme will be holistically focused on health and well-being based on the individual’s needs and circumstances.

#### **5.1 Outcomes**

- 260 hours of dedicated project worker input (5 hours per week)
- The formal outcomes measurement tool to be used for this project is MYCAW (Measure Yourself Concerns and Wellbeing) developed by the University of Bristol. It is particularly well suited to measuring a diverse range of issues as it involves no element of pre-determination. It is also simple, accessible and user-friendly making it ideal for self-assessment of project benefits and successes amongst vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised individuals/households.

#### **5.2 Success criteria**

- Customer feedback, worker observations and information from the client case records to produce anonymised case studies

- Use of NGN's VMT to help identify vulnerable customers

A split between the different areas of support is anticipated as follows, although the precise balance will vary from individual to individual:

- PSR awareness / sign ups (20%)
- WHD applications (10%)
- Benefits health checks / income maximisation (20%)
- Monitoring usage /billing /budgeting /tariffs and smart meters (15%)
- Energy debt(s) (5%)
- Trust funds supported applications (5%)
- Energy efficiency measures (5%)
- Gas, electrical and fire safety including CO and what to do in emergencies (20%)

## **6. Project Partners and third parties involved**

*Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement*

This project will receive referrals from a wide range of statutory and community and voluntary sector organisations as part of a multi-agency support, working to jointly meet the needs of disabled people and individuals with long-term health conditions. Working particularly closely with Trussell Trust foodbanks across Leeds. In terms of VCMA outcomes and success criteria, DIAL we will be involving Green Doctors, Care and Repair (Home Improvement Agency), Fire and Rescue (for Safe and Well visits), Adult Social Care, Health and Housing and Stay Well This Winter funded project partners. These are amongst a whole host of local sources of support for meeting the wider needs of the project beneficiaries.

## **7. Potential for new learning**

*Details of what the GDN(s) expect to learn and how the learning will be disseminated.*

The project will enable DIAL Leeds to further develop their knowledge, skills and expertise for successfully supporting vulnerable individuals/households with any energy related problems and concerns. Enhanced awareness and understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic impacts on disabled people.

## **8. Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations**

*The Funding Licensee(s) should justify the scale of the VCMA Project – including the scale of the investment relative to its potential benefits. As part of this, it should provide the SROI calculation.*

This specific project covers Leeds and the immediate surrounding areas. The Social Return on Investment in terms of the benefits to vulnerable customers (both financial and non-financial) are factors such as gains relating to physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, and wider social welfare factors in a person's life. These should significantly outweigh the monies invested in the project. This project has been calculated as having a positive SROI return.

**VCMA Project start and end date**

*Detail start and end date of the VCMA Project and, where relevant, the VCMA Project that preceded this initiative.*

1st April 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023

**Geographic area**

*Details of where the VCMA Project will take place. If the VCMA Project is collaborative, the Funding Licensee area(s) in which the project will take place should be identified.*

Leeds and immediate surrounding area

**Approved by**

Eileen Brown  
Customer Experience Director