

## Green Doctor – Energy Matters

<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>	01 April 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*

The problem which the project will solve, is to tackle fuel poverty, energy vulnerability and related issues. The project is being supported as it aligns with NGN's Vulnerability Strategy around financial hardship and affordability which directly link to fuel poverty. The CV-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on everyone, but even more so for customers living in vulnerable situations and there are many new emerging issues as a direct result of this. Some of the emerging issues are increased access to food banks, additional needs and new vulnerabilities being created and also an increase in debt and financial advice.

### 1.1 The solution

The Green Doctor 'Energy Matters' service aims to reduce energy costs, increase energy-efficiency and improve health & wellbeing by visiting customer's homes. The Green Doctor's role is also to install small energy efficiency measures, complete PSR referrals, raise awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and the need to have both regular appliance safety checks and install CO alarms. Green Doctors have existed for a while and as they are classed as trusted intermediaries, they can gain access to those customers who are hard to reach and sometimes impossible to reach. Through comprehensive home visits and a telephone advice service, vulnerable customers can be identified and supported.

## 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.*

An integral part of the project will be to raise awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide poisoning through pre and post awareness questionnaires and the need to have both regular appliance safety checks and CO monitors installed.

### 2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- Reduce energy costs, increase energy-efficiency and improve health and wellbeing
- Sign customers up to the PSR
- Provide carbon monoxide (CO) awareness and measuring this with pre and post questionnaires
- Provide CO alarms to customers that need them

### 2.2 Scope

- 650 residents and 1500 beneficiaries contacted
- 30 CO alarms provided to vulnerable customers
- Covers NGN network area

- 120 households given smart meter advice
- Increased awareness of carbon monoxide (CO)-

### **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 in fuel poverty and aligns to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy, under the financial hardship theme. CO awareness sessions will also be delivered and CO alarms will be provided to vulnerable customers, as part of the project outputs.

The Green Doctor service has a good track record. This service has evolved over the past 12 years and has proven to be successful in supporting vulnerable customers and those with energy related issues, whilst also identifying many other issues. One of their key strengths is utilising their extensive specialist partnership network for further assistance.

The Green Doctors have built a reputation based on trust, care and professionalism. They provide a much more holistic, socially focused approach than just energy advice and are well known for 'going the extra mile' to support the most complex and vulnerable cases.

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

#### **3.1 Eligibility criteria**

- NGN have calculated that this project will have a positive SROI for customers
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the financial hardship theme
- Has defined outcomes as required (see outcome 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.

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 – 2021**

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 July 2020 workshop stakeholders discussed new emerging issues due to Covid-19, what the impact of the pandemic had on hidden vulnerability and how the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support CIVS. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts have been associated with debt, isolation, redundancy and anxiety. One of the biggest fears was allowing people into the home, especially those who were shielding.

During our August 2020 workshop, stakeholders also identified that there was an increase in debt/money management issues, specifically with those people who were 'Just About Managing' due to the current pandemic. They said larger energy bills and being at home caused serious concerns, especially during winter. As Green Doctors are trusted intermediaries, they are ideally placed to support customers experiencing all of these issues, via this project.

One of the main features of the Green Doctor service is the level of community engagement delivered. Regular advice, information and training sessions are offered. Traditionally face to face events but now remote sessions are being offered to a variety of groups. The themes include relevant energy topics from general how to save money, increase efficiency, access further support to more focused sessions on preparing for winter, smart meters, the Green Homes Grant scheme and many others. Regular feedback surveys are conducted to gauge customer satisfaction and improve the service as and when required.

In January 2021 we held a specific fuel poverty workshop. During this workshop our stakeholders said that fuel, food and general poverty are inter-linked and we need more streamlined ways of working together. The service provided by Green Doctors is bespoke and tailored to suit individual needs. This project fully aligns with the need to have a single point of contact, holistic service in place, to support the most vulnerable within our communities.

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

This group provides ~~Provide~~ an independent oversight into the actions we take to support CIVS. ~~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 CIVS ~~customers in vulnerable situations~~ which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

#### **4.3 Social Indicator Mapping, Covid 19 Research and ~~V~~Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT)**

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 VMT has been demonstrated to stakeholders to highlight any vulnerability gaps we have on our network. This

included fuel poverty data, unemployment and areas of deprivation, to name but a few. The VMT allows you to add multiple factors of vulnerability together, to create a heat map for where factors combine to create areas of highest need. All data can be mixed and matched. This has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues. Feedback from our social indicator mapping research indicates that unemployment and the claimant of benefits is higher in the NGN area than nationally. Places with pronounced concentrations on both measures include Bradford, Hull and urban areas in the North East such as Hartlepool, South Tyne, Middlesbrough and Sunderland ie across the network area. From this research, there is an obvious need to have a service such as that provided by Green Doctors to support customers in vulnerable situations. 17% of people in our network are unemployed therefore advice around income maximisation, benefits advice and other services can be provided via the Green Doctor service and customers can also be referred in from other organisations.

The Green Doctor Energy Matters project will cover the NGN network area and in relation to this, recent CV-19 research has drawn some wide conclusions across the whole NGN area, in terms of the impact it has had.

The service provided through this project will help to address the following most marked impacts:

- 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, such as refugees, asylum seekers, and those facing domestic abuse

Wider conclusions from the CV-19 research, further support the need for such a holistic service:

- Those with severe health risks who are shielding face multiple difficulties – the health conditions that put them at risk, plus isolation and challenges in accessing service;
- Different vulnerability factors tend to be concentrated in the same local areas, most strikingly in the North East, but also in parts of West Yorkshire. Many of the same places, are also the most badly afflicted by Covid-19;
- Covid-19 impacts extend beyond vulnerable people to the organisations who support them. Many groups/charities have been unable to provide their usual services, including hospices, domestic violence refuges and food banks, and financial pressures are threatening their viability;
- Potential responses to Covid-19 impacts on vulnerable groups are wide ranging and likely to involve operational practices, communication to customers, action on fuel poverty, and help for vulnerable customers and the groups who support them

#### 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 rurality and mental health 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.*

##### 5.1 Outcomes

- Yorkshire – 350 calls/visits per year
- Newcastle & Gateshead – 150 calls/visits per year
- Tees Valley – 150 calls/visits per
- Savings from switching/grants etc
- PSR sign ups
- Energy efficiency/water advice
- Supplier liaison for debt issues
- Carbon savings

##### 5.2 Success criteria

- All **vulnerable** customers referred will have a greater understanding of the importance of gas safety and the dangers associated with **Carbon Monoxide** via the CO awareness survey
- Success is measured by the number of referrals, type of support given & progress made in new delivery areas
- Feedback/customer satisfaction surveys will be conducted every 6 months & evaluated to identify any necessary adaptations.

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

*Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement*

The project partners involved are from local community groups to housing associations, Councils & Public Health. Partners with organisations in large programmes in Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Kirklees & North Yorkshire.

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

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

Monitoring & feedback surveys will enable new learning & development as the project progresses. During delivery the project may encounter new circumstances which require adaptations – the present Covid situation being an example where the project has been altered to telephone advice, online training and new partnerships.

## **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.*

The total number of hours the service is provided for - 1520 hours, valued as positive interactions with the customer. CO alarms given to vulnerable customers have been valued as avoided cost to customers. This project has 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.*

Yorkshire, Tees Valley, Newcastle & Gateshead.

### **Approved by**

Eileen Brown  
Customer Experience Director