

## Green Doctor – Fuel Poverty Training Course

<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 this project will solve is to tackle fuel poverty and the lack of knowledge around fuel poverty. Awareness training will be provided to frontline key workers and trusted partners, to help deliver the key messages associated with this. The project is being supported as there is a need to raise awareness of fuel poverty in our network and through the training, be able to support those customers who are living in, or at risk of falling into fuel poverty, with appropriate advice, skills and knowledge. Fuel poverty has been compounded by the impact of the CV-19 pandemic, as a consequence of people being furloughed and losing their jobs. On that basis, this project provides the opportunity to raise awareness of fuel poverty and its associated impacts and provide the appropriate support, to be able to mitigate against it from happening or re-occurring.

## 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.*

### 2.1 Shared Purpose

The Green Doctor fuel poverty course is delivered both online and face to face. The scope has increased due to the ease of access from more distant regions of our delivery areas. The aim of the course is to train frontline workers from a wide variety of organisations, who in some way support people in or at risk of falling into fuel poverty. Since November 2019 around 250 frontline key workers have been trained, who have then potentially disseminated the knowledge learnt to on average 8-10 people each day, as part of their role. There is a diverse mix of people on the course from housing officers, debt advice workers, health professionals, social prescribers, engineers and community representatives. Many of these have become 'energy champions'.

### 2.2 The objectives of this initiative are:

- To improve fuel poverty awareness
- Train frontline key workers
- Provide carbon monoxide (CO) awareness information

### 2.42.3 Scope

- Deliver 10 training sessions per year with an average of 10 people per session
- Delivering online sessions training 30+ people
- The length of the training sessions - 2 hours online and 4 hours face to face
- Covers the whole of NGN's area
- Increased awareness of carbon monoxide (CO) with pre and post awareness questionnaires-

### **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 tackle the issue of fuel poverty from a number of perspectives and also introduces issues relating to vulnerability, carbon monoxide and extra support services. There has also been a correlation with previous delivery of the course and an increase in Green Doctor referrals, which means more support for vulnerable people. This project will equip key frontline workers with the ability to address any potential fuel poverty cases they may come across. Financial vulnerability and hardship are the main themes addressed in this project, which align with NGN's Vulnerability Strategy. There is also a link to mental health with the project, as living in fuel poverty and potentially in a cold, damp home can have a detrimental effect on mental wellbeing.

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

#### **3.1 Eligibility criteria**

- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with our financial hardship theme and associated mental health issues.
- The project will also align with rural vulnerability, as many customers off the gas grid are living in fuel poverty
- This project will cover CO awareness which is a key safety message for those living in fuel poverty and off gas grid customers who may use alternative fossil fuels for heating and cooking
- Has defined outcomes as required
- 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 has had on hidden vulnerability and how the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support vulnerable customers. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts have been associated with more people falling into fuel poverty, increased debt due to furlough or redundancy and the associated anxiety and other mental health issues, that come with these extra challenges.

During our August 2020 CV-19 specific workshop, our stakeholders also identified that there was an increase in debt/money management issues, specifically with those people who were 'Just About Managing' (JAMS) due to the pandemic. They said larger energy bills and being at home were major concerns, especially during winter, which resulted in those identified as JAMS, also falling into fuel poverty.

In January 2021 we held a specific fuel poverty workshop. During this workshop our stakeholders said it would be good for NGN to use partners to promote the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES). They also said that fuel, food and general poverty are all linked and there is an associated impact of appliances being allowed to fall into disrepair, due to not being able to afford to replace, and maintain them. The consequence of which is a greater risk of CO poisoning. Workshop feedback recommended that more streamlined ways of working together is required and trusted partners can help raise awareness of different things such as fuel poverty, energy efficiency and CO poisoning. By engaging with trusted partners and intermediaries, key information and safety messages can be delivered to those most in need. This awareness training fully aligns with those recommendations and requirements. The course will provide stakeholders with the tools to identify fuel poverty and also signpost to different services and partners for support.

#### 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 ~~CIVScustomers in vulnerable situations~~ which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

#### 4.3 Social Indicator Mapping, Covid 19 Research and 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 Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT) has been demonstrated to stakeholders to highlight any

vulnerability gaps we have on our network. This included fuel poverty data. 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 indicated 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, effectively across the whole of our network. The research also indicates that 17% of people in our network aren't in employment. It is therefore essential that frontline workers are trained on how to tackle fuel poverty, especially when dealing with people in unemployment, who are potentially struggling financially and likely to have to choose between heating or eating.

CV-19 research undertaken by NGN in June '20 drew some wide conclusions below, which have the potential to impact those customers living in fuel poverty. Training of front-line workers will help to support customers in these complex situations and raise awareness of the help that is available.

- The most severely impacted include those with multiple risk factors and vulnerabilities e.g. older people with serious underlying health conditions, exacerbated for those in dense urban areas and poor housing stock. Poor housing stock results in people potentially living in fuel poverty
- 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 localities are also the most badly afflicted by Covid-19 and therefore potentially push more people into fuel poverty
- 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

CO and PSR research also identified the following overall key actions within NGN's network area. Some, if not all of these areas will be addressed through the fuel poverty training course.

- Target increasing awareness of the dangers of CO - only 36% of c1800 respondents across NGN's network recognised that CO can kill and 15.5% of respondents rated their awareness of CO as 5 or lower out of 10. This is a significant cause for concern
- Increase understanding of what CO actually is – only 22% of respondents were able to identify it as a gas which is invisible, colourless, odourless, not detectable and only 21% identified it as a gas which is dangerous, deadly and poisonous
- Encourage people to get a CO alarm - A concerning 27% of the people who responded did not have a CO alarm in their home
- Encourage people to test their alarms – 27% of respondents only tested their alarm annually
- Look to increase awareness of the Priority Services Register (PSR) - 57% of respondents had no understanding of the PSR. There are many benefits to this service which can help those living in fuel poverty

#### 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 financial hardship and rurality as part of this project, align to NGN's Vulnerability **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

- Deliver 10 training sessions per year with an average of 10 people per session
- Deliver online training sessions with an average of around 30+ people

##### 5.2 Success criteria

- Estimated that 1 person who attends the course will support 50 other people over the year and that 10% of those people will take up the switching, grants & energy-efficiency advice given
- **Increased awareness of carbon monoxide (CO)** via pre and post awareness surveys-

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

*Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement*

The project involves a great amount of partnership work as it involves directly communicating with people from organisations across all delivery areas. These include Local Councils, Public Health, Debt Advice agencies, Housing Associations and community groups, to name a few.

#### 7. Potential for new learning

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

The course is based on delivering 'new learning' to attendees and to the customers that each organisation supports. Success of the course is measured via feedback from the sessions which enables learning & development where necessary.

## **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.*

Social value assessment was based on an estimation that 1 person who attends the course will support 50 other people over the year and that 10% of those people will take up the switching, grants and energy-efficiency advice given. 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.*

All of NGN area.

### **Approved by**

Eileen Brown  
Customer Experience Director