

## Highfield Co-op (Bradford district) - Community Energy and Carbon Monoxide Awareness Project

<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*

There are vulnerable communities within the Bradford district who may not be aware of Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning, such as refugees, low income families, elderly and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. Many refugees arriving in the United Kingdom face multiple health challenges. Some refugees' health issues result from experiences in their home countries; others may develop once they arrive. Because refugees generally live in low-income housing, one concern can be the impact on health (physical and mental) from living in poor housing (cold/damp homes) which can increase the risk of fuel poverty. Even when living in safe housing however, refugees who lack experience with western-style homes and are from different cultural backgrounds, may be at greater risk than native residents. In addition, limited English and literacy skills may prevent some refugee families from learning how to safely use and maintain their new homes. This has the potential to lead to the risk of CO poisoning from appliances, if the families are unsure of how to safely maintain these and may be unaware of the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning. There is a big gap in knowledge within these different cultures, especially around heating and cooking, in terms of CO awareness.

### **1.1 The solution**

Highfield Co-op aim to work closely with these different cultures and vulnerable communities to raise awareness of CO poisoning, including the signs and symptoms and to provide advice around energy saving. Highfield Co-op have access to these groups and are a trusted intermediary within the community, who can reach those who could potentially fall through the gaps. They operate at grass roots level and are therefore able to access ambassadors and key contacts within these diverse and hard to reach groups.

## **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**

This project aims to deliver clear and effective messaging around the risks of CO poisoning, including signs and symptoms, by hosting workshops and community events around community energy and CO awareness. This will involve linking into other groups with the same shared purpose.

### **2.2 The objectives of this initiative are:**

- Provide carbon monoxide (CO) awareness sessions to vulnerable customers
- Provide advice around energy saving
- Provide CO alarms

### **2.3 Scope**

- 40 people trained as CO awareness trainers

- 120 leaflets issued (via awareness sessions delivered) – to reach 600 people in total (family size 5)
- Awareness in community checked through pre and post questionnaires
- Issuing of CO alarms
- The geographical area of Bradford

### **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 vulnerable customers from different cultural backgrounds, who may not be aware of the dangers of CO. Some people will have recently arrived from war torn countries as refugees. There is a significant gap in knowledge within refugee and other culturally diverse communities around the dangers of CO poisoning. Recent CO research undertaken by NGN found that increasing awareness of the dangers of CO was a priority in Bradford. CO sessions will be delivered as part of the project outputs. This project seeks to take advantage of a unique opportunity, to provide important and potentially life-saving information, to vulnerable customers who are difficult to reach. As the project has a temporary vulnerability theme it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy, as does the energy saving element, which will ultimately result in financial savings.

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

#### **3.1 Eligibility criteria**

- As this project is around CO awareness and reducing the risk of harm caused by CO, it aligns with the eligibility criteria. The project also supports NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the temporary and financial vulnerability themes
- The challenges around language barriers and communication in the Bradford area, also aligns with the physical vulnerability theme
- Has defined outcomes as required (see outcomes section)
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms
- NGN have calculated that this project will have a positive SROI for customers

### **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 – 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 CV-19 specific workshop, our stakeholders identified that there was an increased risk of CO poisoning due to the impact of the pandemic. This is further compounded when there are cultural differences to also consider, due to alternative ways of heating and cooking. Many people have been furloughed, are on lower incomes and suffered redundancy, which have created significant financial challenges. As a consequence, maintaining and repairing/replacing appliances is not a priority for these groups, therefore significantly increasing the risk of CO poisoning. Stakeholders said there needs to be more focus on CO awareness, so customers understand the risks posed by not having appliances repaired or serviced. Refugee communities are likely to be on low incomes and potentially living in fuel poverty and as a consequence, due to lack of support, there is a significant gap in their knowledge around CO. The challenge around language barriers makes it even more difficult to reach these culturally diverse groups. This project has been designed in partnership with community groups which Highfield Co-op already work with and have therefore been involved in the planning process.

#### **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 and Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT)**

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 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. All data can be mixed and matched to answer complicated questions, e.g. see where there are a high number of older people living in low energy efficient housing and in fuel poverty. This has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues.

In our wider stakeholder engagement programme, we have also heard very strongly, how safety is at the forefront of stakeholders' minds. Stakeholders see a strong correlation between safety and our

social obligations and have told us that it is essential that we continue to raise awareness of carbon monoxide, because doing so saves lives.

Specifically, in relation to this project, Highfield Co-op are bespoke to the region of Bradford/Keighley. This community group has extensive reach into those customers living in social isolation, those customers who are in fuel poverty and those in desperate need of support. This area also has a high prevalence of communities whereby English is not their first language and therefore high prevalence of diverse groups with many cultural differences. Stakeholder engagement through 2020 told us that access to many support services is becoming increasingly difficult and has been compounded by the pandemic. Highfield Co-op are a specialist organisation, operating within one of the most deprived areas of our network and are the only organisation who could effectively provide the services that have been identified. NGN has a long-standing relationship with Highfield Co-op and no other organisation exists within Bradford/Keighley which can provide this varying degree of support, in particular within BAME communities.

Feedback from our social indicator mapping research, indicated that Bradford had a high number of CO jobs attended by NGN. More recently, NGN commissioned some CO research which highlighted that only 32% of respondents in Bradford recognise that CO can kill you and 20% of respondents rate their awareness of CO as 5 out of 10 or lower. 34% of respondents did not feel their awareness had increased over the past few years. 33% of the people who responded in Bradford did not have a CO alarm in their home and only 29% of respondents test their alarm annually. From the same research, the number of respondents who have a disc which changes colour when CO is present is highest in Bradford. The concern here is that a disc is no longer a recommended option. From this evidence, it is clear that this project should have a positive effect on raising awareness around CO in the Bradford area.

#### **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 temporary, physical and financial vulnerability within the 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**

- 40 people trained as CO awareness trainers
- 120 leaflets issued (via awareness sessions delivered) – to reach 600 people in total (family size 5)
- 40 CO alarms delivered to households

## 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
- Customers will also be provided with an alarm and instructions on how to use it
- Customers will also have an awareness of how to save energy

## 6. Project Partners and third parties involved

*Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement*

This project will have several stakeholders such as Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), Sudanese in Bradford community charity, United Nations Educational, UNESCO City of Film Bradford and CABAD

## 7. Potential for new learning

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

The learning which will arise from this project, will be understanding how customers in vulnerable situations, in particular from culturally diverse groups, can be reached. Further learning will be how best to deliver workshops / get messages around the dangers of CO, in particular to ethnic communities and those with cultural differences. The learning will also be around understanding the impact of CO awareness in the community and sharing the lessons learnt with other similar communities, within NGN's geographical footprint.

## 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 has been based on the extensive reach, assuming that 1 CO related illness is prevented in 2021/22. CO alarms are being provided and it is forecast that trainers and households will pass on information further than the people impacted directly by the project. 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.*

This project will take place in Bradford.

**Approved by**

Eileen Brown  
Customer Experience Director