

Highfield Co-op - Community Energy Matters Magazine

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	July 2021
Project contact name:	Jill Walker
Project contact number/email:	JWalker@northerngas.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	*detailed separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	*detailed separately

1. Problem(s)

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

There are a lot of customers in Bradford experiencing fuel poverty and lack CO awareness. This project is being supported as our social indicator mapping research has indicated that there are 9,646 people unemployed in the Bradford area and 13,455 claiming benefits in this area. This research suggests the NGN area has a higher proportion of both unemployment and benefit claimants than nationally. Approximately 146,000 are unemployed and 139,000 are on claimant count benefits. Places with pronounced concentrations on both measures include Bradford. This research also indicated that over 365,000 (12.8%) people experience fuel poverty in the NGN area, 31,706 of which from the Bradford area. A general lack of awareness exists around the causes of fuel poverty and the impact it has, such as potentially having to choose between heating and eating. As well as the knock-on effect of living in financial hardship and therefore not being able to afford to have appliances maintained, repaired and replaced regularly. Thus, posing an increased risk of CO poisoning, from appliances falling into disrepair.

1.1 The solution

Highfield CO-OP aim to create a community energy matters magazine, to deliver key information to communities about CO awareness messages and information on various energy related issues, to vulnerable people within the Bradford and Keighley area. The publication will be available online as well as in hard copy. A community magazine can achieve a number of benefits in relaying key messages such as these. For example, there is a dedicated, local audience and the messages are being delivered from a credible, grass roots source such as Highfield and so the trust is already built. There is confidence that the information contained in relation to these messages is of high quality and relevant. A community magazine also enables Highfield CO-OP to reach a lot of people, who as a result of their vulnerabilities, may not be able to gain access to this information elsewhere.

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 The objectives of this initiative are:

- Provide information on energy saving advice, government grants, schemes on energy saving, and CO awareness
- It is planned to produce an online and paper copy three times a year

2.2 Scope

- 140 paper copies delivered and also available online
- CO awareness information provided
- Fuel poverty and energy saving information
- The geographical area of Bradford and surrounding area

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 lacking awareness of the dangers of CO. It will include raising awareness on energy savings tips and energy efficiency via an online and printed resource. Bradford is culturally diverse, and this creates further challenges due to the differences in heating and cooking habits between different cultures. The project aligns to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy under the theme of financial hardship and physical impairments, due to the potential impact CO may have on the body. CO awareness information will also be included in the magazine.

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 and physical vulnerability themes
- 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 – 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 July 2020 workshop stakeholders discussed new emerging 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 some of the main impacts have been associated with debt, isolation, redundancy, anxiety and other mental health issues. This project will help address those and similar issues, associated with living in fuel poverty and being on a low income. Stakeholders also told us that access to essential services was becoming more difficult, which in turn, meant key energy related information was not readily available.

During our August 2020 workshop our 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 was giving cause for concern, especially during winter. The demand for information regarding benefits increased, as a result of redundancies. During our August 2020 workshop our stakeholders also identified that there was an increased risk of CO due to the pandemic and that there needs to be more focus on CO awareness.

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 we need more streamlined ways of working together, joining the dots and using partners to help raise awareness of different funding available.

In our wider stakeholder engagement programme, we have 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.

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 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. All data can be mixed and matched to answer complicated questions, e.g. see where there are a high number of culturally diverse people living in low energy efficient housing and in fuel poverty. This has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues. Feedback from our social indicator mapping research indicated that are 9,646 people unemployed in the Bradford area and 13,455 claiming benefits in this area. Places with pronounced concentrations of both measures include Bradford. This research also indicated that over 365,000 (12.8%) people experience fuel poverty in the NGN area, 31,706 of which from the Bradford area. In addition to this, Bradford also had a high number of CO jobs attended by NGN.

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 project will involve community volunteers, who will be working on the magazine and know where the most difficult to reach are within their communities. Volunteers have expressed an interest in producing the community energy matters magazine and have therefore been part of the discussion, when designing this project. Bradford also has a high prevalence of communities whereby English is not their first language. This creates further challenges when already having to find essential services that are becoming increasingly difficult to access, due to the pandemic.

From recent CO and PSR research commissioned by NGN, the summary below were the top actions identified for the Bradford area. This project and the creation of the magazine will help address some of the gaps.

- Target increasing awareness of the dangers of CO - only 32% recognise that CO can kill you and 20% of respondents rate their awareness of CO as 5 or lower. 34% of respondents in Bradford do not feel their awareness has increased over the years
- Increase understanding of what CO actually is – only 22% were able to identify it as gas which is invisible, colourless, odourless, not detectable and only 21% identified it as a gas which is dangerous, deadly, poisonous, toxic
- Encourage people to get a CO alarm - 33% of the people who responded in Bradford did not have a CO alarm in their home and 6 % had a disc which changes colour (no longer recommended)
- Encourage people to test their alarms – 29% of respondents test their alarm annually.
- Increase awareness of the Priority Services Register - 64% of respondents had no understanding of the services available to those on the Priority Services Register

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 physical vulnerability around the possible effects of CO, 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

- This project will achieve a readership and reach to over 600 households (c3000 people assuming 5 per household)
- CO information will be provided to customers
- 40 hours of research for magazine features
- The volunteers who are from the locality and new volunteers who will be recruited from the deprived areas, to give volunteering opportunities
- 8 volunteers equating to 130 hours volunteering

5.2 Success criteria

All vulnerable customers accessing the magazine, should have a greater understanding of the importance of energy efficiency, energy savings and the dangers associated with carbon monoxide. As a consequence of receiving the information in the magazine, customers will be able to take steps to deal with energy related issues and to mitigate against CO poisoning occurring. The inclusion of case studies in the magazine, will demonstrate that by taking some positive action, things can get better, if have access to the relevant information available.

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

This project partners will be Highfield community film collective, Sight Airedale, Keighley volunteering services.

7. Potential for new learning

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

Volunteers and the people involved in the project will learn skills such as writing articles, interviewing techniques, research on energy issues and CO. As well as government schemes and what's happening in the area/where additional support is required. The volunteers will also learn how to contact hard to reach groups within the community.

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 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 – 31st 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 district – Keighley, Shipley, Bingley, Steeton, West Bowling and Manningham

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director