

Community Energy Cafe

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 long term unemployed and low skilled people living in the Keighley area of Bradford. As well as this challenge, these customers are also experiencing fuel poverty. This project is being supported as our social indicator mapping research has highlighted that there are 9,646 people unemployed in the Bradford area and 13,455 claiming benefits. This research suggests the NGN area has a higher proportion of both unemployment and benefit claimants than nationally - approx. 146,000 are unemployed and 139,000 are on claimant count benefits. Places with pronounced concentrations on both measures include Bradford.

1.1 The solution

Highfield Co-op aims to create a pop-up energy café, where members of the community can attend and which will provide an opportunity to raise awareness of fuel poverty, provide energy advice and raise awareness of CO to vulnerable people, who are unemployed and claiming benefits within the Keighley area. The project has direct benefits for the targeted audience groups in terms of financial savings and awareness of key safety messages. It involves specifically working with vulnerable groups such as people on low income, those experiencing long term unemployment (and associated mental health problems), people with low skills and marginalised communities experiencing fuel poverty. The project idea was created via consultations with the local community in the central ward area of Keighley. This was done through meetings online and questionnaires.

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
- Set up the pop-up café in areas identified as socially deprived

2.2 Scope

- 290 visitors to the café
- 400 meals provided in 12 months
- 30 CO alarms provided to vulnerable customers
- The geographical area of Keighley, 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 customers in vulnerable situations, in particular, customers in fuel poverty and suffering financial hardship through unemployment and low skilled /low paid jobs. It aligns to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy theme around financial vulnerability. CO sessions will also be delivered, and CO alarms provided to vulnerable customers, as part of the project outputs.

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 vulnerability theme
- 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.

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 ie unable to contact energy suppliers for example. A pop-up café will provide an environment where support can be found in relation to energy and other advice, in the absence of being able to contact an energy supplier.

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 / 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. This project acknowledges that feedback and partners in this project, include Keighley CAB and Keighley Voluntary Services.

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/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 unemployed 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. This research also indicated that over 365,000 (12.8%) people experience fuel poverty in the NGN area, 31,706 of which are from the Bradford area. Bradford also had a high number of CO jobs attended by NGN.

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.

Specifically, in relation to this project Highfield Co-op are bespoke to the region of Bradford/Keighley. This group has extensive reach into those customers living in fuel poverty and on low incomes ie in desperate need of support. This area also has a high prevalence of communities whereby English is not their first language, which further compounds existing problems. Stakeholder engagement through 2020 told us that access to many 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 no other organisation exists within Bradford/Keighley which can provide this varying degree of support, in particular within communities, including BAME, on low incomes and living in fuel poverty. From recent CO research commissioned by NGN, in the Bradford area, only 32% recognise that CO can kill you and 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.

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 vulnerability and also mental health (indirectly) 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

- 400 meals and 800 drinks provided in 12 months
- 30 CO alarms provided to households
- 160 hours volunteering

5.2 Success criteria

- All vulnerable customers referred will have a greater understanding of the importance of gas safety and the dangers associated with CO via the pre/post awareness survey
- The project will be monitored using individual interviews, group interviews and questionnaires
- Record how many people take part in fuel poverty workshops

- Record people's learning through progress sheets

6. Project partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

This project will have several stakeholders involved, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), Keighley Dementia champions, Keighley Voluntary Services and the Good Shepherd Centre.

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 identifying barriers that marginalised communities experience and sharing that learning with other similar communities. This could be across the whole of NGN's area. Creating solutions for problems and encouraging communities to participate in fuel poverty workshops, will also provide invaluable learning, especially in relation to BAME communities.

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.

July 2021 – 31st March 2022

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 Keighley, Bradford.

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director