

Supporting our customers in vulnerable situations

Energy Crisis /
Partnership Working
Workshop



16th November 2021

together
we are
the **network**

Thank you

Thank you again to those of you who joined us for our Energy Crisis / Partnership Working Workshop on Tuesday 16th November.

Myself, Jill, Steve, Steph and our facilitators thoroughly enjoyed seeing you all again. A special thank-you to our guest presenter Cliff Duff from our partner organisation Durham County Council (DCC), who provided an excellent insight into his GP Partnering pilot project, which is funded through our Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA). Cliff articulated how the current energy crisis is already impacting some of the GP practice patients, in terms of fuel poverty and affordable warmth.

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director

Purpose of the workshop



delegates



overall satisfaction with the event (out of 10)

- **You said / we did** – update from our fuel poverty workshop in September
- **Partner spotlight session** - Cliff Duff - GP Partnering VCMA project
- **Energy crisis** – overview of the impact on our partners and communities
- **NGN's proposal** – focus areas for the winter of 2021/22
- **Breakout session** – what can we do to provide additional support to our partner organisations, as a result of the energy crisis?

GP Partnering / VCMA project spotlight session – Cliff Duff, DCC

Cliff provided an overview of his VCMA project, GP Partnering. He explained what DCC offer to their customers and the services they provide, as part of the project. Since June 2021, the project has:

- Assisted patients with cold related ill health on low incomes and in fuel poverty
- Targeted patients with Asthma and COPD
- Partnered with 30 GP Practices in County Durham
- Enabled engagement with the county wide Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- Extended support to include patients living with long covid
- Enabled GP Practices to contact their patients to identify those requiring additional support ie dependent on their needs
- Enabled DCC to carry out home visits, CO awareness surveys, discuss fuel

tariffs, energy saving advice and PSR referrals. They also make referrals for energy efficiency grants

Progress to date:

- Officer employed to administer the pilot
- CO & PSR awareness to DCC’s Housing Service
- Stanley GP Practice contacted 1,390 patients
- Consett GP Practice contacted 1,769 patients
- 422 PSR Registrations & 55 CO Registrations
- 30 ECO Flex boiler grants claimed
- Promotional literature being distributed
- Cliff also presented a case study of a customer they have supported that was living in fuel poverty.

Energy crisis – impact on our partners and communities

Eileen provided a high-level overview of the current energy crisis. Highlighting that global circumstances (COVID) and GB short term issues, have created extreme rises currently being experienced. Gas suppliers are constrained in passing on full prices by the consumer price cap set by Ofgem twice annually – effective from 1 April and 1 October each year.

Eileen went on to explain that gas and electricity markets have distinct but different licensed entities making up the supply chain:

- Gas Transporters – prices are determined by price control
- Gas Shippers – wholesale purchasers of gas transported through the GTs pipeline system. This role only exists in the gas market
- Gas Suppliers – retail sellers of gas to consumers

Finally, the Supplier of Last Resort (SoLR) process was also explained. Joanna Ferguson, NGN’s Head of Market Services & Regulatory Compliance, provided support to Eileen in this section and was able to answer any detailed questions:

- Ofgem appoint a Supplier of Last Resort (SoLR) to take on the portfolio of a failing supplier. This is usually through a bid process
- Due to the current wholesale price issues, it is unlikely that any SoLR will be able to honour existing retail prices,

without incurring losses for these supply points

- SoLRs can apply to Ofgem for compensation as a Last Resort Supply Payment to cover additional costs that they incur as a direct result of the SoLR activities. These Last Resort Supply Payments may relate to increased administrative costs, protection of customer credit balances and additional energy purchasing
- Ofgem assess these costs, and following consultation may approve the claim and instruct Gas Transporters to pay these costs in the form of a Last Resort Supply Payment “Levy”
- This is paid by the GT, usually over a 12-month period, with these costs being recovered in subsequent transportation charges

Over the course of the Energy Crisis session, Slido was used to assess the audience’s understanding of a number of issues - questions overleaf.

Breakout session – what can we do to provide additional support to our partner organisations, as a result of the energy crisis?

Q1 – How much do you understand about the energy crisis? (1= Don't understand at all, 10 = I know exactly what's happening and why)

Average score was 6.8

Q2 – How much do you think you as an organisation will be impacted? (1 = Not at all, 10 = Severely)

Average score was 7.3

Q3 – What questions do you have about the energy crisis?

A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) is being created. This will be shared and continuously updated

Q4 – How much do you understand about the Supplier of Last Resort (SoLR) process?

Average score was 5.1

Q5 – What do you think this means for our customers in vulnerable situations?

- Less likely to switch again if the SOLR process is clunky - potentially missing out on better deals in the future
- More debt (not just for energy). More stress and mental health impacts, including children and educational impacts. Unsafe coping strategies and energy rationing. Newly vulnerable households exposed to risk. Physical health impacts. Cutting back on other essentials
- As a carbon monoxide awareness charity - I think many people won't be servicing appliances - so a higher risk of CO.

Already got quite a few requests for CO alarms because people want to be safe but they sadly can't afford alarms with everything else they have to pay for.

- Confusion, uncertainty
- It massively adds to existing vulnerabilities - more in terms of quantity of vulnerable people but also more vulnerable
- If the process does take longer than the 3 weeks mentioned, it can push customers directly into debt as the money they would have used to pay that bill each month, does get spent on other things unfortunately
- Customers on tariff's which are coming to an end shortly are worrying how this might impact them and what this might mean for them, not knowing...
- Health impacted by cold weather as they won't put the heating on - further demand on the NHS due to exacerbated health conditions from living in cold, damp homes
- It is going to be massive, impacting on physical and mental health. Increases in domestic abuse cases.
- More people in fuel poverty, deciding whether to eat or heat especially the very vulnerable
- Customers on low income with prepayment meters cannot find the additional income needed to prevent self-disconnection / rationing
- Increased amounts of clients in fuel debt
- More customers are likely to find themselves in vulnerable circumstances
- They are not going to know how their

bills might change, therefore can't budget

NGN's proposal – two focus areas for the winter

The audience were made aware of the two areas of focus NGN proposed for the coming winter

1. Re-engineering of existing office space to create a 'community partner' hub

We are working on a proposal to convert some of the office space at our NGN Leeds office to become a 'Community Partner Hub'. The offer will include:

- Reallocation of office space for our community partners to use, either as and when, or full-time if needed
 - Use of office space for any training needs
 - Use of facilities such as printers; WiFi; photocopiers etc
2. NGN volunteering opportunities to support our community partners
 - All NGN colleagues have 2 volunteering days to use each year
 - The skills that our colleagues have and can share, are wide-ranging. For example, accounting, audit, design, marketing, PR, health and safety, HR etc

Three questions were posed, and each facilitator took a question each, as detailed below:

- What do we need to consider when creating a 'community partnering hub'? Is this something that would be useful to you, or organisations that you work with?
- What skills would be useful to you as an organisation, that we could provide through our colleague volunteering days?
- What can we do to provide additional support to our partner organisations, as a result of the energy crisis?

Overall stakeholder feedback, in relation to all of the questions posed, was as follows:

- The idea of creating a hub would be beneficial
- Need to think about where it would be located, as we have partners across the network not just Thorpe Park
- Office space on an ad-hoc need basis would be good
- Training facilities would be good and to use your volunteering days to train partners
- Using our (NGN's) kit – using a team session or a zoom session and being able to run this from the hub would be great
- General consensus that it was a good idea, strong support from all participants
- Because it was only 2 days, it was agreed there would need to be pre-planning, dialogue prior to the days, and organisations should plan NGN

volunteering days around their busiest times / projects when they need extra support and work to a pre agreed plan

- There was a suggestion for the 2 days to be split into hours, e.g.2 hours per week. Logistics of this were also discussed and noted that this would work better for remote working rather than attending an organisation's office
- Most organisations had the same needs of audit, bookkeeping / accounting and marketing / design. Challenge for NGN to spread these skillsets evenly across the organisations. IT expertise was also mentioned as a gap - there is a real opportunity to bring 3iG colleagues into this
- More visibility needed of what NGN can offer - potential for a future session to be a showcase of our organisation chart, to brief the teams on what expertise we have
- For councils and the likes of Groundwork, they'd find operational expertise more valuable in a best practice / training sharing format, rather than volunteers
- Logistically, stakeholders discussed the possibility of a catalogue / directory system, or a submission form for charities. It was agreed there needed to be a 'hub' for this to be coordinated
- GDPR concerns were noted as a potential blocker, participants questioned the implications of sharing sensitive data with NGN colleagues
- One organisation noted 'how do they give back' and 'how does it become a 2-way street?', i.e. what can they offer to

NGN in terms of training and education?

- General consensus - use of NGN facilities / volunteers to support was a good idea – everyone supportive. Especially for training / could do this jointly with partners
- Use of NGN volunteers to support – would need a 'Volunteer Bank' - would need to be pre-planning, dialogue prior to the days. Partners need to know how many volunteer hours / days would be available and with what skill sets and when. Needs to be planned in a formal / structured manner. Mapping exercise may be required to match needs/skills
- Use of facilities will enable partners to network automatically/ share ideas - could use Leeds and Sunderland offices for their face to face activities
- Could use venues as a best practice / training sharing format rather than volunteers
- Promotional and awareness raising opportunities could be included at a venue – other partners can see who is offering what
- CO alarms – could help partners to purchase these at a reduced cost / if ordered in bulk (like friends and family). Reduced costs means partners could purchase / help more
- Water PSR – raise awareness with all our partners. Works better for messaging if 'trusted' partners are used. Affordability tariffs could also be used. NWL often struggle to have direct contact with customers and we need to use partners to help achieve this

Event Evaluation and Future Engagement – 16 feedback responses

Summary:	Customers in Vulnerable Situations Fuel Poverty workshop	Tuesday 15th June 2021
Event Evaluation		
Q1	What do you want to get out of today?	
Q2	Choose 2 words from this list below to describe this event	Interesting, Insightful, Useful
Q3	Overall, how satisfied were you with the event?	8.6
Q4	How would you rate the discussions?	8.6
Q5	How would you rate the event contact and speakers?	9
Q6	How would you rate the networking opportunities?	7.1
Q7	Is there anything you think could be improved / changes for future workshops?	No - really good It would be useful to have the names of those attending against their organisations Zoom is tough and the handovers are always hard with who runs the slides etc. But that a bit slicker would help. I though the break outs were great Really good, interactive session. Very well facilitated and presented Option to choose the break out session would be great. Maybe a networking session or in January a face to face workshop? More discussion time I think the participant naming system could be improved - whilst it is nice to recognise individuals by their name it isn't easy to link them to an organisation. - also understanding which organisation they represent could be helpful to facilitate networking and provide context to their input Not enough time for group discussion I was at a loss (first time here) with the SLIDO facility - so couldn't contribute much to that part of the discussion. Some prior explanation would have helped newcomers It's always easier to network face to face and I thought the opportunity to use a breakout room at the end of the session was a good idea More breakouts

Q8	Is there anything else you would like to tell us?	These sessions are so useful for a virtually '2-man band' charity - it allows us to access information that is useful to allow us to continue helping people Would really like to be actively involved as Think CO from Gas Safe Charity in the workshop on 25th January. Lots of free resources available to anyone which enable you to know more about CO sources, signs and symptoms, how to help prevent it and what to do if you suspect CO risks with someone you are supporting. My first session and very insightful, will definitely be attending again if invited. As always I'd be more than happy to run a 5 or 10 min session on some of the work we do at Charis, especially around the emergency assistance Yes , more networking time allocated The networking worked well - I was able to speak directly to Cliff Duff at the end and found that helpful. In some ways this is even easier than trying to approach a stranger at a meeting, or break into an ongoing conversation The sessions showed an understanding of the (sometimes) complex issues surrounding the fuel poverty agenda
Q9	Thinking of yourself as a stakeholder of NGN, how satisfied are you with the relationship that you have with NGN	8.6
Q10	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	
	NGN keeps me up to date on their business plans	Strongly agree 3 Agree 6 Somewhat agree 1 Neither agree nor disagree 3 Somewhat disagree 2 Disagree 1
	NGN provided me with clear information about their business performance	Strongly agree 1 Agree 7 Somewhat agree 2 Neither agree nor disagree 4 Disagree 2
	NGN provided me with opportunities to give feedback on the topics that interest me	Strongly agree 5 Agree 4 Somewhat agree 3 Neither agree nor disagree 2 Somewhat disagree 1 Disagree 1

NGN allows me to give feedback through my preferred method	Strongly agree	4
	Agree	5
	Somewhat agree	2
	Neither agree nor disagree	3
	Disagree	2

NGN makes it clear how they have used feedback to change	Strongly agree	3
	Agree	6
	Somewhat agree	3
	Neither agree nor disagree	2
	Somewhat disagree	1
	Disagree	1

Future Engagement

Q1	How else would you like to engage with NGN in future?	More events around fuel poverty
		Already covered
		Back to face to face!
		Provide resources for its staff and the staff and volunteers of its partners in CO awareness
		I have answered above based on my very early working relationship with NGN, I am very keen to work more with NGN and I look forward to our next meeting. The team I have met have been very good and communicated very well with me
		Continuing as is and in relation to the community hub and volunteer support opportunities
		No issues
		Email
		Would like more direct information on the areas above
		Continue attending workshops
		Newsletter

Tell us what you think

Thank you for reading this report. We welcome any further feedback, thoughts or ideas you have. Please drop us a line on at stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk

For further information contact: stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk

