

## Groundwork - Young People with Energy

<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 2022
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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*

At the point when young people start living independently, no teaching nor education is given around how to use energy efficiently and safely in the home, the actions that can be taken to reduce costs, nor how the world of energy suppliers works – everyone is expected to just get on with it. As such, many young people are likely to be paying more than they need to for their bills, not realising the financial impact the cost of energy can have on their income, putting themselves at risk of accruing debt and putting up with cold homes, due to limited awareness of ways and schemes that can help make homes warmer. This all puts people at risk of fuel poverty.

Government statistics show that households where the oldest person is under 25, have higher levels of fuel poverty than any other age group and young people are more likely to be living in privately rented accommodation, with poorer energy efficiency standards. This also raises the issue of the servicing and repair of appliances, which is a concern when some private landlords do not always fulfil their obligations in relation to gas safety. As a consequence, there is an increased risk of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning in these properties. In many cases, young people don't seek help until they have got into difficulties with utility bills and appliances fall into disrepair, at which point it is much harder to catch-up again and from a gas safety perspective, can have serious consequences.

### **1.1 The solution**

This project will target young people aged 16-25 who have responsibility for paying gas and electricity bills in their home. It will educate them around energy use and ways to reduce their costs and stay safe, whilst also looking to inspire them to get involved in awareness-raising campaigns themselves. They will be engaged via a steering group of organisations, who represent cohorts such as young carers, care leavers and youth charities. A variety of mediums will be used for training and engagement and a toolkit will be developed, which will be used with young people. One to one advice will also be provided via digital platforms.

## **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 overall aim of this project is to engage with young people to improve their knowledge and understanding of energy use, energy bills and CO safety.

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

- Improve confidence in managing household budgets
- Reduce worry and anxiety about utility bills
- Improve financial stability and reduce vulnerability to fuel debts
- Generate financial savings on energy bills
- Ensure they are safe, warm and well in their homes

## 2.3 Scope

- Establish a steering group of key organisations in the North East (e.g. Sunderland, Newcastle) regions i.e. representatives of those public/voluntary sector organisations which support young carers, care leavers, young parents, young people with disabilities, social housing providers, youth charities etc
- Work with these organisations to develop an energy saving toolkit that staff can use with young people
- Provide training and support to staff and volunteers from these organisations around energy awareness and how they can use the toolkit to integrate energy advice into their work
- Provide and develop awareness sessions, activities and campaigns for young people to learn about energy and how to manage bills
- Encourage young people to develop and roll-out their own awareness raising campaigns and ideas
- Provide one-to-one advice to young people via technological platforms such as online chat, WhatsApp, Facebook messenger, Zoom or similar

## 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 young people in vulnerable situations, in particular young people aged 16-25 that are:

- Care leavers
- Young carers
- Young people with a mental or physical disability
- Young parents
- Young people moving into their first tenancy
- Young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training)
- Individuals on a low income

Working with young people in vulnerable situations is vitally important for several reasons:

- Young people are rarely prioritised in fuel poverty initiatives, yet government statistics show that households where the oldest person is under 25 have higher levels of fuel poverty than any other age group
- Young people are more likely to be living in privately rented accommodation with poorer energy efficiency and safety standards
- A confused.com survey shows that half of young people have never switched their energy supplier, so will be paying more than necessary
- A study by the debt charity Step Change shows increased level of borrowing amongst young age groups, with 75% of 18-24 year olds having unsecured debts
- Dealing with the aftermath of Covid-19, and the current energy and cost of living crises are causing particular financial hardship for the under 25's who have seen the highest level of

unemployment of all age groups, with a corresponding high increase in Universal Credit applications

- Under 25s have experienced more mental health issues than any other group during CV-19
- The project's ultimate aim is to mitigate against fuel poverty, reducing anxiety around utility costs and ensuring young people can better afford to be warm and safe in their home. The project therefore aligns to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy themes around financial hardship and mental health.

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

### **3.1 Eligibility criteria**

- This project will have a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the financial hardship and mental health themes
- 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.

This project has already proven its success over the last year, as it has been delivered by the 'Yorkshire Energy Doctor'.

Groundwork Yorkshire – Green Doctors have been approached by Yorkshire Energy Doctor, to expand delivery of this project in the North East, which is not a region covered by Yorkshire Energy Doctor.

Groundwork has offices & teams based in the North East region who also deliver the Green Doctor service & importantly already have programmes that engage with the 16–25 year-old target group, such as, the Gateshead under 25 support team, the Groundwork dedicated Youth Team & their community hub involvement.

#### **4.1 Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops 2020 -2022**

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. This includes digital engagement in light of CV-19. During 2020 - 2022 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders on the subject of CIVS. In 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 mental health issues and an increase in food/fuel poverty.

In the CV-19 specific workshop held in August 2020, our stakeholders also identified that larger energy bills was an issue due to the pandemic. They stated that larger energy bills were due to spending more time at home due to lockdown, especially during winter. Demand for energy advice dropped but more general enquiries were evident in relation to redundancy and benefits advice. They also mentioned that mental health had been significantly impacted by the pandemic and in particular, for young people, students and disabled people, who felt more socially isolated due to the lockdown.

In January 2021 we held a specific fuel poverty workshop. During this workshop our stakeholders said it would be good for NGN to us 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. Feedback told us that partners can help raise awareness of different funding available and in relation to this project, the linking up of organisations by way of a steering group will address that point. This project fully aligns with the need to help young people in fuel poverty and those on low incomes, to enable them to gain the knowledge and understanding of how to manage their energy bills and stay safe, in order to prevent fuel poverty and health issues in the future.

During our November 2021 Energy Crisis / Partnership Working Workshop our stakeholders said the energy crisis will result in people not getting their appliances serviced every year, which increases the risks of CO poisoning. Since November 2021 and currently, we're in both an energy and cost of living crisis, which is further impacting vulnerable customers and increases all of these risks. People are continuing to have to make choices between heating, eating and looking after their health. The servicing of appliances will continue to fall further down the list of customers priorities as a result of these two crises.

We held a CO awareness specific workshop in February 2022 of which Think CO hosted a partner spotlight presentation around CO. During this workshop our stakeholders identified that gas servicing organisations need to communicate more effectively with customers. They suggested that these organisations could collect information whilst handling and leaving useful information with customers whilst on site.

Each year we use our annual Customer Perceptions Research to understand the priorities of our customers. Amongst a set of general tracker questions i.e., same questions that are asked year on year, the evidence in the most recent research (February 2022), indicated that keeping bills as low as

possible ranked more highly, than providing a safe and reliable supply of gas, for the first time. This is a clear indication, as to how concerned customers are about the rising cost of living and energy and the subsequent impact these will have on other bills.

#### **4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)**

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support CIVS. 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 CIVS which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

#### **4.3 Social Indicator Mapping and Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT)**

Social indicator mapping research was refreshed in June 2022. This has been shared with our strategic partners as part of our stakeholder engagement.

The research undertaken in June 2022, indicated that Bradford, Hull, Scarborough, South Tyneside and Sunderland were the top five places, to emerge as having the greatest concentration of vulnerabilities within NGN's network. This was based on a combination of the following vulnerability factors:

- Fuel poverty
- Benefit claims
- No qualifications
- Long term health problem / disability

Due to the financial challenges, currently experienced in these areas, makes it even more important to raise awareness of managing energy bills.

A new VMT has been demonstrated to stakeholders, to highlight any vulnerability gaps we have on our network. 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. For example in this scenario, age demographic and associated tenure can be identified, as well as fuel poverty hot spots. All data can be mixed and matched and the VMT has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues.

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 CO because doing so saves lives.

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

- Production of a toolkit that staff can use when supporting young people on energy issues
- Training provided to 100 members of staff who work with young people on energy awareness and the toolkit
- 50 young people given energy advice using the new toolkit
- Young people receive one-to-one specialist energy advice
- 200 young people engaged through awareness sessions and other activities

### Success criteria

- Steering group in place to oversee the project – this will involve representatives of key organisations that support vulnerable young people
- Production of a toolkit that staff can use when supporting young people on energy issues. This can subsequently be shared across the whole network as well as with other GDN's and DNO partners

## 6. Project Partners and third parties involved

*Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement*

The project partners involved are Gateshead Council & Housing, Sunderland Council & Housing, Newcastle Council & Housing, Homegroup Housing Association, Thirteen Group Housing Association, Barnardo's Newcastle, Gateshead under 25 support team and Groundwork's Community Team.

## 7. Potential for new learning

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

The project will firstly produce a toolkit that could be used further afield by other professionals that support vulnerable young people. Learn about the most effective ways of engaging with young people on energy, both in terms of messaging and communication methods, as well as about any specific challenges they face around energy bills, appliance safety and keeping warm.

This learning can then be shared in other geographical areas and with other agencies that support young people. Groundwork will start doing this through the relevant contacts they have established across the northeast of England through our Groundwork & Green Doctor programmes. They will look to run online workshops to disseminate information on our project and to provide training on

the use of the toolkit. These will also be used to identify additional opportunities to work with other organisations going forward.

Groundwork will also look to share learning through forums such as the NEA Fuel Poverty Forum.

## **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.*

June 2022 – May 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.*

The project will take place in the geographical area of the North East – mainly Gateshead, Newcastle and Sunderland.

### **Approved by**

Eileen Brown  
Customer Experience Director