

Hope 4 U - NHS Support Service

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	March 2023
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

At a time, which should be filled with great excitement, can also bring enormous expense and stress to an individual or family. Finding out that you are expecting, if planned or unexpected, can bring a mix of emotions, happiness, excitement, fear, stress, and anxiety.

The average cost of a baby in the first month is likely to be in the region of £500, which does not include items such as crib, furniture, a pram, and a car seat. A survey conducted by Child Poverty Action Group revealed that 64% of people were not prepared for the costs involved.

Unfortunately, figures show that child poverty in the UK is increasing and that the youngest children continue to be most at risk with the effect of poverty starting even before a child is born due to a lack of healthy food for the mother. Birthweights in the most deprived areas can on average be 200g lower, children are more likely to die suddenly in infancy, to suffer acute infections, and to experience mental health.

Children growing up in poverty in the early years are much more likely to struggle with their early learning and are at much greater risk of struggling in primary and secondary school. Poverty puts tremendous pressure on families who don't have the money to give their children the types of environments and experiences others may have. The impact on physical and mental health are lifelong and higher rates of arthritis, high blood pressure, respiratory illness and depression are being seen in later life.

Solution

Many people do not know how their income may change, the full costs and impact and any possible grants that they may be entitled to. The proposed service is to work with Airedale NHS Foundation Trust and Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust maternity units, supporting parents with planning their budgets, benefit check and income maximisation, money management, housing issues, sign up to PSR, saving on utility costs and explaining further grant options.

The project will include the essential service of safety with Carbon Monoxide and energy efficiency, keeping warm and well for the baby and the mother.

By working with the NHS Trust, essential information would directly be delivered to people who would benefit. One of the biggest barriers is always distrust around any support available, but by working with the NHS, trust is already established.

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.

The project would deliver services to areas served by Northern Gas Networks.

By delivering a service in conjunction with the NHS gives an ideal opportunity to gather and give out information. At the expected mothers first appointment, information and consent will be gathered for a direct referral to be made through to Hope 4U using the NHS.net secure system.

Hope 4U know from experience that many of the conversations reported are around low incomes, benefits, budgeting, and the increasing fuel costs. By referring people through to Hope 4U will allow a non-judgemental service to be delivered.

There are many benefits and entitlements available when pregnant and when the baby is born, including maternity benefits and the Sure Start Maternity. If in employment, Statutory Maternity Pay is 90% of earning for the first six weeks, then drops further for the next 33 weeks. Some employers may offer different terms but the need to find out exactly what will be received if working is critical.

In creating scenario planning it will give clear income levels which can be understood and planned for, whether in employment or not, allowing more accurate budgeting going forward. A timeline leading up to birth can be completed with each parent to ensure they are claiming and following the correct procedures.

The overall service aim is to make homes warm, safe. Not everyone will access the Hope 4U service, but it is anticipated that approximately 360 families over the year will initially take up the service. This figure may rise when the project is established by expanding out to further maternity departments.

2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- Check income and benefit entitlements – income maximisation & scenario planning
- Maternity Grants
- Budgeting advice
- Energy and Water saving hints
- Behaviour changes on energy and water usage
- Information on smart meters
- Negotiating energy bill queries
- Information and registration on the Priority Services Register
- Access schemes to reduce utility costs – social tariffs
- Information to raise awareness of carbon monoxide
- Information to raise awareness of the Priority Services Register and make registration with consent
- Signpost to other local support services

2.2 Scope

- 360 families will access the service over 12 months
- CO awareness sessions delivered
- PSR referrals

- NHS Support service project will include two areas:
 - Airedale General Hospital
 - Bradford Teaching NHS Hospital and the associated centers

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 VCMA funding, as it will support patients on the maternity ward in Airedale General Hospital and Bradford Teaching NHS Hospital and the associated centres. The project will support customers who are living in financial hardship and fuel poverty across Airedale and Bradford, as well as raising awareness of CO. As the project has financial hardship themes, it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy.

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

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- This project has a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the financial hardship theme
- Has defined outcomes as required
- 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 – 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 (including digital engagement in light of CV-19). During 2019-2021 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 had on hidden vulnerability. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts were associated with an increase in fuel and food poverty and there is a greater need more than ever, due to the cost of living and energy crisis, to support customers accessing fuel and food banks. Quite often a dilemma between heating and eating.

In January and September 2021, we held a couple of fuel poverty workshops. During these workshops our stakeholders said that fuel, food and general poverty are all linked, and we need more streamlined ways of working together. Partners can help raise awareness of different funding and support available. This project fully aligns with the need to help vulnerable customers in fuel poverty.

Further stakeholder engagement throughout 2020, told us that fuel poverty and the choice between heating and eating is becoming more prevalent. The current energy crisis is further compounding this already serious issue. This project provides a solution to helping those customers who are financially struggling and need extra help. Haope 4 U are a trusted partner to the NHS and they are therefore able to provide help and support to their customers.

Recent social indicator mapping research carried out 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 the signs and symptoms of CO. These localities need to be key areas for consideration, both in terms of ensuring service delivery is aware of challenges people may face, and in relation to targeting potential support. This project aligns with this need as Bradford is one of the places to have the greatest concentration of vulnerabilities within NGN's network.

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 cost of energy and the subsequent impact this will have on other bills.

4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support customers in vulnerable situations (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 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 mental health which are addressed through 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

- To initially receive 360 referrals per annum from the two NHS hospitals and the associated centers.
- To provide confidential and impartial advice to parents. The service will be delivered by skilled advisors, by telephone, and post
- The outcomes will include, income maximised, building a sustainable budget, and reducing financial stress.
- From the Hope 4U advice and support services, it is anticipated that:
- Up to 360 expectant and new mothers will be referred to Hope 4U to receive non-judgmental services via the NHS Hospitals.
- CO awareness sessions to vulnerable customers
- Referrals to the Priority Services Register

5.2 Success criteria

- Income maximisation check and information on current arrears/debts
- Information on available maternity grants
- Energy and Water Saving Hints
- Information on changing behavior to save on energy and water usage
- Information to raise awareness of carbon monoxide

- Raising awareness of the Priority Services Register and make registration with the clients consent
- Access charities, trust funds to help with energy arrears

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

Hope 4U

Hope 4U will be the lead organisation for the project, delivering the service and reporting outcomes to Northern Gas Networks.

Hope 4U delivers a national service funded by organisations, such as National Grid, Wales & West and the Fuel Bank Foundation. Having over 30 years' experience, they understand everyone is an individual and should be treated in a non-judgmental way and listened to. Their services are not time limited.

Airedale Hospital

The maternity data and digital administrator is very supportive of the project and believes it will be an invaluable service for the patients. Discussions have taken place with them on how referrals would take place and the services open to the patients.

The maternity data and digital administrator would be in charge of opening the service across the different departments, outreach staff and visiting staff in her area.

Bradford NHS

A digital midwife from this hospital, has been very supportive of the project from the initial contact made. She has met with all the community members to discuss the project. They believe that the project would be valuable to all the women in Bradford. They would initially start the project with a few teams and once processes are established extend to all teams.

7. Potential for new learning

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

Any learning will be shared with stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies

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.

March 2023 – February 2025

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.

Geographical area of Airedale and Bradford

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director