

Centre for Warmth – Bilton Hall

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	March 2024
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Total cost (£k)	*detailed separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	*detailed separately

1. Problem(s)

Bilton Hall Centre is located in Jarrow in South Tyneside. It is one of the UK's most disadvantaged areas (43.6% of South Tyneside in multiple deprivation vs. national average 20.04%). Bilton Hall Community Trust serves a diverse population facing life-limiting health issues, unemployment, low income or a combinations of all these.

Recent consultation results highlighted communication gaps between South Tyneside service providers and the community, leading to residents' limited awareness of available support. Furthermore, the lack of accessible, one-on-one support outside of town centres and council facilities creates a barrier for those needing help the most. Currently food and fuel poverty affect not just the unemployed, but also working individuals struggling to make ends meet. Overstretched services like CAB and welfare teams leave a gap that community facilities like theirs are having to fill.

Solution

Bilton Hall Community Trust has applied for VCMA funding to become a Centre for Warmth. It is a thriving independent community centre dedicated to fostering inclusivity and empowering individuals and organisations within the Bilton Hall community and wider area, regardless of background or ability.

The Centre for Warmth concept was developed to ensure a holistic approach to supporting fuel poor households within a community setting. Centre users will receive a combination of services such as:

- energy advice
- CO awareness and advice
- income maximisation through benefit entitlement checks and managing debt
- free or reduced cost food/clothing
- fuel top up vouchers
- connections to other NGN funded partner information/assistance

Plus training, information, advice and services bespoke to their individual neighbourhoods. All provided in a warm safe space designed to improve health and wellbeing, increase household income, and help communities better manage their energy.

Bilton Hall's vision is to be a vibrant hub where everyone feels a sense of belonging, connection, and empowered to reach their full potential by:

- Providing accessible facilities and resources: This includes our the upcoming redevelopment of a 3 acre which will transform the space into a welcoming outdoor haven for everyone to enjoy, fostering stronger connections and promoting outdoor activities. Offering a diverse range of activities and programs: Hosting everything

from social events and educational workshops to fitness classes and support groups, catering to various interests and needs.

- Empowering individuals and organizations: Providing resources, training, and support to help individuals and partner organisations achieve their goals and make a positive impact on the community.
- Actively addressing community challenges: Collaboration with partners to tackle issues like food insecurity, social isolation, and lack of access to opportunities.

Bilton Hall describes itself as a beacon of hope, inspiring others to believe in the possibility of positive change and the ability to make a real difference in their communities.

2. Scope and Objectives

The Centre for Warmth project aims to serve 2500 direct beneficiaries over the two year period in the Jarrow locality of South Tyneside by employing 3 additional members of staff. It is expected through the support received, centre users will have their capacity and skills increased so they are empowered to be able to help themselves. These roles will also allow the time for the specific work to be done with individuals and families around a culture shift and introducing more ownership of energy efficiency, CO awareness and greener living. Through outreach work staff will pick up issues for professional interventions. Their work will enhance the existing provision at the Centre which is currently run by part-time workers and volunteers.

2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- To improve health and wellbeing of the centre users
- To reduce fuel poverty
- To increase income through benefit maximisation and debt management
- To provide CO awareness and advice
- To increase awareness and registrations of the PSR

2.2 Scope

- Benefit/debt advice
- Energy Efficiency advice
- CO awareness
- PSR registration
- Safeguarding
- Group activities to reduce isolation (crafts, music therapy or physical indoor or outdoor activity)
- Support with digital inclusion
- Access to healthcare – NHS linking
- Support to access small grants for white goods
- Food/fuel vouchers

- Support to improve living conditions and accessing the right services to help with their circumstances.

3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as it will support vulnerable customers who are living in financial hardship and fuel poverty across the Jarrow locality, as well as raising awareness of CO and the PSR. As the project has mental wellbeing and financial hardship themes, it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy too.

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 and the wider vulnerability categories of:
 - Financial hardship
 - Accessibility, including language
 - Socio-demographic
 - Cultural
 - Mental Wellbeing themes
- Has defined outcomes as required
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms

4. Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

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

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. Since 2019 we've held regular workshops with our stakeholders, on the subject of Customers In Vulnerable Situations (CIVS). This ensures that we are well informed to address the needs of customers across our network and through collaborative projects.

Stakeholder engagement throughout 2022, told us that fuel poverty and the choice between heating and eating is becoming more prevalent. The energy and cost of living crises have further compounded this issue. This project provides a solution to helping those customers who are financially struggling and need extra help to address energy affordability. The project fully aligns with the need to help vulnerable customers in fuel poverty.

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

Our most recent stakeholder engagement during 2023 has informed us that financial hardship is still a key area of focus, alongside the health impacts associated with, or exacerbated by, living in cold and damp homes. Stakeholders also told us that increasing capacity for support within services would be key to addressing the immediate and longer term impacts of fuel poverty and energy affordability. This project addresses this need and ensures additional capacity to support households who may be at risk, through a well-established and trusted advice service.

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 (March 2023), indicated that keeping bills as low as possible ranked more highly, than providing a safe and reliable supply of gas. 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. Customers were also asked to prioritise the list of vulnerabilities listed below:

- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability
- Physical challenges
- Financial Hardship

This was the order of priority from the customers surveyed:

- Financial Hardship
- Physical challenges
- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability

Financial hardship continued to be the dimension of vulnerability that most customers prioritised, with more customers in the most recent survey selecting this as their top priority. Physical challenges were second, closely followed by Mental well-being third. Rurality and Temporary vulnerability were ranked fourth and fifth.

Very recent (Autumn 2023) Bespoke Vulnerability Stakeholder Mapping research identified categories of stakeholders that are hard to reach, this included:

- People living with a disability
- Senior citizens with long term conditions
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Mental health

Health conditions which are prevalent in the NGN region are:

- Cancer and chronic kidney disease
- Musculoskeletal conditions
- Respiratory
- Mental health

Through the research carried out, the findings show that the 5 original NGN vulnerability categories have now evolved to 10 categories. These are:

- Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space
- Mental wellbeing
- Financial hardship
- Temporary vulnerability – including post hospital recovery and pregnancy / maternity
- Socio Demographic
- Household composition
- Rural Vulnerability
- Accessibility Including language
- Medical Dependant on Energy
- Cultural

4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support our 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 customers in vulnerable situations 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 rural and financial vulnerability within the project, align to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy.

5. Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

Bilton Hall Centre will employ 3 members of staff. A Hub Manager focusing on service level agreements (SLAs) and partnership building which involves establishing and maintaining agreements with various support service providers ensuring the community has access to a diverse range of necessary resources. A Kafe Assistant Manager. This role also involves supporting individuals on 6 week work placement community payback programs throughout their journey. A Green Space and Activities Coordinator. This role involves scheduling activities and booking clients into available slots with partner organizations. The coordinator plans and oversees engaging activities for clients, fostering social interaction and skill development. This role encompasses managing open access sessions at designated locations within the community.

5.1 Outcomes

The Project will provide dedicated Support and Community Engagement:

- Private 1-2-1 Support Space: We'll provide a dedicated, confidential space for partner organizations to meet with clients and address their individual needs. Where services have accessibility 7days a week from a 9-9pm time slot
- Community Engagement Activities: To combat isolation and encourage participation, we'll host two, 2-hour community engagement events each week. These events will connect residents with vital services, including PSR registration, and foster a sense of belonging through creative activities within Bilton Hall and the Gardens
- Open Access Service Hours: Beyond scheduled events, we'll offer 4 additional hours per week for drop-in consultations, coffee mornings, and information sharing activities. This open-door approach creates a welcoming environment for residents to access needed services throughout the year (50 weeks across the 2-year project)

Over the next two years, this project aims to empower 2500 community members by:

- Providing a wide range of in-depth advice and support services
- Equipping them with knowledge and resources on energy efficiency
- Helping people register for the PSR

- Raising carbon monoxide awareness
- Providing the kafe assistant program fostering valuable work experience and skills development
- Combatting isolation and loneliness
- Promoting health and well-being
- Signing 1,000 customers onto the PSR
- Providing CO awareness sessions to 1,000 customers

The centre is committed to reducing their environmental impact and long-term financial burden. Specifically focusing on installing solar panels, which will minimise reliance on traditional energy sources, reducing their carbon footprint, and ultimately lowering their overheads over time as a charity. They are committed to amplifying their reach beyond the immediate participants by engaging an additional 1,000 individuals through social media campaigns. These campaigns will raise awareness about carbon monoxide, the PSR, and energy efficiency on various platforms throughout the project. With a substantial existing footfall and over 100 daily clients, Bilton Hall Community Trust is uniquely positioned to significantly bolster community engagement. It aims to connect with at least 400 new community members throughout the project.

5.2 Success criteria

Number of total beneficiaries = 2500	2500	1000	100	300	500	200	200	24	1500
Raising awareness of the PSR	✓								
Energy information	✓								
Energy efficiency advice		✓							
Sign clients onto the PSR				✓					
Educate individuals on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness					✓				
Offer income maximisation advice, such as supporting with applying for benefits via sign posting					✓				
Provide CO alarms			✓						
Social Activities-reducing isolation							✓		
Garden and Food Learning						✓			

Kitchen work placement program direct support through volunteering								✓	
Supporting existing centre users, social business and charities and groups via the allocation of funding to cover utilities									✓

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Collaboration is the cornerstone of their approach. Working with a network of community partners, including:

- Charitable organisations: Like Waves Additional Needs Support Group and New Hope North East CIO, who provide vital services to specific community segments, such as families with disabled children.
- Local businesses: Collaborating with businesses like Greggs, KFC, and Nandos addresses food insecurity by distributing surplus food to those in need.
- Community groups: Partnering with groups like Bilton Hall Boxing ABA and Williby Rocs CIC to offer diverse activities and programs that promote physical and mental well-being.

7. Potential for new learning

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

8. Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations

This project has a positive SROI return.

VCMA Project start and end date

March 2024-March 2026

Geographic area

South Tyneside

Approved by

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