

Centre for Warmth – Khidmat Centre

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
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Project contact name:	Laura Ratcliffe
Project contact number/email:	LRatcliffe@northerngas.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	*detailed separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	*detailed separately

1. Problem(s)

The most recent edition of the English Indices of Deprivation published in 2019, which also includes the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019, cites Bradford District as being ranked the 5th most income deprived and 6th most employment deprived local authority. Within this 22% of children are below the poverty line and 15% of the District's household are in fuel poverty. In our estimation, these figures will have significantly worsened since 2019, during and post covid, this is corroborated by Bradford Council's poverty strategy which states 20% of families are in food and fuel poverty (Strategy launched in 2022). Furthermore, the Council have also identified that Bradford has the 3rd highest percentage of children living in relative poverty and 2nd highest in absolute poverty in England, when judged before housing costs are taken into account.

The Poverty Strategy also identifies that 14 of Bradford's 30 wards are in the 10% most deprived in England.

According to Bradford Council's Poverty Strategy, the risk of being in poverty is particularly high if one falls into one or more of the following groups:

- A household headed by somebody of Bangladeshi/Pakistani/Black/Roma Gypsy Traveller ethnicity
- Those on pension or pension credit
- Large families of multi-generational households
- Those registered with a disability
- Single parents

The majority of Khidmat Centre service users fall into the above brackets of low income, acute poverty of food and fuel, there are also a number of women prison leavers experiencing homelessness. Their situations are further compounded by low literacy levels, particularly amongst first and second generation 'BAME' communities, lack of awareness of services, difficulty navigating required help and support, low confidence, low self-esteem and a deficit of trust. There is also a cultural sense of pride from centre users, in not asking for help which further exacerbates their situation. Centre users have very little understanding of issues to do with fuel-efficiency and safety and certainly do not understand issues around carbon monoxide and its dangers. Due to language barriers and lack of confidence many are unable to price check or get the best value for money. There are also significant 'new and emerging' communities of Eastern European descent and refugees from various countries around the world. Once again, these communities have real challenges with the English language but also are not able to access timely help and support.

Solution

The Khidmat Centre has applied for VCMA funding to become a Centre for Warmth. The centre is open 7 days a week due to demand, it has an average annual footfall of 24,000 centre users.

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.

2. Scope and Objectives

The Khidmat Centre for Warmth aims to serve 5800 direct beneficiaries over the two year period in the Bradford BD7 locality 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 and debt advice.
- Housing advice.
- Form filling.
- Interpretation/translation language support.

- Support with arranging appointment i.e GP, DWP, NHS etc.
- Immigration referrals and signposting.
- Signposting to other specialist service i.e legal, domestic violence, mediation.
- Support with education and employment opportunities.
- Raising awareness of grants and government schemes.
- Advice regarding free school meals, clothing and voucher schemes and appeals.

3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as it will support elderly and BAME vulnerable customers who are living in financial hardship and fuel poverty across the BD7 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.

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

The Khidmat Centre will employ 3 members of staff.

2 x Elderly and Family Support Workers where staff members will offer wrap around and capacity building support' for families. It is expected through the support received, these families will have their capacity and skills increased so they are empowered to have the confidence and knowledge to navigate support for themselves. The Elderly and Family Support Worker 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 to families in and around the Centre, the Elderly and Family Workers will pick up issues for professional interventions such as depression, domestic violence, safeguarding, food poverty and make referrals where necessary. One of the posts will be female for cultural and faith appropriateness, where females may be more comfortable and open to speaking with another female about their issues. Both posts are not exclusive and we expect both of the workers to work with one another but we have built in the cultural sensitivity element into it. Their work will build on existing provision at the Centre which is currently run by part-time workers and volunteers.

1 x Specialist IAG worker (Qualified to The Gateway Qualification level 3 Award in Information, Advice or Guidance or equivalent). This person will work at the Centre to support vulnerable individuals and families.

5.1 Outcomes

- Educate people to understand their rights and freedom
- Education around energy efficiency advice

- Carbon monoxide awareness in conjunction with partners – safety of appliance advice
- Priority Service Register information and registration of 1120 customers
- Supporting families to manage pressures relating to income deprivation
- Applications for grants and government schemes
- To develop & signpost to mental health and wellbeing activities i.e walking groups, social clubs and day trips
- To identify early family intervention
- Food poverty alleviation –luncheon clubs and food banks
- Signposting and referrals to specialist agencies
- Outreach work to promote and connect with families and providers
- Benefit and debt advice
- Housing advice
- Form filling
- Interpretation/translation language support
- Support with arranging appointments i.e GP, DWP, NHS etc.
- Immigration referrals and signposting
- Signposting to other specialist services i.e legal, domestic violence, mediation
- Support with education and employment opportunities
- Advice regarding free school meals, clothing and voucher schemes

5.2 Success criteria

Number of total of direct beneficiaries over 2 years = 5800	5800	3800	1920	1200	1120	500	400
IAG benefit, advice and debt management information service	✓						
IAG benefit, advice and debt management advice service		✓					
Listening and support service	✓						
Energy efficiency advice	✓						
CO Awareness	✓						
PSR Awareness	✓						

PSR Registration					✓		
Organised Wellbeing Activities			✓				
Outreach to families				✓			
Signposting/ referrals						✓	
Awareness raising and workshops energy efficiency							✓

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

In order to deliver the project, where specialist intervention is needed, the centre will be working in partnership with a range of providers which they will signpost to. Examples of these partners are; the neighbouring Horton Grange Primary School who also work with families with complex needs, Bradford Council for Housing support and safeguarding, DWP for benefits and employability support, Probation services for women prison leavers, Citizens Advice for claims and appeals, West Yorkshire Fire Service for fire safety, CO awareness and fire alarms. MIND in Bradford or the Cellar Trust for specialist mental health support.

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

Bradford

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director