

## Centre for Warmth – Windhill Centre

<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>	March 2024
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<b>Total cost (£k)</b>	*detailed separately
<b>Total VCMA funding required (£k)</b>	*detailed separately

## **1. Problem(s)**

Windhill in Bradford is one of the 5% most deprived areas within the UK, it has a high crime rate, high obesity rate, high level of unemployment, high percentage of people renting poor quality housing many without gardens, most families rely on public transport or walking to access services. Windhill is lucky to have many amenities and local areas of green space to play in, but often families have low enthusiasm in accessing the resources we have.

Windhill Centre are a very busy community centre with a footfall of around 300-350 individual people per week (at least 15,000 per year). They offer a range of activities to suite the people, of all ages and abilities who attend and are in need.

The current staff team have noticed a backlog with more and more families in crisis coming through the door, with reducing availability for funding. The current needs of families vary from being cold at home, not enough food for the family especially during holiday periods, increased social isolation due to limited funds impacting their access to not just enriching experiences but basic essential services. Poor housing conditions including damp, non-repairs and overcrowding, limited access to reliable white goods and increased energy bills have impacted individuals access to quality meals, hot water for bathing and clean clothing.

These factors also impact families in crisis in other areas such as digital poverty and educational deprivation with little or no access to wifi/internet at home and very little engagement with after school and outside activities, often secondary school work is done through online resources laptops/smart phones required adding to monthly costs in the household.

Many families have since suffered with mental health, the feeling of not being good enough, embarrassed to ask for help, not being able to provide the same happy time they had growing up, for their own children. There are adults living alone eating ready meals instead of knowing how to cook a healthy meal. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic can still be felt amongst residents as more people have been staying at home isolated suspended in a new pattern of not mixing with other people and/or in social groups locally.

## **Solution**

The Windhill Centre has applied for VCMA funding to become a Centre for Warmth. Their project will focus support on families in crisis (the term “families” referring to people of all ages and abilities from babies through to the elderly), aiming to provide office-based friendly conversations, breaking down barriers, reducing anxieties, building relationships and trust for people to speak openly about their needs in a confidential safe way. By offering full all-round support to the families in crisis, it will enable them to not just overcome their immediate issue of being cold or have no food at home, but to help them resolve the root cause and live independently again.

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 Windhill Centre for Warmth project based in Bradford, aims to directly serve 5000 beneficiaries through a range of measures. As a trusted provider within their community they are in an ideal position to deliver this project.

The funding will be used to employ 2 part time Advocacy Support workers and a part time Community Support Worker. It aims to provide a safe, warm and welcoming environment for all members of the community to attend groups, advice, the café, the computer suite or the nursery without the sense of stigma attached. To build friendships and gain knowledge of their rights and benefit from the wealth of support available to them.

All visitors to the centre past and present will be offered the choice of joining their text update service to keep in touch with what's new and happening within the centre and locally.

### **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

The main services provided will include:

- Information and support around energy, CO and finances/budgeting
- In depth advice and support regarding benefits, debts, appeals, foodbank vouchers and gas/electric support
- Securing free nursery places
- Carbon monoxide/ home fire safety advice
- CO detectors issued
- PSR registrations
- Free wellbeing activities within and around the centre
- Volunteers trained to offer support in the community
- Access to low-cost foods/clothing/household goods
- Access to free holiday club and after school club activities
- Families with reduced levels of crisis, having coping strategies in place for support
- People indirectly supported per year (based on everyone passing information to 4 other people) would be approximately 10,000 pa.

## 3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as it will support a wide range of vulnerable customers who are living in financial hardship and fuel poverty across the Windhill locality of Bradford, 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**

The Windhill Centre will employ 3 part-time members of staff, 2 x Advocacy Support workers and a Community Support Worker. The dedicated advisors will fully support the families onto the correct benefits, provide immediate support to families in need of food or fuel, offering carbon monoxide alarms, providing nappies and milk for families with young children, ensuring they are accessing healthy start vouchers, relieving debt issues where possible and alleviating the associated mental health concerns.

The advice team will signpost families to the nursery to access free child places for those eligible and adults to a variety of groups available during the day, offer volunteering positions to support first steps back into the workplace. The key aim will be to enable families to be able to stand on their own two feet again, whilst supporting them during their greatest times of crisis. For families with older children a youth worker will provide support through activities available after school and during the holidays, keeping in touch with the children, building their resilience to circumstances at home by displaying what a good role

model is, offer spaces into the cooking classes with energy efficient low cost recipes, enabling children to access local parks and amenities relevant to their ages, teaching parents about lower cost activities available locally for the children to attend, bringing back play into the community, finding safe spaces for playing out, building local friendships with the elderly, children and parents, encouraging community event days and re-establishing community spirit and networks for people to support each other.

## 5.1 Outcomes

The main services provided will include:

- Energy efficiency information
- Energy efficiency advice
- Educate individuals on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness
- Provide CO alarms
- Raise awareness of the Priority Services Register (PSR)
- Sign 1,500 families onto the PSR
- Offer financial/budgeting information
- Offer income maximisation advice, such as supporting with applying for benefits, dealing with debts
- Nursery places
- One to one well-being activities within and local to the community centre
- Community Centre Activities
- Volunteering Programme
- Foodshare / Clothes share / Household
- After School Club and Holiday Club Sessions
- Reduced Level of Crisis

## 5.2 Success criteria

Number of total direct beneficiaries	5000	2600	1500	900	200	400	100	20000
<b>5000 (broken down as):</b>								
Energy efficiency information	✓							
Energy efficiency advice		✓						
Educate individuals on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness		✓						
Provide CO alarms					✓			
Raise awareness of the Priority Services Register (PSR)	✓							



Sign families onto the PSR			✓					
Offer financial/budgeting information	✓							
Offer income maximisation advice, such as supporting with applying for benefits, dealing with debts		✓						
Free nursery spaces							✓	
One to one well-being activities within and local to the community centre		✓						
Community Centre Activities						✓		
Volunteering Programme							✓	
Foodshare / Clothes share / Household		✓						
After School Club and Holiday Club Sessions				✓				
Reduced Level of Crisis			✓					
Indirect support								✓

## 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 CAB, Incommunities, Skills House, One In A Million, Local Councillors, Ward Officers, Crag Road Methodist Church, Christchurch School, Christchurch Church, Windhill Idle Shipley Healthy and Happy (WISHH), NHS community partnership, JOIN US Move Play (JU:MP), All Teed Up, Early Years Alliance, PING! Table tennis, Worth Connecting Digital Support, Bradford New Church Community project, Probation Service, National Lottery Awards for All, Bradford Council, Low Ash school, High Craggs school, Poplars Farm school, St Anthonys school, Swaine House school, Common Wealth Theatre, Liberty Arts, STEM theatre in a box, ASDA foundation charity, Feeding Bradford, Coop, Rethink food, Neighbourly, Fareshare, Tesco, Marks & spencer, Bookers, Lidl, Asda Aldi, Morrisons, Baildon Community Link, Bolton Woods centre, Play Bradford, Into the Wild, Bingley Bubble Canalside surgery, Hale, Shipley Hub, Kirkgate centre, Cottingley Community Centre, Get Out More.

## 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