

Cleveland Fire and Rescue – Stay Safe and Warm

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)

This should outline the problem(s) which is/are being addressed by the VCMA Project

This project will address the issue of lack of awareness around knowing the signs of CO poisoning and what to do in that situation. New legislation places a responsibility on landlords to ensure their properties have working CO alarms, but many have not acted upon this legislation yet.

1.1 The solution

Cleveland Fire and Rescue will identify households without CO alarms, rectify the issue as a priority, then refer landlords to housing local authority teams where appropriate to ensure that they understand their responsibilities and fulfil them in any remaining properties they are responsible for.

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 The objectives of this initiative are:

This project will deliver interventions to 500 households across the Cleveland districts of Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland. The key objectives of the project are:

- To keep our most vulnerable residents safe from harm, through the delivery of a multi-agency collaboration project.
- To install carbon monoxide alarms into the homes of the most vulnerable residents
- To educate vulnerable groups of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide poisoning and how to protect themselves from it.

2.2 Scope

Each household would receive and have access to the following package of support through the project:

- Safer homes visit where crews ensure they have appropriate smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in their property and fit where necessary.
- Any other relevant risk reduction can also be issued on the visit as needed by the individuals.
- Home fire safety advice is given at each property.
- If the residents are struggling to keep warm in their home, warmth packs and electric heaters are issued as well as keep warm advice - outcome improved comfort.
- Onward referrals are made to community organisations including Age UK, Smoking Cessation, Social Prescribers
- Cleveland Fire Brigade has a befriending service for lonely and isolated older people that residents can also be referred into for additional support.

- Local authority partners would be informed of any private rented properties that did not have adequate CO alarms and their housing teams would follow up with these landlords to ensure they are aware of their responsibilities and provide any information required.
- Local Authority partners can offer support through a range of avenues including Household Support Fund - income maximisation.

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 supports vulnerable customers without a CO alarm in the home and will educate them about the signs of CO poisoning.

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

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- The project supports NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the CO awareness theme.
- Has defined outcomes as required (see outcomes section)
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms
- NGN have calculated that this project will have a positive SROI

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

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:

1. Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space
2. Mental wellbeing
3. Financial hardship
4. Temporary vulnerability – including post hospital recovery and pregnancy / maternity
5. Socio Demographic
6. Household composition
7. Rural Vulnerability
8. Accessibility Including language
9. Medical Dependant on Energy
10. 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

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

- Issue and install 500 Carbon Monoxide detector alarms.
- Deliver 10 carbon monoxide awareness sessions to groups of young people/adults with additional responsibility in their homes.
- 500 households will have the opportunity to benefit from onward referral to local support services through collaboration between the Local Authorities.
- Cleveland Fire Brigade staff would encourage vulnerable residents to sign up the Priority Services Register.

5.2 Success criteria

- Warmth packs and electric heaters are issued as well as keep warm advice - outcome improved comfort.
- Service for lonely and isolated older people that residents can also be referred into for additional support - outcome - reduced social isolation.
- Adding carbon monoxide alarms to the list of equipment that our teams currently issue as part of their Stay Safe and Warm visits.
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6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

This project will be delivered by our Stay Safe and Warm collaboration. The project lead, and single point of contact for the bid is Cleveland Fire Authority, however the project would not be possible without collaboration between the Fire Authority and the 4 local councils; Hartlepool Borough Council; Stockton Borough Council; Middlesbrough Council & Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council. . All 5 organisations are working together to keep their residents safe and warm. This partnership has been successfully delivering Stay Safe and Warm for 15 years and has supported over 9,000 households in that time. If successful in this application we will be able to add carbon monoxide awareness, education and detection to the services delivered through Stay Safe and Warm to keep our most vulnerable residents safe through our strong and existing collaboration and initiative.

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.

January 2024 – December 2024

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.

This project will cover Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director