

## DIAL Leeds - Energy Confident Extension

<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)

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

Access to many individual case work services are becoming increasingly difficult and this has been compounded by the pandemic. Especially for those living with physical disadvantage, who may also be shielding. As a consequence of the pandemic there is a gap in user-friendly peer support for individuals and households experiencing fuel poverty, health and personal safety risks. Other vulnerabilities linked to disability and long-term health conditions, create further problems for this group. There are barriers in their ability to access, understand or act on information / advice through mainstream channels. This project with DIAL Leeds will go some way to addressing that problem.

### 1.1 The solution

DIAL Leeds are a Disabled People's User Led Organisation (DPULO) providing empowering peer support for disabled people in a safe and positive environment, both remotely and face to face. This project will enable DIAL to provide personally tailored customer support and casework, based on individual needs to resolve any energy related problems and those living in fuel poverty. This project will support people with physical and sensory impairments, learning disabilities and / or long-term conditions including mental health issues to confidently work through their issues and concerns on a one to one basis. Due to the nature of the organisation DIAL will be able to access those customers that are hard and often impossible to reach.

## 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:

The project objectives are to increase confidence, self-esteem and resilience which in turn will lead to increased physical and mental health and wellbeing. Overall, the aim is to empower people to prepare for emergency situations that could help to save lives.

In summary specific objectives are to provide support in achieving the following:

- PSR awareness raising and sign-up
- Warm Home Discount applications
- Benefits health checks and income maximisation
- Gas, electricity and fire safety including carbon monoxide (CO) awareness and what to do in the event of an emergency

## 2.2 Scope

- Assistance with monitoring energy usage and billing/budgeting issues including smart meter take-up and accessing best tariffs from current or other suppliers
- Energy debt advice and assistance
- Energy trust funds supported applications
- Accessing financial and practical support for energy efficiency measures
- Geographical area of Leeds

## 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 the VCMA funding, as it will support customers in vulnerable situations, in particular, customers living in fuel poverty and general financial hardship. This project specifically provides assistance to support customers with physical and sensory impairments, learning disabilities and long-term conditions such as mental health issues. DIAL is in direct daily contact with people living in poverty as a result of complex and multiple barriers to health, economic and social wellbeing. These themes all align to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy. DIAL offers holistic support to empower vulnerable disabled people to change their lives for the better in the short and longer terms.

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

### 3.1 Eligibility criteria

- This project has been calculated as having a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the physical challenges and financial hardship themes
- Has defined outcomes as required (see outcome section)
- 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**

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**

- Involving Green Doctors, Care and Repair (Home Improvement Agency)
- Fire and Rescue (for Safe and Well visits)
- Adult Social Care, Health and Housing
- 260 hours of dedicated project worker input (5 hours per week)
- Formal outcomes measurement tool is MYCAW (Measure Yourself Concerns and Wellbeing) developed by the University of Bristol
- 150 PSR referrals
- 75 CO awareness sessions

### **5.2 Success criteria**

- Customer feedback, worker observations and information from the client case records to produce anonymised case studies.
- 300 people contacted over 260 hours over the year.
- 150 PSR sign-ups forecasted
- Warm home discount applications
- 75 CO awareness sessions
- Energy efficiency measure

## **6. Project Partners and third parties involved**

*Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement*

This project will receive referrals from a wide range of statutory and community and voluntary sector organisations as part of a multi-agency support working to jointly meet the needs of disabled people and individuals with long-term health conditions. Working particularly closely with Trussell Trust foodbanks across Leeds.

## **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.*

1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026

### **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.*

Leeds and immediate surrounding area.

### **Approved by**

Eileen Brown  
Customer Experience Director