

Northern Gas Networks – Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Awareness Business Partnerships and Relationships Officer

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	March 2024
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)

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

A dedicated role is required to support the delivery of NGN's Customers in Vulnerable Situations Strategy, VCMA Strategy and associated commitments for GD2, by managing projects funded through the Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance. The Business Partnerships and Relationship Officer will report directly into the Social Strategy Programme Manager. Close liaison with the Vulnerability Innovation Lead will also be required, in relation to some Innovation activities such as Carbon Monoxide (CO) Awareness Strategy and new projects.

The role will also oversee new projects being introduced over the coming years, continuing to the end of GD2 ie 31st March 2026. The role will support projects covering all types of vulnerabilities and will involve working with partners such as charities, community groups and those working at grass roots level, who deal with hard-to-reach communities, to ensure that projects and budgets are managed from initial concept to completion. The role will also include responsibility for reporting in line with the VCMA governance document and associated requirements. There is a requirement for a dedicated, single point of contact to work closely with all project partners and other GDN's for collaborative VCMA projects.

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.

The role will be one of a supportive nature, solely responsible for developing relationships with partners and generating new VCMA projects. The role will require an understanding of the development of partnership working with Local Authorities, housing providers, energy sector partners, community sector and charities, across NGN's footprint. The role will also be responsible for overseeing the development of projects and identifying opportunities for new projects and any training requirements for project partners, to enable them to further support hard to reach communities and seldom heard groups.

The role will involve validating all community initiatives and projects against the VCMA eligibility criteria and they will need to have a close working relationship with NGN's Economic Evaluation Lead, to ensure a positive social return on investment is achieved.

The role will involve supporting an annual stakeholder showcase event and promote the work of NGN as widely as possible, in accordance with procedures agreed with partners. This may involve representing NGN at appropriate forums and events to support customers in vulnerable situations.

In summary, the scope of the role will involve identifying, defining, and controlling the outputs associated with all of NGN's projects funded from VCMA.

2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- Identification of new projects and creating action in response to data around social indicator mapping, vulnerability mapping, customer perceptions research and internal and external stakeholder engagement activities related to fuel poverty and, or other types of vulnerabilities, identified in NGN's Consumer Vulnerability Strategy
- Build and maintain strong relationships with internal, new and existing external stakeholders and identify which stakeholders are required for the successful delivery of VCMA projects. A key part of the role is to support GDN and industry working groups
- Responsibility for the creation of business cases for potential VCMA projects which are proposed to the business by third parties, that collaboration opportunities are enabled and executed where appropriate both across GDN's and with wider industry and other utilities
- Responsibility for ensuring a wide range of project ideas are generated and progressed across all areas within NGN's geographical footprint by working with new partners
- Ensure that all initiatives introduced and projects that are approved, comply with relevant Licence Obligations, and are aligned with the commitments made and recognised in the GD2 Business Plan

2.2 Scope

- Covers all of NGN's geographical area
- All projects link into vulnerability and raising awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide (CO) and PSR
- Project alignment with NGN's Vulnerability Strategy

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 the dedicated role will be to identify new projects and creating action plans in response to data around social indicator mapping, vulnerability mapping, customer perceptions research and internal and external stakeholder engagement activities related to fuel poverty and, or other types of vulnerabilities, identified in NGN's Consumer Vulnerability Strategy. Each project will align with at least one of NGN's Vulnerability Strategy themes - physical disability, mental health, rural isolation, financial hardship and temporary vulnerability.

There will be no collaboration from other GDN's nor other funded sources for this specific role.

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- This project will have a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by supporting projects with partners that align with all of the themes, namely: financial hardship, rural isolation, physical disabilities, mental health and temporary vulnerabilities
- Has defined outcomes as required
- 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. There is clearly a need to support these communities, through projects that can be overseen by a dedicated resource. The socio-economic characteristics have been a key factor in our prioritising engagement with vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups of customers, often through our partners, 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 2019 – 2021

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 (including digital engagement in light of CV-19). During 2019-2020 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders on the subject of customers in vulnerable situations. During our July 2020 workshop stakeholders discussed new emerging issues under Social Mobility due to Covid-19, what the impact of the pandemic has on hidden vulnerability and how the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support CIVS. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts have been associated with debt, isolation, redundancy, and anxiety.

In our October 2020 workshop our stakeholder's mentioned communication was a priority. This role therefore aligns to this specific need as partners will have one, dedicated point of contact for their projects. A quarterly newsletter will be produced by the Project Coordinator to keep stakeholders up to date with what is happening within the business and provide stakeholders with an update on VCMA projects.

During our January 2021 workshop, our stakeholders said we need more streamlined ways of working together. This role addresses that needs as the Project Coordinator will ensure that the projects are progressing as they should be (quarterly reporting), will have oversight of all projects

and facilitate the linking up of project partners. This will be achieved through regular partner round table sessions and networking opportunities at the workshops.

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 CIVS, which meets the needs of our stakeholders. The introduction of a dedicated role to support VCMA projects has been welcomed by the CEG.

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. All of the themes within the strategy will be covered by projects being coordinated by this dedicated role.

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

- Preparing reports to Ofgem
- Facilitate / support an annual showcase event for stakeholders
- Achieve outputs and outcomes as agreed with partners and Ofgem, via quarterly reporting
- Case studies evidencing project achievements
- A full review undertaken of all projects on an annual basis – identification of those for replication and scaling up
- Identification of new projects
- Build and maintain strong relationships with internal, new and existing external stakeholders and identify which stakeholders are required for the successful delivery of VCMA projects
- Support GDN and industry working groups
- Creation of business cases for potential VCMA projects
- Ensuring a wide range of project ideas are generated and progressed across all areas within NGN's geographical footprint by working with new partners

5.2 Success criteria

- This role provides partners and stakeholders with a more streamlined way of working together and communicating in relation to their projects
- Demonstration of actions taken to minimise risk and the sharing of any lessons learnt for all projects
- Developing new VCMA projects
- Developing existing and new relationships with partners
- Demonstration of supporting customers in vulnerable situations by way of financial savings, CO awareness sessions, PSR registrations and other quantitative and qualitative outcomes
- Comprehensive reporting and SROI – this will be measured for each project

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

NGN will be working with multiple social partners to develop new VCMA projects. The role will also involve close liaison with other Gas Distribution Networks for collaborative VCMA projects

7. Potential for new learning

Details of what the GDN(s) expect to learn and how the learning will be disseminated.

As this is a new role it will evolve over time. Any learning will be shared internally, with all GDN's and other partners. The role will be reviewed at 6/12 monthly intervals with NGN internal stakeholders. Learning will be captured on a Lessons Learnt log.

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.

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.

September 2023 – 31st 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.

All of NGN's geographical area

Approved by

Eileen Brown

Customer Experience Director