

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	Bensham
Funding GDN(s) <i>The GDN(s) which register(s) the project</i>	Northern Gas Networks
New or updated <i>(indicate as appropriate by removing the option that does not apply)</i>	New
Collaborative VCMA Projects <i>Specific role(s) of GDN(s) participating in a collaborative VCMA Project:</i>	N/A
Date of PEA Submission	February 2025
VCMA Project contact <i>Name:</i> <i>Email:</i> <i>Number:</i>	Laura Ratcliffe lratcliffe@northerngas.co.uk 07928501779
Total cost (£k):	*detailed separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k):	*detailed separately

Problem(s)	<p>Gateshead is rank 47th out 317 local authorities in England on the Multiple Deprivation Index Low-income communities lack vital potentially life-saving information because of low literacy levels or no access to the internet due to the Cost-of-Living Crisis. According to Skills for Life, 22% of adults in Gateshead need assistance with literacy and 63% need support with numbers and numeracy. Written documentation surrounding energy efficiency, Carbon Monoxide awareness/ safety measures and household support initiatives are often in formats that vulnerable residents don't understand, and therefore often overlooked.</p> <p>The average household income in Gateshead is £11k less than the average across England. This means that households will be using their appliances less for cooking, they are turning the fridge and/or freezer off and washing dishes in cold water. Food insecurity is a public health concern because it can affect the type and amount of food eaten, and thus affect physical and mental health and wellbeing. It can also affect social health as people are unable to take part in 'normal' food experiences, like eating out or inviting friends over, and can begin to feel excluded from daily social life. Having a healthy balanced diet is important for good health, therefore people who are most impacted by the cost-of-living are more likely to have a poorer quality of diet leading to health problems. Food prices have soared from December 2023 by 8 percent. Gateshead Foodbank currently distributes 2.5 tonnes of food per week to local people who cannot afford basic essentials.</p> <p>Most of the food donated to foodbanks tends to be processed rather than fresh. Items like tinned soup, meat, puddings, and pasta sauce are commonly available. While these items can help address short-term crises, long-term reliance on such</p>
-------------------	--

	<p>processed foods may lead to nutritional deficiencies. Families who consistently rely on food banks may be at risk of inadequate intake of fibre, calcium, iron, and various vitamins due to the lack of fresh produce and meat.</p> <p>The Solution: As a trusted community resource, Gateshead FC Community Foundation are in a perfect position to facilitate the Gateshead Centre for Warmth.</p> <p>By delivering an array of learning opportunities, community support and social engagement activities, they aim to improve people's lives and instil community spirit and connectedness.</p> <p>They will use their activities and community engagement as a vehicle to provide valuable information on health and wellbeing, income maximisation, energy efficiency, carbon monoxide safety advice.</p>
Scope and Objectives	<p>On average The Foundation works with approximately 9000 people per year. Around 60 percent of these people with fall into our vulnerability category. It is our primary objective provide support to those most in need.</p> <p>Their objectives are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To engage 3 new members of staff, plus one existing to oversee this project. • To facilitate and co-ordinate a group of staff and volunteers to become Energy Ambassadors, who can provide information to service users about the Priority Register, energy saving tips and tricks, staying warm during the winter months, and the dangers of Carbon Monoxide and the benefits of alarms. • To distribute information throughout social events. • To provide opportunities for Energy Ambassadors to go out to events at Gateshead Stadium and across the boroughs to reach a wider audience. • To provide information presentations to community groups, schools and Gateshead charities. • Provide Carbon Monoxide alarms to those that need them. • To provide easy read information material for vulnerable residents to understand. • Promote the sharing of information through collaborative networks and across popular social media platforms. • Make referrals to Gateshead Citizen's Advice • Deliver a "Positive About Energy" campaign targeted towards vulnerable residents, offering information, advice and support on how to keep warm on a budget during the winter months and proving resources on where to seek help. • Keep warm in the community boxes. These boxes include a variety of essentials for our elderly residents such as blankets, hats and

	<p>scarves, warming foods such as soup and Bovril. Products to help them keep warm and potentially reduce gas and electricity usage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate energy efficiency during community cookery programmes. • To engage and provide support to hard-to-reach communities including asylum seeker and refugee, the Jewish community and the Roma community. • To provide energy efficient cookery classes to vulnerable members of the community to help reduce food insecurity across Gateshead. • To provide holistic and accredited learning opportunities and social engagements to enhance people's lives. • To work with survivors of DV to provide practical skills, boost confidence, self-worth and improve health and wellbeing. • To provide outreach family support and health and wellbeing sessions. • To engage and provide support to those struggling with homelessness. • To engage young adults and parents on the NHS mental health waiting lists, and their family in activities whilst offering an information, advice and support network. • To offer a literacy project for both parents and children to learn and enjoy together. • Working with partners to maximise income and reduce outgoings.
<p>Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA</p>	<p>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 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.</p> <p>NGN's Centre for Warmth approach affords an opportunity for partners to pay, retain and upskill centre staff and volunteers to expand on their current service provision. The aim of which is to empower them to provide the above range of services. Therefore, being able to help their communities with immediate crisis support, to deal with the significant impacts of food and fuel poverty, as well as other financial hardship.</p> <p>There will be no collaboration from other GDN's nor other funded sources.</p> <p>Eligibility criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Accessibility, including language • Socio-demographic • Cultural • Mental Wellbeing themes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has defined outcomes as required • Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms
Evidence of stakeholder or customer support	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The topics of the workshops are listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending allowances well - Health focus, Energy affordability – 12th September 2023 • Energy affordability – staying warm and healthy at home – 21st November 2023 • Meeting demand – capacity and resilience – 6th February 2024 • Annual Strategic Workshop – April 24 <p>Stakeholder engagement throughout 2023 and 2024 told us that financial hardship, fuel poverty and health were the key areas of focus. In particular directing people towards good quality energy efficiency and fuel poverty advice. With regards to the concern about health this was specifically the link between living in a cold, damp home and the impact on health. 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 that additional capacity to support households who may be at risk, through a well-established and trusted advice service. This project will also ensure a holistic structured approach, tackling an immediate need to support fuel poor households and 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.</p> <p>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 (Spring 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG)

This group previously known as the Customer Engagement Group, provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support our customers in vulnerable situations. 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

	<p>challenges into how we deal with customers in vulnerable situations which meets the needs of our stakeholders. The ISG work with NGN, to create the content of the Customers In Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) workshops, previously detailed in the document.</p> <p>Vulnerability Strategy (Updated Spring 2024) NGN's dedicated Customers in Vulnerable Situations Strategy is continually reviewed to reflect changes in need. The most recent update was in June 24, reflecting the increase in the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance from c£7m to £20m. This ongoing strategy review continues to be informed by Stakeholder feedback. The six strategic principles, detailed below, form the basis of the strategy. Different support mechanisms and approaches have been mapped against each of the six principles, reflecting priority areas from stakeholder feedback.</p> <p>The six key priority areas identified by our stakeholders are summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority Area 1: Increased focus on health • Priority Area 2: Collaboration and linking up partners and funding • Priority Area 3: Increasing capacity for support within partner organisations • Priority Area 4: Connecting and responding to different aspects and complexities of vulnerability • Priority Area 5 – Continued support for those in financial hardship • Priority Area 6 - Scaling up existing projects
Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria	<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train 5 staff & volunteer Energy Ambassadors. • Provide easy to understand information to educate individuals on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness and energy efficiency. • Increase knowledge and awareness of CO and will provide CO alarms. • Raise awareness of the Priority Services Register (PSR). • Support residents to sign onto the PSR. • Be inclusive and allow everyone access to information i.e. leaflets and information in other languages and BSL interpreters. • Signpost to Gateshead Citizen's Advice. • Provide energy efficient cookery classes to vulnerable residents. • Teach residents culinary skills including healthy eating, cooking on a budget, food wastage and environmental impacts. • Aim to reduce food insecurity in Gateshead by having students take home the meals that they have created during the cookery class for their families to enjoy. • Provide holistic learning to boost confidence and self-esteem and encourage friendships. • Aim to reduce isolation and loneliness, improve mental health and to foster community spirit. <p>Success Criteria</p>

	Number of total beneficiaries = 1150 (broken down as)	1000	500	250	100	50
	Raising awareness of the PSR		✓			
	PSR Registrations			✓		
	Energy Efficiency awareness		✓			
	Educate individuals on CO awareness		✓			
	CO awareness surveys completed				✓	
	CO Alarms				✓	
	Energy Efficient Cookery				✓	
	Food distribution activities				✓	
	Improved wellbeing and information sharing on debt management, benefits and energy efficiency through face to face interactions.	✓				
	Youth Mental Health					✓
	Female Empowerment					✓
	Keep Warm in the Community Project				✓	
	Income Maximisation/ general advice and support (signposting)			✓		
	Project Partners and third parties involved	<p>For the food projects, Nourish Food School and Big River Bakery. Gateshead Food Bank and Feeding Families for extra food support.</p> <p>Whilst for survivors of DV, partners include Oasis Housing, Rape Crisis, Northumbria Police and Smart Works.</p> <p>Citizens Advice, The National Literacy Trust, NHS Mental Health Team, YOT, NE Youth, Streetgames, VRU, Northumbria Police, CAHM's</p> <p>Equally important is the connection to Gateshead FC. Following a successful season, their social media platforms have extremely high numbers of interaction that can be utilised. As well as their own Facebook and Twitter X pages where they have a vast number of followers.</p>				
Potential for new learning	Any learning will be shared with stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies.					
Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations, including NPV	This project has a positive SROI return. SROI: £3.18 NPV: £615,770.22					
VCMA Project start and end date	January 2025-December 2025					
Geographical area	Gateshead					
Internal governance and project management evidence	VCMA Governance Group Meeting: N/A Outcome of meeting: Our Centre For Warmth Strategy was approved at Governance in July 2024. A Centre for Warmth Co-ordinator has been appointed to manage these projects.					
Approved by: Job Title:	Eileen Brown Customer Experience Director					
Signature:						

