

## Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

<b>Project title:</b>	Focus4Hope – Centre for Warmth
<b>Funding GDN(s)</b> <i>The GDN(s) which register(s) the project</i>	Northern Gas Networks
<b>New or updated</b> <i>(indicate as appropriate by removing the option that does not apply)</i>	New
<b>Collaborative VCMA Projects</b> <i>Specific role(s) of GDN(s) participating in a collaborative VCMA Project:</i>	N/A
<b>Date of PEA Submission</b>	March 2025
<b>VCMA Project contact</b> <i>Name:</i> <i>Email:</i> <i>Number:</i>	Laura Ratcliffe <a href="mailto:lratcliffe@northerngas.co.uk">lratcliffe@northerngas.co.uk</a> 07928501779
<b>Total cost (£k):</b>	*detailed separately
<b>Total VCMA funding required (£k):</b>	*detailed separately

<b>Problem(s)</b>	<p>This Centre for Warmth aims to tackle two significant issues that profoundly affect the individuals Focus4Hope works with: <b>fuel poverty</b> and <b>carbon monoxide (CO) safety</b>. These challenges are particularly acute for vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, those with disabilities, and low-income households.</p> <p><b>a. Fuel Poverty</b> Fuel poverty arises when individuals cannot afford to heat their homes adequately, leading to cold living conditions that exacerbate existing health issues such as respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular conditions, and mental health problems. The rising cost of energy, particularly in the current cost-of-living crisis, has hit Focus4Hope's service users hard, many of whom are already experiencing financial hardship. Poor mobility, fixed incomes, and other socioeconomic barriers make it difficult for these individuals to escape fuel poverty, resulting in a cycle of declining health and well-being. For the elderly, isolation and cold homes increase the risk of severe illness, which Focus4Hope addresses through its community events, drop ins, and practical support. However, access to sustainable, long-term solutions like energy advice and financial aid is essential.</p> <p><b>b. Carbon Monoxide Safety</b> Many vulnerable households are unaware of the dangers of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, often lacking the resources to install CO alarms or access information about its risks. This lack of awareness can lead to life-threatening situations, as carbon monoxide is a colourless, odourless gas that can be fatal. These households are at higher risk due to limited access to safety education and the financial means to invest in proper detection devices, increasing their vulnerability to CO poisoning.</p>
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Without adequate intervention, many families remain unaware of the immediate health dangers posed by CO, exacerbating the risks of undetected gas leaks in their homes. The combination of low awareness, limited resources, and unsafe living conditions places already vulnerable individuals and families in potentially dangerous situations, which could be prevented with proper education and resources.

### **Solution**

By working collaboratively with Northern Gas Networks (NGN), Focus4Hope can create an NGN Centre for Warmth at our Hub in central Brighthouse. This partnership would directly address the fuel poverty and carbon monoxide (CO) safety challenges faced by vulnerable individuals within the local community, including the elderly, low-income families, and people with disabilities.

#### **Key Elements of the Centre for Warmth at Focus4Hope**

**Energy Advice and Support:** The Centre will provide energy-saving advice to help families better manage their energy consumption and reduce costs.

Tailored advice on how to insulate homes effectively, guidance on switching to cheaper energy providers, and practical tips to lower utility bills.

**Focus4Hope's Centre for Warmth** will become a place where individuals can seek fuel top-up vouchers, ensuring they can afford to keep their homes warm, especially during colder months.

**Carbon Monoxide Awareness and Safety:** A critical aspect of the Centre for Warmth will be to increase CO awareness and offer free CO alarms to vulnerable households.

Focus4Hope's service users and community, particularly those in older, poorly maintained housing, are at higher risk of CO exposure.

**Income Maximisation and Financial Support:** To alleviate the financial strain many families face, Focus4Hope Centre for Warmth will provide income maximisation services, such as benefit entitlement checks and debt management support.

By helping individuals access the financial aid they're entitled to, it will ensure that more households can stay warm without falling into debt.

**Food and Clothing Support:** Focus4Hope's existing services, such as the social supermarket and social inclusion activities, including coffee mornings, elderly events, and community meals, will be seamlessly integrated into the Centre for Warmth's offerings.

This approach will address food poverty while providing essential energy support. By adopting a holistic support model, the Centre ensures that families can meet their most critical needs—such as access to affordable food, social engagement, and energy assistance—all under one roof.

This integrated model not only tackles immediate challenges like fuel and food poverty but also fosters a stronger sense of community and inclusion.

**Warm, Safe Community Space:** The centre will offer a safe, warm space for people to gather, share experiences, and build community resilience. The Centre for Warmth at Focus4Hope will host workshops, drop-in sessions, and social events designed to reduce isolation and foster community cohesion. Focus4Hope is deeply embedded within the Brighthouse community and has earned the trust of its vulnerable members through existing services like elderly support, homeless outreach, and SEND family groups. With the Centre for Warmth, the Hub will become a central point where these individuals can access the additional support, they need to face rising energy costs and other challenges brought on by

	<p>the cost-of-living crisis. The Hub's strong volunteer base will ensure smooth service delivery and ongoing engagement with local families.</p> <p>The Centre for Warmth concept was developed to ensure a holistic approach to supporting fuel poor households within a community setting. A Centre for Warmth Strategy has been developed and approved by our independent Governance Panel on 30th July 2024.</p> <p>Centre users will receive a combination of services such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• energy advice</li> <li>• CO awareness and advice</li> <li>• income maximisation through benefit entitlement checks and managing debt</li> <li>• free or reduced cost food/clothing</li> <li>• fuel top up vouchers</li> <li>• connections to other NGN funded partner information/assistance</li> </ul> <p>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.</p>
<b>Scope and Objectives</b>	<p>The primary objective of the project is to create a sustainable and community-driven Centre for Warmth in Brighouse. The project seeks to deliver immediate, tangible benefits to vulnerable residents by addressing fuel poverty, carbon monoxide (CO) safety, and income maximisation.</p> <p><b>The objectives of this initiative are:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Combat fuel poverty</b> by offering energy-saving advice, fuel vouchers, and practical support to help residents manage and reduce their energy costs.</li> <li>• <b>Increase CO awareness</b> by providing free CO alarms and educational workshops to ensure household safety, especially in poorly maintained homes.</li> <li>• <b>Maximise household income</b> through benefit entitlement checks and debt management services, helping residents access financial support and the social supermarket.</li> <li>• <b>Foster community resilience</b> by offering food support, clothing, and a warm, safe space where vulnerable people can gather, reducing isolation and improving mental well-being.</li> <li>• <b>Support and educate</b> by providing education and support to vulnerable groups by helping them navigate emerging energy policies and prepare for the digital switchover. As a registered digital inclusion hub, Focus4Hope offers essential resources and assistance to individuals who may not have access to digital services, ensuring they are not left behind during this transition.</li> </ul> <p><b>Scope</b></p>

	<p>The project will primarily target the most vulnerable individuals on the NGN network within Brighthouse and surrounding areas. These include elderly residents, low-income families, disabled individuals, and ethnic minority groups, who are at higher risk of fuel poverty and are disproportionately impacted by rising energy costs and housing-related challenges.</p> <p>The Centre for Warmth will offer a holistic package of support through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Energy advice and fuel top-up vouchers</b> for residents who cannot afford to heat their homes.</li> <li>• <b>CO safety</b> via the distribution of CO alarms and safety training.</li> <li>• <b>Income maximisation</b> services, including support with benefits claims and managing debts.</li> <li>• <b>Social Supermarket Offer:</b> Focus4Hope's existing social supermarket will distribute vital food supplies, while also offering weekly "winter warmer" community meals to support those struggling with the "heat or eat" dilemma. This term reflects the harsh reality many low-income families face, where they must choose between heating their homes or purchasing food due to rising energy and living costs. By providing nutritious meals and essential food items, Focus4Hope ensures that vulnerable individuals and families do not have to make this difficult decision. In addition, the Centre will serve as a warm, welcoming space during the colder months, offering both sustenance and a safe environment to those at risk. This approach helps alleviate some of the financial strain caused by the cost-of-living crisis, improving both the physical and mental well-being of the community members.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA</b></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><b>Eligibility criteria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This project has a positive SROI</li> <li>• 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"> <li>• Financial hardship</li> <li>• Accessibility, including language</li> <li>• Socio-demographic</li> <li>• Cultural</li> <li>• Mental Wellbeing themes</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Has defined outcomes as required</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms</li> </ul>
<b>Evidence of stakeholder or customer support</b>	<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. 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><b>Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops</b>  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"> <li>• Spending allowances well - Health focus, Energy affordability – 12th September 2023</li> <li>• Energy affordability – staying warm and healthy at home – 21st November 2023</li> <li>• Meeting demand – capacity and resilience – 6th February 2024</li> <li>• Annual Strategic Workshop – April 24</li> </ul> <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.</p>

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

**Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG)**



	<p>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 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><b>Vulnerability Strategy (Updated Spring 2024)</b>  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"> <li>• Priority Area 1: Increased focus on health</li> <li>• Priority Area 2: Collaboration and linking up partners and funding</li> <li>• Priority Area 3: Increasing capacity for support within partner organisations</li> <li>• Priority Area 4: Connecting and responding to different aspects and complexities of vulnerability</li> <li>• Priority Area 5 – Continued support for those in financial hardship</li> <li>• Priority Area 6 - Scaling up existing projects</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria</b>	<p>By delivering these outcomes, the Centre for Warmth project at Focus4Hope will address both immediate needs (such as food security and warmth) and long-term support through education, social engagement, and resource access. This will contribute to building a stronger, more resilient community.</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Combating Isolation and Loneliness:</b> The Centre for Warmth at Focus4Hope will provide a safe, welcoming space for vulnerable individuals, particularly the elderly and those living alone, to come together and socialise. By hosting weekly community meals, coffee mornings, and social activities, the Focus4Hope will create opportunities for people to build relationships, reducing isolation and loneliness in the community. The focus on a warm environment is especially vital during the colder months, offering both physical and emotional warmth to those who need it.</li> <li>• <b>Improved Access to Food and Resources (Heat or Eat):</b> Through the social supermarket fortnightly "winter warmer" community meals, (if the demand is high, we will increase this to a weekly offer) the Centre for Warmth and Focus4Hope will address the ongoing "heat or eat" dilemma. Individuals and families will have access to</li> </ul>

	<p>nutritious food and free meals, reducing the pressure to choose between heating their homes or buying food. In addition, referrals will be made for utility top-ups, helping alleviate fuel poverty.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Education on CO Safety and Energy Efficiency:</b> The Centre for Warmth and Focus4Hope will deliver education on carbon monoxide (CO) safety and energy-saving strategies. By raising awareness about CO poisoning risks, providing CO alarms, and offering tips on energy-efficient living, the Centre for Warmth and Focus4Hope will equip individuals with the knowledge they need to stay safe in their homes.</li> <li>• <b>Digital Inclusion and Energy Support:</b> The Centre for Warmth and Focus4Hope will offer digital support services, helping the community prepare for the digital switchover and access emerging energy policies. This includes guiding vulnerable groups through online processes such as applying for benefits or managing their energy accounts, which is particularly important as many services move online.</li> </ul> <p>Educate individuals on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness - 500  Priority Service Registration - 200  Priority Service Registration Awareness – 2,000  Provide CO Alarms – 60  Energy efficiency information - 500  Energy efficiency Advice - 150  Offer income maximisation information, such as supporting with applying for benefits - 100  Centre for Warmth Community meal - 480  Purchase electrical items to help reduce utility bills. slow cookers, air fryers, electric blankets, hot water bottles -150  Christmas project – 2,000  Domestic Violence Home starter Kits - 24  Social Media Raising Awareness – 10,000</p>
<b>Project Partners and third parties involved</b>	Focus4Hope collaborates extensively with numerous local partners across Calderdale and Kirklees, including other charities, local food banks, schools, and sheltered housing providers. These include DWP Restart Scheme, St Augustine's, Staying Well Calderdale, Andys Man Club, Unmasked Mental Health, Social Prescribers, Happy Days Ministries Charity, Healthy Minds, Noah's Ark, Women's Centre, Brighouse, Project Colt, and Local Authorities Services.
<b>Potential for new learning</b>	Any learning will be shared with stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies.
<b>Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations, including NPV</b>	<p>This project has a positive SROI return.</p> <p><b>SROI:</b> £9.77</p> <p><b>NPV:</b> £1,510,436.64</p>
<b>VCMA Project start and end date</b>	November 2024-October 2025



<b>Geographical area</b>	Calderdale and Kirklees
<b>Internal governance and project management evidence</b>	VCMA Governance Group Meeting: N/A Outcome of meeting: Our Centre For Warmth Strategy was approved at Governance in July 2024.
<b>Approved by:</b> <b>Job Title:</b>	Eileen Brown Customer Experience Director
<b>Signature:</b>	