

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	Groundwork- Noah's Ark extension
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>	Extension
Collaborative VCMA Projects <i>Specific role(s) of GDN(s) participating in a collaborative VCMA Project:</i>	N/A
Date of PEA Submission	March 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>At the point when young people start living independently, no teaching nor education is given around how to use energy efficiently and safely in the home, the actions that can be taken to reduce costs, nor how the world of energy suppliers works – everyone is expected to just get on with it. As such, many young people are likely to be paying more than they need to for their bills, not realising the financial impact the cost of energy can have on their income, putting themselves at risk of accruing debt and putting up with cold homes, due to limited awareness of ways and schemes that can help make homes warmer. This all puts people at risk of fuel poverty.</p> <p>The issues being addressed by this proposal include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel Poverty • Financial hardship/debt • Mental Health • Unemployment • Food poverty • Geographical gap coverage (Calderdale) <p>Solution</p> <p>This project will form a partnership between Groundwork Yorkshire's Green Doctor service & Noah's Ark. This collaboration will bring together fuel poverty support, income maximisation, mental health support & training.</p> <p>This service will be available to residents across the Calderdale region.</p>
-------------------	---

Scope and Objectives	<p>Scope</p> <p>This project will collaborate with Noah's Ark and will bring together fuel poverty support, income maximisation, mental health support & training.</p> <p>The scope of this project is to deliver 200 Green Doctor fuel poverty interventions & for Noah's Ark to provide their services for 200 clients. This service will be available to residents across the Calderdale region.</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>The objective is for both organisations to refer into each other for respective services Green Doctor services include both home visits & telephone advice support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Saving and advice • Billing and metering issues, where possible switching to a more appropriate payment method; • Energy Complaints and assisting them through to resolution; • Identifying other assistance entitlement and referring to other support • Applying to & raising awareness of Priority Service registers – 100 PSR referrals • A water bill health check; o Applications for social water tariffs; o Applications for water meters; o Resolving issues with water debt; Installation of water saving devices • Energy Use • Correct usage and setting up of heating controls; • Switching energy providers for a cheaper deal; • Energy usage/ reducing energy bills through behavioural change, including appliance costs; • Water saving and meter fitting for appropriate households; • Liaise with energy companies to set up payment plans for debt and priority service registers; • Install a range of small scale energy efficiency measures including: draught proofing, reflective radiator panels, energy saving lightbulbs, water and power saving devices and pipe lagging; • Carbon Monoxide awareness raising – 100 • CO awareness feedback forms
-----------------------------	---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preventing condensation, damp and consequent mould growth; • Referrals to other local support agencies and their services; • Seasonal health and wellbeing advice; • Referrals to other services such as Fire Service, Adult Social Care, Food Banks, Health care professionals, Housing support teams, Debt support charities • Liaising and negotiating with energy suppliers to switch tariffs, remove or reduce existing fuel debt • Access to grants for debt relief to tackle ongoing fuel debt issues • Access to grants for white goods and other home appliances for the most vulnerable households • Liaising with Local Authorities for tenants in poor quality private sector housing where the landlords are unwilling to make improvements to the property. • Noah's Ark · Noah's Ark services take a very person-centred approach to each client: working holistically to address the barriers and issues affecting them. • A typical client may receive: · Counselling or psychotherapy • Money advice · Financial capability training (Budget like a Boss) • Employment support • Food support • Onward referral to a 3rd party organisation if there are additional needs.
Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA	<p>This project qualifies under the criteria for the VCMA funding, as it will support customers within the Calderdale region to help tackle the issue of fuel poverty and mental health. Subjects such as understanding of energy use, energy bills, income maximisation and CO safety will also be addressed through this project and customers will be referred onto the PSR where eligible.</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 will have a positive SROI • This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the financial hardship and mental health themes • Has defined outcomes as required (see outcomes section) • Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms
<p>Evidence of stakeholder or customer support</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>Stakeholder engagement throughout 2022, 2023 and 2024, 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. This was based on a combination of the following vulnerability factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel poverty • Benefit claims • No qualifications • Long term health problem / disability <p>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.</p> <p>Through research carried out in 2023, the findings show that the 5 original NGN vulnerability categories have now evolved to 10 categories. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Feedback from our Spending allowances well - health focus (September '23) workshop, indicated that one of the biggest concerns was health, specifically the link between living in a cold, damp home and the impact on health. Health projects are a priority for NGN this regulatory year and the need for winter warmer packs and heat the person items are growing as the cold weather sets in.

Through extensive engagement with stakeholders, we are seeing a number of key themes coming through consistently in terms of the impact of health and increased risks associated with cold, damp homes. Some notable observations and key areas are:

- We're seeing evidence of more expensive fuel costs for those with disabilities and those living with specific health conditions
- We're seeing a rise in mental health issues within our network – and acknowledging this as a barrier to engagement in longer term support
- We're acknowledging increases in the risk of CO poisoning – and looking at ways to identify and address this

Feedback from our annual VCMA Showcase Event (July 2024) included questions around how GDN's can help people who are not traditionally eligible for support, so many are in private rented or mortgage properties and do work. This project will help vulnerable customers regardless of their property tenure. Stakeholders also mentioned enhanced health risks that cancer sufferers face.

Feedback from our Supporting Communities Together Event (October 2024) told us that the support is needed now more than ever to help customers stay warm and well in their own homes. Stakeholders also mentioned that If bills can't be lowered by price per kWh, then support advice initiatives re: other ways to stay warm should be available to customers. Stakeholders also mentioned that NGN should support customers this winter by providing practical support in the form of winter warm packs, vouchers etc.

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

	<p>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>Vulnerability Strategy (Updated Spring 2024)</p> <p>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. 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"> • 200 direct beneficiaries • 400 indirect beneficiaries • 100 PSR referrals • 100 CO awareness surveys • 200 Green Doctor fuel poverty interventions • Noah's Ark to provide their services to 200 clients <p>Success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All vulnerable customers referred will have a greater understanding of the importance of gas safety and the dangers associated with carbon monoxide via the CO awareness survey • Success is measured by the number of referrals, type of support given & progress made in new delivery areas
Project Partners and third parties involved	The project partners involved are Groundwork Yorkshire and Noah's Ark
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	<p>This project has a positive SROI return.</p> <p>SROI: £2.63</p> <p>NPV: £536,303.74</p>

VCMA Project start and end date	January 2025 - March 2026
Geographical area	The project will take place in the geographical area of Calderdale
Internal governance and project management evidence	VCMA Governance Group Meeting: 26 th November 2024 Outcome of meeting: Approved
Approved by: Job Title:	Eileen Brown Customer Experience Director
Signature:	