

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	Involve – Centre for Warmth
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	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>Involve Leeds is community centre in Hunslet, which until July 2023 was an alternative provision for young people at risk of exclusion from education, and in the evenings and weekends the centre was used by a variety of local community groups. During 2023 pressure on school budget meant that we received less referrals to the alternative provision and the Trustees took the decision to close the alternative provision and focus entirely on being a community centre. There was an identified gap in provision, which Involve had been made aware of in consultation events with local people and partner organisations. Hunslet did not have a community centre. Involves community trusts them and is open to do more and wants the area and their lives to improve. Hunslet is the ward in Leeds with the highest rate of potentially preventable suicide (as reported by Mind staff) and the highest ward for preventable deaths. In the latest public health figures available Hunslet and Riverside have the highest rates of common and also severe mental health in Leeds. In the Leeds City Council Priority Neighbourhood plan Hunslet was characterised as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranked 1st (most deprived) neighbourhood in Leeds, demonstrates all the characteristics of multiple deprivation and a poor quality of life. • It has a high demographic and ethnic mix, and one in four households do not have English as their main language. • There are many transient communities, and the area is often the first place for new migrants to live. • Despite improvements, the housing stock remains poor and there continues to be a high turnover of residents. • The area is close to the city centre and other employable areas with accessible bus routes. (However as a centre in the heart of the
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	<p>community the city centre is not seen to be a close neighbourhood to local residents who prefer to access all services in South Leeds)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime rates are high, and very often under reported. Drug dealing and anti-social behaviour in particular are significant problems. • Outcomes for children are very poor, and there are a number of concerns from local practitioners about child welfare issues. • People find it difficult to engage with public services, and equally, the Council offer can be inflexible in some cases. <p>Solution</p> <p>The local community is their asset. They have a sense of pride and want things to be different, but also want it to be delivered locally. Involve only became a community centre in September 23 and now has over 100 regular weekly users. And community organisations book us every day of the week. Most of our groups are led by local people who recognise the challenges some of the community face and are willing to support work for that solution.</p> <p>Many of the local community do not recognise their level of need, or the steps that can be taken to change the situation but do talk about their life experiences. Having expert advisers on site would help them and by being welcomed to informal activities relationships can be built.</p> <p>They have a core group of volunteers and community leaders and skilling them up would provide the centre (and so the community) with local advisers, which in turn will help to make the project sustainable.</p> <p>In terms of training sessions on CM and the risks associated with this the centre is the perfect venue for this – they are recognised as a safe space with warm drinks and food, they can make an offer a lot of local people will engage with. Additionally their links to other community organisations means they are able to extend their reach and include them in education and advice sessions / work.</p> <p>All of the existing groups would welcome conversations, information and advice and will appreciate the community based nature of this project.</p> <p>They have local partnerships – with the local library and community hub, community organisations so can spread the resource across these partnerships, for basic information.</p> <p>They are an inclusive space so reach some of the people who do not access more formal services.</p> <p>They have set up a partnership with Methodist Housing Association so that they make their Centre for Warmth offer available to lonely and isolated elderly people in their community.</p> <p>They know their community – some of the challenges they face. And importantly they have built trust with the local people here and can only build on that. Their community want locally delivered services, in a place they trust and are that space.</p>
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Scope and Objectives	<p>The Involve Centre for Warmth is based at the heart of the community experiencing multiple layers of deprivation. They want to build on their existing work with this community to reduce their levels of vulnerability and improve their health, economic and social outcomes. This is also a community with little knowledge of carbon monoxide safety, and they plan to raise awareness, through their groups but also through centre-based activities. They will also undertake work, in partnership with local organisation like Green doctors, to reduce fuel poverty and increase efficiency but importantly ensure their community is able to make informed choices which will lead to sustainable change and improved outcomes. Their work will be focused on those who already access the centre with high levels of need but will also be available to all local residents and communities to affect Hunslet wide change.</p> <p>They know the impact of deprivation (see section 1) and are committed to making a difference in partnership with their community, with whom they have an already existing strong relationship, based on trust. Their ethos is to build on the resilience of local people so that Hunslet can thrive. The local people deserve a centre for warmth to support them improve outcomes and look forward with hope.</p> <p>The objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work with local residents and community organisations to increase understanding but also improve outcomes in Hunslet • To ensure members of the local community understand more about PSR and carbon monoxide but also have an opportunity to understand more about their energy use and options relating to both cost and efficiency • Improved health outcomes, particularly but not exclusively mental health • More skilled community leaders – having undergone training but also acted as mentors / providing advice/ signposting • Improved financial outcomes for members of the community as they learn more about efficiency and relevant financial factors • Reduction in poverty levels as people gain control over their energy use • Reduced risk of CM poisoning as the community awareness and access to resources increases • Improved engagement with services (both voluntary and statutory) • Empowered and more resilient community. • Increase household income and reduce poverty • Help local families / individuals to better manage their energy consumption • Vulnerable within the community to be registered on the PSR <p>Targeted Reach, and how you have identified this</p> <p>Their current reach is over 100 a week and growing. We know this from the number of people who attend the regular session held at the centre. With</p>
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	<p>one off events and external booking, who they will also be able to access, they believe their reach is 5-600 people and growing.</p> <p>From their local knowledge (based on listening to current users as well as local reports -by both health and the local authority) they know this community has unmet need – in terms of health issues but also social and financial exclusion. Many of their regular users speak about fuel poverty, being in debt, having cookers and heaters that don't work, or they can't afford to use. Living in poverty directly impacts on health outcomes and the figures on the poor health outcomes for Hunslet speak for themselves.</p> <p>Additionally Involve has just been asked to be a centre for employment services outreach with weekly sessions being provided to encourage local residents back into work, and to look at benefit implications and options. This will bring a new cohort to the centre who will be included in the project.</p> <p>They have the highest rates of poor mental health and severe issues around mental health in Leeds. They run a peer mental health support group in their centre due to need and lack of access to services. A number of their regular users talk about their mental health and the impact it has had and is having on their lives. Many of their users also have physical disabilities from chronic illness to losing their sight. Some of their regular users have illness and disability related to lived experience of homelessness and / or addiction.</p> <p>Making sure members of these communities become priorities will make a huge difference in this community.</p>
Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA	<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. 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 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</p>

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:

- 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>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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthier, happier, more resilient community managing their finances better, informed about their energy and benefits so they can make informed choices. • Increased awareness of CM and associated risks • Less negative health impact from CM poisoning • Increased self-esteem – for those feeling more informed but also local leaders who have been trained on CM and delivered advice and support to their peers. • A local informed resource in terms of local people who have been trained to give advice which adds to the sustainability of the project <p>Success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater understanding of the links between energy and health - they plan to reach 1000 with advice and information on energy efficiency, carbon monoxide and PSR. • In terms of vulnerability as some of their community experience multiple layers of deprivation and therefore may need more input and support but with consequential impact. For the most vulnerable-full holistic wrap around face-to-face support-50 people • Those with CM alarms 300 • For those experiencing food and fuel poverty in the ward 300

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To increase knowledge across local families and communities 1,000• Numbers supported but also number referred on to more specialist support (our role as a bridge) 350• A pool of locally trained experts from the community who can act as community leaders. – the plan is to create peer supporters / leaders who will develop knowledge but also skills to offer support for the year but also beyond. 20 <table><tr><td>Number of total beneficiaries = 1000 (broken down as)</td><td>1000</td><td>400</td><td>300</td><td>250</td><td>200</td><td>20</td></tr><tr><td>Raising awareness of the PSR</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>PSR Registrations</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Energy efficiency information</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Energy efficiency advice</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Educate individuals on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Provide CO alarms to those who need them and have completed the awareness surveys</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Offer income maximisation advice, such as supporting with applying for benefits</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Increasing number of volunteers with CO knowledge (peer mentors)</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr><tr><td>Outreach to isolated members of the community</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr></table>	Number of total beneficiaries = 1000 (broken down as)	1000	400	300	250	200	20	Raising awareness of the PSR	✓						PSR Registrations		✓					Energy efficiency information	✓						Energy efficiency advice				✓			Educate individuals on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	✓						Provide CO alarms to those who need them and have completed the awareness surveys			✓				Offer income maximisation advice, such as supporting with applying for benefits			✓				Increasing number of volunteers with CO knowledge (peer mentors)						✓	Outreach to isolated members of the community					✓	
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Project Partners and third parties involved	<p>They would love to have Green doctors based here to help with advice sessions</p> <p>Local experts who will undertake the free training so they can deliver sessions</p> <p>They are part of a number of South Leeds networks and will partner with them</p> <p>Hunslet and Belle Isle Community Project - children and family focused</p> <p>Methodist Housing Association (MHA) - links to isolated elderly</p> <p>Hunslet Community Hub and Library</p> <p>Local Community Groups</p> <p>We are also a support centre, almost by default – we opened our doors and welcomed all – for a number of local homeless people. We are working closely with a project helping to address human trafficking in a proactive way – by buying up trap houses and converting them to accommodation for those who need it. – the impact on some of these people of the centre for warmth has the potential to be lifesaving – a safe and warm space leading to a safe and warm home, with support.</p> <p>We also look forward to building some professional partnerships with local organisations who can build on our initial support - through in depth financial and benefits advice, mental health support, housing – MHA but also local tenants and residents associations as well as local authority social housing.</p> <p>Getting clean – a project for ex-prisoners</p> <p>Simon on the Streets – a street-based homelessness project</p> <p>Public Health – we are part of the local care partnership so will look at building relationships with public health to identify longer term health benefits as a result of this project</p>																																																																						

	<p>We will also be working with Leeds city Council on the back into employment project as Hunslet is a target ward for them</p> <p>MHA and Involve are also setting up sessions for local isolated and lonely elderly residents in the New Year.</p> <p>We are also working with 2 arts projects - Opera North and Swarthmore to address issues like isolation and emotional well-being with local people</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	<p>This project has a positive SROI return.</p> <p>SROI: £2.38</p> <p>NPV: £394,257.24</p>
VCMA Project start and end date	February 2025 until January 2026.
Geographical area	Hunslet and Riverside Ward though people also come to us from across South Leeds
Internal governance and project management evidence	<p>VCMA Governance Group Meeting: N/A</p> <p>Outcome of meeting: Our Centre For Warmth Strategy was approved at Governance in July 2024.</p>
Approved by: Job Title:	<p>Eileen Brown</p> <p>Customer Experience Director</p>
Signature:	