

## Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

<b>Project title:</b>	Northern Cancer Voices-Treat, Heat or Eat Project
<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>One in 2 people will be impacted by a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime and being able to cope with such a diagnosis whilst maintaining their health and wellbeing will be difficult. Cancer is a genetic disease mostly caused by damage to genes caused by smoking, alcohol, obesity, and sunlight.</p> <p>There are circa 860 patients in treatment at the moment in the North East, and this is expected to grow. Cancer patients are vulnerable as the diagnosis of cancer is an extremely stressful time for the patient and their family. Their life is turned upside down and they may lose all their financial support overnight. Numerous practical difficulties immediately present themselves and a stressed patient is likely to have a worse outcome.</p> <p>The cancer targets set by NHS and the National Cancer teams are very specific and limited. They are totally dependent on the public at large to come forward for screening, identifying signs of cancer early and to visit a GP. It is also important that those in hardship and receiving a cancer diagnosis have the tools and equipment necessary to maintain any equipment they may have and keeping themselves warm at home is critical.</p> <p><b>Solution</b></p> <p>Northern Cancer Voices (NCV) aim to improve the experience of cancer patients by increasing patient participation in their communities and strengthening the network of patient and carer groups in the region whilst promoting awareness of NGN services. It is important that NCV promote these services to those in hardship and receiving a cancer diagnosis as this positive support will be seen as a bit of a lifeline and relieve stress. NCV can reach parts of the community that are difficult to reach and identify any areas where support might make a difference, for example to ensure fewer</p>
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	<p>condemned appliances are being used in the homes of cancer patients. They aim to understand why people are not attending cancer appointments and also promote the benefits of identifying signs and symptoms to provide an earlier diagnosis. Recent feedback has informed us that many vulnerable patients are not aware of their treatment pathway nor of many of the benefits they are entitled to. NCV will signpost to partner organisations to resolve this issue. Cancer patients may also have additional energy needs during their cancer pathway and may have medical equipment in their home.</p>
<b>Scope and Objectives</b>	<p>NCV will speak to circa 3000 people impacted by a cancer diagnosis over 17 months.</p> <p>Convert 20% of these to NGN Priority Service Register and deliver carbon monoxide awareness training to 30%. Input 200 items of feedback to provide intelligence to Trusts for improvement to services. Train Newcastle and Teesside Airport staff in PSR and CO for them to onward convert. Attend events in all 4 NENC areas for Health and Wellbeing to promote PSR/CO/Energy information.</p> <p>Promote the ambition of the VCMA Strategy, the NHS Long Term Plan and Cancer Programme through improving the quality of services, reducing inequalities and promoting innovation. High quality and complete patient level data linked to clinical and patient outcomes is required to fulfil these duties. Keeping patients warm and 'healthy' as they undertake their cancer journey and remove any stress they may have about heating costs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cancer experience feedback</li> <li>• PSR registration</li> <li>• CO awareness and training</li> <li>• Signposting to Energy efficiency information and advice</li> <li>• NCV led coffee mornings in all NENC areas to signpost and provide peer support</li> </ul> <p><b>The objectives of this initiative are:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve health and wellbeing</li> <li>• To reduce fuel poverty</li> <li>• To provide CO awareness and advice</li> <li>• To increase awareness and registrations of the PSR</li> </ul> <p><b>Service Improvement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collate information and create intelligence which can be shared with service providers and NGN to promote service improvement.</li> <li>• Build effective relationships with providers to ensure the voices are heard within the communities they serve.</li> </ul>
<b>Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA</b>	<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</p>

	<p>has mental wellbeing and financial hardship themes, it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy too.</p> <p>This project aims to support our Centres for Warmth in assisting their communities with immediate crisis support, to deal with the significant impacts of 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> <li>• Has defined outcomes as required</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms</p>
<p><b>Evidence of stakeholder or customer support</b></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"> <li>• Fuel poverty</li> <li>• Benefit claims</li> <li>• No qualifications</li> <li>• Long term health problem / disability</li> </ul> <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>

Through research carried out in 2023, 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

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. This project will help keep customers living with cancer warm and well in their own homes.

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

	<p>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.</p> <p><b>Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG)</b>  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>To develop a formal structured process of feeding into NGN and trusts, the patient experience measured by new outcome metrics that can be captured in communities and tailored to audience. A structured method of raising awareness and uptake of NGN services with a framework for collaboration of customers, patients, carers, volunteers and professionals in Teesside with new support groups established as points of contact.</p> <p>Face to face sessions. Meetings / Events. Training Opportunities – Cancer Champion and NGN services awareness. To ensure clear and consistent messages are given by cancer champions so that customers know where and how to engage NGN for support.</p> <p>Helping patients to manage their own care by providing guidance freely available via the website and other in person and/or media channels. Encouraging more patients to attend</p> <p><b>Raising awareness of the PSR-3000</b>  Through targeted marketing and face to face sessions  <b>PSR Registrations-600</b>  <i>Assist individuals with completion of their registrations on a face to face basis</i></p>

	<p><b>CO trainings-900</b> train individuals to increase CO awareness</p> <p><b>Airport special assistance-50</b> train airport assistance staff in the PSR and CO offer</p> <p><b>New support coffee events-200</b> Create 6 new regular sessions for peer support</p> <p><b>Volunteers into paid roles-5</b> convert 50% of volunteer base to paid roles</p> <p><b>Cancer Awareness Training-200</b> Deliver signs and symptoms training into businesses as part of the better health at work or CSR programmes. 12 sessions @16ppl approx per session</p> <p><b>Signpost and referrals-200</b> To NGN partner services</p> <p><b>Success criteria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 new NCV coffee mornings and peer support groups stood up across NENC where we can promote PSR/CO and Signpost to Energy Advice</li> <li>• 200 items of feedback into NCV Survey for cancer service improvement</li> <li>• 3000 PSR conversations</li> <li>• 600 New PSR Registrations</li> <li>• 900 CO trainings completed</li> <li>• 50 Airport Special assistance staff trained on PSR/CO – to onward refer</li> </ul>
<b>Project Partners and third parties involved</b>	Northern Cancer Alliance Programmes, Cancer Locality groups across the Integrated Care Partnerships, GP Alliances, PCP groups, Macmillan, Cancer North (support groups), National Energy Action, Newcastle and Teesside Airports, Northumbria, Durham, Cleveland and Cumbria Police and Prisons, local/regional Mayors
<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>	This project has a positive SROI return. <b>SROI:</b> £2.65 <b>NPV:</b> £634,264.23
<b>VCMA Project start and end date</b>	October 2024-March 2026
<b>Geographical area</b>	North East and Cumbria, Tees.
<b>Internal governance and project management evidence</b>	VCMA Governance Group Meeting: 8 <sup>th</sup> October 2024 Outcome of meeting: Approved
<b>Approved by: Job Title:</b>	Eileen Brown Customer Experience Director
<b>Signature:</b>	