

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	Pottery Bank – 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>Pottery Bank Community Centre is based in the Walker ward of Newcastle. Overall, it is ranked 32 out of 32,844 areas of deprivation in the UK. On the six measures of deprivation used by The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Employment, Income, Health, Crime is within the worst 1%. For Housing and the Environment deprivation is least pronounced in comparison to other parts of the UK. The challenges facing the community are intergenerational, interconnected and both psychological and practical after many years of decline following the closure of major industries in the region. According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Newcastle has become relatively more deprived between 2015 and 2019, moving from an overall rank of 42 to a rank of 32, where the local authority ranked '1' is the most-deprived in England (Statistics and intelligence Newcastle City Council)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walker is ranked 1st in deprivation in Newcastle • The incidence of disability, long-term limiting illness and mental health issues are significantly higher than the local, regional and national averages. • Walker Ward has the highest number of lone parents in Newcastle • Walker has the highest levels of children living in poverty in Newcastle <p>Unemployment Unemployment is a challenge for many people living in Walker. Those hardest hit are the those with no qualifications, young people (with no qualifications, no experience) criminal records, single parents, workers over 55 and people with disabilities. Often unemployment is trap which people struggle to move out of due to a lack of opportunity for routes into employment. Unemployment</p>
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	<p>is linked to ill-health, criminality, drug & alcohol abuse and low educational levels. Integrated solutions are need to assist people into employment.</p> <p>Income Individual and family income levels are low in Walker. There has been a rise in Foodbank use. 120 people per week use Pottery Bank's foodbank. There is a high level of universal credit dependency. The introduction of Universal Credit has been problematic for many people. There is a reliance for many people on state benefits and the support of voluntary and statutory services.</p> <p>Health The incidence of disability, long-term limiting illness and mental health issues are key challenges with Walker. There is a dependency on statutory and voluntary services for care support. Many families struggle with inter-generational health problems which impact negatively both young and old. Mental health is a real challenge in this community. Domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, self-harm all feature as problems impacting on the daily lives of people.</p> <p>Crime Crime within Walker is a real challenge. This ranges from anti-social behaviour to violent crime. Physical assaults within families and between members of the community are common. Crime impacts on young, old, male and female.</p> <p>Responding to those in need and families surviving on low household income, facing food and fuel poverty, increased cost of living crisis and vulnerable older people living in isolation. The cost of living and fuel crisis has seen the number of local people coming to the centre who cannot afford food or to heat their homes. Referrals for our support and access to food from these target groups has increased due to the increased fear of facing both food hunger and fuel poverty. Walker is an area of high deprivation and the recent cost of living crisis has had a real impact with increased financial strain on those most vulnerable. There are few warm spaces available for individuals to access in the local area, Pottery Bank Community Centre provide for those most vulnerable and help towards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combating food and fuel poverty in the local community and target groups • Access to food, emergency supplies and warm spaces <p>Solution Daily access to an affordable community café, food delivery to local day centres and older people's houses and a Pay-As-You-Feel (PAYF) Food Shop, accessed by 218 local family members per week. The Community Centre is a place for socialising providing access to community activity and affordable meals on a daily basis. Daily access to a warm space is provided where local residents can have somewhere to go without spending money they don't have.</p>
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	<p>A framework of community engagement activity is provided which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooking on a budget course • Growing and cooking your own food produce • Budget, benefits and financial advice and inclusion - income maximisation through benefit entitlement checks and managing debt • Household budgeting workshops • Access to Credit Union • PAYF Community Food Shop • Luncheon Clubs and Family meals • Warm Space community drop-ins • Community Café and Community Allotment • energy advice • CO awareness and advice • connections to other NGN funded partner information/assistance • Priority Service Register awareness and registrations <p>All of the activities and services are in direct response to the cost of living crisis and vulnerable individuals who are having to make choices between food or fuel. The PAYF Food Shop provides access to donated food for local families and individuals daily. As a locally rooted organisation within a close community they work with vulnerable individuals; families at risk, families living in poverty, lone parents, long term unemployed and people with mental health difficulties. The Community Centre offers an opportunity to work in the heart of a local community on a small scale and really get to know and build relationships with the local families of the area, gaining credibility within Walker, this makes it easier for local people and families to share their problems in a trusted forum without feeling judged, we offer a safe place for those most vulnerable. Their work aims to use community engagement and activity as a vehicle for improving the quality of lives of local residents who are affected by social isolation, poverty and disadvantage and provide a focus for both social inclusion and health and wellbeing.</p>
Scope and Objectives	<p>Local people are living with fear and financial insecurities and PBCC want to be able to provide access to community engagement activity and a warm space on a daily basis. Their project would help families from their neighbourhood to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce Food and fuel Poverty • Improve well-being and mental health • Reduce health and financial anxiety • Improve the lives of families in receipt of benefits and low incomes <p>This will be achieved through their Centre for Warmth program:</p>

- **Family focused activities:** Adult & Family cooking and growing courses, Family Craft activities, Family support and intergenerational activity. School holiday activities including; Family fun days and community meals,
- **Improving lives – financial inclusion activity;** Budgeting support and advice, referral as required, for formal debt advice and debt management. Access to community PAYF Food hub and volunteering opportunities.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing – Nature and Social Engagement Activity;** including courses and workshops in growing, woodwork, lifestyle and self-esteem, mindfulness and one to one support and volunteering opportunities.
- **Access to Community Café – Food and Social Inclusion Activity;** including daily access to affordable meals and snacks. Weekly Luncheon/activity clubs for over 55's, community social events and School holiday activities including: Kids activity/cooking sessions and volunteering opportunities.

Services will incorporate advice around CO awareness and energy advice, PSR awareness and registrations whilst offering immediate crisis support and low cost or free groceries and hot or cold food.

The objective is to deliver an activity programme that brings about positive change to people lives and incorporate additional activities that aims to bring about long-term change to both the individual and the community. Making inroads into changing the poverty and deprivation statistics attached to Walker, building local resilience and provision of sustainable service delivery. Their journey of activities and interventions will:

- Increase volunteer and training opportunities for people who have mental health issues, disabilities or are suffering the effects of poverty, lack of money
- Increase confidence and self-esteem among local family members and volunteers
- Increase disposable income among volunteers, beneficiaries and their families
- Help to reduce money worries
- Increase awareness of free, quality accessible support and advice available

Support will include:

- Financial Inclusion Activity – benefits advice, credit union membership, Community Vouchers
- Structured volunteering support and training – work placements, volunteers contract, mentoring
- Community Development activity – access to community groups, shared experiences, informal support, warm hub, food-based activity.

Beneficiaries will include:

- Families living in poverty

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals with mental health issues and increased anxiety • Unemployed individuals • Individuals in receipt of benefits • PBCC Community membership <p>Benefits to the local community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved mental health • To reduce fuel poverty • To reduce food poverty • To increase income through benefit maximisation and debt management • Improved social inclusion • Improved economic well-being • Improved individual and Community Resilience • Increased employability prospects • Increased community wealth • Improved livelihoods • Provide CO awareness and advice • To increase awareness and registrations of the PSR <p>To do this they will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train staff to deliver advice around CO awareness and energy saving advice. • Deliver open door warm space community drop-ins, offer a hot drink, food and advice around CO safety and advice and energy advice. • Deliver a community engagement programme of activity focused on food and fuel poverty • Delivery a programme of financial inclusion activity • Raise awareness of the Priority Services Register (PSR) and sign households up through existing networks, (PAYF Food Hub, Community Café and Community Allotment) • 50 people assisted with benefit applications • 100 people assisted with debt issues • 200 people registered on the PSR • 50 people engaged in healthy/low-cost cooking • 30 people engaged in grow your own vegetables • 100 people helped out of loneliness and social isolation • 15 people helped into work or volunteering • 100 people with increased awareness of CO
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</p>

	<p>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 This project has a positive SROI</p> <p>This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the Financial hardship theme and the wider vulnerability categories of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial hardship • Accessibility, including language • Socio-demographic • Cultural • Mental Wellbeing themes • Has defined outcomes as required • Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms
<p>Evidence of stakeholder or customer support</p>	<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</p>

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.

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:

- 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:

	<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 <p>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 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. 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"> • Training provided to staff to offer energy awareness advice sessions (level 2 NEA). Energy advice and CO awareness sessions delivered on a monthly basis. • Staff & Volunteers will be trained to be energy buddies through Energy Ambassadors' course. • Support 150 individuals in the community food and financial inclusion activity • Engage 150 individuals in our warm space activity programme

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 households will be signed up to the Priority Services Register (PSR) • 50 new households in receipt of information given about available services and CO awareness. <p>Success criteria Measure and capture our social impact through:</p> <p>Consulting – To consult through the lifetime of the project with the purpose of offering people input on project delivery and shaping. Asking beneficiaries for more detailed ideas and options about how projects should work shaping and evolving project delivery along the way. To utilise the following methodologies to collect both qualitative and quantitative information. Focusing in particular on qualitative data which includes perceptions, attitudes, qualities or feelings. This information will be used to assess quality and the sustainability of actions and the extent to which the community feels they are valuable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Self-Evaluation Methods • Monitoring and evaluations processes of each individual activity • Focus groups utilising participatory appraisal techniques • Closed Facebook chat • Open days • Case studies • Events <p>Engagement: To directly involve beneficiaries in decision making and managing and/or contributing to delivery in a practical way, or around governance. Such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working groups • Advisory panels • Volunteers • Social media options
Project Partners and third parties involved	Community Catering Initiative, East End Community Networks, Foundation Futures, Barnardos, Food Banks, Welfare Rights and CAB and Newcastle Community Services.
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: £7.07 NPV: £82,476.55
VCMA Project start and end date	April 2025-March 2026
Geographical area	Walker, Newcastle Upon Tyne
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:

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