

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	Services Beyond the Meter (SBtM)
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>Our emergency engineers enter thousands of homes across our network each year, attending many customers reporting gas or carbon monoxide (CO) emergencies. Our primary focus when completing this work is to safeguard life and property.</p> <p>During these emergencies, our engineers and staff often encounter a significant number of customers in vulnerable situations who may lack the resources to maintain safe gas appliances. As a result, these households are at an increased risk of not having critical heat/hot water or cooking facilities. They may also resort to potentially hazardous coping mechanisms, all of which can be detrimental to health and wellbeing.</p>
Scope and Objectives	<p>The whole concept of the Services Beyond the Meter (SBtM) programme is to offer customers in vulnerable situations a way to keep themselves safe, warm, and independent in their own home giving them access to support that wasn't previously there.</p> <p>Where our engineers have attended a natural gas or CO emergency and isolated the gas supply, we are now able to return and test the appliances to confirm safe operation and ultimately, restore the gas supply to the customer's property either by carrying out a service, repair or replacement on the installation.</p>

	<p>The journey below illustrates the customer experience:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emergency call received from the customer to the call centre. 2. An emergency engineer attends site to safeguard life and property and removes the risk by isolating the gas supply. 3. The engineer recognises signs of vulnerability on site after seeing various signs or picking up on this from discussions with the customer. 4. The engineer then refers the customer onto our SBtM customer advisors to conduct eligibility checks. 5. An appointment is then scheduled for one of our 4 SBtM engineers to attend their property to test the appliances for safety or to make a repair or undertake a replacement on the installation. 6. The SBtM engineer attends the customer property and works on the customers gas installation and appliances. 7. The gas installation and appliances are tested and confirmed safe either by repair, service or replacement. 8. The gas supply and appliances are re-instated leaving the customer on supply and safe. <p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide support to vulnerable customers • Referrals to the Priority Services Register • Servicing of essential gas appliances • Repair/replacement of essential gas appliances and pipework • x4 SBtM engineers • x2 SBtM Technical Leads • Case studies from beneficiaries (anonymised) • Covers all of NGN network
<p>Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA</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</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 • Has defined outcomes as required <p>Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms</p>
<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. 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 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

	<p>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
<p>Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria</p>	<p>3.1 Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign vulnerable customers onto the PSR • Provide CO awareness • Carry out CO investigations • Repair, replace or service gas appliances • Install CO alarms <p>3.2 Success criteria</p> <p>Before this project these jobs would have been left isolated at the meter outlet leaving the customer off supply.</p> <p>Our goal is to ensure that every customer we visit through SBtM activities experiences an improved situation because of our visit.</p>

Project Partners and third parties involved	NGN will be working with multiple social partners to develop new VCMA projects. The role will also involve close liaison with other Gas Distribution Networks for collaborative VCMA projects
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: £4.31 NPV: £32,500,313.06
VCMA Project start and end date	December 2024 - March 2026
Geographical area	The project will cover the whole of NGN network
Internal governance and project management evidence	This project was approved internally to align with our vulnerability strategy.
Approved by: Job Title:	Eileen Brown Customer Experience Director
Signature:	