

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	Services Beyond the Meter-Project Lead
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)	In the UK as many as one in six homes could be living with an unsafe gas appliance. This equates to around four million households at risk of being disconnected from supply should their appliance be checked by a gas engineer. Whilst many households can afford to repair or replace an appliance, vulnerable and low-income households may face financial or other barriers, which prevent them from doing this. 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.
Scope and Objectives	<p>The aim of this role will be to support the delivery of NGN's Customers in Vulnerable Situations Strategy, Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Strategy and associated commitments for GD2, by managing projects funded through the VCMA.</p> <p>The Project Lead will create and embed new processes relating to our GD2 commitments of never leaving a customer vulnerable, following an NGN visit. Focusing on CMDDA1 investigation and the service, repair, and replacement of gas appliances.</p> <p>Reporting to the Customer Experience Director the role will require close liaison and networking across the business and with external stakeholders.</p>

	<p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead and manage the team • Create and embed process and ways of working to deliver SBtM across the network. • Ensure processes and ways of working drive excellent customer experience. • Provide all required management information and reporting. • Review performance and drive continuous improvement. • Work with the Head of Customer Operations Support to deliver of the project. • Manage the budget for the project. • Ensure governance of the project. • Ensure the SBtM team is appropriately trained, and all necessary qualifications and certification are in place. • Support and develop the team. • Collaborate with other GDNs to ensure technical and procedural best practice. • Raise the profile of SBtM across NGN. • Support the wider Social Strategy team • Carry out site visits to ensure best practice and customer experience.
<p>Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA</p>	<p>This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as the dedicated roles will be the first point of contact for SBtM queries and aligns to NGNs Customers in Vulnerable Situations Strategy, VCMA Strategy and associated commitments for GD2, by managing projects funded through the VCMA.</p> <p>There will be no collaboration from other GDN's nor other funded sources for this specific role.</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 supporting projects with partners that align with all of the themes, namely: financial hardship, rural isolation, physical disabilities, mental health and temporary vulnerabilities • 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>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>

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:

- Fuel poverty
- Benefit claims
- No qualifications
- Long term health problem / disability

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.

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 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 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.

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:

- Priority Area 1: Increased focus on health

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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>3.1 Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead and manage the team • Create and embed process and ways of working to deliver SBtM across the network. • Ensure processes and ways of working drive excellent customer experience. • Provide all required management information and reporting. • Review performance and drive continuous improvement. • Work with the Head of Customer Operations Support to deliver of the project. • Manage the budget for the project. • Ensure governance of the project. • Ensure the SBtM team is appropriately trained, and all necessary qualifications and certification are in place. • Support and develop the team. • Collaborate with other GDNs to ensure technical and procedural best practice. • Raise the profile of SBtM across NGN. • Support the wider Social Strategy team • Carry out site visits to ensure best practice and customer experience. <p>3.2 Success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration of actions taken to minimise risk and the sharing of any lessons learnt from SBtM jobs • Creation of SBtM policies & procedures • Good understanding of Safe Control of Operations procedures • Updating relevant codes of practice, engineering instructions safety and statutory regulation. • An understanding of NGN Engineering and Safety policies and procedures • An understanding of external good practice, e.g. HSE documents • Demonstration of supporting customers in vulnerable situations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive reporting– this will be measured for each eligible SBTM job
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	<p>This project has a positive SROI return.</p> <p>SROI: £6.19</p> <p>NPV: £2,945,798.67</p>
VCMA Project start and end date	October 2023 - 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:	