

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	Shiney Advice and Resource Project (ShARP) – 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>Shiney Advice and Resource Project (ShARP) is a membership organisation and registered charity which was founded in 1981 by a group of local people from Shiney Row in the Coalfield area of Sunderland. In common with other cities across the United Kingdom Sunderland has some affluent neighbourhoods and a range of services and amenities providing a good quality of life for residents. The city is going through a period of regeneration with some exciting opportunities for the future emerging like the new film studios and Smart City initiatives. However, for many people living in Sunderland, they are not likely to be able to access some of these opportunities as their lived reality is significantly different. Many people live in areas with high levels of deprivation, health inequalities and low educational attainment. Employment opportunities are limited with many people working in low skilled insecure jobs often on Zero Hour contracts which gives few options to plan, budget, manage finances or save. This in turn limits opportunities, impacts on mental wellbeing and can diminish people's confidence and ability to make positive choices for themselves and their families. Several key issues have negatively impacted on the population of Sunderland (Coalfields) in terms of Health and Wellbeing which widen health inequalities and show a predicted impact in Sunderland on individuals, families and some communities that many households will not have enough income for food, fuel, housing and other essentials. A recently commissioned Government study completed by the Health Foundation 'The Fair Society, Healthy Lives' known as the Marmot Review on fuel poverty, cold homes and inequalities described a 'humanitarian crisis' of fuel poverty with thousands of lives affected. Sunderland has one of the highest rates of early preventable deaths due to cold. The review highlighted</p>
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	<p>that 'Warm homes, nutritious food and a stable job are vital building blocks for health'. In addition to the effect of cold homes on mental and physical illness, living on a low income does much damage. If people are constantly worrying about making ends meet it puts a strain on our bodies, resulting in increased stress, with effects on the heart and blood vessels and a disordered immune system. This type of living environment will mean thousands of people will die earlier than they should, and for children there is a heightened risk of death, acute respiratory illness and long-term damage to lungs caused through cold, damp, mouldy homes. It is also thought that the toxic stress of living in such conditions can permanently affect their brain development which in term may limit long term development and possibly their educational attainment.</p>
Scope and Objectives	<p>The ShARP Centre for Warmth team will provide a range of activities throughout the week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of a Warm, Safe, Welcoming Space for all • Dedicated Centre for Warmth Advice Worker to offer advice through a mix of drop-in sessions, workshops, 1:1 appointments • Dedicated Centre for Warmth Community Worker to develop a range of engagement activities in partnership with the Advice Worker <p>The activities will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit and debt advice • Income maximisation through supporting benefit claims • Promoting and delivery of "Take Up" campaigns e.g. Pension Credit, Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance etc. • Budgeting advice delivered through a "social kitchen" sourcing and cooking nutritious meals from scratch • Social Kitchen – shared community mealtimes with social activities • Bringing in partners/specialist providers to raise awareness on key issues e.g. Green Doctors, Tyne & Wear Fire and Rescue – Smoke Alarms, CO monitors etc <p>The objectives of this initiative are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the health and wellbeing of centre users • To reduce fuel poverty • To increase household income through take up of benefit entitlement • To provide debt advice and support to manage debt • To increase awareness of and registration on the PSR • To provide CO awareness and advice in partnership with the Energy Advice Worker
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 across the Shiney Row locality of Sunderland, 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</p>

	<p>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 • 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</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>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</p>

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.

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

	<p>Through the research carried out, 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 <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>As a result of developing a Centre for Warmth they will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ 2 members of staff who will work closely together as a team to provide an integrated wraparound bespoke advice service and community support offer <p>Outcomes</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness of the PSR through targeted marketing and face to face sessions • PSR Registrations. Will assist individuals with completion of their registrations on a face-to-face basis • Offer income maximisation advice, such as supporting with applying for benefits • Dedicated Centre for Warmth Advice Worker will offer a range of bespoke advice to maximise income through take up of benefit entitlement, budgeting, debt advice, negotiating with creditors creating payment plans • Partnership Engagement- The Centre for Warmth Advice Worker will use the existing 5 Voluntary Community Sector Networks to provide CO and Energy Advice awareness sessions to partners across the city to maximise reach of the project • Energy efficiency advice - maximise take up through partnership work. Introduce the Green Doctor offer and make referrals into that project • Educate individuals on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness. • The Centre for Warmth Advice Worker will work with ShARP Energy Advice Worker to maximise their contacts • Raise awareness of CO alarms. The Centre for Warmth Advice Worker will work in partnership with the advice team at ShARP to raise awareness of CO monitors and raise awareness with tenants in private rented accommodation about the landlords responsibility to provide CO monitors • Offer supported self-serve for Benefit Checks. The Centre for Warmth Advice Worker will support and teach people on how to carry out their own benefit checks using the free resources in the ShARP Digital Hub • Establish wrap around support in the ShARP Centre for Warmth. The ShARP Centre for Warmth Community Worker will provide a range of wraparound centre-based activities to local people Monday – Friday to identify and address need. Activities will include a social kitchen, community mealtimes, craft and chat activities, Shiney Marras Men's Group, family activities and school holiday family cooking etc. <p> Raising awareness of the PSR - 1,920 PSR Registrations – 200 Information and support – 1920 Partnership engagement through city wide VCS Networks – 100 Energy efficiency advice - maximise take up through partnership work with Green Doctor – 100 Advice and support to make claims – 900 Raise awareness of CO – 1,920 Surveys showing increased awareness of CO – 200 Offer supported self-serve for Benefit Checks – 200 Establish wrap around support in the ShARP Centre for Warmth - 500 </p>
Project Partners and third parties involved	They will use their existing network of partners including other advice providers to maximise reach for the project.

	<p>A number of their partners have particular specialisms, and they would bring those into the ShARP Centre for Warmth.</p> <p>They work proactively with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Doctor to use their expertise and networks to benefit local people • NEA for additional advice and support to clients • Community Foundation team to inform them of emerging need • SCC local welfare reform/financial resilience team to inform them of gaps and emerging trends • Public Health to link with and promote campaigns • Gentoo for housing • Gentoo Money Matters Team – money advice for Gentoo tenants • Social landlords – Karbon Homes, 13 etc • Shelter • Pallion Action Group – partner in advice provision • Back on The Map • Citizens Advice Sunderland • Veterans in Crisis – specialist support for veterans • WWIN (Wearside Women in Need) – specialist support and training/Domestic Abuse • Social Prescribers – refer to ShARP and we link back to them/GPs • Age UK • SCC – Family Hub offer • Sunderland Foodbanks – Trussell Trust and the independent food aid providers • Hopewood Hospital – benefit advice to patient prior to discharge if required • Sunderland Royal Hospital • Headway – specialist support for people with acquired brain injury • Macmillan • Stroke Association • Age UK
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: £13.73</p> <p>NPV: £1,214,260.82</p>
VCMA Project start and end date	November 2024-October 2025
Geographical area	Coalfield area of Sunderland, West, North and East of the city of Sunderland and Washington.
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:	