

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	The Mem – 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>Wallsend is a town in North Tyneside, Tyne and Wear. It has a population of 43,842 and lies 4 miles (6.5 kilometres) east of Newcastle upon Tyne.[2] There is a need to address stark inequalities in health and wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fuel poverty is a significant issue in the area, with 11.5% of households in North Tyneside falling below the Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) threshold. In Wallsend and riverside wards, this figure is likely much higher, given the correlation between fuel poverty and deprivation • Wallsend and the surrounding riverside wards consistently rank within the most deprived 10% nationally, with life expectancy rates among the lowest in the country. Research commissioned by Health Equals highlights that life expectancy at birth in Wallsend is 78.1 years, 6.5 years shorter than in the healthiest parts of the UK. • Gaps in life expectancy within North Tyneside are stark—11.4 years for males and 9.9 years for females—primarily driven by preventable conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory illnesses. • Contributing factors such as smoking, obesity, and fuel poverty exacerbate these health disparities, creating an urgent need for accessible, community-centred solutions. Ill health is prevalent. • The withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Allowance further deepens this crisis, disproportionately impacting low-income pensioners and vulnerable households. Without this support, many face impossible choices between heating their homes and meeting other basic needs, heightening health risks and reducing quality of life. • Cold homes lead to higher rates of illness and isolation, particularly for the elderly, compounding the area's existing health challenges and the challenges of the private rented sector, extortionate rents and absent landlords.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Child Poverty Coalition reports that 31.3% of children in North Tyneside live in poverty, with 69% of these children in working families. • Riverside wards experience some of the highest levels of deprivation in the borough, where poverty impacts every aspect of children's lives, from housing and education to nutrition and health. • The cost-of-living crisis has intensified the struggles of families, particularly in deprived areas, where rising energy bills and stagnant incomes push more households into hardship. • Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning is a silent but potentially deadly risk, particularly for older people living in disadvantaged areas of North Tyneside. This colorless, odorless gas, often produced by faulty or poorly maintained heating systems, gas appliances, and chimneys, can be a silent killer. Vulnerable populations, especially older people in lower-income post code areas, are at an increased risk due to factors like inadequate heating, aging housing infrastructure, and limited access to essential services. <p>The area of benefit contains disproportionate private rented sector accommodation.</p> <p>Solution</p> <p>To develop a Centre for Warmth to ensure support for residents living in poverty and/ or disproportionately affected by addressing the multifaceted challenges they face by providing comprehensive and interconnected services, resources, and guidance. It goes beyond meeting immediate needs, like food or housing, to address the underlying causes and long-term impacts of poverty, fostering resilience and self-sufficiency.</p> <p>We would</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Income maximisation and benefit advice • Engage staff and volunteers in training as Community Energy Ambassadors and NEA Level 2 Fuel Debt in the Community training. • Deliver energy efficiency support and advice sessions and activities after required training has been completed • Increase capacity of our food related activity to not only tackle poverty but engage the most socially isolated, building connections with our wider range of services (and this project in particular) offering warm and safe spaces where food is the hook and a tool to address isolation • Raise awareness of the priority services registration and when appropriate support the completion of registrations • Raise awareness about the dangers of CO/ natural gas
Scope and Objectives	<p>Scope</p> <p>A Hub host will be recruited to work alongside a project manager to develop and deliver energy advice & guidance suitable for the identified audiences. Coordinate a group of volunteer community energy ambassadors recruited and trained who will not just be Centre based but deliver outreach sessions. All staff and volunteers will be offered Community Energy Ambassadors and NEA level 2 Fuel debt in the community training.</p> <p>Residents will benefit from increased levels of household income through working with the centre's specialist advisors. The specialist benefits advisors will support households to identify and access previously unclaimed benefits.</p>

	<p>The scope of this work will include elements of advocacy connecting and supporting residents with other services such as food</p> <p>Residents will understand the benefit of being registered on the PSR.</p> <p>Centre staff will all receive an awareness on the PSR and will help eligible households through the registration process.</p> <p>Residents will have an increased awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide (CO) /and will have a reduced risk of harm caused by CO. This will be achieved through the centre's staff providing CO awareness conversations and distributing CO alarms to the most at risk households, following a survey so people understand the dangers and symptoms of CO.</p> <p>Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase community awareness of energy efficiency • To improve the health and wellbeing of residents including anxiety relief • Reduction in fuel poverty • Income maximisation work to increase household budgets • CO awareness and advice/ education • Increased awareness and registrations to PSR • Reduce social isolation
<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. 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 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> <p>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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 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.</p> <p>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</p>

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:

- 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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 The centre will support over 1,000 residents over the year. Residents will receive a benefits check alongside awareness raising and be supported to identify all benefits that they are eligible for and in addition be guided through the claims process with advocacy support if required and applicable. The worker alongside the energy ambassadors will offer essential advice on carbon monoxide / natural gas safety and registration to the priority services register. PRS registrations will be supported. The centre will support around 800 people per annum on energy efficiency advice. Increased attendance at social isolation food related activity connecting residents to all services.</p> <p>Success Criteria</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 800 clients will receive advice on identifying and accessing previously unclaimed benefits with 200 receiving intensive support including advocacy. • Around 800 clients will receive an awareness conversation on the dangers of CO. Approximately 200 of the most at-risk households will also receive a CO alarm, if appropriate following a CO survey. • Around 800 households will improve their awareness of the PSR, with around 200 eligible households will also be supported to register. • Around 800 clients will receive energy efficiency advice and 20 energy ambassadors will be trained and developed as part of embedding knowledge across the organisation and partners.
Project Partners and third parties involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Tyneside Food Partnership • Anxious Minds Charity - Mental Health charity lead by those of lived experience • The Peoples Advice Service- internal CIC providing welfare rights and advocacy • Move It Studios CIC- women led enterprise supporting children young people with fitness, dance and all round wellbeing • Hellcats - Cheerleading Group targeted at children and young people and their families • The Trades Council - tackling inequalities • North Tyneside Poverty Intervention Network • The Twisting Ducks Theatre Company for those with special needs where performance arts deliver key messages • Wallsend Children Community - a network led by Save the Children, focused on children and young people • Local businesses - including tenants of The Mem • Age UK North Tyneside • VODA - VODA is the Local Infrastructure Organisation for North Tyneside whose role is to support and strengthen the voluntary and community sector in North Tyneside. • Walking With - charity that works with veterans, asylum seekers and refugees.
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: 5.66</p> <p>NPV: £1,002,724.19</p>
VCMA Project start and end date	March 2025-February 2026
Geographical area	Wallsend
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. A Centre for Warmth Co-ordinator has been appointed to manage these projects.</p>
Approved by: Job Title:	<p>Eileen Brown</p> <p>Customer Experience Director</p>

Signature:

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