

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	The Well – 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	January 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>River City is a Christian Church established in 2016 and based in the East of Hull that is committed to improving the lives of everyone. This includes caring for people's physical and emotional wellbeing, particularly those who are suffering from the effects of poverty and poor mental or physical health. This is done through the provision of practical support and guidance via their Foodbank, Basic Life Skills Courses, Employability Support, Mental Health Support Groups, and opportunities for social connection to overcome social isolation through a weekly warm space, social groups etc. In 2021 they secured a lease on their building, The Well, which is quickly becoming a hub for the local community.</p> <p>Hull has high levels of both poverty and deprivation. Hull has a higher unemployment rate, more poor housing, residents qualified to a lower level and higher levels of crime. Increased deprivation means that there is poorer health, but this is compounded as poor health also affects other measures such as employment and motivation to improve employment, education and the person's environment such as housing. In addition, those who live in the most deprived area are more likely to have risk factors for ill health such as smoking, poor diet, lack of physical activity, etc. It is also generally more difficult to change lifestyle behaviour if the environment is more stressful resulting from poorer employment prospects and housing, increased debt, relationship problems, etc.</p> <p>Based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 score, Hull is the 4th most deprived local authority in England (out of 317), and more than half the small areas in Hull (54%) are amongst the most deprived 20% nationally.</p> <p>Child poverty (children living in households where income is less than 60% the median household income before housing costs) is high in Hull. For 2016, 27.1% of</p>
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dependent children aged 0-19 years lived in relative poverty compared to 17.0% across England. In one of the wards we work in, Marfleet, the number was 40.2%. In total, it is estimated that there were 16,345 (out of 60,305) dependent children living in poverty in Hull.

For 2016, it is estimated that 15,877 (13.8%) of households (out of total 115,050) spent 10% or more of their income on fuel (or would do so in order to achieve satisfactory heating requirements). This is higher than England (11.1%) and has been increasing in Hull since 2011 when it was 10.6%.

People in Hull also have poorer physical and mental health than the national population. There were 273 preventable deaths per 100,000 residents in Hull in 2013-2015, higher than for England, Yorkshire and the Humber.

Solution

There are a number of initiatives at the centre open 4 days a week to the public, providing access to the following:

- A warm space where to have a hot drink, chat and opportunities to engage in other services.
- A Trussell Trust Foodbank which is open on Tuesdays and Wednesdays
- A regular CAB Advisor would be available to give advice on benefits and income maximisation as well as debt support
- hand hold customers through debt management plans with the likes of Step change
- On a Thursday provide a hot meal, drinks, and regular activities such as board games, quizzes and opportunities to sign up for term-time courses.
- During term time, run regular courses in subjects such as healthy cooking on a budget, mental health and wellbeing, arts and crafts, gardening/horticulture, music therapy through a community choir, basic English conversation, basic literacy and numeracy etc.
- Run a 'Recovery Course' for those struggling with addictive behaviours and substance misuse.
- Outreach into some of the communities slightly further away from the building, in areas such as Long hill and Marfleet where deprivation is high.
- During the school holidays, run family-focussed events to support those struggling to feed their whole family and heat their homes.
- Provide free household appliances that can help to reduce people's spending on energy – for examples: slow cookers, air fryers etc.
- Provide pre-cooked meals that can simply be re-heated at home, saving fuel costs.
- Raising awareness of the PSR and CO safety, to include one staff member from the BME community to ensure those new to the city are welcomed and provided with this information and accessing the cheapest fuel tariffs.
- Free CO alarms to those in need.
- To become a Fuel Bank Partner to provide fuel vouchers to those on pre-payment meters.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For health and well being they will run 4 x intensive 5 week, one to one, mental wellbeing courses including resilience, emotional wellbeing, self compassion & self-care and building healthy relationships. These courses are particularly beneficial for those identified as being at risk of suicide. <p>The Centre for Warmth concept was developed to ensure a holistic approach to supporting fuel poor households within a community setting. A Centre for Warmth Strategy has been developed and approved by our independent Governance Panel on 30th July 2024.</p> <p>Centre users will receive a combination of services such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • energy advice • CO awareness and advice • income maximisation through benefit entitlement checks and managing debt • free or reduced cost food/clothing • fuel top up vouchers • connections to other NGN funded partner information/assistance <p>Plus training, information, advice and services bespoke to their individual neighbourhoods. All provided in a warm safe space designed to improve health and wellbeing, increase household income, and help communities better manage their energy.</p>
Scope and Objectives	<p>The Well aims to improve the physical and mental health of those that they work with, increasing resilience and the ability to combat fuel and food poverty. Providing access to a warm space and engaging activities, support and advice and a dedicated team who will raise awareness of the PSR and CO safety. To raise awareness within the BAME community of their tenants' rights how they can improve their fuel efficiency. To maximise people's income, reduce their debts and help them overcome their barriers to employability.</p> <p>The objectives of this initiative are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of clients and their families • To maximise income through benefit maximisation and debt management and/or budgeting support • Reduce fuel poverty for all • Provide assistance to the BAME community • Provide CO awareness and advice • Increase awareness and registrations of PSR

	<p>Scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open The Well 4 days a week for access to support with the impacts of deprivation incl. food and fuel poverty and poor physical/mental health. • Provide access to daytime activities which will improve people's basic life skills, and their physical and mental health. • Raise awareness of benefits entitlements and provide support with debt reduction and employability. • Encourage people to enrol on the PSR and give a CO alarm to those in need. • Engage with the BAME community and increase their knowledge of energy saving measures, the PSR and CO safety.
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 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.</p>

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.

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.

The topics of the workshops are listed below:

- 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

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.

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:

- 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

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>Vulnerability Strategy (Updated Spring 2024)</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run 80 Foodbank sessions. • Have a CAB advisor available for 2.5 hours a week. • Run 40 Warm Space sessions. • Provide energy-saving appliances to 200 households. • Provide at least 100 activity sessions for local residents incl. arts and crafts, music therapy, basic English, literacy and numeracy, addiction recovery, mental health and wellbeing. • Do outreach into communities slightly further away (but still within the target area) to engage residents, incl. 6 'pop-up' sessions. • Enrol people on the PSR. • Raise awareness of the dangers of CO and issue CO alarms to those in need.
Project Partners and third parties involved	<p>Working with existing partners, as well as engaging new ones. Existing partners are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hull Foodbank. • EMS (Environmental Management Solutions) – a local charity working on growing food and increasing healthy eating. • Nordoff Robins for our Music Therapy/Community Choir sessions. • Human Brilliance (a local Mental Health Organisation) • Hull CAB • Local Independent craftspeople.
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: £4.20</p> <p>NPV: £597,699.58</p>

VCMA Project start and end date	November 2024 - October 2025
Geographical area	Hull
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.
Approved by: Job Title:	Eileen Brown Customer Experience Director
Signature:	