

## Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

<b>Project title:</b>	<b>Hope 4 U - NHS Support Service extension</b>
<b>Funding GDN(s)</b> <i>The GDN(s) which register(s) the project</i>	Northern Gas Networks
<b>New or updated</b> <i>(indicate as appropriate by removing the option that does not apply)</i>	Extension
<b>Collaborative VCMA Projects</b> <i>Specific role(s) of GDN(s) participating in a collaborative VCMA Project:</i>	N/A
<b>Date of PEA Submission</b>	March 2025
<b>VCMA Project contact</b> <i>Name:</i> <i>Email:</i> <i>Number:</i>	Laura Ratcliffe <a href="mailto:lratcliffe@northerngas.co.uk">lratcliffe@northerngas.co.uk</a> 07928501779
<b>Total cost (£k):</b>	£
<b>Total VCMA funding required (£k):</b>	£

<b>Problem(s)</b>	<p>At a time, which should be filled with great excitement, it can also bring enormous expense and stress to an individual or family. Finding out that you are expecting, if planned or unexpected, can bring a mix of emotions, happiness, excitement, fear, stress, and anxiety.</p> <p>The average cost of a baby in the first month is likely to be in the region of £500, which does not include items such as crib, furniture, a pram, and a car seat. A survey conducted by Child Poverty Action Group revealed that 64% of people were not prepared for the costs involved.</p> <p>Unfortunately, figures show that child poverty in the UK is increasing and that the youngest children continue to be most at risk with the effect of poverty starting even before a child is born due to a lack of healthy food for the mother. Birthweights in the most deprived areas can on average be 200g lower, children are more likely to die suddenly in infancy, to suffer acute infections, and to experience mental health.</p> <p>Children growing up in poverty in the early years are much more likely to struggle with their early learning and are at much greater risk of struggling in primary and secondary school.</p>
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	<p>Poverty puts tremendous pressure on families who don't have the money to give their children the types of environments and experiences others may have. The impact on physical and mental health are lifelong and higher rates of arthritis, high blood pressure, respiratory illness and depression are being seen in later life.</p> <p><b>Solution</b></p> <p>Hope 4U delivers a national service providing a 24/7 interpreting service allowing three-way calls to ensure clients with limited or no English have full access to the services.</p> <p>Many people do not know how their income may change due to pregnancy, the full costs and impact and any possible grants that they may be entitled to.</p> <p>The service which has been active for 12 months works with Airedale NHS Foundation Trust and Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust maternity units, supporting parents with planning their budgets, benefit check and income maximisation, money management, housing issues, sign up to PSR, saving on utility costs and explaining further grant options.</p> <p>The project includes the essential service of safety with Carbon Monoxide and energy efficiency, keeping warm and well for the baby and the mother.</p> <p>By working with the NHS Trust, essential information is delivered to people who would benefit. One of the biggest barriers is always distrust around any support available, but by working with the NHS, trust is already established.</p>
<p><b>Scope and Objectives</b></p>	<p><b>Scope</b></p> <p>By delivering the services in conjunction with the NHS gives an ideal opportunity to gather and provide information.</p> <p>Referrals to Hope 4U will come direct from the midwives who have identified a vulnerability and need. The service delivered will be non-judgemental delivered with empathy and skill. The overall objective is to support and advise patients on how to live in a safe, warm home with financial sustainability.</p> <p>The areas covered are very diverse, and English is not always the first language. An interpreting service is available to allow a three-way call to ensure no language barriers.</p>

	<p><b>Objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve health and wellbeing</li> <li>• To reduce fuel poverty</li> <li>• 875 - Raising awareness of the PSR</li> <li>• 438 - PSR registrations</li> <li>• 875 - Raising CO awareness</li> <li>• 438 - CO awareness survey completion</li> <li>• 525 - Energy behaviour change</li> <li>• 218 - Maternity grants</li> <li>• 88 - Energy/water/general debt/social tariff schemes identified and grants/ Income maximisation uplifts</li> </ul>
<p><b>Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA</b></p>	<p>This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as it will support vulnerable customers across the Airedale General Hospital and Bradford Teaching NHS Hospital and the associated centres, addressing fuel poverty as well as raising awareness of CO and the PSR. As the project also has mental wellbeing, cultural, temporary vulnerability and financial hardship themes, it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy.</p> <p>There will be no collaboration from other GDN's nor other funded sources.</p> <p><b>Eligibility criteria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This project has a positive SROI</li> <li>• 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"> <li>• Financial hardship</li> <li>• Socio-demographic</li> <li>• Cultural</li> <li>• Temporary vulnerability</li> <li>• Mental Wellbeing themes</li> <li>• Medically Dependent on Energy</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Has defined outcomes as required</li> <li>• Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms</li> </ul>

<p><b>Evidence of stakeholder or customer support</b></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"> <li>• Fuel poverty</li> <li>• Benefit claims</li> <li>• No qualifications</li> <li>• Long term health problem / disability</li> </ul> <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"> <li>• Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space</li> <li>• Mental wellbeing</li> <li>• Financial hardship</li> <li>• Temporary vulnerability – including post hospital recovery and pregnancy / maternity</li> <li>• Socio Demographic</li> <li>• Household composition</li> <li>• Rural Vulnerability</li> <li>• Accessibility Including language</li> <li>• Medical Dependant on Energy</li> <li>• Cultural</li> </ul>
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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.

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

	<p>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"> <li>• Priority Area 1: Increased focus on health</li> <li>• Priority Area 2: Collaboration and linking up partners and funding</li> <li>• Priority Area 3: Increasing capacity for support within partner organisations</li> <li>• Priority Area 4: Connecting and responding to different aspects and complexities of vulnerability</li> <li>• Priority Area 5 – Continued support for those in financial hardship</li> <li>• Priority Area 6 - Scaling up existing projects</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria</b>	<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve health and wellbeing</li> <li>• To reduce fuel poverty</li> <li>• 875 - Raising awareness of the PSR</li> <li>• 438 - PSR registrations</li> <li>• 875 - Raising CO awareness</li> <li>• 438 - CO awareness survey completion</li> <li>• 525 - Energy behaviour change</li> <li>• 218 - Maternity grants</li> <li>• 88 - Energy/water/general debt/social tariff schemes identified and grants/ Income maximisation uplifts</li> </ul> <p><b>Success criteria</b></p> <p>The success of the contract would show multiple interventions for the patients who engage.</p>
<b>Project Partners and third parties involved</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hope 4U will be the lead organisation for the project, delivering the service and reporting outcomes to Northern Gas Networks. Hope 4U delivers a national service funded by organisations, such as National Grid, Wales &amp; West and the Fuel Bank Foundation. Having over 30 years' experience, we understand everyone is an individual and should be treated in a non-judgmental way and listened to. Our services are not time limited.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Airedale Hospital Laura Frankland, the maternity data and digital administrator set up the project in her area and is very supportive of the project and believes it is an invaluable service for the patients. Our contact going forward is Karen Savage, community manager/midwife.</li> <li>Bradford NHS Kelly Holroyd, digital midwife, has been very supportive of the project from the initial contact made. Kelly met with all the community members to discuss the project. Our main contact is now Nicci Haslem, community manager/midwife. They believe that the project is valuable to all the women in Bradford.</li> </ul>
<b>Potential for new learning</b>	Any learning will be shared with stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies.
<b>Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations, including NPV</b>	This project has a positive SROI return. <b>SROI:</b> £ <b>NPV:</b> £
<b>VCMA Project start and end date</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2025-March 2026
<b>Geographical area</b>	NHS Support service project will include two areas:  Airedale General Hospital and Bradford Teaching NHS Hospital and the associated centres.
<b>Internal governance and project management evidence</b>	VCMA Governance Group Meeting: 25 <sup>th</sup> February 2025 Outcome of meeting: Approved
<b>Approved by:</b> <b>Job Title:</b>	Eileen Brown Customer Experience Director
<b>Signature:</b>	