Northern Gas Networks – Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Trainer

Funding GDN(s)	**Northern Gas Networks**
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	September 2021
Project contact name:	Jill Walker
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Total cost (£k)	*detailed separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	*detailed separately

1. **Problem(s)**

This should outline the problem(s) which is/are being addressed by the VCMA Project

The project/role is being funded, as we need to make staff within Northern Gas Networks (NGN), partners and customers alike, aware of the wide-ranging vulnerabilities that can exist within our network. There is currently a knowledge and skills gap within NGN, around vulnerability awareness in general and therefore, there is a need to raise awareness and educate around the various projects that are being funded through the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) and the associated challenges they each address. Project partners, many of which are charities and grass roots organisations, do not always have the resource nor time to be able to raise awareness themselves around gas safety and customers living in vulnerable circumstances. It was felt that the Trainer role would assist in providing that support to project partners, internally and beyond, to make every contact count, with customers who are living in these situations.

The role will include supporting internal colleagues and external stakeholders and partners in being trained around all areas relating to vulnerability. This includes, but not limited to – training internal colleagues and partners on carbon monoxide (CO) and vulnerability awareness, fuel poverty, energy efficiency, Priority Services Register (PSR) and promoting the locking cooker valve service. NGN are currently developing a Customer Vulnerability & Competency Framework (CVCF), the main aim of which, is to train all NGN staff on identifying vulnerability and being able to take action to support customers, or refer on to a third party, when required. An individual's role within the organisation, will determine the level of awareness training they receive, for example everyone will receive Dementia Friends training. The Trainer role will be the conduit to delivering all vulnerability associated training to NGN staff, which will feed into the competency framework. Front line workers will receive the most focussed training, due to their close interaction with customers who may require additional support. The role will ensure that training is delivered by an internal NGN resource, as opposed to having to outsource the service, which creates additional costs. NGN currently outsources vulnerability awareness training to a 3rd party at a significant cost to the business.

2. **Scope and Objectives**

The scope and objectives of the VCMA Project should be clearly defined including the benefits which would directly impact customers on the participating GDNs' network(s), and where the benefits of the VCMA Projects lie.

The scope would cover a single resource to provide training to NGN staff and other external stakeholders, which supports NGN's Vulnerability Strategy. From an internal perspective, the training delivered by the Vulnerability Trainer, will be in line with the Customer Vulnerability and Competency Framework, which will be made up of both e-learning modules and face to face training. The training will be delivered, wherever and whenever there is a training or awareness need identified, either internally or by an external partner. The Customer Vulnerability & Competency Framework will be coming online in GD2 and will enable the business (NGN), to monitor training needs and highlight when refresher training is due. The training delivered will address network wide requirements. The scope will also cover training delivery for accredited bodies, such as BPEC.

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2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- To raise awareness and provide training to increase skills and knowledge associated with customers living in vulnerable circumstances
- Train NGN staff, project partners and stakeholders, around areas identified within the Customer and Vulnerability Competency Framework modules and that align to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy. Examples of training that will be delivered are:
    - CO awareness
    - 'Making Every Contact Count' awareness training and associated referral routes
    - Dementia Friends
    - Priority Services Register
    - Fuel Poverty awareness

- Identify and support community initiatives and training opportunities around vulnerability and CO, in conjunction with VCMA projects being funded by NGN

2.2 Scope

- Deliver internal training to NGN staff, in line with NGN's Vulnerability Strategy
- Deliver external training to partner organisations (Train the Trainer), who have links into grass roots, hard to reach and seldom heard communities
- Delivering online and face to face sessions
- Gathering feedback on success of training delivered
- Covers all of NGN's geographical area

3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This should include an explanation of why the VCMA Project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria. This is a requirement

This project qualifies under the criteria for the VCMA funding, as the role will be one of training delivery and coordination, in relation to all areas associated with vulnerability and CO awareness. This will be in line with NGN's Vulnerability Strategy, CSR obligations, Inclusive Service Provision (BSI 18477) and Social Mobility Pledge.

There will be no collaboration from other GDN's nor other funded sources.

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- This project will have a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy and Customer Vulnerability & Competency Framework. The training being delivered will align with one or more of the NGN's Vulnerability Strategy themes:
    - Rurality
    - Financial hardship
    - Physical disabilities

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- o   Mental health challenges
- o   Temporary vulnerabilities
- Has defined outcomes as required
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms

4. Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

This should provide information of the customer engagement that has taken place in the development of VCMA Projects where appropriate. If there is no evidence of stakeholder engagement or customer support, this should justify why it was not appropriate to engage with stakeholders and customers.

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.

4.1 Making Every Contact Count (MECC) - research

From July 2018 – July 2019, a research project was undertaken in partnership with the national fuel poverty, National Energy Action (NEA). The research sought to safeguard vulnerable domestic customers who are impacted by a gas disconnection. The project reviewed current practice and made recommendations for a good practice protocol, for those vulnerable customers who were disconnected. Namely, identifying those who required additional support, taking action to resolve an issue identified and follow up calls to close the loop.

Feedback from a customer panel in November 2019, recommended that MECC protocols should be rolled out as part of business as usual within NGN. Learning was shared with the other GDN's. The training courses delivered by a third party, as part of the operational delivery element of the project, provided key insights into customers living in vulnerable circumstances. This enabled front line engineers to identify energy and other vulnerabilities. Following the training, nearly 70% of engineers described their knowledge of the different ways households can be vulnerable, in the context of home energy, as 'excellent'.

4.2 Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops 2019 – 2021

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 (including digital engagement in light of CV-19).

During 2019-2020 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders on the subject of customers in vulnerable situations. During our July 2020 workshop, stakeholders discussed what the impact of the pandemic has on hidden vulnerability and how the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support CIVS. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts have been associated with debt, isolation, redundancy, and anxiety. Some, if not all of these challenges, may potentially be observed by NGN's front-line engineers and other operational colleagues, who visit properties. It is therefore imperative they receive the relevant awareness, knowledge and skills required, to be able to identify where additional support is required. This can only be achieved through regular training and awareness raising.

During our August 2020 workshop, our stakeholders identified that there was an increase in debt/money management issues, specifically with those people who were 'Just About Managing'. due to the current pandemic. General enquiries around benefits advice also increased. As part of the protocols established during the MECC project research, engineers are able to refer customers on for additional support, to partner organisations and other third parties, for things such as debt and benefits advice. This has been achieved through the external training they received to identify vulnerability.

In our October 2020 workshop, our stakeholders mentioned communication was a priority. They said E-learning modules are required to train staff and volunteers, so they are aware of what to look and listen for. The Vulnerability Trainer role aligns with the need highlighted in the workshop.

In January 2021 we held a specific fuel poverty workshop. During this workshop our stakeholders said it would be good to improve knowledge within NGN to help offer support in the community. They also said that fuel, food and general poverty are linked and we need more streamlined ways of working together and that partners can help raise awareness of different funding available. This project/role fully aligns with the need to raise awareness of what partner organisations offer and establishing reciprocal training arrangements, in relation to fuel poverty and energy efficiency.

In our annual strategic workshop in April 2021, we reviewed the previous 'enhanced commitments for GD2' which stakeholders had voted on at previous sessions. Clear direction was given on the three priorities to focus on. Two of the three were, developing a Customer & Vulnerability Competency (training) Framework (CVCF) and also to train our community partners. This role will help achieve both of those stakeholder requests.

4.3 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support Customers In Vulnerable Situations (CIVS). 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 CIVS, which meets the needs of our stakeholders.

4.4 Social Indicator Mapping & Covid 19 Research

Social indicator mapping took place in 2019 and further research around CV-19 impact was undertaken in July 2020. This was shared as part of our stakeholder engagement. A new Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT) has been demonstrated to stakeholders to highlight any vulnerability gaps we have on our network, including fuel poverty data. The VMT allows you to add

multiple factors of vulnerability together, to create a heat map for where factors combine to create areas of highest need. This has also been updated to reflect more emerging issues and areas where more focussed training would be beneficial.

All of the data gathered as a result of this research will be used to identify priority training topics. Other training needs will be identified by focussing on the key social indicators in each of NGN's Strategic Partner geographical patches. This will ensure that internal colleagues are aware of the training required, to support the top two key social indicators in each of NGN's 9 geographical areas.

4.5 Vulnerability Strategy AAA Framework

Within our Vulnerability Strategy we have developed, with the help of our stakeholders, the 'AAA' framework. This helps us support our customers in vulnerable situations. Awareness, Accessibility and Action. By adapting this principles-based approach into our AAA framework, we will ensure that all customers are treated fairly and consistently. All themes within the strategy will be supported by the introduction of this role.

5. Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

Details of the VCMA Project outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these, interim milestones and how the Funding Licensee will evaluate whether the project has been successful. Each action should have a proportion of the funding allocated.

5.1 Outcomes

- Deliver training sessions to NGN staff and partners both online and face to face
- Robust training plan for internal colleagues, in line with the Customer and Vulnerability Competency Framework
- Number of NGN staff members trained
- Number of partner organisations trained
- Pre and post training questionnaires
- Increased number of PSR referrals
- Increased number of CO awareness surveys
- Training provision for new partners identified through other VCMA funded projects / NGN's Strategic Partners
- Increased awareness and promotion of the locking cooker valve service and other services during training sessions
- Monthly referral numbers for customers identified as requiring additional support, via NGN's front-line workers

5.2 Success criteria

- This role will enable NGN staff, stakeholders and partners to be trained in all areas of vulnerability identified in NGN's Vulnerability Strategy
- Monitoring of training through the Customer Vulnerability and Competency Framework

- Additional PSR sign-ups and other positive social benefits as a result of the role and specifically the training provided to community partners, which would not be possible had an external provider been used
- Increased awareness, both internally and externally with project partners around areas such as Dementia, carbon monoxide, fuel poverty
- Training evaluation, to ensure the content and delivery always aligns to objectives associated with vulnerability

6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

NGN will not be working with any third party or partners to deliver this role/project

7. Potential for new learning

Details of what the GDN(s) expect to learn and how the learning will be disseminated.

As this is a new role it will evolve over time. The success of the role and the associated evolution of the Customer and Vulnerability Framework will be shared internally and externally with all stakeholders in particular, with other network operators and project partners. The role will be reviewed at 6/12 monthly intervals with NGN internal stakeholders and project partners.

8. Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations

The Funding Licensee(s) should justify the scale of the VCMA Project – including the scale of the investment relative to its potential benefits. As part of this, it should provide the SROI calculation.

This project has a positive SROI return.

VCMA Project start and end date
Detail start and end date of the VCMA Project and, where relevant, the VCMA Project that preceded this initiative.

1st April 2021 – 31st March 2026

Geographic area
Details of where the VCMA Project will take place. If the VCMA Project is collaborative, the Funding Licensee area(s) in which the project will take place should be identified.

All of NGN's geographical area

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director