Age UK North Tyneside - Information and Advice Role

Funding GDN(s)	Northern Gas Networks
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	Role of GDN(s) N/A
Date of PEA submission:	March 2023
Project contact name:	Jill Walker
Project contact number/email:	JWalker@northerngas.co.uk
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

North Tyneside's overall population has grown 4.1% and Age UK North Tyneside have seen an increase of 21.3% in their 65 and older age group. They have seen a significant increase in the need for pensionable age people requiring help and support due to the current cost of living crisis, as well as helping older people who are socially isolated and lonely.

Solution

This project will offer information and advice to over 6,000 customers across the region each year through Age UK North Tyneside's information and advice team who help to maximise income and reduce outgoings, as well as ensuring our customers are living in a safe, healthy environment.

They also have care point coordinators who help patients move from hospital to home safely and ensure that their accommodation is safe, warm and as cost effective as it can be. This is crucial to keep the customer at home, so they do not end up back in hospital. Their customer service team who see a wide variety of vulnerable customers every day. All of their free services help vulnerable residents within North Tyneside, ensuring living in a safe, warm, healthy home contributes to health and wellness which keeps customers away from GP surgeries and hospitals.

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 project will be available to all North Tyneside residents over the age of 50 who require help and support with income and the cost of living. This will help to address social isolation and loneliness through referrals into the wellbeing centres and social activity events.

The project aims to see 250 customers (minimum) per month, where they take the opportunity to have guided conversations to establish their needs and offer help and support to get customers over the poverty line, live healthy lives, in a safe and warm home. Age UK North Tyneside aim to re-claim over £1 million in unclaimed benefits for their customers. They will ensure customers come out of hospital into a safe, warm home, so they do not return to a hospital bed, reducing the demand on the NHS. Age UK North Tyneside will signpost and refer into organisations that they partner with to assist customers to get what they need, such as home adaptions and improvements to provide a better quality of life.

The benefit to customers is maximising income, living in a safe, warm home, returning home from hospital with the support in place to ensure they are comfortable and have what they need to live well but reduce costs where possible. Every customer that Age UK North Tyneside interact with is an opportunity to share knowledge and better ways of living, to reduce costs and be more energy efficient. Customers trust them, they don't sell them anything, they give, so they are more likely to follow their guidance due to the help and support provided to customers on an ongoing basis.

2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:

- Age UK North Tyneside expect to assist over 6,000 older vulnerable people to increase income, reduce their outgoings through smarter living, and get more customers involved with social activities for health and wellbeing
- Their services are promoted through social media however, they receive most referrals from local authority social workers, GP's and NHS, as well as word of mouth from customers who have used the service previously
- Their teams will visit customers in their homes to assess their needs and complete necessary actions to achieve the outcomes required, so customers are living healthy lives whilst reducing costs, providing them with more disposable income
- With more than £1 million of unclaimed benefits being awarded to eligible customers, this helps customers to pay increased energy bills, as well as normal cost of living increases
- Provide CO awareness sessions to vulnerable customers
- Referrals to the Priority Services Register

2.2 Scope

- 6,000 customers minimum being supported by Age UK North Tyneside
- More than £1 million of unclaimed benefits awarded every year
- Educating customers on reducing costs and carbon footprint. Providing them with examples of how they can easily achieve this through small changes to day to day living
- Reducing the need for customers to use primary and secondary care by offering social activities and places to go for additional help and support that they were not aware of
- CO awareness sessions delivered
- PSR referrals
- The geographical area of North Tyneside

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 VCMA funding, as it will support elderly vulnerable customers who are living in financial hardship and fuel poverty across North Tyneside, as well as raising awareness of CO. As the project has financial hardship themes, it aligns with NGN'S Vulnerability Strategy.

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

3.1 Eligibility criteria

- This project has a positive SROI
- This project will support NGN's Vulnerability Strategy by aligning with the financial hardship theme
- 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 Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops 2019 – 2022

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 2019-2021 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders, on the subject of customers in vulnerable situations. During our July 2020 workshop, stakeholders discussed new emerging issues due to Covid-19, what the impact of the pandemic had on hidden vulnerability. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts were associated with an increase in fuel and food poverty and there is a greater need more than ever, due to the cost of living and energy crisis, to support customers accessing fuel and food banks. Quite often a dilemma between heating and eating.

In January and September 2021, we held a couple of fuel poverty workshops. During these workshops our stakeholders said that fuel, food and general poverty are all linked, and we need more streamlined ways of working together. Partners can help raise awareness of different funding and support available. This project fully aligns with the need to help vulnerable customers in fuel poverty.

Further stakeholder engagement throughout 2020, told us that fuel poverty and the choice between heating and eating is becoming more prevalent. The current energy crisis is further compounding

this already serious issue. This project provides a solution to helping those customers who are financially struggling and need extra help. North Tyneside Age UK are a trusted partner and organisation to the residents in their area and they are therefore able to provide help and support to their customers.

Recent social indicator mapping research carried out in June 2022, indicated that Bradford, Hull, Scarborough, South Tyneside, and Sunderland were the top five places, to emerge as having the greatest concentration of vulnerabilities within NGN's network. This was based on a combination of the following vulnerability factors:

- ➢ Fuel poverty
- ➢ Benefit claims
- ➢ No qualifications
- ➢ Long term health problem / disability

Due to the financial challenges, currently experienced in these areas, makes it even more important to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of CO. These localities need to be key areas for consideration, both in terms of ensuring service delivery is aware of challenges people may face, and in relation to targeting potential support.

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 (February 2022), indicated that keeping bills as low as possible ranked more highly, than providing a safe and reliable supply of gas, for the first time. 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.

4.2 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.

4.3 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. The themes of financial hardship and mental health which are addressed through this project, align to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy.

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

- Energy saving for vulnerable customers
- CO awareness sessions to vulnerable customers
- Referrals to the Priority Services Register
- Improved health from more balanced diet

5.2 Success criteria

- 6,000 customers minimum being supported by Age UK North Tyneside
- More than £1 million of unclaimed benefits awarded every year
- Reducing the need for customers to use primary and secondary care
- CO awareness sessions delivered to clients
- Direct PSR referrals

6. **Project Partners and third parties involved**

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

Age UK North Tyneside would deliver 100% of the help and support to customers.

They will refer into third parties such as CAB, GP's, local authority, where there is a need, and accept referrals from third parties to assist customers achieve their need. They also signpost to many organisations for a variety of reasons (home improvements, legal advice etc.)

7. **Potential for new learning**

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

Any learning will be shared with stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies

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.

December 2022 – 31st January 2025

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.

Geographical area of North Tyneside

Approved by

Eileen Brown
Customer Experience Director