

## Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

<b>Project title:</b>	AGE UK North Tyneside extension-Information and advice role
<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>	Updated-Extension to original project
<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:lratliffe@northerngas.co.uk">lratliffe@northerngas.co.uk</a> 07928501779
<b>Total cost (£k):</b>	*detailed separately
<b>Total VCMA funding required (£k):</b>	*detailed separately

<b>Problem(s)</b>	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.
<b>Scope and Objectives</b>	<p>The original project working with AGE UK North Tyneside (AGE UK NT) was to make support available to all North Tyneside residents over the age of 50 who required help with income and the increased cost of living. This helps to address social isolation and loneliness through referrals into the wellbeing centres and social activity events.</p> <p>The original project was for 250 customers (minimum) per month, where they have guided conversations to establish needs and offer help and support to get customers over the poverty line, live healthy lives, in a safe and warm home. share knowledge and better ways of living, to reduce costs and be more energy efficient. Customers trust AGE UK NT, 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.</p> <p>The extension will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide access to information to 3,000 residents</li> <li>• Provide outreach on a monthly basis in a minimum of 3 locations</li> <li>• Directly support at least 600 customers over the remaining 14 months of the project</li> <li>• Provide over £1m in unclaimed benefits</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide CO &amp; PSR information to 3k residents</li> <li>• Directly refer 50 residents to the PSR</li> <li>• Signpost where most appropriate to partner organisations for additional customer support</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 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>This project aims to support our Centres for Warmth in assisting their communities with immediate crisis support, to deal with the significant impacts of 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><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>• Accessibility, including language</li> <li>• Socio-demographic</li> <li>• Cultural</li> <li>• Mental Wellbeing themes</li> <li>• Has defined outcomes as required</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms</p>
<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> </ul>

- No qualifications
- Long term health problem / disability

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.

Through research carried out in 2023, 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

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

	<p>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. This project will help keep customers living with cancer warm and well in their own homes.</p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG)</b>  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><b>Vulnerability Strategy (Updated Spring 2024)</b>  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"> <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>
<p><b>Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria</b></p>	<p>Due to additional pressures facing older people which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fuel cap rise</li> <li>• Cost of living crisis</li> <li>• Change in Government policy relating to Winter Fuel eligibility criteria</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate crisis issues impacting weather events</li> <li>• Continued social isolation issues</li> <li>• Digital poverty &amp; exclusion</li> </ul> <p>AGE UK NT will continue to support a high number of older people who are struggling due to increased pressures on their household income.</p> <p>Their recent consultation exercise with 3k older residents confirmed that they continue to struggle to navigate the information and support available to them in an increasingly digitised environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide access to information to 3k residents</li> <li>• Provide outreach on a monthly basis in a minimum of 3 locations</li> <li>• Directly support at least 600 customers over the remaining 14 months of the project</li> <li>• Provide over £1m in unclaimed benefits</li> <li>• Provide CO &amp; PSR information to 3k residents</li> <li>• Directly refer 50 residents to the PSR</li> <li>• Signpost where most appropriate to partner organisations for additional customer support</li> </ul>
<b>Project Partners and third parties involved</b>	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.)
<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> £17.49 <b>NPV:</b> £
<b>VCMA Project start and end date</b>	Feb 2025-March 2026
<b>Geographical area</b>	North Tyneside
<b>Internal governance and project management evidence</b>	VCMA Governance Group Meeting: Outcome of meeting: Approved
<b>Approved by: Job Title:</b>	Eileen Brown Customer Experience Director
<b>Signature:</b>	