

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Project title:	Yorkshire Energy Doctor CIC – Warm Homes Healthy People – East Riding
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	June 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>Fuel poverty</p> <p>15.2% of households in East Riding of Yorkshire are in fuel poverty but, in certain parts of the district, these levels are much higher - 46% of households in parts of Bridlington are fuel poor, 40% in Holderness and 37% in Goole. These figures reflect significant numbers of people who are struggling to heat their homes and pay their energy bills, both of which bring adverse impacts for physical health and mental well-being.</p> <p>Access to energy advice</p> <p>In comparison to North and West Yorkshire, East Riding of Yorkshire is not well-served by organisations who provide specialist energy advice, and uptake of our Energy Ambassadors training in the area has been low. This poses the risk that fuel poor households are not having access to support to make homes warmer and energy bills more affordable, a vital service considering the following challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy debt being at a record high (Citizens Advice) • Absence of cost-of-living payments for 2024/25 and the government stopping the Winter Fuel Payment for the majority of pensioners
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- Ongoing concerns around paying energy bills
- Nearly 1 million electricity prepayment customers 'self-disconnecting' every quarter due to a lack of funds to top-up their meter (Ofgem)
- Ongoing problems with 3.5 million smart meters not working, leading to estimated energy use and often shock 'catch-up' bills to deal with
- 'No standing charge' tariffs being introduced next winter by Ofgem – these are likely to be welcomed by many but won't be cheaper for everyone
- The Radio Teleswitch service being switched off in June – this will impact customers with meters that switch between peak and off-peak energy use.

Access to good quality energy advice is therefore essential at this time and this project will fill the current gap in provision in East Riding.

Increased vulnerability of older people

There is also a need to target specific support towards older people in East Riding in light of the following:

- a. Loss of the Winter Fuel Payment which is increasing the risk of cold homes amongst pensioners
- b. Research from Independent Age where 67% of older people said they will turn heating on less than they would like this winter and nearly one-quarter suggested they would not turn it on at all after changes to Winter Fuel Payment
- c. There is a high proportion of older residents in East Riding – 26.4% of residents are over 65 compared to 18.6% across England and Wales (2021 Census)
- d. The area is very rural - half of the population in East Riding live in rural areas, which brings extra challenges in terms of access to information and connection to local services
- e. Age UK Hull cover East Riding but they cannot currently offer home visits in East Riding due to capacity issues, limiting the capacity for older people to get the support they need if they find it difficult to access phone advice
- f. One in three of people over 75 do not use the internet (Age UK), making it harder to find information that can help and/or presenting barriers to completing forms for possible financial support

	<p>The Solution:</p> <p>Yorkshire Energy Doctor CIC will work with local partners in East Riding of Yorkshire to deliver a package of energy support into the area, including providing 1-2-1 advice, energy outreach sessions, awareness-raising and training for frontline organisations, and awareness campaigns via social media. This will be offered to all vulnerable groups but will include a specific focus on reaching over 65s.</p> <p>The Selby District of North Yorkshire (where we are based) borders East Riding so it is practical to extend our service geographically. We have had very positive preliminary conversations with two key local infrastructure support organisations (Community Vision and the HEY SMILE Foundation), as well as East Riding of Yorkshire Council’s Financial Inclusion lead, all of whom are willing to support and work with them if they can secure initial resources to expand into their area.</p>
<p>Scope and Objectives</p>	<p>The overall aim of this project is to engage with households in the East Riding area to help tackle fuel poverty and, by doing so, make energy bills more affordable, reduce stress and anxiety, and make homes warmer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver energy outreach events at community venues (linking in with groups for older people, digital literacy projects, food banks etc). • Provide 1-2-1 support to households through a combination of remote advice and home visits, including in-depth case work where needed. This can be accessed on referral from another agency, through an outreach session, or self-referral following promotional activity. • Conduct Warm and Well assessments for over 65s by working with partners such as Primary Care Networks to proactively send communications to over 65s with health conditions, offering advice around energy bills, grants for insulation, fire service referrals, CO awareness, PSR sign-ups and benefits checks. • Provide training sessions to staff members and volunteers from local voluntary and public sector organisations, equipping them to identify those in fuel poverty, to know how to help and how to make a referral. • Raise awareness of the project and provide advice around energy, the PSR and CO through social media and circulating information in parish newsletters.

Through the above activities, they will provide advice and support to households around:

- *Tackling fuel poverty and energy affordability* – this will include advice around understanding energy bills, switching to cheaper tariffs, challenging billing problems, advocacy with energy suppliers, managing energy debt, accessing energy efficiency grants, providing energy saving tips, referrals for emergency prepayment vouchers (via Fuel Bank Foundation), and reducing water bills. They will also make onward referrals for advice around income maximisation and wider debt advice where appropriate.
- *Priority Services Register* – raising awareness both directly to households and via organisations who support vulnerable residents.
- *Carbon monoxide awareness* – raise awareness of the risks of carbon monoxide, symptoms, sources and ways to stay safe.

Although they will be taking different approaches to reach vulnerable households, a significant proportion of the resources will go towards providing 1-2-1 support. This is vital as a) there is more complexity in dealing with issues at the current time and b) they are targeting older people, many of whom may need more hands-on support. Despite this being more resource-intensive, it ultimately generates more concrete action and therefore has a much bigger impact.

As noted above, they will be targeting their activities in East Riding, an area where there is not currently a specialist energy advice agency, where there are pockets of very high levels of fuel poverty, and where the population has an above average proportion of pensioners.

They will target the reach of the project activities according to:

- a. Geographical location – they will use their interactive fuel poverty map (see right) to target their outreach sessions in areas with the highest levels of fuel poverty.
- b. Individual need - take referrals for 1-2-1 advice from other frontline agencies for vulnerable households from anywhere across East Riding where staff have identified an energy-related issue.
- c. Socio-demographic need - a targeted approach by offering warm and well assessments for over 65s (ideally looking to work with a local PCN(s))

	<p>and/or other agencies who support older residents), as well as identifying groups of older people for outreach sessions.</p> <p>As they will be working with a range of other partner organisations, they will reach fuel poor households with different vulnerabilities, including pensioners, people with physical and mental health conditions, families with young children, the unemployed, young people, carers, residents where English is not the first language, and those with poor literacy and numeracy.</p>
<p>Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA</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>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 <p>Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms</p>
<p>Evidence of stakeholder or customer support</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"> • Fuel poverty • Benefit claims • 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

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

	<p>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>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> <p>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 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
<p>Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria</p>	<p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved knowledge around how to manage and reduce energy bills • Increased plans in place to deal with energy debt • Energy savings • Financial savings generated on energy and water bills • Reduced stress and anxiety around energy bills • Increased awareness of carbon monoxide • Vulnerable customers signed-up to the PSR

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to other services to stay safe, warm and well <p>Actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide 1-2-1 tailored support to 100 households • Reach 250 residents with energy advice through outreach sessions in the community • Conduct 175 Warm and Well assessments for over 65s • Make onward referrals for 40 households to other local services (e.g. food banks, fire service, benefits checks, debt advice) • Provide training to 100 staff members or volunteers from local voluntary and public sector organisations • Generate a minimum £25k of financial savings to households • 300 individuals engaged with awareness raising content through social media • Sign-up 100 households to the PSR • Raise awareness of CO to 150 households <p>Success criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success will be having reduced anxiety around energy costs and enabling residents to be better able to heat their homes, alongside having: • Delivered against all actions listed above • Collected quantitative data to be able to evidence impact against all the other outcomes listed above • Collated qualitative feedback from a proportion of beneficiaries regarding the impact the support has had • Developed strong partnerships in a new geographical area which will lead to the development of further projects and additional continuation funding • A new staff member who we can retain after the end of the 12 months
<p>Project Partners and third parties involved</p>	<p>They have already established links with the following organisations in East Riding:</p> <p><i>Community Vision:</i> Local infrastructure support organisation for East Riding and North Lincolnshire - will generate and circulate social media content to promote the project and raise awareness of the PSR and CO</p> <p><i>East Riding Food Poverty Alliance:</i> Partnership of food charities, voluntary and community sector organisations tackling food poverty - referral partner and opportunity for regular outreach at food banks</p> <p><i>HEY SMILE Foundation:</i> Local infrastructure organisation, supporting and empowering local charities. Coordinate the East Riding VCSE network so will</p>

	<p>provide networking and partnership building opportunities, including through regular monthly partnership meetings</p> <p><i>East Riding Council's Programme Manager:</i> Coordinates Financial Inclusion Working Group, providing partnership working opportunities through quarterly meetings</p> <p><i>Home Start Goole:</i> Provide practical and emotional advice to families who are having difficulties managing parenting for a variety of reasons - referral partner and link to reach vulnerable households</p> <p><i>Refugee Council:</i> Support refugees with crisis advice and practical support to settle and integrate into their new community - referral partner and opportunity for regular outreach at drop-in events</p> <p>We also have connections with two PCNs through our Energy Ambassadors network so will look at opportunities to work further through those.</p> <p>We expect to identify more possible partners and referral routes through attending local partnership meetings.</p>
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: £1.82</p> <p>NPV: £96,371.15</p>
VCMA Project start and end date	March 2025 - 31 st March 2026
Geographical area	Area covered by East Riding of Yorkshire Council (Unitary Authority). This encompasses the county of East Riding of Yorkshire, excluding Hull.
Internal governance and project management evidence	<p>VCMA Governance Group Meeting: 25 February 2025</p> <p>Outcome of meeting: Approved</p>
Approved by: Job Title:	<p>Eileen Brown</p> <p>Customer Experience Director</p>
Signature:	