

## Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

<b>Project title:</b>	New Wortley – Centre for Warmth
<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>	New
<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>	*detailed separately
<b>Total VCMA funding required (£k):</b>	*detailed separately

<b>Problem(s)</b>	<p>New Wortley Community Association provides services and support that promotes the well-being of local people (living in New Wortley &amp; Armley) aiming to improve their health, education, social and recreational opportunities.</p> <p>New Wortley (and neighbourhoods of Armley) is in the top 1% deprivation areas in the country and is one of six priority neighbourhoods identified by Leeds City Council. Local people face multiple, compounding health inequalities. There is a prevalence of low-income households, inter-generational unemployment and a culture of low aspirations and low self-esteem. Current life expectancy is well below the city and national average and New Wortley has one of the highest suicide rates nationally.</p> <p>Pressing current issues in New Wortley and Armley are those linked to poor mental and physical health, effects of costs of living, anti-social behaviour and substance reliance and misuse. Child poverty, poor educational achievement and SEN diagnosis and simply getting children to school. Along with an increase in financial hardship for many, poor housing stock/repairs, increase in energy bills, Council tax, feeding the family, all which have a dramatic effect on both physical and mental health. There are also a high number of people in the area reliant upon loan sharks, friends, acquaintances who have no way of paying these loans back.</p> <p>Over the past 4 years and since becoming an emergency care hub during the covid 19 pandemic, New Wortley Community association and its centre underwent many changes. New services provisions were developed to assist with food poverty, access to medication and GP appointments, support around mental health and</p>
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social inclusion, community action activity packs to help families and children at home, hot meal delivery and a service that meant staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to assist those most marginalised and vulnerable on getting the right food, fuel and benefit support.

Since then the provisions and services have stayed with a growing need for food resource and access to low cost affordable healthy food and meals. The hardship support fund originally helped to identify those most in need of fuel top ups and access to funds to help with the rising costs experienced today.

The centre is now seeing an increasing number of families children and individuals who are isolated, struggling to cope due to financial deprivation, a high number with neuro-diverse needs, Aspergers and autism and also differing groups and ethnicity requirements, including language and communication barriers to deal with.

### **The Solution**

- Improved general Health and Wellbeing of centre users
- To provide help and support around CO awareness and advice
- Ensure increased income through benefit maximisation
- Create social connects and peer to peer support through activities and workshops
- To reduce fuel poverty
- Improved access to cost effective transport
- To increase awareness and registrations of PSR
- To develop a community network and information leaflet
- To encourage communities to “look after each other”.

By Providing a Centre of Warmth at New Wortley Community Centre they would offer the best possible support and access to existing and developing new services and activities to get individuals, families and children to the right intervention. Depending upon circumstances, educate people in a world of uncertainty around what is available for them without prejudice or discrimination and a huge divide between those with more disposable income and those who have not. The Centre for Warmth will be promoted and created into a safe space for those in need and unsure of where to go. The Community energy Ambassadors and staff leading the project will provide the correct personalised pathway of support for each person, family or child to ensure they know what is available and their entitlement.

The centre for warmth will house other partners and service providers every week by having an Information Café for anyone to access one day per week. It will also provide free hot food support for those in need, cooking sessions & workshops, referrals to their membership program and food Pantry (subsidised prices and free items) including Hygiene packs, hot water bottles, clothing, fuel vouchers, CO awareness and advice, monoxide detectors and goodies and information packs of all the local services, reporting numbers, housing support etc.

	<p>Ethnic minority groups and diverse communities will be able to access material in different language/formats, working with public health on all of the above with 1:2:1 support where needed.</p> <p>The Centre for Warmth concept was developed to ensure a holistic approach to supporting fuel poor households within a community setting. A Centre for Warmth Strategy has been developed and approved by our independent Governance Panel on 30th July 2024.</p> <p>Centre users will receive a combination of services such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• energy advice</li> <li>• CO awareness and advice</li> <li>• income maximisation through benefit entitlement checks and managing debt</li> <li>• free or reduced cost food/clothing</li> <li>• fuel top up vouchers</li> <li>• connections to other NGN funded partner information/assistance</li> </ul> <p>Plus training, information, advice and services bespoke to their individual neighbourhoods. All provided in a warm safe space designed to improve health and wellbeing, increase household income, and help communities better manage their energy.</p>
<p><b>Scope and Objectives</b></p>	<p>The project seeks to deliver immediate, tangible benefits to vulnerable residents by addressing fuel poverty, carbon monoxide (CO) safety, and income maximisation.</p> <p><b>The objectives of this initiative are:</b> New Wortley Community CENTRE FOR WARMTH project aims to use their existing centre, partners, services and develop new services and ideas to create a support hub for local people and families. The new services will focus on providing energy advice, CO awareness along with crisis support for those in need of food support, fuel support, clothing, advice and guidance.</p> <p>We will utilise our existing services, resources and networks to increase knowledge and education for those who are most vulnerable or in need of 1:2:1 Guidance and support, skilling up the existing staff and volunteers (new and old) to assist in what is a concerning time for many.</p> <p>The centre for warmth will run alongside &amp; interlink with our new HOPE (Help with opportunities to prepare for employment) project which also aims to skill those furthest from the job market or who are struggling with online and digital skills and how to keep up with current technology and changing times.</p> <p>Additional support and services will be run as part of the CENTRE FOR WARMTH in order to help those with language barriers, additional learning needs or who are part of the older generation who need more support and understanding when it comes to learning how things work.</p>

The objectives of this initiative are as follows:-

- To provide a safe community setting for anyone to access
- To reduce fuel poverty
- To provide training and skills for those supporting others (inc Staff, Volunteers and local partners)
- To Improve general Health & Wellbeing of centre users
- To provide CO awareness and advice
- To Increase awareness and registration of the PSR
- To increase income through maximisation of benefits and debt management
- To improve and make accessible Digital inclusion for all

## 2.2 The Scope

- Train all staff to deliver advice around CO awareness and energy advice
- Link with housing officers, CAB, Credit Union, Money Buddies, Armley Hub (LCC staff) to offer help and advice around income maximisation through benefits & employment
- Work with local schools, churches, organisations, charities, social workers and family support teams to identify those most vulnerable and in need of support and refer to our services
- To deliver 2 weekly breakfast clubs providing a drop in space for those to find out more surrounding safety and energy efficiency, CO awareness, debt management.
- Interlink with our Information café providing a space where lots of organisations and partners come and give advice and support on the cost of living
- Supporting diverse communities through 1:2:1 appointments and workshops around energy efficiency, paying bills and setting up direct debits and means of payment (especially those with language barriers)
- Deliver a series of 'LEARN TOGETHER' cooking sessions to assist with cooking on a budget and offering incentives such as slow cookers, air fryers and creative ways of eating together for those who live alone
- Improve inclusion and isolation of local people and those most vulnerable by inviting them to the above sessions and ways to access food support
- Run 3 focus groups around the cost of living and offer fuel vouchers as an incentive
- Run age appropriate workshops on money advice and guidance for Young people & Cooking on a budget for your family
- Train a team of 6 Volunteer Community Energy Ambassadors for our organisation
- Train a further 6 staff as Community Energy Ambassadors to share information and knowledge across all networks
- Run a Community Event each quarter and a Launch event (inviting Abigail Marshall-Katung to open the Centre of Warmth ( Councillor & Lord Mayor of Leeds)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide 200 monoxide alarms and education for local people</li> <li>• Provide a hardship fund for people and families who are really struggling and in need of support</li> <li>• 150 people registered on PSR</li> <li>• 100 assisted with debt advice</li> <li>• 30 people helped into volunteering, placement or employment</li> <li>• 200 people increased knowledge/awareness of CO</li> <li>• 20 young people educated around money management and setting a budget</li> <li>• 150 helped out of isolation and social inclusion</li> <li>• 100 people engaged through cooking sessions and zero waste</li> <li>• 100 people introduced to food &amp; clothing support</li> <li>• Provide a safe space for people to access help, support and information from health and wellbeing services to groups, activities and welfare support for all</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>NGN's Centre for Warmth approach affords an opportunity for partners to pay, retain and upskill centre staff and volunteers to expand on their current service provision. The aim of which is to empower them to provide the above range of services. Therefore, being able to help their communities with immediate crisis support, to deal with the significant impacts of food and 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> </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>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</p>

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.

### **Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops**

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.

The topics of the workshops are listed below:

- Spending allowances well - Health focus, Energy affordability – 12th September 2023
- Energy affordability – staying warm and healthy at home – 21st November 2023
- Meeting demand – capacity and resilience – 6th February 2024
- Annual Strategic Workshop – April 24

Stakeholder engagement throughout 2023 and 2024 told us that financial hardship, fuel poverty and health were the key areas of focus. In particular directing people towards good quality energy efficiency and fuel poverty advice. With regards to the concern about health this was specifically the link between living in a cold, damp home and the impact on health. 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 that additional capacity to support households who may be at risk, through a well-established and trusted advice service. This project will also ensure a holistic structured approach, tackling an immediate need to support fuel poor households and 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.

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 (Spring 2023), indicated that keeping bills as low as possible ranked more highly, than providing a safe and reliable supply of gas. 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. Customers were also asked to prioritise the list of vulnerabilities listed below:

- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability
- Physical challenges
- Financial Hardship

This was the order of priority from the customers surveyed:

- Financial Hardship
- Physical challenges
- Mental wellbeing
- Rurality
- Temporary vulnerability

Financial hardship continued to be the dimension of vulnerability that most customers prioritised, with more customers in the most recent survey selecting this as their top priority. Physical challenges were second, closely followed by Mental well-being third. Rurality and Temporary vulnerability were ranked fourth and fifth.

Very recent (Autumn 2023) Bespoke Vulnerability Stakeholder Mapping research identified categories of stakeholders that are hard to reach, this included:

- People living with a disability
- Senior citizens with long term conditions
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Mental health

Health conditions which are prevalent in the NGN region are:

- Cancer and chronic kidney disease
- Musculoskeletal conditions
- Respiratory
- Mental health

Through the research carried out, 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

#### **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

	<p>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>By delivering these outcomes, the Centre for Warmth project at New Wortley will address both immediate needs (such as food security and warmth) and long-term support through education, social engagement, and resource access. This will contribute to building a stronger, more resilient community.</p> <p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More local people engaging in the centre for support</li> <li>• Increased awareness of CO advice</li> <li>• Maximise household incomes through benefit entitlement and employment</li> <li>• Access to Free or reduced cost clothing, food &amp; Fuel support</li> <li>• Educative sessions around food and healthy lifestyles (cooking on a budget)</li> <li>• Build Community support and resilience in response to the cost of living</li> </ul> <p><b>Success Criteria</b></p>

Number of total beneficiaries = 1000 (broken down as)	1000	150	200	250	50	30	12
Raising awareness of the PSR	✓						
PSR Registrations		✓					
Energy efficiency awareness				✓			
Energy efficiency advice		✓					
CO enhanced awareness				✓			
carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	✓						
Provide CO advice			✓				
Offer income maximisation advice			✓				
Cooking workshops					✓		
Community ambassadors							✓
Money Advice and guidance (young people)						✓	
Community breakfast club		✓					

**Project Partners and third parties involved**

We are excited to work with the following partners to establish a Centre for Warmth at our Community centre in New Wortley for referrals, promotion & service delivery

Northern Gas – funding information, help and advice, initiatives training support packages

Armley Helping Hands – a flagship neighbourhood network for older people.

Armley Action Team – a newly formed CIC who have moved into new premises on Gelder Road, just off Armley Town Street. The CIC is run by local people and has strong local connections. The premises will also be able to refer and signpost and act as an “information hub” for the wider Armley Area.

Leeds City Council – housing, employment and skills, benefits agency, communities team

Money buddies – finance and budget support

CAB – help and support drop in

Forward leads – help and support surrounding alcohol & substance mis-use

Foodsavers – organisation that links foodbanks with the credit union we are becoming a member from January 2025. £1 per week signed up will be banked for each member from Pantry membership payment and targeting those who want to move out of Food poverty.

Armley Community anchor network – 7 partners, Dixons Unity Academy, Christ Church Armley , Armley Action team Armley Helping Hands, Interplay theatre, Climate Action Armley, West Leeds Amateur RL football club, Leeds City Mission

Local GP surgeries, Priory View Medical centre, Thornton Medical Centre and Armley Moor medical practice

Local primary schools & parents and carers – Castleton Primary school, St Barts C of E, Holy family Primary school, Christ Church C of E Armley.

Public Health England

Voluntary Action Leeds, Forum Central – Third Sector infrastructure organisations

<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> £3.41 <b>NPV:</b> £602,442.73
<b>VCMA Project start and end date</b>	January 2025-December 2025
<b>Geographical area</b>	Armley and New Wortley
<b>Internal governance and project management evidence</b>	VCMA Governance Group Meeting: N/A Outcome of meeting: Our Centre For Warmth Strategy was approved at Governance in July 2024. A Centre for Warmth Co-ordinator has been appointed to manage these projects.
<b>Approved by:</b> <b>Job Title:</b>	Eileen Brown Customer Experience Director
<b>Signature:</b>	