

## Citizens Advice Sheffield - BSL

<b>Funding GDN(s)</b>	<b>Northern Gas Networks</b>
<b>For Collaborative VCMA Projects:</b>	Role of GDN(s) N/A
<b>Date of PEA submission:</b>	August 2024
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<b>Total cost (£k)</b>	*detailed separately
<b>Total VCMA funding required (£k)</b>	*detailed separately

## 1. Problem(s)

There are over 87,000 deaf people in the country yet only 2000 British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters. A recent research project, funded by the National Lottery with the Deaf community, found that Deaf clients preferred advice from a trained advice worker who was fluent in BSL rather than using an interpreter.

Clients who are profoundly deaf or hearing-impaired struggle to access services, including free independent Legal Advice. They face significant barriers to communication, leading to social isolation, limited employment opportunities and reduced access to essential services. These barriers can include a lack of access to sign language interpreters, limited captioning in videos and online content and a general lack of awareness of the communication needs of Deaf individuals.

## Solution

It was clear from speaking to the other partners that there was a lack of provision for deaf clients across the partnership. Sheffield Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) decided to work with Leeds CAB to set up a service in BSL for the deaf community there.

Deaf people are often overlooked despite requiring in-depth attention to their specific communication needs. Sheffield CAB has worked with the Sheffield Deaf community for over 30 years. Originally set up by a group of Deaf people, they now employ 4 profoundly Deaf advisers and 3 hearing advisers who use British Sign Language. Providing advice on a wide range of issues, including:

- Energy Advice
- Income Maximisation
- Debt
- Housing
- Employment
- Immigration

If a client requires a specialist service they will ensure a seamless referral to the appropriate team, fully supported by the BSL Adviser.

The project will expand the BSL advice to Cumbria, which in terms of legal advice specifically in BSL, is very limited.

Sheffield CAB will provide advice to profoundly deaf and hard of hearing clients who are in fuel poverty or at risk of fuel poverty, 3 advisers will be deployed to the project.

Sheffield CAB will provide energy advice including advice on Carbon Monoxide, energy saving advice and fuel poverty advice to deaf/hard of hearing clients. Such advice will be provided by advisers who are profoundly deaf themselves or use BSL.

If a deaf/hard of hearing customer of Sheffield CAB requires specialist advice in any area of law including, Employment and Immigration Law, a seamless referral will be made and the BSL adviser will facilitate the meeting and support the client through the advice process. This will be actively monitored by Sheffield CAB to ensure there is capacity and will work with the CABs in Cumbria should the demand for the service increase. Sheffield CAB will produce videos on the dangers of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning in BSL and share on social media platforms. They will Promote/secure carbon monoxide detectors for deaf clients, being mindful that hearing family members will also need to be catered for.

## **2. Scope and Objectives**

### **2.1 The objectives of this initiative are:**

To provide deaf or hard of hearing clients in Cumbria with accessible advice in BSL that enables and empowers them to address energy issues and other advice issues identified during the course of a holistic assessment of their advice needs.

### **2.2 Scope**

Based on official statistics there are 87,000 people who are deaf in the UK, deafness is the third most common disability in the world, most deaf people don't class their deafness as a disability or as a problem to be fixed. Most deaf people use BSL.

BSL isn't simply English with hand signs, it is a different language with its own grammar and sentence construction.

Even the best lip readers only catch half of the words that are said. Deaf people struggle to access services on a daily basis, poorer access to health services, lack of sign language interpreters and a general lack of awareness of the communication needs of Deaf individuals.

Sheffield CAB has run an exemplar deaf advice service in Sheffield for over 30 years.

The service will be provided to deaf/BSL users in Cumbria who have an energy-related advice need. Advice will not be limited to energy as a holistic assessment of needs will be undertaken and clients will be advised or signposted appropriately to ensure all their issues are addressed.

## **3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA**

This project qualifies under the criteria for VCMA funding, as it will support vulnerable, deaf/hard of hearing customers who are living with, addressing 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.

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 and the wider vulnerability categories of:
  - Financial hardship
  - Socio-demographic
  - Cultural
  - Temporary vulnerability
  - Mental Wellbeing themes
  - Medically Dependent on Energy
- Has defined outcomes as required
- Goes beyond NGN's licence obligations and price control funded mechanisms

## 4. Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

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

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.

Stakeholder engagement throughout 2022, 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:

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

Our most recent 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.

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 (March 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

#### **4.2 Customer Engagement Group (CEG)**

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support our 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 customers in vulnerable situations 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 rural and financial vulnerability within the project, align to NGN's Vulnerability Strategy.

### **5. Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria**

Utilising their existing framework, they will meticulously monitor the progress and outcomes achieved for each household supported. This rigorous tracking methodology allows them to tangibly demonstrate that the interventions and support have brought about meaningful change in the lives of local people.

Their framework enables them to analyse and evaluate the impact of support on the behaviours of the households. They aim to educate them on the use and benefits of mains gas, change their energy consumption habits, encouraging them to adopt more sustainable practices and reduce their carbon footprint. By monitoring changes in energy usage patterns and surveying the households, they can measure the success of their efforts in influencing their behaviours.

## 5.1 Outcomes

- 322 profoundly deaf or hard of hearing clients will receive energy advice, including income maximisation and referral to other specialist services should this be required.
- 10 workshops per year will be delivered to promote the PSR, enable sign up and raise awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide poisoning.

## 5.2 Success criteria

The Deaf community will have access to energy advice, income maximisation in BSL, bespoke referral pathways developed for other areas of advice, working closely with Leeds CAB and the local Deaf club. Sheffield CAB has now trained Leeds staff on deaf awareness, have completed a video in BSL to inform the clients what to expect at an appointment and set up a Community Access Point, where the deaf clients can press the screen and instantly speak to an adviser in BSL. Bespoke appointments will also be offered for follow on work.

400 - Raising awareness of the PSR through targeted marketing and face to face sessions for the Deaf community

100 - PSR Registrations on a face-to-face basis using BSL

400 - Raising awareness of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning via BSL videos and social media

270 - Energy Advice and Income Maximisation to deaf/hard of hearing customers and bespoke referrals to other areas of Law

## 6. Project Partners and third parties involved

Citizens Advice in:

Carlisle and Eden

Allerdale

Leeds

Bradford & Airedale

North Yorkshire

Newcastle

Northumberland

Stockton

Middlesbrough

County Durham

Hull & East Riding

## **7. Potential for new learning**

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

## **8. Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations**

This project has a positive SROI return.

### **VCMA Project start and end date**

September 2024-March 2026

### **Geographic area**

Leeds

Bradford

Copeland (borough of Copeland)

South Lakes (offices Kendal and Ulverston)

Allerdale

Barrow

Carlisle and Eden (main offices Carlisle and Penrith)

### **Approved by**

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