

Start date: April 2026

PEA reference: FP-Collab-022a

Reach Out



Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)



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Project registration table

Project summary							
Project title	Reach Out						
Strategic area	Fuel Poverty & Energy Affordability						
Lead partner name	Severn Wye Energy Agency						
Lead GDN(s)	Wales & West Utilities (WWU)						
Funding GDN(s)	WWU, SGN						
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New						
Collaborative VCMA Projects Specific role(s) of GDN(s) participating in a collaborative VCMA Project	WWU – Lead SGN – Delivery only						
Date of PEA submission	April 2026						
Project start and end date	April 2026 – March 2028						
Project location	England (Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire)						
Project contact							
Name	Sophie Stone						
Contact details	Sophie.Stone@wwutilities.co.uk						
Project partners and third parties involved							
Organisation name	Role						
Severn Wye	Delivery of core funded service						
Costs and funding							
Total cost (£k)	£716,925.83						
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	Total funding = £716,925.83 <table> <tr> <td>GDN</td> <td>Funding</td> </tr> <tr> <td>WWU</td> <td>£666,985.83</td> </tr> <tr> <td>SGN</td> <td>£49,940.00</td> </tr> </table>	GDN	Funding	WWU	£666,985.83	SGN	£49,940.00
GDN	Funding						
WWU	£666,985.83						
SGN	£49,940.00						
Total BAU vulnerability and CO safety activity baseline allowance funding by activity (£k)	PEA may be updated at the time of providing items such as CO alarms/Warms Packs						

Problem(s)

This section needs to outline the problem(s) which is/are being addressed by the VCMA project.

Across Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, people from minority and marginalised communities face disproportionate barriers to accessing safe, affordable energy support. These barriers extend well beyond income and are rooted in structural, cultural and systemic inequality.

Households from refugee, asylum-seeking, migrant, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities experience fuel poverty in distinct ways. Language barriers, insecure and temporary housing, limited familiarity with the UK energy market, digital exclusion and distrust of statutory services all compound the risk of energy vulnerability. For many, these factors intersect, significantly reducing their ability to seek help through mainstream advice routes.

Patterns of migration and dispersal have led to growing refugee and asylum-seeking populations across the south west of England. Newly arrived households are frequently placed into temporary or private rented accommodation, often with poor energy efficiency and little control over heating systems. Many have limited understanding of energy meters, billing cycles, tariffs or consumer rights. Without accessible, culturally competent, face-to-face support, these households are at heightened risk of energy debt, self-disconnection and unsafe heating practices.

Severn Wye Energy Agency's GD2 Reach Out delivery demonstrated that unmet need within minority communities was substantially greater than initially anticipated. Through trusted partnerships and a community-based presence, the programme identified hidden vulnerability among households who would not engage with mainstream advice services due to language obstacles, fear of authority, trauma histories or previous negative experiences of seeking help.

In Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire, significant unmet need persists among displaced families, migrant workers, minority ethnic older people and residents who are digitally excluded. In Oxfordshire, similar patterns are emerging, particularly in areas associated with dispersal accommodation and communities with limited interaction with statutory systems.

Energy affordability cannot be effectively addressed if advice and support services remain inaccessible to those most at risk. Without targeted, culturally competent outreach, minority households will continue to face avoidable energy crises, escalating debt, deteriorating health outcomes and exclusion from essential protections such as the Priority Services Register (PSR).

This proposal responds directly to these challenges, embedding trusted, accessible energy advocacy within communities that are currently underserved and at greatest risk of being overlooked.

Scope and objectives

Outline the scope and objectives of the VCMA project linked to the problem statement above. This 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.

This project will deliver targeted, community-based energy advocacy across Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, focusing on minority and marginalised households who experience structural barriers to accessing safe, affordable energy services on participating GDNs' networks.

The scope of the project is shaped by learning from GD2 Reach Out delivery, alongside demographic analysis and extensive stakeholder engagement. Evidence shows that communities including refugees, asylum

seekers, migrants, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller households are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty and energy vulnerability. Barriers such as limited English proficiency, digital exclusion, insecure or poor-quality housing, unfamiliarity with the UK energy system and mistrust of statutory services significantly reduce engagement with suppliers and mainstream advice channels.

In Oxfordshire, growing diversity driven by sustained refugee and asylum dispersal, alongside increased reliance on temporary and private rented accommodation, has created areas of concentrated unmet need. Similar patterns continue across Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire. Frontline organisations consistently report households who lack basic understanding of energy systems and are unable or unwilling to engage independently with suppliers, leading to heightened risk of energy debt, self-disconnection and unsafe heating practices, including increased carbon monoxide risk.

Delivery will be led by trained Community-Based Energy Advocates (CBEAs) embedded within trusted, non-statutory environments such as community hubs, ESOL provision, refugee support services, faith groups and minority-led organisations. This model ensures support is accessible, culturally competent and delivered face-to-face, enabling effective engagement with households who would otherwise remain hidden from traditional services.

Project objectives

- Reduce structural and cultural barriers preventing minority households from accessing energy advice, supplier engagement and consumer protections
- Improve understanding of the UK energy system, billing arrangements, tariffs and consumer rights through accessible, language-appropriate support
- Increase uptake of the Priority Services Register (PSR) among eligible minority and displaced households
- Prevent self-disconnection and reduce energy debt through holistic, case-managed advocacy
- Promote gas and carbon monoxide safety through trusted, culturally relevant engagement
- Strengthen community resilience by equipping minority-focused frontline organisations to identify and refer vulnerable customers

The project will deliver clear benefits to customers on participating GDN networks by improving safety, increasing engagement with protective mechanisms such as the PSR, and enabling earlier intervention to prevent avoidable harm. By addressing accessibility, trust and cultural barriers, GD3 Reach Out will reduce risk on the gas network, improve customer resilience and ensure that minority households are able to access energy support equitably and safely.

Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This should include an explanation of why the VCMA project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria, and how it aligns with the GDN's VCMA collaborative strategy.

This project meets this eligibility criteria, as the project aligns with the GDNs collaborative vulnerability strategy, in which we have a clear ambition to keep our communities safe and warm, and to support those most in need by helping vulnerable households not just today but as we invest in a green energy future.

This project aligns with the following shared objectives of our collaborative vulnerability strategy:

- Help more vulnerable households access energy safeguarding services

- Reach communities under-served and most in need of trusted intermediaries to take up support services

It has been co-designed with Severn Wye and been developed in line with the updated VCMI governance framework, embedding robust oversight, transparency and continuous improvement from the outset. The VCMA eligibility criteria have been met and are detailed within the table at the end of the PEA.

The GDNs' vulnerability strategy under the pillar 'supporting priority customer groups' underpins this approach, using data and insights to identify those customers who are both most in need and least likely to access help without tailored provision. By combining this evidence led targeting with trusted intermediaries and specialist, accessible services, the project is designed to reach people who would otherwise be excluded from essential support.

How VCMA funding complements or supplements BAU activities

Where the VCMA Project is being delivered alongside a BAU vulnerability and/or CO safety activity or activities funded through the GDN's baseline allowance, the GDN must provide sufficient evidence that the VCMA Project complements or supplements the BAU activity or activities to prevent the risk of double funding.

This project has been designed to supplement and enhance existing BAU vulnerability and CO safety activity, not to duplicate it.

Learning from GD2 Reach Out delivery and ongoing partner engagement demonstrates that minority and marginalised communities are significantly under-represented within BAU engagement routes. Structural barriers including language needs, digital exclusion, insecure housing and mistrust of statutory or utility services limit the effectiveness of existing approaches in reaching these households.

VCMA funding enables Severn Wye to deliver additional, targeted activity through a community-embedded energy advocacy model. Trained Community-Based Energy Advocates operate within trusted, non-statutory settings such as community hubs, ESOL provision, refugee support services, faith groups and minority-led organisations. These delivery environments and engagement methods sit outside BAU delivery but are essential for identifying hidden vulnerability and supporting customers who would not otherwise engage.

Where PSR promotion and CO safety feature within BAU activity, the Reach Out project adds value by removing access barriers rather than replicating provision. VCMA-funded advocates support understanding and uptake through culturally competent, face-to-face engagement, delivering messages in accessible languages and formats and supporting registration where appropriate. This approach increases the effectiveness of existing protections rather than duplicating them.

VCMA funding also enables a greater depth of intervention than is achievable through BAU activity, including extended case-work, supplier advocacy and sustained trust-building with communities experiencing complex vulnerability. These activities are time-intensive, specialist in nature and necessary to prevent escalation into energy debt, self-disconnection and unsafe heating practices, but fall outside baseline allowances.

In addition, the project strengthens BAU outcomes by improving identification of vulnerable customers upstream and establishing trusted referral pathways between community organisations and the GDNs, supporting earlier intervention and risk reduction on the gas network.

Clear role separation, defined delivery boundaries and outcome monitoring ensure that VCMA funding delivers demonstrable additionality while mitigating any risk of double funding.

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.

Severn Wye and the GDNs will carry out monthly reporting reviews on measurable outcomes against targets to ensure successful delivery. Quarterly reviews will provide the opportunity for more in-depth analysis and the ability to highlight insights and learnings to share, as well as identify any risks and requirement for any associated actions to mitigate these.

Key outcomes expected from this project:

Outcome	Overall Target	Target by network	
		SGN Target 5%	WWU Target 95%
Total Interactions	8,197	430	7,767
Outcomes by activity:			
CO Safety Information	2,639	138	2,501
PSR Awareness	3,111	162	2,949
Energy Efficiency Advice (Common Measures)	1,348	66	1,282
Energy Efficiency Advice (Behavioural)	1,969	102	1,867
Billing Support / Meter Readings	1,285	66	1,219
Energy Triage	3,573	178	3,395
Income Maximisation (Energy Funding)	426	22	404
Income Maximisation (Tariff Switching)	1,000	50	950
Energy Fund Provision – Fuel Vouchers	1,477	76	1,401
Front Line Worker Training	400	20	380

In Oxfordshire, delivery assumptions include a mobilisation period in the build-up to Year 1 (running between 1st October 2026 to 31st September 2027) to support partnership development, community mapping and integration of CBEAs prior to full delivery. This mobilisation phase is a defined project action and milestone, essential to ensuring successful outcomes and effective use of VCMA funding.

Success Criteria

- Support delivered through a mix of home visits, community drop-ins, group learning sessions and proactive outreach
- Engagement takes place within trusted community settings to maximise accessibility and comfort
- Approach builds on proven effectiveness from Phase 1 delivery and GD2 Reach Out learning
- Ensures advice is accessible, culturally appropriate and responsive to residents' daily realities
- Expansion into new areas informed by established operational learning to maintain quality, consistency and impact
- Delivery recognises the need for time to build local visibility and establish trusted relationships
- Emphasis on embedding delivery authentically within communities and partner networks
- Trust-based approach supports sustained engagement with households experiencing complex vulnerability

- Model designed to drive positive, long-term outcomes for residents through consistent and relationship-led support

Potential for new learning

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

Building on learning from GD2, their Oxfordshire activity will pilot a one-year delivery model focused on the densely populated communities within the City of Oxford. Previous engagement demonstrated that working effectively with minority communities requires sustained presence, cultural competence and time to build trust. Initial engagement may be gradual, but once relationships are established, participation and referrals increase significantly. To support this approach, a six-month mobilisation period is planned to enable local partnership building, mapping of community organisations, and recruitment of appropriate staff, whilst recruitment is ongoing the senior team will build an established referral pipeline ready for work to commence over the busiest Autumn/Winter months.

Recruitment practices developed through earlier phases will continue to prioritise strong interpersonal skills, lived understanding of communities, and relationship-building capacity alongside technical energy advice expertise. Staff will receive specialist training in safeguarding, trauma awareness and cultural competence to ensure that engagement is sensitive and inclusive.

The Oxford pilot will allow them to test a scalable model for engaging households who may experience language barriers, cultural barriers or distrust of statutory systems in a new locality. Learning from the pilot will inform future delivery models across other areas and contribute to cross-GDN coordination on best practice, it also allows them to explore the viability of sourcing other funding partners to allow the work to develop beyond the geographical boundary of the City of Oxford and then beyond 2027 and make this truly a collaborative utility project.

Organisationally, they have refined their delivery model to maximise cost-effectiveness while maintaining quality through reduction of management hours with the project managed by one director and a management report rather than straddling two directorates. Ongoing quality assurance, customer feedback and collaboration with partners across the energy advice and advocacy sector will ensure continuous improvement and shared learning across VCMA-funded projects.

Aligning with and supporting wider vulnerability approaches

Details of how the project supports or aligns with approaches to vulnerability taken by the wider energy industry, other utilities and/or consumer organisations; local, national or devolved governments; or evidence innovation or a gap in vulnerability support provision. For example, this could include evidence of collaboration beyond the VCMA, non-VCMA joint funding of the initiative, or identified gaps in the provision of vulnerability services which the project seeks to address. The GDN should show how the project fits within broader approaches to vulnerability.

This proposal aligns fully with Ofgem's VCMA Governance requirements by delivering targeted, proactive support to customers in vulnerable situations who are at risk of detriment, disengagement or safety harm. It reflects the core VCMA principles of delivering additionality, measurable social value, and collaborative working across utility networks and community infrastructure.

The project directly addresses a recognised gap within current vulnerability provision: minority and marginalised communities who experience systemic barriers to accessing mainstream energy advice and supplier-led support mechanisms. While supplier vulnerability strategies and PSR frameworks are well

established, evidence from their GD2 Reach Out delivery shows that many minority households remain underrepresented on the PSR and are less likely to proactively engage with energy providers. Barriers include limited English proficiency, low energy system literacy, digital exclusion, trauma-related distrust of authorities, insecure housing arrangements, and lack of awareness of consumer rights.

By embedding culturally competent, face-to-face advocacy within trusted community settings, this project operationalises inclusive vulnerability support in a way that complements, rather than duplicates, supplier and network protections. It ensures eligible customers are identified, supported to register for the Priority Services Register, and made aware of gas safety and carbon monoxide risks in formats that are accessible and culturally appropriate.

The proposal also aligns with wider energy industry commitments to improve inclusivity and equity within vulnerability identification, as well as cross-sector approaches linking fuel poverty, health inequality and financial resilience. Minority communities are disproportionately affected by cold-related illness, overcrowded housing, and insecure tenancy arrangements. By intervening early through trusted outreach, the project supports prevention of crisis presentations, reduces risk of self-disconnection, and contributes to improved health and wellbeing outcomes.

Furthermore, the project complements local authority equality and inclusion strategies, NHS health equity priorities, and voluntary sector integration programmes supporting refugee and migrant communities. It strengthens collaborative infrastructure across utility providers by enabling structured referral pathways between VCMA-funded projects, local advice services, and community-based organisations.

Through measurable increases in PSR registrations, improved energy literacy, reduction in energy debt, and enhanced carbon monoxide awareness, the project contributes directly to safer network operation and reduced risk exposure among vulnerable gas customers.

By embedding delivery within community ecosystems rather than expecting vulnerable customers to navigate complex systems independently, the project strengthens inclusive vulnerability frameworks across the energy sector and demonstrates best practice in equitable VCMA delivery.

Monitoring and evaluation

Details of how the GDNs will work with their project partners to monitor the impact of the VCMA project and evaluate its effectiveness and success.

Severn Wye and the GDNs will continue to review monthly reports on measurable outcomes, working collaboratively to ensure successful delivery. Each quarter, the core project team will meet to share performance insights, highlight and mitigate any underperformance, and provide structured updates on delivery, risks and emerging outcomes.

WWU as the lead GDN will work with Severn Wye to ensure that there is an evidence base through audit and research that seeks to understand how effective the project is at engaging people dealing with a cancer diagnosis improve the quality of life for vulnerable individuals and assess the before and after to better understand the impact of the services provided on the lived experience of beneficiaries. WWU will also ask Severn Wye to share testimonials and case studies from patients who benefit from the support of the project, where applicable.

The GDNs will report annually on partnership impact, sharing broadly via collaborative and company-specific reports to showcase outcomes and key learnings and inform future delivery. Additionally, the Vulnerability Working Group will provide performance updates to the National Delivery Group and National Steering Panel

(NSP) with all GDNs disseminating results through their business governance processes, including their respective Independent Steering Groups (ISG).

Scale of VCMA project and SROI calculations, including NPV

Justify the scale of the VCMA project – including the scale of the investment relative to its potential benefits. As part of this, the Funding Licensee(s) should provide the SROI calculation, including NPV. Note: The value in numbers of the SROI and NPV must be provided, rather than confirmation of positive impact.

Together with the other Gas Distribution Networks we worked with leading social impact research consultancy SIRIO Strategies on the development of the Industry Standard Social Value Framework and supporting GDN Rulebook. We have used that GDN Rulebook to carry out an assessment of financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable households included in this partnership.

We've incorporated social value based on the deliverables and associated targets detailed above. Carrying out an assessment of these predicted outcomes we forecast a positive net Social Return on Investment of £2.55 for every £1 spent.

Social value measurement

Total cost*	£707,408.78
Total gross present value	£2,508,775.29
Net Present Value (NPV)	£1,801,366.51
SROI	£2.55

*Accounting for inflationary factors over the term of the project.

Internal governance and project management evidence

Provide a description of GDN(s) review of proposal and project sign off, with details on how the project will be managed.

Project management for this partnership will be led by WWU on behalf of the participating GDNs, with clear governance arrangements in place to monitor delivery, performance and risk throughout the duration of the project. A structured contract framework will ensure that any material changes remain aligned with customer need and stakeholder expectations, safeguarding the effective and responsible use of VCMA funds.

WWU has worked closely with Severn Wye and the other GDNs to co-design this partnership so that its ambition directly contributes to the GDN's Collaborative Vulnerability Strategy, developed through the Vulnerability Working Group and overseen by the GDN VCMA Steering Group.

The PEA has been reviewed and approved through each network's internal governance processes and formally signed off by the relevant senior leaders.

GDN	Approver (Name and Role)	Date
WWU	Rob Long – Chief Operating Officer	17/06/26
SGN	Maureen McIntosh – Director of Customer Services	29/07/26

Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility Criteria	Description	Project qualifies Yes / No
Positive SROI	Have a positive, or a forecasted positive, Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculated in accordance with a model which the GDNs have developed and submitted to Ofgem including for the gas consumers funding the VCMA Project	Yes
Positive NPV	Have a positive, or a forecasted positive Net Present Value (NPV)	Yes
Support Criteria	Either: i. provide support to consumers in Vulnerable Situations and relate to Energy Safeguarding, or ii. provide support for those most at risk of being left behind in the transition to net zero, or iii. provide awareness of, and education on, the dangers of CO beyond the activities funded as business as usual (BAU) through baseline allowances, or iv. reduce the risk of harm caused by CO	Yes
Defined Outcomes	Have specific, measurable, and time-bound outcomes which align with relevant Consumer Vulnerability Strategy objectives to achieve the requirements set out in Support Criteria above	Yes
Beyond Other Funding	Go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanism(s), including baseline allowance funding, or required through licence obligations	Yes
Support or Align	Support or align with approaches to vulnerability taken by the wider energy industry, other utilities and/or consumer organisations, and local, national and devolved government, or evidence innovation or a gap in vulnerability support provision;	Yes
No Other External Funding	Not be delivered through other external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including through other government (national, devolved or local) funding	Yes
BAU vulnerability and CO safety activities	Where a GDN's BAU vulnerability and CO safety activities are funded through baseline allowances, these are not suitable for funding through the VCMA. The GDN is permitted to use VCMA funds to supplement or complement its BAU activities, however, it must ensure that its reporting provides sufficient evidence to prevent double funding.	N/A

Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance servicing

Eligibility Criteria	Description	Project qualifies Yes / No or N/A
Servicing must meet the following criteria:	Either: i. A GDN has had to isolate and condemn an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role; or ii. A GDN or its Project Partner has identified an essential gas appliance which has not been serviced in the last 12 months in the owner-occupied home of a customer in a Vulnerable Situation where an occupier of the property suffers from a permanent or temporary health condition¹² that makes them more vulnerable to health risks associated with cold homes; or iii. A GDN or its Project Partner has identified an essential gas appliance which has not been serviced in the last 12 months in a tenant-occupied home of a customer in a Vulnerable Situation where it is the tenant's responsibility to maintain the essential gas appliance, where an occupier of the property suffers from a permanent or temporary health condition that makes them more vulnerable to health risks associated with cold homes	N/A
Affordability	The household cannot afford to service the essential gas appliance, as assessed against the affordability criteria set out in the VCMA governance document	N/A
Funding	Sufficient funding is not available from other sources (including a social or private landlord and national, devolved, or local government funding) to fund the essential gas appliance servicing	N/A

Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance repair and replacement

Eligibility Criteria	Description	Project qualifies Yes / No or N/A
Unsafe pipework and essential gas appliance repair or replacement must meet the following criteria:	Either: i. GDN has had to isolate and condemn unsafe pipework or an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role; or ii. A GDN or its Project Partner has had to condemn unsafe pipework, or an essential gas appliance, following an essential gas appliance service (as described in 3.19 of the VCMA governance document)	N/A
Health condition	Either: i. The occupier of the property suffers from a permanent or temporary health condition that makes them more vulnerable to health risks associated with cold homes and has a household income of £31,000 or below in 2025/26 prices, adjusted for inflation using Consumer Price Index with Housing costs (CPIH) 13, or ii. the household cannot afford to service the essential gas appliance, as assessed against the affordability criteria set out in Appendix 1 of the VCMA governance document	N/A
Funding	Sufficient funding is not available from other sources (including national, devolved, or local government funding) to fund the unsafe pipework or the essential gas appliance repair or replacement.	N/A