Start date: April 2026
PEA reference: PCG-Collab-001a

Disability Energy Support (DES)

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







UK GAS DISTRIBUTION NETWORKS

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Project registration table

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<tr><td>Strategic area</td><td>Supporting Priority Customer Groups</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lead partner name</td><td>Scope</td></tr>
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<tr><td>Funding GDN(s)</td><td>Cadent, NGN, SGN and WWU</td></tr>
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<tr><td>Collaborative VCMA Projects
Specific role(s) of GDN(s) participating in a collaborative VCMA Project</td><td>SGN lead
Cadent, NGN and WWU – delivery</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date of PEA submission</td><td>April 2026</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project start and end date</td><td>April 2026 – March 2028</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project location</td><td>England, Scotland and Wales</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sectors involved</td><td>Gas Distribution Network
Charitable Organisation</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Project contact</td></tr>
<tr><td>Name</td><td>Shelley Smith</td></tr>
<tr><td>Contact details</td><td>Positive.impact@sgn.co.uk</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Project partners and third parties involved</td></tr>
<tr><td>Organisation name</td><td>Role</td></tr>
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<tr><td>National Energy Action</td><td>Energy Advisor training – Level 3</td></tr>
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<tr><td>Fuel Bank Foundation</td><td>Crisis funding for pre-payment customers</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Costs and funding</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total cost (£k)</td><td>£1,106,728</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total VCMA funding required (£k)</td><td>
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<tr><td>GDN</td><td>Percentage</td><td>Funding</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cadent</td><td>49.6030%</td><td>£548,971</td></tr>
<tr><td>NGN</td><td>11.5965%</td><td>£128,341</td></tr>
<tr><td>SGN</td><td>27.1459%</td><td>£300,431</td></tr>
<tr><td>WWU</td><td>11.6546%</td><td>£128,985</td></tr>
<tr><td>Total</td><td>100%</td><td>£1,106,728</td></tr>
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</td></tr>
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Total BAU vulnerability and CO safety activity baseline allowance funding by activity (£k)	

Problem(s)

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

Life costs more for disabled people. On average, life costs an extra £1,095 a month if you're disabled, according to 2025 research from Scope. Disabled households have higher energy use that is largely non-negotiable, due to medical, mobility and health needs. As a result, they experience a deeper fuel poverty gap and a higher risk of choosing between heating, powering essential equipment and buying food.

Scope's analysis shows disabled households spent around 31% more a week in 2023 than before the pandemic, equivalent to about £3,068 a year extra, with a larger share of that spending going on energy and other essentials. Disabled households spend about 8% of their budget on energy compared with 6% for non-disabled households, an extra £12 per week or £634 per year on energy alone. Scope reports that almost a third of disabled people (29%) have been pushed into debt in the current cost-of-living crisis, compared with 16% of non-disabled people, and average energy debt among disabled households they support reached around £1,794.

Evidence indicates that disabled people face greater energy affordability challenges than nondisabled people, even when controlling for household income. Consumer Scotland's analysis finds disabled consumers, particularly those "limited a lot" by their condition, are more likely to report difficulty keeping up with energy bills than people with similar incomes but without disabilities. This shows that disability related energy needs, not just poverty, drive vulnerability.

Disabled people need tailored energy advice services because their situations are different, both in how they use energy and how they can access support. Many have non-negotiable energy needs linked to medical equipment, mobility aids and the need for consistently warm homes, so standard "use less energy" messages can be irrelevant or even unsafe. At the same time, disabled people are more likely to face barriers such as inaccessible information formats, digital exclusion, and difficulty navigating complex systems, which means advice must be provided in formats and channels that match their communication needs. They are also more likely to have experienced discrimination or poor treatment from institutions, so building trust through specialist, disability led organisations and peer support is crucial for advice to be believed, acted on and sustained. Tailored services that recognise all three dimensions, energy use, communication access and trust are therefore essential if advice is to genuinely reduce risk and improve wellbeing for disabled people.

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.

Scope is the UK's leading pan-disability equality charity, providing practical information and emotional support to disabled people and their families when it is most needed.

Over more than five years of working together, the GDNs and Scope have been working together in partnership to develop and refine a mature, embedded energy advice service that is bespoke to disabled people and rooted in their lived experience.

The partnership now provides a dedicated energy advice service designed for, and proactively marketed to, disabled people, so they know trusted, specialist help is available for their utility and energy needs. Support is delivered by trained specialists with expertise in both utilities and disability, ensuring the best possible outcomes and improving access to safe, warm homes.

Together we're committed to the ongoing co-design of the service and to regularly update its content so that advice is accurate, tailored and practical, empowering disabled people to navigate complex utility systems, maximise their household income and address their individual energy needs.

In summary, the scope of our partnership covers;

- An energy safeguarding triage service via the Scope helpline
- A dedicated energy advice team (DES) embedded within Scope's broader advice services offering to support disabled people who are struggling with their energy needs and require tailored help to access services or address energy safeguarding issues
- A dedicated Benefits advice service to support financially vulnerable disabled people to unlock unclaimed benefits and access relevant grant schemes
- A referral pathway for disabled people identified as requiring the Scope support services.

The project scope will provide disabled people with a dedicated energy safeguarding service that will help address energy debt, access energy safeguarding support services, including the Priority Services Register and increase the household incomes of disabled people. Our shared objectives are to;

- Safeguard disabled customers facing the highest energy-related risk
- Reduce escalation of energy debt and affordability issues
- Increase take-up of Priority Services Register support
- Improve household stability, confidence and resilience

Project design engagement

Targeting vulnerability support: This must describe how the GDN(s) identified the vulnerability need being addressed through the VCMA project, including the use of consumer research, stakeholder engagement, and data and technology.

Evidence of stakeholder and/or customer support: Information regarding all stakeholder and/or customer engagement which has contributed to the development of the VCMA Project.

Stakeholder project design input: How stakeholders were actively involved in the project design, and how their input and feedback were incorporated to shape the project design. Where stakeholders disagree about the project design, justification must be provided for why the current project design is deemed preferable.

SGN first partnered with Scope in 2020 to deliver tailored, targeted support through our Disability Energy Support (DES) with a water advice service. The partnership introduced a pathway for SGN to refer disabled customers for guidance and personalised support and to market the telephony support service across Scope's channels. From April 2022, the partnership was extended nationally to include all four GDNs, recognising that disabled people were among those most affected by the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis and that together we could increase our impact through a national approach.

To better understand these challenges and shape effective support, Scope carried out in-depth research between August 2022 and August 2023, funded by the GDNs, which revealed:

- 50% of disabled people said they were struggling to keep warm and safe, unable to afford the essentials
- 41% confirmed they had equipment relating to their disability, condition, or impairment that used energy

- 83% of DES service users reported that they were struggling to afford to keep medical equipment powered
- 47% confirmed they were in arrears with at least one utility, and an average energy debt was £1,794
- 38% of disabled households didn't have a working carbon monoxide alarm
- 53% of those with a pre-payment meter earned or received less income than the national living wage.

To ensure that we we're making a difference in the beneficiaries of the DES service Scope completed more research to evaluate the effectiveness of our service on the lived experience of disabled people, where we learned that:

- 72% of all engagements resulted in a positive outcome, providing immediate relief and stability
- Customers consistently reported feeling more confident and in control after receiving support, reflecting a significant improvement in self-efficacy
- Crucially, these outcomes show that DES is not just a reactive crisis intervention, it actively builds long-term resilience, empowering disabled people to manage future challenges with confidence.

Throughout GD2 the GDNs shared the insights from our partnership with Scope with our regional and national stakeholders at local and national stakeholder events including the VCMA Showcases in 2022 and in 2023. Across both local and national stakeholder events stakeholders have consistently supported the ongoing development of our partnership with Scope and our collective ambition to bring accessible and tailored energy safeguarding services to disabled people.

Building on our partnership activities in GD2, where Cadent and SGN successfully delivered a range of regional research and innovative projects enabled by repurposed Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme funding, the partnership has recognised that these models, while valuable, are more resource-intensive and harder to scale. By concentrating investment and effort on proven, accessible national services, the partnership can reach more disabled people consistently, provide holistic support around energy and income, and ensure that those most in need benefit from sustained, high-quality assistance. Scope and the GDNs have agreed that the greatest impact for the largest number of disabled people is achieved by focusing on the Scope helpline, our dedicated DES advice service and our benefits checking service as the core offer.

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:

- Empower local communities to identify and support vulnerable households with their energy safeguarding needs
- 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 Scope 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.

By working with Scope, the GDNs have an established a referral pathway for any disabled people they identify who need support from Scope's services.

The GDNs are a part of the Scope Utilities Membership, which brings together cross utility organisations from energy retailers, energy networks, water companies and telecoms to work closely together to improve the service provision nationally for disabled people. (£10k per year per member)

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.

Scope 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	Project Target	Target by network			
		Cadent Target 49.6030%	NGN Target 11.5965%	SGN Target 27.1459%	WWU Target 11.6546%
Advice line triage	12,000	5,952	1,392	3,258	1,399
DES customers	7,000	3,472	812	1,900	816
Income / Welfare benefits checks	3,000	1,488	348	814	350
Debt management	630	312	73	171	73
Energy funding	2,000	992	232	543	233
Grant applications	300	149	35	81	35
Tariff switching	70	35	8	19	8

Water social tariffs	1,500	744	174	407	175
PSR conversations	7,000	3,472	812	1,900	816
PSR registrations	3,000	1,488	348	814	350
Energy advice	12,150	6,027	1,409	3,298	1,416
Fuel vouchers	700	347	81	190	82
Metering support	1,500	744	174	407	175
CO safety info	6,300	3,125	731	1,710	734
Team training	9	4	1	2	1
CO alarms	TBC				

Success Criteria

During this 2-year project, DES will support 17,500 unique households. Through this support, the project will deliver the following:

- Training to ensure Scope DES team have the skills and capacity to support customers who come through the service
- Meaningful outcomes to all customers who interact with the DES service, meeting target numbers and making a measurable difference
- An accessible service to meet the needs of disabled customers
- Ensuring disabled households remain safe, warm and connected, with a reduced risk of self-disconnection
- Improved affordability through debt resolution, billing support and income maximisation
- Increased access to Priority Services Register protections for eligible customers
- Improved customer confidence, stability and ability to manage energy-related issues
- Earlier identification and stabilisation of high-risk households, reducing escalation and harm
- Embedding learning from a long-standing partnership to ensure our organisations are better able to service customers within our core roles

Potential for new learning

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

The DES service has been built on a strong foundation of data, insight and the lived experience of disabled customers who have used and shaped the support.

Co-developed by Scope, the GDNs and other members of Scope's cross utility SUM programme, the service is grounded in what disabled people say they need from energy advice, safeguarding and income support. It also draws on insight from cross sector leads to ensure it aligns with the wider landscape of support available across utility networks and suppliers. Designed from the outset to be inclusive and evidence led, the service is intentionally structured to generate learning that will inform future VCMA activity and strengthen vulnerability strategies across the industry.

Through its tailored engagement model, accessible referral pathways and bespoke support offer, the project is helping to identify what works for disabled people who are currently underserved by existing provision. The insight gathered will strengthen industry approaches to vulnerability, improve cross sector coordination and ensure that future services are more inclusive, targeted and effective.

We are committed to sharing this insight through the VCMI governance framework including but not limited to the VCMI Annual Reports, regional and national stakeholder events.

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.

A dedicated, bespoke energy advice service for disabled people that is co-designed, branded and delivered with Scope and the GDNs strengthens the wider energy industry's approach to vulnerability while addressing a clear gap in provision based on supporting those most in need and where there is a clear demand for the tailored support.

As part of this, the GDNs' involvement in the Scope Utilities Membership further strengthens the case for a national, disability-inclusive service. This membership brings together organisations across energy retailers, energy networks, water companies and telecoms to work collaboratively to improve service provision for disabled people. Embedding this project within that wider cross-utility framework ensures alignment with national best practice and reinforces a shared commitment to improving outcomes for disabled households.

By offering accessible, disability-inclusive support on Priority Services Register access, carbon monoxide safety, energy debt, energy schemes and income/benefits checks, the service operationalises the principles set out in the Fuel Poverty Strategies for England, Scotland and Wales and aligns with the ambitions of the new Warm Homes Plan to target support at those most at risk.

It complements existing vulnerability frameworks used by energy suppliers, networks, other utilities and consumer organisations by focusing on disabled people who are disproportionately exposed to high energy needs and low incomes and ensuring they can navigate complex systems with tailored, trusted help.

The co-design approach, built on an established partnership and piloted models with proven outcomes, demonstrates innovation beyond standard VCMA activity and provides a scalable template for collaborative, cross-sector vulnerability support that integrates with, rather than duplicates, wider national and devolved strategies.

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.

Scope 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.

SGN as the lead GDN will work with Scope to ensure that there is an evidence base through audit and research that seeks to understand how effective the project is at engaging disabled people who are struggling to maintain a safe and warm home and assess the before and after to better understand the impact of the services provided on the lived experience of beneficiaries.

We 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 £8.43 for every £1 spent

Social value measurement

Total cost*	£1,096,877.61
Total gross present value	£10,345,959.25
Net Present Value (NPV)	£9,249,081.64
SROI	£8.43

*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 SGN 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.

SGN has worked closely with Scope 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
Cadent	Phil Burrows, Head of Customer Vulnerability	01/04/26
NGN	Eileen Brown, Director of Customer Service	28/04/26
SGN	Maureen McIntosh, Director of Customer Services	31/03/26
WWU	Gwyn Thomas – Communications & Customer Senior Manager	16/06/26

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.	Yes

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