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PEA reference: FP-Collab-010a

Citizens Advice Energy Advice Programme



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



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Project registration table

Project summary																		
Project title		Citizens Advice - Energy Advice Programme																
Strategic area		Fuel Poverty																
Lead partner name(s)		Citizens Advice England and Wales																
Lead GDN(s)		SGN																
Funding GDN(s)		NGN & WWU																
New/Updated		New																
Collaborative VCMA Projects Specific role(s) of GDN(s) participating in a collaborative VCMA Project		SGN are the lead GDN facilitating the programme across NGN and WWU’s geographic network areas.																
Date of PEA submission		May 2026																
Project start and end date		April 2026 – March 2027																
Project location		GB wide																
Sectors involved		Gas Distribution Network Charitable Organisation / Consumer Group																
Project contact																		
Name		Graeme McLarty																
Contact details		Positive.impact@sgn.co.uk																
Project partners and third parties involved																		
Organisation name		Role																
Citizens Advice		Lead delivery partner managing relationships with local Citizens Advice hubs involved																
Costs and funding																		
Total cost (£k)		Total - £550,000																
Total VCMA funding required (£k)		<table><tr><th>GDN</th><th>Percentage</th><th>Funding</th></tr><tr><td>NGN</td><td>27.6009%</td><td>£151,804.74</td></tr><tr><td>SGN</td><td>44.6600%</td><td>£245,629.93</td></tr><tr><td>WWU</td><td>27.7391%</td><td>£152,565.32</td></tr><tr><td>Total</td><td>100%</td><td>£550,000</td></tr></table>		GDN	Percentage	Funding	NGN	27.6009%	£151,804.74	SGN	44.6600%	£245,629.93	WWU	27.7391%	£152,565.32	Total	100%	£550,000
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Total	100%	£550,000																
Total BAU vulnerability and CO safety activity baseline allowance funding by activity (£k)		N/A																

Problem(s)

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

The ongoing cost of living crisis has deepened long-standing inequalities in energy affordability, pushing more households into fuel poverty and exposing the limits of existing support systems. Fuel poverty is widespread and worsening. Across the UK, an estimated 6.1 million households live in fuel poverty, [with official figures](#) showing that in 2024 around 2.73 million households in England, approximately 11% were in fuel poverty, and a further 8.99 million households were spending more than 10% of their income on energy after housing costs. The [Welsh Government](#) estimates that 25% of all households, around 340,000 were in fuel poverty in October 2024, and 83% of lower income households were unable to afford adequate warmth, with nearly a- quarter of these in severe fuel poverty. These numbers illustrate the scale of energy vulnerability and many households who do not meet the strict definition of fuel poverty still struggle to maintain a safe and warm home.

Energy debt is also escalating. [Ofgem reported](#) that by June 2025, domestic consumer energy debt reached £4.43 billion, up 20% from 2024 and 71% since 2023. Around 2 million UK households are currently in arrears on their energy bills, a burden that falls heavily on low income- and older households who have little financial flexibility. Debt not only increases financial stress but also deepens anxiety, reduces wellbeing, and can deter people from seeking help due to fear of judgement or further financial repercussions.

Data tells us that people on low incomes, disabled people, private renters, and those living in inefficient homes are disproportionately affected. Rising housing costs have pushed an estimated 17,000 additional households into fuel poverty between 2023 and 2024, but this figure masks the wider reality, many more households are on the brink, juggling competing essentials such as food, rent, and heating. As a result, [Citizens Advice](#) has seen record demand for crisis support. In 2025, as inflation surged and energy prices spiked, the service provided charitable support to around 12,000 people every month, including fuel and food bank vouchers. Increasingly, people are presenting in acute energy crisis unable to top up prepayment meters, living in cold homes, or facing unmanageable energy debt that threatens their financial stability.

The complexity of these challenges means that people rarely present with a single, isolated issue. Energy debt is often intertwined with rent arrears, insecure employment, benefit delays, digital exclusion, or health conditions exacerbated by cold homes. Navigating the energy system, tariffs, debt pathways, supplier disputes, efficiency measures, and crisis entitlements all requires time, confidence, and technical understanding that many vulnerable households simply do not have. Getting help is also complicated, often requiring engagement with suppliers, government schemes, local authorities, and sometimes charitable funds. For people already in crisis, this complexity can be overwhelming, leading to worsening outcomes.

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.

Working alongside the participating Gas Distribution Networks, Citizens Advice England and Wales have co-designed the next phase of the partnership, building directly on learning from previous delivery and ensuring the programme provides meaningful, practical and trusted support to households in crisis through a coordinated network of skilled Citizens Advice energy advisors.

It will include:

- **Identifying and supporting the right Citizens Advice Hubs to deliver regional energy advice**

Working with Northern Gas Networks, SGN, and WWU, the programme will identify the Citizens Advice Energy Advice Partnership Hubs best placed to meet local community needs. Selection will be based on evidence of fuel poverty prevalence, levels of energy crisis demand, local infrastructure, existing funded projects and the capacity of each Hub to deliver specialist energy advice. This approach ensures that support is targeted where it will have the greatest impact, while maintaining flexibility to draw on the wider Citizens Advice network when additional expertise or capacity is required. Through this regional model, the programme will maintain consistent quality standards while tailoring delivery to the specific challenges faced by communities across England and Wales.

- **Delivering energy advice, crisis intervention, and safeguarding support for households in energy crisis**

The programme will provide vulnerable and fuel-poor households with a single, trusted point of contact for independent, holistic energy advice. Skilled Citizens Advice advisors will deliver one-to-one support focused on improving energy affordability and helping households maintain a safe and warm home. This includes crisis interventions such as emergency fuel and food vouchers, support for people who are self-disconnecting or unable to top up prepayment meters, and safeguarding responses for households at heightened risk. Advisors will offer practical and behavioural energy saving guidance, smart meter support, tariff and billing advice, supplier advocacy, and assistance with fuel debt. Income maximisation and benefit entitlement checks will ensure households access all financial support available to them. Additional support will include PSR awareness and registration as well as carbon monoxide safety advice. This integrated approach strengthens households' resilience, reduces the risk of crisis escalation, and empowers people to manage their energy needs more confidently.

- **Providing coordinated triage and referral into wider Citizens Advice and partner services**

Recognising that energy issues rarely occur in isolation, the programme will embed a strong triage and referral function to ensure every client receives support for the full range of challenges they face. Advisors will identify underlying issues such as fuel debt, housing disrepair, income insecurity, digital exclusion, or wider financial hardship, and connect households to the most appropriate services within the Citizens Advice network or to trusted external partners. This whole person- approach is essential to supporting vulnerable households through ongoing energy affordability pressures and enabling them to remain safe, warm, and financially stable.

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.

Citizens Advice has become one of the most trusted and influential organisations supporting households across England and Wales through the ongoing energy and cost of living crisis. Its national reach, independence, and deep community presence mean it sees issues earlier and more widely than almost any other organisation, giving it a unique understanding of the pressures facing people in fuel poverty. This insight has been strengthened further through its partnership with SGN, NGN and WWU throughout GD2, where joint delivery has enabled Citizens Advice to support over 24,000 vulnerable households while building a detailed evidence base on what works, who is seeking help, and who remains underserved.

Through this partnership, Citizens Advice has developed and refined a model of holistic, crisis -focused energy support that responds to the realities of people’s lives. The service has revealed clear patterns in who proactively seeks help, often those already in severe financial distress, people with long term- health conditions, and households reliant on prepayment meters.

The partnership has also enabled Citizens Advice to pilot and embed new forms of specialist support. A key example is the development of enhanced training programmes on carbon monoxide awareness and safeguarding, delivered in collaboration with the GDNs. What began as a pilot has now become a core part of advisor training, ensuring frontline staff can identify CO risks, provide accurate safety advice, and escalate concerns quickly. This has strengthened the safety net for households living in unsafe or poorly maintained homes, many of whom are already struggling with energy affordability.

The value and impact of this work have been recognised widely. The initiative has been showcased at the VCMA Annual Showcase events in 2022, 2023 and 2025, receiving consistently positive feedback from stakeholders. This reflects both the credibility of Citizens Advice as a trusted national organisation and the recognised value of its evidence driven community led approach.

Throughout GD2, the collaboration has enabled us to deliver a series of targeted pilot initiatives that have brought essential, practical support directly to vulnerable households when they needed it most. Working together, we have provided crisis funding, energy and food vouchers, CO safety packs and Locking Cooker Valves, this insight has helped us co-design our approach for this extended project into 2027.

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

This initiative was co-designed with Citizens Advice England and Wales, SGN, NGN and WWU and has 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 “fuel poverty and energy affordability” underpins this approach, using data and insights to identify those communities 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 services.

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 in partnership with the GDNs, Citizen's Advice has established a robust referral pathway to raise concerns related to key energy safeguarding services with the group. This collaboration ensures that issues affecting vulnerable individuals, particularly those who may struggle to access or navigate utility services are identified early and directed to the appropriate support from their utility companies.

As a trusted organisation, Citizen's Advice is well placed to engage effectively with vulnerable individuals and refer eligible people for BAU funded support. This includes access to carbon monoxide alarms, Locking Cooker Valves, and other measures that help maintain safety and independence in the home.

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.

Citizens Advice England and Wales and the participating 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		
		NGN Target 27.6009%	SGN Target 44.6600%	WWU Target 27.7391%
CO safety information	3,300	911	1,474	915
PSR conversations	2,640	729	1,179	732
PSR registrations	330	91	147	92
Energy triage	3,300	911	1,474	915
Energy advice	2,640	729	1,179	732
Wellbeing support	3,300	911	1,474	915
Income Max	2,640	729	1,179	732
Emergency fuel fund	1,979	546	884	549
Emergency food fund	1,452	401	648	403

Success Criteria

During this 12-month project, Citizens Advice will support a minimum of 3,300 vulnerable households with accessible guidance on their energy matters. Through this support, the project will deliver the following:

- Training to ensure information and advice teams have the skills and capacity to triage and support people for energy safeguarding risk who come through the service
- Meaningful outcomes related to energy and personal wellbeing for people who access the service
- 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
- Insights on the challenges faced by customers using the service and characteristics of the communities needing extra help

Potential for new learning

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

The partnership has been built on a strong foundation of data, insight and the lived experience of people who have used and shaped the support services provided.

The project is designed to generate learning that can inform future VCMA activity and wider vulnerability approaches, including insight into effective engagement, referral pathways and support models for people who are currently under-served by existing provision.

Through this proposed project, we expect to develop further learning on scaling outreach models, refining triage processes and strengthening referral pathways to better support vulnerable households through the transition to a green energy future.

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.

The project aligns closely with the wider vulnerability strategies adopted across the energy industry, local government and consumer organisations, while also addressing clear gaps in current provision. Its focus on holistic, crisis focused energy advice delivered through trusted Citizens Advice Hubs complements national and regional approaches that prioritise support for households most at risk of fuel poverty. By providing tailored guidance on energy affordability, income maximisation, safeguarding, carbon monoxide safety and access to essential services, the programme reflects the principles embedded in the Fuel Poverty strategies for England and Wales and supports the ambitions of the Warm Homes Plan to target those facing the greatest barriers.

Across the energy sector, suppliers, networks and government schemes increasingly recognise the need for coordinated, person centred support for vulnerable people. This project strengthens that landscape by offering a single, trusted point of contact for households in crisis, bridging the gap between national schemes, such as the Warm Home Discount and local authority fuel poverty initiatives, and the lived experience of people struggling to stay safe and warm.

The partnership with SGN, NGN and WWU throughout GD2 has generated valuable insight into who proactively seeks support and which communities remain underserved. This evidence has informed targeted outreach approaches, ensuring that digitally excluded households, private renters, rural communities and those with complex vulnerabilities are not left underserved.

The project has been designed to complement the work of local authorities, housing providers and third-sector organisations by embedding clear referral pathways into wider Citizens Advice services and specialist partners. This avoids duplication and strengthens local support, ensuring that people presenting with energy issues can also access debt advice, housing support, welfare assistance and safeguarding interventions.

The introduction of enhanced carbon monoxide training, piloted through the partnership and now embedded across Citizens Advice, further aligns the project with industry-wide safety priorities and reinforces the role of advisers in protecting households from harm.

By filling critical gaps in accessibility, coordination and crisis response, the project strengthens the wider vulnerability framework and ensures that households facing the greatest hardship receive timely, expert and compassionate support.

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.

This project features co-designed success criteria underpinning its Social Return on Investment (SROI) forecast, with clear reporting and insight requirements from mobilisation through to delivery. Citizens Advice England and Wales and the participating GDNs will continue to review monthly reports on measurable outcomes, collaborating to ensure successful delivery, while each quarter the core project team will come together to share performance insights, highlight mitigations for any underperformance, and drive opportunities for continuous improvement.

We will report annually on partnership impact, sharing broadly via collaborative and company-specific reports to showcase outcomes and key learnings. Additionally, the CO and Vulnerability Working Groups provide performance updates to the National Delivery Group and National Steering Panel, with all GDNs disseminating results through their business governance processes, including Independent Steering Group.

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 £11.49 for every £1 spent.

Social value measurement

Total cost*	£554,545.83
Total gross present value	£6,924,174.50
Net Present Value (NPV)	£6,369,628.66
SROI	£11.49

*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 oversight 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 Citizens Advice England and Wales, NGN and WWU 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
NGN	Eileen Brown – Director of Customer Services	20/03/26
SGN	Maureen McIntosh – Director of Customer Services	22/05/26
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	NA
Affordability	The household cannot afford to service the essential gas appliance, as assessed against the affordability criteria set out in the VCMA governance document	NA
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	NA

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)	NA
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	NA
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.	NA