

# GDN Collaborative Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)

## Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

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### *Carents Room – Phase 2*

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*1<sup>st</sup> March 2024*

Update: March 2026

**Gas Network Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Governance Document - Project Eligibility Criteria**

<b>Section 1 - Eligibility criteria for company specific projects (other than condemned essential gas appliance repair and replacement)</b>	
In order to qualify as a VCMA project, a project must:	
<b>VCMA Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>Criteria Satisfied (Yes/No)</b>
a) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Have a positive, or 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, and</li> <li>ii. have a positive, or a forecasted positive Net Present Value (NPV);</li> </ul>	Yes
b) Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Provide support to consumers in vulnerable situations, and relate to energy safeguarding, or</li> <li>ii. Provide awareness on the dangers of CO, or</li> <li>iii. Reduce the risk of harm caused by CO;</li> </ul>	Yes
c) Have defined outcomes and the associated actions to achieve the requirements in paragraph b;	Yes
d) Go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanism(s) or required through licence obligations; and	Yes
e) Not be delivered through other external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including through other government (national, devolved or local) funding.	Yes
<b>Section 2 - Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance servicing</b>	
To qualify as a VCMA Project, essential gas appliance servicing must meet the following criteria:	
a) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. GDN has had to isolate and condemn an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role; or</li> <li>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 condition that makes them more vulnerable to health risks associated with cold homes; or</li> <li>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; and</li> </ul>	N/A
b) the household cannot afford to service the essential gas appliance, as assessed against the affordability criteria in the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) Guidance: Delivery document; and	N/A
c) 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
<b>Section 3 - Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance repair and replacement</b>	
To qualify as a VCMA Project, unsafe pipework and essential gas appliance repair or replacement must meet the following criteria:	
a) A GDN has to isolate and condemn unsafe pipework or an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role; and	N/A
b) the household cannot afford to repair or replace unsafe pipework or the essential gas appliance, as assessed against the affordability criteria in the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) Guidance: Delivery document; and	N/A

c) Sufficient funding is not available from other sources (including national, devolved or local government funding) to fund the unsafe pipework or essential gas appliance repair or replacement.	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Section 4 - Eligibility criteria for collaborative VCMA projects</b> In order to qualify as a collaborative VCMA project, a project must:	
a) Meet the company specific project eligibility criteria set out in sections 1-3 above; and	<b>Yes</b>
b) Have the potential to benefit consumers on the participating networks; and	<b>Yes</b>
c) Involve two, or more, gas distribution companies.	<b>Yes</b>

Gas Network Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Governance Document - Project Registration Table 2

<b>Information Required</b>	<b>Description</b>																																
<b>Project Title</b>	Carents Room Phase 2																																
<b>Funding GDN(s)</b>	Collaborative GDN Project – Cadent & NGN																																
<b>New / Updated (indicate as appropriate)</b>	Update March 2026																																
<b>For Collaborative VCMA Projects: Role of GDN(s)</b>	Collaborative between Cadent and NGN as detailed above. NGN Lead GDN																																
<b>Date of PEA Submission</b>	01.03.2024 <b>31.03.2026 – Revised to include extra funding from Cadent</b>																																
<b>VCMA Project Contact Name, email and Number</b>	Eileen Brown <a href="mailto:EBrown@northerngas.co.uk">EBrown@northerngas.co.uk</a> 07789 007719																																
<b>Total Cost (£k)</b>	£1,882,408.00 + VAT  <b>Update March 2026: £1,952,288 + VAT</b>																																
<b>Total VCMA Funding Required (£k)</b>	<p>Project costs:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th><b>Percentage Contribution</b></th> <th>Overall Split</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><b>Cadent</b></td> <td>50%</td> <td>£891,324.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>NGN</b></td> <td>50%</td> <td>£891,324.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Total</b></td> <td><b>100.0%</b></td> <td><b>£1,782,408.00</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Advertisement costs:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th><b>Percentage Contribution</b></th> <th>Overall Split</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td><b>Cadent</b></td> <td>50%</td> <td>£50,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>NGN</b></td> <td>50%</td> <td>£50,000.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Total</b></td> <td><b>100.0%</b></td> <td><b>£100,000.00</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Project spend</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Overall costs</td> <td><b>£1,882,408.00</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Yr1 Spend</td> <td><b>£941,324.00</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Yr 2 Spend</td> <td><b>£941,324.00</b></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><b>Update March 2026: £69,880.00 – extra funding from Cadent to support the marketing, comms and PR agency and the associated strategy</b></p>		<b>Percentage Contribution</b>	Overall Split	<b>Cadent</b>	50%	£891,324.00	<b>NGN</b>	50%	£891,324.00	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>£1,782,408.00</b>		<b>Percentage Contribution</b>	Overall Split	<b>Cadent</b>	50%	£50,000.00	<b>NGN</b>	50%	£50,000.00	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>£100,000.00</b>		Project spend	Overall costs	<b>£1,882,408.00</b>	Yr1 Spend	<b>£941,324.00</b>	Yr 2 Spend	<b>£941,324.00</b>
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<b>Problem(s)</b>	<p><i>This should outline the problem(s) which is/are being addressed by the VCMA Project.</i></p> <p>There is a nationwide agenda to tackle the problems associated with people that care for their elderly parents (Carents) that need support. Ageing and caring in the UK can often be isolating and challenging, compounded by a lack of recognition and a shortage of suitable information, services, products, and experiences which could make life easier for busy Carents and their ageing parents.</p> <p>Energy networks commonly find it difficult to overcome social and digital exclusion to engage with vulnerable older people and keep them safe and well. As society ages, there are rising numbers of older people living in the community with multiple age related physical, social, financial, and geographical vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities mean that older people are unusually susceptible to very small changes in their physical or social environment, are more likely to be targeted by those with disreputable intentions and more reliant on energy whilst being less able to use energy efficiently. This can make</p>																																

	<p>those living in fuel poverty even more vulnerable, especially when access to essential services can be a further challenge.</p> <p>Age related vulnerabilities also perpetuate social and digital exclusion making it more difficult for energy networks to engage with older people in relation to information, services and products which could help them and prevent them from suffering unnecessarily. Common examples relate to the uptake of the Priority Services Register (PSR) which is used by around 25-30% of those that are eligible; poor uptake of innovations such as locking cooker valves and door stop access codes, and major challenges promoting awareness of the carbon monoxide (CO) safety agenda. Strata Nostra have already created the website called 'The Carents Room' which Cadent and NGN have supported since 2022. During this time the Carents Room platform has developed significantly. We wish to continue to support this projects growth and impact with the intention of it becoming self-sustaining beyond GD2.</p> <p>The Carents Room can be utilised by anyone in the UK who needs general support, in their carenting role, therefore this is not limited to specific geographical areas. The project provides Carents with fuel poverty advice, energy efficiency advice as well as providing information on the PSR, CO awareness and a wide range of information, including benefits, health and locking cooker valves. The project has enabled the development of a "Carent" community, known as 'the carents lounge'. This is an online safe space where carents can interact with one another and offer information and peer support.</p> <p>As this is an online resource, it is available to carents 24/7/365 which addresses the challenges associated with accessibility to advice, information and support which is a common difficulty faced by carers.</p> <p><b>Ageing and vulnerability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health - 2/3 of over 65 yrs have multiple health problems</li> <li>• Physical - ¼ of over 85 yrs are living with frailty, progressive functional decline</li> <li>• Mental - 1 in 5 older adults experience depression</li> <li>• Cognitive - 1 in 6 over 80 yrs living with dementia</li> <li>• Financial - 18% of pensioners live in relative poverty</li> <li>• Social - Average age of a scam victim is 75 yrs</li> <li>• Digital - 42% over 75 yrs do not use the internet</li> </ul> <p><b>Carents, carenting &amp; vulnerability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frail elderly - increasingly dependent on family and friends to stay safe and well</li> <li>• Carents - the biggest group of unpaid carers in the UK (4 million)</li> <li>• Carenting - activities involved in caring for an ageing relative</li> <li>• Carents - Isolated, unsupported, time starved and under pressure</li> <li>• Carents face risks to their health, wellbeing, and finances</li> </ul>
<p><b>Scope and Objectives</b></p>	<p><i>The scope and objectives of the VCMA Project 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.</i></p> <p>The Carents Room phase 2 project aims to reach 1 million potential Carents in the UK. There are currently an estimated 5 million Carents nationally. Carents are the largest group of unpaid carers, and this number is growing rapidly in the face of our ageing population.</p> <p>The Carents Room is an interactive, online website for Carents to access anywhere in the UK and receive instant online support.</p> <p>The objectives of this project are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ To have an interactive online website for 1 million Carents during the course of the project to access instant support, energy advice and health information</li> <li>➤ Ability to be able to register an account with The Carents Room to access additional services and support</li> <li>➤ Direct users to thepsr.co.uk to identify their GDN and link to relevant websites to generate 5000 Priority Service Registrations (PSR) per annum. Using a referral code to enable GDNs to track how many referrals the website has generated. This method of traffic direction can also be used to encourage users of "The Carents Room" to complete CO awareness questionnaires</li> </ul>

- Continue to improve the functionality of the website that is currently active
- Increase awareness of the website and the related social media community by using a marketing strategy company
- Raise awareness about the dangers of CO by specific information, and additional signposting to relevant online resources including, but not limited to, GDN websites etc
- Raise awareness of energy efficiency by specific information, and additional signposting to relevant online resources including, but not limited to, GDN websites, charities, warm home schemes etc
- To become commercially self-sustainable
- GDPR Compliance
- Accessibility of the website to be functional e.g. Recite ME

Scope:

- To improve and enhance the existing website to build a long term and highly functional tool to ensure successful delivery of the objectives.
- The ability to record conversion data from those that seek help/assistance by accessing “The Carents Room” and their journey with signposts to the relevant support/service.
- Provide a unique method of support to Carents whilst providing assistance to GDNs in the form of site traffic to have visibility of the process to sign up to the Priority Services Register, to partake in CO awareness questionnaires or apply for Locking Cooker Valves.
- The website is available nationally across the participating GDNs geographical locations. As it is an online website, customers outside of the UK may choose to access the site, therefore creating further accessibility and awareness
- Intended to be able to benefit those that are harder to reach e.g. those that have internet access but live rurally and/or have mobility challenges that prevent being involved in local communities to receive information/assistance
- To follow the predicted SROI impact figures, informed by Strata Nostra and NGN
- A self-sustaining and accessible engagement platform tailored to meet the needs of Carents, that can refer them and their relatives to relevant services and products including those provided, or facilitated, by participating GDNs and DNOs.
- The project will enable the development of a “Carent” community who can register an account for relevant energy related content and gain access to vulnerability support from a wider range of partners to promote/safeguard the wellbeing of themselves/those that they care for.

Activity	KPIs Year 1	KPIs Year 2
Visits to the Carents Room Website	1 million by the end of the project	
Pharmacy bags delivered to pharmacies across the NGN and Cadent network	2,000,000	2,000,000
GP Packs – sent to every GP in the UK	7,000	7,000
PSR registrations	5,000	5,000
CO Awareness sessions	5,000	5,000
Locking Cooker Valve referrals	750	750

During phase 2 there will be an additional role for a Business Development Manager. This role is pivotal in developing the project further beyond VCMA funding and will allow the Carents Room to continue. This in turn makes the project sustainable.

**Why the Project is Being Funded Through the VCMA**

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

Re-purposing FPNES funds to VCMA activity gives GDNs and delivery partners the opportunity for a major strategic intervention with significant and beneficial outcomes, and long sought after partnerships within the health sector as a whole.

	<p>This project meets all of the VCMA criteria for funding, as it will support vulnerable customers who are caring for their elderly parents and also enable them to understand and access relevant communities, information and resources to help them keep their vulnerable older relatives safe and well. This support includes raising awareness of CO and generating PSR referrals.</p> <p>The Carents Room aims to support people who have become lonely, increasingly isolated and at risk of fuel poverty. The Carents Room is an online virtual place within the community which Carents can access to find other Carents in a friendly environment, access information on a range of different subjects, access, energy advice and carbon monoxide (CO) information. This project will provide Carents with a place to access all the support and information they will need to be a Carent.</p> <p>At the recent Ofgem vulnerability summit, two things were made clear: personal circumstances, especially health, should rise-up the consumer vulnerability agenda, and that health is a 'data black hole' with limited data sharing potential. This proposal builds on the outcome from this and other relevant engagement with Ofgem.</p> <p>The VCMA is a £171m allowance available over the five-year RIIO GD2 period (2021-2026) for GDN programmes that seek to address consumer vulnerability and CO safety, particularly activity that goes above and beyond business as usual. This proposal aligns with the objectives of the updated GDN VCMA Strategy, under the theme of Fuel Poverty and Energy Affordability.</p>
<p><b>Evidence of Stakeholder/Customer Support</b></p>	<p><i>This should provide information of the customer engagement that has taken place in the development of VCMA Projects where appropriate. If there is no evidence of stakeholder engagement or customer support, this should justify why it was not appropriate to engage with stakeholders and customers</i></p> <p><b>Carers Northumberland (a local authority funded unpaid carers network)</b></p> <p>Early stakeholder engagement with this network provided the following feedback:</p> <p><i>"It is quite the most straight forward &amp; informative site that I have come across in a very long time. Just the concept of the living room terminology for different aspects as well as coining the terms Carent &amp; Carenting (as we all know that the use of the word carer is often not acceptable &amp; too open ended) is inspired.</i></p> <p><i>"It seems a far too valuable a resource for so many carers, to allow it to remain hidden!"</i></p> <p><i>"I recognise so many aspects that I came across when sharing the care of my elderly parents with my siblings. (I was lucky it was shared care)"</i></p> <p><i>I would have found a website such as this very supportive. Unfortunately, too late for me now but not for thousands of others, A great resource!"</i></p> <p><b>NHS GP surgeries</b></p> <p>Included in NHS GP medical practice website's information page about support for caring for elderly relatives / older adults across England. These GP practices include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catherine House Surgery, Totnes, Devon</li> <li>• Harbourside family Practice, Bristol</li> <li>• NHS Selegate Surgery, Hexham</li> <li>• The Farley Road Medical Practice, South Croydon, Surrey</li> <li>• Friendly Family Surgery, Bolsover, Derbyshire</li> </ul> <p>A quote from Mrs Anne Brooks Practice Manager, NHS Selegate Surgery, Hexham Northumberland;</p> <p><i>"It is an exceptionally well researched and comprehensive resource. The support and information you're providing is incredibly important."</i></p> <p><b>Feedback from service users</b></p> <p>During the course of phase 1 of the project, service users have provided great feedback on the website and social media platform.</p>

One service user has said “Thank you for highlighting this. I’m now currently installing CO alarms in my parents house. Having arrived at last weeks visit to be engulfed by the stench of gas (hob left on without flame and parents hadn’t noticed!) This article has now made me aware that some of my dad’s dementia symptoms could actually be attributed to him constantly firing up an old motorcycle in his garage and not ventilating whilst doing it!”

Other users from the Carents Lounge have provided the following feedback:

- “Sometimes I feel alone in my role as a carer.....Glad I found this group.”
- “It’s so nice to hear other people’s experiences.....”
- “Anything that can be done to support Carents is welcome...”

### **NGN VCMA Strategy (updated for FPNES repurposing) – stakeholder feedback**

The additional funding from Ofgem, as a result of the repurposing of Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES), provided NGN with the opportunity to gather further stakeholder feedback on how this money could be spent well. At the request of Ofgem, each GDN’s VCMA Strategy needed to be updated, to reflect this increase in funding and to ensure a consistent approach in terms of focus of vulnerability themes, between the gas networks.

NGN gathered feedback from several key stakeholders by way of bilateral meetings namely, National Energy Action (NEA), Fuel Bank Foundation, Northern Powergrid and NGN’s Customer Engagement Group. This feedback has been used to change and refine our approach, in line with Ofgem’s request.

Fuel poverty will be the primary focus; however, we also acknowledge that there are complex needs associated with this, that need to be considered. This updated strategy has evolved around NGN’s 5 original vulnerability themes (physical health, mental health, rurality, financial hardship and transient vulnerability). Stakeholder feedback has importantly identified new and emerging issues, specifically around health and financial hardship.

The six key themes identified by our stakeholders on areas to prioritise, are summarised below. One of the key themes identified by stakeholders which was identified as a priority, was

#### **Increased focus on health:**

- Need to exploit opportunities to link to the health sector and prioritise low-income households with support for energy costs, in particular, those medically dependent on energy
- There needs to be a hard-wired link between energy savings and warm homes
- Must be driven by priorities of NHS to avoid hospitalisation
- Support is required for those at greater risk and those with more complex health vulnerabilities
- Projects should align health and high-risk deprivation – building on health projects that use data well
- Use data to inform health categories most at risk and least able to achieve affordable warmth

#### **Connecting and responding to different aspects and complexities of vulnerability, including:**

- Targeting support to reach those who may not have access to or knowledge of support available
- Those who may not ask for help
- Those seeking support for the first time
- Understanding needs and tailoring approach to where it is needed

#### **Financial hardship**

- Financial hardship is more widespread therefore affecting more people – more people are vulnerable/need to access support in general (debt advice)
- New vulnerabilities are emerging and impacting those people who are “just about managing”

- Within this, there are some with greater risks/depth/complexity of vulnerability e.g. greater barriers/challenges to accessing support – knowledge of services/access to services/digital exclusion/language or communication barriers

This feedback supports the need for this project and aligns with VCMA.

### **NGN 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. We have held multiple workshops with our stakeholders throughout the year, on the subject of Customers in Vulnerable Situations. During our annual strategic CIVS workshop (April 2023,) we asked our stakeholders state what their priorities were, as well as NGN's, for the next 12 months.

From the information that stakeholders gave us as their priority areas for this year, the following themes were identified for quarterly, hot topic workshops and these were scheduled accordingly:

1. **Spending allowances well - health focus (September '23)**
2. Energy affordability – staying warm and healthy at home (November '23)
3. Meeting demand – capacity and resilience (February '24)

### **Spending allowances well – health focus CIVS workshop**

At this workshop The Carens Room, phase 1 project was discussed, and stakeholders agreed that NGN and Cadent should look to fund this project further. The aim of the workshop was to gather as much feedback from stakeholders, to inform the development of future health projects. Stakeholders were asked a number of questions around preventative and proactive solutions to prevent health conditions.

Stakeholders told us that one of the biggest concerns was health, specifically the link between living in a cold, damp home and the impact on health.

Health projects are a priority for NGN this regulatory year and we have already started engaging with NEA and other partners on this issue. We are also engaging with the charity Noah's Ark, in relation to financial hardship and mental health. Through extensive engagement with stakeholders, we are seeing a number of key themes coming through consistently in terms of the impact of health and increased risks associated with cold, damp homes.

Some notable observations and key areas are:

- We're seeing evidence of more expensive fuel costs for those with disabilities and those living with specific health conditions
- We're seeing a rise in mental health issues within our network – and acknowledging this as a barrier to engagement in longer term support
- We're acknowledging increases in the risk of CO poisoning – and looking at ways to identify and address this

### **Research:**

Recent social indicator mapping research carried out in June 2022, indicated that Bradford, Hull, Scarborough, South Tyneside, and Sunderland were the top five places, to emerge as having the greatest concentration of vulnerabilities within NGN's network. This was based on a combination of the following vulnerability factors:

- Fuel poverty
- Financial Vulnerability
  - Benefit claims
  - Unemployment
- Physical Health
  - Long term health problem / disability
  - Disability Living Allowance claimants
- Mental health
- Rurality and no access to services
- Ageing populations

- **Unpaid carers**
- Ethnic minorities and language challenges
- Unskilled / no qualifications

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

Through the research carried out, the findings show that the 5 original NGN vulnerability categories have now evolved to 10 categories. These are:

1. Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space
2. Mental wellbeing
3. Financial hardship
4. Temporary vulnerability – including post hospital recovery and pregnancy / maternity
5. Socio Demographic
6. Household composition
7. Rural Vulnerability
8. Accessibility Including language
9. Medical Dependant on Energy
10. Cultural

### **Stakeholder feedback from Cadent**

With regards to the customer/stakeholder engagement conducted by Cadent, an insights project was undertaken in May 2023 to support the future delivery of VCMA projects. The project was undertaken by experts from Savanta and consisted of stakeholder and customer interviews, as well as a national omnibus survey. The customer surveys found that tackling affordability and fuel poverty was top of mind. Every customer engaged as part of the project reported affordability as a concern, with many pointing to the mental and physical health impacts that they had directly experienced as a result of the cost of living/fuel crisis.

The partnership with the Carents Room will bring together energy advice and other specialist services with health professionals to support people to live in warm and safe homes. The partnership will support people to receive energy efficiency measures and information, benefit checks, and carbon monoxide information.

Stakeholders were asked to comment on Cadent's current and proposed funding allocation to each of the four VCMA pillars – 1) tackling affordability and fuel poverty, 2) carbon monoxide awareness, 3) going beyond to never leave a customer vulnerable without gas, and 4) identifying individual needs and joined up services.

Stakeholders supported Cadent's current split of its VCMA funding, with 45% of all allowances focussed on tackling affordability and fuel poverty. Stakeholders felt that because this is such a pressing issue, a larger proportion of Cadent's funding should go towards this VCMA pillar. Stakeholders acknowledge that in 'normal times' they might also think differently but in the short term they consider tackling affordability and fuel poverty hugely important.

<p><b>Outcomes, Associated Actions and Success Criteria</b></p>	<p><i>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.</i></p> <p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Carents Room website capabilities expanded and improved on. Additional modules highlighting support content for Carents</li> <li>• Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) implemented and utilized including automation of a mail management package and dashboard metrics</li> <li>• Business Development Manager in post to help with the support and delivery of the project. This role will also look for funding to ensure the project is sustainable beyond VCMA funding</li> <li>• Minimum 5,000 PSR referrals per annum</li> <li>• Increased CO awareness with an external link to the CO awareness survey provided by NGN &amp; Cadent – 5,000 awareness surveys completed per annum</li> <li>• Increased energy efficiency awareness (due to increased traffic to the website and Energy efficiency focussed topics/sections). 200,000 visitors accessing this information each year</li> <li>• Refer elderly parents for locking cooker valves, 750 referrals per year</li> <li>• Increased promotion of the website through targeted marketing and social media marketing.</li> <li>• Ability to provide access for Carents, and/or their relatives, services and support/products that are relevant including those provided, or facilitated, by DNOs/GDNs including but not limited to Locking Cooker Valves, CO alarms, access to the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme, home improvement agencies etc.</li> </ul> <p><b>Success criteria</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 million Carents to access the site over the course of the project</li> <li>• The website is accessible to anyone in the UK</li> <li>• Increased awareness of what a Carent is</li> <li>• All visitors to the website will have a greater understanding of the importance of gas safety, CO awareness, energy efficiency, completing PSRs and the support network that is available throughout the UK for Carents.</li> <li>• Scaling up an already tried and tested model. (The model being the existing website)</li> <li>• Self-sustaining website, able to operate independently of the Network Partners</li> <li>• Has the potential to be endorsed by GPs nationally</li> <li>• Has the potential to work in partnership with the NHS nationally</li> <li>• Project will be sustainable once VCMA funding has ended – due to Business Development Manager role</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project Partners and Third Parties Involved</b></p>	<p><i>Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>NGN – Lead gas network</b></li> <li>• Cadent Gas – Collaborating gas network</li> <li>• EIC - Providing project delivery support</li> <li>• Strata Nostra – Lead Innovator</li> </ul>
<p><b>Potential for New Learning</b></p>	<p><i>Details of what the GDN(s) expect to learn and how the learning will be disseminated.</i></p>

	<p>An in-depth evaluation, gathering quantitative and qualitative data will document the lived experience and real-world impacts of this support.</p> <p>Any learning will be shared with all stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies.</p>								
<b>Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations, including NPV</b>	<p><i>The Funding Licensee(s) should justify the scale of the VCMA Project – including the scale of the investment relative to its potential benefits. As part of this, it 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.</i></p> <p>This project has a positive SROI return – based on a formal assessment conducted by NGN.</p> <p>The following calculations were based on a range of evidence including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A proof-of-concept trial conducted in collaboration with NGN, as part of a regional innovation challenge competition</li> <li>• Epidemiology of relevant conditions e.g., dementia, carbon monoxide poisoning, physical disability in later life,</li> <li>• Uptake rates which have been achieved by various GDN projects to date</li> </ul> <p>This project will greatly improve the functionality and usability of the Carer's Room platform, as well as increase the awareness for the platform. The support offered will include details of CO awareness, innovation projects focussed on vulnerable customers, and wider vulnerable customer information for GDNs and DNOs. Examples of this are Priority Service Register &amp; customer winter preparedness.</p> <p>The project will aim to reach 1 million potential Carers in the UK, out of an estimated 5 million. Additionally, this project will involve creating a sustainable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which will enable the website to last beyond VCMA funding.</p> <p>There is potential for 10 to 30% of 1 million Carers, and their dependents to sign up as a result of the site – however, until this can be modelled an assumption of 5,000 PSR sign ups can be made per annum.</p> <p>It is estimated that the website could save at least 1 life via avoided CO poisoning and over 200 illnesses with hospitalisation. The Carer's Room will enable access to benefits such as the "Attendance Allowance", it is estimated that 100,000 visitors would benefit from this, up to 200,000 visitors could access energy efficiency and up to 10,000 visitors could receive a carers allowance.</p> <p>Overall Social Return on Investment (SROI) &amp; Payback:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Option</th> <th>SROI</th> <th>NPV</th> <th>Payback Years</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>VCMA Project</td> <td>£62.03</td> <td>£139,646,639</td> <td>1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Option	SROI	NPV	Payback Years	VCMA Project	£62.03	£139,646,639	1
Option	SROI	NPV	Payback Years						
VCMA Project	£62.03	£139,646,639	1						
<b>VCMA Project Start and End Date</b>	<p><i>Detail start and end date of the VCMA project and, where relevant, the VCMA project that preceded this initiative.</i></p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026</p>								
<b>Geographical Area</b>	<p><i>Details of where the VCMA Project will take place. If the VCMA Project is collaborative, the Funding Licensee area(s) in which the project will take place should be identified.</i></p> <p>National UK project</p>								

### Internal governance and project management evidence

*Description of GDN(s) review of proposal and project sign off, with details on how the project will be managed*



Stage 1: GDN Collaboration Group PEA Review  
**Meeting date review completed:** 31.03.2026  
**Review completed by:**

GDN:	Name:	Job Title:
Cadent	Phil Burrows	Head of Customer Vulnerability
NGN	Laura Ratcliffe	Social Strategy Programme Manager

Stage 2: GD2CVG Panel Review  
**Meeting date sign off agreed:**  
**Review completed by:** 31.03.2026

GDN:	Name:	Job Title:
Cadent	Phil Burrows	Head of Customer Vulnerability
NGN	Laura Ratcliffe	Social Strategy Programme Manager

Step 3: Participating GDN individual signatory sign-off

GDN	Name:	Job Title:	Signature:	Date:
Cadent:	Phil Burrows	Head of Customer Vulnerability		31.03.2026
NGN:	Eileen Brown	Customer Experience Director		31.03.2026

**Project management:**

This project will be managed by NGN

Step 4: Upload PEA Document to the Website & Notification Email Sent to Ofgem (vcma@ofgem.gov.uk)

Date that PEA Document Uploaded to the Website: Awaiting Ofgem approval

Date that Notification Email Sent to Ofgem: 31.03.2026