

Northern Gas Networks

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Highfield CO-OP – Addressing Local Fuel Poverty

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



 Fuel Poverty and Energy	Carbon Monoxide Awareness 
Supporting Priority Customer 	Services Beyond the Meter 

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Project registration table

Project summary	
Project title	Highfield CO-OP
Strategic Area	Fuel Poverty and Energy Affordability
Funding GDN(s) The GDN(s) which register(s) the project	Northern Gas Networks (NGN)
New/Updated State whether this is a new or updated PEA (indicate as appropriate by removing the option that does not apply)	New
Collaborative VCMA Projects Specific role(s) of GDN(s) participating in a collaborative VCMA Project	N/A
Date of PEA submission This needs to be the initial date of a first project submission	June 2026
Project start and end date	1 April 2026 – 31 March 2027
Project location	Keighley and Bradford
Sectors involved	Distribution Network Operator Gas Distribution Network Consumer Group Charitable Organisation Local Authority Water Supplier Telecommunications Provider Other (specify)
Project contact	
Name	Laura Ratcliffe
Contact details	vcma@northerngas.co.uk
Project partners and third parties involved	
Organisation name	Role
Groundwork Yorkshire	Lead project partner
Costs and funding	
Total cost (£k)	£13,000
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£13,000
Total BAU vulnerability and CO safety activity baseline allowance funding by activity (£k)	£0

Problem(s)

Communities within the Keighley and Bradford area continue to experience significant levels of fuel poverty, particularly among vulnerable groups including students, young people, BAME communities, refugees, and individuals with visual impairments. These groups often face multiple and overlapping barriers that limit their ability to access energy support services, including low awareness of available assistance, language and cultural barriers, and reduced engagement with traditional communication channels.

As a result, many households are at increased risk of financial hardship, unsafe heating practices, and reduced resilience to energy-related challenges. Limited awareness around carbon monoxide (CO) safety further exacerbates risks to health and wellbeing, particularly for those living in fuel poverty who may rely on unsafe or inefficient heating methods.

There is also an underutilisation of key support mechanisms such as the Priority Services Register (PSR), meaning that eligible households are not receiving additional protections and tailored assistance. This highlights a gap in targeted, community-based engagement approaches that effectively reach and support vulnerable populations in accessing the information, services, and safety measures available to them.

Overall, without targeted intervention, these challenges contribute to ongoing inequality, reduced safety, and missed opportunities to improve outcomes for households experiencing fuel poverty.

Scope and objectives

Scope

The project will deliver community-based engagement activities across the Keighley and Bradford area, targeting households experiencing fuel poverty, with a particular focus on vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups including students, young people, BAME communities, refugees, and individuals with visual impairments.

Delivery will be undertaken through a range of tailored outreach methods, including film festivals, STEM open days, and targeted engagement sessions designed to increase accessibility and participation. These activities will provide practical support and raise awareness of energy-related issues, with a strong emphasis on carbon monoxide (CO) safety, available financial and welfare support, and energy advice.

The project will also include the delivery of key VCMA outputs, including CO safety engagement (e.g. surveys and awareness), distribution of CO alarms to eligible households, and promotion of the Priority Services Register (PSR), supporting increased uptake among vulnerable customers.

Objectives

The objectives of the project are to:

- Increase awareness of the support available to households experiencing fuel poverty, ensuring information is accessible and culturally appropriate for targeted communities
- Improve carbon monoxide safety awareness and behaviours through engagement, surveys, and the provision of CO alarms
- Support eligible households to access additional protections by promoting and facilitating registration onto the Priority Services Register (PSR)
- Deliver targeted, community-led engagement that effectively reaches underrepresented and hard-to-reach groups
- Provide measurable and evidenced outcomes that demonstrate impact, value for money, and alignment with VCMA governance requirements

Project design engagement

Targeting vulnerability support:

The project is designed to deliver targeted, inclusive and community-led engagement that prioritises support for households experiencing fuel poverty, with a particular focus on vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups across the Keighley and Bradford area. These groups include students and young people, BAME communities, refugees, and individuals with visual impairments, who often face barriers in accessing mainstream energy advice and support services.

Engagement activities have been specifically developed to reflect the needs and preferences of these communities, using accessible and culturally appropriate delivery methods. This includes non-traditional engagement approaches such as film festivals, STEM open days, and targeted outreach sessions, which are designed to build trust, increase participation, and improve understanding of energy support, carbon monoxide (CO) safety, and wider available services.

The project will work directly with community groups and partners to reach individuals who may be digitally excluded, socially isolated, or less likely to engage with standard communication channels. This tailored approach ensures that engagement is accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the specific challenges faced by each target group.

Support delivered through the project will focus on improving awareness of fuel poverty assistance, promoting safer behaviours through CO safety messaging, and enabling access to practical interventions such as CO alarms and the Priority Services Register (PSR).

Overall, the project design ensures that vulnerability is at the core of delivery, with targeted engagement activities that reduce barriers to access, increase awareness, and provide tangible support to those most in need, contributing to improved safety, wellbeing, and resilience within local communities.

Evidence of stakeholder and/or customer support:

The project has been designed in response to identified needs within the Keighley and Bradford area, with a clear focus on supporting communities experiencing fuel poverty and improving access to energy advice and safety interventions. Engagement with community groups and local networks has highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by vulnerable populations, particularly in relation to low awareness of available support, barriers to engagement, and increased risks associated with unsafe heating practices.

Highfield Co-op has an established presence within the local community and works directly with a range of stakeholders including students, young people, BAME communities, refugees, and individuals with visual impairments. These relationships provide a strong foundation for understanding customer needs and tailoring delivery approaches that are accessible, inclusive, and trusted by the communities being supported.

Feedback from these stakeholder groups has informed the design of engagement activities, with a preference for non-traditional and community-based approaches such as film festivals, STEM open days, and targeted outreach sessions. These methods have been identified as effective in encouraging participation and enabling meaningful conversations around fuel poverty, carbon monoxide (CO) safety, and the support available.

There is also clear evidence of need and demand for greater awareness of key services such as the Priority Services Register (PSR), with many eligible households currently not accessing the additional support available to them. This further demonstrates the importance of targeted, community-led engagement to bridge this gap and ensure vulnerable customers receive appropriate protections and assistance.

Overall, the project is underpinned by strong stakeholder insight and local knowledge, ensuring that delivery is responsive to customer needs and capable of achieving meaningful outcomes for those most at risk of fuel poverty and associated safety issues.

Stakeholder project design input:

The design of the project has been informed by ongoing engagement with local stakeholders and community groups across the Keighley and Bradford area. Highfield Co-op has established relationships with key community networks, including organisations supporting students, young people, BAME communities, refugees, and individuals with visual impairments. These relationships have enabled direct insight into the specific challenges faced by vulnerable households experiencing fuel poverty.

Stakeholder input has highlighted the need for more accessible, culturally appropriate and engaging approaches to delivering energy advice and safety messaging. In response, the project incorporates non-traditional engagement methods such as film festivals, STEM open days, and targeted outreach

activities, which have been identified by stakeholders as effective ways to engage underrepresented groups and encourage participation.

Feedback from stakeholders has also informed the focus on practical, outcome-based support, including raising awareness of carbon monoxide (CO) safety, promoting safer behaviours, and improving access to the Priority Services Register (PSR). This ensures that engagement is not only informative but leads to tangible outcomes for participating households.

In addition, stakeholders have emphasised the importance of delivering engagement through trusted community settings and partners, enabling the project to reach individuals who may be digitally excluded, socially isolated, or less likely to engage with mainstream services. This insight has shaped the project's delivery model, ensuring that activities are community-led, inclusive, and responsive to local needs.

Overall, stakeholder input has played a central role in shaping the project, ensuring that design, delivery methods, and outputs are aligned with the needs of target communities and are capable of delivering meaningful and measurable outcomes.

Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project aligns directly with the objectives of the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA), which is designed to support customers in vulnerable situations and improve carbon monoxide (CO) safety outcomes. The project focuses on households experiencing fuel poverty and targets groups that are often underrepresented or harder to reach through traditional engagement approaches, including young people, BAME communities, refugees, and individuals with visual impairments.

The funding enables the delivery of tailored, community-led interventions that address key barriers to engagement, including low awareness of support services, cultural and accessibility challenges, and limited uptake of safety measures. Without VCMA support, these targeted activities—such as film festivals, STEM engagement, and outreach sessions—would not be delivered at the same scale or in a way that effectively reaches vulnerable households.

The project also contributes to core VCMA priorities by improving awareness and behaviours related to carbon monoxide safety, facilitating access to practical interventions such as CO alarms, and increasing registrations to the Priority Services Register (PSR). These outcomes directly support improved safety, resilience, and wellbeing for customers in vulnerable circumstances.

Furthermore, the project delivers measurable and evidenced outcomes, including CO safety engagement, alarm distribution, and PSR uptake, ensuring that the funding provides clear value for money and aligns with Ofgem's expectations for transparency, accountability, and impact.

Overall, VCMA funding is essential to enable the delivery of this targeted, impactful project, ensuring that vulnerable households receive the support, information, and protections necessary to improve their energy resilience and safety.

How VCMA funding complements or supplements BAU activities

The project delivers additional, targeted support that complements existing business-as-usual (BAU) activities by focusing on vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities who are less likely to engage with standard energy advice services. While BAU activity provides universal support and safety messaging, it is often limited in its ability to reach groups facing barriers such as language, accessibility needs, cultural differences, or social exclusion.

VCMA funding enables the delivery of tailored, community-based engagement approaches that extend beyond BAU provision. This includes innovative outreach methods such as film festivals, STEM open days, and targeted sessions delivered within trusted community settings. These approaches are specifically designed to increase awareness and participation among groups experiencing fuel poverty who would not typically access or benefit from mainstream engagement channels.

The project also supplements BAU by providing enhanced, intervention-led support, including direct carbon monoxide (CO) safety engagement, distribution of CO alarms to eligible households, and proactive promotion of the Priority Services Register (PSR). These targeted interventions go beyond general awareness-raising and ensure that vulnerable households receive practical, tailored support to improve safety and resilience.

In addition, VCMA funding supports partnership working with established community organisations, enabling delivery through trusted networks that complement NGN's existing outreach capabilities. This collaborative approach strengthens the overall impact of BAU activities by extending reach, improving engagement quality, and ensuring support is delivered in a way that is accessible and appropriate for diverse communities.

Overall, VCMA funding enhances BAU delivery by enabling a more targeted, inclusive, and intensive level of support, ensuring that vulnerable customers who are most at risk of fuel poverty and safety issues are effectively reached and supported.

For individual GDN VCMA Projects:

Justification for why the project should not be collaborative

This project is most effectively delivered as an individual GDN VCMA initiative due to its highly localised, community-specific design and delivery model within the Keighley and Bradford area. The project is built around Highfield Co-op's established relationships and deep understanding of the specific needs, challenges, and cultural dynamics of the local communities it serves, including students, young people, BAME communities, refugees, and individuals with visual impairments.

The engagement approach relies on tailored, place-based delivery methods such as film festivals, STEM open days, and targeted outreach sessions, which are designed in direct response to locally identified needs. These activities require strong, trusted community connections and on-the-ground knowledge that would be difficult to replicate or scale effectively across multiple GDN regions without reducing the impact and effectiveness of delivery.

Additionally, the project focuses on delivering targeted outcomes for a defined geographic area, including carbon monoxide (CO) safety engagement, distribution of CO alarms, and increased uptake of the Priority Services Register (PSR). These outputs are based on the specific requirements and demand within the local community, supporting efficient and focused delivery aligned to identified need.

Collaboration with other GDNs would introduce complexity and reduce flexibility in delivery, as differing regional priorities, stakeholder relationships, and community needs would require significant adaptation of the project model. Given the targeted nature of the intervention and the reliance on local trust and engagement, a single-GDN approach ensures clearer governance, more streamlined delivery, and stronger outcomes for the communities being supported.

Overall, the project is best suited to individual VCMA delivery, enabling a focused, locally tailored approach that maximises impact and effectively addresses fuel poverty and safety challenges within the target area.

Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

Highfield CO-OP and NGN 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	Annual Target
PSR Registrations	50
CO Surveys	25
CO alarms distributed	50

Success Criteria

- Delivery of all agreed outputs within the project timeframe, including CO surveys, CO alarm distribution and PSR registrations
- Demonstrable increase in awareness among participating households of:
 - Available fuel poverty support
 - Carbon monoxide (CO) safety
 - The Priority Services Register (PSR)

- Successful completion and recording of carbon monoxide safety engagement activity, including surveys and alarm distribution
- Evidence of increased uptake of the Priority Services Register (PSR) as a direct result of project delivery
- Delivery of targeted engagement that effectively reaches vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups within the project area
- Provision of clear, timely, and accurate monitoring and reporting information in line with NGN and VCMA requirements
- Demonstration of measurable outcomes and impact aligned to VCMA objectives, including improved safety, awareness, and access to support

Potential for new learning

This project presents strong potential for new learning through its use of innovative, community-led engagement approaches to address fuel poverty and carbon monoxide (CO) safety within hard-to-reach groups. By delivering non-traditional engagement methods such as film festivals, STEM open days, and targeted outreach sessions, the project will provide valuable insight into how alternative delivery models can improve participation and outcomes among vulnerable populations.

A key area of learning will be understanding how different groups—including students, BAME communities, refugees, and individuals with visual impairments—engage with energy advice, safety messaging, and support services when these are delivered in accessible and culturally appropriate formats. This will help identify the most effective approaches for overcoming barriers such as digital exclusion, language differences, and low awareness.

The project will also generate learning in relation to behaviour change, particularly in improving awareness and uptake of carbon monoxide (CO) safety measures and the Priority Services Register (PSR). Monitoring and reporting processes embedded within the project will provide evidence on which interventions are most successful in driving measurable outcomes, including increased engagement, improved safety awareness, and greater access to support.

In addition, partnership working with community organisations will offer insights into how trusted local networks can be leveraged to extend reach and enhance the effectiveness of VCMA delivery. This will support the identification of best practice approaches that could be adapted or scaled across future projects.

Overall, the project will contribute to a broader evidence base on how targeted, place-based interventions can deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable households, informing future VCMA programme design, delivery models, and stakeholder engagement strategies.

Aligning with and supporting wider vulnerability approaches

The project aligns closely with wider vulnerability strategies by supporting households experiencing fuel poverty and addressing the specific needs of customers in vulnerable situations, in line with VCMA objectives. It focuses on targeted engagement with groups who are more likely to experience additional barriers, including students, young people, BAME communities, refugees, and individuals with visual impairments.

The delivery model complements broader vulnerability approaches by prioritising accessibility, inclusion, and tailored support. Through community-based engagement activities, the project ensures that information and services are delivered in ways that are culturally appropriate, easy to understand, and accessible to those who may be digitally excluded or socially isolated.

The project also supports wider vulnerability objectives by promoting key support mechanisms, such as the Priority Services Register (PSR), enabling eligible households to access additional protections and tailored assistance. This contributes to improving customer resilience, safety, and overall wellbeing.

In addition, the project reinforces broader safety and wellbeing strategies through its focus on carbon monoxide (CO) awareness, education, and the provision of CO alarms. This ensures that vulnerable households are better informed and protected from risks associated with unsafe heating practices.

By working in partnership with trusted community organisations, the project strengthens existing vulnerability frameworks, extending reach and enhancing the effectiveness of support delivered to those most in need. This collaborative, community-led approach ensures alignment with wider organisational and regulatory priorities, while delivering measurable outcomes for vulnerable customers.

Overall, the project supports and enhances wider vulnerability approaches by delivering targeted, inclusive, and preventative interventions that improve safety, awareness, and access to essential support services for vulnerable households.

Monitoring and evaluation

NGN will work closely with Highfield CO-OP to monitor delivery, track outputs, and evaluate the overall impact of the project. A shared monitoring framework will be used to ensure consistent data collection, quality assurance, and transparent reporting throughout the project.

Quarterly reporting: NGN will compile quarterly updates summarising progress, outcomes, and learning, ensuring transparency and alignment with Ofgem requirements.

Final evaluation report: At project completion, NGN and FCN will produce a joint evaluation summarising delivery, impact, customer outcomes, and recommendations for future activity.

Scale of VCMA project and SROI calculations, including NPV

NGN have applied the Industry Standard Social Value Framework and GDN Rulebook, developed collaboratively, to assess the financial and wellbeing outcomes associated with the project, ensuring consistency and comparability across networks.

Based on forecast outcomes and costs, the project is expected to deliver a Social Return on Investment (SROI) of £6.90 for every £1 invested, demonstrating that the scale of investment is proportionate to the benefits delivered for customers across participating in our network.

Social value measurement

Total cost*	£13,000
Total gross present value	£100,013.77
Net Present Value (NPV)	£87,354.46
SROI	£6.90

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

Internal governance and project management evidence

All VCMA project proposals submitted to Northern Gas Networks are subject to a robust internal review and assurance process to ensure strategic alignment, value for money, and compliance with VCMA eligibility criteria.

Where a proposal meets this required criteria, a Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculation is undertaken in line with NGN's approved methodology to evidence a positive social impact and value for consumers funding the VCMA programme.

They are then sent to an external governance panel for an independent scrutiny. The panel meets quarterly and consists of sector specialists with a good understanding of VCMA. This ensures the project aligns with NGN's Customers in Vulnerable Situations objectives and delivers meaningful outcomes for households at risk of fuel poverty and vulnerability.

Following approval, the project is managed and overseen by VCMA Project Coordinators at NGN. Ongoing delivery is monitored through a structured performance management framework, which includes:

- Submission of quarterly monitoring reports by the partner organisation, detailing activity, outputs, outcomes, and progress against agreed targets.
- Regular one-to-one meetings between NGN and the project partner to review delivery, address any challenges, and provide ongoing support and assurance, including any risks on delivery and associated mitigation.

- Participation in regular NGN partner network calls, enabling partners to share best practice, learning, and innovative approaches, while supporting continuous improvement across the network.

This approach ensures strong governance, effective delivery oversight, and continuous learning, while maintaining alignment with NGN’s wider VCMA objectives of delivering positive and measurable social impact for customers and communities.

Initial:

Approver (Name and Role)	Date
Eileen Brown, Customer Experience Director	April 2026

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: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 paragraph b;	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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. ii. iii. 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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