

Start date: April 2026





PEA reference: V.PC3.64.A6.013.006.NE.N

Treat, Heat or Eat Community Engagement

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



 <p>Fuel Poverty and Energy</p>	<p>Carbon Monoxide Awareness</p> 
<p>Supporting Priority Customer</p> 	<p>Services Beyond the Meter</p> 

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Project registration table

Project summary	
Project title	Treat, Heat or Eat Community Engagement
Strategic Area	Supporting Priority Customers
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	North East and North Cumbria
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
Northern Cancer Voices	Lead project partner
Costs and funding	
Total cost (£k)	£50,000
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£50,000

Total BAU vulnerability and CO safety activity baseline allowance funding by activity (£k)	£0
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Problem(s)

Northern Gas Networks (NGN) is committed to supporting customers in vulnerable situations, particularly those facing affordability challenges, health-related vulnerabilities, and safety risks in the home. Within this strategic ambition, NGN recognises that clinically vulnerable people—especially those undergoing cancer treatment—are at significantly increased risk of fuel poverty, cold homes, and the difficult trade-offs between essential needs often described as “treat, heat or eat.”

Evidence across the North East and North Cumbria shows that cancer patients frequently experience reduced income, increased household costs, and disruption to normal routines, all of which intensify the risk of energy insecurity. Many households in this situation lack awareness of safeguarding services such as the Priority Services Register (PSR), have limited understanding of carbon monoxide (CO) risk, and face practical or emotional barriers to accessing help. These pressures are further concentrated in high-IMD neighbourhoods where poor housing quality, low income and health inequalities intersect.

Scope and objectives

- To address the challenges outlined in the Problem Statement, this VCMA project will deliver a focused, community-based programme designed to reach clinically vulnerable people across the North East and North Cumbria. The project will provide in-person safeguarding, safety and hardship support to individuals who are disproportionately affected by the pressures of treatment, reduced income, and energy insecurity
- Contribute to a fair transition toward low-carbon heating, ensuring no-one is left behind

Working with NGN, Northern Cancer Voices (NCV) will support clinically vulnerable individuals and their households by:

- Delivering targeted community engagement in the highest-IMD areas and cancer support pathways
- Providing PSR advice, eligibility checks and registrations for patients and carers
- Introducing structured carbon monoxide (CO) safety conversations and distributing CO monitors with guidance
- Identifying households at risk of self-disconnection or hardship and providing rapid heat/food interventions
- Completing home eligibility checks and facilitating referrals to financial assistance, welfare, retrofit, and health support
- Coordinating supported journeys to hospital to reduce missed appointments and related escalation

This scope ensures direct, practical support for those most at risk, strengthens safeguarding, and reduces avoidable harm linked to cold homes, energy affordability and CO exposure.

The above project scope will:

- Increase PSR registrations and improve safeguarding outcomes for clinically vulnerable households
- Enhance CO safety knowledge and reduce the risk of CO harm through conversations and monitor distribution
- Reduce immediate financial and wellbeing pressures through targeted hardship interventions
- Improve access to wider support services, including welfare advice, energy efficiency programmes and financial assistance
- Reduce missed hospital appointments for vulnerable patients through supported journeys
- Generate insight that strengthens NGN's vulnerability strategy, local partnerships and future targeted interventions

Project design engagement

Targeting vulnerability support:

NGN has identified the vulnerability need for this project through a combination of data analysis, consumer research, frontline operational insight, and extensive engagement with partners in the health and community sectors. NGN's vulnerability mapping highlights clusters of clinically vulnerable individuals living in areas of high deprivation across the North East and North Cumbria—where low incomes, poor housing conditions, and health inequalities overlap. These areas consistently show higher risks of fuel poverty, self-disconnection, and reduced ability to maintain safe, warm homes.

Frontline teams and community partners report increasing concerns about patients facing difficult decisions between essential needs ("treat, heat or eat"), particularly during active cancer treatment when income often drops and household costs rise. Consumer research confirms that clinically vulnerable households are more likely to experience energy insecurity, lack awareness of the Priority Services Register (PSR), and have limited understanding of carbon monoxide (CO) risks. Technology and data tools, including NGN's PSR analytics and IMD mapping, further demonstrate the need for targeted, proactive support.

Evidence of stakeholder and/or customer support:

Engagement with health charities, hospital support teams, local authorities and community groups highlighted the value of trusted, face-to-face engagement for patients and carers. Feedback from earlier iterations of Treat, Heat or Eat informed the streamlined, frontline-first design.

Stakeholder project design input:

Stakeholders played a central role in shaping the design of the Treat, Heat or Eat – Community Engagement project. As an established initiative already delivered across the North East and Cumbria, the project builds on several years of co-production with community organisations, clinical partners, and service users who have lived experience of financial vulnerability, fuel poverty, and clinical risk.

Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

The Treat, Heat or Eat – Community Engagement project meets the full VCMA eligibility criteria and strongly aligns with NGN’s updated vulnerability strategy and priority target communities. The project delivers meaningful, measurable support to clinically vulnerable households across the North East and North Cumbria—groups identified as high-priority within NGN’s collaborative vulnerability strategy.

NGN’s vulnerability strategy sets four core delivery priorities, as outlined in NGN’s Project Eligibility Assessment guidance and internal VCMA governance materials.

This project supports all four strategic delivery areas:

1. Providing direct services for customers

The project delivers hands-on support through home visits, emergency heat/food provision, safety conversations, and supported hospital journeys.

2. Reducing carbon monoxide harm

Through CO monitor distribution and extensive CO safety conversations, the project directly reduces the risk of CO exposure for vulnerable households.

3. Supporting priority vulnerable groups

The project focuses on people living with cancer and other clinical vulnerabilities, and those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods—priority groups identified in NGN’s updated target community framework.

4. Tackling fuel poverty and affordability

The programme provides practical interventions that reduce fuel stress, supports income vulnerability through signposting, and improves access to wider assistance.

How VCMA funding complements or supplements BAU activities

This project supplements BAU by delivering additional, proactive support that goes beyond NGN’s mandated responsibilities. It provides targeted engagement with clinically vulnerable households, including CO safety conversations, eligibility checks, emergency heat/food support, and tailored interventions that BAU teams are not resourced to provide.

For individual GDN VCMA Projects:

[Justification for why the project should not be collaborative](#)

This project is designed specifically around the needs of clinically vulnerable households in the North East and North Cumbria, where NGN’s vulnerability mapping and stakeholder engagement highlight distinct health inequalities, high deprivation, and a concentration of complex vulnerability factors not mirrored across other GDN regions. These localised characteristics create a unique operating environment that necessitates a region-specific approach.

Delivery is dependent on the established partnership with NCV, a specialist organisation embedded within the local clinical and community landscape. The personalised support model—including direct engagement, home-based assessments, emergency interventions, and supported hospital journeys—is built on existing local referral pathways and trusted relationships that do not exist outside NGN’s footprint.

Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

NCV 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	300-500
CO monitors distributed	200
CO safety conversations	1,500+
Home eligibility checks for wider support	250+
Households supported with direct heat/food interventions	200
Fuel/food emergency responses	100
Supported hospital attendance journeys	200

Success Criteria

- All deliverable targets are met or exceeded within the 12-month delivery period.
- Vulnerable households receive meaningful support that reduces risk of CO harm, financial stress, food insecurity and crisis escalation.
- PSR registrations significantly increase among clinically vulnerable households within the North East and North Cumbria.
- CO conversations and monitor distribution lead to measurable improvements in safety behaviour and awareness.

Potential for new learning

This project provides NGN with significant opportunities to generate new learning about how clinically vulnerable households experience fuel poverty, CO risk and barriers to healthcare access across the North East and North Cumbria.

What NGN expects to learn

- Impact of targeted clinical vulnerability outreach:
Insight into how tailored engagement with cancer patients and people undergoing treatment influences safety behaviours, CO awareness, PSR uptake and crisis prevention.-vulnerability outreach:
- Effectiveness of high touch, homebased support models:
Evidence on which types of personalised interventions (eligibility checks, heat/food support, hospital attendance assistance) drive the greatest improvements in household resilience.-touch, home-based support models:
- Patterns of need in high-IMD neighbourhoods:
Learning on how deprivation, clinical vulnerability and fuel insecurity intersect, enabling NGN to refine targeting for future VCMA and BAU strategies.
- Improved understanding of barriers to essential health access:
Data on missed appointments, emergency escalations, and outcomes linked to supported hospital journeys.

Aligning with and supporting wider vulnerability approaches

This project aligns with wider energy sector and public sector approaches to supporting customers in vulnerable situations, as required by the VCMA Governance Document.-sector and public-sector approaches to supporting customers in vulnerable situations, as required by the VCMA Governance Document.

It complements national and industry efforts by increasing access to safeguarding services, reducing CO harm, and improving crisis prevention support for clinically vulnerable households. It also supports NHS and local authority priorities around reducing missed hospital appointments, addressing fuel poverty, and improving health outcomes.-prevention support for clinically vulnerable households. It also supports NHS and local authority priorities around reducing missed hospital appointments, addressing fuel poverty, and improving health outcomes.

The delivery model—through Northern Cancer Voices—reflects community based approaches used across the third sector, filling gaps in existing provision by offering tailored, high touch support not available through other utilities or statutory services. Learning from this project will contribute to wider GDN vulnerability insights and ongoing cross sector collaboration.-based approaches used across the third sector, filling gaps in existing provision by offering tailored, high-touch support not available through other utilities or statutory services. Learning from this project will contribute to wider GDN vulnerability insights and ongoing cross-sector collaboration.

Monitoring and evaluation

NGN will work closely with NCV to monitor delivery, ensure compliance with VCMA governance, and evaluate the project's effectiveness. Quarterly reporting is required under the project agreement, with NCV submitting structured updates covering delivery progress, KPIs, case studies, risks, and emerging insights

Monitoring will include:

- Quarterly performance reports detailing progress against all deliverables (PSR registrations, CO activity, eligibility checks, interventions, emergency responses and hospital attendance support).
- Review of outcomes and success measures, assessed against the targets set out in the PEA.
- Quality assurance checks through ongoing partner communication and review of supporting evidence.
- SROI and impact evaluation, using data gathered throughout delivery to assess social value in line with VCMA governance expectations.

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 £11.60 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*	£50,000
Total gross present value	£613,700.49
Net Present Value (NPV)	£565,010.84
SROI	£11.60

*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: <ul 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