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A trusted source of information and practical support

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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	A trusted source of information and practical support
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	Gateshead
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
Skills 4 Work Gateshead	Lead project partner
Costs and funding	
Total cost (£k)	£34,557.00
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£34,557.00

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 by improving safety, affordability, and access to energy safeguarding services. This ambition aligns with NGN's strategic themes of Fuel Poverty and Energy Affordability, Carbon Monoxide Awareness, Services Beyond the Meter, and Supporting Priority Customers.

In Gateshead, young adults aged 18–30 with disabilities and/or poor mental health face multiple challenges that increase their vulnerability. Many do not engage with mainstream providers and rely heavily on trusted, community-based organisations for support. Skills 4 Work Gateshead supports this group through intensive person-centred work, addressing multiple, interconnected issues for families and young people who are the hardest to reach.

There is a clear need for targeted, accessible energy-related support for these young people, including:

- understanding and signing up to the Priority Services Register (PSR),
- awareness of carbon monoxide (CO) dangers,
- safe use of CO alarms,
- essential energy efficiency advice, and
- practical life skills such as energy-efficient cooking.

These vulnerabilities are compounded by communication barriers, low confidence, digital exclusion, and a lack of accessible information. As Warm Welcome national champions and Gateshead MECC Champions, Skills 4 Work already provides trusted information to local communities and is widely recognised as a safe, reliable touchpoint for individuals who otherwise disengage from services.

Scope and objectives

This project will address the challenges outlined in the problem statement by delivering a package of targeted, accessible support designed specifically for young adults aged 18–30 with disabilities and/or poor mental health who do not engage with mainstream services. Working with NGN, Skills 4 Work Gateshead will support this target group by:

- Delivering PSR awareness and sign-ups to increase safeguarding protections for vulnerable young people.
- Providing CO awareness sessions to educate young people about the risks of carbon monoxide poisoning and how to stay safe.
- Issuing CO alarms to improve household safety among those at greater risk.
- Providing energy efficiency advice to support affordability and reduce energy consumption.
- Delivering an energy-efficient cooking programme tailored specifically for young people with disabilities to build independent living skills
- Using social media and digital engagement, in partnership with Yorkshire Energy Doctor, to cascade trusted energy information to a wider local audience

- Engaging with all Warm Welcome Spaces across Gateshead to spread PSR and CO messages, using Skills 4 Work's role as a national Warm Welcome champion

The above project scope will:

- Increase the number of vulnerable young adults in Gateshead who understand, join, and benefit from the **Priority Services Register**.
- Improve **CO safety awareness** and reduce risks through targeted education and alarm distribution.
- Strengthen young people's ability to **manage energy use**, save money, and understand affordability.
- Build **independent living skills** through hands-on energy-efficient cooking activities.
- Expand the reach of accurate energy information through social media and local digital channels.
- Strengthen community safeguarding and advice pathways through Warm Welcome spaces.
- Ensure young disabled adults, who may not engage with other providers, receive trusted, ongoing support through a familiar organisation.

Project design engagement

Targeting vulnerability support:

NGN has identified the vulnerability need addressed by this VCMA project through engagement with trusted local delivery partners and evidence gathered from previous project delivery. Skills 4 Work Gateshead works with young adults aged 18-30 with disabilities and/or poor mental health who are often disengaged from mainstream services and therefore at higher risk of missing out on energy safeguarding, CO safety information and affordability support.

The project responds to clear evidence that this cohort experiences multiple, overlapping vulnerabilities, including difficulties accessing information, low confidence, mental health challenges, and limited independent living skills. Skills 4 Work's established role as Gateshead MECC Champions, Warm Welcome National Champions, and their ongoing partnership work at both local and national level (including Disability Rights UK, UK Youth and MIND) has highlighted persistent gaps in accessible, trusted energy-related support for this group.

Evidence of stakeholder and/or customer support:

The project has strong support from a range of stakeholders and customers. Skills 4 Work works closely with families, local partners, and community networks who consistently identify the need for continued support around energy safety, affordability, and independent living skills for young people with disabilities and poor mental health.

Local Warm Welcome Spaces across Gateshead have expressed the value of Skills 4 Work's role in cascading trusted information, particularly around PSR sign-ups and CO awareness. National partners such as Disability Rights UK, UK Youth and MIND have also contributed to Skills 4 Work's

understanding of barriers faced by disabled young people, reinforcing the need for accessible, practical interventions.

Feedback from young people supported through previous delivery has demonstrated high engagement when information is delivered by a trusted organisation in a supportive, inclusive environment, providing strong evidence of ongoing demand for the project.

Stakeholder project design input:

Stakeholders have actively influenced the design of the project. Feedback from young people, families and partner organisations shaped focus on practical, hands on activities such as the energy efficient cooking programme, alongside clear and accessible PSR and CO safety messaging.

Warm Welcome partners contributed to the decision to formally cascade information across all Gateshead Warm Welcome Spaces, ensuring consistent safeguarding messages reach a wider audience. Input from digital partners, including Yorkshire Energy Doctor, informed the inclusion of social media activity to extend reach beyond face-to-face engagement.

Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria as it aligns directly with NGN's vulnerability strategy, which aims to keep communities safe and warm and to support those most in need, both now and as we transition towards a green energy future.

The project aligns with four objectives of NGN's vulnerability strategy:

- **Help more vulnerable households access energy safeguarding services**
Through PSR awareness activity and PSR sign-ups, the project increases safeguarding for young adults with additional needs.
- **Support customers' move towards net zero, tailored to their needs and circumstances**
By delivering energy efficiency advice and practical energy-efficient cooking sessions, the project helps young people understand and manage their energy use in an affordable and sustainable way.
- **Reduce carbon monoxide harm**
The project delivers CO awareness sessions and issues CO alarms, improving safety for vulnerable households beyond NGN's business-as-usual activity.
- **Support priority vulnerable groups**
The project is specifically designed for young people with disabilities and poor mental health, ensuring those most at risk are not left behind.

To achieve our strategic ambition, NGN has identified four priority delivery areas, all of which this project directly supports:

- Providing direct services for customers

- Reducing carbon monoxide harm
- Supporting priority vulnerable groups
- Tackling fuel poverty and affordability

How VCMA funding complements or supplements BAU activities

The Skills 4 Work – A trusted source of information and practical support project goes significantly beyond BAU activity. VCMA funding enables NGN to extend its support to a group that is not routinely reached through BAU approaches: young adults aged 18–30 with disabilities and/or poor mental health who often do not engage with mainstream services.

The project complements and supplements BAU in the following ways:

- Enhanced PSR engagement beyond BAU
- Additional CO safety activity
- Targeted energy efficiency and affordability support
- Community-based and trusted delivery
- Digital engagement and awareness

For individual GDN VCMA Projects:

Justification for why the project should not be collaborative

The Skills 4 Work – A trusted source of information and practical support project is most appropriately delivered as an individual NGN VCMA project due to the highly localised nature of the need, the specific characteristics of the target community, and the specialist delivery model required.

The project is designed to support young adults aged 18–30 with disabilities and/or poor mental health in Gateshead. This cohort faces unique challenges, including disengagement from mainstream services, communication barriers, and a need for trusted, relationship-based support. These challenges are shaped by local service provision, community networks, and demographic factors that are specific to Gateshead and NGN’s network area.

The vulnerability drivers addressed by the project are therefore place-based, rather than consistent across multiple GDN regions. A collaborative project would reduce the ability to tailor delivery to the specific needs of this local community.

Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

Skills 4 work 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 sign-ups	270
PSR awareness	280
CO awareness	235
CO alarms issued	175
Energy efficiency advice	260
Energy efficiency cooking programme for young people with disabilities	15

Success Criteria

- Vulnerable young adults in Gateshead are safely and effectively engaged through trusted, accessible support.
- PSR awareness and safeguarding engagement increase among young people with disabilities and/or poor mental health.
- CO safety understanding improves, supported by the distribution and correct use of CO alarms.
- Practical energy-efficient cooking sessions support greater independence and confidence.
- Monitoring and reporting evidence consistent delivery, high engagement, and positive customer experience.

Potential for new learning

Through delivery of the project, NGN expects to learn more about:

- Effective engagement methods for reaching young people who do not engage with mainstream services, particularly through trusted community organisations.
- How accessible, practical interventions (such as energy-efficient cooking sessions) can improve understanding of energy use, affordability, and independent living skills.
- The impact of tailored PSR and CO safety messaging when delivered in familiar, supportive environments.

- The role of Warm Welcome Spaces and digital channels in extending reach to vulnerable groups.
- Barriers and enablers to energy safeguarding for young adults with disabilities and poor mental health.

Aligning with and supporting wider vulnerability approaches

The Skills 4 Work project aligns strongly with wider approaches to vulnerability taken across the energy sector, local government, and the voluntary and community sector. It supports shared priorities focused on safeguarding, inclusion, affordability, and carbon monoxide (CO) safety, while addressing a clear gap in provision for young adults with disabilities and/or poor mental health.

Across the energy industry, there is a common emphasis on improving access to energy safeguarding services, including the Priority Services Register (PSR), and ensuring vulnerable customers are not left behind. This project directly supports this approach by delivering targeted PSR awareness and sign-ups through a trusted community organisation, ensuring engagement with a cohort that is often under-represented in traditional safeguarding activity.

The project also aligns with wider CO safety and harm-reduction approaches promoted across the energy sector. By delivering accessible CO awareness sessions and issuing CO alarms to vulnerable young people, the project complements national CO prevention messaging and extends it to a group that may otherwise struggle to access or understand standard communications.

Importantly, the project addresses an identified gap in vulnerability support provision. Young adults with disabilities and poor mental health often do not engage with mainstream advice or energy services and can be overlooked by traditional delivery models. By embedding energy safeguarding, CO safety and affordability advice within a trusted youth-focused service, the project provides an innovative, preventative approach that fits within broader vulnerability strategies while reaching customers who would otherwise remain unsupported.

Monitoring and evaluation

NGN will work closely with Skills 4 Work Gateshead to monitor delivery, measure impact, and evaluate the effectiveness of the project throughout the 12-month delivery period. Monitoring arrangements are designed to ensure activities are delivered as planned, targets are achieved, and support is reaching the intended vulnerable groups.

- Quarterly reports
- Financial monitoring
- 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 £2.46 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*	£34,557.00
Total gross present value	£116,407.73
Net Present Value (NPV)	£82,756.36
SROI	£2.46

*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"> <li data-bbox="427 465 1305 577">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 <li data-bbox="427 607 1305 846">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 <li data-bbox="427 875 1305 1160">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