

Gas Distribution Networks

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)

Annual Collaborative Report
1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022



Welcome

This is the first annual report for the collaborative work undertaken by the Gas Distribution Networks (GDNs) under the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA). It covers the first year of the Regulatory period known as RIIO GD2 running from the 1st April 2021 to the 31st March 2022. The GDNs are also publishing individual reports detailing the projects they have supported with VCMA, in their own networks.

This report explains what the VCMA is and how the GDNs have worked with stakeholders to ensure their projects meet the needs of customers, and the challenges they face in relation to the cost of living and energy prices. Projects are brought to life through case studies showing the overall societal benefits and real impact on individuals and families.

Introducing the VCMA

The allocation of the VCMA resulted from the influence that stakeholder engagement had on the GDN's RIIO-GD2 business plans for the Ofgem price control between April 2021 and March 2026. Originally proposed as a £30m funding pot by Ofgem, stakeholder feedback about customers needs and the GDNs ability to deliver resulted in the pot being increased to £60m for the five year period. Each GDN has a proportion of the pot based upon the number of customers gas is supplied to.

The VCMA supports the GDNs individual business plans, providing funding for networks to utilise on innovative, eligible projects that are focussed on supporting vulnerability and/or carbon monoxide (CO) safety initiatives.

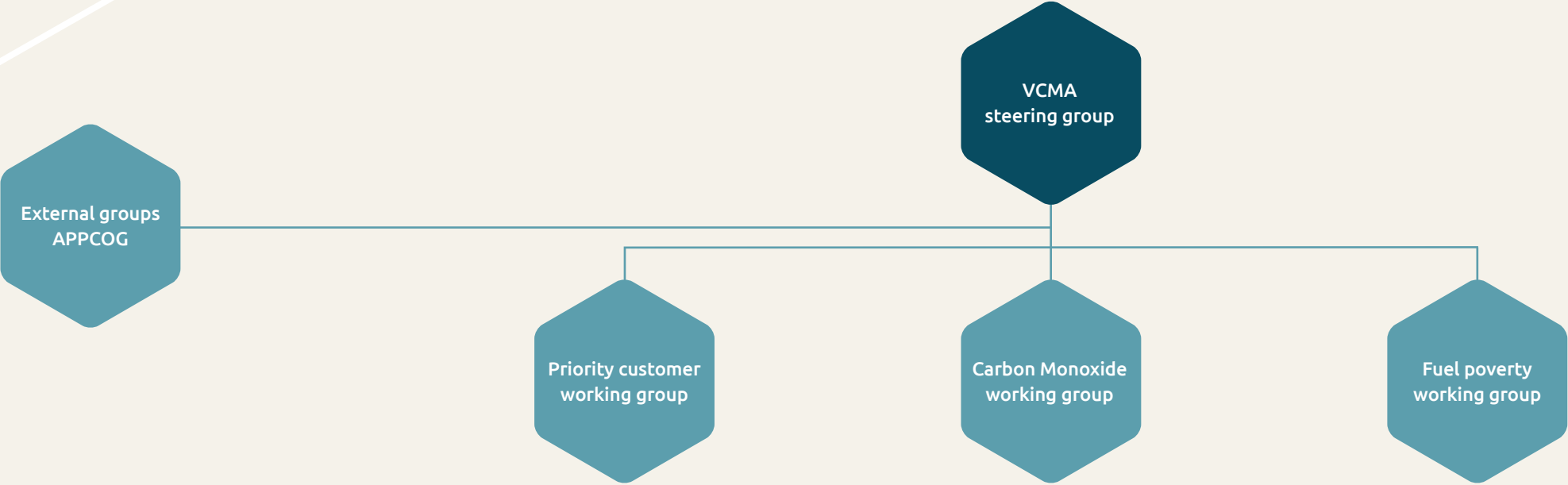
Collaborative working

The VCMA governance rules require that at least £15m (25% of the £60m pot) is spent on collaborative projects, defined as an initiative funded by at least two GDNs, that also meets the company-specific VCMA eligibility criteria.

Reflecting on the first year of the scheme, it has been refreshing for the GDNs to be able to work together under a framework that does not create competition between them for individual gain, as we had in previous periods. In practice, the collaborative allowance has offered a mechanism and promoted the sharing of best practice across networks, ensuring maximum benefit to customers nationally.

A significant benefit of the collaborative funding mechanism is that it encourages open and cooperatives approaches to project delivery between GDNs.

To build our knowledge and develop projects, a structure of GDN groups allows for open discussion about work being undertaken in each GDN and opportunities for projects to be undertaken collaboratively. The graphic opposite shows the hierarchy and how we interface with other groups.



Stakeholders and Strategy

Throughout the development of their RIIO-GD2 business plans, all GDNs undertook comprehensive programmes of enhanced stakeholder engagement to inform their decision making and proposals. This process revealed a strong appetite from stakeholders, including consumers, to do more to support customers in vulnerable circumstances.

Our stakeholders have been key to us securing this allowance through our business plan development and it was their responses to the Ofgem consultations on the RIIO GD2 proposals that led to the use it or lose it allowance being doubled from £30m to £60m.

Each GDN frequently holds stakeholder engagement sessions, allowing networks to regularly obtain the views of stakeholders including domestic consumers. The insight from stakeholders is shared between GDNs and helps guide

our priorities and split of the VCMA between the different opportunities; it also ensures that the areas where we can make a difference are aligned to stakeholder priorities.

We also have stakeholders involved in our GDN groups and steering committee, either as standing attendees or invitees. The VCMA steering group has Citizens Advice, National Energy Action and Energy UK as members who provide challenge to our strategies and projects. They are also well placed to provide us with insight into government and policy development, which in turn allows us to develop projects. We also sit on national groups such as All-Party Parliamentary Carbon Monoxide Group (APPCOG) and we have identified and filled gaps in research and campaigns through engagement with multiple parties focused on CO such as, Gas Safe Register and Project Shout.

We have learnt that we need to be agile and move quickly to meet people’s needs. When the energy crisis was first raised in October 2021, we moved quickly to identify some major projects with the Citizens Advice and the Fuel Bank Foundation to support homes to maintain affordable warmth over the next two winters.

In July 2022 we will be running our first annual VCMA showcase event. This will allow stakeholders to hear and see more about the projects we have commenced and those that will start delivering in Year 2 of the scheme. It is an opportunity for stakeholders to challenge the GDNs and suggest how we can do more and maximise outcomes. It is also an opportunity for stakeholders to think about future years projects and to start forming proposals for the GDNs to consider.

Measuring outcomes and benefits of projects

The GDNs have developed various ways of measuring benefits of projects. During Business Plan development, we all undertook willingness to pay research with consumers. Along with the insight from the wider stakeholder engagement programme, this established that stakeholders and customers were willing for part of their gas bills to go to projects that would help support customers in vulnerable circumstances, tackle energy affordability, and promote CO awareness.

The GDNs all developed models to evaluate Social Return on investment (SROI). These models assess the financial benefit to a customer / household and the societal benefits. Off setting the cost of the project provides a net benefit that should be positive i.e. the benefits are larger than the investment.

For example, a partnership may help customer finances by:

- Identifying unclaimed benefits
- Reducing utility bills through tariffs, energy efficiency advice and accessing finance for insulation
- Tackling energy debt
- Providing a Fuel Voucher to keep the energy flowing
- Accessing the Warm Home Discount payment each year. This will be £150 for winter 2022-23

Social benefits may include:

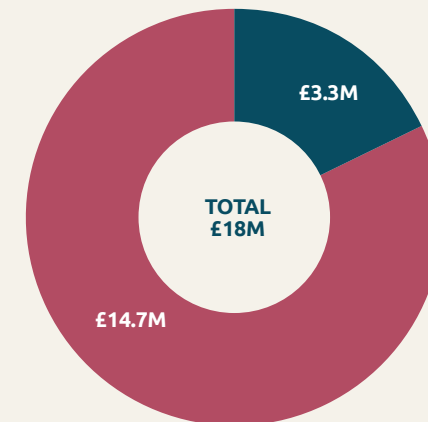
- Reduced visits to doctors linked to cold damp homes or CO
- Reducing hospital stays
- Reducing serious injuries or deaths from
- Reducing peoples stress and improving mental health
- Reducing reliance on care professionals

These statistics can demonstrate a projects success or where it needs to do more. However, the real impact of projects is brought to life through case studies and the words of people who have been helped. You will see some of these in our project profiles.

Summary of projects and outcomes – see Appendix A

Ofgem have allocated the GDNs to spend £60m in total on VCMA projects with at least 25% (£15m) being spent on collaborative projects. The allowance is set in 2018/19 prices so when annual inflation is applied using the Consumer Price Index (CPIH) that equates to around £18m for collaborative projects.

The VCMA is funding available to the GDNs over the 5 year period of GD2 ie ending 31st March 2026. During year one of GD2, the GDNs required time to work with partners, develop and mobilise the projects, which impacted on the spend in year 1. The projection is that there will be an increase in spend in the coming months and years, due the projects in development, which are detailed in the table on page 24. With the help of stakeholder feedback, GDNs will continue to manage the funds effectively over the remainder of GD2.



■ Allocated allowance at March 2022 (rounded)
■ Spend to be allocated (rounded)

Collaborative VCMA annual report 2022: Case studies





Citizens Advice

Lead GDN	SGN	Forecast SROI	£1.81 return for every £1 spent
Participating GDNS	Cadent; NGN; WWU	Status	On track
Cost	£1,788.792	Start/End Date	Jan 22 – March 23

Why we're working together

Citizens Advice gives free and independent advice to millions of people each year, over the phone and in person. Through its Energy Advice Programme, Citizens Advice has been helping people access expert energy advice, get better energy deals and make savings to those who need it since 2014.


Alongside energy advice, its trained advisors provide holistic advice on other issues including benefits, debts and housing. Its programme is targeted at people on low incomes who are in fuel poverty or at risk of being in fuel poverty – a group who we know from National Energy Action (NEA) and Gas Safety Trust research are at heightened risk of CO poisoning.

Throughout late 2021, Citizens Advice experienced record month-on-month increases in calls requesting energy advice in the face of the emerging energy crisis. Increased demand was resulting in a widening gap in its service offering. Citizens Advice simply didn't have enough capacity within its energy advice team to continue providing specialist one-to-one energy advice for all the people who needed it.

With SGN already having an established partnership with Citizens Advice Hampshire through the award-winning Home and Well partnership and other gas networks also having relationships with local Citizens Advice branches, we were well-positioned to extend our partnership to a national level.

How we're working together

Together, we co-designed an energy safeguarding programme with Citizens Advice to meet the increasing customer need. With our support, we would not only be able to create the capacity for Citizens Advice to continue providing energy advice at a time of unprecedented need, but we would also be able to address a knowledge and skills gap within the organisation to enable frontline Citizens Advice energy advisors to also raise awareness of the dangers of CO and identify potential CO risks when supporting people in vulnerable circumstances.



As part of our collaborative programme, we also initiated a three-month pilot to provide clients with a CO safety and energy advice pack designed to help tackle the increased risk of CO poisoning that's faced by households in fuel poverty. We believed people in energy crisis often don't have the money for a working CO alarm or an annual gas safety check, so our pack included a CO alarm, CO safety and energy efficiency advice. The trial would determine whether such a pack is an effective way to support people in vulnerable circumstances to stay safe and warm at home.

With public anxiety and hardship rapidly increasing due to the ever-worsening energy crisis, we had to mobilise our support quickly as winter approached. And we did. **We were able to mobilise this new partnership** and deliver the first advice session by 4 January, **just four weeks after agreeing funding**, with 43 local Citizens Advice Hubs mobilised across our collective footprints in England and Wales by the end of March and a further 36 Hubs planned to mobilise from 1 April 2022.

Partnership outcomes

We aimed to directly support 17,500 vulnerable people during our 15-month partnership. By March, providing 3,688 people with energy advice, we'd already exceeded our target for the number of clients we planned to support during the first three months.

We're delighted the partnership is delivering ahead of our ambition. We're monitoring demand closely with Citizens Advice and reviewing all learning to plan the second phase of the project, which will see us extend the duration based on need and customer demand.

By collaborating with a trusted national partner on an established support service, we have been able to support **1,127 people experiencing concerns around energy** – of whom 76% are on a low income, 42% are in fuel poverty and 44% are at risk of fuel poverty. With support to use energy safely, efficiently and affordably. Citizens Advice advisors have been able to help clients with their energy concerns, access fuel vouchers and food banks, sign up for the Priority Services Register (PSR) and access the Warm Home Discount Scheme.

We've expanded the scope of Citizens Advice's legacy service to upskill 164 of the organisation's energy advisors to provide CO safety advice, resulting in CO advice being delivered to **3,688 clients so far**. This means over 3,600 vulnerable households at greater risk of CO poisoning now have an increased awareness of the silent killer, who would not have received that additional energy safeguarding without our programme.

Energy advisors found more than **50% of gas customers using the service did not have a working CO alarm**. After their one-to-one energy advice session, clients received our free CO alarm, demonstrating that our CO safety and energy advice packs are an effective and desired method for customers to maintain a safe and warm home. We're reviewing our CO safety and energy advice pack pilot with the intention that we'll continue with this provision for the remainder of the programme, subject to the outcome of feedback surveys being carried out by Citizens Advice in April/May.

Our programme has enabled Citizens Advice to support record numbers of clients this winter, resulting in an **overall financial gain of £1,291,695 for low-income and fuel-poor households** through benefit checks, writing off debt, energy efficiency measures, liaising with energy suppliers and other income maximisation opportunities.

Key programme achievements

- Delivering CO advice to **3,688 clients**
- Improving the CO knowledge of **97% of clients**
- Supporting clients address **10,660 energy issues**
- Helping with an additional **3,346 non-energy issues**
- Improved wellbeing and capacity to manage reported by **61% of clients**
- Benefits advice provided to **1,257 clients**
- **1,553 households registered** on to the PSR
- Recording **more than £1.2 million financial gain** to households in fuel poverty

Client story

Client X has anxiety and depression. They live with their sibling, who is their carer, in a house they own.

We educated the client on the risks of CO, the symptoms of CO poisoning and how to protect themselves. We provided them with a free CO alarm as they didn't currently have one.

From our conversations about CO safety, we were able to discuss their energy consumption and living situation more broadly. We discovered they were living without heating and hot water, as they didn't have a card for their prepayment meter and their boiler wasn't working.

We liaised with their supplier and NEST to resolve these issues. Through a one-to-one session and follow-up support, we've helped the client gain £10,673.56 in income through:

- A full benefit check, identifying a potential annual increase from the Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity (LCWRA) element of £4,123.56 and an additional £3,120 from PIP
- Facilitate the installation of installing a new boiler and radiators at a cost of £3,000
- Switching to the Welsh Water HelpU tariff for a £240 annual saving
- Applying for the Warm Home Discount at £140
- Advising on other energy efficiency measures, totalling £50 in saving per year

We also registered the client on the PSR to ensure all their energy companies can best support them from now on.

Reflecting on our service, the client said:

"My experience with Citizens Advice has been excellent, they helped resolve my problem and wouldn't have been able to do this without their support."

Dan Gill, Utility Partnerships Manager,
Citizens Advice:

"In the first three months of working together, we have identified over £1.2 million of estimated financial outcomes for our clients, and this has exceeded our forecasts for the partnership.

"The fantastic outcomes achieved mean we are outperforming the social return on investment estimates for this partnership.

"It is great to partner with organisations that are proactively making a change."





Fuel Bank Foundation

Lead GDN
Participating GDNS
Cost

SGN
Cadent; NGN; WWU
£500,000

Forecast SROI
Status
Start/End Date

£5.95 return for every £1 spent
On track
Jan 22 – Jan 24

Why we're working together

For households with prepayment energy meters, the amounts customers pay vary massively between summer and winter as the amount of energy they use goes up. The ongoing fuel crisis in 2021 meant more and more families were being forced into fuel poverty and having to make the distressing choice between heating and eating. What's more, living in a cold home has significant and demonstrable direct and indirect health impacts.

Fuel poor households up and down the country are not only dealing with the physical and mental impacts of not being able to afford their energy bills, but they're also more at risk of CO poisoning as lower-income householders are often reliant on older boilers, older heaters or even gas stoves or cookers to heat their homes. These households are also less likely to have gas appliances regularly maintained and, in privately-owned properties, have a working CO alarm.

Fuel Bank Foundation provides same-day support to households in fuel crisis, giving customers access to energy to heat their homes and cook, which in turn, gives them the breathing space to get back on their feet and resolve underlying issues. Through its national network of partner organisations,

including food banks, local authorities, Citizens Advice and charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support and Scope, Fuel Bank Foundation distributes fuel vouchers for people on prepayment meters and where relevant ensures that the client is offered long term support to address the underlying causes of poverty.

With the ongoing fuel crisis and upcoming price cap increases, our operational teams and partner organisations were seeing more customers worried about how they would afford to keep warm this winter. This spiralling need was reflected in the unsupportable and record volume of organisations reaching out to Fuel Bank Foundation for access to fuel vouchers from last October onwards.

With so many organisations demanding more support than ever before, Fuel Bank Foundation was reaching the limit of its capacity. It would be unable to support every organisation requesting help during winter 2021/22.

How we're working together

Our two-year partnership with Fuel Bank Foundation will enable the charity to provide a minimum of 8,000 vulnerable households with emergency help through its network of partner organisations. Our £500,000 of funding is being further boosted by an **additional £75,000 from electricity networks Scottish and Southern Energy Networks, SP Energy Networks and Northern Powergrid** who we're delighted to have join our programme.

As well as providing same day or next day emergency credit to people struggling to top up their prepayment gas and/or electricity meters, we've established a referral pathway with the charity for our frontline engineers to refer customers in crisis. By joining Fuel Bank Foundation's referral network, we're broadening its network of organisations working to identify households in crisis and opening up access to more vulnerable households in need of support.

Beyond the initial emergency help, Fuel Bank Foundation provides additional ongoing support to help manage energy costs, working together to support families out of crisis and access help to maximise their income and address energy debt. Through our partnership, we're working to better understand how we can support the charity's longer-term help to include CO awareness and, for the first time, creating a route for vulnerable households to access CO alarms where income or information is a barrier to safety.

Partnership outcomes

With gas and electricity networks working together in partnership, we're helping thousands of people stay safe and warm at home in an incredibly challenging time. As well as providing urgent support to lift vulnerable households out of crisis, we're facilitating longer-term help from partners to help families with the wider issues they face from community support networks they trust.

“At Fuel Bank Foundation, we are already seeing an unprecedented level of demand for our services which has risen by 75% in recent months. And this is before another expected rise to the price cap on 01 October and an increase in people's energy consumption when they switch their heating on again.

It is, therefore, very welcome and timely to have this funding from the GDNs and the electricity networks as it will give certainty that we are able to continue and even possibly expand our ability to support people who are struggling to pre-pay for their energy.”

Matthew Cole, Fuel Bank Foundation.

Key programme achievements

- This year we're on target to **help over 4,000 households** with emergency funding
- This equates to **supporting 13,872 people** with access to emergency funding and further help to households in fuel crisis via the GDN contribution
- **Expanding our programme to a further 3,714 people** from electricity networks additional contribution

Scout Association



Lead GDN
Participating GDNs
Cost

SGN
Cadent; NGN; WWU
£343,500

Forecast SROI
Status
Start/End Date

£1.86 return for every £1 spent
On track
Aug 21 – Aug 24

Why we're working together

Young people are one of the groups most at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning and one of the least aware of the dangers of CO. Each year, the Scout Association equips more than 360,000 young people aged 4 to 25 with skills for life through weekly meetings and trips away from home. Included within its diverse and inspiring programme are a number of activities, such as campfires and BBQs, that have the potential to put both young people and adult volunteers at risk of CO poisoning.

Younger people, particularly those between the ages of 5 and 11, take messages home and **share learning with their families**. By engaging with young people around CO awareness, we're not only able to protect this at-risk group from the dangers of CO poisoning but we can also raise awareness of the silent killer among other age groups and hard-to-reach at-risk groups, including communities in deprived areas and BAME communities.

How we're working together

While the Scouts empowers its members to be independent and safe, the organisation did not have any CO awareness activities within its existing programmes. We're working collaboratively with the Scouts' dedicated programme content curators to co-develop CO awareness activities for groups across all its age ranges. These activities contribute to the achievement of badges.

We've also sponsored and helped co-design an updated Home Safety Badge for Cubs. The badge design includes a CO alarm, which has become the overarching logo for our collaborative partnership and activities.

To enable Scouts volunteers to effectively deliver our CO awareness activities, we've supported the development of training materials to **equip leaders with all the information they need to educate young people about CO safety**.

Beyond the activity programme, we're also raising CO awareness through the Scouts website and communications channels. By sharing information about CO safety while camping, we've expanded the reach of our awareness-raising activity to educate non-members, such as leaders, parents and carers.



Partnership outcomes

We've educated, engaged and empowered 35,696 young people on how to protect themselves and their families from CO through four activities designed to best suit the Beavers and Cubs age ranges.

More than 2,600 Cubs have been awarded our sponsored Home Safety Badge after successfully completing our co-designed activities to educate 8 to 10½-year-olds on how to prevent accidents at home, reduce risk and what to do when they suspect CO.

With 18.7% of Scout sections across the UK located in IMD areas 1 – 3, we have been able to reach at least 4,800 young people from deprived areas and those young people have become CO advocates within these hard-to-reach communities.

Again, by engaging young people from this hard-to-reach groups, we're able to indirectly reach their families too as they share their learning at home.

“ The input from the Gas Distribution Networks to create the first four activities added significant value to the process. By marrying the GDN’s significant knowledge around Carbon Monoxide with The Scouts’ know-how in creating amazing activities, we have four high-quality, engaging activities. The aim of the partnership is to provide young people with the skills and knowledge around CO to stay safe, and these activities do just that.”

Scouts Content Team.

Key programme achievements

- **Awarding 2,646 CO** Partnership sponsored Cub Home Safety badges
- **Educating 35,696 young people** about the dangers of carbon monoxide
- **Engaged over 140,000 adult volunteers** on the dangers of CO and promotion of scouting activities linked to CO safety
- Targeted social media engagement **reaching over 17,000 people**

CO and PSR Awareness Campaign – Winter 21/22



Lead GDN	Cadent	Forecast SROI	£5.75 return for every £1 spent
Participating GDNs	SGN; NGN; WWU	Status	Complete
Cost	£383,270.88	Start/End Date	December 21 - March 22

Why we're working together

Despite a year on year decline in the number of unintentional CO related deaths, CO still presents a major health risk to gas and other carbon based fuel users across the country. Annually, an average of 4,000 A&E visits, 200 long-term hospital admissions, and 30.3 deaths are attributed to CO poisoning; many in the industry predict these figures to be conservative at both high and low exposure levels.


Low levels of awareness on the signs, symptoms, and dangers of CO may contribute towards the number of hospital admissions and deaths nationally.

A 2021 research study found that the majority of people (54% of a 3,060 sample) have either heard of CO, but know little about the dangers, or are completely unaware of CO and the dangers. This percentage increased in younger, low income and ethnic minority groups.

Alongside awareness and regular gas appliance servicing, the installation of an audible CO alarm remains one of most effective preventive measures. **Whilst CO alarms are widely available, less than 50% of households have one.**

Increases in CO poisoning risk factors can be seasonal. For instance, the threat posed by incorrect use of BBQs can be more prevalent in the summer months, whilst the danger posed by poorly maintained/fitted gas appliances can be more common in the winter.

As well as awareness on the signs, symptoms, and dangers of CO, registration to the PSR can be one of the most effective means of support that GDNs are able to offer to customers in vulnerable situations. By registering to the PSR, GDNs are able to identify the reasons behind customer's vulnerabilities and take tailored actions to support them. However, it is estimated that approximately 6mil customers, who could be registered, are not.



Although there may be regional variance in gas appliance ownership, customer demographics, and vulnerability categories, the key messaging on CO safety and PSR remains consistent across the country. As such, the GDNs identified an opportunity to utilise a portion of the collaborative VCMA fund to deliver a multi-faceted awareness campaign at scale, ensuring that a large number and range of customers were able to access important safety information.

The GDNs formed a partnership with advertising agency J Seven Media, allowing the networks to utilise the agency's extensive experience to shape all aspects of the campaign's material and logistics. The GDNs also recognised the need to employ a partner that was expert in a number of media platforms, as the campaign's success would be linked to its ability to reach a range of audiences.

How we're working together

The collaborative VCMA fund offered the GDNs an opportunity to deliver essential messaging on CO safety, including use of the national gas emergency number, and PSR at scale, providing benefit to customers through a wide-reaching, consistent, and engaging campaign.

In order to ensure effective spend of the VCMA on the collaborative project, the GDNs worked with J Seven Media to adopt the model of:

1. **Raise awareness** – utilised various media to reach audiences with a memorable message
2. **Education and consideration** – Content on CO and PSR were consistently presented to customers to build engagement, trust, and provoke thought
3. **Take action** – targeted channels were used to offer an immediate solution to customer's concerns

This model included the use of several media types including London Underground posters/panels, bus street liners, phone kiosks, social media, audio, radio advertising, printed press and search engines.

The GDNs recognised the need to partner with experts like J Seven Media, particularly due to the challenge presented by the range of audiences that the campaign needed to engage.

For example, research suggests that younger age groups can be more at risk to the dangers of CO; this is due to a lack of awareness, low levels of alarm ownership, and gas appliance usage/behaviours. Contrastingly, many vulnerabilities included in PSR need code categories are more prevalent in older age groups.

The GDNs were able to use J Seven Media's advertising experience across multiple channels to ensure that a range of age groups, vulnerabilities, and the digitally excluded were able to access the campaign's messaging.

As well as factors such as low levels of awareness and alarm ownership, the GDNs also identified the need to act now due to developing energy crisis in 2021-2022. **Increases in fuel poverty and the impact of the pandemic led to the demand for gas appliance servicing, repairs, and installations to decrease by 34%.** This reduction may contribute to an increased risk of exposure to CO and outages following a gas emergency.

Key achievements

- The collaborative VCMA winter campaign **reached 29,494,789 individual customers**, surpassing the previously delivered summer campaign's reach of 20,800,000 individuals
- The winter campaign **created a total of £3,205,055.86 in social value** through raising awareness on the signs, symptoms, and dangers of CO
- Nationally, Priority Services Register registrations increased from an average of 11.28 registrations per week (sample between 01/10/2020 – 16/03/2021) to an **average of 77.92 registrations per week** during the campaign delivery window

Partnership outcomes

The collaborative VCMA winter campaign built on the Cadent-specific project delivered in summer 2021. The summer campaign was seen by an estimated 20.8 million individuals, and expectations were that the expanded winter programme would achieve an even greater impact due to its utilisation of a wider range of media and broader footprint.

Project evaluations report that the collaborative winter campaign reached a total of 29,494,789 individuals.

Insight from industry consultants suggested a retention rate of 24% when measuring the effectiveness of customers understanding and taking action from printed messaging (e.g. billboards).

However, The GDNs applied a conservative retention rate of 1%, due to range of media utilised and the challenges in quantifying the number of customers that have taken action as a direct result of the campaign.

Overall, the GDNs believe that the project created the following positive outcomes:

In excess of 290,000 customers received an awareness of:

- The signs, symptoms, and dangers of CO
- The PSR, the protection it offers, and the process of registration
- The support offered through the gas emergency helpline when suspecting CO
- Customers reached through the project would experience reductions in stress due to being better equipped when encountering a gas emergency, supply outage, and/or suspecting CO

As well as creating an immediate positive impact of safeguarding customers reached through the campaign, the collaborative project also offered the GDNs insight that could shape future awareness initiatives. For instance, learning on the effectiveness and cost/benefit analysis of each media channel will help maximise the success of future collaborative campaigns.

Finally, the collaborative campaign utilised a range of media channels to engage a number of customer groups, each with their own level of digital literacy and unique barrier(s) to being reached. For example, the project offered the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of audio advertising (e.g. Spotify/radio), versus printed press and digital media. This learning will help the GDNs to adapt strategies, ensuring increased effectiveness and value of future VCMA projects.

Future aspirations

Although significant progress has been made in increasing awareness and reducing the number of fatalities/injuries linked to CO, further work is required to ensure households remain safe. **Approximately 22,000,000 households continue to use mains gas**, whilst many million more rely on other carbon based fuels for their heating and cooking energy source.

Many predict that the 2022 energy crisis and wider rises in the cost of living may lead to millions more homes falling into fuel poverty, this may in turn impact household's ability to regularly service their gas appliances – a significant CO risk factor.

As such, the GDNs have an ambition to expand the scope of the project, aiming to deliver a summer/winter campaign each year for the remainder of the RIIO-GD2 price control. Future campaigns will build on the learning obtained from 2021-2022's initiative.



Carbon Monoxide in pregnancy research study project



Lead GDN
Participating GDNs
Cost

Cadent
SGN; NGN; WWU
£311,470
(£249,974 of VCMA funding)

Forecast SROI

Status
Start/End Date

The full social benefit of this project will be realised on Future VCMA programmes - see below case study for more information.
Ongoing
April 21 - approx. April 23

Why we're working together/Project Purpose

The collaborative CO in pregnancy project aims to provide insight on the level of risk and impact of exposure to CO in a specific customer group. The project will provide awareness on the relationship between CO and pregnancy, and also give the GDNs a greater understanding on how to influence and engage the pregnant community.

There are approximately 650,000 live births in England each year, with 4,700 perinatal deaths. Of this figure, 1,500 deaths are unexplained, with the possibility that some are the result of CO poisoning of the pregnant woman. Lower level exposure to CO can also have a detrimental effect on the health of the mother and foetus.

The GDNs and wider industry have historically conducted research on the prevalence, and risk of exposure to CO in the general population. However, the level of CO awareness and specific health risks within the pregnant community is still relatively unknown.

In terms of identifying exposure to CO from dangerous gas appliances, the pregnant group also face several unique challenges. For example, whilst the industry has established processes to account for CO caused by smoking, there has been very little research conducted on exposure to environmental CO (e.g. emitted by dangerous appliances).

Furthermore, CO in pregnant women can be difficult to identify due to the environment in when they are tested. For instance, many women leave their home environment for testing at maternity units. This can be problematic, as CO starts to leave the body when air not contaminated with CO is breathed in, resulting in an increased risk of health practitioners not being able to identify environmental CO.

The project also aims to address the industry's knowledge gap on environmental CO. Many of the medical symptoms of CO poisoning (e.g. fatigue, nausea etc.) are also associated with pregnancy, increasing the difficulty for health professionals in correctly identifying the presence of CO.

The vast majority of collaborative and company-specific VCMA projects provided an immediate tangible social return on investment in the first year of RIIO-GD2. For example, initiatives centred on the issuing of CO education/alerts and advice on home energy efficiency provided customers with instant benefit. The CO in Pregnancy Research Project differs, in that the full social value of the project will be realised on future vulnerability projects in this price control and beyond. Immediate social return benefits are each woman taking part in the study receives a Love2Shop gift voucher, a Safe and Well home check completed by the Fire and Rescue Service which includes fire and CO awareness discussions and a free CO alarm which is placed in the appropriate position during the home check visit. The project will provide the GDNs with a rich understanding on the attitudes, understanding, and behaviours of an especially vulnerable group towards CO. This improved understanding will help GDNs to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of future CO safety initiatives.

Additionally, the value of the project will stretch beyond just the gas distribution networks, as awareness on the signs, symptoms, and dangers of CO is disseminated across health professionals on a national scale. As well as improving the effectiveness of future projects, the study has also supported 77 women so far to stay safe against the dangers of CO.

There was resounding stakeholder support for the delivery of a research study specifically aimed at CO in pregnancy, based on recommendations from the "COMed working paper on CO in Pregnancy" and the "COMed Carbon Monoxide Poisoning: Saving Lives, Advancing Treatment"

How we're working together

The GDNs worked in partnership with a number of stakeholders to deliver the project. These stakeholders included Improving Performance in Practice (IPIP), national Fire and Rescue Services, NHS maternity units, and various equipment partners.

Local maternity services will support the recruitment of **120 women into the study**, whilst Fire and Rescue services are responsible for installing and retrieving monitoring equipment as part of their wider Safe and Well checks programme. Every woman taking part in the study receives a £20 Love2Shop gift voucher and a CO alarm placed in a suitable position during the Safe and Well check visit. The project also obtained approval from the National Institute of Health Research and Clinical Research Network.

100 pregnant women took part in the quantitative element of the project, whereby CO environmental and breath readings were recorded over a two week period. 15-20 pregnant women participated in the qualitative section of the project, offering their beliefs, knowledge and attitudes towards CO.

Key achievements

The VCMA collaborative project is still ongoing, and a final report is not due until March 2023. However, the key milestones achieved so far are:

- The research project **gained ethical approval** - this was key given the customer group participating in the study
- **All participants offered a Fire and Rescue Service Safe and Well visit**, allowing customers to access wider benefit on fire/gas safety and affordable warmth
- **Contract steering group formed** and study governance, protocols, pathways, escalation procedures developed and agreed. Successful working relationships between Fire and Rescue Services and NHS Midwifery departments have been formed and are expected to continue outside of this project on an ongoing basis with the opportunity for a wider scale relationship to be formed across different areas of the country.

Partnership outcomes

The project aims to assess potential sources and measure CO levels in pregnant women. This insight can be used to further understand the prevalence of exposure, how such exposure occurs, and whether current processes are fit for purpose when identifying exposure to CO in the home.

The project will also identify barriers and enablers to protecting women and their unborn children from harm caused by CO, therefore providing an awareness on pregnant women and health professional's attitudes, knowledge and concerns towards CO.

The programme will also provide information regarding possible requirements for the protection of pregnant women under schemes delivered by Central Government Departments, Agencies, NHS England and stakeholders in the domestic fuel industry.

Client story

IPIP shared several case studies with the GDNs to support the study. A real life example included:

"A 23 year old woman attended her midwife appointment where routine CO breath levels were tested and found to be at 64ppm. She was a non smoker as was her partner and could not understand the high reading. Her partner was also tested and his reading was 82ppm. The woman had reported symptoms of headache and nausea which had been dismissed as symptoms of a normal pregnancy.

The couple attended A&E for oxygen therapy, and a gas engineer attended the home finding CO levels above 200ppm, and the boiler was condemned. The couple didn't have a CO alarm and were unaware of the dangers. The woman went on to have a normal delivery of a healthy baby however suffered severe anxiety throughout her pregnancy due to concerns regarding the possible impact to the baby"

Director of Improving Performance in Practice (IPIP)
Hilary Wareing stated:

"One of the most important things we can do is give every child the best start in life and part of that is helping women keep their baby safe during pregnancy. The funding for this study is allowing us to gain a better understanding of the harm being caused by exposure to carbon monoxide and how we can support women to remove that risk during their pregnancy."



Looking ahead to 22/23 and beyond

The VCMA has provided a much-needed opportunity for the GDNs to truly support our customers and communities in most need. Over the last year we have formed strategic, meaningful and impactful relationships with key partner organisations that we aim to continue for years to come. Key to our approach has been the ability to adapt and change in response to emerging issues and changing customer needs.

Over the next 12 months, we recognise that the cost of living crisis will continue to have an enduring impact on the customers and communities that we serve, pushing more people into poverty, and making living conditions extremely difficult for those who were 'just about managing'.

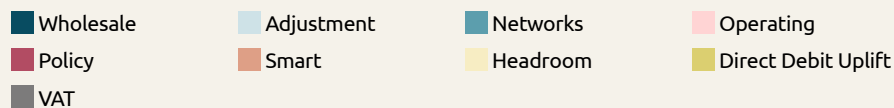
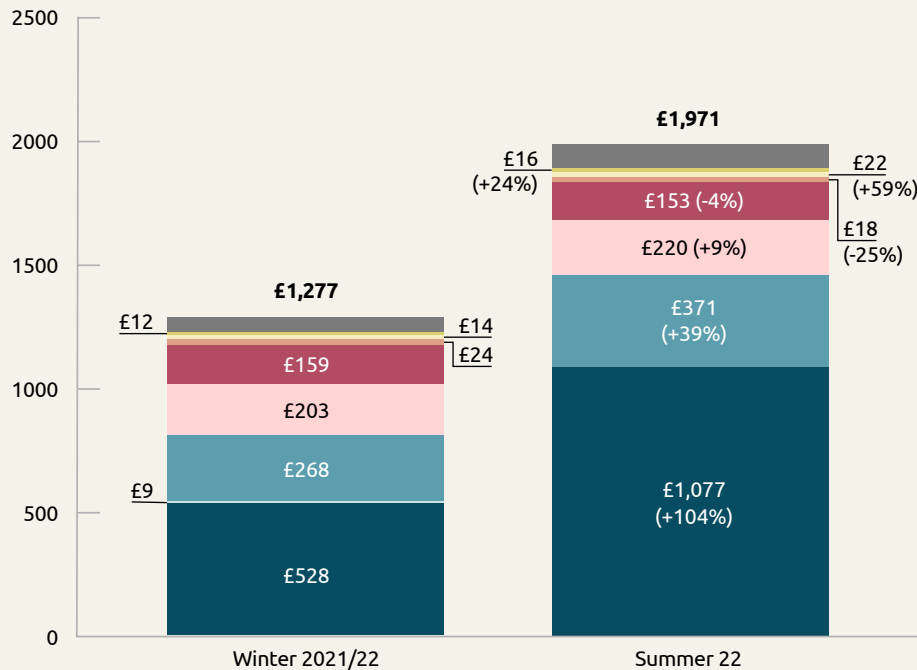
NEA analysis on page 23 shows how the price cap changes will impact different household groups, with low-income households being disproportionately impacted.

How is the price cap changing?

We are seeing record increases in the price cap. Those with credit meters will pay **£1971/year** on average.

Prepayment users will pay on average **£2017/year**.

These increases are almost entirely due to changes in the wholesale market.

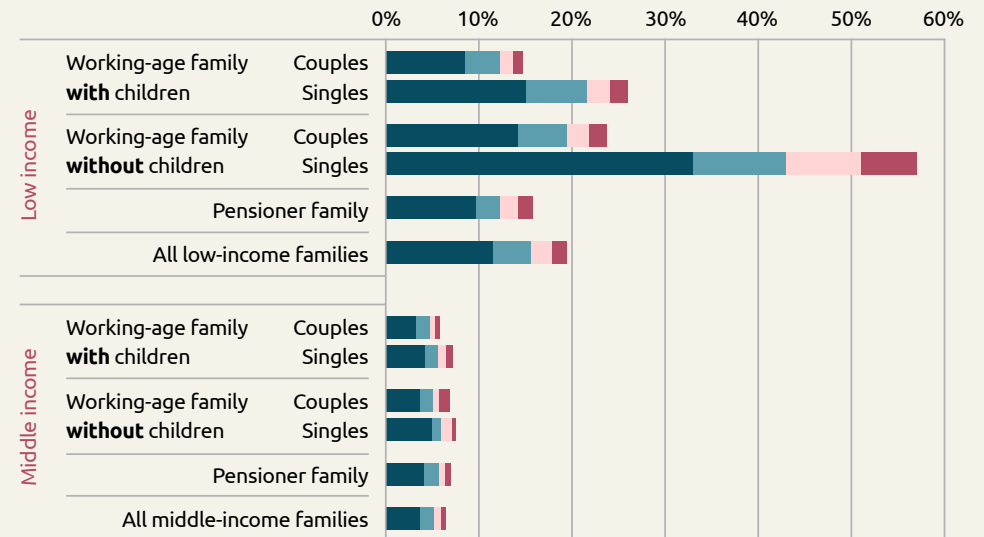


How do these changes impact on different households?

Low income households will be disproportionately impacted – especially single working age households without children.

Others at particular risk include:

- Older people
- Households with a disability/medical condition
- Young families
- Prepayment users
- Households living in Northern Ireland



Source: JRF analysis of ONS' Living Costs and Food Survey and Ofgem's Energy Price Cap data

Due to the energy price cap and associated impact on households and living costs in general, the GDNs are continuously horizon scanning, for projects that will help alleviate the financial burden on households.

We already have a number of new projects and partnerships in the pipeline that will extend our reach and maximise opportunities for support. We are continuing to make sure that projects are built holistically, and where possible, provide customers with the information they need at one touchpoint, rather than having to go down multiple routes.

Here are just some of the projects and partnerships that we are looking to support over the coming 12 months:

Project Name	Partner	Target audience	Status	Lead GDN	Participating GDNs
Disability Energy Support	SCOPE	Vulnerable customers living with disability	In delivery	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU
Young people financial resilience schools programme	MyBnk	9-11 year olds	In delivery	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU
NSPCC Collaborative GDN Project	NSPCC	0-18 year olds	Project in design	Cadent	NGN, SGN and WWU
Tackling fuel poverty amongst terminally ill people	Marie Curie	Vulnerable customers living with life limited conditions	Project in design	SGN	TBC
WASH Advice line	NEA	Low income households	In delivery	Cadent and SGN	TBC
Mental Health and Money Advice National Programme	Mental Health UK	Vulnerable customers living with mental health issues	Pilot project active in Scotland	SGN	TBC
National Programme	Young Carers	Young carers	Project in design	Cadent	TBC
People living with Cancer	Maggie's	Vulnerable customers living with cancer	Project in design	Cadent	NGN, SGN and WWU
Safe and Warm homes	Age UK	Older people	Project in design	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU
Carbon Monoxide Education Programme	Bonanza Creative	Primary and Secondary School aged children	In delivery	SGN	NGN and WWU
CO Safe Homes	Dorset and Wiltshire FRS	Vulnerable households	In delivery	SGN	WWU
PSR Pilot – CO safety	SPEN	PSR households	In delivery	SGN	Cadent and WWU
Newly independent CO Game Over and University	Heavenly and Campus Group	16-24 year olds	Project in design	WWU and SGN	NGN
Carents Room	Carents Room	Older People and Carers	Project in design	NGN	Cadent
One Number	Groundwork / NEA	Low income households	In delivery	Cadent	NGN

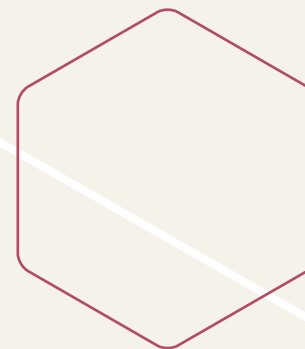
Finally, over the coming months, and alongside our stakeholders, we will be considering how we should profile our remaining VCMA allocation over the next four years. Whilst we want to make sure that we have sufficient funds to support projects until the end of GD2, there is an urgency to provide significant and meaningful levels of support right now.

Reports from many of our partners are showing that demand on services is increasing day on day. This may mean that we spend more of our allowance over the next 12-18 months in response to this demand, leaving less for the remaining years in GD2. We also may consider to align our spend seasonally, so investing more with partners who are responding to crisis situations over the cold months, when need will be at its greatest.

How to get involved

Visit the GDN websites to find out more information about the VCMA and how to put forward your ideas for future projects:

cadentgas.com
northerngasnetworks.co.uk
sgn.co.uk
wwutilities.co.uk



Appendix – Project Update Summary Tables



VCMA Title/Name	Target audience (PSR where applicable)	Key Stakeholder Engagement Activities	Total Cost	Spend in Yr1	Update against agreed milestones in PEA	Learning and dissemination activities	Remaining Timescales
Citizens Advice National partnership.	Consumers in vulnerable situations and relate to energy safeguarding, provide awareness of the dangers of CO and an Energy and CO safety pack that will reduce the risk of harm caused by CO.	<p>SGN Customer Engagement Group and Vulnerable Steering Group Engagement Guided SGN to work with existing organisations that already support those in crisis and where we are able to broaden the reach or increase the capacity of those established charities that support people most in need. Prioritising those on low incomes, in extreme financial vulnerability and fuel crisis.</p> <p>GDN CO Collaboration Group When discussing this as a potential collaborative VCMA project with the members of the GDN CO Collaboration Group, strategic stakeholders including all four GDNs, Gas Safe Register and Project Shout supported this partnership and the progression of this project.</p> <p>GDN GD2 Consumer Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Steering Group Feedback from Matt Copeland member of our strategic steering group and Head of Policy and Public Affairs at NEA said “I support the Citizens Advice National partnership going through the VCMA. This winter, and throughout next year, it will be increasingly important to provide additional practical support to struggling energy consumers. These projects will look to give additional advice, but also, crucially, 6 Classified as Internal financial support to those households that need it most, so that they can stay warm and well at home through this period of extended high energy prices”.</p>	£1,788,792	£728,941.80 First two invoice payments for each GDN and includes the £22,375 for 2,500 CO alarms in the CO/Energy Pack pilot	<p>CA Advisor CO Training Project target 120 advisors trained on CO. Q1 (Jan – Mar 22) Delivery – 125 CA Advisors trained on CO.</p> <p>Energy Advice (EAP) Q1 target – 1,000. Q1 delivery – 1,127 (112%) CO Advice Q1 target – 2,500. Q1 delivery – 2,561 (102%)</p> <p>CO + Energy Packs (CO alarm) Pilot project to provide 2,500 CO alarm and Energy Advice packs. Over 50% of clients supported require the pack with 1,781 issued in Q1.</p> <p>Fuel bill renegotiation Q1 target – 200 Q1 delivery – 612</p> <p>Warm Home Discount Q1 target – 700 Q1 delivery – 1,425</p> <p>PSR Registrations Q1 target – 590 Q1 delivery – 1,553</p>	<p>Learnings from this project are disseminated through the monthly collaboration and strategy group. First quarterly report includes a more detailed view of outcomes and learnings. We will review quarterly reporting to look at what we’ve learnt, and how it’s helped us adapt and shape. Learnings will also be shared through the Showcase event to inform interested stakeholders and potential partners.</p> <p>Working with Citizens Advice and their broader network we are hoping to enhance our understanding of the additional benefits for customers that come from a partner embedded within other referral pathways and able to refer out customers in need to other services.</p> <p>We also hope to understand if the provision of an energy and CO safety pack sent out to customers following an awareness/advice discussion is an effective method of delivering a CO safety device and additional information on managing a safe and warm home.</p>	March 2023

VCMA Title/Name	Target audience (PSR where applicable)	Key Stakeholder Engagement Activities	Total Cost	Spend in Yr1	Update against agreed milestones in PEA	Learning and dissemination activities	Remaining Timescales
Fuel Bank Foundation	Vulnerable households identified via a network of community support partners and where required by direct referral from the funding networks.	<p>SGN Customer Engagement Group and Vulnerable Steering Group Engagement</p> <p>In light of the increased numbers of people unable to afford energy our embedded stakeholder groups challenged SGN to identify an organisation that could support those most vulnerable to self disconnection with access to emergency funds so that they could have respite from living in a cold and unhealthy home. Our Vulnerability Steering Group provided guidance and recommended we look to form a national collaboration, one where funding could be accessed easily by those in crisis, with an established network to identify those in need. The partner also needed to have the controls in place to ensure there was robust eligibility processes and that through direct funding that we were offering access to further help as not to create dependency on the scheme for customers.</p> <p>GDN GD2 Consumer Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Steering Group</p> <p>The group reviewed and endorsed the proposal as it was agreed that the data available highlighted that the customer groups most likely to need crisis support was those on pre-payment meters as the fuel and cost of living crisis would mean more people are at risk of rationing energy or self-disconnection. The steering groups agreed that there was a need to link into an established network of grassroots agencies helping those in crisis with the controls to ensure follow on support was provided.</p>	£500,000	£250,000	<p>This initiative is delivering inline with the PEA scope.</p> <p>The team at Fuel Bank Foundation are on track for supporting 4,000 households with the groups funding within the first year.</p> <p>Since the PEA was submitted there has been additional funding from three regional electricity network operators which will increase the ability to support more households without creating additional management costs to Fuel Bank Foundation.</p>	<p>We run monthly meetings with FBF who provide information as to what is happening in the network of partnerships, which new grassroots organisations are accessing the unbounded funding. FBF also share insights as to the monthly increases in customer demand and customer / charity case studies which are cascaded for discussion and learning in the monthly Vulnerability Working Group.</p> <p>These insights and the FBF research and reporting is also shared with the electricity networks and we've been able to onboard additional funding via 3 of the DNOs to date.</p>	21 months remaining

VCMA Title/Name	Target audience (PSR where applicable)	Key Stakeholder Engagement Activities	Total Cost	Spend in Yr1	Update against agreed milestones in PEA	Learning and dissemination activities	Remaining Timescales
The Scouts – Carbon Monoxide Awareness Programme.	Young People / Hard to reach groups.	<p>SGN's Future Thinkers Panel During a dedicated CO Safety session with SGN's Future Thinkers Panel, which is made up of sixteen 14 – 16 year olds from across their network regions in Scotland and southern England, with key interests in topics like climate change, future energy solutions and STEM careers, one of the panel's key recommendations was to make links with organisations like Scouts. Their reasoning for this was that young people are more likely to listen to and learn from information about CO safety in a formal setting that already has a focus on learning.</p> <p>SGN's Vulnerability Steering Group During 2020/21 our Vulnerable Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability and CO strategies and our priorities for GD2. They guided us to work with existing organisation that tap into the target audience and encouraged us to work with partners who have a shared ambition. Data tells us the target audience is correct and our shared ambition is to ensure young people are safe, informed and empowered to be ambassadors for us in the community. The Vulnerability Steering Group have endorsed SGN's leadership in this initiative.</p> <p>GDN Strategic Engagement Groups When discussing this as a potential collaborative VCMA project during both the GDN CO Collaboration Group and GD2 Consumer Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Steering Group strategic stakeholders involved in both groups supported this partnership and the progression of this project.</p>	£300,000	£100,000	<p>Young People reach Yr1 target in PEA to engage 75,000 young people with the activities. Only started delivering in February 2022.</p> <p>From February and March the estimated young person reach is 35,696, nearly 50% of the Yr1 target. *nb – The estimated YP reach could include some duplication as doesn't account for individual young people may complete multiple activities.</p> <p>Badge sales 2,646 GDN Cub Home safety badges sold. *nb – This doesn't correlate to young people engaged as multiple activities must be completed to achieve the badge.</p> <p>Adult Volunteer Engagement Yr1 Target of 11,250 adults engaged in CO/activities. 2,231 clicks on activities by Adult Volunteers. CO messaging included in two Scouts' membership emails (Launch comms and CO comp), with 363 clicks in CO specific posts.</p> <p>GDN Partner Page views 818 partner page views. No target set on this and Scouts advised that partner page views tend to be low as it's the activity pages that get the attention and views</p> <p>Case Studies/CO awareness score Not yet undertaken the selected case study/CO awareness survey activity as wanted to launch and promote the activities first.</p> <p>Attendance at GDN attended Scout event No events run as yet. Details of some in planning and will share details once confirmed.</p>	<p>Learnings from this project are disseminated through the monthly collaboration and strategy group. Not yet had the first quarterly report, but this will include a more detailed view of outcomes and learnings. We will review year on year reporting to look at what we've learnt, and how it's helped us adapt and shape. Learnings will also be shared through the Showcase event to inform interested stakeholders and potential partners.</p> <p>We will use the insights from this project to develop our awareness and education programme for young people around CO and broader safety messaging. Informing decisions on future potential partnerships and projects with the possibility to mirror the model if successful.</p>	August 2024

VCMA Title/Name	Target audience (PSR where applicable)	Key Stakeholder Engagement Activities	Total Cost	Spend in Yr1	Update against agreed milestones in PEA	Learning and dissemination activities	Remaining Timescales
Winter Campaign – J Seven Media	A range of customer demographics were targeted through a range of media channels (e.g. younger age groups, digitally excluded etc.). The campaign aimed to target higher CO risk audiences and customers more likely to be eligible for PSR registration.	<p>The GDNs engaged with several advertising agencies to understand the most effective methods for reaching and engaging customers, particularly following the shift in the landscape as a result of Covid-19.</p> <p>The GDNs also engaged with several key stakeholders including Policy Connect and Gas Safe Register when formalising the project.</p>	£383,270.88	£383,270.88	<p>The campaign reached 29,494,789 individual customers, surpassing the previously delivered summer campaign’s reach of 20,800,000 individuals.</p> <p>The campaign created a total of £3,205,055.86 in social value through raising awareness on the signs, symptoms, and dangers of CO.</p> <p>PSR registrations increased from an average of 11.28 registrations per week (to an average of 77.92 registrations per week during the campaign delivery window.</p>	<p>The project offered multiple learning opportunities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An improved understanding on the effectiveness and cost/benefit of a range of engagement channels including social media, printed press and audio • On unique considerations of working collaboratively with multiple GDNs. This learning has improved the efficiency and ability to mobilise of subsequent collaborative VCMA projects (e.g. working collaboratively across multiple procurement/legal departments) 	Project completed in year one of RII0-GD2 – there is an ambition to expand and further improve the project in future years of the price control.

VCMA Title/Name	Target audience (PSR where applicable)	Key Stakeholder Engagement Activities	Total Cost	Spend in Yr1	Update against agreed milestones in PEA	Learning and dissemination activities	Remaining Timescales
<p>Exposure to CO during pregnancy research.</p>	<p>Pregnant women suspected of being at higher risk of exposure to the dangers of carbon monoxide.</p>	<p>The project is being delivered in partnership with a number of organisations including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liverpool John Moores University, • NHS Maternity • Fire & Rescue Services • Gas Safety Trust • Improving Performance in Practice (IPIP) <p>The GDNs engaged with key stakeholders from the NHS, the National Institute of Health Research and Clinical Research Network, Fire and Rescue Services, and health practitioners.</p> <p>The GDNs also conducted wide reaching and varied stakeholder engagement as part of their RII0-GD2 business planning and VCMA year one activity. Many stakeholders supported initiatives aimed at further understanding CO risk and raising awareness.</p>	<p>£311,470</p>	<p>£137,485.80</p>	<p>The VCMA project is a research study, with the aim of providing an insight into the level of risk and impact of exposure to CO in pregnant women.</p> <p>Key Milestones</p> <p>The project has delivered against many key milestones outlined in the PEA. For example:</p> <p>The project parties have developed and agreed research study governance and procedures;</p> <p>Ethical approval sought and obtained. NHS and FRS sites identified, and contracts signed.</p> <p>Research site staff trained in clinical governance, research protocol and use of equipment.</p> <p>Recruitment commenced for study one and study two.</p> <p>Project Outcomes</p> <p>The outcomes in year one are limited due to the start-up and mobilisation of the project.</p> <p>There is extensive governance and ethics to get through given the nature of the project.</p> <p>The Fire and Rescue Service have so far completed 45 Safe and Well check visits including a free CO alarm for each home. Also 32 interviews have been completed so far by the research team understanding the attitudes and behaviors towards CO.</p> <p>The study was limited due to the pandemic through the winter and a strategic decision was made to pause the project at the start of Spring, ready to be started again in Winter when participants use their appliances more frequently.</p>	<p>The project offers multiple learning opportunities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature of this project and the customer group participating legitimately created the need for additional assurance and ethical approval. The GDNs went through a period of learning on how to coordinate multiple stakeholders to obtain this level of ethical approval/assurance • Delivery by front line NHS staff is crucial to the success of the project. The GDNs gained learning and insight on how to best engage partners such as the NHS during/in the aftermath of a pandemic • SROI calculations – the need to demonstrate a positive SROI was a relatively new regulatory concept for some GDNs. The group obtained a lot of learning on how to quantify “indirect” social value on research based projects 	<p>The VCMA collaborative project is still ongoing, and a final report is not due until March 2023.</p>