



Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance Annual Collaborative Report 2022/23 Gas Distribution Networks



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How to use our interactive report

Clicking on a link highlighted in **green** will take you through to a section within this report or an external website for more information.

From this page, you can navigate to a particular section in the report by using the quick links in our contents list.



Welcome

This is the second annual collaborative report from the Gas Distribution Networks (GDNs) for the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA). It marks the first two years of the regulatory period known as RIIO-GD2, running from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2023.

The GDNs are also publishing individual reports which should be read alongside this report.

This report explains how we work together collaboratively to identify and protect customers in vulnerable situations through our day-to-day activities, and how the VCMA allows us to offer additional support to our customers and the communities we serve.

2022/23 has been a challenging year for communities across Britain, with the majority of homes impacted by the highest inflation rates for 40 years and unprecedented energy costs. This year's report, therefore, has a strong focus on how we have adapted our strategy and built new partnerships and projects to keep energy affordable and customers safe in their homes.

We're extremely proud to work together to support vulnerable households nationwide. We're creating genuine value for our customers by using VMCA funds responsibly to design and facilitate tailored programmes that best support customers in need.

Together, we learn, innovate and share best practice for the benefit of all our customers, engaging stakeholders and our expert partner organisations every step of the way.

Our customers trust us to keep them safe and warm, and we don't take this responsibility lightly.

Through the course of this report, we'll share how we're harnessing the opportunities of the VCMA funding to collectively deliver a positive impact in the communities we serve.



Supporting priority customers during our works

Who we are and what we do

As Britain's four gas distribution network companies, we're regulated by the energy regulator Ofgem. Our work on the gas networks means we're in our communities keeping our customers safe and warm 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

We know our customers' needs are varied and some households need extra help to maintain a safe and warm home. This could be due to financial, social, health or environmental factors, and can be complex with some people having multiple factors impacting their lives.

We have long-standing licence conditions as gas distribution network operators, which require us to identify vulnerable customers and provide additional services to those that need them.



The Priority Services Register (PSR)

We can access the gas suppliers' Priority Services Register data to help identify customers in need of priority support as we go about our work. Around 24% of homes in Britain are registered on the gas suppliers' PSRs.

Our teams, including operational contractors working on our behalf, look to identify and support eligible customers to access the PSR and support for their bespoke needs. This year, we've referred 77,972 eligible households for the PSR.

Collectively as GDNs, we've worked with the Energy Networks Association (ENA) and electricity distribution network operators (DNOs) to promote data sharing in recent years. We proudly launched the new website, the-psr.co.uk, in March 2023 to make it even easier for vulnerable customers to join the PSR through a single online resource.



Common support from all GDNs

Either proactively through the use of the PSR or when we identify a customer in a vulnerable situation through the course of our operational work, we commonly provide the following additional support services:

- Accessible communications
- Translation and interpretation services, including written, verbal and British Sign Language (BSL)
- Voice and SMS broadcast location-based messages for support during gas emergencies
- Alternative electric heating and cooking appliances during gas supply interruptions
- Hot food and hot water during gas supply incidents
- Alternative accommodation, where required, during supply interruptions
- Free alterations of services to meet physical access needs
- Referrals for energy advice services through trusted, expert partners
- Support to access funded gas connections through the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES).

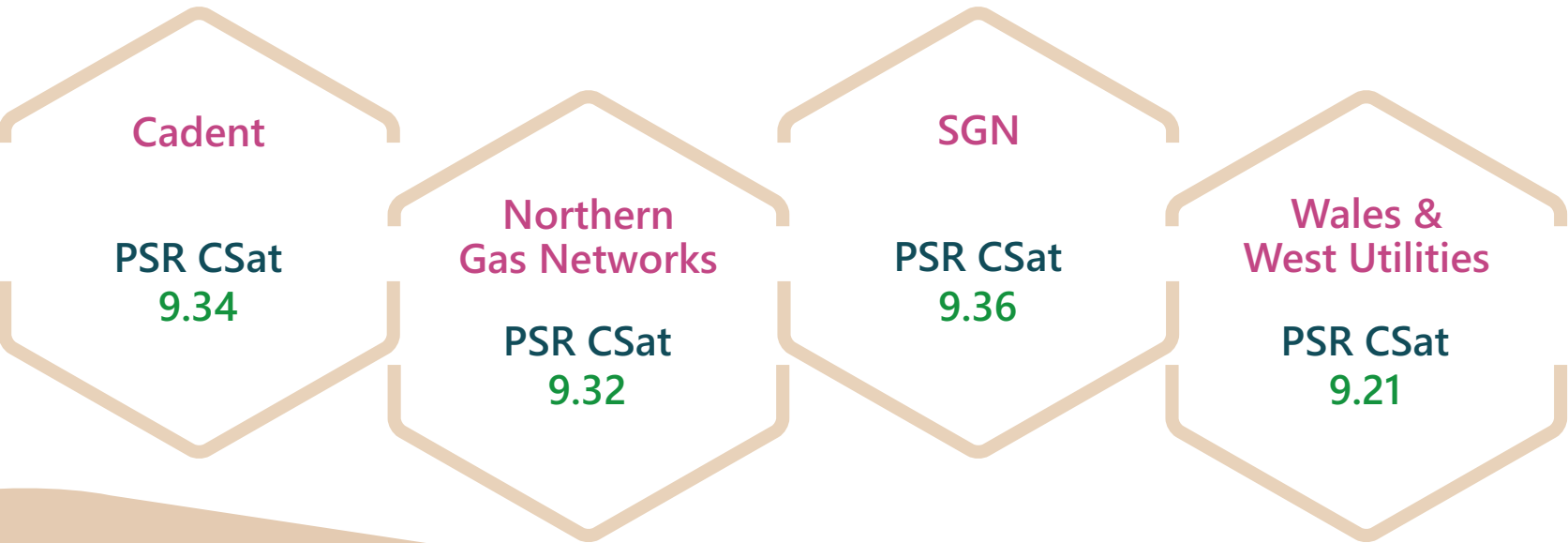
How we measure our priority customer performance

We work hard to make sure we get things rights for our priority customers, and we’re continually working to improve the services and support we offer.

We measure our priority customer performance through PSR customer satisfaction scores (CSat).

When a PSR-registered customer interacts with us, whether it’s a gas emergency, planned work or new connection, their experience is measured by Explain Market Research through telephone, postal and online customer surveys.

2022/23 performance



We all invite further external audit into our core business to validate that the services we provide are fair and inclusive. Proudly, we have all achieved and maintained either the British Standard BS18477 for inclusive service provision (SGN and Cadent) or the new ISO 22458 for inclusive services and consumer vulnerability and Kitemark (Northern Gas Networks and Wales & West Utilities). This provides reassurance that we are achieving and maintaining high standards for the vulnerable customers we serve.

Our PSR customers consistently score us above **9 out of 10** for customer satisfaction with a GDN average of **9.30** for 2022/23. In comparison, the latest UKCSI* UK Customer Satisfaction Score for January 2023 is **7.77 out of 10**.



* The UK Customer Satisfaction Index (UKCSI) is a national benchmark of customer satisfaction.

Introducing the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

The current Ofgem price control period RIIO-GD2 runs for five years from April 2021 to March 2026. The £60 million (2018/19 prices) Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) supports the GDNs' individual business plans and ambitions for looking after vulnerable customers during RIIO-GD2.

The funding supports programmes focused on vulnerable customers and carbon monoxide (CO) safety initiatives that go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanisms or required through licence obligations. Eligible programmes must:

- provide support to consumers in vulnerable situations and relate to energy safeguarding, or
- provide awareness of the dangers of CO, or
- reduce the risk of harm caused by CO.

Each GDN is allocated a proportion of the £60 million allowance based on the number of customers they serve.



Working collaboratively

Collaboration enables us to achieve better outcomes for our customers across Britain. Collaborative programmes bring economies of scale, enabling us to reach more people, share learning and reduce the administrative impact on the third sector.

Each network will spend a minimum of 25% of our allowance on joint-GDN collaborative programmes, exceeding Ofgem’s governance target. The 25% represents £15 million of funding in 2018/19 prices, which is predicted to be in the region of £18.5 million in real terms with annual inflation applied using the Consumer Price Index (CPIH).

Typically, we establish collaborative programmes in regions served by more than one gas network or when the need of a particular vulnerable customer group isn’t defined by geographical location. Structuring programmes in this way provides benefits to us, our customers and our third-sector partner organisations.

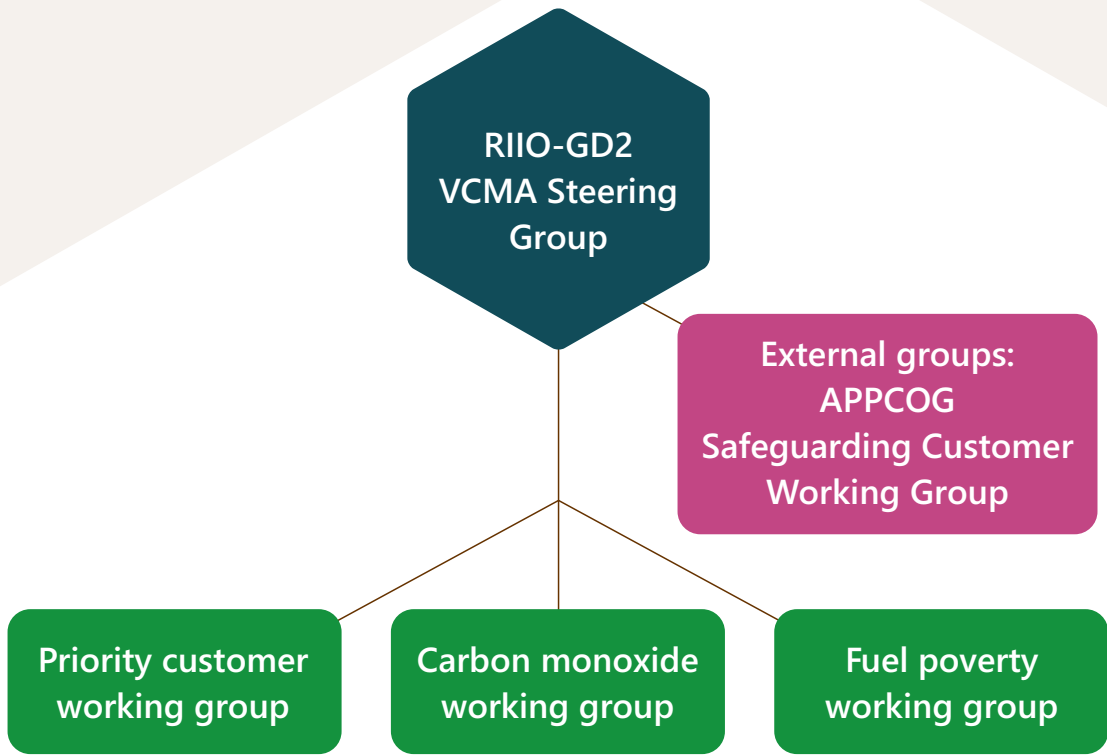
Structuring our support

Our collaborative strategy is governed by our RIIO-GD2 VCMA Steering Group, made up of senior leaders from all networks as well as stakeholder representatives from key customer organisations including Citizens Advice, National Energy Action and Energy UK.

Accountable to our steering group are our three needs-focused working groups. All three groups work to determine, design and manage our collaborative programmes, presenting to the RIIO-GD2 Steering Group every six weeks on programme performance and future initiatives. These meetings are also an opportunity for the steering group to ask questions, challenge and share valuable insight.

Every network participates in every working group. Together we discuss local-level programmes and developments, sharing learnings and identifying opportunities for collaborative working.

In addition, we engage with key industry-level groups to share insight and best practice, such as the energy sector’s Safeguarding Customers Working Group (CSWG) with representatives from all energy market participants including energy suppliers and electricity networks. These groups ensure our activity aligns with what’s happening across the wider industry and our programmes don’t duplicate or conflict with other active or planned initiatives to support vulnerable customers and reduce CO exposure. This enriches the quality of our outcomes and ensures we’re up to date with vulnerable customer initiatives across retail, electricity distribution and other utilities.



Our strategy

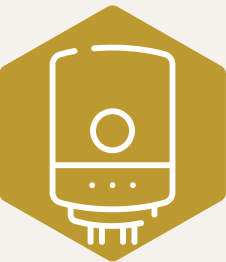
Each network has its own strategy for delivering the VCMA, which includes collaborative projects, based on regional stakeholder engagement and our individual RIIO-GD2 business plan commitments.

We are all committed to identifying and supporting customers who need extra help to stay safe and warm at home. And we all work to address the barriers our customers face in being able to afford energy and protect themselves from CO harm.

We share this same approach when it comes to our collaborative projects:

Our collaborative strategy is to engage with stakeholders and undertake research to determine areas of greatest customer need.

Our projects can be summarised under four key themes:



Services beyond the meter

Direct operational support provided to vulnerable customers as we go about our work



Fuel poverty and energy affordability

Programmes designed to help customers struggling to afford energy



Supporting priority customer groups

Programmes targeted at supporting PSR-eligible customers



Carbon monoxide awareness

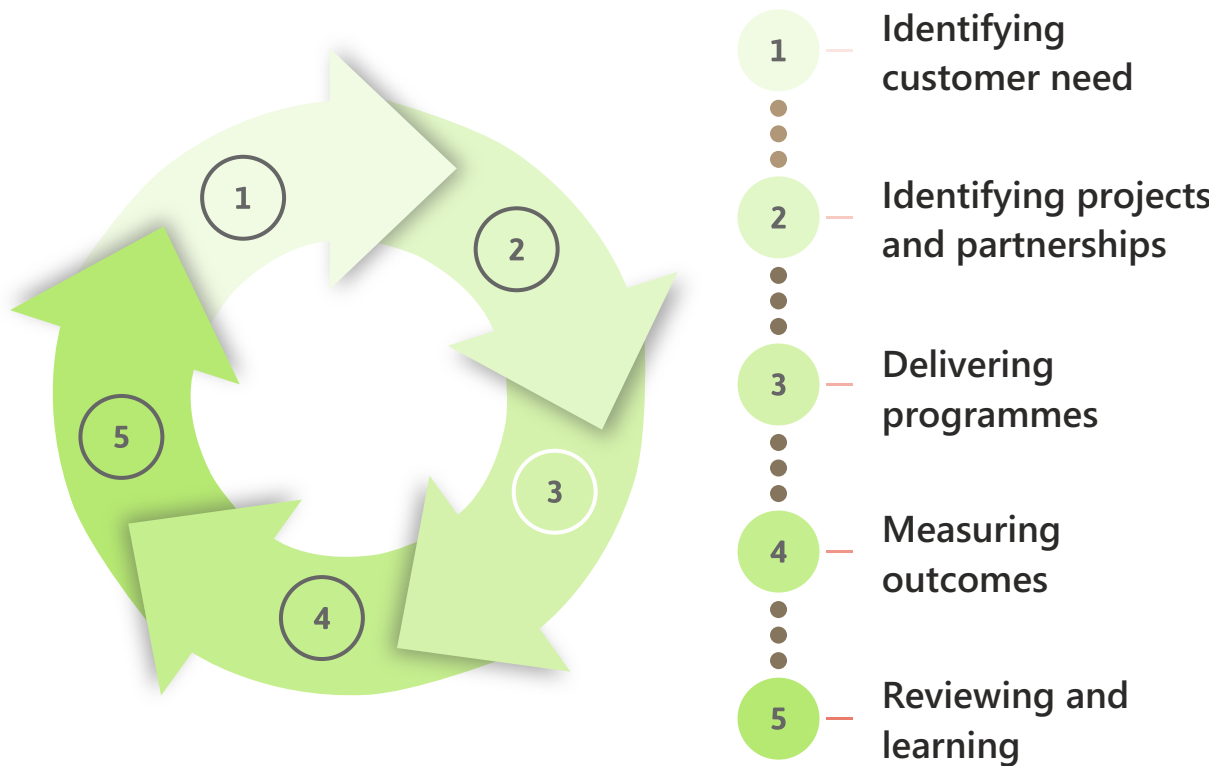
Programmes to increase awareness of carbon monoxide and how to stay safe from CO

Look out for these icons as they will guide the primary driver of the projects later in the report.

These themes have defined the programmes that you'll read more about as you progress through this report. You'll also find case studies for some of our programmes within each of these four themes within **our projects section**.



We identify, design and deliver our programmes through a five-stage process, which is detailed in the following pages:



Identifying customer need

Our stakeholders have been key to us securing this allowance through our business plan development. It was their responses to the Ofgem consultations on the RIIO-GD2 proposals that led to the fund being doubled from an initial £30 million to £60 million.

Embracing stakeholder insight

Each GDN holds regular stakeholder engagement sessions with charities, consumer groups, customers and our colleagues. Reports such as the NEA's annual UK Fuel Poverty Monitor, Citizens Advice's Cost-of-Living Dashboard and Scope's Cost-of-Living and Disability Price Tag 2023 research are also invaluable in identifying customers' needs.

An additional trigger for projects is legislation and regulations. An example of this was the introduction of new regulations in Scotland, England and Wales requiring all landlords to install CO alarms in properties with fossil fuel appliances leading to our CO Awareness Week campaign, which you can read more about on [page 29](#).

These channels of engagement and reports enable us to obtain an up-to-date picture of the changing economic and social landscape in order to guide our priorities and respond appropriately to changing customer needs.

Our RIIO-GD2 Steering Group

We also involve stakeholders as either standing attendees or invitees to our GDN groups and steering committee. The RIIO-GD2 VCMA Steering Group includes representatives from Citizens Advice, National Energy Action and Energy UK, 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. In addition, we sit on national groups, such as the 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 safety.

Responding to the energy crisis

A key theme that we've heard through both our individual GDN engagement and the RIIO-GD2 Steering Group is that we need to respond quickly and effectively to hardship caused by the energy crisis. When the energy crisis first reared its head in October 2021, we moved quickly to identify some major projects with Citizens Advice and the Fuel Bank Foundation to support vulnerable households to keep the heating and lights on through the next two winters.

It became clear during 2022 that high energy prices were here for some time and inflation will remain high. Customers will continue to be impacted by this, requiring crisis support as well as longer-term advice and support services that will put them in a better place to effectively manage their energy consumption costs into the future.

By ensuring we're responsive and relevant in how we develop new partnerships and deliver existing partnerships, we're able to meet the needs of households in energy crisis.

"We need to bring more attention to the severity of the cost-of-living crisis. I know other people with disabilities like myself who can't afford to put the heating on and eat, so they have to choose."

Fuel Bank Foundation beneficiary

Identifying projects and partnerships

Once a customer need has been identified, projects will be scoped and suitable partners with national coverage sought to help us deliver the projects. We look to both new and existing partners to help us deliver programmes to keep our most vulnerable customers safe and warm at home.



Sometimes projects may be with different partners but align to the same aims and outcomes. The project with Age UK, Age Cymru and Age Scotland is a good example where three partnerships have been established but the aim and outcomes are all aligned.

Similarly, we have all identified a need to support vulnerable customers we encounter who have broken or faulty gas pipework and essential appliances. Through contracts with different delivery partners, we have ensured eligibility criteria are similar across Britain with support being given to customers to fund a repair of the pipework or appliance, or where uneconomic, a replacement appliance can be installed.

Delivering programmes

We take great care in creating programmes that deliver tangible outcomes for vulnerable customers.

Co-designing programmes can take anywhere between six months and two years, as we need to ensure we have the correct outcomes, people, processes and contracts in place to ensure successful programme delivery.

The role of the lead GDN is pivotal in ensuring successful programme delivery.

Using our collaborative strategy as the foundation to determine the scope of work, the lead network looks at the best way to deliver a support programme or CO awareness initiative that addresses a particular customer need. This involves working to identify appropriate partnerships and taking the lead on co-designing the initiative, using partner recommendations in our approach to ensure we design and deliver a meaningful programme aligned to both the GDNs' and our partner's strategic ambitions.

From the scope of work comes the Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA). During the PEA process, the lead GDN works with the other GDNs to validate that the proposed programme is well-socialised, meets the requirements of the project scope and reflects stakeholder feedback. The lead GDN will also ensure the initiative meets all VCMA requirements, including a robust Social Return on Investment (SROI) assessment and partner reporting capabilities.

Once approved by each of the participating organisations, the PEA is submitted to our regulator and the lead GDN – in partnership with the other GDNs – supports the onboarding, mobilisation and launch of the new programme. This could include training of GDN or partner teams, co-designing the development of new resources and any supporting communications to promote the initiative.

As the programme moves into delivery, the lead GDN works alongside the partner to facilitate monthly reporting and progress meetings. Regular reporting and partner engagement are fundamental elements of our programme design, enabling both parties to have visibility of any challenges that could impact outcome delivery and providing an opportunity to look for best practice for further development or to share with other partners.

Throughout the programme development and delivery, the lead GDN is responsible for ensuring the programme adheres to all governance processes and any learning is cascaded to all networks to support the overall success of our collaborative VCMA programme portfolio.



Measuring outcomes

We have all developed our own models to evaluate Social Return on Investment (SROI) over recent years. These models assess the financial benefit to customers and the societal benefits using proxies based on a set of recognised values and probabilities. Offsetting the cost of the project provides a net benefit that should be positive ie the benefits are larger than the investment.

For example, a partnership may help customers by:

- improving the household's ability to reduce energy costs over the long term through energy-efficient behaviours and access to grant schemes to increase home energy efficiency
 - identifying unclaimed benefits to increase the household income
 - tackling energy debt
 - providing a fuel voucher to keep the energy flowing
 - registering households for the PSR
 - increasing CO awareness and adding CO protections such as alarms.
- Social benefits include:
 - reducing the impact on the NHS linked to cold damp homes
 - reducing serious injuries or deaths from CO
 - reducing people's stress and improving mental health.

During 2022/23, we have run projects through the companies' different models to ensure all give similar positive SROI projections. Projects are generally assessed over a five-year period, but some benefits may ensue for a longer period with increased uncertainty.

As we move forward, we're looking to provide greater consistency across the utility sector. We've been working with the Energy Networks Association (ENA), DNOs and transmission companies to create a single SROI model for all companies to use to measure SROI.

SIRIO Strategies has been awarded the contract to deliver this new model and maintain a common proxy bank with work already underway and planned delivery in September 2023. This framework will allow for improved comparability, transparency and objectivity in measuring the benefits of our activities, while allowing the flexibility to reflect regional factors.

These metrics and customer outcomes demonstrate a project's success or opportunity to adapt to do more. We also see the impact of our programmes through the stories of the customers we support. These real-life case studies from the people we have helped are a testimony to the impact we can have by working collaboratively to help the most vulnerable members of our communities.



Reviewing and learning

Reviewing our programmes and learning from our activity is fundamental to our strategic approach.

It is ingrained in every stage of our programme governance, from our RIIO-GD2 VCMA Steering Group and industry working groups through to our programme relationships and our supporting stakeholder engagement.

Our first VCMA showcase event

In July 2022, we held our first annual VCMA showcase event. It was an opportunity for us to share our new programmes with stakeholders, as well as update on projects that we would start delivering in year two. Our stakeholders provided constructive feedback on our live programmes and helped identify gaps in the current reach of our portfolio, in particular support for people with health conditions.

In response, we reviewed our successful regional partnerships and looked to focus our attention on those groups where the impact of struggling to maintain a safe and warm home would have the greatest impact. As a result this year, we've expanded SGN's Disability Energy Support service programme with Scope to become a national collaboration and we co-designed and launched a new programme with cancer support charity Maggie's in November that builds on the learning of a local partnership led by Wales & West Utilities last year.

We also received questions about how we were going to ramp up progress over the course of RIIO-GD2 to meet customer need and deliver the allowance against our business plan ambitions.

While year one was a mobilisation year, which saw us focus on determining our strategic approach and identifying the right partners to co-design and deliver our collaborative programmes, year two has seen us move rapidly from design into delivery.

This year we've seen successful pilots from year one go on to be able to create greater capacity and expand certain programmes nationally in year two. An example of this is our new programme with Citizens Advice England and Wales, where based on a successful pilot, we're able to extend the service to support more households in southern England and Wales.

As we move into year three of our VCMA programme, we're looking forward to even more programmes moving into delivery, including our project with the NSPCC which has been in design for the past two years. We explain more about our future programmes in [the looking ahead section](#) on page 32.

We foster and capture extensive feedback from our programme partners through regular reporting, encompassing project successes, delivery challenges and additional opportunities.

Through reviewing these real-time insights, we're able to adapt initiatives to current needs and shape new programmes to meet gaps in our service provision.



Image: NSPCC photography by Tom Hull.
The children pictured are models

Programme spend

Last year, during our first year of delivery, we undertook significant foundation work to identify and co-design our new portfolio of programmes, as well as adapting quickly to tailor our support in response to the cost-of-living crisis. As we’ve moved through this year, we’ve had a far greater number of programmes begin delivery.

Through the VCMA, we have £15 million to support our collaborative programmes over the five-year RIIO-GD2 price control. The allowance is set in 2018/19 prices so when annual inflation is applied using the Consumer Price index (CPIH) that equates to a minimum of around £18.5 million for collaborative projects. While each network is required to spend a minimum of 25% of the individual allowance on collaborative programmes, we can commit more than 25% as we’re able to use our company-specific allowance on collaborative programmes.

For example, Northern Gas Networks has committed 49% of their total VCMA allowance to collaborative programmes and WWU 27%, as they meet their business commitments through these joint-GDN initiatives. Where networks have spent more than 25%, this has been supported by customer and stakeholder feedback.

There is still a minimum of £1.2 million (2018/19 prices) of VCMA funds remaining to be committed to collaborative projects over the remainder of the price control, although we may exceed this figure with company-specific allowances where it meets our strategic ambitions and has stakeholder support.

We are working together on forecasting collaborative spend across the remaining RIIO-GD2 period and we are still seeking collaborative projects that deliver nationwide support programmes with the benefits that working together with national or multi-regional partners brings.

Here’s a view of how the VCMA collaborative funds have been committed to partnerships to date, which exceeds the minimum requirement of 25% of the allowance.

Collaborative projects	28
Minimum target spend (2018/19 prices)	£15,000,000
With CPIH	£18,500,000
Committed spend to 31 March 2023	£18,544,541
Minimum committed VCMA collaboration funds	£19,200,000



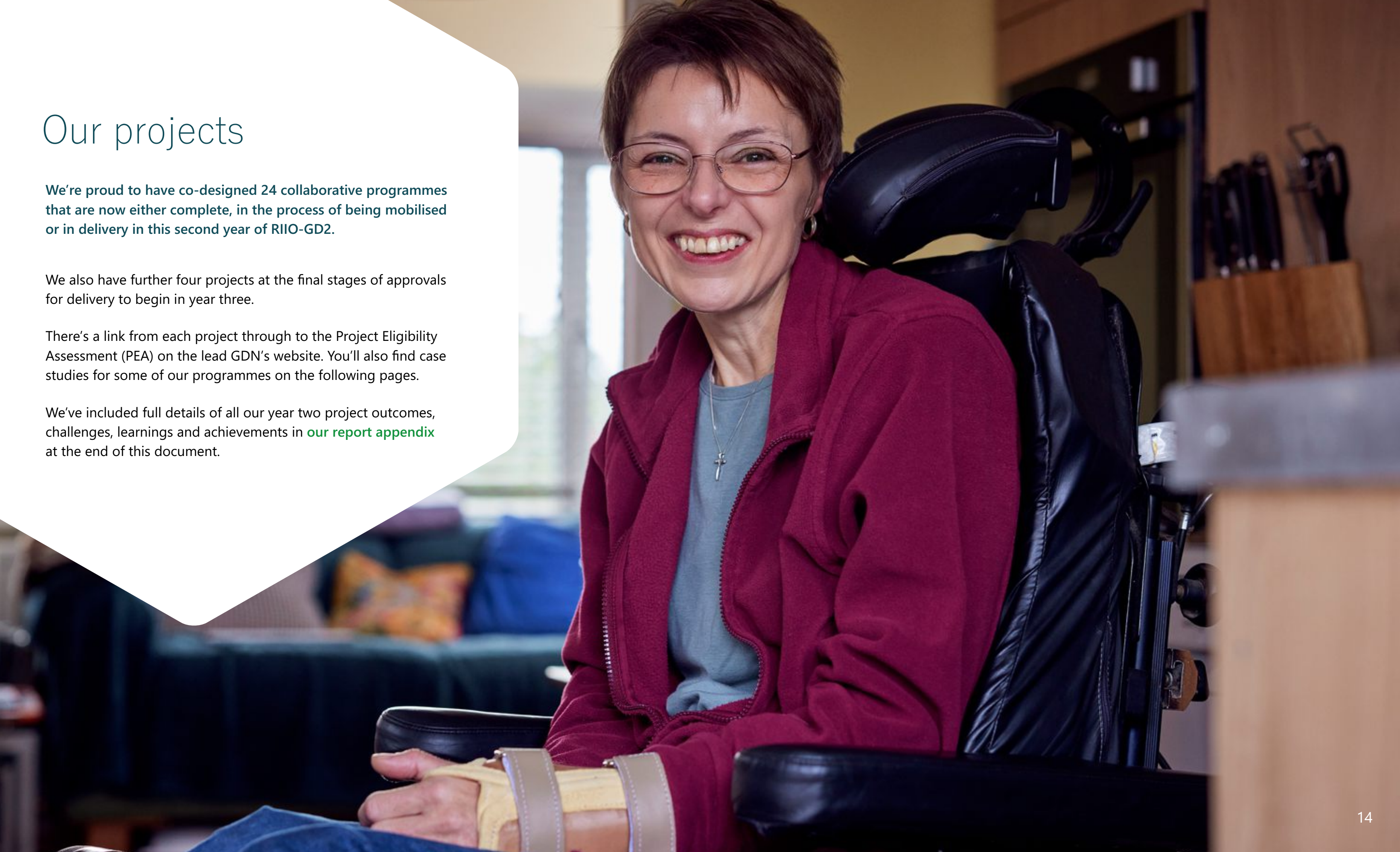
Our projects

We're proud to have co-designed 24 collaborative programmes that are now either complete, in the process of being mobilised or in delivery in this second year of RIIO-GD2.

We also have further four projects at the final stages of approvals for delivery to begin in year three.

There's a link from each project through to the Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA) on the lead GDN's website. You'll also find case studies for some of our programmes on the following pages.

We've included full details of all our year two project outcomes, challenges, learnings and achievements in [our report appendix](#) at the end of this document.

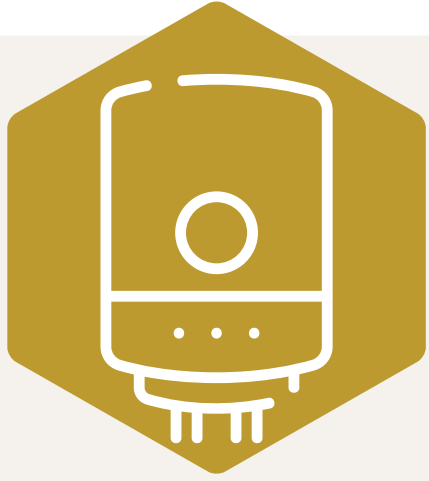


Projects summary

All £ values within the following tables and report appendix are expressed in real-year costs.

Partner organisation	Lead GDN	Participating GDNs	Project	Strategic theme	Duration	Forecast SROI*	Total committed cost	Status
Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age UK	SGN & WWU	Cadent and NGN	Helping older people live in safe and warm homes	Supporting priority customer groups	2023-25	£8.38	£1,035,000	Delivering
APPCOG and Policy Connect	WWU	Cadent, NGN and SGN	CO Awareness Week 2022	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2022	£24.86	£20,000	Completed
Bonanza Creative	SGN	NGN and WWU	CO awareness in schools (Year 1)	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2022	£1.56	£49,880	Completed
Bonanza Creative	SGN	NGN and WWU	CO awareness in schools (Year 2)	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2022-23	£2.51	£157,763	Delivering
Citizens Advice England and Wales	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU	Energy safeguarding and CO safety partnership	Fuel poverty and energy affordability	2022-23	£5.76	£2,081,545	Completed
Citizens Advice England and Wales	SGN	NGN and WWU	Energy safeguarding and CO safety partnership	Fuel poverty and energy affordability	2023-26	£5.54	£2,505,388	Delivering
Fuel Bank Foundation	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU	Fuel crisis support	Fuel poverty and energy affordability	2022-24	£5.95	£500,000	Delivering
Gas Safe Charity	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU	Think CO app development	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2023-26	£0.51	£42,825	Mobilising
Groundwork and NEA	Cadent	NGN	One Number	Services beyond the meter	2023-25	£2.75	£4,823,036	Delivering
Heavenly and Campus Group	SGN and WWU	Cadent and NGN	Game Over	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2022-23	£8.45	£300,869	Delivering
IPIP	Cadent	NGN, SGN and WWU	CO in pregnancy research study	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2021-23	£0.02	£249,974	Delivering
JSeven	Cadent	NGN, SGN and WWU	CO winter awareness campaign 2021-22	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2021-22	£39.30	£383,270	Completed
Maggie's	Cadent	NGN and SGN	Maggie's centres – Safe and warm	Supporting priority customer groups	2022-24	£3.70	£212,040	Delivering
Marie Curie	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU	Energy safeguarding for terminally ill people	Supporting priority customer groups	2022-25	£12.16	£1,780,825	Delivering
MyBnk	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU	Schools - Financial inclusion and energy saving	Fuel poverty and energy affordability	2022-25	£15.53	£377,000	Delivering
NEA and The Wise Group	Cadent and SGN	n/a	Warm and Safe Homes	Fuel poverty and energy affordability	2022-23	£8.05	£237,721	Completed
NSPCC	Cadent	NGN, SGN and WWU	NSPCC Collaborative GDN Project	Services beyond the meter	2023-25	£5.01	£595,719	Mobilising
Policy Connect	Cadent	NGN, SGN and WWU	CO Safe 4 Summer campaign	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2022	£34.51	£50,000	Completed
Scope	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU	Disability Energy Support (DES)	Supporting priority customer groups	2022-24	£12.48	£240,000	Delivering
Scope	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU	Disabled community CO research	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2022	£1.82	£30,600	Completed
SP Energy Networks	SGN	Cadent and WWU	Priority Services Register - CO pilot	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2022-23	£13.18	£2,685	Delivering
Strata Nostra Ltd	NGN	Cadent	The Carents Room	Supporting priority customer groups	2022-23	£8.74	£298,840	Delivering
The Scout Association	SGN	Cadent, NGN and WWU	Carbon monoxide awareness programme	Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	2021-24	£1.81	£300,000	Delivering
n/a	Cadent	NGN	Services beyond the meter	Services beyond the meter	2022-23	£0.71	£585,995	Completed

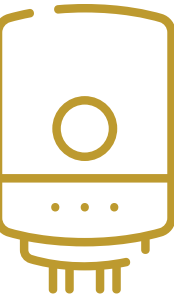
* Forecast SROI (Social Return on Investment) indicates the anticipated amount of social value delivered for every £1 spent.



Services beyond the meter

As gas networks, we're all committed to keeping our customers safe and warm. We recognise that for some customers, it's not possible to maintain a safe and warm home without extra help from us. With direct support, we're able to help vulnerable households as we go about our operational work.

Our individual commitments to supporting vulnerable customers have evolved into services beyond the meter. At the heart of these services, and common to all networks, is our emergency gas appliance repair and replacement programme.



Why we've established the programme

We're responsible for the gas pipes up to a customer's gas meter, while all the pipes and appliances inside the home are the responsibility of the customer.

If our engineers identify a safety issue with appliances or internal pipework beyond the meter while they're attending a gas emergency or upgrading our networks, we may have to condemn the appliance or isolate the gas supply.

Vulnerable households may not be able to afford the unexpected expense of a Gas Safe registered engineer to visit their home or replace their appliance, meaning they can go for long periods without adequate heating, hot water or cooking facilities. While we ensure all households are left with temporary electric cooking and heating appliances, these can be extremely costly for households to run and are not solving the long-term need to stay safe and warm at home.

Programme impact

All four gas networks have established regional programmes to ensure that vulnerable households aren't left without gas any longer than necessary if we have to isolate their gas supply.

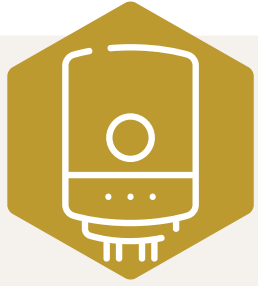
If a vulnerable customer cannot afford the repair or replacement of pipework or an essential gas appliance, we arrange for a Gas Safe registered engineer to visit and carry out the required repair, replacement or service. Sometimes this will be one of our own upskilled engineers and sometimes we use a partner organisation to carry out this work. Gas Safe registered engineers can also carry out enhanced CMDD1A checks to identify the source of a carbon monoxide leak.

By providing these additional services and emergency funding, these programmes enable us to reduce the time it would take a vulnerable household to get their gas supply back on.

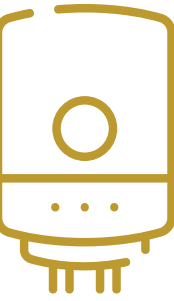
As well as being able to prevent a vulnerable household from being left without gas indefinitely, our programmes allow us to provide additional safety measures where appropriate, such as installing our free locking cooker valve (LCV) safety device or issuing a CO alarm, as well as connecting these households to vital support services from other organisations.

Although we all deliver our programmes through different partners, we work together to share best practice around how we support the identification of eligible customers through to how we connect vulnerable customers to other support services once the gas repairs are complete. This reflects our desire to seek a consistent approach to eligibility and customer access to this support.





Emergency gas appliance repair and replacement



One Number

GDN: Cadent and Northern Gas Networks

Programme partner: Groundwork UK and NEA

Duration: January 2023 to January 2025

Households referred: 131

Repairs or replacements: 35 (Cadent)

Investment: £445,848 (Cadent) and £91,753 (Northern Gas Networks)

Cadent has delivered fully-funded gas appliance repairs, replacements and servicing through a company-specific programme since 2020. The collaborative VCMA created an opportunity to share best practice and expand the service across multiple networks.

Cadent has partnered with Northern Gas Networks to co-create the One Number programme. Newly launched in 2023, Cadent and Northern Gas Networks' engineers can now refer vulnerable households to partners Groundwork or NEA for additional help and support including energy efficiency advice, help with financial support and benefit entitlement as well as more instant support with repairing or replacing aged or condemned appliances. This approach ensures that customers remain safe, warm and independent in their homes.

"Right now there are 7.5 million UK households in fuel poverty. When something goes wrong with their gas supply these people are at risk of disconnection – no heating, no hot food or showers. The One Number programme means those in the most need can get their boilers repaired or replaced as well as receive vital energy advice at a time when it's never been needed more".

Adam Scorer, Chief Executive, National Energy Action (NEA)

Care and Repair

GDN: SGN

Programme partner: Universal Gas Solutions

Duration: April 2022 to March 2023

Households referred: 233

Repairs or replacements: 202

Investment: £160,313

SGN's Care and Repair programme was launched in 2021, following a successful pilot in winter 2020.

If the customer is eligible for government funding towards repairs, we'll help them access it. If there's no funding mechanism, we'll help.

As well as providing access to a Gas Safe registered engineer to repair or replace essential gas appliances or pipework, the programme – currently delivered by Universal Gas Solutions – can also help customers when there is a suspected CO leak from a gas appliance.

In addition, the Universal Gas Solutions team can provide customers with additional support services including installing new CO alarms, providing energy efficiency advice, income maximisation and, if needed, onward referrals to debt support teams.

"The engineers were great, I couldn't fault them. I am so grateful. Due to all the upheaval of all the stuff in the property, I could see it wasn't going to be an easy job to upgrade my boiler and central heating system. I'm so pleased with it all so far. At least I haven't got to worry about being unsafe now and I have heating and hot water, which is perfect. I can't thank you enough, it's really appreciated."

Mrs Turner, SGN customer

Gas appliance referral scheme

GDN: Wales & West Utilities

Programme partner: Warm Wales and NEA

Duration: July 2021 to July 2025

Households referred: 179

Repairs or replacements: 106

Investment: £171,123

Through the gas appliance referral scheme, Wales & West Utilities engineers can refer any customer they're concerned about leaving without gas to NEA.

NEA will have a conversation with the customer and some cases are resolved through signposting or linking up with their landlord.

Where the customer does require support, a Gas Safe registered engineer will attend the property and carry out an assessment. If it's economical to do so, the engineer will repair the appliance or pipework. If not, we will look at replacing the appliance, accessing external funding where applicable.

Through the NEA, customers are also offered support on maximising income, registering for the PSR and CO awareness.

"I've just had a new boiler and radiators in my house and I can't thank you enough. I had been without any heating for a few years and without hot water for six weeks. You have changed everything for me. I cried when I walked into my warm home.

"Please don't ever underestimate what you do for people, it can't be put into words how much you have changed things for me. My kids and grandkids will come up to a warm home now, whereas before they stayed away as it was too cold".

Sarah T, WWU customer

Cadent and Northern Gas Networks

Services Beyond the Meter

Key 2022/23 achievements



Households reached:
702



Energy conversations
702



CO awareness conversations:
702



PSR registrations:
140



Appliance safety checks:
24



Pipework trace/repair/replace:
24



Cooker replacements:
24

Why we're working together How we're working together

Cadent and Northern Gas Networks are working collaboratively to ensure every customer in a vulnerable situation is safe and connected when they need us most.

When we have to isolate the gas supply after attending a gas or carbon monoxide emergency, we are now able to return to the property and test the affected appliance to confirm if it's safe to use. This means we're able to ultimately restore the customer's gas supply.

By providing access to support that wasn't previously available, this programme is able to offer vulnerable households ways to keep themselves safe, warm and independent in their own home.

Collectively, we have upskilled 76 Cadent and Northern Gas Networks engineers with additional downstream training to be able to test customer appliances for CO, carry out pipework repairs, service appliances and replace cookers. Using our own engineers cuts down on the time the vulnerable household is without gas and improves the overall customer journey.

Engineers from both Cadent and Northern Gas Networks have participated in the training together at Cadent's purpose-built training centre in Hitchen.

We've also created a robust engineer buddying and sign-off process, which involves Northern Gas Networks engineers shadowing already-upskilled Cadent engineers to build competence in the required work types. This peer-to-peer support is underpinned by the use of a robust online platform that engineers can visit to access technical support when required.

Additionally, we have worked together to embed an effective working partnership with Groundwork and NEA to deliver a capital works programme. This allows for work types such as appliance repair and replacement to be delivered safely and effectively.


Building on the company-specific project launched by Cadent in year one, our collaborative approach will enable Northern Gas Networks to go live with services beyond the meter from June 2023.

"This collaborative approach to services beyond the meter is an important next step as we strive to take a lead across the industry in ensuring we go above and beyond to keep our vulnerable customers safe and connected. We look forward to continuing our strong working relationship with Northern Gas Networks to increase their team of trained engineers in 2023 and grow the project to ensure we can support every customer that is eligible and in need of our support."

Sam Graham,
Technical Manager - Social Programmes,
Cadent

Project at a glance


Lead GDN:



Cadent
Your Gas Network

- Duration: April 2022 to March 2023
- Investment: £585,995

Participating GDNs:



Northern Gas Networks

- Forecast SROI: £0.71
- Status: Completed

Partnership impact

Our 'Services beyond the meter' programme has helped more than 700 households, who traditionally would have been left vulnerable after having their supply isolated.

A key benefit of this programme is that our upskilled engineers can carry out CMDD1A checks at vulnerable households where the CO alarm has sounded to determine whether there is a CO leak at the property. In a large percentage of cases, the engineer can reconnect the customer's supply after identifying a false alarm. Without our engineers, the vulnerable customer would have needed to arrange for a Gas Safe registered engineer to attend their home to carry out this check at their own cost.

The success of the project has been achieved through collaboration, sharing best practice and having a joined-up approach. We have built a strong working relationship between the two GDNs, which has allowed us to have engineers working across both networks and share best practice to ensure all our customers benefit from the same standard of service.





Fuel poverty and affordability

As we closed our first year of VCMA programme activity, we started to see the impact of the emerging cost-of-living crisis on our customers. We recognised that certain customer groups, such as low-income households, older people and people with a medical condition, would be disproportionately impacted by the crisis.

In the past year, the landscape in which we are supporting our vulnerable customers has changed dramatically. Off the back of the pandemic, vulnerable households faced new hardships brought on by the energy crisis and cost-of-living crisis. Up and down the country, household budgets were being stretched to unsustainable levels, while many people were being pushed into fuel poverty for the first time.

Acutely aware of the increasing scale of need across the communities we serve, we engaged our stakeholders to help us shape our collaborative programmes to ensure we're able to provide meaningful impact at a time when our vulnerable customers need our help the most.

Ahead of the winter, our partner Citizens Advice started to build extensive insight into what was happening within its service, who was needing help and the issues vulnerable households were facing. This insight has formed what is now called the Citizens Advice Cost-of-Living Dashboard and it clearly highlighted the customer groups that were in crisis and asking for help were those with disabilities, medical conditions and those using pre-payment meters.

These findings were reinforced by research from other partners, including Age Scotland and Scope. While Fuel Bank Foundation also shared worrying insights that over two million energy support scheme pre-payment meter vouchers were still unclaimed, an unrealised opportunity for one of the most vulnerable groups at this time.

The insight we receive from our partners is so comprehensive, it's helping us evolve our approach and guide our priorities so we deliver support where it's needed most. It's also helping us shape partnerships with other organisations, including how we could work with potential partners on supporting benefits checks and helping eligible households to access current energy schemes designed to help them through this difficult time.



In addition to stakeholder insight, all the GDNs have invested in regional data mapping tools, so we have a better understanding of the community demographics represented locally as well as the nature of the need in that community. Local data sets on poverty impacting children have helped guide our MyBnk project that takes 'Fuel Finance' into schools where families are already needing assistance, like the pupil premium and free school meals.

The partnership studies within this section feature programmes designed to help customers struggling to afford energy. It's important to note that insights we've already shared through RIIO-GD1 and the first year of RIIO-GD2 have found that customers who are unable to afford energy are more likely to be in a group eligible for the PSR and also struggle to maintain a safe home by routine appliance servicing. We've purposefully considered this when co-designing programme outcomes, ensuring that many of our partners are now able to assist eligible households to sign up to the PSR and access lifesaving CO alarms and advice.

By recognising this relationship between fuel poverty, CO risk and PSR eligibility, and co-designing our programmes accordingly, we're able to provide holistic support to help lift vulnerable households out of fuel poverty and improve affordability.





Energy safeguarding and CO safety partnership

Key 2022/23 achievements




Households reached:
16,800



Energy advice sessions:
6,904



CO alarms provided:
4,933



CO awareness conversations:
16,800



PSR registrations:
7,173



Benefits advice:
9,584



LCV referrals:
48

Why we're working together

Citizens Advice provides free and independent advice to millions of people in England and Wales each year, over the phone and in person. Through its Energy Advice Programme, the charity helps vulnerable people access expert energy advice, get better energy deals and improve their household income.

Together, we co-designed an energy safeguarding programme that expands on the charity's existing service to help more low-income households across England and Wales at a time of exceptionally high demand.

Through our partnership, we're also able to address a knowledge and skills gap within the organisation to enable its energy advisers to also raise awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide.

How we're working together

In year two of our partnership, we've continued to add capacity to the existing Energy Advice Programme service to provide in-depth one-to-one advice to more households in need. We've also trained 600 more advisers on the dangers of carbon monoxide and how people can protect themselves from the silent killer.

Through the pilot, we trialled providing clients with a free CO alarm as part of a CO safety and energy efficiency advice pack, believing people in energy crisis often don't have the money for a working CO alarm. During the three-month trial, Citizens Advice identified more than 50% of households that should have a lifesaving CO alarm didn't have one and 79% of advisers stated that the free alarm was 'very important' to the service. In response, we extended the initial three-month trial to provide these packs throughout this year's programme.


Additional winter funding

The partnership has had such a positive impact on vulnerable households from the outset of the pilot that SGN and Wales & West Utilities increased our funding for winter 2022/23 to facilitate more energy advice sessions. Our additional training is enabling advisers to provide in-person CO awareness sessions at 79 local Citizens Advice hubs across England and Wales.

This resulted in more than 1,930 additional households receiving in-depth energy advice sessions and these households also received CO awareness wherever possible.




Project at a glance

Lead GDN:



- Duration: January 2022 to March 2023
- Investment: £2,081,545

Participating GDNs:



- Forecast SROI: £5.76
- Status: Complete

Partnership impact

As we progressed through our partnership, Citizens Advice continued to experience extraordinary call volumes. As a result, we exceeded our 12-month project target for delivering CO-only advice sessions by 10%. By the end of the reporting year, we had provided CO advice to 9,896 clients – almost 900 households over our target.

For each client provided with energy and CO advice this year, our support has led to an average income gain of £835. Over the entire 15-month programme to date, we've supported 20,488 clients and achieved an income gain of £7,056,535 for these households.

This year, we've also supported Citizens Advice to develop CO awareness training for all its advisers nationwide through our partnership with Gas Safe Charity. As a result, we're able to protect people from CO harm far beyond the remit of our collaborative programme.

Our partnership runs deeper than financial support alone. We have equipped the charity's energy advisers with resources that enable them to provide greater support to households in crisis, including referrals for food or fuel vouchers.

In turn, our holistic support is improving the mental and physical health and wellbeing of thousands of households across the country – 69% of clients reported our programme has had a positive impact on their health and/or improved their confidence and ability to manage their issues.

Based on this successful 15-month partnership, we will now extend this programme through to the end of RIIO-GD2, which will see us build greater capacity for energy safeguarding of vulnerable households across SGN's Southern region, plus Northern Gas Networks and Wales & West Utilities geographical footprints.

"Your approach to co-designing services ensures we are truly tackling the need for clients during the cost-of-living crisis. Our strategic partnership is vital to the sustainability of our services long term and we are extremely proud to work in partnership with the GDNs."

Daniel Gill,
Utilities Partnership Manager, Citizens Advice

"I didn't even know that some of this help was available. The information about carbon monoxide saved my life!"

Citizens Advice client

Fuel crisis support

Key 2022/23 achievements



Households
reached:
6,288



Households provided
with fuel vouchers
4,836



Why we're working together

As the fuel crisis escalated into the cost-of-living crisis, more and more households were struggling to afford to keep their homes warm. Record numbers of households were finding themselves in fuel poverty and the crisis was disproportionately impacting households on pre-payment meters.

Fuel Bank Foundation provides same-day financial support to households in fuel crisis, providing emergency fuel vouchers when their prepayment gas or electricity meter has run out of credit. Where needed, the charity also provides ongoing assistance to increase financial resilience and avoid dependency on emergency funds.

Insight from this year's research highlighted that at the point the Fuel Bank Foundation stepped in, 65% of households had resorted to switching off the heating and 55% were skipping meals.

How we're working together

Delivered through Fuel Bank Foundation's network of community support partners, we're able to provide vulnerable households in fuel crisis with both immediate emergency funds and longer-term practical help.

We're providing same or next-day emergency fuel vouchers for people struggling to top up their prepayment energy meters, as well as ongoing advice and support to help manage energy costs and lift families out of fuel poverty.

Fuel Bank Foundation shares invaluable insight with us about the experience of prepayment meter customers and how they're being particularly impacted by cost-of-living crisis, so we're better informed to support these customers through the unique challenges they face to keep safe and warm.

"We had no gas for four days. We didn't know who to approach for anything like that. We were literally freezing, my partner's chest was getting worse, and I was panicking and trying to borrow money and just couldn't get it from anywhere."

Fuel Bank Foundation beneficiary

Project at a glance

Lead GDN:



- Duration: January 2022 to January 2024
- Investment: £500,000

Participating GDNs:



- Forecast SROI: £5.95
- Status: On track

Partnership impact

Recognising the current scale of need, we invited regional electricity networks (DNOs) to join our programme. This added a further £75,000 of much-needed funding at this time of crisis while minimising the administrative burden of processing those funds on the charity. The extra funding helped us provide an extra 1,452 households with emergency fuel vouchers.

Together, we've increased the charity's capacity to support people in fuel crisis by providing the financial backing to allow existing centres to keep operating, and to allow new centres to open across Britain.

After receiving our support, 91% of households reported they were better able to cope financially, 61% reported an improvement in mental wellbeing and 59% reported an improvement in their physical wellbeing.

The funding provided by our programme has been transformative, being described by community support partners as a crucial lifeline that provides support when and where it is needed.

"Fuel Bank Foundation was born in the energy sector and became a charity after a number of years as a corporate project. It is amazing – and we are so appreciative – to see this critical link continue and strengthen through the VCMA project. The practical advice and support provided by the network companies delivers a step change in helping Fuel Bank Foundation achieve its vision and purpose. Thank you!"

Matt Cole, Head of Fuel Bank Foundation

Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) advice line

Key 2022/23 achievements



Households reached:
2,535



Energy advice sessions:
2,391



CO awareness conversations:
139



PSR registrations:
1,562



Crisis funds provided:
£20,000

Why we're working together

The impacts of the cost-of-living and fuel crisis have led to households already living in fuel poverty being plunged further into hardship, as well as a new demographic of customers experiencing fuel poverty for the first time.

National Energy Action (NEA) research shows that rates of fuel poverty increased to 13.4% in England and 24.6% in Scotland in 2022, meaning that VCMA-funded support from the gas distribution networks was required on a large scale.

Improved energy efficiency and increased household income are two of the factors that reduce a household's chance of experiencing fuel poverty. The collaborative Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) partnership aims to support customers to improve their energy efficiency behaviours, access funding to improve their property's efficiency and increase their household income.

"I really can't thank you enough for helping me. My life seems less bleak. Thank you for helping with the fuel voucher, debt support and access to the foodbank. Blimey, I just shed a tear of relief and gratitude!"

NEA/Wise beneficiary with debilitating health conditions

How we're working together

In year one, both Cadent and SGN had projects with NEA and The Wise Group. After reviewing our projects together and sharing learnings, we co-designed a new collaborative programme for year two.

We're providing an energy advice phonenumber service, where vulnerable customers can receive support with matters such as registering for the PSR, help and advice with energy issues and simple energy-saving tips.

In addition, we're able to support customers with more complex needs through remote casework, in-person surgeries and workshops. This level of support typically includes help with grant applications, supplier billing issues and managing fuel debt.

We're also providing face-to-face support through a series of community events targeted in areas of high deprivation and fuel poverty. Held in community spaces such as libraries, GP surgeries and foodbanks, these events offer in-person support with income maximisation and energy efficiency.

Recognising the need to provide urgent support in response to the cost-of-living crisis, when NEA encounters a household in severe hardship, our ringfenced fund allows the organisation to provide immediate crisis support through pre-payment meter top-ups, debt relief and supplier credit.

Project at a glance

Participating GDNs:



- Duration: April 2022 to April 2023
- Investment: £237,721

- Forecast SROI: £9.08
- Status: Completed

Partnership impact

As the cost-of-living crisis deepened, demand for the WASH advice service increased. By building capacity for NEA and The Wise Group to respond to this increased demand, we were able to provide immediate benefits for customers in need rather than trying to attract these customers to a new service elsewhere.

By bringing together Cadent and SGN's established projects into a new collaborative programme this year, we've been able to offer our service to more people. Importantly, we've also made use of our existing infrastructure without needing to spend money unnecessarily on new phone lines, establishing area-specific networks or spending time setting up and replicating projects when we have a model that can work for all.

With the foundations of our collaborative programme firmly embedded this year, we intend to extend our partnership to include all four networks in year three.

"Thanks to the support of this partnership, the Wise Group has been able to help some of the most disadvantaged households struggling with fuel costs in the last year, in addition to directly engaging with those living in one of the most deprived regions in Scotland."

Sean Duffy,
CEO, The Wise Group

"The WASH project has enabled us to support clients in England, while our partnership with The Wise Group has helped those in Scotland. Collaboration like this is so important for ensuring as many customers as possible are helped and those with complex needs are given the correct support."

Peter Sumby,
Director of Operations,
National Energy Action



Supporting priority customer groups

Some of our customers need more help than others to stay safe and warm at home. By registering eligible households on the Priority Services Register (PSR), we're able to make sure the most vulnerable members of our community are known to their utility companies and proactively offer support.

We've developed a range of programmes targeted at supporting priority customer groups, helping PSR-eligible households who are especially susceptible to harm from living in a cold, damp or unsafe home.

As we started year two, insight from NEA and Citizens Advice had already begun to identify that the forecast energy price cap changes would have different impacts on different customer groups. People on low incomes, older people, households with a disability or medical conditions and young families would all be disproportionately affected.

These are all groups that particularly need to stay safe and warm at home to ensure that their health and wellbeing are not impacted, so it was important that we had partnerships in place to support these households.

We began year two by looking at the priority groups that would be most impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and we prioritised the mobilisation of projects that were going to have the greatest impact in keeping our customers safe and warm as the crisis took hold.

While our different priority customer groups have different needs, they often share circumstances that bring them together as a community and may already have a trusted relationship with established support organisations representing their community.





Recognising the opportunity these organisations provide to deliver targeted help to those who need it most, particularly at this time of crisis, we're partnering with trusted community organisations to build their capacity with energy safeguarding skills to support vulnerable households.





Energy safeguarding, helping older people live in safe and warm homes

Key February 2023 to March 2023 achievements

					
Age Cymru	Households reached: 35	Energy advice sessions: 35	CO awareness conversations: 31	PSR registrations: 19	Benefits advice: 16
Age Scotland	Households reached: 4,958	Energy advice sessions: 422	CO awareness conversations: 348	PSR registrations: 141	Benefits advice: 1,912
Age UK	Households reached: 11,871	Energy advice sessions: 573		PSR registrations: 275	Benefits advice: 11,298

Why we're working together

Older people are particularly at risk of fuel poverty. Older people spend more time at home and often need to consume more energy to keep warm. They're more vulnerable to the impact of living in a cold or damp home, yet they're less likely to live in an energy-efficient home, have their gas appliances routinely serviced or be aware of energy support schemes.

Even before the cost-of-living crisis, around one million older people were already living in fuel poverty. In January 2022, Age UK research predicted that rising energy costs could push a further 150,000 into fuel poverty in the following months.

We're able to help lift older people across England, Scotland and Wales out of fuel poverty by partnering with Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age UK to offer desperately needed support, companionship and advice.

How we're working together

Our collaborative programme builds on the successful partnership co-designed between Age Scotland and SGN, which helped more than 20,000 older people maintain a safe and warm home in 18 months.

By joining forces as all four networks to create an expanded two-year programme with Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age UK, we'll provide energy safeguarding services to 200,000 more older people nationwide.

We've established a referral path for frontline engineers across all four gas networks to direct vulnerable older people to the charities' expert advice lines. Trained advisers are on hand to help older people sign up for the Priority Services Register, increase their household income through benefit checks, improve their home energy efficiency and raise awareness of carbon monoxide.

Reflecting the challenging financial times, we're also delivering workshops focused on income maximisation and financial resilience in the most vulnerable areas in Scotland and Wales.

Project at a glance

Lead GDN:



- Duration: February 2023 to January 2025
- Investment: £1,035,000

Participating GDNs:



- Forecast SROI: £8.38
- Status: Mobilising

Partnership impact

This year, it's about coming together in a joined-up way as gas networks and the regional Age UK charities to share learnings and help more older people stay safe and warm at home.

Together, we're building capacity and our service is maturing more quickly. By sharing our learnings across organisations, we're able to set up the regional services more efficiently, meaning we've been able to help people more quickly through the expanded service.

"This partnership is so important in helping us reach more older people and providing the support they need at such a difficult time."

Victoria Lloyd,
Chief Executive, Age Cymru

"This winter 9.6 million older people were worried about affording to heat their homes. Thanks to GDN funding, Age UK is helping thousands of vulnerable older people access unclaimed welfare benefits to help with energy costs."

Hannorah Lee,
Director of Partnerships, Age UK

"Given current cost of living pressures, it's vital that people know where to turn for help and advice and are claiming the support they are entitled to. The demand for advice and support has never been greater, and we know this partnership has made a real difference to the lives of older people across Scotland."

Mark O'Donnell,
Chief Executive, Age Scotland



Marie Curie



Energy safeguarding and tackling fuel poverty for terminally ill people

Key 2022/23 achievements



Households reached:
1,185



Benefits advice:
832



Energy advice sessions:
536



PSR registrations:
1,185

Why we're working together

Anyone can experience fuel poverty, but among the groups most vulnerable to the damaging consequence of living in cold housing are older people, those with chronic illnesses or long-term conditions, and people with low or declining incomes.

Many people who are terminally ill fall into several, if not all, of these categories. Their deteriorating health often means spending more to heat their homes, which some struggle to afford due to depleted incomes and significant costs associated with their illness.

Given their trusted position in communities, Marie Curie's frontline teams are perfectly positioned to identify households needing support, visiting between 30,000 and 45,000 households per year who are at high risk of being in, or falling into, fuel poverty.

After receiving a terminal diagnosis, people should be able to concentrate on the things that matter – making the most of the time they have left, creating new memories with loved ones and putting their affairs in order. They shouldn't have to worry about whether they can afford to keep their house warm.

How we're working together

Through partnering with Marie Curie, we are identifying and supporting terminally ill people and their families across Britain who are in fuel poverty with dedicated support and advice.

We've recruited Energy Support Officers (ESOs) to join the charity's Information and Support line to help terminally ill people access financial support to tackle fuel poverty. The ESOs are also training the wider adviser team on how to deal with energy-related enquiries and provide benefit and income maximisation checks.

People with terminal illnesses are eligible for extra support from energy companies via the PSR. We're working with Marie Curie's support line and frontline nursing teams to promote the service and help households to register.

We're also providing bespoke training and support to community nurses, healthcare assistants and volunteers on how to spot signs of a household in fuel poverty and where to signpost patients for further support.

"Things are going great. The fuel poverty training is being very well received so far. For me, being able to help people and make them aware of information and services they didn't know about to help with rising bills is amazing. We're getting lots of positive feedback from callers too."

Rachel,
Energy Support Officer, Marie Curie

Project at a glance

Lead GDN:



Participating GDNs:



- Duration: September 2022 to October 2025
- Investment: £1,780,825

- Forecast SROI: £12.16
- Status: On track

Partnership impact

Since launching our partnership in December 2022, the ESOs have supported 174 callers to date.

Marie Curie frontline staff and ESOs have held 1,185 conversations about the PSR, directing people with terminal illnesses to the additional help they need.

Our partnership has resulted in £528,761 worth of benefits identified for people at end of life, with an average of £137 identified per person.

We've rolled out community training to four pilot sites to help Marie Curie teams to identify patients who may be experiencing fuel poverty and we'll be ready for national roll-out by September.

All of this is providing invaluable support for people at end of life, including those with a terminal illness and those who are bereaved, and experiencing fuel poverty or concerned about their energy usage.

Through this partnership, we've been able to bring together other organisations that support people with life-limiting illnesses in a roundtable to discuss broader energy resilience and safeguarding. This includes Kidney Care UK, Hospice Care UK, Parkinson's UK and others.

"We are thrilled with the progress of our partnership with the gas networks. Our Energy Support Officers have been busy taking calls and rolling out training to Marie Curie staff in the community so we can better support terminally ill people across the UK struggling with rising energy bills. Energy costs remain a key concern for vulnerable families living with a terminal illness, and this partnership ensures we tackle these prescient issues head on."

Matthew Reed,
Chief Executive, Marie Curie



Disability Energy Support (DES) with water advice

Key 2022/23 achievements



Households reached by a DES adviser:
1,963



Energy advice sessions:
1,963



CO awareness conversations:
1,963



PSR registrations:
1,256



Benefits advice:
1,963

Why we're working together

Life costs more for disabled people. On average, life costs an extra £975 a month if you're disabled, according to research from Scope.

With the additional costs of heating, equipment and therapies, disabled people are more likely to face financial vulnerability, increased energy costs and fuel poverty. As well as that, disabled people often find it more challenging to access the information and support needed to help combat these issues.

We've partnered with disability equality charity Scope to deliver tailored and targeted support through our Disability Energy Support (DES) service and new online resources to help disabled households maintain a safe and warm home.

"You listened, treated me with respect, believed me and didn't rush me. You offered relevant info for the issue I had called for which I also urgently needed but did not dare hope for, due to experience with other local and advice services."

DES beneficiary

How we're working together

In 2020, SGN and Scope launched the DES with water advice service. Our collaborative partnership builds on the initial programme to open up access to Scope's independent energy advice and advocacy service to disabled people across England, Scotland and Wales, as well as meet the increased demand for this service as a result of the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

When a client contacts the DES helpline, an experienced utility adviser will assess their individual household needs during a one-on-one telephone appointment. Trained advisers provide bespoke and tailored support, such as understanding energy and water bills, managing energy and water debt, and accessing benefits and grants.

Advisers are also able to register disabled households for the energy and water industry PSRs to help us – as well as the electricity networks and water companies – better support our disabled customers through our day-to-day services and in an emergency.

In addition, we've worked with Scope to redevelop its online resources around energy advice to enable disabled people to self-serve and access the information they need on its website. These resources have been a valuable resource for people who are looking for trusted information, with 83,733 views of the 'Help with energy bills' page and 15,825 views of the Priority Services Register page.

Project at a glance

Lead GDN:



- Duration: April 2022 to May 2024
- Investment: £240,000

Participating GDNs:



- Forecast SROI: £12.48
- Status: Exceeding target

Partnership impact

In expanding the partnership to include all GDNs, we've opened up access to the DES to disabled people nationwide and aim to support 700 people per year through the service. We've established a trusted referral route for engineers from all networks to refer disabled people for independent support to manage their energy and water needs, as well as a gateway into other Scope support services.

In creating an accessible route for disabled people to access clear information and support on energy issues, we've saved disabled households an average of £485.94 by reviewing benefit and grant entitlements.

Through the partnership, we've also provided 5,331 customers with carbon monoxide information through both the DES team and the charity's website. This interest in carbon monoxide safety advice has led us to carry out baseline insights to ensure we understand the needs of disabled people in avoiding carbon monoxide harm.

This partnership is particularly needed in the current climate with disabled people being one of the groups most impacted by the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. The DES team has seen an 80% increase in the total number of people requesting appointments this year, compared with 2021/22.

"Scope's Disability Price Tag research shows the average disabled household faces extra costs of £975 per month compared to non-disabled households. These costs have been exacerbated by the energy crisis. The Disability Energy Support with Water Advice has been a lifeline to thousands of customers, giving energy advice, helping reduce costs and having a positive impact on their health and wellbeing."

Tim Vanstone,
 Programme Lead for Energy Services, Scope



Why we're working together

'Carent' is the term used to describe adults who have taken on a caring role for their elderly parents. Taking on this responsibility can lead to loneliness, isolation and risk of fuel poverty through decreased income and/or additional financial burdens. Carents often have little time to seek out and access valuable advice, information and support that could offer reassurance and support during their time in a caring role.

The Carents Room provides access to an online hub to support vulnerable customers who are in a carenting role and are otherwise hard to reach.

By partnering with The Carents Room, we're able to share energy-related information and resources to help keep Carents and their vulnerable older relatives safe and well, including energy efficiency advice and carbon monoxide information, as well as enabling PSR referrals.

"It is an exceptionally well-researched and comprehensive resource. The support and information you're providing is incredibly important."

Practice Manager,
Sele Medical Practice, Hexham

How we're working together

Working with expert web developers and marketing agencies EIC, Revolution Growth and Bloom Digital Ltd, we're improving website resilience, accessibility and building the foundation for a new marketing strategy to target Carents.

Initially founded during the pandemic, the existing Carents Room website was not able to handle sufficient volumes of traffic. With VMCA support, we've been able to greatly improve the functionality of the site, making it easier for Carents to access much-needed advice and information.

We've also expanded the scope of information available through the platform to include fuel poverty and energy efficiency advice, as well as information about reducing carbon monoxide harm in the home and how to register for the PSR.

Project at a glance

Lead GDN:



Participating GDN:



- Duration: December 2022 to December 2023
- Investment: £298,840
- Forecast SROI: £8.74
- Status: On track

Partnership progress

The Carents Room project launched in December 2022. Initial actions, in line with the project plan, were focused on project set-up, developing the site infrastructure, creating new content and the marketing and comms plans which would be required to deliver the KPIs over the remainder of the project period.

Drawing upon the expertise of all partners involved, we've implemented key site updates such as installing accessibility tools (ReciteMe) and added new content to ensure Carents can access energy safeguarding information and advice.

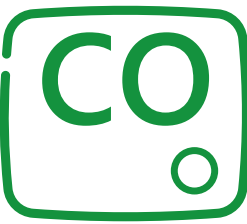
In preparation for launch, our activities on social media and paid media targeted Carents and focus on raising awareness of the PSR, energy efficiency and relevant financial benefits such as carers allowance and attendance allowance.

The **new Carents Room website** went live in April 2023 and we look forward to reviewing initial customer outputs in July 2023.

Although this collaboration involves only two of the four GDNs, the website has national reach and will therefore benefit a larger community of Carents.

"It is quite the most straightforward and informative site that I have come across in a very long time."

Carers Northumberland



Carbon monoxide awareness

We have a long-established GDN and stakeholder CO working group that has been focused for many years on gathering data and insight that enables us to design effective awareness campaigns. More recently, we've targeted our campaigns at key groups within our communities with the lowest awareness of carbon monoxide.

For example, we worked together throughout RIIO-GD1 to run the annual children's CO safety competition, taking CO safety messaging into schools and youth organisations. Over the years, we've received hundreds of creative entries from primary school-aged children nationwide. From posters, poems and videos, to raps, interactive games and local briefings, young people have found truly impactful ways to help keep their friends, families and communities safe from the silent killer.

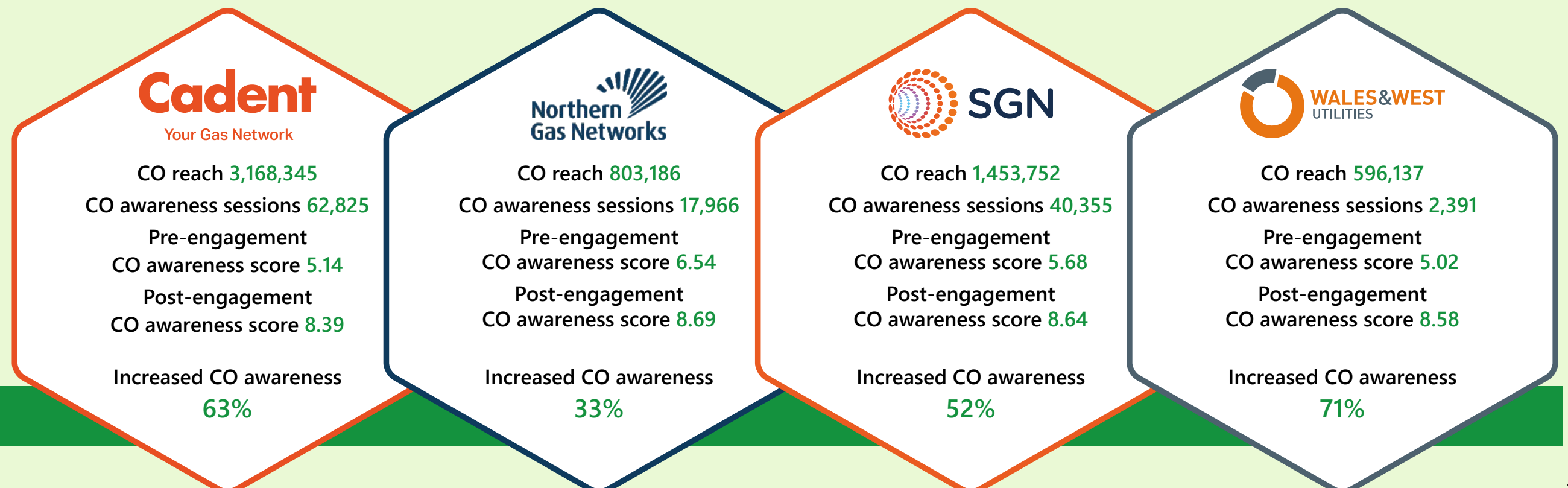
Our collaborative approach has been the foundation of a number of key partnerships over the years. Through the VCMA, we've embraced the additional opportunity to work together to reach larger audiences, as well as develop new and innovative initiatives to engage our communities.

In year two, we've seen some of our successful regional pilot projects mature into national collaborations. While we've expanded pilot national schemes, such as our carbon monoxide schools education programme, into longer-term commitments so we can build enduring recognisable campaigns.



It's our ambition to empower and educate people on how to identify the signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide and how to protect themselves from the highly poisonous gas. The partnerships we develop all share this ambition and include common CO measures.

Impact of CO awareness sessions



Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week campaign

Key 2022/23 achievements



People reached:
2,679,691



Website landing
page visitors:
1,528



Facebook
campaign reach:
15,800



Instagram
campaign reach:
1,100



Twitter
impressions:
1 million +

Why we're working together

The cost-of-living crisis and increase in fuel bills mean many more people are struggling to pay their bills. Desperate to cut costs, low-income households are having to make tough choices when it comes to keeping warm at home.

With Gas Safe Register research finding that one in five homes have at least one faulty gas appliance, we wanted to raise awareness that cutting corners costs lives.

In summer 2022, Policy Connect ran a highly successful and low-cost digital media campaign called 'CO Alarms Saves Lives' on behalf of all the gas networks, which was endorsed by the All-Party Parliamentary Carbon Monoxide Group (APPCOG). Following this success, we decided to take the opportunity to run a similar campaign around Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week in November 2022.

"The substantial reach of the 2022 campaign has once again proved the power of collaboration in raising awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide. As Chair of the APPCOG Communications group, I'm grateful as ever for the support of the UK Gas Distribution Networks."

Rob Lyon,
APPCOG Communications Group Chair

How we're working together

We worked with Policy Connect to develop, promote and share a multi-media CO awareness campaign during Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week 2022.

We built on our enduring Carbon Monoxide: Alarms Save Lives campaign, producing a new website landing page and supporting media assets with the key message that cutting corners costs lives. Our multi-channel campaign encompassed website updates and news stories, paid and organic social media posts, radio interviews and media coverage.

Against the backdrop of the cost-of-living crisis, our campaign specifically focused on highlighting the safety risks of cutting corners to save money, for example, by blocking up ventilation passages or using outdoor cooking equipment to heat the home.

Through this lens, our campaign was able to deliver the core principles of carbon monoxide safety, including the symptoms of CO poisoning and the importance of CO alarms and appliance servicing.

Our messaging was tailored to engage and reach different target audiences, including landlords, people living in social housing and other vulnerable groups.

Project at a glance

Lead GDN:



- Duration: November 2022
- Investment: £20,000

Participating GDNs:



- Forecast SROI: £24.86
- Status: Completed

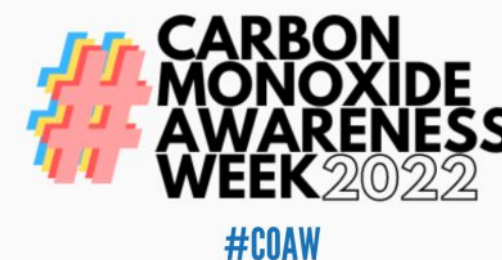
Partnership impact

In developing our campaign, we engaged key stakeholders including Barry Sheerman MP, Stephanie Peacock MP, Liz Twist MP, John McNally MP, Alex Cunningham MP and Jane Hunt MP and Craig Drinkald, CO Lead for the National Fire Chiefs Council and Area Manager for Cumbria FRS.

In engaging these stakeholders, they became high-profile ambassadors for Carbon Monoxide Awareness Week by featuring in our videos, participating in media interviews and amplifying our campaign activities.

Endorsement of our campaign by respected national organisations with large social media followings, such as The Royal College of Nursing, the National Residential Landlords Association and Public Health Wales, raised the profile and reach of our activities.

Our dedicated [campaign landing page](#) received 1,528 unique visitors. Our paid-for social media posts offered 4.6 million opportunities for target audiences to engage with the campaign materials, with a total of 2.5 million individuals viewing the materials. While our media engagement resulted in 12 radio and digital media channels across the country covering our campaign, including in Bristol, Cumbria, Manchester and Wales, generating 21 items of coverage.



"The response to the campaign has been absolutely phenomenal this year. The APPCOG has seen action from the youngest in society, with primary school children learning about CO in the classroom, to care home residents, all being given training in carbon monoxide and understanding alarms, providing the perfect opportunity to embed lifesaving knowledge, follow safe practices, and implement measures to prevent harm all year round."

Laura Fatah,
Policy & Research Manager, Policy Connect



Game Over CO awareness programme

Key 2022/23 achievements



16 to 24-year-olds reached
across social media:
1.19 million



Students reached over
the 5-day university tour:
5,000+



Social media likes for
influencer CO content:
10,732

Why we're working together

In 2020, we collectively conducted gas and CO safety research which identified that awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide was significantly lower in young people aged 16 to 24 than in other age groups.

Our research uncovered that nearly half of 16 to 24-year-olds incorrectly thought CO had a smell. In addition, young people were far less likely to have a working audible CO alarm or think it is important to have gas appliances annually serviced.

These factors all put young people at greater risk of carbon monoxide harm.

Both Wales & West Utilities and SGN individually ran projects to target this hard-to-reach group through digital platforms and student ambassadors embedded in university campuses.

Our collaborative project builds on our individual successes with the programme partners behind these programmes – Heavenly Media and Campus Group – to design and deliver a new national campaign, coherent across content, look and feel, that targets at-risk young people.

How we're working together

The Game Over campaign builds upon the successful Wales & West Utilities pilot that uses a gaming theme to target young people with 'silent killer' CO awareness messaging through 15 and 30-second audio and video adverts.

Our multi-channel approach sees the ads placed across social media platforms including Facebook, YouTube and Snapchat, streaming services ITVX, All 4 and Spotify, and digital radio via DAX and Octave Audio.

Five social media influencers were recruited to amplify our activity and spread the message on the dangers of CO poisoning on Instagram and TikTok, increasing the reach to females in this age group.

Additionally, building upon the pilot run by SGN, student ambassadors from 16 universities across England, Scotland and Wales have been recruited to run events and share campaign content and merchandise.

We're also supplementing the student ambassador activity with a bespoke on-campus retro arcade game, based on our Game Over concept. The arcade tour has visited five university campuses across all the GDN areas to date.

As well as our Silent Killer game and campaign film, our campaign website covers where CO comes from, the symptoms of CO poisoning, how to stay safe and the gas emergency number.

Project at a glance

Lead GDNs:



Participating GDNs:



- Duration: October 2022 to August 2023
- Investment: £300,869

- Forecast SROI: £8.45
- Status: On track

Partnership impact

Our collaborative Game Over campaign delivered 4.5 million opportunities for young people to see our CO awareness video and audio ads during the first year of our programme. The targeted social media videos – which show two online gamers, one of whom is impacted by CO poisoning – were watched in full 667,000 times on Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube and ITVX.

With a new cohort of students starting at universities in the autumn, we'll apply our learnings from the first year in the next phase of our programme. As a result, we'll only run the 15-second version of our film on social media and we'll also constantly review and redeploy the budget across social platforms should any underperform.

We developed a new single GDN brand, UKGDNs, and a **dedicated project website** to provide our target audience with tailored CO information. With the website linked to each of our individual websites, we are considering the potential for this site to be used as a hub for other collaborative messaging in future.

"It's really good to see content creators promoting safety and health instead of promoting trash games that let's be honest no one is going to play".

@log552k7 on TikTok

"As well as generating mass awareness (1.7 million impressions) from more traditional campus media channels, by utilising a combination of live events, student ambassadors and nano-influencers we've been able to ensure a deeper level of peer-to-peer education and engagement across 16 key universities – and, crucially – communicate an important, serious message in a means that is memorable, unique and relevant to this demographic."

Michael Munro,
Campus Group





The Scout Association

Carbon monoxide awareness programme



Key 2022/23 achievements



Young people
reached:
47,782



CO awareness
sessions:
3,000+



Cub Home
Safety Badges:
16,548



Why we're working together

While young people are one of the demographics most at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, they're also one of the groups least aware of the dangers of CO.

Every week, The Scouts help almost half a million young people develop skills for life, with nights away and camping forming an integral part of scouting.

Our partnership with The Scouts not only enables us to reduce CO harm among large numbers of young people nationally, but we're also able to raise awareness of the silent killer among young people who are potentially more likely than their peers to come into contact with CO through camping and other outdoor activities.

How we're working together

We've created a range of engaging and interactive activities to help young people understand the signs and symptoms of CO poisoning and the steps to take if they suspect CO is present in their home.

More than 16,500 Cubs have been awarded our sponsored Home Safety Badge this year, having actively taken steps to protect their homes and families from carbon monoxide.

We've also introduced a further six activities this year, tailored to the differing needs and interests of young people across four Scouting sections – Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers. The newest set of activities includes useful camping recipes embedded with CO safety information and a new mystery game where players must identify what the undetected danger is.

Our mystery game resonated so well with Scouts, that it was one of the top searches on the entire Scout Association website in March 2023.

"Understanding the dangers of carbon monoxide is important for everyone. The activities we've created use the expertise from the gas distribution companies to embed this crucial safety message in a fun, engaging way that builds skills for life. Through this partnership, we can equip over 350,000 young people with important skills that may one day save a life."

Simon Carter,
Head of Media Relations, The Scouts

Project at a glance

Lead GDN:



Participating GDNs:



- Duration: October 2021 to October 2024
- Investment: £300,000
- Forecast SROI: £1.81
- Status: On track

Partnership impact

Our programme equips young people with safety knowledge and life skills that transcend their meetings and camping expeditions. By engaging with Scouts, we're able to educate whole households about the dangers of CO as younger people, particularly those between the ages of 5 and 11, share learning with their families. With young people becoming ambassadors for CO safety, we're able to extend the reach of our awareness-raising activities to other at-risk and hard-to-reach age groups and communities.

With our partnership now well established, CO safety is embedded within The Scouts' wider website, social media activity and membership communications. For example, every camping item for sale on the Scout Stores website now has a safety message asking customers to consider the dangers of CO poisoning.

While at a more local level, individual Scout districts have promoted the GDN CO Safety Competition via their social media accounts.

When messaging about how to stay safe from the dangers of CO at home and promotion of the CO activities we've created was shared in the Scouts membership e-newsletter, it was opened by over 69,900 Scouting members. The organisation has fully embraced our programme and is actively seeking to promote CO awareness across its channels.

This appetite to increase CO awareness-raising activities beyond our initial programme is reflected in the organisation's training for adult volunteers. We've linked The Scouts with another of our programme partners, Gas Safe Charity, to design a bespoke training programme to educate and empower Scout leaders to engage young people around CO safety.

Looking ahead

Ramping up delivery

After our extensive work to identify partners and co-design new collaborative programmes in year one, we've been able to begin delivering multiple new initiatives at pace this year.

At a time when the cost-of-living crisis has made life exceptionally difficult for so many households, we've been able to provide a wealth of support for our vulnerable customers to help them maintain a safe and warm home.

New programmes for year three

Building on this year's success, we have a number of exciting new projects recently mobilised and to deliver in earnest next year.

The first of these is a collaborative programme with cancer support charity Maggie's, involving Cadent, Northern Gas Networks and SGN. Together, we will provide additional funding to Maggie's centres across England and Scotland to help people living with cancer with energy safeguarding and affordability. Wales & West Utilities also has a separate project with Maggie's in South Wales and Cheltenham that delivers similar outcomes for customers.

We will also be increasing our energy advice and debt support for people with mental health conditions through the Mental Health and Money Advice Service, as we expand on SGN's regional pilot programme with Mental Health UK in Scotland to co-design a new national programme. Our new collaborative partnership will enable Mental Health UK to increase its digital service provision to reach more people across the UK.

Collaborative awareness campaigns

When it comes to raising awareness of carbon monoxide, the national gas emergency number and the PSR, we recognise we can far increase our impact through delivering collaborative, national campaigns in place of smaller, regional campaigns.

We have appointed the experienced creative agency Eleven Miles to design and deliver a new multi-year campaign series that will run through to the end of RIIO-GD2 in March 2026. We aim to reach 56 million people through annual summer and winter campaigns, that will encompass broadcast, digital and print activity.



Additional fuel poverty funding through VCMA2

As gas distribution networks, we have worked with Ofgem and other key national stakeholders to review the allowances we have to help vulnerable customers. UK and devolved government policy changes mean that funding for first-time gas heating is very limited, resulting in large forecast under-delivery of the FPNES scheme.

Following extensive consultation with our regulator and our stakeholders to address the gap, we will repurpose some of the unspent FPNES allowance to help alleviate fuel poverty through the VCMA mechanism over the remainder of RIIO-GD2.

With this additional funding, the overall VCMA pot will almost treble in value from £60 million to £170 million over the course of RIIO-GD2, offering exciting new opportunities to create large-scale collaborative programmes with national partners to address the widespread levels of vulnerability that continue to impact our customers.

The new funding will be focused on fuel poverty and energy affordability and support for priority customers. We will, however, ensure that each customer interaction is used as an opportunity to raise awareness of the PSR and carbon monoxide, continuing to issue free CO alarms where appropriate.

We have all reviewed and updated our individual VCMA strategies to assess how we can amplify the impact of our activity using this additional funding. Within this review, we've considered the impact of the significant and enduring societal changes over recent years – such as the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis – have had on vulnerable groups and reflected this in our strategies accordingly.

We have also worked with Ofgem and stakeholders to review the VCMA guidance document including additional scrutiny and approval of high value projects.

As we embark on year three, we will continue to work with stakeholders to verify the needs of customers, before moving into procurement events and approaches to national partners to co-create new projects and expanding existing programmes. We are anticipating that we will start delivering projects under this additional funding from late 2023.



Appendix

Full project data

In addition to the information we've shared in [our projects summary section](#), we've also reported full details of our year two outcomes and financial information.

We want this information to be as easy as possible to review, so we've collated this into a document that's held online.

[View our full project data](#)



Thank you to all our partners
who've helped us compile this year's
VCMA Annual Collaborative Report.

For more information about our regional initiatives, please visit our websites:



cadentgas.com



northerngasnetworks.co.uk



sgn.co.uk



wwutilities.co.uk

