

Regional Fire and Rescue Service and Community Partnerships

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

March 2022

Update May 2023

Update August 2025

SGN



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1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
New/Updated	Update August 2025
Date of PEA submission:	4 October 2021 Update May 2023 Update August 2025
Project contact name:	Dan Edwards
Project contact number/email:	dan.edwards@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k) ** Ringfenced value will be assessed and revised annually based on need and delivery	£991,110 Update August 2025 £1,075,000
Total VCMA funding required (£k) ** Ringfenced value will be assessed and revised annually based on need and delivery	£991,110 Update August 2025 £1,075,000

2 Problem statement

Many people in the UK who use carbon fuelled appliances are not aware of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide and do not have a working audible Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarm. Of 8,000 people surveyed in 2020 45% didn't know that CO doesn't have a smell, and only 42% had a working audible CO alarm.

Young people are one of the groups least aware of the dangers of CO, of 1,679 16-24yr olds surveyed only 31% knew that CO didn't have a smell, this was the lowest percentage of all the age groups surveyed. Of those same 1,679 16-24yr olds only 26% stated that they had a working audible CO alarm, the lowest percentage across all the age groups. There is a clear need to educate young people on the dangers of CO, not only to improve their awareness and keep them safe from CO harm, but to empower them to share that learning with their peers and households, extending the reach of that education, raising CO awareness and reducing CO harm as a result.

11 regional Fire and Rescue Services across our network areas run Home Safety or Safe & Well programmes that provide risk prevention and wider health and wellbeing interventions to vulnerable households. Through partner engagement we have learned that the provision of funding is inconsistent for CO safety, including engagement and access to CO alarms.

In many cases the alarms provided are also restricted to standard standalone CO alarms and not accessible offerings. With some of the most vulnerable groups at risk from CO harm and fire being those with sensory and/or cognitive impairment, there is a need to provide accessible CO and fire alarms tailored to meet their needs.

There are also a number of regional community support organisations that provide much needed support to vulnerable customers and communities within our networks, including those we would not ordinarily directly reach ourselves. These community support organisations are unable to provide CO safety devices or advice for those they help due to funding, despite being well placed to offer this when supporting customers in their homes and communities.

We serve some of the most diverse communities in the UK, with wide, varied, and ever-changing demographics that have associated challenges and needs. This can include different age groups, hard-to-reach communities, people with disabilities, the financially vulnerable, or any other customer segment likely to have bespoke needs. We understand that diverse communities require tailored communication to ensure the risks and mitigations are understood to maintain a safe and warm home.

We know that some of the most vulnerable people in our community are not aware of the provisions that can be provided by their utilities to maintain a safe and warm home, including free or discounted gas connections, Priority Services Register sign-up, independent energy advice or Locking Cooker Valve installations.

Update May 2023

Working with regional Fire and Rescue and community support organisations has shown that whilst these organisations and their staff/volunteers have access to and provide support for the most vulnerable and diverse communities within our network areas, they often don't have the knowledge, skills, or confidence to be able to consider and identify CO risks or provide CO awareness discussions for the vulnerable households they support.

Update August 2025

The households regional Fire and Rescue Service and community support organisations engage are often some of the most vulnerable and at risk in our communities, and in many cases these households may also be experiencing fuel poverty.

Through our mature partnerships and close relationships, we've learnt that in some cases these vulnerable fuel poor households are using old and potentially unsafe heat the person items such as electric blankets and heated throws. These items not only pose a potential fire hazard but will also not be as energy efficient as more modern equipment therefore costing households already experiencing fuel poverty more to run.

3 Scope and objectives

3.1 Objectives

To support vulnerable customers to use energy safely efficiently and affordably in our communities by working with regional partners delivering relevant services to reduce risk to vulnerable customers.

Work in partnership with regional community partners, and Fire and Rescue Services across our networks to support the funding of consistent services around gas and CO safety, tailoring and delivering in home interventions that reduce harm and increase health and wellbeing for the household.

We will also look for opportunities to collaborate with regional partners to onward refer customers in vulnerable circumstances for support services tailored to meet their needs.

Update May 2023

To support regional Fire and Rescue and community organisations to access tailored CO awareness training that will educate and empower their teams, enabling them to not only identify CO risks in the households they support, but also provide CO awareness advice and information for the customers and clients themselves, helping to keep them safer from the dangers of CO.

Update August 2025

Our overarching ambition through this project remains unchanged, to support vulnerable customers to use energy safely efficiently and affordably in our communities by working with regional partners delivering relevant services to reduce risk to vulnerable households. Through the insight we've gathered it's evident that we can do more with these partners to better achieve this ambition. Going beyond CO alarms and awareness advice, working with partners to respond to regional needs based on partners expertise and capacity.

3.2 Scope

Programme is for the full five-year period however delivery outcomes will be reviewed annually.

The partnership aims to deliver the following with a regional approach dependent on regional need:

- Increase CO awareness and reduce CO harm for vulnerable and at-risk customers through the provision of CO education on; the dangers, the symptoms, and the signs of CO, as well as prevention/safeguarding measures and what to do if CO is suspected.
- Ensure vulnerable customers supported that do not have a working audible CO alarm receive a CO alarm correctly installed to reduce and mitigate the risk of CO harm for them and their household.
- Ensure vulnerable customers with sensory or cognitive impairment supported that do not have a working or suitable accessible CO alarm receive an accessible CO alarm tailored to meet their needs correctly installed to reduce and mitigate the risk of CO harm for them and their household.
- Provide access to our additional support services to all regional partners to enable them to refer their customers to us for support, as many of these will be hard-to-reach customers who we may not otherwise have engaged.
- Ensure our partner's teams, advisors and volunteers are trained on the correct installation and setup of standalone and accessible CO and fire alarm systems.
- Measure CO awareness levels of customers supported to track increase in awareness and identify any best practice or improvement measures required.
- Capture case studies from both our partners and the customers they support about the benefits of the visit and in particular the provision of CO awareness and alarms.
- Work with partners to incorporate CO safety education into any education programmes they have for young people. This CO safety education should include education on; the dangers, the symptoms, and the signs of CO, as well as prevention/safeguarding measures and what to do if CO is suspected.
- Work with regional partners within our network areas to deliver tailored support to target groups in their communities that; increases CO awareness, reduces CO harm, and/or provides broader support for customers to enable them to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably.

Update May 2023

- Ensure our partners and their teams are educated on CO safety using a recognised training package either the Gas Safe Charity's Think CO workshops and/or e-Learning package to provide them with the skills and knowledge to confidently provide CO awareness advice and identify CO risks.

Update August 2025

- Work with partners to understand the regional need, and the partners capacity to provide modern efficient heat the person items for the vulnerable households they support
- Provide regional partners with training on and access to our SGN Safe & Warm referral network, enabling them to refer those they identify as in need for additional more in-depth support
- Provide regional partners with CO awareness resources in a range of formats and languages, making them accessible to the communities being supported.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project has been designed to work with FRS's and regional community partners within our network area to provide support to vulnerable households we wouldn't otherwise have been able to reach. It has been assessed to provide a forecasted positive SROI and will actively educate vulnerable households on CO whilst reducing the CO risk by installing appropriate CO alarms to meet need.

This project will also provide broader support to help vulnerable customers use energy safely, efficiently and affordably, including but not limited to; energy advice, funded gas connections, PSR sign up, Locking Cooker Valve installations and targeted support for hard-to-reach or at-risk groups to address key issues.

For any regional partner that falls entirely within our network area 100% of the funding will come from us, with no collaboration from other GDN's or other funded sources. Where there are footprint overlaps with another GDN we will look to collaborate with the GDN(s) in question to provide shared services and funding accordingly based on the split of the delivery partner area. We have defined outcomes for this project around

increased CO awareness, provision of CO safety solutions, additional support services for vulnerable customers and CO education for young people.

Update August 2025

This partnership aligns to the SGN commitment to deliver support services for customers aligned to our four strategic pillars:

- 1 Services Beyond the Meter
- 2 Supporting Priority Customer Groups
- 3 Fuel Poverty & Energy Affordability
- 4 **Carbon Monoxide Awareness**

This project aligns to strategic pillar number four with outcomes in two and three.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Regional Fire and Rescue Services

Our regional FRS's are recognised as being well placed to identify hard-to-reach and high-risk groups/customers, as well as their associated challenges and any needs specific to them at a regional level. They aim to sustain people in the community, in safe and suitable homes - preventing harm, injury, hospital admission and loss of life. Firefighters, paramedics, police and teachers make up the top, most trusted professions in the UK, according to IFSEC Global Survey. Through a reciprocal and joined up approach Fire Officers are a valuable asset to community partners such as SGN, as they are able to engage with hard-to-reach customers and can often be the first on the scene or have initial eyes-on before other services in a welfare concern or crime situation.

FRS's provide Home Safety or Safe & Well visits for customers in the most vulnerable situations, the following list of factors that align to our vulnerability principles of supporting those most at risk would trigger a Home Safety or Safe and Well visit, or a referral for one from a community partner.

- The person is aged over 65 years
- No working smoke detector
- Has Telecare (base unit, pendant and linked smoke detector)
- Cannot hear a standard smoke detector and lives alone
- Has permanent physical disability or frailty affecting their ability to either summon help or escape safely in an emergency
- A long-term illness, where medication has an impact on them responding in an emergency
- Permanent mobility difficulty
- Smokes inside the home; signs of burn marks or smoking in bed
- Hoarding at clutter rating 4 and above; affecting access to rooms, loading and escape routes
- Cognitive impairment affecting their ability to react and respond in an emergency
- Equipment that has impact on safety in the home; oxygen therapy, air flow mattress, mobility scooters, walking aids, e-cigarettes
- Arson threat; domestic violence affecting their safety and escape in their home
- Substance abuse where it impacts safety in the home
- Any other health, wellbeing, or safety issue.

5.2 2019 SGN CO Roundtable Events

In November 2019 we held two CO roundtable events, one in each of our network areas with key stakeholders, including representatives from Scottish Government, Gas Safe Register, Corgi Services, RoSPA, Local Authorities, Gas Safe Charity and CO – Gas Safety to discuss our GD2 business planning on CO and gain feedback on our short term GD1 focus and longer term GD2 focus.

Feedback we received during these events told us; “You need to target an intervention that isn’t about an FCO visit, instead working with those who visit these types of people (living in poverty and not servicing their appliances)”, and “Make a referral for a free CO Alarm installation for vulnerable customers through trusted partners”.

Working with FRS’s and regional community organisations addresses both suggestions as the CO intervention is not related to a visit by one of our First Call Operatives (FCO) and referrals for support either through a Safe & Well visit or community support organisation can be made by any organisation or family member.

5.3 2019 SGN First Call operative CO Survey

In 2019 we surveyed our engineers to ask about CO to find out what they see when visiting homes and how they think we should support our customers and communities.

From this survey the most common issue found by our engineers when attending a property in relation to CO was a CO battery/alarm failure.

When we asked what we should do to solve the issues, the top three answers to this gave a very clear direction. These answers were:

1. Install a free CO alarm
2. Provide literature with pictures and guidance on how to identify the signs of CO
3. Referral to fire and rescue for installation of free CO alarm and offer of other available support

By working with FRS’s and community partners to educate customers on the dangers of CO, provide the installation of a CO alarm, and providing access to other available support either directly or through onward referral we’re able to address all of the above solutions provided by our engineers. .

5.4 Vulnerable Steering Group

During 2020/21 our Vulnerable Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2. Our Vulnerable Steering Group recommended Fire and Rescue Services as a key partner for us to work with to support our most vulnerable customers throughout GD2. Recognising the link we already have through our Additional Services Referral process and the alignment of safety messaging around CO.

5.5 GDN CO Collaboration group

Through our ongoing involvement and engagement with the GDN CO collaboration group it is evident that working with trusted regional partners, including Fire and Rescue Services, is seen as best practice by all four GDNs when trying to support and engage customers in vulnerable circumstances around the dangers of CO, inline with other home safety messages including fire safety, smoking cessation, hoarding, scam advice and access/mobility issues.

5.6 SGN RIIO GD2 Business Plan

In the process of shaping our RIIO GD2 Business Plan we engaged stakeholders and customers about our plan to support 50,000 customers each year through a three tiered approach, and what services/initiatives should be included within each of those tiers. During our Positive Impact round table event our stakeholders emphasised the importance of partnerships to increase the value of our allowance in generating positive outcomes for customers. Feedback from our Customer Service & Supporting Vulnerable Customer – Shaping the Business Plan Qualitative Workshops suggested potential tier two initiatives should include the provision of additional services through referral partners and specifically coordinating with Fire and Rescue home safety checks.

6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes for the 5-year programme

Our partnerships with regional community partners and Fire and Rescue Services within our network areas for the duration of GD2 will provide the following outcomes for some of our most vulnerable and at-risk customers and customer groups, as well as the teams that support them:

- Customers supported will receive CO alarms tailored to meet their needs including;
 - standard standalone CO alarms
 - interlinked hard of hearing CO and fire alarm systems for deaf/hearing impaired customers
 - combined CO and smoke verbal alarms for blind/visually impaired customers, or those with cognitive impairment
- Partner organisation and their team members will, where required, receive training on;
 - CO safety and awareness
 - the correct installation of standard standalone CO alarms
 - the correct installation of interlinked hard of hearing CO and fire alarm systems
 - the correct installation of combined CO and smoke verbal alarms
- Customers supported will be more aware of the risks of Carbon Monoxide and how to mitigate them.
- Where applicable customers will be supported by their utilities Priority Services Register, providing them with the security and support they will need during an unplanned outage.
- Customers supported will have access to independent energy advice to help them;
 - be on the best tariffs for their personal circumstances
 - manage and pay their own utility bills going forward and avoid going into debt
- Customers supported who are at risk of using their gas cooker in an unsafe manner will be referred to us and wherever possible have a Locking Cooker Valve installed completely free of charge enabling them to retain their independence at home and providing reassurance to friends, family and carers.
- Young people will be educated on CO safety through existing education programmes.
- We will work with our regional partners on targeted initiatives for hard-to-reach groups where the partner has identified a need we can support

Update August 2025

- Households in or at risk of fuel poverty can be provided with modern, energy efficient heat the person items to help them safely reduce their energy usage
- Regional partners will have the ability to refer households they identify as in needing for more in-depth support via our SGN Safe & Warm referral network

6.2 Success criteria

- Customers visited by our regional partners within our network area will have a greater understanding of the dangers associated with Carbon Monoxide and as such their risk of CO harm will be reduced, this includes those receiving a CO alarm and those who already have one but CO awareness is still relevant. In 22/23 we saw an increased requirement for alarms, with only 81% of customers provided with a CO awareness conversation by our Fire and Rescue Service and regional partners requiring a CO alarm. This has increased by 11% from year one (70%)
- CO awareness surveys will be completed by all partners to capture the customers awareness on the dangers of CO pre and post discussion/visit
- On average each year 13,600 customers who either do not have a working audible CO alarm, or do not have sufficient working audible CO alarms for their requirement will have a suitable number of CO alarms correctly installed in their home

- On average each year 1,800 deaf/hard of hearing customers who do not have a suitable accessible fire and CO detection system will have an accessible interlinked hard of hearing CO and fire alarm system installed, setup and explained to them
- On average each year 680 blind/visually impaired or cognitive impaired customers who do not have a suitable accessible fire and CO detection system will have a verbal combined CO and smoke alarm installed, setup and explained to them
- An increased number of FRS Home Safety or Safe & Well referrals will be submitted by SGN engineers and contractors via our additional service referral process; 'Careline App', measured through our monthly Additional Services Reporting
- Case studies from partners about what the ability to provide CO alarms and awareness, and the other support our partnerships allow means for them
- Case studies from a sample of customers each year to find out what difference having a CO alarm installed, being made aware of the dangers of CO and any other additional support provided as a result of our partnership has made to them
- Customers offered the support to assess eligibility and sign up to the PSR with an expectation of 20% registration
- Customers provided access to energy advice including information about who to call in an emergency, smart meters, Winter Fuel Payments, Warm Homes Discount, how to check if you are on the best tariff, tariff switching (where available) and energy efficiency advice
- Customers offered information on and access to the gas safety Locking Cooker Valve
- Customers offered information on and access to our Help To Heat fuel poor network extension scheme
- CO education material is included in the education programmes of multiple partners within our network area

Update May 2023

- Partner organisations and their teams will be educated on the signs, symptoms and dangers of CO, how to identify CO risks, prevention and mitigation steps, and what to do if CO is suspected. Thus empowering them to help the households they support stay safer from the risk of CO poisoning.

Update August 2025

Following changes to the CO alarm legislation in England and Scotland, and as a result of our success in developing regional partnerships with the Fire and Rescue Services operating in our network areas we've seen a change in demand for CO alarms. We're updating our success criteria in line with this demand, and to add in capacity to provide heat the person items where there is a recognised need;

- On average each year approximately 16,000 customers who either do not have a working audible CO alarm, or do not have sufficient working audible CO alarms for their requirement will have a suitable number of CO alarms correctly installed in their home
- On average each year approximately 800 deaf/hard of hearing customers who do not have a suitable accessible fire and CO detection system will have an accessible interlinked hard of hearing CO and fire alarm system installed, setup and explained to them
- On average each year 200 blind/visually impaired or cognitive impaired customers who do not have a suitable accessible fire and CO detection system will have a verbal combined CO and smoke alarm installed, setup and explained to them
- Approximately 200 customers experiencing or at risk of fuel poverty using inefficient and potentially unsafe heat the person items will be provided new energy efficient items as well as access to energy efficiency advice

7 Project partners and third parties involved

Regional community organisations able to reach, engage, and support vulnerable, hard-to-reach customers we would otherwise have been unlikely to reach. Providing CO awareness and where required CO alarms to

customers most at risk from the dangers of CO. The list of potential organisations is huge, but examples include;

- Care & Repair – regional offices
- Greener Kirkcaldy
- Blue Lamp Trust
- Handy Van services
- Food banks
- Local charities
- Community groups/leaders

Regional Fire and Rescue Services who will be providing Home Safety, or Safe & Well visits for customers in vulnerable situations across our network areas, providing CO awareness and where required installing alarms to customers most at risk from the dangers of CO via their Safe & Well teams. There are 11 Fire and Rescue Services across our network and we aim to partner with all of them in some capacity based on regional need. They are:

- Buckinghamshire
- Dorset and Wiltshire
- East Sussex
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight
- Kent
- London
- Oxfordshire
- Royal Berkshire
- Surrey
- Scotland – All regions
- West Sussex

Fireblitz Extinguishers Ltd who will be the supplier of the standalone and accessible interlinked hard of hearing CO and fire alarm systems. They will also be providing training for regional partners on the correct installation and setup of both alarm types as required.

Safelincs Fire & Safety Solutions who will be the supplier of the verbal combined CO and smoke alarms for customers with visual or cognitive impairment.

SGN, we are funding the CO alarms that will not only enable our regional partners to install these for customers in vulnerable situations, but also give them the confidence to provide customers with comprehensive CO awareness information knowing they can back it up with the installation of a CO alarm suitable for the customers need(s). We will also be facilitating the training on CO safety and alarm installation Throughout this project we will also track any measurable outcome achieved as a result of our partnerships to enable us to provide the respective partner with performance reviews and trigger improvement plans and additional training if required.

Update May 2023

Gas Safe Charity who provide CO training for frontline organisations via their Think CO training programme.

FireAngel and Aico, who are alternative CO alarm suppliers where there is a need due to partner demand or supply chain issues.

8 Potential for new learning

We expect to learn from this project;

- The level of CO awareness for customers in vulnerable situations across our networks both pre and post support via our CO awareness survey responses. This will help us identify areas of improvement or best practice and support or share accordingly.
- What information customers find useful and is this the best way for them to receive it. This will help frame future CO messaging via regional community partners and more broadly to similar demographics or customer groups.
- Due to the focus on inclusion as part of this project we expect to get a better understanding of effective ways to identify, engage and empower customers with sensory disabilities, enabling us to provide better support on this and other future projects
- We will assess whether regional partners are more comfortable having CO awareness discussions with the customers they support knowing they have the ability to offer and correctly install/setup free CO alarms.
- We will assess whether our own engineers are more likely to refer customers for FRS Home Safety or Safe & Well visits knowing these visits now provide a more holistic service incorporating CO awareness, alarm installation and our other additional support services.

We will be monitoring and evaluating project progress and impact with each partner regularly to enable us to refine and improve our processes and partnerships at an individual partner level. We are keen to learn from this project and for successes and best practice to be incorporated into future delivery and shared with our broader stakeholders and partners.

Our learnings will also be shared as part of a wider project throughout each year of our VCMA funding at our annual showcase event.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

This project is working with regional community partners and Fire and Rescue Services that operate within the SGN network areas across Scotland and the South. These regional partners provide support to some of the most vulnerable and at-risk customers across our networks. Across the five years we require a ringfenced budget based on anticipated outcome values which will be reviewed annually based on need and performance. Following a review of year one and two delivery and forecast activity for the remainder of GD2 the anticipated costs are:

- 68,110 standard CO alarms
- 9,160 deaf/hard of hearing accessible interlinked hard of hearing Wireless CO sensors
- 3,400 verbal combined CO and smoke alarms
- Awareness and promotional material design and print costs

Additional support services

- Signposting/referral to other partner agencies who can support with health or wellbeing needs.

Social Value Measurement

Working with our measurement partner SIA Partners we've developed a number of social proxy values aligned to the work and outcomes we and our partners are delivering. Using these along with the DNO SROI assessment tool and methodology we have carried out an assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes associated with this project and we forecast a positive net SROI of £7.64.

This project enables our regional community and Fire and Rescue Service partners to refer clients they support to our trusted partners for Energy Advice and additional support however as the social value for these services and outcomes are captured within respective partner PEA's we have excluded these activities from our SROI calculations on this project.

Total cost*	£925,224.68
Total gross present value	£7,993,646.09
NPV	£7,068,421.41
SROI	£7.64

*Total cost over five years accounting for anticipated inflation

Update August 2025

We and the other Gas Distribution Networks worked with leading social impact research consultancy SIRIO Strategies on the development of the Industry Standard Social Value Framework and supporting GDN Rulebook. We have used that GDN Rulebook to carry out an assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable customers incorporated in this partnership. Carrying out this assessment of the delivered outcomes for 21/22 – 24/25 and predicted outcomes for 25/26 we forecast a revised net Social Return on Investment of £6.06 for the project.

Revised overall SROI forecast

Total cost*	£949,963.43
Total gross present value	£6,709,857.86
Net Present Value (NPV)	£5,759,894.43
SROI	£6.06

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

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from 1 September 2021 to 31 March 2026

11 Geographic area

SGN Southern and Scotland network footprint

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

Update August 2025

SGN has worked with regional Fire and Rescue Service and community partners to understand regional need and demand to enable us to design this project and ensure that its ambition contributes to the delivery of our Vulnerability Strategy, the guidance from our Vulnerable Customer Steering Group and adheres to the updated VCMA governance criteria.

The SROI for the original project was assessed working with SIA Partners using the DNO/GDN common rulebook and forecast at providing a net SROI of £7.64. For the update of this project and the associated outcomes we have used the GDN Rulebook developed by SIRIO Strategies as part of the Industry Standard Social Value Framework to forecast the social value and SROI. As detailed above we have updated the SROI forecast using actuals for years one to four and forecast for year five which gives a revised overall forecast SROI of £6.06 for each £1 invested. This will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

To support the project to deliver the success criteria outcomes as detailed, along with the partners we will review progress monthly and quarterly to learn, share best practices and address any delivery issues.

The PEA has been reviewed and approved by the business lead Dan Edwards and the Director of Customer Services Maureen McIntosh.