

Safe and Warm – Sue Ryder

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

Updated: April 2026

PEA reference: PCG-SGNStH-024a



Contents

Contents	2
Project registration table.....	3
Problem(s)	4
Scope and objectives.....	5
Project design engagement	5
Why the project is being funded through the VCMA.....	6
How VCMA funding complements or supplements BAU activities	7
Justification for why the project should not be collaborative	8
Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria	8
Potential for new learning	9
Aligning with and supporting wider vulnerability approaches	10
Monitoring and evaluation	10
Scale of VCMA project and SROI calculations, including NPV	11
Internal governance and project management evidence	12
Eligibility Criteria.....	13

Project registration table

Project summary	
Project title	Safe and Warm – Sue Ryder
Strategic area	Supporting Priority Customer Groups
Lead partner name	Sue Ryder
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission	March 2026
Project start and end date	April 26 – March 2028
Project location	Southern region
Project contact	
Name	Janet Duggan
Contact details	Positive.impact@sgn.co.uk
Project partners and third parties involved	
Organisation name	Role
Sue Ryder	Delivery of the core funded service
Lightning Reach	Delivery partner for financial support schemes
Gas Safe Charity	Think CO Training
Costs and funding	
Total cost (£k)	£100,000
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£100,000
Total BAU vulnerability and CO safety activity baseline allowance funding by activity (£k)	N/A

Problem(s)

This section needs to outline the problem(s) which is/are being addressed by the VCMA project.

Across the UK, fuel poverty remains a significant and rising challenge for households already facing vulnerability. In England, an estimated [36.3% of households](#) (8.99 million) were required to spend more than [10% of their income](#) on domestic energy in 2024, up from 35.5% the previous year.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9714/> Under the January to March 2026 direct debit price cap the average annual bill for typical gas and electricity consumption is £1,758. This is well below the peak level of £2,380 level under the Energy Price Guarantee from October 2022 to June 2023, but still 44% higher than in Winter 2021/22. Fuel poverty disproportionately affects low-income families, older adults, single-parent households, and people living with long-term health conditions - groups consistently identified as among the most vulnerable by national charities and statutory bodies.

Persistent cost-of-living pressures mean households are continuing to reduce essential heating, cut back on hot water use, and limit appliance use, heightening risks to health and wellbeing. [National Energy Action](#) continues to highlight that millions are living in cold, damp homes, resulting in increased pressure on the NHS and exacerbating preexisting inequalities. These risks are particularly pronounced during periods of ill health, bereavement, or major life change, when household resilience is already weakened. Bereaved households often experience a unique combination of financial strain, reduced income, emotional distress, and administrative burden. Many face rising household costs at the same time that benefits, pensions, or wages decrease following the loss of a loved one.

[The Vulnerability Registration Service](#) states there is a major gap in awareness and low registration for the Priority Services Register (PSR) with 80% of UK adults never having heard of the PSR. Older adults, digitally excluded individuals, and people living with health conditions, groups heavily represented among Sue Ryder's customers remain significantly underrepresented on the PSR despite clear eligibility. Barriers include limited awareness, low digital confidence and difficulty completing administrative tasks while grieving, leaving many without essential safety measures or tailored communication support.

Carbon monoxide (CO) exposure also remains a preventable but under recognised safety risk, especially for low-income households living in older or poorly maintained properties. [National data](#) shows that households cutting back on heating may rely on unsafe alternative heating methods or delay boiler servicing, increasing the risk of CO poisoning. Combined with other behaviours such as reduced ventilation to conserve heat, safety risks are heightened at a time when bereaved families may already be struggling with day-to-day tasks.

Across our Southern region, Sue Ryder's 60 shops operate as trusted, familiar community hubs used by two distinct but equally vulnerable groups: those seeking affordable, good-quality items through charity retail, and those who turn to Sue Ryder because they are navigating the emotional and practical challenges of bereavement. Both groups reflect the demographics most affected by fuel poverty, financial strain, and low awareness of safeguarding schemes such as the Priority Services Register. Crucially, these retail environments provide a low barrier, non-stigmatising space where people already feel comfortable asking questions or seeking reassurance. This creates a unique opportunity to reach individuals who may not engage with statutory services, whether they are struggling to keep their homes warm or coping with the upheaval that follows the loss of a loved one.

Scope and objectives

Outline the scope and objectives of the VCMA project linked to the problem statement above. This should be clearly defined including the benefits which would directly impact customers on the participating GDNs' network(s), and where the benefits of the VCMA Projects lie.

Sue Ryder is known as experts in providing compassionate care to people living with a terminal illness or grief, ensuring that they have access to the right support, at the right time. They also operate charity retail shops that form a valuable local resource for the community.

This programme will deliver a targeted, preventative energy safeguarding and fuel poverty support programme with a focus on reaching people approaching the end of their life or who are bereaved across our Southern region, delivered in partnership between SGN and Sue Ryder.

Together, we aim to help customers who are going through the most difficult times of their lives emotionally and financially maintain safe, warm and resilient homes, offering accessible, trusted support within familiar community environments. Through gentle, everyday conversations embedded into Sue Ryder shops, the programme will reduce energy related risks, prevent crisis escalation, and reach households who may be reluctant to access formal advice services.

Our programme will:

- Establish a network of 60 Safe & Warm community touchpoints within priority Sue Ryder shops providing in-person energy safeguarding conversations focused on Priority Services Register (PSR) awareness, carbon monoxide safety, winter preparedness and early identification of energy related risks. The shops offer a welcoming, low barrier environment where customers can seek a range of energy advice and support.
- Equip shop staff and volunteers with seasonal training on energy safeguarding, CO safety, PSR awareness and the Safe & Warm materials, enabling them to confidently hold supportive conversations and signpost customers to further help where appropriate. This ensures that trusted individuals already known in local communities can provide timely and sensitive support throughout the winter period.
- Deliver enhanced winter engagement through two winter retail campaigns, using point-of-sale displays, window materials and simple printed leaflets to increase visibility and spark supportive conversations at scale. A refreshed Safe & Warm digital hub will remain the central access point for downloadable guidance, an email journey and CO safety information.
- Offer clear pathways to further help for customers who may require wellbeing or financial support, including partners offering debt, income, mental health, care, and essential household assistance to trusted external services such as Lightning Reach. This ensures that those with more complex needs can be safely connected to the right organisations quickly and efficiently.

Project design engagement

Targeting vulnerability support: This must describe how the GDN(s) identified the vulnerability need being addressed through the VCMA project, including the use of consumer research, stakeholder engagement, and data and technology.

Evidence of stakeholder and/or customer support: Information regarding all stakeholder and/or customer engagement which has contributed to the development of the VCMA Project.

Stakeholder project design input: How stakeholders were actively involved in the project design, and how their input and feedback were incorporated to shape the project design. Where stakeholders disagree about the project design, justification must be provided for why the current project design is deemed preferable.

The design of this project has been shaped by the identification of significant and growing vulnerability among people living with a life-limiting condition or grief, informed by national data on fuel poverty, insights from frontline bereavement services, and learning gathered through our 18-month partnership with Sue Ryder.

Throughout this work, and through engagement with retail staff, bereavement support teams, and community organisations, we have seen first-hand the financial strain, reduced income, and increased household vulnerability that often follow the death of someone close. These insights, reinforced by low awareness of the Priority Services Register (PSR), limited understanding of carbon monoxide (CO) risks, and the challenges bereaved households face when navigating complex energy and financial systems, guided our approach to designing a service that offers timely, accessible support during periods of heightened fragility.

Stakeholders have played an active role in shaping the model. Retail colleagues highlighted the need for simple, trusted conversations in community spaces that bereaved people already use. Bereavement teams emphasised the importance of support that does not rely on formal appointments or online systems, particularly for those struggling with digital exclusion or administrative overwhelm. Utility partners reinforced the need for clearer pathways into energy safeguarding schemes, including PSR registration, winter readiness advice, and CO safety. This collective engagement informed our decision to prioritise a retail-based, high-reach model that embeds support into everyday interactions, ensuring households affected by a terminal illness or a bereavement can access help without additional burden or disclosure.

Throughout the partnership, we've worked together with Sue Ryder to test approaches, share learning, and refine delivery so it is both scalable and sensitive. Stakeholder feedback has consistently highlighted the need for a model that addresses the interconnected challenges of low income, energy vulnerability, and declining household resilience following a terminal diagnosis or a bereavement, while recognising that grief affects people differently and shapes their capacity to seek help.

This project has also been shaped by the principles co-developed with our Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Steering Group (VSG), ensuring identified priority customer groups are central to the design of locally accessible services. The VSG's framework emphasises co-production with trusted partners, equitable access for people regardless of digital ability or emotional state, and the importance of tailoring support to practical, real-world needs. By grounding the project in a shared, evidence-based understanding of bereavement-related vulnerability, we are building a programme that is not only responsive to lived experience but aligned with wider commitments to fairness, inclusion, and meaningful protection for those most at risk.

Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This should include an explanation of why the VCMA project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria, and how it aligns with the GDN's VCMA collaborative strategy.

This project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria because it directly supports our Vulnerability Strategy and our overarching ambition to keep communities safe, warm, and supported, both now and as we

transition toward a green, clean energy future. Our strategy places vulnerable households at the centre of our decision making, ensuring that those most in need receive meaningful, practical assistance.

The project is designed to help us deliver our Business Plan commitments, particularly two key customer pledges, the first to support at least 650,000 of the most vulnerable households over the next five years. The second, to ensure that the project has been designed to ensure that it delivers meaningful outcomes and measurable value for customers and stakeholders. This includes maximising the social return on investment (SROI) for every pound spent, while consistently prioritising the needs and experiences of vulnerable customers.

In addition, the project reflects the strategic priorities of our Vulnerability Strategy – an approach shared by all four gas networks – which delivers support across four core areas:

- Providing Services Beyond the Meter – direct services for vulnerable households as we go about our day-to-day operational work that extends beyond traditional gas network responsibilities
- Tackling Fuel Poverty and Energy Affordability – targeted support for customers struggling to afford energy, helping households reduce energy costs, improve efficiency, and access essential advice
- Supporting Priority Customer Groups – identifying and assisting those with heightened needs, ensuring they receive tailored and timely support
- Reducing Carbon Monoxide Harm – a data driven approach to raising awareness, improving safety, and reducing carbon monoxide risks.

By addressing these themes, the project demonstrates strong strategic alignment and delivers tangible benefits to vulnerable customers, making it a clear fit for VCMA funding.

This project forms part of the ‘Supporting Priority Customer Groups’ theme and budget area.

How VCMA funding complements or supplements BAU activities

Where the VCMA Project is being delivered alongside a BAU vulnerability and/or CO safety activity or activities funded through the GDN’s baseline allowance, the GDN must provide sufficient evidence that the VCMA Project complements or supplements the BAU activity or activities to prevent the risk of double funding.

By working in partnership with us, Sue Ryder has established a robust signposting pathway to raise concerns related to key energy safeguarding services. This collaboration ensures that issues affecting vulnerable individuals, particularly those who may struggle to access or navigate utility services are identified early and directed to the appropriate support from their utility companies.

As a trusted organisation, Sue Ryder is well placed to engage effectively with vulnerable individuals and refer eligible people for BAU funded support. This includes access to carbon monoxide alarms, Locking Cooker Valves, and other measures that help maintain safety and independence in the home.

Justification for why the project should not be collaborative

This should include evidenced reasoning as to why the VCMA Project cannot, or should not, be delivered in collaboration with other GDNs. For example, this could include the unique context within a network area, or the development of an innovative pilot project.

Sue Ryder already has an active footprint, established relationships, and the specialist capacity to deliver tailored, accessible support.

As a result, the project has been designed to complement the existing partnership network rather than duplicate provision elsewhere. This project takes a place-based approach delivered through Sue Ryder's network of retail shops, using the local insight, trusted community relationships, and everyday customer interactions that these shops naturally generate. This model recognises the specific barriers bereaved people face when seeking support and ensures help is offered in familiar, accessible settings where they already feel comfortable.

The additional benefit is that Sue Ryder provides a national advice service, so the knowledge will be shared beyond our footprint about key support services including the provision of CO safety advice and the importance of being registered on the PSR, via the Safe and Warm Hub.

Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

Details of the VCMA Project outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these, interim milestones and how the Funding Licensee will evaluate whether the project has been successful. Each action should have a proportion of the funding allocated.

Outcome	Project Target	Interim Milestones
Energy Advice	7,000	Quarterly performance - 875
PSR Conversations	5,000	Quarterly performance - 625
CO Safety Information	3,000	Quarterly performance - 375
Front Line Worker Training (including CO awareness)	90	Quarterly performance -11

**Interim performance – averaged out and delivered with seasonal adjustments*

Success Criteria

During this two-year programme, delivered predominately between October-March, Sue Ryder will provide direct support to 7,000 households across our Southern region through 60 retail shops.

Sue Ryder will engage with an additional 4,000 households through a range of digital platforms and communication channels. Support will include simple, clear guidance on winter energy awareness, PSR eligibility, CO safety, and how to access trusted support. The Safe & Warm digital hub will extend this reach beyond shops, offering easy-to-use self-serve resources and signposting so people can revisit information whenever they need it.

Together, these interventions will help bereaved and other vulnerable households feel more able to stay safe, warm, and supported during times of heightened vulnerability.

Potential for new learning

Provide details of what the GDN(s) expect(s) to learn and how the learning will be disseminated.

The learning from our previous partnership with Sue Ryder demonstrates that early engagement through trusted local settings is critical to identifying and supporting vulnerable households, particularly those experiencing bereavement. Sue Ryder's geographically dispersed retail network has proven especially effective at surfacing unmet vulnerability, offering familiar, approachable environments where customers feel comfortable engaging in informal conversations with trusted staff and volunteers. This pattern of engagement has highlighted the value of retail spaces as a first point of contact for people who may not yet recognise that they need support, or who may feel unable to access more formal services during periods of grief.

By centring delivery in these everyday community settings, the remodelled Safe & Warm programme builds on evidence that retail-based approaches are high-volume, low-cost, and scalable. This makes the charity uniquely positioned to provide early intervention at a time when households are most at risk of fuel poverty, reduced income, and safety risks such as carbon monoxide exposure. While we recognise that need also exists within clinical and bereavement support services, this phase reflects the clear learning that retail settings offer the most efficient route for preventative, wider reach engagement that complements more specialist provision.

The programme will strengthen this approach by embedding QR-led signposting pathways and micro-training resources that support staff and volunteers to maximise the impact of brief, meaningful conversations. These tools ensure that customers can be quickly directed to the right support, whether through the Safe & Warm digital hub, Lightning Reach, or other trusted services, while maintaining a delivery model that is both practical and cost-effective. Insights from frontline staff, retail managers, and customer interactions will continue to shape improvements, highlighting patterns of unmet need, barriers to PSR awareness, and opportunities to refine communication and signposting.

As with all SGN partnerships, learning generated through this programme will be shared widely across our Safe & Warm partnership network, informing future community-based initiatives designed to reach vulnerable households. This will include sharing insights through Partner Spotlight sessions, our partner toolkit, and annual vulnerability reports, helping strengthen understanding of how grief-related vulnerability affects energy resilience and how early, accessible support can mitigate risk.

At a wider level, this work contributes to growing national conversations around bereavement, vulnerability, and the importance of trusted community touchpoints in delivering effective early intervention. By grounding learning in the lived experience of bereaved households, the programme will help build a stronger evidence base on what works, where gaps persist, and how person-centred, locally delivered support can be strengthened to reduce long-term risks for those facing one of life's most difficult transitions.

Aligning with and supporting wider vulnerability approaches

Details of how the project supports or aligns with approaches to vulnerability taken by the wider energy industry, other utilities and/or consumer organisations; local, national or devolved governments; or evidence innovation or a gap in vulnerability support provision. For example, this could include evidence of collaboration beyond the VCMA, non-VCMA joint funding of the initiative, or identified gaps in the provision of vulnerability services which the project seeks to address. The GDN should show how the project fits within broader approaches to vulnerability.

This programme aligns closely with wider vulnerability strategies across the energy sector and national policy frameworks by placing early identification, accessible guidance, and partnership-led delivery at the centre of its model. By embedding light-touch energy safeguarding information into everyday retail interactions, the project responds directly to a recognised sector gap, ensuring households vulnerable to fuel poverty receive clear, practical support long before they reach crisis point.

The programme reflects the direction set out in national fuel poverty and winter-readiness strategies, which highlight the importance of improving awareness of established mechanisms such as the Priority Services Register (PSR) and ensuring households at risk can access reliable, consistent information. By providing simple, in-person prompts on PSR eligibility, winter energy behaviours, and CO safety, the programme supports the national ambition to deliver early, preventative guidance to those least likely to engage with formal energy advice channels.

This approach also aligns with principles behind the Warm Homes Plan and wider cross-sector vulnerability frameworks, which emphasise locally delivered, person-centred interventions that address both financial vulnerability and the health impacts of cold or unsafe homes. Charity retail shops naturally reach a broad cross-section of the public, many of whom face financial or bereavement-related vulnerability, making them valuable community touchpoints for preventative support.

The programme's emphasis on improving PSR awareness and strengthening CO safety mirrors utility sector commitments to enhance protections for customers with additional needs. By directing households to the Safe & Warm online hub, the programme consolidates trusted information from reputable consumer advice and energy support organisations, ensuring customers can access consistent, high-quality guidance beyond the shop environment. In partnership with external organisations such as Lightning Reach, customers who may require further assistance can be signposted safely to financial and vulnerability-related help without the need for formal referrals, maintaining safeguarding expectations while ensuring appropriate onward support.

By providing high-reach, low-barrier access to essential information through community retail environments, this programme complements and strengthens wider energy-sector vulnerability strategies. It demonstrates how charity retail networks can serve as an effective early-intervention platform, helping ensure households at risk of winter energy insecurity can receive timely, trusted, and practical guidance in settings where they already feel comfortable.

Monitoring and evaluation

Details of how the GDNs will work with their project partners to monitor the impact of the VCMA project and evaluate its effectiveness and success.

Sue Ryder and SGN will review monthly reports on measurable outcomes, working together to ensure successful delivery. Each quarter, the core project team will meet to share performance insights,

highlight and mitigate any underperformance, and provide structured updates on delivery, risks and emerging outcomes.

Together we will ensure that there is an evidence base through audit and research that seeks to understand how effective the project is in supporting their local communities who are struggling to maintain a safe and warm home and assess the before and after to better understand the impact of the services provided on the lived experience of beneficiaries.

We will report annually on partnership impact, sharing broadly via our company-specific reports to showcase outcomes and key learnings and inform future delivery. Additionally, the learning will be shared across the GDN Vulnerability working group as well as disseminating results through our business governance processes, including on request to our Independent Steering Group (ISG).

Scale of VCMA project and SROI calculations, including NPV

Justify the scale of the VCMA project – including the scale of the investment relative to its potential benefits. As part of this, the Funding Licensee(s) should provide the SROI calculation, including NPV. Note: The value in numbers of the SROI and NPV must be provided, rather than confirmation of positive impact.

Together with the other Gas Distribution Networks, we 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 financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable households included in this partnership.

We've incorporated social value based on the deliverables and associated targets detailed above. Carrying out an assessment of these predicted outcomes we forecast a positive net Social Return on Investment of £1.30 for every £1 spent.

Social value measurement

Total cost*	£100,000
Total gross present value	£228,944.24
Net Present Value (NPV)	£129,490.98
SROI	£1.30

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

Internal governance and project management evidence

Provide a description of GDN(s) review of proposal and project sign off, with details on how the project will be managed.

We have worked closely with Sue Ryder to codesign this partnership so that its ambition directly contributes to our Vulnerability Strategy, developed with support from our stakeholders including through our dedicated Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Steering Group and overseen by our Independent Steering Group. The PEA has been reviewed and approved through our internal governance processes and formally signed off as detailed below.

Approver (Name and Role)	Date
Kerry Potter, Group Social Impact & Vulnerability Manager	31/03/36
Maureen McIntosh, Director of Customer Services	01/04/26

Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility Criteria	Description	Project qualifies Yes / No
Positive SROI	Have a positive, or a forecasted positive, Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculated in accordance with a model which the GDNs have developed and submitted to Ofgem including for the gas consumers funding the VCMA Project	Yes
Positive NPV	Have a positive, or a forecasted positive Net Present Value (NPV)	Yes
Support Criteria	Either: i. provide support to consumers in Vulnerable Situations and relate to Energy Safeguarding, or ii. provide support for those most at risk of being left behind in the transition to net zero, or iii. provide awareness of, and education on, the dangers of CO beyond the activities funded as business as usual (BAU) through baseline allowances, or iv. reduce the risk of harm caused by CO	Yes
Defined Outcomes	Have specific, measurable, and time-bound outcomes which align with relevant Consumer Vulnerability Strategy objectives to achieve the requirements set out in 'Support Criteria' above	Yes
Beyond Other Funding	Go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanism(s), including baseline allowance funding, or required through licence obligations	Yes
Support or Align	Support or align with approaches to vulnerability taken by the wider energy industry, other utilities and/or consumer organisations, and local, national and devolved government, or evidence innovation or a gap in vulnerability support provision;	Yes
No Other External Funding	Not be delivered through other external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including through other government (national, devolved or local) funding	Yes
BAU vulnerability and CO safety activities	Where a GDN's BAU vulnerability and CO safety activities are funded through baseline allowances, these are not suitable for funding through the VCMA. The GDN is permitted to use VCMA funds to supplement or complement its BAU activities, however, it must ensure that its reporting provides sufficient evidence to prevent double funding.	Yes

Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance servicing

Eligibility Criteria	Description	Project qualifies Yes / No or N/A
Servicing must meet the following criteria:	Either: i. A GDN has had to isolate and condemn an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role; or ii. A GDN or its Project Partner has identified an essential gas appliance which has not been serviced in the last 12 months in the owner-occupied home of a customer in a Vulnerable Situation where an occupier of the property suffers from a permanent or temporary health condition¹² that makes them more vulnerable to health risks associated with cold homes; or iii. A GDN or its Project Partner has identified an essential gas appliance which has not been serviced in the last 12 months in a tenant-occupied home of a customer in a Vulnerable Situation where it is the tenant's responsibility to maintain the essential gas appliance, where an occupier of the property suffers from a permanent or temporary health condition that makes them more vulnerable to health risks associated with cold homes	N/A
Affordability	The household cannot afford to service the essential gas appliance, as assessed against the affordability criteria set out in the VCMA governance document	N/A
Funding	Sufficient funding is not available from other sources (including a social or private landlord and national, devolved, or local government funding) to fund the essential gas appliance servicing	N/A

Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance repair and replacement

Eligibility Criteria	Description	Project qualifies Yes / No or N/A
Unsafe pipework and essential gas appliance repair or replacement must meet the following criteria:	Either: i. GDN has had to isolate and condemn unsafe pipework or an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role; or ii. A GDN or its Project Partner has had to condemn unsafe pipework, or an essential gas appliance, following an essential gas appliance service (as described in 3.19 of the VCMA governance document)	N/A
Health condition	Either: i. The occupier of the property suffers from a permanent or temporary health condition that makes them more vulnerable to health risks associated with cold homes and has a household income of £31,000 or below in 2025/26 prices, adjusted for inflation using Consumer Price Index with Housing costs (CPIH) 13, or ii. the household cannot afford to service the essential gas appliance, as assessed against the affordability criteria set out in Appendix 1 of the VCMA governance document	N/A
Funding	Sufficient funding is not available from other sources (including national, devolved, or local government funding) to fund the unsafe pipework or the essential gas appliance repair or replacement.	N/A