

Safe and Warm Advice Service

Citizens Advice Scotland

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

Updated: April 2026

PEA reference: FP-SGNScot-005a



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Project registration table

Project summary	
Project title	Safe and Warm Advice Service
Strategic area	Fuel Poverty and Energy Affordability
Lead partner name	Citizens Advice Scotland
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission	April 2026
Project start and end date	April 2026 – March 2028
Project location	Scotland
Sectors involved (only include those involved in delivery)	Gas Distribution Network Consumer Group Charitable Organisation Local Authority
Project contact	
Name	Margaret Hamilton
Contact details	Positive.impact@sgn.co.uk
Project partners and third parties involved	
Organisation name	Role
Citizens Advice Scotland	Lead delivery partner
Costs and funding	
Total cost (£k)	Redacted due to commercial sensitivity
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£1,500,000.00
Total BAU vulnerability and CO safety activity baseline allowance funding by activity (£k)	Redacted due to commercial sensitivity

Problem(s)

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

Rising energy costs, fuel poverty and financial insecurity continue to place severe pressure on households across the UK. Since 2021, energy prices have almost doubled, and as of early 2026, it's estimated that around 6.7 million households across the UK are living in fuel poverty. Nearly half of low-income households remain in homes that are hard to heat, leaving millions exposed to cold, damp conditions that harm their physical and mental health.

Fuel poverty remains a significant and persistent challenge across Scotland, driven by a combination of low household incomes, rising energy costs, and the poor energy efficiency of much of the country's housing stock. Many households spend a substantial share of their income on energy just to maintain safe and healthy living conditions with the most vulnerable households facing the greatest barriers to staying warm, well, and financially secure.

Many of the households struggling most with rising energy costs are also facing wider financial pressures that compound their situation. When a family is already stretched to cover essentials like food, rent or mortgage payments, council tax, and transport, any increase in energy bills becomes unmanageable. These overlapping pressures mean that fuel poverty rarely exists in isolation, instead, it forms part of a broader pattern of hardship where people are forced into impossible choices about which basic needs they can afford to meet each month.

Scottish households often feel the burden of energy unaffordability even more heavily, with longer nights and colder climate making it particularly difficult to keep warm. Thousands of people are living with overwhelming energy debt and prices remain high, causing harm in communities throughout the country, with demand for energy crisis support significant year-round, even throughout the summer months.

People with complex or long-term health conditions face an even more acute set of challenges. Many rely on medical equipment, higher heating needs, or consistent indoor temperatures to manage their conditions safely, which drives up energy use. At the same time, their ability to work may be limited, reducing household income, and their health needs can make it harder to access support services or navigate complex systems of assistance. This combination of higher essential costs and reduced earning capacity places people with serious health needs at particular risk of falling into deepening fuel poverty.

Many households across Scotland are living with constant dread around how to pay to keep their homes warm and the lights on. Last winter, Citizens Advice Scotland polled the public to find out the [true extent of the energy crisis](#) across Scottish communities and found that:

- More than two fifths of people in Scotland were worried about energy costs
- Almost two thirds had cut back on household spending due to rising energy costs
- And nearly three in five people said they have not been heating all of their rooms or turning down thermostats, during what was a very cold winter.

Over the past 12 months, the number of people needing help to stay warm and manage unaffordable energy bills has continued to rise, highlighting a deepening crisis rather than an improving picture. CAS Safe and Warm advisors have seen sustained and significant demand for support, with thousands of people seeking advice on energy debt, self-disconnections, and how to keep their homes at a safe temperature. This escalating need shows that many households are not just experiencing temporary hardship but are being pushed into long-term financial insecurity, with no sign that the pressure on communities is easing.

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.

Together, SGN and the CAS Safe and Warm Advice Service will deliver tailored advice and practical support to vulnerable households experiencing fuel poverty, financial hardship, and energy efficiency challenges. By offering trusted guidance, the partnership will help households use energy more efficiently, manage costs more affordably, and stay safe and warm in their homes.

The primary focus will be on providing comprehensive energy advice, including practical guidance on energy efficiency and carbon monoxide awareness, alongside benefits and income maximisation support linked to alleviating fuel poverty. This holistic approach will help increase household income, reduce fuel debt, and improving confidence and ability to manage their energy use and household bills effectively.

As a result, clients will experience safer, warmer homes and an increased awareness of carbon monoxide risks. These positive outcomes are evidenced by the sustained success of the project in delivering measurable improvements for vulnerable households since its launch in 2022.

The project will:

- Support vulnerable households who are experiencing fuel poverty, hardship, and fuel efficiency challenges
- Provide advice and support to these households to help them to use energy efficiently, affordably, and safely
- Improve the knowledge of local advice provision and challenges in their local areas through group sessions and community practice sessions
- Improve partnership working and building trust with local organisations (e.g. food banks, housing associations, healthcare provision, education) through dedicated partnership resource, promoting the benefits of the PSR, energy advice and provide CO awareness information

Trained Safe and Warm advisors in Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) and within NHS settings, will provide eligible households with holistic, bespoke energy advice and support, and deliver group sessions to customers and frontline workers to raise awareness of the service and provide information on the energy safeguarding services available to help those in need.

This will lead to increased income for vulnerable households, reduced fuel debt, increased awareness around CO, and an improved ability to manage bills and energy in the home, including resulting in a safer, warmer home.

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.

Building on the foundations of the learning of our GD2 projects, the current project has been co designed with Citizens Advice Scotland, drawing directly on their frontline insight into the barriers people face and the types of interventions that make a meaningful difference. The Safe and Warm project sits alongside complementary projects, all of which feed into a stark picture of the ongoing cycle of fuel poverty and crisis.

The development of this project was also showcased at the VCMA Annual Showcase in 2025, where it was used as a clear example of how a long-standing partnership can evolve over time to meet the changing needs of households most at risk. The presentation highlighted how data and insights from the service are continually analysed to refine delivery, target support more effectively, and respond to emerging trends in vulnerability. Stakeholder feedback at the event was strongly positive, recognising both the adaptability of the model and the strength of the collaboration between SGN and Citizens Advice Scotland.

As a result, the continuation of this project will be delivered in priority areas where the service has previously been delivered aligned to the gaps identified by both Citizens Advice Scotland and SGN. This will allow consistency of advice by having the same members of staff in the role for an extended period of time as well as providing continuity of advice provision, further establishing the service in the local communities as trusted partners.

We're continuing to work with the Citizens Advice Scotland network based on the trusted brand built across the country. Research shows "[that 9 in 10 people know us](#)", with many people 'unable to recall when they first became aware of Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), having always known about them.' One customer confirmed that 'through my lifetime [I've] known [CAB] to be a place to go for problems where you could not afford to pay professional body to take care of it.' Customer satisfaction with the service is high, with over 96% customer satisfaction based on surveys between April and December 2025.

The CAS team are also active members of SGN's Safe and Warm partnership network, contributing vital data, insights, and frontline experience to strengthen the collective response to fuel poverty across Scotland. Through regular engagement, they share emerging trends, best practice, and learning from bureaux across the country, helping to shape a more coordinated and evidence-driven approach. This ongoing collaboration ensures that the project continues to evolve in line with real-world need and that support is informed by the lived experiences of the households most affected.

This project has also been shaped by the principles co-developed with SGN's dedicated Vulnerability Steering Group (VSG), ensuring that vulnerable households are meaningfully involved in the design of locally accessible services. The VSG's framework emphasises coproduction with trusted community partners, equitable access regardless of personal circumstances, and the importance of tailoring support to local need. By grounding the project in a shared, evidence-based understanding of vulnerability we're building a service that is not only responsive to the lived experience of vulnerable households, but also aligned with wider commitments to fairness, inclusion, and targeted support 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 SGN's 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 'Tackling Fuel Poverty and Energy Affordability' 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.

The project learning and insights generated to date will further strengthen how these households are engaged, particularly where barriers to accessing essential services are identified.

As a trusted partner organisation, Citizens Advice Scotland is well positioned to engage directly and effectively with vulnerable households, provide tailored guidance, and refer eligible individuals for BAU-funded support. This includes the provision of 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.

This project is not designed as a collaborative initiative, as other national programmes are already in place across England and Wales. Instead, our work is designed to complement that existing provision rather than duplicate it.

Citizens Advice Scotland works exclusively in Scotland and is uniquely positioned to understand the distinct needs, barriers, and lived experiences of Scotland's vulnerable households. The project model is built on organisational insight, trusted relationships, and place-based delivery, which do not lend themselves to shared delivery across multiple GDN areas.

Households living with poverty and trauma often do not engage with multiple agencies or traditional energy advice services. By offering a 'one-stop' approach that combines financial, energy, and emotional support, Citizens Advice Scotland fills this gap and ensures that vulnerable households are protected from the harmful effects of cold homes, debt and disconnection.

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
CO Safety Information	4,172	Quarterly Performance - 521
CO Alarm Provision	680	Quarterly Performance - 85
PSR Conversations	4,700	Quarterly Performance - 587
PSR Registrations	3,667	Quarterly Performance - 458
Energy Advice (across a number of energy advice measurable areas)	5,592	Quarterly Performance - 699
Income Maximisation (across a number of incomes generating measurable areas)	2,619	Quarterly Performance - 327
Billing Support / Meter Readings	2,729	Quarterly Performance - 341
Emergency Fund Provision	2,823	Quarterly Performance - 352

Success Criteria

Over 24 months, the Safe and Warm Advice Service will support 6,420 vulnerable households experiencing fuel poverty, financial hardship, or challenges related to energy efficiency. The service will provide tailored advice to help households use energy efficiently, affordably, and safely.

The project will also support a further 1,369 households via group sessions and deliver training to 1,010 frontline workers to increase awareness of the service and strengthen community understanding of energy issues.

At a minimum, sessions cover carbon monoxide safety (including sources, symptoms of poisoning, and how to stay safe), the Priority Services Register (PSR), available financial support such as the Warm Home Discount (WHD) and government benefits/income maximisation, energy efficiency advice and ways to reduce bills, and smart meters, including the difference between the smart meter and the in-home display.

Trained advisors within local Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) will deliver holistic, person-centred energy advice and support, ensuring each beneficiary receives guidance suited to their circumstances

The service will focus primarily on specialist energy advice, including guidance on energy efficiency measures and carbon monoxide safety. This will be complemented by benefits and income-maximisation support to help address the wider financial pressures associated with fuel poverty.

Potential for new learning

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

The impact of this project extends beyond direct support to vulnerable households in Scotland creating learning that can strengthen practice across SGN's wider Safe & Warm partnership network and inform other community-based initiatives.

This project has been built on a strong foundation of data, insight and the lived experience of communities who have sought support from Citizens Advice Scotland throughout the cost of living and energy crises. In addition, Citizens Advice Scotland have also commissioned an independent project evaluation to further add understanding of the impact and needs of those being supported by our programme.

Designed from the outset to be inclusive, community centred and evidence led, the project has been intentionally structured to generate learning that will inform future local community engagement programmes.

At a national level, the learning will continue to be shared as it was during GD2 by way of contributions to wider discussions on how to strengthen support for vulnerable households via local and regional partner events such as our Partner Spotlight sessions and regional events, our dedicated partner webpages and partner toolkit as well as through our annual vulnerability reports.

These outputs would be openly shared with the other GDNs via the Vulnerability Working Group and the GDN national Delivery Group and where requested the National Steering Panel.

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.

Scotland's wider vulnerability landscape is shaped by a clear national commitment to ensuring that no household is left behind in the transition to a fairer, greener, and more resilient energy system. The Scottish Fuel Poverty Strategy sets out a statutory framework that recognises fuel poverty as a multidimensional issue, driven

by low-income, high-energy costs, poor energy efficiency, and wider social inequalities. It emphasises the need for targeted, place-based interventions, strong local partnerships, and support that reaches those who face the greatest barriers to accessing national schemes. This project aligns directly with that approach by focusing on communities identified as highly vulnerable and historically underserved, ensuring that support is delivered where it is most needed and in a form that households can trust and access.

This localised model mirrors the principles of Scotland's new Warm Homes Plan, which places a strong emphasis on tackling inequality, improving energy literacy, and ensuring that vulnerable households benefit first from decarbonisation and energy efficiency improvements.

This project also aligns closely with Ofgem's Vulnerability Strategy, which emphasises the need for early identification of consumers at risk, targeted support for those with the most complex needs, and strong partnerships that enable coordinated, cross-sector responses. The strategy highlights the importance of using data and insight to understand vulnerability in all its forms, ensuring that services are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to changing circumstances. By embedding these principles into its design and delivery, the project supports Ofgem's ambition for a more proactive, prevention-focused approach—one where households are not only protected during moments of crisis but are supported to build long-term resilience in an increasingly challenging energy landscape.

Across the UK, utilities increasingly recognise that supporting vulnerable households requires coordinated, multi-agency working. Energy and water are moving towards shared Priority Services Registers, joint outreach programmes, and collaborative safeguarding approaches to ensure that people with the highest needs receive consistent, wrap around support.

By combining national policy alignment with local delivery capability, the project strengthens Scotland's wider vulnerability ecosystem. It ensures that the most disadvantaged households, those facing fuel poverty, digital exclusion, and limited access to services are included in the green energy transition. It also reinforces the principle that effective vulnerability support must be both data driven and community led, rooted in trusted relationships, and delivered through a network of partners working together to maximise impact.

Overall, this partnership fits within broader approaches to vulnerability by addressing a recognised gap in local energy advice by building community capacity to safeguard customers in crisis, that integrates with, rather than duplicates, wider national and devolved strategies.

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.

Citizens Advice Scotland 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.

We will work with Citizens Advice Scotland to ensure that there is an evidence base through audit and research that seeks to understand how effective the project is in supporting 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 as 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 £8.95 for every £1 spent.

Social value measurement

Total cost*	£1,475,451.66
Total gross present value	£14,684,057.05
Net Present Value (NPV)	£13,208,605.39
SROI	£8.95

*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.

SGN has worked closely with Citizens Advice Scotland to co design this partnership so that its ambition directly contributes to the SGN's Vulnerability Strategy, developed with support from our stakeholders including through our dedicated Vulnerability Steering Group and overseen by our Independent Steering Group.

The PEA has been reviewed and approved through SGN's internal governance processes and formally signed off as detailed below.

Approver (Name and Role)	Date
Kerry Potter, Group Social Impact & Vulnerability Manager	20/04/26
Maureen McIntosh, Director of Customer Services	21/04/26

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