

Together for Short Lives

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

Updated: April 2026

PEA reference: PCG-SGNStH-025a



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Project registration table

Project summary	
Project title	Together for Short Lives
Strategic area	Priority Customer Groups
Lead partner name	Together for Short Lives
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission	April 2026
Project start and end date	April 26 – March 2027
Project location	Southern Network
Sectors involved	Gas Distribution Network Charitable Organisations Health and Social Care
Project contact	
Name	Janet Duggan
Contact details	Positive.impact@sgn.co.uk
Project partners and third parties involved	
Organisation name	Role
Together for Short Lives	Delivery of the core funded service
Children's Hospices Across Scotland (CHAS)	Strategic delivery partner in Scotland
Citizens Advice	Referral partner
National Energy Action	Referral partner
Fuel Bank Foundation	Referral partner
Costs and funding	
Total cost (£k)	Redacted due to commercial sensitivity
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£60,000
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.

UK energy prices have almost doubled since 2021, resulting in a sharp increase in fuel poverty according to [National Energy Action report](#). An estimated 6.7 million households are now struggling to heat their homes, which is 13% of the population.

Families caring for seriously ill children face growing pressures as rising living costs intersect with the demands of complex medical care. Many depend on energy-intensive medical and assistive equipment, safe home temperatures and infection-control measures, making them especially vulnerable to increasing energy costs. Children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions are disproportionately concentrated in the UK's most deprived communities, where families already face structural disadvantage, and their numbers have risen sharply, from 32,975 in 2001/02 to 86,625 in 2017/18, reflecting improved survival and persistently high prevalence in deprived areas. The [Make Every Child Count analysis](#) identifies clear socioeconomic gradients: children living in poorer areas are significantly more likely to have complex, life-limiting conditions than those in more affluent areas, intensifying the financial and emotional pressures on families and increasing long-term demand for support services.

At the same time, advances in medicine mean more babies and young people with complex needs are surviving into childhood and adolescence, increasing the number requiring long-term care. This growth, driven by improved survival, changes in medical coding and genuine rises in complex conditions, is expected to continue through 2030, intensifying pressure on families who must manage prolonged, high-intensity care alongside the mounting costs of medical equipment, heating, transport and essential household needs. Energy bills are among the most significant financial strains, as many families cannot safely reduce consumption. National research shows they pay substantially more for essentials like heating and electricity to run vital medical devices, with [Contact's Counting the Costs survey](#) reporting that 43% of families have gone without heating and some have even switched off freezers storing medication or limited critical equipment use to afford bills, choices that carry potentially life-threatening risks.

These financial pressures are intensified by fuel poverty, which disproportionately affects families of seriously ill children. With many living in deprived areas, rising energy bills consume a larger share of already limited income, forcing impossible choices between safety, nutrition and essential medical needs. For these households, financial strain is ongoing, deepening inequality and increasing health risks. A lack of coordinated support further heightens stress. Families must repeatedly explain their circumstances across multiple agencies, a retraumatising process when time and energy are scarce. Complex applications for benefits, grants and energy support are difficult to navigate alongside intensive caring responsibilities, and many families are unaware of schemes like the Priority Services Register or face barriers such as long waits and inconsistent eligibility.

As the only UK-wide children's palliative care charity, Together for Short Lives can provide a unified access point for energy advice, income maximisation and tailored family support. A single route into support would reduce trauma and prevent crises, ensuring families receive practical help, from safety checks and carbon-monoxide risk mitigation to energy-saving measures and referrals. This programme will help keep families safe, warm and financially supported, with fair access to the services that protect their wellbeing and dignity.

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 for Short Lives (TFSL) supports families caring for children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions by providing free, tailored information, emotional support, and practical guidance through its UK-wide Family Support Hub. This programme will deliver a targeted, preventative energy-safeguarding and fuel-poverty intervention for families across our Southern Network, with partnership arrangements in place to support delivery in Scotland through Children's Hospices Across Scotland (CHAS). The initiative will help families keep their homes safe, warm and energy-efficient while offering specialist advice on carbon monoxide (CO) safety and Priority Services Register (PSR) access.

Through the Family Support Hub, families will be able to access integrated support directly, either remotely or in-person, with trained staff providing tailored energy and financial advice aligned to each family's circumstances. In Scotland, TFSL will refer families to CHAS to ensure Scotland-focused support, alongside shared supervision, peer learning and mutual collaboration to strengthen delivery.

Our programme will:

- Increase awareness of the Priority Services Register and the dangers of Carbon Monoxide through our communication channels and via partnership working with our member organisations
- Identify eligible families of seriously ill children, and engage them in energy and safety support outreach, and ensures Priority Services Register (PSR) registration
- Deliver carbon monoxide (CO) awareness advice in person and by phone
- Provide tailored energy advice for high-need households - reviewing usage, optimising heating systems, supporting access to financial help (e.g. Fuel Bank vouchers through an external partnership), and promoting gas safety
- Support families with access to advice and support linked to debt management (through contacts directly with energy suppliers), energy funding, tariff switching and benefits applications
- Work in partnership with hospices across our network and with SGN's vulnerability and VCMA teams to link families into specialist support and monitor outcomes.

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 a clear and growing understanding of the vulnerabilities facing families caring for children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions. Insights gathered through Together for Short Lives' national Family Support Hub, combined with SGN's ongoing collaboration with the charity, highlight the escalating pressures caused by rising energy costs, intensive

medical needs, and the financial strain placed on households already managing complex care routines. Engagement with children's hospices, healthcare professionals, and family support teams has reinforced how deeply energy affordability, home safety, and income insecurity intersect for these families, particularly where medical equipment, heating requirements and increased time spent at home drive unavoidable energy use.

Throughout this work, we have seen the reality of restricted incomes, high out-of-pocket costs, and limited awareness of essential schemes such as the Priority Services Register or carbon monoxide safety protections. Families described fragmented support systems, inconsistent access to financial advice, and the emotional toll of repeatedly retelling their story while seeking help. These insights guided the development of a model designed to connect families to timely, specialist support through a single, trusted point of access within the Family Support Hub.

Stakeholders have played an active role in shaping the service. Hospice teams and community practitioners emphasised the need for flexible, family-centred delivery that works both in-person and remotely. Parents stressed the importance of support that adapts to their ability to engage, whether they can attend external sessions or are housebound due to their child's complex needs. Utility partners highlighted the need for clearer pathways into PSR registration, energy-efficiency interventions and support with managing bills. This collective learning led to a blended model offering tailored one-to-one support, digital resources, proactive signposting, and strong referral routes so no family is excluded by geography, circumstance or crisis.

Ongoing collaboration between Together for Short Lives, SGN and hospice partners has enabled joint testing, iterative improvements and shared decision-making on how best to reach the 17,000 families within the SGN footprint who are likely to benefit from this support. Feedback consistently pointed to the need for a scalable, inclusive approach that recognises the diversity of conditions, family structures and care intensities, while ensuring that all families receive guidance that is personalised, practical and grounded in compassion.

The project has also been informed by principles co-developed with SGN's Vulnerability Steering Group (VSG), ensuring that families of seriously ill children, identified as a priority vulnerability group, are meaningfully involved in shaping service design. These principles emphasise equitable access, partnership with trusted organisations, and ensuring support is not only available but genuinely reachable for those most at risk. By grounding this work in shared values and an evidence-based understanding of family vulnerability, we are building a model that is responsive, humane, and aligned with wider commitments to fairness, inclusion and safeguarding the wellbeing of families facing the most challenging circumstances.

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 strategy.

This project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria because it directly supports SGN's 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 Collaborative Gas Networks' shared approach to vulnerability, delivering support across the following core theme areas:

- Delivering Services Beyond the Meter – ensuring customers receive holistic support that extends beyond traditional gas network responsibilities.
- Tackling Fuel Poverty and Energy Affordability – 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 – raising awareness, improving safety, and reducing the risks associated with CO exposure.

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 SGN, the Together for Short Lives has established a robust referral 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, Together for Short Lives 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.

While each of the other networks has already built strong local partnerships with organisations that specialise in supporting families caring for children with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions, this project has been shaped around where additional value can genuinely be added in Southern England and

with partnership arrangements in place to support delivery in Scotland through Children's Hospices Across Scotland (CHAS). Together for Short Lives 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. It takes a place-based approach across these two network regions, drawing on local insight, trusted community connections, and a clear understanding of the distinct needs of families caring for children with life-limited and life-threatening conditions. The additional benefit is that Together for Short Lives provide a national advice service so the knowledge will be shared beyond SGN's footprint on key support services including the provision of CO safety advice and the importance of being registered on the PSR.

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	700	Quarterly performance - 175
Energy Triage	700	Quarterly performance -175
PSR Conversations	700	Quarterly performance - 175
PSR Registration	175	Quarterly performance - 44
CO Safety Information	700	Quarterly performance - 175
CO Alarm Provision	308	Quarterly performance - 77
Income Maximisation	30	Quarterly performance - 8
Wellbeing Support	700	Quarterly performance - 175
Accessing third party funding for energy efficiency measures	70	Quarterly performance – 18
Training, including energy efficiency advice and CO awareness	10	Quarterly performance – 3

Success Criteria

During this 1-year project, Together for Short Lives will engage with up to 20,000 families caring for children with life-limited and life-threatening conditions through a range of digital platforms and communications channels. Through this collaboration, we will raise awareness and promote key areas including Carbon Monoxide (CO) Safety, the Priority Services Register (PSR), Energy Efficiency Advice, Winter Preparedness, Financial Vulnerability, Partnership/Service Promotion, Locking Cooker Valve awareness and signposting, delivered via a variety of tailored engagement channels.

The partnership will provide direct support to 700 carers across our Southern Network, this will take place via a wide network of family support hubs, where the staff will be trained to provide energy and financial advice and support, which will be tailored in its delivery based on the family's need. These interventions mean that families caring for children with life-limited and life-threatening conditions report improvements in being able to maintain a safe and warm home, financial resilience, access to entitlements including the Priority Services Register, and overall wellbeing.

Potential for new learning

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

Learning from earlier phases of energy-related support has shaped this next-stage model, reaffirming the need for a single trusted access point for families caring for children with life-limiting conditions. Families repeatedly emphasised the value of consistent, personalised support through the Family Support Hub, which will remain the central delivery mechanism for advice on energy safety, financial resilience, and navigating essential schemes such as the Priority Services Register.

Collaboration with children's hospices, clinical teams, voluntary organisations and energy specialists has highlighted the importance of flexible, family-centred delivery that responds to the complexities of high-intensity caring. These partnerships demonstrated the effectiveness of coordinated networks able to address interconnected needs, from energy affordability to carbon monoxide safety and practical challenges in the home.

Key learning shaping the future structure includes the need to:

- Deliver support centrally through the Hub using trained specialists
- Provide hospices and partners with ready-to-use resources rather than additional responsibilities
- Strengthen referral pathways across hospitals, community palliative care and voluntary services
- Offer a varied support model combining communications outreach, personalised advice, and direct safeguarding measures such as CO alarms
- Expand collaboration with community organisations, including food banks, to identify families who should be on the PSR.

We will continue to share the learnings via our local and regional partner events such as our Partner Spotlight sessions, our dedicated partner website pages and Partner Toolkit as well as through our annual vulnerability reports. Independent evaluation will capture family experiences, changes in financial confidence, and safety behaviours, building an evidence base for what works and where further development is needed.

Nationally, the learning will inform broader discussions on strengthening early intervention and reducing pressure on health and social care by supporting vulnerable families in trusted, accessible settings.

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 family-focused approach aligns closely with national and sector-wide vulnerability strategies by placing early identification, tailored support, and partnership-led delivery at the centre of its model. The programme reflects the direction of national policy frameworks that emphasise identifying households at highest risk, improving access to advice and financial support, and strengthening cross-sector collaboration to protect vulnerable families from rising energy costs and safety risks. By proactively supporting families caring for seriously ill children, who face disproportionately high energy use, elevated financial pressure and increased medical vulnerability, the project directly advances national ambitions to safeguard those most affected by the cost of caring.

The model is also consistent with the principles underpinning the Warm Homes Plan, which calls for locally delivered, person-centred interventions that address both the financial and health impacts of living in energy-inefficient or medically demanding households. Families supporting a child with a life-limiting condition often require higher energy consumption for medical equipment, rely on stable home temperatures to manage health risks, and incur significant additional costs due to transport, hospital appointments and round-the-clock care. Providing tailored energy safeguarding support, benefit checks, and clear pathways into home improvements mirrors the Warm Homes Plan's emphasis on integrated, community-based solutions that reduce long-term pressure on the NHS and social care.

The programme's focus on improving awareness and uptake of the Priority Services Register (PSR) also reflects wider utility-sector commitments to strengthen protections for customers with additional needs. By embedding PSR conversations within Family Support Hub interactions, and by collaborating with hospices, hospital palliative care teams and community organisations, we help ensure families can access essential safeguards such as enhanced communication, priority restoration and support with managing energy costs.

This approach contributes directly to the national shift toward multi-agency collaboration in vulnerability support. As part of the VCMA codesign phase, Together for Short Lives will work closely with other partners across the network to develop joint working models and leverage shared expertise. The programme will also seek opportunities to collaborate with other utility providers where synergies exist, enabling more cohesive support for high-risk households across regions.

By building a coordinated network capable of delivering holistic, family-centred support, this programme shows how local and national partners can work together to improve outcomes, strengthen household resilience, and ensure families receive the timely, appropriate help they need.

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.

Together for Short Lives 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 SGN's 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 SGN 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 £0.84 for every £1 spent.

Social value measurement

Total cost*	£60,000
Total gross present value	£111,085.46
Net Present Value (NPV)	£50,589.55
SROI	£0.84

*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 Together for Short Lives 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	14/04/26
Maureen McIntosh, Director of Customer Services	16/04/26

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