

GDN Collaborative Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

The Carents Room Collaborative - extension

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Gas Network Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Governance Document - Project Eligibility Criteria

Section 1 - Eligibility criteria for company specific projects (other than condemned essential gas appliance repair and replacement)	
In order to qualify as a VCMA project, a project must:	
VCMA Eligibility Criteria	Criteria Satisfied (Yes/No)
a) Have a positive, or forecasted positive Social Return on Investment (SROI), including for the gas consumers funding the VCMA project;	Yes
b) Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Provide support to consumers in vulnerable situations, and relate to energy safeguarding, or ii. Provide awareness on the dangers of CO, or iii. Reduce the risk of harm caused by CO; 	Yes
c) Have defined outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these;	Yes
d) Go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanism(s) or required through licence obligations; and	Yes
e) Not be delivered through other external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including through other government (national, devolved or local) funding.	Yes
Section 2 - Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance servicing, repair and replacement projects	
In order to qualify as a VCMA project, unsafe pipework and essential gas appliance servicing, repair or replacement must meet the following criteria:	
a) A GDN has to isolate and condemn unsafe pipework or an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role;	N/A
b) The household cannot afford to service, repair or replace the unsafe pipework or essential gas appliance; and;	N/A
c) Sufficient funding is not available from other sources (including national, devolved or local government funding) to fund the unsafe pipework or essential gas appliance servicing, repair or replacement.	N/A
Section 3 - Eligibility criteria for collaborative VCMA projects	
In order to qualify as a collaborative VCMA project, a project must:	
a) Meet the above company specific and boiler repair and replace (if applicable) project eligibility criteria;	N/A
b) Have the potential to benefit consumers on the participating networks; and	Yes
c) Involve two, or more, gas distribution companies.	Yes

Gas Network Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Governance Document - Project Registration Table 2

Information Required	Description			
Project Title	The Carents Room			
Funding GDN(s)	The GDN(s) which register(s) the VCMA project			
Role of GDN(s) *For Collaborative VCMA Projects only	The specific role(s) of GDN(s) participating in a collaborative VCMA Project Northern Gas Networks (Lead Network) and Cadent			
Date of PEA Submission	Original – 29 th March 2023 Revised – 26 th October 2023			
VCMA Project Contact Name, email and Number	Steven Dacre SDacre@northerngas.co.uk 07778733867			
Total Cost (£k)	Original - £ 298,840.00 Extension costs - £188,000.00 Total with revised costs - £487,050.00			
Total VCMA Funding Required (£k)		Percentage contribution	Overall split (original)	Extension costs
	Cadent	66%	£199,027.44	£101,410.00
	NGN	33%	£99,812.56	£86,800.00
		Project Spend (with revised costs)		
	Overall Cost	£487,050		
Problem(s)	<p>There is a nationwide agenda to tackle the problems associated with children that care for their elderly parents (Carents) that need support. Ageing and caring in the UK can often be isolating and challenging, compounded by a lack of recognition and a shortage of suitable information, services, products, and experiences which could make life easier for busy Carents and their ageing parents.</p> <p>Energy networks commonly find it difficult to overcome social and digital exclusion to engage with vulnerable older people and keep them safe and well. As society ages, there are rising numbers of older people living in the community with multiple age related physical, social, financial, and geographical vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities mean that older people are unusually susceptible to very small changes in their physical or social environment, are more likely to be targeted by those with disreputable intentions and more reliant on energy whilst being less able to use energy efficiently. This can make those living in fuel poverty even more vulnerable, especially when access to essential services can be a further challenge.</p> <p>Age related vulnerabilities also perpetuate social and digital exclusion making it more difficult for energy networks to engage with older people in relation to information, services and products which could help them and prevent them from suffering unnecessarily. Common examples relate to the uptake of the Priority Services Register (PSR) which is used by around 25-30% of those that are eligible; poor uptake of innovations such as locking cooker valves and door stop access codes, and major challenges promoting awareness of the carbon monoxide (CO) safety agenda.</p> <p>Strata Nostra have already created the website called 'The Carents Room', supported by a social media "Carenting" community". Together, these resources enable Carents to access support and advice online. The website is not currently sufficient to handle large volumes of traffic, therefore this project will greatly improve the functionality and usability of the Carents Room platform, as well as increase the awareness for the platform and</p>			

	<p>specific energy related content. The support offered will include details of CO awareness, innovation projects focussed on vulnerable customers, and wider vulnerable customer information for GDNs and DNOs, e.g., PSR and winter preparedness.</p> <p>The Carents Room can also be utilised by anyone in the UK who needs general support, therefore this is not limited to specific geographical areas. The project aims to provide Carents with fuel poverty advice, energy efficiency advice as well as provide information on the PSR, CO awareness and offer health advice to its users. The project will enable the development of a “Carent” community, who can subscribe for relevant energy related content. They will be further supported by a wider collection of online resources, to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of themselves and those that they care for.</p>
<p>Scope and Objectives</p>	<p>“The Carents Room” project aims to reach 1 million potential Carents in the UK, this ambition agreed between Cadent and NGN in October 2021. There are currently an estimated 5 million Carents nationally. They are the largest group of unpaid carers and growing rapidly in the face of our ageing population and due to the pandemic.</p> <p>The Carents Room will be in the form of an interactive, online website for Carents to access anywhere in the UK and receive instant online support. The project will involve creating a sustainable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, which will enable the website to grow and evolve once the project has ended.</p> <p>The Carents Room scoping session with the GDNs in September 2021 lead Strata Nostra to act on information provided. Which informed the objectives and success criteria listed below;</p> <p>The objectives of this project are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have an interactive online website for 1 million Carents during the course of the project to access instant support, energy advice and health information • Ability to be able to register an account with The Carents Room to access additional service and support • Direct users to findmygdn.co.uk to identify their GDN and link to relevant websites to generate 5000 Priority Service Registrations. Using a referral code to enable GDNs to track how many referrals the website has generated. This method of traffic direction can also be used to encourage users of “The Carents Room” to complete CO awareness questionnaires. • Improve functionality of the website that is currently active • Increase awareness of the website and the related social media community by using a marketing strategy company • Raise awareness about the dangers of CO by specific information, and additional signposting to relevant online resources including, but not limited to, GDN websites etc • Raise awareness of energy efficiency by specific information, and additional signposting to relevant online resources including, but not limited to, GDN websites, charities, warm home schemes etc • To become commercially self-sustainable • GDPR Compliance • Accessibility of the website to be functional e.g. Recite ME <p>Scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve and enhance the existing website to build a long term and highly functional tool to ensure successful delivery of the objectives. • The ability to record conversion data from those that seek help/assistance by accessing “The Carents Room” and their journey with signposts to the relevant support/service. • Provide a unique method of support to Carents whilst providing assistance to GDNs in the form of site traffic to have visibility of the process to sign up to the Priority Services Register, to partake in CO awareness questionnaires or apply for Locking Cooker Valves.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The website is available nationally across the participating GDNs geographical locations. As it is an online website, customers outside of the UK may choose to access the site, therefore creating further accessibility and awareness • Intended to be able to benefit those that are harder to reach e.g. those that have internet access but live rurally and/or have mobility challenges that prevent being involved in local communities to receive information/assistance • To follow the predicted SROI impact figures, informed by StrataNostra and NGN • A self-sustaining and accessible engagement platform tailored to meet the needs of Carents, that can refer them and their relatives to relevant services and products including those provided, or facilitated, by participating GDNs and DNOs. • The project will enable the development of a “Carent” community who can register an account for relevant energy related content and gain access to vulnerability support from a wider range of partners to promote/safeguard the wellbeing of themselves/those that they care for. <p>The project has been extended to the 31st March 2024, plus the provision of additional funding for (a) additional marketing resources and (b) additional personnel within the Strata Nostra team. These changes will assist Strata Nostra in achieving their current project KPI's</p> <p>The additional costs include the cost of printing and distributing branded pharmacy bags to 1,000 pharmacies (2,000,000 bags) over an 8 week period. There will also be 7,000 GP packs to 6,500 GP surgeries in England, this includes every GP surgery in England. Some products will also be provided to all GDN's to promote.</p>
<p>Why the Project is Being Funded Through the VCMA</p>	<p>This project meets all of the VCMA criteria for funding, as it will support vulnerable customers who are caring for their elderly parents and also enable them to understand and access relevant communities, information and resources to help them keep their vulnerable older relatives safe and well. This support includes raising awareness of CO and generating PSR referrals. The Carents Room aims to support people who have become lonely, increasingly isolated and at risk of fuel poverty. The Carents Room is an online virtual place within the community which Carents can access to find other Carents in a friendly environment, access information on a range of different subjects, access, energy advice and carbon monoxide information. This project will provide Carents with a place to access all the support and information they will need to be a Carent.</p>
<p>Evidence of Stakeholder/ Customer Support</p>	<p>GDN The Carents Room Scoping Session September 2021</p> <p>The Carents Room project was defined in collaboration with the GDNs at a scoping meeting in September 2021. Which informed the objectives, outcomes and success criteria listed in this PEA based on the “Must haves” discussed. Attended by;</p> <p>Steve Dacre (NGN) David Turner-Bennett (EIC) Aaron El-Hamri (EIC) Jo Giles (Cadent) Jackie (Strata Nostra)</p> <p>NGN Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) Workshops 2019 – 2021</p> <p>Asking our stakeholders what’s important – using our wide range of engagement mechanisms from strategic workshops to customer perceptions, we asked stakeholders to prioritise what is most important to them (including digital engagement in light of CV-19). During 2019-2021 we held multiple workshops with our stakeholders, on the subject of customers in vulnerable situations.</p> <p>During our July 2020 workshop, stakeholders discussed new emerging issues due to Covid-19, what the impact of the pandemic has on hidden vulnerability and how the current pandemic impacted demand for essential services to support customers in vulnerable situations. Our stakeholders told us some of the main impacts have been associated with an increase in fuel and food poverty and there is a greater need than ever, to support customers accessing fuel and food banks. Quite often a dilemma between heating and eating.</p> <p>In the CV-19 specific workshop held in August 2020, our stakeholders also identified that larger energy bills was an issue due to the pandemic. They stated that this was due to people spending more time at home, especially those less mobile, shielding and socially</p>

isolated due to rurality. However, a further challenge which compounded this problem, was not being able to contact energy suppliers to discuss these issues. Access to other essential services also significantly decreased, making it increasingly difficult for those in rural localities. This therefore supports the project as the website is accessible for anyone in the UK and will provide those who live in rural isolation but who are also Carers a place to go to for support and advice on matters such as fuel poverty.

At the same workshop, our stakeholders also identified that there was an increased risk of CO poisoning, due to the impact of the pandemic. Many people have been furloughed, are on lower incomes and suffered redundancy, which have created significant financial challenges. As a consequence, maintaining and repairing/replacing appliances is not a priority for these groups, therefore significantly increasing the risk of CO poisoning. Stakeholders said there needs to be more focus on CO awareness, so customers understand the risks posed by not having appliances repaired or serviced.

In January and September 2021, we held a couple of fuel poverty workshop. During these workshops our stakeholders said fuel poverty is a huge issue in rural locations and there is less focus on geographically hard to reach areas. They also said that fuel, food, and general poverty are all linked, and we need more streamlined ways of working together. Partners can help raise awareness of different funding and support available. This project fully aligns with the need to help vulnerable customers in fuel poverty and the website will provide links to other organisations that support customers who are in vulnerable situations.

Further stakeholder engagement throughout 2020, told us that fuel poverty and the choice between heating and eating is becoming more prevalent. The current energy crisis is further compounding this already serious issue. An online hub with support and advice on fuel poverty, CO awareness and PSR referral will help support those customers that are in need.

NGN Customer Engagement Group (CEG)

This group provides an independent oversight into the actions we take to support customers in vulnerable situations (CIVS). Checking we've got it right – using a range of engagement mechanisms to assess and challenge our response to stakeholder feedback, ensuring we are responding in the right way. This has offered us robust challenges into how we deal with CIVS, which meets the needs of our stakeholders. This group is fully aware of the success of Warm Hubs.

NGN Social Indicator Mapping, Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT) & Covid 19 Research

Academic research and social indicator mapping took place in 2019 and further research around CV-19 impact was undertaken in July 2020. This was shared as part of our stakeholder engagement. A new Vulnerability Mapping Tool (VMT) has been demonstrated to stakeholders to highlight any vulnerability gaps we have on our network. The system allows you to add multiple factors of vulnerability together to create a heat map for where factors combine to create areas of highest need. All data can be mixed and matched to answer complicated questions, e.g., see where there are high areas of rurality associated with people living in fuel poverty, as well as CO hotspots.

Feedback from our social indicator mapping research undertaken in 2019, indicated that unemployment and the claimant of benefits is higher in the NGN area than nationally. The research also indicates that 17% of people in our network aren't in employment. It also identified that overall, the NGN area is significantly less densely populated than England average. It has 20% of England's land area but only 12% of its population, therefore significant areas of rurality – very similar to other areas across the whole of the UK. Approximately 12% of NGN area households do not have anyone in work and in at least five areas of NGN's network, more than a fifth of workers earn below £10,000.

NGN commissioned some CV-19 specific research in June 2020. Feedback from this indicated that rural areas with high dependency on tourism, have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, resulting in job losses, and increased financial hardship as a result. These findings will possibly be the same for other GDN's, therefore indicating that they will face similar issues in their rural areas.

The main access-related impacts of the pandemic are in relation to difficulties faced by those with poor digital access, often in rural and disadvantaged areas. The research also

highlighted that older people, especially in their 70s and above or with underlying health conditions, have greatly increased physical vulnerability. Many will also face increased social and economic vulnerabilities, and they should be a very high priority group in terms of response. The vulnerability of this group is amplified by other factors, such as lower digital access and awareness and higher dependency on public transport – which many in this group will be seeking to avoid using. Other impacts affecting older people are likely to include isolation and loneliness, bereavement, and limited access to services, in particular public transport. This project will help Carers of elderly parent's access support for their parents online which they may not be able to do themselves due to digital isolation. The Carer can download anything from the website in a PDF format which they can then print off.

Carers Northumberland (a local authority funded unpaid carers network)

Early stakeholder engagement with this network provided the following feedback:

"It is quite the most straight forward & informative site that I have come across in a very long time. Just the concept of the living room terminology for different aspects as well as coining the terms Carer & Carer's (as we all know that the use of the word carer is often not acceptable & too open ended) is inspired."

"It seems a far too valuable a resource for so many carers, to allow it to remain hidden!"

"I recognise so many aspects that I came across when sharing the care of my elderly parents with my siblings. (I was lucky it was shared care)"

I would have found a website such as this very supportive. Unfortunately, too late for me now but not for thousands of others, A great resource!"

NHS GP surgeries

Included in NHS GP medical practice website's information page about support for caring for elderly relatives / older adults across England. These GP practices include;

- Catherine House Surgery, Totnes, Devon
- Harbourside family Practice, Bristol
- NHS Selegate Surgery, Hexham
- The Farley Road Medical Practice, South Croydon, Surrey
- Friendly Family Surgery, Bolsover, Derbyshire

A quote from Mrs Anne Brooks Practice Manager, NHS Selegate Surgery, Hexham Northumberland;

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

NHS Selegate Surgery also displays on screen slides about The Carers Room in the patient waiting area.

The Carers Room site survey user responses

"This is a well-formed site, full of relevant information to help steer carers through a challenging emotional journey. I really wish it had been around a few years ago when I needed it."

"A welcome source of information and support. Much needed I think."

Social media community engagement (Instagram)

This community continues to grow - at end of June 2022, there were 1754 followers. Engagement without any paid promotion is around 19%

	<p>Wider NHS innovation</p> <p>In recognition of her work on The Carents Room, its Founder was included in the NHSA list of North Innovation Women for 2022. The NHSA is a partnership between the NHS and the 8 universities in the north east and north west.</p> <p>EIC Awards feedback from the EIC/NGN/Ofgem</p> <p>“Dear Jackie</p> <p>Thank you so much for speaking at the Energy Innovation Awards last night. The feedback from colleagues across the Transmission and Distribution networks, both gas and electricity, has been extremely positive. I think you will have more support for your project.</p> <p>Both the Chairman of Ofgem, Martin Cave and Mark Horsley, CEO for NGN, were delighted to see your project being supported by the industry.</p> <p>Kind regards</p> <p>Denise Massey”</p>
<p>Outcomes, Associated Actions and Success Criteria</p>	<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Carents Room website capabilities expanded and improved on. Additional modules highlighting support content for Carents • Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) implemented and utilized including automation of a mail management package and dashboard metrics. • Minimum 5,000 PSR referrals over the 12-month project timeframe (due to increased traffic to the website) • Increased CO awareness with an external link to the CO awareness survey provided by NGN & Cadent. • Increased energy efficiency awareness (due to increased traffic to the website and Energy efficiency focussed topics/sections). 200,000 visitors accessing this information over the 12-month project timeframe • Refer elderly parents for locking cooker valves, 750 referrals over the 12-month project timeframe • Increased promotion of the website through Revolution Growth, a marketing strategy contractor. Promotion will take place through targeted marketing and social media marketing. Examples, but not limited to; Facebook ads, Google ads, Search Engine Optimisation, industry webinars/sponsorships, influencers and affiliations with existing entities etc. • Ability to provide access for Carents, and/or their relatives, services and support/products that are relevant including those provided, or facilitated, by DNOs/GDNs including but not limited to Locking Cooker Valves, CO alarms, access to the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme, home improvement agencies etc. <p>Success criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 million Carents to access the site over a period of 12 months • The website is accessible to anyone in the UK • Increased awareness of what a Carent is • All visitors to the website will have a greater understanding of the importance of gas safety, CO awareness, energy efficiency, completing PSRs and the support network that is available throughout the UK for Carents.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaling up an already tried and tested model. (The model being the existing website) • Self-sustaining website, able to operate independently of the Network Partners • Has the potential to be endorsed by GPs nationally • Has the potential to work in partnership with the NHS nationally • The Carents Room to be at TRL 9 at the end of the project lifespan 								
Project Partners and Third Parties Involved	<p>NGN – Lead gas network.</p> <p>Cadent Gas – Collaborating gas network</p> <p>EIC - Providing project delivery support</p> <p>Strata Nostra – Lead Innovator</p> <p>Revolution Growth - Marketing Strategy and Marketing Delivery</p> <p>Bloom Digital Ltd - Website development</p>								
Potential for New Learning	<p>Methods and new communication pathways to reach digitally excluded customers through family (Carents) and friends. Insights into user engagement with energy network communications.</p> <p>Any learning will be achieved once the website starts to be utilised. The learning will be shared with all stakeholders, including GDN's, DNO's and water companies.</p>								
Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations	<p>This project has a positive SROI return – based on a formal assessment conducted by NGN.</p> <p>The following calculations were based on a range of evidence including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proof-of-concept trial conducted in collaboration with NGN, as part of a regional innovation challenge competition • Epidemiology of relevant conditions e.g., dementia, carbon monoxide poisoning, physical disability in later life, • Uptake rates which have been achieved by various GDN projects to date <p>This project will greatly improve the functionality and usability of the Carents Room platform, as well as increase the awareness for the platform. The support offered will include details of CO awareness, innovation projects focussed on vulnerable customers, and wider vulnerable customer information for GDNs and DNOs. Examples of this are; Priority Service Register & customer winter preparedness.</p> <p>The project will aim to reach 1 million potential Carents in the UK, out of an estimated 5 million. Additionally, this project will involve creating a sustainable Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system which will enable the website to last a minimum of 5 years.</p> <p>There is potential for 10 to 30% of 1 million Carents, and their dependents to sign up as a result of the site – however, until this can be modelled an assumption of 5,000 PSR sign ups can be made over the 12-month period. These figures are based on results of a trial carried out on March 2021.</p> <p>It is estimated that the website could save at least 1 life via avoided CO poisoning and over 200 illnesses with hospitalisation. The Carents Room will enable access to benefits such as the “Attendance Allowance”, it is estimated that 100,000 visitors would benefit from this, up to 200,000 visitors could access energy efficiency and up to 10,000 visitors could receive a careers allowance.</p> <p>The Carents Room could enable up to 20,000 visitors to have a lower fire risk, 100,000 to have less loneliness/isolation, 7,500 to have the opportunity to have a locking cooker valve installed which would be beneficial in further calculations than what is presented below. Furthermore, the website could help avoid up to 33,000 unplanned hospital admissions, 110,000 GP attendances, 100,000 injuries, 20,000 elderly customers leaving their home for care, and 33,000 carers from leaving work.</p> <p>Overall Social Return on Investment (SROI) & Payback:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="373 2011 1449 2089"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="373 2011 810 2089">Option</th> <th data-bbox="810 2011 1046 2089">SROI</th> <th data-bbox="1046 2011 1264 2089">NPV</th> <th data-bbox="1264 2011 1449 2089">Payback Years</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Option	SROI	NPV	Payback Years				
Option	SROI	NPV	Payback Years						

	VCMA Project	£10.27	£4,166,475.14	1
VCMA Project Start and End Date	Original - 01 November 2022 – 31st October 2023 Extended 1 st November – 31 st March 2024			
Geographical Area	National UK project			

Gas Network Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Governance Document - PEA Control Table

In order to ensure that a VCMA project is registered in accordance with the Ofgem VCMA governance document (incl. project eligibility assessment), the below table should be completed as part of the project registration process.

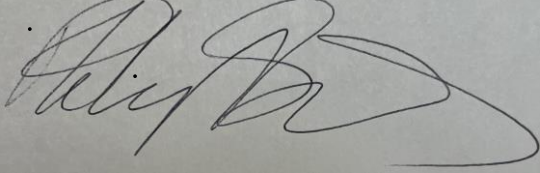

Stage 1: GDN Collaboration Group PEA Review
Meeting date review completed:
Review completed by:

GDN:	Name:	Job Title:
Cadent	Suzanne Callington	Customer Safeguarding Specialist
NGN	Stephanie Ord	VCMA project coordinator

Stage 2: GD2CVG Panel Review
Meeting date sign off agreed:
Review completed by:

GDN:	Name:	Job Title:
Cadent	Philip Burrows	Head of Customer Vulnerability Delivery
NGN	Jill Walker	Social Strategy Project Manager

Step 3: Participating GDN individual signatory sign-off

GDN	Name:	Job Title:	Signature:	Date:
Cadent:	Philip Burrows	Head of Customer Vulnerability Delivery		26/10/2023
NGN:	Eileen Brown	Customer Experience Director		30/10/2023

Step 4: Upload PEA Document to the Website & Notification Email Sent to Ofgem (vcma@ofgem.gov.uk)

Date that PEA Document Uploaded to the Website: Original - 29/03/2023 Extension – 30/10/2023

Date that Notification Email Sent to Ofgem: Original - 29/03/2023 Extension – 30/10/2023