







Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Annual Report

Northern Gas Networks 2024/25



together
we are
the network

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1. A word from our CEO, Mark Horsley



Our key focus throughout the year has been supporting the most vulnerable and providing a deeper level of support for those with more complex needs.

Since the outbreak of Covid, we seem to be living in a state of constant uncertainty. Financial instability, war and civil unrest around the world is having a direct impact on us here at home too with rising energy costs exacerbating the ongoing cost of living crisis. Public services are struggling to meet demand as our extensive network of charity partners report higher than ever numbers of people reaching out for support.

We have a vital role to play in helping our communities keep warm and healthy and we do this well; always putting our customers at the heart of every decision we take as a business.

As I look back over the last 12 months, I am extremely proud of how, following the guidance of our stakeholders, we have invested the increased Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA).

We successfully expanded our network of Centres for Warmth (CfW) from 6 to 20 centres without compromising our overall strategy for this important programme. We used data and local knowledge to identify where a CfW could deliver for those in most need without duplicating existing efforts within the community.

For every project, we examined and reviewed how our collaboration could make the greatest impact. Our pioneering annual Open Days (now in their third year) brought our partners and other service providers together to share best practice, exchange ideas and support each other to help deliver the best for our communities, but also to ensure a sustainable future for

our partner organisations and strengthen the resilience of their people. And to be sure that we were hearing and responding to the quietest and most remote voices from across our region, we introduced innovative and complementary engagement channels such as the Three Hands, Outside In programme and the Partner Networking Call.

We do not underestimate the huge responsibility of having access to the increased VCMA - anyone can spend money but to spend it well takes time and careful consideration. Some of the strategic decisions we have taken since last year on how to invest the VCMA to secure the best outcomes for our customers have led to a change in approach. One example being the decision in early 2024 to bring Services Beyond the Meter (SBtM) in house. This significant change led to us being able to deliver the same services more efficiently and, most importantly, also improving the customer journey with reduced waiting times and better quality/consistency of service.

Finally, I want to thank our people for their passion and dedication in delivering our projects to turn our business strategy into positive outcomes for customers and communities across our region.

Mark Horsley

CEO Northern Gas Networks

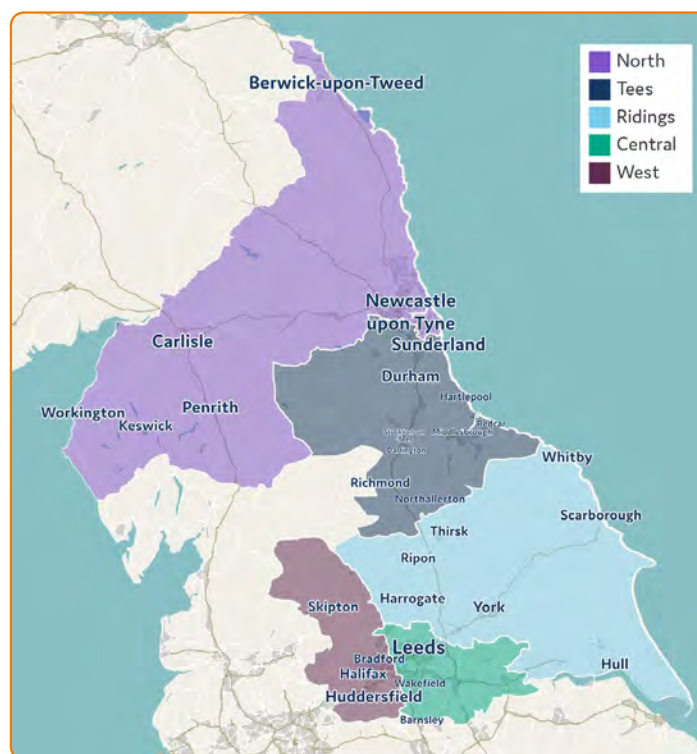
2. Who we are

2.1 About Us

We are Northern Gas Networks (NGN), the gas distributor for the North of England. We keep 2.7 million homes and businesses cooking on gas, through our vast underground pipe network.

We are committed to providing a safe, reliable and great value service to our customers and stakeholders, while developing new technologies to deliver forms of low carbon energy such as hydrogen to support a greener future. We understand the needs of customers across our network, and supporting our most vulnerable customers underpins everything we do. We know our region has some of the highest rates of fuel poverty in the UK – around 17% in Yorkshire and Humber compared with the national average of 13.1%. Other challenges facing low-income households in Yorkshire and Humber, the Northwest and the Northeast, include lower rates of employment and a higher than the national average proportion of economically inactive people. Census data shows lower levels of literacy and numeracy, as well as lower health outcomes than the national average and at least 25% of customers in our region are on the Priority Services Register (PSR). By thinking differently, listening to our colleagues and stakeholders, working closely with our partners, and considering our communities, we are pushing the boundaries of what a utility company is capable of.

Where we operate



NGN Region

We provide energy for cooking, hot water and heating to 6.8 million people throughout the North of England

Our region spans 25,000km² from the Scottish border to South Yorkshire and the Northeast coast to northern Cumbria

We own 37,000km of pipes – the equivalent distance from Leeds to Australia and back again

We employ around 1,300 people directly and provide regular work for around 800 contractors

We hold the internationally recognised standard for environmental management ISO 14001

3. Overview of VCMA

3.1 What it is

The Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) was a newly created fund for the Gas Distribution Networks' (GDNs) funding period April 2021 to March 2026. For Northern Gas Networks (NGN), the initial amount available to spend was approximately £1.3 million per annum. Following a review by Ofgem in 2022/23, funds were re-purposed from the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES) to increase the overall VCMA for GDNs from £60m to £171m.

This report provides an annual update detailing how investment of the VCMA has been progressing, any stakeholder engagement linked to the VCMA, an overview of all projects that have been funded so far, and a look ahead to the next year and beyond. The Collaborative VCMA report will be published in conjunction with individual GDN VCMA reports.

For NGN, the total VCMA allowance increased from **£6.85m** to **£19.64m** in October 2023 (plus inflation). A minimum of 25% must be spent on collaborative projects with the other GDNs. The VCMA guidance details strict criteria for what this can be spent on, and for monitoring and reporting purposes we group the projects into the four main categories below.

All projects must also demonstrate a positive Social Return on Investment (SROI) through a consistent SROI framework.

The 4 key themes:



Fuel poverty and energy affordability

Providing support to reduce fuel poverty and aid energy affordability (including energy efficiency advice and income maximisation)



Supporting priority customers

Providing support to priority customers, including targeted work for these groups and raising awareness of the Priority Services Register (PSR)



Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness

Raising awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide



Services beyond the meter

Services beyond the meter, including support for the repair/replacement of appliances identified through GDN interventions



Click here to read the published Ofgem guidance, detailing how the fund can be spent

3.2 Our Investments

Here is a summary of our VCMA spend to date and forecast spend for the final year of GD2:

We are forecasting to spend the full 'use it or lose it' allowance by the end of GD2 (March 2026), with a split of 62% company specific and 38% collaborative spend.

	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025	2025/2026	Total
Company Specific VCMA Project costs	£466,254	£1,151,013	£3,780,953	£3,947,508	£6,088,498	£15,434,226
Collaborative VCMA Project costs	£122,332	£658,290	£2,091,659	£3,577,336	£2,968,884	£9,418,501
Total VCMA Project costs	£588,586	£1,809,303	£5,872,612	£7,524,844	£9,057,382	£24,852,727

In 2024/5 we increased our level of spend in line with our updated strategy, following the re-purposing of Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES) funding into VCMA. Of the remaining £16.6m available for years 4 and 5, £14.4m had already been allocated to specific projects. In order to make maximum impact with the remaining £2.2m, we agreed with partners to take the following action this year to commit the remaining funds:

- Work with partners on known gaps in themes and geography to co-create projects that address specific needs. In addition, we will target underserved geographical areas including Hull, Bradford, Scarborough and east coast areas, Sunderland and rural/coastal areas in Cumbria and County Durham
- Use targeted tender events to partner with suppliers to deliver the services we specifically require (via identified gaps)

As we are fast approaching the end of GD2, we wanted to ensure any remaining VCMA funding was spent well and so we took time to review the data and identify where we had gaps in provision. Using the research findings from our bespoke mapping data, and reinforced by stakeholder engagement, we identified four main gaps:

1. Unemployed people
2. Older people
3. Farming communities
4. Young people

To address these gaps, we have developed four pilot projects which have the potential of being scaled up across our entire region or indeed, across several GDN regions if they are successful. Further information regarding the four pilot projects can be found in the Look ahead section on [page 75](#).

Looking ahead to GD3 (April 2026 to March 2031) we are already taking steps to understand what we should do, were our strategic direction to change. If this is the case, we will consider how we should evolve our relationship with our partner organisations. Some steps we are already taking are:

- To work closely with our refreshed Strategic Partner framework to understand and evolve our strategy for GD3
- To focus on the long-term sustainability of existing projects and how we can support partners to help them achieve this. We feel that it is important to support project sustainability, to avoid the impact of a 'cliff edge' in funding availability at the end of GD2. We've been considering how we can further support this for our existing partners

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Live VCMA projects

Sitting alongside the VCMA, we have two unique funds specific to NGN that serve to complement and strengthen the support we can provide to those customers in most need.

These are 100% shareholder funded and together we committed to investing a minimum of £1m over the 5-year GD2 period.

Community Partnering Fund (CPF)

The Community Partnering Fund (CPF) provides seed funding to grassroots community groups to support customers in vulnerable situations. Successful projects from this fund can progress to the VCMA, allowing them to be scaled up. One partnership that has expanded through this route is with Yorkshire Energy Doctor CIC. See [page 8](#) for details.

Initially funded by CPF, this partner developed several small, locally based projects into larger network-wide projects through the VCMA fund. This broader reach has enabled customers in the NGN area to access the services and targeted support provided by this partner.

Customer Support Fund (CSF - Previously called Hardship Fund)

The Customer Support Fund is an annual commitment of £150k to support our most vulnerable customers when other funding cannot be used (including VCMA). Although this fund is smaller in comparison to VCMA, there is greater flexibility in how it can be used, and we work hard to ensure that it has a lasting and meaningful impact for beneficiaries. This funding is often complementary to other support and services offered by NGN.

We have used this fund to support the Off Gas Warmth project which enables first-time central heating for households that cannot access other funding sources and would otherwise not be able to achieve affordable warmth for their homes. Where possible, this is accessed alongside Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES) support and acknowledges that not all households are suitable or ready to transition to all-electric heating systems. Most households supported by this project are elderly and have health issues that are exacerbated by the cold.

NGN have committed to helping more households through this project by contributing further funds available from unbilled energy (Theft of Gas). We are the first GDN to commit to using the unbilled energy revenue in this way and have supported numerous additional households in the last two years as a result.

During GD2, the CSF has also enabled NGN to offer additional payments to priority customers in the event of a gas supply interruption between 4-24 hours. This extends our Guaranteed Standards of Performance payment and provides immediate relief from the additional costs incurred by using alternative heating sources, which are often more costly to run.

This year, we have also used a small percentage of our CSF to increase our understanding of the needs of customers who are most vulnerable. This has included engaging insights from lived experts, hearing first-hand how they experience and navigate physical and social challenges. Learning from these insights is invaluable and allows us to collaborate with partners and stakeholders to inform our future direction and focus. See [page 17](#) for details.

A journey from seed funding to VCMA – Yorkshire Energy Doctor CIC

Yorkshire Energy Doctor (YED) CIC has collaborated with NGN for eight years. In 2017, under the Community Partnering Fund (CPF), then known as Community Promises, a project request was submitted to NGN for a small amount of funding focused on Heating for Health. This project aimed to raise awareness of health risks associated with inadequate heating, such as cold homes, damp, condensation, and Carbon Monoxide (CO), and provide practical ways to address them.

The following year, another small funding amount was awarded for a project to raise CO awareness among vulnerable households, engaging frontline staff to improve their knowledge of CO and implement practical actions to mitigate risks among their clients. Prior to the VCMA availability, YED received further CPF funding to support young people aged 16-25 on low incomes moving into their first tenancies, including care leavers and new young parents, focusing on bills, CO awareness, the Priority Services Register, and access to financial support.

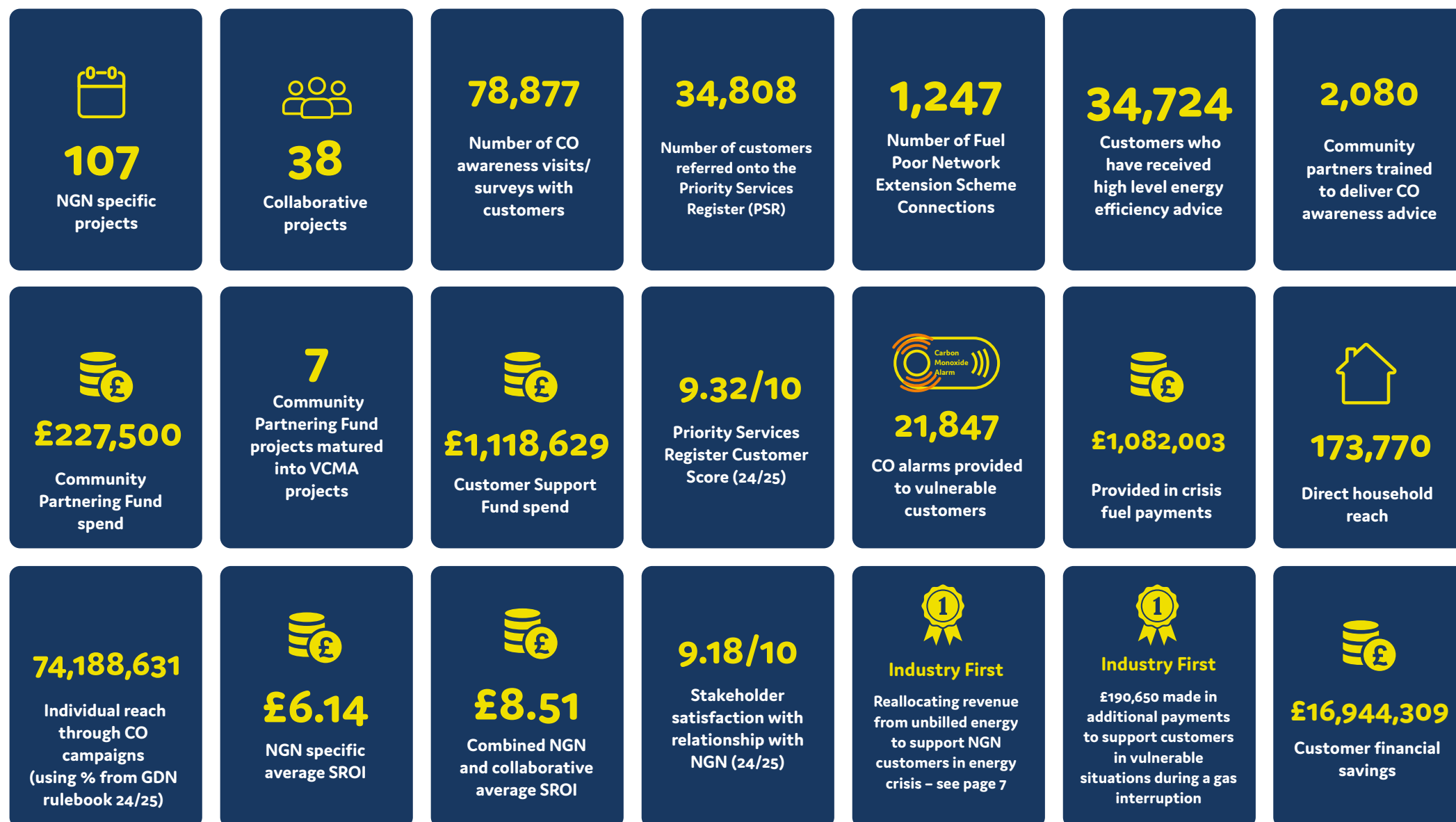
These local projects under CPF were successful, enabling understanding of their effectiveness, target cohorts, and impact. The outcomes provided confidence for greater ambition, maturing into three larger VCMA projects

over the past four years, including Community Energy Ambassadors (CEA). This project trains individuals in fuel poverty and energy awareness, equipping them to spread energy matters through social networks, creating broader networking opportunities and collaboration with new partners. Our Centres for Warmth now engage with this programme, training staff and volunteers as Energy Ambassadors. VCMA funding supports vulnerable groups and scales projects across the NGN footprint area, benefiting many communities and individuals.

In October 2024, Dr Kate Urwin, the project lead, received the NGN award for Charity Partner of the Year, acknowledging the impactful work undertaken with this partner.



3.3 Performance Highlights (GD2 to date) For full detail on performance see [Appendix 1](#)



4. Strategy

4.1 Overview of approach

Throughout this year we have continued to use the six key priority areas as defined by our stakeholders to guide and validate VCMA investments.

Some of our key headlines are:

- **Warm Homes Healthy Futures** project went live in April 24 - NGN led, largest VCMA collaborative project to date
- Addressing remaining gaps against bespoke vulnerability mapping – project in partnership with **Farming Communities Network**

- Extension and expansion of successful existing projects (tier 1 & 2 focus) – using learning from other GDNs to inform our projects (**SCAAWS project**)
- Services Beyond the Meter evolution – moved to in house delivery
- Expansion of localised service delivery and support - achieved target of 20 **Centres for Warmth** for GD2 by March 2025

These headlines complement the six key priority areas identified by our stakeholders, and are summarised below, along with examples of how we have responded to this feedback:

Priority Area	Case study to illustrate NGN response
<p>1. Increased focus on health</p> <p>Must be driven by priorities of NHS to avoid hospitalisation.</p> <p>Projects should align health and high-risk deprivation – building on health projects that use data well.</p> <p>Use data to inform health categories most at risk and least able to achieve affordable warmth.</p>	<p>Warm Homes Healthy Futures</p> <p>Warm Homes Healthy Futures is the largest collaborative VCMA project to date and is led by NGN. Delivery of the project started in 2024 after much planning and preparation between the four GDNs and the primary delivery partner, National Energy Action. The project connects health professionals and local public health bodies with energy advice and other specialist services, with the aim of keeping vulnerable households warm and safe, resulting in improved health outcomes. The project is currently funded until the end of GD2 and has attracted much interest on a local and national level for its unique approach and level of ambition. Now delivering nationally, this project uses a locally targeted approach to engage households affected by deprivation and health inequalities. Over the lifetime of the project, support will reach 24,000 unique beneficiaries and data gathered will provide vital insights to the impact of tackling fuel poverty and health inequalities simultaneously.</p> <p>See case study on page 40.</p>

Priority Area	Case study to illustrate NGN response
<p>2. Collaboration and linking up partners and funding</p> <p>Targeting specific geographical areas mutually identified with partners as areas of high deprivation/risk but underserved by way of current projects. This could be achieved by joint stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>Outreach programme to get more partners on board, targeting hard to reach areas.</p> <p>Build on existing northern networks, such as Infrastructure North, to maximise reach.</p>	<p>NGN Supporting Communities Together open day</p> <p>The Supporting Communities Together event provides an opportunity for partners to network face to face and to catch up on some of the innovation projects and work that NGN have been progressing over the last year, to support customers in vulnerable situations.</p> <p>This was the third time that NGN have held this annual event, which is held in a different part of our network each year.</p> <p>Last year’s event was in Newcastle and the previous year it was in Leeds. This year we tasked ourselves with using a suitably accessible Community & Voluntary Sector (CVS) organisation building, in order to direct resources back into the community. This idea was supported by our partners and had an extremely positive response. We intend to take the same approach for our 2025 open day.</p> <p>The event was hosted by Fresh Futures in Brian Jackson House, Huddersfield. This community building was adjacent to the railway station and close to numerous car parks, allowing easy access for stall holders and guests alike.</p> <p>On the day there were over 50 attendees and the overall satisfaction score for the event was 8.7. Attendees included our Community/Strategic Partners, who showcased some of their Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) projects, as well as projects from innovation partners.</p> <p>NGN colleagues also participated in the event, showcasing some of the internal support provided by our business to help the most vulnerable in our communities. This included the One Number (repair, replacement and servicing of appliances, after a gas emergency intervention) and Services Beyond the Meter projects which are both funded through VCMA and are evolving into business-as-usual activities. It was also a fantastic opportunity for some of our senior leaders, to meet the Strategic Partners within their geographical locations.</p> <p>It was a great networking opportunity; throughout the day there was a lot of interaction with one another leading to some great collaboration concepts being formed.</p>



Click here to watch the video from our open day

<https://vimeo.com/1022083210>

Priority Area	Case study to illustrate NGN response
<p>3. Increasing capacity for support within partner organisations</p> <p>Scaling up to reach more people in fuel poverty within areas of poverty - consider grant funding via larger national charities to reach smaller local groups.</p> <p>Longer term projects funded to increase sustainability/certainty. Consideration of immediate versus long term support.</p> <p>Consistency of service provision across the network in terms of advice and information. It may be necessary to increase partner capacity within key strategic referral networks, to address inconsistencies in support provision through localised referral networks.</p>	<p>Supporting Communities to Achieve Affordable Warmth and Safety (SCAAWS)</p> <p>Working in partnership with Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE), NGN has created a new network of partners that brings together grassroot community organisations. This enables the funded services to work together at a local/ granular level to provide support around energy affordability and gas safety.</p> <p>Through this scheme, grassroot community groups will be armed with the skills, knowledge and funding needed to help customers in vulnerable situations. In particular, those living in fuel poverty and experiencing financial hardship. Support and training are provided to each partner through CSE, covering energy and financial advice, PSR awareness, crisis support, and information on the dangers of CO.</p> <p>See case study on page 35.</p>
<p>4. Connecting and responding to different aspects and complexities of vulnerability</p> <p>Targeting support to reach those who may not have access to, or knowledge of, support available.</p> <p>Those who may not ask for help.</p> <p>Those seeking support for the first time.</p> <p>Young people who may be living independently for the first time and struggling to meet/ understand their energy needs/requirements.</p> <p>Tailoring VCMA2 response to match the diverse nature of NGN communities and needs.</p> <p>Understanding needs and tailoring approach to where it is needed.</p> <p>Digital inclusion, household and community resilience.</p>	<p>Farming Communities Network</p> <p>After identifying farming and remote communities as a gap in our VCMA funded support provision, we explored opportunities to target support in the NGN area. People in farming and rural communities can face unique challenges and vulnerabilities including isolation, loneliness, poor physical and mental health, low access to services such as GPs, broadband or mobile reception. There can be vulnerable adults and vulnerable children living and working on farms. Farmhouses are typically more susceptible to carbon monoxide poisoning due to poorly installed or maintained boilers, water heaters, furnaces, stoves, and ovens. Many farmhouses are several hundred years old and both expensive and hard to heat. Coupled with the average household income being well below the national average, this may mean regular servicing and/or replacement of essential appliances is overlooked as other bills appear more pressing. Many farmhouses use solid fuel as a source of heat which is of course more prone to carbon monoxide emissions. The project that NGN have established with the Farming Community Network aims to sign up this under-served community to the PSR, increase awareness of CO, improve health and wellbeing, maximise income and reduce the carbon footprint in farming communities.</p>



Priority Area	Case study to illustrate NGN response
<p>5. Continued support for those in financial hardship</p> <p>Financial hardship is more widespread therefore affecting more people – more people are vulnerable/needing to access support in general (debt advice).</p> <p>New vulnerabilities are emerging and impacting those people who are “just about managing”.</p> <p>Within this, there are some with greater risks/depth/complexity of vulnerability e.g. greater barriers/challenges to accessing support – knowledge of services/access to services/digital exclusion/language or communication barriers.</p> <p>Consider geography – coastal towns and tenure.</p>	<p>Services Beyond the Meter</p> <p>This year we adapted our approach to our Services Beyond the Meter (SBtM) work and moved from external to in-house delivery to bring greater efficiencies and ultimately help more vulnerable households across our network. Our in-house delivery model enables us to take ownership of the customer journey helping to build trust with the customer. We can take a more holistic approach by signposting customers to other services and organisations that can offer help and support in areas that are beyond our remit.</p> <p>We look to support customers for the long term. If a customer receives support with a new boiler installation or a boiler service, we will pro-actively contact them when the next service is due, to establish whether they remain eligible for support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieves the stress and worry about costs of servicing • Ensures the boiler is safe and operating correctly • Greater opportunity for increased support and signposting <p>See page 72 for further details.</p>
<p>6. Scaling up existing projects</p> <p>Build on successful projects and extend partnership networks into areas of greatest need.</p> <p>Continue to learn and share from each other. Where a project may have concluded within one region it may be that the approach can be effectively used in another region.</p>	<p>Centres for Warmth (CfW)</p> <p>In August 2024, NGN published the Centres for Warmth Strategy, outlining our aims and approach to reaching the most deprived communities across our network using the CFW model. Having already opened six CfW by the end of March 2024, we continued working with local communities, reaching our target to identify 20 CfW across our network by the end of March 2025. Detailed mapping and discussions with Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) enabled us to concentrate efforts on the geographical areas most in need, with some areas warranting funding for more than one centre. Each centre acknowledges the specific needs and diversity of the local community, but encompasses common aspects of support provision and awareness, enabled through VCMA funding. NGN have facilitated opportunities for CFW delivery partners to network, share best practice and learn from each other to strengthen their delivery.</p> <p>See page 37 for further details.</p>

We will continue to use data and stakeholder insights to inform our approach, to make certain that we are targeting support in line with our overarching vulnerability strategy, and taking account of changes in the social, economic and political climate.

4.2 Measuring impact

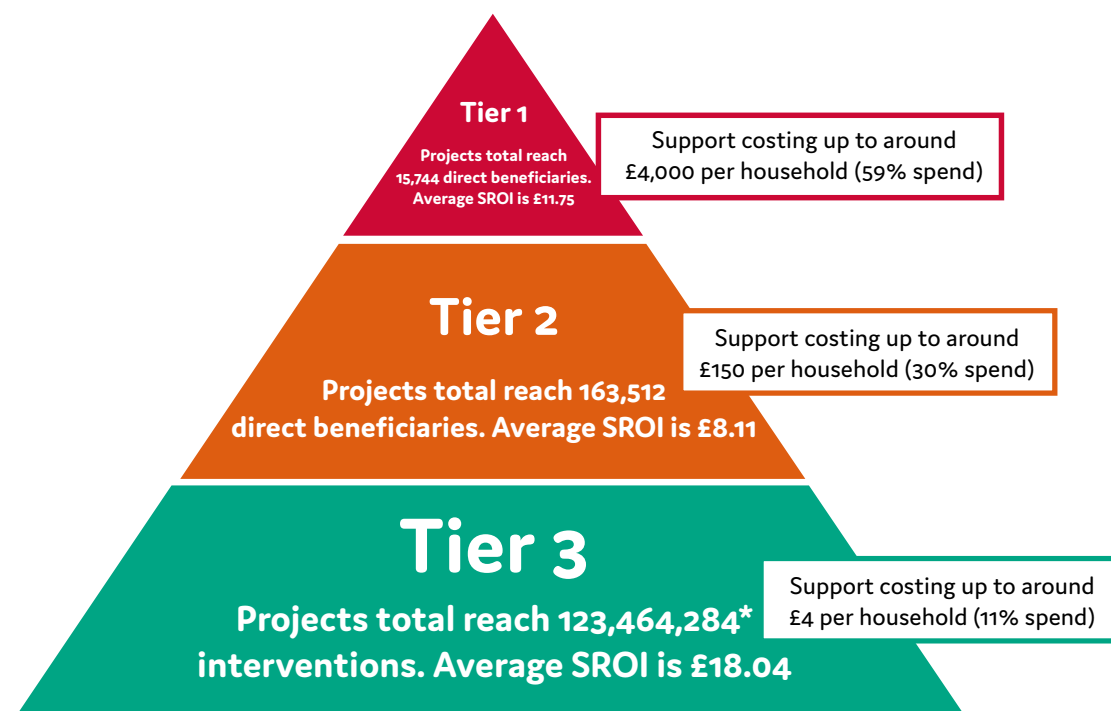
We are continually challenging ourselves to make sure that we fully understand the impact of our VCMA projects, so that we can make informed decisions about what new partnerships we form, projects we start, and how these can evolve and grow. We have continued to use a 3-tier model which we introduced last year, to categorise the support that we fund:

- Tier 1 - Includes projects focused on appliance repair/replacement, in-depth case work and targeting support towards high-risk groups, where there may be complex barriers to accessing or engaging in support
- Tier 2 - Includes projects focused on direct awareness and lower-level advice
- Tier 3 - Includes projects focused on awareness campaigns, lighter touch and self-initiated support

Combined NGN & collaborative VCMA spend – Years 1-4:

By measuring in this way, we have been able to better target our support and also understand impact:

- SROI for tiers 1 and 2 is generally lower, but these usually involve more intensive casework to meet complex needs
- SROI for tier 3 is generally higher, and these projects target easier to reach customer groups, with broad media campaigns
- Through increased learning and efficiencies, we have reduced the cost but increased our reach within tier 1 support during year 4
- By extending and expanding long-term partnerships, we have moved some projects from tier 2 up to tier 1 in line with customer demand and need
- NGN continue to achieve high reach and widespread awareness through targeted tier 3 campaigns



*32% from the total campaign reach as agreed within GDN Rulebook

Social Impact Measurement

Supporting Partners to sustain their activities beyond VCMA Funding

It is NGN’s ambition going forward to support its partners delivering projects with Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) to sustain their projects beyond the end of their funding periods.

Part of this support is to enable partners to carry out their own evaluation of their projects in order to **measure and demonstrate their social impact**. This will provide more opportunities for partners to secure further income from other funders and assist in constant review and improvement of their performance.

A comprehensive toolkit for Social Impact Measurement and a summary version of this has been created to provide partners with an in-depth, step by step guide to help them to plan how they can measure their impact. This will be shared with partners over the coming months.

Forecast v Actual Social Return on Investment

A sample of projects have been re-evaluated this year to measure the actual social value against the original forecasts.

All reassessments have demonstrated an increase in social value from the original forecast, and some examples of re-evaluated projects are shown below:

CO Awareness	Supporting Priority Customers
Stay Safe & Warm	Hope 4 U – NHS Support
Cleveland Fire & Rescue Services	Providing support to new and expectant parents to access all relevant funding and support available and stay safe in their homes
Raising awareness around the dangers of Carbon Monoxide	Forecast SROI: £6.56
Forecast SROI: £6.56	Re-evaluated SROI: £12.25
Re-evaluated SROI: £8.20	Reviewed SROI: 46% increase from forecast
Reviewed SROI: 25% increase from forecast	



4.3 Stakeholder engagement 2024/25

Over the past 12 months, we have had an intensive period of engagement with our stakeholders. As well as our embedded business as usual Customers in Vulnerable Situations (CIVS) engagement framework, we have also been engaging on our GD3 business plan. We worked with our stakeholders to make sure that we used existing channels wherever possible to engage on both current topics and priorities as well as longer term plans and priorities for GD3. Where necessary, we introduced separate engagement channels to meet the needs of our GD3 engagement plan (for example the Three Hands – Outside In Programme).

In the Look ahead section at the end of the VCMA Report ([page 75](#)) we outline key stakeholder priorities for GD3 and how these have influenced our GD3 commitments and plans for 2025/6. In this section, we focus primarily on those insights that we have heard and responded to over the last 12 months. It is worth noting that we refreshed our Vulnerability Strategy in 2023 through extensive stakeholder engagement. We use this to guide the work that we undertake to support our CIVS, whilst continually talking to our stakeholders to understand if there are any emerging issues/risks that we need to take account of, alongside working with our stakeholders to make sure that our collective approach is in line with our strategy. We also work collaboratively regionally with our infrastructure partners, and nationally with the other GDNs, to ensure that our impact is maximised through collective effort.

CIVS Annual Strategic Workshop – 23rd April 2024

Our annual workshop always forms the basis of engagement for the coming year. We take the opportunity to talk over and take feedback and challenge on our performance, including how we have engaged over the previous 12 months. We also hear from stakeholders about their priorities and concerns so that we can tailor our engagement to their needs.

From the information that stakeholders gave us, their priority areas for this year were:

You said	We have
Focus on providing more in-depth support for customers with complex needs – depth over breadth	Increased support for customers in tier 1 for remainder of GD2 – see page 14. This is supporting customers where multiple interventions are often needed, and in particular, for those with complex needs
Strike the right balance between providing crisis support and sustainably lifting people out of fuel poverty	Used data, research and stakeholder engagement to select the right balance of projects, to support where the need is greatest within communities. This is helping us to strike the right balance, whether through providing immediate crisis support (Centres for Warmth) or working with partners such as National Energy Action through the WHHF project to get to the root cause of fuel poverty issues, linking to other influencing factors
Provide more face-to-face opportunities to engage at a community level	Looked at this on a number of fronts. We have expanded our programme of tier 1 support, which provides face-to-face interventions for those customers in most need. We have also developed the NGN annual open day, and in 2024 we held this in a community setting in Huddersfield – see details on page 11
NGN should prioritise repairing/replacing gas appliances and doing safety checks – keeping people safe whilst they remain on gas	Brought delivery of SBtM in house, allowing us to reach more customers. We also worked with Ofgem to broaden the reach of the SBtM criteria within the VCMA governance document
Make the most of every interaction, using this opportunity to understand how we can provide support both directly and through our network of partners	CIVS Hot Topic Workshop 1 – 10th December 2024 – Behind Closed Doors – Making Every Contact Count. View CIVS workshop reports here (https://together.northerngasnetworks.co.uk/what-youre-telling-us/)
Support customers who are at risk of being left behind in the energy transition	CIVS Hot Topic Workshop 2 – 11th March 2025 – Supporting Vulnerable Customers Through the Energy Transition

Stakeholder Engagement Framework

Partner Networking Call	Bi-Monthly	Different from the Strategic Partner call, NGN facilitate a Partner Networking call on a bi-monthly basis, each hosted by one of our partners. This is more for partners to foster collaboration and share project ideas and best practice. To support the call, we have established a shared resource area for partners. This allows partners to review meeting records, view partner projects and contact details, view host presentation slides, and to share training and event information etc.
Independent Stakeholder Group (ISG)	Bi-monthly	Includes deep dive sessions around vulnerability themes. Updates group on VCMA progress and opportunity to challenge and review against performance and delivery
New Outside In (Three Hands)	Quarterly	Facilitated online workshops, hearing lived experiences from expert witnesses, and broad discussion with other member organisations to take learning forward
Strategic Partner Roundtable	Quarterly	Meeting with NGN's Strategic Partners to monitor and review progress of VCMA projects. Ofgem metrics reviewed, lessons learnt, and future opportunities also discussed
Infrastructure North	Quarterly	Collaboration across partners in the North and Yorkshire – consists of NGN, Northern Powergrid, Yorkshire Water and Northumbrian Water
Utilities Together	Quarterly	Collaboration across all utilities in Cumbria/Northwest of England – consists of NGN, Cadent, Electricity Northwest and United Utilities
CIVS newsletter	Quarterly	Updates for stakeholders on VCMA projects and other funding streams. The newsletter also includes business updates and future engagement activities and is currently in the process of being revised by our VCMA Comms Manager



4.4 Governance

NGN has a well-established independent VCMA Governance Group to review NGN regional projects. The panel is made up of colleagues from Water Companies, Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) and Citizens Advice (CA), currently meeting every month. Project proposals are shared in advance of the meetings. The project review process involves addressing the following:

- Does the project proposal meet VCMA eligibility criteria?
- Does the proposal align with NGN's current Customers in Vulnerable Situations Strategy?
- Cost per beneficiary?
- What is the SROI value?

Over the last 12 months, the VCMA Governance Group has evolved to provide challenge and sanction to specific strategic approaches, which would then in turn help to streamline the approval process for projects driven by certain strategies. An example of this is the Centres for Warmth Strategy, which was approved by the Governance Group in July 2024.

During this time, the Governance Group approved 16 new projects and 9 extensions to existing projects. Two or three of these were initially rejected seeking further clarification. One concern raised was that the benefit gains per customer seemed low therefore, the methodology and calculations they had used were requested in order to ensure the Governance Group was comparing accurately. The information was provided and subsequently accepted and approved by the group.



In addition to the VCMA Governance Group, we also have additional external and internal assurance on our overall VCMA Strategy, including:

- ISO 22458 – Consumer Vulnerability Kitemark (evolved from BSI 18477, which NGN has held since 2015) - awarded in 2024
- Business in the Community – Responsible Business Tracker. Assess against this standard since 2020. Engagement with community partners recognised as best practice
- Stakeholder Engagement and Community Collaboration – quote from BITC (Achieved maximum score in 2024 Assessment) 'The heart of your engagement strategy is that your business makes decisions reflective of stakeholder values and preferences and is founded on a substantial evidence base. You ensure that engagement is strategic, proportionate and efficient and have a range of mechanisms and channels, including your Young Innovators Council and Citizen's Panel, to ensure that your actions are relevant and meaningful'
- Independent Steering group (ISG) and Social Issues Subgroup. VCMA strategy delivery is a key topic area for challenge and review. This is discussed quarterly through deep dive sessions with the Social Issues Subgroup, feeding into the main quarterly ISG strategic meeting
- NGN Board. VCMA strategy delivery is detailed in monthly management reports, and any changes in approach/strategic direction are discussed



5. Our 4 key themes

The 4 key themes:



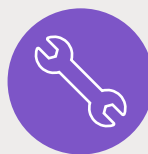
**Fuel poverty
and energy
affordability**



**Supporting
priority
customers**



**Carbon
monoxide
(CO) awareness**



**Services
beyond
the meter**

5.1 Fuel poverty and energy affordability



Fuel poverty is widely understood as being caused by the interaction of three key drivers: household incomes, fuel prices, and the energy efficiency of the home and its appliances. It is also linked to energy and housing markets and the payment method used by the household. Since October 2021, there has been an unprecedented rise in the cost of domestic gas and electricity in the UK.

The past year has remained challenging for our vulnerable customers, and we have been working hard to address this through our funded projects. Changes to benefits, in particular the Winter Fuel Allowance, has further exacerbated issues for our older vulnerable customers and our partners have risen to the challenge.

They have supported numerous pension credit applications within a tight timeframe in order to maximise incomes wherever possible.

With the known impact upon health from fuel poverty, a collaborative project was established with GDNs and National Energy Action. The Warm Homes Healthy Futures (WHHF) project is an evidence-based, 2-year, GB-wide project. It connects health professionals and local public health bodies to energy advice and other specialist services, to support people to live in warm and safe homes and improve health. The project will align activities to tackle health inequalities and fuel poverty simultaneously.

Key stats 2024/25:

£2,281,997

invested in 2024/25 –
NGN only projects

£6.07

average SROI benefit
to every £1 invested

£4,053,032.21

Forecasted spend year
5 - for both NGN and
collaborative projects

Total GD2 forecasted
spend - for both NGN and
collaborative projects

£11,105,060.58

this is 45% of our overall
VCMA allowance

Progress to date

This year we have supported 147,528 customers under this theme, through NGN specific projects.

We have opened a further 14 Centres for Warmth, which in total bring us to our target of 20 for GD2.

5.1.1 NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
Community Action Northumberland (CAN) Click here to read more	Foodbanks CAN are working with two food banks, providing slow cookers and recipe cards and the food needed to cook the recipe. The recipe cards also contain information on energy support and carbon monoxide safety.	Northumberland	2021-2026	£1.31	£20,000.00	 In progress
Community Action Northumberland (CAN) Click here to read more	Slow cooker roadshow This project looks into spending the 6 weeks of summer driving to rurally isolated settlements to deliver energy support, carbon monoxide information and expand on the diversity and efficiency of slow cookers as well as nutritional benefits.	Northumberland	2021-2026	£3.34	£8,000.00	 In progress
Groundwork Yorkshire Limited Click here to read more	Green Doctor - Fuel Poverty Training Course Tackling fuel poverty and the lack of knowledge around fuel poverty. Training will be given to frontline key workers to help deliver the key messages and support people in or at risk of falling into fuel poverty.	Network wide	2021-2026	£6.33	£28,950.00	 In progress
Groundwork Yorkshire Limited Click here to read more	Green Doctor – Energy matters Reducing energy costs, increasing energy-efficiency and improving health and wellbeing.	Yorkshire, Leeds	2021-2026	£1.24	£70,000.00	 In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
Highfield CO-OP Click here to read more	Community Energy Café Creating a pop-up energy café, where members of the community can attend and which will provide an opportunity to raise awareness of fuel poverty, provide energy advice to vulnerable people, who are unemployed and claiming benefits.	Bradford	2021-2026	£4.52	£22,000.00	In progress
Highfield CO-OP Click here to read more	Vulnerability Film Festivals - Using Film To Identify Vulnerable Communities Running a film festival to work closely with different cultures and vulnerable communities to provide advice around fuel and energy in the home.	Bradford	2021-2026	£3.83	£20,250.00	In progress
Yorkshire Energy Doctor CIC Click here to read more	Community Energy Ambassadors Supporting vulnerable residents by using trusted social networks within communities, to cascade information and to enable local action to apply for funding/grants and fuel switching.	North Yorkshire	2021-2026	£2.33	£70,900.00	In progress
Community Action Northumberland (CAN) Click here to read more	Warm Hubs Toolkit Creating a Warm Hub Toolkit, which can be used by any organisation, to ensure that a consistent model, with appropriate rules and governance (to ensure compliance to the model) can be adopted for any locality.	Network wide	2022-2025	£4.88	£17,300.00	In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
Stockton and District Advice and Information Service Click here to read more	Energy Max Project Providing specialist welfare benefits, energy costs advice and support for people who have received energy advice from community-based agencies in the region.	Stockton	2022-2026	£1.29	£90,593.34	 In progress
Community Action Northumberland (CAN) Click here to read more	Warm Hub National Co-ordinator Role Warm Hubs Co-ordinator will assist in the opening of new Warm Hubs across the country and keeping the toolkit website up to date and running smoothly.	Network wide	2022-2026	£2.10	£91,153.83	 In progress
Content Soup Energy Efficiency campaign Click here to read more	Energy Efficiency Campaign Increasing engagement with traditionally hard to reach individuals and communities within the NGN region and identifying the best methods of reaching these groups, in particular fuel poor customers.	Network wide	2023-2026	£8.72	£20,833.00	 In progress
Citizens Advice Bradford Click here to read more	Income Maximisation Project Addressing financial hardship in areas of high deprivation within the Bradford Metropolitan district by employing a specialist Welfare & Advice service, which will look to checking eligibility to benefits and support claimants to complete benefit applications and provide debt advice.	Bradford	2024 -2026	£1.77	£110,000.00	 In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
Communitas Energy CIC Click here to read more	Fuel Poverty Advisory Service Providing a one-stop support service for vulnerable and low-income customers contacting NGN and/or other selected organisations, to be referred for an expert, impartial, 'keep it simple' home heating assessment, and support to navigate home heating options and eligibility/access to related grants.	Network wide	2024 -2026	£1.78	£270,187.77	In progress
Fuel Bank Foundation Click here to read more	Further expand Fuel Bank across Northern England Expanding with a further 75 partners providing longer-term surety, particularly for vulnerable communities in rural and coastal areas.	Network wide	2024 -2026	£3.87	£550,585.33	In progress
Citizens Advice Northumberland Click here to read more	A holistic approach to energy, debt and welfare advice to address the cost-of-living crisis Intervening at the earliest point to support households to make short and long-term changes to their energy consumption behaviour, the project aims to lessen the risk of crisis situations occurring and improve their overall quality of life, health and wellbeing.	Northumberland	2024-2026	£1.77	£450,477.00	In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
Noah's Ark Click here to read more	Breaking the Food Poverty Cycle: Building Emotional and Financial Resilience for Food Bank Users Supporting customers who are using local foodbanks and living in food poverty and reducing the number of people accessing food banks through a process of income maximisation, debt advice, financial capability training, temporary food support, and mental health support	West Yorkshire	2024 -2026	£7.20	£131,163.00	 In progress
Redcar Baptist Church Click here to read more	Redcar Baptist Church - Centre for Warmth Providing a safe, warm and welcoming environment five days a week for all members of the community to receive advice and support, attend interest groups, and access affordable food through their Community Grocery shop, moving people from vulnerability to greater independence.	Redcar	2024 -2026	£9.67	£198,428.00	 In progress
Groundwork Yorkshire Limited Click here to read more	Groundwork's Energy Management Services (GEMS) extension Providing an energy management service to community/charitable organisations, who are based in buildings that have poor thermal energy efficiency and high running costs.	Northumberland	2024-2026	£32.55	£81,400.00	 In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
The Hope Foundation Limited Click here to read more	Hope Foundation - Centre for Warmth Providing support and services as part of our community. Helping to relieve poverty, raise aspirations, and help people participate and have the support they need to improve their life chances.	South Tees	2024 -2026	£8.71	£194,599.00	 In progress
South Tyneside Homes Click here to read more	Energy Support Officer Working with customers who need it most to help them save money and make smarter energy choices.	South Tyneside	2023 -2025	£4.22	£52,000.00	 In progress
Local Services 2 you Ltd Click here to read more	Fuelling Fair Futures - Centre for Warmth Working with people who need support at their own pace with an emphasis on supporting them to make positive changes to become more resilient.	Kirklees	2024-2026	£10.12	£159,542.00	 In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
Northeast Windhill Community Association Click here to read more	Windhill - Centre for Warmth Focusing on supporting families in crisis (the term “families” referring to people of all ages and abilities from babies through to the elderly), aiming to provide office-based friendly conversations, breaking down barriers, reducing anxieties, building relationships and trust for people to speak openly about their needs in a confidential safe way.	Bradford	2024 -2026	£12.55	£85,000.00	 In progress
Bilton Hall Community Trust Click here to read more	Building Stronger Community Links - Centre for Warmth Empowering individuals and organisations: Providing resources, training, and support to help individuals and partner organisations achieve their goals and make a positive impact on the community.	South Tyneside	2024 -2026	£6.27	£162,656.00	 In progress
Khidmat Centres Click here to read more	Nourish & Thrive: Empowering Communities for Sustainable Living - Centre for Warmth Supporting individuals and families around a culture shift and introducing more ownership of energy efficiency.	Bradford	2024 -2026	£10.55	£193,218.24	 In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
Yorkshire Energy Doctor Click here to read more	Warm Homes Healthy People, East Riding Working with local partners in the East Riding of Yorkshire to deliver a package of energy support into the area, including providing 1-2-1 advice, energy outreach sessions, awareness-raising and training for frontline organisations, and awareness campaigns via social media.	East Riding	2024-2026	£1.82	£26,527.00	 In progress
River City Church Hull Click here to read more	The Well – Centre for Warmth Aims to improve the physical and mental health of those that they work with, increasing resilience and the ability to combat fuel and food poverty.	Hull	2024 -2026	£4.20	£52,467.07	 In progress
The National Energy Foundation Click here to read more	Supporting Centres for Warmth This partnership is improving access and amplifying resources to tackle the root causes of fuel poverty. By partnering with the Centres for Warmth, this partnership seeks to make a meaningful impact by supporting those in need addressing the underlying causes of fuel poverty.	Network wide	2024 -2026	£3.36	£40,893.89	 In progress
The Farming Community Network Click here to read more	Supporting people in farming and rural communities to improve energy resilience and awareness of carbon monoxide Improve farmers' understanding of the risks of carbon monoxide, energy efficiency, advice on tariffs and debt issues – including entitlement to benefits where applicable.	North East of England, Cumbria and Yorkshire	2024 -2026	£10.17	£32,535.00	 In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
The Centre West Cumbria Ltd Click here to read more	Maryport – Centre for Warmth Engage with local residents face to face, signpost them to support and services available to them and initiate appropriate training and awareness raising activities to increase CO safety, reduce fuel, food and digital poverty, and reduce loneliness and isolation.	Cumbria	2024-2026	£15.24	£54,787.50	 In progress
Shildon Alive Click here to read more	Shildon Alive - Centre for Warmth Aims to support their existing services and developing new services. The new services will incorporate advice around CO awareness and energy advice whilst offering immediate crisis support and low cost or free groceries, and hot or cold food.	Shildon, Eldon, Dene Valley, Coronation, Coundon Grange, Bishop Auckland, Coundon	2024 -2026	£12.31	£89,700.00	 In progress
Shiney Advice and Resource Project (ShARP) Click here to read more	Shiney Advice and Resource Project (ShARP) - Centre for Warmth Provision of a warm, safe, welcoming space for all and a dedicated Centre for Warmth Advice Worker to offer advice such as improving the health and wellbeing of centre users and reducing fuel poverty.	Coalfield area of Sunderland, West, North and East of the city of Sunderland and Washington.	2024 -2026	£13.73	£45,000.00	 In progress
Rainbow Centre Click here to read more	Rainbow - Centre for Warmth Offering wrap around support to enable clients to become more resilient and less reliant on the foodbank in the future.	Scarborough	2024 -2026	£4.94	£48,241.00	 In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
Citizens Advice Northumberland Click here to read more	Warm Welcomes This project will pilot an integrated support approach aimed at tackling the financial and energy-related challenges faced by unemployed individuals in Northumberland.	Northumberland	2024-2026	£4.98	£27,292.17	In progress
Centre for Sustainable Energy Click here to read more	Supporting Communities to Achieve Affordable Warmth and Safety (SCAAWS) Create a new network of partners that brings together grassroots, community organisations. This will enable them to work together at a local/granular level to provide support around energy and gas safety.	Network wide	2024 -2026	£5.68	£359,999.00	In progress
Fiscus Centre Sunderland Click here to read more	FISCUS - Centre for Warmth A multicultural Centre for Warmth working alongside specialist trusted community partners to alleviate fuel poverty and ensure people living in vulnerable situations can improve their lives and be helped to live well and warm.	Sunderland, Washington, Coalfields	2024 -2026	£11.40	£51,985.00	In progress
Focus4Hope Click here to read more	Focus4Hope - Centre for Warmth Directly address the fuel poverty and carbon monoxide safety challenges faced by vulnerable individuals within the local community, including the elderly, low-income families, and people with disabilities.	Calderdale and Kirklees	2024 -2026	£9.77	£52,615.20	In progress





NGN specific projects







Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
Gateshead FC Community Foundation CIO Click here to read more	Bensham - Centre for Warmth Delivering an array of learning opportunities, community support and social engagement activities, they aim to improve people's lives and instil community spirit and connectedness.	Gateshead	2024-2026	£3.18	£48,438.00	 In progress
Involve Leeds Click here to read more	Involve - Centre for Warmth Working with local residents and community organisations to increase understanding about PSR and carbon monoxide but also having an opportunity to understand more about their energy use and options relating to both cost and efficiency.	Hunslet and Riverside Ward, South Leeds	2024 -2026	£2.38	£43,168.00	 In progress
New Wortley Leeds Click here to read more	New Wortley - Centre for Warmth Providing energy advice, CO awareness along with crisis support for those in need of food support, fuel support, clothing, advice and guidance.	Armley and New Wortley	2024 -2026	£3.42	£44,770.00	 In progress
Newcastle Citizens Advice Click here to read more	Fuel Debt Advice Provide comprehensive, targeted support to residents in Newcastle, particularly those most at risk of fuel poverty and the associated dangers of living in cold, unsafe homes.	Newcastle upon Tyne	2024 -2026	£4.58	£25,392.00	 In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31 st March 2025	Status
<div>Pottery Bank Community</div> <div> Click here to read more</div>	<div>Pottery Bank - Centre for Warmth</div> <div>Daily access to an affordable community café, food delivery to local day centres and older people’s houses and a Pay-As-You-Feel (PAYF) Food Shop.</div>	Walker, Newcastle upon Tyne	2024-2026	£7.07	£78,199.00	<div></div> <div>In progress</div>
<div>Groundwork North East</div> <div> Click here to read more</div>	<div>Groundwork North East & Cumbria</div> <div>Tackling fuel poverty across the Northeast and Cumbria through energy advice, improving the energy efficiency of homes, encouraging behavioural change, enhancing quality of life and contribution to environmental sustainability.</div>	North East of England and Cumbria	2024 -2026	£3.66	£33,075.00	<div></div> <div>In progress</div>



Collaborative projects



Lead GDN	Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
SGN Click here to read more	MyBnk, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	MyBnk Through partnership we can leverage this expertise to deliver material to primary age young people as part of their financial education programme from MyBnk.	2022-2025	£15.53	£37,344.00	In progress
Cadent Click here to read more	National Energy Action, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Collaborative Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) and Wise Group Project National Extension 2023 – 2025 Providing vital support to households who live in fuel poverty and are in vulnerable situations.	2023 -2025	£3.20	£72,843.21	Complete
NGN Click here to read more	National Energy Action, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Warm Homes Healthy Futures Connecting with health professionals and local public health bodies to provide energy advice and other specialist services, to support people to live in warm and safe homes and improve health.	2024 -2026	£2.66	£1,406,987.70	In progress
SGN Click here to read more	Fuel Bank Foundation, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Fuel Bank Foundation – Fuel Crisis Support – extension Directly provided by the Fuel Bank Foundation, existing and new organisations requiring support for financially vulnerable households will have a pathway to access immediate or next day emergency fuel funds, and the provision of additional support services to address long term debt and poverty.	2024 -2026	£5.95	£160,507.32	In progress



Collaborative projects



Lead GDN	Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
<div>WWU</div> <div>Click here to read more</div>	Shelter, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Working together to prevent homelessness Working together to prevent homelessness and to support people to thrive in their home environment.	2024-2026	£42.83	£75,569.30	<div>In progress</div>
<div>Cadent</div> <div>Click here to read more</div>	IE Hub, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Income & Expenditure (IE) Hub Aims to maximise the success of participants identifying and claiming their full entitlement of benefits. This will be achieved by facilitating access to an accessible, expert, online tool.	2024-2026	£4.73	£23,768.46	<div>In progress</div>



5.2.2 Centre for Sustainable Energy - Supporting Communities to Achieve Affordable Warmth and Safety (SCAAWS)



Why we're working together

Working in partnership with Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE), NGN have created a new network of partners that brings together grassroot, community organisations.

This enables them to work together at a local/granular level to provide support around energy and gas safety. Grassroot, community groups will be armed with the skills, knowledge and funding required to help customers in vulnerable situations, particularly those living in fuel poverty and experiencing financial hardship.

The appointed partners support customers by providing:

- Energy advice on how to use energy efficiently and safely and information on relevant energy schemes
- Help to access and register customers onto the Priority Services Register (PSR)
- CO alarms and advice on CO safety
- Onward support for customers in food or fuel crisis
- Help to access benefits assessments and debt support



CASE STUDY - Centre for Sustainable Energy - Supporting Communities to Achieve Affordable Warmth and Safety (SCAAWS)

Quaking Houses Village Hall (QHVH) was one of the organisations who were successful in receiving funding through the SCAAWS project.

They supported a woman who had left her family home, fleeing from domestic abuse with her three children. Initially she was brought to the service by her sister, needing support to sort out finances and benefit claims.

Project outcomes:

Number of people signed up to the PSR	1,793
Number of customers provided with CO advice	45
Direct Beneficiaries	3,491
Savings (if any)	£66,585.78
SROI:	£5.68

QHVH have been able to:

- Help with a Universal Credit claim
- Help with Council Tax Benefit
- Help with support to access the Household Support Fund and Welfare Support
- Provide a voucher to purchase cleaning materials, a food voucher from other funding pots and source pre-loved soft furnishings, household items and some furniture from their local community
- When she is ready, QHVH will secure a social tariff for electricity, gas and water, and low-cost phone and broadband



*Name changed to protect the individual's identity.

5.1.2 Centres for Warmth

What is a Centre for Warmth (CfW)?

The NGN CfW programme was developed to enable community groups to do what they do best, better - delivering guidance and support in a safe environment for people living in vulnerable situations. The centres offer a holistic approach, tackling immediate need in a local setting. CfW's know their customers and are a trusted resource within their communities.

Centre users benefit from a variety of services, including:

- Energy efficiency advice
- Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness and guidance
- Priority Services Register (PSR) information and registration
- Income maximisation

Services are tailored to suit the needs of their community and delivered in warm, safe spaces designed to improve health, mental health, wellbeing, increase household income and help residents manage their energy consumption more effectively.

Centre for Warmth Strategy

The development of the CfW strategy was a collaborative process, shaped by consultation with key stakeholders, to make sure it was grounded in the lived experiences and pressing needs of our communities. It was formally reviewed and approved by the VCMA Governance Group in July 2024 to ensure strong oversight and alignment with wider priorities.

Many of our communities are facing high levels of deprivation and the need for a clear and purposeful strategy is critical. For our CfWs this means prioritising our most vulnerable customers (individuals and families facing complex challenges such as food and fuel poverty, isolation, poor health, or limited access to services).

We make sure services are aligned with the real needs of residents, support long-term resilience, and help attract sustained funding and partnerships.

[Read our Centres for Warmth Strategy here](#)

Our approach

Our approach centred on engaging with Local Infrastructure Organisations, drawing on their deep-rooted knowledge of the communities they serve. These organisations are uniquely positioned to understand grassroots issues, and the specific needs of their residents. Through our partnership with these organisations, we gained meaningful insights into local communities and ensured that our work was rooted in lived experiences and priorities of the people at the heart of those communities. We focused on the quality and impact on each community rather than the quantity of CFWs overall, recognising that well-supported, trusted spaces can have more of a meaningful impact.

How have we measured success?

The project has gone from strength to strength and continues to build on its successes, delivering impactful outcomes for the most vulnerable. We have now identified 20 centres across our network. These centres have matured over the last 12 months and our ambition to target communities that would benefit the most, has been fulfilled as we know from our bespoke mapping and local intelligence that all 20 centres are in places of high levels of deprivation within our network. The centres are vital to their local communities and are already demonstrating their impact and the potential for becoming Future Centres for Warmth ([see page 81 for details](#)).

Centre for Warmth Network call

In addition to regular Partner Networking Calls, project leads from each centre are invited to participate in our Centre for Warmth Network Calls. Over the past 12 months, these calls have grown significantly in both participation and impact, fostering strong relationships and creating a valuable peer support network among the centres.

Held on a quarterly basis, these sessions provide a platform for sharing best practices, discussing common challenges, and exploring sustainable, long-term solutions. They also serve to enhance knowledge around available funding opportunities for ongoing project development.



Centres for Warmth continued

A few quotes from our centres

Local Councillor Andy Parnham said

"I very much welcome this additional funding and support from Northern Gas Networks allowing the Centre to employ advice workers to assist some of our residents who are amongst the most vulnerable in the country. A great example of partnership working!"

New Wortley CfW

"Networking with other Centres for Warmth helped us strengthen partnerships and explore new initiatives. VCMA funding has improved the outlook for the centre and has led us to receiving additional funding (via Kirklees Council) to improve home energy efficiency within our community and enabling us to plan for a brighter future. It was so beneficial for all of us"

The Chestnut Centre CfW



CASE STUDY - Centres for Warmth

Ms A is a single mother of six children and attended the Centre daily and quickly made friends with the other parents and staff. It was through these daily interactions that the Community Connectors (CCs) got to know Ms A and learnt of the difficulties she was facing. Ms A had recently escaped a house fire and abusive partner and come to live in Huddersfield from a nearby town.

The team at the Centre found Ms A to be vulnerable, living with long term health problems, at least one child with learning disabilities and two with heart defects. Ms A also suffers severe financial hardship; partly due to an over-payment of benefits before Universal Credit was introduced.

With help and guidance from the Centre, Ms A has been supported in several areas in her life including:

- Supermarket vouchers towards energy costs, food and children's clothing
- Advice on healthy eating – air fryer supplied
- Warm items for cold weather such as blankets, draught excluder, energy saving light bulbs
- Signing up to PSR and CO Awareness
- Support with utility bills

As Ms A had to leave her family home, she has no family support in her new surroundings and has been very appreciative of the help being given by the Centre. She said "The staff help in every way they can sorting out difficult situations. The staff are very friendly and helpful"



*Name changed to protect the individual's identity.

National Energy Action (NEA)

- Warm Homes Healthy Futures (WHHF)



Why we're working together

Warm Homes Healthy Futures is a collaborative venture between all four GDN's, led by NGN. Working with the national fuel poverty action charity, NEA, we have developed this ambitious national project which seeks to tackle fuel poverty and health simultaneously. The project took time to establish across the GDNs, as NEA set out to understand which health sector and public health partnerships could be put in place to achieve maximum impact for households most negatively affected by low incomes and health inequalities. The case study below demonstrates the value of this project and its unique approach to supporting fuel poor households.

	Achieved to March 2025
Triage	4,771
Energy Casework	3,200
Benefits advice (only)	1661
Benefit check and claim support	691
CO alarms	3426
Servicing	38
Community Energy Efficiency and CO awareness events	3843
Training and upskilling in energy awareness and CO	406



Click here to watch the video



CASE STUDY -National Energy Action (NEA) - Warm Homes Health Futures (WHHF)

Mr B, 80, lives with his partner and their granddaughter in private rented accommodation.

He is disabled, has multiple long-term health conditions, and suffers from mental ill health.

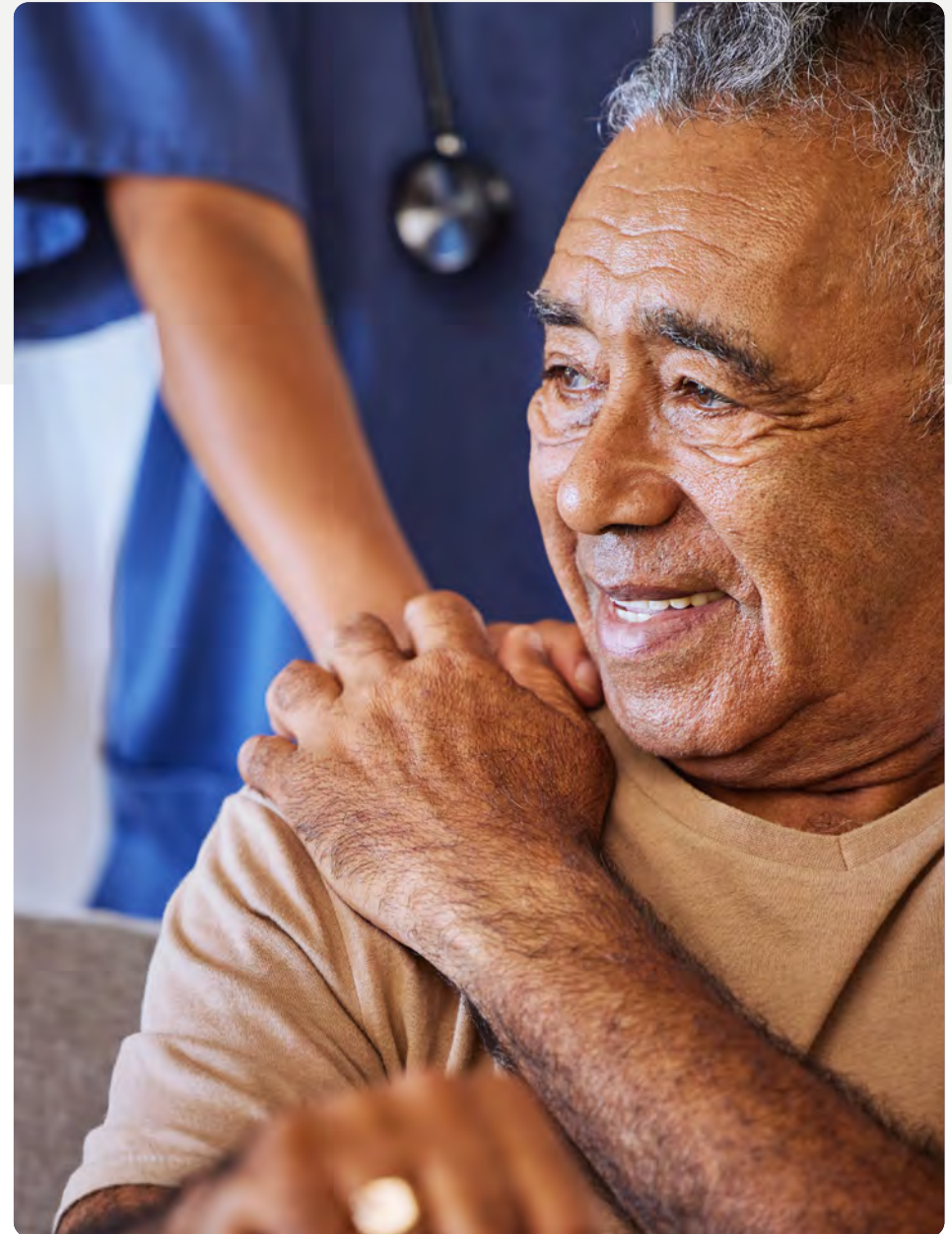
His partner supports him, and they rely on various benefits.

They were avoiding using the storage heaters and immersion heater in their all-electric household, due to concerns about the high energy bills and mounting debt.

The couple had energy arrears of £3,700 and struggled with repayments. His partner thought Mr B had Parkinson's disease because he was shaking constantly, but it turned out that he was shaking so much because he was so cold. Mr B was referred to NEA for energy advice and fuel debt support by his Social Prescribing Link Worker.

Support from NEA helped Mr B and his partner by -

- Applying to the Fuel Debt Relief Fund, resulting in £1,000 credited to their account
- Applying to the Warm Home Prescription fund, adding another £700 to their account
- Successfully applying to their energy supplier's trust fund, which wrote off the remaining debt
- Providing energy advice, including a social water tariff saving them over £100
- Arranging a winter warmth pack and a benefit entitlement check, leading to Mr B's partner receiving Carers Allowance



*Name changed to protect the individual's identity.

THEME 2

5.2 Supporting priority customers



All communities have individuals and households that need additional help and support to stay safe and warm. We are working with our partners to identify these households and helping them to register onto the Priority Services Register (PSR) so that they are prioritised for support when they most need it.

Together with our stakeholders, NGN has identified 10 categories of priority needs for customers who would benefit from energy industry initiatives to stay safe and warm. These are:

1. **Physical challenges, inclusive of communication issues, physical space**
2. **Mental wellbeing**
3. **Financial hardship**
4. **Temporary vulnerability**
5. **Socio-demographic**
6. **Household composition**
7. **Rural vulnerability**
8. **Accessibility including language**
9. **Medical dependant on energy**
10. **Cultural**

We have mapped out our projects against these priority needs and identified gaps in provisions, to spend our remaining allowance well.

An example of this is a project that we have developed with Northern Powergrid and Citizens Advice Sheffield, to deliver a virtual British Sign Language offer to profoundly Deaf or hard of hearing clients to receive energy advice, income maximisation, and referral to other specialist services should this be required. They will also be delivering workshops for CO awareness and to register customers onto the PSR.

[See case study on page 53.](#)

Key stats 2024/25:

£2,482,644.99

Invested in 2024/25
– NGN only projects

£6.41

Average SROI benefit
to every £1 invested

Total GD2
forecasted spend
- for both NGN
and collaborative
projects

£7,107,581.43

this is **27%** of our
overall VCMA
allowance

£2,659,591.81





Forecasted spend year 5 - for both NGN
and collaborative projects

Progress to date

- **Annual target of 5,000 PSR registrations per year – NGN are exceeding this target**
- **Total for year 4 – 11,729**
- **Total so far for GD2 – 34,808 - We have achieved our overall GD2 target of 25,000**

5.2.1 NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
DIAL Leeds Click here to read more	Energy Confident Supporting people with physical and sensory impairments, learning disabilities and/or long-term conditions including mental health issues to confidently work through their issues and concerns on a one-to-one basis.	Leeds	2021-2026	£3.24	£35,026.86	 In progress
Highfield CO-OP Click here to read more	Visual Impairment Energy Project Working closely with vulnerable communities to raise awareness of fuel poverty and CO poisoning, specifically with visually impaired customers.	Bradford & Airedale	2021-2026	£4.38	£16,750.00	 In progress
Highfield CO-OP Click here to read more	Community STEM Events Increasing interest in STEM-related careers among vulnerable groups by portraying science, technology, engineering, and maths in an interesting light, so that it will give rise to an impulse to explore.	Bradford	2021-2026	£10.36	£19,250.00	 In progress – being extended for the remainder of GD2
Highfield CO-OP Click here to read more	Mental Health Film and Conversations Project Showing films at various venues within the Bradford district, to help those with mental health challenges, to understand the dangers of CO and to support them in accessing information around energy saving tips and ideas. The films will help to start conversations around fuel poverty and CO and to find solutions on how to deal with fuel poverty for people with mental health needs.	Bradford	2021-2026	£4.26	£19,250.00	 In progress –being extended for the remainder of GD2





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
Yorkshire Energy Doctor CIC Click here to read more	Heating for Health Reducing the number of individuals with a long-term health condition who are living in fuel poverty in North Yorkshire. This will be achieved by providing fuel poverty training to health professionals, who work with some of the most vulnerable residents in local communities.	North Yorkshire	2021-2026	£1.53	£80,000.00	 In progress
Northern Gas Networks Click here to read more	NGN VCMA Project Co-ordinator Responsible for coordinating the delivery of a range of VCMA projects and will facilitate a single point of contact for partners and internal colleagues alike.	Network wide	2021-2026	£3.62	£144,287.09	 In progress
Northern Gas Networks Click here to read more	NGN VCMA Vulnerability Trainer Raising awareness and provide training to increase skills and knowledge associated with customers living in vulnerable circumstances.	Network wide	2021-2026	£4.86	£138,548.22	 In progress
Middlesbrough Environment City Click here to read more	Warm Homes Healthy Children Working alongside Yorkshire Energy Doctor to embed knowledge and information around energy advice, the Priority Services Register (PSR), CO, and other sources of support, into the consciousness of all family support services and their communications.	Middlesbrough and Redcar	2022-2025	£7.51	£23,000.00	 In progress





NGN specific projects









Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
Groundwork Yorkshire Limited Click here to read more	Noah's Ark Forming a partnership between Groundwork Yorkshire's Green Doctor service & Noah's Ark. This collaboration brings together fuel poverty support, income maximisation, mental health support & training.	West Yorkshire	2022-2026	£2.95	£228,000.00	 In progress
Age UK North Tyneside Click here to read more	Information and Advice Role Offering information and advice to over 6,000 customers across the region each year through Age UK North Tyneside's information and advice team who help to maximise income and reduce outgoings, as well as ensuring our customers are living in a safe, healthy environment.	North Tyneside	2022-2026	£15.20	£57,179.00	 In progress
Hope 4 U Ltd Click here to read more	NHS Support Service Working with Airedale NHS Foundation Trust and Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust maternity units, supporting parents with planning their budgets, benefit check and income maximisation, money management, housing issues, sign up to PSR, saving on utility costs and explaining further grant options.	Airedale & Bradford	2022-2026	£13.34	£231,038.00	 In progress - being extended for the remainder of GD2
Northern Gas Networks Click here to read more	Back-office staff costs Responsible for overseeing the development of projects and ensuring the projects are compliant with procurement standards etc.	Network wide	2021-2026	n/a	£134,083.61	 In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
South Tees NHS Foundation Trust  Click here to read more	Maternity Digital Inclusion and Equity Providing women with a smart device free of charge, which meets the appropriate standards to access the maternity app and appropriate digital information.	South Tees	2024-2026	£9.49	£277,271.59	 In progress
South Tees NHS Foundation Trust  Click here to read more	Enhanced Maternity Care Providing enhanced care to the most vulnerable women and families in our community, with a focus on perinatal mental health and parent-infant bonding.	South Tees	2024-2025	£5.81	£206,822.00	 In progress
Middlesbrough Environment City & NHS  Click here to read more	NHS - Tees Valley Heating on Prescription Pilot Utilising funding to support those living in disadvantaged groups with the respiratory condition COPD and support them to warm their home in winter, plus support with making positive changes to their heating infrastructure to prevent exacerbation of their condition.	South Tees	2024-2025	£1.68	£558,765.00	 Complete





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
Skills 4 Work Gateshead Click here to read more	A trusted source of information and practical support Offering a unique approach to their warm spaces as they are run by the young people and community volunteers who are supported by their trained staff.	Gateshead	2024-2026	£25.37	£49,768.00	In progress
Northern Gas Networks Click here to read more	VCMA Project Coordinator 2023 Responsible for coordinating the delivery of a range of VCMA projects and facilitating a single point of contact for partners and internal colleagues alike.	Network wide	2023-2026	£3.66	£53,616.62	In progress
Northern Gas Networks Click here to read more	VCMA Vulnerability Partnerships and Relationships Officer Responsible for developing relationships with partners and generating new VCMA projects. The role requires an understanding of the development of partnership working with Local Authorities, housing providers, energy sector partners, community sector and charities.	Network wide	2023-2026	£2.59	£64,561.48	In progress
Northern Gas Networks Click here to read more	Centre for Warmth Project Coordinator Responsible for coordinating the delivery of a range of Centre for Warmth projects and enables a single point of contact for partners and internal colleagues alike.	Network wide	2024-2026	£3.66	£42,374.02	In progress





NGN specific projects







Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
Groundwork Yorkshire Limited Click here to read more	ESOL Project Raising awareness of the risks of Carbon Monoxide, the sources of CO, the impacts & prevention. CO leaflets are distributed to all attendees, with translated versions made available when necessary. Similarly, they will do the same for the Priority Service Register.	Yorkshire	2024-2026	£22.22	£24,903.00	In progress
Everyday Enable Click here to read more	Income Maximisation and Awareness Raise awareness amongst both individuals in the community and professionals about the welfare benefit system, and what help and support is available to those who are vulnerable.	North Yorkshire	2023-2025	£6.34	£45,000.00	In progress
Citizens Advice Northumberland Click here to read more	Ageing Well, More Money Less Worry Provide targeted advice and practical support to help older people access financial benefits, reduce energy costs, and improve their well-being.	Northumberland	2024-2026	£3.24	£27,549.83	In progress
The Wise Group Click here to read more	HEAT Helps fuel poor households experiencing energy crises through the provision of independent, tailored advice to ensure emergencies are dealt with quickly and efficiently.	Network wide	2024-2026	£4.64	£214,285.71	In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
Northern Cancer Voices  Click here to read more	Treat, Heat or Eat Community Engagement Keeping patients warm and 'healthy' as they undertake their cancer journey and remove any stress they may have about heating costs.	North East of England, Teesside and Cumbria	2024-2026	£2.65	£81,500.00	 In progress
Citizens Advice Sheffield  Click here to read more	Advice in BSL to Deaf Community Providing energy advice including advice on carbon monoxide, energy saving advice and fuel poverty advice to deaf/hard of hearing clients. Advice is provided remotely via video call by advisers who are profoundly deaf themselves or use BSL.	Leeds, Bradford, Copeland, South Lakes, Allerdale, Barrow, Carlisle and Eden	2024-2026	£4.20	£90,536.00	 In progress



Collaborative projects



Lead GDN	Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend	Status
NGN Click here to read more	Strata Nostra, EIC, Cadent	The Carents Room – phase 2 An interactive website for Carents (carers of parents) to access anywhere in the UK and receive instant online support.	2022 - 2026	£8.74	£657,214.56	In progress
SGN Click here to read more	Marie Curie, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Marie Curie Identifying and supporting terminally ill people and their families that are suffering from fuel poverty with dedicated support and advice.	2022 - 2025	£12.16	£175,008.20	In progress - being extended for the remainder of GD2
SGN Click here to read more	Maggie Keswick Jencks Cancer Caring Centres Trust ("Maggie's"), Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	The Maggie's Centres Safe and Warm Project Identifying customer needs and providing joined up support services for those who benefit from energy safeguarding services and working together with Maggie's to engage with people living with cancer.	2022 - 2025	£3.70	£21,204.00	In progress - being extended for the remainder of GD2
SGN Click here to read more	Age UK, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Energy Safeguarding - Helping older people live in safe and warm homes Supporting people in vulnerable situations by providing energy safeguarding services to older people who are in or at risk of fuel poverty.	2023 –2026	£8.38	£106,372.50	In progress



Collaborative projects



Lead GDN	Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend	Status
WWU Click here to read more	Kidney Care UK, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Safe and Warm: Providing a Critical Lifeline to Dialysis Patients Across the UK Enabling patients to access all the benefits and welfare support they are entitled to. Patients will also benefit from access to specialist money and energy advice, framed within the context of the specific challenges faced by kidney patients.	2024 - 2026	£9.63	£214,487.15	 In progress
WWU Click here to read more	Carers Trust UK, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Alleviating Unpaid Carers from Fuel Poverty Focus on alleviating the financial penalties and specifically fuel hardships that many carers, their families and those that they care for experience by having to heat, feed and manage the finances and affairs of multiple households.	2024-2026	£42.03	£334,093.55	 In progress
NGN Click here to read more	National Energy Action, Northern Gas Networks, SGN	A Warm Welcome Aims to support new and expectant parents and families with young children to not only survive but thrive in a safe, warm and healthy home.	2024-2026	£11.93	£41,118.26	 In progress
SGN/WWU Click here to read more	Mental Health UK, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Energy Safeguarding and tackling fuel poverty for people with Mental Health To help users with claiming benefits, resolving debt issues, signposting to health and social care support and applying to charitable trusts.	2024-2026	£9.07	£37,914.30	 In progress



Collaborative projects



Lead GDN	Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend	Status
<div>SGN</div> <div>Click here to read more</div>	National Energy Action, Northern Gas Networks, SGN	<div>Empowered by Energy</div> <div>Identify engaged members of the refugee and asylum seeker communities and support them to become energy champions, to make changes not only to their own situation but also that of their friends and peers.</div>	2024-2026	£1.60	£20,000.00	<div>In progress</div>



5.2.2 Citizens Advice Sheffield

- Advice in BSL to Deaf Community



Why we're working together

There are over 87,000 deaf individuals in the country but only approximately 2,000 British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters available to provide assistance. A recent research initiative, funded by the National Lottery in collaboration with the Deaf community, revealed that Deaf clients preferred receiving advice from trained advisors fluent in BSL rather than relying on an interpreter. Discussions with other partners highlighted a lack of adequate services for deaf clients across the partnership. Consequently, Sheffield Citizens Advice (Sheffield CA) collaborated with Leeds Citizens Advice (Leeds CA) to establish a dedicated service in BSL for the local Deaf community.

This project has significantly enhanced access to various forms of support for the Deaf community. Services now include energy advice, income maximisation in BSL, and bespoke referral pathways for additional areas of advice, developed in conjunction with Leeds CA and the local Deaf club. Sheffield CA has conducted Deaf awareness training for Leeds staff, produced a BSL video to inform clients about what to expect during appointments, and established a Community Access Point where Deaf clients can communicate directly with an advisor in BSL via a screen interface. Northern Powergrid approached NGN in 2024 to jointly fund this initiative through regulatory funding. Although the specialist nature of this support incurs high delivery costs, it effectively removes the barriers faced by the Deaf community, enabling them to access essential advice to remain warm and maximise household income.



CASE STUDY - Citizens Advice Sheffield

- Advice in BSL to Deaf Community

Mr C is a profoundly deaf user of British Sign Language (BSL) with no clear speech and limited literacy skills. Following the passing of his father in November 2021, Mr C received a letter regarding an outstanding amount on his father's energy bill.

Given the three-year gap since his father's death, this caused confusion for Mr C, who was also grappling with the transition to Universal Credit (UC) without confidence in using his UC journal. While he had assistance in claiming UC, he lacked guidance on how to manage the UC journal.



Citizens Advice (CA) provided extensive support to Mr C by helping him navigate his UC journal, understand payment statements, and verify the accuracy of his payments. With Mr C's authorisation, CA contacted the energy supplier on his behalf using VRS (Video Relay Service). It was discovered that the debt of £1,551 had been transferred to a debt collection agency. CA subsequently communicated with this agency, which returned the debt to the supplier's collection team. CA then engaged with the supplier's bereavement team, providing the necessary information regarding Mr C's father's death.

During this process, Mr C received another letter from a different collection agency. CA reassured him that the matter was being handled and provided the energy supplier with the required information. The supplier's bereavement team then contacted a third party responsible for managing deceased accounts, who attempted to call Mr C without realising he was deaf. An apology was issued, and the supplier inquired if Mr C wished to file a complaint.

Ultimately, CA succeeded in having Mr C's debt written off. They also provided energy efficiency information via BSL videos on their website and ensured Mr C was receiving the correct benefits along with a detailed explanation of his UC payments. Through CA's services, Mr C resolved the outstanding issue and gained proficiency in managing his UC payments moving forward.



Project outcomes:

Number of people signed up to the PSR	93
Number of customers provided with CO advice	332
Direct beneficiaries	332
Energy Advice and Income Maximisation to Deaf or Hard of Hearing customers:	332 interventions
SROI	£4.20

*Name changed to protect the individual's identity.

5.2.3 Northern Cancer Voices

- Treat, Heat or Eat

NORTHERN Cancer Voices

Why we're working together

One in two people will be impacted by a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime and being able to cope with such a diagnosis whilst maintaining their health and wellbeing will be difficult. There are circa 860 patients currently in treatment in the North East, and this is expected to grow. Cancer patients are vulnerable as the diagnosis of cancer is an extremely stressful time for the patient and their family. Their life is turned upside down and they may lose all their financial support overnight. Numerous practical difficulties immediately present themselves and a stressed patient is likely to have a worse outcome.

Northern Cancer Voices (NCV) aim to improve the experience of cancer patients by increasing patient participation in their communities and strengthening the network of patient and carer groups in the region whilst promoting awareness of NGN services. It is important that NCV promote these services to those in hardship and receiving a cancer diagnosis as this positive support will be seen as a bit of a lifeline and relieve stress.



CASE STUDY - Northern Cancer Voices

- Treat, Heat or Eat

Northern Cancer Voices met a gentleman in his 80s in The Grainger Market, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, the week before Christmas 2024. They had a table in their health hub as part of their partnership working program with Healthworks Newcastle. This partnership is around raising awareness of signs and symptoms of cancer, screening, as well as collating feedback surrounding the cancer pathway in NHS. The gentleman stated that he lived alone in a flat in Newcastle, he had bowel cancer within the last 10 years, he was vulnerable, had no family to provide support and no carers in place.

He also explained that due to the rising costs of energy, he had not used the heating in his home for 2 years as he could not afford to pay the bills. He also advised that he had not had a bath nor a shower at home for more than 2 years for the same reason. In order to keep clean, he would heat a pan of water on his electric stove. The gentleman talked about his concerns surrounding his diagnosis and treatment, his fears of it returning in the future and not knowing where to turn. The gentleman appeared fearful, lonely and uncertain.

Northern Cancer Voices Engagement Officer (Lucy) and Engagement Director (Lorna), spent 2 hours with the gentleman talking, asking questions and listening to him about his situation and concerns. A picture was developed of what his main areas of concern were and with his consent, the following actions were taken to support:

- Signposting to local social prescribing team for ongoing social support
- Referred to HEAT for energy cost review
- Delivered a CO awareness conversation surrounding signs, symptoms and safety
- Registered the gentleman on PSR (he seemed to be unsure if he was already registered)
- Fed back into the NHS regarding his experience and concerns for the future
- Provided Northern Cancer Voices contact number for future support, if unsure or if help was needed again

Outcomes:

- PSR registration
- CO alarm provided
- Feedback passed onto NHS services
- HEAT energy review – third party completion
- Social Prescriber support for wider concerns

When the gentleman had to leave, Lucy checked in with him to see how he was feeling following the interaction and the actions that were taken. The gentleman expressed he was feeling relieved he spoke to the team, thankful that we listened and provided some advice, guidance and appropriate support. He seemed to be more relaxed and had a clearer plan in terms of the next steps to take. Before he left, Lucy recapped the conversation that had taken place, to ensure that he fully understood everything that had been discussed, the referrals that were made and the signposting to other services. The gentleman acknowledged that his current living situation was not good, and action was required to help him improve his situation.

Project outcomes:

Number of people signed up to the PSR	81
Number of customers provided with CO advice	86
Direct Beneficiaries	500
CO alarms provided	73
SROI	£2.65

5.3 Carbon Monoxide (CO) awareness



As a Gas Distribution Network, we attend multiple properties each day in response to gas emergency callouts, including those involving suspected carbon monoxide (CO). Raising awareness of CO is a high priority for NGN.

We strive to ensure that customers understand the dangers associated with not having gas appliances regularly serviced or repaired.

This year through collaboration with other Gas Distribution Networks (GDNs) and partners, we were able to reach a wider audience and further spread the awareness about the risks of CO.

We are part of a well-established CO working group comprising GDNs and key stakeholders that has been dedicated for many years to gathering data and insights on CO.

This work has enabled us to design effective awareness campaigns. More recently, we have focused our efforts on targeting these campaigns towards specific groups within our communities who have the lowest level of CO awareness.

During a stakeholder engagement session, it was identified that the risk of CO exposure increases significantly for individuals who are unable to have their appliances repaired or maintained due to financial hardship.

For these vulnerable groups, maintaining or replacing appliances is often not a priority, which in turn raises the risk of CO poisoning.

Many of our customers in vulnerable circumstances are unable to afford CO alarms and are already struggling to cover basic needs such as food and heating for themselves and their families. In response, NGN will continue to provide free CO alarms to vulnerable customers across our network throughout GD2.

Collaborative campaigns typically consist of general advice regarding signs, symptoms and CO safety awareness. Also includes social media, public advertising, and radio advertising.



Key stats 2024/25:

£199,117

Invested in 2024/25
– NGN only projects

£11.21

Average SROI benefit
to every £1 invested

Total GD2
forecasted spend
– for both NGN
and collaborative
projects

£2,543,854

this is **10%** of our
overall VCMA
allowance

£678,492

Forecasted spend year 5 - for
both NGN and collaborative
projects






Progress to date

- Customers reached through Carbon Monoxide (CO) awareness initiatives – GDN rulebook % proportion (customers likely to take actions as a result of the increased awareness) – In year 4 our total reach was **74,188,631**
- Number of CO awareness visits/surveys with customers – target for GD2 is 50,000 – we are currently on track and exceeding our target, during 2024/25 we carried out **23,004** visits/surveys and our total to date is – **78,877**
- Average score before CO awareness visit – there was no set target for GD2, however for year 4 our average before score is **6.22**
- Average score after CO awareness visit - there was no set target for GD2, however for year 4 our average after score is **8.61**



5.3.1 NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
Highfield CO-OP  Click here to read more	Community Energy and Carbon Monoxide Awareness Project Providing information on energy saving advice, government grants, schemes on energy saving, and CO awareness.	Bradford	2021-2026	£37.04	£15,750.00	 In progress
Lake District Foundation  Click here to read more	Carbon Monoxide (CO) and Environmental Impact Awareness in Cumbria Campaign This project aims to educate the importance of gas safety, and the dangers associated with Carbon Monoxide via the CO awareness survey.	Cumbria	2021-2026	£1.81	£76,240.00	 In progress





NGN specific projects









Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
Northern Gas Networks and Safelincs Click here to read more	VCMA CO Alarms Distributing CO alarms to customers in vulnerable situations across the NGN network.	Network wide	2022-2026	£12.00	£109,071.00	 In progress
Yorkshire Coast Sight Support Click here to read more	Breathing Safe, Keeping Warm This project will raise awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide and will provide living safe and well tips.	Yorkshire	2024 - 2026	£7.71	£22,890.00	 In progress
Cleveland Fire Authority Click here to read more	Stay Safe and Warm Identifying households without CO alarms, rectify the issue as a priority, then refer landlords to housing local authority teams where appropriate.	Teesside	2024 - 2026	£6.56	£35,925.00	 In progress
Content Soup Ltd Click here to read more	Comms CO campaigns Increasing awareness and understanding about what a customer should do if they smell gas or suspect Carbon Monoxide.	Network wide	2023 - 2026	£8.72	£60,957.00	 In progress



Collaborative projects









Lead GDN	Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend	Status
SGN  Click here to read more	The Scout Association, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	The Scouts Carbon Monoxide Awareness Programme Educating, engaging and empowering up to 360,000 young people, increasing their understanding of the dangers and ways in which they can prevent harm for themselves and others from CO.	2021 - 2026	£1.81	£47,411.40	 In progress
Cadent  Click here to read more	Eleven Miles Limited, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Collaborative GDN Winter and Summer Awareness Campaigns Raising Awareness by using mass reaching channels to launch with a memorable device; priming audiences to look out for Carbon Monoxide concerns.	2023 - 2026	£120.42	£92,712.63	 In progress
NGN  Click here to read more	Egnida Innovation Ltd, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Raising CO Awareness using Augmented Reality Increasing levels of Carbon Monoxide awareness within the university student population, by creating a targeted campaign. The campaign entertaining enough to compete for young people's attention and also incentivises them to engage with CO awareness training.	2023-2025	£3.51	£20,000.00	 In progress



Collaborative projects



Lead GDN	Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend	Status
SGN  Click here to read more	The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Citizens Advice National - Energy Safeguarding and CO Safety Partnerships 3yr extension Delivering in partnership with Citizens Advice, this project aims to support vulnerable households with a single point of contact for independent and bespoke support to keep a safe and warm home for less.	2023 - 2026	£5.54	£702,069.74	 In progress
Cadent  Click here to read more	Improving Performance in Practice (IPIP) Limited, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Preventing Harm from Environmental Exposure to Carbon Monoxide (PHECO) - E-Learning for Health This project will develop a generic learning module to help a broad range of health and social care staff better understand the harm caused by exposure to carbon monoxide.	2024 - 2026	£18.63	£28,888.25	 In progress
SGN  Click here to read more	Gas Safe Charity, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Think CO App Development This project will enable development and launch of a CO awareness app for frontline workers, to support the Think CO carbon monoxide awareness training.	2023 - 2026	£1.10	£4,949.09	 In progress



Collaborative projects



Lead GDN	Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend	Status
<div>SGN</div> <div>Click here to read more</div>	Bonanza Creative, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	Bonanza Creative - Carbon Monoxide Education - Year 3-5 Educating, engaging and empowering over 14,000 young people, increasing their understanding of the dangers and ways in which they can prevent harm for themselves and others from CO.	2023 - 2026	£2.35	£125,641.08	<div>In progress</div>
<div>SGN</div> <div>Click here to read more</div>	Bonanza Creative, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN	Carbon Monoxide Schools' Education Programme 2022 - 26 (KS3 pilot) To reach young people through primary schools with tailored educational sessions and supporting resources in an environment where they are focussed on learning and most likely to be receptive to CO safety advice.	2024-2026	£11.11	£3,666.66	<div>In progress</div>



5.3.2 Cleveland Fire and Rescue - Stay Safe and Warm



Why we're working together

Cleveland Fire and Rescue support NGN customers by identifying households without CO alarms, rectifying the issue as a priority, then referring landlords to housing local authority teams where appropriate to ensure that they understand their responsibilities and fulfil them in any remaining properties they are responsible for. Each household would receive and have access to the following package of support through the project:

- Safer homes visit where crews ensure they have appropriate smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in their property and fit where necessary
- Any other relevant risk reduction can also be issued on the visit as needed by the individuals
- Home fire safety advice is given at each property
- If the residents are struggling to keep warm in their home, warmth packs and electric heaters are issued as well as keep warm advice - outcome improved comfort
- Onward referrals are made to community organisations including Age UK, Smoking Cessation, Social Prescribers
- Cleveland Fire Brigade has a befriending service for lonely and isolated older people that residents can also be referred into for additional support



CASE STUDY - Cleveland Fire and Rescue - Stay Safe and Warm

Mr F received a Safer Homes visit in Hartlepool. He was living alone and feeling lonely. His home was quite cluttered, and he had no carpets downstairs due to having a new puppy that had soiled the carpets.

He had a gas boiler in his bedroom and an open wood burner in the entrance lobby of his home.

Mr F was also storing fuel for the fire by the fireside, which was on an exit route for the property. From a fire safety perspective this was a concern, due to an exit route being unavailable should an evacuation be required.

Smoke alarms were fitted throughout the property, and two carbon monoxide alarms were fitted: one in the bedroom by the boiler and one in the entrance near the wood burner.

Fire and Rescue submitted a safeguarding referral for Mr F and made a referral to Cleveland Fire Brigade's Befriending Service, to help address his loneliness and isolation.

Mr F was contacted by the Befriending Service and subsequently attended social activities at The Headland Community Fire Station. He has received follow-up visits from Fire and Rescue's Community Advocates who have shared additional information and support.

Project outcomes:

Number of CO awareness surveys completed:	100
Direct Beneficiaries:	728
CO alarms installed:	500
SROI:	£3.28



5.3.2 Highfield Food Cooperative



Why we're working together

Highfield Food Cooperative are a small, grassroots community group based in Keighley, West Yorkshire and focus on promoting healthier lifestyles and reducing social isolation for local people. Set within the Bradford borough, this area has a diverse population, encompassing many different ethnicities and households who do not speak English as a first language. The team at Highfield are trusted by and well-connected to the local community.

By partnering with NGN throughout GD2, Highfield Food Cooperative has been able to widen their reach and provide extended messaging around energy and carbon monoxide awareness, and the Priority Services Register. VCMA has supported numerous small projects, with Highfield using innovative methods of engaging people in this important messaging through their social activities.



CASE STUDY - Highfield Food Cooperative - canal boats/raising awareness of CO

“I never knew how dangerous CO poisoning was and it can even happen on a barge. I participated in the CO workshop and will share this knowledge with others”. Customer D (aged 72)



Highfield Food Cooperative teamed up with an organisation called Waymakers, who own a barge and wanted to explore how to get people more involved in the canals.

A number of workshops were delivered on the barge, around raising awareness of CO and it was found that some narrow boats don't have kitchens. In the summertime, it is not uncommon to have barbecues brought on deck and when it rains, it has been known to take the equipment inside.

The group plans to do 5 more CO awareness sessions to try and target around 40 boats moored around Skipton, Silsden, Bingley and Shipley in West Yorkshire. The intention is to provide CO alarms to boats that don't have them.

The project lead and 2 other volunteers are training to be skippers, so that they can take barges out. The aim is to engage those with mental health challenges, to visit the barges and enjoy the waterways, whilst learning about CO awareness, PSR and energy efficiency hints and tips.



Accessible CO alarms – issued to Citizens Advice Sheffield - BSL project

Whilst NGN has always provided CO alarms for customers in vulnerable situations, the need to offer more CO alarm options from an inclusivity perspective, has become more prevalent.

Stakeholder and partner feedback has provided an opportunity for NGN to purchase CO alarms to support those within our communities who live with hearing impairments.

An alternative portable alarm for leisure activities (e.g. camping/caravanning/boating) has also been purchased for distribution to those who need them.

5.4 Services beyond the meter



As a gas network, we are dedicated to ensuring customer safety and warmth. We acknowledge that some customers cannot maintain a safe and warm home without additional assistance from us. Through direct support, we assist vulnerable households during our routine operations.

If our engineers identify a safety issue with appliances or internal pipework beyond the meter while responding to a gas emergency or upgrading our networks, they may need to condemn the appliance or isolate the gas supply.

Vulnerable households may not afford the unexpected expense of a Gas Safe registered engineer to visit their home or replace their appliance, potentially leaving them without adequate heating, hot water, or cooking facilities for extended periods.

While we provide temporary electric cooking and heating appliances, these can be costly to operate and do not address the long-term need to stay safe and warm at home.

If a vulnerable customer cannot afford to service, repair, or replace pipework or an essential gas appliance and meets the eligibility criteria set out by Ofgem, we will arrange for a Gas Safe registered engineer to visit and carry out the required repair, replacement, or service.

Key stats 2024/25:

£129,835

Invested in 2024/25
– NGN only projects

£6.40

Average SROI benefit
to every £1 invested

£455,000

Forecasted spend year
5 - for both NGN and
collaborative projects

Total GD2 forecasted spend - for both NGN and collaborative projects

£1,553,963 – this is 7% of our overall VCMA allowance

Progress to date

- **416 repair and replacement interventions**
- **101 appliances serviced**
- **386 carbon monoxide investigations completed**

5.4.1 NGN specific projects







Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
Northern Gas Networks Click here to read more	Customer Care Advisor – MECC This role is vital to support the continuity of making every contact count (MECC) when NGN personnel interact with a customer. This service is required when a First Call Operative from NGN, disconnects an appliance / isolates a gas supply to a customer's home when they have been identified as living in vulnerable circumstances.	Network wide	2022-2026	£1.57	£81,306.30	In progress
Northern Gas Networks Click here to read more	Services Beyond the Meter Technical Leads These two dedicated roles will embed new processes relating to our GD2 commitments of never leaving a customer vulnerable, following an NGN visit. The technical expertise of these colleagues ensures that the Services Beyond the Meter programme delivers efficient, high quality outcomes for vulnerable households when needed.	Network wide	2024-2026	£4.36	£201,573.81	In progress
Northern Gas Networks Click here to read more	Vulnerability Economic Evaluation Analyst This role implements best-practice economic evaluation methodologies, models, and metrics to support investment decision-making, and to quantify the value impact of NGN's Customers in Vulnerable Situations Strategy, VCMA Strategy and associated commitments for GD2. This role oversees the SROI evaluation of new VCMA projects.	Network wide	2023-2026	£2.73	£70,585.28	In progress





NGN specific projects



Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Region	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend – up until 31st March 2025	Status
<div>Northern Gas Networks</div> <div> Click here to read more</div>	Services Beyond the Meter-Project Lead A dedicated role to support the delivery of NGN's Customers in Vulnerable Situations Strategy, Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) Strategy and associated commitments for GD2, by managing projects funded through the VCMA. Focusing on CMDDA1 investigation and the service, repair, and replacement of gas appliances.	Network wide	2024-2026	£6.19	£33,286.00	<div> In progress</div>
<div>Northern Gas Networks</div> <div> Click here to read more</div>	Services Beyond the Meter The whole concept of the Services Beyond the Meter (SBtM) programme is to offer customers in vulnerable situations a way to keep themselves safe, warm, and independent in their own home giving them access to support that wasn't previously there.	Network wide	2024-2026	£6.40	£201,573.81	<div> In progress</div>



Collaborative projects



Lead GDN	Lead partner organisation	Project title and description	Duration	Forecast SROI	Total NGN committed spend	Status
Cadent Click here to read more	NSPCC, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks, SGN, Wales & West Utilities	NSPCC Collaborative GDN Project This project aims to raise awareness of the NSPCC helpline and share techniques on how to spot potential child mistreatment through delivering “It’s Your Call” training to GDN staff and contractors.	2023-2025	£5.01	£57,546.43	 In progress
Cadent Click here to read more	Groundwork, Cadent, Northern Gas Networks	Cadent and NGN collaborative One Number programme 2023-2025 The Cadent and NGN Collaborative One Number Programme 2023 - 2025 project builds on a company specific pilot delivered on Cadent’s networks between April 2021 and December 2022. This collaborative project uses the same model and learning from the Cadent pilot to deliver support to customers in vulnerable situations living in the Eastern, North London, Northwest, West Midlands, and NGN networks. The project will commence in January 2023 and will run for a period of two years until January 2025.	2023 -2025	£2.75	£1,013,303.10	 Complete
Cadent Click here to read more	Cadent, Northern Gas Networks	Services Beyond the Meter Offering customers in vulnerable situations a way to keep themselves safe, warm, and independent.	2023 -2025	£0.71	£249,008.43	 Complete



5.3.2 - Northern Gas Networks - Services Beyond the Meter

Services beyond the meter

How we've developed our in-house offering

This year, NGN has employed a Services Beyond the Meter (SBtM) Project Lead to review our delivery options through VCMA. Since January 2025, in addition to conducting enhanced carbon monoxide investigations with our upskilled engineers, we have brought the delivery of service, repair, and replacement of essential gas appliances in-house.

Utilising four of our Gas Safe registered engineers, we can support our customers from the start of their journey right through to completion, which has significantly reduced resolution time and costs while improving the customer experience. For resilience and complex installations requiring additional resources, we retain the option to use dedicated service partners.

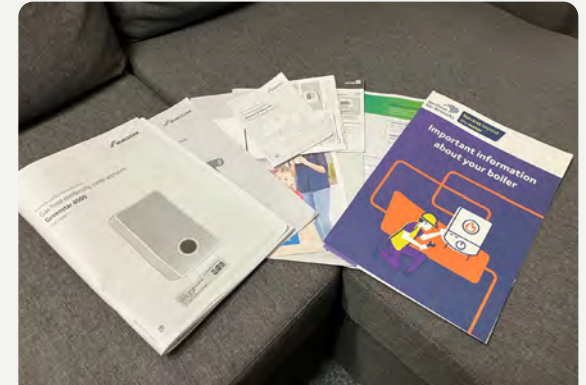


CASE STUDY - Northern Gas Networks - Services Beyond the Meter

An elderly gentleman living alone was referred to services beyond the meter following a check for safety call out. The boiler was found to be dangerous and not working correctly and was isolated.

Eligibility for support was confirmed, and NGN visited to find that the boiler was beyond repair, leaving the customer without heating and hot water.

The customer was unwell with poor sight and mobility issues following a stroke; therefore, we needed to act quickly. A new boiler was ordered, and our engineer completed the installation within 3 days.



Part of our service is to register the boiler for the customer and ensure that they understand how to operate it. New carbon monoxide alarms are also installed. When the boiler is due for the annual service, we contact the customer again to check eligibility. If they remain eligible, we then return to carry out the first annual service.

The customer was grateful for our support and gave the team a satisfaction score of 10/10 and said:

"Everything has been really good!"



CASE STUDY - Northern Gas Networks - Services Beyond the Meter

During gas mains replacement work NGN engineers attended a property to carry out safety checks following restoration of the gas supply.

The property was served by a warm air unit, and the system could not be restarted. Identifying the customer as highly vulnerable, living alone with severe disabilities and medical issues requiring weekly dialysis, the case was referred to Services Beyond the Meter.



Reviewing options for funding the team ruled out ECO4 and progressed support through Services Beyond the Meter. A complex installation requiring a full new central heating system was carried out by our in-house team providing the customer with a safe and secure heating and hot water system.

The customer was hugely grateful for our support stating that:

"The team had encountered many difficulties during the installation but have been amazing. This work has been a massive help for me now and for the future."



6. Look ahead





2025/6 is the final year of GD2 delivery. As we look ahead into the next 12 months, we have three key areas of focus and activity – **delivering on our GD2 commitments, reaching underserved communities, and helping projects deliver sustainably.**

Delivering on our GD2 commitments

Looking at our GD2 commitments, we are delivering over and above against all targets, with the exception of fuel poor connections – [see Appendix 1](#)

Heading into 2025/26, 98% of our VCMA for GD2 has been committed, leaving only a small amount for any new/emerging work this year. We have contingency plans for any under/over delivering projects to make sure that funds can be reallocated to have the maximum impact for our customers.

Our overall forecast spend against each of the VCMA themes is outlined in the table below:

Project theme	NGN VCMA allocation	
 Fuel poverty and energy affordability	46%	Continuation of successful projects and pilots ahead of GD3 to ensure wider impact of services (mixture of crisis prevention and longer-term support) - majority tier 1 and 2 (new pilot projects – farming communities and unemployed people)
 Supporting priority customers	30%	Continuation of successful projects and pilots ahead of GD3 to ensure wider impact of services (mixture of crisis prevention and longer-term support) - majority tier 1 and 2 (new pilot projects - older people, younger people)
 Carbon monoxide (CO) awareness	13%	Scaling up CO awareness through Comms VCMA strategy, and distribution of CO alarms (including accessible alarms) – tier 3
 Services beyond the meter	11%	Continuing to refine our in-house programme of delivery– tier 1

Reaching underserved communities

Our second priority area for the remainder of GD2 is to focus on underserved vulnerability groups, including: unemployed, older people, farming and geographically remote communities, and younger people. We have established four pilot projects for 2025/26 to support these specific groups, which can then be scaled up in other areas during GD3 if appropriate.



Unemployed people

Northumberland has one of the highest economic inactivity rates (26.2%) in the North East of England, with a significant proportion of unemployed households (21.5%); well above national averages. Many unemployed individuals face delays in benefit processing, accumulating debt, particularly in energy costs, which has been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis in recent years.

We are launching a project with Citizens Advice Northumberland to pilot an integrated support approach aimed at tackling the financial and energy-related challenges faced by unemployed individuals in Northumberland. It will provide staff within job centres, as well as offering telephone appointments and home visits. This will assist newly unemployed people with advice and support to prevent crisis situations arising, addressing financial hardship, fuel poverty, and reaching underrepresented and vulnerable groups. The pilot will test effective methods of engagement and intervention through a collaborative, community-driven approach, ensuring unemployed individuals receive practical, actionable support to improve their financial resilience and energy security. Caseworkers will:

- Conduct a comprehensive benefit check
- Identify further opportunities for income maximisation
- Carry out a full energy advice assessment
- Provide one-off guidance on switching tariffs, energy efficiency and affordable tariffs
- Provide carbon monoxide awareness, identifying unsafe situations
- Support Priority Services Register (PSR) registrations

They will also assess any additional advice needs, such as debt, housing, or family issues, and either provide direct assistance or refer clients to the appropriate internal service.

Older people

Older people in Northumberland are increasingly facing financial hardship, exacerbated by rising living costs, unclaimed benefits, fuel poverty, and social isolation. The county has a significantly higher proportion of residents over 65 than both its regional and national counterparts, making this issue particularly urgent.

CA Northumberland will provide targeted advice and practical support to help older people access financial benefits, reduce energy costs, and improve their well-being. A comprehensive and evidence-based approach, ensuring that vulnerable older people receive tailored, accessible assistance to address fuel poverty effectively. Caseworkers will also act on behalf of clients to challenge energy debts, resolve supplier issues, and dispute benefit decisions. Support will include:

- Benefit entitlement checks & application support
- Energy advice & interventions
- Carbon monoxide awareness
- Referrals to wider support networks
- Outreach, home visits & community engagement



Farming communities

Farming and rural communities face unique challenges, such as isolation, poor health, limited access to services, and lower connectivity. Vulnerable adults and children also live and work on farms. The Farming Community Network (FCN), trusted and well-connected, is launching a pilot project across the North East and Cumbria to:

- Educate farmers on carbon monoxide risks, energy efficiency, tariffs, debt issues, and benefits
- Encourage farmers to register for the Priority Services Register
- Distribute carbon monoxide detectors
- Publish content on the FCN FarmWell website
- Increase NGN's understanding of farming community challenges
- Connect partners with farming communities



Young people

A pilot project in collaboration with Barnardos has been established as a preventative measure to assist young care leavers embarking on their first tenancy, as well as young carers of parents with drug and alcohol addictions.

Fuel poverty is limiting the capacity for young individuals to complete education and training courses. This project aims to support young people transitioning to independent living for the first time, who are struggling to understand and manage their costs. Additionally, those living at home often lack awareness of available support, do not know who to approach for help, and require assistance in overcoming any stigma associated with seeking support.

Young people initially across the Northeast and Yorkshire will receive support and resources to make informed choices and decisions around energy-saving and safe usage. These resources include:

- Benefits advice and income maximisation
- Debt advice
- Assistance with gas and electricity accounts, including fuel debt management
- Guidance on switching suppliers
- Energy efficiency options
- Applications for support and relief
- Tips to reduce water use and information on qualifying for a low-income tariff
- Warm Home Discount
- Priority Services Register information and registration
- Increased carbon monoxide awareness

In addition to the priority areas detailed above, there is also a contingency plan for any unused funds to include additional winter support for Centres for Warmth and an increased allowance for SBtM activities.



Helping projects deliver sustainably

Our activities for 2024/5 have heavily focused on this area, which remains crucial as GD2 concludes. In preparing how we will allocate VCMA funds in GD3, depending on various funding scenarios, we evaluated each project and partner we support to assess current and forecasted delivery levels and outcomes for our customers. We also identified which projects and partners are most at risk of discontinuation if VCMA funding decreases.

We consulted extensively with stakeholders to determine their needs from us. Clear and honest communication emerged as a critical requirement. To address this, we have made sustainability a standing agenda item at our monthly networking calls, during which partners can share ideas about their initiatives and how NGN can provide support. We have kept stakeholders informed about any GD3 developments and committed to early and clear communication once the Draft Determination is published.

Lastly, the theme for our annual 2025 NGN open day is Project and Partner Sustainability. We are bringing together organisations with available funding sources (beyond VCMA), along with colleges, universities, and volunteer networks, to generate ideas for delivering projects more sustainably.



“The more vulnerable people are, the more important it is that the relationships that we have and the partnerships that we have together and separately, are key and long standing.”

Harry Carson, Northern Powergrid



“Talking to people about how they’re using their funding and their service to adapt, is really interesting for us. Northern Gas Networks have been really successful in engaging with people.”

Tori Bradison, Northern Cancer Voices

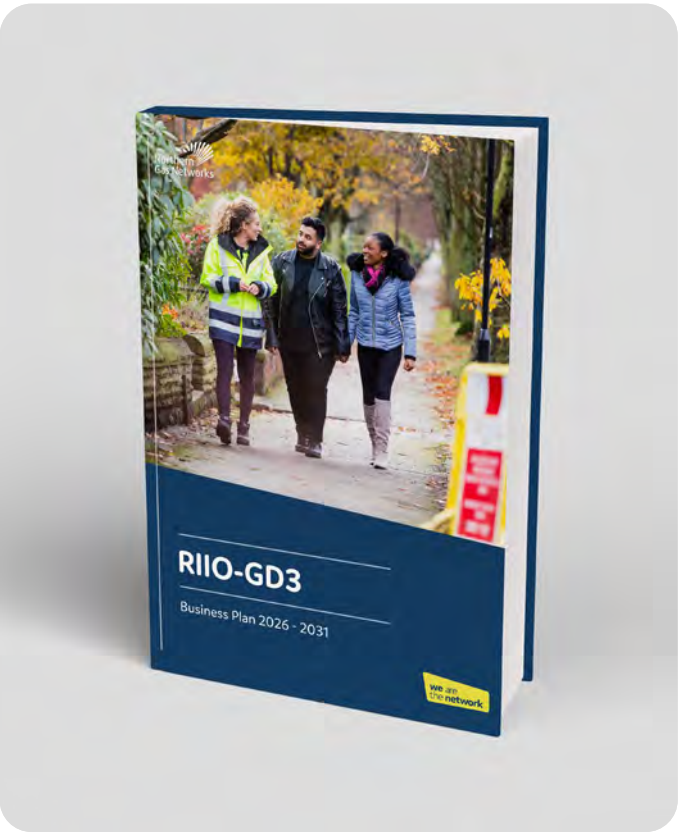
Programme of 25/26 engagement to support VCMA delivery

Date	Workshop topic
13th May 2025 10am to 1pm	Annual Strategic Review and Planning Workshop 2025 - online
10th June 2025 9:30am to 2pm	Supporting Communities Together, NGN Annual Open Day – Bullion Hall, Chester-le-Street, Durham
9th July 2025 9:30am to 3pm	GDN VCMA Showcase event – online
9th September 2025 10am to 12pm	CIVS Hot Topic Workshop 1 – online Enabling Collaboration
16th October 2025 9:30am to 1pm	NGN Annual Stakeholder Conference – Thorpe Park, Leeds LS15 8TU (hybrid event)
11th November 2025 10am to 12pm	CIVS Hot Topic Workshop 2 – online Supporting Health Outcomes
10th February 2026 10am to 12pm	CIVS Hot Topic Workshop 3 – online Inclusive Support Provision
April 2026 - TBC	Annual Strategic Review and Planning Workshop 2026 - online

Getting ready for GD3

Our GD3 Business Plan period runs from April 2026 to March 2031. Throughout 2023 and 2024 we engaged extensively with our stakeholders, listening to their views, and understanding what their priorities/challenges were for the coming years. We triangulated all the feedback that we received to come up with high level themes, and then discussed with them appropriate commitments that we could make.

You can read our full business plan [here](#).



For GD3, co-created with our stakeholders, we have outlined 21 voluntary vulnerability commitments, which either stretch beyond what we have achieved for our customers and communities through GD2, or introduce new areas of focus.

Through February and March 2025, we talked to our stakeholders in a series of bilaterals about getting ready for GD3.

They helped us to prioritise 5 of the 21 commitments that we needed to work on early, and also outlined which ones they thought they could best support with:

Priority area description	Number of Strategic Partners/ Stakeholders pledging to support
Ideas and input about support needed to make projects sustainable	8
Development of a regional collaborative PSR Awareness Strategy	7
Development of a regional collaborative Vulnerability Investment Strategy	3
Development of the NGN Inclusivity Assessment Tool	3
Development of outputs related to our approach to a fair and just transition	8

We now have a clear plan for activity for 2025/6 to help us get ready to hit the ground running from April 2026 onwards. Key to our approach is to make sure that we use existing engagement to work through these areas – stakeholders frequently tell us that we need to be mindful of the time that we ask of them, especially as many of them will be engaged heavily in ED3 engagement activities over the coming twelve to eighteen months.

Work has already begun to work through these 5 priority areas, as we linked the latest CIVS Hot Topic Workshop in March to bring in a discussion on measurable outputs related to energy efficiency advice, as this had been identified by our stakeholders as an area that needed more work to support our ambitions for a just and fair transition to net zero.

An example of how this engagement is already leading to fresh thinking can be seen through plans to evolve the Centres for Warmth programme. This links across two of our GD3 commitments - development of outputs related to our approach to a fair and just transition and development of a regional collaborative Vulnerability Investment Strategy.

Resilient Centres for Warmth

Building on the success of our Centres for Warmth project, we aim to evolve these into Centres for Future Warmth, supporting the transition to net zero in vulnerable communities. Stakeholders have told us that it is vital to work 'with' communities to understand their needs, without overwhelming them with too much change too soon.

If successful, this approach will contribute to community-based education, particularly as we prepare for a transition to a net-zero future. This ensures customers can participate in this transition at a pace and time that suits their circumstances.

Additionally, we are collaborating with Northern Powergrid to enhance community resilience. 'Centres for Resilience' is a Northern Powergrid initiative – a community-based facility providing essential services during power outages or emergencies. These centres offer backup power sources, communication systems, and other critical resources to keep customers connected and safe during crises.

In partnership with Northern Powergrid, NGN is piloting this initiative at our Redcar Centre for Warmth, with plans to expand resilience centres across our network. This approach aims to improve community support during emergencies, contribute to long-term sustainability, and may enable access to potential funding.

"At Northern Powergrid we are constantly looking for new ways to support customers who may experience a power cut. Providing warm, safe and secure places for them whilst we fix the power is key, especially during the cold, winter months. When you bring the strength of Northern Powergrid and Northern Gas Networks together, and we collaborate positively with a shared vision, this makes a huge difference for our customers.

We are looking forward to working with Northern Gas Networks on how we can share their Centre for Warmth spaces to help us look after our mutual customers if a power cut occurs"

Quote from Harry Carson, Customer Vulnerability Advisor, Northern Powergrid (NPg)

We hope that you have found our 2024/25 VCMA report informative and engaging. We very much look forward to working with all our partners and stakeholders through 2025/6, to deliver the best possible outcomes for our customers and communities.



7. Appendices

Appendix 1

Key Performance Outputs 24/25



[Click here to read appendix 1](#)

Appendix 2

Stakeholder Engagement
Overview 24/25



[Click here to read appendix 2](#)

Appendix 3

VCMA Detailed Project Table



[Click here to read appendix 3](#)

Key contacts

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