Cadent

Your Gas Network

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Fresh Energy

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Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)







Contents

Contents 2

Project registration table 3

Problem statement 4

Scope and objectives 4

Targeting vulnerability support 6

Evidence of stakeholder or customer support 6

Why the project is being funded through the VCMA 7

Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria 7

Potential for new learning 9

Monitoring and evaluation 9

Scale of VCMA project and SROI calculations, including NPV 10

Internal governance and project management evidence 10

Eligibility Criteria 11

Project registration table

Project summary	
Project title	**Fresh Energy**
Strategic area	**Tackling Affordability and Fuel Poverty**
Lead partner name	**National Energy Action (NEA)**
Lead GDN(s)	Cadent
Funding GDN(s)	Cadent
New/Updated **(indicate as appropriate)**	New
Date of PEA submission	1st April 2026
Project start and end date	1st April 2026 – 31st March 2028
Project location	National
Project contact	
Name	Phil Burrows
Contact details	Email address: Phil.m.burrows@cadentgas.com
Project partners and third parties involved	
Organisation name	**Role**
National Energy Action (NEA)	To provide advice to individuals experiencing fuel poverty
A Fairer Chance	Ex-offender support
Costs and funding	
Total cost (£k)	Partner Cost: £290,034.45
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£290,034.45
Total BAU vulnerability and CO safety activity baseline allowance funding by activity (£k)	

Problem statement

A third of businesses state that they are unable to address skills gaps in their workforce, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Thinking outside the box about recruitment and exploring new talent pools can help overcome such challenges. One such source of labour is people leaving prison with a conviction. As things stand, only one in seven people finds a job within six months of leaving prison. For women, this situation is exacerbated as women who commit crime are viewed more harshly by society. In a survey of 511 women, 86% cited employment as a problem area, with 51% believing the problem they faced, having a criminal record, was exacerbated by being a woman. Nearly two-thirds (59%) of women leaving prison had experienced domestic abuse at some point in their lives. Providing employment opportunities to women leaving prison is a crucial step towards reducing reoffending rates and helping them reintegrate into society; it is equally important to provide support and resources to help them overcome the challenges they face upon release. This project aims to break down these barriers by providing employment opportunities to women leaving prison with convictions, helping to build up their employment history, increase their income, enhance their life skills, whilst simultaneously equipping them with understanding and knowledge on how to manage energy and provide advice and support to NEA's clients in fuel poverty.

Scope and objectives

Scope:

In partnership with A Fairer Chance, NEA will continue the employment of the two Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) advice line Coordinators recruited in 2024 for a further two-year period. A Fairer Chance will continue to provide wrap-around support based on their individual requirements and needs.

The service begins long before light-touch advice or an appointment with an energy adviser. The WASH advice line Coordinators provide an essential first point of contact for individuals who are often anxious, overwhelmed or in crisis. Staff take the time to listen, reassure and understand the person's full circumstances, building trust and enabling clients to engage effectively with support. This human-centred early engagement prevents escalation, reduces drop-out, and ensures clients receive the right help at the right time.

Once the client feels supported and able to move forward, our staff provide or arrange the following practical assistance:

- checking tariffs for the best deals
- Priority Services Register (information and sign-ups)
- simple hints and tips on how to make a home more energy efficient and warmer
- billing/metering issues
- smart meter advice

- switching opportunities (when appropriate)
- condensation and dampness
- housing disrepair - options and services
- energy company complaints procedure
- CO advice and referrals for CO alarms
- signposting to local and national sources of help to ensure clients are fully supported
- the provision of advice leaflets to support information given
- Warm Home Discount
- pre-payment meter top up vouchers
- ECO (signposting)
- cold weather payments
- Green Homes grants (signposting)
- energy industry trust fund applications (signposting)

In addition to the continued employment of the two WASH advice line Coordinators, NEA wishes to identify, engage and recruit a further FTE to provide further support to NEA's Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) advice line. This will again be a woman who has recently been in prison and released within the last six months.
NEA will provide them with an in-depth induction programme into NEA and appropriate training to help them succeed as part of the WASH team. In addition, this training will support them to be able to also manage their own energy and stay warm in their own homes.
The individuals will also be supported by A Fairer Chance who will provide wrap-around support based on their individual requirements and needs. For example, some may have potentially been out of the employment market for a number of years and need help to utilise their skills and some may need more complex support as they have additional personal issues upon leaving prison.

Objectives:

Provide 4,880 households living in fuel poverty with access to a NEA WASH Coordinator who will provide clients with general advice and triage the clients with complex needs onto further support.
The planned and measurable outcomes for the project are:
Add capacity to a service which provides a single point of contact for people on low incomes or living in vulnerable circumstances to address their energy issues and ensure a customer journey which is easy to engage with and streamlines its approach to make both internal and external communications clear and ensure a client is always provided with holistic advice.

The project aims to provide customers with numerous types of support to achieve the following outcomes:

4,880 clients receive financial and energy advice through a WASH Coordinator. The customers reached stand to benefit from advice around in-home energy usage, carbon monoxide awareness and support with registering on the PSR (if applicable).

Targeting vulnerability support

As of January 2023, more than 12 million people have a criminal record in the UK which is roughly 27% of the working population. The current labour shortages across the UK have made headlines and left businesses crying out for staff. From joining bonuses to bids to engage untapped 'talent pools', the crisis has forced the hand of employers who are now viewing inclusive hiring in a new light[i1]

In March 2024 the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero reported that 36.3% (8.99 million households) spent over 10% of their income (after housing costs) on energy – up from 35.5% in 2023. 11% (2.73 million) in England under the LILEE metric.

The Cadent Energy Diaries identified financial concerns create a tension between living comfortably and living affordably. 61% of the public say that they are anxious about the cost of energy bills, and 51% agree that the increase in energy bills is negatively impacting on every area of their life.[2]

Evidence of stakeholder or customer support

The employment of ex-offenders is a government priority as employment not only reduces costs in terms of unemployment related benefits, but it is also instrumental in reducing reoffending as ex-offenders who gain employment after leaving prison are 9 percentage points less likely to reoffend. Over £14 million has been invested to address the root causes of female offending which includes moving away from abusive relationships, finding work and stable accommodation. Without support it is estimated half of women who have been in prison will go on to re-offend, with a taxpayer bill of £1.7 billion a year.

Stakeholder project design input

In 2024, National Energy Action (NEA), in partnership with A Fairer Chance, and Cadent embarked on a programme of work, Fresh Energy, which recruited two full-time-equivalent posts (three part-time employees) into the charity to deliver energy advice to clients via telephone and online advice lines. The team undertook extensive training in energy advice delivery, confidential case management reporting, expert coaching in telephone advice line protocols, setting professional boundaries, assessing fuel voucher eligibility and shadowed colleagues to develop their skills.

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[1] https://unlock.org.uk/policy-issues/key-facts/
[22] Fair Sustainability - Cadent Gas Ltd

This established a programme of working and collaborative supervision supplied by NEA and A Fairer Chance. Two of the Fresh Energy staff recruited in December 2024 successfully passed their six-month probation period, the third individual did not due to performance issues which had no connection with her offending history.

Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project aligns with two of the objectives of our collaborative vulnerability strategy:

- Help more vulnerable households access energy safeguarding services
- Support our customers' move towards net zero, tailored according to their needs and circumstances.

To achieve our strategic ambition and realise our objectives, we've set four priority delivery areas:

- Providing direct services for customers
- Reducing carbon monoxide harm
- Supporting priority vulnerable groups
- Tackling fuel poverty and affordability

How VCMA funding complements or supplements BAU vulnerability and CO safety activities funded through baseline allowances

This project complements BAU as trusted staff are providing a single point of contact and can engage more effectively with vulnerable individuals. Their process is extremely detailed and covers all aspects of a customer's situation including income and energy advice. During the course of this interaction they will identify clients eligible for BAU-funded support and offer the appropriate service.

Justification for why the project should not be collaborative

The primary aim of this project is to employ females who have unspent criminal records, specifically those who have spent time in custody. These individuals may have experienced complex trauma and need support with maintaining housing, managing and professional relationships including post-release licence conditions. These need to be undertaken with experienced and trusted individuals and as it is still in development the partner is keen to progress slowly. The supporting organisation a Fairer Chance is London based and the option to provide face to face support is preferable at this point.

Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

Project outcomes

The project is split into two parts, the first is two existing helpline staff who were recruited and trained during GD2 and will continue to be employed by NEA. There is an additional post being created but as it is expected they will not be fully operational until early 2027 this is reflected in the targets.

Service(s)	Summary of Service Option 1 Two existing posts	Summary of Service Additional post Recruitment Q3 2026	Expected Number of Customers Reached
PSR conversations	3,904	976	4,880
PSR Registrations	390	97	487
Energy Efficiency advice	3,904	976	4,880
Carbon monoxide awareness	3,904	976	4,880
Total footfall	3,904	976	4,880

Associated actions

NEA will lead delivery of the project working closely with A Fairer Chance, who work with employers, people with convictions and those at risk of offending to remove barriers to jobs and reduce crime and its impact on communities. They help employers recruit from a pool of talent they would not usually have access to, whilst supporting individuals to use their skills and aspirations to find employment and reach financial freedom. They also provide a range of trauma-informed, tailor made, interventions with the end goal of gaining sustainable employment.

Established working and collaborative supervision supplied by NEA and A Fairer Chance will help break the cycle of reoffending through employment.

Success Criteria

Meeting the following criteria will help Cadent determine the success of the project:

- Customers supported under the project report improved comfort and warmth at home.
- Customers supported under the project feel safer at home due to registration on the PSR (where applicable), increased awareness of the signs, symptoms and dangers of carbon monoxide and receiving a carbon monoxide detector (in appropriate circumstances).
- Customers reached through the project are supported with wider referral services where a need is identified as part of NEA's detailed advice calls.
- 4,880 clients will report increased financial well-being from the provision of income and energy advice/support.

Potential for new learning

The initial pilot has been successful in retaining two employees who are now working independently on the helpline, who will continue to do so over the next two years. The continuation of the project will provide an opportunity to understand the challenges and opportunities for a similar approach with other partners and how it could successfully be integrated using the feedback from NEA.

Aligning with and supporting wider vulnerability approaches

This project combines the Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) advice line with a dedicated project supporting the employment of women leaving prison. The Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) advice line provides energy advice, income support and promotes better insulation to individuals in fuel poverty. The coordinators provide a first point of contact for individuals who are often anxious, overwhelmed or in crisis. By taking the time to listen, reassure and understand a person's full circumstances, building trust and enabling clients to engage effectively, it prevents escalation, reduces drop-out and ensures clients receive the right help at the right time.

Individuals leaving prison are disproportionately more likely to experience fuel poverty, housing instability and income insecurity in addition to systemic labour market barriers and financial/energy insecurity. This is more challenging for women. Overcoming barriers to employment, education and housing is paramount to successful integration.

Women leaving prison can empathise with individuals in crisis as they will have experienced some or all of the issues presented. Having been provided with the requisite training they are not only an asset to the team, but they are also providing a secure future for themselves and their families and reducing the possibility of reoffending.

Monitoring and evaluation

Cadent has worked closely with NEA to codesign this project, ensuring it aligns with the delivery of our Vulnerability Strategy and fully meets VCMA governance criteria. The partnership framework includes robust monitoring and evaluation processes to track progress, ensure accountability, and continually improve delivery.

To maintain strong oversight, Cadent will hold quarterly online meetings with the NEA leadership team. These meetings will review achievements, assess challenges, evaluate risks, and capture best practices. This approach ensures any issues are identified and addressed promptly, supporting effective and consistent delivery across the project.

Scale of VCMA project and SROI calculations, including NPV

The SROI for the NEA Fresh Energy project has been calculated using the GDN Rulebook that was produced by working with SIRIO and all the GDNs.

Social value measurement

Total cost*	£269,644.54
Total gross present value	£1,102,573.83
Net Present Value (NPV)	£832,929.29
SROI	£3.09

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

Internal governance and project management evidence

Cadent has worked alongside NEA to co-design this partnership and ensure that it aligns with the delivery of our collaborative Vulnerability Strategy and the VCMA governance criteria.

The SROI for this project has been calculated utilising the information shared by NEA. We have based the SROI on those figures, which has generated a forecast SROI of £3.09 using the GDN Rulebook.

Cadent and NEA will meet quarterly to review outcomes, learn, share best practices, ensure the correct customers are being supported, and address any delivery issues.

GDN	Approver (Name and Role)	Date
Cadent	Amanda Jones Community Partnership Lead	14/04/2026
Cadent	Emma Turnbull Social Programmes Manager	18/05/2026
Cadent	Philip Burrows, Head of Customer Vulnerability and Social Purpose	07/10/2026

Eligibility Criteria

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

Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance servicing

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

Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance repair and replacement

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