Cadent
Your Gas Network

Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

The Witham Hub - Community Centre

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May 2023

Updated June 2025 Lucy Nembaware

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

Section 1 - Eligibility criteria for company specific projects (other than condemned essential gas appliance repair and replacement) In order to qualify as a VCMA project, a project must:	
VCMA Eligibility Criteria	**Criteria Satisfied (Yes/No)**
a) Have a positive, or forecasted positive Social Return on Investment (SROI), including for the gas consumers funding the VCMA project;	**Yes**
b) Either: **i.** Provide support to consumers in vulnerable situations, and relate to energy safeguarding, or **ii.** Provide awareness on the dangers of CO, or **iii.** Reduce the risk of harm caused by CO;	**Yes**
c) Have defined outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these;	**Yes**
d) Go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanism(s) or required through licence obligations; and	**Yes**
e) Not be delivered through other external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including through other government (national, devolved or local) funding.	**Yes**
Section 2 - Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance servicing, repair and replacement projects In order to qualify as a VCMA project, unsafe pipework and essential gas appliance servicing, repair or replacement must meet the following criteria:	
a) A GDN has to isolate and condemn unsafe pipework or an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role;	**N/A**
b) The household cannot afford to service, repair or replace the unsafe pipework or essential gas appliance; and;	**N/A**
c) Sufficient funding is not available from other sources (including national, devolved or local government funding) to fund the unsafe pipework or essential gas appliance servicing, repair or replacement.	**N/A**

Section 3 - Eligibility criteria for collaborative VCMA projects In order to qualify as a collaborative VCMA project, a project must:	
a) Meet the above company specific and boiler repair and replace (if applicable) project eligibility criteria;	**N/A**
b) Have the potential to benefit consumers on the participating networks; and	**N/A**
c) Involve two, or more, gas distribution companies.	**N/A**

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

Information Required	Description
Project Title	The Witham Hub Centre for Warmth
Funding GDN(s)	Cadent
Role of GDN(s) ***For Collaborative VCMA Projects only**	Not applicable - Cadent company-specific project
Date of PEA Submission	May 2023 Updated: June 2025
VCMA Project Contact Name, email and Number	Name: Phil Burrows Title: Head of Customer Vulnerability Social Programme Delivery Email: Phil.m.burrows@cadentgas.com Phone: 07773 545451
Total Cost (£k)	Centre costs: £100,000.00 Project Management costs: £4,000.00 Total Project cost: £104,000.00 Updated June 2025 – additional costs. Centre costs: £39,000.00 Slow cookers: £1,559.04 Leaflets: £1,763.64 Project management cost: £1,692.91 Total: £44,015.59
Total VCMA Funding Required (£k)	£104,000.00 **<u>Updated June 2025</u>** £148,015.59
Problem(s)	The Witham Hub is located in the town of Witham, Essex on Cadent's East Anglia network. With increased domestic fuel costs and unprecedented volatility in the energy market, people on low incomes, including pensioners, people with disabilities and families, face profound challenges keeping their homes warm, dry and conducive to health. [1]In Witham, 4595 households (11.3%) live in fuel poverty and on average 62.6 received support from the main national energy efficiency programme. <u>The Whitham Hub</u> The Witham Hub is a small charity in the town of Witham, Essex. The charity is set up to provide support to local people who are struggling making ends meet, they offer support via a

[1] Witham - National Energy Action (NEA)

	community fridge and a community food support scheme. The centre offers a free food service via a referral scheme working with trusted partners. They run a community café to support our service users with their mental health, social isolation, and to give them a place to run small peer to peer support groups. The centre has two private meeting rooms which are available for low-cost hire. They also work closely with multiple groups to offer many different support services and do lots of work behind the scenes to help those struggling with addiction, domestic violence, signposting and much more. **<u>Updated June 2025</u>** While inflation has eased, many individuals are still facing the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis and many residents are struggling to afford necessities, including those in employment (who would traditionally be viewed as being secure). Witham Hub has seen an increase in demand for support with the founder stating, the local demand for help is "quite scary", especially as Witham has seen an increase in individuals travelling from Braintree to use its services due to the cost-of-living crisis. Due to the Witham hub struggling to meet demand, a second site called Braintree Hub opened in April, where like for like support is available to residents. This project has proven to be successful and driven real change by ensuring that individuals in Witham and Braintree receive essential advice on CO safety, energy efficiency, income maximisation and the PSR. However, for the project to continue and grow, Witham Hub needs the funding and resources provided by Cadent, as Cadent funding is one of the charities main sources of income.
Scope and Objectives	Cadent will provide The Witham Hub with £104,00.00 of VCMA funding to deliver a 2-year Centre for Warmth project. The two-year 2023-2025 agreement replicates the previous project model in other Centres for Warmth, whereby specialist benefits advisors are employed using the VCMA. This service provided vulnerable households with essential financial support and created a very strong SROI. <u>Scope</u> The centre will set up and run events to promote energy efficiency and carbon monoxide safety in the home; this will include providing a carbon monoxide alarm to those who need or do not have one. The centre will aim to ensure that all service users that need to be registered with the Priority Service Register are and that they understand how to access services when any issues arise. The centre will promote this service on their promotion TV media in the Hub to ensure it is at the forefront of the minds of their visitors. The Whitam Community Hub has identified that their service user's often find filling in forms quite difficult and struggle with the jargon that forms have. They would like to provide dedicated staff to be available to assist with the process in a private area of the Hub, someone who will be there and on hand to follow the

	process from start to finish, so there is continuity. The centre feels this will give the service user a more comfortable experience to complete what can be a very daunting process. They will offer a debt consolidation service, helping the service user by assisting them to contact companies and discuss their debts and set up payment plans with the companies. Lastly, they will include both individual and group budgeting sessions, often just understanding where money is being spent can show where savings can potentially be made. One of the most important things that The Whitham Community Hub has identified is that once people start to struggle financially is that their mental health hits rock bottom, they often have people very emotional in the hub and feeling very overwhelmed so they feel having a mental health counsellor available to ensure they have support through difficult situations will give both practical and holistic support which we hope will make the journey to financial stability easier. The centre will set up and area with leaflets to explain how to understand their energy bills and other useful information such as the PSR and carbon monoxide safety advice. The centre will also run workshops around 'Gas safety' in local schools to raise awareness on carbon monoxide. The centre will employ 3 members of staff to be dedicated to: • To promote energy efficiency via energy efficiency events • To identify those who should be registered with the Priority Services Register including adding them to the register. • Holding events to raise awareness on carbon monoxide safety and supplying an CO alarm to those who need them. • Offer support and advice on income maximisation and applying for benefits. • Debt consolidation and budgeting • Mental Health Support • Hold events at the local schools to raise awareness on carbon monoxide. • The centre will require funding to hire a dedicated room for the advice sessions. • The centre will supply Cadent with a quarterly report on numbers attending all advice sessions. The project aims to reach 400 – 500 per annum in the Hub Workshops. They may reach more as the advice workers will be travelling to schools and community events where higher footfall is expected. <u>Objectives</u> Cadent will measure the success of the Centre for Warmth - The Witham Hub Community Centre against the achievement of the following objectives: • To deliver income maximisation/benefits advice to 900 customers over the 2 years.

	• To deliver energy efficiency advice to 900 customers over the 2 years. • To deliver CO advice to 900 customers over the 2 years. • To supply 200 customers with a carbon monoxide alarm over 2 years. • To deliver PSR advice to 900 customers over the 2 years. • To support 400 customers to sign up to the PSR over the 2 years. • To generate a positive social return on investment - see the below relevant section for more details. **Updated June 2025** Cadent will provide Witham Hub with an additional £44,015.59 for a 10-month extension. The funding will enable Witham Hub to deliver the additional services below from their two sites and via outreach. Project Objectives The success of the project will be measured against achieving the additional objectives: • Provide 1,300 individuals with PSR advice via one-to-one or group conversations. • Sign 130 individuals onto the PSR. • Support 300 individuals with income maximisation advice. • Provide 1,000 individuals with CO awareness advice via one-to-one or group conversations. • Provide 50 most-at-risk individuals with CO alarms. • 400 individuals will attend the centre and have access to loneliness and isolation support. In addition to the above, Witham Hub has presented that there are individuals in the communities that they support who would benefit from receiving slow-cooking advice and a free slow cooker. Many individuals fit within the criteria of individuals who would most benefit from the service and resource. The purpose will be to teach individuals how to cook healthy, affordable and energy efficient meals via slow cooker education sessions. Therefore, as a new element of the project, 56 individuals without a slow cooker will be supported with this service.100 individuals will receive slow cooking advice only.
Why the Project is Being Funded Through the VCMA	**We believe that the project meets all the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance eligibility criteria:** **a. Have a positive, or a forecasted positive, Social Return on Investment (SROI) including for the gas consumers funding the VCMA Project:** *The project delivers a positive forecasted social return on investment. This is based on achieving the target reach for income maximisation, registrations to the PSR and education on carbon monoxide. More information can be found in the relevant section below.*

	b. **Either**: i. Provide support to consumers in Vulnerable Situations and relate to energy safeguarding, or, ii. Provide awareness of the dangers of CO, or, iii. Reduce the risk of harm caused by CO. The project delivers services that meet all three elements of this criteria. For example, the specialist advisors will help households maximise their income, enabling residents to afford the cost of heating their home to an adequate level. The project will also raise awareness of the dangers of CO and promote registration to the PSR. c. **Have defined outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these:** *Cadent and The Witham Hub Community Centre have entered into a service agreement that will contain the project objective and actions. Further detail can also be found below.* **d. Go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanism(s) or required through licence obligations, and,** *This method of delivering support to customers in vulnerable situations falls outside of Cadent's BAU activities and other licence conditions.* **e. Not be delivered through other external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including through other government (national, devolved, or local) funding,** *This project will be solely delivered through Cadent's VCMA funding.*
Evidence of Stakeholder/Customer Support	Cadent conducted extensive stakeholder and customer engagement to obtain feedback on its RIIO-GD2 business plans and subsequent Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) delivery. Temperature Checks – we complete periodic 'temperature checks' with a cross section of our customer base, including our Customer Forum. These demonstrate that customers continue to support the key measures that we identified when developing our RIIO-2 plan, with a heightened requirement to support people with the cost-of-living crisis. The Energy Diaries research – through extensive research with customers living in fuel poverty over a period of several months, we then engaged with experts such as Citizen's Advice, NEA and a suite of other charities operating in this space to co-create several additional initiatives that Cadent could offer to its customers. This was one of these initiatives. Charity Partnerships – we have strategic level partnerships in place with around 40 consumer advice organisations and charities. We engage regularly to assess the benefits of existing

	projects and consider options elsewhere, taking the opportunity to benchmark against others and seek to learn. Centres for Warmth – the teams running the centres also fed into the development of this initiative, when considering the successes of the existing centre projects and opportunities for enhancements, based on the specific needs of the customers / households already being supported. Stakeholder feedback – Working with various Stakeholders we can understand the needs of customers living in vulnerable situations across our networks. Regular conversations and check ins with organisations such as Citizens Advice, National Energy Action and Groundwork. These regular check ins allow us to gain feedback on the projects we are or should be supporting and ensuring that the projects are in the best interests of our customers. The guidance we are being given is consistently around supporting customers living in fuel poverty and especially in light of the current energy crisis. Stakeholder feedback – We have sent out questionnaires to organisations we deal with and some that have an interest in the customers we are looking to support, and we have received overwhelming support and confirmation that the projects we are supporting are appropriate and are helping those most at risk. **Updated June 2025** Many of our stakeholders continue to support activities and projects centred around tackling fuel poverty, hand-in hand with the cost-of-living crisis. To this day, the Centres for Warmth project continues to be advocated by many. **Quote from local stakeholders** **Tina, Centre Manager** “We are not funded by any other source for our projects to help our community. Cadent funding means we can continue to support our community when they need it most. We are working with vulnerable people who are often overlooked. We can provide them with support with the funding but also keep them safe and make sure they have a ‘warm space’, know they have food and keep an eye on them generally. We talk to them about the services in their homes to know if the boiler is working, if they have hot water and what type of support they need. Cadent’s funding is not just our lifeline as a charity, it’s the community’s”. **Quote from local service user** Laura Fowle, 45, has used the Witham Hub for the last few months to purchase discounted food. A bookkeeper in London for 19 years, she knows how to handle her money, but her working days were cut from four to three. "I was quite OK before then but now I'm really feeling the pinch - certain months there's less money than I'd hope for," she said.

	"[The hub has made a massive difference - being able to put the heating on, staying warm and healthy and happy, it's just fantastic."
Information Required	**Description**
Outcomes, Associated Actions and Success Criteria	<u>Project Outcomes</u> The VCMA project will be delivered in partnership with The Witham Hub Community Centre and aims to support between 800-1000 customers with home energy, income, and carbon monoxide advice over the duration of the 2-year project. The Centre for Warmth project model relies on the provision of VCMA funding, materials and resource to a community centre located in an area of high deprivation, fuel poverty, and carbon monoxide risk. The increased levels of funding, resource and materials enable the community centre to increase the centre's existing support for customers living in vulnerable situations. The Centre for Warmth Project aims to achieve the following outcomes: • Provide customers with advice on income maximisation and benefit entitlement which individuals will report increased levels of household income. • Provide customers with advice on energy efficiency which will save customers money on their energy bills. • Provide customers with advice on carbon monoxide safety and reduce the risk of harm caused by carbon monoxide. • Provide customers with advice on the PSR. • Assist customers in registering to the PSR to ensure customers will report reduced levels of anxiety in fearing a utility outage. • Tackle loneliness and isolation at the centre by providing support to lonely local residents, ensuring that they can access the community centre and the services it offers. <u>Associated Actions</u> The VCMA funding will be used for: • Employ 3x specialist advice workers to offer advice on income maximisation, benefit entitlement, energy efficiency, carbon monoxide and the PSR. • Assist with the rental of a room that will be dedicated to the project, where advice sessions will be held. • Centre staff will all receive training on the PSR, carbon monoxide safety advice and energy efficiency advice. • Host group sessions on carbon monoxide, the signs and symptoms, and safety advice. • Host group sessions educating customers on the PSR and will help eligible households through the registration process. • Host CO a number of awareness sessions in the local schools every year and out in the community to help raise awareness on carbon monoxide, PSR and energy efficiency advice.

	Success criteria The success of the project will be evaluated against the meeting of the project's objectives. These objectives include: 1. The project will reach 900 customers across the duration of the 2-year project. 2. 900 customers will receive in-depth 1-2-1 advice on income maximisation advice. 3. 900 customers will receive energy efficiency advice. 4 900 customers will receive advice on carbon monoxide awareness. 5. 200 customers will receive a carbon monoxide alarm. 6. 900 customers will receive advice on the PSR. 7. 300 customers will be supported signing onto the PSR register. 8. 900 customers will attend the sessions and activities to help alleviate loneliness and isolation. **Updated June 2025** The services listed below will be provided via two Centres for Warmth, Witham Hub and Braintree Hub. The advisers employed via the project and volunteers will deliver services and activities to address all relevant vulnerabilities experienced by members of the community in Witham and neighbouring Braintree. Although support is expanding to the Braintree Hub, the staff allocation remains the same, which is reflected in the project reach. Associated Actions Cadent will continue to provide the funding, resources and training required to support Witham Hub for an additional 10 months. This will ensure the successful continuation of the Centre for Warmth project. Witham Hub will carry forward successful elements of the project, successfully deliver support from the new Braintree Hub and incorporate slow cooker education into their project deliverables. Success Criteria The success of the extension will be measured against achieving the additional objectives: • Provide 1,300 individuals with PSR advice via one-to-one or group conversations. • Sign 130 individuals onto the PSR. • Support 300 individuals with income maximisation advice. • Provide 1,000 individuals with CO awareness advice via one-to-one or group conversations. • Provide 50 most-at-risk individuals with CO alarms. • 56 individuals without a slow cooker will receive one for free and will receive slow cooking advice.100 individuals with slow cooking advice only. • 400 individuals will attend the centres and have access to loneliness and isolation support and 150 will report on feeling alleviated in loneliness. These figures are included in the SROI calculation below.

Project Partners and Third Parties Involved	Cadent and The Witham Hub Community Centre
Potential for New Learning	Since the project began in April 2021 Cadent has come to realise that every area/town seems to be suffering with the same problems. Fuel poverty, unemployment, low wages, and the cost-of-living crisis. We have realised that by partnering with these centres, Cadent are in a better position to reach many more vulnerable customers than we would alone. The reason for this is that the people who work in the centres are trusted by the community. Alongside these, each area is also dealing with specific issues. Cadent has brought the centres together on a forum in order for them to share ideas, best practice and resources. This forum has helped to forge links with centres, which were not previously there, and acts as a support network. This takes place online every six months and is proving really beneficial to all the centres involved. **<u>Updated June 2025</u>** The centres are under continuous pressure to meet the growing demands to support with many different community needs, especially as local authorities' resources dwindle. Therefore, by understanding the changing and continuing needs of different communities, Cadent can learn how to best support them with overcoming socioeconomic challenges. In turn, it can also support cross network learning. Where possible, Cadent will continue to listen to their partners to try to improve the support and services provided to vulnerable customers, as we have done with the extension model by ensuring the funding is more flexible to meet each centre's needs.
Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations	<u>The scale of the VCMA Project</u> Cadent will invest £104,000.00 in partnership with The Witham Hub Community Centre over 2 years. The project will support an average of 900 households with a range of services. The project will benefit households in close proximity to the community centre, and those in the wider area through the specialist advisors and community support workers. Total investment= £104,00.00 <u>SROI Calculations</u> • 900 customers supported with benefits and debt advice = £1,545,399.00 • 900 customers supported with energy efficiency advice = £330,993.00 • 900 customers advised on CO= £7,857.00 • 300 PSR sign-ups= £43,167.00

	• 900 tackle social isolation= £124,800.00 (for 2x a year only as the risk of experiencing loneliness and isolation can increase again after the project stops delivering support) 5-year gross present value= £2,052,216.00 1-year gross present value= £447,883.20 5-year net social return on investment = £1,948,216.00 1-year Social Return on Investment = £395,883.20 SROI: £1:19 The above calculations have been calculations by SIA Partners. <u>The Cost of Loneliness</u> The Centre for Warmth project will reach customers living in urban areas of Cadent's network. [2]BBC report found that 46% of England's urban population are aged 65 or over. [3]One-fourth of the population aged 65 years and older reported feelings of loneliness. [4]Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology reported a net present value of £6,000 for people who reported being lonely most of the time. This figure was across a 10-year period and equates to £600 per annum. This research concluded that older people who feel lonely are at greater risk of developing conditions such as dementia and depression. [5]The health foundation reported that 21% of older people who live alone, or face feelings of loneliness visit their GP at least once a month. This places pressure on front-line services since many people who experience loneliness think of their GP as someone they can relate to and who will listen to them, engaging in an open, friendly dialogue. The centres For Warmth project aims to reach 900 customers. 46% of which will be aged 65 and over.

[2] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43316697

[3] https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html#:~:text=Older%20adults%20are%20at%20increased,the%20amount%20of%20social%20contact.

[4] https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s00127-019-01733-7.pdf

[5] https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/news/older-people-living-alone-are-50-more-likely-to-visit-ae-than-those-who-live-with

	[6]Campaign to end loneliness reported that over 700,000 people aged 65 and over are experiencing feelings of loneliness. 46% of this age group lives in urban areas which equates to 322,000 people. Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology research suggest a potential saving of £600 per annum for each older customer supported that was previously experiencing feelings of loneliness. The Centre for Warmth project will run for 2 years, equating to a saving of £1,200 per customer. This equates to an overall benefit of £: £124,800.00 for 2x year only as the risk of experiencing loneliness and isolation can increase again after the project stops delivering support. 1. 900 customers using the centre. 2. 46% of the population is over 65 = 414 customers 3. 25% of 414 people are lonely with health conditions = 103.5 people 104 people x £1200 (£600 per annum) = £124,800.00 **Updated June 2025** Cadent will invest a further £44,015.59 in partnership with Witham Hub, to support individuals in vulnerable situations within Witham and Braintree. Overall, Cadent will invest £148,015.59 over the 34-month project duration. • 1,200 individuals will receive income maximisation advice = £2,060,532.00 • 1,000 individuals will receive energy efficiency advice = £367,770.00 • 1,900 individuals will receive advice on CO = £16,587.00 • 530 individuals will be registered to the PSR = £76,261.70 • 56 individuals will receive a slow cooker and advice on cooking healthier meals = £13,239.52 • 150 individuals will be alleviated from loneliness and isolation = £255,000.00 Five-year gross present value = £2,789,390.22 One-year gross present value = £569,278.04 Five-year net present value = £2,641,374.63 One-year net present value = £517,278.04 SROI Ratio: £1:18

[6] https://campaigntoendloneliness.org/guidance/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/StatisticsGFLA.pdf

VCMA Project Start and End Date	Start Date June 2023 End Date May 2025 **<u>Updated June 2025</u>** Start date: 01/06/2023 End date: 31/03/2026
Geographical Area	The project will be delivered in Cadent's East Angelia network. Supporting the communities located in Witham, Essex.
Remaining Amount in the Allowance at Time of Registration	

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

In order to ensure that a VCMA project is registered in accordance with the Ofgem VCMA governance document (incl. project eligibility assessment), the below table should be completed as part of the project registration process.	
Stage 1: Sustainability and Social Purpose Team PEA Peer Review	
Date Immediate Team Peer Review Completed:18/05/2023 Completed:20/11/2025	Review Completed By: Amanda Jones Review Completed By: Emma Turnbull
Stage 2: Sustainability and Social Purpose Team Management Review	
Date Management Review Completed:22/05/2023 & 20/11/2025	Review Completed By: Phil Burrows
Step 3: Director of Sustainability & Social Purpose Sign-Off: Mark Belmega	
Director of Sustainability and Social Purpose Sign-Off Date:15/03/2024	
Step 4: Upload PEA Document to the Website & Notification Email Sent to Ofgem (vcma@ofgem.gov.uk)	
Date that PEA Document Uploaded to the Website: March 2024 / December 2025	
Date that Notification Email Sent to Ofgem: March 2024 / December 2025	