

# Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)

## Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA) *Centres for Warmth – Ronkswood*

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*Updated December 2024*



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

| <b>Section 1 - Eligibility criteria for company-specific projects (other than condemned essential gas appliance repair and replacement)</b>   |                                    |
|---|------------------------------------|
| To qualify as a VCMA project, a project must:   |                                    |
| <b>VCMA Eligibility Criteria</b>  | <b>Criteria Satisfied (Yes/No)</b> |
| a) Have a positive or forecasted positive Social Return on Investment (SROI), including for the gas consumers funding the VCMA project.   | Yes                                |
| b) Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Provide support to consumers in vulnerable situations and relate to energy safeguarding or</li> <li>ii. Provide awareness of the dangers of CO or</li> <li>iii. Reduce the risk of harm caused by CO.</li> </ul> | Yes                                |
| c) Have defined outcomes and the actions associated with achieving these.   | Yes                                |
| d) Go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanism(s) or required through license obligations and  | Yes                                |
| e) Not be delivered through external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including other government (national, devolved, or local) funding.   | Yes                                |
| <b>Section 2 - Eligibility criteria for company-specific essential gas appliance servicing, repair, and replacement projects</b>  |                                    |
| 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.   | N/A                                |
| c) Sufficient funding is unavailable from other sources (including national, devolved, or local government funding) to fund unsafe pipework or essential gas appliance servicing, repair, or replacement.   | N/A                                |
| <b>Section 3 - Eligibility criteria for collaborative VCMA projects</b>   |                                    |
| 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   | Ronkswood Centre for Warmth – Six centres  |
| Funding GDN(s)  | Cadent   |
| Role of GDN(s)<br>*For Collaborative VCMA Projects only | Not applicable - Cadent specific project   |
| Date of PEA Submission                                  | June 2022<br><br><b>Updated December 2024</b>  |
| VCMA Project Contact Name, email, and Number            | Name: Phil Burrows,<br>Email: phil.m.burrows@cadentgas.com<br>Number: 07773 545451   |
| Total Cost (£k)   | £185,480.05<br><b>Updated December 2024</b><br>Additional costs:<br>Centre costs: £217,270.00<br>Slow cookers: £8,352.00<br>Leaflets: £1,763.64<br>Project management cost 4%: £9,095.43<br><br>Total: £236,481.07   |
| Total VCMA Funding Required (£k)                        | £174,584.90<br>£6,504.00 (based on distributing 20 CO alarms per month @ £13.55)<br>Project management costs £4,391.15<br>Total – £185,480.05<br><br><b>Updated December 2024</b><br><br>Updated Total: £421,961.12  |
| Problem(s)  | Ronkswood is located on Cadent's West Midlands network, has high levels of deprivation, and is one of the most deprived areas in Worcester.<br><br>High levels of deprivation can and are often linked to broader issues such as fuel poverty, increased carbon monoxide risk, and financial hardship.<br><br><u>Unemployment</u><br><br>According to Labour market indicators, working-aged people living in the most deprived areas are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as the national average. Furthermore, the unemployment rate in the top decile of IMD areas is 17%, compared with an average of 8% across England (and 4% in the least deprived areas).<br><br><u>Fuel poverty</u> |

Statistics suggest that a higher percentage of people living in areas of high deprivation experience unemployment and have a lower income.

These households are more at risk of fuel poverty, as they may not have enough income to heat their homes adequately. They are more likely to turn their heating off or down, resulting in cold, damp living conditions and an increased risk of suffering from associated illnesses such as respiratory issues, high blood pressure, and depression/anxiety.

Many industry observers predict that national fuel poverty rates will rise significantly over the year ahead due to increases in the energy price cap and broader challenges with the cost of living.

### Debt

According to the Citizens Advice Bureau, households in the lowest income group are three times more likely to be in debt, with a debt amounting to up to six months' worth of income. Additionally, customers who rent are twice as likely as those with a mortgage to owe more than six months' pay.

When factoring in unemployment, low income, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental health, the chances of people being in debt are significantly higher. These people either do not have access to or believe there is a stigma to seeking debt advice.

### Risk of exposure to carbon monoxide and levels of deprivation

Around 40 people living in the UK die from carbon monoxide poisoning each year. An additional 4,000 people attend accidents and emergencies each year due to carbon monoxide, and 200 people are left hospitalised.

Fuel poverty and high household debt can influence a customer's risk of exposure to carbon monoxide. An unavailability of household income can mean that many customers do not have the means to regularly service their gas appliances and/or purchase audible carbon monoxide alarms.

### Updated December 2024

The project's ongoing success has led to significant growth and increased interest within the community. This heightened engagement presents an opportunity to expand the current initiative, allowing the Ronkswood and Worcester Community Trust to manage more appointments effectively.

Over the past two years, the number of individuals seeking assistance has seen a noticeable rise as they navigate various everyday challenges. The demand for guidance on benefits and energy efficiency measures is steadily increasing, and the closure of Age UK Hereford and Worcestershire has only heightened this demand.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Nearly 100 Age UK Herefordshire & Worcestershire staff facing redundancy - BBC News](#)

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|                                    | <p>The rising cost of living has forced many households to cut back on essential items, particularly affecting low-income families. It is common for adults to skip meals to provide for their children or hesitate to use their heating systems due to financial worries. Additionally, older adults often experience anxiety about their heating usage, even when necessary for comfort and well-being. The social consequences of such economic hardship can be profound, leading to family stress, negative impacts on social and cultural engagement, and increased rates of crime and victimisation.</p>   |
| <p><b>Scope and Objectives</b></p> | <p><u>Project scope</u></p> <p>Cadent will provide Ronkswood Community Centre with <b>£185,480.05</b> of VCMA funding over 2 years to enable the delivery.</p> <p>The centre will use the funding to provide services to residents in vulnerable situations.</p> <p>These services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver support to residents by issuing advice, including home energy efficiency, debt management, benefit entitlement checks/applications, and gas safety.</li> <li>• The delivery of slow cooking classes designed to promote slow cooking as an affordable, energy-efficient, and healthy method of feeding a family.</li> <li>• Signing up appropriate attendees to the PSR.</li> <li>• The delivery of Carbon monoxide safety advice and, where appropriate, alarms.</li> <li>• Deliver general gas safety advice.</li> </ul> <p>The project aims to reach approximately 4,000 people over the initial 24-month project. This total reach (some people will receive more than one service) will be divided between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1,220 income maximisation/debt support.</li> <li>• 720 energy efficiency advice.</li> <li>• 2000 carbon monoxide awareness.</li> <li>• Issue 480 CO alarms</li> <li>• 2000 PSR sign-ups.</li> <li>• 80 - 100 customers receiving advice on slow cooking.</li> </ul> <p><u>Project objectives</u></p> <p>The project contains a series of objectives that success will be measured:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To support customers across the project area living in isolation, fuel poverty, and at risk of exposure to carbon monoxide.</li> <li>• To deliver income maximisation/home energy efficiency advice to approximately 1,940 households.</li> </ul> |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To deliver slow cooking awareness sessions to approximately 90 people.</li> <li>• To encourage and support eligible customers in signing up for the PSR, we forecast that approximately 2,000 customers will register through this project.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Updated December 2024</u></b></p> <p>Cadent will provide Ronkswood with an additional £236,481.07 for a 16-month extension. This funding will enable the six community centres to offer additional services as listed below.</p> <p><b><u>Project Objectives</u></b><br/>The success of the project will be measured by achieving the additional objectives below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver PSR advice to 1,250 individuals.</li> <li>• Register 125 individuals to the PSR.</li> <li>• Provide energy efficiency advice to 1,250 individuals via one-on-one or group conversations.</li> <li>• Provide 1,250 individuals with income maximisation services.</li> <li>• Provide 300 slow cookers at dedicated events and as individual needs emerge.</li> <li>• Provide one-on-one carbon monoxide awareness conversations to 1,250 individuals.</li> <li>• Distribute 200 carbon monoxide alarms.</li> <li>• 143 individuals will attend the centre and converse with others, alleviating loneliness and isolation.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Why the Project is Being Funded Through the VCMA</b></p> | <p>Cadent believes that this project meets all the required VCMA eligibility criteria.</p> <p><b>a. The project is forecasted to have a positive SROI. Please see the relevant section for more information.</b></p> <p><i>We believe this project has the deliverables necessary to create a positive social return on investment—see the section below for more details.</i></p> <p><b>b. The project will either:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>i. Provide support to consumers in vulnerable situations and relate to energy safeguarding or</b></li> <li><b>ii. Provide awareness of the dangers of CO or</b></li> <li><b>iii. Reduce the risk of harm caused by CO.</b></li> </ul> <p><i>The project will support customers living in vulnerable situations through energy efficiency advice and income maximisation. It will also educate customers on the dangers of CO and issue audible alarms to particularly at-risk households.</i></p> <p><b>c. The project has defined outcomes and the actions associated with achieving them.</b></p>   |

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|  | <p><i>This project has clearly defined outcomes and associated outcomes, the meeting of which will quantify success. Further information on the project's outcomes and associated actions can be found in the relevant section below.</i></p> <p><b>d. The project goes beyond the activities funded through other price control mechanisms or required by license obligations.</b></p> <p><i>The method of delivering support to customers living in vulnerable situations is innovative, as it utilises partnerships with key community stakeholders. This will allow Cadent to distribute essential advice to one of the customer groups that has been historically difficult to engage.</i></p> <p><b>e. Not be delivered through other external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including other government (national, devolved, or local) funding.</b></p> <p><i>This project will be delivered solely through Cadent's VCMA funding.</i></p>  |
| <p><b>Evidence of Stakeholder/Customer Support</b></p> | <p>Cadent conducted extensive stakeholder and customer research in May 2022 after completing RIIO-GD2 year one. The study aimed to assess customer/stakeholder opinion on Cadent's allocation of VCMA spend and gain insight into where we should direct VCMA funding in the future.</p> <p>61% of stakeholders (the highest proportion by individual category) supported Cadent's increasing its VCMA allocation for projects to tackle fuel poverty.</p> <p>The Ronkswood Centre for Warmth project targets fuel poverty by offering energy/income advice to at-risk households.</p> <p>Cadent's <sup>2</sup>The Independent Customer Engagement Group report for its RIIO-GD2 business plans contains feedback on various proposals, including Cadent's ambitions for tackling fuel poverty.</p> <p>The report supported Cadent's holistic approach to tackling fuel poverty, which involves and providing a household with a combination of services and advice.</p> <p>The Customer engagement group recognised the need for a comprehensive approach that supports a household with its fuel prices (FPNES), energy efficiency (advice/repair and replacement), and household income (income maximisation).</p> <p>The Centre for Warmth's partnership with Ronkswood Community Centre will allow Cadent to apply an integrated approach to supporting fuel-poor households. Residents will receive services, such as energy advice and benefit entitlement checks, designed to increase household income and help them better manage their energy.</p> |

<sup>2</sup> <https://cadentgas.com/nggdwsdev/media/Downloads/business-plan/Cadent-CEG-report-with-appendices.pdf>

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|                                    | <p>Cadent sought feedback from the national rural communities' charity ACRE on our proposals, mainly on ensuring that rural and semi-rural communities benefit from Cadent's management of the VCMA.</p> <p>ACRE supported Cadent's strategy of using projects that promote togetherness in rural and semi-rural communities. The charity also supported Cadent's strategy of tackling isolation and fuel poverty and promoting awareness of carbon monoxide, recognising these as essential issues in communities.</p> <p>Although parts of Worcester are urban, many Ronkswood Community Centre clients live in surrounding rural/semi-rural communities. Some of these communities lack employment opportunities, have expensive fuel (e.g., LPG/oil, etc.), and have poor transport infrastructure. The Centre for Warmth project will support rural/semi-rural households by maximising their income and helping them manage their home energy better.</p> <p><b><u>Updated December 2024</u></b></p> <p>Department for Energy Security and Net Zero found that 13% of households were fuel-poor in 2023; that is 3.17 million households. The average fuel poverty gap of £417, up from £348 in 2022 in real terms<sup>3</sup>.</p> <p>Households in fuel poverty depend on the interaction of key drivers, including energy efficiency measures and income maximisation. Energy efficiency measures lifted 112,000 households out of fuel poverty between 2022 and 2023. Due to income maximisation, low-income households grew faster than the median income in 2023, reducing fuel poverty. Rising housing costs partially offset this. In 2023, energy prices rose, moving 28,000 households into fuel poverty.<sup>4</sup></p> <p><b>Quote from Ronkswood Project Co-ordinator:</b></p> <p>"We are delivering Cadent support with three staff members, which has been running since Jan 23. There has been an influx of referrals over and above what was expected related to debt, energy, and housing. The drop-in sessions have increased to include sessions at local schools, which will increase further into 2024 -2025. This is known to us through conversations that have taken place with the local schools who have identified new parents to the school who need support."</p> <p>"Additional support for reducing isolation and targeting other members of the community who require debt, energy, and finance support. As we have run the slow cooker program, this has reached the deeper community, and more people have been able to access Cadent support than would normally."</p> |
| <p><b>Information Required</b></p> | <p><b>Description</b></p>   |

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fuel-poverty-factsheet-2024>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fuel-poverty-factsheet-2024>

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| <p><b>Outcomes, Associated Actions, and Success Criteria</b></p> | <p><u>Project outcomes</u></p> <p>The VCMA project will be delivered in partnership with Ronkswood Community Centre and aims to support approximately 4,000 residents with energy/safety/loneliness issues across an initial 24-month project period.</p> <p>The Ronkswood Community Centre for Warmth project aims to achieve the following outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support and advice to customers on numerous topics, including benefit entitlement checks, homelessness, energy advice, fuel bank vouchers, income maximisation, and mental health support.</li> <li>• Provide residents with slow cooking classes to promote affordability, efficiency, and health benefits.</li> <li>• Provide support to lonely residents, ensuring they can access the community centre and its services.</li> <li>• Provide residents with energy efficiency advice, carbon monoxide awareness, and general gas safety.</li> </ul> <p><u>Associated actions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cadent's funding will be used to employ and train two community advisors. The advisors will have the skills to provide services aimed at tackling fuel poverty, provide support on energy efficiency measures, assist with debt consolidation, and deliver benefit entitlement checks. The advisors will also be skilled at providing awareness of the dangers, signs, and symptoms of CO and facilitating community activities that support lonely and isolated residents.</li> <li>• Ronkswood Community Centre will deliver slow-cooking classes that promote affordable, healthy, and efficient cooking. Participants will receive slow cookers free of charge.</li> <li>• Cadent will provide funding for the additional staff members, cooking classes, and ingredients, as well as providing slow cookers and CO alarms.</li> </ul> <p><u>Success criteria</u></p> <p>The project's success will be evaluated against meeting the project's objectives. These objectives include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The project will reach approximately 4,000 customers over 24 months. Customers will be engaged through various methods, including 1-2-1 sessions, home visits, or community centre drop-in clinics.</li> <li>2. 80 - 100 residents will receive support in using slow cookers as affordable, efficient, and healthy cooking methods.</li> <li>3. 1,500 customers will attend significant quarterly community engagement events.</li> <li>4. Approximately 2,000 people will sign up for the PSR.</li> </ol> <p>In addition to aiming to reach a target number of customers, Cadent and Ronkswood Community Centre will review the project's qualitative benefits/indicators as part of the final evaluation.</p> |
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Meeting the below indicators will help Cadent determine the success of the project:

- Customers will realise increases in household income by ensuring they are claiming the benefits they are entitled to.
- Homeless residents are supported with financial, well-being and safety advice.
- Customers will report a decrease in anxiety and stress due to receiving support with home energy, financial and broader issues.
- Customers can utilise slow cooking to make affordable and healthy meals whilst reducing their energy and food bills.
- Isolated community members will report improved mental well-being through experiencing lower feelings of loneliness.
- Customers will report an increased awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide and an increased feeling of safety at home.

### **Updated December 2024**

The services listed below will be provided via six Centres for Warmth. Ronkswood Community outreach workers will deliver services and activities to address all the vulnerabilities experienced by people within the community covering the full demographic.

### **Associated Actions**

- Ronkswood will maintain a total of six Centres for Warmth across Worcester.
- Cadent will continue to fund three full-time staff members and a project coordinator.
- Cadent will provide Ronkswood staff members and volunteers with refresher training on CO, PSR, and energy efficiency advice.
- Cadent will continue providing Ronkswood with materials to aid the project's delivery. These materials will include leaflets, CO alarms, and slow cookers.
- Ronkswood will continue to increase the use of slow cookers and slow cooking lessons. The centre will design and coordinate these and deliver them through the Snack and Chat program. This will help the local community get advice on cooking healthy, low-cost meals and allow individuals to cook more energy efficiently.
- Ronkswood will continue to run various sessions for individuals attending the centre to access advice and support. These will be a combination of one-to-one appointments and group sessions.

### **Success Criteria**

The success of the extension will be measured against achieving the additional objectives:

- Deliver PSR advice to 1,250 individuals.
- Register 125 individuals onto the PSR.

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|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide energy efficiency advice to 1,250 individuals via one-on-one or group conversations.</li> <li>• Provide 1,250 individuals with income maximisation services.</li> <li>• Provide 300 slow cookers at dedicated events and as individual needs emerge.</li> <li>• Provide one-on-one carbon monoxide awareness conversations to 1,250 individuals.</li> <li>• Distribute 200 carbon monoxide alarms.</li> <li>• 143 individuals will attend the centre and converse with others, alleviating loneliness and isolation.</li> </ul> <p>These figures are included in the SROI calculation below.</p>  |
| <p><b>Project Partners and Third Parties Involved</b></p>     | <p>Ronkswood Community Centre</p>  |
| <p><b>Potential for New Learning</b></p>                      | <p>The Ronkswood Community Centre for Warmth project offers many potential areas of learning that Cadent can adopt for other VCMA-funded projects in RIIO-GD2.</p> <p>One of the main rationales behind funding the project is the number of residents living in vulnerable situations and fuel poverty. The centres also focus on supporting isolated community members, an area that previous Cadent projects had not directly focused on. This project will combine the VCMA-focused services of CO education and energy efficiency advice with activities that support the mental well-being of lonely residents. This will provide Cadent with learning on the effectiveness of combining both types of support and the best method(s) of delivering it.</p> <p>When assessing options for VCMA projects, we considered the effectiveness of directly engaging with end customers (rather than using a project partner). This project will provide insight into the effectiveness of working with community stakeholders such as Ronkswood Community Centre. These stakeholders are trusted members of communities, and Cadent's partnerships with them allow us to engage previously difficult-to-reach customers with VCMA-funded services. The collaboration with Ronkswood Community Centre will also provide Cadent with learning about customers' receptiveness to support from Gas Distribution Networks amid an energy crisis. Some customers may be unaware of the industry's structure between suppliers, shippers, and GDNs, and the project will offer good learning on customer's attitudes towards support provided by energy companies.</p> <p><b><u>Updated December 2024</u></b></p> <p>This vital support will continue to enable the centre to address fuel and food insecurity, ensure that people are claiming all they are entitled to, and continue to support people in whatever way they need.</p> <p>Cadent will continue to listen to the centre's feedback as we have done with the extension model by ensuring the funding is more flexible to meet each centre's needs.</p> |
| <p><b>The scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations</b></p> | <p><b><u>The scale of the VCMA project</u></b></p>   |

The Ronkswood Centre for Warmth project will deliver support for an initial 24-month duration and focus on providing advice to approximately 4,000 customers.

#### Social return on investment calculations

- 1,220 income maximisation/debt support
- 720 energy efficiency advice
- 2,000 carbon monoxide awareness.
- 2,000 PSR sign ups
- 80 - 100 customers receiving advice on slow cooking
  
- Forecasted 5-year social return on investment = £2,664,904.07(gross)
- Investment = **£185,480.00**
- Forecasted 5-year social return £2,470,424.07 (net)
- Forecasted 5-year gross present value from the issuing energy advice = £264,794.40
- Forecasted 5-year gross present value from income maximisation = £2,094,874.20
- Forecasted 5-year gross present value from providing customers with CO awareness = £17,455.47
- Forecasted 5-year gross present value from registering customers to the PSR = £287,780.00
- SROI Ratio: £1: £13

***The SROI calculations based on data provided by SIA partners are conservative. They also omit the slow-pot cooking SROI.***

#### **Updated December 2024**

Cadent will invest a further £236,481.07 in partnership with Ronkswood Community Centres.

For the entire duration of the project, including the original and extension of the project, Cadent will invest £421,961.12 over 40 months.

- 2,470 individuals will receive income maximisation advice = £4,241,261.70
- 1,970 individuals will receive energy efficiency advice = £724,506.90
- 3,250 individuals will receive advice on CO = £28,372.50
- 2,125 individuals will be registered to the PSR = £305,766.25
- 390 individuals will receive a slow cooker and advice on cooking healthier meals = £92,203.80
- 603 individuals will alleviate loneliness = £1,206,000.00

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|  | <p>Five-year gross present value = £6,598,111.15<br/>One-year gross present value = £1,440,222.23</p> <p>Five-year net present value = £6,176,150.03<br/>One-year net present value = £1,352,172.58</p> <p>SROI Ratio: £1:15</p> |
| <b>VCMA Project Start and End Date</b> | <p>Project start date: 01/12/2022<br/>Project completion date: 30/11/2024</p> <p><b><u>Updated December 2024</u></b></p> <p>Project Start Date: 01/12/2024<br/>Project Completion Date: 31/03/2026</p>                           |
| <b>Geographical Area</b>               | <p>The project will be delivered to communities in and around the Ronkswood area of Worcester in our West Midlands Network.</p>  |

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

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|--|---|
| <p>The table below should be completed as part of the project registration process to ensure that a VCMA project is registered by the Ofgem VCMA governance document (including project eligibility assessment).</p> |   |
| <p>Stage 1: Sustainability and Social PEA Peer Review</p>  |   |
| <p>Date Immediate Team Peer Review Completed:<br/>13/01/2023</p>   | <p>Review Completed By: Emma Turnbull</p>   |
| <p>Stage 2: Sustainability and Social Purpose Team Management Review</p>   |   |
| <p>Data Management Review Completed:<br/>13/01/2023</p>  | <p>Review Completed By:<br/>Guv Dosanjh</p> |
| <p>Step 3: Director of Customer Sustainability and Social Purpose Sign-Off: Phil Burrows</p>   |   |
| <p>Director Sign-Off Date; 22/01/2025</p>  |   |
| <p>Step 4: Upload the PEA Document to the Website &amp; a Notification Email to Ofgem (vcma@ofgem.gov.uk)</p>  |   |
| <p>Date that PEA Document Uploaded to the Website: March 2025</p>  |   |
| <p>Date that Notification Email Sent to Ofgem: March 2025</p>  |   |