A blue and orange logo

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

**Do you agree with our proposed design of the VCMA UIOLI mechanism?**

I am writing on behalf of the Broomhall (Sheffield) Centre for Warmth which has been funded by Cadent through the VCMA UIOLI since July 2023.

Firstly we are relieved that you are now proposing to provide funding at or near to the levels proposed by the GDNs instead of reducing it. The reality in our area is that the need for this service is increasing not reducing. Energy costs continue to rise while we experience ever more clients struggling with their basic living costs.

There is a significant overlap between users of our food bank, lunch club, warm/welcome space and other drop-in sessions and the service provided by the Centre for Warmth. This reflects the fact that more people are in fuel poverty than ever with the industry suggesting that fuel poverty is increasing this year by over 11%.

We are concerned that OfGem is at times in this proposal tending to see people and needs in multiple silos rather than as having interrelated and shared needs. This is reflected in two details within the proposal although in you have acknowledged the need for some integration.

The first area is proposing that CO activity moves from VCMA to BAU. While we agree it should be part of BAU work we fear that the approach could result in the advice not reaching only the vulnerable, i.e. those who need it most. People with language difficulties (many of our users have very limited English) or other major financial, physical and mental health or personal needs do not respond to generalised communications. They tend to open up and accept help in the context of a trusted relationship, so are massively benefiting from the group sessions and individual appointments with the Centre for Warmth workers. We would therefore encourage you to welcome more integrated activity between generalist and specialist CO awareness activity across the two funding areas.

The second area is broader. Put simply, the people who come to us for support struggle with multiple issues, very rarely with just fuel poverty. Our partnership with Sheffield Citizens Advice (SCA) and our employment of one worker with substantial experience of helping people into employment has enabled us to provide a holistic approach to their issues. In para 3.133 you reference concern that VCMA projects should focus on gas related activity. Our experience shows that vulnerable clients always see gas as part of their overall problems, never as isolated concerns. For effectiveness, and basic credibility with our community, we need to respond. We have not duplicated but have integrated with the other services the Broomhall Centre provides and with SCA and increasingly with other agencies to ensure that each can play its part effectively. Again we welcome your proposal to allow some joint working and would support you encouraging it further.

Pete Sacker

Secretary

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