

Highland Affordable Warmth – New Start

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	
Date of PEA submission:	03 September 2021
Project contact name:	Linda Spence
Project contact number/email:	linda.spence@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	*provided separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	

1 Problem(s)

This should outline the problem(s) which is/are being addressed by the VCMA Project.

High fuel and food poverty levels

The Highlands has some of the highest fuel poverty rates in the UK: 32% of people are affected. Levels are high due to reasons particular to the region, including energy inefficiency of traditional architectures, longer lighting and heating hours in winter, and increased weather exposure. COVID-19 restrictions have exacerbated issues: people staying at home are using more energy than they normally would.

Highland employments can be seasonal/short-term and despite low incidence of disease, Highland residents have been the worst affected economically by COVID-19. Rural premiums on living-essentials result in 10-40% higher household budgets (Citizens Advice Scotland). Sudden drops in income have left many struggling to access sufficient food or money to cover energy bills. 10% of council area zones in the Highlands are categorised in the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland.

There are an increasing number of households unable to sustain normal patterns of food shopping and eating, seeking charitable food aid to help them do so. New Start Highland (NSH) set up a Food Hub during lockdown to supply essential food to 1,400 Highland individuals via community groups. James Dunbar, CEO, said: *“this project ran as part of the Highlands’ urgent COVID-19 response. Unfortunately, we recognise that the need for this service is likely to remain for some time. Food insecurity is going to increase not decrease.”*

Poor life skills

NSH work with people experiencing the most vulnerability in society: those in poverty, crisis, those meeting challenges with mental health, substance misuse, loneliness, and isolation. Their Housing Support team supports people to transition from homelessness into permanent accommodation or maintain a tenancy. They also support people who are long term unemployed to equip them with the skills they will need to get into jobs.

From experience working with the very vulnerable, NSH know a significant number of their service users do not possess life skills from which they can grow their personal development. Service users lack basic energy saving and food skills. With an inability to access the most basic needs such as

living in a warm home and cooking healthy food, each person's ability to tackle more complex challenges and achieve productive life changes (e.g. employment and positive community interaction) is inhibited: they experience low concentration levels, reduced self-confidence and esteem, poor levels of health and income – all hurdles in a route out of poverty and crisis.

Preventative approach required

Changeworks' Affordable Warmth Service' clients are often experiencing crisis energy issues by the time they are referred to them. Early intervention approaches are required to mitigate the most vulnerable experiencing preventable fuel poverty issues.

Food poverty issues are particularly concerning, principally because food is a building block of life. Vulnerable people lacking the ability to produce and consume good quality food face the prospect of deteriorating levels of physical and mental health and restricted ability to care for family and dependents, resulting in generational health and social issues. Creating a platform which delivers food preparation and cooking skills, will help break this cycle.

2 Scope and Objectives

The scope and objectives of the VCMA Project should be clearly defined including the benefits which would directly impact customers on the participating GDNs' network(s), and where the benefits of the VCMA Projects lie.

2.1 Objectives

Changeworks will partner with New Start Highland to target groups most vulnerable to fuel and food poverty in a timely way, to maximise energy safeguarding impact and provide; facilitated access to the Priority Services Register, coaching to become an engaged and efficient utility consumer, education on how to be Carbon Monoxide (CO) aware, and cooking skills to improve independent living and support affordably warm homes and healthy eating.

Objectives

- To introduce preventative approaches to tackle fuel and food poverty crises before they happen and provide awareness of the dangers of CO.
- To empower up to **1500 vulnerable people** to affordably heat their homes and pay energy bills, raise awareness around water efficiency linked to energy costs and address CO safety issues.
- To provide **750 households with slow cookers** and recipe cards to help them reduce energy costs and maintain a healthy balanced diet
- To **empower up to 230 vulnerable people** to be able to shop within a budget and gain the knowledge and skills to appreciate and cook healthy, nourishing food for families and dependents, identified based upon need.
- To promote the health benefits of warmer homes and better dietary management.
- To create a platform from which people can take better care of themselves through diet, share cooking skills with others and progress in personal development.
- To create legacy beyond the funding period by enabling ongoing fuel and food poverty support and awareness of CO dangers within existing services.

3. Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA

This should include an explanation of why the VCMA Project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria. This is a requirement

This project will provide support to consumers to provide preventative measures which tackle fuel poverty issues and to address CO safety issues resulting in positive Social Return on Investment. The project will provide holistic energy/water efficiency advice and awareness of the dangers of CO tailored to the needs of each householder, to support energy safeguarding and reduce the risk of harm caused by CO. The project will work collaboratively with expert agencies to maximise positive impacts and deliver defined outcomes for individuals.

4 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

This should provide information of the customer engagement that has taken place in the development of VCMA Projects where appropriate. If there is no evidence of stakeholder engagement or customer support, this should justify why it was not appropriate to engage with stakeholders and customers.

4.1 Experienced delivery partners with skills and access to target group

The project will build on existing customer support and success in the Highland area. Since October 2018 Changeworks' Affordable Warmth Services have supported over 1,400 people in the Highlands, achieving £771,100 of financial savings for them. Support delivered was in-depth, averaging 8.7 interactions per client¹. 77% of service users had incomes under £16,190 and 92% had a vulnerability proxy. After support 76% of service-users said they now know how to save money on their energy bills, 82% said Advisors' expertise helped them learn about dealing with their energy issues and 60% reported greater confidence dealing with energy issues.

An early intervention approach would be beneficial to vulnerable new and existing tenants to support tenancy sustainment and prevent fuel and food poverty issues. Many people accessing our services lack knowledge and skills to confidently manage their energy and food costs. Consulting with nearly 400 vulnerable tenants who had moved into their property within the year Changeworks learnt 80% were concerned about energy prices, with 46% (and 57% of those who were first-time tenants) unsure how to best use their heating system. 29% told us they could not afford to be warm at home and 23% that they could not afford to buy all the food that they need.

"I do think that after you sign your tenancy, someone should come to your new home and run over everything you need to know... I honestly felt I'd been given a house but not shown how to run it. It's a bit like giving someone a car without teaching them how to drive!"

"I don't know how to go about anything like sorting my gas debt out, my heating, my boiler. I don't know who to go to. I wish I'd had help when I'd first moved in."

"I wasn't really aware of how much I was spending on my energy. This is my first house. I never really thought before about what temperature for heating or turning lights off."

New Start Highland housing support officers consulted with 82 of their service-users during regular appointments to receive feedback on shaping services to meet need. This established a need for energy efficiency advice to reduce the burden of expensive fuel bills and make homes safer and warmer to live in. Respondents had a real desire for energy support, recognising they need help to make changes as they cannot do this on their own.

- 100% were unhappy with their energy costs and wanted to know how to reduce costs
- 91% did not know which gas tariff they were paying and 74% were unsure of their electricity tariff. 79% did not know how to check their tariff, with low awareness of the impact of different tariffs.
- 98% believed their home could benefit from better insulation, heating, and home improvements
- 99% would like to improve the way they use/save energy in their home
- 100% would like help to achieve lower energy bills and would be happy for a New Start Highland worker to speak to them about reducing bills and delivering home improvements.

¹ e.g. home visit, phone call, email, letter, texts, casework, advocacy tasks

We want to build on previous partnership learnings that demonstrate close collaboration and co-location increases joined up working and provides better outcomes for tenants. This is an approach we want to adopt and trial in this project working together with New Start Highland.

“Changeworks affordable warmth advice for our tenants is hugely beneficial. Their Advisors work closely with our housing and tenancy support teams and help people sustain their tenancies. The difference Advisors have made to tenants should not be underestimated.” Joyce Cuthbert, Housing Manager, Port of Leith Housing Association

4.2 Moving Forward Together – Stakeholder Workshops held during 2018 and 2020

Sharing our top 5 scenarios with our stakeholders during our engagement workshops in 2018, they agreed that providing essential emergency funding for customers in vulnerable circumstances should remain one of our top priorities. In addition, our stakeholders wanted to see us approach affordability broader than ‘gas’, as customers who face financial hardship need support with all their utilities, water, gas, and electricity should be approached as essentials services.

4.3 Customer Engagement Group 2019/20

Shaping our business plan to support customers in vulnerable circumstances we have committed to over the 5-year price control supporting over 250,000 vulnerable customers to use gas safely, affordably, and efficiently. We have a three-tiered approach and tier 1; 2 and 3 priorities include providing independent support to help provide vulnerable customers with independent access to affordable energy.

4.4 Vulnerable Steering Group

During 2020/21 our Vulnerable Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2. For year 1 we prioritised key initiatives to support our most vulnerable customers in our target areas, where customers are most impacted by our key vulnerabilities; fuel poverty, communities most impacted by Covid-19, and those hard to reach who require tailored advice and support services aligned to personal wellbeing and safety.

5 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

Details of the VCMA Project outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these, interim milestones and how the Funding Licensee will evaluate whether the project has been successful. Each action should have a proportion of the funding allocated.

5.1 Outcomes

Changeworks and New Start Highland will work collaboratively to empower up to 1500 vulnerable people to build skills to tackle the root causes of fuel poverty and address CO safety issues, and up to 750 to tackle food poverty. Early intervention support will be dovetailed into New Start Highland's existing services for those transitioning from homelessness into permanent accommodation to help maintain their tenancy. After support tenants will be able to affordably heat their homes, cook nutritious meals and address carbon monoxide safety issues. The project will work collaboratively with other agencies to maximise positive impacts and deliver defined outcomes for individuals.

5.2 Associated actions

Together Changeworks and New Start Highland will trial and evaluate different partnership interventions, building on our existing experience, to deliver a holistic and person-centred support to achieve outcomes.

A Changeworks Affordable Warmth Advisor will co-locate at New Start Highland offices to train and equip 20 New Start Highland housing support officers with fuel poverty awareness, energy advice, water efficiency and carbon monoxide safety training so they can provide this as part of the housing support they deliver for their service users. The Changeworks Affordable Warmth Advisor will provide ongoing peer-support to NSH housing support officers and provide in-depth 1-1 support to up to 375 service-users referred by New Start Highland who need specialist fuel poverty advocacy/casework to tackle complex fuel poverty issues. This model enables hard-to-reach and hard-to-engage groups to access affordable warmth and CO support from those they already trust. The model also provides sustainability beyond the funded period by building this support into New Start Highland's existing delivery.

New Start Highland will recruit a skilled food trainer to develop a basic food kitchen and deliver support to up to 230 service-users to build skills in food shopping, cooking, and food management. The trainer will support service-users on shopping trips, through cooking classes, and in conjunction with the New Start Highland team, distribute slow cookers, food parcels and recipe books on course completion.

By project end (i.e. over 2.5 years):

All service users – up to 1500 – will receive advice on:

- energy efficient behaviours in the home
- energy efficient measures and how to access these e.g. Home Energy Scotland referral
- setting up energy accounts, understanding energy bills and meters, accessing discounts and supplier support (e.g. WHD and PSR), accessing energy vouchers, and/or switching, water efficiency
- the dangers of CO and how to be safe
- tackling and preventing condensation and dampness
- Joining PSR and the benefits this brings to them
- Advice on Warm Home Discount through their energy supplier

Service users who need in-depth energy support – up to 375 people – will be supported by Changeworks to receive:

- specialist heating system advice
- support to untangle and resolve fuel billing issues
- support with water efficiency and water saving measures for the home
- fuel debt advice/advocacy with supplier
- eligibility check for Warm Home discount
- access to hardship funds (where available)
- CO alarm for their home
- signposting/referrals to wider income maximisation advice.

750 service users will be supported to develop food skills. 750 will receive a slow cooker and recipe book and up to 230 will attend a food awareness course delivered by New Start Highland.² Courses will be delivered from New Start Highland’s premises in the Carsegate area of Inverness, and cover:

- food shopping on a restricted budget for healthy ingredients
- skills to cook a range of healthy recipes and dishes to suit the family
- awareness of nutritional and health benefits of foods
- food storage and hygiene, minimising food waste and maximising usage
- cascading skills to other family members and dependents.

A breakdown of outputs is provided below:

Output breakdown	Yr1		Yr2	Yr3	Project total
	2021	2022	2022/23	2023/24	
	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Mar	Apr-Mar	
	Q1	Q2	Full year	Full year	
Service users supported by New Start Highland with utility advice	150	150	600	600	1500
25% service users triaged by New Start Highland for in-depth support from Changeworks (energy bills/debt)	37	38	150	150	375
Service users supported by New Start Highland to access slow cookers and recipe cards	250		250	250	750
Service users supported by New Start Highland	15	15	100	100	230

² Food awareness courses will be delivered in years 2 and 3 of the project to people experiencing food poverty with an opportunity to scale this operation up following successful completion of outcomes. In Year 1 we will look to provide 250 slow cookers and recipe books.

with food skills through food awareness course					
Service users supported by New Start Highland with employability food skills	0	0	15	15	30

Stakeholder	Impact	Outcome	Indicator – survey responses	Indicators – activity record
Service users	Wellbeing & Legacy	Skills gained to maximise opportunities to be affordably warm	80% service users tell us they are following energy efficient behaviour best practice. 80% service users tell us they are warmer in their homes.	# referrals for grants for measures (e.g. heating systems, insulation) # supported to set up energy accounts best suited to needs
		Skills gained to prevent condensation and dampness to have a drier healthier home	Service users tell us they understand how to prevent condensation and dampness.	
		Reduced anxiety	75% service users tell us they are less worried about their energy bills	
		Increased feeling of empowerment	80% service users tell us they have increased knowledge about how to deal with energy issues	
		CO safety	80% service users on mains gas tell us they understand the risks of CO	# provided with a new CO alarm
		Priority Service Register access improved		# applicable service users informed / referred PSR
		Increased security of tenancy	Service users tell us they are more confident managing their tenancy because of energy advice	NSH staff record behavioural changes
		More manageable energy costs	Service users provide us with examples (service user quotes)	# energy accounts set up # accessed suitable tariffs # accessed WHD £ savings due to e/e measures £ behaviour change savings
		More people have access to gaining cooking skills to cook more nutritious meals	80% of service users tell us their cooking skills have improved	80% service users record skills in a personal project log.
		More people can pass on cooking skills to family and children	75% of people tell us they have involved family and children in home cooking	# dependants participating in home cooking sessions recorded
	Financial resilience	Increased disposable income		£ saved from grants accessed, fuel billing/debt issues resolved

				# referrals to income maximisation
		Improved financial skills	80% service users tell us they have increased knowledge about how to deal with energy issues	
		Prevention of energy crisis issues	NSH to survey service users to establish base line for energy crisis issues.	# service users that have avoided energy crisis issues every 6 months
		People have better access to affordable food and meals	80% of service users tell us they have a better understanding of where and what foods are available	80% of service users complete a food diary to record quantitative and qualitative food data
		Reduced spend on food	80% of service users tell us they have reduced food waste and improved food budgeting skills	Average food spends assessed and savings recorded by service users
		People use their cooking skills to help enter the hospitality jobs market	20% of service users express an interest in gaining employment in food related occupations	# service users entering food related jobs recorded
Environment	Climate change mitigation	Lifetime CO2 reduction resulting from project activity	80% service users report good energy efficiency behaviours	Carbon saving metric associated with advice delivery used Carbon saving assumed from referrals for measures (Energy Saving Trust)
			Service users report good food waste reduction behaviours	Carbon saving metric to measure food waste reduction (Zero Waste Scotland)
Partners	Increased knowledge, confidence, and skills	Increased staff confidence to support clients to affordably heat and eat, and be CO safe	20 NSH staff report increased confidence supporting tenants to achieve affordable warmth, food, and CO safety	Basic energy advice training achieved by 20 staff and recorded in PDP
	Customer journey improvement	Service designed to improve service users' outcomes	95% of service users satisfied with service	Energy advice embedded into NSH existing support
	Collaboration	Hard-to-reach group in need of support reached		Up to 1500 engaged and supported 100% clients with vulnerability proxy
			Partners and staff report increased awareness and appetite to participate in project	Up to 200 service users identified and engaged in cooking skills classes per annum
		Joined-up working	95% of staff working on project satisfied or very satisfied with the service	Co-location of staff Cross-referrals Staff training

				New partnerships / ways of working formed
	Employment	Jobs created (FTE)		Number of jobs created (i.e. employed on project)

6 Project Partners and third parties involved

Details of Project Partners or third-party involvement

Changeworks is Scotland’s leading environmental charity with 35 years’ experience delivering solutions for low carbon living and empowering the most vulnerable people to be affordably warm. Changeworks’ Affordable Warmth Service is a specialist service supporting vulnerable people by providing holistic, bespoke and in-depth energy advice to tackle fuel poverty. The team’s approach is focused on empowering people to gain sustainable life skills to tackle issues themselves. Staff have the skills and experience to deliver robust outcomes:

- Scottish National Standards accredited to deliver Type 1 Utility Debts advice
- City & Guilds Energy Awareness and Renewable Energy certified (Level 3) and receive comprehensive in-house training
- Disclosure Scotland checked and have training in: Child Protection, Protection of Vulnerable Adults, Lone Worker Safety, and Equalities

New Start Highland work to relieve poverty in the Highlands, to meet the needs of those suffering homelessness or unemployment by offering practical and life changing support. They support people experiencing the greatest barriers in maintaining a tenancy, in training for employment and in furnishing a home.

New Start Highland’s Housing Support team will work with Changeworks to integrate energy advice, fuel poverty support and carbon monoxide safety awareness into their existing services supporting people to transition from homelessness into permanent accommodation or maintain a tenancy. New Start Highland will deliver the food awareness courses from their premises in the Carsegate area of Inverness.

Scottish and Southern Energy Networks (SSEN) is the regional electricity network company responsible for the distribution of electricity within the target area of the project. SSEN pride themselves on not just working in our communities but being part of them as well. Their focus on people helps us understand the needs of the community, delivering the best service possible – no excuses. As a partner in this project SSEN will provide householders with a range of useful resources including winter resilience bags with torches, room temperature thermometer cards, 105 magnets and the provision of slow cookers the new home programmes.

Scottish Water is the regional water provider and will be working in the partnership to guide the team on water efficiency alongside providing new householders with water efficiency devices.

7 Potential for new learning

Details of what the GDN(s) expect to learn and how the learning will be disseminated.

We are looking to best understand:

- If this early intervention project which supports the most vulnerable in society, who have faced hardship will be successful in empowering service users with skills to keep them affordably warm and access affordable nutritious food. We want to learn if these life skills will help prevent fuel poverty and food poverty issues, supporting the prevention of ill health (e.g. both mental and physical issues from living in cold damp homes with the anxiety and stress of high energy costs), crisis scenarios where they fall into an unmanageable energy debt, and supports their ability to maintain a tenancy and feed their family.
- If this joined-up working partnership model better enables delivery of fuel poverty support, reaching greater numbers of those hard-to-reach and hard-to-engage.
- Lessons to replicate and ways to grow this model of partnership delivery.

Monitoring and evaluation

The following activities will be in place to monitor and evaluate project progress and impacts (please see indicators in outcomes table above for more detail):

Quantitative and qualitative service user outcomes and demographics/vulnerabilities recorded/monitored;

- Service user before-and-after-support surveys and follow-up calls
- In-bound and out-bound referrals from/to partners and other services recorded/monitored (e.g. for benefits advice, energy saving measures)
- Feedback, indicators, outputs, and outcomes reported on quarterly
- Project progress monitored: e.g. monthly Advisor 1-to-1s, quarterly partner meetings.
- Our Client Advisory Group³ feedback will help shape activity and learnings shared
- The SROI calculations around investment into the social nature of this project, we will work with SIA to understand fully the calculations.

Sharing of learnings will be disseminated via project progress/annual reporting, case studies, newsletters, website, briefings to organisations and to members across our relevant networks e.g. Energy Action Scotland, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, local financial inclusion networks and at the annual showcase event.

³ Our clients are asked to join an Advisory Group to analyse our service – considering whether current methods of delivery are the most effective means of meeting the aims of the service, reaching its target service users, and enabling accessibility. Clients will be asked what might make the service more attractive to service users and alternative methods of delivery applied to current methods and reviewed for improvements.

8 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations

The Funding Licensee(s) should justify the scale of the VCMA Project – including the scale of the investment relative to its potential benefits. As part of this, it should provide the SROI calculation.

Referral outcomes; Target 1500 households over 2.5 years (advice programme)

Based upon recent programmes that followed a similar model we would expect to see customers who access the services achieve the following, however we anticipate that with the nature of need we could expect higher representation in the PSR outcomes and income maximisation outcomes based upon working with this community of people in crisis. Performance against these assumptions will be monitored closely throughout the programme.

- 100% Energy Efficiency advice including proactive account set up, so all are supported to identify eligible schemes and best tariffs
- 100% Water efficiency advice linked to reduction in energy costs
- 80% increased knowledge / confidence managing utilities / tenancy
- 80% tell us they are warmer in their homes
- 100% offered support to join PSR for energy and water
- 75% reporting reduced anxiety and less worried about their energy bills
- 100% provided with CO Safety advice and a CO Alarm where required
- 80% increased confidence in shopping and cooking healthy and affordable meals
- 100% eligibility check for Warm Home Discount funding
- 20 New Start Highland staff report increased confidence supporting clients to achieve affordable warmth, food and CO safety

Social Value Measurement

Working with leading social impact research consultancy Simetrica we have developed a bespoke social value bank of financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable customers. The approach used to estimate social value is based on best practice endorsed by HM Treasury for the evaluation of social policy, and utilises values from the Treasury's 'Green Book' where applicable.

We recognise that there is a significant gap in our current catalogue of measurement values, particularly for measurement related to non-utility-based outcomes, for example, benefits check and income max. We will continue to measure the actual outcomes for participants and will seek external assessment as the project develops. We have not included the value of the gifted items including slow cookers and torches until we have a better understanding of their use and impact to the end users.

* SROI assessment provided separately

VCMA Project start and end date

Detail start and end date of the VCMA Project and, where relevant, the VCMA Project that preceded this initiative.

September 2021-March 2024

Mobilisation of project to start September 21 with delivery to service users starting in October. Proposed costs and duration are for project delivery for just over 2.5 years initially (September 2021-March 2024). However, this is dependent upon outcomes and we would consider continuing delivery beyond this period, welcoming opportunities to build on successful outcomes and to use learnings to modify project approaches as necessary.

Geographic area

Details of where the VCMA Project will take place. If the VCMA Project is collaborative, the Funding Licensee area(s) in which the project will take place should be identified.

Scottish Highland local authority area, with a focus on areas with high deprivation

- Inverness – City & Rural boundaries, including Nairn
- Badenoch & Strathspey – Aviemore, Kingussie
- Caithness – Wick & Thurso
- Ross-shire – Alness, Invergordon, Dingwall, Muir of Ord, Ullapool
- Sutherland – Lairg, Dornoch, Brora, Golspie
- Lochaber – Fort William, Kyle & Lochalsh, Mallaig
- Isle of Skye

NSH team will deliver services in the rural areas of these districts too.

Approved by

Rob Gray

Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications