

# Tackling fuel poverty together Sussex

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

1<sup>st</sup> December 2021

SGN



# SGN

Your gas. Our network.

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## 1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	
Date of PEA submission:	01/12/2021
Project contact name:	Kerry Potter
Project contact number/email:	<a href="mailto:Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk">Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk</a>
Total cost (£k)	
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	

## 2 Problem statement

During 2021 it is estimated that three million English households are living in fuel poverty (Dept for Business, Energy and Business Strategy). Nearly half of low-income households are still living in hard to heat homes, and the rate of improvements is well below what is needed to lift people out of fuel poverty by a target date of 2030. Tackling cold homes is now more important than ever with the upcoming winter crisis and utility bills rising and COVID financial support measures being removed, 1 in 5 households are expected to fall into poverty.

Living in a cold home has significant and demonstrable direct and indirect health impacts. There is strong evidence that shows it is associated with poor health outcomes and an increased risk of morbidity and mortality for all age groups. (Public Health England)

Groups who are more vulnerable to health problems associated with cold homes:

- People with cardiovascular conditions
- People with respiratory conditions (in particular, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and childhood asthma)
- People with mental health conditions
- People with disabilities
- Older people (65 and older)
- Young children (under 5)
- Pregnant women
- People on a low income
- People who have attended hospital due to a fall
- People who move in and out of homelessness
- People with addictions
- Recent immigrants and asylum seekers (Public Health England)

The Marmot Review into the health impacts of cold homes and fuel poverty found a strong association between cold temperatures and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Links between cold housing and minor illnesses such as colds and flu were also reported (Marmot Review Team, 2011). Fuel poverty and living in a cold home has also been linked to excess winter deaths. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 40% of excess winter deaths are caused by living in a cold home (WHO, 2007) and the Hills review estimates that some 10% of excess winter deaths are directly attributable to fuel poverty (Hills, 2012).

In 2019, within the Southeast there were 4,300 excess winter deaths (ONS,2021). Although we cannot attribute all of these to cold homes, research certainly suggests that at least a large number of these deaths could have been caused by living in a cold home. Taking action on cold homes will not only reduce hospital admissions and the excess mortality rate but have other tangible impacts including reduced absence from school and work, reduced financial and fuel poverty. (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, 2015). The evidence is clear, there are multiple benefits from addressing fuel poverty and tackling cold-related ill health. Working with the Energy Savings Trust we've updated our Vulnerability Mapping tools and introduced our Vulnerability Index using data to better identify communities most at risk of living in a cold and unhealthy home, most in need of additional and tailored support, enabling our works to make the greatest positive impact in helping those in need access to maintaining a safe and warm home.

### Why Arun?

According to the 2019 Indices of Deprivation, Arun ranks as the second most deprived district in West Sussex, being 149th out of 317 among lower tier authorities nationwide. This figure contains what is in some neighbourhoods a significant level of deprivation with four of the top five most deprived LSOAs in the county being in Arun. Two of these are in Bognor, around the Marine and Bersted Wards and two in Littlehampton, around Ham and Wick. These LSOAs fall within the top ten percent most deprived nationally. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) latest statistics for 2019 revealed that 5,165 households in Arun district are defined to be living in fuel poverty. This coupled with the fact that the Arun district had 100 excess winter deaths in 2018/2019 (ONS, 2021) highlighting the need for an energy advice service targeting these vulnerable groups.

The data below highlights the nature of need in the Arun community;

- 47,624 people with cardiovascular conditions
- 15,050 people with respiratory conditions
- 17,582 people with mental health conditions
- 2,017 people living with dementia
- 3,195 children live in low-income families
- 31,489 people with disabilities or limiting long-term health conditions
- 46,459 people aged 65 and over

### Why Chichester?

Chichester District is characterised as relatively affluent. Nationally it ranks 213 most deprived out of 317 lower tier Authorities and has no LSOAs within the top 10%, or 20% most deprived. It has three LSOAs within the top 30% all of which sit within its main settlement, the City of Chichester. Beyond the overall picture, however, there is poverty within the district, and particular challenges which arise from rurality, such as high costs of living including high costs for household fuel and the costs of transportation. Data on Fuel Poverty from 2019 shows that in the Chichester Parliamentary Constituency 4,053 of households are defined as being fuel poor. This heightened risk of fuel poverty alongside an excess winter death figure of 40 (ONS, 2021) proves that there is a need for an energy advice service targeting these vulnerable groups.

The data below highlights the nature of need in the Chichester community;

- 27,125 people with cardiovascular conditions
- 9,007 people with respiratory conditions
- 9,165 people with mental health conditions
- 19,883 people with disabilities and/or limiting long-term health conditions
- 2,336 people living with dementia
- 33,634 people aged 65 and over

This, coupled with Chichester's ageing population and the expectation that those over 65 are predicted to have increased by 4.6 percentage points by 2030, shows that there is a large amount of people who might be at risk of increased mortality if they did fall into fuel poverty. Again, it also gives an indication of the likely demand throughout the Chichester district. Although Chichester does have a growing ageing population, it also has about 11% (1,960) of its child population are from low-income families. The reality of families living in poverty means deciding whether to put food on their table or heat their home.

### Why Hastings?

According to the 2019 Indices of Deprivation, Hastings ranks as the most deprived district in the South East, being 13th out of 317 among lower tier authorities nationwide, compared to 19th in 2015.

This figure contains what is in some neighbourhoods a significant level of deprivation with two LSOAs being amongst the most deprived 1% in the country. Both are in Hastings, in Baird and Tressell wards. The majority of the county's deprived neighbourhoods are located in Hastings, where 16 out of 53 neighbourhoods (30%) rank in the most deprived decile nationally. There is significant poverty within the Hastings district, this is mirrored in the fuel poverty statistics, which suggest 4,780 of households are in fuel poverty. When looking at the percentage of households in fuel poverty, it is then not a surprise that in 2018/2019 Hastings had 10 excess winter deaths (ONS,2021), proving that there is a need for an energy advice service targeting these vulnerable groups.

The data below highlights the nature of need in the Hastings community;

- 32,465 people with cardiovascular conditions
- 10,070 people with respiratory conditions
- 16,067 people with mental health conditions
- 1,320 people living with dementia
- 4,455 children in Hastings living in low-income families
- 26,845 people aged 65 years and over

### Why Rother?

According to the 2019 Indices of Deprivation, Rother is the 10th most deprived district in the South-East region out of 51 in total. It ranks 139 out of 317 lower tier authorities nationwide where 1 is the most deprived. Two LSOA neighbourhoods in the Bexhill Sidley area are amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. There are 4 LSOAs in Rother which are amongst the 20% most deprived in the country. 4,650 households live in fuel poverty which represents 10.6% of all households in the district. This is significantly higher than the national average proportion of fuel poor households in England (9.9%). The most recent data available from the ONS reveals there were 40 excess winter deaths in Rother demonstrating the need for energy advice services targeting these vulnerable groups in the area.

The data below highlights the nature of need in the Rother community;

- 24,049 people with cardiovascular conditions
- 7,203 people with respiratory conditions
- 1,687 people with mental health conditions
- 1,008 people living with dementia
- 2,920 children aged below 5
- 30,842 people aged over 65

### Fuel poor homes are not just cold but can also be unsafe

There is a direct correlation between fuel poverty and carbon monoxide poisoning. Lower income householders are often reliant on older boilers, older heaters or even gas stoves or cookers to heat their homes. National Energy Action and Gas Safety Trust research found 35% of low income and vulnerable households surveyed exceeded the 10ppm threshold for carbon monoxide levels.

- People living in deprived areas are also less likely to own an audible CO alarm than homes in non-deprived areas, further increasing the risk of CO poisoning.
- Older people, pregnant women, and young children have also been found to be particularly vulnerable to CO poisoning, spending more time at home and with a need to stay warm, resulting using the heating more regularly.
- Social tenants are less at risk due to RSL requirements for annual gas safety checks and higher energy efficiency standards.

### 3 Scope and objectives

Working with the Primary Community Networks, Social Prescribers, Adult Care services, Hospitals, Mental Health units and voluntary care organisations in Sussex to set up direct referral pathways for professionals to refer anyone who is in fuel poverty and in one of the vulnerable groups into a dedicated crisis support team. This dedicated team and broader Citizens Advice network will deliver a holistic, wraparound advice service mainly focused on debt, welfare benefit, income maximisation, energy, including eligibility for water tariffs, and CO safety, and financial capability advice but also able to provide any other advice needed.

The dedicated team are trained in motivational interviewing techniques and will support residents in behaviour change so they are better able to keep safe and warm. The team will provide the support that is needed to best support the service user, those who just need advice and information, provide casework for people who need ongoing support but also a full hands-on, vulnerable casework service for people who lack capacity to act. The team will also work with statutory and non-for-profit organisations to ensure that services users have the support needed to reduce any possible risk of health deterioration or hospital admission.

We aim to support a minimum of 550 vulnerable households each year, and a total of 825 over the funding period with tailored advice and support provisions to improve the health, wellbeing, and financial outcomes for those households and to work with other statutory or non-for-profit organisation to provide the support needed to reduce the service user's likelihood of a negative health impacts.

The partnership will deliver:

- A dedicated 'utility' team of experienced Citizen Advice client advisors across Sussex and clinical environments with the skills to provide utility services not limited to industry initiatives, including; PSR, emergency fuel vouchers, Warm Home Discount, Winter fuel payments, tariff and energy and debt support, information on smart meters, CO and gas safety, Locking Cooker Valves, and who to contact in an emergency (0800 111 999 and 105)
- A joined-up service between Health and Social support teams and Citizens Advice to support those in crisis access tailored help with a focus on ensuring access to essential services (energy, water, housing and food) with the outcomes of improving the quality of people's lives, their mental, physical, and financial wellbeing
- A broader social impact as we alleviate the pressures on the NHS, avoiding the need to use health care services
- A robust network of regional and relevant secondary key partnerships to ensure health and wellbeing services are specific and local to client need – current network including;
  - ESCC Health and Social Care Connect
  - Home Works (East Sussex)
  - STEPS East and West
  - Fellowship of St Nicholas Health & Wellbeing Community Hubs
  - Seaview Project for vulnerable people
  - Sussex Partnership NHS Trust mental health services (specifically Woodlands Centre for Acute Care, Amberstone Hospital, St Anne's Centre)
  - HEART (Hastings Emergency Action Resilience Team)

- Education Futures Trust for younger vulnerable people
- Trussel Trust – local Food banks
- West Sussex Children’s Services
- West Sussex Adults’ Services
- Social Prescribing services (Arun, Regis, Chichester)
- Carers Support
- Wellbeing teams (Arun and Chichester)
- Housing options teams (Arun and Chichester)
- Sure Start
- Homeless charities (Stonepillow, Turning Tides)
- WSCC Community Hub
- Richmond Fellowship
- Arun & Chichester job centres
- West Sussex MIND
- Age UK West Sussex and Brighton & Hove
- Aspire Sussex

Across the four pilot areas there are referral function to different degrees, and we would seek to ensure all feeder organisations can work with the system effectively and maximise referrals to the service. Development of Primary Community Networks and social prescribing services across the areas is at different stages and this has had an impact on the way referrals take place. We will invest in progressing these relationships further

## 4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project will provide support to residents in crisis, providing access to key services including the PSR, interventions that address fuel and water poverty and broader safeguarding and wellbeing services, whilst delivering a positive Social Return on Investment. The project will provide holistic utility efficiency advice and CO safety interventions, empowering each householder to use energy safely, efficiently and affordably. The project will work collaboratively with expert agencies to maximise positive impacts beyond energy, increasing the health and wellbeing of the individual supported and delivering defined outcomes.

## 5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

### 5.1 Citizens Advice

Tackling cold homes is now more important than ever with the upcoming winter crisis and utility bills rising and COVID financial support measures being removed, 1 in 5 households are expected to fall into poverty. We expect this to be worse felt in these more deprived areas and by people within the described vulnerable groups, as they are more likely to be socially and/or digitally excluded and unable to resolve issues by themselves.

More and more households now rely on financial hardship schemes to make ends meet, between 14th December 2020 and 13th April 2021 in West Sussex, Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice distributed £300,000 worth of fuel vouchers, boiler repairs, emergency heaters, blankets and other products and services to keep vulnerable people warm during the winter. This reflects the need within these deprived areas and we expect this to worsen over the coming months and reliance on hardship schemes to increase.

### 5.2 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 due to the impact of Covid 19 on our most vulnerable customers in relation to affordability. 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, and water, gas and electricity should be approached as essentials services.

### 5.3 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 vulnerable customers with access to affordable energy.

### 5.4 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 and they recommended we work with established charities that support people most in need. It is with guidance and support from our dedicated Vulnerable Steering Group that SGN prioritise the regions in our geographic area that are most in need, and to support those most likely to need support from their utility company. One such group is those with critical and long-term health conditions. This scheme is co-designed with Citizens Advice, UK Power Networks, Scottish and Southern Energy Networks, Southern Water and Portsmouth Water to provide tangible support from the health care setting into a safe and warm home. This approach has been endorsed by our strategic panel as it looks to provide a holistic and empowering service in partnership with other utilities.

### 5.5 SGN RIIO-GD2 Business Plan

In the process of shaping our RIIO GD2 Business Plan we engaged stakeholders and customers about our plan to support 50,000 customers each year through a three-tiered approach, and what services/initiatives should be included within each of those tiers. During our Positive Impact round table event our stakeholders emphasised the importance of partnerships to increase the value of our allowance in generating positive outcomes for customers. Feedback from our Customer Service & Supporting Vulnerable Customer – Shaping the Business Plan Qualitative Workshops suggested potential tier two initiatives should include supporting those most vulnerable to living in a cold and unhealthy home, as well as connecting with NHS prevention teams.

## 6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

### 6.1 Outcomes

The collaborative funding of the Sussex partnership will enable the dedicated team to support over 825 vulnerable people over 18 months with tailored support to maintain a safe and warm home each year across Sussex with a focus on Arun, Chichester, Rother and Hastings. The partnership will be embedded within the community working closely with health care workers, consumer advocates and utility company representatives to address the barriers clients face to maintaining a safe and warm home.

The Home and Well project provides the following outcomes. Clients will:

- Be supported by their utilities Priority Services Register - providing them with the security and support they would need in the event of an unplanned outage from all of their regional utility companies
- Be on the best utility tariffs for their personal circumstances
- Be able to manage and pay their own utility bills going forward and avoid going into debt
- Be more aware of the risks of Carbon Monoxide and how to mitigate these
- Have reduced stress, and improved health and wellbeing, and therefore better life chances/quality of life by having the support networks they need
- Be more able to cope at home

## 6.2 Success Criteria

To support over 825 clients by addressing the issues that would prevent them maintain a safe and warm home long term. We aim to support those in need with access to practical help that improves their health and wellbeing and increases their confidence to manage their household utility costs.

- Year 1 – successfully measure the personal impact of the support provided by gathering feedback from clients on the impact of the support provided including how confident they feel in maintaining a safe and warm home
- Develop the dedicated team and deliver the following support services to clients in need of additional help, in financial crisis and unable to maintain a safe and warm home;
  - Clients supported to assess eligibility and sign-up to the PSR with an expectation of 60% registration
  - Clients provided with energy advice including information about who to call in an emergency, smart meters, Winter Fuel Payments, Warm Homes Discount, how to check if you are on the best tariff and energy efficiency advice
  - Clients assessed as to whether they need support to manage fuel debt or change tariff
  - Clients offered support to assess eligibility and sign up to water social tariff and water PSR
  - Patients offered information and access to safety interventions including the Locking Cooker Valve and a free CO alarm tailored to meet their need(s)
  - Clients will be offered access to the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme
  - Clients assessed for income max and eligible benefits, and supported where eligible for debt support and/or access to income related benefits
  - Clients assessed for needs related to crisis support including access to emergency fuel vouchers, food parcels or wellbeing support services

To monitor our impact in line with the above, we will:

- Monitor client outcomes against services provided, patient demographics, vulnerabilities and needs
- Build in targeted, concise questions to our post service survey
- Work closely with our partners to ensure that we all understand the issues faced by clients enabling us to continue to develop our services by need

## 7 Project partners and third parties involved

- Citizens Advice Hastings / Arun and Chichester – programme and delivery partner providing the dedicated team to support clients from crisis into a safe and warm home
- SGN – lead gas network providing programme funding and support to the delivery team, including training, access to broader referral partners, and direct services for customers including but not limited to Locking Cooker Valves, CO alarms and access to the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme.
- Southern Water – regional water network providing programme funding and support through the water sure teams on social tariffs and the water PSR.
- UK Power Networks and Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks - regional electricity distribution network operators providing programme funding and support to the delivery team including but not limited to access to the energy PSR.

## 8 Potential for new learning

### Monitoring and evaluation

The following activities will be in place to monitor and evaluate project progress and impacts:

- 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
- Feedback, indicators, outputs and outcomes reported on quarterly

- Project progress monitored: these include monthly and quarterly partner meetings to share ideas and challenges through individual and organisational partnership case studies.

### **Learning**

We are keen to build in additional learning from this project and the sister project 'Home and Well' and for successes to be incorporated into future delivery as well as promoted to others both in the Citizens Advice network and to broader stakeholders. We intend to share an annual report across electricity, gas and water networks in addition to sharing project impacts and case studies during our annual showcase event.

## **9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations**

### **Social Value Measurement**

In addition to our commitment to a mid-point SROI independent assessment by SIA partners, we are working with leading social impact research consultancy Simetrica and have developed a bespoke social value bank of financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable customers. We will continue to measure all the outcomes for patients using this approach, which is used to estimate social value 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.

## **10 VCMA Project start and end date**

The project will run from 01/12/2021 to 01/05/2023 (18months)

## **11 Geographic area**

Sussex with a focus on Arun, Chichester, Hastings and Rother

## **12 Approval**

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications