

Citizens Advice Scotland - Safe and Warm Scotland Advisory Service

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

01 March 2022

SGN



SGN

Your gas. Our network.

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1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
Date of PEA submission:	03.02.2022
Project contact name:	Linda Spence
Project contact number/email:	Linda.spence@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	*provided separately
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	*provided separately

2 Problem statement

1 in 3 people in Scotland are finding their energy bills unaffordable, with many struggling with rising energy costs, and 24% of people citing their home as hard to heat as a reason why they are finding bills unaffordable, according to a recent Citizen Advice Scotland YouGov poll. For those vulnerable households in fuel poverty and hard to reach groups who have been unable to access local support services (due to the Covid restrictions), there's an increased risk of using unsafe appliances /fuels to heat their homes, rationing of supplies or self-isolation leading to cold damp homes which impacts the safety, health, and wellbeing of households.

Fuel poor households at risk of self-isolation can lead to un-serviced gas fuelled appliances risk to CO and not able to meet requirements of the new Scottish legislation around installation of connected fire alarms and working CO detector in the home, due to financial difficulty.

In 2022/23, energy bills are expected to continue to rise due to the after-effects of people spending more time at home, the 54% increase in energy prices, household incomes unable to support rising costs, benefit changes and the loss of employment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as lockdown restrictions ease, the impact of these will continue to be felt.

Citizen Advice Bureaus (CAB) and the Extra Help Unit throughout Scotland have experienced an increase in demand from households enquiring about energy costs, debt, financial support and help towards managing their household/living costs as their circumstances change. During 20/21 they supported 171,000 clients with over 647,000 advice issues and accessing £147m of financial gain. Many households supported, were faced with the choice of either heating their homes or feeding their families, and in these circumstances, accessing food and fuel banks for the first-time.

In June 2021 almost two-thirds of CAB clients (64%) were 'new', making contact with the network for the first time. This demonstrates the breadth of the impact of the financial impact of COVID, and also the need to support people who are likely to be unfamiliar with the support that is available to them from their local CAB.

In the most deprived areas of Scotland, CAB is facing further increases in demand from communities as Covid restrictions ease, fire safety and CO regulations come into force and the new energy price cap comes in in April 22. Building partnership with CAB will ensure that this trusted service can help households in crisis with access to support to have a safe and warm home.

Providing holistic advice, delivered at a local level is the key to alleviating both the immediate effects and root causes of fuel poverty and to creating safe and warm homes.

3 Scope and objectives

Delivered in partnership with Citizen Advice Scotland (CAS) funded over 2-years, the project will be delivered through dedicated CAB energy advisors based in 9 Bureaux in Scotland supporting up to 6,412 consumers over the period. Providing a single point of contact for clients and front-line workers either face to face, by phone, virtual appointment, or local group energy sessions. Supporting hard to reach groups, the project will

specifically target asylum seekers, minority ethnic groups, travellers, Park Home communities, digitally excluded and other vulnerable groups in Scottish communities.

Using specialist energy advisers, the project will reach into communities of place and interest across all of Scotland, tackling inequalities of outcome and socio-economic disadvantage. We know the target groups will be adversely impacted by the economic effects of coronavirus, and the need for energy advice, income maximisation advice and support will be greater as more people have been and continue to spend more time at home.

Though primarily focussing on energy advice, the project will provide holistic advice and support, clients who access the service will be signposted into the CAB network for support with issues other than energy from specialist advisers.

- Bespoke energy advice which involves but is not limited to resolving energy billing and debt issues, energy efficiency advice, help to switch suppliers or tariffs (as and when this becomes a feasible option again), how to read meters and/or bills, payment methods, raising disputes with suppliers about back billing or other complex issues, taking forward a complaint about an energy supplier or distributor on a client's behalf and referrals to Home Energy Scotland (HES).
- Benefit entitlement checks to ensure customers are receiving the appropriate benefits and grants based on their individual circumstances, including but not limited to Warm Home Discount.
- Support vulnerable clients to register on the PSR for their DNO / Supplier/Water PSR (ensuring where possible the 'tick' to share information beyond the DNO / Supplier).
- Locking Cooker Valve (LCV) referrals into SGN where a need is identified to add a safety device to the gas cooker.
- Providing emergency funds, housing support, food vouchers to support with immediate need, providing advice/support on managing household outgoings.
- CO awareness sessions provided to customers including key CO messaging; annual appliance testing, CO alarm maintenance, identifying signs/symptoms, and actions if CO exposure/presence is suspected.
- Access to dedicated frontline worker CO safety training for the 9 CABs to educate them on the sources, signs, and symptoms of CO poisoning (including the risks around low-level poisoning), what actions to take if CO poisoning is suspected, and what they can do to prevent CO.

It also aims to develop and maintain partnerships with local community groups to increase awareness of the project, reaching out to those digitally excluded and in hard-to-reach communities.

As well as providing one to one support, advisers will deliver group sessions to frontline workers and consumers. This model has worked effectively for the Energy Best Deal project that bureaux in Scotland have delivered for the last 10 years and will include CO awareness as part of the sessions.

- Bureaux will target consumers who would not normally engage with the energy market by working in partnership with local community groups to offer group sessions to vulnerable consumers and frontline workers who support those in or at risk of fuel poverty.
- Where vulnerable consumers attending group sessions require more in depth support they will be offered one-to-one support.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project operates within our Scotland network, in our top areas of vulnerability and has been co-designed with Citizens Advice Scotland to find solutions that work for all our customers. It qualifies under the VCMA funding criteria as it will provide energy efficiency advice and CO safety advice/interventions, empowering each householder to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 SGN Customer Engagement Group and Vulnerable Steering Group Engagement

During the shaping of the SGN business plan we committed to, over the 5-year price control, to support over 250,000 vulnerable customers to use gas safely, affordably, and efficiently. To ensure that we adapt to market conditions we continue to engage our SGN Vulnerable Steering Group, they help us shape our vulnerability and CO strategies and our priorities for GD2 based on current need. Our expert stakeholders representing a range of vulnerable customer segments guided us to work with existing organisations that already support those in crisis and where we are able to broaden the reach or increase the capacity of those established charities that support people most in need. It is with guidance and support from our dedicated Vulnerable Steering Group that SGN prioritise support for those most likely to need help from their utility company due to low incomes, in extreme financial vulnerability and fuel crisis

5.2 Energy Best Deal Scotland Evaluation 2020-21 Evaluation report to Citizens Advice Scotland May 2021 - Centre for Sustainable Energy

Frontline workers group sessions:

- 1,055 frontline workers attended a group session.
- Nearly half estimated that 60-100% of their clients were in fuel poverty.
- Nearly all reported that the sessions were useful and helped to increase their confidence in delivering energy advice.
- Most intended to share what they had learnt with their colleagues and clients.

These findings are based on responses from 267 feedback forms completed by frontline workers who attended a group session.

Frontline workers who completed the survey rated the EBD group sessions highly and reported improved confidence in their ability to provide advice to clients on energy issues. Most expected to pass on knowledge gained in the sessions to both colleagues and clients. All frontline workers described aspects of the session as good or excellent. This includes the presentation skills of the trainer that 79% (212) reported was excellent, the usefulness of the session that 73% (193) reported was excellent and the overall content that 74% (192) reported was excellent. The sessions increased many frontline workers awareness of energy issues. Most (76%, 204) reported that the session had changed their view on the importance of fuel poverty to their clients' Frontline workers anticipated that they would pass on things they had learnt during the sessions to either clients or colleagues. Frontline workers were asked to give an estimate of how many clients they expect to advise in the next six months using information they had learnt. The mean number of clients they expected to pass information on to was 37 (median – 20). In addition, most (93%, 74) reported that they would probably or definitely pass on what they learnt at the session to colleagues, estimating that they would pass what they had learnt on to an average of 11 (median – 6) colleagues.

6 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

The partnership energy advisors will work collaboratively to empower up to 6,400 vulnerable people and front-line workers to build skills to tackle the root causes of fuel poverty and address CO safety issues. After support clients will be able to affordably heat their homes, address debt situations, understand benefits of PSR and address CO safety issues.

The project will work collaboratively with other agencies to maximise positive impacts and deliver defined outcomes for individuals.

The partnership will be embedded in targeted local bureaux and provide the following outcomes

Table 1: Focus Areas & Outcomes

Focus Areas	Actions /Activities	Outcomes	Impact – social good
Fuel Poverty	Hybrid delivery of specialist energy advice by phone, email or video calls and face to face advice / home visits when lockdown restrictions allow.	Supporting vulnerable clients, including those who have been adversely affected by lockdown due to loss of jobs and furloughing leading to increased energy costs as people spend more time at home. This will lead to an increase in PSR registration and sign up for the WHD and in improvement in client’s housing and energy usage situations.	The impact of this will be demonstrated through case studies, client feedback and quarterly reports.
Hardship	Provision of holistic advice to clients as fuel poverty is inextricably linked with other forms of poverty and debt.	Clients are supported to have a full benefits check, and manage any debts including energy, so their income is maximised. Clients can also receive any other appropriate advice in the CAB.	The impact of this will be demonstrated through case studies, client feedback and quarterly reports.
Energy and Fuel Efficiency	Energy advisers will provide energy efficiency advice to help affordability in home, also make referrals via the HES referral portal for specialist support on energy efficiency measures. CAS will access and report on the outcomes of energy efficiency measures installed.	This ensures that clients receive support from CAB and also HES ensuring they receive expert advice and support on the measures, grants, and loans available to them. Clients will know how to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably and that they can request a free gas safety check.	The impact of this will be demonstrated through case studies, client feedback and quarterly reports.
Health & Wellbeing	Bureaux will continue to work with partners - the NHS, social care, local third sector organisations and local authorities to ensure this support can be provided to the most vulnerable clients. Energy advisers will attend the Gas Safe Charity CO training to become educated on CO safety and confident to provide CO awareness to customers they work with.	This will aim to ensure vulnerable clients and front-line workers are given an understanding of the dangers of carbon monoxide, an opportunity to be given a carbon monoxide monitor, and supported to sign up for the PSR (if they have not already done so) and receive appropriate energy advice to keep their clients homes safe and warm leading to healthier living conditions.	The impact of this will be demonstrated through case studies, client feedback and quarterly reports.
Social Return on Investment	Energy Advisers provide advice and demonstrate eg how to switch supplier and keep costs down by using energy more efficiently in the home. Providing a comfortable warm environment, alleviating stresses of debt management and providing awareness of CO. FP Households will feel more confident managing energy and households’ costs.	Clients will be better skilled and more confident and able to help themselves, eg by managing their energy bills, saving energy, having a warmer home, and understanding of the importance of and dangers of CO. This will also improve their peace of mind. Frontline workers will have a better understanding of how to identify and support clients in fuel poverty and with CO support needs.	The impact of this will be demonstrated through case studies, client feedback and quarterly reports.

6.2 Success Criteria

The partnership will successfully identify, train and support communities to build energy resilience skills and look to provide tangible outcomes for a minimum of 6400 households in areas most in need by delivering;

- CAB Energy Advisors provided CO safety training
- CAB advisors offered and achieving City and Guilds certification in energy efficiency

- Clients supported to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably via one-to-one advice
- Energy group sessions in targeted communities (Roma communities, Asylum Seekers, Park Homes, digitally excluded, vulnerable groups)
- Front-line workers (including NHS) supported through energy workshops including energy safeguarding and CO safety in communities, providing engagement in hard-to-reach communities
- Clients assessed on the impact of CO awareness sessions by completing the CO Awareness Survey
- Clients supported to use energy affordably, including reviewing billing and tariffs to ensure they are getting the best price for their energy usage – Due to the current fuel crisis and market conditions it may not be possible to achieve this outcome initially, however under normal circumstances this would be an outcome of the CAB and we've included this as a potential outcome in the expectation the market will return to 'normal' during the life of this partnership
- Clients supported with fuel bill renegotiation and payment options for fuel debt
- Clients supported to access and receive Warm Home Discount
- Clients engaged on the importance of the Priority Services Register, and supported to register where required
- Clients supported to access the services of relevant partnership organisations, including access to trust/hardship funding
- Clients supported in accessing Locking Cooker Valves where required

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

- Monitor outcomes against services provided
- Monitor who is making use of the service - customer demographics, vulnerabilities, and needs
- CO Survey service users for satisfaction and impact
- Work closely with our partners to ensure that we all understand the issues faced to continue to develop our services

7 Project partners and third parties involved

- CAS - Citizens Advice Scotland
- Home Energy Scotland
- Gas Safe Charity
- SGN
- Local partners including the NHS, social care, local third sector organisations and local authorities

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

CAS have included an option for an independent evaluation of the project in the start of year 2 so this can inform future developments and provision.

- This will involve a series of interviews with both project staff and clients in order to evaluate the training, good practice and how it could be shared as well as weeding out bad practice. Interviews with clients will assess their satisfaction with the service and associated outcomes.
- This would provide parameters for future service design and improvements, and help identify what works well, avoid what doesn't work well and what are vital requirements for future energy advice projects.

Learning

We will learn about the energy advisor programme and the impact/benefits of local engagement in communities and how key messages are cascaded, helping to understand more around type of engagement preferred, especially in the harder to reach communities.

We will learn more around the challenges fuel poor households face with the impact of COVID-19 and the engagement/partnerships CAS/CAB have set up locally with other stakeholders to provide additional support services to lift these households out of fuel poverty.

We will learn more around the successes of a holistic approach extending beyond fuel poverty, learning from the Home and Well model being trialled in our Southern Network, and the benefits realisation for the clients who receive this support. We will also learn more around SROI the evaluation and outcomes.

CAS will be trained on CO/LCV and FPNES from SGN and if successful this model could be adopted throughout all of CAS moving forward.

This project will help us build a framework for Years 2 to 5 with CAS supporting households in fuel poverty with the option to expand the reach into other geographical areas as per our Vulnerability Strategy. This will also be informed by the year 2 evaluation of the project.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

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 have forecast a minimum net SROI of £1.80. We are working with SIA Partners to carry out a further, full and in-depth SROI forecast due to the expected outcomes and associated social value aligned to this project.

*detailed SROI provided separately

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from 1 March 2022 to 31 March 2024

11 Geographic area

Taken from our vulnerability Index, which is weighted by Age, Covid, Deprivation, Disability, Finance, Health, and Inclusion, based on the communities most in need. Glasgow City, North Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway and Dundee City.

Other areas for future considerations are Inverclyde

12 Approval

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications