

CAS – North-East Energy Advisory Services pilot

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

07/10/21

SGN



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Contents

1 Description	3
2 Problem statement	3
3 Scope and objectives	3
3.1 Scope	3
3.2 Objectives	4
4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA	5
5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support	6
5.1 Customer feedback – Citizens Advice Energy Team	6
5.2 Moving Forward Together – Stakeholder Workshops held during 2018 and 2020	6
5.3 Customer Engagement Group 2019/20	6
5.4 Vulnerable Steering Group	6
6 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria	7
6.1 Outcomes	7
6.2 Success Criteria	7
7 Project partners and third parties involved	8
8 Potential for new learning	8
9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations	8
10 VCMA Project start and end date	8
11 Geographic area	9
12 Approval	9

1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	
Date of PEA submission:	20 October 2021
Project contact name:	Linda Spence
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2 Problem statement

Citizen Advice Bureaus (CAB) throughout Scotland are experiencing an increase in demand from households enquiring about financial support and help towards managing their household/living costs as their circumstances have changed. Households are finding it difficult to keep up with the rising costs of utility/household bills, furlough schemes ending and the changes to universal credits. At times making the choice between heating their homes or feeding their families, with many slipping into fuel poverty quickly, which is having an impact on their own/families health and wellbeing. They are at risk of self-isolation which could lead to homeowners in fuel poverty having cold homes, 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.

CAB at a local level in areas most affected want to support all enquiries they receive to ensure no household is left without the access to support services they need however are finding this additional resource difficult to fund, for two years they have sourced additional funding to fund a project to support four area's most in need within North of Scotland. The project has led to training and resources for specialist energy advisors, and so far, has supported over 1,100 households, with over 5,000 separate issues being discussed, and providing a direct financial benefit in excess of £350,000. The personal welfare increase provided by the targeted help and support has meant when surveyed 98% of people helped said it improved their peace of mind, with 46% going as far as to say the interventions had improved their mental health and 32% sited physical health improvements.

Expansion of project 2021/22

In 2021/22, energy bills are expected to continue to rise due to the after-effects of people spending more time at home, the increase in the price cap, household incomes falling as a result of furloughing and the loss of employment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as lockdown restrictions ease, the impact of these will continue to be felt.

In year 3 to help with the expansion into Dundee SGN have been asked to through VCMA fund the project allowing CAS to provide additional support in one of CAB's target areas around fuel poverty, with safety around CO and wellbeing added to the project.

3 Scope and objectives

3.1 Scope

CAS want to maintain service levels in all five bureaus identified to provide a specialist energy advisor who will advise and support vulnerable clients who are experiencing fuel poverty, hardship, fuel efficiency challenges and health and wellbeing challenges. These clients will continue to have access to support services specific to their need as well as encouraging these clients to sign up to the Priority Services Register. The Citizens Advice Network in Scotland is ideally suited to partner with us to provide support for these clients as their philosophy is to support clients with a variety of issues. CAS' holistic approach allows them to combine specialist fuel poverty advice with advice on other areas that affect their clients' health and wellbeing.

Over the past two years since the project has been up and running it has grown, and CAS now provide four specialist energy advisors working in local communities in specific geographical areas who are most at risk from financial hardship. CAS have also reviewed their client profile data to help them identify groups of clients who may be more at risk of being in fuel poverty because of their personal or wider circumstances and tailored their programme accordingly.

3.2 Objectives

The overriding objective is to ensure that there is a reduction in fuel poverty and those most at risk are supported effectively. CAS recognise that fuel poverty is inextricably linked to other forms of poverty and debt, and individuals who require support in dealing with fuel poverty are also likely to require support with benefits, housing and other issues related to low income. The project, like the bureau network, will take a holistic view to advising and assisting vulnerable clients. There will be an overarching approach to achieving income maximisation which, in turn, will allow clients to address their fuel poverty. We will also educate households to be more CO aware to help them stay safe and well in their homes.

Our national coverage through our bureau network allows us to align with SSEN/SGN Northern Region and to support those vulnerable clients categorised within the PSR. This support is provided by generalist advisors and specialist advice services working at a local level and providing a tailored service for the communities they support.

Summary of proposed project delivery in 2021/22

- The project aims to **reduce fuel poverty** in the North region and provide **support to around 820 vulnerable households**
- This will be done by funding the existing **four 0.8 full time equivalent** specialist Energy Advisors in local Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) in northern Scotland and one 0.8 full time equivalent specialist Energy Advisor joining Dundee in Winter period.
- The project aims to have 1,899 to 2,216 contacts with clients (by email, telephone, face to face or video conference)
- Demonstrating the complexity of the advice given, the project aims to provide 3,308 to 3,375 pieces of advice to clients
- An expected client financial gain of between £219,375 to £250,312
- Non-client financial gains, including supporting clients to improve their ability to
 - help themselves
 - manage their energy bills, including cheaper energy bills
 - save energy in their home
 - improve their housing situation, including having a warmer home
- Continue to inform clients about the PSR and new PSR website to encourage sign up
- The project Energy Advisors will provide advice to clients, and to generalist CAB advisors – this is referred to as 2nd tier advice
- Advisors will provide holistic, bespoke energy advice which involves resolving billing issues, energy-efficiency advice, help to switch suppliers, benefits checks, referrals to Warm Home Discount and Home Energy Scotland (HES), and supporting vulnerable clients to join the Priority Services Register (PSR).
- Advisors will provide water efficiency advice to households to help them reduce energy costs with referrals to HES for further support with Energy Efficiency saving water gadgets

- Advisors will provide CO safety advice and raise awareness through their conversations with households, and provide free CO alarms specific to the clients need
- Advisors will refer households for a free Locking Cooker Valve installation to support their campaign of safe and well in the home
- Advisors will where possible assess needs of households and refer for further support services relating to mental health issues where this has been identified
- Advisors will continue to refer households to Scotland’s Affordable Warmth Scheme which helps support FPNES and best heating solutions for their home

Further objective –Support Health and Well Being

The first 2 years of the project, which were very different from each other due to the impact of the pandemic, have provided a solid baseline to continue developing. In 2020/21, the project aimed to focus on 4 areas*: fuel poverty; hardship; fuel efficiency; health & wellbeing. The latter has been more challenging because of the pandemic, eg., it has not been possible to do something as simple as put leaflets about the service in hospitals. Nevertheless, Stirling CAB made real inroads, sending out Winter Warmth newsletters which were shared by the NHS Health Improvement team across all NHS and associated contacts and included in a Council COVID-19 Community response bulletin. In Western Isles, the Energy Advisor has worked with NHS Western Isles and local MacMillan nurses, who regularly signpost clients to the service, to develop referral pathways. These partnerships will be maintained and developed in the future.

CAS are very keen to take best practice from the Home and Well model and apply this to the Energy Advice Project. We have been recommended to use the current programme as the basis for this.

Sitting alongside this, Energy Advisors will work with discharge units to develop referral pathways and raise awareness of the service, developing the SSEN Occupational Therapy student project at Robert Gordon University (RGU). South West Aberdeenshire Citizens advice Bureau (SWACAB) have a Board member who works on the marketing team at RGU so and would be able to provide support to this project too. This would involve supporting patients being discharged from hospital, particularly those with electrical medical equipment, or for those living at home but supported with care.

All of this can be seen in table 1 in section 6 along with the corresponding outcomes and impact to be achieved.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project will provide support to households from CAS expert energy advisors which tackle fuel poverty issues and address CO safety issues resulting in positive Social Return on Investment. The project will provide holistic energy/water efficiency advice, access to the Priority Services Register and raise 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.

Funding for this project will be joint funding from SGN and SSEN which allows CAS to extend reach to a 5th bureau in Scotland.

Criteria below has been met

- a) have a positive, or a forecasted positive, Social Return on Investment (SROI) including for the gas consumers funding the VCMA Project.
- b) either:
 - i. provide support to consumers in Vulnerable Situations and relate to energy safeguarding, or

- ii. provide awareness of the dangers of CO,
- c) have defined outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these.
- d) go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanism(s) or required through licence obligations; and
- e) not be delivered through other external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including through other government (national, devolved, or local) funding

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

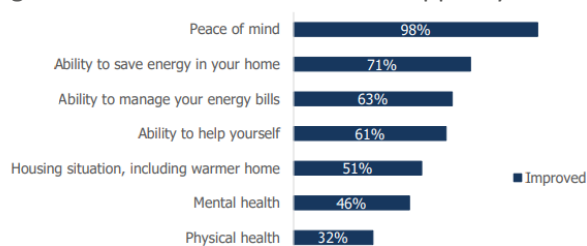
5.1 Customer feedback – Citizens Advice Energy Team

Customers who have accessed support from the existing energy team services have had the opportunity to provide feedback on the impact this support has had on their health and wellbeing.

Client feedback surveys:

They asked their clients what they thought about the service we provided, and the impact it had on their lives. In 2020/21, 46 clients responded, all with very positive feedback: 97% of clients surveyed rated the service as good or very good. Clients are also asked to rate whether the service has improved aspects of their lives. The feedback received has been extremely positive.

Figure 5. What difference has the support you received made to your...?



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. 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.

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 provide vulnerable customers with independent 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 in our target areas where customers are most impacted by our key vulnerability; fuel poverty, communities most impacted by Covid 19, those hard to reach, and those who require tailored advice and support services aligned to personal wellbeing and safety.

6 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

CAS and Energy Advisors will work collaboratively to empower up to 820 vulnerable people 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.

Focus Areas and 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.	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, 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.
Fuel/Water Efficiency	Energy advisers will make referrals via the HES referral portal for specialist support on energy/water efficiency measures. CAS will access and report on the outcomes of energy/water efficiency measures installed.	This ensures that clients receive support from the national Energy Efficiency project and can receive expert advice and support on the measures, grants and loans available to them. It will also assist households with access to the Affordable Warmth Scheme, which helps households with the best heating solution for their home, with signposting to FPNES included.	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.	This will aim to ensure vulnerable clients are supported to sign up for the PSR (if they have not already done so) and receive appropriate energy advice to keep their homes warm and help manage their health including mental health support where identified.	The impact of this will be demonstrated through case studies, client feedback and quarterly reports.
Safety within the home	Bureaux will educate households on CO awareness and safety and provide free CO alarms where required for homes.	This will help raise awareness and understanding of the dangers associated with CO and educate households on where to go for additional support.	The impact of this will be demonstrated through client survey feedback and quarterly reports around referrals for free CO alarms.
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.	Clients will be better skilled and more confident and able to help themselves, eg by managing their energy bills, saving energy, and having a warmer home. This will also improve their peace of mind.	The impact of this will be demonstrated through case studies, client feedback and quarterly reports.

The project is outcomes driven and will report on the number of households supported and the issues advised on, client financial gain, number of PSR referrals, number of CO referrals/advice, number of energy/water efficiency and partnership referrals (in particular those to Home Energy Scotland with associated outcomes, where known) and outcomes delivered.

6.2 Success Criteria

By project end

- Number of clients advised
- Number of pieces of advice given
- Number of contacts with clients
- Client financial gain as a result of referrals and/or advice
- Non-financial gain as a result of referrals and/or advice
- Number of clients asked about the PSR, already on it and added to it
- Number of clients provided with CO advice and alarms
- Number and type of referrals made to partnership organisations
- Number and type of energy efficiency measures installed (through the HES portal)
- Client outcomes as a result of EE installs and advice (through HES portal)

- Client satisfaction

7 Project partners and third parties involved

- CAS - Citizens Advice Scotland
- CAB - Citizen Advice Bureaux
- SSEN- Scottish and Southern Energy Network
- HES – Home Energy Scotland
- TIG - Tighean Innse Gall
- SCARF – Safety, Caring, Achievement, Resilience, Friendship

8 Potential for new 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 us 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.

Expanding to Dundee bureaux will also allow us to understand opportunities with the local hospital and adopt the Home and Well model we are delivering in the south in Hampshire and IOW.

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

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

Referral outcomes; Target 820 households over 12 months.

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.

Minimum SROI assessment

Based purely on a subset of the predicted outcomes we forecast a positive Social Return On Investment for this project.

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from August 2021 to July 2022

Mobilisation of project started August 21 with delivery to service users from Dundee starting from September 21. 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

11 Geographic area

Caithness, Stirling District, South West Aberdeenshire, Western Isles and Dundee

12 Approval

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications