

Energy Canny Communities

In partnership with Greener Kirkcaldy

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance 2 initiative

16 February 2023

SGN



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1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	
Date of PEA submission:	16/02/23
Project contact name:	Linda Spence
Project contact number/email:	Linda.spence@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£25,556.50
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£25,556.50

2 Problem statement

Fuel poverty

Fuel poverty is a real and persistent problem in Fife; with 26 neighbourhoods identified as having high levels of income deprivation, falling within the bottom 10% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (Scottish Government, 2020). Fife has the third-highest local authority share of deprivation and areas in mid-Fife have the highest levels of inequality and unemployment, with average household incomes in these areas significantly below the Scottish average¹.

The current energy price crisis has exacerbated the impact on households further. Research by the National Energy Agency and Energy Action Scotland found that households in the fuel poverty are being disproportionately impacted by the energy crisis. Fuel poor households often live on the lowest incomes and in the most inefficient homes. These conditions magnify the impact of price rises for people with the least space in their budgets to cope. In addition to the acute financial impacts, households are seeing huge negative consequences for their health and wellbeing². The Scottish Government estimated 40% of households to be in fuel poverty in September 2022³. Whilst, the Child Poverty Action Group estimate that, as of January 2023, 62% of Scottish households are now in fuel poverty⁴.

CO safety

Carbon Monoxide (CO) can pose a serious threat to health; in the UK every year CO poisoning accounts results in 4,000 people being treated in hospital and around 40 deaths. Many people in the UK who use carbon fuelled appliances are not aware of the dangers of CO and do not have a working audible CO alarm.

There is a direct correlation between fuel poverty and carbon monoxide poisoning. Lower income householders are often reliant on older gas boilers, older heaters, or even most dangerously, gas cookers to heat their homes. National Energy Action and Gas Safety Trust research found 35% of low income and vulnerable households surveyed exceeded the 10 parts-per-million (ppm) threshold for carbon monoxide levels. Older people, pregnant women, and young children are particularly vulnerable to CO poisoning, due to spending more time at home and an increased need to stay warm, resulting in increased heating use⁵. 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 poisoning⁶.

¹ Fife Housing Partnership, 2020, *Local Housing Strategy Interim 2020-2022*.

² National Energy Agency, 2022, *Fuel Poverty Monitor Report 2021-2022*

³ *ibid*.

⁴ <https://cpag.org.uk/news-blogs/news-listings/fuel-poverty-updated-estimates-uk>

⁵ SafeLink's, 2020, *Carbon monoxide poisoning: Who is most at risk?*

⁶ Kokkarinen et al, 2014, *Investigation of audible carbon monoxide alarm ownership*.

Collaborative and preventative approach

People in Fife are often experiencing crisis energy issues by the time they are referred to Greener Kirkcaldy's energy advice service. To mitigate the most preventable problems linked to fuel poverty, early intervention is required. However, some of the people most in need are also the hardest to reach and the least able to protect their interests in the energy market. Many of the most vulnerable households are falling through the gaps of national or local assistance schemes, receiving little or no support⁷. Older people, and those with disabilities, are often unaware of how to access information and advice. In Fife, 31.6% of adults have a limiting long-term condition. In 2022, 49% of the people supported through Greener Kirkcaldy's energy advice service were in extreme fuel poverty and 41% were known to be living with a long-term health condition or disability. In 2022, Greener Kirkcaldy helped to prevent the disconnection of almost 2,000 households on prepayment meters.

The demand for Fife-based energy advice provision is growing, with Greener Kirkcaldy's energy advice service currently over-subscribed and employing a waiting list. Fife organisations in non-energy sectors have increased their support to help households through the cost-of-living crisis, but do not have the skills or capacity to provide in-depth energy support. Requests from these organisations for talks and drop-in energy advice surgeries from Greener Kirkcaldy's energy advice service has increased significantly in the last year. In addition, other local support agencies often do not have the knowledge to identify fuel poverty.

Greener Kirkcaldy provides training to frontline workers in other organisations to identify and refer people in fuel poverty. In 2021, it trained 250 frontline workers; in 2022 this had risen to 700. There is a need to increase this work further, but the scope of support is limited by capacity.

Working in partnership with SGN and other agencies to provide holistic energy advice is the key to alleviating both the immediate effects and root causes of fuel poverty and to creating safe and warm homes. A collaborative approach of working in areas of high fuel poverty, with local trusted organisations who support people on low incomes or most vulnerable to fuel poverty, provides targeted support where it is most needed.

3 Scope and objectives

This project will engage with 2,240 people in the Fife community over a five-month period, raising awareness of energy issues and providing support to improve the wellbeing, safety, and financial outcomes for fuel poor households. It will also provide a referral pathway to provide these households with access to support services under this project.

Greener Kirkcaldy will provide further in-depth support to 240 vulnerable households at risk of, or living with, fuel poverty, providing advice on energy efficiency and financial support, plus referrals to other sources of well-being support, including income maximisation, befriending services, registration to the priority services register and debt clearance.

Where appropriate, people will be referred on to statutory and local schemes to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, including Home Energy Scotland's Warmer Homes Scotland programme and Greener Kirkcaldy's 'handy' service. Fuel poor households on pre-payment meters who are at risk of self-disconnection and under-heating will be referred for fuel vouchers to help stay connected.

Greener Kirkcaldy will partner with other local organisations supporting vulnerable people in their community, for example food pantry projects, parent and toddler groups and disability support groups. They will host a series of pop-up energy advice surgeries in the places people are already accessing other services and will provide training to referral partners.

The project will also raise awareness of the risks of CO in the home and provide fuel poor households without a CO monitor one for free. Vulnerable households that require additional support will be referred to SGN for CO monitors, locking cooker valves and for fire safety visits through their partner support.

⁷ National Energy Agency, 2022, *Fuel Poverty Monitor Report 2021-2022*

The project will build on the success of Greener Kirkcaldy's existing energy advice service, extending support to the most vulnerable and hard to reach households this winter. It will address the increase in demand for support from Fife households in fuel poverty that are struggling to heat their homes affordably, especially older people, people on low incomes, single parent families with young children and people with disabilities or long-term health issues.

The project will work very closely with SGN throughout, making best use of its available services. Greener Kirkcaldy will draw on their existing network of other agencies, expanding this network over the course of the project, to provide a holistic package of assistance to fuel poor households. This will empower participants to manage their energy usage going forward and give them the confidence and knowledge to seek further support should they require further help in the future.

The project will achieve sustainable, measurable outcomes for the people it works with, supporting them to achieve a warm and safe home affordably and making them more resilient to future risks of fuel poverty.

The project will:

- Reach Fife households through various contact channels, community events and direct marketing, social media, newsletter, and other partnership communication channels.
- Deliver free and impartial energy advice and support to fuel poor households in Fife through community-based workshops in targeted areas
- Identify and tackle under-heating, and those at risk of self-disconnection, thereby reducing the risks of cold-related ill-health.
- Raise awareness to people of CO risks and identify ways to make participant's homes safer.
- Ensure vulnerable participants are on the priority services register for energy and water and they can access broader relevant support services.
- Tackle fuel poverty holistically, increasing participants' ability to manage their energy use and costs going forward.
- Increase partnership working and support in fuel poor communities through pop-up energy advice surgeries.
- Increase the level of knowledge of our services amongst other local support agencies.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria as it will address the specific needs of Fife households and deliver energy safeguarding services and a tailored package of support where extreme vulnerability exists, including those living in fuel poverty. It will work holistically to empower people to use energy safely, affordably, and efficiently. It will also work collaboratively with a network of expert agencies, to go beyond the provision of energy advice and meet the increased demand for support in Fife, maximising the positive impacts of the project and delivering a positive Social Return on Investment.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Experienced delivery partners with skills and access to target group

Greener Kirkcaldy has been providing in depth energy advice to fuel poor Fife households since 2012, and works closely with Home Energy Scotland, Fife Council's Housing Services, and many of the 200 other referral partners. To date, they have provided in-depth energy advice to over 10,000 households, helping them save energy and money, maximise their income, tackle fuel debt and access other support services.

Experience gained during the course of their work has shown:

- Many people locally, especially older people, people with disabilities and health conditions and low-income households, under-heat their homes and are at risk of cold-related ill-health.

- It only takes a small, unexpected expense to trigger a crisis for households in 'in-work' poverty or people with insecure work.
- People in under-heated homes are more at risk of CO as they are more likely to reduce ventilation in order to retain heat and less likely to be aware of the causes and dangers of a poorly ventilated home.
- Other local support agencies often do not have the knowledge to identify fuel poverty or the skills to provide in-depth energy support.

Greener Kirkcaldy's 2021 participant survey evidences the impact of their support: 71% feel warmer or more comfortable at home, however, the survey also revealed that 23% need additional heat but were under-heating their homes. 91% of respondents feel more confident managing their home energy use after receiving advice.

5.2 SGN Business Plan– Stakeholder workshops

Our Vulnerability Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2. With their guidance we intend to prioritise key initiatives to support our most vulnerable customers. It is with guidance and support from our dedicated Vulnerable Steering Group that SGN use data to prioritise and target communities most likely to be living in a cold and unhealthy home. In 2021 our strategic steering group reiterated the vital impact we could have by co-ordinating our activities with others to support those most in need, those most impacted by the cost of living and energy cost crisis.

6 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

The planned and measurable outcomes for the partnership are:

- People supported through the one-to-one sessions will be empowered to manage their energy usage and costs to reduce the risk of further fuel poverty.
- People supported will be less at risk of utility disconnection, helping them manage affordable warmth within their home.
- People will feel safer in their homes as they will have access to CO awareness and carbon monoxide detectors, helping them become more aware of the risks of Carbon Monoxide and how to mitigate these.
- People living in fuel poor households will have greater access to emergency funding and support through fuel vouchers and food workshops.
- People supported will have access to measurable immediate and ongoing financial savings improving their household income and health and wellbeing.
- People within the community will have an increased awareness of priority service register with an expected increase in registrations.
- Increased knowledge of support services including non-energy support by fuel poor households and other local support agencies in Fife.
- Production of community specific energy safeguarding materials to fuel poor households, helping them access support services required specific to their needs.

6.2 Associated actions

6.2.1 In-depth energy advice and support

Greener Kirkcaldy's team of energy advisors, who are all qualified in City & Guilds Energy Awareness, will deliver in-depth energy advice. This will be via either a telephone advice service, or face-to-face engagement at a home visit for those needing more in-depth advice or support.

When delivering energy advice, the advisors make an initial assessment, asking a series of questions about the home and the household's needs, concerns, and motivations. They then give tailored advice, including:

- Helping participants to improve their understanding of energy bills, meters and tariffs, heating and hot water systems and heating controls.
- Supporting participants to achieve a suitable heating regime.
- Options for physical improvements to the home e.g. insulation, draught-proofing, new heating systems under FPNES or controls and home renewable technologies.
- Assisting with accessing statutory schemes and other relevant grant schemes.
- Ensuring participants' homes are safe and healthy spaces through ventilation, condensation, and damp advice, along with CO safety.
- Encouraging the best use of heating, lighting, and appliances.
- Giving simple, low-cost tips to save energy.
- Providing impartial energy switching advice.
- Referring vulnerable participants to the Priority Service Register.
- Giving advice on fuel debt and entitlements, such as the Warm Home Discount.
- Energy monitor loans to help households understand their electricity usage and smart meter advice.
- Providing a range of advice materials and leaflets relevant to each participant's home and circumstances.
- Thermal imaging surveys to verify building performance to specifications - to determine whether the building has insulation, locate air leaks, verify structure, design, and locate moisture intrusion.

In addition to this Greener Kirkcaldy will:

- Act as an advocate if participants need support to deal with energy suppliers or landlords.
- Refer participants to funded appliance repair or replacement services, if needed.
- Refer participants for fuel vouchers to alleviate an immediate energy crisis and prevent disconnection.
- Refer participants to other support services: e.g. Citizens Advice Scotland for benefit checks to maximise income, to carer, befriending or food provision services, and SGNs additional services.

6.2.2 Additional Support

CO monitors, provided by SGN, will be gifted to households that do not have a monitor, identified through the energy advice project.

The energy advisors will also make referrals for additional support provided by the project partners including:

- SGN to provide locking cooker valves and CO alarms to vulnerable households.
- Greener Kirkcaldy's 'handy' service, a means-tested service which installs simple energy efficiency measures and provides energy saving items to improve thermal comfort and safety and reduce energy usage. The service also provides 'cosy packs', comprising of a thermal blanket, warm clothes, and advice leaflets, to help participants in emergency situations.
- Home Energy Scotland's Warmer Homes Scotland programme and water saving measures.

6.2.3 Community energy advice pop-ups

In partnership with other local support agencies, energy advisors will host 10 drop-in energy advice surgeries at community spaces in the most at-risk communities. These pop-ups will increase access to energy advice support, increase energy literacy and resilience and reduce fuel poverty amongst the most vulnerable households. To ensure maximum reach with the target audience, the pop-ups will run alongside other activities that partner organisations are delivering, and partner organisations will encourage their participants to engage with the project services.

6.2.4 Community Engagement Approach

The project will benefit households in Fife that are most vulnerable to the impacts of fuel poverty, especially older people, people with disabilities or long-term health issues, and households on low incomes. It will focus support in areas where it most needed, in particular in the neighbourhoods that fall within the bottom 10% of

the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, especially post-industrial towns in Central Fife and Levenmouth and former mining villages.

To achieve the project outcomes, a varied and targeted marketing strategy will be carried out to engage participants. The project will be promoted through local shops and community buildings, as well as social media, to reach local groups and organisations. Drop-in energy advice surgeries hosted in local community spaces alongside various groups and organisations will help to spread the word as well as increasing close partnership working and referrals, including broader support organisations and local landlords.

By taking a holistic approach to tackling the causes of fuel poverty, the project will deliver a package of support of crucial services through a central trusted agency. For example, alongside the delivery of energy advice the project will provide wider support, such as referrals to Citizens Advice & Rights Fife for income maximization and benefit checks and support for households experiencing food poverty by signposting to local community pantries and cooking and budgeting skills courses e.g. Greener Kirkcaldy's "Smart Cooking" course.

6.3 Success Criteria

A minimum of 120 people will be supported one to one with in-depth support, a further 120 through energy advice pop-ups and 2,000 through various partnership networks and marketing channels, helping all use energy affordably, efficiently, and safely.

Our project will provide access to:

- 2000 people access to energy efficiency advice, Co awareness and priority service register through various marketing/leaflet drops etc targeted areas
- 240 people in depth Energy Efficiency advice, including energy usage, tariffs etc.
- 240 Priority Service Register registration
- 240 CO Safety conversation
- 40 working CO alarms where required
- 240 "Safe and Warm" energy saving guides for all participating households
- 80 Fuel debt and budgeting advice and grants to clear fuel debt
- 80 Income maximisation and benefit entitlement reviews
- 60 Warm Home Discount applications
- 48 food and essentials funded support
- 10 Energy advice pop ups in community spaces.
- 30 training for front line workers on energy safeguarding (PSR/CO)
- 30 training on fuel poverty awareness

To evaluate the impact, we will:

- Monitor outcomes against services provided, ensuring that those trained on the support services are confident in their ability to identify and support eligible customers to relevant help.
- Monitor outcomes of energy advice pop ups and the identification of households most in need, gathering insight around energy usage, food and fuel poverty and CO safety.
- Generate learning reports from insights generated from the engagement of the 2,240 households, through various community engagement and local partnerships.
- Work closely with our partners to ensure that we all understand the issues faced to continue to develop our services in the community based on need.

7 Project partners and third parties involved

Greener Kirkcaldy

Greener Kirkcaldy, the lead delivery partner, is a community-led charity and development trust working locally to combat the climate emergency, tackle fuel poverty and food insecurity, delivering a range of projects, activities, and training skills to meet the needs and goals of local people.

It has an established energy advice service, experienced in by providing holistic, bespoke, and in-depth energy advice to tackle fuel poverty and empowering vulnerable people in Fife to gain the confidence and skills to manage their energy. Staff have the skills and experience to deliver robust outcomes.

SGN

Greener Kirkcaldy and SGN will work closely in partnership to support to the project, providing training and 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.

Scottish Power Energy Network

Regional electricity distribution network operators providing programme funding and support to the delivery team including, but not limited to, access to the energy PSR.

Fuel Bank Foundation

The project will work with the Fuel Bank Foundation to provide fuel vouchers to fuel poor households. The Fuel Bank Foundation issue vouchers in a timely manner, have robust monitoring systems, and have a proven track record in providing support where it is most needed, having supported over 275,000 people by 2019.

Home Energy Scotland

Home Energy Scotland will act as a referral partner for the project, providing additional energy efficiency and water saving measures. SGN and Greener Kirkcaldy have a good working relationship with Home Energy Scotland and partnership agreements in place.

FORT partner network

A Fife-based network of over 200 partners providing additional support services that can be accessed directly through the Fife Online Referral Tracker system.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

As a partnership we will work closely to ensure that we all understand the issues faced by fuel poor households and the Fife community and adapt the support provided to address barriers to affordable warmth.

We will produce data and insight from the project activities and create a final report with findings and recommendations which show the real difference our project has made over the short period.

Through ongoing monitoring, we will:

- Keep comprehensive records of all activities undertaken and the number of households taking part in each.
- Use a client relationship management system to record the people receiving in-depth advice, including a summary of the advice given, any referrals made, and measures installed.
- Record activities and social return on investment through case studies.
- Monitor money saved/gained for each household using the 'financial gain' methodology of Citizens Advice Scotland, which includes increases in income, savings made by switching energy supplier, and other ways in which households benefit financially due to our advice and support.

Energy Canny Communities

- Use customer satisfaction surveys to evaluate the impact project activities have on the households taking part.
- Collate feedback captured through other communications, including in person and through online platforms.

Our learning will be published on Greener Kirkcaldy's website and disseminated to project partners and relevant members and stakeholders in the sector through the VCMA showcase and the Annual Report.

Learning

We are keen to learn from this project and for the successes to be incorporated into future delivery initiatives and promoted to others. Below are opportunities we see for replication, learning and sharing:

- We can use the data and feedback required to create best practices for supporting hard to reach households in fuel poverty and understand how to use energy safely and affordably.
- We will assess the variety of feedback tools used to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the project advice and activities, documenting project learning and sharing best practice among organisations seeking similar outcomes for communities and groups who are hard to reach with existing services.
- We will use an Action Learning approach to reflect on progress and identify good practice, especially around how to reach and engage with people who might not normally ask for help, or to add new activities.
- Partnership working will generate new joined up working practices and lessons learned to be replicated in future projects and to understand if there is a gap in providing support to fuel poor households.
- We will disseminate project learning at a local level, to partner organisations through steering groups, and share best practice with other grass-root organisations.
- Evaluating delivery will support learnings and successes which will be shared with the Fife Fuel Poverty Strategy Steering Group and Fife Healthy Heating Group, working with them throughout the project to identify and support further fuel poor households in Fife.

Greener Kirkcaldy will use the project experience to inform local policy, such as Fife's Fuel Poverty Strategy, and will share learning nationally through events such as Energy Action Scotland's advice forums, and Scottish Communities Climate Action Network's gatherings. Greener Kirkcaldy's CEO is a member of the Energy Consumers Commission. The learning from this project will inform her contributions to the Commission's advocacy and research work.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

Social Value Measurement

Working with SIA Partners we've developed a number of social proxy values aligned to the work and outcomes we and our partners are delivering. Using these along with the DNO SROI assessment tool and methodology we have carried out an assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes associated with this project, and we forecast a positive net SROI of £9.02

5-year reporting figures		
Economic	Total cost	£25,556.50
	Total gross present value	£255,948.89
	NPV	£230,392.39
	SROI	£9.02

Our energy canny community initiative will reach over 2,240 households and 200 partner organisations in the Fife area. Bringing much needed tailored energy safeguarding and fuel poverty support to communities through pop up hubs to reach those organisations who don't have skillset to support people most in need.

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from 31 March to 31 August 2023

11 Geographic area

Fife, Scotland – Top 10 area in our Fuel Poverty Mapping tool

12 Approval

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications