

Groundwork Green Doctors – Kent

VCMA

1 April 2023

SGN



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1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
Date of PEA submission:	01 April 2023
Project contact name:	Kerry Potter
Project contact number/email:	Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£365,733.50
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£104,332.50

2 Problem statement

During 2021, it was estimated that three million English households were living in fuel poverty (Dept for Business, Energy and Business Strategy). It was recognised that nearly half of low-income households were still living in hard to heat homes, and the rate of improvements was well below what is needed to lift people out of fuel poverty by a target date of 2030. Since then, the UK's energy prices have more than doubled in the past 12 months it is currently estimated that there are over 6.7 million households living in fuel poverty in the UK.

From 1 October 2022, the government implemented an energy price guarantee, which limits the amount households can be charged per unit of gas or electricity. The energy price guarantee has been amended many times throughout its introduction in October 2022, however it has recently been announced in the 2022 Autumn Statement that the energy price guarantee will last until April 2024. It is worth noting, the energy price guarantee stays as it is until the end of March 2023, after which it will rise by about 20% (so an 'average' household will pay £3k instead of £2.5k).

It is predicted that such price rise will increase the number of households into fuel poverty to almost 11 million, that is 1 in 3 households, many of which will be in extreme fuel poverty. (NEA, Fuel Poverty Coalition, Cornwall Insight)

Data from the most recently released government statistics shows a worrying picture in Kent. Data collected in 2020 (released in April 2022) shows;

- Fuel poverty has increased in Kent by 15.5% over the previous year (+8593 households).
- All Kent local authorities saw an increase in households in fuel poverty since 2019.
- Thanet had the highest fuel poverty rate in Kent (12.8%) and saw the biggest increase in number of fuel poor households since 2019 (+1478).
- Canterbury saw the biggest percentage increase in (+25.2%) number of fuel poor households (+1443 households).

This data would not include the impact of the recent cost of living crisis, when updated figures are released the expectation is that the increase in cost pressure households are facing will be reflected in a substantial increase in the rates of fuel poverty.

More recent data for 2021/22 from the Trussell Trust shows that use of food banks is still increasing in Kent and Medway, up by 24% on pre-pandemic levels. This increase reflects an additional 4762 food parcels provided to households in Kent, in the year from April 2021 to March 2022 the Trussell Trust distributed 22,087 food parcels to households in Kent.

Communities are coming together and providing support for households in crisis, food banks and warm spaces are helping those unable to maintain a safe and warm home or feed themselves and their families. Whilst these are valuable community resources, bringing people together and helping them with immediate help they could do more if there was an informed and trusted helper with the resources on hand to address the needs that have become a barrier to a safe and warm home both short and longer term.

3 Scope and objectives

Building onto an existing 2-year successful VCMA initiative with Groundwork Kent, support services were delivered in target areas of Coastal Kent including Thanet, Medway and Folkstone, with groundwork laid, we're adapting the support available based upon the increased needs of households in extreme fuel poverty and expanding the service to greater Kent.

The objective of the initiative is to provide those in fuel poverty and energy crisis with easy access to an energy adviser to provide direct advice to customers in need, and training to frontline community groups so that those working with vulnerable people can ensure that fuel poverty is identified and those at risk of living in a cold and unsafe home are signposted to appropriate support services.

The scope of the initiative covers;

1. A dedicated team of experienced Groundwork Green Doctors across Kent with the skills to provide utility services not limited to industry initiatives including PSR (water and energy), Warm Home Discount, Winter fuel payments, water social tariff, debt support, information on smart meters, gas safety, Locking Cooker Valves and who to contact in an emergency (eg. 0800 111 999 and 105)
2. Providing advice on gas safety and the provision of carbon monoxide alarms for households that do not have a working audible carbon monoxide alarm – including checking that the customer is confident that they can recognise the signs and symptoms and keep themselves safe from carbon monoxide harm
3. A joined-up service between trained referral partners which includes training front line teams to identify and effectively refer people into the Green Doctors team who face issues with affordable utilities with the outcomes of improving the quality of people's lives, their mental, physical, and financial wellbeing
4. A robust network of regional and relevant secondary key partnerships to ensure access to utility services as well as health and wellbeing services that are specific and local to client need. Current network includes; Medway Housing Society, West Kent Homes, Kent County Council, Thanet Council, Gravesham District Council, Involve Kent (Wellbeing network), ReferKENT, Kent Coastal Volunteers, Porchlight, NHS social prescribing networks, foodbanks, Warm Hubs, and community support groups including refugee and asylum support groups, and regional care support teams
5. The provision of interventions for households in energy crisis where no other funding is available, to include fuel vouchers for either pre-payment meters or credit meters and heat the person resources – only for households identified as in energy crisis and where vulnerable customer(s) occupy the property and their health is being impacted by being cold.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project will provide support for households that are financially vulnerable and hard to reach due to communication barriers, including those who are digitally excluded, to access key services including the PSR, interventions that address fuel and water poverty and broader safeguarding / 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 deliver defined outcomes.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Citizens Advice – Cost of Living Dashboard

Citizens Advice are collating the data from the support they're providing in our communities, this data is significant and has highlighted not just the increase in need for households throughout the last few years, but more recently the challenges faced by customer groups most impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. Key insights from the research highlights that there has been a significant increase of households in energy crisis, those

unable to afford to top up prepayment meters or going into energy debt. All indicators on cost of living and energy crisis highlight that disabled people have more adversely impacted than non-disabled people due to their increased energy needs and the impact of inflation on benefits. Supporting disabled people with their energy costs and avoiding energy debt is key to the support required for this customer group.

5.2 Groundwork South / London – Green Doctor feedback

Customer engagement is central to the way that Groundwork operates. We know that the Green Doctor programme is highly effective in meeting the needs of service users with feedback surveys indicating a 98% satisfaction rating. We use feedback surveys to understand the quality of our intervention and to be able to improve the service to be more responsive to need. Over the past year Green Doctors have been working with Involve Kent to better understand the Wellbeing impact of our energy advice through a post visit wellbeing survey. Recent customer testimonials from November 2022;

“Thank you so much for helping me apply for a grant to improve my home! The energy saving package was a lovely and very kind surprise too. I've installed everything” **30+ female client with young children in the home, and a home with low with EPC.**

“Thank you once again you are very kind, the advisor spent so much time with me helping save money on my energy and water. I wish you all the luck because you've made me feel absolutely marvellous to help me.” **60+ client, the Green Doctor has opened a case with her water supplier to join the social tariff.**

“You are such a valuable service; I am going to tell all my friends about you. And it is such a comfort a service like yours is out there. The Green Doctor was very supportive in helping me understand my energy and appliance use, he also helped sort out draught proofing for my doors and windows. I feel more confident about my situation now.” **70+ couple referred by their son to help with energy advice as their home was cold and draughty with old double glazing.**

5.3 SGNs Vulnerability Steering Group

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. On review of the unspent Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme our Vulnerability Steering Group endorsed that this initiative fulfils a gap in support currently available to those most in need.

6 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

The Groundwork Green Doctor team will work to directly support 1,100 people over two years who are financially vulnerable or in hard-to-reach communities, in the most at-risk communities in Kent providing access to independent and impactful solutions to using energy safely, efficiently, and affordably.

The partnership will continue to be embedded within the community, linked closely with a network of regional service providers and training to support effective referrals with organisations including; Kent Warm Hubs, Arches Local Trust, Kent Mind, Porchlight, Live Well Kent, Men in Sheds, and health care providers providing expert support to address the barriers people face to a safe and warm home.

The project aims to provide the following outcomes to service users;

- For frontline support workers - the skills to identify and effectively refer people who would benefit from the tailored support

- For eligible people to be supported by their utilities Priority Services Register, providing them with the security and support they will need during an outage and tailored support with costs
- For people who are seeking energy advisory services, safe ways to stay safe and warm, information on what support is available and help to manage and pay their own utility bills going forward
- For all – increased awareness of the risks of Carbon Monoxide and how to mitigate these
- For all – increased health and wellbeing and ideally resulting in being more able to cope at home
- For those identified as in energy crisis – support to deal with the immediate needs including access to fuel vouchers and heated the person resources.

6.2 Success Criteria

Working together Groundwork South / London and SGN will be providing support to households in Kent to those impacted by fuel poverty and the cost-of-living crisis. We are aiming to deliver the following customer outcomes over two years, which has formed the basis of our social return on investment modelling.

- 24 Frontline worker training sessions (approx. 240 frontline workers)
- 120 community workshops including the support at Kent Warm Hubs
- 1100 customers provided with support to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably at events or via the telephone support service
- 700 households provided with small energy saving measures (not VCMA funded)
- 150 customers provided with 'case worker support' as they are living in energy crisis and require help and access to funded provisions
- 200 customers provided with fuel vouchers
- 125 customers provided with heated electric low-cost throw rugs or other heat the person items
- 400 customers supported to join the PSR
- 750 customers provided with CO awareness sessions
- 250 customers provided with a CO alarm.

7 Project partners and third parties involved

Co-funded initiative, with a network of complementary funding streams that enable us to provide a holistic household and customer support provision that addressed fuel poverty and broader vulnerability support interventions.

- **Groundwork London / South** – to deliver the support programme and manage the network of referral pathways to identify eligible vulnerable households.
- **British Gas Energy Trust** – funding fuel vouchers, advisory services, and energy efficiency measures in Thanet area only
- **Groundwork UK - Energy Redress funding** – advisory services and energy efficient measures
- **SGN** – funding energy advisory training, events and case worker support, fuel vouchers, heat the person resources and carbon monoxide alarms.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

We will be assessing the customer journey, the impact of the support provided including outcomes as detailed above. To monitor the impact of our programme we will monitor outcomes of those using the services provided by capturing data on who is using the service including demographics, vulnerabilities and needs. We will work closely with our partners to ensure that we all understand the issues faced to continue to develop our services by need. The Groundwork team will survey users of the service and provide case studies of the impact of the programme on frontline support and impact of individuals supported by the initiative (partner and individual)

Learning

The outcomes of the project will be shared at a minimum across our partnership network and with other energy network / energy supplier organisations and the Utilities Customer Safeguarding working groups.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

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 £6.42

Social Value Measurement

5-year reporting figures		
Economic	Total cost	£102,526.43
	Total gross present value	£760,607.78
	NPV	£658,081.36
	SROI	£6.42

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from April 2023 until April 2025

11 Geographic area

Kent

12 Approval

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications