

# Help for disabled people in energy crisis

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance 2 initiative

15 February 2023  
SGN



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## 1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
Date of PEA submission:	15 February 2023
Project contact name:	Kerry Potter
Project contact number/email:	Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£169,000
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£169,000

## 2 Problem statement

Against a backdrop of the UK's energy prices doubling 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<sup>st</sup> October 2022, the government implemented an energy price guarantee (EPG), which limits the amount households can be charged per unit of gas or electricity. The EPG has been amended many times throughout its introduction in October 2022, however it has recently been announced in the 2022 Autumn Statement that it will last until April 2024. It is worth noting, if the EPG 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).

If a price rise materialises, it is predicted this will increase the number of households falling into fuel poverty to almost 11 million, equivalent to 1 in 3 households, many of which will be in extreme fuel poverty.

We know that disabled people have been impacted the most throughout the energy and cost of living crisis, this is evident in the data collated by Citizens Advice and has been reflected in the experiences captured by Scope's Disability Energy Service (DES) and the recent research conducted by the Scope Utilities Membership partners<sup>1</sup>.

We're already seeing evidence that the impact has been further exacerbated this winter with many expressing their concerns of how they will cope during the coldest months to heat their home.

In the last 6 months the Scope support services have seen referrals to their dedicated energy advice service increase five-fold since the same period last year. This has shown the increased demand for free and accessible support to help manage rising costs. Key insights from the DES team this year include;

- 32% of customers are in arrears with their energy - £1,089 on average per customer
- 35% of customers require assistive equipment with 21% already considering or turning off their equipment to reduce energy costs this winter

DES customers have shared with Scope that they have exhausted all energy savings tips offered to them and feel their only option is to now limit the amount of energy they use, many of which are now only heating their homes when they have support in or for 1 hour per day, some are not using heat at all impacting both their health and wellbeing.

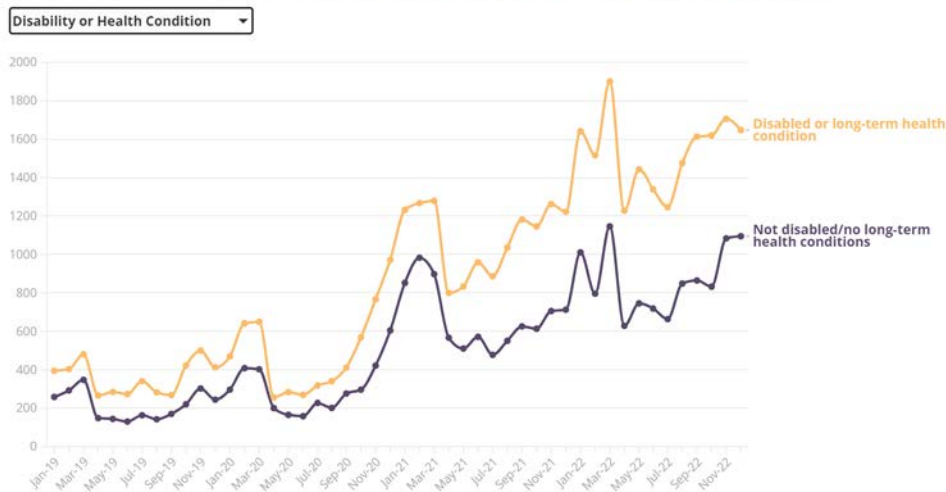
Data shared by Citizens Advice as detailed in the February 2023 [Cost of Living Crisis dashboard](#), has demonstrated it is disabled people who continue to be most likely to be found in energy crisis, requiring tailored support, and that it's disabled people who are disproportionately going into energy debt as the energy needs are greater and impact of self-disconnection more acute.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/research-policy/cost-of-living-report/>

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Extracts from the February 2023 Cost of Living Crisis dashboard:

The number of people we're helping with practical energy efficiency advice every month by demographic group



Average energy debt held by the people we help with energy debt by health status



It's clear that disabled people are making difficult decisions to stay safe and warm in their homes, and feedback from disabled people has been incorporated to highlight what support would be most impactful should they be in energy crisis.

### 3 Scope and objectives

Building onto an existing VCMA initiative, the dedicated Disability Energy Service (DES) where disabled people have free access to inclusive and tailored help to manage energy and water needs, the scope of this initiative is to provide disabled people in energy crisis with interventions that address need based on health outcomes.

The objective of the initiative is to minimise the health and wellbeing impacts of disabled people who are in energy crisis.

The scope of the initiative is to assess the needs of the households and provide where eligible one or both of the following interventions:

1. The partnership will provide fuel vouchers to those on energy credit meters who are at risk of being moved on to Prepayment meters due to energy debt or who are building energy debt as a result of requiring energy as they are reliant on assisted technology. This service is required as there is funding available to

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Scope's DES service for pre-payment but not for credit customers though the Fuel Bank Foundation partnership.

2. Where it's assessed that the households are still unable to afford to heat their home to a temperature that is required for less mobile people, the partnership will then look to heat the person by providing electric throw blankets, a low cost to run alternative that will increase wellbeing for the customer.

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

This project will provide support to those most vulnerable and in energy crisis, providing access to interventions that help reduce the impact on health and wellbeing outcomes in addition to a service that already delivers broader safeguarding support for disabled people. The project is targeted to help those most impacted by fuel poverty and the outcomes defined are forecast to deliver a positive SROI.

## 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. Scope – Cost of living 2022 report

Scope's Cost of Living 2022 report highlights the additional impacts the cost-of-living crisis has had on disabled people. In earlier research conducted by the charity they confirmed that life already costs more if you are or are caring for a disabled person, that's before the cost-of-living crisis and the increase in energy costs doubled the unit cost of energy in 12 months. This additional cost worked out to be £583 per month. With over 1/3 of disabled people claiming that their disability impacts their energy needs, 91% of disabled people are worried about how they are going to pay for their energy this winter. 57% of disabled people say that their income does not or only just covers their essential bills and over this winter the DES team have seen that 43% of disabled people who are using the service are already in energy debt. The effects on physical health of not being able to adequately heat their home are stark, with 40% of disabled people going without heating causing them to be uncomfortable or in pain, 31% say that it would severely impact their health and 9% said it could put their lives at risk. The DES team do have fuel vouchers for prepayment meters, and the impacts of being able to offer this immediate help are significant.

### 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.

## 6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

### 6.1. Outcomes.

The partnership will support the DES team to provide a minimum of 700 clients in energy crisis with interventions that will enable them to keep safe and warm in addition to the case worker support provided through the DES service.

The interventions will be embedded to work collaboratively to address the extreme hardship households face to maintaining a safe and warm home during the colder months.

For clients identified as in energy crisis, with disabilities that require additional energy needs, that meet the criteria of, a) the disabled customer is in at least one month's arrears on their energy bill and b) is reliant on assistive technology that increases their need for energy.

1. Be provided with DES advisory services designed to increase household income and keep safe and warm this winter
2. Be supported by being provided with an energy voucher of up to £150 to support them to fund essential appliances and heating
3. Be supported by being provided with a plug-in heated throw blanket to ensure that a disabled person with limited mobility is comfortably warm even in a colder home

### 6.2. Success Criteria

Working together Scope and SGN will be looking to support disabled people most impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. We are aiming to deliver the following customer outcomes, which has formed the basis of our social return on investment modelling.

- 700 disabled customers in SGNs footprint area living in fuel crisis provided with up to £150 in energy credit to increase their ability to maintain a safe and warm home, increasing the health and wellbeing of the household
- 700 heated electric low-cost throw rugs for disabled people who are less mobile to ensure that they have the benefit of a warm space even if they are unable to heat their homes adequately due to cost
- Support disabled people's increasing energy debt

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.

## 7 Project partners and third parties involved

SGN – funding the interventions and identifying disabled people who could benefit from DES and these targeted interventions

Scope – providing the advice services via DES, identifying those who are eligible for the interventions, ensuring delivery of the interventions, and measuring the customer feedback and impact of these additional measures of support

Purple Chameleon Ltd – supplier of the heated blankets

Post Office – supplier of the energy credit vouchers

## 8 Potential for new learning

### Monitoring and evaluation

10% of disabled people will complete an evaluation survey with Scope to understand the impact of receiving the additional interventions in both our Southern and Scotland areas. We will be assessing the customer

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journey, the impact of the voucher value in terms of energy use, the overall impact on their financial situation and the impact of their health and wellbeing.

### Learning

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

## 9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

### Social Value Measurement

Working alongside leading social impact research consultancy SIA Partners we carried out in-depth research to develop a new proxy to support the SROI forecast for this project to understand the impact of 'heating the person'. This looks at the financial, societal and carbon saving benefits linked to heating a person and how to capture the value of these. We used this 'heat the person' proxy alongside other existing proxies including the provision of fuel vouchers for a household in energy crisis to carry out an assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable customers incorporated in this partnership. From this we forecast a positive net social return of £7.07.

5-year reporting figures		
Economic	Total cost	£169,000.00
	Total gross present value	£1,363,561.10
	NPV	£1,194,561.10
	SROI	£7.07

## 10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from February 2023 until February 2024

## 11 Geographic area

SGNs network areas

## 12 Approval

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications