

Tackling Fuel Poverty together

East Sussex & West Sussex

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

October 2023

SGN



SGN

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1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
Date of PEA submission:	October 2023
Project contact name:	Kerry Potter
Project contact number/email:	Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£255,000
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£170,000

2 Problem statement

In 2022, there were an estimated 3.26 million households living in fuel poverty in England, based on the LILEE metric (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2023). This is an increase from 3.1 million in 2021 and doesn't take into consideration the cost-of-living crisis that has hit households throughout the winter of 2022-23 and beyond. National Energy Action state the figure as 6.7 million UK household since October 2022, using the 10% of income measure. 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.

Living in a cold home has significant and demonstrable direct and indirect health impacts. There is strong evidence that shows it is associated with poor health outcomes and an increased risk of morbidity and mortality for all age groups. (Public Health England).

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Groups who are more vulnerable to health problems associated with cold homes:

- People with cardiovascular conditions
- People with respiratory conditions
- People with mental health conditions
- People with disabilities
- Older people (65 and older)
- Young children (under 5)
- Pregnant women
- People on a low income
- People who have attended hospital due to a fall
- People who move in and out of homelessness
- People with addictions
- Recent immigrants and asylum seekers (Public Health England)

The Marmot Review into the health impacts of cold homes and fuel poverty found a strong association between cold temperatures and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Fuel poverty and living in a cold home has been linked to excess winter deaths. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 40% of excess winter deaths are caused by living in a cold home and the Hills review estimates that some 10% of excess winter deaths are directly attributable to fuel poverty (Hills, 2012).

In the year 2021-2022, excess Winter deaths in the Southeast (excluding COVID-19) increased from 390 to 1,500 (ONS, 2023). Taking action on cold homes will not only reduce hospital admissions and the excess mortality rate but have other tangible impacts including reduced absence from school and work, reduced financial and fuel poverty. (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, 2015). The evidence is clear, there are multiple benefits from addressing fuel poverty and tackling cold-related ill health.

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Working alongside Citizens Advice, SGN and the other regional utility networks have reviewed the data that identifies communities in East and West Sussex where the need is greatest based upon health indicators associated with cold homes and sharp changes in fuel poverty data.

This has highlighted four areas where the need is greatest.

Arun

The Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) latest statistics for 2019 revealed that 6,337 households in Arun district are defined to be living in fuel poverty. This is an increase of 1,000 households when compared to the previous release of these statistics. This, coupled with the fact that the Arun district had 290 excess winter deaths in 2019/20, 190 more than the previous year. The data shows that there are 47,624 people living with cardiovascular conditions, 15,050 people with respiratory conditions, 17,582 people with mental health conditions, 2,017 people living with dementia and 6,535 children aged below 5. Data from Public Health England, ONS (Office for National Statistics) highlights those 3,195 children live in low-income families, 31,489 people are known to be living with disabilities or limiting long-term health conditions and there are 46,885 people aged 65 and over.

Chichester

Data on Fuel Poverty from 2019 shows that in the Chichester Parliamentary Constituency has 4,842 households defined as being fuel poor. This heightened risk of fuel poverty alongside an excess winter death figure of 160, saw an increase of over 100 additional deaths in the past year. The data below shows the Chichester residents within NICE vulnerable groups includes, 27,125 people with cardiovascular conditions, 9,007 people who have respiratory conditions, 9,165 people who have mental health conditions and 4,250 children aged below 5. Data from Public Health England, ONS (Office for National Statistics) highlights that there are 19,883 people with disabilities and/or limiting long-term health conditions, and 2,336 people living with dementia. There is also data that Chichester is an ageing community and already has 33,634 people aged over 65.

Hastings

Hastings ranks as the most deprived district in the Southeast, being 13th out of 317 among lower tier authorities nationwide, compared to 19th in 2015. This figure contains what is in some neighbourhoods a significant level of deprivation with two LSOAs being amongst the most deprived 1% in the country. The majority of the county's deprived neighbourhoods are located in Hastings, where 16 out of 53 neighbourhoods (30%) rank in the most deprived decile nationally. This is mirrored in the fuel poverty statistics, with 5,756 of households in fuel poverty. In 2018/2019 Hastings had 250 excess winter deaths (an increase of over 200 in the last year). The Hastings residents within NICE vulnerable groups includes, 32,465 people with cardiovascular conditions, 10,070 people with respiratory conditions, 16,067 people with mental health conditions, 1,320 people living with dementia and 5,574 children aged below 5. It's also known that at least 4,455 children in Hastings are living in low-income families.

Rother

Rother is the 10th most deprived district in the South-East region out of 51 in total. It ranks 139th out of 317 lower tier authorities nationwide where 1 is the most deprived. There are 4 LSOAs in Rother which are amongst the 20% most deprived in the country. 4,661 households live in fuel poverty which represents 10.6% of all households in the district. The most recent data available from the ONS reveals there were 260 excess winter deaths in Rother. Rother residents within NICE vulnerable groups includes 24,049 people with cardiovascular conditions, 7,203 people with respiratory conditions, 1,687 people with mental health conditions, 1,008 people living with dementia, 2,920 children aged below 5 and 30,842 people aged over 65.

Fuel poor homes are not just cold but can also be unsafe

There is a direct correlation between fuel poverty and carbon monoxide poisoning. Lower income householders are often reliant on older boilers, older heaters or even gas stoves or cookers to heat their homes. National Energy Action and Gas Safety Trust research found 35% of low income and vulnerable

households surveyed exceeded the 10ppm threshold for carbon monoxide levels. We also know that there is a direct correlation between lack of appliance servicing and CO poisoning, and financial vulnerability, while not the only factor to explain non-servicing in low-income households, is a key determinant, particularly among vulnerable owner occupants.

- 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 poisoning
- Older people, pregnant women, and young children have also been found to be particularly vulnerable to CO poisoning, spending more time at home and with a need to stay warm, resulting in using the heating more regularly
- Social tenants are less at risk due to RSL requirements for annual gas safety checks and higher energy efficiency standards

3 Scope and objectives

Working with a shared ambition together the partnership has the aim to identify and support vulnerable households and provide a range of tailored support services that address the underlying causes of fuel poverty, helping those most vulnerable and at risk of living in a cold and unhealthy home.

The partnership will work closely with health providers and voluntary sector support groups the partnership will join forces to help vulnerable customers and will deliver a year-round service with an enhanced service over winter where there is a greater need to provide practical support to keep residents safe and warm.

Dedicated utility advice team

The partnership will maintain a referral network working closely with the Primary Care teams, Social Prescribers, Adult Care services, Mental Health units and voluntary care organisations in Arun, Chichester, Hastings, and Rother to set up direct referral pathways for professionals to refer anyone who is struggling with utility costs and in one of the vulnerable groups into a dedicated utility advice team.

This dedicated team and broader Citizens Advice network will deliver a holistic, wraparound advice service mainly focused on debt, welfare benefit, income maximisation, energy, including eligibility for water tariffs, and CO safety, and financial capability advice but also able to provide any other advice needed.

The dedicated team are trained in motivational interviewing techniques and will support residents in behaviour change, so they are better able to keep safe and warm. The team will provide the support that is needed to best support the service user, those who just need advice and information, provide casework for people who need ongoing support but also a casework service for people who lack capacity to act. The team will also work with statutory and non-for-profit organisations to ensure that services users have the support needed to reduce any possible risk of health deterioration or hospital admission.

We aim to support a minimum of 600 individuals over the one-year funding period with tailored advice and support provisions to improve the health, wellbeing, and financial outcomes for those households and to work with other statutory or non-for-profit organisation to provide the support needed to reduce the service user's likelihood of a negative health impacts.

Enhanced winter support

To ensure that the partnership can identify and support those most at risk during winter the team will deliver an enhanced winter support programme that builds awareness and skills for frontline workers in health care and voluntary care organisations as well as a network of Warm Hubs where we can provide respite and advice services to those in need during the colder months.

- We will provide front-line worker training to give workers the skills and knowledge needed to identify characteristics of living in a cold home, households in fuel poverty and increase the likelihood of them identifying households who would be best supported through the warm welcome hubs. Through the Frontline Worker Training we aim to train at least 175 frontline workers over the autumn period.

- Working in partnership with the County, District and Borough Councils, West Sussex, East Sussex and UK Harvest and the local Food Banks, Citizens Advice will create a support framework of Warm Hubs that proactively offers information and advice to vulnerable Sussex residents on how to stay safe and warm this coming winter. The partnership will provide services from already established warm hubs around Sussex these include faith centres, Community Hubs, Village Halls, libraries, and other community spaces. These spaces provide vulnerable residents living in hard-to-heat homes, and those experiencing fuel poverty, with a welcoming location where they can take part in activities, warm up and have a hot drink or a hot meal (food is not available in some libraries). At the Warm Hubs our teams will provide energy and financial support advice, fire safety advice, CO monitors, easy energy efficiency measures and cooking equipment (e.g., slow cookers) and low cost, healthy recipes. Through the Warm Hubs we aim to support 2,779 vulnerable households over the winter period finding it difficult to keep warm this winter, providing tailored advice and support provisions to improve the health, wellbeing, and financial outcomes for those households.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This partnership will provide support across East and West Sussex on energy safeguarding, ensuring that those who are at risk of living in a cold and unhealthy home have access to key support services to alleviate fuel poverty. In addition, the partnership looks to support at risk vulnerable customers on to the Priority Services Register as well as provide carbon monoxide (CO) alarms where needed as well as CO safety advice. The services will work collaboratively with expert agencies to maximise positive impacts beyond energy, increasing the health and wellbeing of the individual supported and delivering defined outcomes.

This partnership has been externally assured by SIA partners for Social Return on Investment.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Citizens Advice – East Sussex and West Sussex

The team have successfully delivered Tackling Fuel Poverty together and a winter warm hubs VCMA partnership in 2021-2023. By working closely with health partners, the team has built a strong referral network that has allowed the team to identify those in the most vulnerable situations, including clients who were living completely without gas and electricity. The Sussex-based teams have extensive experience in managing grant support and fuel vouchers to those in need since before the outbreak of COVID-19 and continue to provide high-quality energy advice services. The team achieved more than £250,000 in financial outcomes for their clients during the project, including debt write offs, benefit awards and home improvement grants. We learned that due to the complexity of the issues faced, the majority of clients needed multiple interactions over several months to resolve the underlying issues. The project allowed the clients to be dealt with holistically, make genuine long-term behavioural changes, build trust in all partners, and empower the clients to deal with any future issues. The referrers, including health partners, were grateful for the direct link to the service and have already started to see the impact the service makes to individual's physical and mental wellbeing.

The winter warm hub service supported 3,160 clients from February 2023-May 2023. Working closely with community partners has allowed the team to identify those in the most vulnerable situations and direct them to the most appropriate source of help. The project allowed the clients to be dealt with holistically, make genuine long-term behavioural changes, build trust in all partners, and empower the clients to deal with any future issues. It has also further developed relationships with other statutory and voluntary bodies within the local areas.

5.2 Tackling Fuel Poverty together – Beneficiary feedback

TFPT NICE Vulnerable Group Service Client feedback:

“I have multiple health conditions after a stroke. I had lived with concrete floors for 4 years, your adviser organised funding for carpets which has been life changing for me. Also sorted funding for a sofa bed for the living room. The carpets have turned my small flat into a home and has actually improved the arthritis in my ankles. The new sofa bed has improved my hip, shoulder, and pelvic problems. They also managed to get funding to help with my energy bills as my back was against the wall being forced to have a pay as you go meter. Thanks to the adviser this did not happen. With their help I managed to pay for some little changes to help with my disabilities/health conditions myself. The team have truly changed my life. Instead of waking up in the morning looking around - feeling depressed - seeing no way of paying for basics - carpets, sofa - I now wake up to carpet under my feet - a comfortable place to sit and it all just makes me smile and feel like I have a home. I cannot thank you enough. Also huge thanks to investors in this fund - you are changing sick and disabled people's lives for the better. A little hope and help in life go a long way to improving mental health - it certainly has with me. For the first time since my stroke in 2014 I am actually making plans for the future - because of the service I have received I now feel I have a future. If I could hug you all I would, but can't, so virtual hugs to the team and all the investors”

Warm Welcome Spaces Stakeholder feedback:

“We have been extremely impressed with how Citizens Advice has been able to mobilise for both County Councils in Sussex and the Districts and Boroughs to partner and support households accessing warm welcome spaces. West Sussex County Council has a strong relationship with Arun & Chichester Citizens Advice and has made available significant funds from the DWP Household Support Fund to distribute warm packs, has also made hygiene packs available and accessible through warm welcome spaces and supported the scheme direct mailer. Through their work residents have been able to boost their resilience to the current pressures, build confidence and take greater control of their finances.”

Warm Welcome Spaces Client Feedback:

“Thanked CA for all the help he had received, as a single father of 4 daughters under the age of 9, he had no idea how he would have coped without our help.”

5.3 SGN's Vulnerability Steering Group (VSG)

Our VSG has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2 and how best to utilise the VCMA to help those most at risk of living in a cold and unhealthy home. It is with guidance and support from our dedicated VSG that SGN use data to prioritise and target communities most likely to be living in a cold and unhealthy home, in particular those living with a health condition made worse by living in a cold and damp home. This partnership is built on data and covers both geographic areas where there is compelling data that identifies vulnerable customer needs, both due to fuel poverty and health indicators.

As we've progressed our portfolio of projects throughout GD2 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. The VSG have recommended that we look at ways in which we can build stronger links with other organisations including collaborating with other utilities, health services and charities to deliver support services that tackle the fuel poverty gap and the underlying causes of fuel poverty.

6 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

Through this collaborative partnership the team aim to support those most at risk of health impacts of living in a cold and unhealthy home. The partnership will be embedded within the community working closely with health care workers, consumer advocates and utility company representatives to address the barriers clients face to maintaining a safe and warm home.

We will:

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- Provide frontline training to health care professionals and care organisations to help identify vulnerable households at risk of living in fuel poverty
- Provide a dedicated energy advice service to residents across East Sussex and West Sussex
- Provide residents across East Sussex and West Sussex with practical information on ways to stay safe and warm and where to get help if needed
- Provide a safe and warm space for residents to meet up, engage with others in a warm and inviting space where help and advice is tailored to need
- Provide households with access to Carbon Monoxide (CO) safety advice and CO alarms
- Increase vulnerable customers household incomes identifying eligible benefits, providing access to energy crisis funding where needed and facilitating debt support services
- Alleviate the health and financial burdens faced by households affected by fuel poverty
- Providing greater customer resilience by supporting eligible households sign up to the PSR
- Enhance energy efficiency in vulnerable households to reduce energy costs and environmental impact by providing energy advice and where possible energy efficiency measures funded outside of VCMA

6.2 Success Criteria

Through the partnership we're aiming to deliver the following outcomes for customers based upon our experience of our projects delivered in partnership between 2021-2023;

- 175 NHS Frontline workers trained on how to identify and refer vulnerable customers into the advice teams or into a Warm Hub
- 600 NICE vulnerable group customers within Arun, Chichester, Hastings, and Rother will be provided with energy advice via the dedicated energy advice team (information on PSR, Smart meters, energy and water efficiency advice, income maximisation including benefits checks and grant applications, CO safety)
- A dedicated mailer to 500,000 residents across East Sussex and West Sussex covering information on Winter Resilience, PSR, CO Safety and energy advice information – including the promotion of Warm Hubs
- 2,779 unique Warm Hub customers – provided with energy advice services and CO safety advice
- 133 Warm Hub customers supported to sign up to the PSR
- 331 Warm Hub customers provided with support to sign up to the Southern Water social tariff
- 331 Warm Hub customers provided with water saving advice
- 399 Warm Hub customers provided with fuel vouchers
- 268 Warm Hub customers supported with debt support services
- 1,377 Warm Hub customers referred on for income maximisation case work
- 535 Warm Hub customers provided with easy energy efficiency measures and cooking appliances (funded by DNOs)

Additional funding provided by local authority means that beneficiaries will also receive:

- 2,000 hygiene packs distributed at Warm Hubs to vulnerable residents
- 1,080 Warm Hub customers provided advice on cooking healthy and low-cost meals

7 Project partners and third parties involved

SGN regional gas network providing £170,000 in programme funding for:

- Frontline worker training and direct mailer to 500,000 residents across East Sussex and West Sussex
- 66.7% of the energy and benefits advisory service for 600 NICE and 2,779 unique Warm Hub customers including Supporting access to the Priority Services Register and access to carbon monoxide alarms and locking cooker valves where need identified

SSEN - providing £25,000 in programme funding for:

- 9.8% of the energy and benefits advisory service for 600 NICE and 2,779 unique Warm Hub customers including supporting access to the Priority Services Register and,

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- Easy energy efficiency equipment and energy efficient cooking appliances

UK Power Networks – providing £50,000 in programme funding for:

- 19.6% of the energy and benefits advisory service for 600 NICE and 2,779 unique Warm Hub customers including supporting access to the Priority Services Register and,
- Easy energy efficiency equipment and energy efficiency cooking appliances

Southern Water – provided £10,000 in programme funding for:

- 3.9% of the energy and benefits advisory service for 600 NICE and 2,779 unique Warm Hub customers including supporting access to the Priority Services Register

The County, District and Borough councils will be providing £391,999 in match funding for hygiene packs, a number of fuel vouchers, hot meals, grants to set up warm welcome spaces, wellbeing team support, communications support, access to Household Support Fund funds for help paying off energy debts etc. NB. More match funding is likely to be identified once the local authorities confirms budgets for their winter support programmes.

West Sussex County Council, and 7 Districts and Boroughs which are as follows:

- Adur District Council
- Arun District Council
- Chichester District Council
- Crawley Borough Council
- Horsham District Council
- Mid Sussex District Council
- Worthing Borough Council

East Sussex County Council and 5 Districts and Boroughs which are as follows:

- Wealden District Council
- Hastings Borough Council
- Eastbourne Borough Council
- Lewes Borough Council
- Rother District Council

- **UK Harvest** – linking into warm spaces with their community food hubs and distributing healthy recipes
- **West Sussex & East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service** - will be providing information on winter safety and how to stay safe this winter with the rising costs of living, both at the Warm Spaces and integrated into their community programme and where required installation of CO alarms.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

To ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of project advancements and outcomes, the following measures will be implemented:

- Systematic reporting and monitoring of quantitative and qualitative outcomes.
- Tracking and monitoring of both incoming and outgoing referrals from and to our partners and related services.
- Regular reporting of feedback, indicators, outputs, and outcomes on a quarterly basis.

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- Effective management of project progress, involving monthly and quarterly partner meetings aimed at sharing insights, addressing challenges, and presenting individual and organizational partnership case studies.

All beneficiaries will be asked for their consent to participate in a Customer Satisfaction Survey with their data segmented by DNO footprint. We aim to deliver a CSAT score of 93% or more for the advice services provided.

Learning

We are keen to build on the success of the last 18 months, having now established referral pathways and upskilled staff to deliver all aspects of advice. Our targets are in line with supporting those who are in the most vulnerable situations, requiring ongoing casework and support.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

We've worked with leading social impact research consultancy SIA Partners to carry out an assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable customers incorporated in this partnership.

Carrying out an in-depth assessment with Citizens Advice East Sussex and West Sussex, and SGN using common industry tools including the DNO/GDN proxy bank and rule books, they forecast a positive net social return of £3.75 as detailed below.

Social Value Measurement

5-year figures		
Economic	Total cost	£255,000.00
	Total gross present value	£1,210,096.13
	NPV	£955,096.13
	SROI	£3.75
	Gross present value per person	£2.42*

*GPV per person lower due to the direct mailer reaching 500,000 people.

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from September 2023 to August 2024

11 Geographic area

East Sussex and West Sussex

12 Approval

Maureen McIntosh - Director of Customer Services