

Safe and Warm Winter Outreach programme – CAS

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance/Fuel Poverty initiative

1 September 2023

SGN



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1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
Date of PEA submission:	26.09.23
Project contact name:	Safe and Warm – Winter Outreach Programme – Citizen Advice Scotland
Project contact number/email:	Linda.spence@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£400,000.11
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£400,000.11

2 Problem statement

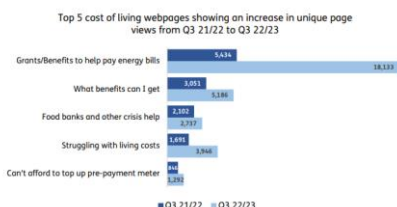
There are 6.5 million households struggling to pay at least one of their bills¹ and households are finding it difficult to keep up with the rising costs of utility/ household bills and the after-effects of the pandemic. Many people are having to make the choice between heating their homes or feeding their families², with many slipping into fuel poverty quickly, which has an impact on their own/families health and wellbeing. This means people living in cold, energy inefficient homes that are expensive to heat. Fuel poverty can lead to poor physical and mental health, increased inequality, and a reduced quality of life.³

In 2023/24, energy bills are expected to continue to rise, with the Energy Price Guarantee remaining in place a typical household's energy bills in Scotland will stay at around £2,500 per year, which is unaffordable for many fuel poor households.

Demand for energy advice continues to grow with Citizen Advice Scotland's website pages relating to paying for energy bills showing an upward trend. The website has around 2.5 million users a year and gives insight into general trends and concerns across the wider population in Scotland. In the first 9 months of 22/23 there were huge increases in page views of online advice relating to the cost of living compared to the whole of 2021/22, including⁴:

- > Grants and Benefits to help pay energy bills up by **194%**
- > Get help with bills up by **156%**
- > Struggling to pay energy bills up by **147%**
- > Struggling with living costs up by **146%**
- > Can't afford to top up pre-payment meter up by **78%**

Similarly, the figure below shows the increase in views of pages in relation to 'Grants/Benefits to help pay energy bills' and 'struggling with living costs', which increased by a respective 70% and 57% from Quarter 3 in 2021/22 to Quarter 3 of 2022/23.



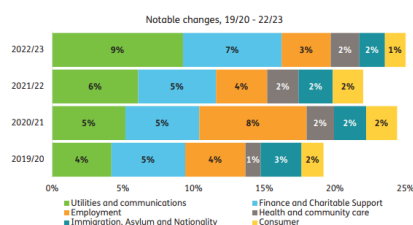
¹ <https://sgn.co.uk/news/extra-support-provided-fuel-poor-homes-thanks-fuel-bank-foundation-cash-boost>

² www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-62626752

³ https://www.sgn.co.uk/sites/default/files/media-entities/documents/2022-02/SGN-VCMA-PEA-Empowered-by-Energy-0222_0.pdf

⁴ https://www.cas.org.uk/system/files/publications/col_january_2023_proof_2.pdf

The Citizens Advice network holds the largest data set on social issues – both quantitative and qualitative – outside the public sector in Scotland. This provides unique insight into the experience and issues faced by all SGN’s Scottish customers. For the first time ever, demand for energy advice across the Citizens Advice network has overtaken advice for Universal Credit and other benefits⁵. That underlines the scale and depth of the energy crisis, but it also means that our evidence base about the experience of customers in Scotland has never been more comprehensive. The figure below shows the increase in the percentage of engagements relating to ‘utilities and communications’ issues (which energy is categorised under), which have been brought to the network in the last few years.⁶



Moreover, low income and vulnerable customers are disproportionately represented within our advice customer population. A summary of advice demand and demographic data is outlined below:

- 58,328 pieces of advice on energy were provided in the first nine months of 2022/23 – an increase on pre-pandemic levels.
- In the 2021/22 financial year, 64% of all fuel customers indicated they live in urban areas.
- 60% of all fuel customers indicate they live in SIMD areas 1 & 2 (most deprived), with 51% of these customers accessing our services
- Most fuel customers are between the ages of 25 and 64 with a quarter aged between 45 and 64.

CAB throughout Scotland are experiencing an unprecedented increase in demand from households enquiring about financial support and help towards managing their living costs as their circumstances change. Recent polling has identified that 38% of adults in Scotland, an estimated 1.7 million, are worried about being able to pay their energy bills. Almost 2 million people are anxious about the cost-of-living crisis more broadly, beyond energy bills.⁷

The gap in understanding lived experience of vulnerability in Scotland

During recent discussions with Ofgem and the other GDN’s, it has become apparent that a gap exists in terms of advocates for the experience of vulnerable customers in Scotland with existing advocates being limited to referring to the experiences of customers in England and Wales. This is a particular risk, as there are a range of distinct factors that can only be fully understood and considered through direct local insight attained from vulnerable and fuel-poor customers in Scotland.

Below is a short summary of the factors which have different and specific implications for customers in Scotland, and which may cause or exacerbate vulnerability:

- **Affordability** – recent analysis indicates that energy bills are up to £1,000 higher in Scotland. This is the result of a number of factors, including the condition of the housing stock, colder and wetter weather, and the limited availability of gas in rural Scotland. Comparatively higher costs can either cause or exacerbate vulnerability.
- **Devolved benefits** – vulnerable and fuel-poor customers in Scotland access a different range of support relating to energy (for example, the Winter Heating Payment has replaced the Cold Weather Payment). The design and targeting of these benefits has implications for vulnerable and fuel-poor customers in Scotland.

⁵ <https://www.cas.org.uk/news/we-have-new-set-for-gotten-groups-whose-voices-need-be-heard>

⁶ https://www.cas.org.uk/system/files/publications/data_report_mar_23.pdf

⁷ <https://www.cas.org.uk/news/help-hand-if-youre-worried-about-energy-costs>

- **Energy efficiency** – the support available to customers in Scotland to help them access a range of energy efficiency measures differs to that elsewhere in the UK.
- **Fuel poverty** – the Scottish Government has a distinct definition on fuel poverty part of which incorporates the concept of being able to meet reasonable needs.
- **Net zero** – Scotland’s statutory net zero targets are five years earlier than the rest of the UK meaning that the transition will happen at accelerated pace and scale. A key priority for our influencing activity is to ensure that the interests of low income and vulnerable customers are at the heart of a just transition to net zero.

Identifying the distinct policy context is only part of the problem however, and it is only through direct access to local communities across Scotland that the impact of these differences can be fully understood.

Providing holistic advice and energy safeguarding delivered at a local level is the key to alleviating both the immediate effects and root causes of fuel poverty and to creating safe and warm homes. Our partnership with SGN will help CAB support the increase in demand in Scotland’s most fuel poor communities in areas of deprivation.

3 Scope and objectives

Our Winter outreach programme will support fourteen communities in Scotland living in deprived areas between the period of October 2023 until the end of March 2024.

The location of the Citizens Advice Bureau’s (CAB) to provide this support are located in Airdrie, Bridgeton, CAB West Lothian, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway CAS, Dalkeith, East Renfrewshire, Grangemouth & Bo’ness, Motherwell, Parkhead, Perth, Renfrewshire, Rutherglen & Cambuslang, Stirling.

Our programme will deliver face to face holistic energy and income maximisation advice at community hubs to around 2,400 fuel poor households and provide training for up to 1,300 front line workers on areas such as energy efficiency, priority services register and carbon monoxide awareness.

We will meet our aims by

- Targeting outreaches based in but not limited to warm hubs, libraries, foodbanks and health settings.
- Supporting customers from fuel poor households and in areas where there is extreme fuel poverty because of the current energy/cost of living crisis.
- Providing one to one advice and group sessions to both customers and frontline workers.
- Continuing to target customers who are eligible to sign up for the PSR, as below.⁸

Scope:

Our project will increase the reach of the CAB network in Scotland helping vulnerable customers to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably⁹ by;

- helping them manage their energy bills themselves (including cheaper energy bills);
- improving their housing situation, including having a warmer home;
- improving their understanding of carbon monoxide safety issues (and be provided with CO monitors where these are needed);
- improving their understanding of the Priority Service Register and resilience in the home.

⁸ <https://psrscotland.com/>

⁹ <https://www.sgn.co.uk/sites/default/files/media-entities/documents/2022-07/Appendix-023-SGN-Customer-Vulnerability.pdf>

For the bureaux and communities;

- allowing consistency of advice by having support available at the same outreach location for an extended period of time;
- increasing staff retention, which increases continuity of advice provision and helps establish the service in the local community;
- allowing the development of partnership working and trust building with local organisations where the outreach advice is provided to promote the benefits of energy advice and CO awareness;
- improving the knowledge of local advice provision and challenges in their local areas, allowing advisers to provide bespoke advice to customers;
- upskilling the knowledge of volunteer advisers who provide support at group sessions;
- enabling the existing outreaches to adapt, improve and expand;
- enabling bureaux to develop and maintain partnerships with local community groups to increase awareness of the project and referrals in;
- enabling better partnership working and building up trust with local organisations (eg food banks, housing associations, healthcare provision, local libraries) to promote the benefits of the PSR and energy advice;
- allowing advisers to develop their knowledge of local advice provision and challenges in their rural areas. From this, advisers can better articulate the benefits to customers of being on the PSR.

As well as providing one to one support, advisers will

- target customers who would not normally engage with the energy market by working in partnership with local community groups to offer group sessions to vulnerable customers and;
- deliver group sessions to frontline workers who support those in or at risk of fuel poverty. This has been proven to extend the reach of the project into local communities, and;
- where vulnerable customers attending group sessions require more in-depth support, they will be offered one-to-one support by the bureau advisers.

CAS has a unique and unfiltered insight into the factors which cause and exacerbate vulnerability within the communities that we support. The scale and reach of our network of advisers provides deep and unparalleled knowledge and insight of the issues consumers face. Advisers often act as an early warning system for emerging problems and concerns – we use that insight to influence proactively.

To support further we aim to recruit a new Vulnerability and Insight Officer for the programme who will:

- set up adviser focus groups tailored to subjects and issues of interest around fuel poverty and the issues communities face. This is valuable in terms of providing deeper insight into the experience of customers;
- identify gaps in understanding the experience of consumer vulnerability and set out how the policy context in Scotland is distinct to the rest of the UK therefore requiring specific insight and expertise;
- offer further policy insight into the lived experience of Scottish customers, and setting out what this activity will entail in practice including but not limited to
 - Evidence gathering, preparation, and participation in stakeholder engagement
 - Providing policy briefings on emerging issues that impact on vulnerable customers in Scotland
 - Providing quantitative data and insight using CAS advice code data
 - Providing case studies through CAS Social Policy Feedback (SPF) to add texture

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

Our partnership aligns to SGNs updated vulnerability strategy as it's targeted on providing a holistic service to households living in fuel poverty by identifying the best and most appropriate solution for that household. Our programme will provide support to clients in energy crisis, providing access to key services from CAB including the PSR, interventions that address fuel and water poverty and broader safeguarding and wellbeing services, whilst delivering a positive Social Return on Investment.

It will provide holistic utility efficiency advice, income maximisation and debt management, and CO safety interventions. Empowering each householder to use energy/appliances safely, efficiently, and affordably. We will work collaboratively with other organisations/communities to maximise positive impacts beyond energy, increasing the health and wellbeing of the individuals supported and delivering defined outcomes.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

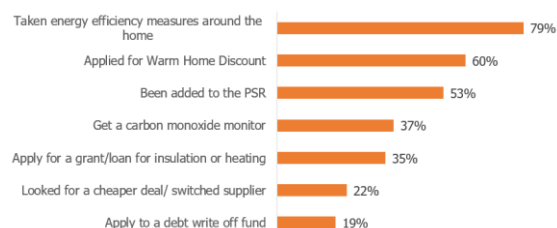
5.1. CAS Frontline workers group session – Outreach project

Frontline worker group sessions delivered by the SGN outreach project between the end of February and June 2023 were attended by 291 frontline workers. 74% estimated that 60-100% of their clients were in fuel poverty. Over 90% reported that the sessions were useful and helped to increase their confidence in delivering energy advice.

Research from the SGN funded Safe and Warm Advice Service shows that most of those involved intend to share what they had learnt with their colleagues and clients. On average, each frontline worker will pass on what they have learnt to 17 colleagues and 129 clients.

Frontline workers who completed the follow up survey rated the Safe and Warm sessions highly and reported improved confidence in their ability to provide advice to clients on energy issues. Most expected to pass on knowledge gained in the sessions to both colleagues and clients. All frontline workers described aspects of the session as good or excellent. This includes; the presentation skills of the trainer that 100% reported was excellent, the usefulness of the session that 100% reported was excellent and the overall content that 100% reported was excellent. The sessions increased many frontline workers awareness of energy issues. We have also had great feedback from clients who attended our open reach sessions at local centres across SGN's network.

Since your appointment at the CAB, have you done any of the following?¹⁰




CAB will continue to deliver group sessions to raise awareness of the advice and support they can provide and the sources of help from other organisations. Figures from the SGN funded Safe and Warm project show that around two thirds of attendees are customers and one third are frontline workers and we would expect this to be replicated in this project.


The reach of the training can be seen below:

¹⁰ Safe and Warm Advice Service – April 2022 to March 2023 (emailed to SGN on 13th April)

Bureaux will also deliver training directly to **1,245** customers.



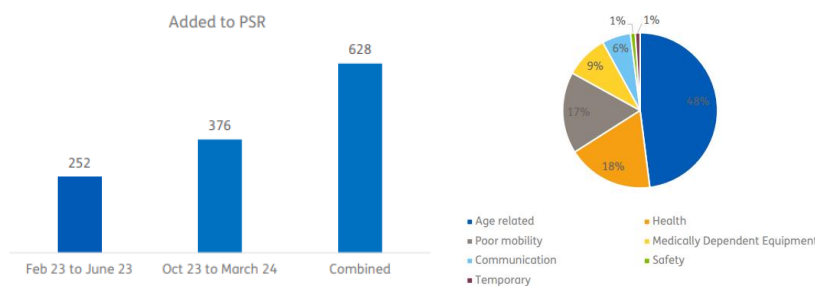
Bureaux deliver training to **415** frontline workers
 On average those frontline workers pass what they've learnt on to **5,000** colleagues
57,000 customers



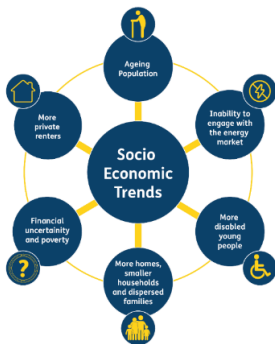
Priority Services Register

CAS and the participating CAB recognise the significance of the PSR, its ability to record all SGN’s vulnerable customers within a single central system, and our role in emphasising its importance to vulnerable customers. Through this project we will be able to reach customers with a wide range of vulnerabilities, from customers who rely on electricity to operate vital medical equipment (like oxygen concentrators or sleep apnoea masks), to customers with a long-term disability or mobility need and those who require additional support because of their age.

Projected additional PSR numbers and breakdown for the project are:



We would aim to continue to contribute to the growth of the PSR by targeting the key groups outlined below.



5.2. SGN Vulnerability Steering Group

Our Vulnerability Steering Group (VSG) has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy, 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. 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 to deliver support services that tackle the fuel poverty gap and the underlying causes of fuel poverty.

5.3. SGN RIIO-GD2 Business Plan

In the process of shaping our RIIO GD2 Business Plan we engaged stakeholders and customers about our plan to support 50,000 customers each year through a three-tiered approach, and what services/initiatives should

be included within each of those tiers. During our Positive Impact round table event our stakeholders emphasised the importance of partnerships to increase the value of our allowance in generating positive outcomes for customers. Feedback from our Customer Service & Supporting Vulnerable Customer – Shaping the Business Plan Qualitative Workshops suggested potential tier two initiatives should include supporting those most vulnerable to living in a cold and unhealthy home.

6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

6.1. Outcomes

Through the extension of this outreach work, CAS would aim to achieve the following outcomes

- support 2,000 to 2,400 clients with one to one advice
- support 1,100 to 1,300 people (clients or frontline workers) via group sessions
- provide 7,300 to 8,400 pieces of advice to clients

These clients will be aligned to the number;

- given energy advice and support
- who have signed up to the PSR
- who have received a financial gain
- who have received a non-financial gain

Outcomes will be aligned to;

- number of pieces of advice given
- number of contacts with clients
- number and type of referrals made to partnership organisations
- client satisfaction

6.2. Success Criteria

Estimated outcomes over 6 month project period;

- 2,200 Clients one to one sessions on energy efficiency advice, energy usage, tariff support
- a further 1,851 vulnerable customers/ front line workers supported through energy/CO workshops that include energy efficiency/usage advice, income maximisation information, PSR eligibility, household support and CO awareness
- 1,600 clients will have CO awareness sessions in bureaux
- 1,600 clients will receive behavioural energy advice
- 1,137 clients will access trust fund applications and fuel vouchers
- 968 clients will receive benefit entitlement and income maximisation checks
- 968 clients will have fuel bill negotiation, payment options for fuel debt and metering support
- 746 front line workers trained on emergency energy safeguarding
- 572 people registered on PSR for energy and water
- 484 Warm Home Discount applications
- 418 clients supported with energy redress
- 350 households receive CO monitors
- 40 CAB advisors trained on CO safety via Think CO e-Learning package (available to all 14 bureaux, scope to train more people)

The Vulnerability Insight Officer role will lead to:

- Improved understanding of SGN customer experience in Scotland through unfiltered insight into factors which cause and exacerbate vulnerability and fuel poverty
- Improved understanding of specific policy context as applies in Scotland through tailored briefing underpinned by evidence from the CAB network

- Improved insight into experience of vulnerable consumers in Scotland through CAB adviser focus groups.

To monitor our impact in line with the above, we will

- Monitor outcomes against services provided
- Monitor who is making use of the service - customer demographics, vulnerabilities, and needs
- Work closely with organisations who will support clients to ensure that we all understand the issues faced to continue to develop our services at a local level

7 Project partners and third parties involved

- CAS - Citizens Advice Scotland
- Home Energy Scotland
- Gas Safe Charity
- SGN
- Local partners including the NHS, social care, local third sector organisations, local authorities, libraries
- Local community groups, local warm hubs and healthcare settings, eg GP surgeries

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

The following activities will be in place to monitor and evaluate project progress and impacts:

- Quantitative and qualitative service user outcomes and demographics/vulnerabilities recorded/monitored
- Service user before-and-after-support surveys
- In-bound and out-bound referrals from/to partners and other services recorded/monitored
- Feedback, indicators, outputs, and outcomes reported at end of initiative

Learning

We will learn about the energy advisor programme, the impact/benefits of local engagement in communities and how key messages are cascaded, helping to 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 Cost-of-Living Crisis 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.

CAS will be trained on CO/PSR via SGN and if successful this model could be adopted throughout all of CAS moving forward.

This project will help us build a framework for Years 3 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

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 CAS and SGN using common industry tools including the DNO/GDN proxy bank and rule books, they forecast a positive net social return of £3.07 as detailed below.

Social Value Measurement

The project forecast is to deliver in the period October 2023 to March 2024:

The proposed budget is £400,000.11 which is broken out in the table below.

5-year reporting figures		
Economic	Total cost	£400,000.11
	Total gross present value	£1,627,439.40
	NPV	£1,227,439.40
	SROI	£3.07

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from October 2023 to March 2024.

11 Geographic area

The location of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) have been identified as Airdrie, Bridgeton, CAB West Lothian, Clackmannanshire, DAGCAS, Dalkeith, East Renfrewshire, Grangemouth & Bo'ness, Motherwell, Parkhead, Perth, Renfrewshire, Rutherglen & Cambuslang, Stirling.

Approval

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications