

South West London Energy Advice Partnership (SWLEAP)

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

March 2024
SGN



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1 Description

Project title	South West London Energy Advice Partnership (SWLEAP)
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	13 March 2024
Project contact name:	Janet Duggan
Project contact number/email:	janet.duggan@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£399,649
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£344,649

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's (NEA) [October 2023](#) figures show 6.5 million UK households are in fuel poverty, based on the definition of low-income households spending more than 10% of their income on their energy bills. Fuel poverty is driven by energy efficiency, energy costs and income. It is recognised that nearly half of low-income households are 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.

In the same NEA YouGov polling it was found that 49% of households turned the heating off even though it was cold in the house, 43% of adults had gone to bed early to stay warm and 13% of households had used appliances like ovens to stay warm.

Findings from [Friends of the Earth](#) predict that last year more than 1 million households were in extreme fuel poverty, spending more than 20% of their disposable income on energy. 742,200 households will be spending between 20-30% of their income on energy costs, 196,500 between 30-40%, and 117,400 more than 40%. Friends of the Earth highlight the strong correlation between vulnerable customer groups and fuel poverty, reporting that 21% of households in fuel poverty have somebody in receipt of disability payments and 42% of older people are spending more than 10% of their income on energy. [Runnymede Trust](#) research suggests that just under a third (32%) of White people were likely to experience fuel poverty this winter compared to more than half (52%) of Black and minority ethnic people (rising to two thirds (66%) of Pakistani and Bangladeshi people). According to the Government's own statistics, in the 2 years to March 2021, an average of 12.6% of white households were in fuel poverty, compared with 19.1% of households from all other ethnic groups combined. See figures for the % of rented accommodation in the local information below.

National Energy Action understands that changes to the Warm Home Discount saw over 800,000 low-income vulnerable households miss out on the £150 rebate last winter. Two-thirds of those in fuel poverty aren't receiving means-tested benefit payments and so don't receive the government support offered to those who are. This particular group of householders is on the rise, increasing the importance of access to good quality advice and other financial support that is available.

[The End Fuel Poverty Coalition](#) has estimated that 4,950 excess winter deaths in the UK were caused by living in cold homes during winter 2022/23. In 2024 no one should be at risk of death due to being unable to keep warm in their home. There are vast inequalities across South London, and these exist within wealthier areas. For example, in the London Borough of Wandsworth, the Department of Levelling Up (DLUHC) data identifies key 'hotspots' of deprivation including Latchmere and Tooting. Referring to government data on off gas grid supplies, the households in Latchmere and Tooting having a higher percentage of off gas grid homes. In

addition, Wandsworth has the lowest percentage of Energy Efficiency measures installed under the ECO scheme due to hard to heat homes. This combination of deprivation levels and fuel supply data sources enables us to create comprehensive resident profiles allowing for more precise targeting, and ensures we are getting support to those who need it the most.

The most recent Fuel Poverty data highlights that in Wandsworth there are at least 13,521 households in fuel poverty, in Richmond upon Thames 8,271, in Merton 9,936 and in Kingston upon Thames 7,174. (Gov Sub-regional fuel poverty, 2021 data). This data doesn't take into consideration the doubling of energy costs.

This data also shows that there is a high percentage of people living in rented accommodation in these Boroughs. In Wandsworth the figures are 36.3% private rented and 19.3% social rented. For the other boroughs the figures are Richmond - 24.8%/12.1%, Kingston 27.3%/11.1% and Merton 29%/14.2%.

South West London Energy Advice Partnership (SWLEAP) is a partnership between two local not for profit organisations that are grounded in their local communities: CREW Energy in London Borough of Wandsworth and Habitats & Heritage in London Borough of Richmond. Their very strong local connections and the permanence of their presence helps to foster a sense of stability and continuity amongst residents using the service. Over the last two and a half years SWLEAP has worked very hard to make contact with many residents at events in community settings, including community centres, primary schools, social housing developments and churches. It has also conducted frontline worker training with many relevant public and voluntary sector employees and local councillors, and this has led to referrals. SWLEAP has shown its ability to reach vulnerable households and is continuously finding ways to better target this demographic.

The service has seen an increase in households being served and a reduction in funding to manage the service. During the colder months of the year demand for SWLEAP's services typically increases by 66% compared to the warmer months and this increasing need is currently not being met.

In recent years the energy in home teams is seeing an increasing number of properties that are in a poorer state than their current EPC suggests. Damp is rife in many of these homes, reflecting cold bridging from inadequate insulation but the EPC has assumed that a cavity has been filled, in some instances the team are noting that the loft insulation is not at the standard expected (50mm instead of 270mm). In addition, there are cases where the windows are assumed to be double, or triple glazed however they are not.

As homes are not at the standard that the EPC suggests the household is not eligible for the energy efficiency measures (ECO4 / Warmer Homes Scheme) that would help make the home less cold and damp.

3 Scope and objectives

Working in partnership SGN and South West London Energy Advice Partnership will bring together a large network of local community partners to proactively support vulnerable residents across the London Boroughs of Wandsworth, Richmond, Kingston and Merton with tailored support services to tackle fuel poverty and introduce energy safeguards that help those most vulnerable maintain a safe and warm home.

The partnership aims to build capacity into an extensive service, delivering advice to vulnerable consumers through diverse methods, including home visits, a free to call telephone advice line, face to face appointments and presentations/stalls at community events and the premises of local service providers.

SWLEAP have established relationships with social prescribers and GP surgeries to reach vulnerable households. In addition, their existing trusted network of referral partners and agencies includes South West London Law Centres and Citizens Advice. The project will strengthen existing relationships, alongside developing new ones, to ensure a robust pipeline of referrals into the energy advice service from voluntary organisations, local authorities and housing associations in Wandsworth, Richmond, Merton and Kingston.

To ensure that support reaches underrepresented groups the partnership will develop tailored engagement which includes delivering energy cafés and advice sessions at local community events, such as Mushkil Aasaan

a charity which provides social care for the Muslim community, Eco-Churches which serve the Afro-Caribbean community and the local Gujarati centres. In Richmond, we will work with the Multicultural Richmond clients and English as an Additional Language groups ensuring that culture and language are not a barrier to support.

The partnership will provide a tailored level of support to clients, supporting with interventions, delivered through a mix of community volunteers and trained employed advisers, the services include;

- Frontline worker training to identify and triage households in need of energy advice services
- Comprehensive in-home advice service on saving energy, using and optimising heating systems, billing or metering concerns, CO alarms and safety advice, registration to the PSR, through a home energy visit.
- In community workshops and energy advisory services at warm hubs, community centres, faith centres, libraries, schools and food banks.
- Customer assessment and onward referrals into energy efficiency schemes - local, regional and national heating and insulation grants.
- Energy advocacy service – where required the team will conduct a “three-party” calls, between a client, our team, and a third party such as an energy supplier or a relevant person of support like a friend or family member.
- Emergency Crisis funds - access to emergency fuel ‘top-up’ vouchers and emergency support for clients not in use of prepayment metres.
- A service to reassess the EPC rating where it is found that the conditions are worse than expected to ensure support to access energy efficiency scheme.
- An inclusive service - irrespective of literacy, neurodiversity or intensity of support required. We have experience in supporting clients with complex needs and will dedicate the time to provide ongoing support, depending on the given intervention. Advice in different languages via translation services. Our team is also currently proficient in Urdu, Punjabi, French, Italian, Spanish, Slovenian, Czech and Slovak.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project will provide support to vulnerable residents of South West London, providing an in home and in community advice services, with access to 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 carbon monoxide 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 delivering defined outcomes.

This partnership service goes above and beyond our core responsibilities as a Gas Distribution Network and is eligible under the VCMA funding criteria as it will provide energy crisis support, access to energy efficiency and CO advice, empowering vulnerable households to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably.

This partnership aligns to the SGN commitment to deliver support services for customers aligned to our four strategic pillars:

1. Services Beyond the Meter
2. Supporting Priority Customer Groups
3. **Fuel Poverty & Energy Affordability**
4. Carbon Monoxide Awareness

This project aligns to strategic pillars 3 (2 and 4).

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Stakeholder Support

To date SWLEAP has partnered with over 40 stakeholders to generate referrals and put on energy advice events. These include 3 councils, 6 libraries, 2 MPs surgeries, 7 children's centres, 2 Warm hubs, 1 social supermarket, 4 food banks, 11 charities, 5 councillors and 2 NHS Trusts. This list highlights the broad spectrum of support garnered over the past two and half years since the launch of SWLEAP.

SWLEAP is now in discussion with the Wandsworth and Merton social prescribing service run by Enable. In Richmond the service is run by a charity called RUILS which SWLEAP has worked with extensively. They have also developed a strong bond with Wandsworth and Richmond Councils' Climate and Cost of Living teams. In addition, SWLEAP were asked to be delivery partners to deliver over 3000 winter warm packs consisting of energy saving equipment and advice to local vulnerable residents over winter 2023/4.

SWLEAP is already working closely with the South London Together partners by passing on ECO 4 referrals to SELCE to administer. They also refer clients across South West London boroughs to Thinking Works for crisis relief vouchers, working closely with them to ensure they don't cover the same events.

SWLEAP are looking to extend this partnership by accessing their heat doctors service for their most vulnerable clients. They would also like to share their own ideas around the EPC checks service. Finally, SWLEAP believe that the current ECO 4 brokers make it very hard to refer clients for ECO 4 funding and exploring a new partnership with SELCE and Thinking Works to see if a direct referral service to the big energy suppliers could be developed.

5.2 Customer Feedback – SWLEAP

Below are two case studies that we feel highlight the depth of service SWLEAP offers and the impact we have. Case Study 1 demonstrates the strong links and support we have from local councillors which resulted in the client receiving life changing sums of money and shows how important our telephone advice service can be for complex cases. Case Study 2 illustrates the breadth of support our home energy advisers offer. This includes the installation of energy saving devices, behavioural change, energy debt relief and signposting to ECO funding.

Case study 1 – English as a second language speaker with health issues (Mrs H @ SW15)

Mrs H lived in a 4 bed privately rented house with 3 of her adult children who were still in education. She had built up debt of over £11,000 partly because of her low income and partly because one of the children had recently moved out but the council had not applied a rent reduction. The SWLEAP energy adviser completed a discretionary funding form for her and requested, via a local councillor, that the Council move her to a smaller property. She was awarded over £5,000 of discretionary funding from Wandsworth Council after providing proof that her child had moved out. Her rent was also reduced to almost a third, £756 from her previous rent of £2,000. SWLEAP referred her to Citizens Advice to support her with applying for universal credit and a fuel voucher (£89) in her new property whilst she sorted her finances out and to the charity South West London Law Centres to attempt to have £4,000 of utility debt waived.

Year one savings on actions taken £20,059 and Mrs H will benefit from a £14,928 annual rent reduction for many years to come.

Case study 2 – Pensioner's with health conditions (Mr I @ SW17)

Mr and Mrs I are pensioners (70+) struggling to pay their bills. Mr I suffers from mobility issues, fibromyalgia and bowel disease and he is also primary carer for his wife who is currently undergoing cancer treatment. Both illnesses are exacerbated by cold weather. The gas boiler in Mr I's property is also inefficient and breaks down frequently which is resulting in higher costs. The increase in the cost of living, increased costs of care and the efficiency of the property have made things difficult. On inspection of his bills the SWLEAP energy adviser

concluded that Mr I could benefit from applying to a trust fund run by his energy provider and also to the Thames Water Help scheme for his water bills. The energy adviser completed the necessary application on behalf of Mr I and subsequently Mr I was awarded £1,200 off his gas bill and a 50% discount off his water bill, a £145 reduction.

Mr I also received a home energy visit from SWLEAP where we were able to apply small measures to the property, such as draught proofing for his windows, and Radflek for his external facing radiators which will produce a saving of £40 per year. Moreover, we offered advice on how to best manage his heating controls and we also reduced the boiler flow temperature to 60°, resulting in a predicted £108 saving. He was added to the Priority Services Register for vulnerable utilities customers.

During the visit, the energy advisor was also able to help Mr I by addressing some of his energy behaviours such as heating unoccupied rooms and leaving appliances on stand-by. Mr I was also referred to receive a free benefit check via Citizens Advice and was referred to local ECO installers to check his eligibility for a replacement boiler and windows.

The total saving on measures implemented was £1363.

Customer Feedback

SWLEAP customers are invited to provide feedback and performance is high at 95.4% overall satisfaction rating and 99.17% of customers would recommend us to friends.

"Amazing Andrea was beyond helpful. So kind and informative. I have learnt so much."

"SWLEAP is a wonderful organisation. Couldn't ask for more. Thank you."

"2 lovely ladies visited my home, very friendly, easy to talk to. I was amazed they gave me LED bulbs to save on energy. I have put foils behind my radiator now. What a great service you provide. Thank you very much."

Partner feedback

"We had a visit from (SWLEAP) Crew Energy to provide information for hospital staff and visitors on how they can make small changes to save energy in their homes and distribute some energy-efficient boxes. The visit was extremely popular with very high demand for boxes and information, from all staff categories from porters and canteen staff to nurses and doctors."

Toby also delivered a webinar on ways to save energy, which was especially useful for staff who are struggling with the Cost-of-Living crisis. For us as an organisation, this type of support is invaluable, as our people really appreciate practical advice and support during the time when many are struggling to pay their bills.

We are very grateful for all the support from Crew Energy and hope to work with them in the future."

Kristina Middleton, Health and Wellbeing Lead, St Georges Hospital

5.3 SGN Stakeholder feedback – Vulnerable Steering Group

Throughout GD2 our dedicated Vulnerable Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities to ensure that we meet our Business Plan commitments to support vulnerable customers, those most in need of support to maintain a safe and warm home. It is with guidance and support from our dedicated Vulnerable Steering Group that SGN have a clear approach to delivering support to vulnerable customers, ensuring that we're using relevant data to prioritise targeting priority customer groups and working in geographic areas most likely to be living in cold and unhealthy homes.

SGNs stakeholder endorsed strategy prioritised key Priority Customer Groups that require tailored support services to those who are served by local organisations with a focus on health and wellbeing services for the most vulnerable in our community. This partnership is designed to support residents in South London where there are barriers to support through targeted engagement in faith communities and where language and culture require bespoke support.

During our Stakeholder engagement sessions over 2021-2023, stakeholders valued creating opportunities for local organisations to build skills and access VCMA funding to make a positive impact by supporting customer in need use energy safely, efficiently and affordably.

6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

SWLEAP will bring together a network across the London Boroughs of Wandsworth, Richmond, Kingston and Merton to help identify households in fuel poverty and share information and access to resources that help keep those most vulnerable customers safe and warm in their own homes.

Services that the partnership will provide vulnerable households will receive help with:

- A multi-channel engagement service to help residents struggling to maintain a safe and warm home, including services via a free phone telephone advice line, video calls, home visits and community events as well as direct marketing of the help available by social media and community posters
- An extensive network within the community to identify households in fuel poverty to refer into the service including local authorities, housing associations, health services and community groups
- A holistic household tailored service adapted to the needs of the residents to identify ways to increase energy efficiency, increase household incomes, address financial debts and access services designed to safeguard vulnerable households including the Priority Services Register (PSR)
- Access to measures that can help reduce energy consumption costs (funded from Local Authority), warm packs help to keep vulnerable people warm and emergency fuel vouchers for those in energy crisis
- Advice on ways to reduce CO2 and help to understand the CO2 savings made by energy efficiency measures and energy efficient behaviours
- Guidance on how to safely use energy, including Information on carbon monoxide (CO) safety and access to free CO alarms
- Information and access to Locking Cooker Valves for those living with dementia(s) or other cognitive impairment(s)
- Information and onward signposting to other support organisations including London Fire Brigade, the local authority / third party providers of services eg professional declutters, South West London Law Centres and Citizens Advice and relevant grant schemes (ECO4, HUG and Boiler Replacement Scheme).
- The EPC checking service will allow referrals to some clients for funding (ECO4, Warmer Homes) and others it may be a referral to their council about the legal status of the EPC, with a view to re-housing or housing upgrades by the landlord.

6.2 Success Criteria

To support at least 4,000 clients over two years addressing the issues of fuel poverty and cold homes. We aim to support those in need with access to practical interventions that improves their health and wellbeing and increases their confidence and capability to manage their household utility costs.

Over the two years our ambition is to;

- Train four volunteers or staff to NEA level 3 and a further six provided with base level skills to run community events and increase their skills / employability in the future
- Train 80 frontline referral networks on how to identify fuel poverty, carbon monoxide risk factors and refer into the service
- Deliver 300 community events / workshops in venues including warm hubs, libraries, civic centres, faith centres, schools and children's centres reaching 3,000 people with energy advice and take-home advice packs in inclusive formats
- Provide telephone-based case worker services to 300 households, with on average three call appointments to address energy concerns

- Provide energy home visits to 1,000 households to identify opportunities to increase energy efficiency via small measures, eligibility for energy efficiency schemes, reduce energy costs and case work energy debts and address any welfare concerns
- Provide 4,000 households with carbon monoxide safety advice and 800 carbon monoxide alarms gifted to households in need
- Provide 4,000 households with information of the Priority Services Register and support to register
- Provide information on Thames Water's Water Help and Water Sure and white goods fund with an expectation of 800 discussions and 300 referrals
- Provide 400 households with fuel vouchers, 50% (200) funded by SGN. A further 200 households will be referred through to third party suppliers
- Provide 230 households with food referral services
- Provide 1,000 households with Winter warm packs (6 LED bulbs, a three pack of Radflek and 5m of draught excluder). Provide 1000 further households with reduced pack (6 LED bulbs, and 5m of draught excluder). Provide 3,000 households with 5m of draught excluder
- Provide 48 EPC re-assessments with a soft target of being able to refer half of these either to a funding scheme or as a red flag raise to their local authority about the rating of the property.

7 Project partners and third parties involved

- SGN – regional gas network providing programme funding for energy advice events, home visits and our telephone support service
- Crew Energy – primary delivery of services for the SWLEAP programme
- Habitats & Heritage – delivery of service in London Borough of Richmond
- Thames Water – regional water provider, providing access to Water Help and Water Sure, alongside access to their white goods and furniture fund
- Wandsworth and Richmond Council – funding for energy saving small measures including LEDs, radiator foil, draught excluders, letterbox covers, chimney balloons, boiler jackets and winter warm packs.
- Wimbledon Foundation - funding for (50%) fuel vouchers
- Enable - referrals of clients via their health team / partnering with their social prescribers in Wandsworth and Merton to provide support to patients across the two boroughs. In Wandsworth alone Enable support 40 surgeries

Broader referral network;

- RUILS supporting disabled people to live independently and runs social prescribing for Richmond
- Local foodbanks and charities including; Earlsfield Food Bank, Trussell Trust foodbanks (7), and Richmond food banks, Keeping Families Together, Hestia, Katherine Low Settlement and Wandsworth Care Alliance.
- Children Services and Libraries - 6 children centres across Wandsworth, 5 Libraries
- Faith Centres – including three churches and one Gujarati centre, Hindu community centre, Tooting Islamic Centre and Balham Masjid.
- NHS Trusts - St George's Hospital
- MPs and Councillors - SWLEAP works closely with 2 of the 3 MPs in Wandsworth and a number of local councillors. It has also received strong support and promotion from the 2 MPs in Richmond. SWLEAP regularly support Saturday surgeries and encourage local councillors to refer residents through to the service.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

Evaluation will be completed throughout an individual's engagement with the project, this enables monitoring of their development and the long-term, impact of the support.

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

- Quantitative and qualitative service user outcomes for service users
- Service user before-and-after-support surveys and follow-up calls – 10% of service users to complete
- Feedback, indicators, outputs, and outcomes reported on monthly / quarterly
- Recording conversion rates of engagements to home energy visits/telephone advice.
- The recording and monitoring of the type of advice given and its attributed savings.
- Recording the measurement of the contribution of the project to financial and CO2 savings through the installation of small measures.
- Case studies

Learning

We are looking to see if this project could be replicable in other geographic areas if delivered by organisations with good local connections. We are keen to share our experience with other new and existing energy advice services about learning from our experiences and are aiming to present experiences to date to a Community Energy London meeting in 2024 in addition to SGN's Safe and Warm partnership network.

The partners will also look to offer mentoring to services to nascent community groups including training to Transition Town Ilford, Transition Town Kingston and Croydon Community Energy.

Skills and resources that the SWLEAP team would like to share include;

- 1) How to build a network of stakeholders to generate leads
- 2) How to manage a home visit
- 3) Routes to the numerous advocacy services
- 4) How to work with your local council which we see as key to success in any borough or county
- 5) Safeguarding and volunteer policies
- 6) Database set up and reporting
- 7) Equipment procurement- SW LEAP has developed a network of wholesalers who provide discounts on LEDs, radiator foils and draught excluders. We are continually looking to add suppliers and products to this list.

We are keen to learn from this project and for successes to be incorporated into future delivery as well as shared with other sector participants. We intend to share an annual report across electricity, gas and water networks and with local authorities in addition to sharing project impacts and case studies during our annual showcase event.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV

We 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 of the predicted outcomes we forecast a positive net social return of £1.53

Social Value Measurement

Total cost*	£392,891.65
Total gross present value	£993,752.08
Net Present Value (NPV)	£600,860.43
SROI	£1.53

*Accounting for inflationary factors over the term of the project.

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from 01/04/2024 to 31/03/2026

11 Geographic area

The London Borough of Wandsworth, Merton and Richmond upon Thames.

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

Description of GDN(s) review of proposal and project sign off, with details on how the project will be managed

SGN has worked alongside South West London Energy Advice Partnership to co-design this partnership and ensure that its ambition contributes to the delivery of our Vulnerability Strategy, the guidance from our Vulnerable Customer Steering Group and adheres to the updated VCMA governance criteria.

The SROI has been externally assessed by SIA Partners using the DNO / GDN common rulebook. As detailed above SIA partners have reviewed the current partnership scope which has been forecast at adding an additional £1.53 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and South West London Energy Advice Partnership will meet monthly and quarterly to review outcomes, learn, share best practices, and address any delivery issues.

The PEA has been reviewed and approved by the business lead Kerry Potter and the Director of Customer Services Maureen McIntosh.