

Worthing Mencap

My Network Energy Advice

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

March 2024

SGN



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1 Description

Project title	Worthing Mencap - My Network Energy Advice
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	March 2024
Project contact name: (SGN)	Janet Duggan
Project contact email: (SGN)	janet.duggan@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£152,081
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£152,081

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 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.

Scope's 'Out in the cold' [report](#) published in 2018 showed that over a third of disabled adults say that their impairment or condition has a significant effect on their energy costs. There more than 900,000 households with a disabled person in England are living in fuel poverty, with 55% of disabled adults worried about paying their energy bills, with disabled families paying significantly more on their utilities than non-disabled families.

Three in five (57%), say that their energy bills have increased significantly and that they are concerned about being able to afford their energy in winter. It was also determined in this research that disabled people are largely unaware of the support available to them to safeguard their needs, including key services like the Priority Services Register (PSR), and that disabled people value targeted and tailored support designed for their needs.

In 2023, Scope in their [cost of living](#) crisis revisited this research and found that this situation had worsened for disabled people who now, on average, find that life costs an extra £1,222 a month if you're disabled. With the extra costs of heating, equipment and therapies, disabled people are more likely to face financial vulnerability, increased energy costs and fuel poverty.

There are 26,185 households in fuel poverty in West Sussex Fuel Poverty as cited in [West Sussex Framework for Action 2021- 2026](#). There are an estimated 10,600 adults aged 16+ with a learning disability or autism living in West Sussex (West Sussex County Council, 2024). The data above highlights that there is a higher likelihood that households with disabled people in West Sussex will be at risk of or living in fuel poverty.

Only [5.1% of adults with a learning disability](#) are in paid employment in England, against a figure of 75.7% of the general population. In West Sussex, these stats are [considerably lower at 2.1%](#), thus meaning the vast majority of people with a learning disability rely on benefits as their main source of income. This limited income combined with rising energy costs put people with a learning disability at further risk of living in fuel poverty.

Due to caring priorities at home, parents and carers are often less able to work to full-time hours in a week, significantly reducing their income potential. Energy related information, guidance and support is often missed

by parents or carers in households with people with a disability, meaning they are left behind when in fuel poverty.

Worthing Mencap forms part of a consortium of charities delivering information, advice and support across West Sussex to people with a disability. The countywide network of services, called My Network, has seen an increase in demand of energy related support needs since the cost-of-living crisis began. Many people are concerned about their rising costs of energy and their static benefit income, this presents an increasing risk of entering into financial debt and poor mental and physical health. This results in a high demand for other services, causing a strain on statutory resources in the area.

People with a learning disability or autism, often need support to understand and action correspondence from utility companies. Information and guidance on the energy support available, reducing energy usage, keeping warm and safe at home and general communication with energy providers is often not offered in an accessible/ understandable way for those with a learning disability or autism.

Worthing Mencap identified the lack of appropriate information and support for people with a disability in the Worthing area and addressed this through SGNs Safe and Warm Scheme supported by the Centre for Sustainable Energy in 2023. Through this project they supported 185 households with a disabled person to access accessible energy information and advice, with carbon monoxide safe awareness guidance. This project proved there is a demand for the service in Worthing. Working with partner charities across West Sussex they have identified this need is reflected across the county. Worthing Mencap have the partnerships, infrastructure and experience to scale this work up to reach a much larger pool of people with a disability across West Sussex.

3 Scope and objectives

By working in partnership with Worthing Mencap, the objective of the partnership is to work across West Sussex; to enable them to target vulnerable households who may be experiencing barriers to accessing services, to help alleviate fuel poverty and increase energy safety awareness.

Through the partnership we will directly reach households of vulnerable people with a disability in West Sussex to provide a dedicated in-house Energy Advice Co-ordinator who will give targeted household support. This will cover:

- Providing accessible energy advice and guidance on reducing energy usage
- Providing information on the Priority Services Register and support where required to help identified vulnerable households to sign up for support
- Providing benefit eligibility checks to ensure household income is maximised
- Develop and use accessible energy advice and safety resources and tools for people with a learning disability and autism
- Run energy information and advice/ carbon monoxide safety workshops to disabled people and their carers across West Sussex
- Providing accessible information on carbon monoxide safety and where required provide free carbon monoxide alarms
- Providing access to the Locking Cooker Valve where required
- Providing training to staff/volunteers on energy safeguarding services including how to identify fuel poverty, carbon monoxide harm and how to describe the benefits of registering to the Priority Services Register
- Providing access to debt advice and support
- Offer a 'Warm Hub' available for 6 days a week in the Worthing Borough.

The in-house Energy Advice Co-ordinator will work with already established links with service providers across West Sussex to reach people to access the project's support. These service providers include: Aldingbourne Trust, Dimensions UK, Signposts Mid Sussex, Guildcare, Ferring Country Centre, Job Centre Plus across West

Sussex, West Sussex County Council. They will also seek to form new links with other service providers as well as working with West Sussex County Council to identify further pockets of demand within the disabled community within the county.

This project aims to address the barriers disabled people face in understanding and accessing the energy support that is available to them if they are in or at risk of fuel poverty in West Sussex. It will also provide vital energy safety awareness in an accessible way that will significantly reduce risk to health at home. This will give disabled people equal access to support to alleviate fuel poverty.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project is proposed for funding through the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) which aims to work with households experiencing fuel poverty. This project does this by providing direct support to people with learning disabilities and their families who are struggling to maintain a safe and warm home.

The project delivers against SGNs Vulnerability Strategy, by providing targeted support to disabled people, most at risk of living in fuel poverty based upon their personal circumstances.

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 support to those people in some of the priority groups and in the regional communities most at risk, providing information on using energy safely, efficiently and affordably.

This partnership aligns to the SGN commitment to deliver support services 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 2 (3 & 4)

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Worthing Mencap

Worthing Mencap's vision is to enable people with disabilities, primarily those with a learning disability to lead full and independent lives. Their mission is to champion the rights and provide support to people with disabilities, primarily those with a learning disability and their families, carers and supporters. This is achieved through a range of opportunities and services in the Worthing and surrounding area to enable them to lead independent lives engaging fully in the local community.

As part of their commitment to their vision and mission they have delivered Information, Advice and Support services for people with a disability since 2010, called the My Network service. This service was developed out of the need for people with a disability to have access to appropriate support if they did not meet the threshold for funded Social Care support from the Local Authority. Universal access services were not able to provide the depth of support required to meet the needs of people who have cognitive barriers to communication, understanding and process. This meant that they were left behind and the demand for Social Service' crisis intervention was higher.

The service has evolved to become a key function for preventative services for people with a disability in West Sussex, with a countywide network of My Network services. People can self-refer to the service or be referred by a professional from another local service. The service supports people with various aspects of managing independent living, but a large gap in this provision since its conception has been the capacity and professional

knowledge to give real focus on energy utilities. The scope of which includes managing energy accounts, accessing energy support/ benefit schemes, understanding bills, saving money on energy, staying safe & warm in winter. This gap was partly addressed in Worthing through a pilot project through SGN's Safe and Warm communities project where Centre for Sustainable Energy provided training and resources to deliver help in 2023.

5.2 Case Study and Feedback

Feedback – individual

James has a mild learning disability and lives independently in the community. James' energy tariff had come to an end, he took the letter he had received from his supplier into our Support Co-ordinators to help him read and understand it. Our support co-ordinator explained what his options were and supported him to shop around for a better deal. James now feels empowered to know he doesn't have to stick with the same supplier when his tariff finishes and he knows where he can access support if he is unsure about his energy bills.

'The information I got was easy to understand and afterwards I felt like I understood what was happening. Lorna helped me to get my energy cheaper from another company. She also gave me some good tips to stay warm at home without turning the heating on.' James – Service User

Feedback – organisation – Frontline supported tenancies.

'Our residents have benefited hugely from the energy advice and guidance provided by Worthing Mencap. Following on from the 'Being Energy Efficient' and 'Carbon monoxide awareness' workshops they delivered at our resident's support hub some of the people we support have been able to reduce their energy use and save money, which is vital for them as the majority of people are in receipt of benefits as their main source of income. Emma was able to support those not on the priority services register to sign up, so that they are reassured if anything goes wrong in the area they will be top of the list to be supported.' Frontline Supported Tenancies -

Case Study

Sue is in her 40's, she is autistic and is living independently in the community. She recently moved to the Worthing area from Crawley to be closer to her mother who is requiring more family support for her age-related needs. Although Sue wanted to move to be closer to her mother, she also finds change very stressful and difficult to deal with due to her autism. There was a high risk that Sue would not cope well with the scale of this change and ignore the vital moving home tasks required as they are viewed as 'too stressful to think about'. This would have a detrimental impact on her mental and financial wellbeing in the long term.

Sue was being supported by the My Network drop-in support service in Crawley, run by Dimensions UK in a county-wide partnership with Worthing Mencap (and other providers). The My Network Support Co-ordinator in Crawley contacted their Worthing counterparts to begin the transition of support for Sue before she moved. This included a supported visit to the My Network drop-in support service at Buddys community cafe in Worthing, run by Worthing Mencap, before her moving date. The two Support Co-ordinators linked together to help Sue take meter readings before leaving her old property in Crawley.

Our Worthing Support Co-ordinator who had received energy advice training from SGN met with Sue at Buddys a week after she moved into her new property. At this appointment Sue was supported to give her final meter readings to her old energy supplier and arrange a final bill. Due to Sue's autism, she is only able to cope well with actioning one task at a time, she would find it overwhelmingly stressful to attempt to action too many tasks and would shut off from tasks if they became too stressful.

At the next appointment Sue was supported to set up an account with the energy suppliers at her new property. Whilst setting up her new account the provider was informed of her need to be on the Priority Services Register and flagged that she may be eligible for the Warm Home Discount later on in the year.

Sue was also supported with making the relevant changes to things such as her Universal Credit claim, other utility accounts and subscriptions at other appointments.

Once the priority moving home tasks had been undertaken and Sue was more settled into her new home, she attended an energy advice and carbon monoxide awareness quiz at Buddys. Here she learnt about tips to stay warm at home whilst using less energy and the dangers and indicators of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Over a long period of time Sue has settled into living in Worthing. She feels on top of her energy accounts and is able to access support to understand her bills through the My Network service. If her bills start becoming too expensive Sue now has the knowledge and skills to cut down her energy usage to try and save money whilst still staying warm at home.

Without our specialist support at a very stressful time for Sue she would have just ignored all of the key tasks required to be undertaken when she moved house, because they would have been too overwhelming to carry out on her own. If she didn't action these tasks, she would be in debt to energy suppliers for a property she no longer lived in. She would not have set up accounts and paid bills for her new property. This would eventually get on top of her and spiral out of control, with issues becoming so complex they would require a much higher level of intervention at a much higher cost to statutory services. This in turn would put her tenancy; independence; financial, mental and physical health & wellbeing at significant risk. Universal access Information and Advice services would not have had the skills or afforded the time that Sue required, due to her autism, to deliver the support she needed.

Following our support Sue is safe and warm at home.

5.3 SGNs Vulnerable Steering Group

Our Vulnerable Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2 from strategy into delivery. With their guidance we intend to prioritise key initiatives to support our most vulnerable customers.

With a data driven approach to identify communities most likely to suffer detriment from living in a cold and unhealthy home, it was identified that we should prioritise programmes that help people who are living with a disability. In 2023 our strategic steering group re-iterated the vital impact we could have by co-ordinating our activities with others to identify and 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 directly support people with a disability living in West Sussex at a time when costs are increasing month on month and the need to save money, avoid debt and ensure income maximisation is paramount.

My Network Energy Advice will provide the following outcomes for people with a disability in West Sussex:

- Be provided with easy-to-understand information on how to save on energy costs through reducing usage and staying warm with alternative methods, via EasyRead documents
- Be provided with easy-to-understand information on available energy support
- Be supported to join the Priority Services Register - providing security and support needed in the event of an unplanned outage from their regional utility companies and ensure that their suppliers are aware of any additional communication needs
- Be supported to understand their eligibility to access various benefits. E.g. PIP, Universal Credit, Carer's Support Allowance through a My Network Adviser
- Be provided with information of where they can access future energy support and guidance
- Increased confidence and mental wellbeing to know they are in control of managing their utilities
- Be provided with easy-to-understand information on carbon monoxide safety
- Access to carbon monoxide safety alarms for their home

- Access to Locking Cooker Valves
- Be supported to reduce the risk of entering into debt with their energy suppliers
- Be supported to effectively manage any current debt with energy suppliers

Wider outcomes will be:

- Providing access to a 'Warm Space' for the Worthing community
- Providing more skilled and knowledgeable Information and Advice workforce for people with a disability across West Sussex
- Providing more energy related tools and resources available to help professionals supporting people with a disability.

6.2 Success Criteria

Through our partnership, we will be able to effectively support people with a disability, their families and carers in the West Sussex area to be safe and warm at home.

We will use key outcomes to measure success:

Reach a total of 1,875 vulnerable households with information on reducing energy usage, carbon monoxide awareness and supported access to the Priority Services Register.

- Provide training to 10 members of external staff delivering Information and Advice to people with a disability on energy safeguarding services including how to identify fuel poverty, carbon monoxide harm and how to describe the benefits of registering to the Priority Services Register
- Deliver 900 1:1 energy advice and support appointments which includes CO safety discussions, support to sign up to the Priority Services Register and a benefit eligibility check
- Deliver 200 accessible energy advice (including carbon monoxide awareness and PSR info) group workshops to at least 1,400 people with a learning disability or autism and/or carers
- Deliver at least 20 information stalls at specialised events through the network of partnerships for disabled people, providing CO awareness, PSR information and referrals into the 1:1 appointments for at least 200 people.
- Distribute 200 carbon monoxide alarms to households without a working alarm
- Identifying 50 households that would benefit from an LCV and onward referral to SGN
- Support 20 people to receive debt advice or better manage their debt and an onward referral to NEF for a home visit to explore ways in which energy efficiency can be increased
- Over 8,000 walk ins across 2 years to our 'Warm Hub' at Buddys in Worthing.

7 Project partners and third parties involved

SGN - lead gas network providing funding and support to the delivery team, including training, access to broader referral partners, and direct services for customers including but not limited to the Priority Services Register, Locking Cooker Valves, carbon monoxide alarms

Worthing Mencap - delivery and coordination of service

The partners will continue to closely work with a network of local disability service providers to identify eligible people for the service across West Sussex including; Aldingbourne Trust, Dimensions UK, Signposts Mid Sussex, Guildcare, Ferring Country Centre.

Other partners include: West Sussex County Council, Borough and District Councils, DWP & Job Centre Plus – across West Sussex, Carers Support West Sussex, Social Prescribers.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

This partnership has been co-designed by Worthing Mencap and SGN, building capacity by providing access to key services including the PSR, interventions that address fuel poverty and broader safeguarding and wellbeing services to those in need. As we continue to evolve the partnership and progress with the delivery, the following activities will be in place to monitor and evaluate project progress and impacts:

- Quantitative and qualitative customer outcomes
- Feedback questionnaires to ensure that the services are valued by those who use it
- The questionnaires have additional space for attendees to write more in-depth personalised reviews and this qualitative data is invaluable to us in helping assess and shape our services
- Ongoing referrals from/to partners to ensure that we're delivering outcomes that address both crisis and long-term fuel poverty / health outcomes
- Each month we will review the progress of the support service to share ideas and challenges through individual and organisational partnership case studies.

Learning

We are keen to learn from this project and for successes to be incorporated into ongoing projects that engage with people with a disability and their families. Through working across Worthing, Adur and Arun the group will review the success of training, workshops and case studies to identify and share best practice. In addition to networking, the project offers learning opportunities across stakeholder organisations which result in an improved understanding of clients' needs.

During the pilot programme supported via SGNs Safe and Warm communities scheme supported by Centre for Sustainable Energy the team were able to create, test and further develop resources such as interactive online quizzes and EasyRead information documents. This insight helped to better understand people's support's priorities throughout the seasons relating to their energy needs, learning that will allow us to tailor our support and our messaging to people throughout the changing seasons through this ongoing partnership.

SGN will share the outcomes via stakeholder mechanisms including the SGN Safe and Warm partnership network the GDN Vulnerability Working Group as well as via the VCMA Annual Showcase and VCMA Annual Report.

This project has the potential to be upscaled as a model, working with other GDN's, enabling more people living with a cognitive or learning disability stay safe, warm and sometimes with greater confidence and independence at home.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV

We worked with leading social impact research consultancy SIA Partners to develop a social value methodology aligning to the DNO Rulebook with additional GDN specific proxies. Using this methodology to carry out an in-depth assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable customers incorporated in this partnership we forecast a positive net social return of £6.65 over five years.

Social Value Measurement

Total cost*	£149,508.72
Total gross present value	£1,143,125.48
Net Present Value (NPV)	£993,616.76
SROI	£6.65

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

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from April 2024 – March 2026 (2 years)

11 Geographic area

West Sussex

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 Worthing Mencap 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 internally assessed using the SIA Partners methodology and the DNO Rulebook / GDN proxies. As detailed above we have reviewed the current partnership scope which has been forecast at adding an additional £6.65 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and Worthing Mencap 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.