

Safe and Warm Community Scheme

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

January 2024 – January 2025

SGN



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1 Description

Project title	Safe and Warm Community Scheme
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	NA
Date of PEA submission:	December 2023
Project contact name:	Kerry Potter
Project contact number/email:	Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£760,000
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£760,000

2 Problem statement

UK's energy prices have been reported to have almost doubled since 2021, it's currently estimated that there are over 6.7 million households living in fuel poverty in the UK. Nearly half of low-income households are still living in hard to heat homes, and cold homes and poor housing conditions have been linked with a range of health problems in vulnerable adults, children and young people, including respiratory and circulatory health, growth and long-term health. Average energy bills almost doubled last year, and whilst the energy bills support provided in winter 2022-23 went some way to help cover higher costs, there are currently no plans to extend the support.

Increasingly people are finding it hard to manage energy bills, leading to negative physical and mental health impacts from problems associated with living in cold homes. Residents who experience fuel poverty are also more likely to be exposed to dangerous carbon monoxide exposure. Due to financial vulnerability, they may be unable to safely maintain their gas appliances, resulting in a lack of regular gas appliance servicing, coupled with the absence of carbon monoxide alarms, puts vulnerable residents at an increased risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Many people have poor awareness of the funding and support available, which is often both patchy and difficult to navigate. There is often stigma attached to seeking help around money, which makes it hard for people to actively seek support, despite increasing debt levels in low-income households. We understand that more than 15% of low-income households are behind on a (non-mortgage) debt repayment or household bill with many without savings to cover these essential household expenses.¹ Core agencies and charities have a backlog of enquiries, with demand for help outstripping their capacity to deliver it and this is further compounded as customer needs are often complex and require multiple personalised interventions.

Grassroot charitable organisations can help reach people at a local level who may otherwise slip through the net. To successfully engage these organisations and help them to help people in their communities they themselves need capacity support. This is both in terms of support to access funds to cover their staff and running costs, and also support to build the skills, knowledge and experience of their staff and volunteers to be able to get the right help to their service users.

The SGN Safe and Warm Community Scheme has been running for a year and has demonstrated successes as well as gained significant learning that informs how we provide support to local grass root organisations as they provide energy safeguarding support services. Key learning through the first year has helped shape the scope of the extension of the scheme and has included the addition of additional support to help build the skills required for organisations new to providing energy safeguarding services including how to support

¹ <https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/policy-makers-must-remember-the-energy-crisis-pain-will-not-fall-equally-across-society/>

eligible homes onto the Priority Services Register, how to access and administer energy crisis vouchers, and how to increase awareness of carbon monoxide. We've also increased the training time to provide confidence in reporting outcomes from the partnership.

3 Scope and objectives

Working in partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Energy in December 2022 the SGN Safe and Warm Communities Scheme was launched. The scheme provided funds for small community-based partnerships offering a range of support for households in crisis, focused on energy advice and carbon monoxide safety and operating in the SGN regions. The scheme is focussed on the development and support of grassroots charitable organisations to work at a targeted local level as they provide much needed energy safeguarding support for customers.

Building on the learnings of the first year's delivery of the Safe and Warm Community Scheme we've reviewed and adapted the programme to increase the support and training offered to the local organisations so that they can maximise the impact they have when working with vulnerable residents living in hard-to-heat homes and those experiencing fuel poverty. The partnership aims to;

- Extend the support to those organisations who have previously delivered successfully and identify additional small organisations able to reach and support disadvantaged and harder to reach groups.
- Provide support help relevant organisations access the scheme, with additional training and start up support building on learning from the first year of delivery.
- Provide useful and clear information resources for local organisations so that they can better help those in energy crisis. This includes accessing energy and financial advice as well as the Priority Services Register, crisis support and information on carbon monoxide safety. Wider funding and support schemes are constantly in flux so regular checks and updates on developments, and the development of a new referral directory, will help to keep all practitioners up to speed with what is available.
- Build capacity in funded organisations so that staff and volunteers are better able to support customers through phone and email support, training, and sharing of best practice (e.g. best practice from other projects, innovative ideas for supporting customers, good ways to promote the service locally, how to tap into referral networks)
- Look to identify organisations with 'scalable' projects and recommend them for independent partnerships with SGN, providing a tested route service provision.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

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

This project has been co-designed with stakeholders including Centre for Sustainable Energy based upon recent learnings to provide support to people in energy crisis or living in fuel poverty. The partnership builds capacity in trusted community organisations to help those in need by providing access to key services including the PSR, interventions that address fuel poverty and broader safeguarding and wellbeing services.

Based upon our first year's delivery of the SGN Safe and Warm Community Scheme delivered with Centre for Sustainable Energy the programme has been successful at empowering local organisations to help vulnerable people use energy safely, efficiently and affordably whilst building and supporting a trusted network of partners.

The first year's partnership has been externally reviewed by SIA partners to better understand the social impact of the project and this assessment and the new adaptations made to this partnership have informed the forecast SROI.

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 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 and 4.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 SGN Stakeholder feedback

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 grass root community organisations.

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.

5.2 VCMA Showcase event 2023

At the VCMA Showcase event the existing SGN Safe and Warm Community Scheme, and the role it plays in bringing small grassroots organisations to the table, was well received. It's recognised that smaller organisations can play a crucial part in providing support and meeting people in need 'where they are'. Schemes like this mean they can access VCMA funds even where they are not set up to deliver very large contracts for service provision. Stakeholders were positive about working with a dedicated expert partner to support smaller organisations build energy skills and support resources that enable local delivery.

5.3 Centre for Sustainable Energy – feedback from local organisations

Over the past twelve months we have seen an increase in demand for support from local organisations, and requests for help are becoming more complex and wide ranging. We're also seeing that grassroots

organisations are identifying and supporting those in the community who would otherwise not seek support through mainstream support agencies.

Grassroot organisations have fed back that the scheme has;

- Increased the teams capacity to employ staff and support volunteers in order to offer a broader support service to those in need
- Provided staff within grassroots support organisations with the skills to provide basic advice about energy saving and energy safeguarding via training workshops to help build understanding of fuel poverty and skills in providing energy advisory services. This received very positive feedback from participants and will be repeated, taking into account specific requests for topics and areas where more knowledge is needed.
- Enabled a network approach to helping vulnerable households, as individuals receiving support increasingly need not just energy advice but also crisis support – for example with accessing fuel vouchers, clothing and food banks or community larders. Though the network of other local partners and a new referral directory with support to sharing learning across the network are in direct response to this.
- Provided smaller organisations with confidence as they often find it difficult to keep up to date with sector information. For example, eligibility and availability of funding and support changing year on year (as well as depending on whereabouts in the country you are). Regular updates of the SGN Safe and Warm Community Resource Pack, together with check ins and flagging up developments to funded organisations, will help on the ground provision to keep abreast of changes.
- Testimonial feedback includes;
"At the Kingston College Fresher's Fair where many refugee students learnt about this new and unique project that we are offering. Some testimonials from them stated that they haven't seen any other charity in London offering this advice to Afghan and Ukrainian refugees." - Afghanistan and Central Asian Association
"The project will be essential to help our most vulnerable clients improve their living conditions during the cost-of-living crisis." - Franco Toma, CEO
"Thank you SGN, through you, we are making a difference in our community through our "heating and eating" project. " - Adekemi Giwa Director, The Play Centre Glasgow

6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

The Safe and Warm community scheme project provides the following outcomes

- A thriving network of organisations actively engaged with the scheme and receiving funds to support their work
- Local organisations better able to access up to date advice resources and provide energy saving advice and energy safeguarding support to their service users
- Improved sustainability of local organisations through longer term availability of Safe and Warm Community Scheme, and better placed to apply for funding elsewhere in future as a result of participating in this scheme
- Households better able to access support should they need help to maintain a safe and warm home
- Households supported with critical primary needs, energy and food poverty and debt support

- Households signed up (and/or understand how to sign up) to the Priority Services Register
- Households at lower risk from Carbon Monoxide
- Individuals have improved health and wellbeing after receiving help with energy related issues

6.2 Success Criteria

We aim to support, and record data on, the following customer outcomes by extending the scheme. Each year:

- 18 to 25 charitable grassroots organisations per year provided with the support, resources, funding and skills to help vulnerable people in need to stay safe and warm
- 7,000 households provided with winter resilience, PSR, CO safety and energy advice information.
- 2,500 customers supported to sign up to the Priority Services Register
- 500 customers signposted to CO alarms and a CO safety survey
- 600 customers in fuel crisis provided with fuel vouchers
- 2,000 customers provided with access to crisis food / meal support and clothes banks
- 2,500 customers supported to access debt advice or benefits advice.

7 Project partners and third parties involved

SGN – regional gas network providing programme funding and support to the delivery team, including training on energy schemes including PSR and CO safety, access to a broader referral partner network, and direct services for customers including but not limited to Locking Cooker Valves and CO alarms.

Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) - Independent national charity, established in 1979 to tackle climate change and end the misery of cold homes. CSE undertakes practical work to support communities to take action on energy, alongside original research and analysis to inform local and national policy. CSE has unrivalled UK-wide experience supporting community-based energy projects, working with individuals and groups to achieve positive change - from delivering energy advice to vulnerable households, installing energy efficiency measures, low carbon planning, and community renewables. CSE will administer grants and provide support with the identification, training and ongoing support of the community partners and projects.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

- Monthly reporting against KPIs and outcomes, including identification of good practice and case studies
 - Feedback from previous training sessions, monthly reporting, end of project reviews and partner meetings
 - Evaluation of end of year performance, strengths, and weaknesses
- **Learning**
- Monthly reporting against KPIs and outcomes will be used to track progress against targets. Examples of good practice and case studies identified in reports will be reflected on and will feed into updates provided to funded partners.

- Feedback from organisations previously funded through the scheme will be used to improve support so that they can better support customers. For example, additional up-front support around outcome reporting will now be provided based on feedback from existing grantees.
- During programme delivery, funded organisations will be encouraged to share their own experiences and best practices around reaching and supporting customers with other partners – including through a quarterly workshop. This has proved a valuable element of training events previously delivered.
- Regular training sessions and meetings with partners will continue. These give an opportunity to share ideas and capture learning. Training webinars will be based on the themes of understanding fuel poverty and providing energy and safeguarding advice and tailored to reflect particular needs identified from funded organisations. Discussions will be encouraged so that organisations can share learning – for example, updates on referral routes and partners, eligibility criteria for specific grants and funding, and identification of new opportunities customers can access.
- In response to a need identified by several partners, CSE research together with feedback from funded partners (past and present) will result in a directory of referral organisations, to maximise benefit to customers by signposting out for more complex needs and services which require more expertise (e.g. debt advice services which are regulated by the FCA)
- An end of year evaluation of end of year performance will identify key achievements, strengths and weaknesses.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

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 in investment (SROI) of £0.68. This is based on a conservative view of the outcomes associated with this project due to the challenges of quantifying outcomes when working with multiple grassroots charities.

Total cost	£760,000.00
Total gross present value	£1,274,605.71
Net Present Value (NPV)	£514,605.71
SROI	£0.68

We have also conducted a review of the SROI and NPV with SIA Partners from our previous 12-month delivery Safe and Warm Community Scheme partnership with CSE. This project was forecast to have an SROI of £0.38 and NPV of £190,428, when reviewing this based on actual delivery we saw a 288% increase in NPV up to £739,036 and an SROI of £1.27.

Due to the forecast net SROI for this project being under £1 we will be monitoring outcomes closely to review performance against targets and ensure we met or outperform targets and capture any additional outcomes not included in the original project scope.

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from January 2024 to January 2025

11 Geographic area

SGNs Network areas

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

SGN has worked alongside Centre for Sustainability 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, this includes a review of the most recent 12-month delivery of our Safe and Warm Community Scheme which delivered greater SROI than forecast. As detailed above SIA partners have reviewed the current partnership scope which has been forecast at adding an additional £0.68 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria and over deliver as we did in 2023.

To support the partnership to deliver the success criteria outcomes as detailed, CSE are working closely to support the network of grass root organisations to ensure impactful delivery. CSE and SGN already meet weekly to review partner challenges, and 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.