

Warmth for Wellbeing

Brighton and Hove City Council

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

December 2023

SGN



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1 Description

Project title	Warmth for Wellbeing – Brighton and Hove City Council
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	December 2023
Project contact name:	Kerry Potter
Project contact number/email:	Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£110,000
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£71,500

2 Problem statement

In 2022, there were an estimated 3.26 million households living in fuel poverty in England, based on the LILEE metric (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2023). This is an increase from 3.1 million in 2021 and doesn't take into consideration the cost-of-living crisis that has hit households throughout the winter of 2022-23 and beyond. National Energy Action state the figure as 6.7 million UK households since October 2022, using the 10% of income measure. It is recognised that nearly half of low-income households are still living in hard to heat homes, and the rate of improvements is well below what is needed to lift people out of fuel poverty by a target date of 2030.

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

The Marmot Review into the health impacts of cold homes and fuel poverty found a strong association between cold temperatures and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Fuel poverty and living in a cold home has been linked to excess winter deaths. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 40% of excess winter deaths are caused by living in a cold home and the Hills review estimates that some 10% of excess winter deaths (EWDs) are directly attributable to fuel poverty (Hills, 2012). During the five winters 2016/17 to 2020/21 (most current data available), there were an average of 118 EWDs (excluding COVID-19) in Brighton & Hove each winter (ONS).

Latest sub regional fuel poverty data, for 2021, indicates that 11.6% of households in Brighton & Hove are living in fuel poverty. This equates to over 14,600 households and is significantly higher than the average for the South East (8.6%). The current number of households living in fuel poverty and struggling to pay their energy bills will now be significantly higher due to the increase in energy prices throughout 2022/23 and the wider cost of living crisis.

Since 2013 Brighton & Hove City Council has been providing crisis support via the Local Discretionary Social Fund (LDSF), which includes support with food and fuel vouchers, white goods, furniture and other essentials. The team ensure that ongoing referrals are made to appropriate local advice agencies on issues such as debt and broader welfare advice. The team have also worked with Southern Water previously and will continue to do so through this project to signpost residents to their Priority Services Register (PSR) and social tariffs. Collaboration and information sharing is overseen by the multi-agency Fuel Poverty and Affordable Warmth Steering Group, and managers with direct responsibility for the LDSF sit as permanent members of this group.

The service is targeted towards households in crisis and prioritises the most immediate needs and includes emergency fuel vouchers for people in urgent need whilst providing people with the access and capacity to engage with other long term support mechanisms.

Residents can apply directly to the council for help, or they can be referred into the service by a number of community pathways.

The service has seen unprecedented demand and pressure due to the level of need in Brighton & Hove because of the cost of living and energy crisis. In 2019, there were 1,554 applications for assistance, which resulted in £4,517 help with energy, whereas in 2022-23, there were 6,735 applications for help, amounting to £343,280 of energy crisis assistance.

To ensure that the support is provided to those most in need, all beneficiaries of the current energy support scheme are financially vulnerable, placing them at risk of associated health impacts and wider costs on statutory services.

Feedback from supporting the most vulnerable through the existing services has highlighted that there are significant gaps in understanding on the support that is available to households in vulnerable situations.

There is low awareness of the utility schemes designed to help vulnerable households including the Priority Services Register (PSR), energy advice schemes, water social tariff and gas and carbon monoxide safety check initiatives.

3 Scope and objectives

The partnership aims to work together in partnership to identify and support vulnerable households in energy crisis. This support will focus on those most vulnerable and at risk of poor health outcomes due to living in a cold and unhealthy home, where we will provide immediate and longer-term support to address the underlying causes of fuel poverty.

The partnership will work closely with front line agencies and advice providers to help vulnerable households with enhanced support over winter, where there is a greater need to provide practical support to keep vulnerable people safe and warm. The holistic service will include:

- Targeted identification of households with circumstances that indicate a risk of fuel crisis
- Assessment of Priority Services Register (PSR) eligibility and support to register onto regional utility PSRs (energy and water)
- Provision of crisis support including utility triage, and the allocation of energy vouchers for customers via Prepayment meter vouchers, or direct to energy accounts for direct debit customers
- Household income assessments and benefits checks to alleviate fuel poverty
- Home energy advice visits with installation of small energy efficiency measures to alleviate fuel poverty (not funded by the VCMA fund)
- Household safety triage, with information on the safe and efficient use of energy, carbon monoxide safety conversation and the offer of a Safe and Well visit / and or a carbon monoxide alarm

The project will be overseen by, and report to, the multi-agency Brighton & Hove Fuel Poverty & Affordable Warmth Steering Group. This will ensure that support is targeted at those residents in greatest need and at greatest risk from living in a cold home. The steering group will ensure scrutiny and coordination with other workstreams and support around the wider cost of living crisis and related workstreams, such as the work underway around food poverty and financial inclusion in the city.

Organisations across the city are picking up the same issues around fuel and food poverty and cost of living. The size and broad impact of the problem requires partnership working to alleviate the multitude of challenges residents face.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

SIA partners have independently assessed this initiative to ensure that it returns a positive SROI by delivering a community project that supports vulnerable households to use energy safely, efficiently and affordably.

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

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 SGN's Vulnerable Customer 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.

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. They have recommended that we look at ways in which we can build stronger links with other organisations including collaborating with other utilities, health services and charities to deliver support services that tackle the fuel poverty gap and the underlying causes of fuel poverty.

5.2 Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC)

BHCC's draft [Cost of Living Plan](#) calls for evidence driven emergency support, targeting those most in need, whilst also building ongoing financial resilience for households. The plan is linked to the work of the Fuel Poverty and Affordable Warmth Steering Group and highlights the role of the Local Discretionary Social Fund in providing a safety net for households in the form of basic essentials and fuel support.

Work to date in the city has recognised the value of collaboration between different agencies as all are impacted by the cost-of-living crisis. There has been a range of meetings with key city partners to identify shared challenges and opportunities to join up intelligence and support to increase impact and social value of interventions across the city and the wider region. It is recognised that this is not an issue the City Council can address on its own. This theme was explored at the City Cost of Living [Summit](#) held earlier in 2023.

5.3 Client case study and customer feedback

The partners look to ensure that the needs of the client are understood and addressed and utilise funding from a number of funders to address the issues that impact the client's health and wellbeing. Here is a recent case study that demonstrate the impact collaborative funding can have to address urgent needs.

Case Study

January 2023 - The client and their partner were both near pensionable age and found themselves stuck without any central heating in the middle of winter. They unexpectedly had to pay for several repairs to their property and while the work was being carried out in their home, all radiators were removed with the intention of having them replaced. However, repairs to the property cost their entire savings, so they were unable to afford new radiators and were left without any central heating. The client is physically disabled, partially sighted, diabetic and is also suffering from kidney failure. They were also struggling with their mental health. Not having any heating was therefore severely impacting the clients' health and wellbeing. From our initial call with the client, it was clear that this was a case that needed prioritising as they were without heating during one of the coldest weeks in winter. They had electricity but no gas, so we ordered an oil-filled radiator which arrived within two days. We also booked a home visit to assess and refer for an emergency Warm Safe Homes Grant (WSHG). On visiting, the house was very cold (around 11 degrees Celsius) and the client was wrapped in blankets in the living room to try and keep warm. We stressed the importance of getting the living room to a healthy temperature of 18 to 21 degrees, which was now achievable with the oil-filled radiator. We also supplied an electric blanket and left 8 radiator reflector sheets and showed them how they could be fitted once radiators were installed. An urgent WSHG referral was made requesting new radiators throughout the property, a room thermostat and programmer, and a new boiler. The client was on a prepay meter, so we also applied for energy vouchers and a £200 Energyworks grant to help cover the cost of energy until their central heating was back up and running.

In this case study, the lack of central heating was an urgent health risk to the client. Given the clients' physical vulnerabilities, the help we provided brought them significant health benefits. The clients were very grateful for our help and have been in contact since to let us know that they are doing well.

6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

Through this collaborative partnership the project aims to alleviate the health and financial burdens faced by households living in fuel poverty. We will target support to those most at risk of the negative health impacts of living in a cold and unhealthy home by providing a range of support services that address the underlying causes of fuel poverty.

We will:

- Provide households in energy crisis with crisis funding in addition to advice and support to manage both the immediate need and additional help to address the underlying causes of fuel poverty
- Provide households with access to fire and Carbon Monoxide (CO) safety advice and CO alarms where needed
- Increase vulnerable customers household incomes identifying eligible benefits and facilitating debt support services
- Provide greater customer resilience by supporting eligible households to sign up to the PSR
- Enhance energy efficiency in vulnerable households to reduce energy costs and environmental impact by providing energy advice and where possible energy efficiency measures funded outside of VCMA

6.2 Success Criteria

To ensure that we're delivering against our shared objectives we will be monitoring the impact of our partnership on client outcomes against forecasted assumptions. We will be sharing insights on who is using the service and the impact this is having on dependency for support and feedback from service users.

- 1,042 households identified and provided with support on energy matters including energy efficiency advice, access to fuel voucher crisis funds and onward referral into our network of partners, including Energyworks or LEAP for in-depth energy advice and support with billing debts, grant applications and energy efficiency schemes and East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service for in home safety assessments
- 1,042 customers assessed for eligibility to the Priority Services Register and supported to register where required
- 1,042 households assessed to ensure that they have the relevant carbon monoxide safeguards in place and will be provided with a carbon monoxide alarm where required (forecast value 100)
- 100 Brighton & Hove City Council employees and partners will be provided with awareness raising information on CO safety
- A Customer Satisfaction Survey will be offered to each customer and a response rate of 15% is estimated, due to the complex nature of the client group.

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, CO alarms including literature in a range of languages, and access to the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme.

UK Power Networks (UKPN) - lead electricity network providing funding and support to the delivery team, including training on the Priority Services Register,

Southern Water - lead water network providing funding and support to the delivery team, including training on the Priority Services Register and water efficiency and water social tariff.

Brighton & Hove City Council – identify vulnerable households in need of support; administer energy grants; support sign up to Priority Service Registers; onwards referrals for in-depth energy and money advice, fire service home safety checks, CO alarm installation and gas servicing.

Citizen's Advice Brighton & Hove – Energyworks project providing personalised energy advice; MoneyWorks partnership providing in-depth money advice.

Money Advice Plus - MoneyWorks partnership providing in-depth money advice.

Brighton & Hove Energy Services Cooperative - Energyworks project providing home visits with personalised energy advice.

Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP) – home visits / phone calls with personalised energy advice and onwards referral for in-depth money advice. Onward referrals to the LEAP [Boiler](#) scheme can be made for repair or replacement of condemned boilers.

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service – home safety checks with CO alarm installation and provision of heated blankets.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

Evaluation and measuring impact will be vital to the success of this pilot project and it will also be crucial in informing the expansion of the initiative beyond winter 2023/24.

This partnership project has been co-designed by Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC), SGN, UKPN, and Southern Water, with recent learnings from the 2023 UKPN, BHCC and Citizens Advice Brighton & Hove Energyworks project collaboration, providing support to people in energy crisis or living in fuel poverty. The partnership builds capacity in the BHCC Local Discretionary Social Fund 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 resident outcomes
- Resident feedback surveys to ensure that the services are valued by those who use it
- 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

Through the Fuel Poverty & Affordable Warmth Steering Group and a range of other networks, including Your Energy Sussex, Greater Brighton and the Warmer Homes consortium of local authorities, learning from this collaborative project can be shared widely. The evaluation will allow us to monitor impacts and apply lessons to future local schemes to ensure that interventions are best targeted, and outcomes maximised, which will inform the longer-term partnership ambitions.

We will also be looking to share the learnings of this partnership through the SGN Safe and Warm partnership network and more broadly to our stakeholders via the VCMA Annual Showcase(s) and VCMA Annual Report.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV

Alongside UKPN 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 attributed to SGN we forecast a positive net social return in investment (SROI) of £1.93.

Total cost	£71,500
Total gross present value	£209,670
Net Present Value (NPV)	£138,170
SROI	£1.93

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The pilot project will run from January 2024 to April 2024 with the view to extend the partnership based on insights captured during this time.

11 Geographic area

Brighton and Hove – East Sussex

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

SGN has worked alongside the partners 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.

To support the partnership to deliver the success criteria outcomes as detailed, the partners will review progress monthly and quarterly to 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.