

# Healthy Homes Solutions & Vulnerability Registration Service

Southern England

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

May 2024  
SGN



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## 1 Description

Project title	Healthy Homes Solutions
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2024
Project contact name:	Kerry Potter
Project contact number/email:	Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£619,116.20
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£619,116.20

## 2 Problem statement

According to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the number of households who are required to spend more than 10 per cent of their income (after housing costs) on domestic energy rose in 2023 to 36.4 per cent of households (8.91 million), up from 27.4 per cent in 2022 (6.66 million). Typical energy bills under the January to March 2024 price cap were almost 60% higher than in winter 2021/22. Even with recent reduction to energy price cap, the annual energy cost for a typical household in the UK is £1,690. Nearly half of low-income households are still living in hard to heat homes, and the rate of improvement is well below what is needed to lift people out of fuel poverty by a target date of 2030.

The intersecting challenges of mental health, energy inefficiency, and financial instability are significant barriers for many UK residents, further exacerbated by recent economic pressures and the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority), around 28 million adults in the UK are considered to be in vulnerable circumstances. Approximately 7.5 million people in the UK live with diagnosed mental health conditions, facing increased difficulty in managing household utilities and maintaining safe, warm homes.

This situation is particularly dire for those in energy-inefficient homes, where poor insulation, damp and mould and outdated heating systems contribute to excessive energy costs and increased vulnerability to health risks and mental health conditions.

As part of Healthy Homes Solutions (HHS) independent SROI assessment potentially vulnerable and fuel poor households are provided and a survey which is sent to all registered households. Results from this survey show that 68% are unaware of the Priority Services Register (PSR) and its benefits. Additionally, 43% report moderate to severe damp and mould, exacerbating their vulnerability and fuel poverty, and 25% believe that they need support to check if they are eligible for DWP benefits.

In summary the key problems identified from the survey are:

1. households especially those the most in-need households are unclear on whether they are eligible for energy efficiency schemes
2. the complexity of absence of centralised support overwhelms residents, causing anxiety and stress as significant time is needed to research, trust, and apply for available services
3. there is a lack of understanding of the Priority Services Register with 68% of vulnerable residents are unaware of the PSR
4. that 44% of vulnerable and fuel-poor homes have poor Energy Performance Certificates (D, E, F, G ratings) and over 62% of the most vulnerable are in council tax bands A and B
5. that there is a keenness to be more energy efficient and take part in a greener future, that lack of

knowledge, navigating eligibility schemes and other household costs often prohibit action.

There are 5.5m current data records across the SGN Southern region in the Healthy Homes National Householder Database (NHD), with information that relates to the social-economic, tenure, council tax band, ONS, DWP, sonar, EPC, heating, and affordability data of the household.

Within this data set, there are over 767k households identified as ‘vulnerable’ where the service holds the customer’s name, address, contact data and full GDPR contact eligibility which would enable personalised contact. Looking at this mapped data HHS has identified that over 334k ‘vulnerable and in-fuel poverty’ homes, and 37k properties in ‘extreme poverty and poor energy efficient’ homes with an EPC of D, E, F or G.

### 3 Scope and objectives

Working in partnership, SGN and Healthy Homes Solutions will provide an integrated data-driven approach to help identify and support eligible vulnerable households to access key energy-safeguarding services to help maintain a safe and warm home.

By combining rich, profiled vulnerability, fuel-poor and household resident data and insights from the Vulnerability Registration Service (VRS) to proactively identify and engage residents in vulnerable, fuel-poor and health risk situations (severe damp and mould) that partnership will provide targeted interventions and Carbon Monoxide (CO) education that will lead to meaningful improvements in their quality of life and a reduction of utility bills.

Through a structured triage process, the team will identify the most critical needs of each household, guiding them through various support options tailored to enhance their living conditions and reduce energy costs. This holistic support framework not only addresses immediate needs but also facilitates long-term well-being and safety through continuous engagement and support updates.

The ambition of the partnerships is to identify and alleviate the immediate pressures faced by vulnerable people and contributes to broader societal goals of reducing health disparities and improving environmental sustainability through energy efficiency by connecting eligible households to support services designed to help.

#### Objectives:

Identify and engage at risk vulnerable households to triage and support to access the following services;

- Energy Efficiency advice and information through a customer driven channel, either via the call centre or on request by sharing an accessible information pack (emailed booklet, braille, hard of hearing, partially sighted and the use of ReciteMe accessibility and language tools on the registration page)
- Eligibility assessment for ECO4 and other Decarbonisation Schemes such as ECO4, GBIS, Flex, HUG and SHDF Government Schemes
- Income maximisation checks, and onward support to access Policy in Practice’s Benefits Calculator and supported access to IE Hub to help manage debt
- Priority Services Register sign up via thepsr.co.uk
- Carbon Monoxide (CO) / Gas Safety advice including the provision of CO alarms where required
- Onward support to access help including support to access Broadband and water social tariffs
- Signposting to a broader partnership network based on need, including SGN’s Safe & Warm partnership network (Age UK, NEA, Scope, Maggie’s Cancer Care, Marie Curie, and Citizens Advice) and partners who are linked to HHS including Alzheimer’s Society.

The partnership will work collaboratively to enhance these positive impacts and achieve clearly defined outcomes. By integrating expert advice and services tailored to the unique needs of each household, the project ensures enhanced health, financial resilience, energy safeguarding, and increased CO awareness among hard-to-reach communities.

## 4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This partnership will provide support across SGNs Southern network area on energy safeguarding, ensuring that those who are at risk of living in a cold and unhealthy home have access to key support services to alleviate fuel poverty. In addition, the partnership looks to support at risk vulnerable customers on to the Priority Services Register as well as provide carbon monoxide (CO) alarms where needed as well as CO safety advice. The services will work collaboratively with expert agencies to maximise positive impacts beyond energy, increasing the health and well-being 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 Independent HACT SROI Surveys on HHS and VRS Customer Impact

The HHS and VRS initiative have consistently aligned with stakeholder priorities by addressing key concerns related to customer vulnerability. This has been reaffirmed through continuous dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders, who emphasise the necessity of supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances, particularly with respect to broader utility affordability—encompassing water, gas, and electricity.

Recent independent surveys conducted by HACT highlight a critical need for our services: over 72% of surveyed participants were unaware that they were eligible for or that these services were available and, in some cases, free. This underscores the importance of our initiative in raising awareness and providing essential support. HHS approach extends beyond just engagement, by actively reducing the burden on these individuals.

For instance, in their initial pilot, they found that researching, finding, and completing forms for Cadent PSR, VRS, TPS, DWP, and Friends Against Scams took residents around 88 minutes. With this service, residents provide their details once, and the team handle the form completion for them. This saves them approximately 88 minutes, reducing stress and anxiety, especially for vulnerable residents. This not only demonstrates the effectiveness of the initiative but also enhances customer

experience by simplifying access to vital services.

### Summary of Latest HACT SROI Feedback Surveys

The latest HACT SROI feedback surveys for Cadent and WWU programs indicate high levels of satisfaction and improved well-being among participants. Key findings include an average rating of 4.27 out of 5 for feeling safer and more at ease after signing up for the Priority Service Register (PSR) and a rating of 3.89 out of 5 for feeling less stressed after joining the Vulnerability Registration Service (VRS). Additionally, the presence of Carbon Monoxide Alarms has reduced worries, with an average rating of 4.25 out of 5. The information booklet provided has also been well-received, scoring 4.51 out of 5 for making residents feel better about accessing additional services. Overall life satisfaction among those accessing VRS HHS Initiative services is 7.65 out of 10

In terms of specific service uptake, 80.39% of participants opted into the VRS, 77.45% into the PSR, 29.41% into the Free Benefit Checker, and 26.47% into Broadband Social Tariffs. A significant majority, 75%, found information on reducing energy bills helpful, while 27% benefited from property maintenance advice. The initiative has prompted further actions such as seeking mental health support (52%), accessing home heating support (29%), and taking steps to prevent damp and mould (17%). Additionally, 57% feel better knowing they have easy access to these services, 16% report improved health and well-being, and 8% see a better financial situation, with 63% likely to recommend the HHS Initiative to others.

## 5.2 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.

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

The HHS and VRS initiative leverages the expertise of integrated services and decarbonisation schemes to provide exceptional support to SGN customers in Southern England.

Over the past four years, HHS has focused on vulnerability, fuel-poor and decarbonisation programs in collaboration with utility companies, energy company obligation companies, managing agents, DESNZ, and whole-house retrofit installers. HHS's service combines household fabric checks with affordability, energy efficiency assessments and vulnerability needs to match homes with the relevant criteria to triage, support and signpost to relevant services available, including eligibility for DWP and active decarbonisation schemes, including ECO4, GBIS, Flex, HUG, SHDF plus NEST in Wales.

**To achieve this the partnership will:**

1. Support vulnerable and fuel-poor homes to triage, support and signpost to the services that are relevant to their needs
2. Identify and contact customers identifiable via data profiling as ‘at risk’ and provide them with information support available to maintain a safe and warm home. Applying a broad contact channel approach ensuring comprehensive coverage, targeting those most in need. Use a current multi-channel approach, of social media advertising, email and text messaging. Test the effectiveness of printed material through partnerships with Housing Associations and Local Authorities where applicable
3. Provide a holistic energy safeguarding service approach that is tailored to customer needs and where needed facilitate and support the completion of registration forms by proxy on behalf of households, ensuring that vulnerable households are supported seamlessly, where the partner of the scheme allows HHS to complete the forms
4. Provide energy advice services; including energy conservation, safe ways to maintain a warm home, home energy efficiency consultations and assess eligibility for home energy efficiency schemes
5. Provide integrated carbon monoxide safety awareness into HHS engagements - including CO awareness advice, provision of CO alarms and checking whether customers are confident that they would know what to do if they suspected CO exposure
6. Promote and support the registration of eligible households to the Priority Services Register ensuring that vulnerable households are registered, and the customers are aware of the support services available
7. Support households on low incomes access to benefits checks and support from debt support teams within the collaborative partnership network
8. Ensure that customers with specific needs are supported with access to other support schemes provided by broadband and water providers
9. Support onward referrals to support services provided by other Safe & Warm partners in SGN’s partnership network and HHS’s network including but not limited to Marie Curie, Scope, Citizen’s Advice, NEA and Maggie’s Cancer Centres.
10. Monitor, evaluate, report and adapt to the feedback and outcomes achieved by the service by including gathering qualitative and quantitative data from the residents who have received support, to understand the direct benefits and any areas for improvement. This may involve enhancing existing services or introducing new support mechanisms to address emerging challenges.

**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.

- Training 6 frontline team members through the train-the-trainer approach to include specific training requirements determined by SGN
- Provide 20,000 households reached via targeted engagement to offer support services through a multi-channel programme
- Provide 8,000 personalised engagements to provide tailored support services for vulnerable households via landing page self-selection and call centre calls including self-selected callback appointments that give residents the choice of engagement
- Provide 8,000 households with energy advice including, energy conservation, ways to safe-



energy and money, to maintain a safe and warm home through all registrations receiving a copy of the booklet

- Provide 2,000 households with a more detailed 12x page booklet on energy efficiency and reducing their household bills through a new 12x page booklet (launch in QTR 3 2024)
- Support 8,000 households to be assessed for energy efficiency schemes eligibility through landing page pre-qualification questions, and circa 20% will complete the additional criteria and eligibility form
- Support 8,000 of households with CO awareness through the landing page, call centre calls and booklet and currently 3% request CO alarms to be issued
- Provide 8,000 PSR conversations with an expectation of 72% PSR registrations
- Provide 5,000 VRS (Vulnerability Registration Service) registrations
- Provide 1,500 households with income maximisation and debt support
- Provide 2,000 households with information to access energy schemes including WHD
- Support 3,200 – at around 40% of all current registrations ask for further information on broadband social tariffs and water-saving kits
- Support 8,000 households to provide damp and mould details. All relevant households (61% currently) will receive a new booklet in quarter 3 2024 on the prevention and remediation process by tenure.
- Identify 8,000 households to sign up by proxy and where relevant an onward referral via the SGN's and HHS referral partners as detailed below.

## 7 Project partners and third parties involved

### SGN - funding partner

- Access to the SGN Safe & Warm partnership network
- Gas Safe Charity for CO Awareness training
- Locking Cooker Values

### HHS and VRS

- Delivery of PEA success criteria
- Management of the VRS (Vulnerability Registration Service)
- HHS Homes improvement decarbonisation checks
- Telephone Preference Service (TPS)

### Referral pathways;

- Cancer Care support (Maggie's Cancer Care)
- Mental Health Support (Mental Health UK/ Shout)
- Dementia Support (Alzheimer's Society)
- Gambling Support (Gamcare)
- Friends Against Scams (Trading Standards)
- Scope (DES for disabled people) (From QTR 3 2024)
- Cruse (for bereaved people) (From QTR 3 2024)
- Age UK (for older people) (From QTR 3 2024)
- Carers Association (for Carers) (From QTR 3 2024)
- Citizen's Advice (for a range of support services) (From QTR 3 2024)
- Kidney Care UK (for people with kidney disease) (From QTR 3 2024)
- NEA (for fuel poverty additional support)
- National Energy Foundation (NEF) (for home energy audits) (New service)
- IE Hub (for proactive finance management) (From QTR 3 2024)
- DWP (Department of Work and Pension) Benefits Check with EntitledTo. (Policy in Practise)



- from QTR 3 2024)
- Payplan (for debt management)

## 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. Through the partnership 800 customers will be surveyed to capture feedback and insight on the experience and outcomes as a result of the support provided as per the HACT questions to feed into the HACT SROI independent report provided at halfway through and at the end of the programme.

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 eligibility rates of engagements into energy efficiency scheme referrals
- The recording and monitoring of the type of advice given and its attributed savings
- Case studies

### Learning

We are keen to review the outputs of the monitoring and evaluation activities and share our experiences with SGN’s Safe and Warm partnership network.

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 SIRIO Strategies 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 £2.36.

### Social Value Measurement

<b>Total cost*</b>	£602,626.95
<b>Total gross present value</b>	£2,026,635.45
<b>Net Present Value (NPV)</b>	£1,424,008.50
<b>SROI</b>	£2.36

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

## 10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from 01/07/2024 to 31/03/2026

## 11 Geographic area

SGN’s southern network region

## 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 Healthy Homes Solutions 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 SIRIO Strategies using the DNO / GDN common rulebook. As detailed above SIRIO Strategies have reviewed the current partnership scope which has been forecast at adding an additional £2.36 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and Healthy Homes Solutions 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.