

Energy for Carers

West Sussex

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

November 2024

SGN



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Contents

1..... Description.....	3
2..... Problem statement.....	3
3..... Scope and objectives	4
4..... Why the project is being funded through the VCMA	4
5..... Evidence of stakeholder/customer support	5
5.1 Case study	5
5.2 Local Stakeholder Support	5
5.3 SGNs Vulnerability Steering Group (VSG).....	6
6..... Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria	6
6.1 Outcomes.....	6
6.2 Success Criteria	7
7..... Project partners and third parties involved.....	7
8..... Potential for new learning	7
9..... Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV	8
10..... VCMA Project start and end date	8
11..... Geographic area	8
12..... Internal governance and project management evidence.....	8

1 Description

Project title	Energy for Carers
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	November 2024
Project contact name:	Janet Duggan
Project contact email:	janet.duggan@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£291,631
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£279,631

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). Lower income households are more likely to respond to higher energy prices by cutting energy use below safe levels. Some will find themselves in the situation where energy will become unaffordable, resulting in self-disconnection or unmanageable energy debt.

Typical energy bills under the January to March 2024 price cap were almost 60% higher than in winter 2021/22. Although the price cap has started to lower again from April this year, with no further cost of living payments scheduled, we can say with some certainty that the effects of the cost-of-living crisis will continue to be felt by our residents. DESNZ have also reported that rising housing costs have brought an estimated 51,000 households into fuel poverty this year and “after considering energy rebates, energy efficiency and household changes the overall required energy costs increased by 27 per cent between 2022 and 2023 in real terms. The change in energy prices after government support is estimated to have increased fuel poverty by around 238,000 households over this period.”

Nationally, Citizens Advice helped over 220,000 people with crisis support in 2023 – their highest figure to date, this trend has continued in 2024. They are also seeing a marked increase in people presenting with complex problems, and multiple debts so when someone presents with energy issues, such as affordability, billing, and customer service, they also need support in other areas.

The most recent Census 2021 puts the estimated number of unpaid carers at 5 million in England and Wales. However, Carers UK research in 2022 estimates the number of unpaid carers in the UK could be as high as 10.6 million ([Carers UK, Carers Week 2022 research report](#)).

With the current cost of living crisis, carers have faced unprecedented pressure on their finances: a quarter of carers (25%) are cutting back on essentials like food or heating and nearly two thirds (63%) are extremely worried about managing their monthly costs ([Carers UK, State of Caring 2022](#)). In addition, caring comes with additional costs and many carers suffer financial hardship. 44% of working-age adults who are caring for 35 hours or more a week are in poverty ([Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK Poverty 2022](#)). An estimated one million carers have given up work or reduced working hours to care, over two thirds (68%) of those who had given up work to care were more than £10,000 a year worse off as a result.

As they cope with reduced household incomes, illness and disability bring considerable additional costs, this includes higher energy costs as families are at home all day and disabled, ill and older people need to be kept warm. A survey by Carers UK showed that a third (34%) were unable to afford their utility bills and almost half (45%) were cutting back on essentials like food and heating in order to make ends meet. 54% were spending more than 10% of their household incomes on energy.

Based on the Census 2021 data, West Sussex currently has 72,815 unpaid carers. This equates to 8% of the population of the area. The true figure will be considerable higher as many unpaid carers remain unidentified and

many people do not recognise themselves as carers. In CSWS's recent Engagement Survey of local carers (841 carers engaged), 59% of carers said they have financial worries "I can't afford decent healthy food for myself as my priority is feeding the person I care for and there is not enough for both of us". Carers Support West Sussex (CSWS) has 31,000 carers registered with them and is the sole provider of the county council funded carer support services for adults across West Sussex.

Whilst Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice (ACCA) have been offering the Single Point of Contact service for energy advice in West Sussex for over 4 years, only a small proportion self-identify as carers which suggests the current format may not be accessible to all carers needing energy support, alongside the need for advisers to understand more about who is classed as carer and how they can be supported.

Alongside this, ACCA's energy services are at full capacity meaning there may be delays in carers receiving vital help with their energy issues, potentially leading to self-disconnection and an exacerbation of health issues.

3 Scope and objectives

Working in partnership, SGN, Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice (ACCA) and Carers Support West Sussex (CSWS) will work together to ensure carers in West Sussex can keep themselves and their cared-for warm and well all year round. The partnership will create a preventative approach that keeps more vulnerable individuals safe at home, reduces avoidable need for GP and hospital services, maximises a carer's income and improves their access to emotional, practical and peer support.

CSWS will utilise its existing caring groups and community services to proactively give advice on energy-related behaviour change, wellbeing, income maximisation and benefits. In addition to both practical and emotional support in accordance with The Significant Seven (a framework to identify wellbeing and signs of deterioration). ACCA will expand its specialist energy team to provide appointment slots for carers, booked by the CSWS team, to ensure carers receive advice on carbon monoxide safety, access to fuel vouchers and crisis funds, are signed up to the Priority Services Register and are given advice on how to retrofit their home to ensure it is fit for the future, all at a time that suits them.

This new partnership will provide:

- A large campaign to upskill carers in identifying deterioration of their cared for and reduce their risk of harm (via emailed carers newsletter, additions in local authority newsletters and printed magazines, social media posts, flyers distributed by both organisations at events and in offices)
- Training to enable ACCA staff to proactively identify carers
- Training to enable CSWS staff to proactively start energy conversations
- Energy and wellbeing support embedded into every CSWS activity in the community, as well as through its telephone advice services
- A direct route for carers to access specialist energy advice in a way that meets their needs
- Increased awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide
- More capacity for carers to have their income maximised through benefit checks and application support

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 unpaid carers and those they care for and are struggling to maintain a safe and warm home.

The project delivers against SGN's Vulnerability Strategy, by providing targeted support to households who are individuals that have caring responsibilities and at 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 (with outcomes linked to 3&4)

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Case study

A West Sussex resident had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and their partner, aged 55, had suddenly become their carer. They were referred into the ACCA energy service by social prescribers after receiving a high energy bill and were unsure how they could possibly pay it.

Their income had dramatically reduced due to both of them needing to give up work. The house needed to stay warm to keep the cared-for comfortable, but the carer wasn't sure how they could afford this. They were unsure how to heat their house efficiently, what they would do in the event of power outage, how to claim benefits and the carer needed both practical and emotional support to process their new role as a carer.

The energy advice team used a person-centred approach to support the client, including being flexible with appointment times, using email, working alongside the social prescriber to save duplication and ensuring the client was referred and not just signposted to support services.

The client was able to receive a grant to help with their energy costs as well as a full review of their energy usage at home. They were added to the Priority Services Register and given carbon monoxide safety advice. The social prescriber informed the adviser about the wellbeing support available from Carers Support West Sussex, as well as providing a carer assessment to see how the client could be supported, alongside offering equipment and counselling. The frontline workers from all organisations took the time to speak together to ensure there was no duplication in what was being asked of the client and that the client's time was used as effectively as possible with any of the professionals.

This case highlights the need for a joining up of energy services and carer services so that carers can be supported with both the financial and emotional impact of becoming a carer, by trained frontline workers who understand the needs of carers.

5.2 Local Stakeholder Support

Carers Support is the sole provider, in West Sussex, of support to adult carers. CSWS have nearly 31,000 carers registered and are the trusted provider of both statutory and non-statutory services commissioned by West Sussex County Council (awarded again for 5 years and mobilising in April 2024). CSWS is also funded by the Integrated Care Board to improve carer identification and support in Primary Care and has worked with 85 primary care settings and numerous hospitals in the past two years.

What CSWS' commissioners say:

"West Sussex County Council have worked closely with the charity Carers Support West Sussex (CSWS) for over 10 years and regard them as a key strategic partner. CSWS provide an excellent service to the ever-growing number of family and friends carers in the county and are a pleasure to work with. They are professional, well run, accountable and make a real difference to our residents." Mark Greening, Commissioning Manager

What partners say:

"It's been a pleasure to work with colleagues across Sussex on this project and I think there is a much higher level of understanding amongst staff groups to the healthcare challenges of being a carer." Practice Manager / Primary Care Engagement Project"

What carers say:

CSWS' recent carers satisfaction survey revealed that:

- 94% thought the service was easy to access
- 96% said the information provided was easy to understand
- 94% said I felt safe to discuss my situation.

"Carers support is a fantastic organisation that is there to support you, provide information & signposts to other organisations if required. The support groups are amazing as you feel heard & listened to as well as sharing tips & tricks while allowing you to be among friends who are in similar positions" Carer.

ACCA's Single Point of Contact energy service has been supported and endorsed by West Sussex County Council as well as all district and borough councils within West Sussex since its inception. They have been trusted to distribute the Department for Work and Pensions Household Support Fund for all 6 phases, with the county handing over most of the funding for energy support to ACCA every year.

5.3 SGNs Vulnerability Steering Group (VSG)

Our VSG 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 where Carers are most likely at risk of living in fuel poverty based upon their personal circumstances.

In 2024 our strategic steering group re-iterated the vital impact we could have by coordinating 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

Through the partnership, SGN, CSWS and ACCA will increase carer resilience to fuel poverty, reduce the risk of cold or heat related illnesses for themselves and those they care for and live in a home fit for the future. This will be achieved by:

- A communications campaign using both digital and print media channels tailored to the needs of carers
- More frontline workers able to deliver energy advice
- More frontline workers able to proactively identify carers and their support options
- Increased uptake of the Priority Services Register
- Giving carers information on Carbon Monoxide safety awareness and offering CO alarms where appropriate
- Proactive identification of decline in cared-for unpaid carers' health
- Alleviation of immediate fuel crisis
- Long-term energy behaviour changes to reduce energy consumption and lower carbon emissions
- Increased uptake of retrofitting measures to allow homes to remain warm and efficient in the future
- Increased income for carers through benefit checks and other activities
- A long-term relationship fostered between all organisations allowing the legacy of this project to continue after the end of the funding period.

6.2 Success Criteria

To support over 3,060 carers with energy information and support to maintain a safe and warm home.

We aim to achieve this by:

- Providing energy information via direct mailer, social media, website, newsletters to 40,000 carers across West Sussex detailing support available locally and promoting the service: including information on the Priority Services Register, Carbon Monoxide safety, energy efficiency measures and the Significant7 framework
- ACCA to deliver training sessions to 100 frontline workers in energy awareness
- CSWS to deliver training session to 100 to ACCA frontline staff in general carer awareness

In-depth advice to 1,560 customers (ACCA):

- 1,560 carers will receive energy appointments including CO Awareness, PSR and in-depth energy advice (including common and behavioural measures) and referring on to funding sources for retro fitting energy efficiency measures
- 200 of these carers will be provided with a CO alarm
- 320 of these carers will be supported to access the Priority Services Register
- 320 of these carers will be provided with energy crisis support including access to fuel vouchers
- 560 of these carers will be proactively identified as carers following the training by CSWS

In-depth advice to 1,500 (CSWS):

- 1,000 carers will receive energy information via in person carer groups and events, to include 500 carers receiving support via the Significant7 framework (Significant 7+ is an innovative training tool for Care Homes to ensure the prevention of avoidable A&E attendances and acute admissions for complex and frail patients) and 330 carers referred/signposted onto other support services
- 500 carers will receive income maximisation support, including benefits advice, wellbeing grants, funding for equipment and adult social care direct payments.

7 Project partners and third parties involved

SGN – lead gas network providing funding and support to the delivery team.

CSWS – delivering behavioural energy advice and wellbeing support at carers groups in the communities and over the telephone, alongside an expanded benefits support service. CSWS will provide training to ACCA on carer identification and support options.

ACCA – provide a dedicated carers' specialist energy service via booked appointments, accessible through CSWS. Additionally identifying and supporting new carers providing them with support to access CSWS' services. ACCA will train CSWS staff on behavioural energy advice so that this can be delivered in the community.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

This partnership has been co-designed by Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice 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 who have caring responsibilities. Through working across West Sussex, the group will review the success of 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 carers needs. 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.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV

We and the other Gas Distribution Networks worked with leading social impact research consultancy SIRIO Strategies on the development of the Industry Standard Social Value Framework and supporting GDN Rulebook. We have used that GDN Rulebook 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 assessment of the predicted outcomes we forecast a positive net Social Return on Investment of £14.96.

Social Value Measurement

Total cost*	£283,220.64
Total gross present value	£4,519,454.28
Net Present Value (NPV)	£4,236,233.64
SROI	£14.96

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

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from 1st January 2025 – 31st March 2026

11 Geographic area

West Sussex

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

SGN has worked alongside Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice 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 by SGN using the GDN rulebook as part of the Industry Standard Social Value Framework, the current partnership scope has been forecast at adding an additional £14.96 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice 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.