

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

Safe and Warm initiative

01 March 2022 updated February 2023 to extending timescales to August 2023

SGN



SGN

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1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
Date of PEA submission:	01/03/2022
Project contact name:	Linda Spence
Project contact number/email:	linda.spence@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£120,526.75
Total VCMA funding required for this project (£k)	£96,026.75

2 Problem statement

People living with long term conditions experience a range of challenges when managing a safe and warm home and have been identified as at higher risk of fuel poverty because of factors which include household income as well as the required use of fuel because of their health status.

It has been identified through the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland's (the ALLIANCE) membership that people who are living with long term conditions may not be aware of the support services in the utility sector that are designed for their needs such as the Priority Services Register. In addition, there can be challenges which people face in terms of the accessibility of information and communication about support services designed to help household reliance with their essential services.

The ALLIANCE's Links Worker Service operates out of 69 GP practices in Glasgow City and in West Dunbartonshire that are described as operating in the Deep End¹ - serving the most deprived populations in Scotland. We know from the Links Worker Service that the people they support encounter a range of issues, are impacted by multiple forms of marginalisation, have a range of complex health needs, are living on low incomes, and managing with the costs associated with heating their home. These issues include:

- People living in private rented housing where landlords are often not keeping up with repairs, linking in with gas inspections or servicing/providing Carbon Monoxide detectors. Some of these householders are people whose first language is not English and who are not aware of their rights or how to action them
- Even for those living in social rented housing, issues are brought to the attention of Links Workers around fuel and food poverty
- The pandemic has worsened people's mental health – both for those with pre-existing mental health conditions and those whose mental health has deteriorated because of the pandemic. There is evidence of this for people with learning disabilities and autism. This is having an impact on people's resilience and sense of self-efficacy.
- The pandemic has contributed to a worsening of people's health status because of the disruption to health services and social care packages² and has also had a significant impact on unpaid carers.
- The most prevalent reasons for seeing a Community Links Practitioner (CLP) are poverty/welfare/income related reasons (15%) and housing (also 15%).
- Patient feedback demonstrates that the help received with getting access to food provides such a relief to people who have to choose between food and fuel. And this leads to applying for warm home discounts and meetings with welfare advisers to determine how to reduce costs etc.
- Money advice services are currently overstretched across Glasgow City

¹ <https://www.gla.ac.uk/researchinstitutes/healthwellbeing/research/generalpractice/deepend/about/>

² <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Health-Wellbeing-and-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-Final-Report.pdf>

- Home adaptations are another challenge encountered as linking in with Social Care Direct has lengthy waiting lists for OT referrals to be carried out regarding home assessments. Then it depends on whether the householder is in social housing, private rented or is a homeowner on having the funds to carry out any adaptations.

People living with long term conditions, disabled people and unpaid carers have been widely identified as being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, have proportionately less household income, and are more likely to face adverse health and wellbeing impacts linked to fuel poverty.

Within the Glasgow City ALLIANCE Links Worker Service, 15% of reasons for referrals are linked directly to poverty, and 15% for housing issues: this is approximately 380 people in a six-month period. Since October 2021 the service started to see an increase in clients being referred into the service specifically in relation to fuel poverty, and an additional 7.4% of referrals for money issues. The ALLIANCE Link Worker service are monitoring the impact of the energy crisis and changes in the price cap to forecasting an increase in demand for help to a community already recognised as the top area in SGN's Vulnerability Index.

Within the Glasgow City ALLIANCE Links Worker Service, in the last quarter of 2022, 29% of reasons for referrals were linked directly to poverty, and 16% for housing issues: this is approximately 1100 people in a three-month period. There was an increase in referrals specifically in relation to fuel poverty, with a more than 250% increase in the number of such referrals, and with these referrals making up 2.5% of all referrals received. An additional 5.1% of referrals received (not counting anywhere fuel poverty was listed) were for money issues.

A large part of the work of a CLW (community links worker) is signposting to, and making onward referrals to, specialised sources of support. These included over 1,100 cases where links (referrals, applications, or signposts) were made to NHS financial advice, over 600 to housing associations for housing support, over 330 to local mental health organisations, over 310 to food banks (and over 210 to food pantries), and over 180 local carers services. All these referral topics have clear links to addressing the causes and consequences of health inequalities.

3 Scope and objectives

As the largest third sector intermediary for health and social care in Scotland, the ALLIANCE and SGN have a shared ambition to understand the barriers that people with long term conditions, disabled people and unpaid carers face in being able to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably, and for this information to be available to shape future strategy and schemes to help people realise their rights to housing and health.

There are three phases to the scope of this work:

1. Initially, through the ALLIANCE Links Worker Service to the scheme will identify eligible customers for referral for financial support and to other services including the Priority Services Register and the SGN CO Scheme.
2. The work with the ALLIANCE team to identify member organisations who would be best supported by ALLIANCE working with people identified as high priority for support who are living with long term conditions, disabled people and unpaid carers in Scottish local authority areas identified by SGN as high priority who can work in partnership to bring into and inform the scope of this project.
3. The ALLIANCE team will deliver a programme of engagement with the member organisations and Links Worker Service to gather learning and feedback from individuals and member organisations to explore the further support and services which are needed by people living with long term conditions, disabled people, and unpaid carers, identify gaps and work to define and develop solutions which would address these gaps. In addition, there will be communication sessions and materials in accessible formats to ensure that eligible households are engaged to sign up to support services including the Priority Services Register.

The objectives of this work are to:

1. Develop a coordinated approach to ensuring there is the required support available to people with long term conditions, disabled people, and unpaid carers around maintaining safe, affordable, and efficient home.
2. Build connections between third sector partners and SGN and other related utility infrastructure companies in Scotland
3. Ensure financial support is available to people living with long term conditions, disabled people, and unpaid carers at risk of fuel poverty, and that they are identified as priority customers and receive the additional support that this entitles them to
4. Ensure information resources on energy efficiency are shared with ALLIANCE members and link worker participants and support effective signposting, ensuring that information is accessible and inclusive, and that active referral pathways are effective
5. Support people to navigate the services on offer taking into account their personalised circumstances
6. Identify gaps in support and services and work with ALLIANCE members and links worker service to design and develop solutions to these
7. Link eligible individuals with other services that may offer them support and information (eg. A Local Information Service for Scotland (ALISS) and ALLIANCE's condition specific Lived Experience Networks).
8. Help to tackle stigma around vulnerability and poverty and gather evidence and insights which can be shared with relevant stakeholders.

The partnership will work with ALLIANCE member organisations to explore opportunities to roll out this approach to other local authority areas in Scotland and to populations at high risk of fuel poverty and will identify gaps to the services and support and provide routes to addressing these gaps which are tailored to individual circumstances.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria as it will provide energy safeguarding services including direct advice and support to households where extreme vulnerability exists, including those at risk of or living in fuel poverty. The aim of the programme is to enhance the skills of those providing support services through the Health and Social Care Alliance to households in extreme need, equipping them with understanding, knowledge, and resources to manage their energy and critically stay warm in their homes.

This project will also engage on key matters to build energy resilience, increase awareness on the dangers of CO and key support services including the Priority Services Register whilst delivering a forecast positive Social Return on Investment.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 SGN and Alliance – Workshop with Member Organisations 2021

To inform this application, the ALLIANCE in partnership with SGN held a workshop with a selection of its member organisations to discuss the intersection between living with long term conditions with fuel poverty, and what is needed in terms of support and services.

This discussion with ALLIANCE members revealed a number of key themes including a strong indication that poverty and financial insecurity are deeply held concerns amongst disabled people and people living with long term conditions. Comments included people highlighting that they were making difficult choices between heating their home or using the internet, the importance of people with sensory loss being able to have accessible alarm systems, and the impact of the pandemic on people's mental health a recurring issue. It was also identified that there was limited knowledge of key support services like the Priority Services Register by the support organisations and client community.

Themes also included assisting eligible individuals to mitigate fuel poverty and avoiding the use of the term vulnerable which can be seen as stigmatising. It was also stressed that there is the need for more awareness raising of services available, support to navigate the complex systems, support for organisations when working with individuals, and accessible communication of services. It was also highlighted that many ALLIANCE members have specialised knowledge and strong relationships with the individuals eligible for such support and that it is important to working with such organisations to develop the right response.

5.2 SGN Business Plan - Stakeholder Workshops

Sharing our top 5 scenarios with our stakeholders during our engagement workshops in 2018, and updated retests in 2020 they agreed that providing essential emergency funding and essential skills for customers in vulnerable circumstances should remain one of our top priorities due to the impact of Covid on our most vulnerable customers in relation to affordability. In addition, our stakeholders wanted to see us approach affordability broader than 'gas', as customers who face financial hardship need support with all their utilities, and that water, gas and electricity should be approached as essentials services.

5.3 SGN Vulnerability Steering Group

During 2020/21 our Vulnerable Steering Group helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2. For year 1 we prioritised key initiatives to support our most vulnerable customers and they recommended that we work with established charities that support people most in need. It is with guidance and support from our dedicated Vulnerable Steering Group that SGN prioritise customer groups that are 'vulnerable due to critical and chronic ill health' ensuring that our support is targeted to those most likely to require tailored and tangible support to achieve a safe and warm home. An approach that has been endorsed by our strategic panel, as it looks to provide a holistic and empowering service in partnership with other utilities.

6 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

The planned and measurable outcomes for the partnership are;

- ALLIANCE Links Workers and member organisations, and through them people with long term conditions, disabled people, and unpaid carers, have an increased knowledge of the support available to people eligible for priority services and feel better able to identify and effectively refer people who would benefit from the tailored support available.
- ALLIANCE Links Workers and member organisations, and through them people with long term conditions disabled people and unpaid carers, are more aware of the risks of Carbon Monoxide and how to mitigate these
- People living with long term conditions have greater access to emergency funding and support
- People living with long term conditions have reduced stress, and improved health and wellbeing
- There is an increase in evidence and awareness of the issues impacting on people with long term conditions, disabled people, and unpaid carers in terms of energy safety, efficiency, and affordability

In total, this project will directly engage 61 Link Workers and provide a minimum of 1000 people who use the service with support and where required access to emergency fuel funds. As this is a pilot, we're looking to better understand the other outcomes linked to the training and the support provided to households with complex and varied needs.

6.2 Success Criteria

A minimum of 1000 people supported within an 18-month period from Links Worker Service enabling greater access to;

- Emergency fuel funds
- Priority Service Register registration

- CO Safety conversation and access to a working CO alarm where required
- Onward referrals and signposting to schemes designed to help those reduce costs to maintain a warm home
- Income maximisation and benefit checks
- Health and Wellbeing support

To monitor our impact in line with the above, we will:

- Monitor outcomes against services provided ensuring that those trained on the support services are confident in their ability to identify and support eligible customers to relevant help including confidently promote the benefits of the Priority Services Register and the CO Safety Scheme
- Monitor, already registered individuals, the take up and confidence of participants of the Links worker service to the Priority Services Register and CO Safety survey
- Generate learning reports from insights generated from the engagement with ALLIANCE Links Workers and member organisations
- Work closely with our partners to ensure that we all understand the issues faced to continue to develop our services by need

7 Project partners and third parties involved

The Health and Social Care ALLIANCE - will lead the delivery of this pilot project. They are the national third sector intermediary for a range of health and social care organisations with a growing membership of over 3,000 national and local third sector organisations, associates in the statutory and private sectors, disabled people, people living with long term conditions and unpaid carers. Many NHS Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships, Medical Practices, Third Sector Interfaces, Libraries and Access Panels are also members.

SGN – lead gas network providing funding and support to the delivery team, including training on energy relevant support services, access to broader referral partners, and direct services for customers including but not limited to emergency fuel vouchers, Locking Cooker Valves, CO alarms and access to the Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme.

8 Potential for new learning

Through ongoing monitoring of the impact of this project on ALLIANCE Links Workers, member organisations and ultimately people with long term conditions, disabled people, and unpaid carers, we will produce insights and an annual evaluation report that will provide insights for SGN into; barriers faced, effective engagement, inclusive communication and information, and the impact of accessing support to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably.

As a partnership we will work closely to ensure that we all understand the issues faced by participants of the ALLIANCE Link Worker Service and adapt the support provided to address barriers to a safe and warm home.

The data and information collected from the project activities will be collated and analysed to create a post-project report with findings and recommendations, and to show the real difference that has been made.

This project report will be published and disseminated to project partners, and relevant members and stakeholders in the sector through the VCMA showcase and the Annual Report.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

Working with SIA Partners we've developed a number of social proxy values aligned to the work and outcomes we and our partners are delivering. Using these along with the DNO SROI assessment tool and methodology we have carried out an assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes associated with this project, and we forecast a positive net SROI of £5.80

Social Value Measurement

5-year reporting figures

Economic	Total cost	£120,526.00
	Total gross present value	£819,377.00
	NPV	£698,851.00
	SROI	£5.80

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The pilot project will run from March 2022 to March 2023, updated Feb 23 extended to 31 August 2023 due to our approach to introduce initiatives to all 61 Links Workers across both areas.

6 to 8 months set up phase

- Trialled initiative in a few GP surgeries
- CO awareness training completed all Links Workers
- PSR training completed all Links workers training of Links Workers
- Charis portal set up for all Links workers and relevant processes in place

11 Geographic area

Scotland with increased focus on Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire.

12 Approval

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications