

EnergyPLUS

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

May 2025
SGN



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1 Description

Project title	EnergyPLUS
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	May 2025
Project contact name:	Janet Duggan
Project contact email:	Janet.duggan@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£115,485
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£115,485

2 Problem statement

Typical energy bills under the January to March 2024 price cap were almost 60% higher than in winter 2021/22 and with a further 10% increase from October 1st, 2024, and a forecast increase again for 2025 energy costs remain unaffordable for many. DESNZ have also reported “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”.

Nationally, Citizen’s Advice helped over 220,000 people with crisis support in 2023 – their highest figure to date, this trend has continued in 2024. They are reporting 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.

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.

deafPLUS is a national charity dedicated to supporting Deaf and hard of hearing people through advocacy, employment support, assistive technology guidance, and accessible health and social care services. They work to reduce isolation, improve wellbeing, and ensure equality for people living with hearing loss.

While Bromley remains a main service hub for deafPLUS, their impact and outreach extend across SGN’s Southern network, where significant need persists. Bromley alone is home to an estimated 60,000 people with hearing loss, based on [RNID prevalence data](#) and local population estimates. Given the borough’s older demographic, the true number is likely higher.

However, the scale of need goes far beyond Bromley. Across SGN’s Southern network which includes parts of Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex, Surrey, South London (including the boroughs of Bexley and Merton), Hampshire, Dorset, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, and the Isle of Wight there are approximately 14.9 million residents according to [Office for National Statistics](#).

Based on updated national data:

- 12 million people in the UK are deaf or have hearing loss ([RNID, 2024](#))
- Around 151,000 people in the UK are estimated to be profoundly deaf from Gov – [Gov – British Sign Language Report](#)

- The [2021 Census](#) reported 22,000 people in England and Wales using British Sign Language (BSL) as their main language, though this is widely considered under-reported.

Wider figures from the [British Deaf Association](#) suggest that 87,000 people in the UK may use BSL as their first or preferred language.

In Scotland, similar disparities exist. An estimated 1 million people have some degree of hearing loss, including around 70,000 with severe or profound deafness. Approximately 12,000 people are known to use British Sign Language (BSL), although this figure may be under-reported due to census limitations. according to [Scottish Government data](#) and partners like [Deaf Action](#) and [RNID Hearing Matters Scotland Supplement](#).

Living with hearing loss brings a unique set of challenges, many of which are intensified during periods of economic strain. Deaf and hard of hearing people continue to face significant barriers in the workplace. According to [RNID](#), 65% of working-age adults with hearing loss are in employment, compared to 79% of the general population. For those who are severely or profoundly deaf, this figure drops further to just 39%. This employment gap contributes to increased financial vulnerability, particularly during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis.

Having an accessible carbon monoxide alarm (CO) is crucial as they provide life-saving alerts to Deaf individuals who would otherwise be unaware of dangerous CO exposure. The introduction of strobe lights and vibrating pads ensure they receive timely and life-saving information.

Communication access also comes with added costs. BSL interpreters are essential for accessing healthcare, council services, and employment but are often unavailable due to both underfunding and a lack of supply, with only around [1,500 qualified BSL interpreters](#) registered with the [NRCPD](#), serving an estimated 87,000 BSL users across the UK. A deafPLUS survey found that 64% of BSL users in Southeast England had difficulty accessing a qualified interpreter in health or council services.

This lack of access contributes to wider exclusion. According to RNID, two-thirds (67%) of Deaf and hard of hearing people report avoiding certain situations because of communication barriers. Over 1 in 3 people (35%) say they've been misunderstood or treated unfairly when trying to access services, and 44% report that poor communication has negatively affected their mental health.

Without appropriate communication support, Deaf people are more likely to miss vital appointments, make uninformed decisions, and experience poorer health, wellbeing, and social outcomes.

Isolation is another serious concern. 52% of Deaf clients supported by deafPLUS across SGN's Southern network report experiencing moderate to severe loneliness, largely driven by communication barriers and a lack of accessible community resources. These issues are particularly difficult during bereavement, when Deaf-aware or BSL-capable services are lacking.

Digital inequality adds another layer to financial exclusion. While precise data is limited, there is widespread concern within the Deaf community that many essential services, such as emergency grants and energy support, are primarily delivered by phone or online, in formats that are not consistently accessible to Deaf users. As a result, Deaf individuals often face delays or additional barriers when trying to access critical support.

deafPLUS is one of the few organisations offering financial capability and energy advice in BSL. Since the beginning of the cost-of-living crisis, they have seen a 40% rise in demand, especially from older Deaf adults and those recently bereaved. Their services are currently stretched beyond capacity.

Rising energy costs, compounded by financial vulnerability and communication barriers, mean that Deaf people face heightened risks of unsafe or unaffordable living conditions—highlighting the urgent need for trusted, tailored engagement and accessible services like those provided by deafPLUS to ensure Deaf individuals can maintain safe, warm homes.

3 Scope and objectives

By working in partnership with deafPLUS, we aim to tackle fuel poverty in the Deaf community, including those with sensory loss and complex needs, by providing access to utility support services they are eligible for.

Together we aim to raise awareness of tailored energy safeguarding services including the Priority Services Register, CO safety and the support available to people living in fuel poverty amongst the deafPLUS service users, staff and volunteers.

Through the partnership we can ensure that inclusion becomes an integral part of this mission creating a supportive environment where every individual feels valued and accepted; breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of belonging for the Deaf community in using energy safely, efficiently and affordably.

We recognise that there is a significant language barrier for the Deaf community. A lack of qualified interpreters and limited BSL-friendly communication across essential services places Deaf individuals at a distinct disadvantage, contributing to exclusion from energy safeguarding support that should otherwise be accessible to them.

The scope of the partnership with deafPLUS will include:

- 1) **Training deafPLUS employees:** deafPLUS staff will be trained in Fuel Debt Advice in the Community (C&G Level 2 Award) by National Energy Action, who will then train additional deafPLUS staff to help them identify clients in fuel crisis, the symptoms of fuel poverty, and where to signpost to for onward support
- 2) **Marketing and awareness campaigns:** Multi-channel resources will be developed to promote the Priority Services Register and energy safeguarding services including an energy advice booklet, support available and signposting information, targeting deafPLUS service users, staff, and volunteers
- 3) **Providing personalised energy safeguarding advice:** via Adviceline and in-person 121 support across 7 locations across SGN's Southern network
- 4) **Onward referrals:** Clients will be referred to SGN's partnership network for additional support, including home energy assessments and debt assistance

Through collaboration the partnership will directly help Deaf people access energy safeguarding services and alleviate the financial stress caused by rising fuel bills, addressing the immediate issues faced at a critical time of need and will leave a lasting legacy within communities.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project meets the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) eligibility criteria as it provides direct support to vulnerable households who would benefit from dedicated energy safeguarding support and or who 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 Deaf and 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 energy efficiency advice and carbon monoxide awareness, 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 (with outcomes delivered in 3 & 4).

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 DeafPLUS

deafPLUS – Because no deaf person should face barriers to communication and inclusion:

For over 40 years, deafPLUS has been committed to breaking down barriers between deaf and hearing people and ensuring that deaf individuals have equal access to information, support, and services. deafPLUS has worked with hundreds of people every year, supporting them through services designed by and for deaf people.

In 2023–24, deafPLUS delivered a wide range of specialist services tailored to the needs of the deaf community, including:

- Information, Advice and Advocacy (IAA): Reaching over 1,500 clients with accessible advice in areas such as welfare rights, housing, debt, and discrimination delivered in British Sign Language (BSL), deafblind manual, and other accessible formats.
- Sight and Hearing Loss Services: Supporting 500+ people with dual sensory loss to remain independent, safe, and connected in their communities.
- BSL Healthy Minds: Providing mental health support in BSL through 1:1 and group-based services.
- Digital Inclusion: Training over 300 clients in digital skills to help overcome isolation and access essential online services.
- Employment Support: Helping deaf individuals gain the confidence and skills to secure meaningful employment.

deafPLUS also plays a leading role in advocacy and systemic change campaigning for better access to healthcare, employment, and emergency services for deaf people.

5.2 Case Studies

Case Study 1:

Client B, a 60-year-old Deaf woman and BSL user from Tower Hamlets, was referred to deafPLUS after struggling to understand a series of energy arrears letters. Living on a low income and digitally excluded, she was unaware of the support schemes available and not registered on the Priority Services Register.

Our advisor arranged an in-person appointment, identified over £800 in energy debt, and supported her through applications for energy grants and Warm Home Discount. As a result:

- £650 of debt was cleared
- A manageable repayment plan was set
- Client E was successfully added to the Priority Services Register
- She now receives bills in large print and accessible formats

Client E also joined our Lifelong Learning programme to improve digital skills. She is now confident enough to send letters via WhatsApp for support and feels empowered to manage her bills.

“I feel relieved... I know where to go for help now.”

This case highlights the long-term impact of inclusive, accessible services and the intersection between digital exclusion and financial vulnerability.

Case study 2:

Client A is a 37-year-old profoundly Deaf British Sign Language (BSL) user and a single mother of three with low English literacy skills. She sought help from the Camden Deaf Advice Service (CDAS) after noticing recurring charges from a fashion company. Due to her low literacy skills and limited access to effective communication methods, she was unable to resolve the issue independently. The Advisor NA, already familiar with Client A's needs, scheduled a longer appointment to ensure clear communication. Initial attempts to cancel the subscription via the company app failed due to its complexity and lack of accessible features. With a BSL interpreter, NA contacted the company directly, explained Client A's vulnerabilities, and advocated for a resolution.

Following the intervention the company refunded £450 in charges and cancelled the subscription. This alleviated financial stress for Client A and provided funds for essential family needs. She was also educated about her consumer rights and encouraged to monitor her bank statements regularly.

The case highlighted systemic barriers faced by Deaf consumers. Emphasises the need for companies to offer accessible and inclusive communication and cancellation processes. Demonstrates the value of advocacy services like CDAS in achieving fair outcomes.

Feedback from Client A about the service: “I got the money back, much better for me and my family... I was very anxious that I made a mistake but you [advisor NA], helped to explain... thank you.”

5.3 SGNs Vulnerable Steering Group (VSG)

Our VSG has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2 and how best to utilise the VCMA to help those most at risk of living in a cold and unhealthy home. It is with guidance and support from our dedicated VSG that SGN use data to prioritise and target communities most likely to be living in a cold and unhealthy home, in particular those living with a health condition made worse by living in a cold and damp home.

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. The VSG have recommended that we look to build stronger links with organisations who already are trusted by the community we're looking to support.

In 2024 our strategic steering group re-iterated the vital impact we could have by embedding support services in trusted organisations who can deliver impactful community engagement that addresses the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and addresses barriers that customers face from receiving the help needed.

6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

Working together, SGN and deafPLUS will be looking to support the Deaf community to stay safe and warm at home. Over the duration of the partnership, we are aiming to deliver the following customer outcomes, which has formed the basis of our social return on investment modelling.

Outcomes for beneficiaries will be;

- Through training and information, increase the knowledge of deafPLUS staff around fuel poverty, energy safeguarding and increased energy efficiency, driven by a dedicated Project Lead
- Increased awareness on the extent of fuel poverty and living in a cold home within households from the Deaf community and easy access to practical information to mitigate its negative impact
- Deliver information and support to households from the Deaf community, in a holistic way, including providing in-person support in Bromley and via Advice online through a range of services
- Provide information on the benefits of the Priority Services Register to people from the Deaf community and support to access as required
- Provide safety awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide in the home and how to mitigate this including providing CO alarms, when required
- Increased confidence from the Deaf community, including those with sensory loss and complex needs, in what to do if struggling with fuel debt and onward referrals for crisis support where needed

6.2 Success Criteria

Through our partnership, we will aim to support reach 20,000 people within the Deaf community with information on safe ways to use energy safely, efficiently and affordably, resulting in 1,250 people from the Deaf community being provided with personalised energy safeguarding services that help them maintain a safe and warm home across the SGN's southern and Scotland network to be safe and warm at home.

We will be able to deliver the following outcomes through providing 2 project energy coordinators:

- 2 employees to complete the NEA Level 2 in Fuel Debt Advice in the Community (C&G 6281-16), with learnings cascaded internally
- 10 deafPLUS employees trained on how to identify fuel poverty, deliver accessible energy advice, energy safeguarding measures and provide appropriate referrals
- 20,000 clients reached via a social media campaign (PSR, CO awareness, winter readiness, energy efficiency etc) across southern and Scotland network
- 1,100 Deaf people provided with personalised energy safeguarding advice (energy advice, PSR and CO awareness – with an onward warm referral where required) this will be delivered by;
 - 800 clients supported via BSL Adviceline and video calls
 - 300 clients supported via in person 121 engagements in:
 - London (Bromley, Bexley, Merton)
 - East Sussex
 - Hampshire
 - Reading
 - Wiltshire

- 15 on-line groups sessions to 150 clients covering CO awareness, PSR, energy efficiency, energy debt etc
- 250 households referred on to SGN's funded specialist energy advice teams for assessment for energy efficiency measures and support on energy matters and debt advice (eg. Citizens Advice, IncomeMax, National Energy Foundation)
- 80 accessible CO alarms (strobe & vibrating pad) distributed to households at highest risk (with completed CO survey)
- 300 households supported to sign up to the Priority Services Register
- 750 clients provided with print and digital Energy Access Toolkit (and BSL format QR code) at community hubs and events
- Deliver a Deaf awareness and BSL workshop for SGN Safe and Warm, Careline and Vulnerability Team

7 Project partners and third parties involved

This is where we detail who is involved in the partnership and their role

- SGN - provide funding and ongoing support to deliver successful outcomes for the programme including funding for training and carbon monoxide alarms
- deafPLUS – coordination and delivery of the core programme
- Gas Safe Charity – providing Think CO training workshops and e-learning specifically for CO awareness
- National Energy Foundation (NEF) – providing energy advice including a whole home-based approach to energy efficiency scheme assessment and tailored energy advice and income maximisation services including a home visit service where required (funded VCMA partnership)
- YES Energy Solutions – providing energy advice including a whole home-based approach to energy efficiency scheme assessment and tailored energy advice and income maximisation services (funded VCMA partnership)
- IncomeMax – providing financial support to improve household income through unclaimed benefits
- Citizens Advice - supporting clients with guidance on energy affordability, financial hardship, and access to essential services, helping them make informed decisions during times of economic strain.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

This partnership has been co-designed by deafPLUS and SGN, as part of our Safe and Warm communities programme; supporting people in energy crisis or living in fuel poverty. The partnership builds 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 the Deaf community.

The monitoring of performance reporting will contain SROI data in line with the measures in this document, and as agreed with SGN, as well as qualitative information about challenges, successes and learnings.

Through the partnership we will be looking to assess the needs of the Deaf community who are using the service and assessing what additional resources are required as a result. We will be assessing the demographics of need and the circumstances and reviewing resources eg. Alternative language resources, hearing resources

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.

This project has the potential to be upscaled as a model, working with other GDN's, enabling more people from the Deaf community to be supported.

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 this assessment of the predicted outcomes we forecast net Social Return on Investment of £2.86 for the partnership.

Social Value Measurement

Total cost*	£115,485
Total gross present value	£446,256.00
Net Present Value (NPV)	£330,771.00
SROI	£2.86

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

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from June 2025 to March 2026 (10 months)

11 Geographic area

The project will take place within the SGN Southern Network and Scotland

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

SGN has worked alongside deafPLUS 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 assessed internally using the GDN Rulebook developed by SIRIO Strategies as part of the Industry Standard Social Value Framework. As detailed above we have reviewed the current partnership scope which has been forecast at adding an additional £2.86 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and deafPLUS 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.