

Warm Welcome Spaces

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

December 2025

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 Warm Welcome Spaces – impact summary	5
5.2 Case Study	5
5.3 SGNs Vulnerability Steering Group	6
6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria.....	6
6.1 Outcomes	6
6.2 Success Criteria.....	6
7 Project partners and third parties involved	6
8 Potential for new learning	7
9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV	7
10 VCMA Project start and end date	8
11 Geographic area	8
12 Internal governance and project management evidence	8

1 Description

Project title	Warm Welcome Spaces
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	December 2025
Project contact name:	Graeme Mclarty
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Total cost (£k)	£120,428
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£120,428

2 Problem statement

According to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), in 2024, 36.3 % of households (about 8.99 million) in England are now required to spend more than 10 % of their income (after housing costs) on domestic energy—slightly up from 35.5 % (8.73 million) in 2023.

Lower income households are more likely to respond to higher energy prices by cutting energy use below safe levels, and some experience energy becoming effectively unaffordable, leading to self-disconnection or unmanageable energy debt. After taking account of government rebates, energy efficiency improvements and changes in households, DESNZ estimate that required energy costs still rose by around 27 per cent in real terms between 2022 and 2023.

Typical energy bills under the January to March 2024 price cap were still almost 60 per cent higher than in winter 2021/22. While price caps in late 2024 and 2025 have been lower than the peaks seen in 2022–23, they remain significantly above pre-crisis levels, so energy costs continue to be unaffordable for many low-income households.

Despite some falls from the very highest peaks in 2022–23, analysis in 2024–25 indicates that typical domestic energy bills remain around a quarter higher in real terms than before the crisis, and fuel poverty and energy debt continue to affect millions of households.

Nationally, Citizens Advice has continued to support record numbers of people in severe financial difficulty, with demand for crisis support and local welfare assistance reaching new highs in 2024. In 2024, the service advised over 80,000 people in England alone on local crisis and welfare support, and by 2025 it is helping more than 20,000 people every month with crisis help such as food bank referrals, fuel vouchers and other charitable support. Alongside this rising demand, Citizens Advice is seeing a marked increase in people presenting with complex, multiple problems and significant debts, so that when someone seeks help for energy issues – such as affordability, billing or poor customer service – they are very often also in need of support with wider debt, housing and essential living costs.

Recent data from Citizens Advice Scotland shows high and rising demand for crisis support and energy advice, closely mirroring the trend across England and Wales. Across Scotland, Citizens Advice Bureaux helped almost 24,000 people in February 2025 alone and managed £6.4 million in energy-related debt for clients in 2023/24, with average energy debts reaching £2,300, well above the UK average. The majority of clients presenting with energy issues also required wider support with debt, benefits, and housing, underlining the complexity of the crisis in Scotland and the vital role of holistic advice services.

Since 2020 there has been a rapid growth in the number of people using “warm spaces” such as libraries, churches and community centres as places to keep warm during colder months. Evidence from UK studies suggests that millions of visits are now made to these venues each winter, with thousands of spaces registered nationally. The main drivers of this trend are steep increases in domestic energy costs, rising fuel poverty and wider cost of living pressures, which leave many households unable to afford adequate heating at home.

Warm Welcome Spaces is a UK-wide campaign that coordinates and supports a large network of free, warm, and welcoming community space such as libraries, churches, community centres, cafes and other venues. The ambition is to ensure that everyone can find a safe place to connect, keep warm and feel they belong. The organisation began as an emergency response to the cost of living and energy crisis, helping people who could not afford to heat their homes, and has since grown into a year-round movement focused on tackling both poverty and isolation.

Warm Welcome Spaces provide a core set of free services centred on warmth, safety, and community connection, with additional offerings varying by venue. All spaces are heated, offer basic refreshments like tea or coffee, free Wi-Fi and computer access, and inclusive activities.

However, warm spaces often face significant challenges in addressing the underlying issues driving attendance, such as fuel poverty and low incomes, as they are typically managed by small volunteer teams lacking funding, specialist training or resources for in-depth interventions like energy advice or income maximisation support. These gaps mean opportunities to help people heat their homes sustainably or access entitlements are sometimes missed. Accessibility barriers, including poor physical access, transport limitations and communication issues, further limit reach to disabled people or those with mobility needs, reducing both wellbeing gains and equitable delivery of vital help.

We've learned through working with Warm Spaces that developing skills and capacity within Warm Spaces frontline workers and volunteers' communities requires input from the community as their skills, resources and capacity is varied.

3 Scope and objectives

By working in partnership with Warm Welcome Spaces, the partnership objective is to identify and support those most vulnerable to living in a cold and unhealthy home with skills and resources to help alleviate fuel poverty, provide energy safeguarding services and increase energy safety awareness.

Through the partnership we will;

- Identify a group of existing Warm Welcome Spaces within the network to onboard for a pilot to develop the skills and capabilities to provide immediate and longer term energy safeguarding support
- Co-design a training programme that meets the needs of Warm Welcome Spaces to identify, triage and support people in energy crisis
- Provide crisis support resources for those in need including warm packs
- Provide information and access to carbon monoxide safety advice and alarms where needed
- Provide information and access to energy safeguarding schemes including the Priority Services Register
- Provide access and onward referrals into SGN's Safe and Warm partnership network and support services provided by this community.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project is funded through the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) as it meets the eligibility criteria. This project does this by providing direct support to households who are most likely to be struggling to maintain a safe and warm home.

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 pillar 3 – Fuel Poverty and Energy Affordability.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Warm Welcome Spaces – impact summary

Warm Welcome Spaces have had a significant positive impact on community connection and social wellbeing across the UK. According to recent data, 84% of attendees reported developing a stronger sense of belonging to their local community through their involvement. Similarly, 70% said they now rarely or never feel isolated, highlighting the project's success in tackling loneliness.

The initiative has also achieved impressive reach and engagement. In the past year, around 2.8 million people have visited a Warm Welcome Space, supported by a network of over 10,000 volunteers who help sustain these welcoming environments. Interest in finding local spaces remains high, with nearly 60,000 online map visits recorded.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that Warm Welcome Spaces not only offer practical support but also foster meaningful social connections and stronger, more resilient communities.

5.2 Case Study

The Old Fire Station in Gipton, Leeds, joined the Warm Welcome Campaign in 2022, our first winter and is now a Warm Welcome Champion Space. They tell us how initially they focused on promoting a 'warm space' but found that that label created a stigma and didn't encourage people through the door. When they focused on offering a Warm Welcome Space, with all their wide-ranging activities on offer, more people came through the door for warmth and welcome. The Old Fire Station have always told us how they see being part of our network and branding as a way for them to unite all of their community offers and delivery under the Warm Welcome banner. Below is some further information on the space, in their own words.

The Old Fire Station is a 1930's fire station converted into a community hub in Gipton, Leeds. There is a warm welcome in our cafe which is open to all, with free Wi-Fi and details of events, support and activities. With 6 other charities in the building, they really are a one stop for help and support. The building is fully accessible, has lots of free parking, and is easy to get to on public transport.

Activities run from their renovated fire station; it's an attractive space to be in with a cafe open to the public during the week. This year, we're encouraging people to come and see all the activities we have. Everything we do involves a welcoming space and sometimes there's food. The facilities provide an under 3 stay and play session with a meal, a puzzle and game evening, with snacks, clothing and food parcels on Thursday, minimal charge for the food but if someone is in need they can eat for free. Money bodies: advice for people getting into debt and Health professionals giving advice about how to stay warm and take care of blood pressure.

Beneficiaries include single parent families with children, people with a lot of children, people on benefits and disability benefits specifically, accessing support so they stay warm and so that their vulnerabilities don't increase. People working in lower paid jobs are really struggling as well. We found that the support days we have with advice on how to save money on utilities are very popular, everyone is trying to save money. Some people are living in rental accommodation, they have a metre and they're being charged more than others. People with the least money are paying the most for utilities.

People are going without and keeping things switched off, particularly large families living in rented accommodation or those who have health issues. Ongoing mental health and wellbeing is being battered,

nothing has changed and nothing is better, there's resources out there, but many don't know it's there. The idea is to pool these resources in our building so people can access them in one place.

5.3 SGNs Vulnerability Steering Group

Our Vulnerability Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities throughout 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 that help people where the need is and provide the skills and resources to build capacity in local communities where this is appropriate.

In 2025 our strategic steering group re-iterated the vital impact we could have by co-ordinating 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

The Safe and Warm community scheme project provides the following outcomes to ensure that Warm Welcome Spaces will become access hubs for a co-ordinated energy crisis service that supports vulnerable customers across agencies and organisations;

- An empowered network of grass root organisations actively engaged with the pilot programme to develop resources and skills that bring energy safeguarding support into the Warm Welcome Spaces network
- Warm Welcome Spaces better equipped to provide respite and resources to help people organisations better able to access up to date advice resources and energy safeguarding support to their service users
- Households better able to access support should they need help to maintain a safe and warm home
- Households supported with critical primary needs, energy and food poverty and debt support
- Households signed up (and/or understand how to sign up) to the Priority Services Register
- Households at lower risk from Carbon Monoxide
- Individuals have improved health and wellbeing after receiving help with energy related issues

6.2 Success Criteria

We aim to support, and record data on, the following customer outcomes by extending the scheme.

Over the pilot our ambitions are to;

- Onboard 10 local charitable grassroots organisations through the pilot with workshops and resources to help vulnerable people in need to stay safe and warm
- 1,000 households provided with winter resilience, PSR, CO safety and energy advice information
- 300 customers signposted to CO alarms
- 1,000 customers provided with access to warm packs
- 1,000 customers supported to access personalised energy, debt and /or benefits advice through onward referrals to SGN's Safe and Warm partnership network.

7 Project partners and third parties involved

Warm Welcome Spaces – lead delivery partner for the onboarding and coordination of the pilot project

Local Organisations and Community Groups providing in person respite and activities as venues for warm welcome spaces

SGN and Safe and Warm Partnership Network - We aim to leverage SGN's Safe and Warm partner network to receive referrals and reach vulnerable households in need of income maximisation and energy support.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

This partnership has been co-designed by Warm Welcome Spaces 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 pilot to share ideas and challenges through individual and organisational partnership case studies.

Learning

This pilot project aims to integrate energy safeguarding services into existing Warm Welcome Space, as it's a national campaign supporting over 5,300 community venues that welcomed 2.6 million visits last winter so that we can enhance their ability to address fuel poverty at the frontline.

SGN over the last two years has already provided resources and support to more than 290 warm spaces across its regions, and as part of our long-term strategy, we seek to fully embed these spaces within the Warm Welcome network. This would enable them to access shared national resources, while equipping all network spaces with essential energy safeguarding skills and tools to empower often small and volunteer-led teams, delivering enduring impact for vulnerable users facing high energy costs.

Through working across the Warm Welcome Spaces network we will review the success of training, workshops and case studies to identify and share best practice. We will also welcome leaders and volunteers to get involved in SGN's Safe and Warm partnership network to enrich the support available to the frontline teams and customers using these services.

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 collaborative model as it's a GB wide programme.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV

Together with 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. We've incorporated social value utilising the Industry Standard Social Value framework for the wellbeing benefit of addressing a person's loneliness linked to the research carried out by Warm Welcome Spaces stating 70% of warm space attendees said they now rarely or never feel isolated. Carrying out an assessment of the predicted outcomes we forecast a positive net Social Return on Investment of £12.48 for every £1 spent.

Social Value Measurement

Total cost	£120,428
Total gross present value	£1,623,216.92
Net Present Value (NPV)	£1,502,788.92
SROI	£12.48

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from January 2026 to end of March 2026

11 Geographic area

SGNs Network areas

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

SGN has worked alongside Warm Welcome Spaces 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 £12.48 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and Warm Welcome Spaces will meet monthly 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.