

Extra care support services

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

01/06/22

*Updated May 2023

*Updated May 2024

*Updated March 2026

SGN



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1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
New/Updated	Updated May 2024 *Updated March 26
Date of PEA submission:	01/06/2022 *Updated May 2023 *Updated May 2024 *Updated March 26
Project contact name:	Kerry Potter
Project contact number/email:	Kerry.potter@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k) <i>Ringfenced value will be assessed and revised annually based on need and delivery.</i>	Total; £5,918,026.44 Split as £4,296,503.03 + £1,621,523.41 Care & Repair *Not included in SROI calculation
Total VCMA funding required (£k) <i>Ringfenced value will be assessed and revised annually based on need and delivery.</i>	Total; £5,918,026.44 Split as £4,296,503.03 + £1,621,523.41 Care & Repair *Not included in SROI calculation

2 Problem statement

We work within our communities keeping our customers connected to a safe gas service. Our frontline teams often identify customers in need of urgent help to maintain a safe and warm home where their primary needs are not being met. As a trusted regional service provider, in recent years we have seen that we can support those most vulnerable in our community, and by having teams skilled with appropriate resources in place we have an opportunity to support customers by providing direct crisis support services and access to a network of community safeguarding partners to address customer needs.

During 2018 we ran workshops with our front-line teams and asked them what they were experiencing when working in our communities and in customers' homes, to assess both the training needs and the referral networks we would need to consider and with what priority. We learned that our front-line colleagues would often see customers in desperate situations, that they would often feel the burden of walking away from a customer in need, especially customers who were unsure or confused, and those who didn't have the financial resources to repair or replace gas appliances or who were living in a cold and unsafe home. It was also observed that most of those who were eligible for key initiatives including the energy industries Priority Services Register and the Fire and Rescue Service's home safety assessments were largely unaware of this help.

We have continued to work closely with our front-line colleagues, and we reassessed what our teams needed to help our customers as we went into Covid 19 and again as we assessed the impact of the energy crisis, increase of the energy price cap and the cost of living rises we started to see in 2022. As a result of our GD1 pilot programme our front-line teams fed back that they have increased confidence in offering a helping hand to customers, and that the nature of need has been better understood. We've also seen a change in the needs of customers reflected in societal circumstances, for example during Covid 19 we saw an increase in the needs of customers facing loneliness and digital exclusion which impacted people's ability to access help services,

and more recently we've seen a significant increase in anxiety linked to financial vulnerability, as customers worry about the increased energy and living costs impacting their ability to heat their homes.

We've also become increasingly aware through both direct conversations with customers, and through research, that many of our customers are not aware of the dangers of carbon monoxide and do not have access to a working audible or accessible carbon monoxide alarm. Of 8,000 people surveyed in 2020 45% didn't understand that carbon monoxide doesn't have a smell and only 42% who needed one had a working audible CO alarm. We also learned from our teams and from working closely with our regional Fire and Rescue Service partners that accessible CO alarms, units designed for people with sensory disabilities are largely overlooked but critical to keeping vulnerable customers safe in their homes.

***Update 2022/23**

With more customers negatively impacted by increased energy costs and the cost-of-living crisis in 2022/23 we forecast record numbers of customers unable to afford to maintain a safe and warm home. This was evidenced by fuel poverty and debt data, stakeholder and partner feedback and by the increased numbers of customers being supported by our engineers via our Careline team and our Additional Services offering. Our teams and stakeholders recognised that there was a growing gap for customers, that many customers are unclear on what help is available and how this help can be accessed both through local and national schemes. By facilitating this connection between those who need the support and those who can help access it, our teams and partners are focussed on linking eligible customers to support services designed to alleviate fuel poverty and keep households safe and warm at home.

***Update 2023/24**

This year as we supported our customers during our works, it was clear that although energy costs were coming down from record high levels customers were still struggling to afford household essentials and energy debt has become increasingly familiar for our most vulnerable customers. Our frontline teams have become increasingly trusted by customers and confident in their ability to offer extra help and as a result we've looked at how we can ensure that extra efforts are placed in early identification of vulnerable households as we go about our works.

3 Scope and objectives

As a trusted service provider, our teams are in a unique position, often going into communities and homes where there is need. Our teams are invested in looking out for customers in vulnerable situations and ensuring that the pathway to appropriate support is easily available to help keep our customers safe and warm.

We will provide a dedicated team of skilled Careline advisers to support vulnerable customers that our SGN frontline teams identify in their homes, providing tailored support and onward referrals to community partners where required. The dedicated team will work alongside our frontline teams to assess the support required, where possible provide the support service either directly or via a warm transfer to one of our community partners. The support services provided by our dedicated team will be designed to safeguard vulnerable households, ensuring that they get easy access to energy safeguarding measures and onward support to use energy safely, efficiently and affordably.

***Update 2022/23**

We will provide a dedicated Safe and Warm mobile community team to be visible in vulnerable communities where our engineers and our SGN Vulnerability data index identify communities most likely to need support to maintain a safe and warm home. The dedicated team will work alongside our frontline teams to link customers with local support services including warm hubs and foodbanks in addition to direct referrals into our community partners who can provide tailored support for vulnerable households. The team will provide direct advice on energy and energy safeguarding including access to the PSR and accessible carbon monoxide alarms. The support services provided by our Safe and Warm mobile community team are designed to link customers

to local services and safeguard vulnerable households, ensuring that they get easy access to energy safeguarding measures and onward support to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably.

This will be done by;

- Empowering our frontline teams to identify and offer additional support including access to defined services designed to meet customer needs
- Empowering, training and access to appropriate energy safeguarding services for our dedicated Careline team to enable them to provide customers in vulnerable situations with access to bespoke energy safeguarding support including warm onward referrals to trusted partners and community safeguarding organisations
- Providing customers who have communication needs with appropriate communication resources to ensure customer needs are understood and met
- Providing eligible customers with an inclusive CO safety solution for those least likely to access support without assistance, be that a standalone CO alarm, or an accessible offering tailored to meet the need(s) of the customer (including safety adaptations for deaf, hard of hearing, visual and cognitive disabilities)
- Providing energy safeguarding and CO awareness resources that detail in accessible formats to engage those most at risk as defined by stakeholder feedback, research and insight.
- Providing customers with access to a funded gas safe registered engineer where eligible to complete emergency gas repairs to pipework or essential gas appliances **Not included in SROI forecast
- New for 2022/23 – provide a Safe and Warm community team to help identify customers who are struggling to maintain a safe and warm home. The dedicated team will work alongside our frontline teams to link customers with local support services including warm hubs and foodbanks in addition to direct referrals into our community partners who can provide tailored support for vulnerable households. The team will provide direct advice on energy and energy safeguarding including access to the PSR and accessible carbon monoxide alarms.

***Update May 2024**

SGN's Safe & Warm mobile community team and Careline teams have both increased in size to manage the increased numbers of vulnerable customers identified and supported.

***Update March 2026**

Over the last 12 months we increased our SGN's Safe & Warm mobile community team to align to the changes in regions for our Southern network and reflect the engagement required with our Warm Welcome Spaces / Warm Hubs programmes.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project meets the VCMA eligibility criteria, the scope of which is to provide energy safeguarding, gas safety and carbon monoxide support for customers in vulnerable circumstances. We have defined outcomes for this initiative and these activities are not funded through other price control mechanisms or external funding sources.

***Update May 2024**

SGN provided detail and review of the cost to deliver value for customers and stakeholders in 2023 as part of the revised Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide strategy.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1. Stakeholder engagement – Stakeholder Workshops and Customer Engagement Group

Sharing our top 5 scenarios with our stakeholders during our engagement workshops, stakeholders agreed that providing support for customers in vulnerable circumstances should remain one of our top priorities. 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 water, gas and electricity should be approached as essential services. In shaping our business plan to support customers in vulnerable circumstances we have committed to, over the 5-year price control, supporting over 250,000 vulnerable customers to use gas safely, affordably, and efficiently. Within this consultation process there were key areas our stakeholders prioritised, this included essential gas repairs to those most financially vulnerable and access to independent energy advice and advocacy support services.

*Update May 2023

In 2022/23 – SGN continued our stakeholder engagement with our CSEG who reiterated the importance of identifying customers in need and ensuring these customers we’re supported to access help through effective partnership. CSEG encouraged further focus on linking fuel poor households to expert partners to maximise benefits of income maximisation and ensuring eligible households were supported to access help via government schemes and the PSR.

*Update May 2024

SGN’s ISG has continued to encourage SGN are actively identifying and supporting vulnerable households served by our gas networks.

5.2. Vulnerable Steering Group

During 2020/21 our Vulnerable Steering Group (VSG) has helped us shape our vulnerability and carbon monoxide strategy and our priorities for GD2. For year 1 we prioritised key initiatives to support our most vulnerable customers and they recommended 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 helping customers they identify in vulnerable circumstances ensuring that the team have the skills and appropriate resources in place and support networks to help those most at risk of living in a cold and unsafe home.

*Update May 2023

In 2022/23 Our VSG continued to review and shape our approach to providing direct support to our customers as we go about our works. Working alongside our strategic and delivery partners, both national and grassroots the guidance has been that through further collaboration and a visible presence in the community that SGN and its community partners would be more impactful in helping those most likely to be struggling to maintain a safe and warm home.

*Update May 2024

SGN’s VSG has been engaged in the strategic planning by providing guidance and challenge of our evolving commitments and approach to delivering the VCMA strategy and portfolio.

5.3. Engineer feedback

In 2019 we surveyed our engineers to ask about CO to find out what they see when visiting homes and how they think we should support our customers and communities. From this survey the most common issue found by our engineers when attending a property in relation to CO was a CO battery/alarm failure. When we asked what we should do to solve the issues, the top two answers to this gave a very clear direction. These answers were: 1) Install a free CO alarm and 2) Provide appropriate literature with pictures and guidance on how to

identify the signs of CO that they can leave with a customer. Our engineers have told us that when working in customer's homes, particularly those in vulnerable situations they are concerned when they identify that the customer does not have a working CO alarm or where they need to disconnect a customer due to safety that they think we should be doing something to support these customers to provide them with help to address the problem including providing access to a gas safe engineer and repairing or replacing essential equipment including CO alarms. In 2020/21 we surveyed our frontline engineers to help us understand more around the support they provide to vulnerable customers in their home or onsite, and the training they required to manage customer expectations. 65% of our engineers who responded told us that since COVID, customers were struggling more with mental health difficulties and where to access support as a lot of services had been delayed or cancelled, adding to their concerns around household and energy bills, debt, and gas safety. Our engineers advised we needed to provide a trusted service for them to refer customers for help. In addition, the teams also requested training help to communicate effectively about our works and to offer our support services.

***Update May 2023**

In our engineers during their annual roadshows reiterated that they valued the support services provided by our Careline team and Additional Services offering and that they felt empowered to make recommendations to support the development of the support services offered. They support the piloting of a community scheme that promotes support services for eligible customers including linking them into local support services that help those in need maintain a safe and warm home.

6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

6.1. Outcomes

Through our initiative we will delivering the following outcomes and recording all interactions for customers served directly by our SGN team as identified as vulnerable or at-risk customers during our works;

- SGN frontline engineers provided with training to identify and offer energy safeguarding support and inclusive CO safety solutions to meet the need of customers they support who without intervention would otherwise be unable to access them
- A dedicated specialist team provided with training to support and work with trusted partners to meet the needs of customers they support who without intervention would otherwise be at risk of living in a cold and unsafe home
- A dedicated SGN Safe and Warm mobile community team to support customers in communities identified by our teams and vulnerability data index that are at risk of living in a cold and unsafe home with a local presence to link customers in need with local services
- A comprehensive network of funded and community partnerships to support customers with their energy needs, are in energy crisis or where they would benefit from access to support services impacting the health and wellbeing of the customer
- A provision of inclusive CO safety solutions and resources designed to meet the needs of customers, ensuring that at risk customers are aware of the risks of carbon monoxide and have appropriate safeguards in place
- A dedicated Care and Repair service for eligible customers to access where they have been disconnected due to unsafe pipework or essential gas appliances ****Not included in SROI forecast calculation.**

6.2. Success Criteria

A minimum of 10,000 customers to be supported within a 12-month period as identified by SGN frontline employees and contractors throughout their day to day works to provide energy safeguarding services and onward support for customers in vulnerable situations.

- Empowered employees who confidently never walk away from a customer in need as measured by employee feedback

- Successful training programme on identifying and supporting customers in vulnerable circumstances as measured by the number of customer referrals into the dedicated specialist team
- Increase year on year on the number of customers using support services designed to help customers in vulnerable circumstances including but not limited to providing access to the Priority Services Register, access to independent energy advocacy services, crisis support and access to carbon monoxide and gas safety services
- Increase year on year on the social value of the services provided

***Update May 2024**

A minimum of 20,000 customers supported via SGNs Careline and Safe and Warm community team per year.

***Update March 2026**

As we entered our final year of delivery, we targeted a minimum of 30,000 customers to be supported via SGNs Careline and Safe and Warm community teams.

7 Project partners and third parties involved

- SGN – funding partner and a provider of training for frontline employees and the delivery of the dedicated specialist team supporting customers and co-ordinating support via a comprehensive partner network
- Fireblitz Extinguishers Ltd, Safelincs Fire & Safety Solutions and Mailbox Direct– providers of CO safety solutions
- Charis Grants - provider of emergency food and fuel provisions for financially vulnerable households
- RAD (Royal Association for Deafness), Language Line and SignLive providers of resources for BSL users
- WPA Pinfold and Mad Ideas – provider of CO awareness design and print resources
- Local Authority Safeguarding teams
- *Universal Gas Solutions – provider of gas safe services including essential gas appliances (updated 2022/23)
- Local Authority Safeguarding teams
- *Haste Ltd – the co-provision of the SGN Safe and Warm mobile community team (2022/23)
- Network of funded and unfunded community partners including energy advisory and advocacy services, local foodbanks and other community organisations.

***Update May 2024**

- Universal Gas Solutions – continue to deliver SGN’s Care and Repair service providing maintenance, repair and replacement of essential gas appliances and pipework for eligible customers
- SGNs Safe & Warm community team has been moved in house
- NEA – provider of Energy Advice training for SGN employees
- Gas Safe Charity – provider of carbon monoxide awareness training for SGN employees
- SGNs training team – provider of SGN’s bespoke training packages for SGN employees

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

We are tracking;

- Total number of front-line employees including contractors actively offering support to customers in vulnerable situations
- Total number of customers supported by the dedicated support team
- Total number of support services used to meet customer needs

- Total social value of the support provided to customers either directly or via community partners
- Customer feedback based upon the referral services provided
- Employee feedback on the training and support services required to help customers in vulnerable circumstances
- Increased carbon monoxide awareness and safety in the community as measured by the common survey

Learning

We expect to learn from this project;

- The impact of providing effective training and a pathway to provide extra help to customers in vulnerable circumstances on employee engagement
- The ongoing engagement with employees on vulnerability to drive new support services and training requirements
- As safeguarding and inclusion of customers in vulnerable circumstances underpins this initiative, we expect to learn effective ways to identify, engage and empower customers in crisis or those with additional communication needs, or a sensory or cognitive disability, enabling us to use this insight to inform future projects helping vulnerable households use energy safely, efficiently and affordably.

We will be monitoring and evaluating project progress regularly to enable us to refine and improve our processes and to adjust our ringfenced budget and targets based on need. We are keen to learn from this project and for successes and best practice to be incorporated into future delivery, as well as shared with our broader stakeholders and partners.

Our learnings will be shared throughout the duration of the project, in our annual report and at the VCMA annual showcase event.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

Working with our measurement partner 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 £4.58.

This project enables the outcomes for our referral partners to support with Energy Advice and additional support however as the social value for these services and outcomes are captured within respective partner PEA’s we have excluded these activities from our SROI calculations.

We have also excluded the Care & Repair costs and outcomes from our SROI forecast as this service is a requirement of all GDNs within the VCMA governance document.

Social Value Measurement

Updated using 2022-23 as the baseline year to assess the potential success rates for outcomes, we forecast the following social value for delivery over the five years of GD2;

Total cost*	£1,502,221.84
Total gross present value	£8,376,354.94
NPV	£6,874,133.10
SROI	£4.58

*Total cost over five years accounting for anticipated inflationary factors

*Update May 2024

We have updated our SROI forecast to account for the additional costs and associated outcomes incorporated in this update. While the overall SROI has decreased from last year’s forecast, this is not a reflection of the increased additional support this project enables. This is a conservative forecast based on a subset of expected outcomes, and as stated above, this project enables customer outcomes via our referral partners to support with Energy Advice and other services, however as the social value for these services and outcomes are captured within respective partner PEA’s we have excluded these activities from our SROI forecast.

Updated using 2023-24 delivery to inform success rates for outcomes, we forecast a positive net SROI of £2.34;

Total cost*	£2,756,736.00
Total gross present value	£9,199,961.84
NPV	£6,443,225.84
SROI	£2.34

*Total cost over five years accounting for anticipated inflationary factors

Updated March 2026

Based on actual spend – we’ve updated the table below using the baseline forecast data excluding the funding allocated for Appliance servicing, repair and replacement. We’ve not recalculated the outcomes based on actual delivery as the baseline forecast was not completed using the GDN rulebook.

Total cost*	£4,296,503.03
Total gross present value	£14,350,320.12
NPV	£10,053,817.09
SROI	£2.34

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from April 2021 until March 2026

11 Geographic area

SGN’s network areas in England and Scotland

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

*Update March 2026

The PEA has been reviewed and approved by the business lead Kerry Potter and the Director of Customer Services Maureen McIntosh.