

# Midlothian Affordable Warmth

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

March 2024

SGN



**SGN**

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## 1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
Date of PEA submission:	12.03.24
Project contact name:	Linda Spence
Project contact number/email:	<a href="mailto:Linda.Spence@sgn.co.uk">Linda.Spence@sgn.co.uk</a>
Total cost (£k)	£100,351
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£100,351

## 2 Problem statement

In Midlothian nearly a third of residents struggle to heat their homes affordably – analysis by Energy Action Scotland (2022) of local authority data shows that 27% residents are in fuel poverty. Levels of fuel poverty range across the region and we have identified:

- Geographical areas with the highest probability of fuel poverty – 38-45% in areas in Eskbank, Rural South, Pathhead and Rural East, Penicuik, Pentland
- Certain tenures with higher fuel poverty – 37% of social housing tenants are fuel poor
- Groups with higher vulnerability to fuel poverty – 96% of people in the bottom income band; young families, older people, and those with a disability or long-term illness.

SGN’s vulnerability mapping has identified Midlothian as a priority area to provide ongoing support due to the high levels of deprivation associated with low income, targeting those with health conditions and older people who will be impacted by living in cold damp homes.

There is currently no provision for fuel poverty advice support in Midlothian, a service desperately needed, due to the initiatives below funding constraints.

This partnership would build on the previous support Changeworks and other partners have delivered in the area where there is high demand for energy advice, income maximisation and support to help fuel poor households live in a safe and warm home.

Changeworks in partnership with Midlothian Council supported council tenants in or at risk of fuel poverty to be affordably warm in their homes this ended September 2023 due to funding constraints. Changeworks is delivering a three-year community engagement project in Midlothian engaging people to take energy saving actions (ending March 2025). This initiative does not target vulnerable community groups to provide fuel poverty support, however this VCMA partnership will enable us to reach those vulnerable groups being missed through outreach support.

Changeworks recently delivered Midlothian-wide fuel poverty services targeting young families and housing association tenants, partnering with key stakeholders including Citizens Advice Bureau, Midlothian Sure Start, NHS Lothian and Melville Housing Association. Funding for this initiative has ended.

Delivering these services, Changeworks understands the immediate demand for support, and the local context of energy price rises, cost of living increases, and incomes not keeping up with rising prices.

To create warm affordable homes the provision of holistic fuel poverty support at a local level is key to alleviating both the immediate effects and the root causes of fuel poverty. Midlothian Affordable Warmth takes experience from previous project delivery, joining up partners and approaches to enable provision of more holistic support and impactful outcomes. This partnership will provide both energy advice delivered by

Changeworks, income maximisation advice delivered by Penicuik CAB, and deliver community outreach support targeting vulnerable groups.

### 3 Scope and objectives

Our project will enable the following support to be delivered across the region to fuel poor and vulnerable households between April 2024 and March 2025, working in partnership with Penicuik Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Midlothian Affordable Warmth.

Our service will;

- Support up to 640 people to tackle fuel poverty issues including energy and safeguarding advice of which we expect:
  - **300 people** to be supported by Changeworks, receiving one to one energy advice and advocacy on energy efficiency via telephone, digital tools (text, WhatsApp, emails), appointments, home visits and casework. People will be supported to make the most of heating systems and access energy efficiency measures, and on ways to tackle high fuel costs e.g. support to better manage energy bills, resolve energy billing and debt issues, access grants and discounts. People supported by Changeworks will also receive wider support as required e.g. referrals on to Home Energy Scotland for energy efficiency grants if eligible
  - **250 people** to be supported by CAB, one to one income maximisation advice to help tackle fuel poverty issues via appointments in the bureau, telephone advice, emails, and home visits and casework as required. People will be supported to apply for benefits and grants, reduce outgoings, and improve financial management. People supported by CAB will also receive wider CAB service support as required e.g. energy advice, debt and money advice, consumer issues, work-related problems, and housing advice
  - **180 people** reached through face-to-face outreach in the community, engaging with vulnerable community groups e.g. hosting talks and stalls, attending events, and engaging key stakeholders. Groups will be targeted through partner networks, for example those supporting young families, connecting with Sure Start family centres and schools. This advice will centre around energy usage and fuel poverty. (10% of this group (18) will be referred for support to CAB/Changeworks for 1:1 in depth support)
  - **186 of those who receive advice** will benefit from £49-50 support for their energy costs. This will be available to those on prepayment or credit meters. [Charis Shop](#) will be used to deliver this service so it has the greatest accessibility and flexibility
  - All three advice routes will support energy advice and usage, awareness of and registration to the **Priority Service Register** and **carbon monoxide safety information** and will cross-refer service-users to ensure holistic support is provided
  - In addition, clients of this project will also have access to funding that will help them stay warm at home. Changeworks manages a Midlothian Intervention Fund (Midlothian Council) which has approximately **£12,000** which will allow for the purchase of electric throws, blankets etc for householders. Without this advice service, the fund couldn't be accessed as we do not have an energy advice service in the region.

*\* Some people will receive multiple interventions i.e. be supported by Changeworks (outreach and or advice) and also referred on to CAB. This is why the total number of people reached is 640.*

## 4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

The project delivers against SGNs Vulnerability Strategy, by providing targeted support to households most at risk of living in fuel poverty based upon their personal circumstances and their geographical location.

The partnership service aligns to our strategic ambition to support customers in energy crisis, helping those in fuel poverty to access financial crisis support, and other services including the Priority Services Register, awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide and energy efficiency advice, 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 pillar 3 with outcomes in pillars 2 and 4 also.

## 5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

### 5.1 SGN's Vulnerable Customer Steering Group

Our VSG has helped shape our vulnerability strategy and 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 living with a health condition made worse by living in a cold and damp home. This partnership is built on data and covers both geographic areas where there is compelling data that identifies vulnerable customer needs, both due to fuel poverty and health indicators.

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 at ways in which we can build stronger links with other organisations including collaborating with other utilities, health services and charities to deliver support services that tackle the fuel poverty gap and the underlying causes of fuel poverty.

### 5.2 Warm and Well delivery of support

Midlothian Council funded an energy advice and advocacy service to reach 290 council tenants to tackle fuel poverty issues, October 2021-September 2023.

With cost of living and energy price increases, Changeworks saw an increased demand for the service, especially through the winter months, with a greater number of urgent enquiries and emergency support (e.g. support to tackle fuel debt and to access emergency grants more than doubled between 2021/22 to 2022/23).

Over the course of the project, 338 council tenants were supported, representing 116% of the target – highlighting the high demand for support within the area. Over £64,000 financial savings were achieved in total for tenants, with the average saving £208 per tenant. 68% of service users told us they now feel warm in their home and 77% now feel confident dealing with energy issues themselves. One tenant told us:

*"I feel so much more confident to call up my supplier. I really struggled to phone... I wouldn't call at all, I'd put the letters in a drawer and totally forget about them because I found everything so overwhelming. I can't put my finger on it but [Changeworks' Advisor] has given me the confidence to deal with it myself. Having [the Advisor] in my corner explaining to them what the issues are and that it's not me has helped massively."*

### 5.3 AIM-HI (Access to Improved opportunities in Midlothian for long-term Health Improvement) delivery of support

Working in partnership for four years (2018-2022), Penicuik CAB, Changeworks and Midlothian Sure Start – funded by NHS Lothian – tackled child poverty and improved the health and wellbeing of 550 parents-to-be and families. The project was responding to high fuel poverty levels amongst Midlothian families,<sup>1</sup> 1-in-4 children in Midlothian living in poverty,<sup>2</sup> and Poverty Alliance’ Every Child Every Chance findings (funded by Scottish Government, the Alliance held seven discussions across Midlothian, 2019).<sup>3</sup> Parent participants made it clear:

- There was a need for more income maximisation services.
- Action to make homes more energy efficient and to reduce fuel poverty was needed.
- Community hubs are a central source of information, advice, and signposting.

The project provided low-income families with income maximisation support (Penicuik CAB) and energy advice and advocacy (Changeworks), with outreach delivery in local settings (across Midlothian Sure Start’s six family centres). AIM-HI finished in September 2022 but the need for support is still very high. Over 500 people were being referred into the project at the end (2021-22), compared to 230 in 2019-20. Referral agencies said AIM-HI support was ‘extremely’ (70%) or ‘very’ (21%) needed for families.

*“There is a clear need for this service for families of Midlothian... The service is a lifeline. If it wasn't there this would have a detrimental effect on families.”*

Over the four years the project achieved:

- £463,815 financial savings for families through income maximisation and energy advice support
- Greater health and wellbeing – 43% of service users told us they were more able to cope and felt more relaxed, 41% were warmer at home, and 29% felt more in control.
- Improved integration into existing family support – we delivered workshops in each of Sure Start’s six community family centres, and an active referral network was created across 17 local support agencies e.g., cross-referrals with Home Link Family Support, Children 1st, and Midlothian schools.
- 14,052kgs carbon saved through energy saving behaviour change and installed measures.

### 5.4 Changeworks in Dalkeith

Since 2022, Changeworks has been delivering a local partnership initiative to support communities to tackle climate change and save energy in Midlothian. We are using a place-based approach to achieve community action over a three-year period through development and outreach work. Activity in year one was focused on the town of Dalkeith, expanding in years two and three to cover the bordering settlements of Easthouses, Mayfield, Newbattle and Eskbank. This project has helped us maintain an understanding of needs in the area, enhance relationships with local stakeholders and supports the testing of community engagement approaches for impact. Thus far the project has engaged over 750 householders.

## 6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

### 6.1 Outcomes

The project will support up to 640 people, of which:

- 300 people in or at risk of fuel poverty will receive one-to-one energy advice and advocacy

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2019) *Scottish House Condition Survey: 2016-18 Local Authority Tables*

<sup>2</sup> Child poverty rates increased to 24% in 2019/20 data, compared to 22% in 2014/15

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government (2020) *Midlothian Get Heard Scotland: Summary Report 2019/20*

- 250 people in or at risk of fuel poverty will receive one-to-one income maximisation advice
- 180 people in or at risk of fuel poverty will be reached via outreach community engagement, raising awareness of ways to tackle fuel poverty issues and how to access wider support
- 186 people in or at risk of fuel poverty will receive a fuel voucher/payment
- £12,000 fund can be drawn down for staying warm at home

Please note of the people supported by Changeworks and by CAB, some may be supported by both organisations and reporting will be separated to ensure no double counting of client support. Of the people reached through outreach events it is likely around 10% will go on to be supported either by Changeworks or CAB to receive more in-depth advice on energy or income maximisation.

## 6.2 Success Criteria

Up to 640 people supported to tackle fuel poverty issues they face, of which:

- 300 people receive 1-1 energy advice
- 250 people receive 1-1 income maximisation advice (and access to wider CAB services as required) (30% more in-depth EEA advice)
- 180 people receive face-to-face advice in the community e.g. at group sessions (10% to Changeworks one to one energy advice)
- 186 people will receive energy support payments
- 400 PSR awareness-raising / 100 PSR registrations
- 400 carbon monoxide awareness raising to clients / 20+ CO alarms gifted
- 12 front line workers / volunteers upskilled on fuel poverty, CO and PSR awareness e.g. AW briefings and online Think CO)
- 224 onward referrals and signposting to additional relevant support, e.g. Warmer Homes Scotland, Home Energy Scotland, Warm Homes Discount, food banks, emergency energy top-ups
- £110,000 financial savings in total for those supported\*
- Additional £12,000 will be disbursed via this project for warm home measures for FP households – outcomes will be provided.

\* Financial savings are estimated on the basis of 2022-23 [Energy Saving Trust](#) data.

## 7 Project partners and third parties involved

**Changeworks** is a Scottish charity leading the way in solutions for low-carbon living, based on their 35-year expertise delivering impact and making a difference in people's lives. They believe action must be dramatically scaled up to tackle the climate emergency and make Scotland's homes low carbon, affordably warmer and easier to heat. Their commitment is to support a just transition towards a positive low-carbon reality for everyone, including tackling fuel poverty. Changeworks has delivered energy advice services to tackle fuel poverty in Midlothian for over a decade, working with the council, health professionals, housing associations and third sector support agencies to identify those in need and to deliver support across the region.

Changeworks' Affordable Warmth Service is a specialist service supporting vulnerable people by providing holistic, bespoke, and in-depth energy advice to tackle fuel poverty. The team's approach is focused on empowering people to gain sustainable life skills to tackle issues themselves. Staff have the skills and experience to deliver robust outcomes:

- Scottish National Standards accredited to deliver Type 1 Utility Debts advice
- City & Guilds Energy Awareness and Renewable Energy certified (Level 3) and receive comprehensive in-house training
- Disclosure Scotland checked and have training in: Child Protection, Protection of Vulnerable Adults, Lone Worker Safety, and Equalities

**Penicuik CAB** is one of 59 Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) members delivering advice in the community – forming Scotland’s largest independent advice network. Penicuik CAB’s service is free, impartial, holistic, and confidential, available to all Midlothian residents and designed to meet their needs. Trained Advisors give advice in benefits, benefit appeals, employment, money/debt advice, housing, utilities, consumer issues and immigration. Advisors are trained in information and advice giving, interviewing skills, negotiation, representation, and advocacy.

Penicuik CAB has an important community role:

- Service is accessible with premises centrally located in Midlothian
- Clients are supported to maximise incomes. Last year the CAB achieved £2.3million financial gain for clients, bringing money into the local community.
- Volunteers benefit giving their time in the bureaux: 42% volunteers go into paid work or further education.
- Penicuik CAB has a rich history of collaborative partnership working and contributing locally. Penicuik CAB is a founding member of the Midlothian Financial Inclusion Network (MFIN) and participates in Midlothian strategic community planning groups e.g. we are members of Improving Opportunities Midlothian.

Penicuik CAB meet the aims, principles, and high standards – in both advice-giving and organisational management – of CAS’ exacting membership, subject to independent, quarterly advice quality audits and three-year organisational audit. Advice Scottish National Standards accredited, and Penicuik CAB is licensed by the Financial Conduct Authority to provide debt and money advice.

Other project partners

- SGN - lead gas network providing funding and support to the delivery team, including training, access to broader referral partners, and direct services for customers including but not limited to the Priority Services Register, Locking Cooker Valves, carbon monoxide alarms
- Gas Safe Charity providing tailored CO awareness training for frontline workers
- DNO providing PSR training
- Charis providing the portal for issuing crisis funding

## 8 Potential for new learning

### Monitoring and evaluation

The following activities will be in place to monitor and evaluate project progress and impacts:

- Quantitative and qualitative service user outcomes and demographics/ vulnerabilities recorded/monitored
- Service user before-and-after-support surveys and follow-up calls
- Referrals recorded/monitored
- Feedback, indicators, outputs, and outcomes reported on quarterly
- Project progress monitored: e.g. monthly Advisor 1-to-1s, quarterly partner meetings.

### Learning

We are keen to learn from activity and for successes to be incorporated into future delivery and promoted to others. We will learn about:

- Partnership working and new joined up working practices
- Impact/benefits of local engagement in communities and how key messages are cascaded, helping to understand more around type of engagement preferred, especially in the harder to reach communities.
- New challenges fuel poor householders are facing with the impact of Cost-of-Living crisis.



## 9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

We worked with leading social impact research consultancy SIA Partners to carry out an assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable customers incorporated in this partnership using the DNO methodology/rulebook with additional proxies developed for GDN activity. Carrying out an in-depth assessment of the predicted outcomes we forecast a positive net social return in investment (SROI) of £1.97.

### Social Value Measurement

Total cost	£100,350.50
Total gross present value	£297,611.56
NPV	£197,261.06
SROI	£1.97

## 10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from April 2024-March 2025 (12 months)

## 11 Geographic area

Midlothian, Scotland

## 12 Internal governance and project management evidence

SGN has worked alongside Changeworks 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 externally assessed by SIA Partners using the DNO / GDN common rulebook. As detailed above SIA partners have reviewed the current partnership scope which has been forecast at adding an additional £1.97 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

To support the partnership to deliver the success criteria outcomes as detailed, the partners will review progress monthly and quarterly to learn, share best practices and address any delivery issues.

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