

Safe and Warm Communities Action Hampshire

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

March 2024
SGN



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1 Description

Project title	Safe & Warm Communities Action Hampshire
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	April 2024
Project contact name:	Janet Duggan
Project contact email:	janet.duggan@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£298,864
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£298,864

2 Problem statement

In 2022, there were an estimated 3.26 million households living in fuel poverty in England, based on the LILEE metric (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2023). This is an increase from 3.1 million in 2021 and doesn't take into consideration the cost-of-living crisis that has hit households throughout the winter of 2022-23 and beyond. National Energy Action's October 2023 figures show 6.5 million UK households are in fuel poverty, based on the definition of low-income households spending more than 10% of their income on their energy bills. Fuel poverty is driven by energy efficiency, energy costs and income. It is recognised that nearly half of low-income households are still living in hard to heat homes, and the rate of improvements was well below what is needed to lift people out of fuel poverty by a target date of 2030.

Using data from [National Energy Action](#), it shows that some constituencies within Hampshire and Dorset have a higher than average amount of households living in fuel poverty compared to the average for the South East and South West areas respectively. Some areas are also higher than the national average for households living in fuel poverty. For Hampshire, areas of high fuel poverty include the Isle of Wight (11.6%), Portsmouth South (14.3%), Portsmouth North (9.1%), Southampton Test (11.6%) Gosport (8%) and Havant (8%). For Dorset, high fuel poverty has been identified in Bournemouth East (13.4%) and South Dorset (13.5%).

In National Energy Action's report – [Understanding Carbon Monoxide risk in households](#) vulnerable to fuel poverty, the relationship between poverty and carbon monoxide (CO) risk was examined. The report found that the behaviours around appliances, gas safety and increased risk of CO harm, were linked with poverty, poor housing and age of household. The report recommended signing eligible people up to the Priority Services Register (PSR) and help people on low incomes with gas safety and appliance maintenance.

In addition, a report by the University of Southampton and University of Bristol in December 2023 found that ECO had mixed results in targeting people in the most energy deprived group in the area, with an average of just 71 households per 1,000 receiving any home installations or upgrades.

There are key areas geographically in our region that we have identified where these conditions are most likely. Working with our data and insight partner Energy Savings Trust we have come to understand that the Isle of Wight, Southampton, Havant and Portsmouth are all areas where there are significantly higher indicators of financial vulnerability than the national average, and fuel poverty resulting in poor health, older people and digital exclusion rates. They also have a higher risk of mortality from these issues, so a targeted and tailored approach is required to be able to provide safe and effective support.

Action Hampshire has specialist knowledge in local community, voluntary and social enterprise sector spans with experience extending over 72 years. Action Hampshire's aim is to deliver great services to local people

and communities; speak up for the changes they would like to see and shape the future of where they live and work. We bring the 'voices' of the sector together to create social change and make the world a better and fairer place. Throughout their history, Action Hampshire has supported community-led action, particularly in rural areas, across Hampshire and beyond. The team have extensive experience in supporting and empowering diverse communities to challenge inequity and disadvantage and seek to raise the voice of marginalised and seldom heard communities. They also work closely with the Council for Voluntary Service network in Dorset, enabling the partnership to target organisations and in turn vulnerable households, across two counties.

In 2019 in response to the growing need in the community to help people stay warm and save money on energy, Action Hampshire in partnership with SSEN started 'Warmth Matters'. The project provided targeted community engagement for vulnerable customers about how to save energy, reduce their fuel bills, get support with fuel debt, and encourage eligible people to sign up to the free Priority Services Register (PSR).

Through this and other Action Hampshire projects, the partners learnt that many communities and smaller groups are unaware of support available and experience barriers to accessing universal services. Responding to the voices of different communities Action Hampshire found that when information is delivered by someone they trust and adapted to meet their needs, it will hold more value and be more easily understood. These groups may often be seeing people who are living in unsafe homes or struggling with energy debt who are not being seen by other services. In addition, the team are seeing that in some sessions due to the complexity of the needs of the participants, there is a need to provide additional help to ensure that the customers are safe and warm at home including help to complete forms and make follow up referrals to other support agencies.

Since the launch of the Warmth Matters project the teams have seen the demand for the scheme broader than the current resources enable, and through discussions with the team it was highlighted that there are gaps in gas safety information and CO awareness for vulnerable groups. Action Hampshire have seen first-hand the benefit of the Warmth Matters project across Hampshire to the communities they've been able to support and recognise the opportunity in expanding the scale and breadth of the partnership, with more sessions and a further roll out to Dorset.

3 Scope and objectives

By working in partnership with Action Hampshire, the objective of the partnership is to work with voluntary community and social enterprise (VCSE) groups within Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Bournemouth East and Southern Dorset; to enable them to target vulnerable households who may be experiencing barriers to accessing services, to help alleviate fuel poverty and increase energy safety awareness.

The partnership is designed to reach diverse communities through VCSE groups, who have existing relationships with those communities and are, in many cases, led by people from them.

Through the partnership Action Hampshire will provide a range of support and training to stay safe and warm via community-based events, safety support, upskilling workshops, adapting tools and information so that it's accessible in every way for their communities.

The initiative looks to support VCSE grass root organisations by;

- Providing training to staff/volunteers on energy safeguarding services including how to identify fuel poverty, carbon monoxide harm and how to describe the benefits of registering to the Priority Services Register
- Providing workshops for VCSE groups that helps to build confidence in managing energy costs and safe ways to become energy efficient enabling them to cascade the information to their members
- Providing information on carbon monoxide safety so that VCSE groups have the information and support to access information on carbon monoxide and where required provide free carbon monoxide alarms

- Providing information on the Priority Services Register and support where required to help identified vulnerable households to sign up for support
- Providing access to the Locking Cooker Valve where required for people living with dementia groups and/or people with autism
- Providing a tool kit / information pack and support for VCSE groups, reducing barriers to support.

Through collaboration the partnership will directly alleviate the financial stress caused by rising fuel bills for vulnerable households at a time of need, by upskilling a far-reaching network of small grass root organisations, leaving an enduring legacy within communities.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project is proposed for funding through the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) as it aims to support the most vulnerable to stay safe and warm. This project aims to tackle this need by supporting smaller VCSE organisations with the opportunities, skills and confidence to share learning on how to keep safe and warm, with their beneficiaries. We will be providing opportunity for the priority vulnerability groups to access the support they need in the way that best works for them. Supporting smaller grassroots and community organisations to learn and increase their skills and knowledge in CO safety, energy efficiency, PSR and helping vulnerable people in fuel poverty. This will then help them to have conversations, share knowledge and support their beneficiaries who may not be able to access this information elsewhere.

The project delivers against SGNs Vulnerability Strategy, by targeting under-represented individuals in a flexible way and helping to identify those in most need. Helping to co-create resources that can be used in the future to reach more underserved and vulnerable communities, for example materials cocreated by disabled people, minority ethnic communities, and carers.

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 pillars 2 (with outcomes in both 3 & 4).

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Action Hampshire

This project fits exceptionally well with Action Hampshire's mission to help create strong, healthy, equitable, connected communities. In many projects Action Hampshire's approach of working with VCSE is to build capacity, co-produce materials and support them to deliver community-led activity within their communities has been effective in reaching underserved communities who are often the most disadvantaged and impacted by a range of inequalities. The partnership will develop this approach with support for energy efficiency, carbon monoxide awareness and addressing fuel poverty. These elements clearly relate to people experiencing poverty, and to physical and mental health. People not being able to turn the heating on, affects conditions like asthma, COPD, and mental health conditions. People living with disabilities or long-term health conditions, such as dementia, are in greater need of this support but are less likely to access it.

This project connects with their work with Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICB, community research projects, and environmental projects. It equips the VCSE sector to work with communities so that the impact continues beyond the life cycle of the project and continues to help build healthy and equitable communities where everyone can access this support.

A recent Final Evaluation of the project – Communities Against Cancer evidences the impact of the Action Hampshire team in supporting VCSE organisations to deliver projects and convey messages to their beneficiaries.

5.2 Warmth Matters – Customer Feedback

Warmth Matters sessions provide targeted community engagement for vulnerable customers to learn how to save energy, reduce their fuel bills, get support with fuel debt and encourage eligible people to sign up to the free Priority Services Register (PSR).

Customer feedback from the Warmth Matters Project:

“Thank you for sorting the phone call. I’ve set up the direct debit it was so easy, thinking I been trying to sort that out for 5 years is shocking lol. Thank you so much. I’m realising asking for help is not so scary and it is out there”.

“Thank you for all your help, I really appreciate it. It’s so confusing to know where to go for help”

5.3 SGNs Vulnerable Steering Group

Our Vulnerable Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for 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 who are most at risk in the vulnerability index, this project will focus on those regional areas. Priority groups will include disabled people, financially vulnerable people, digitally and culturally excluded groups, people with mental health conditions, older people & young people.

In 2023 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

Working together, the two-year partnership will enable SGN and Action Hampshire to work with Voluntary Community Social Enterprise organisations who will;

- Increase knowledge and confidence in supporting beneficiaries with energy affordability and fuel poverty, energy debt support and carbon monoxide awareness
- VCSE staff/volunteers will be upskilled and able to hold energy conversations and CO safety advice with beneficiaries
- VCSE organisations will benefit from being part of a larger project and have access to a network and Community of Practice involved in delivering the partnership
- Targeted on-going support and guidance from Action Hampshire to ensure competency
- Co-design energy related materials with the community group specific for their needs (i.e. disabled people, young people, mental health). This would include a range of media resources (leaflets, videos, on-line resources)

Beneficiaries

- Increased safety awareness and access to carbon monoxide alarms in the home
- Increased awareness of the benefits of the Priority Services Register and support to access as required
- Knowledge of how to reduce energy costs at home
- Awareness of locking cooker valve for vulnerable family members (e.g. family members with dementia, cognitive impairment)
- Confidence in what to do if struggling with fuel debt and onward referrals for in-depth financial support where needed
- Information delivered in a peer, community-led, friendly, informal way where beneficiaries can learn, access support and gain new skills in managing their energy safely and efficiently.

6.2 Success Criteria

To support at least 3,500 vulnerable households over two years use energy safely, efficiently and affordably. We aim to support those in need with access to practical help that improves their health and wellbeing and increases their confidence to manage their household utility costs.

Over the two years our ambition is to empower Voluntary Community Social Enterprise communities across Hampshire and Dorset to help vulnerable households stay safe and warm by;

- Training three Action Hampshire staff to an Energy Awareness 6281-01 (Level 3) and two support team members to a standard enabling them to deliver energy advice to households, either face to face or over the phone, and run workshops and community events to empower others to identify and support vulnerable households with energy advice. Action Hampshire to provide 15 energy workshop training sessions to support the onboarding of the VCSE organisations
- Ongoing support to 70 regional VCSE organisations (with a network of 200 volunteers) so that they can support vulnerable households with energy advice and issue resources including energy toolkits / information packs for organisations and customers. Advice to cover – energy saving tips, who to call in an emergency for problems with utilities, smart meters, energy tariff information and what to do if in energy debt
- Provide an additional 84 VCSE organisations (with a reach of 25 households - 2,100 individuals) with the resource pack and access to online support
- Support 3,500 households with energy efficiency and energy safeguarding advice, including advice and signposting for further support on; who to call in an emergency for problems with utilities, smart meters, energy tariff information, locking cooker valves and what to do if in energy debt
- Provide 1,400 customers with a CO Awareness session, and the offer of a CO alarm where required with an expectation of 350 alarms allocated
- Support 1,000 eligible households to sign up to the Priority Services Register
- Identify 200 households for onward referral for assessment for energy efficiency schemes to SGN's nominated energy advice partnership for telephone or in-home energy scheme assessments
- Support 200 vulnerable households on to other support groups based on need
- Deliver a winter readiness social media campaign (October 2024) targeting over 20,000 people across Hampshire and Dorset, providing information and tips on about energy safeguarding via our trusted partner network

7 Project partners and third parties involved

- **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 and CO alarms
- **Action Hampshire** – delivery and coordination of service upskilling the VCSE sector in energy efficiency and fuel poverty support
- **National Energy Action** – providing energy advisory training where required for energy support officers

- **Local Council for Voluntary Services' (CVS')** - key referral pathway to grass root organisations, the partners will continue to closely work with a network of local partners to identify eligible people for the service across Hampshire and Dorset including; Hampshire & Isle of Wight Integrated Care Board, Hampshire County Council and local Borough Councils, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole (BCP) Council, VCSE organisations and local faith groups

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

- The partners will work closely to ensure that we're monitoring outcomes against the success criteria by delivering monthly reporting against KPIs, including identification of good practice and case studies
- Measuring our impact through regular service feedback questionnaires. We will use a tailored five-point evaluation questionnaire to monitor the specific components that we want to improve for beneficiaries.
- Feedback from questionnaires enable us to measure how well we are helping by providing practical advice, are attendees reporting better access to information and support. We are also looking at aspects of general health and well-being such as such as feeling more connected to others and less anxious.
- 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.
- Support given to VCSE organisations to do the same with beneficiaries and design user friendly ways to measure initial awareness and measure awareness following energy conversations.

Learning

We're keen to learn from this project and for successes to be incorporated into ongoing projects that engage VCSE organisations.

Through working across a network of grass root organisations in Hampshire and Dorset, the group will review the success of training, workshops and case studies to identify and share best practice. In addition to networking, the project offers learning opportunities to all stakeholders which result in an improved understanding of the organisation's needs. The project provides a model of reaching smaller groups and community organisations who have contact with vulnerable people and so provides targeted support those most likely to be eligible for help.

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.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV

We worked with leading social impact research consultancy Sirio Strategies to carry out an assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes applicable to our services for vulnerable customers incorporated in this partnership. Carrying out an in-depth assessment of the predicted outcomes we forecast a positive net social return of £4.59.

Social Value Measurement

Total cost*	£291,104.72
Total gross present value	£1,627,846.94
Net Present Value (NPV)	£1,336,742.22
SROI	£4.59

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

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from April 2024 to March 2026 – 24 months

11 Geographic area

Hampshire, Isle of Wight & Dorset

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

Description of GDN(s) review of proposal and project sign off, with details on how the project will be managed

SGN has worked alongside Action Hampshire 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 Sirio Strategies using the industry standard framework supported by the GDN rulebook. As detailed above Sirio Strategies have reviewed the current partnership scope which has been forecast at adding an additional £4.59 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and Action Hampshire 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.