

Safe and Warm Spaces – Scotland

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance 2 initiative

07 February 2023

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	5
5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support	6
5.1 Citizen Advice Scotland.....	6
5.2 Moving Forward Together – Stakeholder Workshops held during 2018 and 2020	6
5.3 Vulnerable Steering Group	6
5.4 SGN RIIO-GD2 Business Plan.....	6
6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria.....	7
6.1 Outcomes	7
6.2 Success Criteria.....	7
7 Project partners and third parties involved	8
8 Potential for new learning	8
9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations	8
10 VCMA Project start and end date	9
11 Geographic area	9
12 Approval	9

1 Description

Funding GDN(s)	SGN
For Collaborative VCMA Projects:	N/A
Date of PEA submission:	07 February 23
Project contact name:	Linda Spence
Project contact number/email:	Linda.spence@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£352,200
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£352,200

2 Problem statement

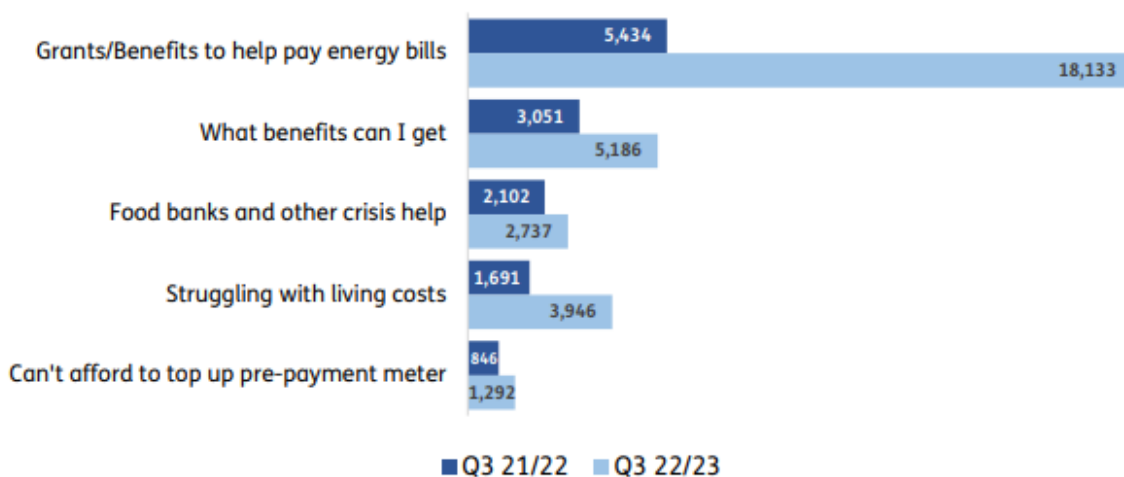
1 in 3 people in Scotland are finding their energy bills unaffordable, with many struggling with the rising increase in the energy price cap and 24% of people citing their home as hard to heat as a reason why they are finding bills unaffordable, according to a recent [Citizen Advice Scotland YouGov poll](#).

Citizen Advice Bureaux (CABx) throughout Scotland are experiencing an unprecedented increase in demand from households enquiring about financial support and help towards managing their living costs as their circumstances change. Recent polling has identified that 38% of adults in Scotland, an estimated 1.7 million, feel anxious or worried about being able to pay their energy bills. The same amount are anxious or worried about adequately heating their home.

Households are finding it difficult to keep up with the rising costs of utility/household bills and the after-effects of the pandemic. At times, having to make the choice between heating their homes or feeding their families, with many slipping into poverty quickly, which is having an impact on their own/families health and wellbeing.

CAS's Cost of Living Analysis Quarter 3 20221, shows the huge year on year increase in views from Quarter 3 of 21/22 to Quarter 3 to 22/23 of webpages on Grants/Benefits to help pay energy bills, Struggling with living costs, and Can't afford to top up pre-payment meter.

Top 5 cost of living webpages showing an increase in unique page views from Q3 21/22 to Q3 22/23



¹ <https://www.cas.org.uk/publications/data-reports>

In 2023/24, energy bills are expected to continue to rise due to the increases in the price cap in 2022 and the end of the Energy Bills Relief Scheme in March 2023. Demand for energy advice has continued to grow with Citizens Advice Scotland's website pages relating to paying for energy bills showing an upward trend. In particular, the pages 'Grants and Benefits to Help You Pay Your Energy Bills' increased 94% between quarter 1 and quarter 2 of 22/23 (the last period for which figures are available), and 'Getting help with bills' increased 78% in the period July to September 2022.²

The price cap on standard and default tariffs rose on 1 October from £1,971/year for a typical user paying by direct debit to £3,549/year. For households on prepay tariffs Ofgem announced a £1,591/year increase to the cap for more than four million – to £3,608/year for a typical household.

Also, from the 1st of October, the government implemented an energy price guarantee, which limits the amount you can be charged per unit of gas or electricity. The energy price guarantee has been amended many times throughout its introduction in October 2022, however it has recently been announced in the 2022 Autumn Statement that the energy price guarantee will last until April 2024³. It is worth noting, the energy price guarantee stays as it is until end of March 2023, after which it will rise by about 20% (so an 'average' household will pay £3k instead of £2.5k).

However, pay increases for many people aren't keeping up with rising prices. This means people's money doesn't go as far, so buying things and paying bills is getting harder. Average wages, not including bonuses, rose by 5.4% in the three months to August 2022. Overall, once inflation is considered, average pay fell by 2.9%. This fall in wages has led many people to rely on hardship schemes and other crisis support to make ends meet. Data from Trussell Trust support this and identified 1 in 7 people using their food banks were employed⁴.

Citizen Advice Bureaux (CAB) throughout Scotland are experiencing an unprecedented increase in demand from households enquiring about financial support and help towards managing their living costs as their circumstances change. Recent polling has identified that 38% of adults in Scotland, an estimated 1.7 million, feel anxious or worried about being able to pay their energy bills. The same amount are anxious or worried about adequately heating their home.

Households are finding it difficult to keep up with the rising costs of utility/household bills and the effects of the recent energy and now cost of living crisis. At times, having to make the choice between heating their homes or feeding their families, with many slipping into poverty quickly, which is having an impact on their own/families health and wellbeing.

Providing holistic advice and energy safeguarding delivered at a local level is the key to alleviating both the immediate effects and root causes of fuel poverty and to creating safe and warm homes. Our partnership with SGN will help CAB support the increase in demand coming from Scotland's most Fuel Poor communities in areas of deprivation.

3 Scope and objectives

Our Safe and Warm Space initiative will build on the existing local community relationships and partnerships within the CAB. The project will identify and work with 20 CAB's in areas identified as fuel poor within SGN's gas network. Participating CAB's will provide targeted intervention via local community outreaches this winter to further their client reach to those most affected by the energy crisis and who are from extreme fuel poverty.

² https://www.cas.org.uk/system/files/publications/col_october_2022_09.11.pdf

³ [Energy bills support factsheet - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/111111/energy_bills_support_factsheet.pdf)

⁴ [Do working people need food banks? - The Trussell Trust](https://www.trusselltrust.org/working-people-need-food-banks/)

Outreach services provide much-needed additional support to clients who are living in areas and to those deemed vulnerable and excluded. These clients will receive an enhanced level of support with advisers coming to a location near them, rather than vice versa so there are no travel costs for the clients.

Outreaches will include, but will not be limited to warm hubs, libraries, foodbanks, schools and NHS/health settings - GP surgeries, health centres or community hospitals. Peripatetic advisers would visit the outreaches on a rolling basis providing holistic advice to clients. These advisers will focus on energy advice and income maximisation, but also provide generalist advice about priority service register and carbon monoxide awareness or refer clients to specialist advisers in the CAB.

The advisers will provide in-depth, holistic and bespoke advice to around 1890 CAB clients and up to 900 people of which 300 are frontline workers at group sessions. These 121 or group sessions will help lift clients out of poverty, maximise household income, and increase clients resilience to manage fuel bills and keep their homes warm.

- 1) Bureaux will reach out to their well-established regional partnerships and access local community groups to help promote the service and encourage referrals and joint working. The focus will be on supporting clients from fuel poor households and in areas where there is extreme fuel poverty, bureaux will be given the opportunity to work in consortia, for example one adviser could attend outreaches for 2 neighbouring bureaux.
- 2) Advisers will help clients maximise their income and make financial savings on their energy bills and provide further support around energy usage, energy debt and redress as well as access to further support schemes available.

Front Line workers will cascade learnings from group sessions to their clients and referring them for further support to our CAB's.

Objectives

Our Safe and Warm Space initiative will:

- help reduce a fuel poor households vulnerability
- educate fuel poor households around energy usage and available support
- provide income maximisation and benefit checks
- access to the priority service register, carbon monoxide awareness
- other services provided by CAB and referral partners
- support front line workers with necessary advice around energy safeguarding and energy usage

The bureaux network see the impact that fuel poverty and associated debt has on people's lives. The CAB service will reach vulnerable groups effectively. Struggling to pay bills can lead to significant negative mental and physical health impacts and detriment. The holistic support that advisers provide can significantly improve the quality of life of people living in vulnerable situations and help to reduce vulnerability generally.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project will provide support to clients in energy crisis, providing access to key services from CAB including the PSR, interventions that address fuel and water poverty and broader safeguarding and wellbeing services, whilst delivering a positive Social Return on Investment. The project will provide holistic utility efficiency advice, income maximisation and debt management and CO safety interventions, empowering each householder to use energy/appliances safely, efficiently, and affordably. The project will work collaboratively with other organisations/communities to maximise positive impacts beyond energy, increasing the health and wellbeing of the individuals supported and delivering defined outcomes.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Citizen Advice Scotland

Frontline workers group sessions delivered by the Safe and Warm Advice Service between April and December 2022 -

- 222 frontline workers attended a group session.
- 74% estimated that 60-100% of their clients were in fuel poverty.
- Over 90% reported that the sessions were useful and helped to increase their confidence in delivering energy advice.
- Most intended to share what they had learnt with their colleagues and clients.

Frontline workers who completed the survey rated the Safe and Warm sessions highly and reported improved confidence in their ability to provide advice to clients on energy issues. Most expected to pass on knowledge gained in the sessions to both colleagues and clients. All frontline workers described aspects of the session as good or excellent. This includes the presentation skills of the trainer that 100% reported was excellent, the usefulness of the session that 100% reported was excellent and the overall content that 100% reported was excellent. The sessions increased many frontline workers awareness of energy issues.

Frontline workers anticipated that they would pass on what they had learnt during the sessions to either clients or colleagues. Frontline workers were asked to give an estimate of how many clients they expect to advise in the next six months using information they had learnt. The frontline workers said they would probably or definitely pass on what they learnt at the session to an average of 9 colleagues, estimating that they would pass what they had learnt on to an average of 193 clients.

5.2 Moving Forward Together – Stakeholder Workshops held during 2018 and 2020

Sharing our top 5 scenarios with our stakeholders during our engagement workshops, they agreed that providing essential emergency funding for customers in vulnerable circumstances should remain one of our top priorities, helping our most vulnerable customers in relation to affordability. 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 essentials services.

5.3 Vulnerable Steering Group

Our Vulnerable Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2. With their guidance we intend to prioritise key initiatives to support our most vulnerable customers. It is with guidance and support from our dedicated Vulnerable Steering Group that SGN should use data to prioritise and target communities most likely to be living in a cold and unhealthy home whilst working alongside other go to support networks to ensure support is holistic and customer centric and is flexible to deliver the required support to those in need this winter. In 2021 our strategic steering group re-iterated 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.

5.4 SGN RIIO-GD2 Business Plan

In the process of shaping our RIIO GD2 Business Plan we engaged stakeholders and customers about our plan to support 50,000 customers each year through a three-tiered approach, and what services/initiatives should be included within each of those tiers. During our Positive Impact round table event our stakeholders emphasised the importance of partnerships to increase the value of our allowance in generating positive outcomes for customers. Feedback from our Customer Service & Supporting Vulnerable Customer – Shaping the Business Plan Qualitative Workshops suggested potential tier two initiatives should include supporting those most vulnerable to living in a cold and unhealthy home.

6 Outcomes, associated actions and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

CAS will report to SGN halfway through the project and at the end on:

- Support 900 to 1,100 people (clients or frontline workers) via group sessions
- Support 1,680 to 1,900 clients
- Provide 6,000 to 6,750 pieces of advice to clients

Number of clients who have been:

- Given energy advice and support
- Signed up to the PSR
- Received a financial gain
- Received a non-financial gain
- Volume of pieces of advice given

Also including:

- Number of contacts with clients
- Number and type of referrals made to partnership organisations
- Client satisfaction

6.2 Success Criteria

- 1,890 People Reached
- Approx. 100 CO Alarms gifted (one to one advice)
- Approx. 60 CO alarms gifted (group sessions/roadshows, etc)
- 63 CO Awareness Conversation
- 436 CO awareness group sessions See below
- 30 Debt Write Off
- 1,032 Emergency Funds
- 1,280 Energy Advice Behavioural
- 191 Food and Household Essentials
- 667 Income Max / Benefits Checks
- Locking Cooker Valve (Referral)
- 200 PSR Registrations
- 166 Utility Tariff Service (Energy/Water)
- 434 Warm Homes Discount
- 867 Billing/meter reading
- 600 Complaints and redress
- 700 No. of consumers at group sessions
- 300 No. of frontline workers at group sessions
- 319 Home Energy Scotland (HES)
- 31 HES Referrals
- 132 HES Energy Advice
- 91 HES Signposting
- 87 HES Home Energy Check
- 27 Warmer Homes Scotland referral

To monitor our impact in line with the above, we will:

- Monitor outcomes against services provided
- Monitor who is making use of the service - customer demographics, vulnerabilities, and needs

- Work closely with organisations who will support clients to ensure that we all understand the issues faced to continue to develop our services at a local level

7 Project partners and third parties involved

- SGN
- Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS)
- Home Energy Scotland (HES)
- Gas Safe Charity
- Local partners including the NHS, social care, local third sector organisations, local authorities, libraries
- Local community groups, local warm hubs and healthcare settings, eg GP surgeries

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
- In-bound and out-bound referrals from/to partners and other services recorded/monitored
- Feedback, indicators, outputs, and outcomes reported at end of initiative

Learning

We will learn about the energy advisor programme and the 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.

We will learn more around the challenges fuel poor households face with the impact of Cost-of-Living Crisis and the engagement/partnerships CAS/CAB have set up locally with other stakeholders to provide additional support services to lift these households out of fuel poverty.

CAS will be trained on CO/PSR from SGN and if successful this model could be adopted throughout all of CAS moving forward.

This project will help us build a framework for Years 3 to 5 with CAS supporting households in fuel poverty with the option to expand the reach into other geographical areas as per our Vulnerability Strategy.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

Social Value Measurement

Working with 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 in-depth assessment of the financial and wellbeing outcomes associated with this project and we forecast a positive net social return of £9.19.

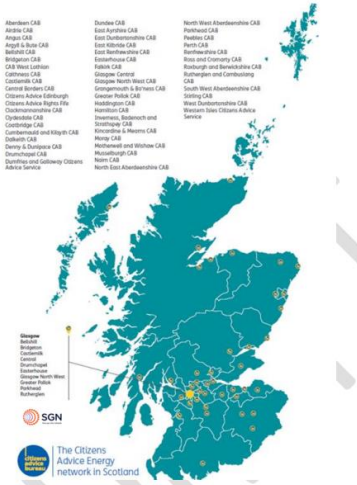
5-year reporting figures		
Economic	Total cost	£352,200.00

Total gross present value	£3,590,177.10
	£3,237,977.10
	£9.19

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from February 23 to August 23

11 Geographic area



Top 20 FP locations in Scotland supported by CAB.

12 Approval

Rob Gray - Director of Stakeholder Relations and Communications