

Help for Warmth Dorset

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

August 2024

SGN



SGN

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1 Description

Project title	Help for Warmth - Dorset
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	01/08/2024
Project contact name:	Janet Duggan
Project contact email:	Janet.Duggan@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£674,833.50
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£279,833.50

2 Problem statement

According to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, the number of households who are required to spend more than 10 per cent of their income (after housing costs) on domestic energy rose in 2023 to 36.4 per cent of households (8.91 million), up from 27.4 per cent in 2022 (6.66 million). Lower income households are more likely to respond to higher energy prices by cutting energy use below safe levels. Some will find themselves in the situation where energy will become unaffordable, resulting in self-disconnection or unmanageable energy debt.

Typical energy bills under the January to March 2024 price cap were almost 60% higher than in winter 2021/22. Although the price cap lowered again from April this year it is once again rising in October, so with no further cost of living payments scheduled, we can say with some certainty that the effects of the cost-of-living crisis will continue to be felt by our residents. DESNZ have also reported that rising housing costs have brought an estimated 51,000 households into fuel poverty this year and “after considering energy rebates, energy efficiency and household changes the overall required energy costs increased by 27 per cent between 2022 and 2023 in real terms. The change in energy prices after government support is estimated to have increased fuel poverty by around 238,000 households over this period.”

Nationally, Citizen’s Advice helped over 220,000 people with crisis support in 2023 – their highest figure to date. They are also seeing a marked increase in people presenting with complex problems, and multiple debts so when someone presents with energy issues, such as affordability, billing, and customer service, they also need support in other areas.

National Energy Action’s July 2024 figures show 5.6 million English households are in fuel poverty (<https://www.nea.org.uk/fuel-poverty-map/>), 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 household 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.

In the same NEA YouGov polling it was found that 49% of households turned the heating off even though it was cold in the house, 43% of adults had gone to bed early to stay warm and 13% of households had used appliances like ovens to stay warm.

Findings from [Friends of the Earth](#) predict that last year almost 1.2 million households were in extreme fuel poverty, spending more than 20% of their disposable income on energy in 2024. Over 400,000 households will be spending between 20-30% of their income on energy costs. Friends of the Earth highlight the strong correlation between vulnerable customer groups and fuel poverty, reporting that 21% of households in fuel poverty have somebody in receipt of disability payments and 42% of older people are spending more than 10% of their income on energy.

Dorset is in the South West, which has the largest regional fuel poverty gap (2022) of £289 for the [region](#). Of the eight constituencies in Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole council areas, 4 are above the South West average and 2 are equal to or exceed the national average. For example, South Dorset (including Weymouth) has 5,888 households in fuel poverty - above national average. North Dorset has 4,723 households in fuel poverty and Bournemouth East (including Boscombe) has 6,503 households in fuel poverty – above the national average. Over the last five years in The South West, according to the [Office for National Statistics](#), an average of 500 people died from cold-related illness over the winter.

Other local factors include;

There are a higher number of households [Off gas grid](#); much higher than the national average with around 50% (50.7% in West Dorset, 47.2% in North Dorset) households unable to access gas central heating. A large proportion of households in North and West Dorset are off the main gas grid and use oil as their primary fuel. This makes it harder, especially for PPM customers, making self-disconnection more prevalent.

Incomes; a lower-than-average gross weekly pay at 10% below the national median. Dorset has four constituency areas of high need with regards the measure of fuel poverty and multiple smaller pockets of deprivation these include Boscombe West (Bournemouth) Weymouth Town, Central Bournemouth, Westham North and Radipole.

The Dorset Council areas of significant deprivation are largely located in the urban areas - in particular the former borough of Weymouth & Portland - but many of Dorset's rural communities could also be considered deprived in terms of barriers to housing and essential services. There are 11 areas in Dorset within the top 20% most deprived nationally for multiple deprivation, up from 10 in 2015. 46% of Dorset's population lives in rural areas. Barriers to housing and essential services are significant in Dorset reflecting rurality and distance from services. 66 Dorset neighbourhoods fall in the 20% most deprived nationally.

Dorset Council area has a population of 380,000 residents, 29% of whom are aged 65 and older (compared to 19% in England and Wales). In Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole council area income deprivation affecting older people has 31 LSOAs within the most deprived 20%.

Ridgewater Energy is a local organisation, providing free professional and impartial energy advice, support, and access to various sources of funding to help improve home energy efficiency for the residents of Dorset. Ridgewater Energy's team have 60 years of combined experience, in designing, developing, and delivering local schemes and projects to improve the energy efficiency of Dorset residents' homes. The service provides a one-stop shop for local organisations and agencies across Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council areas who refer vulnerable households for access to advice, home visits and funding for small energy saving upgrades (e.g., LED lightbulbs, radiator reflectors, draughtproofing etc) insulation, heating upgrades, renewable energy technologies, heat the person resources and comprehensive energy advice guides and information.

Ridgewater Energy's team supports a wide cross-section of households across all tenures of housing and in all housing types, and typically assist a higher percentage of households containing older people, disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions.

The current Ridgewater Energy service has seen an increased demand for home visits and with the current funding allocated are unable to provide this specialist service especially to customers that often fall just outside the qualifying criteria or the current capacity of the team.

3 Scope and objectives

Working in partnership, SGN and Ridgewater Energy will bring together local councils, charitable, 3rd sector partners, the health sector, social housing providers and the private rented sector to tackle fuel poverty and introduce energy safeguards that help those most vulnerable maintain a safe and warm home. The partnership aims to build capacity to support and access to high quality holistic home visits to get the full picture of any issues the resident is facing, in the more relaxed environment of their own home, where they ordinarily open

up far more about all the issues they are experiencing. This will allow for more high impact cross-referrals to other project and local partners.

The objective of the partnership is to help a wider cross-section of vulnerable BCP and Dorset residents through bespoke home visits, to assist them in reducing their energy bills, increasing their energy safety awareness and in achieving affordable warmth. This will result in reductions in levels of fuel poverty, poor indoor air quality and health outcomes, energy debt, along with removing barriers to effective additional support and cross-referral.

Through this partnership and the development of this new service we will jointly provide:

- Train frontline workers and volunteers on energy safeguarding, energy efficiency and assistance schemes and how to refer via online or in-person sessions
- Provide households with a high-quality energy advice home visit, delivered by a qualified energy advisor, including where required, free heat-the-person items, such as heated throws and additional condensation and damp advice, survey, and fact-finding (includes using a thermal imaging camera, damp meter, assessing what type of damp it might be and advising the resident on potential next steps for a resolution to the issue)
- Provide households with free small energy saving items, such as LED lightbulbs, remote controlled sockets etc, which will be funded by BCP and Dorset Council for their respective areas.
- Provide free gas boiler services to eligible vulnerable households
- Provide some households with a free Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) and provide advice and information on any funded improvements possible
- Provide clients with light touch, in person, advice through talking to advisors at events, talks and drop-ins
- Provide information on the Priority Services Register and support where required to help identified vulnerable households to sign up for support
- Provide access to the Locking Cooker Valve where required for dementia groups and/or people with autism
- Provide information on carbon monoxide (CO) safety and where required provide free CO alarms

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project will support vulnerable residents in Dorset struggling to maintain a safe and warm home by providing in home energy visits and energy safeguarding support.

The project delivers against SGNs Vulnerability Strategy, by providing targeted support to households on low-income, disabilities, older people, families and the financially vulnerable most at risk of living in fuel poverty based upon their personal circumstances.

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 3 (with outcomes in 2 & 4)

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Ridgewater Energy

The Ridgewater Energy team provide deliver 'Healthy Homes Dorset' for BCP Council, Dorset Council and Public Health Dorset, which is the flagship, longest running (since 2013) consistent program for energy advice and staple energy efficiency measure funding. The scheme has a basis in supporting people primarily with health conditions to assist them with assessments for energy efficiency measures including loft and cavity wall insulation, and also crucially they deliver energy advice over the telephone and by e-mail, to all BCP and Dorset households like a 'free-at-the-point-of-use' NHS model does. The service also provides home visits under LEAP (Local Energy Advice Partnership: <https://www.ridgewaterenergy.co.uk/projects-and-services/leap/>) as well as under Shared Prosperity Fund and Household Support fund, although the 2 latter funding sources are set to discontinue between September 2024 and March 2025. In addition, we are currently delivering BCP and Dorset Councils HUG2 program: <https://www.dorset-hug.co.uk/>.

Ridgewater Energy partners said:

Amy Gallacher – Community Initiatives Manager – Wellbeing Corporate Directorate – BCP Council

"Ridgewater Energy is a key partner working with BCP Council in delivering the Household Support Fund programme to help those struggling with the costs of living. They are an extremely valued, trusted, and well-respected local organisation that delivers to a high standard. I know that I can trust them to help our residents with energy advice and support, but not only that, they provide this in a friendly non-judgemental way that means the person feels confident to ask for the help that they need and receives clear advice and guidance from a team that has a wealth of knowledge and experience. Working together, Ridgewater Energy has been exceptional in their proactive approach to go above and beyond, to innovate and respond to evolving community needs with new ideas and initiatives. This has included the design and creation of a new "Energy and Money Saving Booklet" and a Tenants and Landlords Advice Booklet on "Condensation and Damp", which has been widely distributed by partners and within community venues across the BCP area and receiving lots of positive feedback on it's easy read and helpful tips approach. They have also organised and distributed heated throws to help people keep warm during the winter, working closely with other community partners and receiving "Thank you's" about the difference it has made for people. This is alongside offering the core services around energy support, through insulation grants, energy advice home visits, emergency boiler repairs and replacements, and extending the white goods and appliances scheme for those that do not have access to this equipment.

Jon Bird - Service Manager - Growth & Economic Regeneration – Dorset Council

"Ridgewater Energy are our current tendered delivery agent for Healthy Homes Dorset, which is a long-standing joint BCP, Dorset Council and Public Health Dorset initiative, to help residents in or at risk of fuel poverty, in poor health, or on low incomes to achieve affordable warmth and keep healthy at home. Ridgewater Energy have been successfully delivering the program for the last three and a half years and have offered an exemplar service, that has been able to assist residents with insulation, heating and renewable energy improvements and upgrades alongside high quality energy advice and referrals to other partner agencies. We are happy to support them in this bid."

Neil Short – Strategic Lead: Climate, Resources & Sustainability – BCP Council

"Ridgewater Energy deliver a number of public-facing services on behalf of the Council, including Healthy Homes Dorset insulation grants, Local Energy Advice Partnership home visits, LAD and HUG2 grant schemes. They have also delivered energy-related elements of our Household Support Fund and Shared Prosperity Fund initiatives for central Government. We have confidence in their ability to project-manage these services, to achieve ambitious targets and provide an excellent customer experience. This is particularly relevant in instances where customers are considered vulnerable, and successfully assisting these clients is a particular strength, so we fully support this bid".

Laura Wilcox – Expert Energy Advisor – Citizens Advice Energy Unit

The Citizens Advice Energy Unit has a very positive working relationship with Ridgewater Energy and work very closely to support Dorset residents in fuel crisis. When we work together, we are able to bring a much more holistic and in-depth offering to clients. For example, the Energy Unit are able to offer longer-term case work and work through energy supplier issues, meter issues and helping clients access vouchers and maximise their income, as well as assist with other issues that might be contributing to the client's circumstances. Between our organisations, we have a vast knowledge base and well-trained teams, which allows us to give professional impartial energy advice, refer to multiple partners and services, identify common difficulties, understand the housing stock and the associated issues, risks, and solutions.

There is a great deal of empathy, understanding and support that we are both able to provide to get real long-term positive outcomes for Dorset residents. These client interactions result in lower bills, higher household income, more disposable income (which is also to the benefit of local commerce) better physical and mental health, and carbon emissions reductions.

Ridgewater Energy - Customer Feedback

I am so grateful to everyone I dealt with at Ridgewater Energy, they were caring and able to help me with multiple issues, the most urgent being my boiler, which had been broken for over a year, which they arranged to have replaced for free all within 10 days. I also had a home visit through LEAP and was signed up for free water saving bits, as well as being referred to Income Max where they identified another £10 per week in disability benefits for me. Finally, I was also able to have my loft insulated and they gave me a heated throw to help keep me warm in the evenings! I would recommend their services to anyone as I was pleasantly surprised with what I was able to get help with!

5.2 SGNs Vulnerability Steering Group (VSG)

Our Vulnerability Steering Group has helped us shape our vulnerability strategy and our priorities for GD2 from strategy into delivery it is with their guidance that we prioritise key initiatives to support our most vulnerable customers stay safe and warm in their homes.

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 who are in poor health, on low incomes, living in rural areas, in EPC D-G properties (or with no EPC), suffering with damp and mould and where a home visit would help identify other need most effectively.

In 2024, our strategic VSG re-iterated the vital impact we could have by coordinating 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

Through the partnership SGN and Ridgewater Energy will increase and improve resident's resilience to fuel poverty and reduce their risk of cold-related illnesses by:

- Giving free and impartial, in-the-home, face-to-face advice to customers on how to reduce their energy use, save money on their household bills and reduce energy debt
- Give customers the knowledge and tools to achieve affordable warmth, by providing free 'heat-the-person' items, such as heated throws and winter warmth packs (gloves, scarfs, blankets, flasks etc), coupled with heating control (thermostats, TRV's, programmers, storage heater settings, smart meters) and wellbeing advice (hot meals, movement, referrals to 'Live Well Dorset')

- Equip customers with knowledge through in-home, face-to-face advice on reading their energy bills, payment methods available, energy debt trusts, social tariffs for utilities, efficient appliance use, ventilation, how to reduce moisture levels
- Provide customers with the appropriate free and local 'Energy and Money Saving' Guides, Condensation and Damp booklets, heating control factsheets, 'Scamwise'* and 'Winter Warmth'* (* provided by the older persons charity Independent Age) and factsheets on any measures they may require under any funded schemes
- Providing customers with carbon monoxide (CO) safety awareness advice and literature and offering free CO monitors where appropriate
- Offer customers suffering with high levels of condensation or damp with an additional element of the visit, which provides them with a hygrometer to measure temperature and humidity. Checks made and advice given on proper ventilation along with using a damp meter and thermal imaging camera if required, to help identify any further actionable issues
- Assisting customers to sign up for Priority Services (Gas, Electricity, Water), social tariffs and free water saving devices
- Check insulation, heating, and the opportunity for renewable energy technologies, via the home visit and compile an EPC, to improve available data for advice and to check whether it meets criteria for government schemes like ECO4, Great British Insulation Scheme and any other national or local Retrofit scheme e.g., HUG2 and any future iterations
- Refer customers into the 'Locking Cooker Valves Scheme' and Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES) when appropriate
- Identifying customers for additional support through the SGN partnership network and supporting with onward referrals including;
 - Citizens Advice for supplier and meter issues, energy repayment plans, trust funds, debt write-off, crisis support along with emergency fuel and food vouchers
 - Citizens Advice and Faithworks for benefits checks and debt advice
 - Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, for a free 'Safe and Well' visit, where they will identify home safety hazards such as fire risk, escape routes and trips and falls hazards
 - Council departments for homelessness prevention, tenancy sustainment, property condition issues in the rental sector, anti-social behaviour, and safeguarding
 - Healthy Homes Dorset where eligible for loft and cavity wall insulation and if funding allows, boiler replacements and top ups to other national funding schemes in the event of a shortfall in funding against cost
- Reducing stress, anxiety and improving mental wellbeing for vulnerable customers.

6.2 Success Criteria

The project will support 2,650 clients over 18-months addressing the issues of cold damp homes, fuel poverty and poor health outcomes.

The support will be aimed at the most vulnerable and in need and will look to include wherever possible, CO awareness, Priority Services Register advice including help to sign up, and referrals into energy safeguarding schemes. Over the 18-months our ambition is to;

- Train 120 frontline workers and volunteers on energy safeguarding, energy efficiency and assistance schemes and how to refer via online or in-person sessions
- Provide 1,200 households with a high-quality energy advice home visit, delivered by a qualified energy advisor who will identify opportunities for practical ways to reduce energy costs and increase energy efficiency, and provide bespoke advice on damp and the provision on in home energy resources based on their needs including but not limited to;
 - 1,200 Energy efficiency packs including LED lightbulbs (funded by BCP & Dorset Council)
 - 1,200 households assessed for CO risk with an expectation of 300 CO alarms issued

- 1,200 households assessed for PSR eligibility and offered support to sign up
- 1,200 households assess for energy crisis support with an expectation to provide 300 Heated throw blankets, 200 bespoke winter warmth packs and 150 water saving devices
- Identify and provide 100 owner occupier households with a free gas boiler service carried out by a local trusted gas safe installer (part of Ridgewater Energy's approved supply chain)
- Provide 150 households with a free Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) and provide advice and information on any funded improvements possible
- Deliver 130 community events, talks, drop-ins, reaching 1,200 households with in person energy advice. Session outcomes to cover;
 - CO awareness and clients given a leaflet
 - PSR awareness and support to help eligible homes sign up (forecast circa 250)
 - Identify and refer households who would benefit from the Locking Cooker Valve (forecast 10)
 - Identify and refer households for a 'Safe and Well' visit from DWFRS (forecast 50)
 - Identify and refer households to 'Live Well Dorset' for diet, exercise, stop smoking and drinking advice and support (forecast 50):
 - Provide households with additional condensation advice and survey and free hygrometer (forecast 200)
 - Provide a warm referral pathway onto Citizens Advice for casework, supplier and meter issues, debt support, food, and fuel vouchers (forecast 200).

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, CO awareness literature and alarms.
- **Ridgewater Energy** – Delivery and coordination of the service, including promotion, event attendance, outreach, home energy visit design and delivery, cross-referring into SGN and wider partner network.
- **Dorset Council** – Will provide £25,000 funding for energy saving devices for the home visits, which may include LED lightbulbs, radiator reflectors, remote controlled sockets, chimney balloons, air fryers etc. They will also directly refer into the service, in particular via the Housing Standards and Sustainability teams.
- **Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole Council** – Will provide £25,000 funding for energy saving devices for the home visits, which may include LED lightbulbs, radiator reflectors, remote controlled sockets, chimney balloons, air fryers etc. They will also refer into the service, in particular via the Access to Food, homelessness and Financial Resilience partnerships as well as Private Sector Housing, Tenancy Sustainment, Support and Inclusion, Communities and Sustainability teams.
- **Carer Support Services** – Actively support the local Carer Groups and the National Carers Rights Day by attending these events held, giving talks and personalised energy advice at a point most suitable for the carer.
- **Citizens Advice Purbeck and East Dorset – Energy Unit** – Mutual referral relationship, as they benefit the clients we see. This is often for energy casework, supplier and meter support, debt advice, debt trust applications and other advocacy work.
- **Private Landlords and Letting Agents** – There are strong links into some of the largest local landlords and letting agents that between them own, or manage over 10,000 properties in Dorset, with the majority of these being in the poorer wards.
- **Social Housing Providers** – Referrals and event attendance opportunities often available with Sovereign Housing, Aster Group, Magna Housing, BCP Homes, Dorset Council and East Borough Housing Trust. Joint housing stock in Dorset estimated at 22,000 homes.
- **Age UK** – Share information on services available, making and receiving direct referrals.

- **Public Health Dorset** – Help promote service provision that prevents cold damp homes and to help improve health outcomes. A partner in Healthy Homes Dorset, they are able to push out comms via their own public and internal channels.
- **Social Prescribers** – Working out of local GP services who currently make 3rd party referrals into Ridgewater Energy online, this is very often for vulnerable patients and carers.
- **Food Settings** – Outlets all over Dorset, such as foodbanks, community fridges, lunch clubs and cooking classes run by a diverse network of providers like Trussell Trust, Faithworks, Bournemouth Churches Housing Association, Poole Waste not Want Not, Hope for Food and others refer into Ridgewater Energy and can disseminate information and allow access to some sessions/events.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

This partnership has been co-designed by Ridgewater Energy 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 support service to share ideas and challenges through individual and organisational partnership case studies.

Learning

We are keen to learn from this project and for successes to be incorporated into ongoing projects that engage with fuel poor vulnerable households. Through working across 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 across stakeholder organisations which result in an improved understanding of clients' needs.

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 model, working with other GDN’s, enabling more vulnerable households to be supported.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV

We worked with leading social impact research consultancy SIRIO Strategies, using the Industry Standard Social Value Framework and supporting GDN Rulebook 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 on Investment of £1.08.

Social Value Measurement

Total cost*	£273,483.64
Total gross present value	£568,925.66

Net Present Value (NPV)	£295,442.02
SROI	£1.08

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

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from September 2024 to March 2026 (19 months)

11 Geographic area

Dorset (BCP and Dorset Council areas)

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 Ridgewater Energy 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 Social Value Framework and Supporting GDN rulebook. As detailed above SIRIO Strategies have reviewed the current partnership scope which has been forecast at adding an additional £1.08 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and Ridgewater Energy 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.