

Switched On

Energy Advice for Rushmoor

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

November 2024

SGN



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1 Description

Project title	Switched On – Energy Advice for Rushmoor
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	31/10/2024
Project contact name:	Janet Duggan
Project contact number/email:	janet.duggan@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£70,193.00
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£70,193.00

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 was lowered in April this year it went up 10% in October and will rise again in January 2025, we can say with some certainty that the effects of the cost-of-living crisis will continue to be felt by those on the lowest incomes the most. 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, Citizens 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 2024 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 more than 1 million households were in extreme fuel poverty, spending more than 20% of their disposable income on energy. 742,200 households will be spending between 20-30% of their income on energy costs, 196,500 between 30-40%, and 117,400 more than 40%. 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.

Rushmoor in Hampshire, despite its geographical location, it is a densely populated and diverse borough that suffers poor levels of economic activity, health, educational attainment, and housing tenure, in stark comparison with its many neighbouring very affluent districts.

As a local constituency, Aldershot (of which Rushmoor makes up the vast majority) has 3,254 households, approximately 7.5%, living in fuel poverty – higher than the Hampshire average. [ONS](#) data also suggests there have been 230 excess winter deaths over the last five years as a result of cold-related issues.

According to the latest [Index of Multiple Deprivation](#), Rushmoor has three areas of worsening multiple deprivation that are in the 20% most deprived in the country, including several LSOAs with deprivation across multiple indicators in the 10% most deprived in England:

- Part of Cherrywood ward (LSOA 119 ranked 3,693 - down from 4,691 in 2015)
- Part of Aldershot Park ward (LSOA 108 ranked 4,053 – down from 4,452 in 2015)
- Part of Wellington ward (LSOA 142 ranked 5,123 – down from 9,131 in 2015)

An area within central Aldershot contains the highest proportion of over 60s in income deprivation in the country, according to the [Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index \(IDAOPI\)](#). LSOA 142 ranks number 1 out of 32,844 areas across England in the latest data from 2019. In fact, the wider Rushmoor area has the highest levels of income deprivation amongst over 60s in the whole of the South East.

As [data from Census 2021](#) illustrates, Rushmoor has a higher proportion of non-UK born residents – including a sizeable older Nepalese community (the majority of which are ex-Army Gurkhas) which make up over 10% of local population, which presents significant additional language, cultural and digital barriers. 8.9% of the population speak Nepali as their main language. Rushmoor has the highest number of Nepali residents of any authority in England and Wales (10,575). It is more ethnically diverse than Hampshire, the South East, and England – as well as itself back at the time of Census 2011.

There is also substantial Armed Forces Community with a high number of veterans in addition to serving personnel and families, including almost 2,000 households living in Service Families Accommodation (SFA). SFA housing has long been considered widely inadequate as cited in the report from the [House of Commons](#).

Higher health inequalities, including greater levels of obesity, smoking, and mental ill-health are also prevalent, as set out by data from the [OHID](#).

Citizens Advice Rushmoor is an independent charity providing free confidential and impartial advice and support to the residents of the Rushmoor area. They have built expertise in energy advice and have delivered this work through a number of programmes over the past 7 years.

Most recently, over the past two years as part of the Safe and Warm Community Scheme they collaborated with Farnborough-based local community group [Prospect Estate Big Local \(PEBL\)](#) to deliver energy advice to some of Rushmoor's hardest to reach groups. However, at the end of this current funding period, PEBL are due to disband when their Big Local Big Lottery funding comes to end, and therefore this service is at risk of being lost.

Through a series of consistent engagement across the community, the project is on track to far exceed its targets of providing energy advice and support to over 850 households since July 2023.

In addition to weekly outreach at local food banks, the project has developed so it best meets client need. They have worked with local partners to attend community events and activities, as well as secure referral pathways for some of the most marginalised individuals and families, such as asylum seekers. This is in addition establishing a clear programme of promotion so that households in need may also self-refer.

The project has involved a two-pronged approach to help people deal with high and unaffordable energy costs; personalised advice on how to reduce their usage, whilst increasing the money needed to put towards fuel. The service has strived to work holistically, offering a person-centred approach to the work with a strong triage offer. Given residents accessing the project often face complex intersectionality in their needs for support, as older

people, disabled people, as well as those with language barriers, this means their difficulties often far exceed just energy needs, demonstrating why a wraparound service of support has been so effective. This complexity of client issues has increased from an average of 2.4 (Q3 2023-24) to 3.9 (Q2 2024-25).

The added benefit of delivering energy advice through the Citizen Advice network is the integration of energy within a holistic advice and casework service, providing a seamless experience for the clients they support.

Advisers have also worked to access external financial support for clients, including Household Support Fund energy vouchers, funding for white goods and other energy efficiency measures, and for those in crisis vouchers via the Fuel Bank Foundation for their PPM. c£75,000 in support has been secured, in addition to financial outcomes related to behavioural change, income maximised, and debt written off or managed.

c60% of service users have had a disability or long-term health condition, c15% have been from the Nepali community, and c25% have been over 60 – all above local proportions.

Demand for the service has grown and continues to without funding this service will be discontinued.

3 Scope and objectives

By working in partnership with Citizens Advice Rushmoor, the partnership objective is to identify and support priority vulnerable customers in Rushmoor; to help alleviate fuel poverty, provide energy safeguarding services and increase energy safety awareness.

Through the partnership we will provide:

- Training and support for frontline community leaders through the 'Advice First Aid' programme to identify and support households living in fuel poverty, for referral into the service where required
- Provide energy safeguarding support services to help alleviate fuel poverty ensuring that the service can be tailored to meet the needs of a diverse community (e.g. regular drop-in service for older Nepali residents and translation services for those unable to communicate in English)
- Hold and attend energy events and workshops at warm spaces and community hubs, as well as drop-in services, for people affected by fuel poverty to help them address the underlying causes, including older people, people with long-term health conditions and the Nepali community
- 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 safety and where required provide free carbon monoxide alarms
- Provide access to fuel vouchers and other grants including HSF (where available) for households in energy crisis
- Provide access to CA caseworkers to help those most vulnerable receive specialist 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 targeting hard to reach communities via regular outreach and engagement, the partnership's ambition is to help now and leave a lasting 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 work with priority vulnerable households experiencing fuel poverty in Rushmoor.

The project delivers against SGNs Vulnerability Strategy, by targeting households on low-income, people who have long-term health conditions, those with language and cultural barriers and older people.

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 priority groups who may be in crisis, 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 all of the strategic pillar 3 (with outcomes in 2 & 4).

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Citizens Advice Rushmoor

Citizens Advice Rushmoor have a long and successful history of working in partnership to reach marginalised across Aldershot and Farnborough, receiving multiple awards in recent years from national Citizens Advice to acknowledge their achievements, including the 'Championing Equality' for their work with the local Nepali community, and 'Best Partnership Working' for their Reaching People Together project.

Customer Case Study:

William is 80 years old and lives alone in a privately rented retirement flat. He was struggling to afford to pay his energy bills also had several other specific energy issues he wanted advice on. Namely, he is physically unable to reach and read his meter, as it is placed high up on the wall. In addition, he has only been billed £1/month since 2022 and doesn't know why. He has been unable to contact his energy supplier about the issue because he has no email address and doesn't like to make phone calls, and the management at his property have said they can't move his meter. As a result of all this, William is concerned that he has been building up energy arrears and is worried that he will one day receive a huge, backdated bill.*

During our appointment with William, the Adviser talked him through some energy advice that will hopefully help to keep his usage low. They also signed William up to the Priority Services Register. They talked him through his best tariff options for his electric storage heaters and discussed the possibility of switching energy supplier if he is not happy with his current service (with the caveat that the switch would depend on the amount of arrears on his account). He was also informed that his EPC was D, but had expired in 2019, so he agreed to email his landlord about the possibility of updating it so that the Adviser could explore his eligibility for energy efficiency schemes and the Warm Home Discount.

William agreed for the Adviser to contact his energy supplier to find out what was happening with his billing. They did discuss the pros and cons of smart meters and how one could help him with his billing, but William decided he didn't want to have one installed at this stage.

Finally, after checking William's benefit entitlement, the Adviser informed him he was eligible for Council Tax Support, Housing Benefit, and potentially Attendance Allowance. He had no idea he might be able to claim these benefits, which would help hugely to make his rent and bills more affordable. William is now booked in for two more appointments to help him make these claims.

As a result of their work with William, he is now more knowledgeable and confident regarding his energy supply, and in the process of resolving the issues with his meter and supplier. Hopefully, he will be able to increase his benefits income and also reduce his energy usage at the same time.

Customer feedback:

“Extremely knowledgeable of subject. Without your help, I would not have known about the Priority Services Register. Great to be able to access extra support as someone who’s disabled.” Q3 2024/25

“The adviser is absolutely amazing and incredible - she is an absolute asset to your charity. Her compassion her empathy and understanding of my needs and concerns have been second to none. She has always ensured that because of my mental health issues she takes time always to listen reassure me and stops at nothing to ensure I get everything sorted. [The adviser] is exceptionally professional, going above and beyond to help resolve my energy debt - I could not do this without her help and support I have ongoing help and support due to my situation, and I cannot fault her. An incredible adviser who has helped save my life. It’s very rare to find someone who is willing to help you or that believes in you, but I want to say a big thank you for your continued help and support.” – Q2 2024/25

“Everything sorted and my big headache and fear of debt (electric/gas debt) resolved by you. Thank you. Impressed with the help I received from your energy service.” Q1 2024/25

Partner feedback – Surrey and Borders NHS Foundation Trust:

“[The adviser] has been an instrumentally part in supporting my client with her complex issues. [He] has gone above and beyond to ensure the best possible outcome. [He] has fantastic communication skills and has kept a number of people updated through the course of his work. My client has felt supported, and this support has helped her to maintain her mental health. Thank you.”

Partner feedback - Clive Grattan, Chair of Prospect Estate Big Local (PEBL)

“PEBL is constantly striving to reach and connect with those most in need in our community, especially as an area with such significant levels of deprivation. Citizens Advice Rushmoor – as our local area’s dedicated advice organisation – have been pivotal in helping design and deliver an array of projects over the last ten years, including the highly successful ‘Safe & Warm’ project since July 2023.

As well as the advice itself, Citizens Advice Rushmoor have used their ‘Advice First Aid’ sessions to upskill other volunteers within PEBL and the wider community (myself included!), so that we can also help to deliver energy support to others. This has been very successful with faith groups, youth groups and with other local organisations getting involved, helping to increase the capacity of the project and further increase the number of households who have been positively impacted by it.

I very much hope Citizens Advice Rushmoor can secure funding to continue this impactful project.”

5.2 SGNs Vulnerability Steering Group (VSG)

Our VSG 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 most likely to suffer detriment from living in a cold and unhealthy home, it was identified that we should prioritise our programmes that help people who are hardest to reach and most at risk of fuel poverty.

In 2024 our strategic steering group 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 & Citizens Advice Rushmoor will increase resilience to fuel poverty by:

- Encouraging vulnerable households to keep warm at home, to aid or improve their health and wellbeing. Helping them to find ways to better manage the balance of this with the costs involved
- Encouraging behavioural change in the home by better using what they have (e.g. thermostats, TRVs, isolators, heating controls, timers etc)
- Increasing household income through running Benefits Checks to identify eligibility, and making internal referral for help with benefits applications and/or appeals
- Building financial capability skills and confidence in the energy market (e.g. help understanding bills, understanding payment methods, confidence in contacting suppliers)
- Reducing energy debt through negotiating affordable repayment plans, applying to trust funds to get debt written off, or referring to our energy debt caseworkers where households have multiple debts and require full debt advice, challenging billing issues and applying the back-billing rules
- Applying for emergency help where needed (e.g. Household Support Fund, Prepayment Top-up Crisis Support Fund, Emergency Local Assistance, Food Parcels etc)
- Giving clients information on Carbon Monoxide safety awareness and offering CO alarms where appropriate
- Reducing stress and improving mental wellbeing among vulnerable households
- Assisting clients in understanding their rights and responsibilities and the energy suppliers' responsibilities to ensure accurate billing, giving confidence in raising complaints at the start of an issue
- Holistic support identified by advisers and appropriate referrals made to internal projects or offices or a partner organisation for additional advice
- Helping clients understand the pros and cons of smart meters to review what is best for that client
- Assessing eligibility and assisting with applications for the Priority Services Register (PSR), Locking Cooker Valve Scheme and Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES) when appropriate.

6.2 Success Criteria

To support at least 1,000 clients over 16 months addressing the issues of fuel poverty and cold homes.

We aim to support those most in need to receive specialist energy advice including information on the Priority Services Register, Carbon Monoxide Awareness, and other energy safeguarding schemes.

Over the period our ambition is to;

- Train 60 front line workers and volunteers on energy safeguarding / triage and referral
- Provide 300 households with personalised energy advice in person, or through specialist support worker referral route, from a qualified energy adviser (including the offer of a Quick Benefits Check)
- Provide an additional 100 clients with in-depth specialist advice to assist with the resolution of complex energy issues including energy debt, supplier and metering issues, income maximisation and the offer of home visits for vulnerable clients where appropriate
- Deliver 80 energy events and workshops at warm spaces and other community hubs, including a weekly Nepali language drop-in advice service
- Provide 600 clients with light touch, in person, advice through talking to advisers at events, warm spaces, and during drop-in services

We forecast that these interactions will result in;

- Signing up 100 vulnerable customers to the Priority Services Register
- Distributing 40 carbon monoxide alarms
- Identify 10 households that would benefit from an LCV and onward referral to SGN
- 150 households provided with energy vouchers from the Household Support Fund
- 50 households identified for fuel vouchers funded by Fuel Bank Foundation

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 alarms
- **Citizens Advice Rushmoor** – delivery and coordination of the service, including establishing regular and consistent outreach activities and drop-in services, targeting areas of deprivation and hard to reach communities, offering clients expert energy advice and support and onward support
- **Rushmoor Council referrals** - built a strong relationship with the Council's financial capabilities team, who frequently make third party referrals. These referrals most often come from the most deprived areas of Aldershot and Farnborough.
- **Carer Support Services** - actively support local carer groups, supplementing other energy-focus work undertaken by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers in Hampshire, attending these events held, giving talks and personalised energy advice at a point most suitable for the carer
- **Links with Nepali/ex-Gurkha community** – utilising existing partners, such as the Gurkha Welfare Trust and Greater Rushmoor Nepali Community, to help this hard-to-reach group to access advice and grants in a way which best suits their needs
- **Social Prescribers** - working out of local GP services who currently make third party referrals into Citizens Advice Rushmoor's generalist service for energy advice, this is often vulnerable patients.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

This partnership has been co-designed by Citizens Advice Rushmoor 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:

- 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 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 are keen to learn from this project and for successes to be incorporated into ongoing projects that engage with our financially vulnerable customers including those from communities where language and culture are barriers to support. Through working across Rushmoor 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 people's 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.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV

We and the other Gas Distribution Networks worked with leading social impact research consultancy SIRIO Strategies on the development of the Industry Standard Social Value Framework and supporting GDN Rulebook. We have used that 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 assessment of the predicted outcomes we forecast a positive net Social Return on Investment of £4.89.

Social Value Measurement

Total cost*	£68,295.22
Total gross present value	£402,495.88
Net Present Value (NPV)	£334,200.66
SROI	£4.89

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

10 VCMA Project start and end date

The project will run from December 2024 - March 2026 (16 months)

11 Geographic area

Rushmoor, Hampshire

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

SGN has worked alongside Citizens Advice Rushmoor 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 assessed internally using the GDN Rulebook developed by SIRIO Strategies as part of the Industry Standard Social Value Framework. As detailed above we have reviewed the current partnership scope which has been forecast at adding an additional £4.89 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and Citizens Advice Rushmoor 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.