

Safe & Warm - Sustainable Selkirk

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

31st July 2024

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1 Description

Project title	Safe & Warm - Sustainable Selkirk
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	31/07/24
Project contact name:	Margaret Hamilton
Project contact number/email:	Margaret.hamilton@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£117,257
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£117,257

2 Problem statement

Nearly one third of Scottish people cannot afford to stay warm. There are now an estimated 850,000 households in Scotland living in fuel poverty, with 20% of households living in extreme fuel poverty ([Fuel Poverty Scotland](#)).

There are nine neighbourhoods in the Scottish Borders with high levels of income deprivation that all fall within the 29% data zone in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, meaning they are some of the most deprived areas in the country (SBC, 2021).

The rates of fuel poverty are increasing, and the number of those experiencing fuel poverty is higher in rural areas, including the Scottish Borders. As the table shows below, fuel poverty is higher than the national average. This is due to the region being primarily remote and rural, type of housing and energy efficiency, type of heating systems and the low wage economy ([Scottish Borders Council, 2024](#)). Please note, these figures have increased since the last published Scottish House Condition Survey due to the ongoing cost of living crisis.

Table 2: Levels of Fuel Poverty and Extreme Fuel Poverty

	Fuel Poverty	Extreme Fuel Poverty
Scottish Borders (Scottish House Condition Survey 2019)	29%	14%
Scottish Borders (Home Analytics)	28%	16%
Scotland Average (Scottish House Condition Survey 2019)	25%	12%

(Source: Scottish Borders LHEES, [SBC, 2024](#))

Some help is available through organisations such as Home Energy Scotland (HES) and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). However, there can be a stigma around asking for help, and phoning a national helpline can be a barrier. Furthermore, HES and CAB do not offer home visits to fuel poor households in the Scottish Borders. This can be an issue for some vulnerable households who may not be able to access information online highlighting a need for access to high-quality face-to-face energy advice, which was previously not available in the area. Community groups, support workers and individuals would like to access services, and feedback from beneficiaries and supporting statements from external partners illustrate the value in offering targeted, bespoke advice and support to those that need it most.

The Sustainable Selkirk project, which is already established in the area, is unlikely to keep up with demand for support from fuel poor households coming into the winter meaning there will be a lengthy waiting period, resulting in delays and households who are in urgent need of support being missed. This assumption is based

on demand for home energy visits remaining steady over the summer months and increasing enquiries from external stakeholders looking to support their clients through this service.

Moreover, many households require two Energy Advisors in attendance due to their complex vulnerabilities, for example, people with mental health conditions and problems with substance misuse.

3 Scope and objectives

To support the community and those struggling to heat their homes safely, efficiently, and affordably, Selkirk Regeneration is partnering with SGN to increase capacity within the Sustainability Selkirk project to meet an expected increase in demand for energy and income related support in the Selkirk area.

Sustainable Selkirk is already an established project led by local community organisation Selkirk Regeneration who's core aim is to bring benefit to the people of Selkirk and the surrounding area.

The new partnership will allow the Sustainable Selkirk project to maintain and expand current advice service targeting vulnerable households including; financially vulnerable, people with mental health conditions, digital and culturally excluded, socially isolated, remote, rural, young families, older people, and disabled people.

While the existing team successfully cover the Scottish Borders area (averaging 40 visits per week during peak periods in winter), some of the most vulnerable households are being missed. By increasing capacity through an additional Energy Advisor, the project can help more Scottish Borders residents stay safe and warm in their homes, keep up with demand, enhance the safeguarding of both employees and customers, and enable building of strong partnership/stakeholder relationships to help more of the most hard-to-reach vulnerable energy consumers.

The new project will continue a wide geographic focus and work more closely with other local groups and organisations, such as Social Services, Parental Employability Team, Housing Associations, Borders Addiction Services, Residents Associations, Citizens Advice, and will allow work to continue (two-way referrals) with such organisations who are able to offer more specialised support in debt alleviation and income maximisation.

Advice will be primarily conducted through in-depth home energy audits to identify ways to save energy by making changes to the way householders use energy, pay their bills and the energy performance of their property.

During the audit, discussions will be around energy bills (suppliers, tariff, method of payment, how much, etc), heating system and controls (both heating devices and how they are used), the condition of the building fabric (insulation levels, draughts, condensation/dampness issues, etc) and appliances/usage.

Light-touch interventions at events, by phone or at the advice centre cannot elicit all the required information to give in-depth advice but may often be precursors to further in-depth interventions at a later date.

Households will be proactively referred for additional advice and support.

Households will be reached for both light touch and in--depth interventions through word of mouth, referrals from partners including HES, and captured at targeted events.

Project objectives include:

- providing tailored, in-depth advice and support to households in or at risk of fuel poverty, through home visits, appointments, and community outreach sessions
- promoting awareness of energy-efficiency measures to help households save energy, save money, and save emissions in their home, whilst achieving an affordable level of comfort
- helping households understand their heating controls, appliances, and smart meters
- liaising with the householder's energy supplier on their behalf
- helping householders to understand their energy bills and tariff
- providing onward referrals where necessary for further energy efficiency measures, income maximation, debt alleviation and enhance well-being

- ongoing support to households to ensure they are properly supported and reduce their risk of ongoing fuel poverty
- identify those not on the Priority Service Register and help them with registrations along with information on resilience should their energy or water be interrupted
- provide carbon monoxide awareness conversations and gift free CO alarms to those at risk of CO harm

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

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

The partnership service aligns to our strategic ambition to support customers in energy crisis, helping those in fuel poverty to access financial crisis support, and other services including the Priority Services Register, awareness of the dangers of Carbon Monoxide and energy efficiency advice, empowering vulnerable households to use energy safely, efficiently, and affordably.

This partnership aligns to the SGN commitment to deliver support services customers aligned to our four strategic pillars:

1. Services Beyond the Meter
2. Supporting Priority Customer Groups
3. Fuel Poverty & Energy Affordability
4. Carbon Monoxide Awareness

This project aligns to strategic pillar 3 (with outcomes in pillar 4).

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 Stakeholder Feedback

Eildon Housing Association

“As a trusted social housing provider, we prioritise the wellbeing and safety of our tenants. We are excited to express our full endorsement for Sustainable Selkirk’s proposal to deliver the VCMA project in the Scottish Borders. This initiative aligns with our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable in our society. Our tenants will benefit from Sustainable Selkirk’s expertise and resource, particularly the holistic nature of the support on offer (i.e., combining financial, energy, and wellbeing services). We are eager to see this collaboration come to fruition and are confident it will establish a more supportive environment for those who need it most.” Liam McGuckin, Sustainability Coordinator, Eildon Housing Association

Scottish Borders Council

“Scottish Borders Council support this application. Sustainable Selkirk provide important and wide-reaching energy advice and support across the Borders region. Delivering the VCMA project will be valuable for supporting our rural communities and vulnerable households that Sustainable Selkirk are well positioned to engage with, to ensure those that need the protection and security of CO detectors, can get access to them.” Neil Robertson, Senior Energy Efficiency Strategy Officer.

Home Energy Scotland

“At Home Energy Scotland South-East, we believe that by working together we can support you to reduce fuel poverty and raise awareness of energy efficiencies. Home Energy Scotland and Sustainable Selkirk have a two-way referral partnership. Sustainable Selkirk provide a local presence in the Scottish Borders community through their hub, presence at local events and links to local organisations. The project is able to support hard to reach & vulnerable households in the community and refer them to Home Energy Scotland for advice and

access to Scottish Government Funding. Home Energy Scotland are able to provide free and impartial advice and support to householders across Scotland. We work closely with local partners who are able to provide ongoing in-depth support to householders. This includes referring customers in the Scottish Borders to Home Energy Scotland for ongoing support with a range of issues including support with billing and debt issues and home visits for in person advice.” Fiona Flynn, Senior Partnerships Officer, HES.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS)

“Our Community Team find the outreach work of Sustainable Selkirk invaluable since it helps our officers gain access to hard-to-reach households and raise carbon monoxide awareness and identify risky behaviours caused by those struggling with energy costs and using alternative means to keep warm (for example, diesel heaters), referring on to us and reporting safety concerns to the appropriate body.” Alan Wear, Local Area Liaison Officer, SFRS

5.2 Project Beneficiaries Feedback

Here is some recent feedback from project beneficiaries.

“I thank you a million times for your help. For your patience, understanding of my situation, support at every step. Without your help, I was in a difficult position since I would not have been able to negotiate with energy supplier and I did not understand anything at all about the payment scheme. You helped me register, figure out the bill, the payment option, and finally everything is fine with my electricity payments. Also grateful for the savings tips and constant support. I couldn't even dream of such support.”

Customer A

“Thank you SO much for all of your help. Because of you my ancient Oven has been replaced and I got a whole new heating system, radiators, pipes, and boiler ALL FOR FREE! I have hot water again which is so amazing, I nearly cried when I used the hot tap! As a single parent on benefits this would have been impossible without Sustainable Selkirk's support. Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

Customer B

“The input from Sustainable Selkirk was very useful, from the draught excluders and energy saving light bulbs to the referrals to the fire service and water company. Most notable was the referral to Warmworks which resulted in my being given a completely new central heating system. I can now look forward to a warm and comfortable house next winter.”

Customer C

“Thank you for your visit on Monday. I was totally astonished.... I really appreciate this help at this time in my life.”

Customer D

“The service I received from home energy was friendly, professional and helpful.”

Customer E

“I would like to thank you for making things happen with my home I've got the central heating in and my front door is on the way thank you for your helping making this possible”

Customer F

5.3 SGN

During the shaping of the SGN business plan we committed to support at least 250,000 vulnerable households to use gas safely, affordably, and efficiently over GD2. During 2023, following ongoing engagement with Ofgem, SGN's Customer and Stakeholder Engagement Group and Vulnerable Steering Group we increased this commitment to support 500,000 vulnerable households, those most at risk of living in a cold and unhealthy

home. SGN have used data and insights to develop our programme, this has underpinned how this commitment to support those most in need from a strategic ambition into an extensive partnership-based delivery programme.

As we have progressed our portfolio of projects throughout GD2, our strategic steering group reiterated the vital impact we could have by co-ordinating our activities with others to support those most in need, those most impacted by the cost of living and energy cost crisis. The VSG have recommended that we look at ways in which we can build stronger links with other organisations including collaborating with other utilities, health services and charities to deliver support services that tackle the fuel poverty gap and the underlying causes of fuel poverty.

6 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

Delivering high-quality energy advice

Activities will include free home visits and provision of advice, support and mentoring to low-income households, including the elderly, long-term health issue/disability and rural off-gas grid households. 90% of our clients come via word of mouth and are also referred by our external partners including HES, CAB, Social Services and NHS. Support will also be delivered in the Energy Advice Centre through in-depth, confidential appointments and telephone calls, and advice at events. The latter will include informal talks and presentations to health and social care worker-led groups, community groups and individuals/households. Our workshops and presentations will be flexible and adapted to suit the needs of the clients.

Cosy measures

To complement existing installation of energy-saving soft measures, the project will distribute heated throws to those most vulnerable (for example, those with health conditions, older people and living alone) to help them stay affordably warm.

Promoting positive financial, safety and well-being outcomes

The project will refer households to other sources of financial and wellbeing support including benefit checks and income maximisation, PSR and home fire safety checks. We will also support households in energy crisis by providing emergency fuel vouchers for those in need. Our free energy advice will include carbon monoxide awareness conversations and distributing of CO alarms.

Hosting energy efficiency and carbon monoxide awareness raising workshops and sessions

The project intends to deliver energy efficiency and CO safety advice workshops for community groups across the Scottish Borders, as well as holding drop-in energy advice clinics at community warm hubs, our office and FoodShare facilities. Attending local group sessions and being present in the community also generates awareness of our home energy advice and support service, which in turn results in home visits to offer one-to-one support. Additionally, we will target frontline workers to enable them to identify and support households in energy crisis.

6.2 Success Criteria

- **1,520** households will receive light touch advice including conversations around **energy efficiency, information about the PSR and CO awareness**. This will be provided at targeted outreach events, drop-in energy clinics, by phone or through online communication

Of which:

- **1,520** will have energy efficiency, energy usage and heating systems advice
- **1,520** will have PSR conversations

- **1,520** will have carbon monoxide safety awareness conversations
- **520** will receive in depth energy advice through a home energy visit
- **500** will receive a CO alarm
- **377** will be referred or signposted to additional relevant support including:
 - Income Maximisation for benefit checks, debt advice and trust fund applications
 - Warm Homes Discount
 - Fire safety checks
- **381** will benefit from £50 fuel vouchers
- **376** PSR water registration
- **336** PSR energy registration
- **300** provided with heated throws
- **280** referrals to grants and schemes for energy saving measures (e.g. through Home Energy Scotland and LEAP)

In addition:

- Householders will save approximately **15% on their energy bills** through tariff, supplier, and/or method of payment switching and energy efficiency advice
- **280** households provided with water saving packs (provided through our partnership with Home Energy Scotland)
- **216** targeted events to provide energy efficiency advice, information about the PSR and CO awareness
- **6** Advisors trained in carbon monoxide awareness, and priority service register one of which employed specifically for this project

7 Project partners and third parties involved

Selkirk Regeneration:

Selkirk Regeneration has extensive first-hand experience in supporting vulnerable households, already providing an established energy advice service, consisting of an Energy Advice Centre and a small, friendly team of trained staff - a Project Coordinator and 4 full-time Energy Advisors delivering home energy advice within the centre, at events and through home visits. Through the Sustainable Selkirk project, Selkirk Regeneration conduct home energy audits, produce follow-up reports, and offer referrals to Home Energy Scotland and other relevant organisations, including but not limited to, income maximisation, social work, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and if relevant, housing associations for further support.

Selkirk Regeneration believe that offering impartial and friendly advice in a local setting or in the home, develops trust with clients, and in turn, promotes greater engagement and uptake in seeking further advice and adopting energy efficiency behaviours and safety measures – to stay safe and warm in their home.

Selkirk Regeneration are a community anchor organisation dedicated to supporting local communities offering friendly advice and building relationships with clients. Their approach has had significant positive outcomes for clients; from light-touch interventions such as helping households to manage their credit prepayment meter and signing up to the Priority Services Register (PSR), to larger interventions such as supporting households through funded energy efficiency schemes and managing large energy debt.

Partnering with SGN will strengthen capacity in meeting the needs of customers, whilst allowing households to receive support currently not available in the Scottish Borders (for example, carbon monoxide awareness and, the offer of home energy visits in the local authority area). In their experience, the best way to identify issues affecting a household is by visiting them in their home.

Home Energy Scotland:

Selkirk Regeneration believe they support and complement Home Energy Scotland, as a referral partner. During a recent community event, the Home Energy Scotland team commented on the benefits of working together to achieve the best outcomes and enhanced engagement with the public and encouraged Selkirk Regeneration to hold further regular community outreach events.

The Scottish Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS):

SFRS' main purpose is *"To work in partnership with communities and with others in the public, private and third sectors, on prevention, protection and response, to improve the safety and well-being of people throughout Scotland."* SFRS is fully committed to these objectives in both fire and non-fire related situations and with that in mind, SFRS has worked closely with Sustainable Selkirk now for approximately 2 years, during which time the partnership has contributed considerably to assisting in our goal of engaging with and providing assistance to the most vulnerable members within our community here in the Scottish Borders.

Both partners are looking to connect with and assist a similar group of vulnerable people, and by working together this greatly increases the chances of both organisations engaging those who will benefit most from the services and assistance we can provide.

SFRS currently supplies CO alarms to home owners within the community who are deemed to be at high risk from fire, so the possibility that Sustainable Selkirk can help to broaden the scope of who can be offered this valuable lifesaving equipment is an exciting development and we would gladly welcome the opportunity to work alongside Sustainable Selkirk further, referring potential clients to them and conducting joint visits with them in our shared aim of protecting the most vulnerable within the community.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

The project will be monitored through existing Sustainability Selkirk systems with all interactions and interventions being tracked through sign-in/up sheets and spreadsheets under the existing data management system.

A data management system will be used for home visits, portal for Home Energy Scotland referrals, and monthly reporting submitted using bespoke template provided by SGN.

Similar monitoring will occur for other services, such as referrals for benefits advice and home safety visits.

Learning

Current energy advice provision has been based on examples of best practices and adapted to suit the needs of our local communities. For example, Selkirk Regeneration have undertaken a knowledge exchange with Greener Kirkcaldy who offer ongoing and informal support, regarding how we can develop and strengthen the capacity of the energy advice service. This has been valuable, and Selkirk Regeneration are keen to share knowledge and experience with others.

The project will continually adapt the service provision in response to feedback from clients and ensure advice is tailored to their needs with input from other service providers.

Selkirk Regeneration regularly network with other local community groups and external organisations. Several community groups across the Scottish Borders have expressed a desire to offer similar services to Sustainable Selkirk in their communities to offer help and support to those in need.

Selkirk Regeneration are part of the Scottish Borders Home Energy Forum, consisting of the Scottish Borders Council, housing associations etc. to identify gaps in energy advice provision, existing energy-related problems in the region and identify opportunities to work together and learn from each other to achieve the maximum positive impact for Scottish Borders households. This project will increase the confidence of potential partners, ensuring they are clear about what the service offers, the target beneficiary (energy consumers in vulnerable situations) and that the project is secured for at least another two years.

A key motivation of this project is not only to help and support those most vulnerable energy consumers, but to ensure the continuation of energy advice service provision. We believe that extending the project beyond its current period will enable the building of secure partnerships that may not have been possible in one financial year, in addition to ensuring staff retention and strengthening the capacity to deliver high-quality energy advice.

Informal partnership working is key for the successful delivery of the project and Selkirk Regeneration will be sharing experience with other similar local projects through the climate hub and will also explore additional funding opportunities and partnership/stakeholder relationships to build sustainability into the project.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations

Social Value Measurement

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 using the Industry Standard Social Value Framework and supporting GDN rulebook. Carrying out an in-depth assessment of the predicted outcomes we forecast a positive net Social Return on Investment of £3.13.

Total cost	£114,596.26
Total gross present value	£472,717.29
Net present value	£358,121.03
SROI	£3.13

10 VCMA Project start and end date

September 2024 to March 2026

11 Geographic area

Scottish Borders

12 Approval

SGN has worked alongside Selkirk Regeneration 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.

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

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