

VOCAL – Safe and Warm Energy Scheme for Unpaid Carers

Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

July 2024

SGN



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1 Description

Project title	Safe and Warm Energy Scheme
Funding GDN(s)	SGN
New/Updated (indicate as appropriate)	New
Date of PEA submission:	08/08/24
Project contact name: (SGN)	Margaret Hamilton
Project contact number/email: (SGN)	Margaret.hamilton@sgn.co.uk
Total cost (£k)	£76,124
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£76,124

2 Problem statement

VOCAL (Voice Of Carers Across Lothian) operates in response to the needs of over 70,000 unpaid adult carers in Edinburgh and across the Lothians. Unpaid carers can be any age and are supporting a family member, partner, relative or friend who needs help to manage a long-term condition, disability, physical or mental health problem. In the UK, it is estimated that 3 in 5 people will be an unpaid carer at some point in their life.

Through VOCAL’s daily interactions with carers, and bi-annual survey responses, it is becoming increasingly apparent unpaid carers are finding it more and more difficult to sustain their caring role as they struggle with the cost-of-living crisis, especially those who rely on heat to keep well as their knowledge around energy affordability and energy safeguarding is limited.

Responses to VOCAL’s carer survey undertaken in 2023 (<https://www.vocal.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Unpaid-carer-experiences-in-Edinburgh-Interactive-June-2024.pdf>) illustrated that the trajectory for the financial difficulties experienced by unpaid carers remains headed firmly in the wrong direction, with 72% of the 1,169 respondents across Edinburgh stating that their caring role had negatively affected their finances.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the finances of unpaid carers also, and VOCAL’s survey found that the cost-of-living crisis, caused by a period of economic instability, exacerbated these issues. According to the survey, the biggest area of increased expenditure during the cost-of-living crisis for unpaid carers in Edinburgh is energy with 88% of respondents stating that this is the area where their finances have been most impacted. Additionally, unpaid carers often have higher demand for amenities like energy. For example, to ensure that a house is adequately heated for the person being cared for who is more susceptible to colder temperatures, oxygen needs or powering additional medical equipment.

Two quotes from the survey help to illustrate the issue:

“The rising cost...[of living]...is impacting on everything in my life that needs paid: transport, energy costs, rent, food, clothing etc. It is a great concern that if the rise keeps going up without an increase on my income. I have [the] fear that we won’t be able to afford to live or afford basic essentials.”

“Heating in the colder months was an issue and I am concerned about winter fuel bills.”

There is high demand for VOCAL’s current Money Matters programme, which provides support via one-to-one sessions to look at service users’ financial situations, with further information and advice offered in relation to welfare benefits and income maximisation. Between April 2023 and March 2024, VOCAL’s Edinburgh service supported 1,509 unpaid carers through one-to-one support, with 566 being supported with welfare benefits and income maximisation support. This represents 37.5% of all the unpaid carers who accessed VOCAL’s

Edinburgh services during this time period. In Midlothian, 341 unpaid carers received one to one support, with 169 being supported in relation to welfare benefits and income maximisation. This represents 49.5% of the unpaid carers who accessed VOCAL's Midlothian services during this time period.

It is clear from the above that unpaid carers are experiencing extreme hardship, alongside those they care for. The impacts of rising energy prices are pushing them into poverty, especially those who rely on energy to keep well. VOCAL have identified a gap in their provision of service for unpaid carers throughout Edinburgh and Midlothian and will work in partnership with SGN to provide an energy advisory support service.

3 Scope and objectives

With winter approaching and uncertainty around energy costs, in partnership with SGN, VOCAL will be introducing a Safe and Warm Energy Officer to their Money Matters programme providing energy safeguarding and energy advisory support across their unpaid carers network.

Our Safe and Warm initiative will support **475** carers across an 18-month period to afford to maintain a safe and warm home during a time where the added strain of the cost-of-living crisis is having a significant impact on their financial circumstance and their health and wellbeing.

Our initiative will provide a support fund for those who are identified as struggling with the costs associated with their energy usage, at risk of rationing their energy supply or self-disconnection and could be at risk of Carbon Monoxide (CO) harm.

We will educate carers on

- energy efficiency for the home and ways to adapt their energy usage
- techniques to help heat homes and use electricity and gas in an efficient and sustainable way checking they have the best tariff
- carbon monoxide awareness
- appliance servicing and provide funding for those unable to afford to service their appliances
- priority service register for those eligible to join including the people they care for

We will also provide further support specific to the needs of the carer and will refer for Money Matters programme and other local support schemes to help improve their financial circumstance, health, and wellbeing.

The project will work in partnership with other local organisations such as MILAN, LGBTHealth, The Action Group, Health in Mind, FAIR, Eric Liddel Community, Space, FAIR and EDG in Edinburgh and in Midlothian British Red Cross and Dalkeith CAB to help identify households in need. This will be particularly helpful when attempting to reach groups such as Black and ethnic minority carers, and young adult carers who have been identified as most at risk of fuel poverty.

The safe and warm energy officer will join VOCAL's existing Money Matters programme, with the first few months spent recruiting for the role and embedding them into the existing team. The focus will then be on creating information materials and training, delivering training to the VOCAL team and partners to increase awareness, and understanding of the project and increase referrals, and support cases as they come through.

4 Why the project is being funded through the VCMA

This project is proposed for funding through the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA) which aims to work with households experiencing fuel poverty. This project does this by providing direct support to unpaid carers who are struggling to maintain a safe and warm home.

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.

This partnership service goes beyond our core responsibilities as a Gas Distribution Network and is eligible under the VCMA funding criteria as it will provide support to those people in some of the priority groups and in the regional communities most at risk, providing information on using energy safely, efficiently, and affordably.

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

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

This project aligns to strategic pillars 2, with outcomes in pillars 1, 3 & 4.

5 Evidence of stakeholder/customer support

5.1 VOCAL Stakeholder information

VOCAL is a carer-led organisation, meaning that all activities are devised in strategic response to identified need amongst households with unpaid carers, which are observed through daily interactions with unpaid carers and a biannual carers survey. VOCAL are keenly aware of how the cost-of-living crisis and particularly food and energy bills are affecting the lives of these households. In addition, the majority of unpaid carers find that their employment situation is affected by caring also, increasingly resulting in reduced hours, or needing to cease work completely. Because of this, the financial impacts of caring are intensified.

Edinburgh's Joint Carers Strategy, devised by VOCAL and the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership clearly sets out a goal of ensuring that "[Unpaid] Carers are able to access the financial support and assistance to which they are entitled." This project fits nicely within this strategic goal of Edinburgh HSCP and the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board, alongside VOCAL's own strategic goals which are best exemplified by the ongoing Money Matters programme, which aims to provide a holistic programme of supports to assist with the financial difficulties that unpaid carers are currently facing.

5.2 Case Study – VOCAL

Case study

AB has been caring for her Mum for 10 years since she was 11 years old. Mum has complex physical and mental health difficulties. AB was referred to VOCAL by an occupational therapist having previously received support from Edinburgh Young Carers.

AB initially was looking for and was supported to apply for a break from caring. AB was also struggling financially due to the cost-of-living crisis and trying to survive on benefits. One of the benefits advisors was able to provide support and did an income maximisation check to ensure they were receiving the correct benefits. The big issues identified with AB were around affording energy and food costs. AB was concerned that the energy company might cut off their supply.

The Benefits adviser recommended contacting the energy provider to inform them of that a vulnerable adult stayed at the address. They also provided information on Changeworks so AB could get further advice on energy use and supports around this. As a short term support the Benefits worker applied to the Foodbank and the fuel bank to provide some short-term relief.

AB was also referred for someone to one support around managing her caring role with a Carer Support Practitioner.

5.3 SGNs Vulnerable Steering Group

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 Vulnerable Steering Group (VSG) has provided ongoing guidance to SGN, reiterating the importance of impactful partnerships that co-ordinate activities with others to support those most in need.

6 Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria

6.1 Outcomes

Through this partnership, we aim to provide support to carers in which unpaid caring is having a significant financial impact and help them afford to maintain a safe and warm home during a time where the added strain of the cost-of-living crisis is having a significant impact on their financial circumstance and their health and wellbeing.

Our main outcome is to ensure these carers can feel safe and warm in their homes. The project will educate them to use energy more efficiently, support to maximise their household income and provide access to grants and schemes to make the homes more efficient. The collective outcomes should ensure a reduction in fuel poverty and a clearer understanding of carbon monoxide.

The project aims to provide:

- Increased financial stability for carers
- Increased confidence in managing household costs
- Enhanced energy efficiency knowledge and safety practices
- Increased knowledge and implementation of energy-saving and safety measures
- Improved wellbeing of carers and those they care for
- Increased awareness and utilisation of energy support services

6.2 Success Criteria

A minimum of 475 unpaid carers will be supported through this initiative through one-to-one in-depth support, group information and advice sessions, and up to 50,000 reached through marketing initiatives including social media, online newsletters, printed newsletters and through VOCAL websites.

Across 18 months, the project will support:

- **475** with energy efficiency advice, energy tariffs and/or heating controls
- **475** with carbon monoxide awareness
- **475** with PSR awareness conversations
- **237** signed up to PRS energy (50%)
- **237** signed up to PSR water (50%)
- **200** referred on to Money Matters to be supported with benefits advice and income maximisation
- **100** provided with carbon monoxide alarms

- **100** referred to external energy support services (e.g. specialist energy debt advice and fuel banks)
- **47** (10%) households eligibility checked for Warm Home Discount
- **20** referred for gas appliance servicing
- **375** receiving one-to-one support for improved wellbeing, and those they care for
- **100** frontline staff trained in providing information regarding energy-saving practices and safety measures
- **100** carers trained in energy saving practices and safety measures

In addition:

- 80% of surveyed participants report increased confidence in managing household costs
- 75% of surveyed participants report an increase in knowledge and implementation of energy-saving and safety measures
- 70% of surveyed participants report a reduction in stress and increased wellbeing
- 70% of surveyed participants report an increase in awareness and utilisation of available energy support services
- 60% of surveyed participants report improvements in warmth and comfort levels at home

7 Project partners and third parties involved

VOCAL (Voice Of Carers Across Lothian): VOCAL, the lead partner in this project operate in response to the needs of over 70,000 unpaid adult carers in Edinburgh and across the Lothians, offering counselling, access to benefits, legal advice, training and much more to support carers prior to them reaching crisis point.

Through VOCAL's daily interactions with carers and bi-annual survey responses, it is becoming increasingly apparent unpaid carers are finding it more and more difficult to sustain their caring role as they struggle with the cost-of-living crisis, especially those who rely on heat to keep well as their knowledge around energy affordability and energy safeguarding is limited.

Dalkeith Citizen Advice Bureau: Expected recipients of training, support with identification of unpaid carers, referrals to our energy worker / VOCAL.

British Red Cross: Expected recipients of training, support with identification of unpaid carers, referrals to our energy worker / VOCAL

Local Authorities: Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership are expected recipients of training, support with identification of unpaid carers, referrals to our energy worker / VOCAL

Local Foodbanks: Edinburgh Community Food and Edinburgh Food Project are expected recipients of training, support with identification of unpaid carers, referrals to our energy worker / VOCAL

Other partners include MILAN, Health in Mind, Eric Liddel Centre, LGBT Health, The Action Group, Edinburgh Development Group, Family Advice Information Resource, who are all expected recipients of training, support with identification of unpaid carers, referrals to our energy worker / VOCAL.

8 Potential for new learning

Monitoring and evaluation

This partnership has been co-designed by VOCAL 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 VOCAL 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
- Case studies evidencing the impact of the support, training, and grants in supporting unpaid carers and the people they provide care for
- 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 VOCAL will review the progress of the support service to share ideas and challenges through individual and organisational partnership case studies.
- Those attending safety sessions, energy efficiency training or accessing 1-2-1 support would be asked to evaluate the services they have received in order to best evaluate the success of the project as it progresses.
- We would be expecting to measure the numbers of information and advice sessions that are provided to unpaid carers, alongside training sessions for frontline staff and other organisations. Likewise, we would track referrals to any other services that could be provided as part of the project, including access to CO alarms, boiler servicing etc, plus referrals to the Priority Services Register.

Learning

We are keen to learn from this project and for successes to be incorporated into ongoing projects that engage unpaid carers. Through working across Edinburgh and Midlothian, 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.

9 Scale of VCMA Project and SROI Calculations, including NPV

Social Value Measurement

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 of £5.37.

Social Value Measurement

Total cost*	£74,614.72
Total gross present value	£475,605.91
Net Present Value (NPV)	£400,991.18
SROI	£5.37

**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.

11 Geographic area

Edinburgh and Midlothian

12 Internal governance and project management evidence

SGN has worked alongside VOCAL 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 £5.37 for each £1 invested, this will be monitored closely to ensure we adhere to the VCMA governance criteria.

SGN and VOCAL 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 Linda Spence and the Director of Customer Services Maureen McIntosh.