

Safe and Warm Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)



Report of impact and learning session

12 March 2024

1: Background

SGN is a Gas Distribution Network which supports almost 6m households and businesses across Scotland and Southern England stay safe and warm. They are in year three of their five-year price control which is for the period April 21 to March 26. Their ambition is to support 500,000 vulnerable households across both networks use energy safely, efficiently and affordably.

To deliver this ambition, SGN have a clear strategy to reach those most vulnerable to living in a cold and unhealthy home through impactful partnerships. To date SGN's Safe and Warm partnership network extends to working with over 100 organisations who share their ambition, to support priority vulnerable groups and regional communities most at risk to maintain a safe and warm home; and work to reduce carbon monoxide harm.

SGN's vulnerability strategy is funded via a use it or lose it regulatory allowance called the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance.

This is the report of an event for 22 people from partners working in Scotland and SGN staff (participant list in annex) facilitated by [Evaluation Support Scotland](#) (ESS). They came together to discuss and share:

- collective understanding of VCMA's **overall impact**
- whether changes could be made to **future evaluation and reporting** to evidence impact even better
- learning about **what works** supporting vulnerable people
- thoughts on SGN's future role

The planned outcomes of the session were:

SGN and partners are (even better) able to

- evaluate and report on a broad range of VCMA impact
- use evidence and learning to influence the future of the VCMA

This report summarises what happened in the session and suggests some next steps. It will be shared with participants.

SGN will use this report to help them inform the basis of their GD3 business plan and help with the evidence gathering to assist demonstrate the impact of the VCMA for clients and communities they serve

2: What difference are we intending to make?

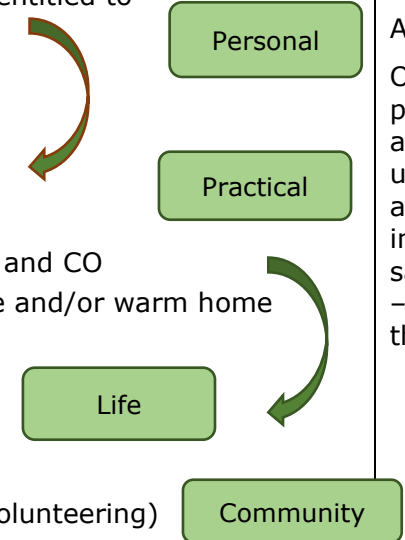
The logic model (or theory of change) on the next page was coproduced by SGN and the session participants and written up by ESS.

It sets out in shorthand summary

- the range of activities delivered across VCMA as a whole
- the short, medium and longer term outcomes (changes or differences) that those activities together intend to achieve

This model shows that the VCMA is different from traditional grant-making in that it has a **system improvement** focus. So there are not just crucial activities and outcomes for people in vulnerable circumstances but **also** activities and outcomes for SGN and partners themselves.

A logic model **explains** the programme simply and provides a framework for **measuring impact**.

Activities (what we do)	Outcomes (difference made)	Overall ...
SGN activities with/for partners • Codesign interventions • Provide: ◦ (2 year) funding ◦ data and intelligence ◦ connections to other organisations ◦ publicity and information resources • Train projects on energy/safety • Share learning Partner activities for vulnerable people¹ • 1-1 energy efficiency advice • 1-1 income maximisation & debt advice • Info sessions on income maximisation & energy efficiency • Provide emergency fuel & food funding / vouchers / food pantries • New models of support (eg one stop shops, mobile advice, digital help) • CO safety advice and information • Refer people to specialised support: ◦ priority service register ◦ energy schemes / care and repair ◦ CO alarms ◦ other support eg housing • Train SGN staff on how to work with vulnerable customers • Awareness raising for communities & groups • Provide volunteering opportunities	Partner staff/volunteers and the services they work for • are more confident advising vulnerable people on energy efficiency and safety • are more connected to other organisations in this space • are better able to develop and evolve services • understand more about fuel poverty & energy safety SGN engineers and customer advisers • are more confident talking to vulnerable people • are better able to refer vulnerable people to other support People in vulnerable circumstances • are more able to talk about home & money worries • are more confident to ask for help • are more aware of the support they are entitled to • feel more in control of their lives • have increased wellbeing • feel less alone or isolated • get the help they are entitled to • are better able to balance their budget • have increased knowledge about energy and CO • know more about how to maintain a safe and/or warm home • are warmer for longer in their home • are safer in their home • are financially better off • are more able help others (eg through volunteering)  The diagram illustrates a progression of outcomes for people in vulnerable circumstances. It consists of four green rounded rectangular boxes arranged vertically: 'Personal', 'Practical', 'Life', and 'Community'. A curved arrow points from 'Personal' down to 'Practical', and another from 'Practical' down to 'Life'. A third curved arrow points from 'Life' down to 'Community'. Additionally, a curved arrow points from the 'Life' box back up to the 'Personal' box, indicating a feedback loop or a return to personal well-being after achieving practical and life-level outcomes.	Every vulnerable person has speedy access to the support they need ... to use energy safely, efficiently and affordably so that they are ... safe, warm and well in their home and are physically and mentally healthier AND Organisations and policy makers have a better understanding about "what works" in keeping people safe, warm and well – and what stops that happening

¹ Older people, critical ill, disabled people, financially vulnerable, people with mental health issues, young people, young families, carers

3: What difference are we making?

The boxes below summarise participants' reflections on programme success. This exercise confirmed the logic model, shared understanding and set the scene for future planning and improvement (later in the session).

About our activities

- More holistic advice
- More types of delivery: face to face & visits
- More time for detailed checks
- More able to adapt to specific needs

About our reach

- Reaching more people (thousands of households helped)
- Support more targeted
- Accessing communities of interest that would not ordinarily be reached
- Personal tailored service to those who would have fallen through the cracks

About personal outcomes

- People know where to go for support
- People have hope and resilience
- People are less anxious
- People living with disability or chronic long-term illness better able to cope

About practical outcomes (safety)

- Dangerous appliances replaced - people not at risk of CO poisoning – (lives saved)
- More access to carbon detectors
- Thousands of young people more aware of CO
- Proactive servicing of appliances – increasing lifespan
- Vulnerable people connected to gas
- More people on Priority Register

About practical outcomes (money)

- Reduced household bills
- Fuel vouchers
- Reduced or eliminated energy debt or enabled repayment
- People get short-term financial assistance
- Income maximisation
- Resolved long-standing supplier issues
- People able to increase energy efficiency

About partner outcomes

- Increased staff awareness of CO safety issues
- Trained volunteers
- Increased and improved partnership working / referrals
- Improved impact measurement
- Data and learning from partnership fed into conversations with Scottish Government on the cost of living crisis

Other

- Building knowledge of people worked with directly has indirect impact on others in the community as people share what they learn

4: What would be lost if the funding stopped?

Participants discussed this question to illuminate more of the benefits of VCMA, including for partners – and showed the job is far from done.

Negative consequence for vulnerable people

- Lives would be lost
- People would go back to choosing between heating and eating
- More people in crisis into further desperation
- People would not know how to keep themselves safe
- More households in fuel poverty

Negative consequences for service provision

- No more immediate access to fuel vouchers
- Loss of distribution of CO alarms
- Loss of specialist energy advice for the most vulnerable
- Reduced direct support on the ground
- Loss of trusting relationships in communities
- More households would be left disconnected from gas
- Eco budgets unspent

Negative consequences for communities

- Loss of basic knowledge in communities
- Awareness diluted

Negative consequences for partners

- No more training for SGN
- Loss of network of organisations connected to convening power of SGN
- Loss of coordinating and linking up sector / expertise for greater reach and impact
- Reduced collaboration
- Loss of specialist knowledge of energy advice (without funding skilled staff would get other jobs)
- Extremely valuable source of sizeable funding for the sector (no other funder provides this support)
- Loss of capacity when services don't exist elsewhere

5: What are we good at measuring and what could we improve?

Taking into account the logic model and discussions about impact, participants reflected on what was positive about the current evaluation and reporting system and what could be even better capture impact and learning fully. There was broad agreement of the following:

We evaluate and report well on:

- Costs
- Activity numbers (eg number of people supported, numbers of sessions)
- Demographic information
- SLA/KPIs within time stated
- Hard (countable) outcomes such as:
 - Debt managed
 - Income maximised
 - Fuel vouchers
 - PSR registration
- Case study based evidence
- Customer experience

What we could improve ...

- About outcomes
 - Evaluate and report on what happens next / longer term outcomes for people supported [would require partners to go back a few months' after to revisit outcomes or to track onward referrals]
 - More on "people" outcomes in the logic model eg how people benefit from CO monitors, improved wellbeing, feeling better, know more etc
 - More case studies or stories to illustrate the journey of change for clients
- About activities
 - Report more about the specifics of support provided
 - More to reflect complexity of casework – volume of work / activity involved
 - How often discussions on PSR take place
- Other points about reporting
 - Remove reporting fields if partners don't do those things [*SGN is now creating reports specific to partners, reflecting their targets*]
 - Change frequency / volume of reporting to reflect project scale [*SGN has started this with partner meetings and more engagement with community managers*]
 - Give examples of need that partners unable to meet within their service
 - Partners to get access to SROI proxies [*as each partner comes on board SGN shares SROI reporting modelling*]
- More sharing of impact - disseminate case studies, networking events

6: What works in supporting vulnerable people?

In this part of the event, partners reflected on and shared what they have learned about “what works” in supporting people to be safe and warm. Below is a summary of the main learning themes.

About the way we work

- ✓ Staff build trust (overcome stigma and shame, build confidence)
- ✓ Listen and allow people to feel heard, empathy - doing “with” not “to”
- ✓ Communicate that people’s problems not insurmountable
- ✓ Build people’s confidence to tackle their own problems – empower
- ✓ Have technical expertise and communicate that knowledge straightforwardly



About service provision

- ✓ One stop shop, flexible and offered in a variety of ways
- ✓ Meeting people where they are and work in the way the customer wants
- ✓ Personalised advice and case work
- ✓ Help people to use and optimise technology safely
- ✓ Practical information eg energy advice packs
- ✓ Address the immediate issue - eg appliance servicing – repair and replacement or working on debt or refer to community support fund



About communication and working with others

- ✓ Make our services visible and accessible
- ✓ Provide advice in suitable formats – language, method (not always digital), funded web-chat service.
- ✓ Get customers together to share experiences
- ✓ Work in the community, enable local groups to support local people
- ✓ Partnerships and referral pathways between organisations



7: SGN's role

We asked participants to give their views on SGN's role in helping customers and communities maintain a safe and warm home – today and in the future. SGN may not be able to do to all of these things so this is **not** a list of commitments, but it will inform future thinking.

SGN as funder

- Fund to drive innovation (technological, energy system, social, communities)
- Be adaptable in what they will fund
- Bespoke approach to each partner's way of working and requirements
- Long term sustainable investment

SGN as part of the system supporting vulnerable people

- Use frontline engineers to identify vulnerability
- Harness a range of SGN resources (staff) to help identify vulnerable customers and sign post and make connections
- Connect partners to work together
- Listen to customers and supplier knowledge
- Provide training and expertise
- Encourage one vulnerable person to refer another (financial reward??)

SGN sharing intelligence and best practice

- Identify safe and warm pathways and ensure no one is left behind
- Events like this to share best practice – and enable collaboration
- Research to understand future challenges
- Wider promotion of case studies

Advocacy and leadership

- Lead industry on how to do better or drive good practice not just in delivery but policy and regulation design too
- Lobby Ofgem for proportional funding to areas with greatest level of fuel poverty (not just client numbers)
- Lobby for partners to have a seat at the table with Ofgem
- Work with partners to influence policy
- Support and enable Just Transition
- Support collaboration between GDNs and partners to reduce duplication

Other

- Removal of pre-payment meters for those with certain conditions

7: Message for SGN

At the end of the session we asked each participant to write a message for SGN. This is what they wrote:

"Thank you for all you are doing in the here and now, and for how you are looking to the future."

"Thank you for bringing us together and for continued investment in partners."

"Thanks for valuing partners' expertise."

"Keep on being an open and approachable partner!"

"Thank you for the support."

"Keep up the good work!"

"Keep up the good work! 😊"

"Going in the right direction!"

"Thank you! For today and your continued support and passion to help us be there for more older people across Scotland."

"I think SGN are leading the way in supporting people in vulnerable situations."

"Keep doing what you're doing. It's working."

"Don't stop the good work! 2 years is too small to build relationship and hit the targets."

"Thanks for funding all these great projects!"

"SGN team is passionate and friendly!"

"Thank you. What about an opportunity for all partners to do an overview webinar on their work."

"Thank you for always thinking about impact and making a difference."

"The partnership developed with the ALLIANCE allows community link workers to help directly individuals experiencing fuel poverty or who are at risk. It also allows the team to then focus on wider health and wellbeing"

"SGN's role in lobbying Ofgem for increased funding to areas in fuel poverty and enforcing stronger regulation would be vital."

"EAS wants to play a role in assisting to progress and coordinate"

"More longer term funding please!"

"Link logic model, PEA and SROI sheet so simple mechanism for communicating and sharing same data"

8: Feedback on the session

We collected anonymous feedback on the day from participants using a sticky wall. All feedback is written up on the following pages. Here are the **headlines**.

What are you taking away from the session?

The main themes were

- ✓ New contacts and connections
- ✓ A better sense of the collective work and inspiration
- ✓ Some practical ideas

Comment on the session – what was good or less good?

Most comments were positive. The main themes were:

- ✓ Participants strongly valued working together and meeting each other
- ✓ The format and facilitation worked well

Three participants said they wanted to have heard more about what other projects did and one was uncomfortable with the photography. One person wanted more time.

Report written up by Steven Marwick, Evaluation Support Scotland

www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk

Scottish Charity Number: SC036529, Scottish Company Number: SC284843

All the feedback

What are you taking away from the session

"New connections"

"New contacts for myself and colleagues"

"Opened several avenues to refer to following networking."

"New partnerships."

"Awareness of what other partners are doing. New contacts."

"Learnt about lots of other organisations that SGN partners with that we can work with collaboratively for our clients."

"Networks and new learning."

"A high number of organisations out there helping folks. How much it crosses over."

"How much great work is going on to support people in vulnerable circumstances."

"Inspiration for how we can apply some of the messages to young people in Scouts and more understanding of the complexities."

"The different charities are all working differently but to a similar goal."

"Insight into other organisations' projects and thinking."

"Optimism about the range of support and provision being funded."

"Sense of opportunity about commitment of partners and SGN to help people living in vulnerable situations."

"Lots of hardworking people delivering support. Good to learn what's out there."

"Chance to meet different people and hear about their projects."

"How I can improve and adapt evaluation techniques and measurement so that they better reflect the diversity of delivery under SGN VCMA."

"Learning from other organisations is incredibly valuable."

"Ideas for improvement and what we can do better."

"Thoughts on how to share the full impact of our work."

"The challenge is pretty large still"

"Need to understand each VCMA partner"

Comment on the session – what was good or less good?

"Felt like you wanted my input."

"Engaging and well led."

"Nice session."

"Opportunity to move around and share learning and experiences."

"Kept busy. Good conversations. Felt meaningful."

"Discussions and coming up with ideas as a group. Good open feedback."

"Good session. Very helpful to meet such varied partners."

"Collaboration. Conversations."

"Opportunity to meet other partners. Very well facilitated."

"Hearing from lots of different organisations and SGN partners."

"Very beneficial and great to speak to others delivering similar projects."

"Good to get different partners together. Would be good to get a better understanding of how SGN works with each."

"I really loved the variety and enthusiasm in the room. The facilitation was excellent and really drew out a common purpose."

"No death by PowerPoint – yay!"

"Nice mix of tasks and engagement in subject."

"Great to make connections with other partners."

"Timings worked well!"

*"Opportunity to have a wider knowledge of everyone and service they offer
Good sessions and interactive"*

Less good

"Being photographed/filmed so much – I felt uncomfortable with this."

[would have liked?]

"visual of all projects represented"

"more introductory focus on what each organisation does"

"Quick introduction by everyone in the room"

"More time, more frequent"

Annex: Organisation Participant list

Age Scotland

Changeworks

Children First

Citizens Advice Scotland

Energy Action Scotland

Evaluation Support Scotland

Fuel Bank Foundation

Gas Safe Charity

Greener Kirkcaldy

Kidney Care UK

NEA

SCARF

Scope

Scouts

SGN

South Seeds

The Health and Social Care Alliance

The Play Centre, Glasgow

Universal Gas Solutions

Warmworks

Wise Group

Yes Energy Solutions