

Single Point of Contact in West Sussex – Supporting the most the most vulnerable



Introduction

We have been asked to submit a business proposal to WSCC in order to secure medium-long term funding for the continuation of the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) service. This proposal will cover the current energy advice services on offer within West Sussex, the energy advice needs within West Sussex, how Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice can meet this need through funding the SPOC service, outcomes you can expect from monitoring and reporting of the SPOC service, a summary of the key points raised and finally costing options.

The current West Sussex energy advice services

Delivered by Citizens Advice

- Single Point of Contact (funded until 31st March 2023)

The Single Point of Contact is a one-stop shop for all energy related queries for residents in West Sussex. It provides light-touch and specialist energy advice through telephone and video; it allows coordination of all the energy services in West Sussex and for professionals to refer their service users. Since its introduction in January 2021, it has reached over **3,000** households.

- The National Association Funded Services
 - *Energy Advice Programme*

The Energy Advice Programme provides:

- Advice appointments to fuel poor and vulnerable consumers who are struggling to pay their bills or require better deals on energy
- Those who need guidance on the most appropriate payment methods or information on how to access help from energy suppliers and the Government
- Information about Smart Meters

The 2022/2023 target is **200** households. This target has been reached but more may be added.

- *Carbon Monoxide Advice Programme*

The programme provides carbon monoxide (CO) awareness discussions with clients through the local Energy Advice Programme (EAP) delivery.

The 2022/2023 target is **200** households. This target has been reached but more may be added.

- *Best Energy Saving Network- Champions*

Group energy advice workshops delivered to consumers

The 2022/2023 target is **150** attendees and has already been exceeded and is now not available until 2023/2024

- *Best Energy Saving Network- Regional Lead*

Group energy advice workshops delivered to frontline workers.

The 2022/2023 target is **200** attendees and has already been exceeded and now not available until 2023/2024

- *TFPT – NICE Vulnerable Groups*

SGN, Southern Water, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks and UK Power Networks have provided funding for 18 months to specifically target households within the NICE vulnerable group; we deliver a wrap-around specialist, hands-on service to households in this group living in cold homes in the Arun & Chichester and Hastings & Rother areas.

We deliver a casework service in all enquiry areas which must include energy and carbon monoxide advice.

The target for this service within the districts of Arun and Chichester is **300** households a year.

- *Decarbonisation*

We are helping to deliver the Warmer Homes Programme as part of the funding provided by the Government's Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery (LAD) & Home Upgrade Grant schemes (HUG).

The Warmer Homes Programme, which has been secured by local authorities across Sussex and Hampshire, offers grant funding to improve the energy efficiency of eligible homes.

Delivered by Other Providers

- LEAP service - Home visits

LEAP offers a home visiting service, but this appears to have been paused since the beginning of the pandemic. They offer a national telephone home energy service including support with bills, money advice and signposting to other services and referrals into other schemes and grants.

- Age UK

Age UK has a webpage on energy saving tips and they have a telephone helpline where the over 65 can get information on how to save energy, keeping warm in the winter and help with heating costs. They are no longer doing instalment of simple energy efficiency measures.

- Fire & Rescue – Safe and Well Home Visits

The Fire and Rescue service offer a home visiting service which assesses the fire risks within homes and helps residents stay safe, they supply and install carbon monoxide detectors.

Online tools:

- West Sussex Affordable Energy website has very good information relating to energy, including energy efficiency grants and sustainability
- Carers Support has a cost-of-living toolkit which includes advice on bills, help to save energy and energy scams

In the past, energy services have been patchy across West Sussex, there are also restrictions on which residents can access some of these services. Whether this be age, income or health conditions.

The role of the Fuel Poverty Coordinator

The West Sussex Fuel Poverty Coordinator is a vital role within the Single Point of Contact service, ensuring constant knowledge gathering of the local energy services to ensure cooperation, rather than duplication of services, updating and improving the West Sussex Energy Website, which now forms a vital part of the Single Point of Contact service and source of reliable information for residents and frontline workers.

West Sussex Energy Advice needs

The price cap on standard and default tariffs rose on 1 October from £1,971/year for a typical user paying by direct debit to £3,549/year. For households on prepay tariffs Ofgem announced a £1,591/year increase to the cap for more than four million – to £3,608/year for a typical household.

Also, from the 1st of October, the government implemented an energy price guarantee, which limits the amount you can be charged per unit of gas or electricity. The energy price guarantee was originally set to last 2 years, however the government amended this on 17th October, and it will now only last until April 2023.

Pay increases for many people aren't keeping up with rising prices. This means people's money doesn't go as far, so buying things and paying bills is getting harder. Average wages, not including bonuses, rose by 5.4% in the three months to August 2022. Overall, once inflation is taken into account, average pay actually fell by 2.9%.

Sub-regional Fuel Poverty Data, 2020

	Location	Number of Households	Number of Households in Fuel Poverty	Proportion of Households in Fuel Poverty (%)
West Sussex		374,894	30,735	8.2
	Adur	29,295	2,704	9.2
	Arun	72,447	6,337	8.7
	Chichester	54,060	4,842	9.0
	Crawley	46,423	3,805	8.2
	Horsham	59,523	4,085	6.9
	Mid Sussex	62,192	4,149	6.7
	Worthing	50,954	4,813	9.4

Based on the 2020 fuel poverty statistics the whole of West Sussex has 30,735 households in fuel poverty, representing a proportion of 8.2%. There are variations between districts with Adur, Worthing and Chichester experiencing rates of 9% and above and Horsham and Mid Sussex with rates below 7%.

Looking closer, we can see from an LSOA level there appears to be a correlation between deprivation and fuel poverty with four of the top five areas being within the 30% most deprived nationally and two areas amongst the 20% most deprived.

LSOA Fuel Poverty Data, 2020

LSOA Name	LA Name	Number of households	Number of households in fuel poverty	Proportion of households fuel poor (%)
Worthing 009A	Worthing	582	102	17.5
Arun 009C	Arun	554	97	17.5
Worthing 011D	Worthing	922	161	17.5
Mid Sussex 010A	Mid Sussex	602	104	17.3
Arun 016A	Arun	551	95	17.2
Arun 016C	Arun	563	95	16.9
Horsham 006B	Horsham	686	115	16.8
Adur 004B	Adur	730	118	16.2
Adur 004C	Adur	539	85	15.8
Worthing 008A	Worthing	1,068	168	15.7
Arun 017E	Arun	1,068	167	15.6
Arun 011D	Arun	1,047	160	15.3
Worthing 006A	Worthing	670	102	15.2

Fuel poverty predictions

The rising cost of living will tip more people into poverty and deepen existing poverty, disproportionately impacting already marginalised communities across Sussex. According to the Select Committee on Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty and Fuel Poverty Methodology handbook (BEIS / BRE updated September 2016) for every 1% rise in energy prices an additional 40,000 homes go into fuel poverty¹.

From 1 April 2023, [Cornwall Insight](#) predict that the price cap for an average household will increase to £4,348. It will fall back to £3,697 in summer 2023 before rising again to £3,722 from 1 October 2023.

The End Fuel Poverty Coalition predicts that 7m households are currently in fuel poverty in the UK (24.5% of all households) and once the Energy Bill Support Scheme (i.e. GBP400 for each household) ends, the levels of fuel poverty in the UK are predicted to rise to 10.7m households (37.6% of all households)².

In West Sussex this would equate to 140,960 households.

The current SPOC service is receiving an average of 280 calls per month. Below you can see the monthly call figures. It is important to note, the October figures were extrapolated 1 week before the end of October.

Below we have also linked a dashboard which illustrates the projected local need in the coming months and how many people we have been able to help so far. Looking toward the end of 2022 it is predicted that we will help 3,367 with energy issues. However, looking at the totals we have already helped 3,052 people. With 2 months left of the calendar year and our calls received

¹ [Price cap and fuel poverty methodology – End Fuel Poverty Coalition](#)

² [Price cap and fuel poverty methodology – End Fuel Poverty Coalition](#)

averaging 280 per month and the colder weather setting in, we are set to surpass these predictions.

[West Sussex - Citizens Advice Data Dashboard | Flourish](#)

What does a good energy offer look like?

A good energy advice offer would allow all West Sussex fuel poor residents access to the advice they need to assist them in navigating their way through the energy/cost-of-living pressures.

It should provide telephone, video light-touch and specialist advice, home visits and in person assistance and allow for professionals and frontline workers to be trained to enable them to recognise the impact of living in a cold home, whether someone is in fuel poverty, the provision of information to support service users in navigating reliable energy related sites and for the direct referral to specialist advice.

Light-touch advice could cover:

- Educating clients to understand energy bills and meters, tariff comparison and switching suppliers, rights and responsibilities of a landlord.
- Helping clients switch supplier/tariff and connecting them to other Citizens Advice services, e.g., debt advice
- Information and advice sessions which prompt behavioural change in clients e.g., usage monitoring (smart meters).

Specialist energy advice which comprises of:

- All the above light-touch advice and, depending on the circumstances, educating clients to use heating systems more efficiently, carbon monoxide safety, their Energy Performance Certificate (EPC), and joining the priority service register
- Assist clients to access the grants available to improve the fabric of the home, using heating systems more efficiently and access to fuel vouchers.

Additionally:

- Allow for professionals and frontline workers to be trained to enable them to recognise the impact of living in a cold home, whether someone is in fuel poverty, the provision of information to support service users in navigating reliable energy related sites and for the direct referral to specialist advice.
- Home visiting energy service which takes energy advice into the homes of the most vulnerable residents e.g. disabled, long-term health condition or elderly.
- Expanded referral pathways and partnership working with other statutory and community services for housing, health, food, wellbeing etc.
- Direct access to hardship and energy efficiency schemes for people in need e.g. HSF, fuel vouchers, energy efficiency schemes such as The Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LAD)³ and The Home Upgrade Grant (HUG)⁴.

³ [Local Authority Delivery \(LAD\) Scheme | What Is It \(solar-grants.co.uk\)](#)

⁴ [Home Upgrade Grant: Phase 2 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Outcomes

We use the Citizens Advice bespoke Case Management System (Casebook) to record profile information for each client and also to record casework. A note is made for every contact/activity with a client and the system allows us to categorise the issues involved in each case using Advice Issue Codes (AICs). Many clients come to us with multiple, complex problems and there can be several AICs for each case. We are able to report on;

- Energy debts written off
- Income gained through hardship schemes
- Wellbeing improvements
- Number and type of simple energy efficiency measures installed in Home Visits

By providing a SPOC service we will achieve;

- More co-ordinated energy advice delivery across the county
- More frontline workers and professionals trained to recognise fuel poverty and answer simple energy related queries.
- More people who are extremely vulnerable gaining access to a home/virtual home visit.

The Citizen Advice bespoke Case Management System is flexible and adaptable and we can monitor outcomes based on funders' preferences.

Summary

The need for a funded Home Energy support service across West Sussex is now more vital than ever. Without a core Home Energy service available to the most in need West Sussex residents, we risk letting thousands of vulnerable residents with the tough decision on whether to eat or heat their home. Cold, dark homes increase peoples risk of premature death, putting further pressure on our local health and wellbeing services and the NHS. Tackling Fuel Poverty is a win- win across the board.

Vulnerable residents need direct support to access and understand these schemes, which is where the importance of a locally trusted Home Energy advice service and wider package of support will be key to minimising the harsh realities of this energy/cost-of-living crisis for West Sussex residents. Providing a consistent, long-term point of contact will help build awareness and trust amongst residents

Costings options

In setting these costing options we have taken into consideration the likely rate of inflation in 2023 and the increase in wages following from it.

Option 1

Funding to continue the current Single Point of Contact service for West Sussex residents, staffed by 2.5 FTE specialists' energy advisers, it will cost, including management costs and overheads,

£105,450 a year. It will allow for 1,900 energy interactions which equates to approximately £55 per interaction. This option will not allow us to deal with the current and predicted demand.

Option 2

To increase the capacity of the SPOC team to 4 FTE to ensure that the predicted telephone/video/email energy advice demands are met it will cost, including management costs, overheads, NEA training and equipment, **£171,704** a year. We will allow for 3,040 energy interactions which equates to approximately £56.48 per intervention. This option will not allow us to provide home visits to the most vulnerable households.

Option 3

To increase the capacity of the team to 5 FTE to ensure that the predicted telephone/video/email energy advice needs are met, and home visits are provided to the most in vulnerable, in need of advice and advocacy and unable to deal with the matter through another channel, it will cost, including management costs, overheads, NEA training, equipment and travel cost, **£216,423** a year. We will allow for 3040 energy interactions and 246 home visits which equates to approximately £65.86 per intervention. This option will allow us to deal with increased demand and provide a home visit service to the most vulnerable.

Additional to the above options

To increase reach and support available through the provision of training to allow professionals and frontline workers to recognise the impact of living in a cold home and whether someone is in fuel poverty, to provide information to support service users in navigating reliable energy related sites and for the provision of updated information through a newsletter and the direct referral to specialist advice.

The cost of a FTE energy advice awareness trainer including equipment is £42,830 a year. This will allow many more fuel poverty households to be reached by other professionals and frontline workers.