

Wales & West Utilities Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

Improving Homes and Wellbeing

Age UK South Gloucestershire

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Eligibility criteria for company specific projects (other than condemned essential gas appliance repair and replacement)

In order to qualify as a VCMA Project, a project must:

- a) have a positive, or a forecasted positive, Social Return on Investment (SROI) including for the gas consumers funding the VCMA Project;
- b) either:
 - i. provide support to consumers in Vulnerable Situations and relate to energy safeguarding, or
 - ii. provide awareness of the dangers of CO, or
 - iii. reduce the risk of harm caused by CO;
- c) have defined outcomes and the associated actions to achieve these;
- d) go beyond activities that are funded through other price control mechanism(s) or required through licence obligations; and
- e) not be delivered through other external funding sources directly accessed by a GDN, including through other government (national, devolved or local) funding.¹

Eligibility criteria for company specific essential gas appliance servicing, repair, and replacement

In order to qualify as a VCMA Project, unsafe pipework and essential gas appliance² servicing, repair or replacement must meet the following criteria:

- a) a GDN has to isolate and condemn unsafe pipework or an an essential gas appliance following a supply interruption or as part of its emergency service role;
- b) the household cannot afford to service, repair or replace unsafe pipework or the essential gas appliance; and
- c) sufficient funding is not available from other sources (including national, devolved or local government funding) to fund the unsafe pipework or the essential gas appliance servicing, repair or replacement.

¹ If part, but not full, funding is available through an external funding source for an eligible project, VCMA funding can be used for the remaining amount.

² Essential gas appliances are gas fuelled heating systems (including gas boilers and gas fires), and gas cookers.

Criteria

Information required for the registration of VCMA projects

Information required	Description
Project title	Improving Homes and Wellbeing (Age UK)
Funding GDN(s)	Wales & West Utilities – Company Specific VCMA Project
New/ Updated PEA	New
VCMA Project contact name, email and number	Sophie Shorney Sophie.shorney@wwutilities.co.uk 07583 076147
Total Cost (£)	£41,508
Total VCMA funding required (£)	£41,508
Problem(s)	<p>Fuel poverty is particularly serious for older people because they are particularly vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home, which increases the risk of stroke, heart attack and exacerbates pre-existing conditions such as cardiovascular disease and arthritis. It also impacts mental health, increasing feelings of anxiety, loneliness and depression.</p> <p>Age UK’s operational teams and our community partner organisations are seeing more older people worried about what is happening not just with their energy company and energy costs but also how they will afford to keep warm and manage household essentials including their utilities.</p> <p>With around 1 million older people already living in fuel poverty, Age UK has warned that the rising energy costs could push a further 150,00 older people into fuel poverty.</p> <p>In April 2020 Age UK South Gloucestershire commenced an Improving Homes and Well Being Service. (IHWS) Houses had been identified throughout the county that had fallen into disrepair with overgrown gardens, and unsightly outbuildings. Upon approach to the homeowners many were found to be older members of the community who lived alone with little or no friends and family. They did not have the finances, technical support such as internet access, or knowledge to approach the correct trades for help or simply lacked physical or mental strength to deal with the repairs and upkeep of their homes.</p>

Criteria

	<p>Simple repairs and maintenance were not being carried out and their homes deteriorated into often cold, damp, untidy and very unsafe living conditions. Age UK staff gathered substantial evidence of the poor living conditions. These poor living conditions impacted client’s health and wellbeing pushing them further into fuel poverty. They found that clients could not afford or did not understand the importance of Carbon Monoxide detection. They had no current Gas Safety certificate and relied upon very old boilers, fires, cookers and other such appliances.</p> <p>During January 2024 Age UK South Glos diverted some money into carbon monoxide detection and caused many Gas Safety Inspections with horrifying results:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A boiler installed within the bedroom had a hand size hole in the flue, this was condemned. 2. A Gas Cooker used by a client with severe dementia had to be condemned. 3. Very few of the 96 clients contacted had a working carbon monoxide detector and knew the importance of these items or what to do if activated. 4. Very few of the clients had any friends or family to help them with this danger.
<p>Scope and Objectives</p>	<p>The project will deliver a three pillared approach to help alleviate fuel poverty and support those who are most in need when it comes to adequately heating their homes keeping them safe and well.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prevention - Working with our Improving Homes and Wellbeing team we will use local Gas Safety Engineers to proactively carry out gas safety checks for older people to make sure their appliances are safe and fit for purpose. Where they require an intervention, Age UK South Glos will work with third party organisations to repair or replace appliance within the eligibility criteria. Local GSRs are also working with the fire services so can include slips, trips and fall assessments where required. This will be a face-to-face service.

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	<p>2) Education – Age UK South Glos will upskill their existing Information and Advice Advisors to support customers with benefit entitlement checks, PSR Referrals, Energy efficiency advice and Carbon Monoxide safety measures. This service will be provided through face-to-face sessions and telephone advice.</p> <p>Awareness – All Age UK South Glos staff will be upskilled to raise awareness of the PSR and Carbon Monoxide Signs and Symptoms so they can discuss directly with the communities they are interacting with. This will be done directly via face-to-face sessions and also through social media posts.</p>
<p>Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA, and how this aligns to GDN’s VCMA Strategy</p>	<p>Wales & West Utilities does not own or bill customers for their gas consumption, however, through stakeholder engagement, we recognise our role in making sure gas is used safely, and efficiently. This project goes above and beyond our core responsibilities as a Gas Distribution Network and is eligible under the VCMA funding criteria as it will provide energy efficiency advice and CO safety advice/interventions, empowering each householder to use energy safely, efficiently and affordably.</p> <p>All GDNs have committed to spending VCMA money within four strategic pillars:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fuel Poverty & Energy Affordability 2. Services Beyond The Meter 3. Supporting Priority Customer Groups 4. Carbon Monoxide Awareness <p>This project aligns to pillar 2.</p>
<p>Evidence of Stakeholder/ Customer support</p>	<p>Age UK: In January 2022 Age UK research found that as a result of the increase in costs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Over half said they’d have to limit the heating in their home - A quarter said they’d have to choose between heating their home and the food they buy if energy bills increase substantially - 43% said they would have to cut back, go into debt or simply not be able to afford to pay their bill.

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	<p>During 2021 it is estimated that three million English households were living in fuel poverty (Dept for Business, Energy and Business Strategy). Nearly half of low-income households would be living in hard to heat homes, and the rate of improvements is well below what is needed to lift people out of fuel poverty by a target date of 2030.</p> <p>Against a backdrop of Covid-19, many older people have increased levels of anxiety (Age UK impact of COVID report) exacerbated by instability in the retail market and a steep rise in utility costs (Age UK Research briefing – impact of energy cap rise on older households in England).</p> <p>WWU: Through our business planning for RIIO GD2, priority customers research and stakeholders told us that tackling fuel poverty was a priority for WWU alongside raising awareness of the PSR and the dangers of CO.</p> <p>Our continued engagement with stakeholders such as the NEA, Citizens Advice, and charities supported by fuel poverty statistics shows due to high inflation and record energy prices that fuel poverty is impacted more homes than ever. People who were struggling are now not using the heating or limiting use to unhealthy levels and appliances are not being serviced leading to future safety risks. The crisis has meant people who have never been in trouble now find themselves needing help but not knowing where to turn for advice.</p> <p>We have tested support for projects under the VCMA which target fuel poverty through our Independent Stakeholder Group, Citizens panels, VCMA showcase events and Regional Workshops with overwhelming support to continue and do even more.</p>
<p>Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria</p>	<p>Outcomes aligned to the three pillars include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prevention – Direct support for 300 older people through proactive services. This will result in approximately: 75 boilers requiring additional repairs

Criteria

	<p>2) Education – Reach at least 4,000 older people per annum (6,000 in total over the 18 months of the project delivery) to discuss the benefits of PSR, CO Safety measures and energy efficiency advice. At least 10% (600 people) will receive in depth support to maximise household income through benefit entitlement checks.</p> <p>3) Awareness – Raise awareness of Carbon Monoxide and the Priority Services Register through leaflets and website/social media posts indirectly reaching 90,000 older people.</p> <p>Other outcomes include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CO Awareness Surveys following their interaction with older people through the VCMA project (10% - 600 surveys) - Distribution of 200 CO Alarms - Distribution of 100 Keep Warm Packs - 600 (10%) PSR Referrals <p>Up to 75 boilers being repaired via funding from third parties.</p>
Project Partners and third parties involved	<p>The project will be delivered by Age UK South Glos, supported by South Gloucestershire Council, The Charity Quartet, AGE, St Monicas Trust, Severn Wye Energy and LEAP.</p> <p>The Prevention pillar of the project and gas safety work will be carried out by 16 GSR's over 2 Gas Safe qualified companies.</p>
Potential for new learning	<p>This is a pilot project which will be carried out by South Glos and WWU. The outcomes and success of this project will be reviewed, and any lessons learnt and best practice will be embedded into future projects with the intention to bring local Age UK and Age Cymru branches together to support a full network delivery.</p> <p>This will continue to evolve in line with the eligibility criteria.</p>
Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations, including NPV	<p>We have taken the forecasted numbers expected by Age UK South Glos and calculated the following SROI over the delivery period using the latest GDN (27/09/24) shared SROI model:</p> <p>Total Gross Present Value = £257,259.00</p>

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	<p>Net Present Value = £217,385.31 SROI per £1 spent = £5.45 provided, rather than confirmation of positive impact.</p>
VCMA Project start and end date	Project will run from November 2024 to March 2026 – 17 months.
Geographical area	The project will be delivered across the southwest of our network, focussing on South Gloucestershire.
Internal governance and project management evidence	<p>This project will have a monthly meeting to assess progress in mobilisation and delivery with a more formal quarterly meeting involving the responsible senior manager(s).</p> <p>Data and outcomes from the project will be summarised and reported quarterly to the WWU Business Delivery Performance Committee for review and challenge and will be formally reported to Ofgem and stakeholder through the annual VCMA report, showcase event and RRP which are all subject to the Data Accuracy Governance process (DAG).</p>