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| Supporting customers in vulnerable situations  |
| Wales & West UtilitiesApril 2021 |

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# Background

Building on successful projects that were launched in GD1, we are looking to invest over £1 million pounds in supporting customers in vulnerable situations over the next five years (April 2021 to March 2026).

We take pride in being one of the top performers for customer service in all UK sectors, with an ICS score of 93.6. We are also the first gas distribution network (GDN) to be accredited against the British Standard for Inclusive Service Provision (BS 18477). These accreditations allow us to benchmark ourselves against the best companies in the UK. They also enable us to look beyond the Ofgem standards that we already use to compare our performance against that of other GDNs, where we are consistently first or second.

We work in around 100,000 homes and communities each year across our network and are well placed to help identify and safeguard consumers in vulnerable situations. Vulnerability comes in all different forms; it may be physical, mental, emotional, geographical or financial. For some, it is a permanent state but for others it may be a transient one. Our stakeholder research has shown how we can affect our customers and we will do everything we can to mitigate this, providing additional services whenever possible.

We know that an ageing population and growing numbers of dementia, diabetes and mental health cases means we will be dealing with increasing numbers of people living in vulnerable situations in GD2. As a responsible business, we are committed to a sustainable approach going forward and making sure we play a positive role in and amongst the communities we serve. Colleagues go above and beyond to provide customer service excellence for everyone, whatever their circumstances, and they understand how important it is to make sure that those customers who require additional support have their voices heard

Among our 2.5 million consumers, many live in vulnerable situations and count on us to understand and respond appropriately. GD1 saw us make positive strides in this area. We care about those in vulnerable situations. In Wales, we have the oldest housing stock, one of the highest poverty levels and the lowest average energy efficiency ratings in the UK and Europe. Recognising the challenges our customers face every day, we have delivered vulnerability training to over 1,680 colleagues to help them identify signs of vulnerability and giving them the tools to provide additional help.

We also held one-to-one interviews with 100 customers in vulnerable situations in their homes, as well as interviewing carers and support agency colleagues. This research was vital in building our Vulnerability Strategy, so we used experts in this field, Mindset, to better understand consumer vulnerability in relation to the use of our services and impact of our work. Through this engagement, we have identified the growing incidence of emotional vulnerability, which appears to be widespread and has been a consideration in the development of our customer GD2 commitments.

Strategic stakeholders said they wanted to see GDNs play a central role in providing support for those living in vulnerable situations as our energy system becomes increasingly complex. Those up to the age of 55, living in Wales and considered fuel poor were more likely to highly rate support of vulnerable customers. Further collaboration with partners will help to further increase our understanding of the spectrum of vulnerability.

Our Challenge

WWU seeks to create a pool of ideas that can be assessed and prioritised to create a roadmap for RIIO GD2.

We are looking for projects and partnerships that can help us:

* Improve access to smart solutions for all our customers and develop new solutions to enable the fuel poor to directly benefit from smart technologies and network flexibility opportunities.
* Minimising the number of, and duration of, interruption to customers supplies and ensuring customers are kept safe and warm during the interruption
* Adaptive technology to assist people with physical needs access their energy safely
* Better understand how the needs of our vulnerable customers will change in the future and what new processes or systems we need to create to continue offering excellent customer service to our vulnerable customers as their needs change.
* Help customers understand how their behaviour impacts their energy usage and promotes positive changes
* Create novel ways to support our vulnerable customers through the transition to net zero and understand the role community energy groups can play.
* Make engagement with communities fairer, more meaningful and find novel ways to help us to understand the needs of the communities in our area that can be replicated by other
* Data, mapping, and analytics ideas to give insights into the customers and communities we serve.

**Information**

Links

* The project will be funded through the Network Innovation Allowance and the work must comply with Ofgem’s Gas NIA Governance Documents. [Link.](https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications-and-updates/riio-2-nia-governance-document-0)
* [Energy for All - Innovate for All](https://www.sustainabilityfirst.org.uk/project-research-reports/180-energy-for-all-innovate-for-all)
* [Smart and Fair? | Centre for Sustainable Energy](https://www.cse.org.uk/projects/view/1359)

Governance

Successful proposals will be funded by the Network Innovation Allowance (NIA), regulated by Ofgem. To secure NIA funding, projects must:

* Be a **new and innovative idea**. This could be new equipment, new applications of existing equipment or new commercial arrangements – with an unproven business case.
* Involve the research, development or demonstration of ideas that could **change how the physical network is used or how the system is operated**.
* Have the **potential to save customers money**, compared to the way things are done now.
* **Not duplicate other innovation projects** in the UK.
* Generate **learning relevant to other network companies**, not just WWU.

Duration

Partners are invited to express their interest in as many challenges as they wish, a separate proposal should be submitted for each challenge. If the idea is a development proposal, please clearly indicate your anticipated project duration in your proposal.

Next Steps and Timelines

All proposals will be reviewed, and a member of the innovation team will be in touch to inform you if the idea is to be taken forward. The innovation team will then guide you through the process which will include project plan development and contract negotiations.

Application

To submit your application please fill in the below, along with any supporting material. The completed form should be returned to Innovation@wwutilities.co.uk

Submission

To register interest please fill out the below

Background to company (max 50 words)

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Proposed Solution (With high level project plan/timelines. Max 500 words)

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Method (Explain the Method to solve the problem and why it has been selected and details of whole energy system model proposed. Max 500 words)

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Estimated Cost (including breakdown of costs. Max 500 words)

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Deliverables (Max 500 words)

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Previous experience – case study/studies of similar work