

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

### Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

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Welfare Benefits Advice Service for Unpaid Carers and  
their Families

*Bridgend Carers*

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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.<sup>1</sup>

## 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 appliance<sup>2</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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	Welfare Benefits Advice Service for Unpaid Carers and their Families
Funding GDN(s)	Wales & West Utilities
New/ Updated PEA	1 April 2022
VCMA Project contact name, email and number	Tom Robinson <a href="mailto:Tom.Robinson@wwutilities.co.uk">Tom.Robinson@wwutilities.co.uk</a> 07890 315438
Total Cost (£)	£50,000
Total VCMA funding required (£)	£50,000
Problem(s)	<p>According to the State of Caring Report 2021 (Carers Wales) "If the health and social care systems are to recover, they must value and put in place support services for carers to enable them to carry on. 2022 must begin with urgent action to meet the needs of unpaid carers who have gone above and beyond during the pandemic."</p> <p>Since the pandemic, the number of unpaid carers in Wales has increased significantly and their physical and mental health has deteriorated, their services disrupted, and their careers curtailed if they are in employment.</p> <p>Unpaid carers were suffering before the pandemic but if recovery from the pandemic is to happen carers need to have improved access to practical financial advice and assistance to enable carers to continue to support their friends and loved ones who are ill, disabled, elderly, suffer with mental health or substance misuse issues.</p> <p>Carers reported, in the State of Caring Report 2021, that 23% feel unconfident of managing financially over the next year (2022) and 8% of unpaid carers are unable to afford utility bills. These figures have been made worse through the pandemic with 36% of carers struggling to make ends meet; 23% are or have been in debt since the pandemic. In addition, energy bills have increased substantially whilst furlough has ended, Universal Credit reduced, and 66% carers are saying that they are spending more on groceries and bills since the start of the pandemic.</p> <p>This project will look to bolster the support being provided by Bridgend Carers Centre.</p>

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<p>Scope and Objectives</p>	<p>Bridgend Carers Centre will hire a Welfare Benefits Advisor for a 2-year period, which will increase support to unpaid carers. This will help carers to avoid poverty through a diverse range of benefit applications (Attendance Allowance, PIP, Carers Allowance, Pension Credit, Council Tax Discount, DLA etc), improve debt management, and improve overall wellbeing for them and the people they care for. The Welfare Benefits Advisor would offer holistic support by assessing the financial situation, helping with debt, disabled badge applications, raising awareness of house/ car insurance comparison websites to save money, water meter installation, bereavement grants and benefits, energy efficiency awareness, applications for the Warm Home discount scheme, Nest Scheme applications (dependant on eligibility), CO safety initiatives and energy comparisons. They will actively sign eligible customers up to the Priority Service Register (PSR), provide awareness and advice around Carbon Monoxide (CO), access to free CO monitors, and utilise their existing network of partnerships to deliver ongoing support beyond this project agreement.</p> <p>We anticipate that this project will be achieve at least 900 interactions between the Welfare Benefits Advisor and clients, resulting in savings of at least £400,000.</p>
<p>Why the Project is being funded through the VCMA, and how this aligns to GDN’s VCMA Strategy</p>	<p>Wales &amp; 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>Evidence of Stakeholder/ Customer support</p>	<p>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>In our business plan we laid out a proposed spend for the first year of RIIO GD2 of £200k towards tackling fuel poverty, out of an</p>

## Criteria

	<p>assumed pot of £750k. In the final determinations, the VCMA allowance for WWU was doubled to £1.4m with 75% to be spent on projects within the WWU area.</p> <p>We have undertaken further stakeholder engagement in late 2020 and early 2021 to understand the impact of COVID-19 and to confirm our assumptions on the split of the VCMA fund. The majority of stakeholders flagged fuel poverty as a bigger issue than ever due to COVID-19 and its impact on people's income, health, and upward cost of gas and electricity.</p> <p>We therefore increased our proposed spend on projects to tackle fuel poverty and energy efficiency to £400k, of which £50,000 will be spent on this project.</p>
<p>Outcomes, associated actions, and success criteria</p>	<p>Wales &amp; West Utilities will fund this project at a cost of £50,000 for a 2-year period. We anticipate that this project will be achieve at least 900 interactions between the Welfare Benefits Advisor and clients, resulting in savings of at least £400,000. The benefits of this project will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct financial benefits to the carer/family</li> <li>- Improved Health and wellbeing of carer/family</li> <li>- Decreased stress</li> <li>- Decreased bills</li> <li>- Warmer/Healthier homes</li> <li>- Safer homes</li> <li>- Increased disposable income</li> <li>- More affluent communities</li> <li>- Improved environmentally friendly homes and these will be achieved by:</li> <li>- Maximisation of income for carers and families through welfare benefits checks and applications.</li> <li>- Increased support to receive debt management through increased referrals to CAB, and debt management agencies.</li> <li>- Safer homes through raising awareness and education of energy efficiency.</li> <li>- Alleviation of fuel poverty through switching tariffs and providers.</li> <li>- Increased capacity to support vulnerable carers and families of dementia, disabled children, cancer, and carers of children with learning disabilities.</li> </ul>

## Criteria

	<p>- Support will be given to bereaved carers through applications for grants and benefits.</p> <p>Through additional support measures like the PSR and partnerships already cultivated by Bridgend Carers Centre this project will also see longevity past the project period, in terms of support for carers.</p>
Project Partners and third parties involved	This project will be delivered through a partnership of Wales & West Utilities, and Bridgend Carers Centre.
Potential for new learning	This project is one of two projects being funded by Wales & west Utilities, for caring agencies, and thus we will be able to compare the results from each and share learning for both for the overall benefit of carers in both areas. This project also gives us the opportunity to engage with both Bridgend Carers Centre and the carers they work with, to understand the impact of our BAU activities on them as a community. In addition, we may find the feedback from this project will justify upscaling this project/ sharing the results of this project with further caring agencies.
Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations, including NPV	We have taken the forecast support measures from Bridgend Carers and used as the input to our SROI model. The output shows a £19.25 net benefit per £1 invested
VCMA Project start and end date	Project start date: 01 April 2022 Project end date: 30 April 2024
Geographical area	This project will be run in Bridgend, Wales.