

VULNERABILITY AND CARBON MONOXIDE ALLOWANCE

Wales & West Utilities Annual Report 2021-2022



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Welcome

Since our establishment in 2005 we have been focused on putting customers at the core of everything we do. We reinforced this in our 2021-2026 Business Plan, where we set out our promises to our customers. The Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance allows us to go further and build upon our proud track record of supporting customers and providing inclusive services. The partnerships we have developed with organisations and our fellow gas networks are already making huge differences to those struggling to pay their bills, increasing energy efficiency and making sure customers are safe in their homes, no longer at risk of carbon monoxide effects. We are passionate about the important role we play and, as a responsible business, we will be focused on growing our partnerships, our skills and our reach to really make a difference to those who need it.

Graham Edwards
Chief Executive



Introduction

This is our first annual report on the specific achievements Wales & West Utilities (WWU) has made using the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA). It covers the first year of the RIIO GD2 regulatory period, 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. The Gas Distribution Networks (GDNs) collaborative report should be read alongside this report.

This report explains what the VCMA is and how WWU has worked with stakeholders to create a portfolio of projects, making sure they meet customers' needs. Projects are evaluated and brought to life through case studies.

Introducing the Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance

The GDNs have licence obligations requiring them to identify and support Priority Customers during general business engagement. This includes tailored communications, braille ID cards, sign language and translation mobile phone apps, the provision of alternative heating, cooking and hot water facilities during incidents, and providing alternative accommodation if required.

We also have a separate allowance to fund first time gas connections for 2,500 homes in RIIO GD2 for customers living in or at risk of fuel poverty – 1,177 connections in 2021/22.

The VCMA has resulted from stakeholder feedback that informed the GDNs RIIO GD2 Business Plans submitted to energy regulator Ofgem to run for the price control period from April 2021 to March 2026. Originally proposed as a £30m fund by Ofgem, stakeholder feedback about the level of customer need and the GDNs' ability to deliver resulted in the fund being increased to £60m for the five-year period. Each GDN has a proportion of the fund based on the number of customers to whom it supplies gas. In WWU's case, this is just under 12% of the total number of UK gas customers, resulting in a fund of £7m (based on 2018/19 prices, which with current inflation (April 2022 CPIH) is around £8.4m in real years' allowance). The VCMA supports the GDNs' individual business plans and ambitions and can be used for VCMA projects focusing on supporting

vulnerability and carbon monoxide safety initiatives. These initiatives must extend beyond activities funded through other price control mechanisms or required through licence obligations. Eligible projects are required to either:

- 1** provide support to consumers in vulnerable situations and relate to energy safeguarding, or
- 2** provide awareness of the dangers of CO, or
- 3** reduce the risk of harm caused by CO.

The VCMA governance rules require that at least 25% of the WWU allowance must be spent on collaborative projects. These are projects where there is a clear benefit to working with a partner who has a national profile (such as Citizens Advice or running a UK-wide carbon monoxide

awareness campaign) or where a partner crosses two GDNs’ boundaries – such as our joint work with SGN and the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service.

WWU-specific projects mainly involve working with partners who operate only in our geographical areas – such as Warm Wales, Care & Repair Cymru or the safety centres Lifeskills in Bristol and Dangerpoint in Wrexham. However, we can also trial a project in our area and then take it to the collaborative forums with a view to scaling it up to be a national project. Our work on reaching young adults with carbon monoxide education is one such example.

To build knowledge and develop projects, a VCMA collaborative GDN group structure allows for open discussion about work being undertaken in each GDN area and opportunities for projects to be undertaken collaboratively. The graphic below shows the group hierarchy. WWU currently chairs the VCMA steering group and provides members to take part in the other groups.

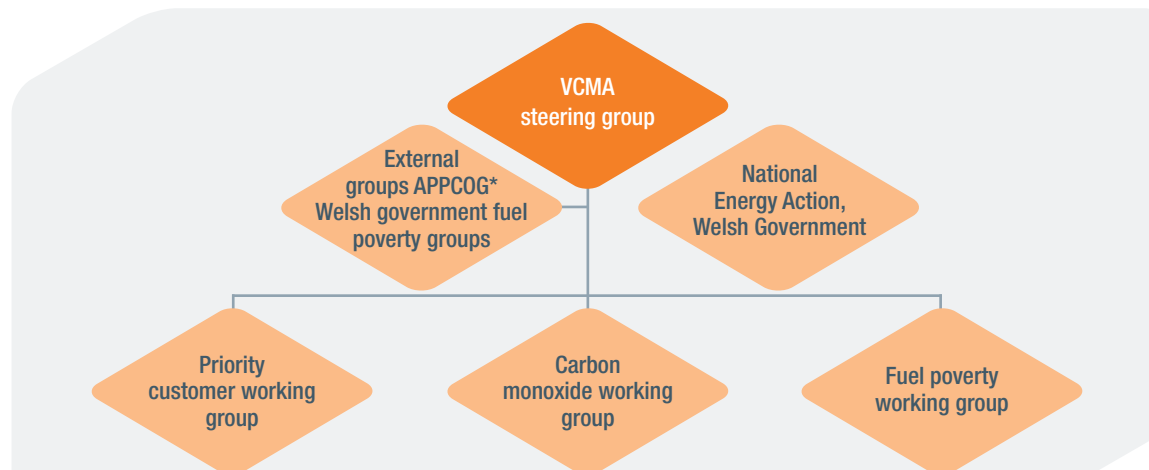
Stakeholders and strategy

Our stakeholders have been key to us securing this allowance to support vulnerability activities, through extensive engagement as part of our RIIO GD2 Business Plan development. It was stakeholder responses to Ofgem consultations on the RIIO GD2 proposals that led to the fund being doubled from £30m to £60m. For WWU this meant a change of our internal budget spend of £0.7m per year increasing to £1.4m a year.

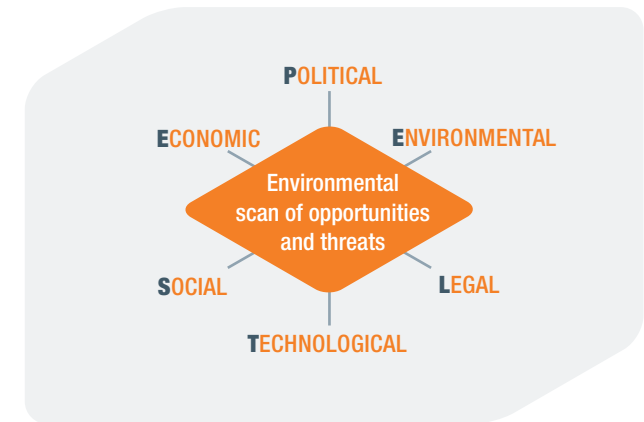
During the stakeholder engagement for the submission of our Business Plan to Ofgem in December 2019, we asked stakeholders opinions on prioritisation of our spend for our allocation. A range of vulnerability experts and regional consumer representative stakeholders concluded we should be profiling our VCMA spend as follows:

Tackling fuel poverty and access to energy	60%
Carbon Monoxide Awareness and alarms	30%
Priority Services Register awareness	10%

At RIIO GD2 commencement, we held further stakeholder engagement, including with consumers on our Citizens’ Panel. We have continued to work with our Consumer Engagement Group (CEG) who provide challenge and review to our VCMA investment plans and project delivery progress. Analysis of all opinions concluded that all vulnerability support areas were still important, but fuel poverty was emerging as the biggest issue – evident now with the current energy and general cost of living crisis. Our stakeholders continue to challenge us to make sure we are appraised of current and future opportunities and issues and making sure our strategy is agile. To support this, we have adopted the use of PESTLE analysis, alongside our risk register and issues log, to understand how each topic is impacting our business.



* All-Party Parliamentary Carbon Monoxide Group



We now use this analysis at the start of each of our internal steering groups and our Strategy Development Committee.

Co-creating VCMA projects with stakeholders

We established a number of partnerships in RIIO GD1 including Warm Wales, Care & Repair Cymru, and with regional Fire and Rescue Services. Warm Wales has focused on ways to identify and support some of the most vulnerable people in our area, helping them access unclaimed benefits, supporting them through making applications for energy efficiency measures and tackling utility tariffs and debt balances. To continue this work into RIIO GD2, we embarked on a formal tender process, through which we re-procured the services of Warm Wales.

Our VCMA website page is sited under our Safe and Warm banner. Learning from the management and administration of our Safe and Warm fund, which we ran during 2020 to support organisations dealing with the Covid-19 emergency, we have run a number of workshops to support organisations through the process of presenting an idea to us and then working with them to shape impactful and substantial projects.

Measuring outcomes and benefits of projects

The GDNs all developed similar models to evaluate Social Return on Investment (SROI). These models assess the financial benefit to a customer/household and the additional societal benefits. Offsetting the cost of the project provides a net benefit that should be positive, i.e. the benefits are larger than the investment.

For example, a partnership may help customer finances by:

- identifying unclaimed benefits
- reducing energy bills through tariffs, energy efficiency advice and accessing finance for insulation
- tackling energy debt
- providing a Fuel Voucher to keep the energy flowing
- accessing the Warm Homes Discount payment of £140 per year.

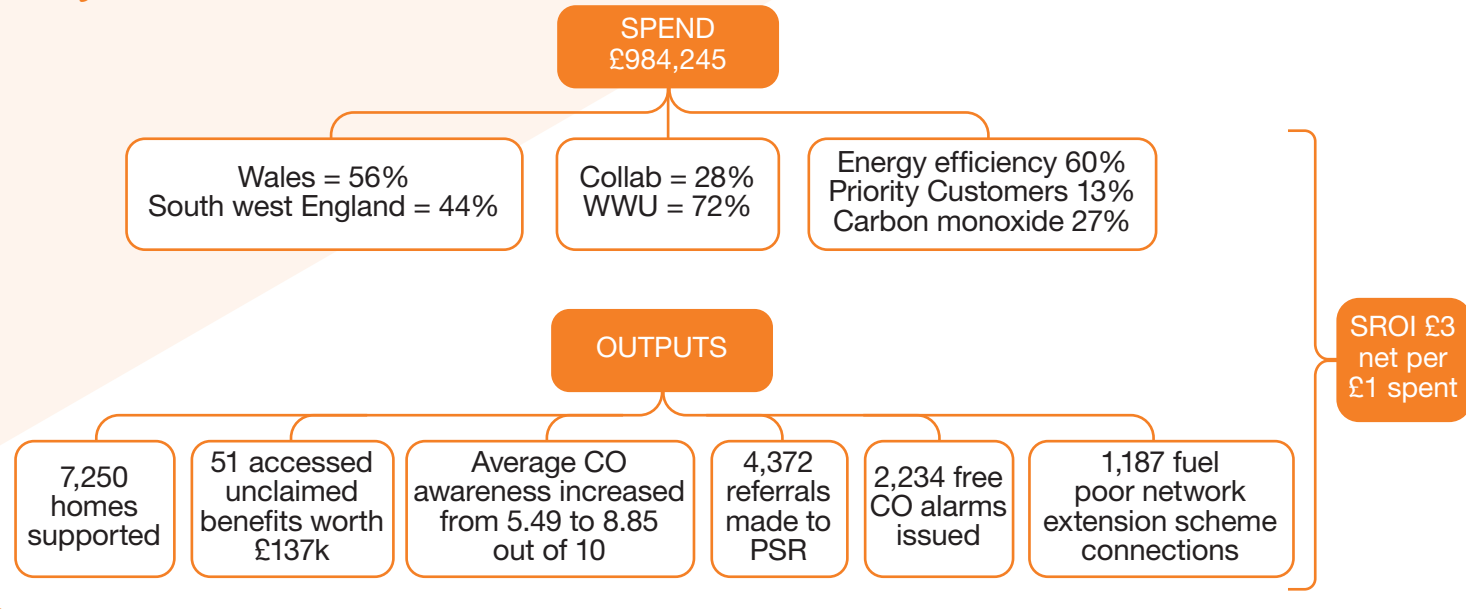
Social benefits may include:

- reducing visits to doctors linked to cold homes or carbon monoxide
- reducing hospital stays
- reducing serious injuries or deaths from carbon monoxide
- reducing stress and improving mental health
- reducing reliance on care professionals.

These statistics can demonstrate a project's success or where it needs to do more to justify the cost. However, the real impact of projects is brought to life through case studies and hearing the words of people who have been helped. You will see some of these in our project profiles.



Project overview



Breakdown of projects by beneficiary type



- Older people
- Young adults / care leaver
- Young families / pregnancy / children
- Physical disability
- Developmental condition
- Mental help
- Fuel poverty
- Isolated
- Language
- Carers

Summary of projects and outcomes

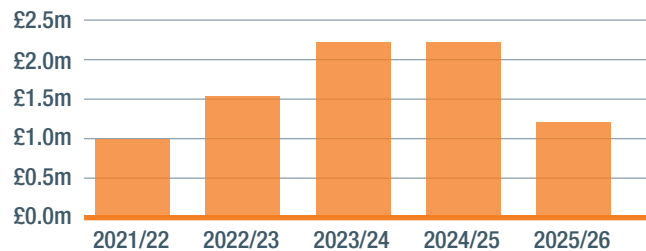
VCMA spend profile

We have spent a total of £0.98m in year one of the VCMA, of which £0.71m (72%) has been on WWU company projects and the remaining 28% on collaborative projects.

This is lower than flat rate expenditure, which would equate to £1.4m in 2018/19 prices, and closer to £1.7m in real prices. This was driven by the doubling of the funding by Ofgem at the December 2020 RIIO GD2 determination, which was too late to change our budget profiles for commencing spend in April 2021, and our own underestimation of the time and resources required to engage and develop new projects.

To make sure we invest our £8.4m funding allocation in RIIO GD2 to best support our customers in most need, we have already increased our budget for 2022 to £1.6m and, due to the unforeseen cost of living crisis and huge energy price increases, we propose to front load our spend and increase to £2.2m for the following two years with the remaining £1.4m spent in the final year of RIIO GD2.

PROJECTED SPEND PROFILE



Supporting customers in vulnerable situations



We support customers who struggle to pay their energy bills as well as dealing with the cost of living crisis. We also help customers avoid the need to self-isolate their energy supplies either through switching off appliances or getting faulty appliances fixed. Research shows that if a home is warm and dry then the whole household is healthier and will have better wellbeing and social confidence – and supporting the wellbeing of our customers is one of our business priorities.

Energy affordability and access

IDENTIFYING THE NEED

With rising fuel prices and the cost of living crisis, the number of people in or at risk of fuel poverty has doubled during 2021/22.

Partner	Cost	Forecast SROI*	Status	Start/end
Warm Wales with National Energy Action (NEA) and Consumer Energy Systems (CES)	£300k per annum for two years	Net £9.21 per £1 invested	On track	July 2021 to June 2023
Warm Wales with NEA	£33k admin plus anticipated £60k repair/replace appliance costs per annum	Net £1.51 per £1 invested	On track	July 2021 to June 2023

*5-year projection

Project year to date (July 2021 – March 2022)	Savings	Homes helped	Average saving per household
South Wales	£246,658	256	£964
North Wales	£52,433	105	£499
Cornwall	£65,956	131	£503
South west	£83,270	153	£544.25
Total	£448,317	645	£695

PROJECT AIMS AND DELIVERY

The scheme is targeting support for 1,000 homes per annum.

Partners assess and review an individual's current situation through telephone calls (especially during Covid-19) and face-to-face engagement where required, and agree an action plan. The Warm Wales/NEA and CES teams hand-hold customers through the necessary paperwork and discussions with various agencies to reach a range of positive outcomes, including:

- ▶ Unclaimed benefits
- ▶ Reducing energy debt and bills
- ▶ Accessing energy measures funding
- ▶ Changing individuals' behaviour to energy use
- ▶ Accessing home adaption grants
- ▶ Priority Services Registration.

OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

A summary of the benefits achieved from April 2021 to March 2022 is shown on the right.

Project year to date (July 2021 – March 2022)	PSR sign-ups	No. 60yr+	No. 0-5yr olds
South Wales	101	84	5
North Wales	49	31	3
Cornwall	23	41	3
South west	37	23	12
Totals	210	179	23



APPRAISAL AND LEARNING

We've worked hard in year one to get a great support services network in place but we know there is still more we can do in north west Wales and in parts of south west England.

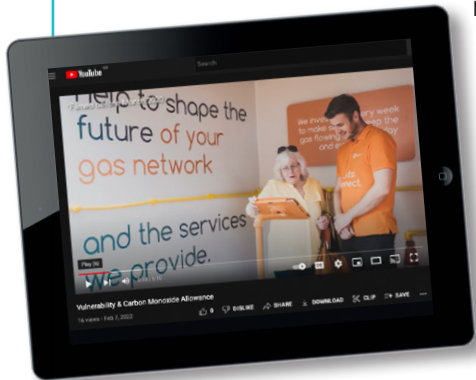
It is clear there are large amounts of unclaimed benefits that people can access and, while these take time to be paid to the claimants, they can be enduring and change people's lives for years to come.

The project needs to remain agile to account for changes in energy efficiency funding for insulation and other home improvements – these provide the second highest financial benefit to customers.

Health professionals can see the societal benefits of this type of project, including reducing demand on the NHS and social housing. We continue to build more referral partners with health professionals but more are needed to ensure a consistent support network across our area.



Check out our video https://youtu.be/o8_63QZNyyo



Case studies

Disabled council tax reduction – £200 a year, plus £1,000 in back payments

The Healthy Homes Healthy People project

supported a householder to claim the disabled person's council tax reduction – their client, 'HH', didn't think he would be entitled to receive this reduction, but he is now saving approximately £200 a year, and has also received a number of years of back payments.

Support with Attendance Allowance

We supported a woman to help her father – he lives in a property she owns. Our partners made a successful application to nest scheme and also for Attendance Allowance in respect of Mr X.

His daughter sent this email:

“ I have just phoned the Attendance Allowance line to see if they can give me an update on my father's claim and guess what..... he's having it!

“ Thank you so much for all of your help and support helping me with his heating and just listening to me. ”



Appliance Scheme

The addition of eligibility to fund repairs and replacement of gas appliances was a late amendment to the VCMA guidance. Eligibility is limited to situations where our engineers have to isolate an appliance due to leakage or safety concerns and where it is clear the customer is vulnerable and there is a risk of them self-disconnecting their energy supply.



PROJECT AIMS AND DELIVERY

Through this partnership, our engineers can refer customers with broken or faulty appliances to National Energy Action (NEA) for support. NEA engages with referred customers to agree what is the best way forward in each situation. Where there is an urgent need for support for meal preparation, the NEA team can employ a Gas Safe Registered (GSR) engineer to visit the customer's home. The engineer will carry out an inspection and advise if it is a low-cost repair, or if the fault is more complex and uneconomic to repair, due to the age of the appliance. Where the customer is able to manage without gas for a short period, applications will be made for Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding (nest in Wales) and any other eligible funding streams. However, if the customer's need for heating is urgent then a new boiler installation will be authorised.

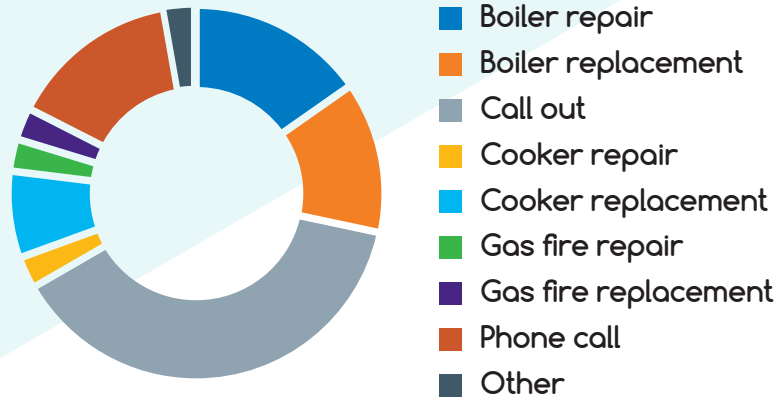


OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

In the first nine months of the scheme, there were 59 householder referrals, of which 39 were helped directly, and the remaining provided information and advice. In some cases, we have funded additional works to make the property safe and hygienic for the GSR engineer to work in, as well as funding work on the appliance.

A summary of the benefits from July 2021 to March 2022 is shown below.

Summary of 39 homes helped through appliance scheme



Case study

Our engineers visited a property following a reported gas leak in Ilfracombe, and found the gas meter unprotected and leaking. The meter boxes were secured to an external wall which was on the point of collapse. In addition, the area was covered with rubbish accumulated over years and dog excrement. We funded a clear-up of the area and re-build of the wall through our hardship fund.

It then became apparent there were multiple issues in the property and with the householders. The wife was receiving a course of chemotherapy, the husband had disabilities as a result of a stroke and their adult son was autistic. The inside of the house was in a similar state to the area outside – and their gas boiler was broken and had been for a number of months, and the cooker had only one working gas ring.

Following an assessment by NEA and conversations with the householders we:

- ▶ moved the family to temporary accommodation
- ▶ funded a clean-up of the house to enable access to the gas appliances and radiators
- ▶ replaced the gas boiler
- ▶ replaced the cooker.

We helped the family register on the Priority Service Register and then passed the case to Warm Wales to assess if any additional benefits could be claimed.

Support for
priority customers



Registering customers on the Priority Services Register has been a key focus for us so that people who need additional support are known, and can be looked after appropriately when we are in contact with them during supply outages. This was a high priority in stakeholder feedback in our preparation for GD2. We are developing a range of additional services beyond our licence obligations to provide alternative heating, cooking and hot water facilities to support the specific needs of individuals in vulnerable situations.

Partner	Cost	Status	Start/end
Care & Repair Cymru	£10k for trial £30k per annum	On track	April 2021 to March 2026
Facebook	£30k per annum	On track	Jan 2022 Review after 12 months
WWU engineers	£8k in 2021/22	On track	April 2021 to March 2026

Care & Repair Cymru

Care & Repair Cymru is the umbrella organisation for 22 Local Authority-aligned Care & Repair agencies in Wales. They deliver contracts for the Welsh Government supporting people aged over 65 and, through other funding streams, also support people aged over 50 with disabilities.

We partnered with Care & Repair Cymru during GD1 and trained their agents to include PSR and carbon monoxide awareness support in their discussions with customers. We also get referrals for Locking Cooker Valves through this route. We have now committed to this relationship over the long term and, in 2022/23, their carbon monoxide awareness and free alarm installation and PSR sign-up work will be

extended to their over-50s programme on a year's trial.

We also help to raise awareness of Care & Repair and the services they can offer in the local communities in which we are active, and colleagues have been involved in their fundraising activities. We have also supported their Board through a Trustee role and used our SROI tools to provide support for their funding bids from other external funding outlets. We sponsored their 2022 annual conference, bringing 140 people from representative organisations together to learn more about supporting people in vulnerable situations and how we plan to support people during future decarbonisation energy system changes.

OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

A summary of the benefits in the period April 2021 to March 2022 is shown below.

PSR referrals	809
CO questionnaires/alarms	871

APPRAISAL AND LEARNING

Running the programme's outcomes achieved through our SROI model shows a net benefit of £5 per £1 invested, based upon a five-year assessment period.

This relationship has potential to expand and bring in more work to support our customers with energy advice – and Welsh Government funds that element under Care & Repair's core funding.

We first partnered with Care & Repair Cymru during GD1



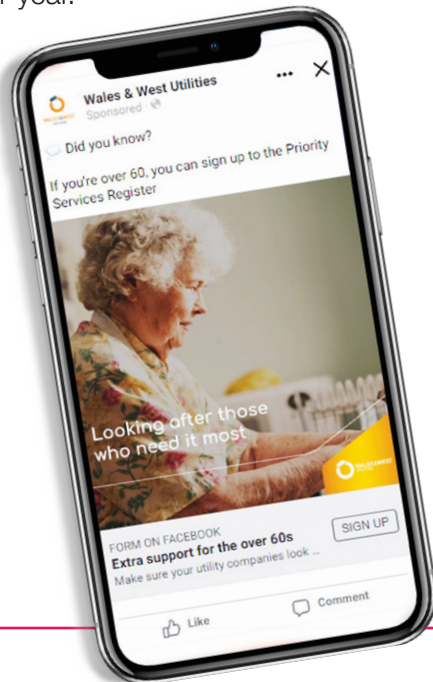
Priority Services Register Facebook campaign

More than 560,000 homes in our area are registered on the Priority Services Register (PSR) – that is 22% of the total 2.4m properties with a gas supply in our area. However, census evidence shows the number of people eligible to register is probably nearer to 40% – so many people are missing out on the protection and benefits of being on PSRs.



PROJECT AIMS AND DELIVERY

We trialled targeted Facebook paid-for campaigns to reach older customers and people with disabilities and health conditions, promoting the PSR and providing an easy route to register with suppliers and other utilities. Our latest campaign is targeting 6,000 PSR sign-ups per year.



OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Since the campaign has gone live in March, we have signed up more than 1,400 customers through this channel at a cost of £2.87 per sign-up.



APPRAISAL AND LEARNING

Previous campaigns indicated this is not the best route to sign up younger people and families, so this campaign targets older people and those with poor health. Our campaign messaging and targeting will be reviewed after 12 months and if target sign-ups continue to be maintained, we will continue it into a second year.

Locking Cooker Valves



IDENTIFYING THE NEED

Dementia is a growing issue in our aging population, severely impacting people's independence and wellbeing. The number of older people with dementia in the UK is forecast to increase from almost 885,000 in 2019 to around 1.6 million in 2040*.



PROJECT AIMS AND DELIVERY

A Locking Cooker Valve (LCV) allows a carer or family member to unlock and open a gas pipe valve so a gas cooker can be used safely. We have budgeted for 50 LCVs to be installed a year – based on our own engineers' installation of 56 in 2021/22. This intervention was made at an average cost of £170 each.

* Care Policy and Evaluation Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, Nov 2019



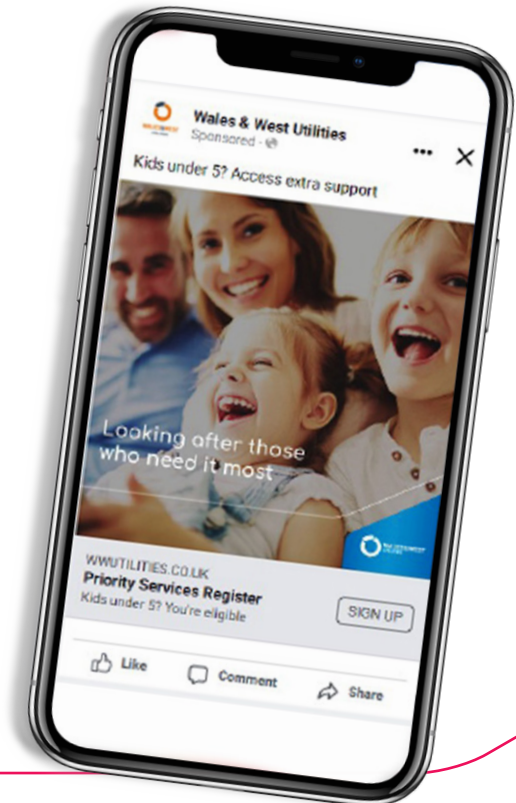
OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Occupants of the 47 homes where LCVs were fitted can benefit from continued use of the gas cooker for meal preparation, while family and carers know the occupant is kept safe once it is locked when they are not there.



APPRAISAL AND LEARNING

With a continual increase in the incidence of dementia, we believe there will be an accompanying increase in demand for this service. We will continue to promote and take referrals from a range of our partners, as well as our own engineers.



Carbon monoxide (CO)
awareness and
free alarms
projects

A close-up, rear view of a worker wearing a high-visibility yellow safety vest. The vest has a large, rectangular, reflective silver patch on the back with the word "GAS" printed in bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. The worker is also wearing a black hard hat. The background is blurred, showing another person and some industrial equipment.

GAS

We want to continue to raise awareness of carbon monoxide due to the potential harm if it's undetected. Research has highlighted that some groups are more at risk than others and this is outlined in our WWU and joint GDN strategies. This is a key aspect of the VCMA.

Carbon monoxide programme overview

Individual projects (excl WWU share of joint projects)	Cost	Status	Start/end date
Lifeskills	£6,500 p.a. over 5 years	On track	2021 to 2026
DangerPoint	£5,700 p.a. over 5 years	On track	2021 to 2026
Alarms for partners and engineers	Circa £80,000 p.a. over 5 years Yr 1 spend £78,780	Some Covid-19 delay	2021 to 2026
CO Awareness campaigns	– Game Over £30,000 – Materials – Yr 1 spend £37,500	Delivered Delivered	2021 to 2022 2021 to 2022
COdebreakers	– COdebreakers + promotion Yr 1 spend £2,930 Subsequent years £3,163 p.a.	On track	2021 to 2026

The ambition of our Carbon Monoxide Strategy is to keep customers safe from carbon monoxide poisoning by raising awareness of the risks, delivering 'for life' messages and administering a free carbon monoxide (CO) alarm distribution programme. This aligns with the aims of our joint GDN collaborative strategy to keep people safe by raising awareness of the risks of CO arising from both appliances connected to mains gas networks and other sources, to effect behaviour change to safeguard those at risk.

Both strategies set out to listen to our

stakeholders, take note of insight from external experts and effectively target programmes to support the groups of people most impacted as well as those most at risk of harm and less engaged.

We have extensively discussed our CO strategies and delivery programmes with our stakeholders, including our Citizens' Panel of representative customers and future customers. Insight has helped shape both our carbon monoxide strategy and delivery programmes, as well as our target audience range.

'For life' CO awareness messaging programmes



IDENTIFYING THE NEED

GDN research has shown that awareness of what to do if you smell gas or suspect CO varies by demographic. Using partners to reach children and young adults has clear benefits.

We deliver 'for life' CO messaging to children, young people and people with learning difficulties via a range of projects – some collaboratively with other gas networks and others individually, due to geography or local issues. Our projects are set out below.

Safety centres – Lifeskills and DangerPoint

The safety centres we support are located in Bristol (Lifeskills centre) which covers a wide surrounding area and North Wales (DangerPoint).

Children and young people visit these centres every year to learn how to keep themselves safe in everyday life, including gas safety and the risk of CO poisoning.

While visits stopped during Covid-19 restrictions, centres maintained an online presence reopening in 2021. The project provides immersive experiences and tailored information in a format that is suited for its visitors.



OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Increased awareness amongst young people of the signs of CO and what to do to keep themselves and their families safe.

Funding is provided to target young people, making them aware of gas safety, including raising awareness about the dangers of CO and how to stay safe. Starting in the 2022 regulatory year, a further project will specifically target young people with learning disabilities as an outreach programme.

Project	Number reached
Lifeskills	3,803
DangerPoint	4,400



APPRAISAL AND LEARNING

While it is possible to develop online resources, a face-to-face immersive experience is difficult to replicate.

“The support from Wales & West Utilities has made a significant difference to the services we provide. Now we can give supporting resources and safety devices to visitors coming to the Centre to learn about issues such as carbon monoxide.”

Cat Harvey-Aldcroft, DangerPoint

We recognised that some of the generic resources developed for young people were not as easily accessible for all audiences such as people with learning difficulties and as a result, we are working with the safety centres to develop projects to meet this need.

COdebreakers

We have continued to run our COdebreakers website-based superhero carbon monoxide competition where children, and some adults, drawn in by an ongoing social media campaign, learn about the risks of CO and how to keep safe. They then use their new knowledge to answer questions that enable them to crack the COde and discover the key to enter a competition where four iPads are awarded each year to randomly selected winners. The competition can only be entered once the COde is revealed when the answers are correctly identified, embedding CO awareness as part of the game.



OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Increased awareness and knowledge of CO and how to stay safe reinforced through an activity.

Competition	Reach/successful entries
COdebreakers	545



APPRAISAL AND LEARNING

This is a low-cost method of raising awareness of CO and provides a way of checking and reinforcing knowledge. We are reviewing social media messaging platforms and channels with a view to encouraging more entries.



Game Over campaign

Game Over campaign – targeted at 16 - 25-year-olds.

We started this digital campaign in 2020/21 when it successfully targeted the large number of online gamers in this age group with CO awareness messaging. For 2022/23 this will be a collaborative GDN CO programme, combining with SGN’s student-focused campaign, targeting a similar age profile. In 2021/22 we again ran the campaign and trialled the use of online YouTube and TikTok influencers to increase reach for the same age group of social platform users. As a result, we will include social influencers in the collaborative campaign.



Tik tok video links **1 • 2 • 3**

OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Increased young person awareness of the dangers of CO and how to stay safe.

Game Over campaign

Media	Impressions	Unique reach	Clicks/swipe-ups	Delivered 'ads'
Facebook (Feb and Nov)	704,296	235,353	4010	
Snapchat (Feb and Nov)	987,811	305,098	7,993	
Spotify (Feb and Nov)		56,972	628	65,018
Octave Audio (Feb and Nov)		31,913		131,282
DAX				56,672
ITV Hub (Feb and Nov)	130,900		112	
Ad Pause	29,209		412	
Influencers		83,438	390	



APPRAISAL AND LEARNING

We will continue to monitor and adapt the social media and influencer mix to maximise reach. Adding influencers increased our demographic reach, particularly to females.



Carbon monoxide free alarm distribution programme



IDENTIFYING THE NEED

By working collaboratively with trusted partners, we can engage customers who are particularly difficult to reach or are seldom heard and they are able to directly assess need. Equally, when our engineers are called out to properties in emergency situations, they have the same opportunity to engage with customers in need.



PROJECT AIMS AND DELIVERY

Our partners distribute and install free CO alarms and advice to groups of customers in vulnerable situations who we would otherwise struggle to reach. We also try to include CO awareness and free alarm distribution in our broader VCMA projects to widen our reach. For distribution in our GDN footprint, we work with local Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and on areas contiguous with other networks we collaborate with such as SGN and Dorset and Wiltshire FRS.

While working on gas emergency call-outs as well as gas pipe replacement schemes, our engineers and customer service officers install free CO alarms for vulnerable individuals and families.



OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Increased awareness among potentially difficult-to-reach priority customers of the dangers of CO and how to stay safe.

Organisations	CO awareness surveys completed	CO alarms distributed
Partners (Warm Wales/ West, FRS, Care & Repair, National Citizens Advice etc and WWU engineers	3,104	2,234

support programmes, on which we will be seeking further stakeholder insight, as well as reviewing the benefits achieved by a new programme with South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS). Working with SWFRS, we are supporting the installation of a new combined

CO, heat and smoke alarm system for people who are profoundly deaf, that also links with other available alarms – eg front door and baby alarms. Wearers of the system’s sensor watch/ pager are alerted to an alarm being activated while they are free to move around their home.



APPRAISAL AND LEARNING

As a GDN operating in Wales and the south west of England, we are impacted by variations in carbon monoxide legislation across the two countries. Changes come into force in Wales from December 2022 outlined in the Fitness of Homes for Human Habitation: guidance for landlords, Part 4 of the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, mandating landlords in Wales to provide audible carbon monoxide alarms in every room of their rental properties with a fossil fuel burning appliance.

In England, this legislative change is still in development. For us, this means a potential divergence in our future carbon monoxide



New projects
for 2022/23



Through workshops with stakeholders, we have committed to the following new projects for 2022/23

Partner	Total funding	Period	Project description	Outcomes
Frame, Pembroke	£50k	2 years	Training and salary of an energy advisor to support 5,000 people coming to Frame for support with household goods	Energy affordability advice Claiming benefits PSR sign-up CO awareness Health and wellbeing Reduced pressure on NHS
Swansea carers	£60k	2 years	Training and salary of an energy advisor to support unpaid carers who look after family members with multiple needs	As above
Bridgend carers	£50k	2 years	Training and salary of an energy advisor to support unpaid carers who look after family members with multiple needs	As above
Maggie's cancer centres	£50k	1 year	Training and salary of an energy advisor to support people with cancer through centres in Cardiff, Swansea and Cheltenham	As above
Centre for Sustainable Energy	£100k	2 years	Funding an existing project supporting people with disabilities across Bath and north east Somerset, taking referrals from the Local Authority and healthcare professionals	As above
South Wales Fire and Rescue Service	£5k	1 year trial	A small-scale trial of carbon monoxide, smoke and heat alarms that alert householders with profound hearing loss through wearable tech. This is a pilot project to demonstrate need and benefit for consideration of wider roll out	Safety of households Wellbeing through peace of mind
Rhondda Cynon Taff Council	£28k	1 year trial	Work in one of the most deprived communities in Wales to test engagement channels and outcomes for people with learning difficulties	Social wellbeing Improved health Development of workplace skills

Lessons learnt

We believe we have risen to the challenge of establishing new partnerships and investing VCMA funding on projects which are supported by our stakeholders, offering real benefits to customers with significant life challenges.

We have learnt as we have proceeded and developed new skills. The VCMA has also created new opportunities for colleagues, some of whom are taking the opportunity to develop their learning and gain new skills for the future. We anticipate an increasing expectation for utilities to continue developing their social consciousness and for additional support services to become business-as-usual activities. We now have in place the right network of customer-facing colleagues, legal counsel, procurement and external communications support to enable us to get projects up and running. As the number of projects we support grows, we will further adapt to make sure we are properly managing each partnership and getting the best value for our customers.

We are also getting our operational colleagues more involved, so they work with local partners to deliver for our customers most in need. This is creating some friendly internal competition around the number of carbon monoxide awareness sessions they can achieve, customers signed up to the PSR and referrals made into partnership schemes. We believe this will generate added value to local projects and leave a legacy in our communities of lower bills and increased safety – beyond the benefits of having upgraded gas pipes in their area.

Where GD1 partnerships were delivering successfully and came within VCMA funding criteria, we have continued them and sought new funding applications from other consumer support organisations. We wanted to make sure we used funding for not only hard-to-reach customers but groups in communities that are the most difficult to reach but were in desperate need. We realised it was more difficult to find the support groups to reach these customers. We took advice from our stakeholders, including our Customer Engagement Group, who told us smaller organisations could be intimidated by the need to fill out complex application forms for funding and be subject to procurement rules they could not satisfy. Following this insight, we simplified the initial application form and made sure our team was able to work with small organisations to support them through the procurement process.

We ran stakeholder workshops in November 2021 to reach smaller organisations supporting local communities in need, and these have resulted in an initial 10 new projects for 2022/23.

We recognise there remain some gaps in geographical spread, and we are planning to specifically target support organisations in areas of south west England and north Wales to ensure an even spread of VCMA funding for customers across our area over the five years of GD2.

“The VCMA has allowed a step change in the number of and scale of projects we can develop with partners which will result in 10,000s of homes helped over the five year period. We know that this support can transform people's lives and we want to make it part of normal business processes.”

Nigel Winnan

Customer and Social Obligations Manager

Looking ahead

Our analysis of external trends across political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors paints a bleak picture for households, with increasing sharp rises in energy costs and the overall cost of living. This in turn means people will cut back on non-essentials such as servicing their gas boiler or turning to other alternatives to heat and cook, which could result in higher risks of gas leakage and carbon monoxide incidents.

The development of collaborative projects with the other GDNs and national partnerships certainly offers a lower cost per intervention, but we are looking to balance this with local need and make sure specific groups who find it difficult or are unable to seek help do not miss out on VCMA support. We are therefore carrying out a detailed analysis of demographics and data associated with fuel poverty and carbon monoxide awareness/incidents that will enable us to proactively target partners who can fill those local level gaps.



For further information about the VCMA, please go to our website
[Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance](#)
or email VCMA@wwutilities.co.uk