

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

Project Eligibility Assessment (PEA)

MC Society Community Connections

Multiple Sclerosis Society

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July 2024

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.

Information required for the registration of VCMA projects

Information required	Description
Project title	MS Society Community Connections
Funding GDN(s)	Wales & West Utilities
New/ Updated PEA	New
VCMA Project contact name, email and number	Rachele Verdini Rachele.verdini@wwutilities.co.uk 07811 795210
Total cost (£k)	£213,734
Total VCMA funding required (£k)	£213,734
Problem(s)	<p>Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a debilitating neurodegenerative condition. It is caused when the body's immune system mistakenly attacks the protective myelin sheath around the nerves, disrupting signals from the brain. There are over 134,000 people across the UK with MS; 7,000 people are newly diagnosed each year. There are an estimated 6,000 people living with MS in Wales, and an estimated 11,000 people in Southwest England, covering Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire.</p> <p>Everyone's MS is different, but common symptoms include mobility problems, impaired vision, pain, severe fatigue, bladder and bowel issues and cognitive difficulties. Because it is both a fluctuating and progressive condition, MS makes life unpredictable.</p> <p>MS is the most common neurological condition in younger people – most people are diagnosed in their twenties to fifties. Once you are diagnosed with MS, it is with you for life, and it is progressive. MS can affect people's quality of life and threaten their ability to work, to be independent and to look after themselves. MS also affects people's families and loved ones, who have to cope with their condition and often take on caring responsibilities.</p> <p>The MS Society are here for everyone living with MS and drive world-leading research, share the latest information and campaign for everyone's rights. They let people with MS know they're not alone and offer advice and support to help them manage their symptoms.</p>

Criteria

	<p>MS Society work closely with the MS community to ensure that their services are shaped by their needs: co-production is at the heart of their organisation.</p> <p>They have a wide range of services such as their free MS Helpline, giving emotional support and information to anyone living with MS. Their Community and Regional Development Officers work directly with the MS Community across Wales and Southwest England, delivering a wide range of events and activities. Their local groups, 13 across Wales and 14 across the Southwest, provide regular services and activities for people with MS, and their friends and families, whilst creating opportunities for the MS community to connect with each other.</p> <p>Throughout Wales and Southwest England, MS Society held listening events to hear directly from the MS Community. Almost 300 people attended these events in person during 2023 and surveys were sent to those who could not attend. A key theme coming through was the need for information and guidance on support available locally to them, as well as the need to access a variety of services and support including access to benefits advice and cost of living related help.</p> <p>Their most recent My MS My Needs survey (the largest survey of people with MS in the UK) had 6,500 respondents and found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Over half of respondents say they are not receiving enough regular guidance on how to self-manage• 7 in 10 of all survey respondents have unmet need with regards to receiving support to better understand the benefits system• Overall, 19% of respondents told us that being in employment had made their MS symptoms worse• Of the retirees completing the survey, 46% had retired or left work early due to ill health <p>Too many people are struggling financially and those who are struggling have greater unmet need than those living comfortably. The impacts for those who reported they were</p>
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Criteria

	<p>struggling financially included going without essentials like food or heating and falling behind with utility bills.</p> <p>MS Society’s joint policy position on Mental Health and MS launched last year with other charities supporting people with MS and it highlights that ‘people with MS are more likely to experience poor mental health than the general population’ and ‘MS can have a long-term impact on loved ones yet support for them is lacking. It is vital that the emotional needs of carers and loved ones are recognised and met alongside people with MS.</p>
<p>Scope and Objectives</p>	<p>The MS Society Community Connections will be a time-limited test and learn project that will connect people with and affected by MS across Wales and the Southwest region with services, activities and resources to enable them to live well with MS. The project will develop links with local service providers which will enable the beneficiaries to access support and activities in their local areas, improving their connections to their community. The project will provide information and guidance to activities and advice around a range of subjects including advice about finances, cost of living related information, energy efficiency information, carbon monoxide awareness, and the Priority Service Register.</p> <p>MS Society will work with and refer to local Citizens’ Advice services and other expert organisations to ensure that the people with and affected by MS are able to access benefits advice. They will work with local health and social care providers as well as other local organisations to improve access to wellbeing services and activities. Developing links with other organisations and ensuring that they are aware of the issues faced by people with MS will have long-term benefits for the MS community.</p> <p>The project will recruit one Community Connections Manager and one Community Connections Officer, one in Wales and one in Southwest England, as well as a part time administrator to support the delivery of activities. The project will be overseen by the</p>

Criteria

	<p>Director of MS Society Cymru with the support of the Regional Development Manager who leads our community activity across England.</p> <p>500 hundred people will be supported through the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Connectors will deliver 320 interventions over the course of the project on a one-to-one basis to increase the knowledge, confidence and connections of people with MS. • Community Connectors and volunteers will deliver 360 interventions over the course of the project at group activities (in person or online) to increase the knowledge and confidence of people with and affected by MS. • The Helpline and Living Well Programme will provide 665 interventions over the course of the project, providing information to people with and affected by MS relating to health and wellbeing, as well as benefits and legal advice. <p>In addition, the project will deliver the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital communication distributed to 4,795 people (including people living with or affected by MS) across Wales and Southwest England highlighting energy efficiency tips, carbon monoxide awareness and the Priority Service Register. Two communications will be sent, one in each year of the project. • Community Connectors and volunteers will deliver MS Awareness Training sessions to partner organisations that the project will signpost to, ensuring that they are equipped to support people with MS who will be accessing their activities and services.
<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</p>

Criteria

	<p>funding criteria as it will provide energy efficiency advice and CO safety advice, 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 strategic pillar one.</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>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>The project will increase the knowledge, skills and confidence that people living with MS have in managing their condition, enabling them to become equal partners in their care. By building community connections, it will reduce loneliness and social isolation while empowering people living with MS to access financial well-being support, which will promote health and wellbeing.</p>

Criteria

	<p>The Community Connections Project team will reach approximately 5,295 people over the course of the project, which can be broken down as below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4,795 customers reached with digital communications highlighting energy efficiency tips, carbon monoxide awareness and Priority Service Register awareness. • 500 customers reached with the services specified below via one-to-one sessions (320 interventions), the Helpline and Living Well Programme (665 interventions) and via in-person or online group activities (320 interventions). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 300 customers will receive advice/support to access the Warm Home Discount. ○ 150 people will receive advice from the Benefits Advisors to make sure that they are in receipt of all benefits/grants/discounts they are entitled to. ○ 300 customers reached with PRS awareness, CO safety awareness information and CO alarms. ○ 50 referrals to the Priority Service Register. ○ 100 individuals reached with MS Awareness Training sessions. <p>Outcomes will be tracked together with financial gains to individuals supported and what type of advice or support was provided. MS Society will also gather feedback from the beneficiaries to gain insight on the impact of their interventions.</p>
<p>Project Partners and third parties involved</p>	<p>The Project will accept referrals from individuals themselves as well as from a number of organisations such as health, social care, NHS specialist MS teams, employers, statutory services and third sector organisations. The Community Connectors will build on existing relationships in the areas such as those with local Citizen Advice organisations and other expert services providers. They will also develop relationships and collaborate with other organisations to guide people affected by MS to the most relevant and suitable services</p>

Criteria

	and activities available to them in their local area.
Potential for new learning	This project will provide insight into the levels and nature of support required by a demographic that we were unable to target previously – those affected by Multiple Sclerosis. This can have implications not only for the MS customers that we will be able to reach with fuel poverty support, but also for WWU more broadly as MS awareness can be further spread to support WWU colleagues and wider customer base. This project will also be testing a delivery model with the potential for upscaling beyond the WWU territory, paving the way for a wider and more consistent support service.
Scale of VCMA Project and SROI calculations, including NPV	<p>We have taken the forecasted numbers expected by MS Society for the project delivery period and calculated the following SROI over a 2-year period:</p> <p>Total Gross Present Value = £243,527.71 Net Present Value = £32,230.40 Positive SROI per £1 spent = £0.15</p> <p>Note: this was calculated as part of the trialling for the most recent GDN-shared SROI model and rulebook, which generates much lower SROI NPVs than previous models.</p>
VCMA Project start and end date	This project will begin in August 2024 and run until the end of March 2026.
Geographical area	Wales and the Southwest region, specifically Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Bristol, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. WWU-only territory.

WWU sign off

Nigel Winnan	Customer & Social Obligations Strategy Manager	Date: 3/9/2024	Signature: <i>Nigel Winnan</i>
David Robinson	Director of Business Services	Date 4 th September 2024	Signature <i>DR</i>