



HOME SAFETY: HOW IMPROVING ELECTRICS IS CHANGING LIVES IN WALES

A partnership between
Care & Repair Cymru and
Electrical Safety First



**Electrical
Safety
First**



Care & Repair Cymru

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The work being done by Electrical Safety First and Care & Repair is undoubtedly saving both lives and properties.

That is why I am so pleased to support the work they are doing. If something is still working then obviously there is nothing wrong with it is a view commonly held often until the time that an electrical fire starts. Some people have not had an electrician to look at their electrical system for several decades.

Older people tend to live in older homes and to have older electrics. Whilst those living in social housing will have their properties maintained by their landlord, those in privately owned properties will be responsible for their own electrical maintenance.

Around 1 in 5 properties in Wales have a hazard that can risk human health.

I am very pleased that Care & Repair and Electrical Safety First have created an Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme to help older people. The scheme highlights the importance of Care & Repair being a home visiting scheme. Importantly the healthy homes checks, by Care & Repair can identify various types of hazards including electrical hazard.



Mike Hedges MS

Member of the Senedd for Swansea East

ELECTRICAL SAFETY FIRST

I am delighted that the funding provided by Electrical Safety First has made such a difference to the lives of those who received it. Electrical safety is crucial and as electricity becomes an increasing part of our lives it is more important than ever that the electrics in our homes are safe. The elderly and disabled are at particular risk and often unable to fund improvements so it is excellent to see the funding used to benefit and help them feel safer in their homes.



Lesley Rudd
Electrical Safety
First CEO



**Electrical
Safety**
First

CARE & REPAIR

We are pleased to bring this report to the attention of stakeholders and policy makers in Wales. Our partnership with Electrical Safety First has proved a lifeline to many of the older people we support, who – as this report will show – would otherwise be left living in unsafe conditions, often without heating or hot water, due to poor electrics in their home and no means to improve them. We have long been calling for a safety-net grant to improve the housing conditions of older people across Wales. Electrical safety is an often overlooked but essential piece of the puzzle in ensuring older people across Wales can live safely, independently and with dignity at home.



Chris Jones
Care & Repair
Cymru Chief
Executive



Care & Repair Cymru

CONTENTS

Older people, older homes, older electrics	5
A Care & Repair and Electrical Safety First Collaboration	7
Use of Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme	8
Findings from Administering the Fund	10
• A lifeline where support has been cut	10
• Speed of the Scheme	11
• A hidden issue	12
The Impact of Poor Electrics on Safe, Independent Living	13
• Accidents at home	13
• Mental health impact and quality of life	18
• Cold homes	21
• Rural homes	24
• Move to telecare	24
• Supporting older people with health conditions	24
The Impact of Poor Electrics on Wider Policy Aims	26
• Adequate housing	26
• Social Services and Wellbeing Act	26
• Decarbonising Welsh Homes	27
• Wellbeing of Future Generations Act	27
Policy Recommendations	28

OLDER PEOPLE, OLDER HOMES, OLDER ELECTRICS

Older people in the owner-occupied housing sector Wales can struggle to maintain the condition of their properties. Around 1 in 5 homes in Wales have a Category 1 hazard present, meaning a hazard that can risk human health.

In Wales, the Housing Health and Safety Rating System includes electrical shocks, fires, burns and scalds resulting from exposure to electricity. Around half of electrical accidents in the home result in burns as well as shock.

Lack of access to the internet to search for advice or reputable traders, worries about scams and upheaval, as well as cognitive and physical challenges mean that getting works done in the home can require additional support.

Older People

Home repairs, including electrical repairs, can be inaccessible for older people who do not have the means to either pay or access information on how to go about making improvements.

Just under 20% of all older people in Wales live in relative income poverty.

There are **around 80,000** older people in Wales who are eligible for pension credit who do not claim it.

Almost 1 in 5 people aged 55+ have got less than £1000 in savings.

There will be **around 50,000** people in Wales aged 65 and over living with dementia by 2050.

The Wales Against Scams Partnership estimated that older people who fall foul to scams **lose around £1,200** each to scams in their lifetime.

The Financial Conduct Authority found that **69% of adults** aged 75 or over displayed one or more characteristics of potential vulnerability.



Older Homes and Older Electrics

Wales does not have an enforceable national policy for the quality of homes in the owner-occupied sector, unlike in social housing sector via the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, or in the private rented sector via the Renting Homes Wales Act (2016).

This means that data on the conditions of homes, including the quality of their electrics, is not readily available. The last Housing Conditions Survey in Wales was conducted in 2017, meaning that available data is out of date and precursors shocks including covid-19, energy price rises and the cost-of-living crisis. It does not specify electrical safety or condition.

Around 80% of older people own their own home in Wales. Care & Repair frequently completes works in properties where electrics have gone untouched for decades. Key research between Electrical Safety First and Swansea University previous found that:

- Older people make up around a third of all dwelling fire casualties.

- People aged over 80 were at least four times more likely than any other age group to be a casualty in an electrical fire.

Wales has the oldest housing stock both in the UK and across Western Europe with 26% of housing being built before 1919. Whereas previously Local Authority Repair Grants could cover some electrical works, these grants have not been routinely available for some years.

The prohibitive cost of electrical repairs coupled with the additional challenges older people face in getting work done in the home mean that electrical preventative and safety work is often not undertaken.

“It’s not just that something’s actively dangerous, it affects people’s quality of life as well.”

Caseworker, Cardiff

A CARE & REPAIR AND ELECTRICAL SAFETY FIRST COLLABORATION

Everyday Care & Repair sees older people across Wales living in homes in an unfit state of repair. Working together, Care & Repair and Electrical Safety First have coproduced a bespoke Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme available to Care & Repair clients with no means of funding to improve the condition and safety of their electrics at home.

The Fund was available to Care & Repair caseworkers over a 5-month period for electric related works for homeowners and private sector tenants where there were instances of hazardous disrepair and no other means of funding the work. In a Care & Repair context, 'private rented' often refers to homes where a client's family member, often a son or daughter, owns the property rather than a formal tenant-landlord relationship.

The Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme has been designed to help older people by providing up to £1,000 towards:

- Contribution towards the cost of a full or part electrical rewire.
- Upgrading of earthing, bonding, RCD protection and consumer units.
- Repairs or replacement of immersion and water heaters.
- Repairs or replacement of electrically powered showers.
- Repairs or replacement of lighting for safety reasons.
- Replacement of broken accessories such as light switches and sockets.
- Portable Appliance Testing.
- Period Inspections.

To be eligible, recipients must be a homeowner or private rented occupier aged 60 or above, or 50+ if living with sensory loss who also met one or more of the below criteria:

In receipt of a state pension only, with no other source of income or savings;

Receive a means tested benefits;

Receive a disability benefit;

Have a low net household income; or

Have household savings of less than £16,000.

USE OF ELECTRICAL IMPROVEMENT GRANT SCHEME

The fund was available for Care & Repair clients aged 60+ or 50+ if living with sensory loss. Of the applications received, two were rejected because they did not meet the eligibility criteria.

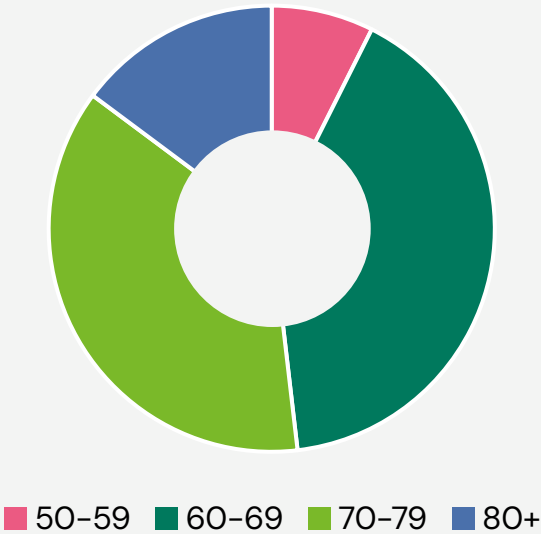
The average age of households accessing the fund was 74, with the oldest household aged 92. Many of the people the Fund helped were living with intersecting challenges, and had presented to Care & Repair with a different issue initially:

“The electrical issues weren’t the presenting problem, you know, that’s not what they came to us for. And I think that that’s quite important really, because of these clients were, they’re all female actually, they all lived on their own, all had sensory loss, mobility issues, quite severe health problems, and all of them had significant electrical and housing repairs that needed doing.”

Caseworker, Mid Wales, who successfully accessed the fund several times



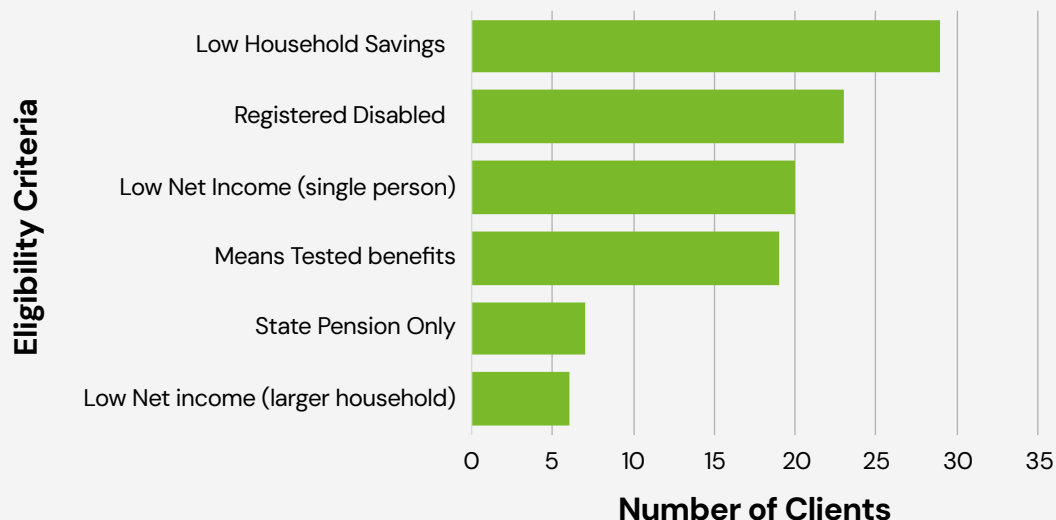
Age of Scheme Recipients



Gender of Scheme Recipients

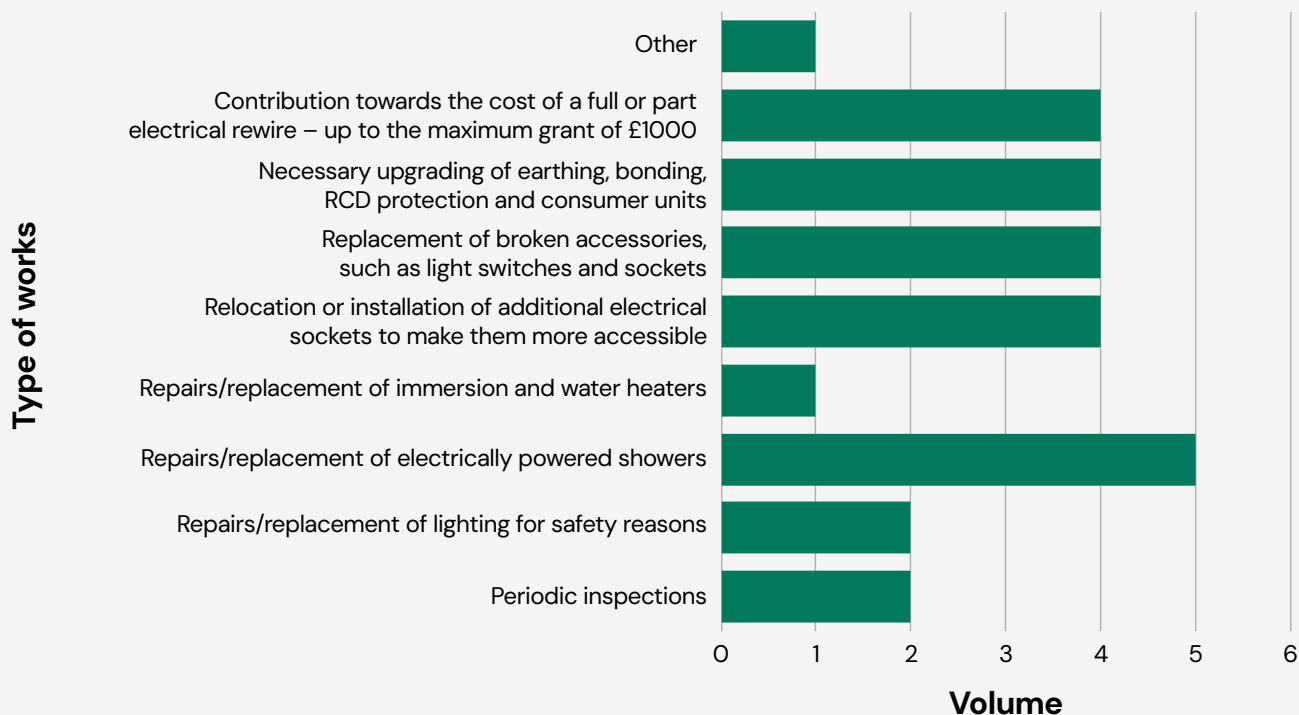


Reasons for Scheme Eligibility



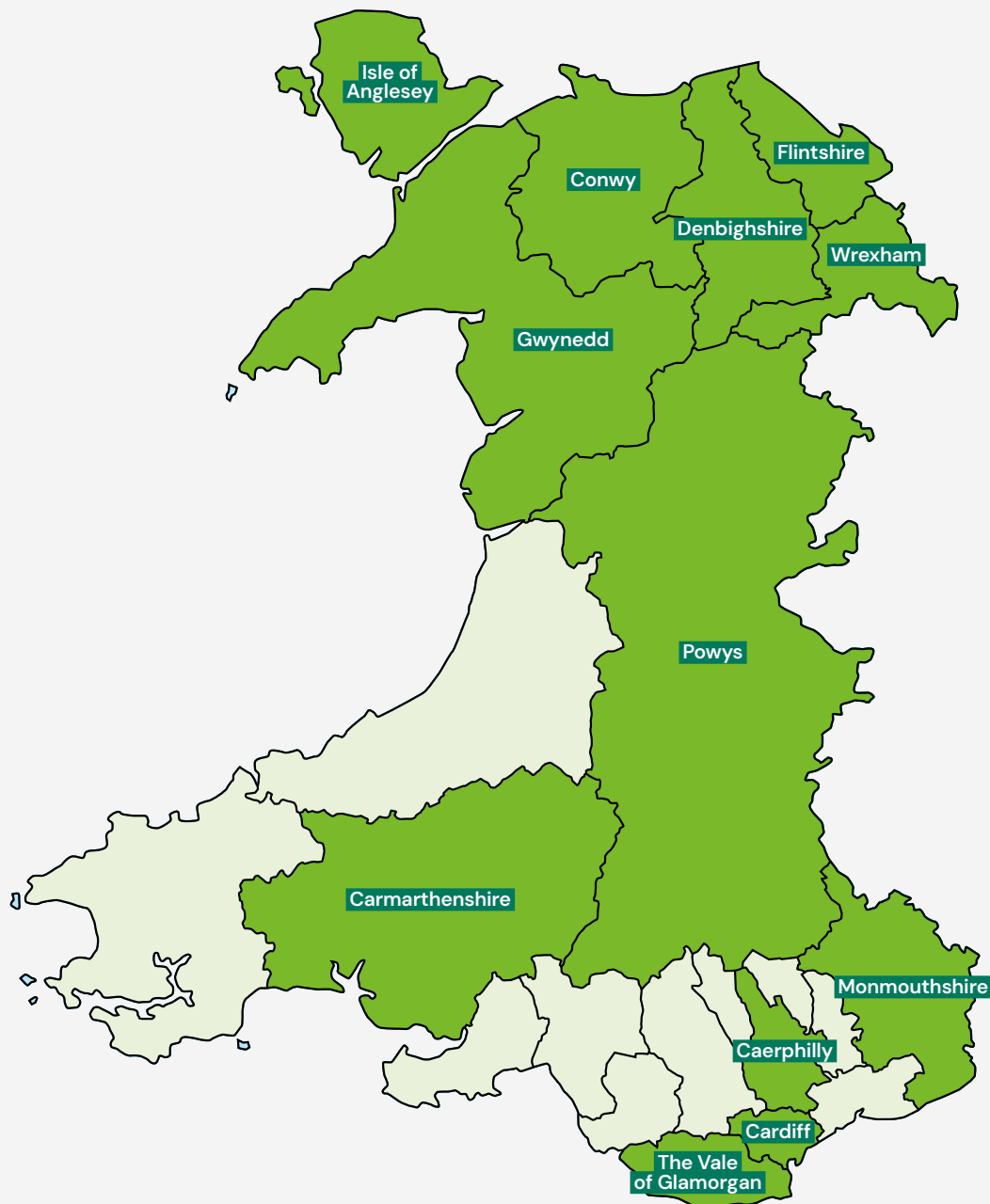
Almost all clients met more than one eligibility criteria. The average number of eligibility criteria met was three. Nearly all clients lived in a house with low household savings, and more than three quarters were registered disabled.

Work funded by the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme



The scheme received applications for all types of work available. Some recipients received multiple works such as upgraded consumer units and installation of additional electrical sockets and replacement switches, showing the flexibility within the scheme to best meet the full needs of clients.

Geographical Spread of Scheme Recipients



The Scheme was available Wales-wide to any Care & Repair client who met the criteria. The Scheme was used across rural and urban settings, particularly in our Gwynedd a Mon and Powys Care & Repair Agencies in rural areas, and our Cardiff & the Vale Care & Repair, which serves the biggest population of older people of all Care & Repair Agencies across a mix of rural-urban areas.

FINDINGS FROM ADMINISTERING THE FUND

A lifeline where support has been cut

Several of the caseworkers we interviewed told us that accessing benevolent pots of money for works to the home is becoming trickier. They cited a change in attitudes towards what funders were willing to fund, with fewer choosing to fund repairs.

A lack of solutions can mean that our caseworkers must present tough choices to clients:

“We have had instances whereby someone needs three or four things doing in the house and it’s a case of saying to them, well, we might be able to get funding for you, but if we do, it’s only going to maybe do one or two. So you’re going to have to choose.”

Caseworker, South Wales

“You and me, we’re working, we can try to budget for [repairs]. But when you’re on a fixed income and you don’t have any savings, you’re kind of stuck if you’re one of our clients. And it does mean that [repairs go uncompleted] unless we get a lot of funding or some benevolent funding, which again, isn’t always easy or quick.”

Home Energy Officer, South Wales

Changes to working patterns have also made a big difference. With the end of National Service in 1958, we now have a cohort of ‘younger’ older people who are not eligible for armed forces grants which have historically provided a lifeline to funding works that otherwise would go unresolved.

Many of the older people we supported through the fund had had varied careers, meaning they were not eligible for specific vocational charitable funds that required years of service – and pay slips to prove it!

“The first thing [people] tend to do when they retire is throw out all their paperwork. And a lot of these funds, they ask for evidence that you’ve worked there. So, they ask for papers, they ask for P60s and P45s, which a lot of people don’t keep.”

Caseworker, South Wales





Speed of the fund

The fund acted as an emergency fund for households in urgent need. Present through all applications to the fund was the necessity to support our clients quickly to ensure that problems did not get worse. Whereas caseworkers highlighted the often challenging and piecemeal approach to applying for benevolent funding, they praised the partnership built on trust between Care & Repair and Electrical Safety First that meant households got the help they needed, when they needed:

“The application form is quite straightforward. We haven’t got time to be filling in absolutely everything and ticking all these boxes and jumping through all these hurdles and wanting all this information. With the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme you think ‘okay, I can do that quickly and I can get that bit done’. And then I can focus on trying to address these other big things that that it can take a lot of our time.”

Caseworker, Mid-Wales

Often the speed of the fund was essential for helping meet time demands from contractors or other services:

“The thing we do find is that sometimes [other funders] do put a time delay on works. They say, ‘well, if it’s not done within this amount of time, we have to cancel the application and the person will have to reapply’, which doesn’t make it easier because then you’re up against the clock.”

Caseworker, South Wales

A hidden issue

The Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme highlights the importance of Care & Repair being a home visiting service. Whereas some clients who accessed the fund had specifically called Care & Repair for electrical repairs – most commonly when an electric shower had stopped working – for every instance where this was the case, there were several more where electrical safety was not the presenting problem.

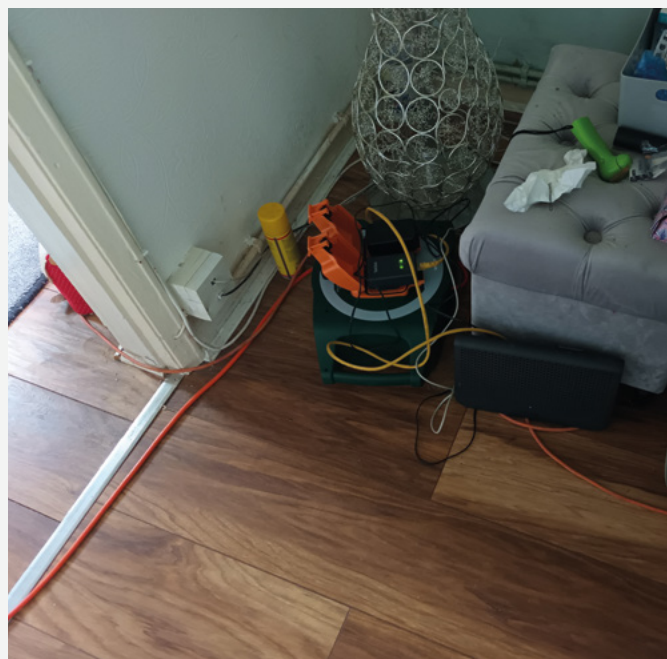
Our Healthy Home Checks are a thorough check of the home for various types of hazards, including electrics. Often, electrical safety repairs as an issue that their clients were unprepared for or did not recognise as a problem.

"I think that's one of the important things about our services that we do home visits... yes, the plug socket was hanging off the wall and had the one didn't work and she couldn't see because the lights didn't work in the living room or the bathroom. But that's how she'd been living. So, she wouldn't have thought to say to me that this is an issue because she was so used to it. That's how they make do."

Caseworker, Mid-Wales

"People are not aware of the fact that they think that because the electric is working and everything's working fine, that it's safe. But in this day and age, you can come across people that haven't touched their electricity for 40-50 years sometimes, which is shocking."

Caseworker, North West Wales



"In my experience it is sort of 'once it's gone, it's gone'. And then they, they don't have the money [to fix it]. They didn't see it coming because it's not something people sort of generally think about. They plug something in, and it works and then when it goes... they come to us asking for help."

Caseworker, South Wales

The success of the partnership between Care & Repair and Electrical Safety First is indicative of the power of collaboration between third sector organisations. The Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme is a solution to an immediate problem where previously statutory organisations would have provided support to enable households to keep on top on maintenance in their home before issues of age and wear and tear became hazardous disrepair.

THE IMPACT OF POOR ELECTRICS ON SAFE, INDEPENDENT LIVING

Care & Repair's clients are presenting to the service with increasingly complex need, where unsafe electrics make up part of a wider issue around housing condition, warmth or accessibility. The fund facilitated electrical works or repairs that enabled other works to go ahead to make the home safer and suitable for independent living.

Accidents at home

The fund supported electrical safety by ameliorating issues around dangerous and faulty electrics. However, several of the types of work eligible under the Fund contributed to improving safety at home beyond just the quality of electrics.

Trailing wires and poor lighting were identified as hazards via Care & Repair's bespoke Healthy Home Check that could contribute to an accident or fall at home and result in an older person being unable to live independently at home. The fund was used to ensure wiring was up to standard and install additional electrical sockets in rooms used by Care & Repair clients to prevent accidents at home:

"She was just living most of her day in those few rooms. So, to her, it was as important as a full rewire because she [previously] couldn't plug devices in, watch TV, stuff like that, and it wasn't safe for her to be overloading that one socket. It's not just that something's actively dangerous, it affects people's quality of life as well."

Caseworker, South Wales

"Very often they [the older person] have to swap plugs and then they have to bend down or get into an awkward place to because they only have one or two sockets on the extension cable but they might have four appliances. So, they've got to swap and mix and match."

Home Energy Officer, South Wales

Older people are at greater risk of having a fall that leads to major health problems, injuries or long-term loss of independence. In Wales 132,00 older people will fall more than once in their home. Having fallen, around half are likely to fall again.

Caseworkers who applied for the Fund on Care & Repair client's behalf detailed older people living in just one room with working electric, instances of falls over trailing wires, and fears of using the bathroom at night because of poor electrics in the home.

CASE STUDY



Area: Cardiff

Eligibility Criteria:

Age: 76

**Registered disabled; low income;
low household savings**

Details:

Mr and Mrs Morgan need a full rewire to the home. Due to the poor condition of the wiring, they only have power to the kitchen.

The lack of power is making life very difficult for Mrs Morgan in particular, who needs to take daily intravenous injections as her body does not absorb nutrients from food correctly. Mrs Morgan often must try to administer her injections in the dark, which she finds extremely difficult, or take daily trips to the hospital to have it done for her. She had also been hospitalised a few times due to difficulties administering the injections herself.

Mr and Mrs Morgan do not have gas heating, so to keep warm they are using an extension lead to plug an electric heater into the working kitchen socket and move the heater around the ground floor. They both have mobility issues, and the trailing wire creates a trip hazard.

They also have no light when using the bathroom as there are no windows in the room. They told Care & Repair that they are very worried about using the bathroom at night in case they trip over in the dark. Mrs Morgan is finding the situation extremely stressful and has been losing sleep over the issue. They told Care & Repair they do not feel safe and secure in their own home.



Outcome:

The Care & Repair caseworker received a quote for a full rewire, additional cables, and new socket, lighting and cooker circuits. The total cost quoted was £5,100 of which the Fund contributed £1,000 with the rest of the money coming from additional sources. The rewire will mean that Mrs Morgan is able to safely administer her medication at home, and well as reduce risk of falls, resulting in fewer hospitalisations and improving the couple's independence.

CASE STUDY



Area: Powys

Eligibility Criteria:

Age: 74

In receipt of state pension only, with no other sources of income; registered disabled; low household savings

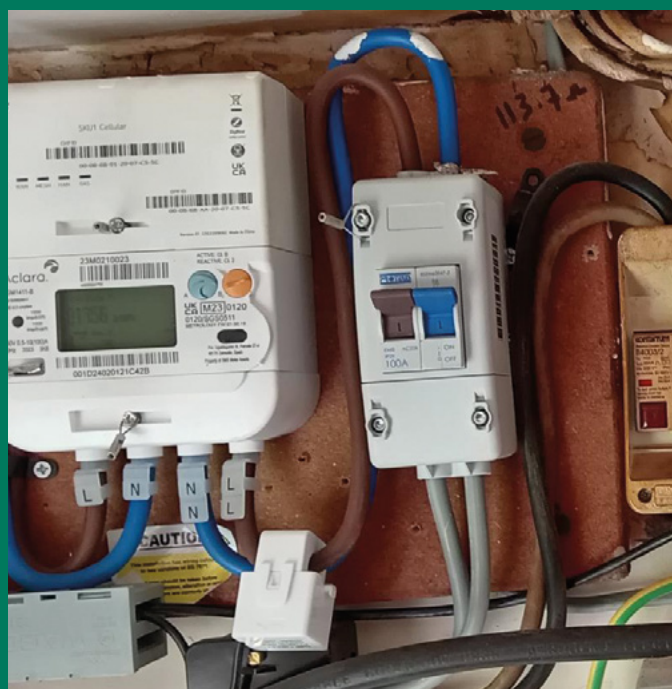
Details:

Mrs Evans is aged 74 and lives on her own. She has macular degeneration and is severely sight impaired. There is no treatment available to improve her vision. Mrs Evans also has hearing loss, arthritis, reduced mobility and cannot read or write.

Due to her severe sight loss, Mrs Evans is struggling to see in the kitchen to safely prepare food and pour her kettle. Mrs Evans also has no heating in the property other than an oil filled radiator in the kitchen, which is where she spends most of her time.

There is only one working plug socket in the kitchen which is cracked and has burn marks making it unsafe to use. The plug socket by the microwave does not work. The plug socket in the hallway is hanging off the wall and unsafe.

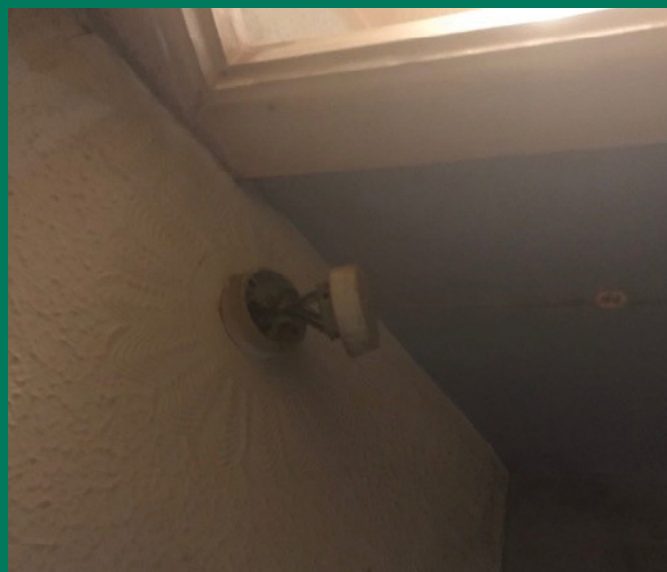
The lighting in Mrs Evans' living room and downstairs WC is not working. Due to Mrs Evans' reduced mobility and severe sight loss, she is at risk of falling and has fallen previously. Replacing the lighting in these rooms is essential to keep Mrs Evans safe. Mrs Evans' only income is her State Pension of £93.60 a week. Mrs Evans has no savings.



Outcome:

Mrs Evans has benefited from replacing her existing lighting with a twin LED batten light in cool white to improve the lighting and make it easier for her to see. In addition to better lighting, Mrs Evans also received internal and external handrails to help her move around the house more safely but exhausted the ENABLE budget, meaning that the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme provided an essential lifeline as other funding sources had been exhausted.

The Care & Repair Caseworker also successfully made an application for Pension Credit and Attendance Allowance to increase Mrs Evans' income and make it easier for her to manage her heating. Care & Repair worked with additional partners, Warm Wales, to improve the heating in the home; and applied for a Disabled Facilities Grant via the Local Authority for an accessible bathroom.



"When I went out to see her [first], she was wearing three coats. When I went out to do an attendance allowance form for, well, as you know, it takes about an hour and a half, two hours. It was so cold in there that I could hardly hold the pen... I know it's not just the electrical work but that when you put all of that together, when I went to see her last week to fill in the DFG application, the difference in her physically, how she looks, how she presents, you could just see the difference, it was tangible."

Mrs Evans' Care & Repair Caseworker

Mental health impact and quality of life

It's clear that electrical safety has a big influence on how safe and happy older people feel at home.

- 14% of the Care & Repair clients who accessed the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme rated their happiness at home as 1 out of 10.
- 59% said they felt unsafe at home. Of the remaining clients, 91% thought there could be further improvements to the safety of their home.
- Only 37% said they felt confident and secure in their home.

Caseworkers described instances of clients living in only one room in their property, or fears of washing, and of accidents in the home due to electrical safety issues.



“[The client] had an old consumer in it, but it had been tripping quite a lot. And she’d paid an electrician emergency call out twice. And she got very upset with me saying that she can’t afford to keep paying electrician to come out. And that’s when I thought the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme would be perfect in this scenario because it was affecting her mental health quite badly.”

Caseworker, North West Wales

“Especially in the winter months [without working electrics for light] you’ve got half a day then, haven’t you? It’s not just being able to function around the home. It’s for everything, isn’t it? Sitting, Cleaning, self-care, sitting, watching telly. All kinds of social interaction, having family and friends over.”

Caseworker, North East Wales

CASE STUDY



Area: Carmarthenshire

Eligibility Criteria:

Age: 64

In receipt of means-tested benefits;
registered disabled; low income;
low household savings

Details:

Mr Williams Lives alone in his own home and is living with managed prostate cancer, spinal injury complications and anxiety. He approached Care & Repair for help with several issues including a faulty boiler and kitchen window that was broken and very draughty.

Upon completing the Care & Repair Healthy Home Check, the Home Energy Officer found that Mr Williams was having difficulty to complete daily tasks such as washing and cooking as his washing machine and cooker were tripping the electric system in his kitchen. There were also a number of sockets not working at all.



Outcome:

The Home Energy Officer used available funds to repair and service his boiler and replace the kitchen window to improve the thermal efficiency and warmth of the home. The Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme has been used to repair the electrics in the kitchen and install additional electrical sockets to make them more accessible. Mr Williams is now able to wash his clothes and cook without worry, as well as use additional appliances including his microwave.

CASE STUDY



Area: Flintshire

Eligibility Criteria:

Age: 66

**In receipt of a means-tested benefit;
registered disabled**

Details:

Mrs Lewis client came to Care & Repair as her shower was no longer working. Care & Repair organised an electrician to look at the property who recommended the shower cubicle needed replacing and a new electric shower and wiring as the existing shower was fitted incorrectly and was unsafe.

Mrs Lewis is very ill with lung cancer and is struggling to manage due to treatment she is having this causes her to feel fatigued and weak. Care & Repair also referred Mrs Lewis to social services to look at having a level access shower installed but this was declined.

For the last year Mrs Lewis has been having to have a wash at her bathroom sink this is causing her undue stress and anxiety which is adds to her low mood and depression.

Mrs Lewis has no money to pay for any of the work herself which is why she came to Care & Repair in the first place and said just wants to feel safe and secure in her own home.

Mrs Lewis is also undergoing further tests to see if the cancer has spread, she is very worried about what the future holds.



Outcome:

After the referral to Social Services was rejected, the Care & Repair Caseworker investigated other avenues of funding based on Mrs Lewis' occupation but they did not meet criteria: getting the relevant documents for benevolent funding was tricky due to Mrs Lewis having spells of feeling very unwell. The Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme has helped fund part of the works required to improve Mrs Lewis' quality of life, be able to meet basic hygiene needs and improve safety and wellbeing at home.

Cold homes

Throughout its use, the Fund has shown how electrical safety is one piece of the puzzle when it comes to supporting older people, often living with intersecting challenges of age, ill-health, disability and low income, to live safely and independently at home.

The Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme is an important enabler to tackle other issues in the home, such as lack of heating and hot water, or to enable other support to go ahead where funding has been harder to come by for repair and safety issues in the home.

“These people are being left now in homes without heating or hot water or both and no real recourse except to apply for piece meal grant funding through ourselves, through occupational, or other charitable funding sources, which can take a lot of time and especially in the colder months, can leave people in situations where they have very cold, very unhealthy homes to live in.”

Home Energy Officer, North Wales



CASE STUDY



Area: Monmouthshire

Eligibility Criteria:

Age: 72

**Registered disabled; low income;
low savings**

Details:

Mrs Clarke was referred to Care & Repair via her support worker following the sudden death of her husband as it was identified that she had no heating and the electrics needed upgrading. Mrs Clarke lives with her son. They both have health issues, and no savings. Mrs Clarke is still paying a large mortgage on the property.

Initially, Mrs Clarke did not want to meet inside the property as she said it was too dark, so the Care & Repair caseworker met her in the garden. It was established that she had had an initial assessment for a supply of gas to property which would be funded through Wales and West Utilities grant and that the Welsh Government Nest scheme had agreed to install a new gas heating system through their grants due to client's health. However, Nest needed the electrics in her property upgraded and made safe before they could proceed with any works. Currently Mrs Clarke is using two portable electrical heaters for warmth from the two electrical sockets that work in the home, and boiling a kettle for hot water.

The Care & Repair Healthy Home check found that the house needed a full rewire and there was significant mould in one of the bedrooms. In addition to this, there were some issues with hoarding meaning that the house needed to be cleared before work could begin.



Marion explained that she is still grief stricken and had not known where to start due to feeling so overwhelmed.

Outcome:

The Caseworker worked with Mrs Clarke's support worker and SSAFA, the Armed Forces Charity, to raise the funds for the rewire. This partnership working meant that Mrs Clarke can get the works done she needs to make her home safer, warmer and have hot water. This is vital for Mrs Clarke's health and wellbeing as she and her son navigate the next stage of their lives.

CASE STUDY



Area: Cardiff

Eligibility Criteria:

Age: 79

**Registered disabled; low income;
low savings**

Details:

Mr Advani lives in his own home which needs maintenance. He contacted Care & Repair originally as he has no heating or hot water and Welsh Government's Nest scheme had been unable to help.

The Care & Repair Caseworker visited Mr Advani and completed a Healthy Home Check, finding that as well as no heating and hot water, there are electrical sockets hanging from the walls and no working power sockets upstairs. Chatting with Mr Advani, they found that he has two young granddaughters who often stay with him, raising safety concerns about the exposed wires. The only bathroom in the house is also upstairs so there is a risk of Mr Advani using the room with no available form of lighting.

The Healthy Home Check also found that Mr Advani does not have any form of protection on his fuse board or a trip switch to protect against getting electrocuted. Care & Repair took advice from an electrician who thought that if we could get the switch to the boiler repaired then the boiler may also work again.



Outcome:

Funding this work through the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme means that Mr Advani's home is safe for him and his visitors. Fixing the electrical switches have provided light to make it safer for Mr Advani to move around the home and have reduced the risk of falls. The switch for the boiler will fix the issue of no heating or hot water the house improving warmth and wellbeing.

Rural homes

The Fund was available across Wales and taken up by caseworkers in rural and urban properties. Caseworkers described the different challenges from the fabric of the building to shortage of contractors to darker properties:

“In rural farmhouses, huge stone walls can present an issue on its own with trying to get fixings. Generally, a lot of contractors don’t like working in stone because you can’t chase the walls, it’s difficult and they don’t like to do it. It’s challenging, yes.”

Caseworker, North Wales

“In rural mid-Wales, the housing stock is old property. They are old properties that are quite dark inside and already have a lot of maintenance issues and concerns. And of course, there’s no renovation grants or anything that you can tap into now for anybody... [if] something goes wrong with electrics there’s the potential of fires and the risk to life.”

Caseworker, Mid Wales

Move to telecare

The Digital Switchover of all telephone and telecare systems from analogue to digital has already been put back from December 2025 to January 2027 due to concerns on the impact of the change on older and vulnerable customers.

There are around 77,000 telecare users in Wales, with an average age of 86. 74% of works undertaken through the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme helped improve or enable modern standard, reliably working electrics in older people’s homes across Wales. The switch the digital requires not only good internet to the home, but a reliable electricity supply to power self-contained units which have limited battery life. This poses a significant risk to older people who, without help to improve their electrics and install digital telecare systems, may find their support to stay independent quite literally turned off.

Supporting older people with health conditions

The fund has supported older people living with health conditions such as cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular disease, arthritis and the plethora of conditions called ‘frailty’.

- 71% of people receiving support through the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme were registered disabled.
- 29% of people receiving support through the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme told us they were living with sensory loss.
- Only 16% of people accessing the Scheme were not registered disabled or living with sensory loss. Some people ticked both boxes.

CASE STUDY



Area: Cardiff

Eligibility Criteria:

Age: 63

**Registered disabled; low income;
low savings**

Details:

Mr Owen was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis over 25 years ago. He manages well with the support of his partner. He is now wheelchair reliant, and his home has been adapted as the symptoms has worsened. His latest adaptation is a through-lift to the upstairs. The couple have used their savings to make their home wheelchair friendly and these have now been exhausted – Mr Owen's partner is not able to work many hours due to caring responsibilities so their income has declined. For Mr Owen to remain as independent as possible there are a few electrical issues that need updating.

He has a front door entry system installed which is operated from the land line telephone. The plug socket where Mr Owen sits has been condemned and needs replacing so that the phone unit can be plugged in and Mr Owen can operate it when he is left alone.

To enter and exit the property Mr Owen must use the back entrance which has been ramped. This is dark and requires lighting for him to use this safely. Currently he is bumping into things and at risk of harming himself.

Mr Owen has a working dog which needs to be walked and Mr Owen does this using his electric wheelchair, without the lighting he will no longer be able to do this independently.

Outcome:

Replacing the plug socket next to his chair means that Mr Owen does not have to transfer himself from his riser chair to the wheelchair to access the front door. This will reduce his falls risk, and means that he will miss fewer callers! The light fitting is imperative to Mr Owen's safety entering and exiting the house, especially in winter months and means that he can maintain his independence and continue to be able to leave the house to walk his dog and take part in his community.



THE IMPACT OF POOR ELECTRICS ON WIDER POLICY AIMS

Adequate Housing

The UK has already signed up to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights which includes a right to adequate housing based on security of tenure; availability of services; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location and cultural adequacy. The Welsh Government has committed to a White Paper exploring the introduction of a Right to Adequate Housing enshrined in Welsh Law.

Safe electrics are an essential part of ensuring all people in Wales can live in an adequate home regardless of tenure type. Throughout this report, the Electrical Improvement Grant Scheme has shown that dangerous and damaged electrics can result in older people living in cold, dark, hazardous homes.

Social Services and Wellbeing Act

Accessibility is a key part of housing adequacy. Care & Repair caseworkers also explained that having good quality, safe, modern electrics are essential to supporting housing accessibility and ensuring that statutory adaptation provision such as Disabled Facilities Grants can go ahead without delays.

“We also get asked to do electrical works in properties for things like Disabled Facilities Grants [DFGs], [where the] council have come to us or the council of referred clients to us. Basically because they’ve been allocated the DFG, they’re able to have a DFG, but then the contractors go out and say we can’t put anything electrical in because the electrics aren’t up to code.”

Caseworker, South Wales

Good electrics support people in Wales to have the care they are entitled to closer to home, maintain a good quality of life, and reduce or delay the need for longer term care and support.



Decarbonising Welsh Homes

The Welsh Government has set out its direction of travel to decarbonise Welsh homes by moving away from fossil fuels to heat homes in Wales to more sustainable heating sources. There will be more reliance on heating systems powered by electric rather than gas; safe electrics that can cope with the demand of heating a home will be essential to this journey.

Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

Improving the housing stock by upgrading electrical safety protects current and future generations, ensuring homes are resilient to changes in climate and adaptable to a person's changing needs as they age.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Free electrical safety checks for older people in Wales

We believe older people in Wales should be eligible for free electrical safety checks every five years in their home, delivered by reputable reliable local contractors.

2. Safety-net grant for serious housing disrepair

Faulty electrics are difficult to fund, require specialist skills, and often are a barrier to additional home improvements that support health and wellbeing. We are calling on a safety-net grant for serious housing disrepair where there is a risk to human health and rectify any issues discovered via a free electrical safety check.

3. Electrical works embedded in the Warm Homes Programme

We believe older people in Wales should be eligible for free electrical safety checks every five years in their home, delivered by reputable reliable local contractors.

4. Campaign to increase awareness of electrical safety

Delivered via online and offline methods of communication, to ensure all older people in Wales are aware of the importance of electrical safety and where to go for specialist support.

**To contact your local Care
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