

Major community outreach project launched in Lancashire by Age Concern Central Lancashire and the North West's big three utility firms.

Age Concern Central Lancashire today launches its new community outreach service, one year on from the first national lockdown in a bid to reach those in need.

The charity along with its partners – North West utility networks Electricity North West, Cadent, and United Utilities - forged a new and exciting collaborative venture alongside the Preston North End Community and Education Trust to reach and support greater numbers of older people across Lancashire.

The project is unlike any other within the county and will certainly get people talking. In the form of a 7.5 tonne, 56 square meter vehicle, Age Concern Central Lancashire will hit the road to bring information and advice to the masses!

The Mercedes Atego van, secured through a competitive bidding process via Preston City Council, has had a £50,000 refit to convert it into a Mobile Advice Centre, which was paid for by the three utility companies.

And now after months of hard work; the vehicle affectionately nicknamed 'MAC' is ready to roll.

Its complete overhaul includes two consultation booths, open space for group activities and talks, air-conditioning and, perhaps most importantly, brew making facilities! In addition, the 'Mobile Advice Centre' is a specially designed to be dementia friendly and is accessible for people of any age and ability to get the information and advice they need. All three of the utility networks will also be offering MAC attendees free advice on safety and energy efficiency measures, as well as tips on how to stay safe and warm in their homes.

The vehicle will be used at supermarket car parks, community events both large and small and throughout Lancashire's towns and villages with a full schedule of locations to be released in due course and once COVID19 restrictions allow. Residents across the county are invited to come and say hello and to ask Age Concern Central Lancashire about support regarding independent living, memory loss and dementia care, benefits advice and legal services such as Wills and Lasting Power of Attorney amongst a myriad of wider themes.

Suzanne Carr, CEO of Age Concern Central Lancashire, praised the project, "This is not the first time in our history we have provided a mobile resource unit. In 1984 the charity began using a bus affectionately called 'The Teapot' bus and people would flock to where it was located to seek our help. Now in our 40th anniversary year we are delighted to bring things full circle and to launch the Mobile Advice Centre or 'MAC' as it's been named. Furthermore; we are delighted to have formed partnerships with the North West's big three utility companies which in turn means our customers will have access to a full suite of services, and most importantly, will be

able to access 1-2-1 support on a range of important matters from independent living through to seeking help during an energy crisis.”

Age Concern Central Lancashire, who [recently](#) won both the prestigious BIBAs Business Hero Award [2020](#) and Lancashire Business View [Award at the Red Rose Awards 2020](#), was granted £50,000 by Electricity North West, Cadent and United Utilities and despite various challenges due to the pandemic the joint venture has finally arrived at the starting line.

Despite such set-backs and delays, the enthusiasm for the project is felt across all partners and is echoed by Jill Hendry, Partnership Lead for Electricity North West.

“The new community outreach service will provide valuable support to customers alongside our existing Priority Service, which offers customers additional help in a power cut, energy efficiency advice and support if you’re struggling to pay your bills and having use of the MAC to support customers in emergency situations by providing hot drinks or the ability to charge a mobile phone is an added bonus.

We’re delighted to be involved in the project and to be able to provide the people of Lancashire with another vital support channel.”

Amanda Phillips, United Utilities’ Priority Services Partnerships and Engagement Lead, expanded on the partnership: “The refurbishment of the mobile advice centre for Age Concern Central Lancashire is one of the first steps we’ve taken as a ‘Utilities Together’ group in the North West.

“We are committed to working collaboratively with Electricity North West and Cadent to support customers in our region who need a little bit of extra help.”

Jenny Moten, North West Network Director for gas network Cadent, said: “It’s fantastic to see the ‘MAC’ ready to hit the road.

“We’ve had an extraordinary year, one that’s had a huge impact on everybody, but particularly older generations who we know have often felt isolated. How great then for the gas, electricity and water networks to be working with Age Concern Central Lancashire to take our support direct to the heart of the communities we serve.

“I’m looking forward to seeing it in action – and, when Covid restrictions allow, having a brew and a natter on-board with our customers.”

Age Concern Central Lancashire is currently working in-line with Government guidance and aims to have MAC touring communities and attend events incrementally as the year progresses. It is hoped the Mobile Advice Centre will begin a tour of supermarket car parks and other community hubs from 12th April 2021.

In addition to the excitement of launching the new project, Age Concern Central Lancashire is also appealing for volunteers to support the initiative. Anyone with

experience in driving HGVs, buses or has CBT training is invited to get in touch with the charity. With the help of volunteer drivers MAC will reach more people across the county. Hours are flexible and will always be with notice. To find out more about this volunteering opportunity please contact Age Concern Central Lancashire on 01772 552865 or email the team on hello@ageconcerncl.org.uk

If you are a business or would like to know more about hosting the MAC for staff welfare events, your customers or, if you have space where communities meet please contact the team on 01772 552850 (option 7) or email hello@ageconcerncl.org.uk

Full details of the MAC calendar can be found on www.ageisjustanumber.org.uk/MAC

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Notes for the Editor

- Age Concern Central Lancashire won both the [BIBAs Business Hero Award](#) and [Lancashire Business View Award](#) in 2020
- Age Concern Central Lancashire is not part of Age UK but is Lancashire's leading independent older peoples' charity
- Website address www.ageisjustanumber.org.uk
- Lead Officer – Abby Waylett @ abbywaylett@ageconcerncl.org.uk

Cadent manages the 21,000-mile gas network in North West England, which distributes gas to heat 2.7 million homes, hospitals, schools, offices and other buildings, as well as supplying industry and HGV fuelling stations. It is also the region's 24/7, 365-day gas emergency service.