

Achieving Warmth in Whiterock and Westrock



**Report Findings on the Door to Door
Local Based Approach**

June 2014

Acknowledgements

NEA would like to acknowledge the following people who made this project possible:

Sarah Reid and Catherine Millman, Public Health Agency

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Al McComb and Pat Gregory, Whiterock Westrock Residents Association

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Una Lappin and Conor McCleave, Belfast City Council

Sinead McKinley, North Belfast Advice Partnership

Raymond Gormley, Bryson Energy

Foreword

Protecting yourself from the cold relies on your ability to keep yourself warm in your home. However, this is becoming ever more challenging. The cost of energy continues to rise against a backdrop where household incomes, poverty rates and the labour market have all worsened in Northern Ireland in the last five years. Thus, Northern Ireland now has some of the highest rates of fuel poverty in the UK.

Households on low incomes, living in poorly insulated houses with inefficient heating systems, are especially vulnerable to the cold. Living in a cold, damp home poses risks not only for a person's physical health but also for their mental wellbeing as the cost of heating may lead to debt or stress.

Evidence confirms that cold weather can kill and causes considerable health problems, particularly for those with pre-existing health conditions. When people are exposed to the cold, they are at an increased risk of cardiac arrest, strokes, respiratory illnesses and falls. In Northern Ireland, approx. 1,300 people die as a result of the cold. For every person who dies; another 8 people will require treatment by their GP or in hospital for cold-weather related illnesses.

The Public Health Agency (PHA) is committed to addressing the causes and associated inequalities of preventable ill-health and lack of wellbeing. Thus, the PHA particularly welcomed this opportunity to support the residents of Whiterock Westrock by working in partnership with NEA, the Community Residents Association, local councillors and other statutory partners.

The vision of the Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Strategy is for a society in which people live in a warm, comfortable home and need not worry about the effect of the cold on their health. Much work has been undertaken across Northern Ireland to tackle fuel poverty through partnership working, and we have been able to bring that learning to Whiterock Westrock to help build a more sustainable community.

The views, strengths, relationships and energies of local communities are essential in building effective approaches to improving health and wellbeing, and this has been particularly evident in this Whiterock Westrock community. We commend them for the work they have done over the past winter and the positive and lasting impact that will have on some of the most vulnerable households in this area.



Seamus Mullen
Head of Health and Wellbeing Improvement (Belfast)
Public Health Agency

Introduction

NEA and the Northern Exposure Project

National Energy Action (NEA) is the national charity which aims to eradicate fuel poverty and campaigns for greater investment in energy efficiency to help those who are poor and vulnerable.

Northern Ireland has the highest rate of fuel poverty in the United Kingdom. Currently 42% of households struggle to pay for the warmth required for good health and well-being.

National Energy Action Northern Ireland (NEA) works to tackle fuel poverty through campaigning, research and policy development, the provision of accredited energy efficiency training and through specific projects such as Northern Exposure.

Northern Exposure

Northern Exposure is a project delivered by NEA and funded by the Public Health Agency for a number of years. It is an action based, community development project, designed to tackle the high levels of fuel poverty in Belfast. It promotes energy efficiency services to tackle heating and insulation problems of low income households by working in partnership with statutory, community and voluntary organisations.

Background to Achieving Affordable Warmth in Whiterock Westrock

In 2013 NEA, as part of the Northern Exposure project produced a report in partnership with the University of Ulster and the Public Health Agency, *Alleviating Fuel Poverty in North and West Belfast, Northern Ireland*.

NEA engaged the University of Ulster to undertake research into the mental health and wellbeing impacts of fuel poverty and how energy efficiency measures can be used to combat them. A significant outcome from the research was it demonstrated to key stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Public Health Agency that energy efficiency measures delivered alongside a managed network of support can assist fuel poor households and deliver improvements in health and wellbeing.

The report provided the main results and conclusions based on qualitative and quantitative research carried out with thirty participants. This included before and after telephone surveys and six in-depth case studies which detailed the lives of householders, their experiences of living in cold damp homes, their experiences of interacting with the grant schemes and the benefits they received from having energy efficiency measures installed. The report captured difficulties that many of the participants face, such as the worry of high energy bills, cold rooms, mouldy walls, burst pipes and leaking oil.

The surveys conducted described how the project interventions addressed these difficulties with varying levels of success via existing schemes. The overall results do show clear improvements in mental health and wellbeing and thermal comfort evidenced in the surveys completed after energy efficiency measures were installed. The full report is available on the NEA website:

[http://www.nea.org.uk/Resources/NEA/NEA Northern Ireland/Documents/NorthernExposureReport\(WEB\)-11Mar13.pdf](http://www.nea.org.uk/Resources/NEA/NEA%20Northern%20Ireland/Documents/NorthernExposureReport(WEB)-11Mar13.pdf)

Recommendations from the report identified a need for action and not just another fuel poverty strategy. A way forward includes tying together the various policies not least to deliver a better customer journey for households as they navigate their way through schemes. The report highlighted that tackling fuel poverty needs to be seen not as a cost but as an investment in the future health and wellbeing of particularly the vulnerable in our society.

The Whiterock Westrock Initiative

Belfast City Councillor, Steven Corr who is based in west Belfast attended the launch of the Northern Exposure report *Alleviating fuel poverty in North and West Belfast, Northern Ireland*. Enthused by the outcomes of the report, Councillor Corr in partnership with NEA and the Public Health Agency convened a working group in the area of Whiterock and Westrock. The aim was to deliver an intervention to maximise access to grants, services and benefits, using a local based approach. The objectives of the intervention were to include:

- energy efficiency measures and advice
- access to support around benefits and debt
- an assessment and use of local services (i.e. Healthy Living Centres and West Belfast Area partnership)

NEA coordinated the planning and implementation of the intervention, in partnership with Councillor Corr and the Whiterock Westrock Residents Association (WWRA), by identifying and arranging regular meetings with key stakeholders and service providers.

Whiterock Westrock Residents Association was originally formed in 1995 initially as a small community collective of volunteers responding to need in the area. The Whiterock Westrock area was once described in the press as *the worst estate in Ulster*. Residents decided on reading this to do something to help the area that would change the headlines in the media to a more positive one. Working in partnership with Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) the Association worked to change and uplift the area by organising summer schemes, tackling anti-social behaviour and getting much needed repairs to homes. The Association has gone from strength to strength and now has an office base in which volunteers work on a daily basis to continue making the area a better place for residents.

The initial planning for the fuel poverty intervention involved creating terms of reference for the steering group and identifying a minimum of 100 households to be targeted using local knowledge.

The WWRA identified volunteers to act as local Enablers. NEA and the Public Health Agency's Health Intelligence Unit provided a one day training course for the enablers. The next step was to work closely with WWRA and the enablers to firm up what each householder would receive. The project was specifically tackling fuel poverty therefore energy efficiency grants were the main priority. In addition, access to a benefit entitlement check and debt advice was also made available for each householder. The group designed and created a home visit support pack which included useful information for the householder including advice on saving energy, useful contacts and a temperature card to enable householders to monitor thermal comfort within their living areas.

Using good practice from the Maximising Access to Services, Grants and Benefits in Rural Areas (MARA) and Urban Maximising Access (UMA) projects enabled us to create the template for the questionnaire. WWRA worked closely with NEA and PHA Health Intelligence Unit to design the household questionnaire which was piloted with 20 households. After this, the questionnaire was fine-tuned, amended and tested with the enablers.



Cllr Corr with members of Whiterock Westrock Residents Association enablers along with Paul Wallace and Lucy Cochrane (NEA)

The enablers all took part in energy efficiency, fuel poverty and interview skills and customer care training and were provided with information about referrals to all grants, services and benefits being offered.

"I really enjoyed the training and thought it was worthwhile as it helped and gave me confidence whilst we were doing the surveys at people's homes". – Seaneen Gilmartin (Enabler)

Advice Provision

The project planning and design highlighted a clear need for local advice provision which was currently lacking. Many householders in the area are deemed vulnerable and there is a high level of deprivation (www.nisra.gov.uk) in the area with many incidences of mental and physical health problems. Access to advice services is limited and with many residents experiencing mobility problems it was necessary to have an advice service in the area for the duration of the project.

Belfast City Council arranged for an advice worker to be placed in the residents association throughout the project to respond to any queries on benefit advice, income maximisation and debt advice. The worker also provided an outreach service for those unable to access the office. The service was provided for a fixed period and as such, all benefit entitlement checks were immediately referred when the completed questionnaires were received. 82 from the 100 householders requested a benefit entitlement check (BEC).

Structure of the Questionnaire

There were three sections to the questionnaire. The first asked about the property including home energy questions such as heating systems and insulation. The second section concentrated on health and wellbeing and utilised the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale which will enable further analysis of benefit from the project. In the final section, householders were asked about community and health services that they were aware of, currently used or would like to use if available in the area.

The demographics were designed to capture the general household composition from the sample and this is illustrated in the following charts with age breakdown, gender and number of members in each household.

The housing questions established if the householder required any additional measures with a specific focus on heating and insulation. This made it possible for referrals to be made to various schemes from the data on the questionnaire. There was an additional space which provided an opportunity for householders to raise any issues not covered by the questionnaire.

When the householder completed the questionnaire they were asked if they consented to being referred to a benefit adviser and or an energy efficiency scheme. They were also asked if they consented to a follow up evaluation approximately 3-6 months after their home visit.

To ensure confidentiality, no personal details were held on the questionnaire; a unique ID number was created and duplicated on a separate consent form. If the householder consented to follow up work and/or evaluation, their contact details

were provided on the consent form. The householder decided during the home visit if they wanted to be referred for a benefit entitlement check, grants and follow up evaluation.

NEA then referred householders who consented and were eligible for any existing schemes such as the Warm Homes Scheme or the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP). A total of 57 householders were subsequently referred for energy schemes. In addition to the home visits 120 energy efficient light bulbs, circa 160 advice and information packs, and 200 temperature cards were distributed.

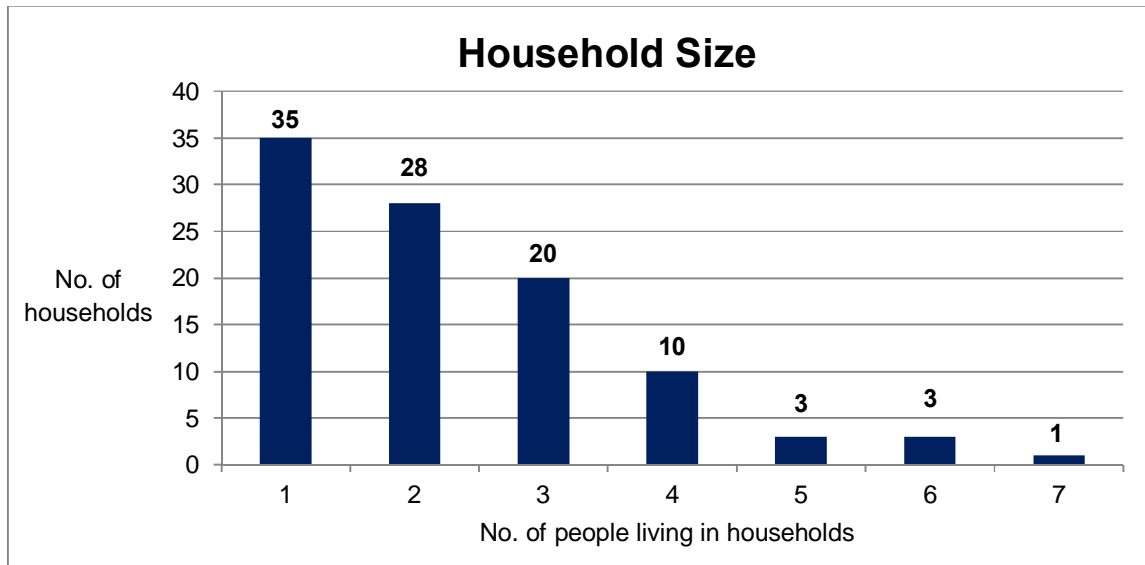
Belfast City Council also provided winter warmth packs to older people in the area during the winter months which consisted of thermal underwear, socks, thermal gilets, blankets, thermal hats and gloves.

Main Findings

The enablers and NEA rapped 240 doors and carried out 100 home visits to householders in the Whiterock and Westrock area.

Household Size

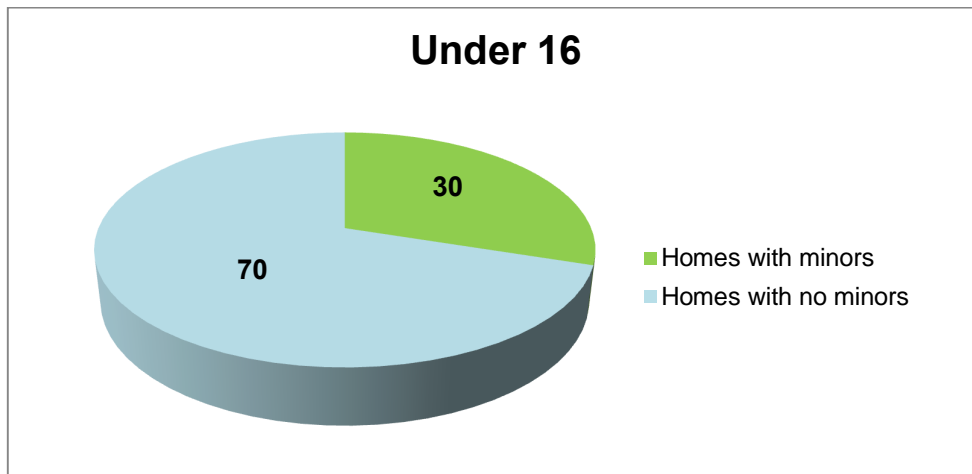
The questionnaire asked for the number of residents in each property including minors which gave a sample of the household composition.



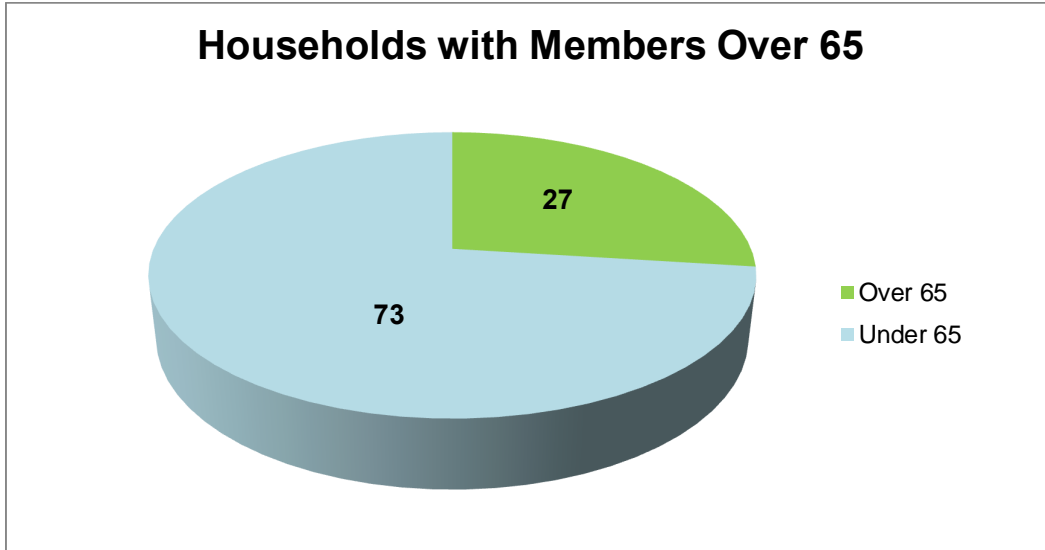
Age groups within households

The survey also recorded dependents under 16 and family members over pension age:

Households with children under 16 living in them



Households with adults over 65 living in them

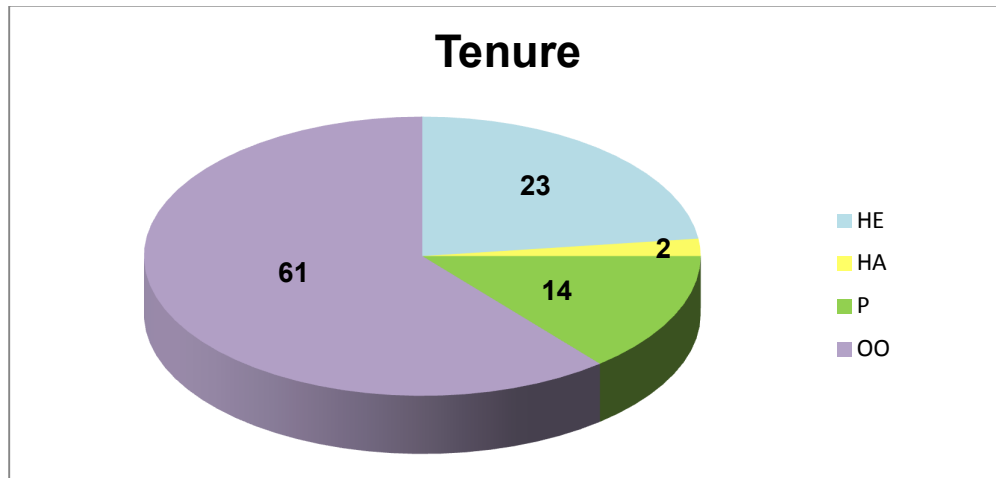


Tenure

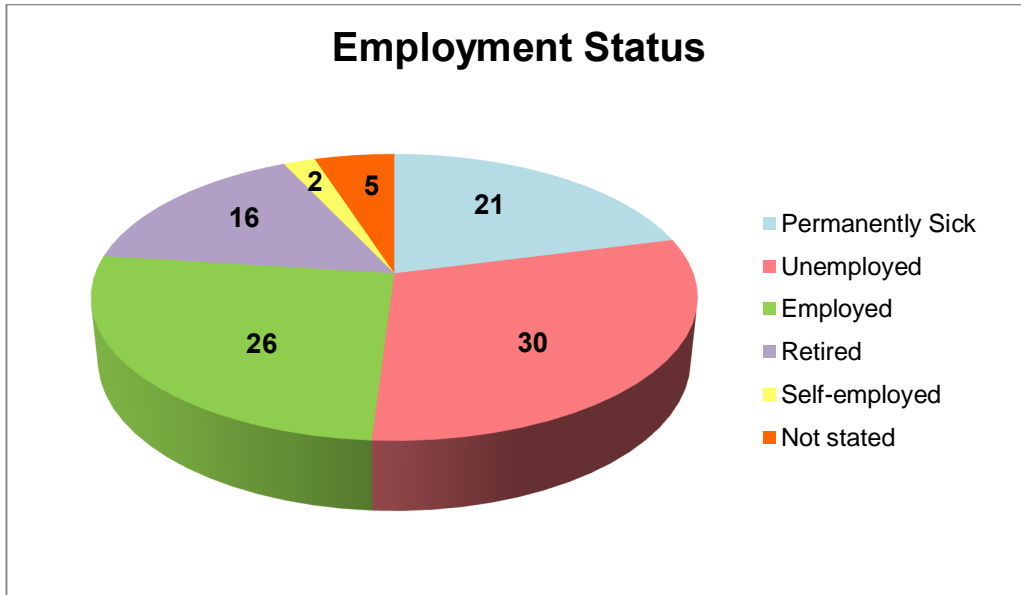
Households that could be eligible for energy efficiency grants, i.e. owner occupiers and the private rented sector were initially targeted through maps provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the local knowledge of the residents association. Therefore a higher proportion of owner occupiers and private tenants were selected however all householders were given information on schemes, contact numbers and energy advice on reducing bills.

The tenures were:

- 23 NIHE
- 2 Housing Associations
- 14 Private Rented
- 61 Owner Occupiers

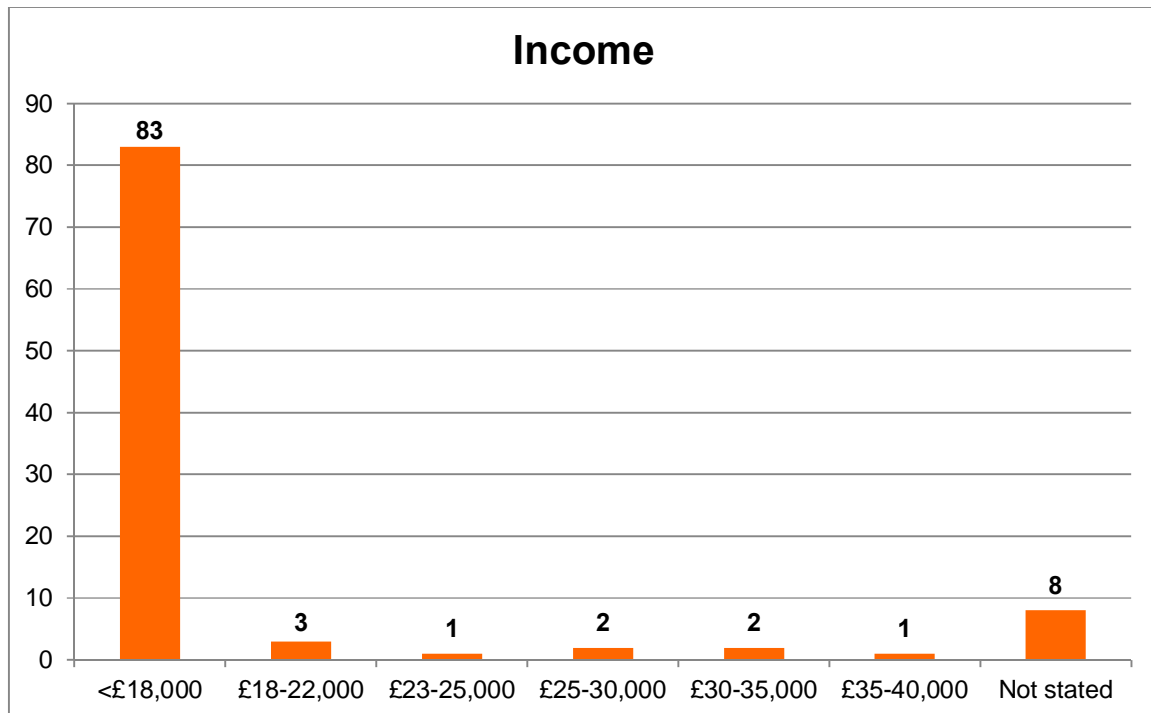


Employment Status



Household Income

Householders were asked for the gross household income, this provided information for referrals to various schemes, the income variables illustrated below were based on the qualifying criteria for a number of schemes for example the NISEP.

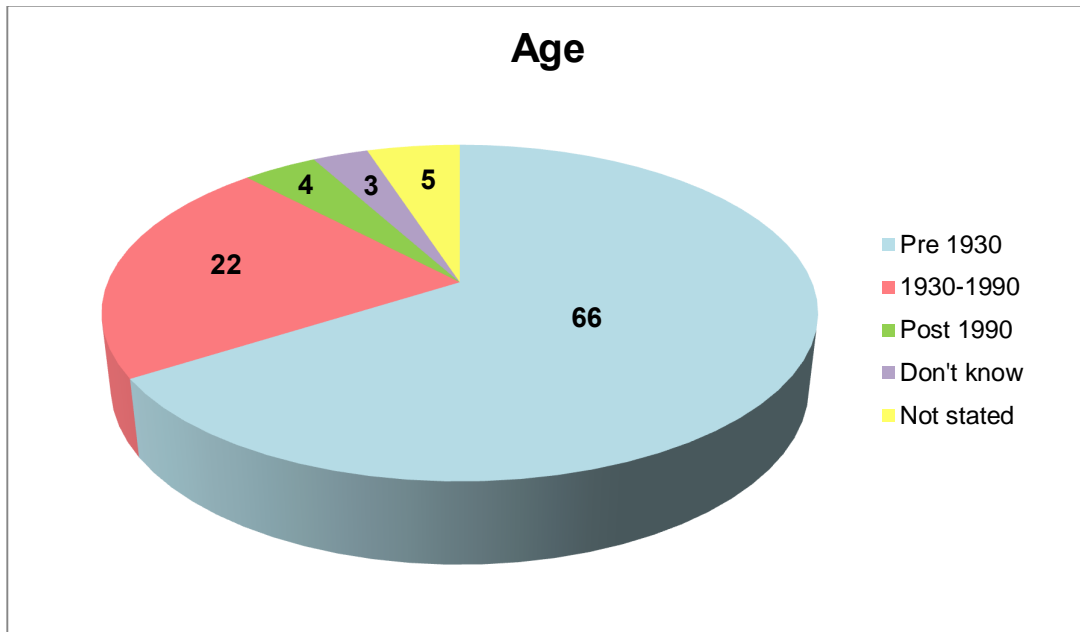


Houses and Home Energy

Householders were asked a number of questions about their homes to gauge what type of grants they may be eligible for and to measure any trends within the homes.

Age of house

Householders were asked to estimate the age of their homes, this gave an approximation on the type of measures that may be appropriate for the house.



Heating Systems

Householders were asked what type of heating fuel that they used and even though the area is on the gas network, there was a high level of owner occupiers and private tenants still using oil. The NIHE tenants were converted to gas central heating systems which had been installed through the NIHE Heating Replacement schemes. There would appear to be a number of reasons why this is the case, in the main a policy decision was taken in 2009 not to include oil to gas heating conversions in the Warm Homes Scheme, hence the reliance on oil continues in this area. Other reasons include the upheaval of converting their system, though many householders expressed an interest in converting to gas due to the availability of pay as you go meters for gas and the need to outlay up to £500 to get a full fill of oil.

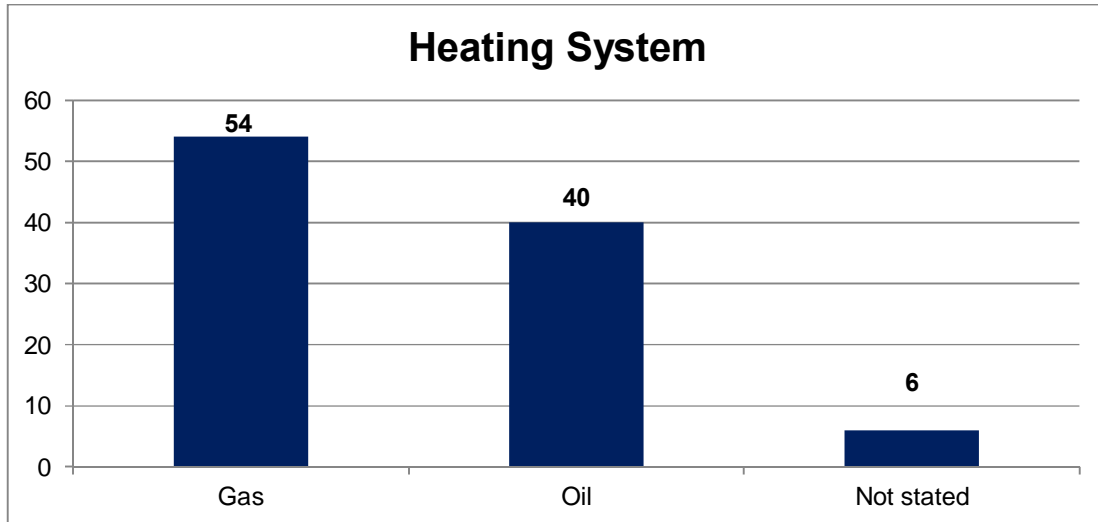
Enablers noted some of the following comments from householders:

'House really cold, full of damp, can't afford to heat. Windows leaking and wind comes in.'

'Draughty windows. Boiler not working at all, using gas bottle fire'

'Oil heating breaks down at least twice a year. House is cold after heating off as heat leaves house quickly.'

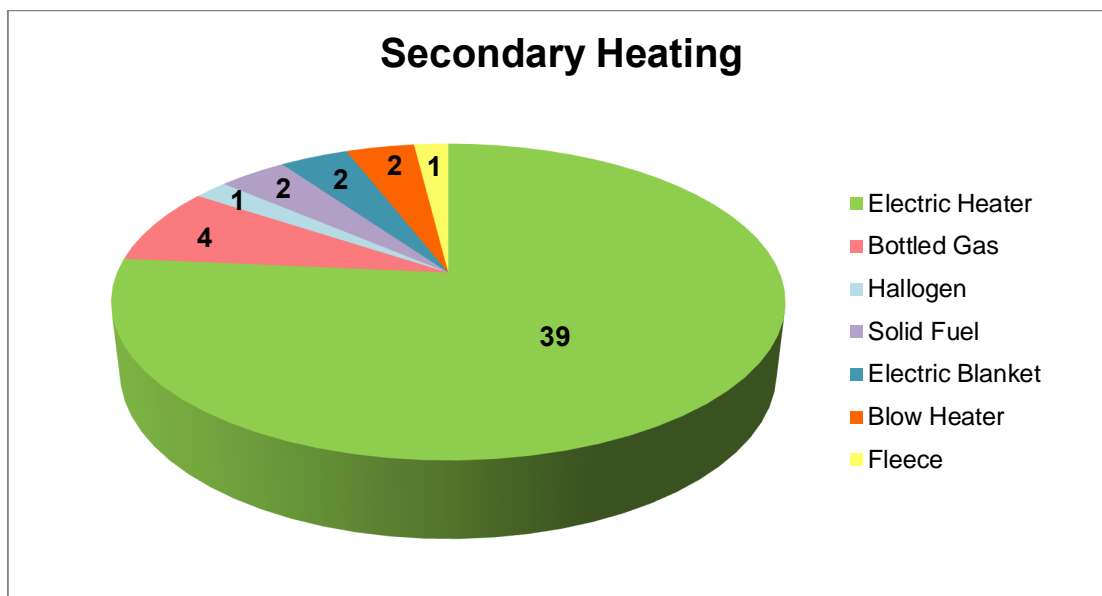
'System has been faulty 7-8 years. Shuts off intermittently.'



Secondary Heating

Householders were asked if they ever used alternative sources of heat in addition to their main central heating system. A startling 46 households were using additional often more expensive room heaters. Reasons for doing this included that in the winter the house was still cold even with the central heating system on and that alternative heating was used when they had run out of their main heating fuel.

Types of heaters used:

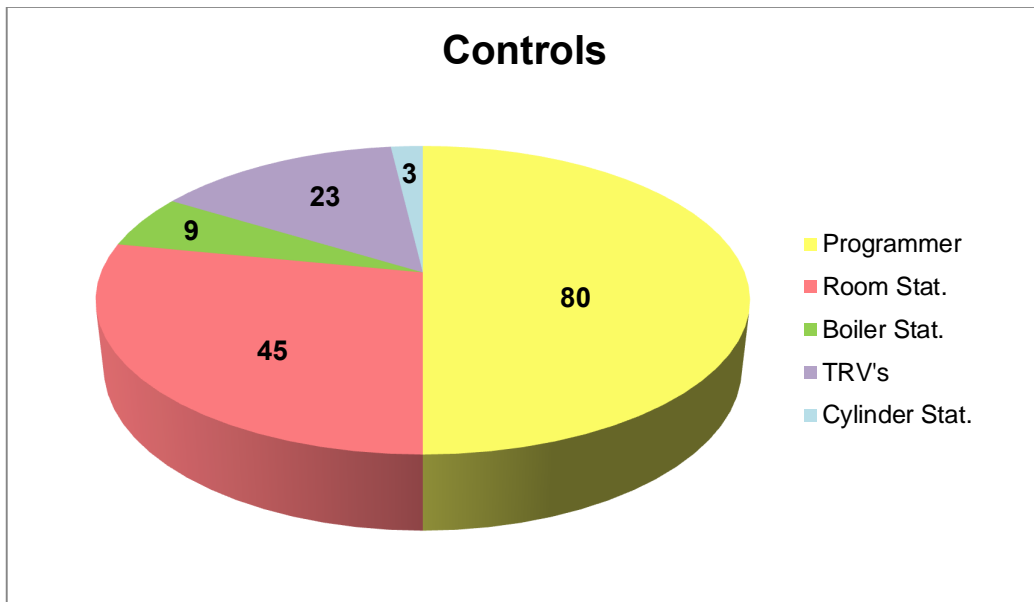


Heating controls

Householders were asked if they had specific controls to manage and effectively use their central heating system. The following controls were listed in the questionnaire:

- Programmer/timer
- Room thermostat
- Thermostatic radiator valves
- Cylinder thermostat
- Boiler thermostat

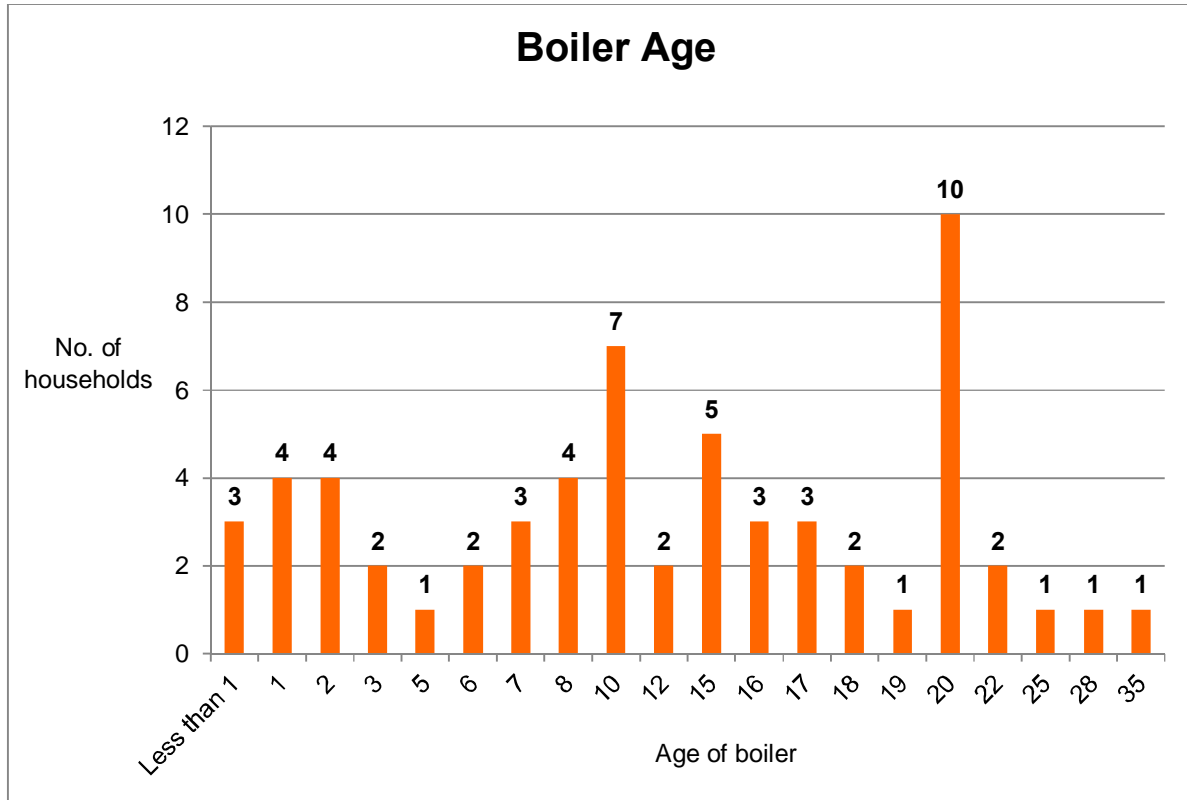
The chart below illustrates the householders response:



The results show that a high percentage (80%) of householders believed they had a programmer/timer though householders were less familiar with, or aware of, boiler and cylinder thermostats. Nearly half households (45%) were aware of their room thermostat.

Age of boiler

Householders were additionally asked the age of their boiler. 39 householders were unsure what age their boiler was and ticked the unsure box. A large proportion did own boilers over 15 years old as illustrated below:

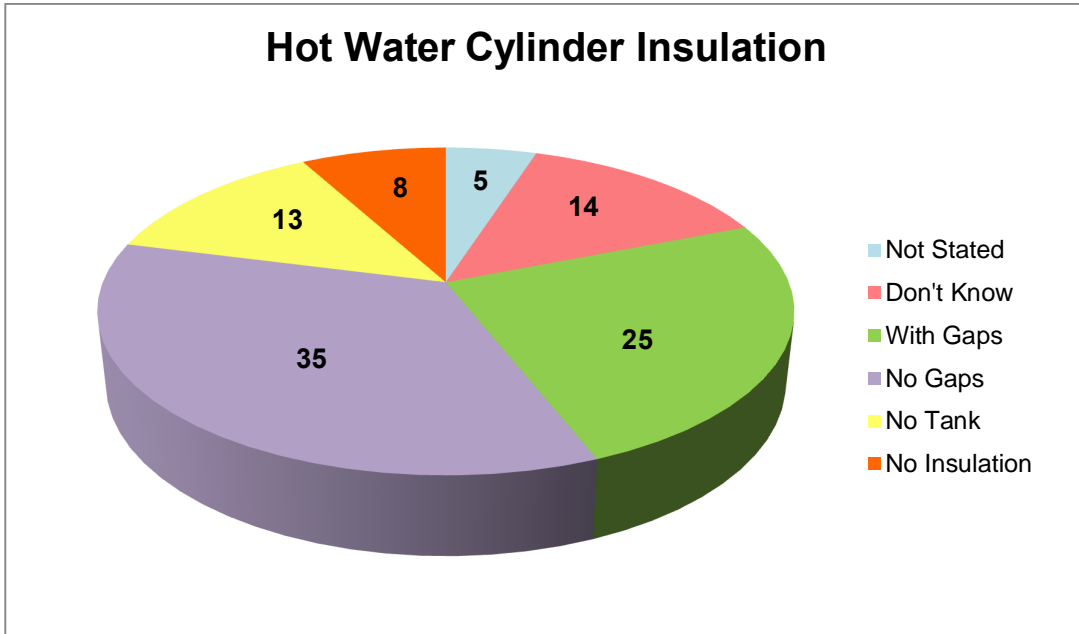


10 householders stated that their boiler was not working at the time the questionnaire was completed. Reasons given were:

- Faulty . 5
- No fuel - 1
- Other . 4

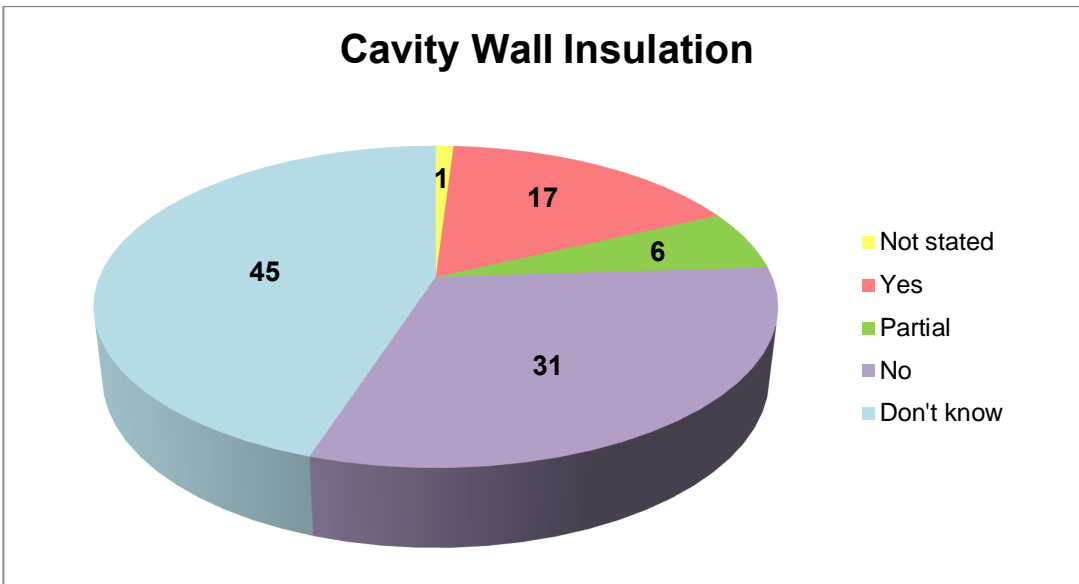
Hot Water Cylinder Insulation

Householders were asked if they had a hot water cylinder and if this was insulated:



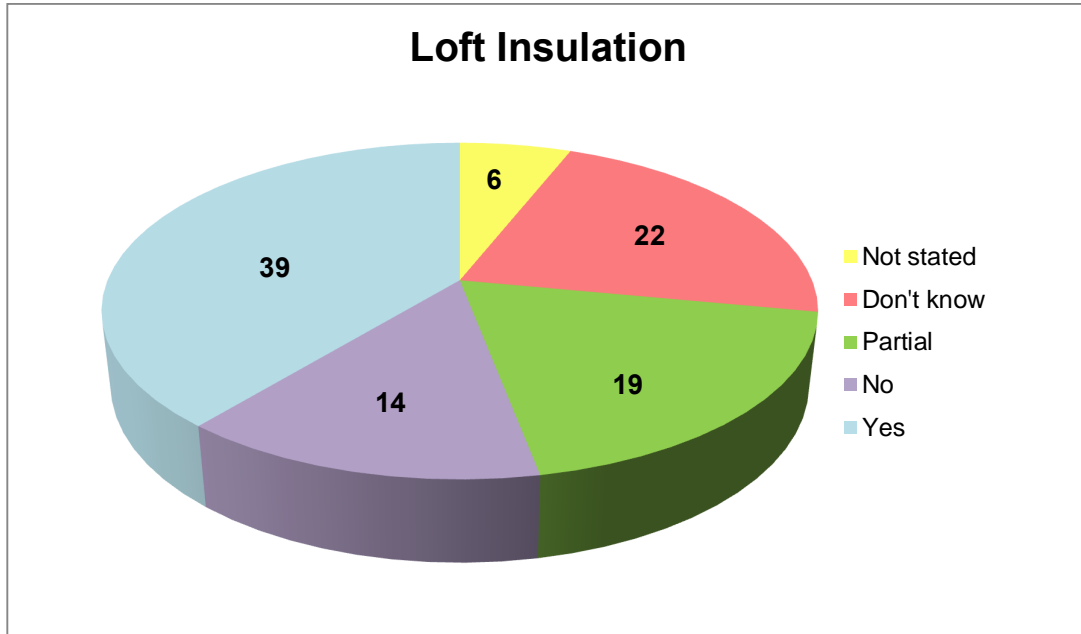
Cavity Wall Insulation

Householders were asked if they had any cavity wall insulation:

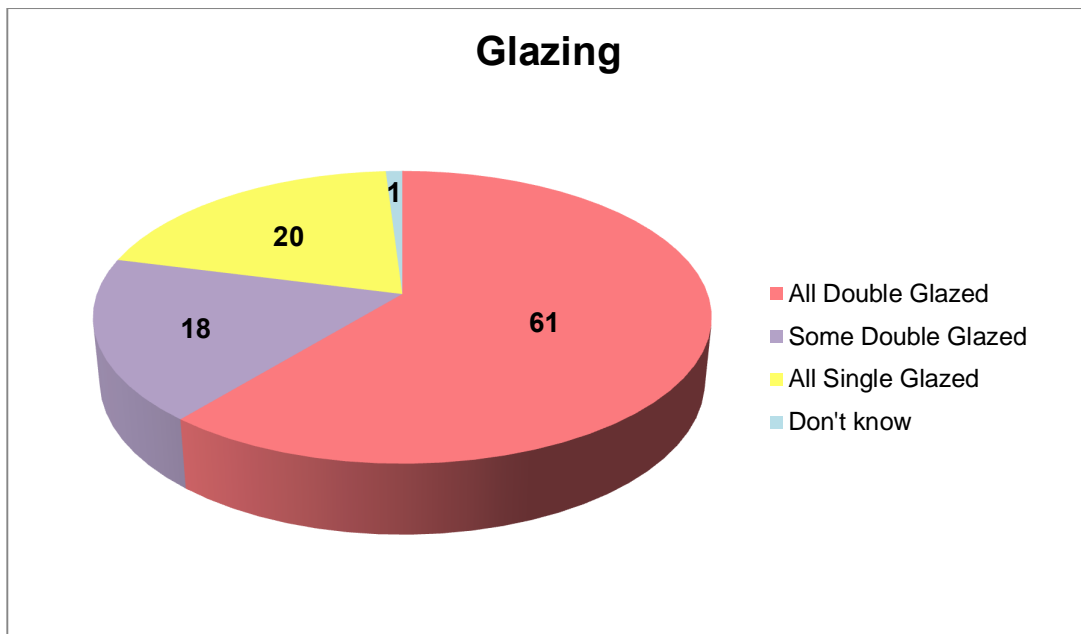


Loft Insulation

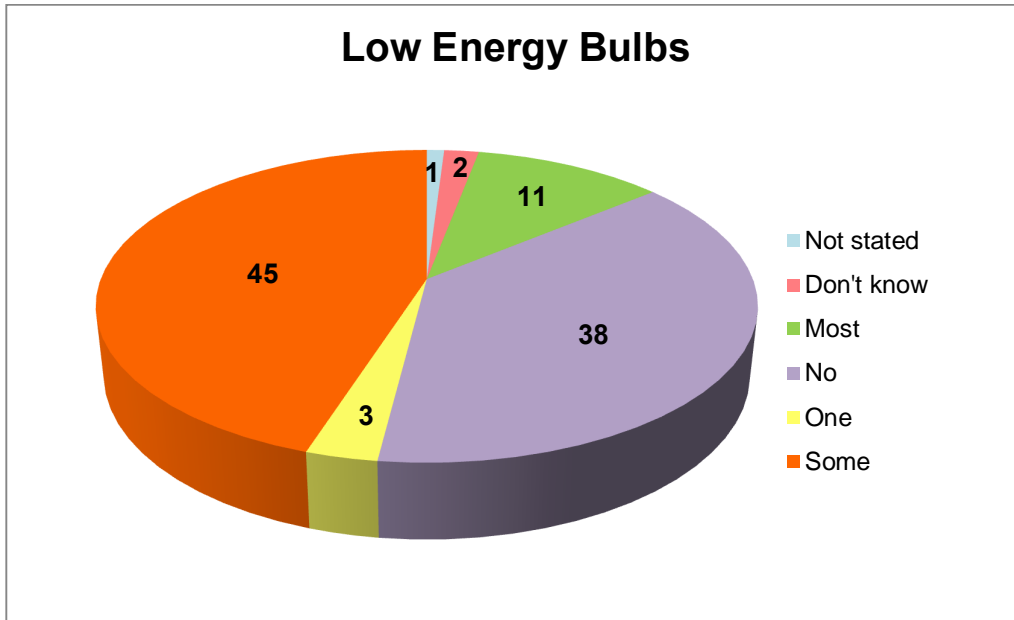
Householders were asked if they had any loft insulation:



Householders were asked about their windows



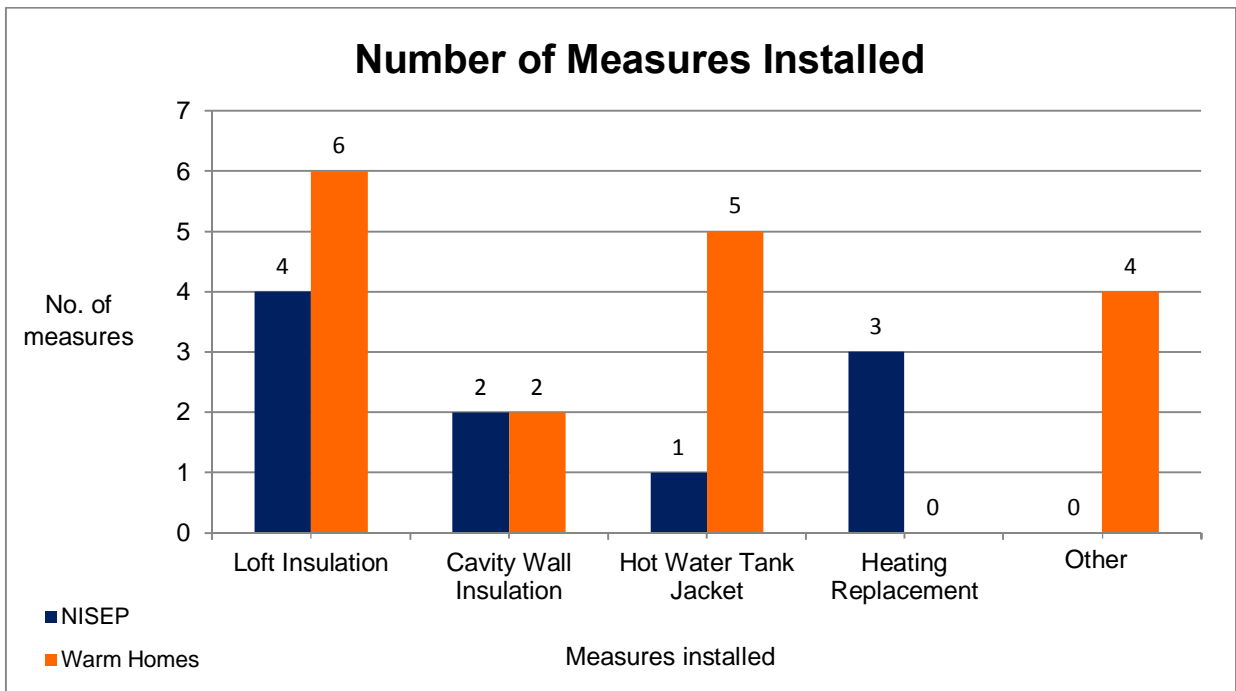
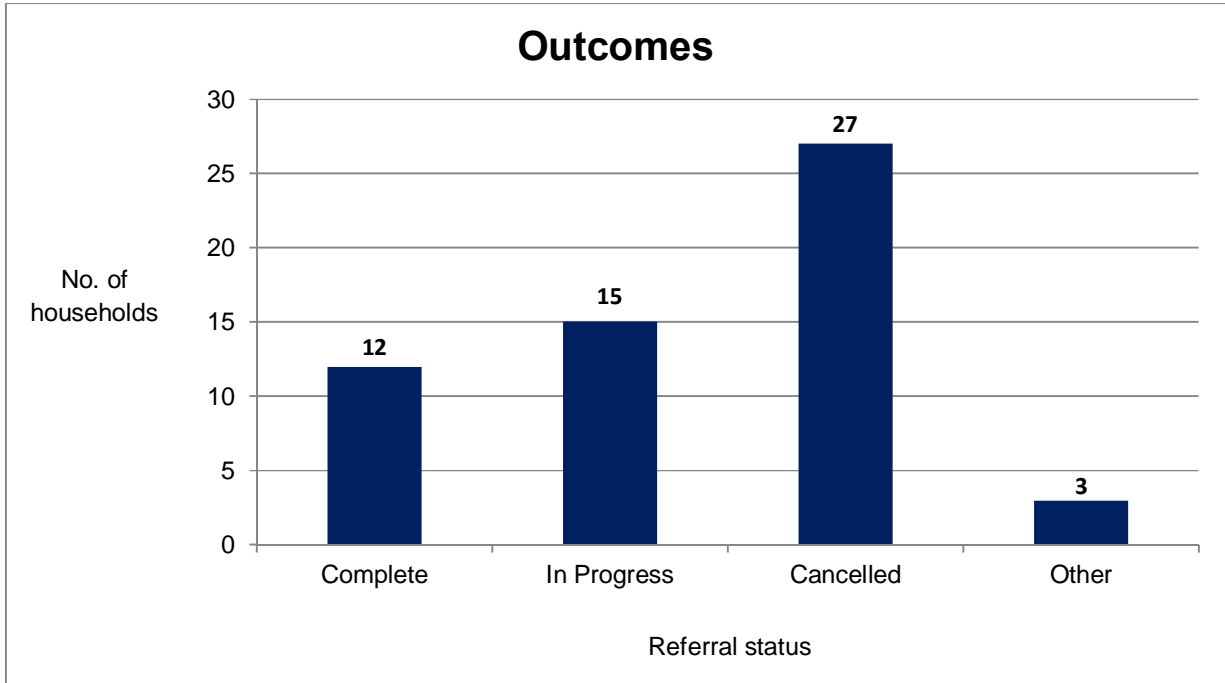
Householders were asked about their use of energy efficient light bulbs



A high proportion of householders were not sure about their insulation or they had old insulation which required a top-up, for example loft insulation. A large number of owner occupied homes were previously owned by the NIHE who would have carried out insulation work in the past. There were issues raised around a possible need to retrofit cavity wall insulation and issues with damp kitchens recurring amongst homes.

Referral Outcomes: Home Energy Schemes

From the 100 householders 25 were living in social housing therefore were not eligible for the Warm Homes Scheme or NISEP. Of the remaining 75 households, 57 were eligible for a referral to grant schemes; of the 18 not referred they either did not request the work, did not require work or a small number were not eligible based on income. The outcomes to date are as follows:



One household's landlord did not provide consent and two householders did not reply. The main reasons for cancellations were that the work was not required with a small number of households not proceeding with the works.

Benefit Entitlement Checks

The majority of households availed of a benefit entitlement check with 82 out of 100 being referred. Of these, 71 Benefit entitlement checks were carried out with an additional 10 better off calculations also carried out (these look at other scenarios including, for example, increasing working hours or returning to work). There was one referral for debt advice, one for tax credits, two family fund applications and six applications for rate relief.

The total annual worth for the benefit maximisation was circa £8,800 in unclaimed benefits and grants.

This included:

- Two rate relief awards
- Two successful family fund applications
- One successful employment and support allowance application.

Additionally the information packs provided important information to householders on saving fuel and energy in the household. Simple alterations in the home such as increasing ventilation and reducing energy use in the home can create lasting advantages to all those involved in the project. More importantly awareness was raised on accessing advice and information on energy efficiency and finance beyond the project at an individual and community level. Links have been established by the community group with ongoing support.

Part Two: Health and Wellbeing

Because of the significant linkages between fuel poverty and health, a section on health and well-being was included in the questionnaire. The Warwick and Edinburgh Wellbeing Scale is a popular measure of wellbeing, it was used in the previous Northern Exposure research.

Householders were asked about their general and physical health (in the preceding four weeks from the day of the home visit) and were provided with multiple choice options on mental health and wellbeing.

The results on general health are below:

| General health in last four weeks | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Poor | 44 |
| Fair | 27 |
| Good | 16 |
| Very good | 11 |
| Excellent | 2 |

| Physical health in last four weeks | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Not stated | 4 |
| Poor | 46 |
| Fair | 25 |
| Good | 14 |
| Very good | 8 |
| Excellent | 3 |

Based on the results there were high incidences of physical and mental health issues from the 100 households sampled. Close to half the householders described both their general health and physical health as poor.

Given the proven evidence that fuel poverty affects both physical and mental health it is hoped that measures subsequently put in place will go some way to improve health and wellbeing levels in households. Evaluations will be taking place a number of months after the project by the Health Intelligence Unit to assess if the health and wellbeing of householders who received any grants or additional income has improved.

Access to Local Services

In order to analyse the local health and community services used by local residents twenty-nine organisations that provided a service were identified which serve the greater Whiterock and Upper Springfield areas. The services were categorised into type. Householders were invited to answer if they were aware of the service, used the service or would use the service if it was in their local community. Numbers were converted into percentage of responses. Some householders did not tick all boxes so the percentages are based on the number of answers that were selected.

The section on services showed a wide gap in knowledge about services being provided in the wider area but at the same time a desire for services to be in the local community such as a community centre and an advice service. The majority of households were aware of and or using the residents association but many expressed that they would like to see additional services particularly a Healthy Living Centre, Community Centre, counselling and therapies in the immediate area. The most used service in the area is the Whiterock Westrock Residents Association.

| Services | Heard of service | | Using service | | Would use service if in area | |
|------------------------------|------------------|----------|---------------|----------|------------------------------|----------|
| | Yes | No | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Healthy Living Centre | 14 (15%) | 82 (85%) | 3 (9%) | 31 (91%) | 70 (90%) | 8 (10%) |
| Family Centre | 12 (13%) | 84 (87%) | 3 (10%) | 28 (90%) | 61 (79%) | 16 (21%) |
| Crèche | 61 (62%) | 37 (38%) | 8 (17%) | 40 (83%) | 27 (43%) | 36 (57%) |
| Counselling | 11 (12%) | 81 (88%) | 1 (3%) | 31 (97%) | 63 (83%) | 13 (17%) |
| Therapies | 14 (15%) | 79 (85%) | 3 (9%) | 29 (91%) | 64 (84%) | 12 (16%) |
| Advice Centre | 36 (38%) | 59 (62%) | 9 (25%) | 27 (75%) | 61 (85%) | 11 (15%) |
| Youth Club | 23 (25%) | 69 (75%) | 2 (6%) | 33 (94%) | 48 (72%) | 19 (28%) |
| Community Centre | 19 (20%) | 75 (80%) | 2 (6%) | 30 (94%) | 61 (85%) | 11 (15%) |
| Leisure Centre | 70 (71%) | 28 (29%) | 19 (37%) | 33 (63%) | 38 (73%) | 14 (27%) |
| Residents Association | 79 (81%) | 19 (19%) | 41 (76%) | 13 (24%) | 48 (86%) | 8 (14%) |

Conclusion and Recommendations

Much has been learned throughout the project and it is anticipated that it will not only bring warmer homes and increased incomes, but also increased awareness of fuel poverty and solutions to the local community. It has already opened pathways to enable local advocacy and a sense of local empowerment. Councillor Corr described the door to door approach as an innovative grass roots initiative that will look at one of the major issues affecting the Whiterock and Westrock area.

The questionnaire will also bring about a focus on health inequalities in the area by using the recognised Health and Wellbeing Scale. The project will also provide valuable information to enable the Public Health Agency to evaluate the benefits arising from the initiative and highlight any gaps in service provision.

All of householders who completed a questionnaire had a central heating system. There were no householders eligible for Warm Homes Plus however three households were referred to the Energy Saver Homes whole house solution provided through the NISEP. Further referrals from the area are still being received. While much of the project concentrated on owner occupied and private rented properties there was interest from NIHE tenants in the project and there are recurring housing issues in a number of the NIHE homes e.g. dampness. Many householders are in fuel poverty and even with a heating system, are often self-disconnecting and or using alternative heat sources. There was an identifiable need for an oil pay as you go option as householders were unable to purchase larger fills of oil.

Many of the householders contacting NEA, raised issues about no fully funded replacement scheme for oil boilers, draughts and in many cases dampness in homes. Householders reported that their homes were difficult to heat or particular rooms colder than others. Many had problems with kitchen extensions which may not have been insulated when constructed. This was both in owner occupied and NIHE properties. The following samples of issues were noted by enablers as additional comments on questionnaires:

'Kitchen extension cold, damp and draughty, leaking. Draughty windows.'

'Kitchen very cold (extension) - only one small radiator.'

'House very cold and damp on walls.'

'House very cold. Gas fire serviced, radiators giving out inadequate heat – Cavity Wall Insulation possibly needs done.'

'Walls damp, house very draughty.'

'Two bedrooms damp, house needs CWI and loft insulation'

'Kitchen cold and damp - no insulation. Windows draughty.'

The pilot identified the fact that some residents were using their oven to heat their kitchen; this highlighted not only a highly inefficient heating method but heat loss through thermal inefficiency.

There is unmet need for holistic advocacy services. Whilst the benefit entitlement checks were extremely important during the project there is an identified need for a longer term caseworker in the area that could take complex cases forward and assist with form completion, tribunal representation and housing issues.

There are apparent limited resources in the residents association which is staffed entirely by volunteers. There is need for further resources within the area; these include raising awareness about health and community services provided, further capacity building and development of the residents association.

Lasting Legacy

There are a number of positive outcomes from the project. There is a real sense of empowerment in the residents association. Enablers have benefited through personal development and are now more energy aware and skilled in making referrals to schemes including Warm Homes Scheme and the NISEP. Householders have received energy efficiency measures and energy awareness has been raised in the local community.

Recommendations

- The high proportion of owner occupiers using oil systems, many with ageing boilers, highlights the need for a fully funded scheme for oil to gas conversions
- Further investigations should be carried out into insulation for single storey extensions in social housing, owner occupied and private tenants
- Retrofitting both social and private housing should be explored particularly in houses with cavity wall insulation
- An oil buying club coordinated in the Whiterock Westrock area may go some way to alleviate issues around budgeting for fuel
- A widespread publicity campaign on accessing energy advice should be established
- Further work is needed on overcoming barriers facing householders accessing community facilities
- A longer term advice surgery in the area would assist the community particularly around the current welfare reform changes.

Appendix 1

Summary of Customer Journey for each householder in AWWW

