

FUEL POVERTY FOCUS

SUMMER 2021



Action for Warm Homes
1981-2021



FISHWICK

ON THE GROUND WITH FILIPE & JO

Page 2

NEA BRINGING WARM & SAFE HOMES TO FISHWICK



Filipe Amarante, Retrofit Project Manager and Jo Boswell Project Development Coordinator

NEA initiated the delivery of the local, in-community assistance project Warm and Safe Homes in Fishwick to help rectify residents' damp and mould issues following a 2013 failed external wall insulation scheme.

The connection between cold, damp homes and the health and wellbeing of residents is well documented and that is why this project is particularly important. NEA is committed to giving a voice to residents in Fishwick, putting householders at the centre of the assistance programme and to place those suffering the most, at the heart of what we deliver.

To provide scrutiny, challenge and assurance to the project, an oversight group has been established and the first meeting took place last month. This group has no direct responsibility or accountability for the project but will provide valuable insight, advice, guidance and challenge to the project and is chaired by a member of NEA's Board of Trustees. Other members include Ofgem, BEIS, Preston City Council and Sir Mark Hendrick MP's office.

NEA has partnered with two key delivery organisations to deliver the Warm and Safe Homes in Fishwick project:

Aldrock, a local company based in the north west with a proven track record working on residential retrofit projects, will be responsible for carrying out property surveys and oversee and approve the repair work. They have demonstrated a genuine commitment to delivering high quality service for householders in Fishwick.

Parity Projects, an award-winning provider of environmental and energy solutions to the residential building sector. Using computer modelling they will help to identify the most effective ways to reduce the energy impact of a property. Parity Projects will appoint the retrofit coordinator and ensure that where relevant, the project complies with stringent retrofit process standards.

The project is taking every precaution to follow government guidance on Covid-19 requirements to ensure the safety of our staff, partners and the people of Fishwick. Individual property surveys are now underway

for those residents who have responded to our initial questionnaire and we hope that seeing NEA in the community and partner representatives carrying out surveys will encourage more residents to come forward for assistance.

Every property that responded to our questionnaire will have two separate surveys; firstly a building survey to identify all the building defects and the remedial actions we can take to put them right and secondly an energy assessment from the retrofit coordinator.

These surveys will allow our partners to create a tailored work plan to resolve the different problems of each property developed after the 2013 scheme and will also detail how to improve their energy efficiency. All work plans will be individual, and NEA will take time to discuss them with each householder, who will have the opportunity to have their opinion heard and factored into the work to be carried out on their homes.

NEA has appointed Filipe Amarante as the Community Retrofit Project Manager to manage the Fishwick project. Filipe, who started in April 2021, is a civil engineer and has previously worked as a project manager of construction projects and on property management in the housing sector. Filipe brings lots of experience managing and delivering technical construction projects with several stakeholders to NEA, and a strong willingness to improve people's lives.

Although NEA wasn't involved in the original project, we care deeply that people are not left living in these conditions. When done well, we know that insulation can make homes warmer, healthier and more affordable to run. Some of those affected have been let down and although we cannot solve all the problems caused in 2013, we hope to make things better for the worst affected households and highlight the need for further action. And alongside the practical improvements, NEA will use the experience to share learnings, understand what makes best-practice and challenge the structure of future large-scale energy retrofit programmes.

As Covid-19 restrictions ease, Filipe and Jo Boswell, NEA's Project Development Coordinator, are starting to make their presence felt in the community, guiding residents through the upcoming process and providing energy efficiency advice to householders. Going forward, with lockdown lifted we expect that on-the-ground activity will increase and one-to-one interaction will become possible as the project takes off. We will keep you updated in Fuel Poverty Focus as the project progresses.

For more information please contact Filipe Amarante, Community Retrofit Project Manager on filipe.amarante@nea.org.uk



PIONEERING NEW SAFEGUARDING SCHEME HITS 1000 REFERRAL MILESTONE

One thousand households have been referred to a pioneering new customer safeguarding scheme launched by NEA, the Cadent Foundation and gas distribution network Cadent.

Reactive Response is a new initiative which aims to help people who are faced with having their gas supply disconnected on safety grounds, to stay warm and safe in their homes. Regulations state that engineers are required to disconnect or isolate the supply of gas to an appliance or property in the event of a gas emergency which poses risk to life and property. However, this can leave vulnerable customers unable to cover the costs of repairing or replacing the appliances, exposing them to the danger of living in a cold home, potentially with no heating, hot water or means of cooking.

The Reactive Response scheme offers a solution by providing support for vulnerable customers who do not have the means or capacity to arrange the necessary works. It allows Cadent engineers to refer customers to NEA, who then organise the repair or replacement work (subject to eligibility). This can range from a simple gas pipework repair to the replacement of gas appliances and even the installation of full central heating systems.

One of the those helped by the scheme is Bethany, a single woman in her 50s with chronic fatigue syndrome. Her boiler had been broken for some time and she had not been able to afford to service or repair it. Reactive Response repaired her boiler, giving her access to heating and hot water for the first time in years.

Peter Sumbly, Director of Operations at NEA said: *“Having an appliance condemned or gas supply disconnected can be devastating, particularly for those who are already struggling to afford heating costs and other essentials. Through this partnership we’ve been able to get people back on track, helping them live in homes that are safe and warm.”*

Once the gas supply has been safely reinstated, NEA offers customers comprehensive energy efficiency advice, helping customers to be better able to heat their homes at an affordable cost. They are also supported to access other sources of help such as the Warm Home Discount and Priority Services Register, offered a benefit entitlement check and support to claim any identified benefits for which they are eligible. This can lead to significant income gains as a result of a Reactive Response referral.

Reactive Response was first launched in 2020 when the Cadent Foundation awarded a £612,000 grant to NEA for a one-year pilot project across Cadent’s networks. Based on the huge success of the pilot programme, a further £1.8 million was recently awarded to fund the initiative for another two years.

Julia Dwyer, Cadent Foundation Director, said: *“Supporting people out of fuel poverty is one of the fundamental objectives of the Cadent Foundation and the Reactive Response scheme offers an innovative new approach to tackling a growing problem. This is the first initiative of its kind within the energy industry and its impact on vulnerable customers has already been phenomenal. By helping people to achieve affordable warmth, the Reactive Response scheme is reducing the number of households likely to be in fuel poverty, improving health and wellbeing and consequently, reducing demand on primary health care services.”*

“We hope that this initiative will one day become standard business practice across the industry, providing a blueprint that all gas and electric distribution networks can replicate to support vulnerable customers.”

Earl Richards, Smart Metering Specialist at Cadent, said: *“A referral from a Cadent engineer to NEA can be the key to re-establishing a safe and effective heating system in the home of a vulnerable person. Reaching the 1000 referrals milestone is testament to the passion and commitment of Cadent engineers to always put the customer first. Unfortunately, it also highlights the high level of need and frequency with which vulnerable customers find themselves at risk of living in a cold home, with no access to hot water or cooking facilities following a gas emergency.”*

“The Reactive Response scheme has not only had a huge benefit for customers, it’s also had a significant impact on Cadent frontline staff. By referring a customer for assistance, they can leave knowing that their needs are being taken care of, giving them peace of mind and job satisfaction.”

The Cadent Foundation is funded by local gas network Cadent, and has been established to support projects large and small that help people living in vulnerable situations and energy poor communities; protect and preserve the natural environment and support in creating a sustainable energy future for all. More information can be found at www.cadentfoundation.com.

NEA ENERGY ADVISORS TAKE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO TACKLING FUEL POVERTY

NEA's Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) Advice Service offers both energy advice and income maximisation advice to low-income and other vulnerable households across England and Wales. Shelly McDonald, Project Development Co-ordinator at NEA provides a first-hand perspective on her work and the value of accessing hardship/trust funds for service users.



As one of NEA's energy advisors I take full advantage of local and regional trust funds and grant aid, to support our service users to improve the energy efficiency of their homes; top-up energy accounts; reduce energy debt; get their energy back on supply; or even to replace heating systems or access white goods. I recently accessed the Greggs Foundation Hardship Fund for a service user in the North East who had to flee domestic violence, and was residing in temporary safe accommodation for a while. She was unsure about her future tenancy, so we paused the advice and support for a while.

On returning home she got back in touch and I picked up the case from where we left off. I looked holistically at her current circumstances and needs, and this highlighted that from an energy perspective she needed comprehensive energy advice to be better able to manage her energy expenditure, due to her reduced single-person income, and to look at the possibility of replacing an inefficient electric cooker that was on rental and eating into her available income. As an advisor I was quickly able to identify that the Greggs Foundation could provide a possible solution and we were able to apply.

The grant application form is easy to complete with the client's participation; providing her income and expenditure details via WhatsApp messaging. The decision took just under a week which is amazing! Greggs Foundation awarded her a new gas cooker to replace her old inefficient electric appliance. This will decrease her energy usage cost and she will make savings on the cost of rental. The client sent a message say *"is it gas? I'm over the moon"*.

Hardship grants like this make such a difference to the lives of people living in fuel poverty, it would be amazing to have a Greggs Foundation in every region!"

GREGGS HARDSHIP FUND

The Hardship Fund provides small grants to people in financial need in the North East of England via recognised social organisations such as housing associations, social services and charities registered with the Charity Commission, who are acting on behalf of a family or individual in need. Grants are made to fund household equipment, such as cookers, fridge freezers and clothing that can make a significant difference to people's lives.

For more information go to <https://www.greggsfoundation.org.uk/grants/hardship-fund>



POLICY

Peter Smith, Director of Policy and Advocacy

NEA ADVOCACY WINS FROM THE LAST YEAR

In a year like no other, NEA worked hard throughout 2020-21 to continue to deliver our key aims as a charity, including our campaign and advocacy priorities. During the financial year 2020/21, NEA worked within four key advocacy themes:

- Consistently supporting the most vulnerable consumers, especially during Covid-19
- Delivering a 'fair' transition to net zero carbon & encouraging inclusive innovation
- Prevention is better than cure – pushing the public health agenda
- Enhancing cooperation between the nations to end fuel poverty

Working within these themes, NEA had some major advocacy successes. In summary, in our work to consistently support the most vulnerable customers, NEA jointly ran a successful campaign seeking to maintain and expand the Warm Home Discount scheme. This resulted in a single year extension of the scheme, keeping it in place in its current form until April 2022 and then a longer-term extension to 2026 and expansion as part of the Energy White Paper. In the energy market, NEA advocated for new regulatory rules to address the risk of self-disconnection for households using prepayment meters. This resulted in Ofgem moving quickly to introduce new licence conditions for energy suppliers to closely monitor self-disconnections, and to ensure that energy debt repayments are based on ability to pay.

NEA has also worked hard to secure wide recognition for the need for a 'fair' transition to net zero carbon. As well as influencing the scope of HMT's upcoming net zero review, this has prompted the UK Government to commit to both an affordability review for water and separately energy which have the explicit aims of supporting low-income customers with the cost of these essential services. Our work alongside gas and electricity energy networks has also ensured there is more support for vulnerable customers within RIIO 2, especially for

innovation, compared to previous price controls. NEA has been able to encourage more investment for energy efficiency measures to upgrade the homes of fuel poor households, to make them warmer and healthier. Last year, NEA saw several significant successes in this area, despite the challenging background of a pandemic and a single year spending review:

- NEA advocated for a 'green economic stimulus', enhancing spending on energy efficiency, focusing on low-income households. This resulted in the Green Homes Grant, with an initial £1bn of funding to upgrade low-income, homes. While the voucher scheme has now ended the government will continue to proceed with local authority-led schemes that are focused on addressing fuel poverty.
- NEA also pushed the UK Government to commit funds towards the two energy efficiency schemes promised in the Conservative Party manifesto, the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) scheme, to address fuel poverty in off-gas grid areas and the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. This resulted in the one-year spending review committing the first year of funding towards these schemes as a down payment ahead of the comprehensive spending review in 2021.
- Additionally, NEA has long advocated for further regulation in the private rented sector, so that privately rented homes can reach EPC C in good time to meet the fuel poverty target in 2030. Government has now consulted on doing just this, with an earlier date of 2028.
- NEA has also fought to maintain funding from the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) until 2026 for low-income households. As part of the commitments in the Energy White Paper, Government committed to extending ECO to 2026 and expanding it by c.50%, to a total spending envelope of £1bn per year.

In a year where public health became more important than ever before, NEA has also sought to highlight the links between cold homes and the health conditions exacerbated by COVID-19. Our UK Fuel Poverty Monitor profiled these links in detail. And over the winter, NEA

worked with Public Health England (PHE) and equivalent bodies across the other UK nations to explore the overlap between the risks of Covid and cold homes and identify where households could get support. Through our work to enhancing cooperation between the nations, NEA made significant strides to updating fuel poverty strategies and related plans across the UK nations to ensure that they remain relevant. This work culminated in the publication of the updated English Fuel Poverty Strategy, ‘Sustainable Warmth’, which looked to embed fuel poverty in both the net zero and health agendas. The Welsh Government published ‘Tackling fuel poverty 2021 to 2035’, setting out their ambitions to eliminate severe and persistent fuel poverty by 2035. And the Northern Ireland Executive, as part of their Energy Strategy consultation, recently committed to update their fuel poverty strategy. NEA also worked with campaign partners to push the UK Government to maintain the current uplift to Universal Credit until September 2021.

Whilst these policy developments represent significant strides in helping to end fuel poverty, much more needs to be done to achieve our key goal. We have therefore evaluated progress towards our priorities and begun engaging our staff and stakeholders on our adapted themes and a new set of policy priorities for 2021/22.

OUR THEMES AND PRIORITIES FOR 21/22

As noted above, NEA currently works within four key advocacy themes. We propose to largely retain these four broad areas for 2021/22, with some small adjustments:

- Consistently supporting the most vulnerable consumers
- Achieving a just transition to net zero for fuel poor households
- Addressing health inequalities
- Addressing the drivers of fuel poverty across the nations

Consistently supporting the most vulnerable consumers ensuring that policies, regulation, markets and company behaviour works in the best interests of fuel poor households remains one of our main policy goals. This key theme will therefore be retained, albeit we are seeking to ensure that our ongoing work in the energy market is complemented across other utilities. This will also involve leveraging insight from our Water Poverty project where understanding the links between water and fuel poverty, is starting to help deliver positive outcomes for customers struggling with their utility bills.

For example, we will seek to achieve several cross-cutting priorities:

- **COMMON IDENTIFICATION.** To stop low income and vulnerable customers often having to repeat sensitive personal information to gain access to related support services, we will help create and embed common approaches to identifying financial vulnerability. This will include pushing for an updated Priority Services Register within the energy and wider utility sectors, that is expanded to include a financial vulnerability flag. We will also push for a cross-sector definition of ‘severe indebtedness’ that works to identify those households most in need of extra support to keep warm and challenge the UK Government and industry to seize the opportunities for using the Digital Economy Act to target assistance on the most vulnerable customers.
- **CONSISTENT SUPPORT SCHEMES.** To best support vulnerable consumers, there is a need to radically improve the customer journey for several obligated industry support schemes. This includes accelerating the smart meter rollout for prepayment households, driving up the accessibility of the new phases of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and Warm Home Discount schemes, informing the implementation of the Affordability Review for water to end the current postcode lottery to social tariffs and continuing to push Ofgem and the UK Government to address utility debt, with a call for the creation of a comprehensive debt strategy.
- **ADDRESSING DIGITAL EXCLUSION.** NEA has increasingly highlighted the challenges that digitally excluded fuel poor households face. As well as challenges to accessing support schemes, digitally excluded low-income consumers, face a significant premium as they are unable to access the best energy deals. NEA will work with new campaign partners to address digital exclusion and enhance the support non-digital households can access from energy and water suppliers.

In addition to these cross-cutting themes, NEA will continue to have a primary focus of ensuring low income and vulnerable energy consumers are protected from unfair bill increases and increasing policy costs. Key to this work will be to ensure price protection is maintained and deepened for the most vulnerable energy customers.

NEA will also continue to push for the UK Government, Ofgem and industry to maximise opportunities created by the smart meter rollout, especially for legacy prepayment customers.

ACHIEVING A JUST TRANSITION TO NET ZERO FOR FUEL POOR HOUSEHOLDS

The target of reaching net zero emissions by 2050, as well as significant cuts before 2035, will present major challenges and changes to fuel poor households. This will include significant changes in the way electricity is generated, stored and used, radical shifts in domestic heating, the likely introduction of new types of energy tariffs and pricing, the introduction of new or restructured policy costs on bills. In response, this year will be crucial to achieve a transition that supports fuel poor households. Within this theme, we will seek to achieve a number of specific priorities:

- Embedding statutory fuel poverty targets and strategies across the UK nations, by leveraging political impetus created by local elections, as well as opportunities presented by newly formed, or soon to be formed, fuel poverty strategies and plans.
- Ensuring HM Treasury's net zero review (and the subsequent BEIS Affordability Review) fully investigates the impact of the transition to net zero on affordability for low income and vulnerable households and develops lasting mechanisms to provide greater transparency and a range of potential interventions to mitigate negative distributional impacts.
- Ensuring full, multi-year funding for existing energy efficiency schemes are committed in Northern Ireland, Wales and in England, HUGs and the SHDF are announced as part of the autumn Comprehensive Spending Review in 2021. NEA will also aim to shape these policies so that fuel poor households can benefit from the transition.
- Ensuring that Government commit to introducing new regulations for the private rented sector to reach EPC C by 2028 with adequate enforcement, as well as sufficient incentives for landlords to drive compliance with the new regulations.
- Enhancing policy engagement processes so that low income and vulnerable consumers are able to convey their own needs and circumstances to inform national policy making.
- Directly influencing local strategies for climate emergencies and decarbonisation to ensure they support fuel poor households and capture jobs creation opportunities and the wider economic benefits of improving energy efficiency and reducing energy costs.

NEA also intends to work with a range of existing and new campaign partners to help make the case to relevant decision-makers to follow a progressive approach to policy making and adopt our recommendations for heat decarbonisation.



ADDRESSING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

In the aftermath of Covid-19, it is more critical than ever for the UK Governments to strengthen work to address the physical and mental health impacts of cold homes. More broadly, Covid-19 has underlined regional health inequalities, which prompt excess mortality and morbidity. Within this theme, we have several key priorities:

- Expanding the cross-departmental working group to strengthen collaboration to address the physical and mental health impacts of cold homes.
- Ensuring ECO and HUG can support referrals from the health sector.
- Developing the evidence-base on the links between FP and health and well-being.
- Ensuring action is taken to further support effective implementation of NICE NG6 guidelines, particularly discharge processes.
- Challenging local health bodies, commissioners and local authorities to address the links between cold homes and health and well-being.

Addressing the drivers of fuel poverty across the nations

Across the UK, addressing fuel poverty is a devolved matter for the Governments of Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. Although each nation has powers to address fuel poverty through the funding of energy efficiency schemes, their influence over the other levers of fuel poverty is limited, for example policy related to cost of energy bills or the benefit system. NEA will look to work with the UK Government, as well as the Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive, to ensure that strategies to eliminate fuel poverty nationally are not undermined by UK Government policy making.

We will seek to achieve the following priorities:

- Boosting incomes, by maintaining our presence in the campaign to #KeepTheLifeline of the £20 uplift in Universal Credit permanently.
- Enhancing UK-wide cooperation/coordination through leveraging our networks across the nations and facilitating discussions between Governments and regulators.
- Establishing a UK-wide funding mechanism for energy efficiency, principally through ensuring the shared prosperity fund is accessible throughout the UK and is available to fund energy efficiency programmes.

ENHANCING OUR ADVOCACY FUNCTIONS

Whilst NEA has been able to secure many positive policy changes and maintain awareness of the problem and solutions to fuel poverty amongst immediate relevant stakeholders and decision makers, the priorities of central government are quick to shift. Now more than ever there are competing demands for their attention and/or limited resources. In addition, to create long-term certainty on key programmes to assist fuel poor households across each of the UK nations, the policy landscape is becoming more complex and the scale of meeting net zero is vast and may become an all-consuming focus for national and local policy making and related programmes.

In response and in step with the development of the new strategic plan, NEA proposes to strengthen capacity within the policy team and enhance our work in Parliament and across the different legislators in each of the devolved nations we work in. NEA will also aim to enhance our profile as a key go-to organisation within the media, key political stakeholders and the wider utility sector(s). NEA will also seek to review and develop the number of campaigns, industry and stakeholder groups we currently sit on to complement our revised themes and policy priorities. Further details on how to get involved with our policy work will be provided to our supporters in the coming months.

WATER

Jess Cook, Project Development Manager

UNDERSTANDING THE CCW AFFORDABILITY REVIEW

On 26 May, the water watchdog, CCW, launched the outcomes of their independent review of affordability support in water, as commissioned by Defra and Welsh Government. The review was undertaken with three key workstreams: social tariffs, access and awareness, and wider support. It recognises that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to affordability support, and that there are still some instances where a local approach may be needed. But overall, it aims to have a more consistent offering for customers who are struggling, and a fairer way of funding and accessing that support.

Opportunities to change the landscape of affordability support don't come up very often, and so NEA were thrilled to be asked to contribute to the review in a number of different ways. Adam Scorer joined their stakeholder advisory group, to provide insight and act as a critical friend throughout the process. We were interviewed for the stakeholder research and submitted an extensive response to the call for evidence, which was influenced considerably by our water poverty advisory panel. And I was partially seconded to CCW to lead the thematic analysis of the call for evidence responses, and to lead one of the three major workstreams of the review – a major opportunity for NEA.

There are 10 key recommendations, with 40 actions sitting underneath them.

1 Customers should be given greater choice and control over how they pay their water bill

This aims to make the most of technologies available to let customers 'self-serve', managing their payments in a way that works best for their individual circumstances. It considers changing the frequency of bills with smart metering and extending payment support services such as Water Direct to support all customers in receipt of benefits, not just those in debt.

2 Companies should, wherever possible, take appropriate action, tailored to a customer's individual needs, with the aim of preventing financial difficulty

This recognises that prevention is better than the cure, aiming to support customers at the earliest opportunity – before they fall into difficulty – with income maximisation reviews, ability to pay assessments, and water metering bill guarantees.

3 Debt support should be based on a customer's individual circumstances and ability to pay

A consistent framework to assess ability to pay will ensure all customers are treated fairly, and payment arrangements are suited to their individual circumstances. Reviewing debt guidance to make it clearer and more concise will provide customers falling into debt with a better understanding of the debt journey.

4 A range of wider support options should be offered. These should have clear eligibility criteria and be easily accessible for all customers, with co-design principles being adopted

This recommendation recognises that social tariffs aren't right for everyone and aims to introduce new services to support customers during the Universal Credit transition, develop changes to Watersure (including changing the level of the bill cap, and the methods of reconfirmation), and agreeing a set of consistent principles for company crisis funds.

5 All available funding streams should be maximised to enable water companies to provide the most effective affordability support for customers

In all customer research it has been shown that customers are more willing to contribute to affordability support for others if the companies are also doing the same. This calls for companies to fund wider support services, recognising that customers will fund social tariffs through cross-subsidy. It also looks at maximising the impact of innovation funding, and how Ofwat can fairly distribute redress payments through the restorative justice approach.

6 Introduce a sustainable, single social tariff to eliminate water poverty in England and Wales at the 5% level. This tariff should have consistent eligibility criteria and be easily accessible to all customers

There are currently 17 different social tariffs, all with different funding levels, eligibility criteria and support levels. This recommendation calls for a single social tariff, to make it easier for customers and supporting organisations to understand if they are eligible, and to raise awareness of support. Linked directly to a measure of severe water poverty, this will ensure those most in need are supported first. In time, we'd like to see this go even further.

7 Customer communications should be clear and accessible

This recommendation outlines a simple message – make things easy for customers to understand, and let customers access it in a method or format that suits their needs. Additionally, it focuses on developing common branding for affordability support to help raise awareness.

8 Water companies should improve their understanding of their customers and the communities they serve, through research, engagement, and increased transparency

Water companies 'inherit' their customers – they're a regional monopoly, and so do not have a contract with the households they provide their services too. This recommendation recognises that but pushes companies to go further to understand who their customers are, and what their needs are. In addition, it calls for companies to develop a 'vulnerability commitment' to treat customers fairly and consistently.

9 Water companies should take a proactive approach to identifying those customers who may need support

This recommendation encourages companies to use the data they already have to identify possible instances of financial difficulty. It encourages companies to look at extremely low levels of water consumption to identify possible instances of self-rationing and offer appropriate interventions.

10 Through information and data-sharing, companies should increase the information they hold to improve the identification of customers in need of financial support

Data-sharing is key to identifying those in need. This recommendation focuses on maximising the powers of the Digital Economy Act, working with government departments such as DWP to automatically notify of new applications for Universal Credit, and developing data-sharing frameworks across multiple sectors to identify those in need at the earliest opportunity.

The review is extensive, and if all recommendations are implemented it will make a significant contribution towards ending water poverty in England and Wales. It's also encouraging to see a positive initial response by the UK Government to work with industry to build a stronger, better, and fairer water service for those who need it most. We must maintain momentum across the water industry, the regulator and government to fully implement the breadth of positive recommendations the Review makes. This is the start of a challenging journey, but one that sits at the heart of the UK Government's levelling up agenda and if we succeed, we can make water bills affordable for all, and ending water poverty for good. But there will always be opportunities in the review for companies, regulators, and Government to go even further.

In response to the recommendations, we think a Water Poverty Strategy should be developed by Defra and Welsh Government. We also want to see a vulnerability strategy developed by Ofwat and in time, we could potentially extend the social tariff to support customers paying 3% of their disposable income on their water bills. Then there is a huge amount more that can be done to link water efficiency in with affordability.

These are all areas we would love to work with the industry on in the coming months and years. We are all aiming to eradicate water poverty by 2030. If we can retain the current momentum, then this is absolutely achievable. Let's do what is right for customers struggling with their water bills. Let's make sure that everyone in the UK has access to safe, clean, and affordable water.

[The full report can be accessed here.](#)

SAVE THE DATE



WARM HOMES WEEK

27 - 30 SEPTEMBER 2021

This September we will be marking our 40th anniversary by holding our biggest ever digital event series. Over the course of four days members, supporters and others with an interest in ending fuel poverty can join workshops, presentations and other events to discuss shared challenges and solutions.

We will be looking at a range of issues including the just transition, getting the right support to those who need it, and how to translate strategies and targets into coordinated, meaningful action. We also want to know what matters most to our members, and will be looking for opportunities to support this or share their work with others.

Further information including booking details will be released shortly. In the meantime if you have a topic you would like to see covered, a speaker you would like to see on the panel, or you would like to contribute to a session in some way, then please get in touch by emailing conference@nea.org.uk

NORTHERN IRELAND

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA), the Northern Exposure Project, now in its 11th year, was designed and implemented initially to tackle the high levels of fuel poverty within the North and West of Belfast.

Since its inception, the project reach has been extended to include all areas enclosed within the Belfast City Council boundaries. Working directly with health and housing professionals, support services, community and voluntary stakeholders to inform strategic development, advocate for clients, enhance delivery capabilities and bring affordable warmth, energy efficiency solutions and appropriate 'wraparound' support services to those most in need.

Northern Exposure key outputs Include:

- Work in partnership with community networks to make referrals to the statutory energy efficiency programmes in Belfast. Interventions include loft and cavity wall insulation, installation of central heating systems. New interventions designed by NEA and supported by our crisis fund and Belfast City Council funding includes repairs and top ups to electricity, gas and oil.
- Work in partnership with the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP), handholding and supporting householders through the referral process from start to finish.
- Raise awareness of fuel poverty and its effects on health; energy efficiency as a solution; and the schemes available to tackle fuel poverty for frontline Health and Social Care staff.
- Work in partnership with locally-based advice centres to increase benefit uptake and to help those referred maximise their income.
- Provide energy efficiency advice, helping to change individual and family behaviours around energy use.

- Raise awareness of fuel poverty, the causes, consequences and solutions. It also raises awareness of energy efficiency by providing advice and support to local communities helping them to build capacity to tackle the factors causing fuel poverty.
- Provide training to local communities in Energy Awareness to create local champions to enable the delivery of professional energy advice.
- Use local and regional communication channels as well as other networks to raise awareness of fuel poverty.
- Work with the PHA and other relevant stakeholders to support the implementation of the NICE NG6 guidelines concerning excess winter deaths and health risks associated with cold homes.

BELFAST WARM AND WELL PROJECT

In partnership with the Belfast Community Planning Partnership and the Public Health Agency, the Belfast Warm and Well Project, was piloted in targeted areas during winter 2019/2020. Throughout lockdown the project continued to directly assist those households deemed vulnerable.

In September 2020, the project entered its 2nd phase, covering September 2020-March 2021, and the range was extended to include all areas of Belfast. Support was offered to the public and organisations working directly with people at risk of living in fuel poverty.

Support included advice and practical support to stay warm and well, and where appropriate, the provision of heating measures and jointly funded discretionary financial assistance (subject to assessment) to alleviate the effects of living in cold and damp homes.

The data for this period is currently being collated and findings will be reported in our next newsletter.

NEA TURNS 40

May marked 40 years of NEA and working to eradicate fuel poverty in the UK.

Since we began in 1981, we have grown from a small group of people helping those in North East England keep warm at home, to a national charity working across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Through our advice delivery, training, advocacy, and research we've helped bring affordable warmth to millions of households and ensured that fuel poverty is now firmly on the policy agenda.



To celebrate this milestone, we have launched our [#40For40](#) challenge and want you to join us! By supporting this challenge, you are not only helping us to raise awareness for fuel poverty in the UK, you'll also be able to fundraise vital funds so we can continue to support more vulnerable households. To take part, you can take on any challenge of your choice – the only catch is it has to be 40-themed! Whether it is baking 40 cakes, running 40 miles, or reading 40 books, it is up to you. For more ideas and information on how to sign up, just visit our [website](#). Good luck!



Action for Warm Homes
1981-2021



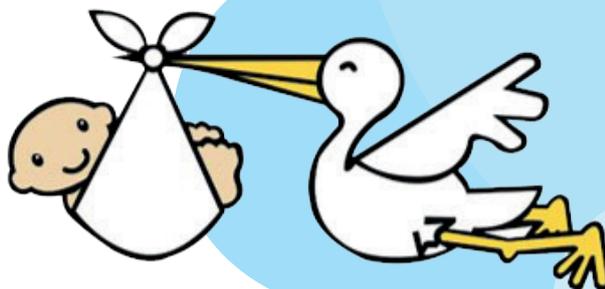
A WARM WELCOME FROM NEA

NEA's Warm Welcome project provides vital advice and support to new and expectant parents at a time when having a warm, safe home is paramount, even more so for families experiencing hardship.

After running a successful pilot project, NEA is now rolling out the project on a larger scale to help more people who need our support. Through this project, we will deliver community advice sessions to help new and expectant parents manage their fuel bills in the best possible way and deliver free training for frontline professionals working with people during and after pregnancy so they can provide energy advice, support and referrals to other sources of assistance.

Through this work, we will be able to help more people like Miss W, who was referred to NEA by a food bank. As a single mother with a three-year-old and four-month-old, she had been extremely upset when she contacted the food bank after facing a reduction in her Universal Credit (UC). She was in emergency credit for both her gas and electricity and unsure of where to turn for help. Through our crisis fund, we were able to support Miss W with a voucher of £49 to split across her gas and electricity until her next UC payment so she could use heating and lighting at home. NEA's project development coordinator was also able to provide information on the Priority Services Register and Warm Home Discount scheme as well as advice on healthy temperatures and general tips for heating and electricity usage. Miss W had also mentioned she had a fridge/freezer which was leaking and was using towels to try and keep the floor dry for her children. With young children walking and crawling around, it was important we helped her get this fixed, so we successfully applied to the BBC Children in Need Emergency Essentials Fund on behalf of Miss W and within 10 days a new fridge/freezer had been delivered directly to her address.

If your organisation would be interested in making a difference to new and expectant parents by hosting a community advice session, or if your staff would be interested in participating in the free accredited training, please do not hesitate to get in touch with nicky.swetnam@nea.org.uk



ENERGY HIGH 5 AWARDS



ENERGY HIGH 5
utilita

Back in October we launched the Energy High 5 awards scheme in partnership with Utilita. The scheme gave grants totalling £10,000 to support 20 organisations working to tackle fuel poverty in their local communities.

Successful organisations included local authorities, citizens advice bureaux, community groups and energy advice providers which delivered a range of different activities. As well as the grants they also benefited from additional support from Utilita such as flyers, handwarmers, hats, thermal mugs and more.

Each project achieved positive outcomes for those living in or at risk of fuel poverty, but we'd like to highlight three in particular.

Sefton OPERA used the funding to provide 100 winter warmth packs to those in need. These included a range of food, a blanket, hand sanitiser and masks, energy efficient lightbulbs, and information on a range of support services operating in the area.

Citizens Advice Derbyshire Districts created a virtual advent calendar using artwork from primary school children to share information around how to save energy over the winter period. As well as helping to educate children within the participating schools, the artwork was shared across social media channels to inspire others to also take action.

Thanet District Council delivered a campaign to encourage frontline workers to learn more about the council's new fuel poverty referral pathway. This included delivering training for 250 partners over a six-week period, resulting in 500 scheme referrals from October 2020 to April 2021. The training and members briefing and momentum around assisting those in fuel poverty enabled a raising of awareness in the council and has started to facilitate the development of new initiatives.

We'd like to thank Utilita again for their support and everybody who was successful in delivering activities over an extremely difficult period.



Referred to us by Coventry Council, 87-year-old Mrs H was listed as clinically extremely vulnerable during lockdown and was in need of a new boiler. Her existing boiler was 25 years old and she didn't have the money for a new one. Mrs H had also been sleeping on the sofa for a year following a burglary in which the burglars entered the property through her bedroom, leaving her traumatised.

Project Development Coordinator at NEA, Judy Best, applied for the Severn Trent Big Difference Scheme to help Mrs H get reduced water payments. Mrs H was then referred to Benefits Advisor, Ann Wood, who completed the attendance allowance benefit forms which was then awarded at the highest rate. Ann also got in touch with the Pension Credit team to let them know and this was also also increased and Mrs H received over £2,000 in backdated payments.

Thanks to this increase in payments, Mrs H has now been able to get a new boiler and repair her burglar alarm, making her feel safer at home. The additional income has also meant she can now afford to take a taxi to the other side of Coventry to see her granddaughter and great-grandchildren.

VIEWPOINT

Eric Greenhalgh, Groundwork Cheshire, Lancashire & Merseyside

ECO AND ECO FLEX BOILER FUNDING

We have found that the boiler replacement funding for the people most in need is at a shockingly low ebb. I am sure it is not just Green Doctor, who are coming across major issues when trying to obtain funding for boiler replacements.

The households we are talking about are the ones that do not have any money whatsoever to contribute, as required through the existing ECO3 scheme operated by the energy suppliers. We come across many issues on a weekly basis and it seems like the officers responsible for devising and delivering the boiler grant schemes are falling short of the mark. We are also finding that the ECO Flex scheme is not working efficiently either, so there are quite a few local authority areas where households are not being supported as well as they could be.

We have been passed a rate card by a local ECO3 installer and as a for instance: a two-bed end terraced property with cavity wall requires a £500 contribution, whilst a four-bed end terrace requires a zero contribution. From our experience, many of the neediest households live in the first type of property and we believe that they are the people who require the most support.

We have recently supported a young family where the father has recently passed away. The mother is on a low income and it came to our attention that the young children (six and nine) were bathing at a local leisure centre, and have been doing so for quite a few weeks.

They did actually have an 'A' rated boiler, but the heat exchanger had split and the cost to replace it was beyond their grasp. This boiler was only five years old and with everything else the family had on in their lives, having the boiler serviced was not on their agenda unfortunately and the guarantee had lapsed. There appears to be little flexibility in the funding systems and, as we all know, many cases are not just black and white; discretion comes to the fore on many occasions.

As you will appreciate, gaining more funding for a replacement boiler after only five years' service was impossible and searching around for some external funding was a real nightmare. We eventually had the boiler replaced and the contribution was made by our trust so that we could fully support this family.

Another one, which is currently on our desk, is an elderly person living in a rural property with an oil boiler for provision of heat and hot water. During the past winter this person has had frostbite, necessitating the removal of toes, and we are still having problems finding financial support to replace a broken down oil boiler. As you know, the replacement of oil boilers is not supported at all and any contribution by the homeowner for a sustainable energy alternative is prohibitive. Where do some of these people find upwards of £5,000 to contribute towards a ground-source heat pump?

I am sure that there are many other horror stories that would confirm that the replacement of boilers for households in real need is no longer hitting the mark.

eric.greenhalgh@groundwork.org.uk



RESEARCH

NEA Research Team

DIGITAL INCLUSION IN THE ENERGY MARKET

On the afternoon of 26 May, and in collaboration with partners at Good Things Foundation, Liverpool University, the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University, and the Supergen Energy Networks Hub, NEA hosted an event on digital inclusion in the energy market. The event followed on from the workshop on digital exclusion at our Warm Homes Week annual conference last year, which many of our members and supporters contributed to.

The event was split across two sessions: the first featuring reflections from Good Things Foundation's community partner organisations about their experiences of supporting digitally excluded consumers with the energy market, and the second showcasing new and ongoing research undertaken by Citizens Advice, the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers, and Good Things Foundation.

Reflecting on the event, three key messages stand out. The first was the ways that digital exclusion intersects with other vulnerabilities and other forms of exclusion to limit fair and affordable access to energy. We heard from Fareeha Usman, founder of the charity Being Woman, as to how rural pockets of Northumberland face multiple challenges in accessing not just the internet, but electricity itself, and also from Hayley Nelson, Director of Learn for Life, who discussed the multiple challenges and exclusions that refugees face in understanding accessing the energy services and digital services that they need when they come to the UK. The work of their charities and of others (including many of NEA's members) is absolutely crucial to providing the care, support, and understanding digitally excluded households need in the energy market.

But of course, this support can only do so much. Time and again across both sessions, we heard about how the ways in which energy systems and infrastructures are

designed often make things harder, more complicated, and deeply frustrating for those who do not have the digital access or skills to take full advantage of them.

From the inaccessibility of EV charging infrastructures for disabled consumers to the numerous ways that switching websites are impossible for those who are offline to access and navigate, it is becoming ever clearer that we need inclusive design principles and 'users' of all kinds to be more centrally involved in how these infrastructures are conceived and built. Worryingly, as we move towards an energy system including Time of Use (ToU) tariffs, Heat as a Service (HaaS), and other complex service packages, the potential for digital inequalities to be exacerbated increases, and the need to consider inclusive design from the very beginning becomes more imperative.

This leads us to the third and final stand out message – the need for more collaboration and more cross-sector working to build this fairer system. At one point, an audience member mused whether there was anyone from energy regulators, or from government, in attendance. Shortly afterwards, messages appeared in the chat from people replying 'yes, here I am', and providing assurances that the issues being discussed would be fed back to colleagues. The need to work together across the third-sector, industry, government, and energy regulators to amplify the issues and work collaboratively towards more inclusive solutions was spoken about, implicitly and explicitly, by all of our presenters – including across borders, as our panellist Marine Cornelis, founder of the EU-wide consumer organisation Next Energy Consumer, aptly reminded us.

As the decarbonisation and digitalisation of the energy system gathers pace, these and other messages will stay at the forefront of our minds as we look to tackle the twin inequalities of digital exclusion and access to affordable energy services. As another audience member aptly put it, there is lots of great work already being done, but still so much to do to make sure the energy system is fair and equitable, both now and in the future.

OUR HEALTH, OUR HOMES

NEA coordinates cross-departmental and cross-sectoral working group with BEIS

For forty years, NEA has partnered with local and national government, health bodies, industry and a wide range of local organisations to deliver practical solutions to improve health and wellbeing and address housing as a key social determinant of ill health. A vital element of this work includes convening a cross-departmental and cross-sectoral Health and Homes Working Group with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

The Health and Housing Working Group (HHWG), which is focused on connecting fuel poverty mitigation with public health, includes representatives from Public Health England, the National Health Service, National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the Department for Health and Social Care, Citizens Advice, the Chartered Institute for Housing, the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health, among others. Feeding into this work at a national level, NEA also facilitates an internal working group to bring together and provide insights for the charity's health-related professional practice, research, and policy.

Quarterly meetings for the HHWG provide a forum for members to share current activities and best practice, as well as set the strategic direction and identify opportunities for multi-stakeholder collaboration in the context of health and fuel poverty mitigation. As part of this, over the last year a number of notable organisations have joined the NEA and BEIS coordinated working group to share best practice and key insights from research and advocacy.

- In October 2020, the Centre for Ageing Better gave a presentation on their 2020 report looking at [Health, Housing, and COVID-19](#) as part of wider work on The Good Homes Inquiry
- In January 2021, the Institute for Health Equity provided an overview of their work on two reports: [Build Back Fairer](#) and [Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On](#)

- In May 2021, Marie Curie presented on their work examining the [vicious cycle of fuel poverty and terminal illness](#)

NEA believes that in the aftermath of COVID-19 it is more critical than ever for the UK Government to strengthen work to address the physical and mental health impacts of cold and poor quality homes. More broadly, the pandemic has underlined and likely exacerbated regional health inequalities, which prompt excess mortality and morbidity. This is why addressing health inequalities is one of NEA's distinct policy priority themes, and as part of this work we hope to influence several key priorities, including:

- Expanding the HHWG to strengthen collaboration to address the physical and mental health impacts of cold and poor quality homes
- Ensuring schemes such as ECO and the Home Upgrade Grant can support referrals from the health sector
- Developing the evidence base on the links between fuel poverty and health and well-being
- Ensuring action is taken to further support effective implementation of NICE NG6 guidelines, particularly discharge processes
- Challenging local health bodies, commissioners and local authorities to address the links between links between cold and poor quality homes and health and well-being

The next HHWG meeting will take place in July 2021. To find out more, contact danielle.butler@nea.org.uk.

Further information about NEA's health-focused work can be found on our website [here](#).

MEMBERS

FOCUS

COASTLINE HOUSING GETTING SMART

After spotting a chilling meter reading in a customer's home, our Smartline team at Coastline Housing managed to contact the resident who had turned off her heating in the days leading up to the discovery. Philip and Adrian spotted that the resident's meter readings showed that their home was only 10°C inside - previously the property had been well heated.

The meter reading below shows that the customer's home was around 13°C. The data also shows that the humidity in the property was starting to rise which would cause other problems such as condensation and mould.



Radon sensor meter reading that alerted the team to take action.

The team contacted the tenant who explained they had had a very recent change in family circumstances and, as a result, had lost income to pay for their heating. By visiting the customer at home (standing outside due to social distancing) the team were able to discuss funding opportunities to help them manage the bills. Working together the team helped the resident complete a funding application, while organising a hardship payment to help in the meantime.

This is a great example of how technology helped the Coastline team to reduce someone's health risks at home and create a network of support to avoid further social isolations, which we hope will really change this customer's life and make her much more comfortable.



Phil and Adrian, Coastline Housing

Why is Smartline using radon sensors?

We have been using sensors to gather data from around 300 of Coastline's residents living in Camborne, Illogan, Pool and Redruth. Our participants who have placed sensors in their homes are taking part in surveys to help us understand their health and wellbeing, while the sensors collect information about their home environment including air quality, humidity, temperature, water usage, air flow and energy usage. Find out more about this research [here](#).

www.coastlinehousing.co.uk
www.smartline.org.uk



WAKEFIELD HELPS LOCAL RESIDENTS TO BECOME MONEY SMART

Wakefield Council's Money Smart Team deal with all things money and debt and have been supporting local residents with energy debt and billing issues as part of our support to tackle fuel poverty. This advocacy work has been crucial over the pandemic and here is one such case showing how the Money Smart project has helped elderly clients resolve a long standing dispute with their energy supplier.

The clients approached for energy and wider advice as they were struggling with their high energy costs. Investigation highlighted that the clients were on an Economy 7 tariff. The clients had switched energy providers in 2017 but within three months of this had found that their monthly direct debit payment mandates increased from around £80 a month to almost £130 a month.

The clients could not understand why their bills continued to be so high and although they had repeatedly complained to the energy company, nothing had been resolved. Finally, they had switched suppliers in late 2018, after failing to get clarity why the bill payments were so much higher. Upon leaving the company, they received a final demand for over £360, and the dispute continued. At the point that the clients first approached in 2019, the previous energy supplier was threatening recovery action, and the clients could not afford to pay the outstanding demand.

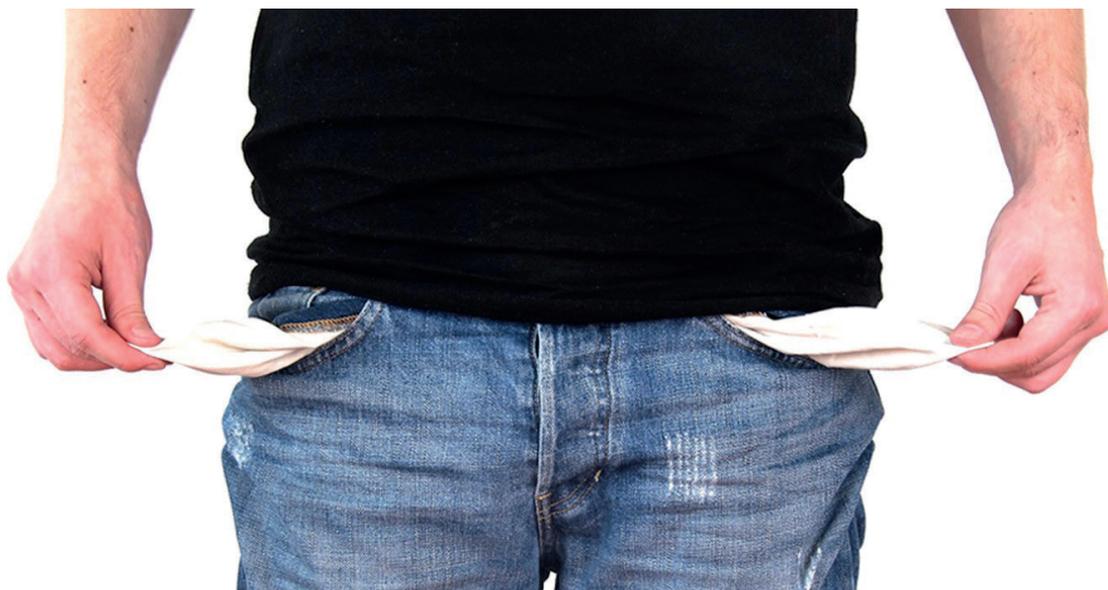
An investigation highlighted that the meter readings had actually been transposed so the clients were being charged the day rate for night energy usage and vice versa.

This appeared to explain the high difference in cost from previous contracts. This was reported to the new energy provider, including provision of photographs of the meters and a full explanation. The current provider agreed with the information provided, immediately recalculated, adjusted the account and the direct debit reduced to around £80 a month once again.

Upon contact with the previous energy company to highlight the discrepancy, they initially refused to take action, citing that the time elapsed prevented this and the case was closed down, leaving the outstanding demand of £360 for payment. Further chases by telephone, letter and email continued throughout 2020. It was reported that the clients had raised several concerns about the billing issue which had been ignored, the current energy provider response, photographs of the meters and a full breakdown of the meter readings, which supported that they had transposed the readings for the entire life of the contract also failed to resolve the issue. The threat of recovery action remained.

A final contact in November 2020, again provided the evidence, plus stop time readings to illustrate the typical usage, clearly identify the meter readings and reported that a complaint to the Energy Ombudsman would be submitted if the company did not investigate fully and try to resolve. In late January 2021, the clients made contact to say they had received a letter from their previous energy provider who had confirmed the error, adjusted their account and confirmed that they had actually been over charged by £987 over the life of their contract. Following adjustment of the account, the clients received a refund of £587.37, plus the removal of threat of recovery action.

The clients said they were "over the moon" to have had the issue resolved as well as receiving money back. They were very thankful for the help they had received from the Team to sort the issue out as they could not have done it by themselves.



INTRODUCING POWER CIRCLE

Power Circle is a new social enterprise set up to tackle climate change and energy affordability – to make sure that the energy transition can be both swift and fair. Its mission is to enable local energy users to access low carbon energy at scale in a way that is affordable, fair and breaks down social barriers.

It will provide smart local energy systems in individual homes and in local areas, all managed together to help keep costs down for energy users and help cut costs and carbon for the wider UK energy system.

The Power Circle business model has been developed over two years with support from Innovate UK and the Energy Systems Catapult. It is a social energy services company (esco) and social virtual power plant (VPP). The esco addresses the barriers to scaling up low carbon installations (constrained capital funding, staff time, expertise etc.) The VPP earns revenue from helping the wider energy system work more smartly. The social enterprise structure addresses issue of trust – fears of being ripped off by third party-funded solutions.

Power Circle works across tenure types – with social and private landlords and homeowners as well as non-residential building owners.

We work across the UK from a base in Scotland. Power Circle has a two-tier structure. Power Circle Ltd is a company limited by guarantee, registered as a charity. Power Circle Projects Ltd is its trading subsidiary which develops and manages projects and programmes.

We are finalising our first two project types.

Solar Circle provides solar PV, battery and smart management for individual houses. Solar Circle cuts costs for tenants and helps landlords meet targets. A study on 200 social landlord homes found that Solar Circle would bring 95% of them to EPC B which in Scotland is the 'EESH 2' target. Just as important, Solar Circle provides a foundation for a switch from gas to electric heating without adding to tenant bills: the battery enables use of cheap overnight electricity.

Climate Positive is our new build project type with whole roof PV and a microgrid. It generates more clean energy than is used onsite – hence Climate Positive.

Power Circle for Flats is under development.

For more info contact info@powercircle.org.uk and visit our website www.powercircle.org.uk

WARMER HOMES WEST MIDLANDS, TACKLING FUEL POVERTY AND SUPPORTING HOUSEHOLDS ACROSS THE REGION

Warmer Homes West Midlands is actively working with households who need support and advice around their energy use. Our particular focus is on those households in most need and who are currently in fuel poverty.

Advice and support is provided by our friendly energy advisors via our freephone number 0808 196 8298. We are available every week from Monday to Friday 9am-5pm.

We also work closely with local communities through outreach activity - delivering events, meetings and roadshows raising awareness of energy use in the community. Our work also extends to offering home visits with individual households. As part of our home visit service, we can also install free small energy efficiency measures, heating efficiency checks and energy switching advice and developing real insight of individual household circumstance. We also have dedicated access to a local benefits assessment and income maximisation specialist. Periodically, we also have access to fuel voucher schemes for prepayment customers. These funding schemes are time-limited but can really support households in immediate crisis.

We continue to develop closer working relationships with local authorities across the region as part of our commitment to deliver the customer journey for green homes grant local authority delivery schemes. This provides an exciting opportunity to grow our service further and further improve awareness.

So where do we work? We can support households in the areas below:

So, if I want to refer to Warmer Homes West Midlands, how do I go about this?

You can do this in a number of ways, but we would recommend that you visit our www.warmerhomeswm.org.uk where you can simply fill out the electronic referral form on behalf of someone else.

If emailing is easier, you can do this by contacting us at:

warmerhomeswm@actonenergy.org.uk

We're always really keen to engage and work with new partners wherever we can, so do get in touch. We'd love to hear from you.



Maria was living alone in a flat and has multiple types of cancer and struggling financially. She had been a self-employed piano teacher but was unable to work due to her illness.

We were able to support Maria by reducing her water bill costs, applying for Warm Home Discount and helping her get on to the priority services register. Not only that, but our advisor also identified a charity which helps actors and musicians who are going through financial difficulty due to illness. Through this Maria was also able to apply for financial assistance to support travel costs to get to hospital.

Lauren Grimes, PR and Marketing Executive, Switchee

THE NORTH AND SOUTH DIVIDE

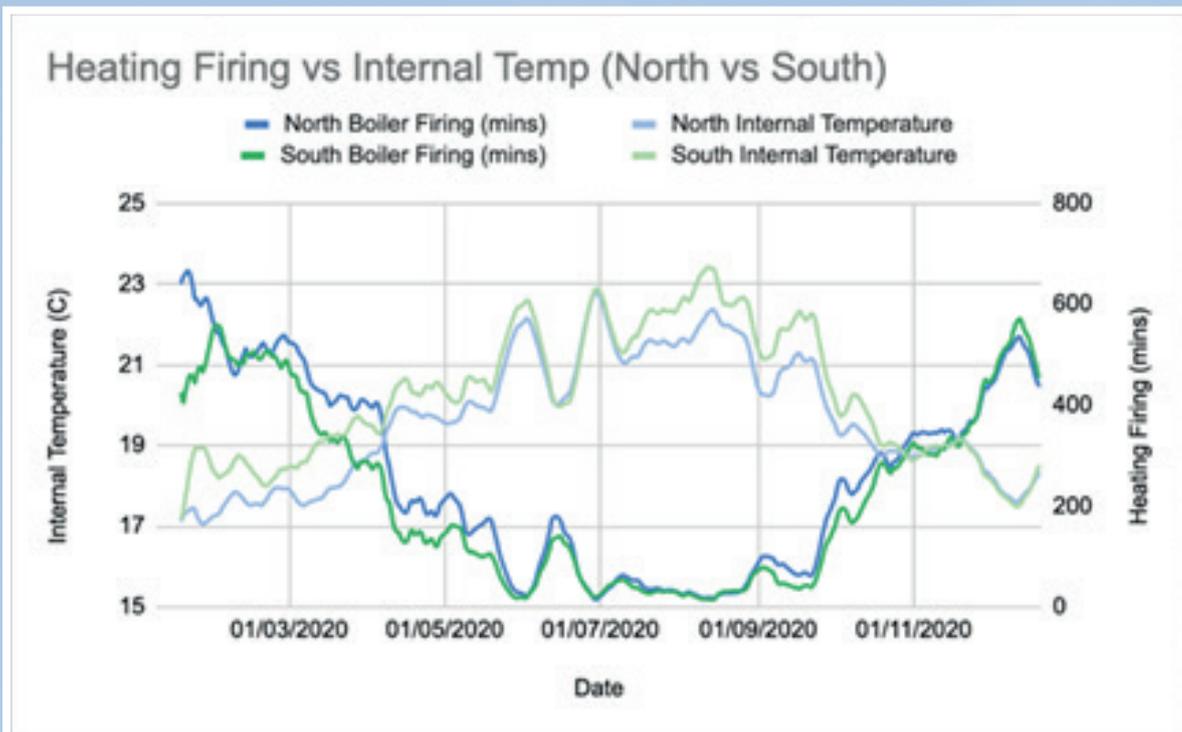
How orientation costs residents £190 per year

When housing providers look to tackle issues with their housing stock, often they focus a tonne of effort on the big stuff. Their homes are too cold, so they install additional insulation in all of them. Their homes are getting mouldy - time for a new ventilation system. This approach has worked in the past - but one thing it sure isn't is cost-effective. Taking a blanket approach to properties can have wide-reaching consequences and not just for the budget. With the amount of data that Switchee has gathered over the years, we're in the very unique position of being able to analyse micro-trends on a macro scale. So when a client approached us looking to understand a potential fuel poverty risk - digging deep down into the data has shown just how much of a change minor differences can make to fuel poverty outcomes.

So how does North VS South come into this?

When looking at fuel poverty it's extremely easy to assume purely economic factors are to blame, but inconsistency in the quality of housing is a major contributor to rising fuel poverty rates. The more extreme examples of this - modern builds vs 1920s properties might seem to be obvious - but there are far more subtle differences that can have huge impacts. To investigate this we worked with a Sunderland-based housing provider who have a number of Switchee installations in a range of identical tower blocks, with an even divide of north and south-facing apartments. So we conducted an experiment to measure the average heat firing time, internal temperature, and the absolute humidity in the north-facing and south-facing apartments.

Below is what the data revealed to us:



Overview			
Facing	Avg. HF Time	Avg. Int. Temp	Avg. Abs Hum
North	260.74	19.59	9.33
South	226.25	20.15	9.23
% difference	-15.25%	2.76%	-1.10%

The results were far more dramatic than we expected - our research showing that south-facing homes required a full thirty-four minutes less heating per day and achieved 0.56C more heat when compared to their north-facing equivalent. This, of course, is the prevailing wisdom with south-facing homes having more direct access to sunlight. The overall cost of this disparity, however, does raise some definite concerns. Over the course of a year - we found that north-facing homes required approximately 210 hours of extra heating in order to reach the same adequate temperatures. With the most common types of property using a gas heating system then this extra time would cost north-facing apartments an average of £190 extra per year in comparison to their south-facing compatriots. We also discovered that those same north-facing homes had a higher absolute humidity making them far more susceptible to mould and damp which can double down on the negative health impacts the health and wellbeing of the residents suffering from fuel poverty. We talk about the postcode lottery, but perhaps social residents are also victims of the orientation lottery.

How does this data have a real impact?

The UK National Office of Statistics noted that smaller homes tend to rely upon electricity for heating and have less cavity insulation making them particularly vulnerable to high electricity prices. By focusing on updating the insulation in north-facing homes, for example, landlords can help their residents conserve heat, protecting them against low temperatures in the winter months and excess warmth in the summer. Research carried out by GreenMatch found that poorly insulated walls lose around 30-40% of household heat while the roof is responsible for approximately 25% of heat loss. Data like this isn't just about identifying trends though - as insulating all north-facing properties puts housing providers right back where they started. Instead, housing needs to begin to look at their portfolio as a series of individual problems that will increase and decrease over time. Different residents will find heating a property more or less difficult - so focusing entirely on overall building standards will not ultimately reduce the rates of fuel poverty. Data, like the kind that Switchee gathers, should be used to make sure every resident is safe and comfortable in their home. In one building that might mean installing additional insulation on north-facing properties and in another that might mean installing a different type of heating system. Each property is different, every resident is unique, and the solution to fuel poverty is to look at them as such.

You can read more of Lauren's blogs at <https://blog.switchee.co/author/lauren-grimes>

TRAINING SERVICES FROM NEA



Action for Warm Homes
1981-2021

NEA has expanded its range of online learning in response to the current pandemic to ensure that organisations can continue to access our training services remotely from wherever they are. Learning options include:



Supported E-learning

Our e-learning modules give learners the flexibility to study at their own pace and from the comfort of their own home / work space with added benefit of accessing support from one of our tutors if needed. We currently offer the following subjects:

- Decarbonising Homes: Technologies, Impacts and Solutions (NEW COURSE - available soon)
- Level 3 Award in Energy Awareness 6281-01
- Fuel Poverty and Health
- Introduction to Domestic Energy Efficiency
- Introduction to Domestic Smart Meters



Interactive webinars

Our webinars are delivered live by our expert tutors and group sizes are kept small to ensure a good level of interaction and support for learners. The following subjects are available:

- Level 2 Award in Fuel Debt Advice in the Community 6281-16
- Changing Energy Related Behaviour
- Fuel Poverty and Health
- Paying for Fuel
- Vulnerability in the Energy Market

Fully funded places are available for some subjects, further details are included in the course outlines on our website.

For more information go to nea.org.uk/training