



Case Study

Partnership working
in Bristol and Somerset



Action for Warm Homes



Introduction

Although the WHF funded individual local authorities and RSLs, some projects have achieved impacts greater than the sum of their parts. An example of this comes from the South West of England where the WHF funded Bristol City Council and Sedgemoor District Council to set up separate but linked projects involving multiple partners. The two councils worked with the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE), a national charity founded in 1979 that aims to prevent people from suffering in cold homes and which tackles the impacts and implications of climate change.

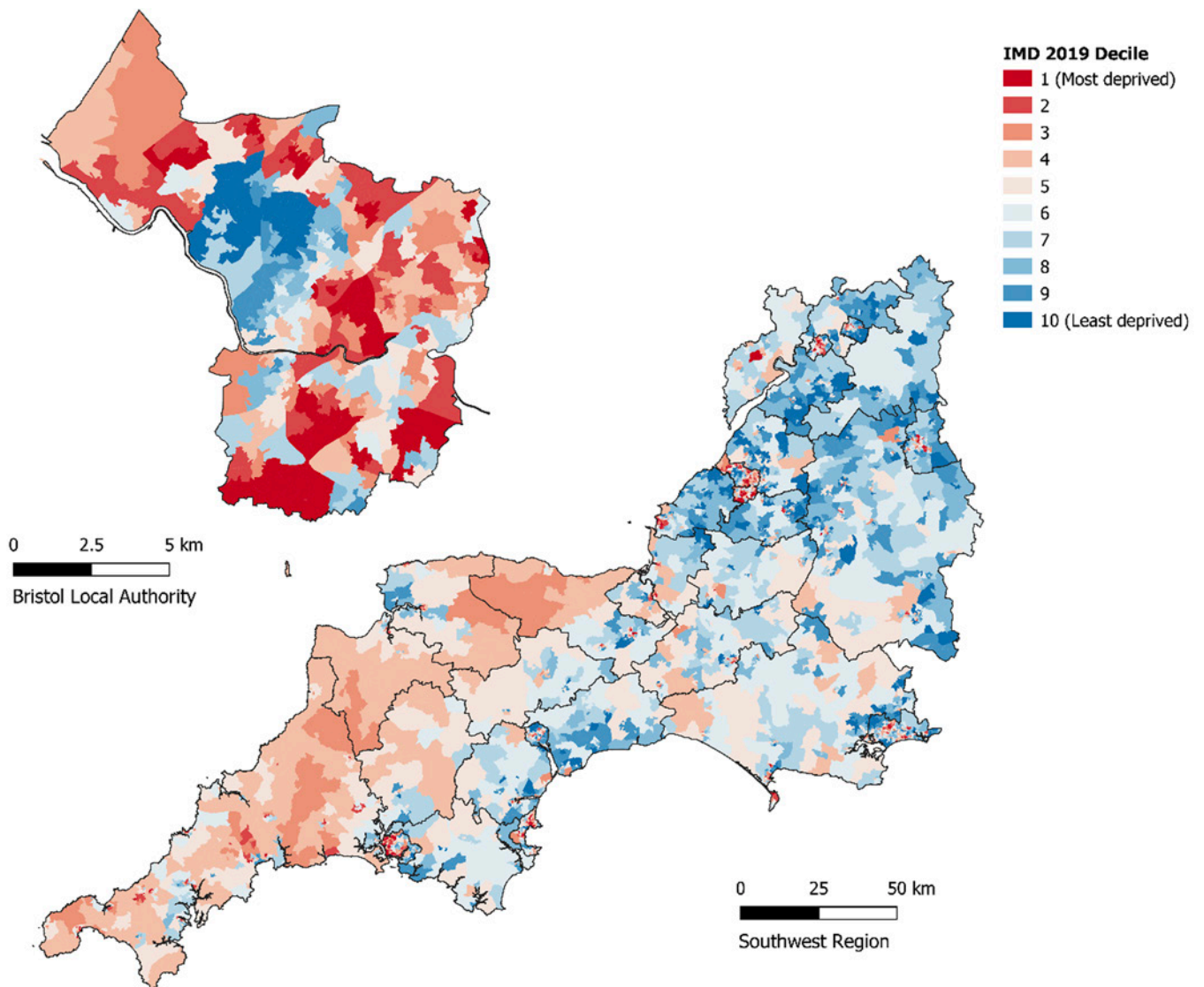


Figure 1: Multiple deprivation map of the South West of England, with Bristol inset.

Working with CSE, Bristol City Council successfully bid for Category 1 and Category 3 funding from the WHF. The Category 1 project delivered first-time central heating to residents across Bristol and Somerset, while the Category 3 funding was used to sustain and expand CSE's Warm Homes Advice and Money (WHAM) service, in partnership with other organisations. For example, Talking Money first approached Bristol City Council with the idea of bidding for WHF funding to expand WHAM, as well as Care and Repair (now called We Care Home Improvements), local NHS services, and numerous other charities and local actors.

Sedgemoor District Council also led a separate bid for Category 1 and Category 3 funding that involved CSE as a central partner, offering first-time central heating and advice to households. The latter was delivered in partnership with Somerset Independence Plus two additional local authorities: North Somerset Council, and Bath and North East Somerset Council.

Both Category 3 projects were fundamentally concerned not only with offering energy advice and support, but also expanding networks of partnership-working across different areas of expertise, to reach and support households across Bristol and Somerset. To deliver both projects, caseworkers employed by CSE were critical; they reached out to local organisations to build relationships, gave presentations and talks about the services each project could offer, and delivered tailored energy and financial advice to households – a topic that will be returned to below.

The evaluation engaged with both projects at different points in their lifespans. Bristol City Council and WHAM took part in Wave 2 of the evaluation fieldwork in 2021, with beneficiaries of both the Category 1 and Category 3 projects receiving questionnaires. Bristol City Council's Category 1 project, and both of the projects formally looked after by Sedgemoor District Council, took part in Wave 3 of the evaluation fieldwork in 2022. Interviews were undertaken with beneficiaries, and the evaluation also conducted two group interviews with delivery staff of both projects.

These activities revealed a picture not of two projects working separately towards the same goal, but of a shared ecosystem of advice and support gradually being upscaled and delivered across Bristol and Somerset. This case study therefore focuses not on one individual project, but gives

an example of how regional impacts – enabled and driven by shared partnership-working – can be achieved through a programme like the WHF.

What were the impacts on households?

Data collected from questionnaires, and from energy-modelling analysis for Bristol's Category 1 project, shows that:

- Before their installation, 87% of questionnaire respondents couldn't easily keep their whole homes warm. Afterwards, 87% of respondents said they now could.
- 97% of questionnaire respondents from Bristol's Category 1 project said the temperature in their home is now more comfortable than before, and 97% said the control they have over their heating system is better.
- Before their intervention, 52% of questionnaire respondents said they couldn't keep warm at home, and it affected their mental health. Post-intervention, 56% of respondents said their mental health is now better than before.
- The average SAP score of Bristol's beneficiary homes improved from 46 (a middle EPC band E) to 68, on the border of EPC bands C and D.
- Before their installation, the average running cost per household of Bristol's beneficiary homes was £2,192. Post-intervention, this had fallen to £1,012.
- For households still technically defined as living in fuel poverty after their intervention, their average fuel poverty gap plummeted from £973 to £123.

Findings from the questionnaire data collected from Sedgemoor's Category 1 beneficiaries also indicate that:

- Before their installation, 91% of questionnaire respondents from Sedgemoor's Category 1 project couldn't easily keep their whole homes warm. Afterwards, 91% of respondents said they now could.
- 91% of questionnaire respondents from Sedgemoor's Category 1 project said the temperature in their home is now more comfortable than before.

- 100% of questionnaire respondents from Sedgemoor's Category 1 project said the control they have over their heating system is now better, and that their heating systems are easier to use than before.
- 100% of questionnaire respondents from Sedgemoor's Category 1 project were satisfied with the service they received.

Lastly, questionnaire data collected from WHAM beneficiaries shows that:

- 58% of questionnaire respondents who received support from WHAM said the temperature in their home is more comfortable now than it was before.
- 46% of questionnaire respondents said they now have more control over their heating system after receiving support from WHAM.
- 48% of questionnaire respondents said the cost of their energy bills is better now than before they received support from WHAM.
- Before their intervention, 61% of questionnaire respondents said they couldn't keep warm at home, and it affected their mental health. Post-intervention, 45% of respondents said their mental health is now better than before.
- After receiving support, 56% of WHAM questionnaire respondents agreed that they are now more interested in how they can be more sustainable in other ways, and three-quarters agreed that they are more interested in how energy is used in the home and how they can save energy.

Who did it help?

The evaluation interviewed several beneficiaries who received help through the services collectively provided by the projects across Bristol and Somerset. One noteworthy example was Lucy. A homeowner and mother of two young children, Lucy received support from WHAM, which included energy advice and an onward referral for a new heating system installation.

Before the intervention, Lucy could not afford to keep her home sufficiently warm for her and her children. During the eighteen-month period prior to coming into contact with WHAM, Lucy used only a single fire in the living room: *"We sort of survived with the fire and we got through."* Unable to afford the energy they needed, Lucy and her family were forced to endure the day-to-day negative impacts of living in a cold home. For example, Lucy described how *"when the kids [were] cold, it was really bad [...] they wouldn't want to get out of bed in the morning because they could see their own breath."*

Lucy also detailed some of the choices she faced between heating her home, and other essentials in her and her children's lives. For example, she remembered how *"there was always a choice about whether we had heating or whether we were able to have a new school uniform."* This led to negative consequences for Lucy's wellbeing and confidence. In the interview, Lucy explained: *"I couldn't even provide a warm house for my children, and that made me feel rubbish."*

However, following the support she received through WHAM, Lucy summarised simply that *"I don't have that anymore."* The installation has enabled the family to enjoy the full space of the house, rather than gathering and huddling in the lounge. For example, before the installation, Lucy recalled how *"we'd all be in the lounge because that's where we'd put a fire on."* Now, however, Lucy says that *"it's just made the house really liveable [...] we can spread out a bit more, and the boys are happier to go to their own beds, whereas they wanted to sleep with me before."* This has boosted Lucy's wellbeing and confidence; but more than that, it has turned her house into a home. As she put it, *"it's made it feel like I belong here, given me a sense of ownership of my house, and made things easier for me."*

Lucy's example is one of many narrated to the evaluation. The testimonies of other beneficiaries of these projects is included anonymously in the main report, but Lucy's is particularly noteworthy. It highlights the full range of impacts that coordinated advice, support and heating measures can have – on the wellbeing of both residents and their children.

What were the main enablers of success?

Project delivery staff emphasised that the key enabler of success for both projects was partnership-working, particularly the shared drive and ambition to deliver and improve services to local residents. Collaboration and inter-agency communication and implementation was one of the most significant features in the success of both projects. The relationships established and built between CSE, both councils, Somerset Independence Plus, and the other project partners, enabled the identification of gaps in provision and the development of support available across Bristol and Somerset. While these partnerships and processes expanded, they were simultaneously based on firm historical foundations and working relationships. As one delivery staff member explained, CSE has *“got a history, a good history”* of working across Bristol and Somerset, and *“historically had caseworkers based in the county.”*

Based on these foundations and forms of gap analysis, the approaches taken by both Category 3 projects, channelled through CSE's caseworkers, greatly expanded the number and variety of partners and organisations working with each project. This enabled the leveraging in different and often bespoke services – such as (for example) armed forces charities, which helped with clearing people's homes to provide access for installations and energy advice. This holistic and multi-pronged approach meant that support was preventive as well as proactive. As one delivery staff member summarised, *“the idea is, before we close them [the case], is that we kind of work with people to enable them to go forward independently and be more resilient going forward, to prevent them getting into debt again, and put those things into place to help them.”*

Linked to this was the role of individual caseworkers themselves, and the specific skills, qualities and attributes they contributed to their projects. Caseworkers were often embedded in referral organisations, working directly with partners; and (in the case of WHAM) were even embedded at local hospitals, to drive referrals of those most at risk of ill-health from living in or being discharged into a cold home. There were challenges associated with this, especially securing access to NHS sites. Caseworkers needed to be able to circulate around hospitals, which resulted in one caseworker

having around 25 different fobs for the sites they could visit and work in. However, persevering with hospital working was hugely beneficial, especially when caseworkers were given an NHS email address to support smooth referral and communication for health partners.

More widely, the approach taken by CSE's caseworkers was a model of delivering tailored, personalised energy advice that best met the needs and requirements of specific households. As delivery staff explained, *“the householder only has one point of contact, a single point of contact who is their caseworker.”* This ensured that if beneficiaries needed further support, or wanted an update regarding an installation CSE was facilitating, *“they have their caseworker's mobile phone number and email address, and if they have any issues with any of the work that the partners are doing, then the caseworker is able to support them with that.”* As Lucy's case study shows, this was perceived as significant in driving multiple positive outcomes and the beneficiaries' satisfaction demonstrated above; *“as you can imagine,”* one delivery staff member summarised, *“we've got some really quite significant outcomes for people, and given them some life-changing support and helped them to sort of get back on their feet.”*

Learning was taken from previous experiences (including Category 1 and experience of the local agencies involved), which influenced the development of Category 3. For example, one CSE delivery staff member who was interviewed described: *“What we used to find is that people just didn't have one energy-related issue, they had multiple issues.”* Collaboration and inter-agency communication and implementation was one of the most significant factors of success. The relationship between CSE and the council enabled the identification of gaps in provision and the development of support available across the city. CSE is well established and respected in the Bristol region. In our interviews with CSE staff, they described their established relationships with Somerset: *“We've got a history – a good history – of working with Somerset in general.”* This working relationship between CSE and the local authority meant that CSE *“historically had caseworkers based in the county”* (CSE delivery staff).

However, the projects were not without their challenges. Early on, data-sharing presented a challenge, especially to the delivery of Bristol City Council's projects; unique data-sharing agreements had to be drawn up between all partners, which was initially time-consuming. But overall, the approach taken by CSE and its partners in the region shows how WHF funding, even when directed at individual local authorities, can support the emergence of organic and eventually self-sustaining networks of advice provision that stretch across local authority boundaries – thereby minimising the risk of postcode lotteries, and improving provision for households most in need of support.