

THE MEMBERS MAGAZINE OF NEA, THE NATIONAL FUEL POVERTY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY CHARITY

# FUEL POVERTY FOCUS

WINTER 2023



## 2022 CONFERENCE REVIEW

### FUEL POVERTY AWARENESS DAY

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Action for Warm Homes

# Fuel Poverty Focus

## February 2023

Welcome to NEA Focus Winter Edition. In this edition we take a look at the topics covered at our annual conference which took place in January. This event was held in Birmingham and hosted over 300 delegates. We will also take a look at our successful Fuel Poverty Awareness Day back in December and highlight our Fuel Poverty Forums which are taking place in March across England and Wales.

In the members section of this edition we explore the help Dudley Council are offering to their residents during the energy crisis; look at how Family Fund supports families on low incomes raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people; and the University of Exeter explains how their work opens the door on how sensor technology can reveal issues in home environments and support health outcomes.

If you would like to put forward an article for the next edition of NEA Fuel Poverty Focus please email our new editor [jess.irwin@nea.org.uk](mailto:jess.irwin@nea.org.uk)

## Alice

Alice Dalglish, Business and Partnerships Officer  
Editor, Fuel Poverty Focus

# Conference overview

As the new year hit us, many of our worst fears had come true.

High prices are forcing millions of households into energy debt. Prepayment meters are being used as a method to control the credit offered to households. And an increasing number of households that use prepayment meters are self-disconnecting for longer and longer periods of time. Our polling has produced some shocking statistics. 81% say they will ration energy this winter, while 55% are already rationing hot water, and 13% are reducing use of medical equipment. Many of the most vulnerable households are falling through the gaps of national or local assistance schemes, receiving little or no support to get them through the most egregious time.

Households in fuel poverty are facing fewer and fewer options to cope with high prices. Our clients are often already rationing to the extreme – so no amount of money spent on energy saving campaigns can help save them money. Advice on switching that in years gone by could have saved a household hundreds of pounds is no longer applicable in a market that isn't competitive below the price cap. And incomes are being eroded by inflation not only in energy prices but of other essentials too. We believe that as of April, 8.4m households will be touched by fuel poverty. Many of them will be at the very limit of their budgets. Others will be living on negative budgets on a regular basis – with outgoings exceeding their income for months on end.

And so to NEA's conference in late January. It was, after a long while, a chance for all of us to come together to work out how we can best help fuel poor households, both urgently this winter, and strategically to eliminate the scourge of fuel poverty in the years to come. A chance to hear from, and learn from, those that live in the most dire of circumstances, to inspire us to carry on with our endeavours to achieve our aim – to end fuel poverty. A chance to discuss how each of us can contribute towards our ultimate aim. Of course, Governments have the most significant role to play. Already, the scale of support has been off the scale.

A massive fiscal intervention is helping us all pay our energy bills. And there has even been additional investment in energy efficiency. They can, and must, provide more targeted support for households. But others have a role to play too.

Hundreds of organisations across the UK have a role in helping fuel poor households. Although they are largely unable to affect the price of energy, there are many different activities that they can undertake to provide support either directly, or indirectly.

Regulators have a key role to play in shaping the energy market, as well as ensuring that energy companies comply with the rules that have been set out for them to follow. Energy suppliers are the key interface between households and the energy they consume in order to power their homes and to stay warm at home.

Energy networks have responsibilities towards energy customers and therefore a role to play in the current crisis. Local government is a trusted point of contact for many vulnerable households when it comes to searching for help, not least because a significant portion of funding for both crisis financial assistance and grants for decarbonising homes is administered by them.

Landlords often have rental agreements include a contractual agreement for energy, where the landlord manages energy bills on behalf of the tenant, and are also responsible for the energy efficiency of the property. Health Practitioners will interact with fuel poor households every day over the winter period, and therefore have a role to play over the coming months.

I cannot think of a time that has been more prescient to come together. We very much enjoyed it and hope you did too. Now, as we return to our day jobs, let's make it count.

MATT COPELAND  
HEAD OF POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS



# POLICY UPDATE

The energy crisis remains one of the most prominent public policy issues facing the UK and there has never been a more important time to come together and discuss how we can help low-income and vulnerable households that will struggle to afford heating their homes this winter.

Energy prices have risen across Europe, but these have been particularly painfully felt across the UK given the energy inefficiency of our homes. In Great Britain, prices have gone from being set at approximately £1,138/year for the average household in the summer of 2021, to £2,500/year in October 2022, even after £10bns worth of subsidy from the UK Government. Prices have doubled in 18 months, and it won't stop there. The Energy Price Guarantee will increase the cost of energy from April 2023 so that the typical household can expect to pay £3000/year for energy, and the £400 Energy Bill Support Scheme will cease to exist. NEA estimates that will leave 8.4m households across the UK in fuel poverty.

Financial support has been significant, but it has not been enough. Across Great Britain, the energy price guarantee is giving every household a limit on the unit rate they can pay for electricity and gas, all electricity customers will receive £400 credit on their accounts, in six monthly instalments over winter. Households receiving a means-tested benefit will


receive £650 in additional income this year, and a further £900 next year. There will be supplements for other vulnerable households too - £600 for households receiving the winter fuel allowance, and £300 for disabled households. That has been supplemented in more, local support in Wales and Scotland. All support is welcome, yet households are still struggling to pay their bills. Citizens Advice have said that in the first nine months of 2022, it had seen more people struggling to top up their prepayment meter than in the whole of 2019-2021 combined.

Beyond this winter, analysts say that prices could remain relatively high, perhaps for the rest of this decade. As part of the Autumn Statement, HM Treasury signalled that the UK Government would work with stakeholders to consider the best approach to protecting consumers from April 2024, including considering a social tariff. NEA believes that this is essential, and that it should be progressed quickly so that low income and vulnerable households can pay an affordable price for energy.

The energy market is clearly no longer working for the poorest households. The price cap was initiated to deliver a 'fair' price for energy, where the profits of energy suppliers were constrained. While it broadly continues to do this job, it is becoming less fair for the poorest households. Ofgem has taken several decisions to make the cap more generous to energy suppliers, in particular increasing the amount of money they can recover as a result of increased volatility in wholesale markets – something that households

pick up the costs for. Standing charges are also seemingly ever increasing – a regressive way to recover costs. However, Ofgem seems unwilling to reduce standing charges in the price cap. In addition, the Warm Home Discount, a useful policy in 'normal times', is simply not enough with energy prices this high and there are significant practical challenges due to the recently stated efforts to better target the scheme to households with higher energy costs. There is therefore a risk that, beyond any additional and potentially one-off crisis support, the current BAU framework is not sufficient for the poorest households.

This points towards a new mechanism that can deliver an affordable price, so that everyone can afford to stay warm at home. NEA has called for a new social tariff that is additional to current protections, mandatory for suppliers to offer, well targeted on those who need it most, provides a meaningful discount and auto-enrols eligible households. Countless other organisations have joined us in calling for a social tariff including anti-poverty charities, green NGOs, energy suppliers, parliamentary committees and the Resolution Foundation. NEA will be pushing to put a duty on the Government to plan for a social tariff through an amendment to the Energy Bill. We will also share our learning with the NI Energy Regulator and in time, a functioning Executive. Despite its merit, a social tariff can only take us so far and there will also be a need to help support households to clear standing charges and address soaring energy debts.



Finally, as most people attending this year's annual conference will agree, the lasting way out of this crisis is to accelerate a fair and affordable transition to net zero. This means rapidly accelerating progress to make fuel poor homes more energy efficient across the UK. Doing so will rely on increasing the funding available for fuel poor homes to make upgrades, ensuring minimum standards for rented housing, and getting the policy frameworks in place in the devolved nations. In England, we are still £1.4bn short of meeting the Conservative Party manifesto spending commitment for upgrading fuel poor homes during this Parliament. This must be addressed urgently. In Wales, with a new Warm Homes Programme on the horizon, an increase in the spending envelope is also needed – doubling the previous annual spend in order to meet fuel poverty and carbon targets. In Northern Ireland funding totalling £440m needs to be committed to 2025 to ensure that all fuel poor homes can reach EPC C by 2030.

The UK Government is, however, making some progress. It has announced a 3 year, £1bn ECO+ scheme, that will focus on insulation measures only, for low- and middle-income households. The devil will be in the detail, and it is important that the scheme focusses as much on low-income households as is reasonably practicable by setting a high minimum spend for those households and removing an assumption of household

contributions. That would not only ensure that the scheme meets the UK Government's statutory remit, underpinned by the 2030 fuel poverty target, but that we continue the drive towards a fair and affordable transition to net zero that public can get behind.

While that funding is crucial for those who have the agency to make upgrades, renters often do not, and landlords need to have a minimum standard that they are required to meet. In England, the UK Government has previously said that it will introduce a standard of EPC C by 2028, for both private and social renters. This ambition, however, has not been translated into law. This must be prioritised and replicated in the devolved nations. While England has a Fuel Poverty Strategy, a statutory target and milestones to get there, Northern Ireland have none of these things, and Wales has only its own strategy. This is a significant deficiency in the devolved nations and must be urgently addressed if we are to move towards a fair and affordable transition across the whole of the UK.



Our Fuel Poverty Awareness Day on Friday 2 December 2022 took place in the most desperate circumstances we've seen at NEA, during our 40 years of existence.

We knew how important the day was going to be, in the middle of a severe energy crisis in which millions of households are struggling to stay warm and out of debt. More and more households are being dragged into fuel poverty, and those already fuel poor into severe fuel poverty. This is particularly the case during the cost of living crisis. This year our focus was on this winter and beyond – and what more the government needs to do.

We published new data from our research team, which showed that a staggering 8.4 million UK households will be in fuel poverty come April. That is a significant number of the population spending 10% or more of its income on energy in order to stay warm.

This increase in fuel poverty is due to the government's Energy Bills Support Scheme ending in April and the Energy Price Guarantee increasing the average annual bill from £2,500 to £3,000. Our research team also broke this down by vulnerable groups – people with disabilities, those in off gas homes and more.

1.8 million carers  
5.9 million low-income and financially vulnerable households  
3.6 million people with a disability  
2.5 million people over 60  
1.6 million households in off-gas homes

**Appearances on BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky News**



The release was covered as an exclusive by the BBC before being circulated to other media. Channel 4 used these statistics and extra data from NEA's research team, and it was the lead item on the streaming service.

We also gave ITV exclusive statistics showing it would take the government 150 years to meet its poverty target for England. They featured our case study Geraldine, a pensioner from Sheffield with disabilities who got into debt on her energy bills. This led to her being visited by debt collectors. Case studies like Geraldine are so important to show the real human suffering behind the statistics, shining a light on the problems that suppliers, the regulator and government can help solve.



Our spokespeople appeared on ITV's Good Morning Britain, Channel 5's Jeremy Vine Show and Sky News, with another of our case studies also speaking about her struggles to afford to keep her home warm as a full-time mum of young children and a partner who works. Many national and local papers picked up our release and so did Press Association. It led to over 300 mentions, 263 of which mentioned Fuel Poverty Awareness Day.

## #FuelPovertyAwarenessDay trended fifth on Twitter

For social media we developed resources for our supporters and partners to share, highlighting statistics, case studies and help for those struggling to afford their energy bills. On Twitter, our resources and hashtag #FuelPovertyAwarenessDay were shared throughout the day, not only by us but by thousands of our supporters including charities, organisations, and politicians like Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and Ed Miliband MP.

## Fuel poverty map

Finally we developed an interactive map for England which shows fuel poverty at constituency level. It also includes details about how areas compare to the national average, as well as contact details for MPs.

More coverage and attention means more public awareness and greater pressure on the government to act. We have been clear that the government must provide additional targeted support for those most in need, and make sure that current support is accessible. Temperatures were close to or below zero in parts of the country and millions have effectively been priced out of heating. We can only hope that the government is paying attention.

The response on the day was fantastic – thanks to all our stakeholders and supporters who helped make Fuel Poverty Awareness Day 2022 such a significant day.

## After a brief hiatus during the Coronavirus pandemic, NEA has been pleased to deliver our flagship Fuel Poverty Forums during 2022.

Fuel Poverty Forums support a broad coalition of organisations that have a range of different responsibilities, but all share a common commitment to finding solutions for vulnerable householders living in the communities in which they operate. During 2022, our forums have taken place online, each tailored to a specific region in England, with the aim of helping to maintain the capacity of local networks to tackle fuel poverty by sharing good practice and providing information on current policy developments. With the ongoing and unprecedented energy crisis, millions more households are facing fuel poverty, and so more than ever, NEA's forums have acted as a vital source of information sharing and networking to best support people during the cost-of-living crisis.

Our Forums took place in June and October/November 2022, reaching 768 stakeholders and we have another round planned for online delivery in March 2023. Forums are free to attend, and we'd encourage you to join your region's next event. To find out more please [see our website](#).



On 15 February individuals and organisations from across the UK took part in The Nation's Biggest Housewarming to raise awareness and vital funds for National Energy Action. We saw a variety of amazing events take place, including a classic bake sale, community events and advice drop-in sessions.

Once again, this event has been hugely successful not only in raising vital funds but also in raising awareness about fuel poverty and the support available across the sector. Yes Energy Solutions hosted a bake sale in their main office for colleagues, SGN and Cadent provided information on their current projects that are helping those in fuel poverty directly and Wolverhampton Homes Energy Wise hosted their own community advice session for their residents.

We want to thank each and every one of you that took part in The Nation's Biggest Housewarming this year, without your support we would not be able provide essential support to those most in need.

For more information on our campaigns and events or how you can support us this year please contact [alice.dalgleish@nea.org.uk](mailto:alice.dalgleish@nea.org.uk)



# TRAINING SERVICES FROM NEA



Action for Warm Homes

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:

- Delivering High Quality Domestic Energy Advice: A Practical Guide [NEW]
- Decarbonising Homes: Technologies, Impacts and Solutions
- 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
- Introduction to Domestic Energy Efficiency
- Understanding Fuel Poverty and Health: Impacts on mental health

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](https://nea.org.uk/training) or contact [lynsey.thompson@nea.org.uk](mailto:lynsey.thompson@nea.org.uk)

# MEMBERS FOCUS

## NEW INSULATION OFFER AVAILABLE NATIONWIDE

Connected for Warmth is an award-winning energy efficiency programme managed by AgilityEco in partnership with Affordable Warmth Solutions. Thanks to new funding from the National Grid Support Fund we are now able to offer fully-funded cavity wall insulation and loft insulation to homes across Britain. National Grid has committed this funding to help alleviate financial distress caused by rising energy costs.

The eligibility for loft and/or cavity wall insulation is very broad:

- It must be a private property in Council Tax bands A-D. Private rented homes are eligible and no contribution is required from the landlord
- The property needs either one or both of these primary measures. Old loft insulation less than 15cm thick can be topped up



The Connected for Warmth team promoting the programme at this year's NEA Conference in Birmingham

No other criteria apply! Smart heating controls and smaller secondary energy saving measures can also be provided as part of the overall package. All work will be done by experienced Trustmark-registered professionals.

You can find out more and apply at [www.connectedforwarmth.org.uk](http://www.connectedforwarmth.org.uk) or by calling the Connected for Warmth team on freephone 0800 107 8576.



South West Lancashire Independent Community Advice Network (ICAN) are very pleased to announce that after a very successful 3-year Community Lottery Funded Project, we were invited to apply for extension funding and are overjoyed to have received 5 years funding, keeping us active in West Lancs to 2027!

# DOING CYBER SALES DIFFERENTLY IN SUPPORT OF NEA

At the end of last year, we were thrilled to be supported by Dowsing & Reynolds, a home décor company who have difference in their DNA.

They think differently and embrace being different in their pursuit of the design and curation of beautiful home décor products to help create homes their customer love. While so many companies and brands were running Black Friday Sales and Cyber Monday Deals in November, D&R were also doing things differently of course!

If you'd visited their website that weekend you would have noticed that one word was missing - SALE! That's because Black Friday has a different meaning for Dowsing & Reynolds. For the past three years, they've chosen to steer clear of seasonal discounts and instead pledged to support a number of charities and causes that they are passionate about. This year they chose National Energy Action.

Founder James Dowsing-Reynolds said, "The work NEA does to help keep vulnerable people and families safe is inspiring, so I'm really pleased Dowsing & Reynolds was able to support their winter appeal and help those most in need during this cost of living crisis.

"Creativity is what we're all about so I was committed to doing things differently and not succumbing to a seasonal sale, even if it meant nominating myself to run 10k! By doing so I hope we can inspire other businesses to think about what positive impact they can make when they step away from the status quo."

And not just that, Ally and James Dowsing-Reynolds, the co-founders of the brand, also donated their personal energy rebate and encouraged their customers to do the same by promoting our Donate the Rebate. If that wasn't enough, on Fuel Poverty Awareness Day James challenged himself to run 10k from his house to the D&R HQ - as a non-runner (prior to this!) he raised an incredible £1100 from friends, family and also their wonderful customers.

Jen Carruthers Jones, Head of Business Growth and Partnerships, National Energy Action said: "We would like to thank Dowsing & Reynolds for choosing to support National Energy Action.

"Together, along with their customers, they have managed to raise an incredible amount which means we can continue the work we do helping those suffering in fuel poverty.

"NEA are proud to have been chosen for this creative and innovative support from such a forward-thinking brand. We challenge others to follow their lead, now more than ever, and show solidarity with people facing extremely tough decisions this winter - heating or eating."

All of us at National Energy Action are so grateful to Ally, James and all the team and customers at Dowsing & Reynolds for their incredible and creative support! If your company or brand would like to support our work at this critical time, please contact Alice on [alice.dalgleish@nea.org.uk](mailto:alice.dalgleish@nea.org.uk).



# HOW REAL-TIME DATA INSIGHT CAN DRIVE ACTION FOR FUEL POVERTY

## SWITCHEE WINTER WEBINAR SERIES

At Switchee we believe that knowledge is power and collaboration is key. With that in mind, we are committed to sharing the expertise of thought leaders in the UK social housing industry. From this, the Switchee Winter 101 Webinar Series was born. For the second webinar in the series Switchee Data Scientist, Obaid Malik, was joined by Adam Scorer, Chief Executive of National Energy Action (NEA). Below details some of the key highlights from this fantastic episode.

### How can data and insights help housing providers?

At Switchee, our data helps identify households who are at risk of fuel poverty and the most in need of help. As a result, housing associations and organisations like the NEA are enabled to focus their efforts and limited resources - Obaid Malik, data scientist at Switchee.

Specifically designed for social housing landlords, the Switchee dashboard displays real-time data, insights and analytics via a comprehensive, user-friendly dashboard.

Segmented by high, medium and low risk, an abundance of actionable insights include identifying condensation, damp and mould risk; and over- or underheating at a per property or housing stock level.

More specifically, if whilst occupied in the past three months, the temperature readings for that household have been below 18° for 50% or more time, they will be assigned fuel poverty risk level.

### What is the data demonstrating?

When comparing the heating season of 2021 and 2022, the data clearly demonstrates a marked change in resident behaviour following the energy crisis.

Changes in resident behaviour from September 2021 to October 2022:

- 5.3% average increase in the number of people heating their homes below 18 degrees.
- 2.33°C average decrease in temperature
- 33 minutes average decrease in duration of time heating the home.

When a home has been flagged as being at risk of fuel poverty (high/ medium/low risk) the data from those homes can then be analysed on a case by case basis. Armed with this data, the housing providers are enabled to proactively communicate with those homes to try and see how they can support them. Follow up communication with residents can be conducted via the Switchee device, realising an up-to 90% response rate from residents.

### Looking to the Future

Unfortunately, the cost of heating our homes is set to yet again rise in the future, as the price cost cap is removed in April of this year. This will mean yet more financial pressure on residents which is likely to continue the trends demonstrated above.

Switchee's mission is to improve the quality of life for people living in rented homes and our device is a proven way to reduce the energy bills of residents' homes and the running costs of them for housing providers. Alone we cannot fix this problem, but armed with data and insights, we can proactively support those that need it most, and help those already struggling from becoming further at risk.

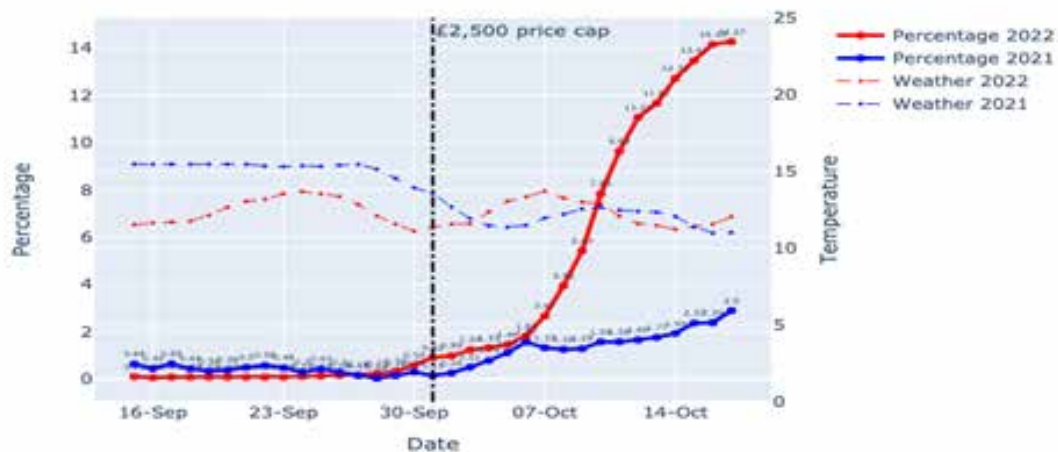
### Want to learn More?

Be the first to hear from our team of experts by joining our upcoming spring webinar Series. [Sign up here today.](#)

### Listen Back

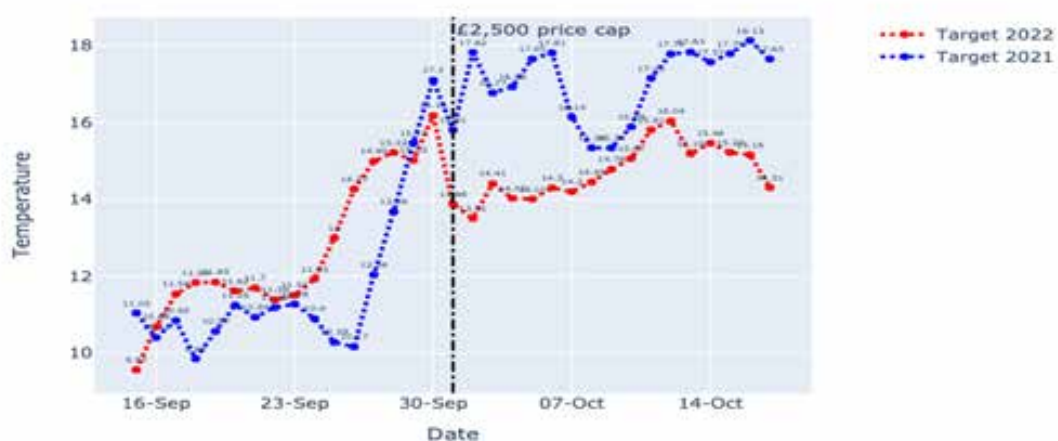
To delve further into the detail of the data and listen back to Switchee's full winter webinar Series by visiting: <https://www.switchee.com/webinars/>

15-Sep to 15 Oct (2022 vs 2021)



Additional 5.3% properties on average year on year and addition of 11.5% more properties <18°C on 17th October 2022.

15-Sep to 15 Oct (2022 vs 2021)



2.33°C decrease in target temperature on average in October 2022 and 3.34°C on 17th October 2022.

15-Sep to 15 Oct (2022 vs 2021)



33 minutes decrease on average in October 2022. 57 minutes decrease on 17th October 2022.

# EMERGENCY WINTER PACKS HELP DUDLEY RESIDENTS IN CRISIS

Dudley residents struggling during the cost-of-living crisis are being given extra support to keep warm and well during the winter months thanks to emergency packs provided by Equans working in conjunction with Dudley Council's Energy Advice Line (DEAL).

The packs are being distributed as an emergency intervention to local food banks, the emergency services, warm spaces and Citizen's Advice cost of living hubs. Each pack contains a range of items to help people keep warm this winter such as LED lantern and appliance charger, microwave heated pad, gloves, food bars, foil blankets and reusable hand warmers.

Residents visiting one of the borough's 'Warm Welcomes' spaces are some of those benefitting. Set up across the borough to support local people 'Warm Welcomes' are safe and welcoming places where people and families can go to keep warm if they are facing challenges or struggling to heat their homes this winter. The spaces offer free hot drinks, activities, and someone on hand to lend a listening ear if needed.

Equans and Dudley MBC are also working closely with the local emergency service teams who are distributing the emergency packs to residents who are requiring immediate help outside of office hours. Many of these have self-disconnected and struggling to keep warm; the packs are a lifeline until services can reach out to provide more intensive support the following morning.



Chris Walford, Equans "During this cost of living and energy crisis, we are pleased to be able to provide emergency relief with our winter packs. We want to help people living in vulnerable situations and support those who will benefit the most from them. It's reassuring to know these packs will help make a real difference at such a difficult time."

Helen Langley, Dudley Council Energy Advice Line (DEAL) "The packs provide immediate support to help people cope in the short term while our energy advice service works alongside to offer the advice and practical help needed to find long term solutions to the challenges presented by increasing levels of fuel poverty"





The majority of families raising a disabled, or seriously ill, child or young person, are facing serious financial jeopardy as a result of winter bill pressures on top of the intensity of the cost-of-living crisis, the latest findings from Family Fund show.

Family Fund is the UK's largest provider of grants to families on low income raising disabled or seriously children and young people.

Findings from the charity's latest poll of over 1,000 families, highlights the gravity of the challenge. Families face sky-high energy costs on top of severely reduced incomes due to caring responsibilities, three times higher costs to look after a disabled child and critical levels of debt.

Over half of families (52%) say they cannot afford to keep their accommodation warm enough this winter – a rise from 42% of families last summer. Up to 74% say they are struggling or falling behind on energy bills and almost one third (32%) say they have been forced to use credit to pay for essential household bills.

These extra costs and growing debts are unavoidable because families with disabled children need to use more energy than other households due to the needs of their children.

Many need electricity for equipment such as ventilators and feeding pumps or to put the heating on to regulate a disabled or seriously ill child's body temperature. Living in a cold home exacerbates the health problems of someone with a disability.

Nearly 60% of families say that as a result of their disabled child's condition or illness they have to pay more for energy.

As one family explained: "Hoist on charge at all times, feeding pump on charge at all times, extra fridge for meds and specialist milk. Issues with temperature regulation so either gas heating on or electric fan".

And another: "[Child requires] 24/7 days a week care, we have someone with her at all times, lights, tv, washing machine, tumble dryer and oxygen machines going all day and night. We also have to keep our heating on 24/7 to keep our house heating regulated so [child] is not going from warm to cold all the time causing her head colds etc."

And another: "Our child has juvenile arthritis so if she gets cold it's painful on her joints and they become stiff and swollen we therefore run the heating more than usual and she also has more hot baths to help soothe her joints."

Despite the need to use more energy due to their disabled children's conditions or illnesses, the inability of more than half of families to keep their accommodation warm is taking its toll on family wellbeing: "just generally not being able to live without worrying what we are all going to eat, keep warm, and be happy in life"

Nearly 75% said their disabled child's health and wellbeing had declined in some way over the last 12 months.

For further information, please contact [research@familyfund.org.uk](mailto:research@familyfund.org.uk).



## THE UNIVERSITY OF EXETER OPENS THE DOOR ON HOW SENSOR TECHNOLOGY CAN REVEAL ISSUES IN HOME ENVIRONMENTS AND SUPPORT HEALTH OUTCOMES

The link between poor housing and poor health has been known, if not fully understood for many years. Those familiar with Maslov's hierarchy of needs will know that shelter is one of the most fundamental of human needs, and yet, 4 million homes failed to meet the decent homes standard in the 2020-21 English Housing Survey and poor housing is estimated to cost the NHS £600 million a year, impacting both physical and mental health of people, for their lifetimes.

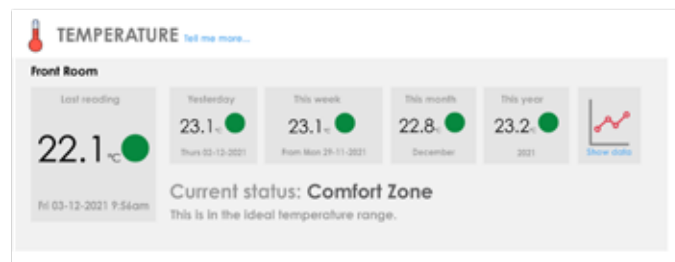
Since 2016, the Smartline Project, a partnership between the University of Exeter, Coastline Housing, Cornwall Council, Volunteer Cornwall and the SW Academic Health Science Network to explore whether digital technologies can help to support the management of healthier homes, and better health and wellbeing outcomes for housing association tenants in some of the poorest postcode areas of the country.

The project which is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund has had the support of over 300 households, recruited from Coastline Housing customers, who allowed digital environmental monitors to be installed in their home and who have worked with the University of Exeter team on a number of studies and surveys to understand whether digital devices can provide a means to both manage their homes and help make connections within their community.

This has resulted in over 5 years of internal environmental data – temperature, humidity, air quality (VOCs and PM2.5) and some utilities data for gas, electricity and water – over 0.7 billion data points.

The project has found environmental monitoring can be a valuable tool, in the right hands. Not many households monitor their own data regularly, and it needs to be provided in a way that is both accessible and meaningful to those that do. This information can help housing associations to identify problems and intervene before a problem becomes a crisis.

However, there needs to be a trusting relationship between tenants and landlords and recognising that this data could be used inappropriately, protections need to be in place to prevent misuse.



Digital technology has a valuable role to play in improving home management, but for some of the most vulnerable households it should not be seen as a replacement for person to person contact – it can provide information to inform and target services but organisations need to be able to respond at a personal level.

Digital engagement isn't for everyone. Ten million people are digitally excluded, 1 in 3 of whom are in social housing. From initial studies, we know that approximately 20% of Smartline participants were not digitally engaged. In the early days of the project, the Smartline team tried addressing this by providing tablet computers with roaming sims, 1:1 and group training and set up digital communities but with limited effect. Then Covid hit and it made sense to look again at digital engagement and explored the barriers to uptake. Lack of confidence, skills and cost were barriers for many. Lack of capacity also a significant challenge due to caring responsibilities and other demands.

Digital exclusion is complicated and approaches to inclusion need to be personal and flexible, reflecting the needs of the individual.

It is important to recognise that for some, digital is not the answer and so systems need to ensure there are options that do not require digital engagement.

The indoor home environment is an understudied area. Through the Smartline Project and other work, we are building our understanding but historically, much of the focus has been on the quality of the outdoor environment – air quality particularly.

Yet we know that many people spend significant periods of time inside. The Smartline cohort of mainly older people, participants reported spending 90% of their time indoors.

What [Smartline has found](#) is that indoor environmental monitoring can be a tool to support early intervention, not so much by the tenant, but rather can help flag households experiencing problems early to the Housing Association, to allow early intervention – stopping a problem from becoming a crisis.



Join Team NEA

# EDINBURGH HALF MARATHON

## 28 MAY 2023

**Want to support NEA? Why not take part in the Edinburgh Half Marathon?**

**Join Team NEA as they put on their running shoes and take part in a world class running event.**

**Starting in Edinburgh city centre, the course will take you out through East Lothian which offers amazing views and an unforgettable running journey. This route is one of the fastest in the UK which means it is the perfect opportunity to hit your personal best!**

**Why not join Team NEA today and try it for yourself.**

**With your support we can continue to raise vital funds to enable us to continue the work we do in helping those suffering in cold and unsafe homes across the UK.**

**Email [alice.dagleish@nea.org.uk](mailto:alice.dagleish@nea.org.uk) for more information.**





Action for Warm Homes

# URGENT APPEALS



## DONATE THE REBATE

Energy bills are rocketing at unprecedented levels and this winter is set to leave millions more people in fuel poverty.

In response to the unaffordable energy bills people across the country are now facing, the government is giving every household a £400 grant toward the cost of bills over six months. While the government has also announced additional support for vulnerable and low-income households, for many, this now simply isn't enough.

National Energy Action needs to be there to support as many people as possible through this difficult winter. No one should have to suffer in a cold home.

With every household in the country eligible for the £400 grant, National Energy Action is asking those who feel they can manage without it to please donate, so we can be there to provide crisis support to people in need.

By making a donation, you will be supporting our essential services to help the most vulnerable stay warm and safe at home.

[nea.org.uk/donate](https://nea.org.uk/donate)

## DONATE YOUR WINTER FUEL PAYMENT

Every year, those aged 65 and above are eligible to receive the Winter Fuel Payment directly from the government. The Winter Fuel Payment is an annual, tax-free payment of between £250 and £600 to help with the cost of heating bills during the winter months. They are not means-tested and so is not dependent on your financial situation.

**This winter, we will see an estimated 6.7 million households fall into fuel poverty.**

The energy crisis has meant more people will be facing devastating choices on how to spend overstretched incomes and fearing for their health and that of their families. Fuel poverty is at crisis levels, the worst we have seen in decades.

At National Energy Action, we are working tirelessly to help as many people as we can, but we can't do this alone. That's why we are asking those who are able, to donate their Winter Fuel Payment to help those in desperate need of support.

Your donation will mean we can be there to help vulnerable people up and down the country stay warm and safe this winter.

[nea.org.uk/donate](https://nea.org.uk/donate)

