



# North West Fuel Poverty Forum 20 June 2023



*Action for Warm Homes*

# About NEA

National Energy Action (NEA) is the national fuel poverty and energy efficiency charity that has worked across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland for the last forty+ years, to ensure that everyone in the UK can afford to live in a warm and safe home.

We work across both the energy and water sectors, with frontline practitioners, companies, regulators and Government, to make positive change for customers in vulnerable circumstances.



*Action for Warm Homes*

Time	Agenda
9:30am	<b>Welcome</b> Jimmy Pugh, Project Development Coordinator, NEA
9:45am	<b>Updates, collaboration and networking opportunities</b> NEA will chair this session and invite participating speakers to share brief updates
10:30am	<b>Policy update</b> Maya Fitchett, Policy Analyst, NEA
11:00am	<b>Refreshments and networking</b>
11:20am	<b>Group discussions</b> Facilitated by NEA
11:50am	<b>Update from United Utilities</b> Nikki Carney, Outreach and Engagement Manager, United Utilities
12:10pm	<b>Update from Agility Eco</b> James Somerville, Policy and Partnership Director, Agility Eco
12:25pm	<b>Forum concludes</b> Round up followed by lunch and networking

NEA is grateful to National Grid for supporting this round of Fuel Poverty Forums



Action for Warm Homes

# How NEA has helped tackle the energy crisis (2022-23)

Our Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) Advice line operates across England and Wales, supporting thousands of people each year with energy and income maximisation advice and information.



Over **16,000 calls** answered through our phone lines  
**465 webchat** conversations  
Over **3,000** online referrals



**1,872 clients** have been supported with Benefit Entitlement Checks, of which **1,088 claims** were made resulting in over **£3.5 million** expected financial gains



**Over 60%** of clients supported had one or more health condition



**11,151 clients** helped with energy advice and support



**Over £734,700** of crisis fund, hardship, bill support or debt relief payments administered by NEA



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*“Thank you so much, honestly, that has been keeping me up at night worrying so it’s a huge relief.”* Single working mum, 34, who had £1,200 of fuel debt written off through the NEA support fund

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*“I couldn’t have got this sorted without you,”* a client said after one of our advisers sorted out billing errors with her supplier to see her account move from debt to credit.

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*“Thank you so much for all your support,”* a client who had been rationing her energy use said, after our adviser solved her complex metering and debt issues.

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A 50-year-old mother of five, dependent on a ventilator and a wheelchair, had £1,204.13 of fuel debt wiped off, and her direct debit set to a more affordable amount, all thanks to one of NEA’s advisers.

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A 62-year-old woman who had been selling her grandmother’s jewellery and borrowing money from friends to get by was helped by one of our advisers with both her energy and water bills. Our adviser got the woman onto a social tariff for her water bills and topped up her gas prepayment meter with a £147 voucher.



# NEA's operational work programme 2023/24

- Communities of interest / supporting under-represented groups
- Smart meter rollout
- Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)



# Communities of interest / supporting under-represented groups

## Warm Welcome

- Providing vital energy advice and support to new and expectant parents in England and Wales
- Aiming to support families with managing their fuel bills and to achieve affordable warmth
- Community advice sessions and targeted support with professionals.

## Building Community Resilience

- NEA and National Grid
- A greater focus on in-community work and direct support through partnership
- Working with partners who have been marginalised and face intersecting barriers in the energy market
- Tailored, local work to understand community needs and respond proactively
- Increase capacity across the advice giving sector.

## Empowered by Energy

- NEA will continue to offer a unique energy awareness project to empower newly recognised refugees to the UK to overcome language barriers, understand new energy systems and save money.
- Interactive and in-depth workshops supported by translators covering a range of energy related topics and advice
- Delivered online and F2F
- Attendees become confident energy champions who can share tips and information with their peers and community networks.





# Smart meter rollout

- Smart Energy GB in Communities is a grants and training programme established by NEA and Smart Energy GB in 2016
- Designed to reach and support people who might experience a barrier in benefiting from the smart meter rollout
- Provide funding to charities, local authorities and housing associations across Great Britain
- Promote the benefits of smart meters and bust myths
- Funding in 2023 is aiming to benefit people in fuel poverty; people who lack digital skills; and people who are carers. 6 smart meter focussed projects have received funding in this region.
- Free resources including a joint NEA/Smart Energy GB advice guide available on the Smart Energy GB website.

For more information: [smartgrants@nea.org.uk](mailto:smartgrants@nea.org.uk)



# NEA and the Vulnerability & Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA)

- Funding allowance for all Gas Distribution Networks (GDNs) allocated and managed by Ofgem
- To be used to support customers in vulnerable situations and to reduce the risks related to Carbon Monoxide
- Allocated according to the size of each GDN's customer base
- NEA is working in partnership with Cadent, Wales & West Utilities (WWU) and SGN to deliver VCMA funded programmes
- Programmes include gas appliance repairs/replacement and servicing, energy and water advice, benefits advice, fuel debt relief and emergency fuel vouchers.

# Cadent – One Number Programme

- Referrals generated by engineers attending emergency call outs and carrying out mains replacement works
- Customers in vulnerable situations are referred to NEA (Eastern and North London network areas) or Groundwork (North West and North East network areas)
- Householders are offered:
  - FREE gas appliance repair/replacement or a FREE gas appliance service (subject to eligibility criteria)
  - Energy and water advice
  - A Benefit Entitlement Check and support to make a claim where required

# Healthy Homes, Healthy People

Partnership approach across Wales & West Utilities footprint

- Energy advice
- Water tariff advice and access to cheaper tariffs
- Heating upgrades, access to top-ups, full support throughout
- Home adaptations – information and referrals
- Priority Services Register
- Home Safety Measures – CO, locking cooker valves
- Income maximisation





# Cadent / SGN Collaboration

- Energy and water advice for SGN and Cadent customers:
  - Energy Debt support
  - Support to access water social tariffs and debt relief schemes
  - Priority Services – registration to supplier and operator Priority Service Registers
- Emergency fuel top-up vouchers fund for customers using the NEA Warm & Safe Homes (WASH) service living in an SGN or Cadent postcode area.
- Linked support to internal and partner organisations:
  - NEAs' Benefits Team
  - Network Operators Carbon Monoxide Alarms
  - Referrals to local foodbanks
  - Measures projects for insulation, heating and controls



# **Updates, collaboration and networking**

Chaired by Jimmy Pugh, Project Development Co-Ordinator,  
NEA



*Action for Warm Homes*



**Policy update**  
Maya Fitchett,  
Policy Analyst, NEA



*Action for Warm Homes*

# NEA's Three Advocacy Priorities



**People** - Supporting fuel poor households through the energy crisis



**Homes** - Achieving a fair and affordable transition to net zero



**Market Frameworks** - Ensuring overarching market, policy and regulatory frameworks work in the interest of fuel poor households

# People - Supporting fuel poor households through the energy crisis

## Recent Developments

- Price cap now down to £2,070 but Government energy support now ended (EBSS and EPG). So prices no different to winter
- 20% of prepay EBSS vouchers have not been redeemed to date. This will be passed back to HMT.
- Income support continues for those in the social security system. But this is defrayed across different essentials.
- One third of fuel poor households are not in the social security system and so receive no support going forward.

## Coming Up

- Continuing to make the case for more targeted support this winter, specifically for energy (i.e. bill rebates/price support)
- Campaigning for a social tariff to ensure that low income households can access an affordable price of energy.
- Consultation on a social tariff expected this summer.



# Homes - Achieving a fair and affordable transition to net zero

## Recent Developments

- UK Government announced a new energy efficiency scheme – “Great British Insulation Scheme”
- More money allocated to Local Authorities and Housing Associations to deliver HUG and SHDF
- Government announced that it would look to rebalance levies on energy bills.
- UK Government debating whether to tighten energy efficiency standards for landlords to meet.

## Coming Up

- Making the case for fuel poverty schemes (including GBIS) to be targeted on fuel poor households. This includes our work with political parties on their manifestos.
- Working with UK Government officials to ensure that current schemes work as well as possible.
- Ensuring that the UK Government does not rebalance energy bills simply through transferring levies to gas bills.
- Building up case studies of private renters.

# Market Frameworks - Ensuring overarching market, policy and regulatory frameworks work in the interest of fuel poor households

## Recent Developments

- Ofgem have consulted on making some changes to energy pricing, including:
  - How debt allowances are calculated in the price cap
  - Pricing differentials for different payment types
- New voluntary agreements regarding the forced installation of prepayment meters.
- Ofgem consulting on how to improve customer service.

## Coming Up

- Continuing to make the case that there should be no/limited price differentials between payment types in the energy market.
- Pushing Ofgem to take the PPM voluntary agreement into the licence.
- Ensuring that energy customers do not pay over the odds for the cost of debt in the price cap

# Forced Prepay – Deep Dive

## New Rules for Pre Installation

- Involuntary PPM as a last resort
- Multiple contact attempts by a range of methods and site welfare visit before Involuntary PPM
- Installs must be smart meters as default

## Exemptions from the process

- High risk group completely exempt from installs, including elderly, very young, and certain medical conditions.
- Broader medium risk group exempt if likely they will self-disconnect

## On site requirements

- Site welfare visit and installation teams to be appropriately trained, with clear expectations on their behaviour
- There is a need for bodycam or audio recording

## New Rules for Post Installation

- New Involuntary PPM to come pre-loaded with credit
- Suppliers must provide aftercare including check ins and monitoring of top ups/consumption
- Households must be offered to be moved back to credit mode if debt is cleared

**Forced installs will not re-commence until suppliers have shown to Ofgem that they can meet these requirements. This is not expected until mid-summer at the earliest.**

# What else is happening?

- **New Select Committee Established for DESNZ** – Angus MacNeil will chair the committee. NEA is engaged with helping the committee shape their initial agenda.
  - **Review of Electricity Market Arrangements (REMA)** – UK Government is looking at changing how the wholesale market works. Some of this will directly impact fuel poor households, so NEA will remain engaged.
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# Indicative Policy Timeline

## Summer 23/24

- Consultations on a social tariff and rebalancing energy bills
- GBIS goes live

## Spring 24/25

- Implementation of a social tariff
- Preparation for election (possible May 2024)

## Autumn 23/24

- Winter price cap announced with decisions on debt/levelisation
- Prepay agreement into the licence?
- Party conferences – focus on manifesto commitments



# Refreshments and networking



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# Group discussions



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# In smaller groups, please discuss:

## Involuntary Prepayment Meter (PPM) – Supplier Code of Practice

- Ofgem's Involuntary PPM Supplier Code of Practice includes a number of characteristics/conditions that should be considered as high or medium risk and therefore exclude them from Involuntary PPM or remote mode switching. Do you think there are other categories which have been missed? If so, what would be your rationale for including them?
- How can we best explain to advisers and/or householders what protections the Code of Practice offers?
- Does the Code of Practice provide sufficient protection? If not, what more could it do?

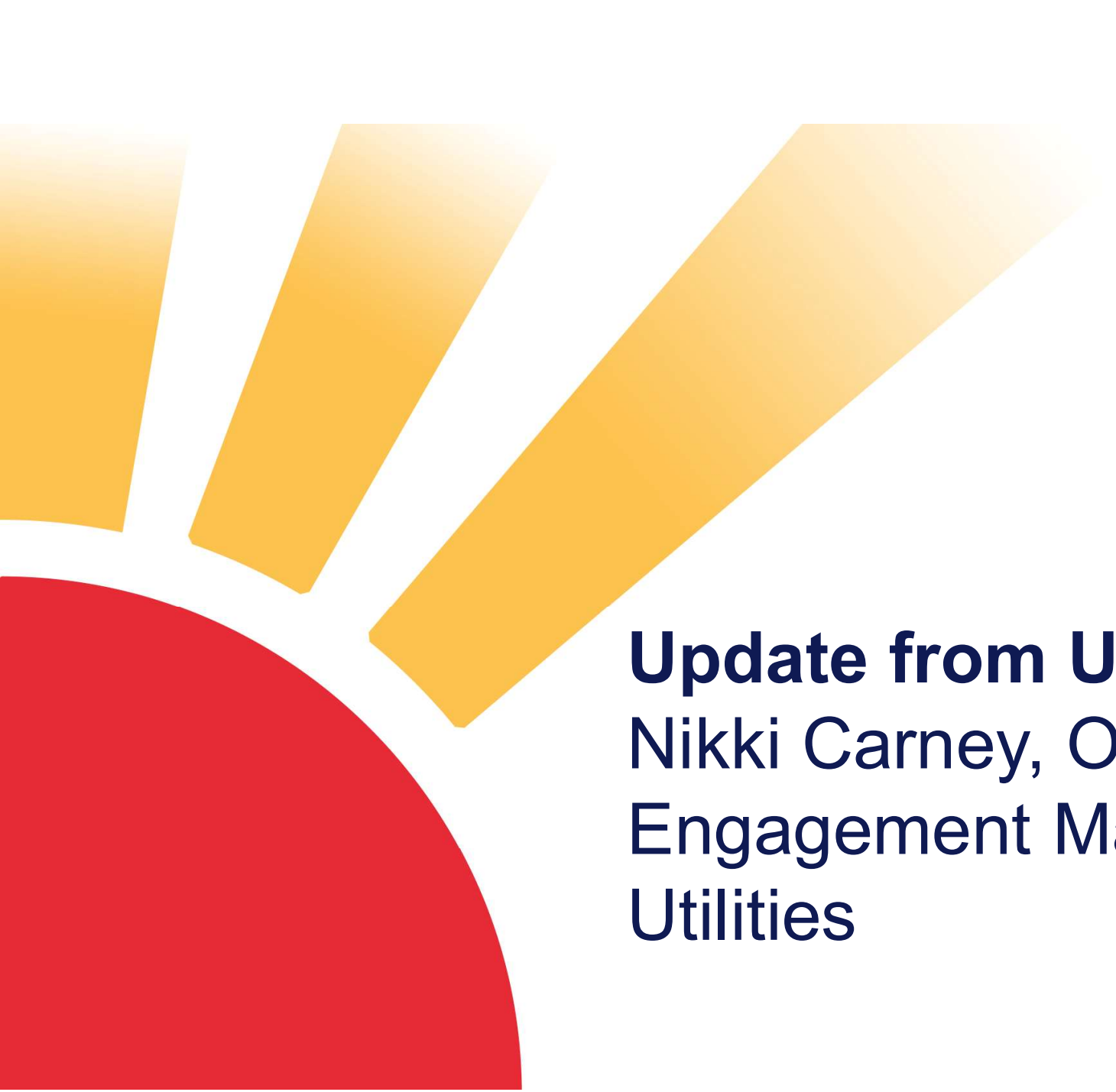
## Digital exclusion and accessibility

- NEA is still finding digital exclusion to be a significant barrier in people being able to access services. What needs to be in place to resolve this? Can you share examples?

## Staff welfare

- Demand from clients for in-depth support is likely to continue and as we've seen this can have a significant impact on advisers' health and wellbeing. What mechanisms do you have in place to protect your staff's welfare? Can you share anything that worked well last winter?
- We recognise that not everyone works as part of a large team – how can we support colleagues who are working in isolation?
- Is there more that you'd like to see NEA do to support you on a peer-to-peer level?





# **Update from United Utilities**

**Nikki Carney, Outreach and  
Engagement Manager, United  
Utilities**



*Action for Warm Homes*

**United Utilities  
Affordability Presentation**



 **United  
Utilities**  
Water for the North West

# Industry leading support schemes available

## Lowest affordable bill

If you have a water meter and receive benefits, and use a lot of water due to ill health or having a large family.



Water Sure



Back on Track

If you're receiving benefits and are either in arrears with your water charges, or your income has been affected by a change in circumstance.



If you are receiving Pension Credit and struggling to make payments.



Help to Pay

## Help with arrears

If you're in real financial difficulty, you could qualify for a one-off payment from our Trust Fund.



Trust Fund

## Industry leading support schemes



Payment Matching



For every £1 you pay we'll match it with £1 too. After 12 months, we'll increase our contribution to £2 for every pound you pay.

## Short term support

If you're struggling with your bill due to losing your job or having to pay out for an unexpected household emergency.



Payment Break



PayAsUGo

PAYG gives customers the option to pay at whatever frequency suits their personal needs as long as they meet the agreed payment milestones as shown on their schedule.

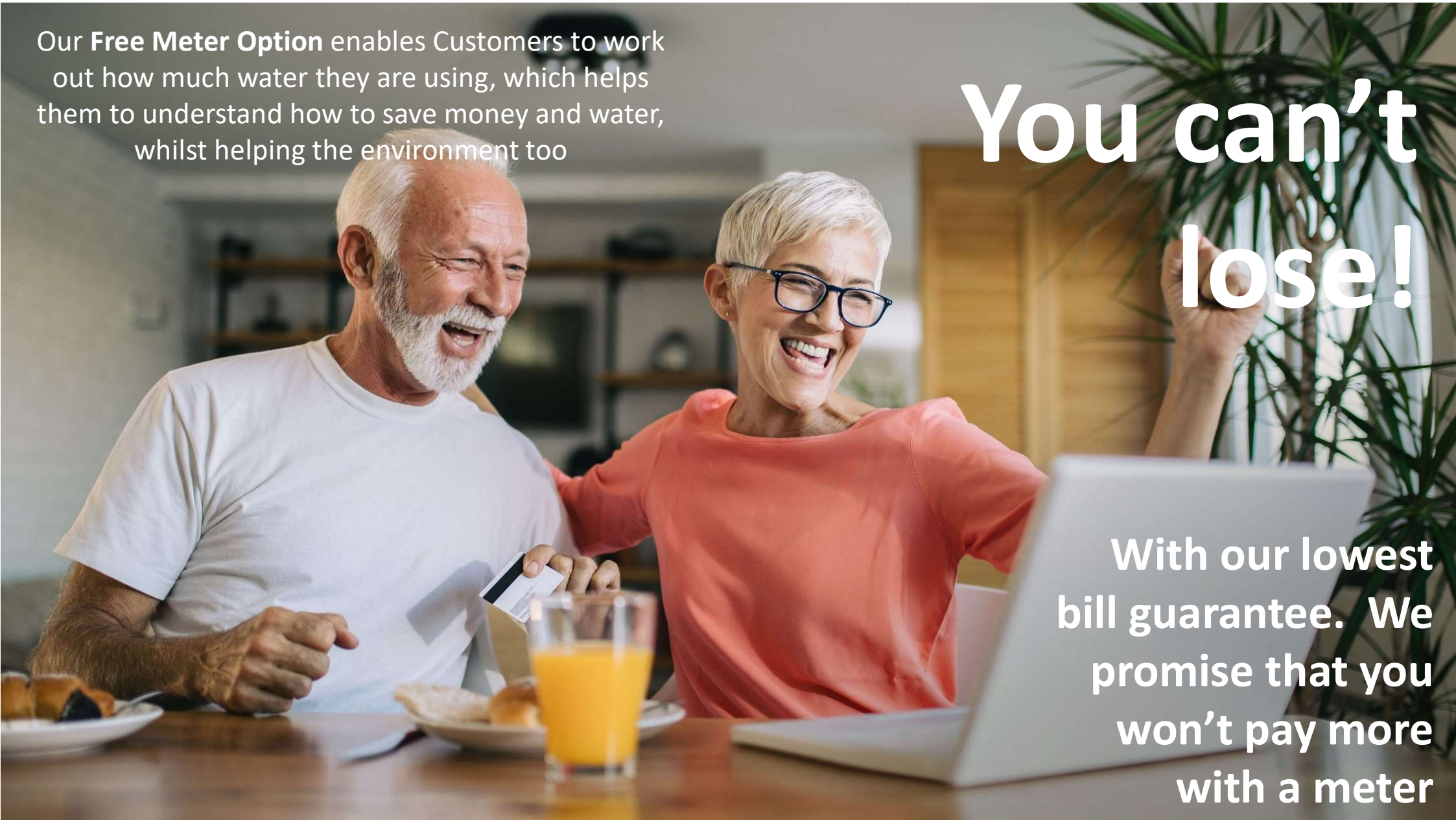


Please visit our website for full details about how we can help [unitedutilities.com/services/your-bill/difficulty-paying-your-bill/](https://unitedutilities.com/services/your-bill/difficulty-paying-your-bill/) Or contact our Affordability Team on **0800 072 6765**

Our **Free Meter Option** enables Customers to work out how much water they are using, which helps them to understand how to save money and water, whilst helping the environment too

# You can't lose!

With our lowest bill guarantee. We promise that you won't pay more with a meter





## Priority Services



Physical



Mental health



Life events



Language



Financial



A complete and dedicated service  
when our customers need it most



Working with partners, stakeholders and charities to drive registration. Training given for employees to spot and support those customers who are 'suffering silently' To register for our Priority Services call the team on **0345 672 2888**

## Relaunch of the Hardship Hub

In 2019 the Hardship Hub was launched with it's main purpose, to be a one-stop resource to help debt advisors gain and share knowledge on local North West support schemes.

We have recently surveyed our current 635 users to establish how the hub can be of help more.

Factoring in the main requests we received we have decided to re-launch the Hardship hub and open this out to members of the public with it's key features being,

- All new modern design
- Simple search and filtering of services system
- Advice and support articles
- Signposting to other useful resources
- Language translation and accessibility options
- Schemes that don't require referral will include contact information
- Schemes that require referral will signpost visitors to find an advisor



## Manchester Affordability Overview

- This table shows the number of active water accounts across Manchester where we have been able to support customers by recognising their affordability needs and placing them onto a scheme.
- The figures are based on the number of current active water accounts, In Manchester there are a total of 227,157 active accounts.

Scheme Type	Customer Volume	% of accounts on schemes
Back on track	13,208	5.81%
Help to pay	3,837	1.69%
DWP – Direct water payments	5,747	2.53%
Payment match	6,210	2.73%
UU Trust Fund	320	0.14%
Watersure	3,280	1.44%
Total	32,602	14.35%

## Blackpool Affordability Overview

- This table shows the number of active water accounts across Blackpool where we have been able to support customers by recognising their affordability needs and placing them onto a scheme.
- The figures are based on the number of current active water accounts, In Blackpool there are a total of 68,929 active accounts.

Scheme Type	Customer Volume	% of accounts on schemes
Back on track	3,556	5.16%
Help to pay	1,103	1.60%
DWP – Direct water payments	1,506	2.18%
Payment match	562	0.82%
UU Trust Fund	80	0.12%
Watersure	570	0.83%
Total	7,377	10.70%

## Rochdale Affordability Overview

- This table shows the number of active water accounts across Rochdale where we have been able to support customers by recognising their affordability needs and placing them onto a scheme.
- The figures are based on the number of current active water accounts, In Rochdale there are a total of 94,415 active accounts.

Scheme Type	Customer Volume	% of accounts on schemes
Back on track	3,398	3.60%
Help to pay	737	0.78%
DWP – Direct water payments	961	1.02%
Payment match	429	0.45%
UU Trust Fund	71	0.08%
Watersure	1,158	1.23%
Total	6,754	7.15%

## Knowsley Affordability Overview

- This table shows the number of active water accounts across Knowsley where we have been able to support customers by recognising their affordability needs and placing them onto a scheme.
- The figures are based on the number of current active water accounts, In Knowsley there are a total of 68,686 active accounts.

Scheme Type	Customer Volume	% of accounts on schemes
Back on track	4,974	7.24%
Help to pay	1,845	2.69%
DWP – Direct water payments	2,169	3.16%
Payment match	720	1.05%
UU Trust Fund	130	0.19%
Watersure	903	1.31%
Total	10,741	15.64%

# What support can we offer?

United Utilities upcoming events in the North West

- Rochdale feel good family picnic, 25<sup>th</sup> July 23 – 28<sup>th</sup> July 23
- Wythenshawe, South Be Proud Celebration, 23<sup>rd</sup> June
- Blackpool, Together cost of living event, 29<sup>th</sup> June
- Cheetham, be proud event, 5<sup>th</sup> July
- Warrington, Ignite your life, 12<sup>th</sup> July



The cost of living crisis is having a huge effect across society, with social housing tenants being hit the hardest. The Affordability Outreach and Engagement Team are offering up their services to attend face to face or virtual team meetings to staff and resources in the housing sector. They are able to present what is available through our schemes and hold Q&A sessions.

Understandably it is not always be possible to attend every event or pop up spots in the area. However we can still spread awareness of the support united utilities have to offer by posting out a variety of leaflets and water efficiency/saving devices to organisations in the North West.



Invite us! If you have any planned events or workshops coming up in the community that you would like us to attend, such as, cost of living awareness, community hubs or any type of public engagement we would like to take the opportunity to get involved.



**The best service to our customers**



**At the lowest sustainable cost**



**In the most responsible way**



# Nikki Carney Outreach & Engagement Manager

Contact Details:

[nikki.carney@uuplc.co.uk](mailto:nikki.carney@uuplc.co.uk)

Mobile: 07553158826

(not for customers)

## ADDRESS

Lingley Mere Business Park

P. O. Box 457

Lingley Green Avenue

Great Sankey

Warrington

WA5 3LP



# **Update from Agility Eco**

James Somerville, Policy and  
Partnership Director,  
Agility Eco



*Action for Warm Homes*



AgilityEco



# Funding for fuel poor homes

James Sommerville – Director of Policy & Partnerships



## Is there enough money?

- To meet the 2030 fuel poverty target?
- To reduce energy use by 15% by 2030?
- To meet the 2050 net zero target?



## Could we spend it if we had it?

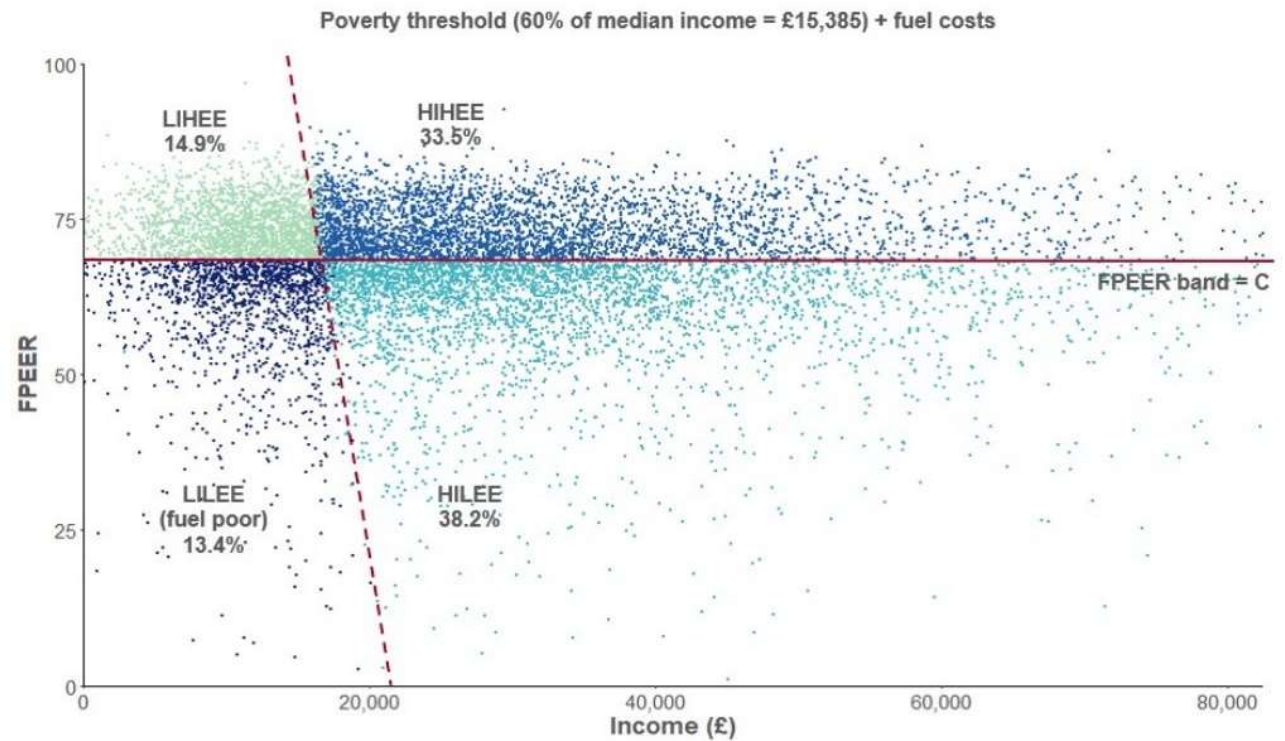
- To achieve high quality installations...
- ...in homes that need the most help...
- ...and doing so in a customer-centred way

# Funding for retrofit can achieve significant results



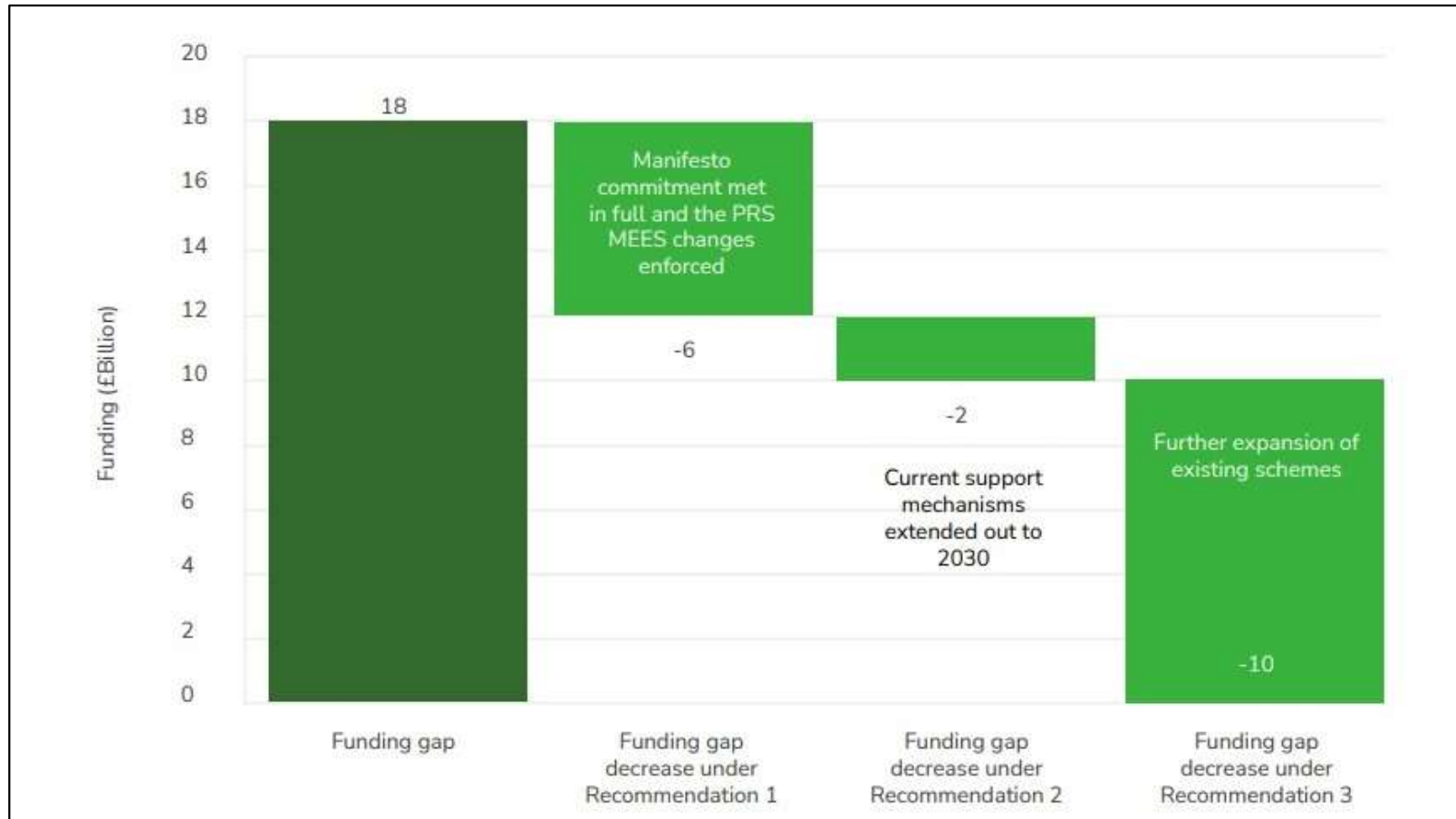


## In October 2021 AgilityEco and Gemserv published a report on funding



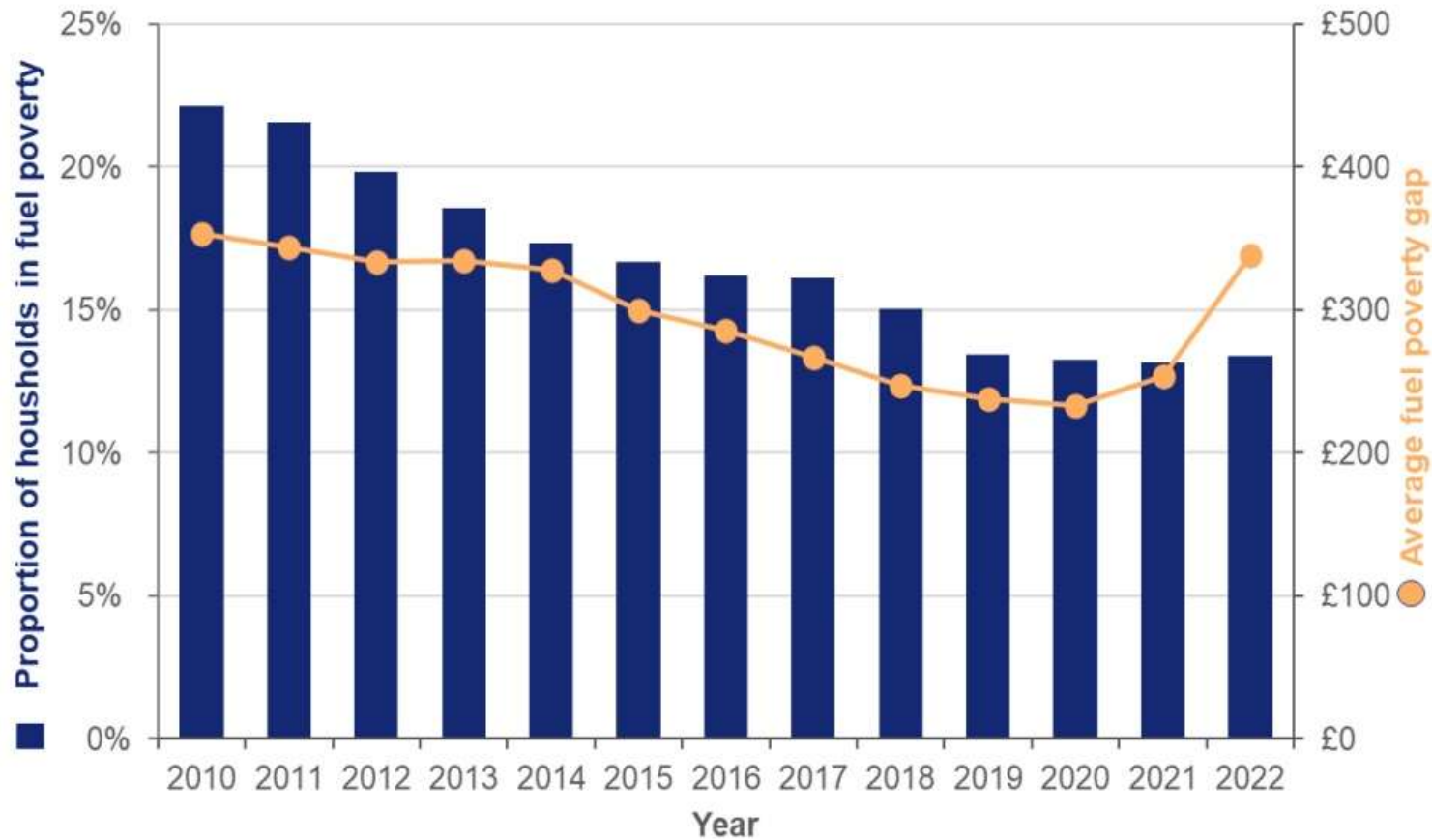
Source: National Statistics – Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics in England 2023 (<https://bit.ly/3lsozcf>)

# Which suggested we were £18bn short...



Source: AgilityEco (<https://bit.ly/40jh144>)

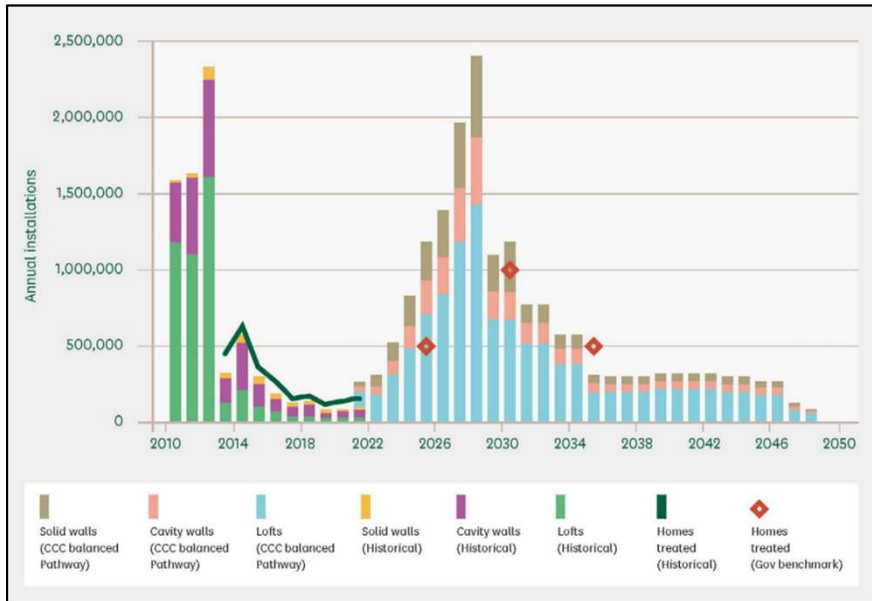
## Recent events have not helped that trajectory



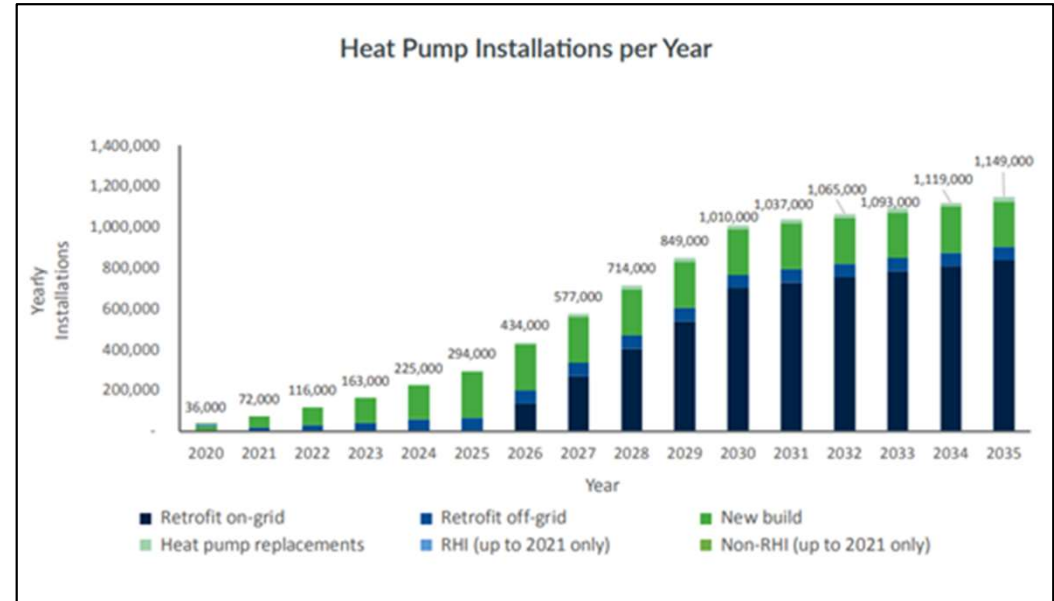
Source: National Statistics – Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics in England 2023 (<https://bit.ly/3lsozcF>)



# And carbon targets are also extremely challenging



Source: The Climate Change Committee– Net Zero – The UK’s contribution to stopping global warming (<https://bit.ly/2IUk9lo>)



Source: Energy Saving Trust (<https://bit.ly/3JR8me>)

# What schemes are there and what promises have been made?



## Public-sector led

HUG 2 worth **£700m** over 2 years.  
SHDF for social landlords also worth another **£800m**



## Private sector-led

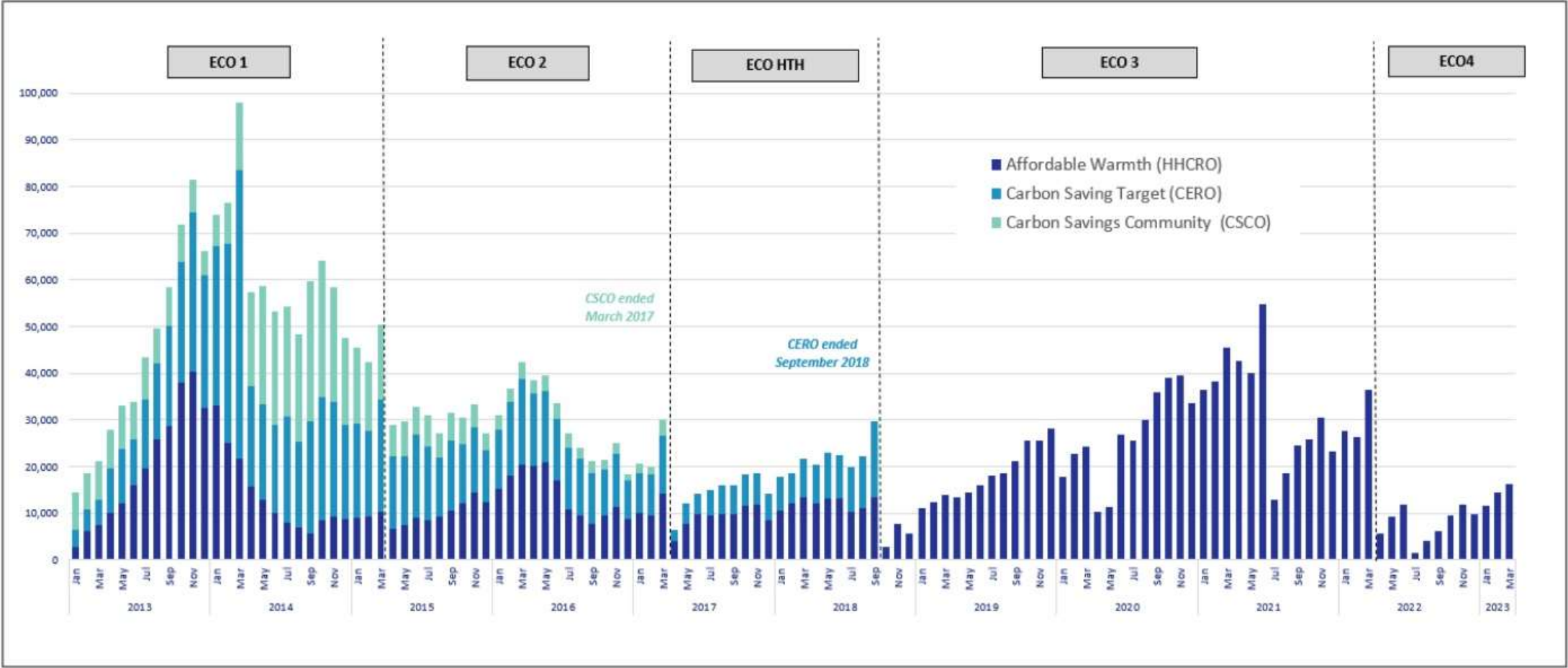
ECO and GBIS worth an average of **£1.3 billion** a year from 2023/24  
Further investment from utility companies and others

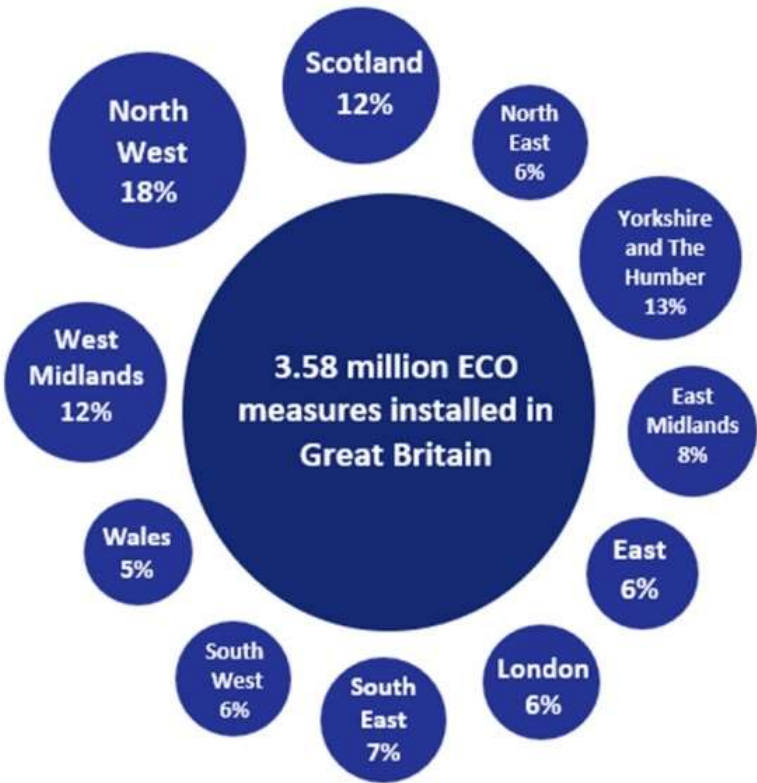


## Consumer-led

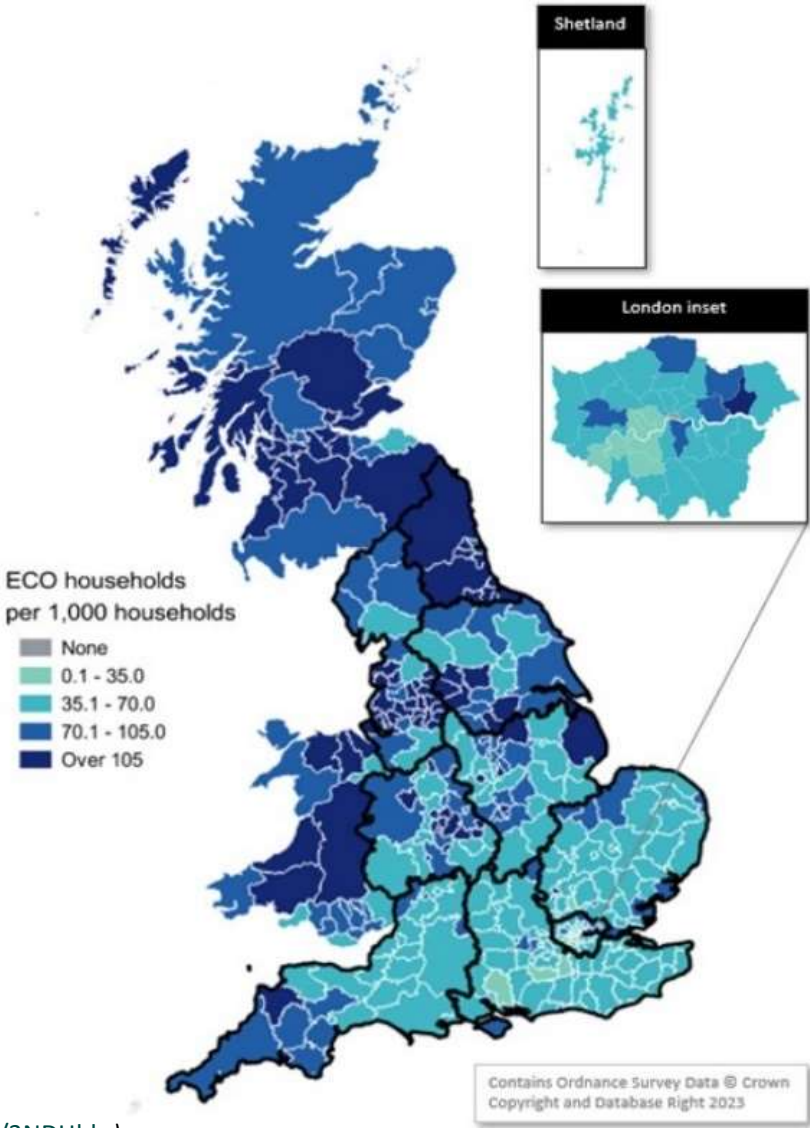
BUS worth **£150m** a year  
HUG CLR (2024/25) worth **£100m**  
Green finance initiatives

**The Chancellor** has promised a further **£6bn** from 2025 to 2028  
**The Opposition** has promised **£29bn** for 19 million homes over 10 years



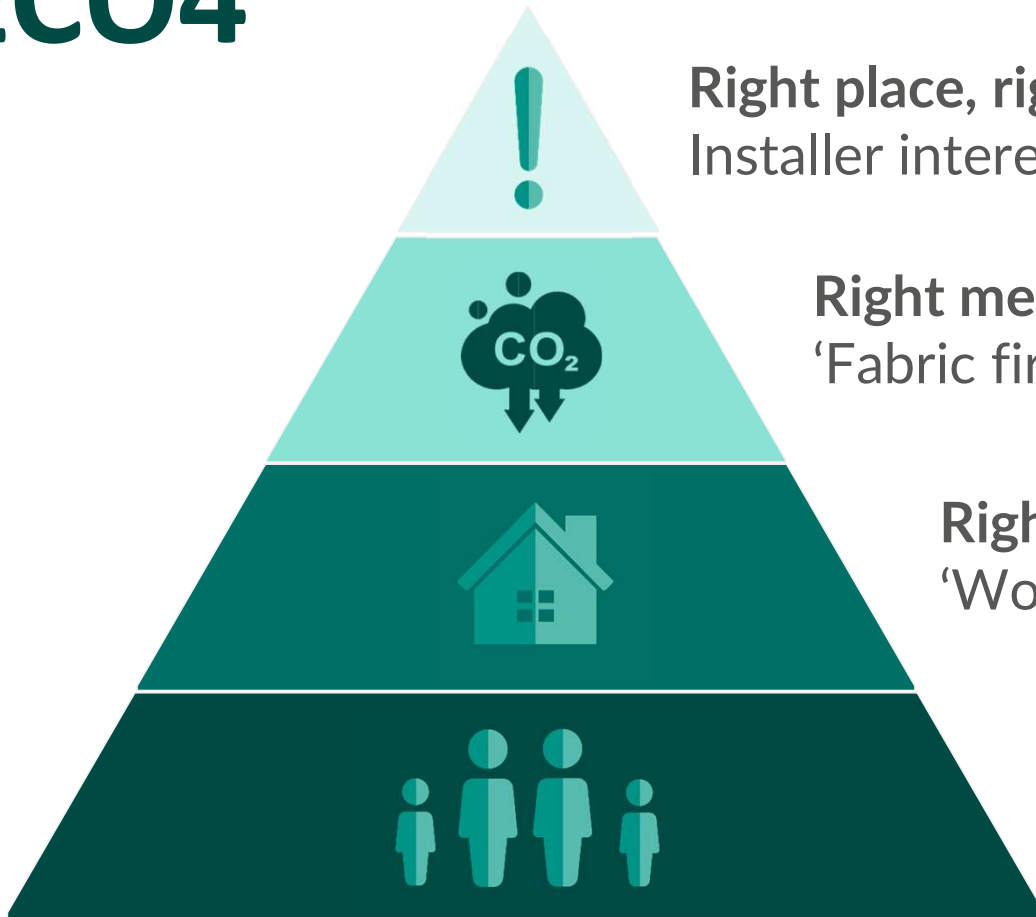


**North West ECO to date: 132 measures per 1,000 households**



Source: DNZES – Household Energy Efficiency Statistical Release – May 2023 (<https://bit.ly/3NDHblu>)

# ECO4



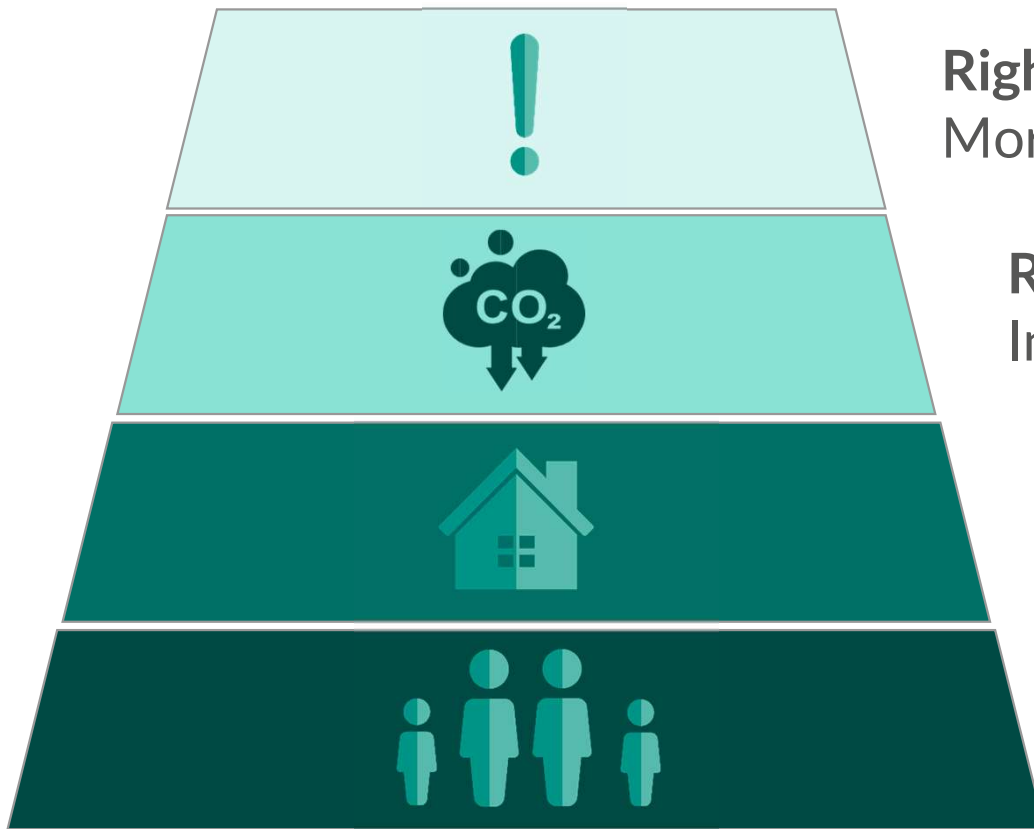
**Right place, right time**  
Installer interest & capacity, regional differences

**Right measures**  
'Fabric first', low carbon, PAS2035

**Right property**  
'Worst first', multiple SAP band increase

**Right Household**  
Help to Heat or ECO Flex

# Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS)

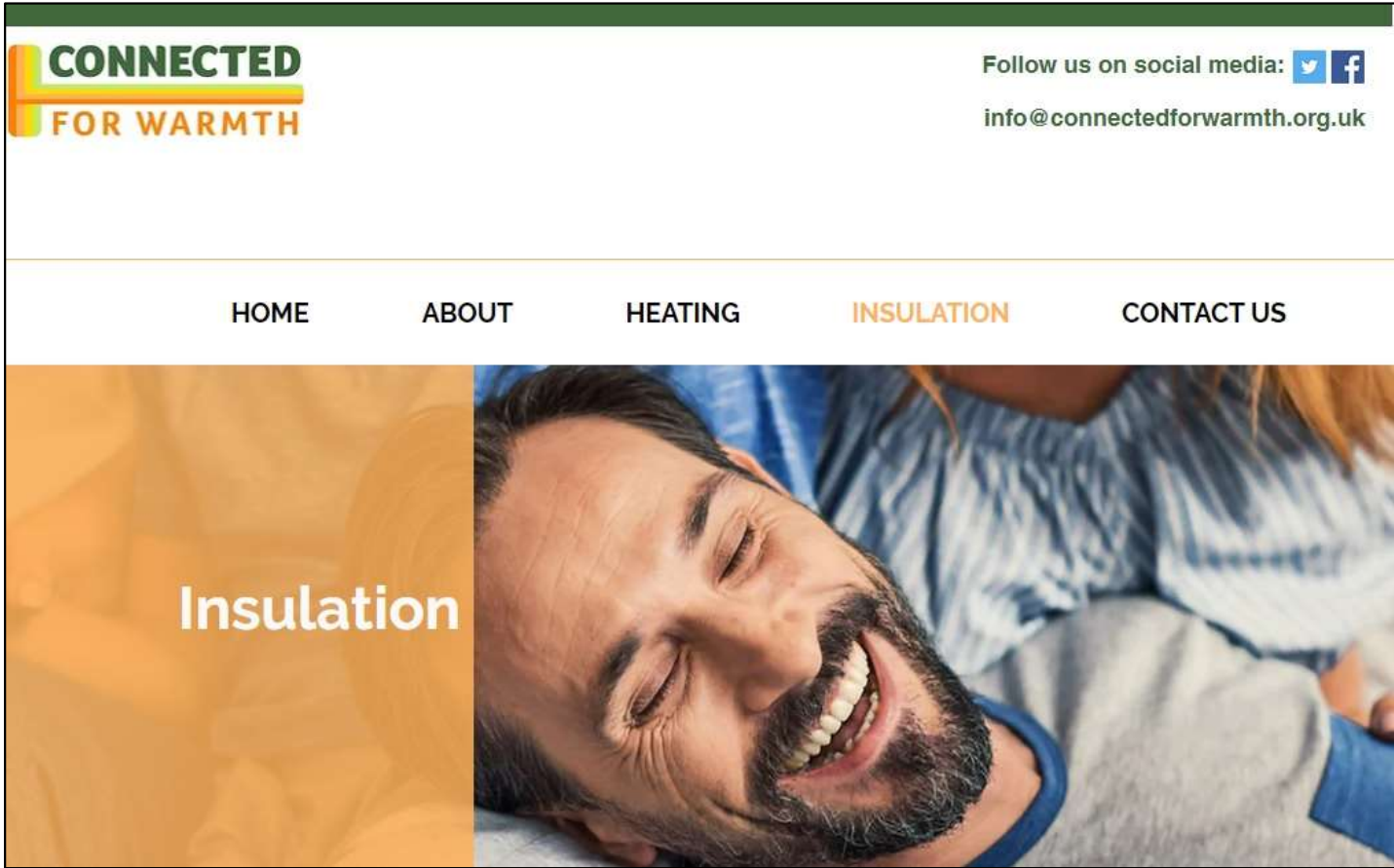


**Right place, right time**  
More capacity across the country

**Right measures**  
Insulation only – single measure fine

**Right property**  
D-rated fine, no SAP band requirement

**Right Household**  
Council Tax Band only criteria for 80%



nationalgrid



Even if we had unlimited funding, we'd still have issues spending it.



### 1. Identifying eligible & suitable households

Blend property and household data to help targeting and maximise eligibility for the various schemes



### 2. Generating interest and trust in retrofit

Maximise involvement by public, private and third sector groups to engage, refer and support customers



### 3. Developing installer capacity

Support investment in skills and employment to help companies grow and meet the demands of PAS



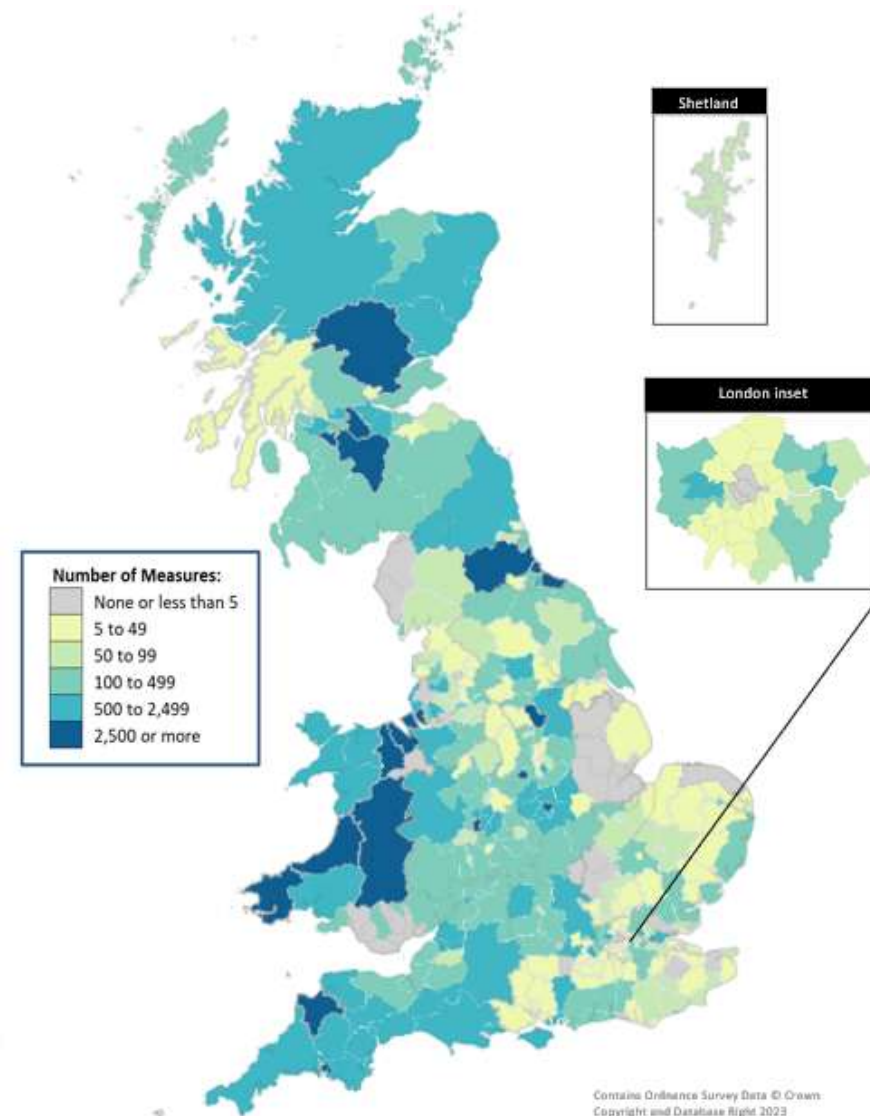
## Making households eligible via Flex

Councils have the opportunity to work with installers and other partners to:

- Publish a Statement of Intent
- Sign declarations
- Actively engage households
- Develop area-based schemes

Last week Ofgem published its latest decision notice covering ECO Flex and GBIS (<https://bit.ly/3Nyp9AW>)

Source: DNZES – Household Energy Efficiency Statistical Release – May 2023 (<https://bit.ly/3NDHblu>)



## Generating interest via coordinated campaigns

**It all adds up**

Energy saving campaign launched

**£55**

Average saving  
per year



**£70**

Average saving  
per year



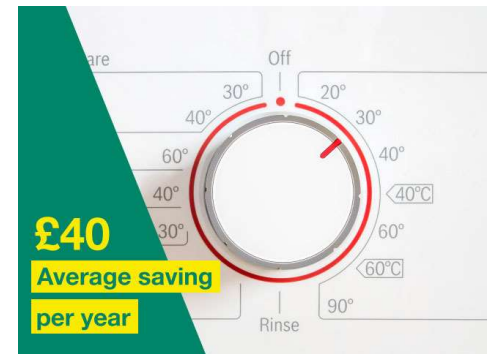
**£70**

Average saving  
per year



**£40**

Average saving  
per year



Source: <https://helpforhouseholds.campaign.gov.uk/energy-saving-advice>



0800 107 8882



Warm Homes Sheffield is a partnership between Sheffield City Council and energy experts AgilityEco. It provides a route to access a number of energy saving programmes that can help Sheffield residents to reduce energy use and stay warm and well. Please click on the links below to find out more about each of the opportunities that are currently available.

Not sure where to start? Need urgent assistance with your bills or your heating? Then contact the friendly Warm Homes Sheffield team on freephone: **0800 107 8882**

They will talk with you about your situation and recommend the most appropriate scheme for you.

[www.warmhomessheffield.org.uk](http://www.warmhomessheffield.org.uk)

#### Home Energy Advice

The Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP) provides tailored energy advice based on your needs.

#### Home Upgrade Grant (HUG)

Council-led programme of heating, insulation and renewables for low-income households that don't use gas central heating.

#### Energy Company Obligation (ECO)

Installer-led scheme to retrofit low income households. The council helps installers make more households eligible for ECO via the ECO Flex initiative.

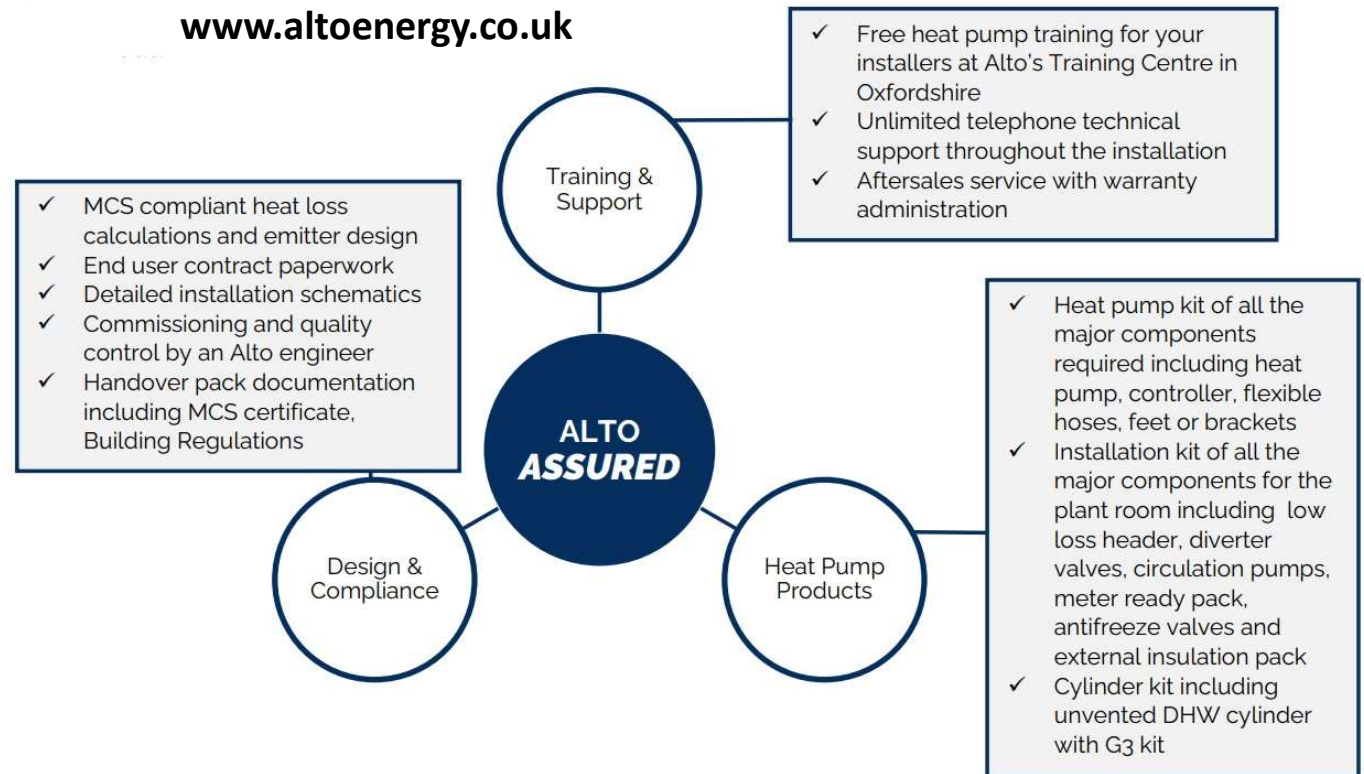
#### Central Heating

Connected for Warmth offers funded low-carbon central heating for low income homes.

# Developing installer capacity



[www.altoenergy.co.uk](http://www.altoenergy.co.uk)





AgilityEco



**Thank you**

[James.sommerville@agilityeco.co.uk](mailto:James.sommerville@agilityeco.co.uk) | 07792 395 985

# Training



Action for Warm Homes

Large suite of short courses or qualifications to help enhance knowledge and practical understanding about fuel poverty, fuel debt, decarbonisation and vulnerability.

Funded places available for frontline staff or volunteers (for non-commercial organisations)

[www.nea.org.uk/training](http://www.nea.org.uk/training)



# NEA Membership



*Action for Warm Homes*

Everything we do, we do in partnership and our members are the heart of those partnerships.

- The **Business Supporters Group** has been in existence for over 20 years. A strong relationship with the business community is vital to ensure the fuel poor can benefit from current schemes and technological developments. NEA's campaigning activities would not be so effective without industry support.
- Our **Supporting and Enhanced Membership** include local authorities, housing associations, health agencies, charities, community groups and contracted installers through energy provider schemes. **Supporting membership is FREE!**

NEA relies on its members, both as a source of income and for support in achieving the charity's aims and objectives. More information about benefits and costs can be found on our website.

# NEA Annual Conference and Exhibition


This year's conference will be taking place from  
**4 - 6 December 2023**  
at the **Leicester Tigers' Stadium** in Leicester.

To join the mailing list for updates and early-bird booking rates,  
go to **[www.nea.org.uk/annual-conference-2023/](http://www.nea.org.uk/annual-conference-2023/)**



*Action for Warm Homes*





**Thank you for attending and for your contributions. We'd be grateful if you can complete an evaluation form & hand this back to a member of NEA staff.**

**Please stay for lunch & further networking.**



*Action for Warm Homes*