West Midlands Fuel Poverty Forum 3 July 2023



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.



Time	Agenda
9:30am	Welcome Andy Littlewood, Project Development Coordinator, NEA
9:45am	Policy update Matt Copeland, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, NEA
10:15am	Updates, collaboration and networking opportunities NEA will chair this session and invite participating speakers to share brief updates
11:00am	Refreshments and networking
11:20am	Group discussions Facilitated by NEA
11:50am	Renters (Reform) Bill – challenges to vulnerable private tenants James Stringer, Landlord & Tenant Liaison Officer, Coventry City Council
12:10pm	Cadent Ecosystem Hub Pilot & Community infrastructure Helen Shervington, Housing Strategy & Modernisation Service Manager, Birmingham City Council
12:25pm	Forum concludes Round up followed by lunch and networking





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 preloaded 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.

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



Updates, collaboration and networking

- Sarah Young Birmingham City Council
- Paul Wiltshire Act on Energy
- OPEN FLOOR
- Andy Littlewood NEA

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





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



"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

"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.

"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.

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.

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.

Action for Warm Homes

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 underrepresented 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 incommunity 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. 5 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

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







- Energy advice
- Water tariff advice and access to cheaper tariffs
- Heating upgrades, access to top-ups, full support throughout
- Home adaptions 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

Refreshments and networking



Group discussions



In smaller groups, please discuss:

<u>Involuntary Prepayment Meter (PPM) – Supplier Code of Practice</u>

- 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?



Action for Warm Homes

Illegal Eviction and Harassment

LANDLORD AND TENANT LIAISON OFFICER, JAMES STRINGER

Landlord and Tenant Liaison Officer

- ▶ New Role (as of March 2021)
- Under reported and rarely prosecuted (locally and nationally)
- Vulnerable more susceptible, ethnic minority groups, low income families, non English speaking households
- Can be hard to 'spot'
- Difficultly in gathering evidence, legislation (Protection from Eviction Act 1977) isn't the most user friendly.
- ▶ It is hoped a specialist, full time officer can increase awareness, set up better referral pathways/reporting mechanisms and can have the experience and capacity to bring prosecutions

Although a big part of my role is illegal eviction and harassment I also....



Deliver training to Landlords and Letting agents on tenancy issues



Work with other organisations (e,g CAB, Social Landlords, The Law Centre etc to signpost and raise awareness



Liaise between Landlords/Agents and Tenants



Co-ordinate multi agency/departmental responses



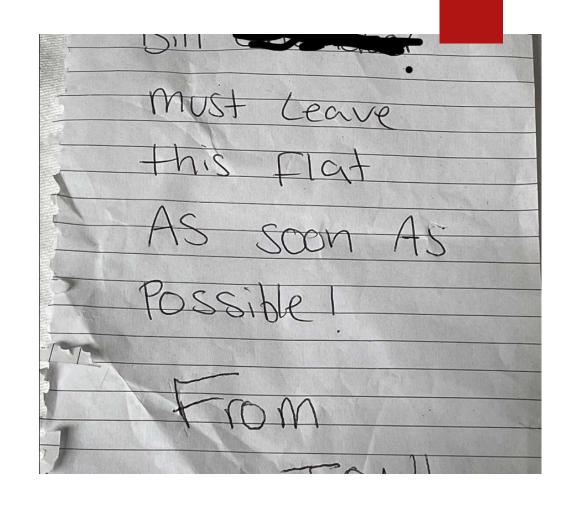
Organise Landlord forums and news letters



Advise Tenants on civil issues such as deposit disputes, rent increases and Tenants fees act

What is Illegal Eviction?

- Not serving a notice (or the correct notice)
- Not giving the required notice period
- Not obtaining a possession order
- Using anyone other than a court appointed bailiff
- Criminal Offence, up to two years imprisonment



Process

Serve legal notice

If Tenant remains, apply to court for possession order

If granted, two weeks notice before attendance of court appointed bailiff

ONLY a court appointed bailiff can evict someone.

End of a fixed term is not the end of the tenancy!

Eviction Notices

- ▶ Section 21 or Section 8
- Section 21 sometimes called 'No fault' as no reason is required
- ▶ Hoops to jump through....must have given the tenant a gas safety cert, Energy performance cert, How to rent guide. Must also have protected deposit within 30 days. Cant serve within first 4 months of tenancy or to end within a fixed term. May be invalid if tenant has complained about disrepair. Must be on form 6A.
- ▶ Section 8, different grounds can be sought usually due to rent arrears but also breach of tenancy, asb, mortgage repossession, deterioration of property. May rely on different grounds, eg, 2 months rent + frequent late payments + some rent outstanding.

Time Scales

Sec 21 still at 2 months

Sec 8 depends on what grounds (2 weeks or 2 months, even instant)

Always remember to include the postage time.

Remember the date on the notice is the date the Landlord can apply to the court for a possession order, not the date the tenant must leave.

What might an Illegal Eviction look like?

- Instructed to leave without a notice (or a homemade notice)
- Instructed to leave not in accordance with the legal time scales (eg Sec 21 notice but with only 2 weeks notice)
- Physically removed by ANYONE other than a court appointed bailiff
- Locks changed
- Pressured/persuaded to leave (can be difficult to prove without clear evidence). This brings us on to.....
- Denied access to part of the house (e,g a down stairs loo they previously had access to)



Harassment, also a criminal offence.

- Broadchurch, but essentially 'doing acts that interfere with the peace and comfort of the tenant'
- Texts, Calls, Social Media
- Visits, unscheduled, unreasonable times, frequent (all of the mentioned or any combination)
- ▶ Threats, overt or subtle
- Cutting off electricity, water, gas or internet (deliberately or through omission)
- Failure to repair things (a front door that doesn't lock may mean you wouldn't feel safe enough to remain in your home)
- ▶ Pick and Mix, one act can be as damaging as 100.



What to do if you think an illegal eviction and/or harassment is happening....

- ► Email <u>housingenforcement@coventry.gov.uk</u>
- Name of family, address, contact details and a synopsis of what has happened. If possible the Landlord or letting agents details but don't worry if you don't have these.
- ▶ I can be contacted directly for advice but please make the referral afterwards to the email address above .
- ▶ I can contact and discuss things with the tenant then make contact with the Landlord

What I may ask the tenant for....

- ▶ A statement which will need a signed declaration of truth.
- A log of events (diary sheets)
- ► Texts, emails and social media.....voicemails, anything that may support the allegation.
- Whilst I may be able to warn the Landlord without these.....any criminal prosecution relies on proving the offence 'beyond reasonable doubt'
- Knowing someone is guilty and proving it are very different things.

Investigation.....

- Landlord will be contacted
- If there is sufficient evidence they will be interviewed under caution
- If the case satisfies the evidential and public interest thresholds then the case will be listed for hearing.



Golden Rules and Key Points

Only a court appointed bailiff can evict someone from their home

There should always be paperwork (eviction notice etc.)

It doesn't have to be the Landlord who is committing the offence....a neighbour trying to force a family out can be guilty of the same offence!

Not every eviction is illega

Disliking the Landlord can quickly become an allegation of harassment

Harassment and illegal eviction can be fluid, one often leads to the other

Always report if uncertain, I would rather deal with 10 false alarms than miss 1 illegal eviction or harassment case

Renters Reform Bill

- ▶ Biggest Shake up of the rental sector in a generation.
- Important to know that what is being suggested may change (substantially)
- ▶ Nobody is certain how the suggested changes will work in practice yet.
- ▶ What I will aim to do today is look at the 'flag ship' change and the possible problems this may cause tenants.

Abolition of Section 21





No more "no fault" evictions

Landlords will need clear and valid reasons to end a tenancy

Potential Problem

"Last orders".
Landlords may rush to use Section 21 while they still can.

Huge spike in lawful evictions

Chance that, in haste, some evictions may be illegal.



Cadent Ecosystem Hub Pilot & Social infrastructure

Helen Shervington – Lead for Warm Spaces & Financial Inclusion





BE BOLD BE BIRMINGHAM



"A collective Impact model"

"Collective Impact is the commitment of a group from different sectors & organisations to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem at scale"

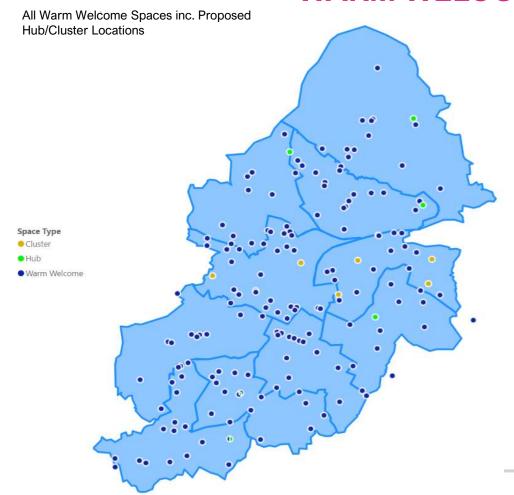
The Birmingham Approach to Warm Welcome:

- Is dignified and does not enhance the stigma and shame associated with poverty and financial difficulty
- Aims to ensure that our communities have access to safe, welcoming, warm spaces where the focus is not upon poverty or an inability to afford heat.
- Does this by offering hospitality and connection; connecting people to each other, services, wellbeing activity, opportunity, and warmth.





WARM WELCOME – CURRENT VIEW





- 213 live spaces on BCC Directory
- Further 30 awaiting validation
- 116 Organisations receiving WW Grants
- 60,000 WW library visits
- Warm Welcome 'Not just for Winter'

BE BOLD BE BIRMINGHAM

BIRMINGHAM 2022 commonwealth





WARM WELCOME: Core Principles





Following the first 5 months of the Warm Welcome Network and its development, we want to re-iterate the core principles of the network to support any upcoming communications and engagement

- Warm Welcome Spaces are 'not just for winter' and are there to service the Community
- An Ecosystem that supports & Empowers community and the organisations that serve them
- Birmingham City Council role as an **enabler** and **backbone** organisation (shift away from traditional procurement approaches)
- Partnership Engaging key stakeholders who are instrumental to the Ecosystem
- Not a Crisis Response Short to medium/long term planning that includes supporting the network in preparing for Autumn & Winter whilst laying foundations for sustainability



Smart Energy GB in Communities programme



- Ensure people in the target group understand how smart meters can benefit them
- Increase the likelihood that people in the target group will seek or accept a smart meter

2800 – Direct activity

>500,000 indirect "impressions"









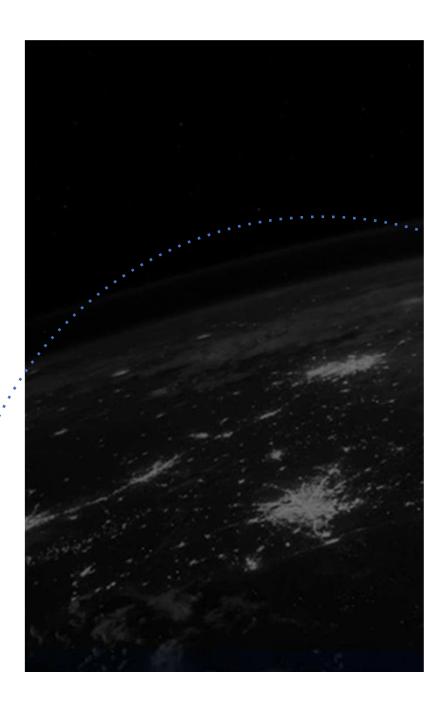




Cadent

Fuel Poverty Partnership Ecosystem





Service offered through partnership ecosystem approach

Partnership Ecosystem approach definition: "A community of partners with aligned objectives that leverage each other's capabilities to achieve a set of mutually beneficial outcomes"

Value Proposition

- Collective capabilities to meet the needs of fuel poor customers while creating a win-win scenario for partners
- Sustainable, pooled funding, bypassing limitations, customer contributions and cliff edges
- A complete list of services, delivered by expert/local partners, each best placed to provide that specific service
- · A single communications strategy, supported by data-driven targeting
- A single point of contact including needs assessments and handholding customers through the journey



Return on investment (ROI)

Metrics to judge success

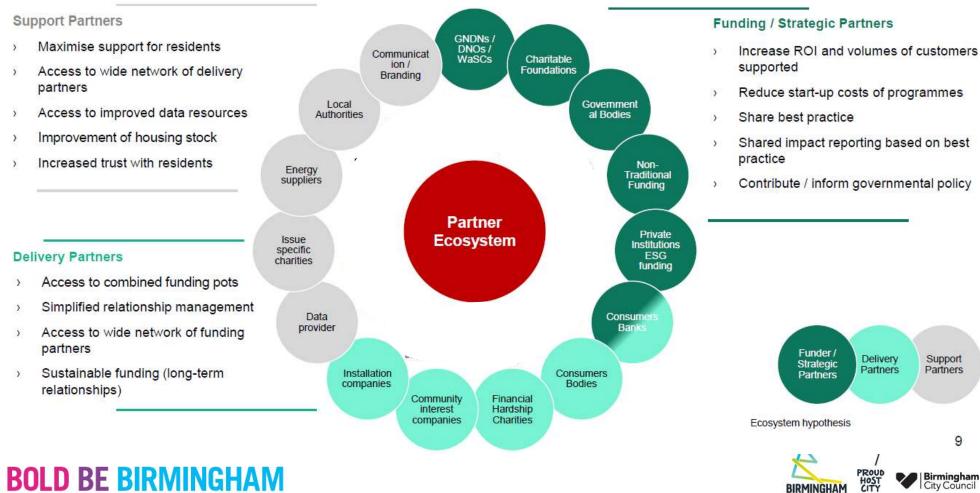


Lifetime value of savings (scale)



of customers lifted out of poverty

Benefits of the partner ecosystem



Partnership Ecosystem Partners Roles



PILOT ELEMENTS

ENGAGEMENT Identification of customers to engage		NEED ASSESSMENT (& Single Point of Contact) Identification of needs (services and measures)	
Solution 1: Benefits Identification of benefits based on eligibility and support thought application processes	Solution 2: Grants Provide small / immediate grants, and advice and support to receive large / government grants	Solution 3: Money Management Advice and support on money management (e.g. bills payment methods, expenditure calculation, setting budget, open bank accounts, etc.)	Solution 4: Debt Advice Advise and support on debt repayment
Solution 5: Energy Efficiency (EE) advice & small installations Energy efficiency advice for money saving and installation that do not required large grant applications	Solution 6: Energy Efficiency (EE) measures -Installation (large) Retrofitting solutions	Solution 7: Low Carbon Technologies (LCT) measures -Advice LCT measures advice for carbon emissions reduction	Solution 8: Low Carbon Technologies (LCT) measures -Installation Install LCT solutions for energy saving and carbon emission reduction



Birmingham Pilot

Aim of the pilot: engage ~100/200 customers in July and August through small warm welcome hubs and referral, and assign customers to delivery partners for initial support



Social Infrastructure

"Social infrastructure represents the crucial organisations, places and spaces that enable communities to create social connections – to form and sustain relationships that help them to thrive"

Development Grant for "Operating-Model for Places to Build Social-Infrastructure" programme





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Training



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



NEA Membership



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

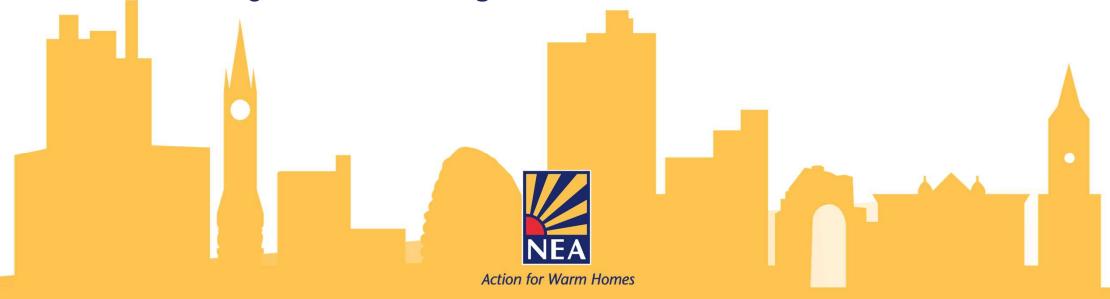
- The Business Supporters Group has been in existence for over 20 years. A strong
 relationship with the business community is vital to ensure the fuel poor can benefit from current
 schemes and technological developments. NEA's campaigning activities would not be so effective
 without industry support.
- 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/



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.

Action for Warm Homes

Please stay for lunch & further networking.