



NATIONAL ENERGY ACTION

DEVELOPING WARM SPACES' CAPACITY TO PROVIDE ENERGY ADVICE AND SUPPORT TO COMMUNITIES

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WHAT WE DID: PHASE 1

UNDERSTAND THE LANDSCAPE AND NEED



Establishing an evidence base.



Mapping the location and other characteristics of warm spaces, such as local demographics and service provision.



Call for Evidence, 101 responses from current or previously established warm spaces.



Literature review.



Three research workshops with warm spaces in the North East and Yorkshire.



WHAT WE DID: PHASE 2

TEST AND REFINE WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE WITH THE SECTOR



Insights and findings from Phase 1 informed the development of a support action plan.



Recommendations were tested and refined through workshops and consultations.



Two online workshops conducted, 28 attendees.



Online consultation, 48 responses.



WHAT WE DID: PHASE 3

APPLY AND EVALUATE A REAL-WORLD SUPPORT MODEL (ODSN)



Developed support action plan was put into practice through the Open Doors Support Network (ODSN).



30 organisations joined the network.



Support package included funding, training, tailored project support, energy resources, webinars and peer networking opportunities.



ODSN-provided support was evaluated through focus groups, interviews and surveys with warm space personnel and service users.



Focus groups and survey with service users.



Interviews and survey with warm space personnel.

INTRODUCTION

Warm spaces – community-led venues offering warmth, social connection, and practical support – have become critical resources, particularly since the peak of the 2022-23 energy crisis.

National Energy Action (NEA), alongside partners including Northern Powergrid, Northern Gas Networks, National Grid Electricity Transmission, National Gas, and Egnida have undertaken a multiphase Network Innovation Allowance project to understand, enhance, and expand the delivery of energy-related advice and support within warm spaces in the Yorkshire and North East regions of England. This collaborative project was commissioned as part of a commitment to support customers in vulnerable circumstances (particularly those experiencing digital exclusion and/or social isolation) and a desire to better understand trusted routes to advice beyond traditional channels. By combining the resources, relationships and expertise of all stakeholders, including both research and delivery elements, the project aimed to generate evidence to create a holistic action plan to support warm spaces in providing energy advice and support and to tackle consumer vulnerability.

Phase 1 established an evidence base through mapping the location and other characteristics of warm spaces, such as their local demographics and service provision; literature review; a Call for Evidence; and a programme of action research with warm space personnel and service users (please see **Appendix 1** for more information). Communities facing high levels of deprivation were prioritised¹ for areas of focus and support. We were able to focus our attention on those areas across East Riding of Yorkshire, North Riding, Leeds, Bradford, the Pennines, Cumbria, North Tyneside, Teesside and Wearside where the need for support, based on area demographics and service presence was identified.

We reached out to organisations with offers of direct support for warm spaces to provide energy-related support, contacting over 110 warm spaces across the regions. Energy advice literature provided reached over 358 clients through a range of community engagement events, and over 130 professionals and volunteers were trained to expand their energy advice capabilities.

¹ The categorisation that created these rankings of need were areas of low income, low EPC standards in homes, coldness-exacerbated health conditions and households with free school meals.

Insights and findings from Phase 1 informed the development of an action plan that identified how warm spaces may need to be supported to deliver energy advice and support. Phase 2 tested and refined these recommendations through online workshops and consultation with organisations operating, or planning to operate, warm spaces. Feedback was used to strengthen the action plan, ensuring it reflected sector experience and practical delivery challenges.

Phase 3 leveraged learnings from Phases 1 and 2 and applied the developed action plan through the ODSN, which opened in September 2025. Thirty organisations in total joined the network, with 15 receiving the full package of support.

A full support package including funding, training access, tailored project support, energy resources, webinars and peer networking opportunities.

All organisations either had an existing warm space or were starting afresh but *crucially* did not deliver complex energy advice support.

Focus groups, interviews and surveys with warm space personnel and service users were used to evaluate the ODSN-provided support and assess impact, usefulness and areas of need or for improvement. An in-person network workshop hosted in March 2026 provided further opportunities for partner networks, ODSN members, and other warm space personnel or interested stakeholders to come together and learn from the project and each other. Here, insights from partner networks, ODSN members, and research insights were presented, and opportunities for feedback and to contribute further insights were provided.

Across three phases of research, consultation, and implementation, the project captured insights from warm space personnel, volunteers, partner organisations, and service users. These findings informed the creation of a **Support Action Plan**, aimed to inform scalable, sustainable approaches, not just short-term crisis response. Accordingly, it provides a broad suite of recommendations intended to provide guidance to existing or future warm spaces on how to sustainably deliver high-quality energy advice as part of their wider offer. A key strength of this project is the way in which research was embedded into live delivery, tested and refined recommendations, and focused in on warm spaces as system connectors rather than standalone venues. This report provides an overview of findings from all three phases of the project.

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

IMPORTANCE OF WARM SPACES

Warm spaces consistently emerged as trusted, welcoming environments that play a critical role in supporting individual wellbeing and strengthening community connections. Across evidence from providers, visitors, and the wider literature, warm spaces were described as places where people could build friendships, reduce loneliness, and feel part of a supportive community. For many visitors, these spaces offered routine, stability, and relief from stressful or unstable home environments, alongside opportunities for social interaction and engagement.

A key strength of warm spaces is the breadth of provision available. Providers reported that, at a minimum, services typically offer warm and welcoming environments with access to food and drink. Many also provide low-cost or free meals and refreshments, internet access, activities, and social events. Beyond this, they frequently act as access points to wider forms of support, including housing, financial, health, and immigration advice. Activities such as hobbies and crafts, children's sessions, exercise classes, faith-based groups, digital support, and community events were commonly reported, demonstrating the role of warm spaces as multifaceted hubs of support rather than solely places to keep warm.

Visitors consistently highlighted the social and community aspects as central reasons for attending and enjoying warm spaces. Many spoke about the value of being able to meet others, talk, and make friends, with some describing a strong 'sense of family'. The ability to combat loneliness through conversation and shared activities was frequently mentioned, alongside the value of connecting with faith communities, children's activities, arts and crafts, and events or trips. Complementary services, such as libraries, affordable cafés, or free warm food and drink, were also highly valued.

In addition, some warm spaces offer paid work and volunteering opportunities, which emerged as a significant benefit. Personnel noted that volunteering often enhanced wellbeing, built confidence, strengthened social connections, and in some cases led to employment opportunities. These pathways were seen as particularly important in supporting longer-term wellbeing and independence.

WHY WARM SPACES ARE IDEAL SPACES TO PROVIDE ENERGY ADVICE

Evidence across all phases of the project demonstrates that warm spaces are uniquely well-suited to delivering energy advice, particularly to individuals experiencing vulnerability, social isolation, or digital exclusion. Their effectiveness lies not only in what they provide, but in how and where advice is delivered.

Warm spaces are widely described as non-judgemental, familiar, and comfortable environments staffed by trusted people. Visitors often see them as safe, welcoming places, sometimes even as feeling like 'home'. This contrasts with the perceived formality or anxiety associated with statutory or online services, which can act as barriers to engagement. For individuals who are anxious about formal systems or lack trust in traditional service providers, such spaces offer a more approachable route to support.

A key factor underpinning their suitability for energy advice is accessibility. Many visitors experience digital exclusion and rely heavily on face-to-face advice and printed materials. Warm spaces remove barriers associated with online-only services, making them particularly effective for older people, people on low incomes, those with long-term health conditions or disabilities, and individuals experiencing isolation or financial hardship. Insights from the Call for Evidence and Phase 1 findings showed that these groups are among the primary audiences reached by warm spaces, and that there is a clear unmet need for energy advice within these demographics.

Across Phase 1, warm spaces were already recognised as places where visitors could access a wide range of advice and support beyond warmth and food. This included housing advice, health and wellbeing support, substance misuse services, and financial guidance. In some spaces, multiple organisations co-located within the same setting, enabling visitors to receive advice from different providers in a single, trusted environment. For example, at one warm space in West Yorkshire, several organisations operated from the space, with visitors accessing energy advice, food packs, and winter support, and being referred onward using leaflets, emergency packs, and direct signposting.

The diversity of visitors reached further reinforces the suitability of warm spaces as arenas for providing energy advice. Case study evidence showed that such spaces attract people living in poverty, those in work but struggling with their mental health, asylum seekers, carers, young people, families, and people with learning difficulties. Many service users had experienced financial hardship, job loss, or social isolation, yet would not typically engage with formal energy advice services. Warm spaces therefore provide access to individuals who might otherwise remain unsupported.

Phase 2 findings highlighted the importance of trust and relationships. Warm spaces often act as bridges between vulnerable individuals and external organisations, enabling people with fragmented or strained relationships with traditional services to engage in support they would otherwise avoid. This has been demonstrated through successful delivery of health interventions, such as vaccinations and health checks, within such spaces. The same model translates effectively to energy advice: when delivered in a trusted, familiar community environment, users are more open to receiving and acting on guidance. Warm spaces allow for meaningful conversations around important issues such as damp, mould and carbon monoxide, all of which can have a negative impact on the health of a household.

Phase 3 provided clear evidence of the impact of delivering energy advice through warm spaces (please see section 'Impact of ODSN on users' for more information). As a result, they were able to access tangible support, including benefits entitlement checks, energy vouchers, supplier advocacy, and help with water debt.

The sense of safety and dignity associated with warm spaces appears to play a critical enabling role. Visitors consistently described them as 'nice and safe places to come to', with personnel emphasising how secure people feel within these environments. This sense of safety was found to encourage take up of additional services, including energy advice, that visitors may otherwise have been sceptical of or unwilling to engage with.

Warm spaces also operate as collaborative hubs, often hosting multiple partners and services. This partnership-based approach strengthens referral pathways, enhances the range of support available, and allows energy advice to act as a springboard to wider assistance, such as financial support, digital inclusion, or emergency funding. For some visitors, these connections were described as transformational, helping to address both immediate energy needs and longer-term resilience.

Taken together, the evidence shows that warm spaces are vital community hubs for delivering energy advice. They are uniquely effective at reaching people who are digitally excluded, socially isolated, or wary of formal services, and energy advice delivered within these settings is more likely to be trusted, acted upon, and lead to meaningful outcomes. By embedding energy advice within familiar, supportive, community-based environments, warm spaces enable support to reach those who need it most.

CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING WARM SPACES

Across all three phases of the project, organisations delivering warm spaces reported a consistent set of challenges that affect both service delivery and sustainability. While warm spaces play a vital role in supporting communities, these barriers can limit their reach, impact, and long-term viability.

Stigma and awareness

One of the most persistent challenges identified was stigma associated with the term 'warm space'. Evidence from the literature, Call for Evidence, and engagement with personnel consistently showed that some individuals are reluctant to attend services explicitly labelled as warm spaces due to feelings of shame or fear of being perceived as unable to heat their homes. In response, many organisations deliberately avoided using the term altogether, instead branding sessions as social, communal, or activity based, or using the name of the venue itself.

This approach was found to increase engagement and attract a broader range of visitors, encouraging year-round use rather than limiting attendance to colder months. However, it also created challenges around awareness, as some potential users were not always aware of the full range of support available, including advice, financial assistance, or energy-related support. Evidence from the literature highlighted that promoting warmth alone was often insufficient to drive attendance, and that activities and social connections were more effective entry points.

Phase 2 findings reinforced this, with stakeholders reporting more positive responses to names that sounded welcoming and community focused. When warm spaces were embedded within existing services, such as food provision or health support, retaining the original service name helped maintain recognition and trust, particularly in areas of high demand.

Funding and sustainability

Funding and financial sustainability emerged as critical and ongoing challenges. Organisations reported rising energy costs, limited grant availability, and a heavy reliance on volunteers, all of which placed pressure on their ability to maintain services. These challenges were particularly acute given that warm spaces themselves often face high heating costs, sometimes resulting in difficult decisions such as restricting heating to specific rooms or reducing activities during colder periods.

Personnel at the Networks Event in Phase 3 particularly highlighted the significant time and expertise required to apply for funding, often alongside other operational responsibilities. For smaller organisations, repeated rejections, complex application processes, and bureaucratic requirements contributed to a sense of precarity. In some cases, this instability directly affected what services could be offered to the community and whether provision could continue at all. Participants at the Network Event suggested that streamlining funding application processes, particularly for organisations submitting multiple bids, could provide meaningful relief and improve sustainability.

Staff capacity, training, and knowledge gaps

Limited staff capacity was another significant barrier. Many warm spaces are run by a single paid staff member or a small team of volunteers, restricting the time available for service development, partnership building, marketing, and monitoring outcomes. This was particularly evident in relation to delivering specialist advice, such as energy support.

Many personnel and volunteers reported lacking confidence or expertise in providing energy advice, especially on complex topics such as fuel debt or renewable technologies. While training was widely recognised as essential to improving service quality, it was also described as time consuming and difficult to prioritise alongside day-to-day delivery pressures.

Partnerships and co-ordination

Partnerships were widely recognised as a strength of warm spaces, enhancing the range of support available and enabling effective signposting. However, establishing and maintaining these partnerships was identified as challenging for smaller organisations with limited capacity. Sole staff members in particular reported difficulties dedicating time to relationship building or navigating complex referral pathways.

Phase 2 consultation findings also highlighted challenges in securing partnerships for mental health support, especially when service users had been excluded from mainstream health or social care services. Stakeholders suggested that enabling smaller organisations to refer into larger, established providers could help address this gap. A minority of respondents also reported competition between partners as a challenge, particularly in contexts of limited funding and resources.

Transport, location and accessibility

Transport and accessibility were repeatedly identified as barriers for both providers and visitors. Warm spaces located in less well known or poorly signposted areas struggled with visibility, while limited public transport options restricted attendance, particularly for older people, disabled individuals, or those without access to private transport. These constraints also limited the times at which services could operate, with evening provision often being unfeasible.

Evidence from Phase 1 and the literature highlighted that a lack of affordable or community transport reduced participation and exacerbated isolation. Greater funding to support transport solutions was identified as a potential way to extend reach and improve accessibility, particularly in rural or underserved areas.

Quality assurance of external providers

Finally, organisations reported challenges around quality assurance when working with external providers. Warm spaces expressed the need for simple and trustworthy mechanisms to verify the legitimacy, safety, and quality of third-party organisations delivering advice or activities within their space. This was viewed as essential for maintaining trust with visitors and protecting the integrity of the service, particularly when visitors are vulnerable or cautious about engaging with unfamiliar providers.

USERS' APPETITE FOR ENERGY ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Across all phases of the project, there was a clear and consistent appetite among service users for energy advice and support delivered through warm spaces. Both users and personnel highlighted strong demand for practical, immediate assistance that helps people better manage energy costs and navigate a complex and often confusing energy system.

The most frequently requested topics of advice across all phases included:

- **Energy bill advice**, including help to understand bills and charges
- **Winter Warmth Support Packs** and low-cost energy efficiency measures
- **Advice on how to save energy at home**, particularly practical, day-to-day actions
- **Information on grants, funding and financial support**
- **Support with the Priority Services Register (PSR)**

These areas reflect users' immediate concerns around affordability, warmth, and managing essential household costs. In contrast, advice on **low-carbon or renewable technologies** was among the least requested topics, suggesting that users prioritise support that addresses short-term financial pressure and everyday energy use over longer-term transition measures. Nevertheless, warm spaces should still be considered as critical spaces to enable conversations around retrofit and to break down misconceptions and anxieties around retrofit.

Phase 3 findings demonstrated that service users who had received energy advice through their warm space found it particularly valuable. Importantly, they valued the ongoing access to advice, knowing they could return to a familiar place for further support as new issues arose.

For many users, warm spaces filled a critical gap. Those who had not previously received energy advice often cited uncertainty about where to go for help or discomfort engaging with other organisations. Warm spaces were seen as approachable, familiar, and non intimidating environments, making users more willing to ask questions and seek support.

Survey responses reinforced these findings. When asked whether they could have accessed energy advice elsewhere:

- Several respondents were **unsure** if alternative provision existed.
- Some reported they **would not have been able to access support at all**.
- Others noted they had **not received energy advice before**, or only many years ago.

Furthermore, survey respondents consistently stated that it was **important or very important** for energy advice and support to be available at warm spaces. Their reasons highlighted several key factors:

- The **difficulty of accessing face-to-face advice elsewhere**
- The **complexity of the energy market**, tariffs and billing systems
- The value of receiving support in a **trusted, familiar and non-judgemental environment**

Digital exclusion was a recurring theme. Many users relied on in-person advice and printed information, as online support was inaccessible or overwhelming. As one service user explained:

“It is very difficult to get information from anywhere other than online, and then it is only if you have access to the internet.”

Service user, survey respondent

Overall, across all phases, the evidence shows a strong appetite for energy advice that is:

- **Practical and immediately relevant**
- **Focused on affordability, warmth and bills**
- **Delivered face to face in trusted community settings**

Warm spaces were seen not just as convenient locations, but as appropriate and preferred environments for energy advice. By combining familiarity, trust, and accessibility, they enabled users to engage with energy support they might otherwise avoid or be unable to access, highlighting their critical role in meeting unmet demand for energy advice among vulnerable communities.

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO DELIVERING ENERGY ADVICE

Findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2 demonstrate that effective delivery of energy advice at warm spaces relies less on a single model and more on flexible, relationship-based and context-sensitive approaches that align with how warm spaces already operate. Across both phases, there was strong consensus that *how* energy advice is delivered is as important as *what* advice is provided.

Evidence from both phases shows that energy advice is most effective when it is **embedded into existing warm space activities**, rather than delivered as a standalone or formal intervention. Warm spaces primarily operate as social, welcoming environments, and advice that is integrated into activities was consistently associated with higher engagement. Practical examples included:

- Providing energy efficiency advice during cooking classes (e.g. using air fryers or slow cookers efficiently)
- Using interactive formats such as energy bingo to prompt discussion and peer learning
- Offering informal conversations around energy while sharing food or refreshments

Both phases strongly indicate that **informal, drop-in models** are the most appropriate and effective way to deliver energy advice in warm spaces. Drop-in advice allowed users to engage at their own pace and enabled advisers to tailor support based on individual circumstances. Formal appointments or structured advice sessions were often unsuitable for reasons such as irregular attendance patterns, time-limited visits or competing priorities.

Trust emerged as a critical enabling factor across both phases. Warm spaces are often perceived as safe environments by users who may have negative or mistrustful experiences with statutory or commercial services. The findings show that energy advice is most impactful when:

- Advisers attend regularly (e.g. weekly or monthly rather than one-off visits)
- The same individuals or organisations are present over time
- Advice is delivered in a familiar and predictable way

Across both phases, the provision of **practical take-home resources** was shown to significantly improve engagement and perceived value. Items such as Winter Warmth Support Packs, energy-saving products, slow cookers, blankets and carbon monoxide monitors acted as effective conversation starters and provided immediate, visible benefit. Users reported that receiving tangible items made energy advice feel relevant and actionable, reduced anxiety around complex topics such as bills or debt, and encouraged follow-up engagement with advisers or referrals.

For personnel, these resources also helped bridge gaps when in-depth advice was not immediately available and supported ongoing discussions beyond the warm space visit.

The findings suggest that **starting with simple, practical advice**, such as how to stay warm at home or reduce everyday energy use, helps build confidence and trust, particularly among users experiencing crisis or multiple disadvantages. More complex discussions (e.g. tariffs, debt, grants, new low-carbon technologies) were often more appropriate once rapport had been established or via referral to specialist partners. Personnel at the Network event also reflected that warm spaces are vital spaces for engaging with low-income, vulnerable households in relation to low-carbon technology and retrofit.

Finally, both phases highlighted the importance of **adapting delivery methods to suit different groups**. While group presentations or Q&A sessions were sometimes effective, particularly for established or shared-identity groups, they were less suitable for mixed audiences where disclosure felt risky.

Best approaches included:

- Offering private spaces for confidential conversations
- Varying delivery times to reach different users
- Providing materials in different languages and accessible formats

RESOURCES NEEDED TO PROVIDE ENERGY ADVICE

Findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2 highlight that warm spaces require a **combination of practical resources, trusted partnerships, accessible information and staff capacity support** to deliver energy advice effectively. Crucially, the evidence shows that resources must be **proportionate, manageable and adaptable** to different warm space models, many of which operate with limited staff, heavy reliance on volunteers, and unstable funding.

Both phases identified a strong need for **simple, high-quality energy advice resources** that warm space personnel can confidently share with users. Printed materials were seen as particularly important due to high levels of digital exclusion among warm space users. Materials supporting **Priority Services Register registration, energy grants, and practical energy saving tips** were especially valuable, as these addressed immediate needs and vulnerabilities. However, both phases cautioned against overwhelming staff with excessive volumes of resources.

Advice materials should be clear and use jargon-free language to allow users to revisit at home or share with friends and family. Similarly, visual formats that support users with low literacy or English as a second language should be considered, as well as availability in multiple languages and accessible formats.

Across both phases, the provision of **tangible, practical items** was consistently identified as an important resource for delivering energy advice. These items served a dual purpose: meeting immediate needs while also facilitating conversations about energy use.

Partnership working was identified as essential to effective energy advice delivery, particularly for warm spaces with limited staff capacity. Best practice involved:

- Trusted external energy advisers delivering sessions on behalf of or alongside warm space staff
- Clear referral pathways to specialist energy or welfare advice
- Simple, curated resource packs for warm space personnel to use when advisers were not present

Attendees at the Network event in Phase 3 also emphasised that partnership with other warm spaces in the local area is essential to providing support and advice to users. This will allow better identification of other supportive spaces they can refer their users to for additional forms of support.

However, the findings also stress the importance of **quality over quantity**. Warm spaces reported feeling overwhelmed by unsolicited offers from multiple organisations and valued trusted intermediaries who could help co-ordinate partnerships and verify legitimacy. Many warm spaces reported being contacted by multiple organisations offering events or advice, which was often overwhelming. Resources identified as helpful, especially for volunteer-led and rural services, included:

- Trusted intermediaries to broker and co-ordinate partnerships
- Clear guidance on assessing the quality and appropriateness of offers
- Support with scheduling and aligning advice sessions to warm space activity patterns

Both phases show that warm spaces also need **basic internal capacity** to support energy conversations, signposting and referrals. Training was consistently identified as a key resource, but only when it was short, practical, and realistic in light of time constraints.

INSIGHTS FROM OPEN DOORS SUPPORT NETWORK

IMPACT ON PERSONNEL

Programme outcomes achieved:

- £27,000 delivered directly to local warm spaces serving their community and developing their offer.
- Over 40,000 energy literature documents sent out, including National Energy Action's Home Energy Checklist.
- Over £1,000 of energy demonstrator items delivered, including hygrometers, radiator foil, draught excluders, dehumidifiers and smart plugs.
- Over 400 Winter Warmth Support Packs distributed, put together by corporate volunteers.
- Three webinars with 10 speakers.

All ODSN members that took part in an interview emphasised that the £1,500 funding had been especially useful for their warm space. The funding allowed organisations to provide extra refreshments for their users, spend more money on advertising their organisation, recruit more energy advisers, or offer their space for free to other organisations. Survey respondents also reported that the support enabled them to allocate more staff time and capacity to meet people in their communities, provide more tailored advice, and reach groups that would otherwise have had very limited access to opportunities, including young people, families, residents experiencing fuel poverty, and individuals digitally excluded.

“ They have their coffee and their banana, and then their soup. And the last few weeks, we’ve had some homemade bread rolls. And they are telling people, right?”

West Yorkshire, ODSN member, interview

Similarly, having an energy advice session hosted by National Energy Action was also mentioned as particularly useful for their organisation. As a result of the advice session, some ODSN members have a better awareness of which organisations to signpost users to, or to invite them to attend their warm space, and have a better awareness of how energy advice can be provided to users. ODSN members felt that the energy advice sessions will bring additional benefits to their organisation in the future, such as raising their profile as a warm space provider in the wider community and encouraging more people to attend and ask for help with energy.

“ The coffee morning and hearing from [National Energy Action adviser], I think they will be more likely now to ask if we could help out in some shape or form around energy for them.”

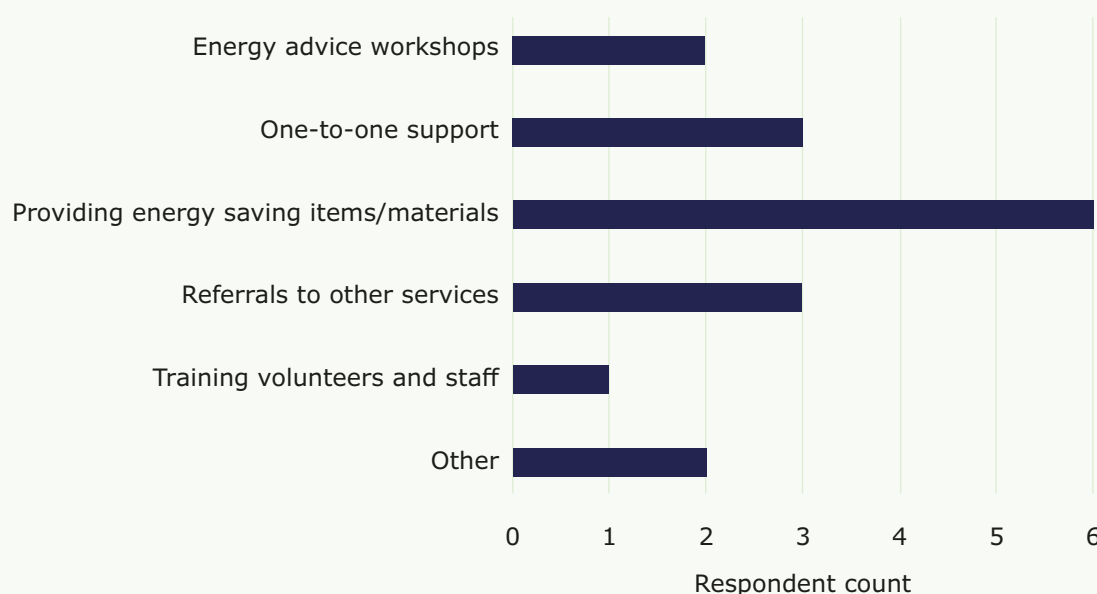
North East, ODSN member, interview

The Winter Warmth Support Packs were also well received by organisations. ODSN members felt that the items included in the packs would be easy and simple for users to start using at home, and that they were items they could easily source and hand out to service users throughout the year. All six ODSN survey respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they now find it easier to access energy-related resources for their clients and feel more confident providing these resources. However, only two respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they feel more confident in finding and accessing funding for their activities, suggesting that ongoing support may be needed to help organisations secure financial sustainability alongside improved service delivery.

There was a lack of confidence around the intricacies of the energy market. All were offered National Energy Action training, a collection of energy advice literature and energy demonstrator items, and three webinars over the course of the programme, focusing on support for individuals, organisations, and funding opportunities. Content was developed in line with areas where organisations said they wanted to grow and develop.

Survey responses also reflected that the ODSN has allowed warm spaces to provide a wide range of support that they would not have been able to provide otherwise. All six respondents reported that the funding enabled them to provide energy-saving items and materials. This was the most common form of support offered. In addition, three respondents reported providing one-to-one energy support, and three reported making referrals to other services because of ODSN support. Two respondents delivered energy advice workshops. Other forms of support included running warm space drop-ins and offering advice to service users in these informal settings.

Figure 1: Type of support warm spaces were able to offer



Organisations felt that ODSN funding would enable them to continue building and strengthening their energy-related support over the next year. One organisation hoped to secure longer-term funding to retain trained advisers and deepen their energy work so that residents would begin to recognise them as a consistent and reliable source of advice. Across organisations, there was a strong desire for regular follow-up sessions, as well as support to help residents join the Priority Services Register and access wider energy assistance. While organisations still felt some distance from being able to deliver energy advice independently, they saw ODSN support as a vital catalyst for growing their confidence, networks and capacity over the next 12 months.

Overall, the ODSN demonstrates how sustained engagement, targeted support and strong partnerships can significantly strengthen community-led responses to fuel poverty. By combining research-led insight with practical training, funding and resources, the programme addressed clear gaps in confidence, capacity and capability across local warm spaces. The outcomes show tangible benefits for organisations and communities, while also creating a stronger evidence base to inform future delivery. This approach has ensured support is both better targeted and better equipped to meet ongoing need.

IMPACT ON USERS

Warm space service users were also asked to give their feedback on the energy advice and support they had received because of ODSN funding. Service users recalled attending an energy advice session, receiving energy advice leaflets, and receiving a Winter Warmth Support Pack.

Service users found the support useful because it was easy to access, delivered in a friendly and familiar environment, and available in a place they were already comfortable attending. Many said they would not have actively sought out energy advice elsewhere but valued having information ‘on their doorstep’ where they could chat informally over a cup of tea. They appreciated the practical resources provided, such as Winter Warmth Support Packs, and the fleece hoodies, draft excluders, radiator panels and energy-saving lightbulbs that came with them, which helped them make changes at home. The availability of paper leaflets and face-to-face guidance was especially important for those who were not confident using computers or online information. Being able to return for ongoing support, in a place where they knew others and felt comfortable, made the advice feel more accessible and impactful. As a result, most service users mentioned that if energy advice and support continued to be provided in their warm space, they would continue to use it due to feeling comfortable to ask for help in those spaces.

“ I think a lot of people wouldn’t actually go out and look for advice.”

West Yorkshire, service user, focus group

Service users reported using the advice in practical ways at home, particularly to manage their heating more efficiently. Several described turning down their thermostats, using their Winter Warmth Support Packs to stay warm, using their boiler more effectively, and using appliances during off-peak times.

“ Well, I’ve turned the radiators down a bit, you know, the temperature, the thermostat, because I might’ve had it on 20, and it [leaflet] said, like, 19 or 18 is sufficient.”

West Yorkshire, service user, focus group

On the next page is a case study outlining the impact an energy advice session delivered by National Energy Action had for a warm space attendee.



CASE STUDY

A North East England-based ODSN support partner invited National Energy Action along to one of their busiest warm spaces, a weekly food/clothing bank and advice session. Normally on this day, the warm space may also invite external partners to attend and support around housing/benefits/energy/credit union as some examples.

‘The partner lead introduced me to a regular client, who was having some issues around an energy debt and who had been keen to speak to National Energy Action for advice, as the ODSN partner had mentioned we were going to attend in person. For case context, the client moved into a local authority property around a year ago. They had faced obstacles with setting up the energy account from the move in and had subsequently received a bill due to some conflicting advice they had received around steps they should be taking.

‘The family did not speak English as a first language and have four children so face higher energy costs alongside low part time wages and some Universal Credit. Their energy debt was around £1,300, and they were making regular payments at this point, but were just seeking some additional support around the balance.

‘The warm space runs a host of advice and support on the day, which is underpinned by a strong team of volunteers who speak various languages. I was able to sit with a volunteer at the warm space for around 45 minutes – 60 minutes, to talk through the issues and formulate a plan, also helpfully requesting some additional information at the session like energy statements. I was able to pull together most of the information for an Energy Trust Fund application, using a form of authority to then ring the supplier after the face-to-face advice, to gather the last of the information needed (and check some other details around the account).

‘The warm space, as a trusted partner in the community, were able to make the introduction to National Energy Action to take forward the steps to try and support. In doing this in person, with a supportive volunteer as a translator, swift action was taken in submitting an application, and in turn successfully cleared the debt balance of £1,345 to allow a fresh start for the family.’

User feedback:

“ I really appreciate it and I and my family are really happy that our stress now finished.”

“ We are really very thankful.”

“ Thank you so much.”

“ I will never forget your kindness.”

CONCLUSION

Overall, this project has demonstrated the significant and wide-ranging impact that targeted support can have in strengthening warm spaces as trusted, community-based hubs for energy advice and wider support. The project has provided a strong foundation for continued development of warm spaces.

Key impacts for personnel:

- Increased confidence and capability among warm space personnel
- Access to funding, training, practical resources and partnership opportunities allowed organisations to expand their offer, reach underserved communities, and embed energy support within existing activities
- Improved skills, knowledge, and networks needed to develop warm space infrastructure

Key impacts for service users:

- Removed key barriers to accessing support, particularly for digitally excluded and socially isolated users
- Increased confidence and reduced anxiety around energy issues, with energy advice and support resulting in life-changing outcomes, such as the resolution of energy debt
- Tangible household outcomes (debt cleared, heating behaviours changed, benefits accessed)

NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Share this report and our findings more widely among the sector so they can disseminate to their networks of warm spaces. This can include our partners in energy advice provision, electricity and gas distribution networks, and local authorities.
- As outlined here, content and provision within this programme was informed by the needs of warm spaces and tried to give opportunities to develop, whether this was through tangible items or learning opportunities in our webinars and training. Frequent throughlines included signposting opportunities, support for staff/volunteers, building improvements and, most importantly, funding. Local authorities and networks should consider putting together information packs for their regions to support warm spaces and aid in information sharing, as currently success in these fields often relies on initiative and luck.
- The relatively small stipend included in the ODSN was frequently regarded as one of the most impactful outcomes of the involvement of the network, with personnel feeding back that it had led to longer opening times, more staff/volunteers, more inviting provisions such as additional food, better facilities and more activities to add to the 'space'. It cannot be underestimated how much small but reliable funding pots, especially in the lead up to the colder months, remove stress from organisations and allow them to develop their offer to their users.
- Many warm spaces who ultimately applied to the ODSN were those we had built relationships up with throughout the runtime of the project, so we were able to develop some trust and name recognition among personnel and service users. Warm spaces frequently accounted to having lots of interest from organisations who wanted to deliver one-off engagements with users. Funding should be prefaced around the principle of continued engagement to have maximum impact on the service users.
- The ODSN model was designed to be entirely scalable and transplantable to other areas outside of the delivery area, where local knowledge is at hand. This model could be tested in other areas with the learnings from this winter to see where we could apply improvements and look at further development. Relationships such as those with the Warm Welcome network could be utilised to make this more effective.

- When co-hosting energy advice sessions, National Energy Action advisers were sure to adapt their approach to the regular users of the space and 'fit in' to the atmosphere of the space, so that advice wasn't perceived as condescending, non-judgemental or impersonal. Advice was also better received with tangible items that could demonstrate such as leaflets or energy saving items, even better if users could take them home.
- In rural areas, funding should consider transport and advertising as part of the offer to make sure these spaces can be well intended.

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF METHODS

PHASE 1

- Call for evidence – 101 responses from warm spaces received
- Literature review
- Three research workshops with warm spaces in the North East and Yorkshire

PHASE 2

- Two online workshops – 28 attendees
- Online consultation – 48 responses

PHASE 3

- Two research workshops at warm spaces
- Three focus groups with service users
- Four interviews with personnel
- Surveys – six responses from personnel and three from service users



NATIONAL ENERGY ACTION

National Energy Action (NEA) is the national fuel poverty charity. We've worked across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland for over 40 years, to ensure that everyone can afford to live in a warm, healthy home.

Together with frontline practitioners, companies, regulators and governments, National Energy Action works to support vulnerable clients, raise awareness and achieve enduring change.

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