



NATIONAL ENERGY ACTION

SUPPORT ACTION PLAN FOR PROVIDING ENERGY-RELATED SUPPORT IN WARM SPACES

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Report prepared by National Energy Action

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This guidance document outlines the Support Action Plan and recommendations developed through our action research with warm spaces and service users. The plan includes a set of recommendations that may be helpful to those who are interested in opening a warm space, or for existing warm space providers who are interested in beginning to offer energy advice.

Phases 1 and 2 of this project gathered insights from organisations running, planning, or with experience of warm spaces. This evidence informed a comprehensive guidance toolkit, featuring practical steps, templates, activity ideas, referral suggestions, and advice on naming, integrating services, and building local partnerships.

In Phase 3, the toolkit was implemented via the Open Doors Support Network (ODSN), testing its recommendations in real-world settings. This demonstrated that structured guidance could help to overcome operational barriers, build trust, and boost community engagement.

Overall, our findings show that successful warm spaces require flexible support models, ongoing collaboration, and tailored communication to address the diverse and changing needs of service users.

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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Based on the evidence from all phases of the project, a list of support options and their associated opportunities and challenges for taking forward support for existing or new warm spaces is provided below:

1

Take an **inclusive approach to labelling and naming 'warm spaces'** and **operate them alongside other services.**

The name can affect how different groups identify the service. As such, names should sound welcoming, social, and simple.

It may not be appropriate to be specifically named as a 'warm space', as this may hinder visitors attending due to stigma. Having a subtle reference to warmth may work well if a warm space is being operated throughout the day. Furthermore, consider running other activities simultaneously, or partnering with other support services. For instance, offering food and refreshments, interactive activities like bingo, health and nutrition services, and opportunities for prizes or complimentary 'goodie bags/packs' etc.

Opportunities



- Can reach people less likely to engage in services and provide them with the relevant energy advice/support.
- Provide multiple and complementary services in a one-stop way.
- Signpost users to other relevant organisations.

Challenges



- Costs and expertise for advertising energy advice sessions being held at warm spaces to reach people less likely to attend.
- Consider using a variety of methods. For example, posters in the local community or advertising via social media.
- Energy advice sessions that need to be provided/tailored alongside complementary or appropriate sessions, introducing timing, coordination and logical challenges; e.g., a homelessness drop-in where providing an energy advice session may not be appropriate for most users.

2

Provide **marketing and communications** support to promote **tailored services** to existing and new service users.

This should consider area demographics and priority needs to ensure energy support/ advice is tailored and uptake is optimised.

For example, taking into consideration digital exclusion and language barriers, ensuring that help with digital tools or guidance can also be provided. Marketing materials should be hybrid. Leaflets, flyers, and posters should be available in an online and physical format to allow wide reach. Ensure services appeal to different age groups, health needs, mobility, preferred learning styles and transport requirements.

Opportunities



- This has the benefit of reaching those least likely to engage with support services.
- Drive uptake and support service sustainability.
- Energy advice and support can be better tailored in accordance with individual needs.
- Physical advertising materials can be referred back to during power cuts, allowing households to identify places of warmth.

Challenges



- Obtaining an initial understanding of who is likely to attend warm spaces will require communication with warm space personnel in order to plan ahead. It will also require access to skills, resources, and support to do this.
- Potential risk that demand will exceed capacity to deliver advice and support.
- Establishing trusted intermediaries to connect warm spaces with external partners will require time and resources.

3

Develop **longer-term partnerships** with warm spaces to offer ongoing energy support, such as weekly or monthly advice sessions.

These partnerships will help smaller organisations provide their warm space users with a greater range of information and access to other organisations.

Warm spaces that are new to providing energy will benefit from having a list of organisations they can signpost their users to for additional support. Similarly, larger support organisations may benefit from knowing which warm spaces operate in their local area to signpost their clients for further support in a friendly and safe space.

Opportunities



- Service users can access energy support/advice at regular intervals and at a time they are comfortable with, as our findings indicate that service users may not approach advisers for energy advice during the first visit.
- Provision of resources for warm space personnel to provide/refer their users to.

Challenges



- Warm space providers may struggle with demand.
- Limited resources can lead to competition among partners and stakeholders.
- Requires good communication between warm space providers and partners.
- Finding opportunities to provide energy advice sessions can be a long process.
- Warm spaces face barriers in accessing other non-energy related partnerships, including mental health support services, limiting their ability to meet complex community needs.

4

Provide **energy-related training courses** for warm space personnel to improve their ability to offer energy support and advice.

Training should consider offering various modules, both face-to-face and online, and varying course content, including volume.

Courses identified as most valuable include those that deliver high quality domestic energy advice that enables provision to vulnerable clients with varying needs; and those that enable personnel to identify vulnerability and energy-related vulnerability. Courses should allow warm space personnel to choose courses based on their current understanding of energy issues, user needs, time and capacity. Training courses or 'refreshers' that are available on an ongoing basis could also be beneficial for warm space personnel to keep updated on changes in the energy market and what advice should subsequently be offered to service users, as well as upskilling and offering opportunities to new colleagues.

Opportunities



- Warm space volunteers will have a better understanding of the range of advice and support they can give their warm space users.
- Reduces warm space personnel being entirely reliant on external organisations to provide energy support to their service users.
- Volunteers and personnel can provide short-term or lighter-touch help to users, while longer-term or more specialised or in-depth help may be provided by an external organisation.

Challenges



- Staff and volunteers have limited time to attend a range of courses.
- There still may be more complex areas of energy advice that staff and volunteers might not be confident to deliver.
- Encouraging staff and volunteers to sign up and complete courses where there may be competing priorities/interests.
- Many warm spaces are constrained by financial or other resources which may be a barrier to taking up training.

5

Provide a **range of energy advice and support**, either directly by warm space personnel/or via external providers, depending on service user needs and interests.

This range of advice should be broad and varied in content and depth, but could include a 'shopping list' of options, including:

- Advice on energy bills.
- Advice on how to save energy at home during all seasons of the year.
- Support with registering on the Priority Services Register.
- Advice literature/resources on how to help keep warm and well at home.
- Signposting to other organisations for additional help.
- Identifying grants to improve home energy efficiency and help with the eligibility criteria and application process.
- Support for digital inclusion, or for those that are digitally excluded.
- Advice on low carbon or renewable technologies.
- Carbon monoxide awareness.
- Small and low-cost measures to help save energy or keep warm at home.

Advice literature should cater to different demographics. As such, resources should be offered in multiple languages and formats to suit different accessibility needs. Similarly, it will be important that enough resources are available to hand out to users to ensure no one misses out on support. Warm spaces that are new to delivering energy advice may benefit from an advice session to accompany the materials to ensure both users and staff/volunteers fully understand the content and/or have the opportunity to ask questions.

Opportunities

- Providing a range of energy support and advice will ensure warm space users will receive the most appropriate help and will cater to households' different needs.
- Having a regular external organisation consistently attend or be available to attend a warm space to provide advice can help develop a rapport and familiarity.
- External organisations can provide advice and resources to service users that warm space personnel are unable to.
- Offer resources and advice literature to warm spaces to provide to service users directly to broaden range of support offered as a core service.



Challenges



- Understanding the specific needs of service users.
- Upskilling and capacity building among warm space personnel (paid staff and volunteers).
- Resource availability (human and financial).
- Identifying, building and maintaining networks of trusted partners.
- The volume of resources in multiple formats may be overwhelming for personnel to manage.

6

Use a **flexible approach** to deliver energy advice and support, matching the format of the warm space and service user needs.

Options include drop-in sessions, group sessions with Q&A, blended or complementary sessions with another service (e.g. cooking), regular and familiar provision, interactive advice sessions.

Where possible, energy advice sessions could be offered at different times during the week to ensure a wider reach of users. Private spaces should also be available to allow for more confidential conversations to happen.

Opportunities



- Can provide personal and tailored support for individuals' needs.
- Drive higher engagement.
- Reduce stigma.
- Support personnel in understanding how advice can be delivered and what advice can be offered.

Drop-in session:

- Broaden engagement with wider groups of users.
- Advice sessions are a good way for personnel to gain a better understanding of users' appetite and need for energy advice.

Presentation Q&A:

- Enhances comfort and facilitates open discussion to allow support/advice to be received without explicitly requesting it (passive receipt).
- Widespread reach and ability to cover the range of support available to visitors such as billing, smart meters, Priority Services Register etc.

Interactive energy-related sessions:

- Creative and novel approach which may be interesting for users.
- Can foster a collaborative approach which complements the community aspect warm space users like about their warm space.
- Learning while 'doing'.
- Embeds energy efficient knowledge and behaviours into everyday activities, providing strong relatability for users.



Challenges



Drop-in session:

- Consistent attendance from external organisations to foster familiarity and trust.
- This approach can be difficult when delivered alongside multiple other services happening simultaneously.
- Not all services will work well with energy advice drop-in sessions.

Presentation and Q&A:

- Requires an appropriate space to deliver a presentation with plenty of seating.
- Hard to keep everyone in the same room at the same time.
- Attendees' focus may drop.
- Generating interest in attending the presentation at their warm space.
- Attendees may feel anxious about asking questions to a wider group, or there may not be enough time to answer all questions.

Interactive energy-related sessions:

- Creative approaches rely on appropriate spaces and facilities, which not all warm spaces may have.
- There may be limited interest.

7

Ensure **sustainable funding** to maintain and enhance warm space provision.

Sustainable funding is essential for warm spaces to operate effectively and provide meaningful support to their communities.

Prioritising funding ensures warm spaces can continue to act as trusted, accessible spaces for community support and energy advice.

Opportunities



- Financial support helps organisations to keep spaces open, offer hot food and refreshments, expand activities, improve outreach, and deliver tailored advice.
- It can also enable personnel to keep their spaces warm and potentially invest in venue energy efficiency improvements.
- Funding can bring partnership and collaboration opportunities.
- Funding can allow warm spaces to recruit and train energy advisers to facilitate energy advice sessions.

Challenges



- Sourcing funding opportunities and making applications requires time and expertise.
- Requirements on governance structures to access funding may prevent some warm spaces, particularly small or volunteer-led groups, from applying or the eligibility to receive, e.g. requiring directors or charity registration etc.
- Funding may be limited and may restrict what activities/resources warm spaces can offer.



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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