

WARM HOME PRESCRIPTION SHOWCASE SUMMARY REPORT



By National Energy Action

Our work has been inspired by the Energy Systems
Catapult Warm Home Prescription Service
<https://es.catapult.org.uk/project/warm-home-prescription>

In partnership with



Introduction

The Warm Home Prescription Service is a targeted scheme run by National Energy Action (NEA), aimed at addressing the dual challenges of fuel poverty and health vulnerabilities. The Warm Home Prescription concept was first developed and piloted by Energy Systems Catapult 2021-2022 and a later trial in 2022-2024.¹ The service worked with NHS professionals to deliver energy account credits and, later, home energy upgrades where possible.

The National Energy Action pilot project follows closely the approach designed by Energy Systems Catapult, who launched the original Warm Home

Prescription model, and sought to target support to specific groups of individuals who are struggling with the cost of energy needed to maintain their health and comfort at home. The project is shaped by the understanding that inadequate heating exacerbates health conditions, particularly among those with terminal illnesses or chronic health conditions that require consistent and reliable energy use for medical equipment.

The National Energy Action Warm Home Prescription Project initially comprised of two arms, each targeting and catering to two distinct groups of households:

1 National Energy Action's Energy and benefits advice service clients: The first arm targeted new and existing clients of National Energy Action's advice service. Clients were eligible for the scheme if they relied on electrical medical equipment to manage long-term health conditions and struggled with energy costs.

2 Greater Manchester end-of-life care clients: The second arm focused on individuals receiving end-of-life care, identified through partnerships with palliative care nurses and other healthcare professionals across Greater Manchester. These clients received bespoke energy advice, financial support to assist with ongoing energy costs, and support for managing energy-related debt. Referrals for additional services offered by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) as well as national schemes were also signposted to these clients.



Both of these groups received financial support towards their energy bills of between £700 and £1000. Alongside the financial support, clients were also offered advice through the Warm Home Prescription service. This will have included support on: using and saving energy at home; energy bills or energy meters; switching energy supplier or tariff; using heating systems or controls; managing or reducing any debt on energy accounts; smart meters; benefit entitlement checks

or applications; referrals for a grant for a new heating system, boiler repair/ replacement, insulation or energy efficient products for homes; and applying for the Priority Services Register.

Later on in project delivery, the criteria were opened up to a third group consisting of clients recruited through National Energy Action's stakeholder networks. This group consisted of a mixture of support up to £700 as well as energy and income maximisation advice.

This showcase report summarises the key findings from the evaluation, and draws on case studies of clients, as well as feedback from client surveys and interviews to gather insight on the impact of the National Energy Action Warm Home Prescription service.

It also covers the impact on subjective fuel poverty and coping mechanisms.

¹ Energy Systems Catapult Warm Home Prescription 2022-24 trial. More information available at: <https://es.catapult.org.uk/project/warm-home-prescription/>



Rahul's story

Rahul lives alone, in socially rented accommodation, and with around-the-clock care. Rahul has muscular dystrophy and is therefore medically dependent on electricity. Because of this, Rahul's electricity usage is incredibly high. This led him to build

National Energy Action adviser resulted in the agreement that the payment arrangement of £100 a month would be in place for three months before it would be evaluated again. A three-way call with Rahul's supplier and his adviser in October 2023 confirmed that Rahul was eligible for the winter

suppliers but surmised that it would be the same issue but with a different supplier. At the same time, Rahul was also having to contend with his care provider closing down, losing half of his carers, and having to find a new care agency.

In May, Rahul's adviser applied to National Energy

'I cannot express my anger and the stress of wondering how I am going to survive in this current cost-of-living crisis. I believe that people with disabilities and health issues like myself should be given more support in order to manage their expenses in this cost-of-living crisis.' - Rahul

up energy debt which, along with the unaffordability of his energy costs in general, caused him enormous stress.

Rahul's health conditions mean that he needs two ventilators to be constantly plugged in, and ventilation in his flat for five hours a day and all night while he sleeps. The ventilation helps to manage the CO2 levels in his living space. Without this, Rahul could fall seriously ill. Alongside this, Rahul uses a nebuliser and cough assist devices, twice a day. He also needs to make use of two ceiling track hoists, which are 'on charge 99% of the time'. Without his ceiling track hoists, Rahul would be 'stuck in one place'. He has electric doors in his flat, to help him to move around his home more easily. Rahul's wheelchair is powered by electricity, and needs to be charged every night. Rahul is, to put it simply, medically dependent on energy.

A call between Rahul's energy supplier and his

support scheme offered by his energy supplier. Rahul was also referred to his supplier's in-house citizens advice service. At this point, Rahul's monthly consumption average was above £350. This was halved due to the winter support scheme. It was agreed that Rahul would pay nearly £180 per month until March 2024, and at that point his remaining debt would be cleared. Rahul's debt stood at nearly £3400.

At the end of the winter support scheme, Rahul returned to his adviser to discuss options now that he had a clear balance. It was agreed that, moving forward, Rahul would continue to pay £200 a month and would need to complete a pay link every three months to continue with this arrangement with his energy supplier. Rahul was still using a high amount of energy, however, and this was unlikely to change. Rahul and his adviser discussed tariff options and other energy

Action's Warm Home Prescription programme and he was accepted on to it.

This provides £1,000 to energy accounts for those on end-of-life care or who are medically dependent on energy. Rahul is now able to continue making payments to his energy supplier and keep his account in credit balance (for the time being). Rahul was happy with the resolution and said, 'National Energy Action helped me so much.' He expressed relief at receiving the support at a time when he did not know how he was going to pay for his usage when his income could not cover his energy bill.



Rahul's case study is one example of the variety of complex circumstances clients present with when entering the Advice Service and demonstrates how those living with long-term health conditions rely on a higher use of energy compared to an average household.

Clients of the service who

'Due to my health reasons my energy use is high so it's difficult to stay in control of my energy use and my financial situation.'

- Warm Home Prescription Service user

'I couldn't afford it. The bill, when it came in, was over £400, and I hadn't switched the heating on at all.'

- Warm Home Prescription Service user

For others, issues in the home made it difficult to keep warm, ranging from damp to the time it takes for the home to get warm:

'But it takes a long time for it to get really warm. So once that's reached a certain temperature, then we turn it [the heating] off. But if we're cooking, I sit in the kitchen because the heat from the oven also provides us some heat in the kitchen as well. So, I just go and sit at the kitchen table and watch a bit of telly out there.'

- Warm Home Prescription Service user

While respondents were still struggling with the cost of keeping their home warm after receiving support, the Warm Home Prescription Service does appear to have reduced the severity of clients' situations,



and survey responses suggest that there was an improvement to subjective fuel poverty. After receiving the support through the Warm Home Prescription Service, almost all (eight out of nine) said they could now keep their whole house warm when they needed or wanted to, with seven out of nine saying they could but it was hard for them and one saying they could easily keep their homes warm. Reasons for this were similar to before, with seven saying cost was still an issue and two saying that their homes didn't keep the heat in well.

For those living in situations similar to Rahul's, where there is a higher-than-normal use of energy, the cost of which can be unmanageable, some cut back in other areas of their lives because they are struggling financially.

Clients were asked if they ever had their heating on lower or less often than they'd like because they can't afford it, with all respondents (nine out of nine) reporting they did this either all or some of the time. After receiving support this was reduced for most, showing some improvement to the incidence of 'unsafe' coping strategies around heat use. Struggling to achieve affordable warmth is often associated with debt and among our small number of participants' responses when asked how often they fall behind with bills were mixed. A small number of clients that reported to falling behind with their energy bills before receiving support and that this had been happening less often since, while a small number felt that it was a more frequent occurrence.

For those living with long-term health conditions, such as Rahul, being able to keep their homes warm and being able to use power can often be

non-negotiable for them to be able to stay healthy and/or manage their condition. Unique circumstances like this offer some suggestions as to why, despite improvements being made to heat rationing, some may not see a long-term improvement to any bill-related debt they may have. This also came through in client testimony provided.

'[I'm] desperate to keep my sick son with what he needs. He needs to be kept cool so hence a fan is always on, the asthma pump needs to be used and foods need to be prepared so I have no choice but to use such.'

– Warm Home Prescription Service user (survey respondent)

Linda's story opposite demonstrates how some clients are struggling with the cost of their energy and how this can impact their day-to-day lives at home. The dual support offered through the Warm Home Prescription service, including advice and financial support, helps clients with more than just the cost of energy and can help to alleviate some rationing behaviours.



Linda's story

Linda lives with her husband in a local authority property. She was referred into National Energy Action by her rent management adviser after she disclosed that she was struggling to pay for her energy with the high cost of living. Linda is a carer for her husband who is disabled and has benign tumours on his spine. He is immobile from the waist down and uses a hoist and electric bed.

Linda received a range of energy-related advice from National Energy Action. Through a winter support fund, she also received an air fryer, slow cooker and cookbooks, to help Linda save money and energy when preparing food. Linda was also provided with a clothes airer as she had been drying clothes on her radiators. She also received a Winter Warmth Support Pack and energy vouchers

to help with her immediate energy needs.

Linda's adviser checked that she was on a social tariff with her water supplier and that Linda was receiving all the benefits and services that she would be eligible for, including cost-of-living support, the Priority Services Register and Warm Home Discount.

As Linda's household is medically dependent on electricity, her energy adviser also made an application to National Energy Action's Warm Home Prescription programme, which was successful. She received a direct payment

of £500 to her gas account, and top-up vouchers totalling £500 for her electricity.

Through the support Linda received, she was able to keep her home warm and keep her electricity meter topped up. Crucially, it provided her with relief from meeting the high costs of using electricity to run the medical equipment upon which her husband was dependent. Linda was now also able to save money and energy in other ways, like drying her washing in a more efficient manner and being able to cook more energy efficiently.

'Linda was very grateful for the support she received. She was staggered by the value of the Warm Home Prescription grant. I had to repeat the amount several times as she just couldn't believe it.'

– Linda's adviser

The importance of supporting the whole family

The Warm Home Prescription service aimed to support more than just the client living with a long-term health condition. The service also aimed to support the whole family. A key aim of the Greater Manchester arm of the Warm Home Prescription service in particular was to be able to continue supporting households once a family member on end-of-life care had passed away. Ibrahim and Hafsa's story below demonstrates the flexibility of the service in supporting whole families as opposed to one client.

Ibrahim and Hafsa's story

Ibrahim was referred to National Energy Action through the Macmillan Cancer team as he was diagnosed with cancer of unknown primary. Ibrahim lived with his wife and five children aged between four and 16 years old, and they were struggling with keeping everyone warm moving into the winter. As a result, they had started to develop energy debt.

Sadly, before Ibrahim's first appointment with his National Energy Action adviser, he passed away. Understandably, this had a huge impact on his wife Hafsa and their children, and their appointment was delayed until they had a chance to process their grief.

A couple of weeks later, Ibrahim's wife, Hafsa was ready to hear about the support available through the Warm Home Prescription scheme. When

her adviser explained that they were able to offer her £700 towards her energy, she simply could not believe it. Since Ibrahim's passing, Hafsa has been incredibly stressed and worried about supporting her family. Such a significant sum of money was a game changer for her at such a difficult time.

Hafsa was very grateful for the support and will be able to move into winter with one less concern.

This case study illustrates the wider impact of the service, and the effect it can have on family members as well as the main client. In the focus groups with staff, advisers commented on the relief the support provided for family members who are often dealing with caring for, and supporting, family members living with long-term health conditions.

'Relief for a family supporting the client [...] and combining this with the stresses of their own family life and work – relief to have a straightforward process to apply to and access.'

– National Energy Action adviser, from the feedback survey conducted with staff

Impact of the support

Advisers discussed the impact that the practical support and advice offered alongside the financial support had on clients. The impact of the practical support was noted especially for those who were receiving end-of-life care:

Allison's story below provides a compelling account of this:

'So, you know, if there's an issue with the account or if they weren't on the Priority Services Register, making sure the practical steps had actually been dealt with was perhaps more useful to them [...] because if they're on palliative care, we're talking months rather than years and some days rather than weeks.'

– National Energy Action adviser, from the focus group conducted with staff

Allison's story

Allison is a single parent to four children, one of whom is receiving end-of-life care. The family had been moved to their current local authority-owned property due to medical complexities and the adaptations required to fully support quality end-of-life care. Within Allison's property there are oxygen concentrators, a feed pump, an additional fridge for medication, two hoists and a lift. This means Allison's family depends on and has a high usage of electricity. Allison was referred by her health care professional and on the initial call with her National Energy Action adviser, it was established that the client had no access to her meters to check meter readings.

Allison required support to speak with her energy supplier. At a time when Allison was needed most, to fully care for her child, she had the additional worry over an energy debt that

was continuing to accrue. National Energy Action provided meter keys to ensure access to the meters and supported Allison to speak with her energy supplier. The conversation ensured that additional support could be accessed along with reassurances around the monthly energy costs within the household as these could then be based on accurate meter readings. Ensuring that the energy supplier was aware of Allison's situation enabled the appropriate support to be accessed. Allison's energy supplier was able to set up a monthly affordable direct debit, ensure that the Priority Services Register was updated and also provide a replacement cooker to further support the needs of the family.

National Energy Action was able to advise around healthy room temperatures and energy efficiency around the home where appropriate.

Allison's adviser processed the £700 WHP support payment and provided options for support with the remainder of the debt to be investigated and progressed at a more appropriate time. Ultimately, this has taken some worry away from the client to allow her to concentrate on the care for her daughter who is fully dependent on her time and care.

Through the support Allison received, she was enabled to access her meters, take meter readings, register on the Priority Services Register, set up an affordable direct debit to avoid further worry and access additional support through her energy supplier. The energy supplier has been able to allocate a case worker to Allison's account to ensure that support continues as and when required.

Allison said that she was so thankful for the support and the help which came at a very dark time for the family.

Managing energy at home

Clients of the service were asked about the impact of the advice and support they received. Of those who gave feedback, around half said that they either agree or strongly agree that they now know more about saving energy at home while also keeping comfortable and healthy, while for a smaller group of others it is easier for them to use and control their heating system. For some, they felt more comfortable communicating with their energy supplier.

As well as this, around half of the clients we spoke to either agree or strongly agree that they now worry less about paying for their energy bills, or are worrying less about paying for their other household bills. Clients expressed this in terms of the knock-on effect of the service for the affordability of other household expenses.

Almost half of the clients who shared their experiences with us said that their household budget feels more manageable overall, and that their financial situation has improved.

‘National Energy Action helped me greatly in dealing with my energy provider... this makes things easier for me when communicating with my energy provider.’ – Warm Home Prescription Service user

‘I haven’t had to worry about the bills, and I’m not worrying about the next one either, because I know there should be enough there to pay for it.’ – Warm Home Prescription Service user

‘I haven’t got to worry, at the minute, about too much, using too much gas and electricity.’ – Warm Home Prescription Service user

‘Well, I think that it’s helped me no end, it’s helped me get straight, it’s helped me get a little hoard of food, let’s put it that way.’ – Warm Home Prescription Service user



The impact on health

The evaluation also examines the impact of the service on the health of the service users². For some of the clients we spoke to there was a sense that their mental and/or physical health had improved, though this was difficult to gauge. While the sample was small, there did appear to be a greater sense that the service impacted on clients’ ability to cope better with long-term health conditions. For those living with long-term health conditions, improvements

to health might be a more longer-term aim than the scope of the project allows, or may not be achievable at all for some clients. Because of this, clients were asked how able they feel to cope with the physical and mental health conditions they, or members of their household, might be living with. Clients discussed the sense of relief that the support from the Warm Home Prescription service was able to bring, as detailed in both client and adviser testimonies:

‘The Warm Home Prescription was a fantastic result –I am overwhelmed by the difference it will make to my general mental health and worry.’ – Warm Home Prescription Service user



Conclusion

Overall, the Warm Home Prescription service has improved households’ ability to achieve affordable warmth and keep their homes warm (subjective fuel poverty) and helped with their ability to cope with their health conditions, while the financial support is shown to alleviate the worry around paying for energy and other household bills. Those living with a long-term health condition are often more reliant on the use of energy at home. This may be to cover the cost of medical equipment and/or to maintain the home at a comfortable temperature. Because of this, it is important for the Warm Home Prescription service to provide a range of support to help those managing their health. The practical support offered by the advice team, alongside the financial support, is key to supporting those either living with long-term health conditions or receiving end-of-life care. Case studies show the positive impact of helping clients with their debt or dealing with their supplier, as well as helping them with access to advice and other practical solutions to help with efficiency in the home. This has been demonstrated through supporting clients with access to Winter Warmth Support Packs and more efficient appliances to use at home. Designing a service that supports the whole family and not just the client with the health condition is integral to helping those with long-term conditions. Additionally, as illustrated in case studies, support has been able to help those who have lost a family member and provide relief to those who are caring for a loved one.

²Those on end-of-life care were not asked the health-related questions

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