

Community Energy Programme

A Summary of the Evaluation Report



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1. Cold weather has shown to increase the demand on the health service (with the cost to the NHS estimated to be around £1.36 billion per year), and with cold homes in particular, it is believed to be the main reason behind increases in respiratory and circulatory diseases in winter. Older people are more likely to suffer from cold weather and in addition to affecting their health it can also potentially adversely affect their quality of life. Evidence however suggests that such an impact is not inevitable.

2. The Community Energy Programme ran between May 2015 and February 2016, and was a pilot project aimed at testing the concept of having fully-qualified Energy Advisers within local Age UK Brand Partners to deliver support to older people to help them have a warm home. The pilot was funded by ENGIE (previously known as GDF Suez) and delivered in six areas in the northeast and northwest of England. The six local Age UK Brand Partners chosen to deliver the programme were Cheshire, Darlington, North Tyneside, South Lakeland, South Tyneside and Teesside.

3. The programme supported 944 older people, delivering support ranging from advice to switching energy tariffs or applying for grants to having energy efficient equipment installed. For the programme as a whole:
 - 252 older people received support with energy bills
 - 86 older people received support reading meters
 - 153 older people received support using heating systems effectively

 - 40 older people received support with fuel debt
 - 14 older people received support claiming £140 from the Warm Home Discount
 - 395 older people received support switching energy tariffs (saving an average of £203 per year)

 - 336 pieces of energy efficient equipment was installed

4. The programme directly supported 944 older people, at an average cost of around £140 per older person (only including staff costs and cost of travel). The average cost (netting off the average saving per older person from switching energy suppliers) is £55 per older person supported. This compares to the average cost of one GP visit of £33 per face-to-face consultation and the average cost of a hospital visit of between £115 and £168. The average cost of support per older person is likely to be lower than the figures from this programme suggest because the programme had to begin winding down just as demand was rising; however, there could be cost pressure in the other direction if the additional older people supported present with more complex cases.
5. The achievement of the programme is demonstrated by older people supported rating the service highly, with all but one older person finding the support offered useful. Almost a quarter of older people supported would not have sought help elsewhere, and not all the remainder may have found the help their needed. Nonetheless the limited timeframe for the programme is likely to mean the effectiveness of the support delivered (and the extent to which it achieved warmer homes for older people) and learning borne is limited.
6. The learning borne from this pilot project is as follows:
 - **Fully-trained Energy Advisers are a real asset** to the delivery of an energy-related service. The breadth and depth of their knowledge means that they have the skills to deal with all types of energy-related issues, enabling local Age UKs to provide a comprehensive energy-related support service. With their focus being on energy-related issues they can take the time and space required to fully support an older person with these issues, visiting them at home and engaging with energy companies which can be time consuming

- **Energy Advisers need the *gift of the gab*** to be successful in this role. They need to be engaging and patient and be able to put older people at ease and build trust with them. They also need to be able to step back and be objective. The ability to build a general conversation and identify those key bits of the conversation that provide a route into discussing energy-related issues is crucial
- **Home visits are beneficial** for Energy Advisers because many times the signs of particular energy-related issues come from observing the living space of an older person; as such Energy Advisers can also be the eyes-on-the-ground and **provided with additional training on what to look for Energy Advisers can spot other issues and refer to appropriate Age UK colleagues**
- **Prioritising the support** of Energy Advisers to older people who may benefit from it most (such as those suffering from the cold or have illnesses that can be aggravated by the cold or have heating equipment issues) can help maximise the benefit from this resource
- **Complementing existing local support** should be the guide for Energy Advisers so that local Age UKs are not using resources to duplicate existing provision, if not required
- **Energy Service funding should be focused on delivering energy-related support** (such as staff costs, travel costs and cost of purchasing equipment) with all other activities provided from within existing local Age UK services including making use of planned awareness raising events to include an energy element

- **Sustaining the service** is a challenge because energy advice is not an income generating service and therefore consideration needs to be given to how best to utilise a fully-trained energy adviser within the organisation and the knowledge they hold
- **Funding energy-related services for two winters** is important to establishing a service that works more effectively based on learning through delivering, it provides greater justification for cost of training Energy Advisers and enables testing the value of a focused resource on energy advice through the year (and not just the winter months)

7. The learning from this pilot programme lends itself to several recommendations:

- Energy Advisers, receiving the level of training received in the pilot programme should be part of an energy service provided by local Age UK Brand Partners. These Energy Advisers should have the *gift of the gab* and have the transport to most efficiently visit older people at home. The Energy Advisers should also be provided with knowledge of other signs to look for and services that Age UK provide to enable identification of other issues that older people may be experiencing
- A basic version of the energy adviser training should be piloted with those Age UK staff who have contact with older people (perhaps in teams that have contact with older people most likely to benefit from warm homes) so that they can spot the signs of older people who may benefit from energy-related support and provide low-level support, freeing up the Energy Adviser to focus on more complex and time consuming cases

- Energy Advisers should target awareness raising of the service to Age UK staff and volunteers and external organisations who are likely to have contact with older people that may benefit most from energy-related support; general awareness raising of the service should be attached to other Age UK awareness raising events
- Funding for energy-related services should prioritise energy-related support to activities that are most likely to reduce older people living in cold homes – resolving existing issues and supporting actions that may help prevent such issues arising
- A *Benefits and Energy Service* model should be tested to understand the benefits and value of a delivery model that aims to maximise disposable income by both increasing income and reducing expenditure
- Age UK National should attempt to persuade OFGEM to remove the requirement that funding from energy companies needs to be spent within one year – it should ideally be available to spend over two years that that incorporate two winters
- Age UK National should attempt to persuade energy companies to use their database to identify older people whose energy use or bill is above a certain threshold – such as the median and mean energy use or bill of their peers – to help identify older people who may benefit from energy related advice and support