

Exeter Community Energy

**Devon, Plymouth & Torbay Health Inequalities**

27<sup>th</sup> February 2023

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**1. Purpose:**

This paper responds to the VCSE health inequality hub themes and the ICS strategic goals and gives a brief overview on the role of community energy organisations, their partners, and the wider energy advice sector's contribution to reducing health inequalities through energy advice and support to maintain warm and healthy homes.

Contribute to the One Devon Partnership ICS goal: *'By 2028, suitable, warm and dry housing will be in place for our population where it will have the greatest impact on people's health and well-being'*.

**2. Responding to the VCSE hub theme and the ICS Strategy:**

**VCSE Hub theme:** Cost of living and Fuel Poverty (Crosses over with the additional hub themes of Rurality & Accessibility, Digital Inclusion, Loneliness & Isolation hub themes).

***One Devon Integrated Care Strategy and strategic goal***

- **Tackling inequalities in outcomes, experience and access** (*By 2028, suitable, warm and dry housing will be in place for our population where it will have the greatest impact on people's health and well-being*)
- **Enhancing productivity and value for money - increase the proportion of our budget by xx on prevention and early intervention** (*defined by maintaining good health, improving health and optimising chronic disease*) to achieve a preventable admissions rate of 95%. For the 5% of preventable admissions.

**3. ECOE aims to make transformative change by tackling fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions.**

Fuel efficiency is at the fore front of most people's minds in response to increasing fuel costs and cost of living crisis. We have seen a 300% increase in enquiries to our free helpline in the last six months.

Devon has high levels of carbon emissions from poorly insulated and hard to heat homes, coupled with an aged demographic, with high levels of disability and complex needs, it is vital that we work smarter to provide positive outcomes around energy efficiency to reduce carbon emissions and reduce household costs.

78% of homes in fuel poverty are classed as vulnerable, with elderly couples, single parent families and the private rental sector being most affect by fuel poverty.

Government has provided support this year for energy bills and capped the energy prices. Prices are likely to remain high for some time, and it's unlikely there will be long term significant help from central government. As the price of everything goes up there will be less disposable income to cover increasing bills.

We work with the council and VCSE partners to identify vulnerable households, those in or at risk of fuel poverty, living in cold/hard to heat homes. Each household is individually assessed, and home visits offered to the most vulnerable and those digitally excluded.

During a home visit, we install simple efficiency measures, advise on damp/condensation; help them understand meter readings and bills, encourage better use of heating controls, provide vouchers for fuel payments, grants for carpets/ white goods and enable access to grants for home improvements such as insulation and solar PV.

These actions contribute significantly with behaviour change, energy efficiency, reduction in household bills, maximising income, debt relief and ultimately reducing carbon to meet net zero goals. Households sometimes have to choose between heating or eating. Experience also shows us that many struggling families skip meals, and avoid turning the heating on for fear of large bills. By helping households to reduce their overall household energy costs we help them increase their levels of disposable income, thus helping to alleviate these issues.

ECOIE reports annually on all household financial savings, carbon reduced and social impact studies reporting on health and wellbeing outcomes, this includes:

- Household savings on average £1,000 in the first year – a combination energy and water bill savings, income maximisation, debt relief and easy measures installed.
- larger insulation grants up to £15K for eligible households (of which ECOIE is the registration partner)
- 4,411 homes supported in fuel poverty (595 tonnes of toxic carbon emissions prevented)

ECOIE works across Exeter, Torbay, Mid Devon, East Devon and Teignmouth and works with community energy organisations across Devon and Plymouth through the Cosy Devon partnership, rebranded now as Energy Saving Devon <https://www.energysavingdevon.org.uk/>

#### **4. Evidenced based research linking Energy Advice to health outcomes.**

There are clear disparities in the efficiency of homes and fuel poverty within the UK causing health inequalities. The ill-effects of cold homes extend far beyond premature mortality. They worsen physical and mental health outcomes, school attendance and educational attainment for young people, and exacerbate the risks of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, falls and injuries, and mental ill health for the elderly.

There is a growing body of research documenting the direct impact of warm and healthy homes to keep people warm, well, connected in their community and independent for longer, reducing GP and hospital admissions.

A report commissioned by East Devon District Council to stimulate the market for energy efficiency and renewable energy, collected data from health partners and social prescribers. The report highlighted the role of referrals to ECOIE's Energy Advice from a trusted partner (secondary health care referral) resulting in a high level of Home Energy visits with 98 NHS secondary care referrals leading to 86 home visits (88% success conversion rate).

Healthier homes (once insulated and heating improved) will lead to reduction in illnesses, less hospital admissions and happier, healthier residents. The link between fuel poverty, cold homes and health outcomes is widely reported on but there is much work to be done to embed energy efficiency advice into the wider advice services referrals and assessment processes.

#### **5. Health inequality of living in a cold/hard to heat home.**

Pre-existing conditions may be exacerbated by cold indoor temperatures, increasing vulnerable people's risk of death or illness. The Under One Roof report by the NEA identified:

- With each 1°C drop in temperature below 5°C, GP consultations for respiratory illness in older people increase by 19%,
- Those living in the coldest 25% of homes are 20% more likely to die in the winter than those living in the warmest 25%.
- For each 1°C drop in outdoor temperature below 19°C, there is a 2.8% increase in mortality for those who live in the coldest 10% of homes while there is a 0.9% increase for those in the warmest 10%.

The Under One Roof Recommendation - Further collaboration between energy, housing and health departments is desirable and deliverable, but the separate policy agendas must align more fully to secure more effective and concrete local actions. Source: <https://www.nea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/NEA-Under-One-Roof-FULL-REPORT-FINAL-Feb-19-1.pdf>

## 6. NHS savings and cost efficiencies

- The financial benefits to the NHS of improving cold homes have been quantified; for every £1.00 spent on energy efficiency retrofit in fuel poor homes it is estimated that £0.42 is saved by the health service.
- Estimated that the overall cost to the NHS of poor housing containing category 1 hazards is £1.4bn.

## 7. Proposals and next steps:

**Proposal A** –To seek ways to raise awareness of, and improve the referrals process through the health, statutory and VCSE sectors. Based on the results of the EDDC study, which highlights the increased success rates for patients that receive energy advice and support, when referred from a trusted referrer.

**Proposal B** To work with partners to develop an evidence-based project around reduced GP visits and hospital admissions following energy advice and support to patients at risk.

For example to replicate/expand on the One Northern Devon (OND), a multi-sector partnership project working together to reduce health inequalities in North Devon and Torridge. See Appendix 1.

## Appendix 1 - Partners in North Devon tackle fuel poverty

Partners in North Devon are working together to tackle fuel poverty.

The initiative is part of the work of One Northern Devon (OND), a multi-sector partnership working together to reduce health inequalities in North Devon and Torridge.

The OND Fuel Poverty group includes members from OND, North Devon Healthcare NHS Trust, North Devon Council, Torridge District Council, not-for-profit social enterprise [361 Energy](#), North Devon Homes, North Devon Voluntary Services and Public Health Devon.

Among the group's recent developments is a pilot project involving 361 Energy and Fremington Medical Centre who are working together to identify and help patients most at risk of fuel poverty. This is a three-phase project:

1. 361 Energy analysed the home analytics database for households within Fremington wards at risk of fuel poverty (to postcode level). The medical centre compared the list against their records. A letter was sent by the medical centre, to the patients who have health conditions that could be worsened by cold, damp homes and whose postcode was on the vulnerable to fuel poverty list. 500 letters were sent out, with patients asked to contact Fremington Medical Centre for referral.
2. Staff will talk to patients directly about fuel poverty and refer directly to 361 Energy (with permission).
3. Promotion on 361 Energy service in waiting rooms.

361 Energy then call the patient to provide free advice on energy tariffs and support switching, as appropriate. They can also deliver free energy-saving measures such as LED light bulbs and draught-proofing and help people access grants for loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, new boilers, and solar panels. The project may also be extended to the whole Barnstaple primary care network area.

<https://www.icsdevon.co.uk/partners-in-north-devon-tackle-fuel-poverty/>