



Energy advice guidance

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Should groups have any comments on this guidance they should email directors@communityenergy.london

Contents

1. Introduction	Page 3
2. Suitability of different platforms	Page 4
3. Training	Page 4
4. Topics to advise on	Page 5
4.1 Improving the energy efficiency of the home	Page 5
4.2 Providing advice on energy use	Page 5
4.3 Maximising income.....	Page 6
5. Preparation and delivery	Page 7
6. Funding.....	Page 8
7. Case study.....	Page 9
8. Further resources	Page 9
9. Version control	Page 10

1. Introduction

This guidance is for community energy groups looking to deliver an energy advice project. The guidance is full of information, tips, and tools groups can use to help them progress their projects. It is not exhaustive but should give groups a good basis for their projects.

Rising energy costs, low incomes and energy-inefficient homes is a reality for many. For some, this means having to choose to heat their home, feed their children or pay their rent.

Those in ill health can have their conditions exacerbated by living in cold, damp and even mouldy homes and experience respiratory illnesses, worsened mental health, increased risk of heart attacks, strokes, hyperthermia and more.

By making our homes more energy efficient and changing our behaviour around the use of energy we can achieve warmer homes, reduce bills and lower carbon emissions. And for those on lower incomes who are struggling to pay bills, by ensuring they are aware of energy-sector funding programmes, and are in receipt of benefits they are entitled to, we can support them to heat their homes more affordably.

Many community energy groups help support households in their areas, especially those struggling to pay their bills, by improving the energy efficiency of homes, providing advice on energy use, and maximising income. This guidance is to help community energy groups provide that advice to the general public.

Fuel poverty occurs when a household has a higher than average fuel bill and the household income falls below the official poverty line after spending the amount needed to heat the home adequately.

Households with a high incidence of fuel poverty include the long-term ill and disabled, people living in lone parent or pensioner households, refugees/ asylum seekers, ex convicts, those on low income, those who do not speak English, those with low literacy skills and more.

The government regularly produces detailed sub-regional fuel poverty data which can help identify areas where there is a high percentage of the community who are struggling to keep their homes warm.

Furthermore Parallel has created a map using sub-regional fuel poverty data from BEIS [here](#).

This data can help groups target certain communities.

Additional support

- [The Mayor's Fuel Poverty Action Plan](#) sets out what the Mayor will do to help lift Londoners out of fuel poverty, and overcome the health effects of cold, damp, draughty living conditions. It also explains what action the Mayor will take to improve collaboration and co-ordination among the wide variety of organisations that are working to tackle fuel poverty.

2. Suitability of different platforms

Groups looking to deliver an energy advice service might first consider what platform would be best:

- **Community events like talks or workshops:** These offer an inclusive way of inviting many members of the local community to attend and have their say, as well as learning from the information you provide. Reach is more widespread but advice is more generalised so impact may be lower.
- **Energy Advice sessions:** By providing advice 1 on 1, at an energy cafe set up at a local library or by providing advice at a hospital for example, you can offer more specific advice but reach will be less widespread.
- **Home Energy Audit:** A trained member of your group may be able to visit a client's home and tailor energy advice for that household however, this requires additional resources and volunteer-time for the group.

By recruiting 'energy champions' you can hold more events or more home visits and reach more people.

For each of these consider all of the time, training and resources your group will need to dedicate, and if you have the appetite and passion.

Groups should also consider if anything like this is already being done in the local area. Ask the local council or do an internet search to identify other organisations or groups delivering similar activities (this might be organisations delivering services focused around housing, older people support, health etc. rather than energy).

3. Training

For all platforms a certain level of training will be required for the group so that they can give advice effectively. Groups will need more in depth training if it is holding energy cafes and/or conducting home energy audits.

National Energy Action (NEA) offers a [range of training programmes](#) through webinars on fuel poverty, fuel debt advice, changing your energy behaviours and paying for fuel. Furthermore, NEA offers City and Guilds qualifications in Energy Awareness level 3, and Fuel Debt Advice level 2.

Group energy champions and advisors will need to ensure they understand their brief well before offering advice and guidance to the general public. Consult with existing groups on how to make training interactive and engaging. Consider webinars, quizzes, role play, case studies, questions types, shadowing, practicing, and mentoring, all of which are essential.

By training others you are also upskilling in the community.

4. Topics to advise on

4.1 Improving the energy efficiency of the home

Groups should cover simple actions households can do to make their homes more energy efficient, for example, draught proofing, using LEDs and central heating controls. Advice should also be provided on how more major interventions, such as loft or cavity wall insulation could be accessed through existing energy efficiency grant programmes such as the Energy Company Obligation (ECO).

Inform households on potential savings of newer more energy efficiency 'white goods' and other electrical appliances

When conducting a home energy survey the use of a thermal imaging camera, which can identify where there may be significant heat losses from the building, can help reinforce the messages around better draught proofing and insulation.

Additional support

- Some groups have thermal imaging kits they may be happy to lend or rent out, like the [CHEESE project](#) in Bristol for example.

4.2 Providing advice on energy use

Groups should highlight simple changes a household can adopt to save energy, for example, turning off appliances that are on standby, turning the thermostat down one degree, and taking a shower over a bath.

Households should be informed of the energy bill savings that can be achieved by implementing these measures, as well as carbon savings that can be achieved. However, beware that some households may already be under heating their home due to problems with paying bills.

Relay how changes can have an effect on someone's living conditions and health as well. By encouraging people not to dry clothes on radiators and improving ventilation for example, it can mean less condensation and less chance for promoting the growth of black mould.

4.3 Maximising income

Inform people on how to read their energy bills correctly and opportunities for reducing their bills. Make sure they are getting accurate bills and that these are not estimated, that they can use cheaper payment methods (direct debit where possible), having a combined (dual fuel) gas and electricity tariff provided through a single supplier, how regularly consumers pay, signing up to paperless billing etc.

Ensure households are on the best energy tariff for them and help support them with switching tariffs, if they struggle to do this.

Identify if consumers might be eligible for certain grants, discounts or benefits for example: ECO, the Warm Home Discount, Winter Fuel Payments, WaterHelp and WaterSure.

Get people to sign up to the Priority Service Register (PSR) where applicable - The PSR is a register held by energy suppliers for customers who may require non-financial support due to their personal circumstances or characteristics. This can include: receiving bills in different formats, notifications of extreme weather, power cuts and works in the area, bills to be sent to a trusted friend or family member, caller ID scheme and more. A household's energy supplier will inform them on how to sign up to the PSR.

Discuss whether the consumer wishes to install smart meters (if not already there). By installing smart meters, homeowners can monitor their energy usage in real time and automatic readings are sent to the energy supplier for more accurate billing. Smart pre-payment meters are also available and allow for credit to be updated remotely. Again, a customer's energy supplier can help with this.

Groups may also want to advise on and help with fuel debt like: accessing various energy suppliers' trust funds or grants, getting on the Fuel Direct scheme which allows people to pay for their energy directly from their benefit payments, helping with budgeting, payment plans, and providing fuel vouchers.

Additional support

- Energy support lines such as [SHINE London](#) or [South London Healthy Homes](#) can provide further details on grants.
- [The Mayor of London's Warmer Homes Service](#) provides: information on energy and water debt relief assistance and billing disputes, help in applying for discounts on energy and water bills and fire safety checks.
- Further help on debt alleviation can be found through the [StepChange Debt Charity](#).
- [Turn2us](#) has a free and easy-to-use Benefits Calculator and Grants Search tools to check what benefits you might be able to claim and what grants you might be able to apply for.
- NEA's WASH Advice Service can provide advice for householders on 0800 304 7159.
- Citizens Advice has a [price comparison tool](#) comparing prices of energy suppliers.

5. Preparation and delivery

Once a platform has been chosen and training has been completed, groups must promote their event to bring in attendees. This could be through: the use of flyers, posters, advertising online, social media, newsletters, press releases and so on. Visit places in the community to promote your event, these could range from: social housing resident associations, pensioners groups, refugee groups, places of worship, community centres, children centres, schools, GP surgeries, food banks etc. If you are targeting those in fuel poverty specifically, think about how you will reach that group.

Engage with local organisations and groups to spread the word and even deliver activities together. This could be done in partnership with the local council for example. This can help with funds, coverage and sends out a stronger message that everyone is working together towards a common goal. It can also help your credibility. Those who you will be advising will likely want to know that you are trustworthy and able to help them before they agree to talk with you and open up fully about their situation.

Undertake a risk assessment before an event and make sure to get insurance in place.

Make and keep case notes, whilst always remembering GDPR. Remember to ask for consent to keep personal information, only keep this where necessary and be extra careful not to leave notes out in the open or accessible on a computer.

For talks and workshops:

- Book your venue in plenty of time. Choose somewhere that is convenient for your target audience to get to and if appropriate consider public transport links/parking facilities. Is there a community space which is well known, and free or cheap to use?

- Consider providing refreshments or freebies to keep people engaged
- Use plain English, don't use too much jargon that won't be understood.
- Keep track of attendees.
- Consider if you want to do follow up calls or visits with attendees.
- Provide useful websites and phone numbers for attendees to have after the event.
- Keep track of any expenses

For energy advice sessions or home energy audits:

- Consider where an energy cafe may be held. You need to be somewhere with a lot of footfall. Make sure people see you and know why you are there. You might use banners for example.
- You might be able to set up referral pathways, with the council or energy suppliers for example, where those who require help are sent to you. It might take time to build the relationships required and obtain a 'good track record' to acquire referrals.
- Consider if you need a booking system.
- Make sure you are set up to deal with those who don't speak English or have certain impairments or disabilities? Consider hiring energy champions from different backgrounds to help with this.
- Provide useful websites and phone numbers for attendees
- Consider if there is a need for some sort of debriefing after sessions, to process any distressing cases
- Keep track of advisors' expenses.

6. Funding

In some cases you may be able to obtain funding to run a workshop, a cafe, or home energy audits. The local authority may be one source of funding, or an energy supplier..

To be successful obtaining funding:

- make sure there is nothing like this being done in the local area already,
- make sure you have a robust project plan,
- make a case for why your services will benefit the community. Projects targeting those in fuel poverty will make the best case,
- demonstrate that you know your stuff.

If you have been given funding you may need to report back about the impact your project has had.

Additional support

- The [CEL website](#) has a Monitoring and Evaluation toolbox for groups, to help them with reporting.
- [SELCE](#) is happy to talk to other groups and possibly share advice on fuel poverty alleviation projects, case notes templates, lists of resources, and energy demand management tool, although some of this is quite specialist.

7. Case study

[SELCE offers a range of services](#) to help local people get a better energy deal in South East London. They provide:

- energy cafes where locals can join them for tea and cake and energy advice,
- interactive workshops for community groups,
- in-depth training or short awareness-raising workshops for frontline workers,
- a pop-up advice cafe at the Woolwich Common Community Centre in Greenwich and Lewisham and energy advice sessions at The Woolwich Centre. This can be accessed through walk-ins or by booking.
- and for households with young children there are home visits. During the visit SELCE provides advice on how people can reduce their bills and will assist with fitting free energy saving devices.

Taking action on climate change and fuel poverty lies at the heart of SELCE's business model. Generating renewable energy and providing advice and support for those struggling to pay their fuel bills and keep their homes warm and bills down provide the twin focus for their work.

The [CEL map](#) shows all CE groups' projects in London.

8. Further resources

- [Community Action of Fuel Poverty's website](#) has loads of resources for those wanting to run workshops and engage champions.
- [Simple Energy Advice](#) run by the government and [Energy Saving Trust](#) provide independent and non biased energy advice.
- [Home improvement agencies](#) assist vulnerable homeowners and private sector tenants who are older, disabled or on a low income to repair, improve, maintain or adapt their homes.
- The Carbon Coop has advice on [delivering retrofit schemes](#).
- [SELCE](#) has loads of experience and resources on helping alleviate fuel poverty.

9. Version control

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