

Supporting our customers in vulnerable situations

Fuel Poverty Workshop



14th September 2021

together
we are
the network

Thank you

Thank you again to those of you who joined us for our Fuel Poverty workshop on Tuesday 14th September.

Myself, Jill, Steve, Steph and our facilitators thoroughly enjoyed seeing you all again. A special thank-you to our guest presenters. Firstly, Simon Kilshaw from our partner organisation Groundwork, who provided an excellent insight into fuel poverty, based on a project called Energy Matters, which is funded through our Vulnerability and Carbon Monoxide Allowance (VCMA). Secondly, to Lee Cattermole from our fuel poor partner organisation, Communitas Energy (CE), who provided an excellent insight into future funding streams and technologies.

Purpose of the workshop

21

delegates

9

overall satisfaction with the event (out of 10)

- **You said / we did** – update from the previous fuel poverty workshop, held in January 2021
- **Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES)**, update on what it is, performance to date and the current funding land scape
- **Partner spotlight session** by Simon Kilshaw – Energy Matters, VCMA funded project
- **Breakout session 1** - Maximizing what's left of the current ECO3 (Energy Company Obligations) funding
- **Future funding and technologies** – presentation from Lee Cattermole, Communitas Energy, - NGN's fuel poor partner
- **Breakout session 2** – Future and concerns around funding / technologies

Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES)

The Fuel Poor Network Extension Scheme (FPNES) is funded from Ofgem which has been provided for the past 8 years and will continue for the next 5 years. The funding enables the Gas Distribution Networks (GDN's) to support vulnerable households living in fuel poverty, by providing them with a financially assisted gas connection.

Performance to date

- GD2 (Gas Distribution 2) – 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2026. This is the next contract period with Ofgem for the GDN's, which will last 5 years
- Target for NGN – 1000 FPNES connections per annum (stretch 2000)
- Current performance – 564 FPNES connections
- Work in pipeline - 1246 connections
- Year 1 – on target to achieve a minimum of 1000 connections
- Current funding available for internal measures (gas central heating), once the gas connection has been installed - ECO3 (Energy Company Obligations - obligation on energy companies) & Warm Homes Fund
- Funding landscape is changing – ECO4 comes into effect from 1st April 2022 and this may impact on the FPNES in future. Currently a FPNES connection is installed in conjunction with first-time gas central heating. From 1st April, the installation of first-time gas central heating may not be supported, as a consequence of the Government's Net Zero Strategy. The next iteration of ECO and what it will look like, is still being determined by BEIS (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy)
- NGN's priority is to support those in the here and now. The aim is to ensure that our vulnerable customers most in need, are at the front of the queue, to get an assisted gas connection and compatible internal measures

Energy Matters, VCMA project spotlight - Simon Kilshaw, Groundwork

Simon provided an overview of the VCMA project, Energy Matters, which involves work undertaken by Green Doctors - energy efficiency experts, employed by Groundwork. He explained what the Green Doctor service offers to customers living in fuel poverty, as well as other services they provide. Their role is to visit people in their homes where possible and help households to stay warm, stay well, save money on their household bills and reduce carbon. The project commenced in April 2021 and the list below, shows some examples of what has been delivered:

- 234 consultations – 650 beneficiaries
- 13 fuel switches to alternative suppliers - £2,457 in financial savings
- 48 Priority Services Register (PSR) sign up's
- 94 customers provided with debt support
- 121 customers advised on smart meters
- 30 customers advised on Energy Trust Fund applications
- 13 customers supported on social water tariffs
- 5 x Community Trust Fund applications completed
- 10 x food parcels delivered

Simon presented a case study of a customer they have supported on the project, who was living in fuel poverty. The photographs shared, really brought the customer's situation to life. The overall message Simon communicated was that support services, such as Green Doctors, need to be afforded the time to make multiple visits to customers. In particular, those with complex needs who require additional support.

The Green Doctor service provides the following support - energy advice consultations, installation of small, energy-efficiency measures, benefits advice (Green Doctor Money), training & information sessions, fuel poverty research projects, domestic energy assessors, retrofit assessors and retrofit co-ordinators.

Breakout session 1 - Maximizing what's left of ECO3 funding / awareness of what's available in ECO4

Questions posed for the session:

- What can partners do to promote FPNES in the next 7 months (here and now)?
- How can we put our vulnerable customers, most in need, at the front of the queue for support?
- What immediate actions are required to accelerate support?
- How can NGN help?

Our stakeholders said:

- Deal with all local authorities – whilst NGN may already do this, due to the pandemic, a lot of the contacts have changed. It's keeping up with this that is challenging
- Need to focus on the communications around how to apply for a new connection under FPNES - communication could be better. Not many people are aware of how to apply for this if they come across a vulnerable customer that needs a gas connection
- Prioritizing vulnerable customers – the standard is 6-8 weeks to get a connection installed. If we know they are vulnerable, bring them to the front of the queue
- The main key is as much partnership working as possible to help vulnerable customers and having contacts with expert organisations to refer people on to. Reach out to the community through trusted organisations e.g. food deliveries / any face-to-face house calls help to identify vulnerabilities face to face. Seeing people in their home environment gives a better perspective of people's situations – easy to miss if

you don't do home visits

- Real opportunity to engage with off grid customers. Energy companies should include information about the FPNES scheme, when sending out bills to customers that are off the gas grid. They will know which customers are off the grid if they are only using electricity – potential customers for gas
- Issue with housing associations as they are trying to get houses and flats all electric. We need to try and get them on board - NGN's comms strategy should help with this
- Is it more common in certain areas, housing markets? Is there a heat map of where we would find this more likely, than randomly finding customers in this situation? There is vulnerability mapping - somewhere where this can overlay would be very important

Future funding / technologies - Lee Cattermole, Communitas Energy (CE)

FPNES in GD2 – funding streams and possible changes

Lee provided an overview of the different funding streams below:

- **Energy Company Obligations (ECO)** - obligation on the energy suppliers. This is a government energy efficiency scheme in Great Britain to help reduce carbon emissions and tackle fuel poverty. The scheme began in April and obligated suppliers must provide measures, which improve the ability of households to heat their homes. This includes actions that result in heating savings such as the replacement or repair of a boiler, cavity wall insulation and loft insulation
- **Home Upgrade Grant (HUG)** - Local Authorities will be able to access the Home Upgrade Grant to support low-income households, by upgrading the energy efficiency of properties off the gas network in England
- **Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery (LAD)** – this funding is being allocated to local authorities through the Local Authority Delivery (LAD) scheme, to improve the energy efficiency of homes of low-income households, helping reduce fuel poverty, phasing out high carbon fossil fuel heating, and delivering progress towards the UK's commitment to net zero by 2050. The LAD scheme aims to raise the energy efficiency of low income and low energy performance homes with a focus on the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). EPC ratings of E, F or G being the focus

Technologies

Lee also provided an overview of future technologies and advised he was happy to provide additional information offline, for anyone interested.

- Gas central heating – low temperature / hydrogen blend options
- Hybrid solutions – combination of heat pump / gas boiler
- Heat pumps

Breakout session 2 - Future funding/technologies

Questions posed for the session:

- Thinking about supporting customers in fuel poverty and getting those in most need to the front of the queue, what are your big questions?
- How can we further help our stakeholders / customers?

Our stakeholders said:

- Lack of accessible information on how to gain funding through ECO3. Must learn lessons for ECO4. Lack of engagement leads to lack of trust. Guide people through the whole journey of new technologies – before, during and after installation. Even with partners, there is a lack of knowledge – needs to be more support at grassroots e.g. Citizen's Advice
- Flexibility – what is suitable for each customer? One size doesn't fit all
- Gas is still the best at the minute and the new transition will take some time to roll out (hydrogen). Sustainability and managing the transition – make sure those most vulnerable have access to the right information. Government putting out wrong messages that gas can't be used after 2025 – scaremongering and not getting the facts out – making customers panic
- Ultimately, it's technology and hardware involved. This comes with a cost for change and will affect the most vulnerable – new technology will be daunting for customers which will be a challenge. New technology may cost more to run to heat the home to the same as they do now. People are unsure of which route to take – lots of uncertainty and unknowns - may put people off deciding which route to take

Event Evaluation and Future Engagement – 8 feedback responses

Summary:	Customers in Vulnerable Situations Fuel Poverty workshop	Tuesday 15th June 2021
Event Evaluation		
Q1	What do you want to get out of today?	
Q2	Choose 2 words from this list below to describe this event	Interesting, insightful
Q3	Overall, how satisfied were you with the event?	9
Q4	How would you rate the discussions?	8.9
Q5	How would you rate the event contact and speakers?	9.3
Q6	How would you rate the networking opportunities?	7.6
Q7	Is there anything you think could be improved / changes for future workshops?	In person, workshops Virtual sessions are always tricky however, it might be useful to bring in some polls during the session to quickly gain feedback on which issues are most pressing, or which issues we feel affect our beneficiaries most. This was also my first session, it would have been helpful to have some more context of what you were looking for, ahead of the session. Possibly meeting in person but that can be so difficult - less likely to actually be able to attend Networking opportunities will improve once everyone is face to face but perhaps there could be time before or after the session for attendees to chat and network

Q8	Is there anything else you would like to tell us?	<p>Improved my knowledge on available grants that are in the pipeline</p> <p>The use of the whiteboard was new to me and so I didn't make the most of it but will be able to apply that technology better in future</p> <p>This was a really useful session and it was great to be involved. At our organization, we support people living with a lung condition, so fuel poverty / poverty / vulnerable people aren't the primary focus of our work. However, lung conditions can be worsened through cold housing etc. Basically, the point I'm trying to make, is that we are not experts in this area as many of the other organizations who attended are - so more information about the schemes would be really useful in helping us to understand what we should be promoting to our service users. Overall, it was an incredibly useful session and gave me lots to think about in terms of how we are supporting our beneficiaries, to ensure they have warm houses. I'll be taking this back to my charity to ensure we are promoting the right schemes and how people can access them.</p> <p>I'd like us to be able to explain what CO-Gas Safety tries to do sometime.</p>
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Q9 **Thinking of yourself as a stakeholder of NGN, how satisfied are you with the relationship that you have with NGN**

9

Q10 **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

NGN keeps me up to date on their business plans	Strongly agree	2
	Agree	4
	Neither agree nor disagree	2
NGN provided me with clear information about their business performance	Strongly agree	2
	Agree	1
	Somewhat agree	3
	Neither agree/disagree	2
NGN provided me with opportunities to give feedback on the topics that interest me	Strongly agree	4
	Agree	2
	Neither agree/disagree	1
	Strongly disagree	1
NGN allows me to give feedback through my preferred method	Strongly agree	2
	Agree	4
	Neither agree/disagree	2
NGN makes it clear how they have used feedback to change	Strongly agree	4
	Agree	2
	Strongly disagree	2

Future Engagement

Q1	How else would you like to engage with NGN in future?	<p>Different energy saving new technologies workshop</p> <p>Virtual events are easier to attend</p> <p>I will continue to attend events and meetings</p> <p>Face to face would be nice to meet everyone in person and have individual chats which are not an option in the current format</p> <p>Online meetings are helpful - saving on travel time and £ - very accessible - participants clearly labelled and contributions well managed to enable full engagement/ participation</p> <p>Just continue what you're doing! It genuinely feels that NGN are really interested in finding solutions that work and gaining insight from relevant stakeholders to do this.</p> <p>It is such a 100% improvement on what it used to be like - many congratulations. Everyone seemed so well engaged and I particularly liked the Green Doctor - wish that this initiative could apply all over the UK. Obviously we'd like the opportunity to explain why it matters so much to survivors to have the gas appliances relit and air tested for carbon monoxide by the First Call Operative because unless you've talked to survivors for years, as I have, nobody would quite understand nor could they understand the impact of the lack of data which follows from lack of testing.</p>
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Future engagement sessions

November 16th, 10am to 12pm - Topic Workshop 3

January 25th, 10am to 12pm (2022) – Topic Workshop 4 (optional)

March 22nd, 9.30am to 1.30pm (2022) - Annual Strategic Review & and Planning Workshop

Tell us what you think

Thank you for reading this report. We welcome any further feedback, thoughts or ideas you have. Please drop us a line on at stakeholder@northerngas.co.uk

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