

Energy Matters

Run by Peterborough Environment City Trust

Funded by the Ebico Trust

First Project Report

I. Aim and Background of Energy Matters

Peterborough Environment City Trust successfully received funding from the Ebico Trust for Energy Matters in June 2015. The fuel poverty project commenced at the beginning of August 2015 and is running for six months, employing a full-time project officer to deliver 345 free home visits within the Can-do area of Peterborough.

As a fuel poverty project, Energy Matters aims to save residents money by reducing energy bills through tariff switching, behavioural changes and applying for the Warm Home Discount. Where possible, the project also seeks to reduce the carbon footprints of residents. The area chosen was of particular significance due to the high levels of fuel poverty identified,¹ reaching up to 12.5 per cent of the city population.

II. Finances and Costs

- Total funded to Peterborough Environment City Trust: **£22,270**
- Project spend from July until September 2015: **£6,834**
 - £3797 staff costs
 - £1785 energy packs
 - £486 recruitment
 - £316 energy awareness and project management training
 - £206 printing flyers and posters
 - £140 marketing
 - £64 staff phone and equipment
 - £40 travel

As well as employing a full-time project officer, funding has allowed the project officer to be trained and properly equipped during home visits. It has also provided residents with an energy pack which they receive during home visits. Each pack supplies an energy-saving light bulb, a pack of recycled clothes pegs, eco-friendly washing up liquid, a thermometer card, pen and a reusable canvas bag.

¹ Peterborough Joint Strategic Needs Assessment,
<<http://www2.peterborough.gov.uk/pdf/HealthAndSocialCare-JSNA-SocialAndEnvironmentalContext.pdf>> p24

III. Marketing Strategy

The project officer met regularly with the Marketing and Communications Manager to discuss the best ways in which Energy Matters could be promoted across Peterborough. Using knowledge and experience from previous projects, an action plan was formed which included referrals, a door-to-door promotion, posters, leaflets, press releases to local media organisations and community events. It was also decided to feature the project on the Peterborough Environment City Trust Facebook page, Twitter account, and through an online information portal.²

○ Referrals and Door-to-door

The majority of home visits are carried out following a referral or through a strong door-to-door strategy. Referrals have predominantly been gained through a mailshot scheme carried out by Cross Keys Homes, a Registered Social Landlord working in partnership with Peterborough Environment City Trust. This has been particularly beneficial since many of their residents are in some way financially vulnerable, making the free advice service most valuable.

○ Posters and Leaflets

The Marketing and Communications Manager liaised with designers and, with the project officer, created an informative Energy Matters poster. Posters and leaflets of the same design have been distributed across houses by the project officer, as well as local churches and shops. This has allowed further referrals to be made to the Energy Matters project.

○ Community Events

The project has also benefited from various community events held with groups including Age UK, Accent Nene Housing Association and Peterborough City Council.

- Peterborough Environment City Trust approached Age UK regarding Energy Matters, and the project officer was invited to attend the Friendship Clubs held in Peterborough's East and Central wards. This provided an opportunity to get to know residents and deliver Energy Matters in the comfort and familiarity of the group. A total of eleven equivalent home visits were completed and further referrals were made.

“We found this very informative and helpful – thank you we have learned a lot”

Peterborough resident, Central Ward

- Accent Nene housing association held a “meet and greet” scheme at the Ashfields site which aimed to tackle a large number of reported issues, including energy and billing awareness. Residents were provided with information about Energy Matters and also some tips on how to manage their utility bills. This also gave the project officer a chance to speak with other attending groups and understand some broader issues which fuel poor residents may experience.

“What a nice start to my week. Thank you”

Sharon from Peterborough, after a home visit

² <<http://www.pect.org.uk/working-with-us/local-communities/energy-matters>>

- Peterborough City Council and Peterborough Environment City Trust are working together towards the “Weeks of Action” Peterborough event, which will allow Energy Matters to be supported and delivered as part of a larger team in the Can-do area. Due to commence in November 2015, Weeks of Action will tackle areas including energy awareness, homelessness, personal safety and more. This will be achieved through holding public information sessions, a variety of stalls across Peterborough venues, and using a door-to-door promotion. A finalised timetable of events is due to be released shortly.

IV. Methodology: Home Visits

Home visits are carried out by the project officer and are typically one hour in length. During the home visits, residents are taken through a questionnaire which targets behavioural changes. Residents are then offered advice on how to easily improve habits which will save energy and money as a result. Financial savings are calculated using the figures provided by the Energy Saving Trust.³ Areas focused on in the questionnaire include the use of thermostats, switching off appliances, using draft-proofing measures and water saving measures. General information surrounding how to avoid damp, using heating controls and the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) home improvements is also provided where needed.

In addition to behavioural savings, an independent, impartial tariff comparison is also offered to residents, giving both prepayment and credit meter participants a chance to look at more cost-effective tariffs.⁴ During the comparison, residents are offered explanations of their energy bills and how to use a price comparison website, equipping them for making tariff savings in the future. Those who wish to switch immediately are taken through the process step-by-step during the visit.

The Warm Home Discount offers qualifying residents further financial assistance on their electricity bills, though few people are aware of it. Participants are therefore given information about what the Warm Home Discount is and how to apply. They are also asked questions surrounding the criteria in order to ascertain whether an application should be made. Applications are either carried out during the home visit or at a later stage if it is more convenient for the resident.

As a thank you for participation, residents are given a free energy pack at the end of the home visit. This provides a canvas bag with various environmentally-friendly items and useful information.

V. Issues Reported in Home Visits

Some fuel poor residents visited experience issues beyond financial matters in their homes, potentially affecting their health and well-being. These include, but are not limited to:

- Condensation and damp
- Growth of mould
- Cold drafts
- Ill-health, including respiratory conditions and poor mental health
- Poor relationships with landlords
- Faulty and/or inefficient heating systems
- Fuel debt
- A lack of understanding surrounding fuel bills

³ Energy Saving Trust, <<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/domestic/>>

⁴ U-switch, <<http://www.uswitch.com/gas-electricity/>>

Advice given during certain home visits therefore has included referring residents to resources beyond Peterborough Environment City Trust, including the Citizens' Advice Peterborough and debt clearance organisations. Other areas of advice include ventilation measures to avoid damp and how to deal with mould growth in the house. Residents are also encouraged to report anything hazardous in the household to their landlords.

VI. Achievements and Outcomes

As a result of the project to date, the following outcomes have been achieved:

- **190** home visits completed in the Can-do area
- **52** Warm Home Discount applications made
- **3** new energy-saving behaviours on average adopted by residents
- **£118.67** average behavioural annual savings made
- **340kg carbon** saved annually by residents through behaviour⁵
- **£295.66** average saving made by residents who switched tariffs
- **£244.13 total average household saving**

In a broader achievement, Energy Matters is providing Peterborough residents with an increased education and awareness on how to use energy efficiently in the household and how to save money. This information equips residents for future savings and allows them to advise their families and friends, referring them to Energy Matters if appropriate.

VII. Case studies

Case Study I

Ms D, mother of one and expecting, had been paying for gas and electricity bills to an account still in her ex-spouse's name. Ms D was therefore unable to discuss any finances with her energy supplier due to the billing circumstance. She also received no information about her economy 7 day readings, resulting in inaccurate billing.

After hearing about Energy Matters through a friend, Ms D was booked onto a home visit. During the visit, the project officer contacted the energy supplier in order to change the account details. Once Ms D was the named account holder, a meter exchange was arranged and carried out successfully. As a backlog of previous bills was received by Ms D at this time, the project officer re-contacted the energy supplier who cancelled all bills. A further financial gesture of good will is currently being settled.

During the home visit, a tariff comparison was carried out which allowed Ms D to switch providers and save £206. In total, from the behavioural saving advice and tariff switching, Ms D saved an annual total of £555.

Ms D feels grateful and reassured that the Energy Matters project is there to help her. She is also now with a provider who she is much happier with.

⁵ Using Energy Saving Trust, 'Fuel Prices and Carbon Intensity'
<<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/content/our-calculations>>

Case Study 2

Mr M lives in Peterborough with seven other members of his family. The property concerned is particularly expensive to heat due to its age, condition and occupancy. Mr M's wife receives disability living allowance and spends much of her time in the property, yet due to the combined household income of all family members, fell short of qualifying for the Warm Home Discount. Mr M also could not afford to insulate the property externally, despite the assistance of locally available grants.

As a tariff change had never been carried out previously for the gas and electricity, Mr M was on a particularly expensive rate for his energy. He was also unaware that changing suppliers was a possibility. After checking the property bills and demonstrating a tariff comparison to Mr M, the family were able to make a saving of £606. Due to further advice given on how to use energy more efficiently in the household, Mr M saved a further estimated £166 annually.

Mr M and his family now know that they are able to switch to other suppliers or tariffs in the future, and how to do so. They are also now aware of the Warm Home Discount and to apply in the future should their total household income change.

Case Study 3

Miss P lives with her child and partner and uses pre-paid meters which were already in the property when moving in. Miss P had accumulated a debt of over £500 on the electric meter. The client was unaware that she was on an economy 7 tariff, and therefore was paying for a high day-time rate without making use of the cheaper night-time electricity. During the home visit, the project officer spoke on behalf of Miss P and the economy 7 was removed, giving an annual saving of £53. Due to an improved awareness on behavioural actions and efficient use of energy, a further estimated £236 was made by the family.

Miss P was previously unaware of the Warm Home Discount, but after finding out about the discount during the home visit, an application was made on her behalf online. In order to switch suppliers and payment methods, Miss P was required to have a debt of less than £500, which is now possible with the £140 Warm Home Discount. This allows Miss P to switch to a more cost-effective supplier and save a further £520. The project officer showed Miss P how to carry out a tariff comparison so that she felt confident with how to switch in the future, and was also given further information regarding debt advice.

Miss P feels happy that she is able to switch from prepayment meters and keep her house warm in the winter for her family. She is also grateful for the debt advice referral and stands in greater stead for the future.