

Community Action for Energy case study: High Peak Borough Council

Overview of energy efficiency

This case study provides an overview of an initiative to improve domestic energy efficiency through the provision of advice and information to members of local community groups.

Objectives

The project aimed to:

- provide a trained community energy adviser for High Peak residents
- encourage a change in the way that people use energy in the home
- identify where health is at risk due to fuel poverty
- assess the take up of energy efficiency improvements and environmental benefits to assist with meeting the Council Home Energy Conservation Act target
- to provide referrals to the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEAC) based in Buxton

A number of secondary objectives were identified, such as supporting and improving the council's relationship with the voluntary sector, and health promotion and improvement services.

Methodology

The project involved the appointment of a part-time (15-hours a week) community energy adviser to work with volunteer and community groups in High Peak. The community energy adviser completed a City and Guilds Energy Awareness Diploma and attended a Community Action for Energy (CAfE) network course on 'working with your community'.

The pilot project tested the potential to engage with people on the subject of energy efficiency by delivering a presentation in the familiar setting of a community group meeting. The project also aimed to explore whether people would be more responsive to the energy saving message when they were not being 'sold' a service or product.

Meetings were held with managers of the three High Peak Volunteer Bureaux and the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) to raise awareness of the project and to identify groups that would be interested in booking CAfE presentations.

Posters and leaflets were distributed to all High Peak offices and to other amenities, such as sports centres, libraries and volunteer bureaux. Adverts and editorials were placed in local newspapers and the CVS mailed leaflets to over 600 volunteer groups in High Peak. Where possible, groups were followed up with a telephone call from the project worker.

The community energy adviser has delivered 58 talks so far to a wide range of interest groups. The talks were delivered using a PowerPoint presentation supported by props and other visual aids. However, in spite of using this executive tool an informal approach was maintained in order to appeal more strongly to members of the volunteer groups and the often predominantly social nature of their meetings.

Many of the groups had members who were suffering from fuel poverty and these benefited from the free or low cost practical tips given at the talks, as well as from the information on

grants and the EEAC. The elderly, infirm and young parents tended to be the most vulnerable to high fuel costs and inadequate insulation.

The presentation was designed to be as interactive as possible. Questions were encouraged throughout each talk as often the answers were of interest to all group members. There was also a quiz at the end of each talk. The project promoted the services of the EEAC and the take up of Warm Front grants where appropriate.

Each attendee was given a box of four low energy light bulbs and an information pack containing: a home energy questionnaire, a Warm Front application form, information on discount schemes for boilers, showers and 'A' rated appliances, various leaflets on health and safety in the home and a pre-paid return envelope.

Where relevant, provision has been made for special needs throughout the project. Energy tips and Warm Front forms have been provided in large print and Braille, and special amendments have been made to talks given to visually impaired groups to ensure that they have remained interesting and engaging without the use of PowerPoint.

Outcomes

Most clients who attended talks from Energy Action in the Community rated the advice they received as "very useful" or "quite useful". A total of 23 per cent were now warmer or more comfortable at home and 23 per cent had also noted lower fuel bills; 16 per cent had noticed fewer draughts; and smaller numbers had noticed less damp, less condensation and better health.

Most of these clients (91 per cent) had installed one or more of the four free compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs), which they received, and on average 2.9 CFLs had been installed by each household installing them, with one or more sometimes kept in reserve. Total annual savings are estimated to be around 256 tonnes carbon dioxide, £25,957 and 956,605 kWh. The average annual savings per client household are 324 kgs carbon dioxide, £33 and 1,209 kWh. Project Costs were quite low at £92/tonne carbon dioxide/pa.

Positive learning points

The most effective marketing tool turned out to be word-of-mouth as demonstrated by the Women's Institute (WI), which booked four presentations for High Peak groups

Initial contact with community groups was made through a trusted third party organisation such as the CVS and this helped to develop confidence in the impartiality of the project.

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