



Consumer Futures Unit

Facing Fuel Poverty

Research into face-to-face advice to help consumers in fuel poverty in Scotland

Background

- ▶ How energy is used in the home is one of the four key drivers of fuel poverty. Providing face-to-face energy advice to certain groups of consumers can help alleviate fuel poverty, alongside services such as the telephone advice on complaints and billing issues delivered by the Extra Help Unit.
- ▶ The Consumer Futures Unit (CFU) at Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) commissioned Changeworks to carry out research into this area, focussing on face-to-face advice delivered in the home.
- ▶ *Facing Fuel Poverty* explores what projects and services delivering face-to-face fuel poverty advice exist in Scotland, examines the benefits and costs of delivering such services and identifies lessons for the design of future schemes.
- ▶ The research was carried out via an online survey, desk-based research, qualitative telephone interviews and data analysis.

Key Findings

- ▶ There are estimated to be 158 projects delivering in-home face-to-face fuel poverty advice in Scotland.
- ▶ These projects include advice on fuel debt and billing, switching, heating system operation, energy behaviours and referrals for energy efficiency measures.
- ▶ The research reported that face-to-face fuel poverty advice was of particular benefit for some consumers who are hard of hearing, unable to leave their home, vulnerable, experiencing mental health problems or who don't have English as a first language.
- ▶ Funding for these projects comes from a wide variety of sources, most commonly government, charities and utilities. Organisations report securing funding as one of the key challenges to delivering face-to-face advice.
- ▶ Monitoring and evaluation of projects is not carried out consistently by delivery organisations. This leads to uncertainty in understanding the costs and quantifiable outcomes of projects delivering face-to-face advice across Scotland.

DRIVERS OF FUEL POVERTY

Household income

Price of energy

Energy performance of homes

How energy is used

158

Projects or services delivering face-to-face fuel poverty advice in Scotland

108

Organisations delivering face-to-face fuel poverty advice in Scotland

£194

Average cost of delivering fuel poverty advice per client

Recommendations

Consideration should be given by the Scottish Government to:

- ▶ Continue to invest, and look to invest further, in face-to-face fuel poverty advice services to support some vulnerable households.
- ▶ Develop an industry-wide standard to increase consistency in reporting of savings achieved from behaviour changes from in-depth energy advice.
- ▶ Look to support delivery organisations to carry out monitoring and evaluation, for example through resources or upskilling.

Recommendations for organisations that fund fuel poverty advice projects are to:

- ▶ Award multi-year funding to increase the efficiency of projects and services, reducing the need for resources to secure funding, set up projects and train staff.
- ▶ Be more flexible in allowing funding to be pooled so that projects can expand and be extended rather than be replicated, increasing efficiencies and reducing additional overheads.
- ▶ Require projects to carry out a minimum level of evaluation. This should include quantifiable outcomes, such as bill savings, as well as qualitative outcomes.
- ▶ Allocate funding to projects specifically to carry out monitoring and evaluation.

It is recommended that organisations delivering fuel poverty advice:

- ▶ Start thinking about monitoring and evaluation of projects before delivery commences and create a suitable monitoring plan.
- ▶ Build in as much monitoring and evaluation as possible. It will help to identify what the project has achieved, areas for improvement and build the case for further funding applications. It also contributes towards sector-wide learning in regards to what projects can and do achieve.
- ▶ Share best practice with other delivery organisations.

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The Consumer Futures Unit puts consumers at the heart of policy and regulation in the energy, post and water sectors in Scotland. Part of Citizens Advice Scotland, we research and gather evidence, which we use to improve outcomes for consumers.



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