



NGED Horizon Scanning 2023

Affordable warmth advice services across National Grid Electricity Distribution's regions

Report for National Grid Electricity Distribution

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Glossary

ASHP	Air Source Heat Pump
BUS	Boiler Upgrade Scheme
ECO	Energy Company Obligation
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
HHRCO	Home Heating Carbon Reduction Obligation (Affordable Warmth)
HUG	Home Upgrade Grant
LADS	Local Authority Delivery scheme
LSOA	Lower Layer Super Output Area (1,000 - 3,000 residents; 400 - 1,200 households)
NGED	National Grid Electricity Distribution
PSR	Priority Services Register
UC	Universal Credit
VSC	Voluntary and Community Sector
WECA	West of England Combined Authority (covers Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire).

Executive Summary

Purpose

National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) commissioned Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) to research the organisations offering energy and affordable warmth services to vulnerable customers in its four license areas. This is to inform and assist NGED in delivery of its social obligations programme. CSE previously carried out a horizon scan for NGED in 2017. Since then, there have been significant changes in the energy advice landscape, global and UK socio-economic contexts including:

- The legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic
- The cost of living and energy crises
- Wider acknowledgement of the health implications of living in a cold home
- Broader changes & challenges in the energy system
- The climate emergency

Research objectives

This horizon scan addressed the following research objectives:

1. Identify service providers operating within NGED's licence areas that offer support to priority service register (PSR) vulnerable customers for the following nine service areas: (1) Income maximisation; (2) Energy efficiency improvements; (3) Heating solutions (traditional); (4) Behavioural change; (5) Smart energy installations (including heat pumps); (6) Smart energy advice; (7) Health and wellbeing (e.g. handrails); (8) Local resilience; (9) Off-gas support.
2. Understand more about the service providers, organisations and funded schemes identified – geographical coverage, range of services provided, vulnerable people supported, referral networks, current staffing, capacity and appetite to expand activities, what has changed for them in the last two to three years.
3. Understand more about the quality and impact of services offered and how this may have changed since 2018.
4. Identify geographical gaps or 'thin spots' in provision, in terms of geographical coverage or reaching particular vulnerable groups.

5. Review the opportunities for NGED to work with and/or actively support these services to contribute to meeting its social obligations and objectives across its licence areas.

Evaluation approach

The research used CSE's capability lens to aid in understanding different aspects of customer needs and how it fits into broader context of vulnerability e.g. temporal vulnerabilities like age, personal and social factors (ethnicity, health), housing (tenure), energy, economic and digital factors. The nine services address one or more of these lenses (for instance digital inclusion projects as part of smart energy advice increase customers' digital access and skills).

The research comprised desk-based research, an online survey and online interviews to identify service providers and learn about their current and future capacity, services offered, and vulnerable consumers reached.

Key findings

In total, 349 organisations were identified. Survey responses were received from 54 organisations, of which 10 were interviewed.

The horizon scan found that half the organisations identified in desk research were registered charities, presenting a potential weakness in the advice sector. Most organisations had only a few funders, making the sectors' resilience to changes in funding regimes precarious.

70% of organisations were identified as providing services in single and multiple local authority areas, 15% at regional scale. A large number of vulnerable customers were engaged with (0-3000+ a year) at all these scales of service provision.

Services were predominantly provided by paid staff. Staff numbers seem to be increasing, but not at the same rate as demand. This is affected by issues like low pay and limitations on the ability to offer flexible working.

A summary table of findings by license area is given on the following page which includes gaps in service provision for the nine services and outreach to vulnerable customer groups, based on PSR needs codes and fuel poverty risk groups.

In terms of the capabilities lens, there is a gap in the energy capability for smart energy installations and smart energy advice for which there is low provision. On digital tech readiness, the horizon scan found evidence that organisations were actively engaged in digital inclusion projects, with replicable good practice. There is opportunity to optimise use of existing resources and expertise on digital inclusion via organisations with computer suites or previous experience in digital inclusion training. Local resilience – meeting personal and social needs of vulnerable clients – had low service provision across all license areas.

Referrals from health and social care have proportionally increased since 2018, now exceeding referrals from local authorities. This reflects work done to support health service referrals in light of greater awareness of the negative health impacts of living in a cold home.

Summary table of key findings from analysis on existing service provision and gaps.

	East Midlands	West Midlands	South Wales	South West
Fuel poverty (FP) levels & characteristics	Small area > 15.1% FP in east of license area with few providers	Large areas >15.1%-60.2% FP in west and north east of license area with few providers. Urban areas well resourced.	Central (Ceredigion) > 19.9% FP; east (Powys) 15.1%-19.9% FP with few providers. Low FP areas in the South East.	Pockets of 15.1-19.9% FP scattered in West Somerset, Devon and Cornwall with few providers
EPC bands E-G	Small number of high LSOAs in centre and north east of license area	High number of high LSOAs in west and north east of license area	LSOAs outside the south east	Small number of high LSOAs in West Somerset, Devon and Cornwall
Household PSR eligibility	High across north east quarter of license area	Urban, a few LSOAs in north west	DNO boundary with North Wales, Welsh border	North Cornwall, West Somerset, Devon coast
Service provision – geographic gaps	(Heating solutions); All except income maximisation.	Health and wellbeing (pockets)	All except income maximisation.	(Heating solutions – pockets); Health and wellbeing; Local resilience
How well existing organisations are meeting area needs	Highest no. of providers and PSR eligibility. Mainly local authorities, local resilience fora, housing association, private enterprises and charities. A lot of regional and multiple local authority- scale delivery. Few energy efficiency schemes identified. Potentially low engagement with social tenants. Strong referral networks with health and social care.	Low no. of providers compared to PSR eligibility. Mainly social and private enterprises, local authorities, housing associations, other public sector. Single and multiple local authority scale delivery. Area less likely to serve the dementia, memory or cognitive impairment needs code.	Least no. of providers, lowest PSR eligibility. Mainly charities, social and private enterprises, housing associations. National and single local authority scale delivery. Few energy efficiency schemes identified. Area least likely to serve: benefits recipients, households with children, ethnic minorities, domestic violence survivors, NHS referrals, single parents and pregnant women or household with a child aged under 5 needs code. Referral networks with schools and carers.	High no. of providers compared to PSR eligibility. Mainly social enterprises, voluntary organisations, private enterprises, other public sector, local resilience fora. A lot of single local authority scale delivery. Referral networks with schools and carers.

However, research found referral pathways to organisations delivering energy efficiency installations had decreased, with long-term negative implications for vulnerable customers.

Compared to 2018, the advice sector is in 'crisis response' mode focusing on income maximisation and emergency interventions (like food and fuel vouchers).

We are far busier now and the complexity of the clients' problems has also increased. So many clients have mental health or addiction problems, we have seen some very sad cases. We have less staff now to deal with the clients and we feel like we are social workers, as we deal with so many things for the clients. We feel as a charity we are picking up the pieces of the lives of the people who are left to really struggle. **Survey respondent**

Due to high demand and waiting lists for advice, some organisations are increasing capacity and providing more services in house (such as debt advice). Others are creating robust referral networks with key partners to deliver holistic support for clients. Despite increases in capacity, organisations are unable to keep up with increased demand. Funding and staffing issues are the main challenges.

There is appetite to scale up services. The factors that would most support organisations to do so are additional funding, certainty of funding duration and provision to train up additional staff. However, three organisations interviewed said that even a significant increase in funding would not enable them to meet the level of need that they were currently experiencing. The systemic challenges faced by the advice sector require strategic intervention to reduce the root causes within the energy sector that are exacerbating inequalities and customer vulnerability.

Recommendations

These recommendations are made to NGED to support its social obligations work to meet the needs of vulnerable customers.

- Assess by LSOA across all license areas for high fuel poverty (LILEE and 10% fuel spend of income after housing cost) and the estimated PSR gap to identify specific areas for intervention, informed by gaps identified in this report. Check service coverage with existing partners and desk research organisations. Establish priority areas for intervention and organisations that can do so.
- Increase awareness of the PSR and support organisations to promote PSR sign ups with resources and training, to reemphasise its importance to staff and its benefits to vulnerable customers. Strengthen referral pathways with Power Up and Affordable Warmth partners, and across each license area to build resilience and improve access to services.
- Promote a single point of contact approach to advice delivery, whether services are delivered in house or via partnerships, to provide a seamless holistic service for clients.
- Tackle the complexity of client support, for example by resourcing reuse initiatives or with direct funds for essential household equipment to reduce time spent grant writing.

- Ensure that referral pathways with energy efficiency scheme providers and Home Improvement Agencies are established. Support access to handyperson services and the installation of small measures, repairs or enabling works which can provide significant benefit to vulnerable clients.
- Encourage and trial smart energy advice / installations with organisations already active or seeking to do so. Identify organisations that can advise and support the installation of low carbon and smart technologies in off-gas areas or hard to treat homes when these technologies would be effective for customers.
- Increase local resilience service provision to facilitate support in emergency situations. Face to face contact in a welcoming local space can be a stepping stone for vulnerable customers in crisis to access further support.
- Advocate to Ofgem, the UK and Welsh governments and other decision-makers on strategic interventions that would reduce the hardship currently being experienced by vulnerable customers in relation to their fuel bills. This might include questioning and commenting on involuntary PPM installation, social tariffs, energy supplier customer services, private sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards regulation and enforcement or more broadly on lack of action on UK digital exclusion policy.

Introduction

Background

This report presents the findings from 2023 research to identify service providers and energy efficiency schemes that operate within National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED)'s four licence areas that could aid NGED in delivery of its social obligations programme. NGED has 1.8 million customers on its Priority Services Register (PSR)¹. It also helps to tackle fuel poverty and its contributing factors for customers in vulnerable situations.

This is the third horizon scan that Centre for Sustainable Energy has conducted for NGED. The first in 2014 identified fuel poverty schemes and support services across the four license areas. The second in 2017 responded to changes in affordable warmth scheme delivery. It also focused on referral pathways with health service providers (in response to NICE guideline ng6 on the health risks associated with cold homes²), local resilience and off gas services.

This third horizon scan assesses the current state of service provision for PSR customers and households at risk of fuel poverty. The context in which service providers now operate has radically changed in the last five years (2018-2022) due to drastically altered global and UK circumstances. This horizon scan seeks to unearth the impacts of unprecedented pressures on advice services since the COVID-19 pandemic and investigates options for increased support and interventions. It also aims to identify how requirements for the new RIIO-ED2 Business Plan (2023-2028) could be integrated into the advice landscape.

Changes in context for advice and support service delivery

Since 2018 households have experienced:

- Rises in energy tariff rates and standing charges with little tariff switching choice, for many after a time of financial strain due to the pandemic.
- A cost of living crisis that has forced many households (e.g. working mortgage owners with negative budgets) to seek energy, income maximisation and debt advice for the first time.
- Ongoing uncertainty regarding energy prices due to the war in Ukraine, quarterly energy price cap changes and lack of clarity about financial assistance for fuel bills from governments.

¹ <https://www.nationalgrid.co.uk/customers-and-community/priority-services/social-obligations>

² National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2015) Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes. NICE guideline ng6 www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng6

- Energy suppliers making record profits whilst failing to pass on decreasing wholesale energy costs to consumers and inappropriately forcing some vulnerable customers to have prepayment meters³.
- Increases in extreme weather events (flooding, storms, heat waves, fires) with outages in some areas all of which can severely impact PSR customers.

Overall, UK customer satisfaction with the energy sector is at its lowest ever⁴. For some households, the systemic challenges described have contributed towards poor mental health. Levels of depression have remained higher than pre-pandemic, with the economically inactive, those finding it hard to pay energy bills, mortgage or rent costs, unpaid full-time carers, and disabled adults experiencing higher rates of moderate to severe depression⁵.

These factors have significantly impacted organisations that provide services for vulnerable customers.

6. Customer demand for support has overstretched many service providers. CSE's energy advice team saw a 50% increase in calls during the first lockdown and a further 50% increase in 2022. There has been a fourfold increase in demand for advice on financial support and energy debt. CSE advisors are now making 10 times more foodbank referrals than they did previously. Waiting lists for casework are commonplace – for one Bristol project it is eight months.
7. Advice service providers now operate in an environment that predominantly focuses on quick-win fuel vouchers and emergency hardship funds. Citizens Advice had supported more prepayment meter customers unable to top up their meter by June 2023 than in 2019, 2020 and 2021 combined. They also provided more people with crisis support to June for the same period than in any previous year⁶. National Energy Action have estimated that 6.6 million UK households are now living in fuel poverty, unable to afford to heat their homes to the temperature needed to keep warm and healthy.⁷
8. Stressed customers seek quick wins for their presenting issue and are less likely to take action on longer-term solutions like obtaining grants for energy efficiency measures.
9. High demand for advice services has pre-empted delivery of more strategic interventions such as providing energy support within hospital discharge schemes. However, the health implications of living in a cold home are widely known. There is increased integration of GP referrals and social prescribing with energy advice service provision to address this.

³ <https://www.ofgem.gov.uk/publications/ofgem-sets-out-clear-expectations-energy-suppliers-financial-resilience-and-supporting-consumers>

⁴ Institute of Customer Service (2023) UK Customer Satisfaction Index pages 12-13

⁵ ONS: Cost of living and depression in adults, Great Britain: 29 September to 23 October 2022

⁶ Citizens Advice Cost of Living Briefing July 2023 <https://public.flourish.studio/story/1634399/>

⁷ Based on a 10% fuel poverty definition, of a household being in fuel poverty if they spent more than 10% of their income on energy services <https://www.nea.org.uk/what-is-fuel-poverty/>

10. Broader changes & challenges in the energy system include the acceleration of the energy transition, market reforms, and new domestic flexibility services. Energy system changes are opening up new areas of consumer advice, creating a need for advice organisations to have increased knowledge about low carbon technologies, how customers might maximise benefits from demand flexibility services or the appropriateness of smart products and services.
11. Changes to the delivery landscape for energy efficiency measures e.g. changes to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), launch of the Local Authority Delivery scheme (LAD), Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) and Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS).

This horizon scan considers advice sector needs and how it is adapting, in light of these new, emergent contingencies. The challenges listed only emphasise how essential effective, joined up and appropriately supported energy advice services are in the face of these systemic issues.

In addition, DNOs are now working to ED2 business plans for 2023-2028 which necessitates a reassessment of the organisations that can help vulnerable customers to actualise a reduction in carbon emissions, meet their needs for a healthy home and essential energy services, and ensure that access to products and services is fair.

Research objectives

The 2023 horizon scan will seek to assess the affordable warmth and other relevant support services for PSR vulnerable customers. It will

1. Identify service providers, local groups and funded schemes that offer support to vulnerable households operating within NGED's licence areas. These will cover organisations and initiatives which relate to one or more of the following nine areas:
 - Income maximisation
 - Energy efficiency - non-behavioural energy efficiency improvements e.g. insulation.
 - Heating solutions - traditional
 - Behavioural change (energy-related).
 - Smart energy installations (low carbon and smart energy technologies (e.g. solar OPV, heat pumps, smart hot water tank).
 - Smart energy advice (smart meters, smart offers that don't need installation).
 - Health and wellbeing (non-energy support for vulnerable people: e.g. handrails).
 - Local resilience (crisis response support: e.g. warm centres, food banks)

- Off-gas support (e.g. oil buying clubs⁸).
2. Understand more about the service providers, organisations and funded schemes identified, to determine the focus and variety of services offered e.g. their geographical coverage, range of services provided, vulnerable people supported, referral networks, current staffing, capacity and appetite to expand activities, what has changed for them in the last two to three years.
 3. Understand more about the quality and impact of services offered (i.e. benefits to their clients) and how this may have changed since 2018.
 4. Identify geographical gaps or ‘thin spots’ in provision, in terms of geographical coverage or reaching particular vulnerable groups.
 5. Review the opportunities for NGED to work with and/or actively support these services to contribute to meeting its social obligations and objectives across its licence areas (including consideration of costs and opportunities for funding). Undertake analysis to build on the findings from research objectives 1-4 to:
 - Identify opportunities for NGED to increase or decrease support or interventions for particular types of service or vulnerable customer.
 - Assess the extent of cross-referral between providers and any apparent ‘holes’ in referral pathways which leave some needs unmet.
 - Present evidence of successful emergent models of service delivery and referral, which merit initial or continued support or replication elsewhere.
 - Assess the health of the sector, in terms of funding prospects, staffing, capacity and appetite for growth and innovation.

Recommendations will be made to NGED on the basis of this analysis on how to work with and/or actively support these services, taking into account wider partnership development already underway, existing NGED social programme activities (e.g. Community Matters Fund) or other projects that could link into findings, such as the Smart Energy Action Plan pilots.

NGED assistance for vulnerable customers

Since 2018, NGED has established four energy advice hubs consisting of a Power Up partner and Affordable Warm partner per license area, which provide energy advice to PSR customers and support for energy efficiency improvements (Table 1). Partners coordinate wider fuel poverty work with smaller agencies across each area.

⁸ New gas connections are included in Heating solutions; low carbon heating in Smart energy installations.

Table 1: NGED Power Up and Affordable Warmth partners

License area	Power Up partner	Affordable Warmth partner
East Midlands	Citizens Advice Derbyshire Districts	Nottingham Energy Partnership
West Midlands	Coventry Citizens Advice	Marches Energy Agency
South Wales	Energy Saving Trust	Care and Repair Cardiff and Vale
South West	CSE	Plymouth Energy Community

The summary of NGED’s vulnerability programme⁹ in Table 2 shows the expansion in PSR referral networks and a four-fold increase in attributed affordable warmth savings since 2017 / 2018.

Table 2: Summary of NGED vulnerability programme 2017-2023

Category	Number	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
PSR	Registrations	1.6 m	1.8 m	1.9m	No data	2m	No data
	Advice contacts	956k	1.1m	957k		1.0m	
Power Up	Customers	7,975	8,693	7,202	7,335	10,062	7,886
	Savings p/a	£2.1m	£1.8m a	£1.9m	£2.4m	£2.6m	£3.0m
Affordable Warmth	Customers	6,387	6,478	7,975	10,619	10,991	12,243
	Savings p/a	£3m	£3.9m	£7.1m	£5.8m	£9.7m	£12.4m
PSR referral networks	Partners	63	87	106	118	149	180

NGED continues to seek ways to strength and expand its vulnerability programme, especially in light of the RIIO-ED2 reporting focus on enabling vulnerable customers to make informed choices about appropriate low carbon and smart technologies and offers.

In 2021, NGED also launched a Community Matters Fund which distributed £5 million to schemes for projects that benefitted vulnerable customers by tackling fuel poverty, social isolation or that improved physical and mental wellbeing.

This report is structured as follows:

- **Research design** – Briefly describes the research process.
- **Overview of existing service provision and gaps** – Presents findings on the organisations delivering services, services delivered, customers reached and any gaps in service provision.
- **Referral pathways** – Explores referral networks between organisations.

⁹ Data supplied by NGED

- **Health of the sector** – Describes the health of the sector in regard to funding, staffing, capacity and motivation to expand services.
- **Services: current practice, gaps and emergent models of delivery and referral** – Summarises each of the nine services, drawing on examples of current reported practice.
- **Discussion: opportunities arising from horizon scan results** - Reviews the opportunities for NGED to support services.
- **Conclusions and Recommendations** – Draws key learning points from the research and suggests actions for NGED to work with and/or actively support these services to contribute to meeting its social obligations and objectives across its licence areas.
- **Appendix** - Provide further details on one aspect of the research.

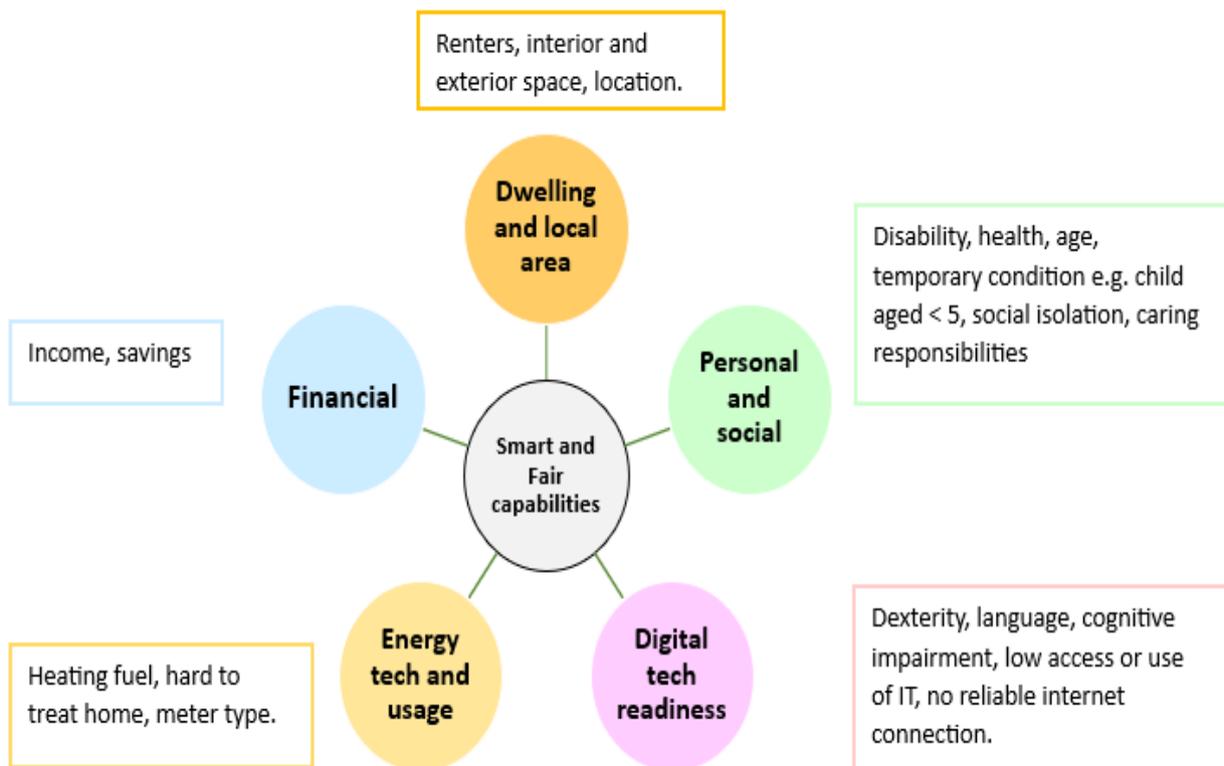
Research design

Overall approach

CSE has developed a capability lens which helps to understand how customer vulnerabilities affect people’s ability to take up energy services, especially smart products, services and tariffs. Figure 1 shows the capability lens, related to PSR needs codes (e.g. chronic health condition) and fuel poverty risk factors (e.g. tenure, low income). The capability lens aids in understanding different aspects of customer needs and how it fits into broader context of vulnerability e.g. temporal vulnerabilities like age, or temporary conditions like pregnancy, recent fall, hospital discharge; personal and social factors (ethnicity, health, ability to communicate in English, refugee status); housing (tenure, location, property type and size); economic and digital factors.

The capability lens will be used to inform analysis, for instance to identify gaps in services and to assess the health of the energy advice sector.

Figure 1: Capability lens with associated PSR vulnerabilities and fuel poverty risk factors



The nine services relate to the capability lens in the following way (Table 3). Note that new gas connections are included in Heating solutions; low carbon heating in Smart energy installations.

Table 3: Description of affordable warmth services and how they relate to the capability lens

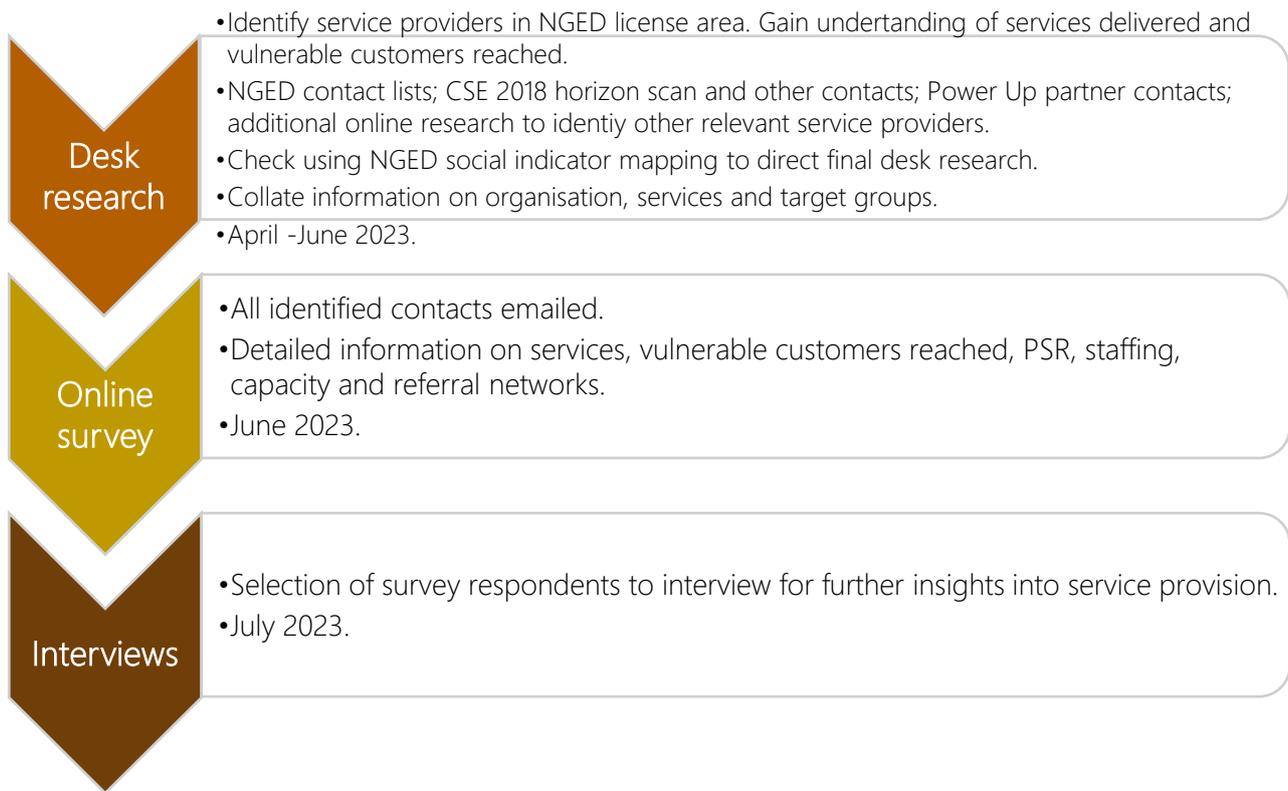
Service	Description	Capability lens
Income maximisation	Direct interventions that result in financial savings: e.g. benefit advice, emergency grants from charities / local authorities; fuel, health or food vouchers; other utility bill savings; affordable energy related support (e.g. Warm Home Discount); switching tariff.	Financial
Energy efficiency	Advice/support for non-behavioural energy saving measures to improve thermal energy efficiency of the home and reduce energy bills (e.g. insulation).	Energy
Heating solutions	Upgrades/grants for traditional heating systems: e.g. gas boilers; new gas connections, first time central heating / hot water systems; traditional heating controls).	Energy
Behavioural change	Advice which supports changes in how clients use energy (e.g. turning off lights/appliances).	Energy
Smart energy installations	Advice/support for installation of smart energy solutions, including low carbon technologies (e.g. solar PV, heat pumps) and smart energy technology (e.g. smart hot water tank).	Energy / Dwelling
Smart energy advice	Other advice on smart energy, including smart meters and uptake of smart offers like time-of-use tariffs and smart plugs that don't need installation.	Energy / Digital
Health and wellbeing	Non-energy support for vulnerable people that helps maintain health and wellbeing at home (e.g. Fire Service, CO alarms, adaptations, home healthcare).	Personal and social
Local resilience	Crisis response support: e.g. warm centres, food banks.	Financial / personal and social
Off-gas support	Support for off-gas households: e.g. oil buying clubs. ¹⁰	Energy

Research methodology

The approach for the research is summarised in Figure 2. Three activities - desk-based research, an online survey and online interviews - were used to gain an understanding of service providers' current and future capacity to deliver the nine identified advice services¹¹ to vulnerable energy customers in NGED license areas.

¹¹ See the first research objective in the Introduction section for the nine services

Figure 2: Research process



1. An Excel database of organisations, service providers and schemes in the NGED license areas offering one or more of the nine services (e.g. income maximisation) was collated. This database is provided to NGED to use alongside this report. It includes a scoring mechanism to help NGED identify organisations that could help it deliver advice services to PSR vulnerable customers. This scoring mechanism is explained in the introductory page of the database. 349 organisations were identified. In total, 194 new organisations were identified compared to the 2018 horizon scan. Further information was gathered on these 349 organisations to understand more about the focus, scale and variety of their services. It was not possible to obtain detailed data in most instances from desk research. The amount of data on each organisation varies. Desk research data was analysed for a few key aspects – services provided, scale of services, vulnerable customers reached - to obtain a broad understanding of available advice support.

Evidence from desk research was used to inform Research Objective 1, 2, and 4 (identification of organisations, understanding the services offered (limited) and identifying service gaps).

2. An online survey was created to collect detailed data on service providers’ range of services, vulnerable people supported, referral networks, staffing, capacity and how services have changed in the last two to three years. The online survey link was sent to all organisations on the collated contact list. After data cleaning, 49 complete survey responses and five partial survey responses were utilised for analysis – a total of 54 survey responses. Only partial responses that included responses to questions on delivery of service by local authority and the number of vulnerable households supported each year were retained.

3. Interviews were conducted with 10 organisations that submitted survey responses to obtain a deeper understanding of the services offered. Organisations were selected based on location, range of services, number of types of PSR vulnerable customers served, the annual number of customers reached and whether comments made in the survey indicated an innovative service or possible best practice. A shortlist of organisations to be interviewed was agreed with NGED. The list of organisations interviewed is given in Annex 3.

Data from the survey and interviews was used to inform research objectives 2-4.

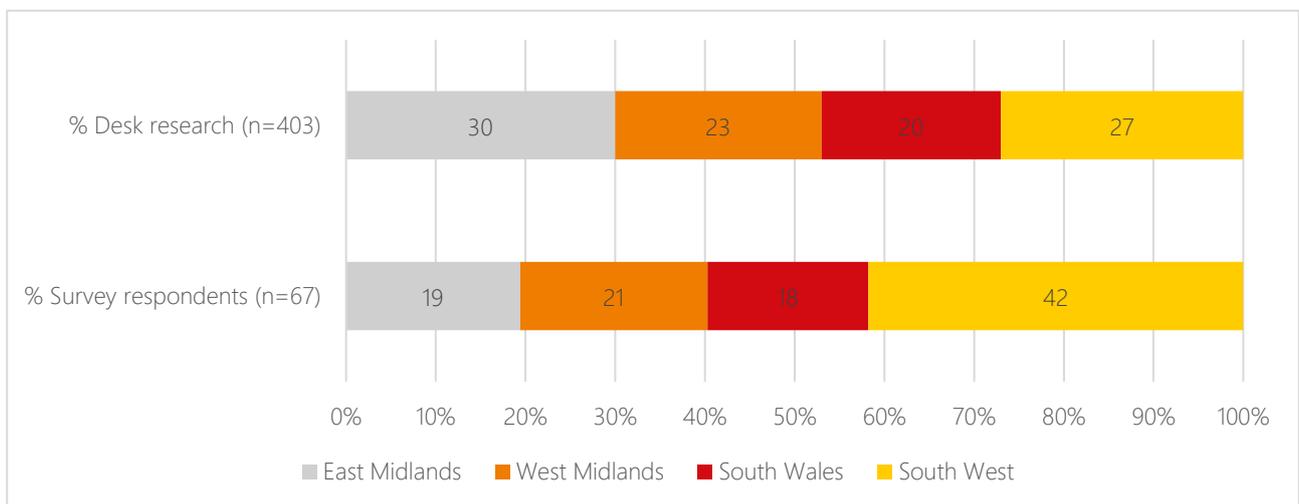
A copy of the online survey and interview topic guide are provided in Annex 1 and 2 respectively. The survey respondents and organisations interviewed are identified in the Excel database.

Characteristics of desk research, survey respondents and interviewees

A comparison of characteristics of desk research organisation and the subset of survey respondents was conducted to consider gaps and possible bias in organisations that filled out the survey.

It was found that for each license area, survey respondents included 15% more organisations from the South West and 11% less from the East Midlands than desk research organisations. The West Midlands and South Wales were also slightly under represented in survey respondents (2% each) (Figure 3¹²).

Figure 3: Desk research organisations and survey respondents by license area



In comparing organisation type, survey respondents included more registered charities (17%), social enterprises (11%) and voluntary organisations (6%) than the desk research organisations. The main organisation types underrepresented in survey respondents were local authorities

¹² Some organisations indicated that they served more than one license area. In that case, they were counted within each license area. For this reason, the number of desk research and survey respondents differs from the actual number of desk research organisations (349) and survey respondents (54)

(15%), housing associations (6%), private enterprise and other types of organisation (4% each) and other public sector organisations (3%).

Comparing scale of organisations' services, survey respondents contained more organisations operating at national, region or county level (a total of 19%), city / town (9%) and neighbourhood level (3%) than desk research organisations. Fewer organisations operating in single or multiple local authorities (a total of 27%) were included in survey respondents.

Thus, survey respondents contained a higher proportion of broadly 'charitable' organisations (charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations) working at larger scale compared to desk research organisations which contained more local authorities, other public sector bodies and housing providers, with organisations operating in one or a few local authority areas. It suggests that relatively well-resourced charitable organisations had the resources and motivation to complete the survey. This is a limitation which should be considered when viewing research findings.

Interviewees

CSE sought to interview 8-12 survey respondents to learn more about their services, the vulnerable customers they reached, their experiences delivering services since the pandemic and any aspiration to increase their capacity for PSR-related work. Selection of organisations was based on range of services offered, their potential for high reach particularly to PSR customers, and including organisations from across the 4 license areas.

The 10 organisations interviewed had the following characteristics (with further information given in Annex 3):

- License area: Two were from East Midlands, three the West Midlands, four South Wales, and one South West area.
- Type of organisation: Six were registered charities, two were social enterprises, two were voluntary organisations.
- Scale: One national, three regional or county, one multiple local authorities, four city or town, one neighbourhood level service delivery.

Thus, all organisations interviewed had broadly charitable objectives. They operated from large to small scale.

Data analysis

Desk research and survey responses were analysed in MS Excel. GIS software was used to map both desk research and survey respondents' locations and other variables (e.g. type of organisation) against a relevant base map e.g. household fuel poverty. NGED social indicator data was used in some instances e.g. Estimated of total PSR eligibility (households). Tables and data visualisations were used to address the research objectives. A summary of the maps and data used to compile them is given in Annex 4.

Transcripts of interviews were analysed by one researcher in QSR International NVivo software using thematic analysis based on the interview questions.

Limitations of the research design and methodology

- In desk research, the location of an organisation's head office in the license area was taken for the postcode. This may not be an accurate reflection of organisational activities.
- Data for organisations identified in desk research that did not respond to the survey is based on limited online information which may be out of date or not represent the full service provision offered by those organisations.
- The 15% survey response rate was average, despite offering an incentive.
- The approach taken to engage with Power Up and Affordable Warmth partners to obtain their current referral partner contact lists was not as productive as hoped. Two partners did not respond to the survey.
- Detailed information on service provision was predominantly available from survey responses. Comparison of survey respondents to organisations identified in desk research indicates a bias in survey respondents towards the South West area, from the charitable sector, and organisations with larger scale of operation.
- Difficulties were encountered mapping local authority boundaries. Changes in boundaries meant that Cherwell, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes were not included in the survey as local authorities that the organisation might serve.
- Responses to the survey showed that some respondents confused energy efficiency scheme delivery with emergency funding like fuel vouchers or Household Support Fund.
- In interviews a mismatch was found for two organisations between what was stated in survey responses and what was learnt in the interviews. In their survey responses organisations reported that they didn't provide smart energy advice but in interviews they mentioned providing advice on smart meters and/or digital support. Similarly with health and wellbeing support, some organisations equated this in the survey to informal wellbeing support rather than a structured service. Whilst the survey text clearly identified what each service included, misinterpretation and underreporting of services by other survey respondent organisations cannot be ruled out.

The next sections present findings from the desk research, surveys and interviews.

Overview of existing service provision and gaps

The section presents findings mainly from desk research and survey responses on the organisations delivering advice, support, energy efficiency measures, and other relevant energy services to vulnerable customers. Findings from interviews on PSR sign ups are also included.

Location of all identified service providers

Figure 4 shows the location of the main office of organisations identified as service providers through the desk research or through the survey.

Figure 4: Provider Organisations Identified from Desk Research and through Survey Responses

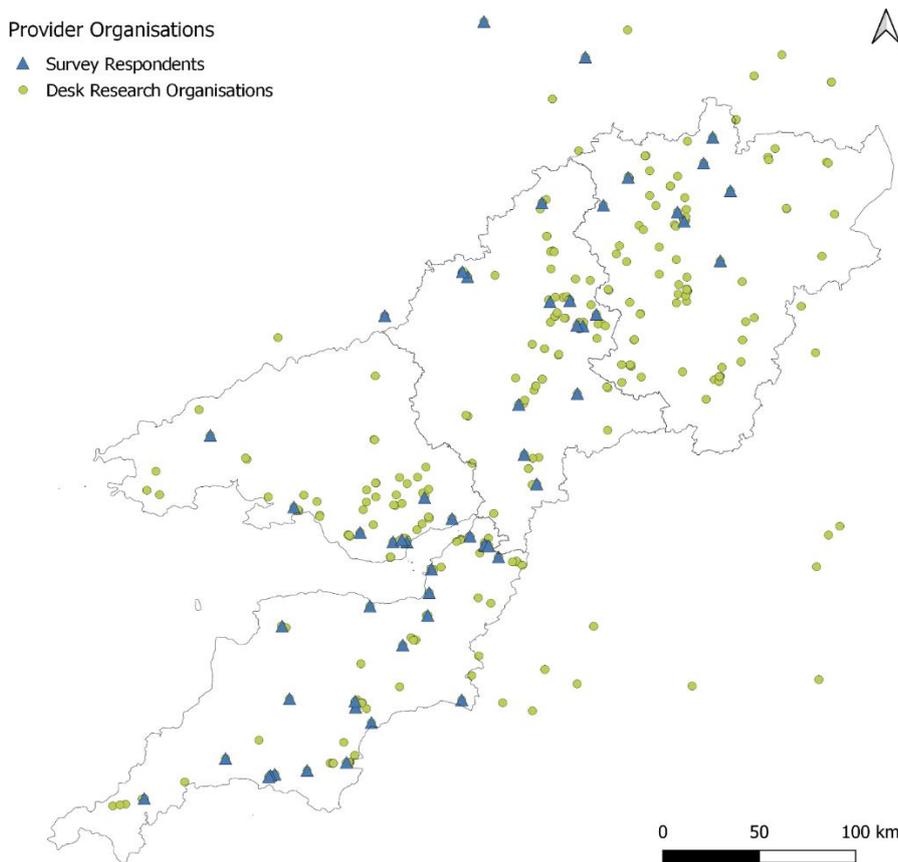


Table 4 shows the percentage of desk research organisations and the estimated percentage of PSR eligible households in each license area.

Table 4: Percentage of desk research organisations and the estimated percentage of PSR eligible households in each license area

License area	% Desk research organisations	Estimate % PSR eligible households
East Midlands	30	34
West Midlands	23	32
South Wales	20	14
South West	27	20

Overall, the West Midlands and South Wales have the least number of organisations. The West Midlands has the highest estimated percentage of PSR eligible households¹³ suggesting that further resources in this license area might be appropriate. The South West area is well served with service providers.

Organisation type

The following maps show organisations identified through the desk research and their organisation type by NGED license area. Fuel poverty data is shown by LSOA (lower layer super output area) for England¹⁴ and by local authority for Wales¹⁵. The definition of fuel poverty is different with the England definition being low-income low energy efficiency (LILEE) and the Wales definition being any household that would have to spend more than 10% of their income on maintaining a satisfactory heating regime.

The East and West Midlands maps show high representation by registered charities. Areas of high fuel poverty are more prevalent in the West Midlands with urban high fuel poverty areas well served by organisations (e.g. the cluster in Birmingham). However, some high fuel poverty areas have no service providers located in the vicinity. This is also observed in Figure 7, in South Wales for the NGED parts of Ceredigion and Powys (the red and orange high fuel poverty areas respectively). The majority of service providers are located in South East Wales in low fuel poverty areas, with a few in South West Wales. Registered charities are again well represented, although there appears to be more variety in organisation type in South Wales. In the South West (Figure 8) no local authorities have the highest percentage of fuel poverty. Variation in organisation type is apparent in the northernmost local authorities in the license area (Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset), plus a cluster in Exeter.

Overall, identifying areas with high fuel poverty and organisations that may be less resilient to changes in funding regimes (some voluntary sector organisations and charities) would be useful. Strengthening referral pathways between organisations could help to support ongoing service provision in those areas.

¹³ NGED social indicator mapping data

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-2022>

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.wales/fuel-poverty-estimates-wales-2018>

Figure 5: Desk Research Providers in the East Midlands by Organisation Type shown with Percentage of Households Fuel Poverty

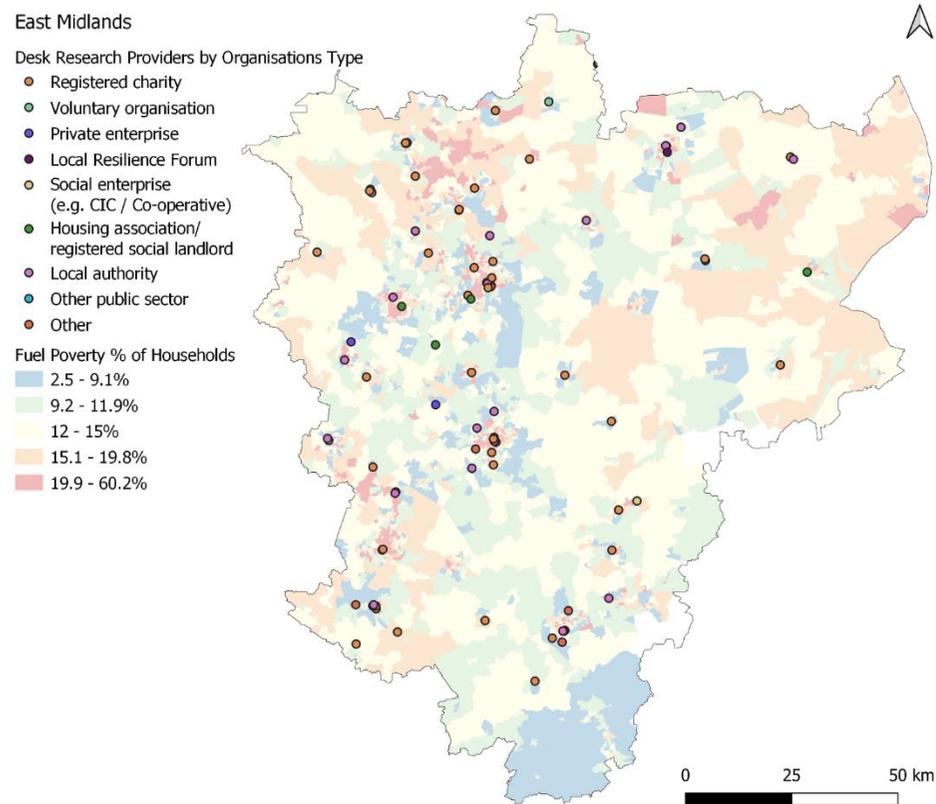


Figure 6: Desk Research Providers in the West Midlands by Organisation Type shown with Percentage of Households Fuel Poverty

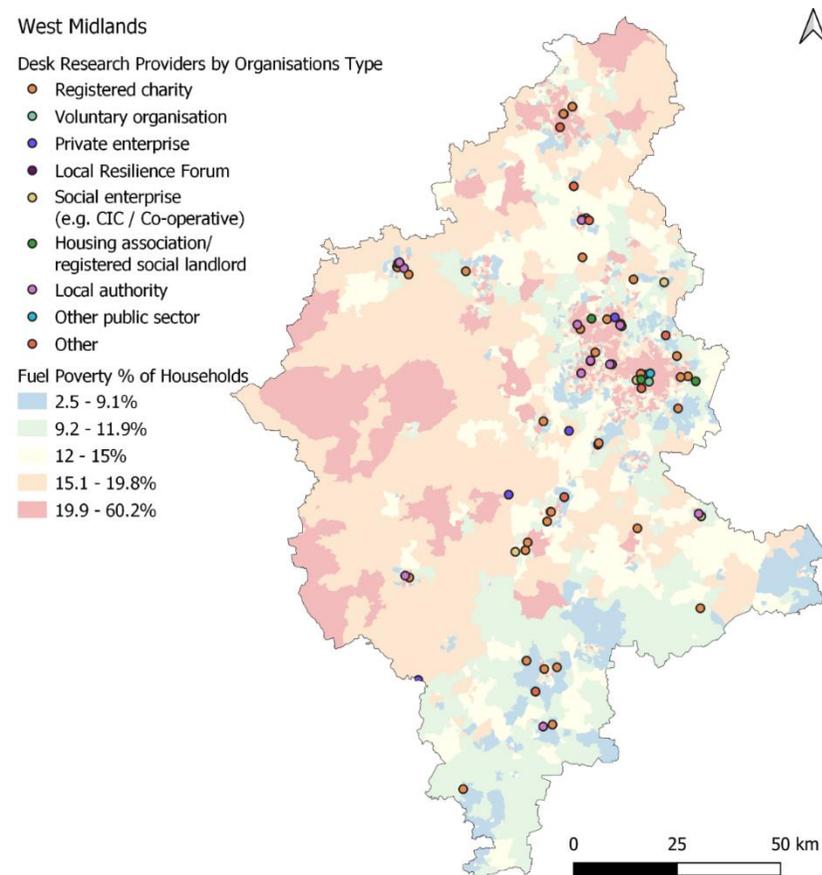


Figure 7: Desk Research Providers in the South Wales by Organisation Type shown with Percentage of Households Fuel Poverty

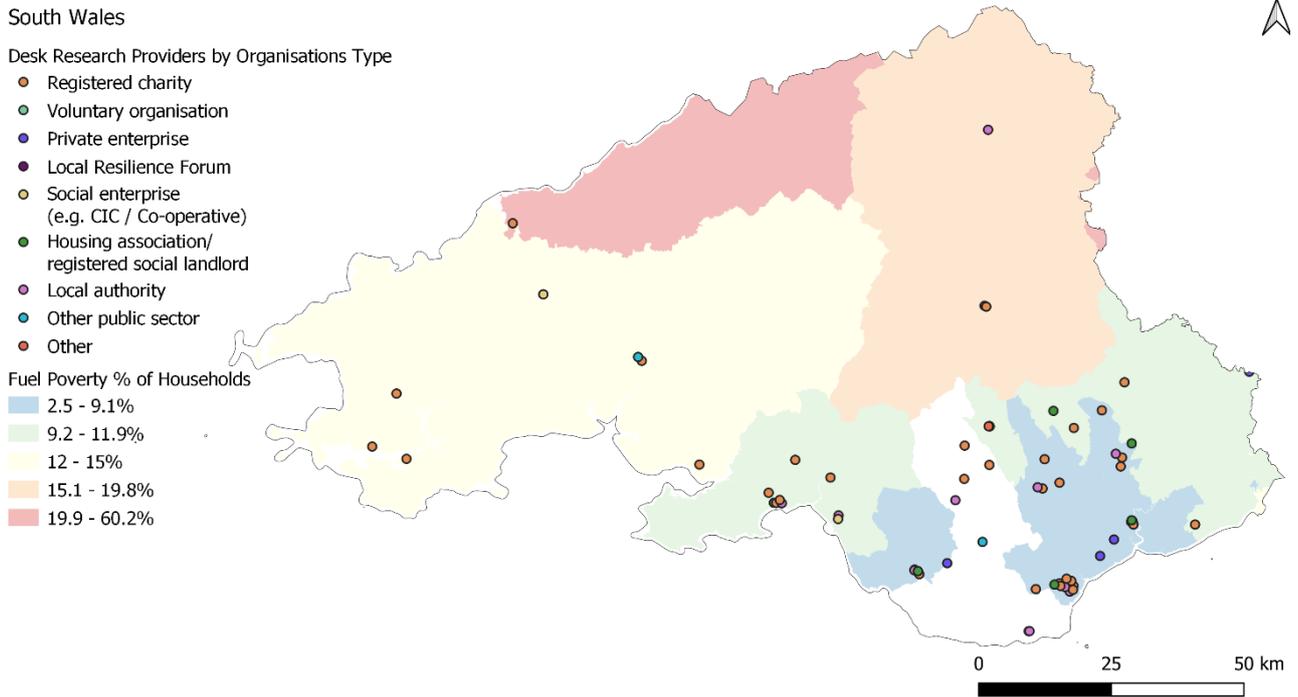


Figure 8: Desk Research Providers in the South West by Organisation Type shown with Percentage of Households Fuel Poverty

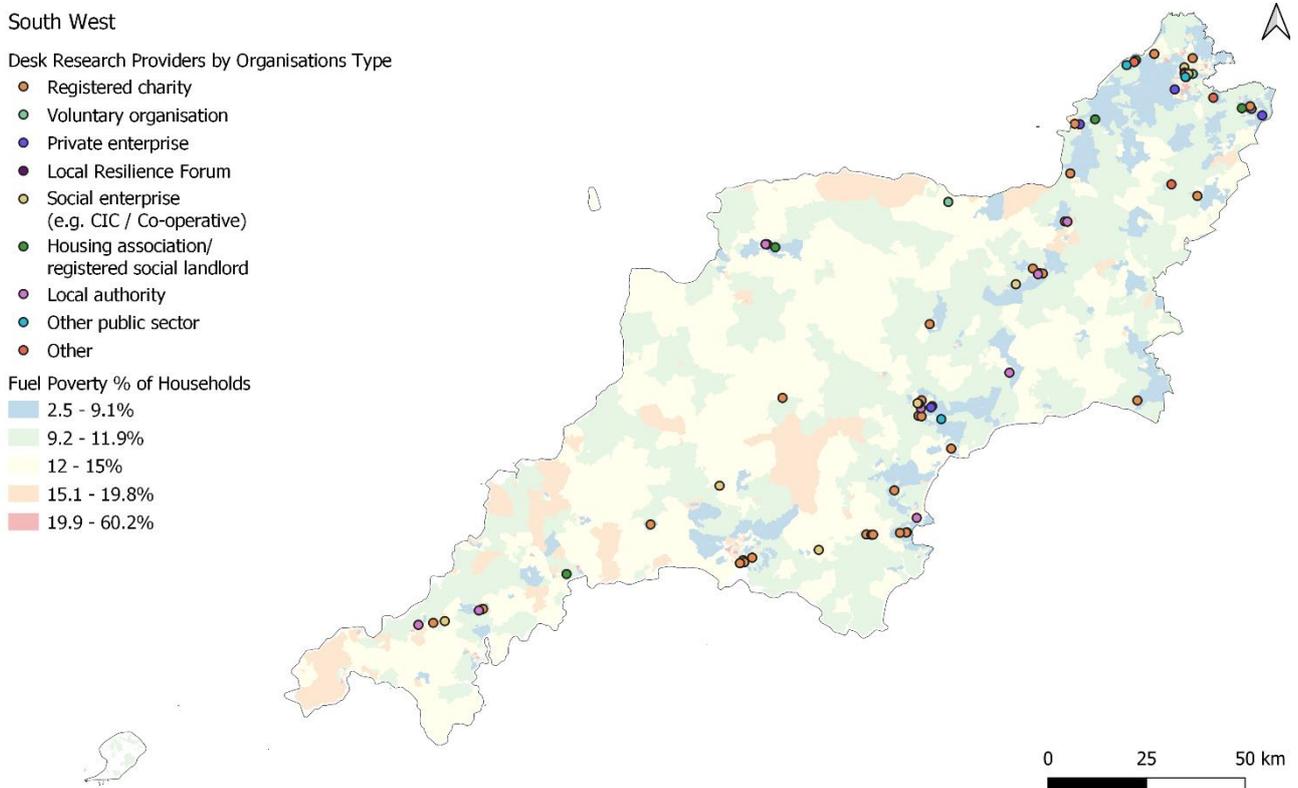


Table 5 summarises the organisation types for desk research and survey respondent organisations. From desk research, just over half the organisations identified were registered charities (180, 52%) and nearly a fifth were local authorities (66, 19%). For survey respondents more than two thirds of organisations represented (37, 69%) were registered charities. The single other organisation type specified by survey respondents was a Community Benefit Society.

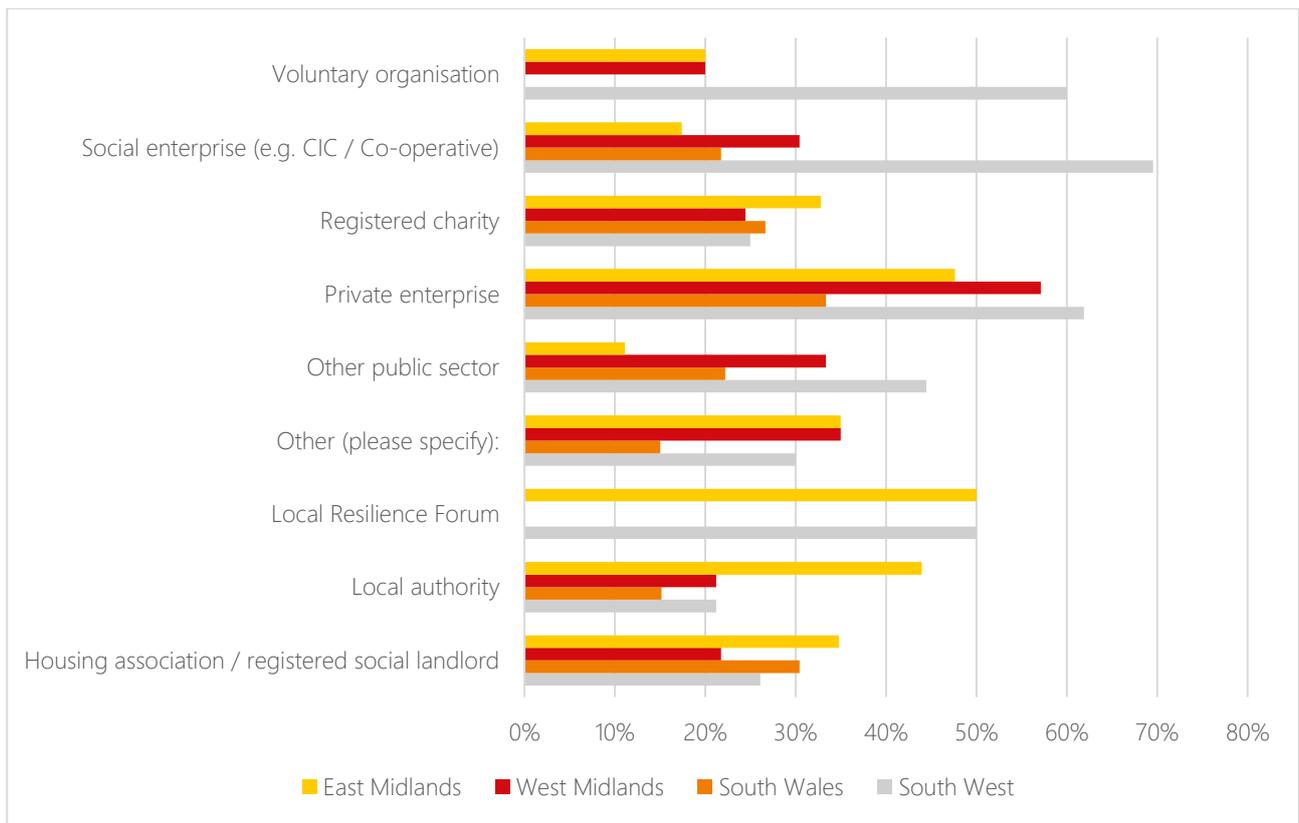
Table 5: Desk research and survey organisations, number and percentage of organisation type

Organisation type	Desk research		Survey	
	Count	%	Count	%
Registered charity	180	52%	37	69%
Local authority	66	19%	2	4%
Social enterprise	22	6%	9	17%
Housing association	22	6%		
Private enterprise	21	6%	1	2%
Other	20	6%	1	2%
Other public sector	9	3%		
Voluntary organisation	4	1%	4	7%
Local resilience forum	2	1%		
Total	346	54	100	100

The difference between desk research and survey respondent organisations was discussed in the research methodology. In both, the predominance of registered charities and social enterprises could present a potential weakness in the resilience of the advice sector (from a funding perspective).

Figure 9 shows the number of desk research organisation types as a proportion of the total number of respondents serving each license area. Desk research organisations serving the South West were most likely to be voluntary organisations or social enterprises. This suggests that strengthening connections with delivery partners and between organisations across the South West could buffer against a harsh funding environment. Organisations serving the East Midlands were most likely to be local authorities, which are more resilient to change.

Figure 9: Desk research organisations by organisation type and license area (n=349)

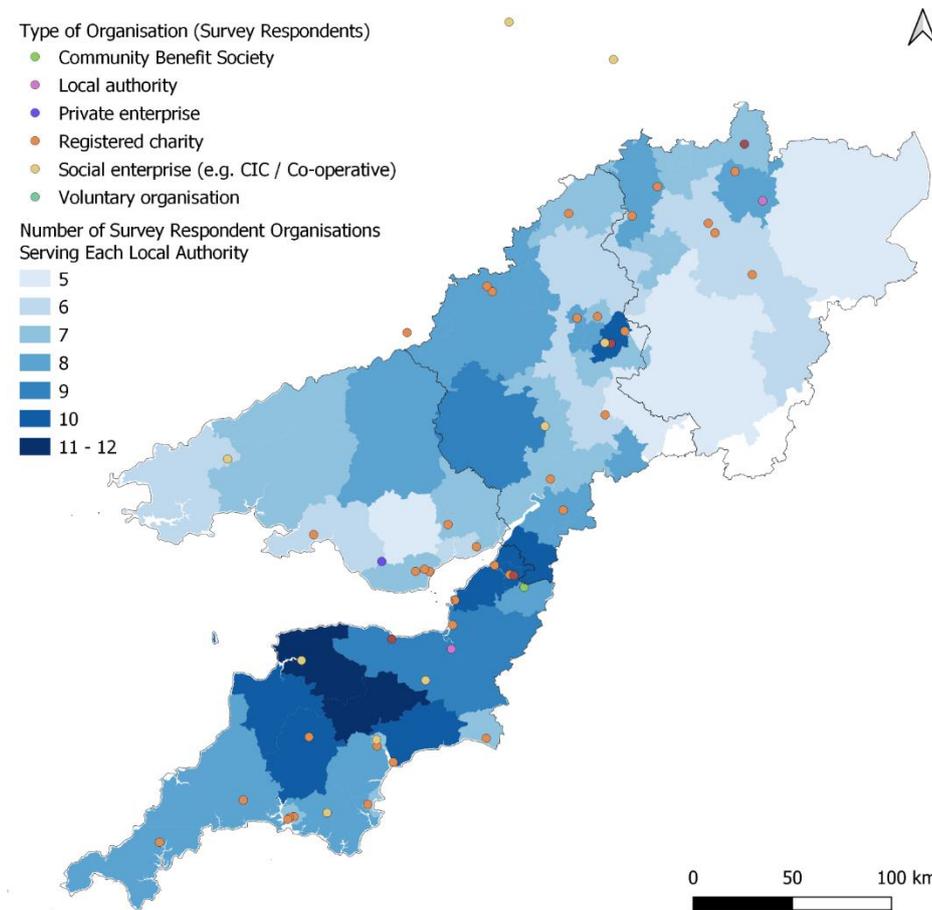


Geographical area of service provision

Figure 10 shows the type of organisation of survey respondents and the service coverage across local authorities. The service provision counts organisations working within each local authority including a count of 1 per local authority in the license area when selecting 'All or most of [license area]' in the survey. There are 5 organisations that cover all or most of South West, East Midlands, and South Wales. West Midlands has 6 organisations that cover all of most of the license area.

Data for desk research organisations on named local authorities that they work in was not available.

Figure 10: Service providers per local authority and type of organisation of survey respondents



Scale of service provision

Table 6 shows the scale of service provision (neighbourhood to national) for organisations identified in desk research. 70% of organisations were identified as providing services in single and multiple local authorities. Only 15% of desk research organisations operated at regional or county scale, with 7% (25) of all organisations being regional and based in the East Midlands. Scale of service was not discerned for two organisations (n=347).

Table 6: Desk research service providers, number and percentage for scale of service, number per license area (n=347)

Desk research: Scale of service	Overall	%	East Midlands	West Midlands	South Wales	South West
Single local authority	140	40	31	25	37	48
Multiple local authorities	103	30	40	35	16	21
Region or county	53	15	25	10	8	11
Other (please specify):	18	5	9	8	5	8
National	17	5	10	10	14	13
City or town	13	4	2	4	1	6
Neighbourhood	3	1	1		1	1
Total	347	100	118	92	82	108

A further analysis of organisation scale of service and number of vulnerable customers reached (based predominantly on survey respondent data) revealed that there was little correlation between geographical scale of services and customers reached (Table 7). Single and multiple local authorities both had a reach spanning 0-3000+ customers.

Table 7: Organisation geographic scale of services, percentage for banded number of vulnerable customers reached (April 2022-March 2023)

Scale of service	Number of vulnerable customers reached (April 2022-March 2023)						
	0-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-1999	2000-2999	3000+
Single local authority	26	34	12	16	25	29	24
Multiple local authorities	12		22	33		29	35
Region or county	38		22	17	75	42	17
Other (please specify):			11				
National	12	33					12
City or town		33	33	17			12
Neighbourhood	12			17			
Grand Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

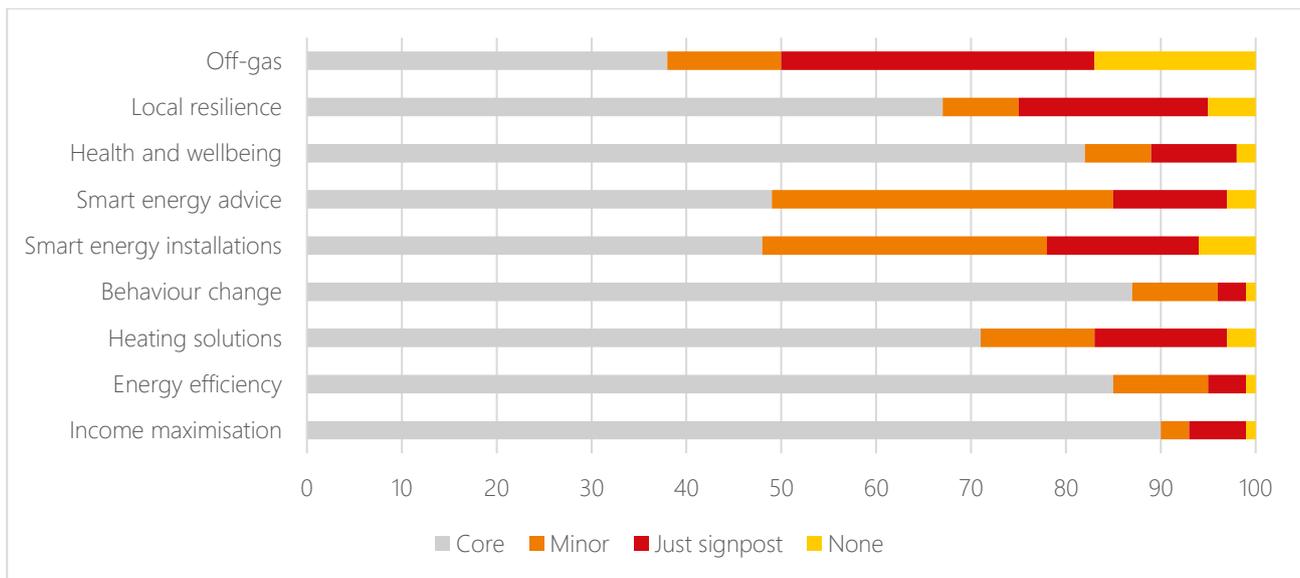
Overall, this suggests that the prevalence of organisations operating at single or multiple local authorities scale can engage with a large number of vulnerable customers and may have tailored services based on a good understanding of local needs and circumstances.

Services provided

Figure 11 shows the nine service areas offered by organisations identified through desk research. Each service area was ranked by a different service level: core service, minor service, just signpost or refer or none. The services provided by the most organisations at any kind of service level were income maximisation (230 organisations, 66%), energy efficiency (201, 58%) and health and wellbeing (184, 53%). This shows that health and wellbeing is now an important component of support for vulnerable customers. Smart energy advice / installation as a core service is relatively low which could be enhanced with further support.

For survey respondents, analysis found that behavioural change (47 respondents, 87%), energy efficiency (43, 80%) and income maximisation (38, 70%) were the most reported core and minor services reported. Organisations serving the East Midlands were least likely to report offering energy efficiency, smart energy advice and smart energy installations support. Organisations in South Wales reported offering the most smart energy installations and smart energy advice, and the least off-gas support. It would be useful to find out what conditions and enabling factors had led to this development in South Wales and to what extent it is replicable elsewhere.

Figure 11: Services offered by desk research organisations (%) (n=349)



For survey respondents, considering the different total numbers of services delivered at both core and minor levels, it was found that the most common number of services delivered at core level was five (11 respondents, 20%). A total of 16 organisations provided six or more services at core level, with one providing 10 services (which includes 'Other service'). Supporting organisations to offer multiple core services provides a more effective, holistic experience to vulnerable customers and can build organisational resilience.

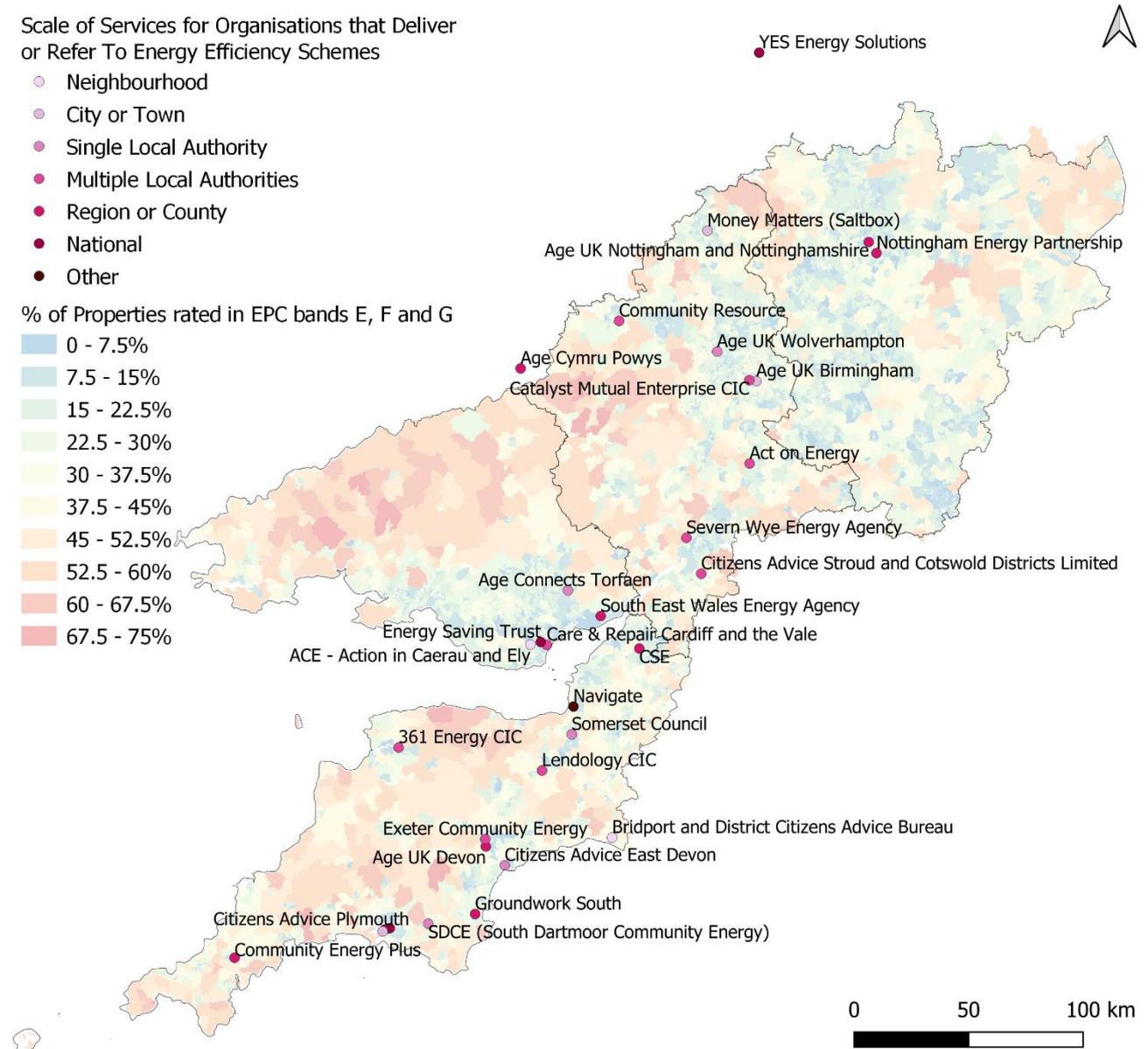
Research on the nine services is presented in the section on Services, along with a map for each service based on survey respondents.

Energy efficiency scheme delivery and referrals

Figure 12 shows the survey respondent organisations that deliver or refer to energy efficiency schemes across the NGED area. It depicts the scale of their delivery or referral service on a base map of percentage of properties with energy performance certificate (EPC) bands E-G. Navigate (marked as Other) refers clients to multiple regions for energy efficiency measures.

The majority of organisations operate at regional to multiple local authority scale. Areas in central South Wales, the West and East Midlands with a higher percentage of properties in EPC bands E-G have few service providers delivering or making referrals for energy efficiency measures. More information on energy efficiency installations in these areas, along with an assessment of need for localised support with current Affordable Warmth delivery partners could help to bridge this gap and facilitate more tailored interventions.

Figure 12: Survey Respondents that Deliver or Refer To Energy Efficiency Schemes by Scale of their Services with Proportion of Properties Rated E, F or G in EPC



For schemes delivered, the most common schemes reported were HUG (eight respondents, 15%), LAD and ECO (six respondents, 11%). Some respondents listed other funding that were not energy efficiency schemes, including Household Support Fund (six), Power Up, Warm Homes Discount, Warm & Wise and Fuel Bank Foundation fuel vouchers. The most common schemes survey respondents reported that referrals were made to were ECO (20 respondents, 37%), LAD and LEAP (six respondents, 11%).

Vulnerable customers supported

This next section moves on to explore the vulnerable customers reached by organisations identified in desk research and survey respondents. Figure 13 shows the number of vulnerable customers reached by survey respondents for April 2022-March 2023. Local authority labels are included solely for broader reference.

Table 8: Desk research organisations by target group supported (n=349)

Target group	Count	%
Low income	236	68%
Benefits recipients	183	52%
Disability or long-term illness	176	50%
Older people (65+)	153	44%
Households with children	87	25%
Socially isolated	82	23%
Social tenants	73	21%
Have care responsibilities	69	20%
Digitally excluded	64	18%
Hard to treat homes	63	18%
Live in off-gas grid area	58	17%
Private renters	54	15%
Live in rural areas	51	15%
Live in areas of high deprivation	42	12%
English second language	34	10%
NHS referrals	35	10%
Single parents	28	8%
Ethnic minorities	27	8%
Refugee or asylum seeker	27	8%
Domestic violence survivor	26	7%
Oldest occupant aged 16-24	23	7%
Adults in FT education	15	4%
Other	7	2%

For survey respondent organisations similar target groups were most served by organisations: older people (51 respondents, 94%), low income (50, 93%) and benefits recipients (44, 83%). Other target groups mentioned included: general service (two respondents), park home residents (two) and food bank users (one).

Overall, further support for advice services is needed for the fuel poverty risk groups with 10% or less engagement by survey respondents. Some risk factors may overlap (e.g. English is customer’s second language, refugees and asylum seekers, ethnic minorities). Engaging via community groups, schools and public service providers could facilitate access to these groups.

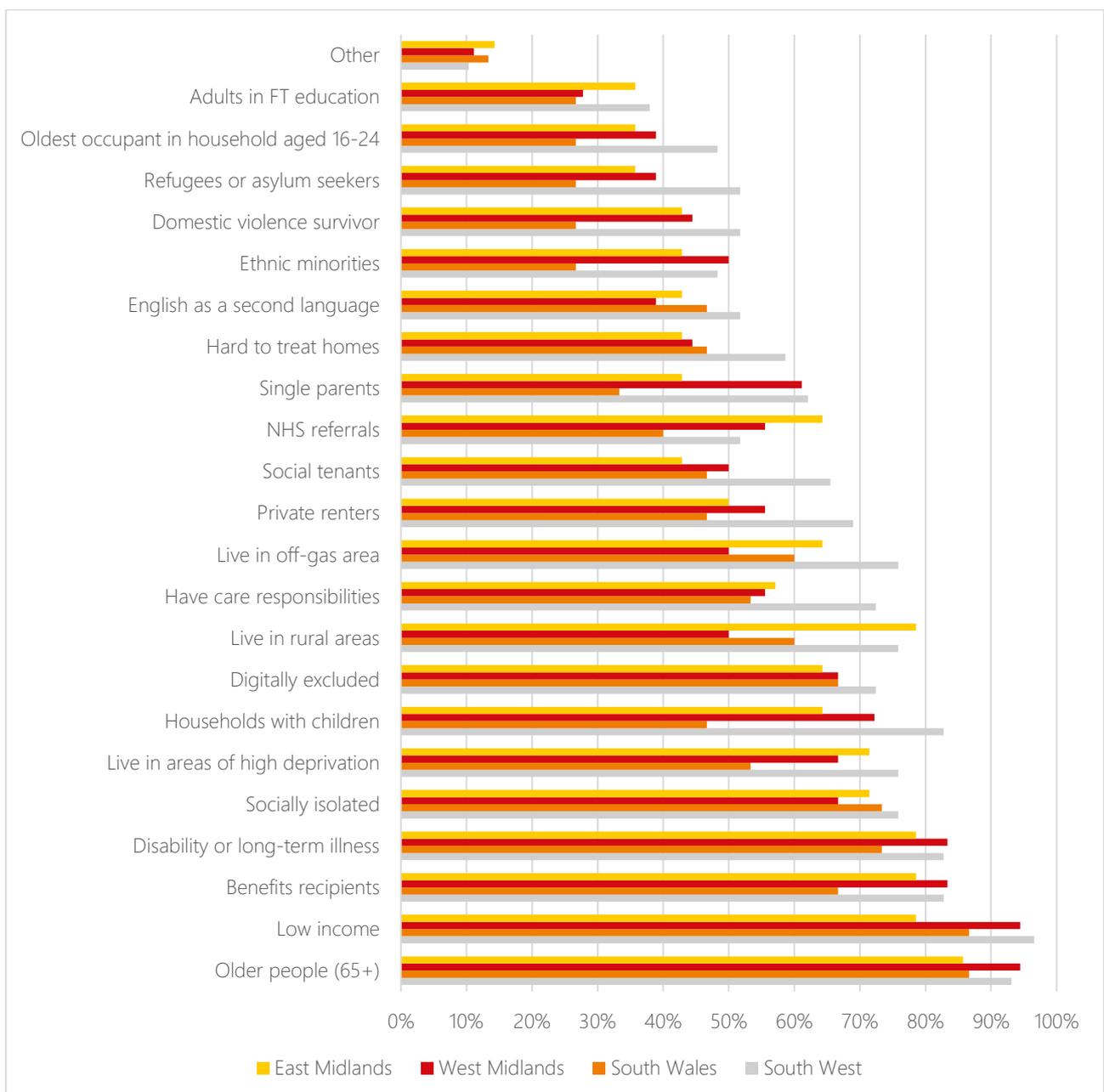
Figure 14 shows the percentage of survey respondent organisations serving each fuel poverty risk customer group as a proportion of the total number of respondents serving each license area. The following gaps in service provision are suggested for further examination and potential support:

- South Wales - less likely (by at least 10%) than those offering services in the other three license areas to serve: benefits recipients, households with children, ethnic minorities, domestic violence survivors, NHS referrals and single parents.
- East Midlands – possibly social housing tenants.

Forging partnerships and referral networks with organisations that already provide services to lesser served target groups in specific license areas could help to ameliorate gaps in reach to vulnerable customers.

It is notable that survey respondents in the East Midlands reported the most NHS referrals. Digital exclusion was covered by more than 60% of survey respondents across all license areas.

Figure 14: Survey organisations by target groups supported and license area (n=54)



Priority Service Register

Considering customer vulnerability based on PSR needs codes, Figure 15 shows desk research organisations by their scale of services alongside the estimated eligibility of households for the PSR. This is given to help visually identify potential gaps in service provision for PSR-eligible households. In all license areas, some geographic areas with high household PSR eligibility have few service providers. A detailed exploration by LSOA with relevant desk research organisations and advice hub partners could identify specific areas for targeted advice interventions.

For survey respondents it was found that the PSR needs codes served by the highest proportion of organisations were aged 65+ (51 respondents, 96%), mental health problems (48, 91%) and chronic/serious illness (43, 81%). The PSR needs codes least served were Unable to communicate in English (25 respondents, 53%) and pregnant women or household with child aged under 5 (31, 58%). These groups overlap with fuel poverty risk groups already identified for improved outreach, although pregnancy was not mentioned. This represents a distinct group to which advice could be targeted.

Analysis of organisations serving each PSR needs code as a proportion of the total number of respondents serving each license area found that organisations in the West Midlands were less likely (by at least 16%) to serve the dementia, memory or cognitive impairment needs code. Organisations in South Wales were less likely (by at least 17%) to serve the pregnant women or household with child aged under 5 needs code. These are specific areas where service provision could be supported and improved.

When looking at the total number of needs codes served by survey respondents, the most common number of needs code served was 12 (17, 32%). Organisations serving South Wales were least likely to serve all 12 codes (18, 33%) and most likely to serve 10 codes (14, 27%). Survey respondents in the East Midlands and South West were most able to help vulnerable customers across multiple PSR needs codes.

Figure 16 shows survey respondent organisations with the number of needs codes they reported to cover on a base map of the estimated PSR gap (number of households). Cross referencing to adjacent Figure 15 which shows scale of service provision is useful to assess whether the high PSR gap LSOAs might be covered by survey respondents with wide outreach. Further analysis found that for survey respondents addressing 10 or more PSR needs codes:

- All license areas had organisations with national to region / county scale of service provision (East and West Midlands 1, South Wales 3, South West 3)
- All license areas had organisations with outreach of 1000 or more customers (East Midlands 3, West Midlands 4, South Wales 5, South West 11)

Further exploration by LSOA with delivery partners and desk research organisations as previously suggested could identify specific areas for targeted advice interventions

Figure 15: Scale of Services by Desk Research Organisations and Priority Services Register Eligibility by LSOA

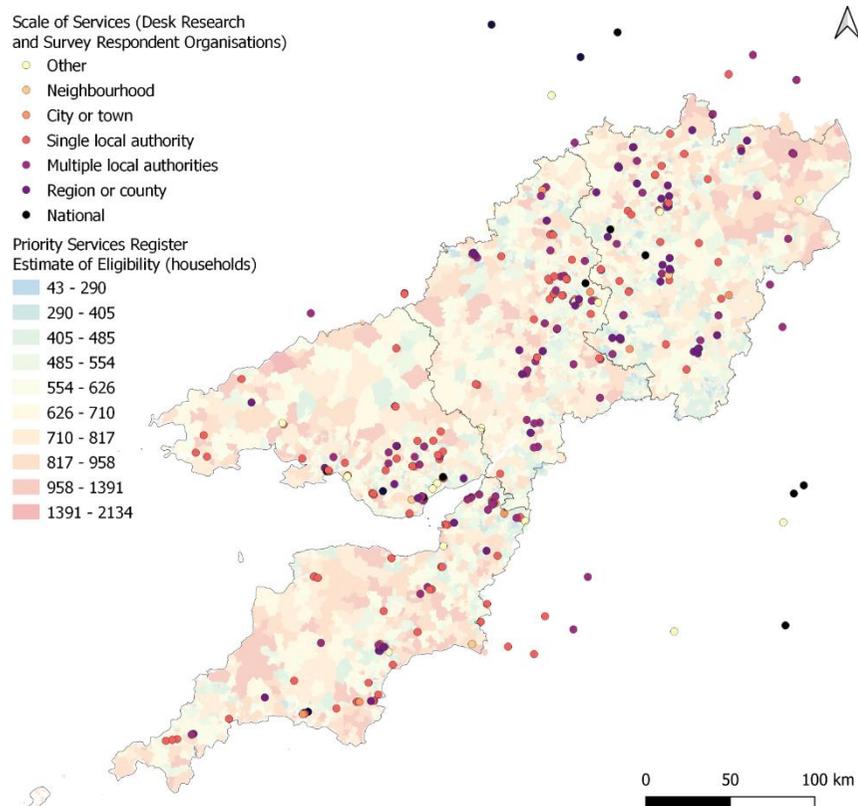
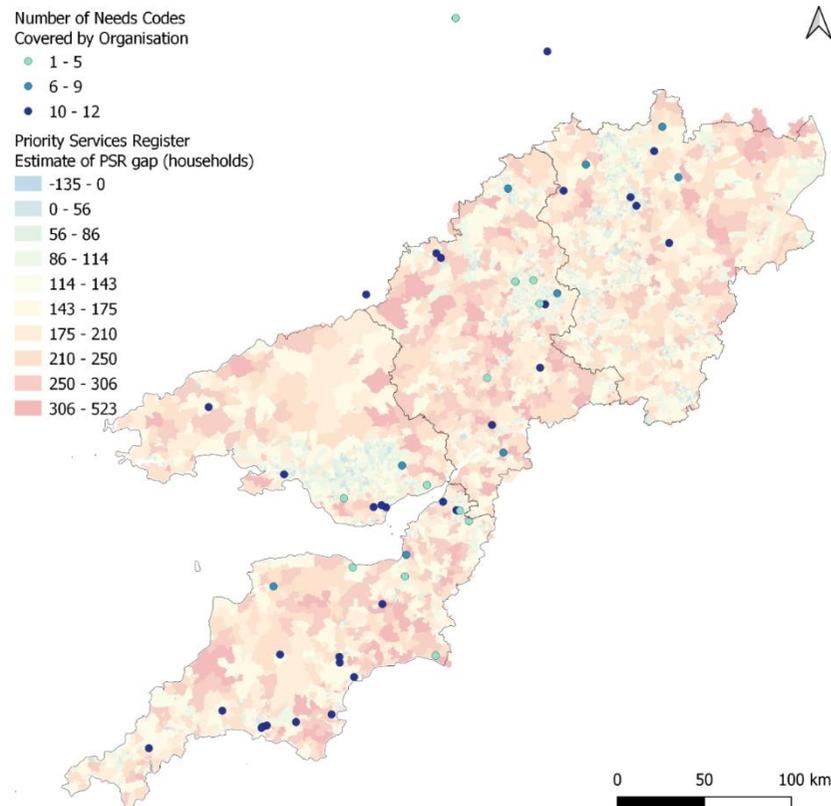


Figure 16: Number of Needs Codes Covered by Survey Respondent Organisations and Priority Services Register Gap (households)



PSR needs code – Unable to communicate in English

Survey respondents reported that the three most common languages that they offered services in were services in English only (18 respondents, 33%), Polish (17, 31%) and Arabic (15, 28%). A summary table of all languages that survey respondents offer services in is given in the Appendix. As this needs code was the one least supported by survey respondents it would be worthwhile to geographically identify groups and communities unable to communicate in English to assess service provision in those areas.

Organisations interviewed – PSR sign ups and clients hard to engage with

The following section summarises further insights from organisations interviewed about PSR sign ups and what would help organisations to do more.

Challenges with PSR sign ups

A number of challenges regarding PSR sign up emerged from interviews.

- PSR sign up support was embedded in one project but not others for one PSR partner, identifying a need for support for organisations to integrate PSR sign ups into all appropriate projects.
- Conflation of energy supplier and NGED PSRs, coupled with low capacity, resulted in some organisations only signing up clients to the energy supplier PSR. They were unaware of the online PSR sign up form. One organisation interviewed was unaware of the NGED PSR. High demand for services made it hard for some organisations to prioritise PSR sign ups. Broader promotion of NGED PSR, its benefits for vulnerable customers and how it fits with energy supplier and water PSRs would be useful.
- Working families eligible for the PSR might be missed due to centre opening hours. PSR partnerships or outreach to Early Years, nurseries and schools could help to target this group (along with overlapping fuel poverty risk groups such as single parents).

Further support for PSR sign ups

Further support was requested by some organisations interviewed to aid PSR sign ups.

- Exeter Community Energy reported that 75 per cent of their clients are eligible for the PSR. They requested an NGED branded banner to use at outreach events to indicate that they are endorsed by NGED and to aid promotion of the PSR. A promotional display could be beneficial for key PSR partners.
- PSR training was requested by Age Cymru Powys. Working in partnership with a water company, they found that after receiving training from the water supplier, referrals for water PSR and other services increased. Age Cymru Powys felt that staff training from NGED could increase energy PSR sign ups.

- One organisation stated that NGED's power cut packs encouraged clients to register for the PSR. Continued provision of power cut packs to PSR partner organisations would be useful.
- Some established advice organisations do not directly sign clients to the PSR. They signpost eligible clients, work in partnership with others to do so, or promote the PSR in newsletters. It may be worthwhile connecting with organisations with a reach of 500+ customers to support active PSR sign up, particularly in high PSR gap areas.

Client groups under-reached

The majority of organisations interviewed felt that they were reaching those in need of their services, but there was a concern amongst a number of organisations that it was becoming harder to reach clients who are digitally excluded:

Even more things are digital-only now so the people who don't have access to digital are the ones that are hardest to reach, not just for us but for everybody.

Rural Action Derbyshire

To combat this, some organisations were involved in community engagement and outreach activities. For example, Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell reported working with faith leaders in their communities to promote their services and build trust:

Being connected in communities means that the people who do understand the community, or the culture, if we can get them to refer to us because we're really good at what we do, then that's the way forward [...] work with the community leaders, the faith leaders, if they know who we are and we can become a trusted voice for them, when the community comes to them and ask for help, they can categorically say, 'Go to Age UK, they will help you.'

Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell

More than 60% of survey respondents reported that they undertook digital inclusion work. Promoting wider engagement via community organisations could help to build trust so that people less willing to seek advice and digital support can do so.

Exeter Community Energy acknowledged that it was harder to engage certain groups, in particular clients with mental health issues and social housing tenants who are referred by their housing providers. Saltbox – Money Matters identified clients with learning disabilities (some undiagnosed) as being harder to engage with and requiring more input:

We see quite a lot with low level capacity issues where [...] that level of understanding just isn't there and that can be really difficult to try and get them to understand what they need to do and why they need to do it, even going over things quite a lot of times.

Saltbox - Money Matters

The additional time required to engage with vulnerable customers should be taken into account when considering service delivery. Sharing best practice or facilitating access to training in

working with clients with mental health issues or learning difficulties would support organisations in service delivery.

This section concludes with a few key points from findings of the horizon scan on gaps or thin spots in geographical coverage of services or in reaching particular vulnerable customer groups.

Key points

Results are based on findings from desk research, survey responses and interviews. As identified in the Research design section, survey respondents were drawn more from the South West area, with fewer from the East Midlands. A disproportionately high number of charities, social enterprises and voluntary organisations is represented compared to desk research organisation, with fewer local authorities and no housing associations.

- From desk research, the West Midlands and South Wales have the least number of service providers. The West Midlands has the highest estimated percentage of PSR eligible households.¹⁶
- Half the organisations identified in desk research were registered charities, presenting a potential weakness in the resilience of the advice sector from a funding perspective.
- 70% of organisations were identified as providing services in single and multiple local authority areas, 15% at regional scale. A large number of vulnerable customers were engaged with (0-3000+ a year) at all these scales of service provision.
- On energy efficiency schemes, areas in central South Wales, the West and East Midlands with a higher percentage of properties in EPC bands E-G have few service providers delivering or making referrals for energy efficiency measures.
- On service providers ability to reach vulnerable customers, fuel poverty risk groups whose needs were least met included English is second language, single parents, refugees and asylum seekers, ethnic minorities, domestic violence survivor, oldest occupant in the home is aged 16-24. The PSR needs codes least served were Unable to communicate in English and pregnant women or household with child aged under 5. In South Wales there was less service provision compared to other license areas for benefits recipients, households with children, ethnic minorities, domestic violence survivors, NHS referrals and single parents. It was less likely to serve the pregnant women or household with child aged under 5 needs code. The East Midlands engaged slightly less proportionally with social housing tenants. The West Midlands was less likely to serve the dementia, memory or cognitive impairment needs code.

¹⁶ NGED social indicator mapping data

Recommendations

- Provide further resources in the West Midlands to expand service provision to meet PSR need. Support expansion of advice services in South Wales, particularly to meet need in high fuel poverty risk and PSR need areas.
- Conduct an assessment by LSOA for high fuel poverty (LILEE and 10% fuel spend of income after housing cost) and estimated PSR gap to identify specific areas for intervention (e.g. Ceredigion and Powys in South Wales). Service coverage could then be checked with existing partners and desk research organisations to initiate interventions. Geographical areas identified include:
 - Gather more information on energy efficiency installations in areas with few energy efficiency schemes and a higher percentage of properties in EPC bands E-G (central South Wales, the West and East Midlands). Assess the need for localised support with current Affordable Warmth delivery partners to bridge the gap and facilitate more tailored interventions.
 - Strengthen referral pathways with Power Up and Affordable Warmth partners, and across each license area particularly in the South West as a means to nurture the resilience of charitable organisations and improve access to services.
 - Address specific gaps in service provision such as local resilience (most areas), smart energy advice / installations (East Midlands, South Wales).
 - Provide further support for advice services for fuel poverty risk groups and PSR needs codes groups in license areas where survey respondent engagement was found to be low. Engage via community groups, Early Years, nurseries, schools and public service providers to facilitate access to these groups.
 - Increase awareness of the PSR and support organisations to promote PSR sign ups with resources and training, to reemphasise its importance to staff and its benefits to vulnerable customers.

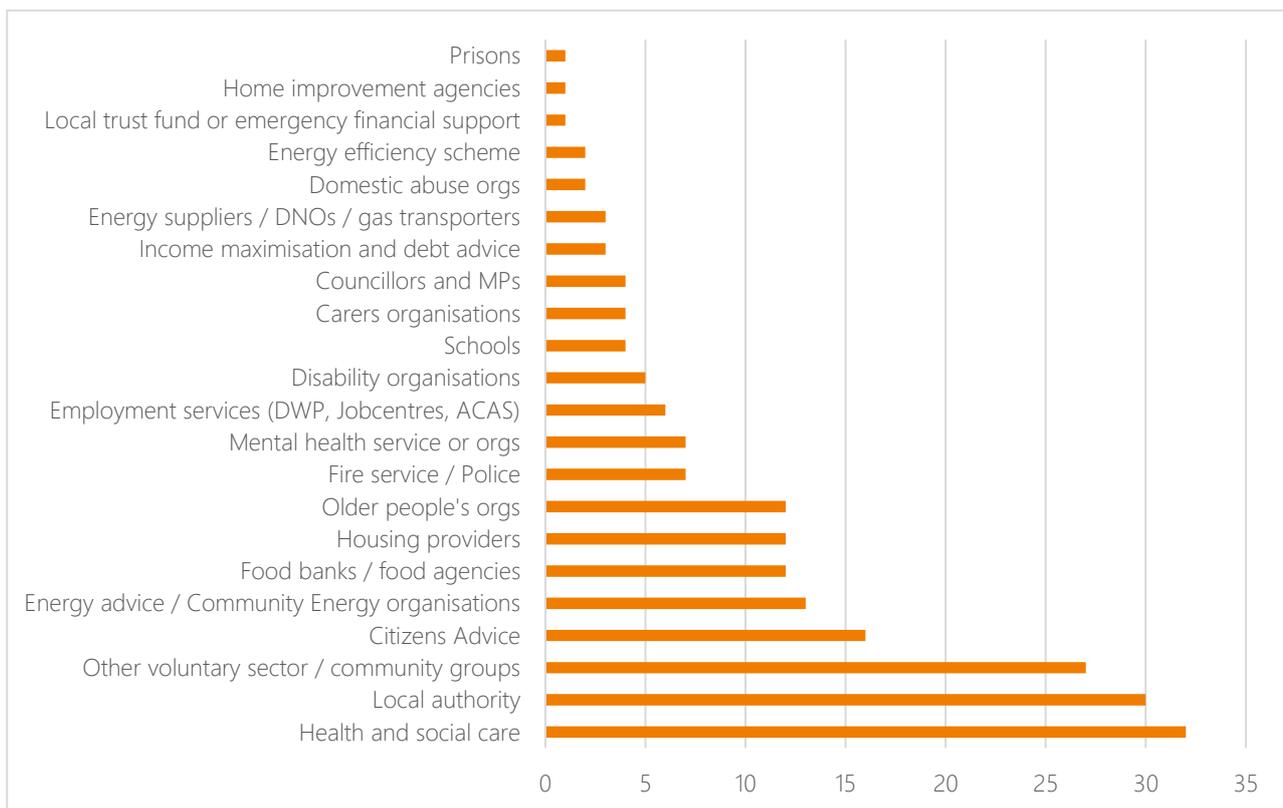
Referral pathways

This section presents findings from survey respondent organisations and interviews on the referral networks of those organisations. Data was not available for desk research organisations. As such, the bias in survey respondents compared to desk research organisations should be borne in mind.

Referral networks

For survey respondents that reported receiving referrals from different organisation types, the three most common organisation types were health and social care (32 respondents, 64%), local authorities (30, 60%) and other voluntary sector or community groups (27, 54%) (Figure 17).

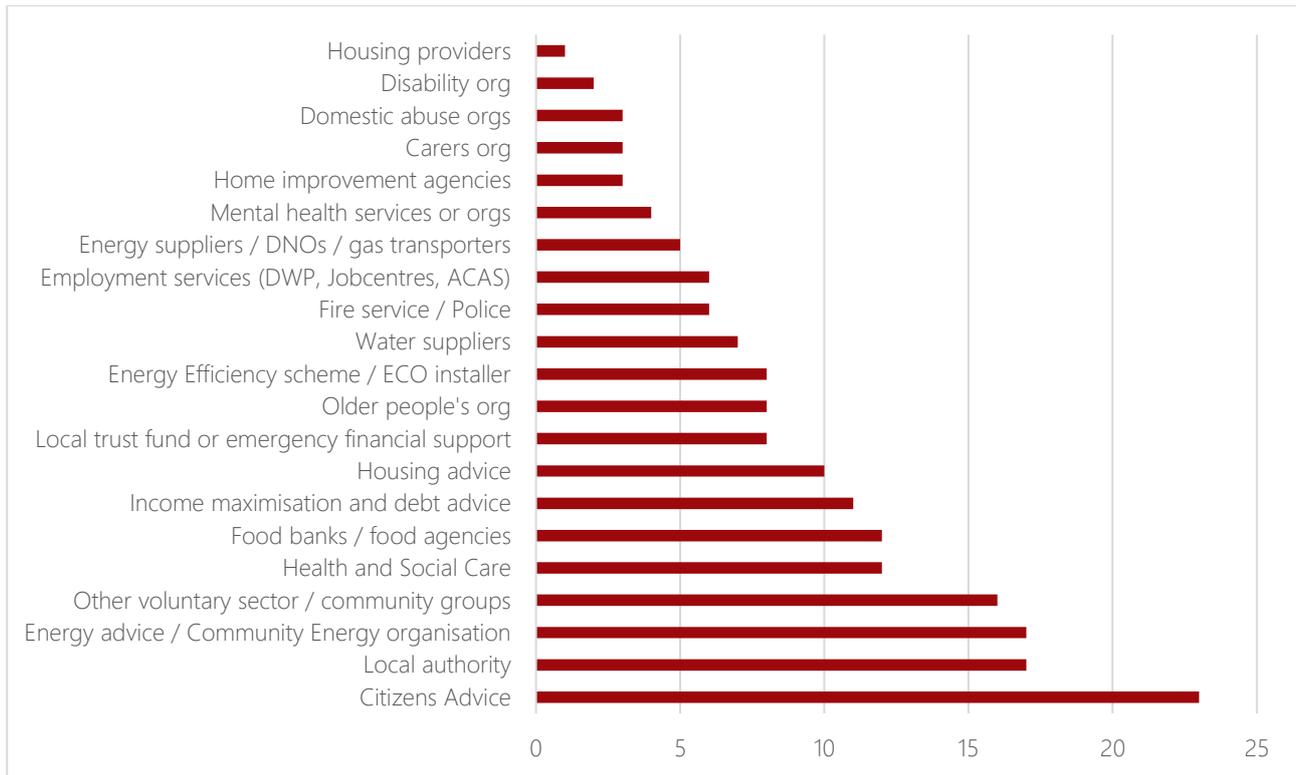
Figure 17: Survey organisations by organisation types receiving referrals from (n=50¹⁷)



Survey respondents were also asked about the organisation types that they referred clients to. The three most common organisation types were Citizens Advice (23 respondents, 46%) and local authorities and energy advice or community energy groups (both 17, 34%) (Figure 18).

¹⁷ Fifty survey respondents answered this question

Figure 18: Survey organisations by organisation types referring to (n=50)



The data showed regional variations in referral networks both in terms of organisations referring to surveyed organisations and the organisations receiving clients from the surveyed organisations. For example, organisations serving the South West were the only organisations that reported referring to employment services, mental health services and housing providers. Where there are strengths in referral networks (e.g. East Midlands health and social care) or disparities (e.g. schools and carers organisations only reportedly being integrated into referral networks in the South West and South Wales), then knowledge sharing sessions could help to encourage further action.

The data also showed a range in the number of organisation types an organisation had in its referral network. Table 9 shows the survey respondents that have the highest number of types of organisation making referrals to them, or that they make referrals to. All license areas are covered, with 50% of organisations based in the South West. Having a wide range of organisations in a referral network can help to indicate the integration of an organisation with other service providers. However, this is limited in that it does not consider the number of referral partners that a survey respondent has. For example, Age Cymru Powys reported that it has 187 referral partners; Exeter Community Energy said there were too many partners to list. It does not represent a gap in service provision.

Table 9: Number of organisation types in the surveyed organisation’s referral network

Organisation	Referrals from	Referrals to
361 Energy CIC	7	6
Age Cymru Powys	5	7
Age Cymru West Glamorgan	6	0
Age UK Devon	3	6
Age UK Plymouth	6	4
Bridport and District Citizens Advice Bureau	4	6
Bristol North West Food Bank	5	7
Care & Repair Cardiff and The Vale	6	6
Citizens Advice Stroud and Cotswold Districts Limited	11	5
Community Energy Plus	9	3
Community Resource	6	5
CSE	5	6
Energy Saving Trust	7	6
Exeter Community Energy	9	12
Saltbox - Money Matters	6	5
Nottingham Energy Partnership	5	6
Plymouth Energy Community	6	7
Rural Action Derbyshire	6	3
Severn Wye Energy Agency	6	3
South Dartmoor Community Energy	7	6

Organisations interviewed – referral networks and client groups under-reached

Referral networks

Findings from the 10 organisations interviewed supported evidence from the broader survey responses. Most organisations interviewed said they were well integrated within their communities, receiving referrals from a diverse range of organisations including NHS staff, social workers, food banks, housing associations and other voluntary and community organisations. In particular most of the organisations interviewed reported a high proportion of referrals from health and social care professionals including GPs, social prescribers and hospital discharge teams:

We work closely with the South West GP Cluster, we have a seamless referral system in place where patients who are vulnerable due to health conditions being impacted by the cold are referred directly into our service and offered immediate support. ACE

An organisation interviewed didn’t have a strong referral network but focused instead on providing as much support in-house for clients as possible. It only referred for specialist housing advice and to charities that supported addiction issues. In its survey response, the organisation

stated that it received referrals from other organisations which “cannot cope with their own demand”. Whilst the number of organisations or organisation types in a network doesn’t indicate gaps in service provision, an implication of having fewer service providers is that service provision may be less resilient.

This ‘single point of contact’ approach differs from organisations embedded within referral networks. Retaining a single point of contact for the client whether within one organisation or a multi-partner delivery framework can help to keep clients engaged and deliver a comprehensive service for them.

Four organisations interviewed reported being reluctant to refer clients to other organisations and expressed a real desire to find solutions for clients themselves, for three reasons.

1. Other agencies were oversubscribed. For example, Exeter Community Energy reported that they used to refer to the Citizens Advice Bureaus in their area for benefit and debt advice but due to the level of demand, were not receiving updates on referrals. This led them to develop their own benefit and debt services to enable them to provide a more joined up service for clients. Exeter Community Energy plan to expand their debt advice service by becoming an accredited debt centre within the next six months.
2. Two organisations said that vulnerable clients found their services more accessible and welcoming than agencies like Citizens Advice. This supports the importance of face-to-face delivery of services in communities.
3. A lack of confidence in referral networks was apparent, mostly due to the level of demand that all agencies were experiencing. For example, ACE support clients with energy bill issues, which is not their usual remit.

In contrast, it was recognised by two organisations interviewed that certain services were beyond their current expertise and remit. For example, South East Wales Energy Agency do not provide income maximisation advice, referring clients to Citizens Advice for this support. Bassetlaw Action Centre consider whether advice and support is offered elsewhere before assisting clients with matters that are not in their usual remit. Five organisations (ACE, Age Cymru Powys, Bassetlaw Action Centre, Saltbox - Money Matters and Rural Action Derbyshire) said that for smart energy installations, they would signpost or refer clients to an energy advice agency for queries on low carbon technologies as they did not have expertise on this.

Potential gaps in service provision and referral networks

Half the organisations interviewed stated that there were no obvious gaps in terms of services they would like to refer clients to (ACE, Age Cymru Powys, Energy Local, South East Wales Energy Agency and Spitfire Services).

The following gaps in services were raised by other organisations:

- Few options on grants for household items such as second-hand furniture and white goods (Exeter Community Energy, Saltbox - Money Matters). Exeter Community Energy

previously used hardship funds to provide vouchers for clients to spend at a second-hand furniture shop which has now gone out of business. When clients were signposted to grant schemes, it was found that they often required support to make successful applications.

- Lack of support and knowledge on energy efficiency and heating solutions. Age Cymru Powys, Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell and Rural Action Derbyshire all indicated in either their survey response or when interviewed that they would like to refer to an organisation for either boiler upgrades, new heating systems or windows and doors. There was also evidence that some of the organisations interviewed were not sufficiently connected to their local energy advice agency or to local authority run retrofit schemes. This has perhaps resulted in a lack of knowledge and awareness of government strategy to decarbonise homes and the funding routes that are available.
- Inadequate mental health service provision to meet current need. Rural Action Derbyshire reported that long waiting times for mental health services in its area could result in clients struggling to engage with its services.
- Reduced off-gas and other services in rural areas. Bassetlaw Action Centre reported that some organisations they previously referred clients to no longer existed, including off-gas support such as an oil bulk buy scheme. The centre also struggled with county-wide services being located in Nottingham, a significant distance for clients to travel. Also, a county-wide carers service does not provide events or groups in its area.

Furthermore, there was also evidence that some organisations were not connected with the Power Up hubs in their area.

Key points

The following points are based on evidence from survey respondents only.

The horizon scan found that survey respondents across license areas received most referrals from health and social care providers, local authorities and voluntary sector or community groups. Survey respondents made referrals most frequently to Citizens Advice, local authorities and energy advice or community energy groups. Where strengths or discrepancies between license areas are apparent in terms of receiving or making referrals, it would be useful for service providers to share expertise to encourage further referral partnerships and joined up service provision.

Organisations appear well embedded in wide and varied referral networks. Qualitative data flagged some gaps:

- The number of organisations in a referral network does not always indicate strength of service provision. There seemed to be two different approaches adopted by organisations regarding referrals, in light of high demand for advice services: (1) Develop capacity and provide services in-house; (2) Develop referral networks. These indicates two forms of

support needed. Some organisations can be supported to offer multiple core services to provide a more effective, holistic experience to vulnerable customers. Where organisations prefer the referral network approach, they should be supported to provide a single point of contact to ease and extend the journey for vulnerable customers, providing them as much benefit as possible. They should also be supported in expanding their referral networks to reduce gaps and widen service provision.

- Promote connection of organisations to Power Up and Affordable Warmth partners, energy efficiency schemes, energy advice agencies, retrofit advisors and installers. First strengthen license area referral networks then secondly, ask local authorities and energy agencies to provide briefings to local organisations when new retrofit schemes open.
- Provide or facilitate access to household items such as second-hand furniture and white goods. Encourage connections between advice organisations, local reuse charities and repair cafes to reduce staff time spent writing applications and provide access for vulnerable customers to second-hand furniture, white goods and other household resources, either on a permanent or temporary loan basis¹⁸. This also supports waste prevention and builds community repair skills.
- Seek advice from service providers on any high priority services that they don't have access to e.g. carers' support and work with advice hubs to try to facilitate this, possibly via online engagement, community transport or other means.

¹⁸ Repair cafes sometimes loan equipment on a weekly basis (e.g. a tent), a flexible, cheaper option which removes the need to purchase infrequently used household items.

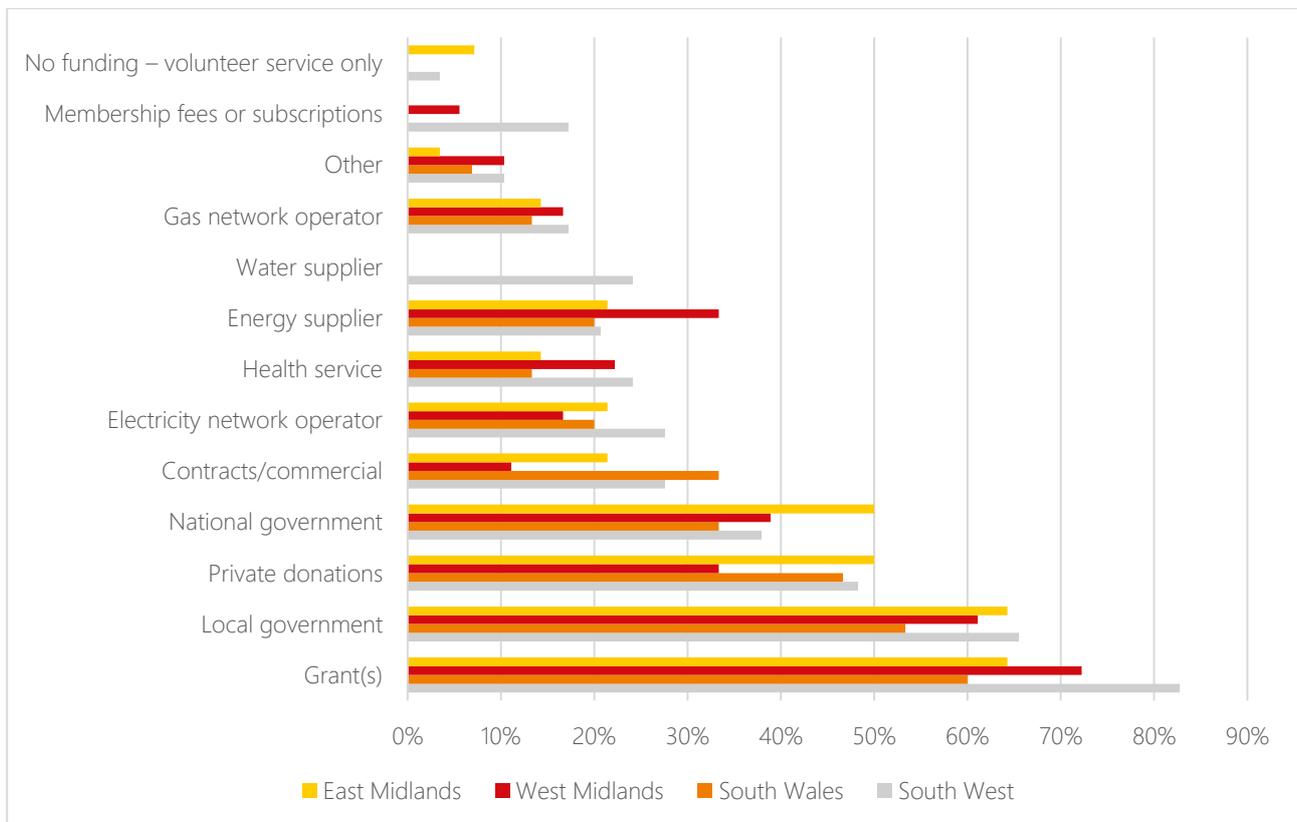
Health of the sector

This section presents findings from survey respondent organisations and interviews on funding, staffing, organisational capacity to scale up and appetite to do so. Data was not available for desk research organisations.

Funding

The most common funding sources that survey respondent organisations reported receiving were grant(s), local government, and private donations (Figure 19). National government funding was also important for organisations in the East Midlands and the West Midlands. The only organisations to report receiving water supplier funding were located in the South East. Encouraging all license areas to work more closely with water utilities could tie together energy and water PSRs. Other funding sources referenced included: fundraising and investment income.

Figure 19: Type of funding source and percentage of survey organisations within a licence area that reported accessing each funding source (n=54¹⁹)



¹⁹ 54 organisations responded to the questions. However, the number of organisations per license area, counting organisations that cover more than one license area within each gives the following number for each license area: East Midlands 14; West Midlands 18; South Wales 15; South West 29.

Survey respondents also commented on specific funding sources. The most common mentioned were national schemes like Energy Redress (four respondents), Household Support Fund (three), ECO, HUGS and Big Energy Saving Network (two each). Grant bodies like British Gas Energy Trust and Big Lottery were also mentioned.

Most (30, 56%) of the surveyed organisations relied on 3 or fewer funding sources, while 15 organisations (27%) received funding from five or more sources (Figure 20). This suggests that survey respondents potentially have low resilience to changes in funding regimes. Particularly with challenges facing charities to continue existing service provision, this is a concern given the current unprecedented demand for services.

Figure 20: Survey organisations by number of funding sources (n=54)



Some survey respondents’ comments referenced challenges with their funding situation. One respondent highlighted that local government funding does not cover staff costs. Another mentioned that delivering schemes for energy suppliers became too much of a bureaucratic burden and financial risk.

In interviews, funding was a focal point in the majority of conversations. Funding insecurity was a source of anxiety. Two organisations [ACE, Saltbox - Money Matters] reported that certain services are at risk of closing or scaling back in the near future if further funding could not be secured. Bassetlaw Action Centre had already scaled back some services due to a funding shortfall. Even Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell, an organisation with long-established relationships with funders, reported that they could not assume ongoing financial support. This further indicates the fragility of energy advice sector.

Amongst many of the organisations interviewed, there was a focus on securing funding to continue to deliver existing over-stretched services as well as a desire to employ new members of staff. Three organisations said that even a significant increase in funding would not enable them to meet the level of need that they were currently experiencing. This suggests that systemic issues - described as a ‘policy failure’ in Citizen Advice’s July 2023 Cost of Living briefing – require pressure from key influencers like NGED to address the root contingencies that contribute to energy customer hardship.

The majority of organisations interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the short-term nature of funding, particularly grant funding. It was noted by several organisations that short term funding did not allow them to plan sufficiently.

[T]here's no tenure funding, or things like security of service. Sometimes it's even as low as a one plus one contract, one year plus a year, you're just getting started and then you're having to stop, or you might have to stop. So yeah, being able to plan for the future and have more long-term planning is key, because then obviously you can manage the processes and the situation better. And actually, it needs time to be embedded in the community to be successful. So, that's a key area. Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell

Two organisations felt that the level of demand for services necessitated that they be reactive rather than proactive, with little capacity for future planning. This impacts on their ability to consider delivering new or innovative services. ACE expressed frustration in funders' needs for innovation which was at odds with their desire to provide consistent services for vulnerable customers.

I just feel that the funders are always looking for something new, something innovative, something that is not necessarily what you did last year, but actually what you did last year was really invested and really needed. So yeah, that's always a challenge. ACE

Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell also stated that they did not want to "ambulance chase" for funding and instead were led by the needs of their clients.

Support with longer-term funding that provides organisations with some funding security can facilitate essential services for vulnerable customers and enable a return to proactive energy advice services, not just crisis support.

Local authority funding was highly valued by some organisations interviewed. Many organisations reported having very strong relationships with local authorities. Yet, funding from local authorities was often short-term, offering limited security. Bassetlaw Action Centre reported that although they continue to have strong relationships with their local authority, a decrease in local authority funding over the years had pushed them to diversify their funding sources. For Exeter Community Energy which works across several local authority areas, there is a disparity in the levels of local authority funding they receive from different areas. NGED financial support is crucial to this organisation to enable it to "level up" the assistance they provide in under-funded areas.

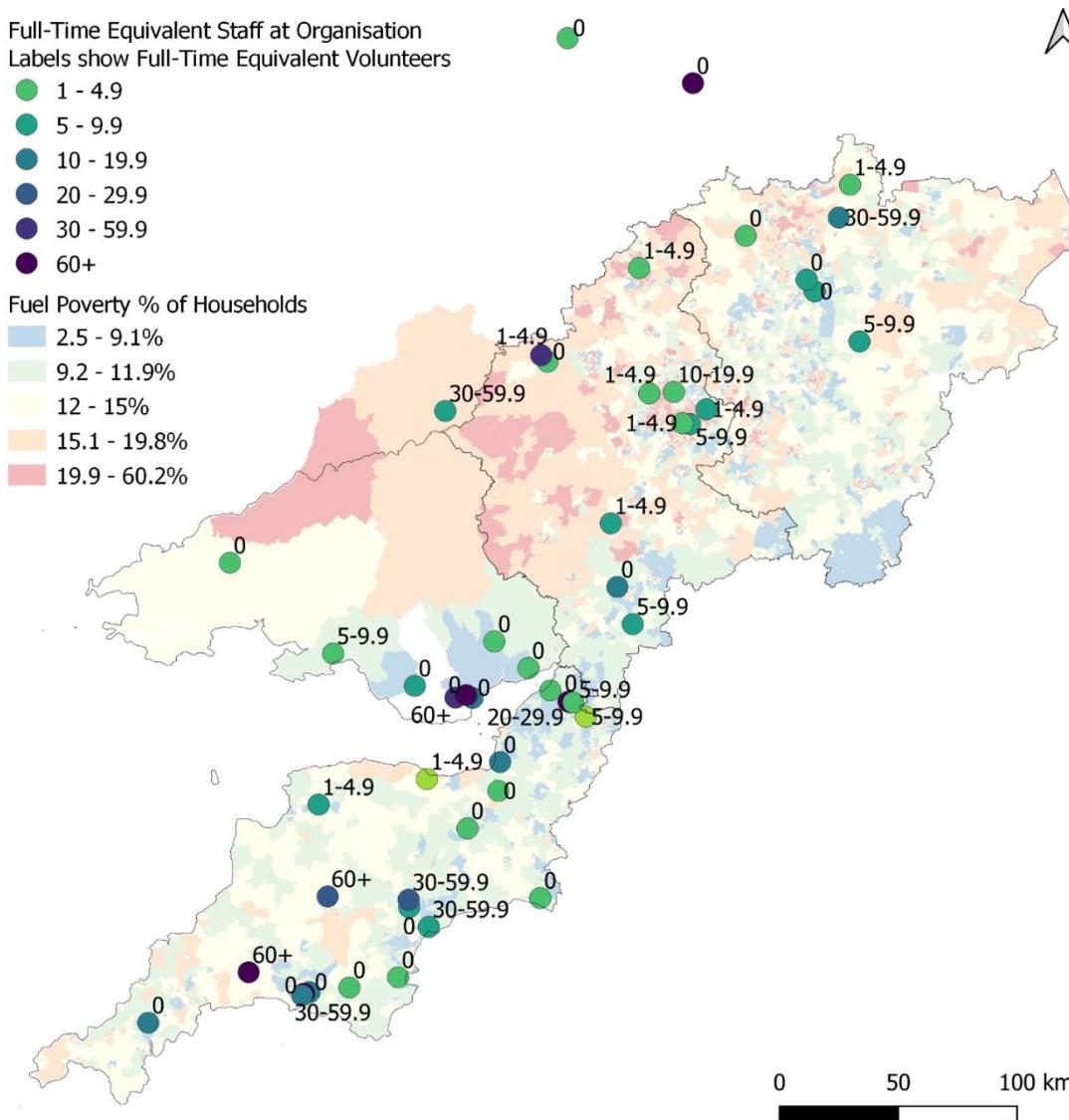
Staffing

Survey respondents were asked about the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and volunteers that worked for the organisation. Results suggest a relatively weak energy advice staffing base. The most common number of FTE staff was >0-4.9 (19 respondents, 38%). Only 16

survey respondents (32%) employed 10 or more FTE staff. Volunteers were not widespread. Almost half (46%, 23 respondents) had no volunteers.

Comparing staffing levels with the percentage of households in fuel poverty across the NGED area shows an uneven distribution (Figure 21). In the West Midlands and South Wales with fuel poverty of greater than 15 per cent show survey respondent organisations with less than 10 FTE staff. Checking for service provision in LSOAs with high fuel poverty and PSR gap has already been suggested as a potentially fruitful action. This could be extended to ensure that there is service provision in every LSOA, regardless of average fuel poverty percentage.

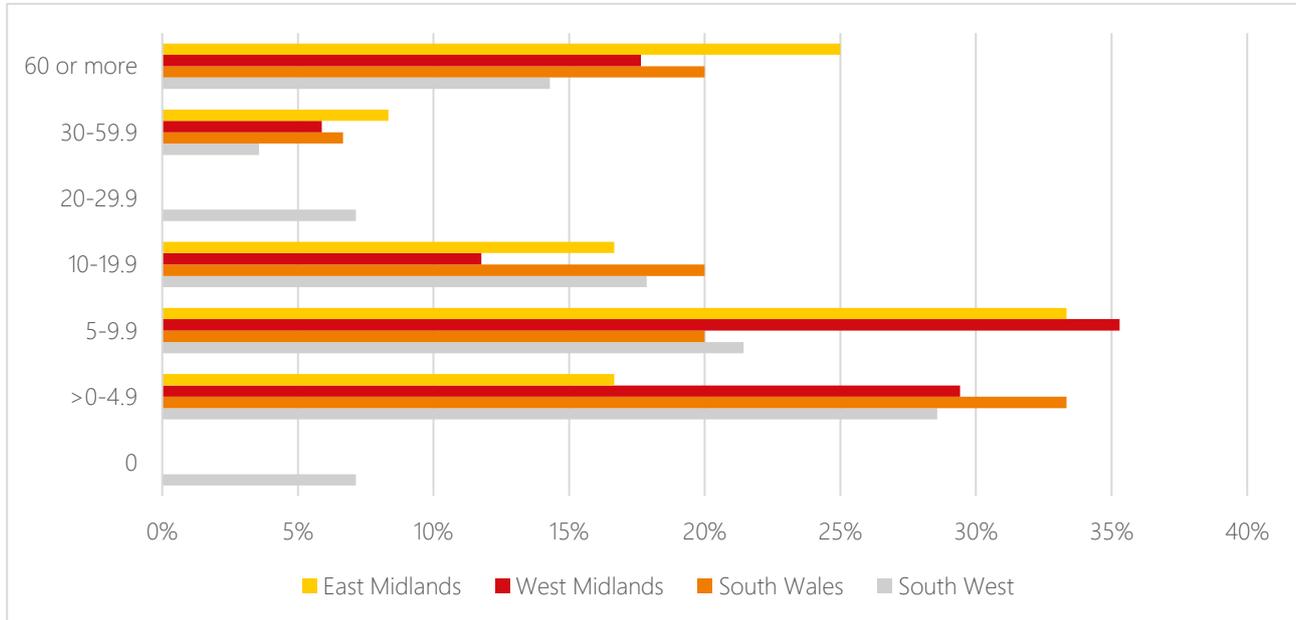
Figure 21: Survey Respondent Organisations' Full-Time Equivalent Staff and Volunteers with Fuel Poverty Percentage



Organisations serving the East Midlands were most likely to report employing 60 or more staff and least likely to employ >0-4.9 staff. Organisations serving the East and West Midlands were most likely to report employing 5-9.9 staff. The only organisations to report employing no FTE

staff were in the South West (Figure 22). Survey responses suggest that the South West has few larger energy advice employers; although this may be a result of a disproportionately high number of charitable organisations from this area in survey respondents that employ fewer staff

Figure 22: Survey organisations by number of FTE staff and license area (n=50)



In interviews, three organisations reported that they had experienced challenges recruiting new members of staff. They viewed this as an impact of the Covid-19 pandemic:

Recruitment, I have no idea what's happened post... because of the pandemic; before you could line up five interviews and four people would turn up, and now you lineup five interviews and none of them turn up. The market just seems to be flipped on its head in all aspects.
Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell.

Pay levels are one issue. Exeter Community Energy reported that they struggled to recruit for a project manager, due to the salary level that they were able to offer. One organisation also reported that candidates are more likely to request flexible or hybrid working, even where the job advert stated that the role had set hours.

As well as issues with staff recruitment, some organisations faced challenges recruiting and retaining volunteers, similarly citing differing expectations following the Covid-19 pandemic for volunteers as well as paid staff. For instance, volunteers were reluctant to return to face-to-face volunteering, had no time for home visits and preferred to engage by phone with people instead. Some volunteers also had less capacity, having to take on more paid work to support themselves through the cost-of-living crisis.

High demand for energy advice, the increasingly stressful nature of providing advice to vulnerable customers (clients' increased reference to suicide²⁰, poor mental health), funding

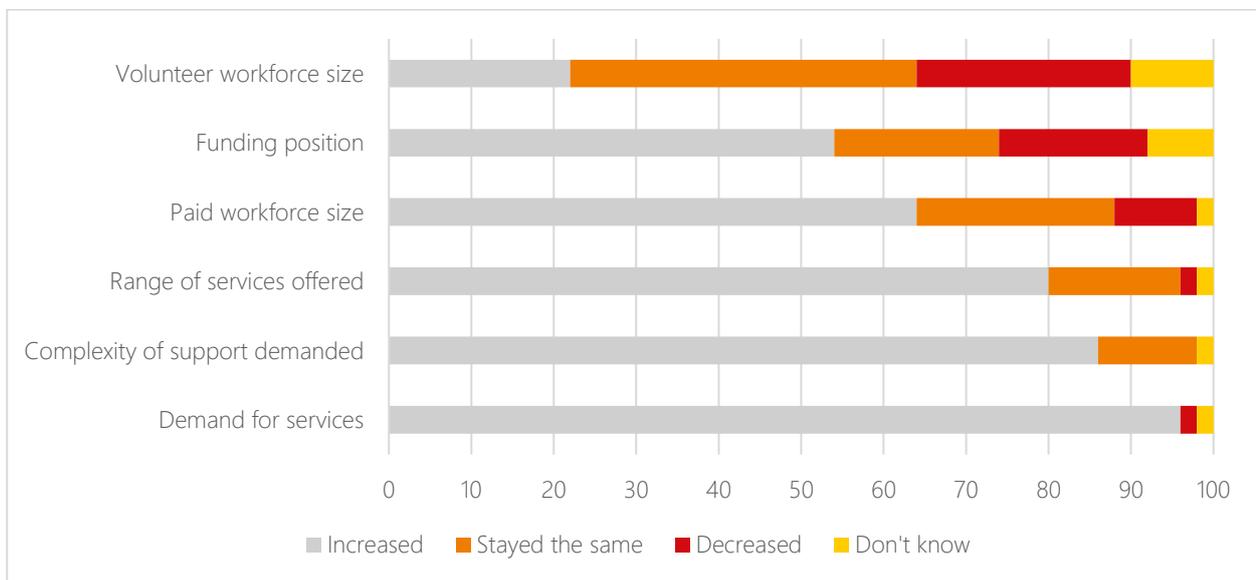
²⁰ Reported by CSE energy advice team

anxiety, difficulties with staff and volunteer recruitment, these all point to the need – as mentioned – for systemic changes. The advice sector can't cope.

Changes experienced since 2020

In the survey, respondents were asked to rate how six different elements of their work had changed since March 2020 (Figure 23). Organisations are experiencing an increase in demand for services (reported by 48 of the 50 organisations surveyed), alongside increased complexity of support demanded, and increased range of services offered. However fewer organisations reported a corresponded increase in the number of staff employed or funding. Nine organisations reported a decrease in funding.

Figure 23: Changes experienced by staff at survey organisations since March 2020 (%) (n=50)



Comments made by survey respondents and reiterated by the majority of interviewees were that the level of demand and subsequent lack of capacity had put significant pressure on staff:

I observed last year within the staff that the pressure was on in a way that we've never seen before, and I was very, very mindful of burnout, and the pressures that they were under. But equally, the commitment and the resilience that they also showed, particularly in the run up to Christmas, it was like nothing I'd ever seen before, but they pulled together, they work together.

ACE

Several other organisations interviewed commented on the commitment and resilience of their staff. Such qualities were held in high regard and deemed to be necessary to enable staff to continue working in such high-pressured environments.

A consequence of lack of staff capacity was that senior staff became involved in frontline service delivery, or had their time split between various projects and roles. Having managers involved in frontline work was often seen as positive, as it kept them in touch with the needs of clients.

However, it was acknowledged by one interviewee that in doing so, managers are not able to focus on the more strategic aspects of their role.

Survey respondent organisations cited increasing complexity of support as another key change since March 2020. Respondents reported dealing with a wider and/or more complex range of issues like mental health, which were taking more time. One respondent also stated they were increasingly supporting different kinds of people, including those in employment. Two respondents reported they were taking on more cases due to a lack of other local support services.

We are far busier now and the complexity of the clients' problems has also increased. So many clients have mental health or addiction problems, we have seen some very sad cases. We have less staff now to deal with the clients and we feel like we are social workers, as we deal with so many things for the clients. We feel as a charity we are picking up the pieces of the lives of the people who are left to really struggle. **Survey respondent**

Nine out of ten organisations interviewed also said that they are experiencing an increase in complex cases, with many reporting that on average, clients now require more in-depth support or help from multiple services within an organisation.

In response to increased level and complexity of demand, several respondents commented that they had upgraded their advice capacity, either in terms of staffing (including staff with new skills) or covering new advice areas. Two respondents reported increasing their energy advice offer. One respondent reported that they now work with more councils to deliver HUG and LAD schemes and their ECO contractor network has grown. Despite increases in capacity, multiple respondents felt they were unable to keep up with increased demand.

Our workforce has increased considerably over the last few years to keep up with the demand. Our staff includes people who have not only previously worked in the charity sector, but also have experiences working for energy suppliers, housing associations and local councils giving us a varied pool of knowledge. **Survey respondent**

Several respondents commented that their funding had not increased in relation to demand. One reported their core funding had reduced.

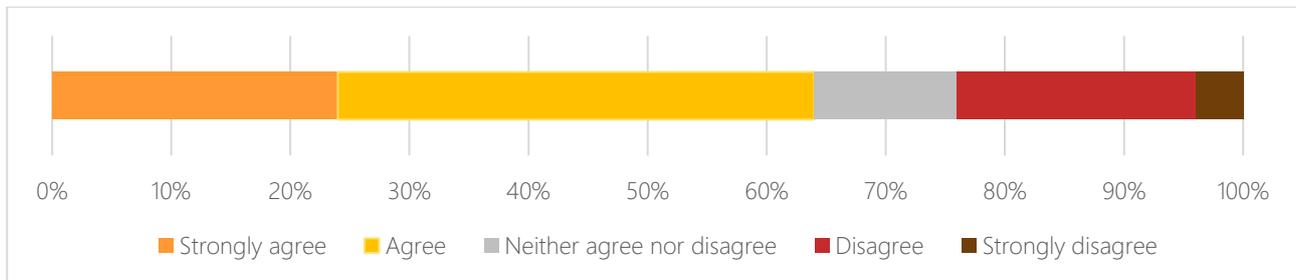
The cost of living crisis has increased interest and demand in our services both from referring agents as well as directly from clients. Our funding has not increased to meet this extra demand. **Survey respondent**

Survey respondent and interviewee comments further illustrate the changing, challenging environment in which energy advice services now operate.

Scaling up services

Most surveyed organisations felt well positioned to scale up. 32 respondents (64%) either agreed (20, 40%) or strongly agreed (12, 24%) with the statement: ‘Overall, the organisation is well-positioned to scale up to meet growing demand for advice, support and energy-related services it delivers over the next six months.’ (Figure 24)

Figure 24: Survey organisations by agreement with being well-placed to scale up (n=50)



Some respondents left comments in relation to how well their organisation was placed to scale up. In general, there was an appetite to scale up to meet growing demand. Seven comments specifically referenced a need for a more skilled and stable workforce. Six referenced a need for funding to support scaling up. Two respondents commented that their organisation had recently scaled up successfully.

Two organisations interviewed disagreed with this survey statement. Due to lack of resources both organisations felt that they could not deliver any more than their current offering:

As it stands, we are at capacity, we have no scope to do anything more. I think going into winter it's going to be quite daunting. ACE

Other organisations interviewed considered themselves to be in a good position to scale up within the next six months. For some, this was dependent upon winning more funding whereas for others, they already had plans to scale up their services. Bassetlaw Action Centre were awaiting the result of a funding application decision to develop a new service to reach a different target group than their current offerings. Exeter Community Energy felt that they were in a good position to scale up and have been slowly growing their retrofit team in order to meet demand for decarbonising homes. The organisation also foresaw higher demand for benefits and debt advice and can increase its capacity in this area. South East Wales Energy Agency has significant reserves so does not require core funding to deliver new services. However, additional funding for bolt-on services for vulnerable customers like fuel vouchers and emergency funding for heating repairs would be useful.

Funding is the main requirement for scaling. Table 10 summarises survey responses about any requirements to help organisations scale up. Survey respondents were asked to rank each requirement from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important). A reverse weighted total was then calculated: for instance, with each one ranking counted as six. By this measure, additional funding, certainty of funding duration and provision to train up additional staff were ranked as the most important overall requirements for respondent organisations to successfully scale up.

Table 10: Survey organisations’ requirements for scaling up, ranked on a scale from most important (1) to least important (6) (n=50)

Requirement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Weighted total
Additional funding	24	17	3	1	4	1	253
Certainty of funding duration	15	18	6	3	5	3	226
Provision to train up additional staff	3	6	21	13	6	1	184
Time to train up additional staff	3	6	14	20	5	2	176
Funding to purchase new technology, software and other costs	4	3	4	12	20	7	138
Access to bigger premises	1	0	2	1	10	36	73

Some respondents left comments in relation to their requirements for scaling up. Three respondents emphasised the importance of long-term funding, especially in terms of planning and being able to recruit skilled, motivated staff. One respondent felt that small grants would be useful for administrative staff.

In an interview, ACE said the increase in demand for their services had spiked when the Universal Credit uplift was withdrawn in October 2021. They’d experienced a 300 per cent increase in demand. They also reported dealing with an increase in complex cases such as benefit appeals which required a lot of staff time. In order to scale up, they felt that they would require certainty of funding duration, which would enable them to plan sufficiently.

Saltbox - Money Matters reported that sufficient additional funding to support more clients would be the most important factor to enable them to scale up, but they would also require funding for new members of staff. They support very vulnerable clients including food bank users.

Key points

To summarise the health of the sector, this research finds:

- Existing funding is varied. Most organisations have one or two funding sources and not much confidence in longevity of the funding suggesting a fragile advice ecosystem. Funding prospects do not appear to be increasing as rapidly as demand or complexity of service provision required to meet vulnerable customers’ needs.
- On staff and volunteer capacity, in general staff numbers seem to be increasing, but not at the same rate as demand. This is affected by other issues like low pay and limitations on the ability to offer flexible working, which affects volunteers too.
- There is appetite for growth – to respond to growing demand or to increase the number or depth of services offered. However, funding and staffing challenges predominate in organisations’ abilities to realise this growth.

More conventional (but less effective) support could include to:

- Provide longer-term funding to support organisations in delivering essential services to vulnerable customers and to enable greater focus on proactive energy advice services.
- Consider whether NGED funding streams (e.g. Community Matters) could be used to bolster funding resilience, for whatever strategically could be most useful to organisations e.g. training, energy champions, grant pots.
- Encourage organisations to work with water utilities, as an additional source of funding and to integrate water and energy PSR cross referrals.

Less conventional (but more effective) support could be to for NGED to advocate for systemic changes to reduce service demand or ameliorate advice organisations' ability to assist vulnerable customers (such as energy supplier consumer services for advisors).

Services: current practice, gaps, and emergent models of delivery and referral

This section draws on primarily survey responses and interviews to outline for the nine service areas aspects of current practice, evidence of best practice and new successful models of delivery and referral. These are useful to help understand how each service could be supported and where some of the challenges and opportunities might lie.

The availability of each service based on survey respondents is shown in a map for each service given in Figure 25 - Figure 34. The density of service provision is shown by weighting a core service as 1 and a minor service as 0.5 in each local authority the organisation works within. The local authority areas of Cherwell, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes appear white on these maps as no data was available for them. These areas were erroneously omitted from the survey due to recent local authority boundary changes.

This section also explores any changes in the quality and impact of services offered and how this may have changed since 2018.

1. Income Maximisation and Debt Advice

Income maximisation advice encompasses direct interventions that result in financial savings such as welfare benefits advice and assisting clients with accessing grants and discounts such as the Warm Home Discount and water company discounts. For the purposes of this analysis, debt advice has also been included within this section.

Figure 25 shows that there are four or more service providers across all local authorities, with more service providers in the South West and a cluster in the West Midlands.

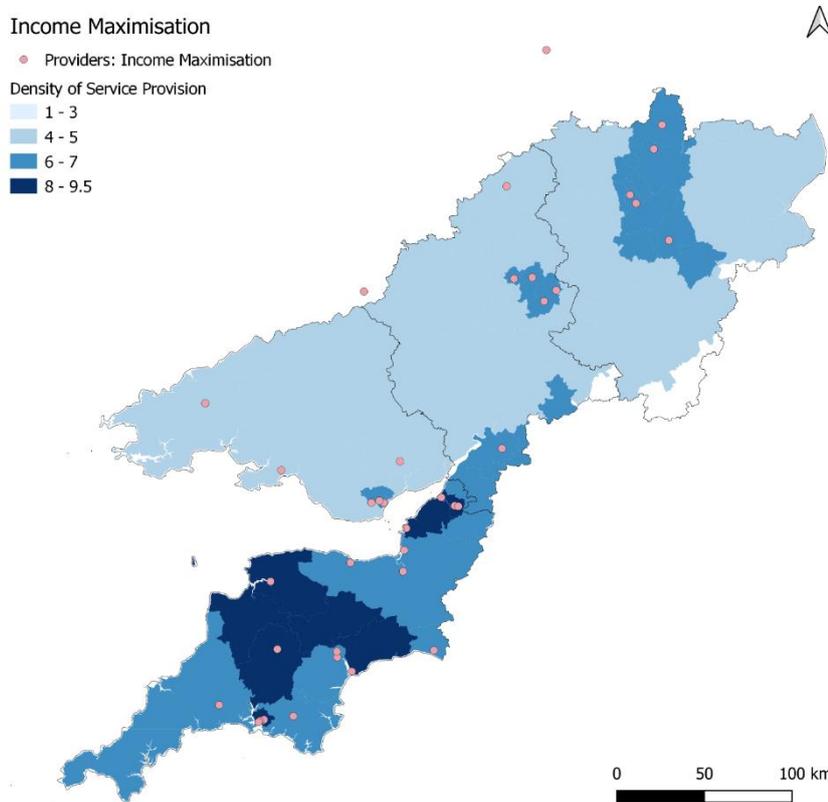
Current provision

Income maximisation and debt advice can deliver important improvements to clients but can be complex and time-consuming work for organisations to provide, particularly when involving benefits claims and appeals. For debt advice, organisations must be accredited based on the Money and Pensions Service Debt Advice Quality Framework.²¹ Demand for these services is high and increasing. Experiences from five organisations interviewed which provide these type of advice services show increasing demand for benefits support (referenced by ACE, Exeter Community Energy and Spitfire Services) and new types of benefits sought by clients who

²¹ The Money Advice Service sets out the minimum knowledge and skills debt advisers need, mapped against the National Occupational Standards (NOS). They use this to accredit organisations that deliver debt advice training and qualifications against their Quality Framework available at <https://debtquality.org.uk/>. See also Advice Quality Standard <https://www.recognisingexcellence.co.uk/aqs/>

previously have not claimed. For example, Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell are now helping clients claim Pension Credit who would not have applied prior to the energy and cost-of-living crisis.

Figure 25: Survey Respondents that offer Income Maximisation (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Income Maximisation by Local Authority



Providers explained how this work improves client outcomes. Claiming passported benefits like Pension Credit can increase clients' weekly income slightly but also make them eligible for a range of further support. Age Cymru Powys reported that most of the 2,000 – 2,500 clients per year they support with benefit claims, did not realise that they were eligible for any financial support.

Making this a core service can increase organisational effectiveness. Exeter Community Energy now employ benefit and debt advisors in-house since seeing an increase in demand after March 2020, which has not abated. By providing this service in-house, clients experience a more joined up service and energy advisors can refer to benefit and debt advisors in the team, freeing up their time to provide energy advice.

However, the challenges of delivering these services should not be overlooked. Spitfire Services are part of the Legal Entitlement Service funded by Birmingham City Council. It provides debt and benefit advice to North Birmingham residents and benefit tribunal support city-wide. The benefit tribunal work is very challenging and time-consuming; this work is a specialist area and requires specialist caseworkers. Spitfire Services said they were struggling to employ full-time

benefit and debt caseworkers to meet demand and an inability to do so was putting strain on the service.

For the organisations interviewed that do not provide income maximisation advice, there was evidence of clearly defined and established referral pathways such as to a Citizens Advice Bureau. New referral partners are emerging in response to the cost of living crisis. Energy Local reported that they refer clients to the Octo Assist scheme. Octo Assist is the hardship fund established by Octopus Energy in November 2021.

Evidence of innovation and successful delivery models

Older farmers were identified by Age Cymru Powys as a hard-to-reach group. They tend to be self-reliant, reluctant to seek help, with some living on a very low income or eligible for disability benefits due to work-related injuries. The Mamwlad project was set up in partnership with Care and Repair to help older farmers maintain their homes and increase their income. A similar approach could initiate contact with other hard to reach groups.

Clients with life limiting illnesses often need assistance with benefit or grant applications and other support. Rural Devon CAB (Citizens Advice Torridge, North, Mid & West Devon) have a specialist Welfare Benefits Team funded by Macmillan Cancer Support (Macmillan Welfare Benefits project). This service recently expanded to cover the whole of Devon in partnership with Citizens Advice branches in Exeter, Plymouth and Torbay.

2. Energy efficiency

Energy efficiency advice and support encompasses non-behavioural energy saving measures. For example, insulation measures and draught proofing. This service is widely delivered with seven of the interviewees reporting that they provide energy efficiency advice and support as a core service.

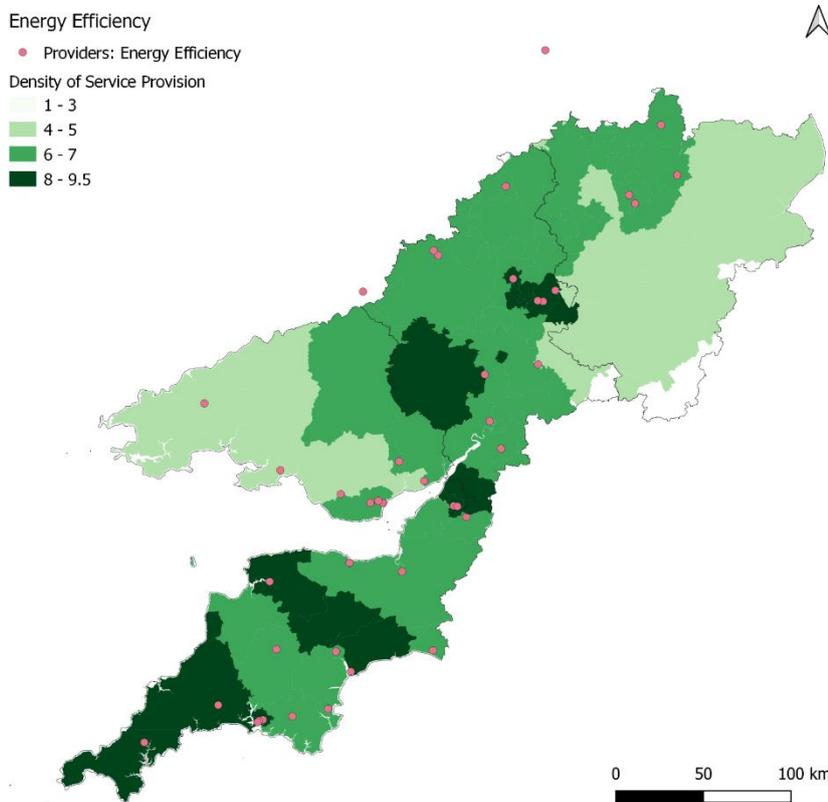
There are six or more service providers across much of the West Midlands, South Wales and South West, with at least four survey respondents covering each local authority (Figure 26).

Current provision, demand and gaps

There was variation in the level of energy efficiency support offered by organisations interviewed. Exeter Community Energy has a dedicated retrofit advice team and provide retrofit services as part of the Devon Home Upgrade Grant Scheme. Energy efficiency advice is available to both able to pay clients and people eligible for funded schemes, with assessment for funded schemes as standard. Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell deliver energy efficiency advice through their Home Falls Prevention Service, which helps with minor repairs, installation of grab rails and small energy efficiency measures. Bassetlaw Action Centre provide energy efficiency advice but no longer have funding to provide small measures. They refer into

the Nottinghamshire Health Housing Service for local support rather than referring clients directly to nationally funded schemes.

Figure 26: Survey Respondents that offer Energy Efficiency (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Energy Efficiency by Local Authority



Interviews revealed a number of challenges and gaps relating to energy efficiency services. One challenge cited by Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell was that it was time-consuming for staff to keep up to date with the grant funded schemes available. A gap was that their oversubscribed service was only funded for six months of the year. They wanted to offer a year-round service with an in-depth room by room home assessment service. This would combine energy efficiency measures, safety measures and smart home technology, enabling clients to remain living independently in their homes for as long as possible.

A gap identified by Age Cymru Powys and Bassetlaw Action Centre was lack of funding for enabling works or for measures such as the replacement of broken or inefficient windows and doors. These smaller interventions can make a significant difference to customers' quality of life.

A challenge reported by ACE was lack of updates on clients referred to the Welsh government's Nest scheme for insulation measures, in effect not knowing the impact for clients. ACE also stated that many of their clients are living in inefficient housing and often struggle with damp and mould issues. This can get disregarded by housing providers. Having stronger relationships with the local authority housing team and housing associations in their area could help to reach customers with energy-related issues.

Saltbox - Money Matters reported experiencing difficulties with LAD schemes being oversubscribed. They also found that private tenants rarely go ahead if referred for funding, either due to tenants not wishing to broach the subject with landlords, or landlords not wishing to contribute to the cost of making energy efficiency improvements to the property.

Lack of capacity, skills and knowledge to deliver energy efficiency services was another barrier. Rural Action Derbyshire signposts or refers clients for energy efficiency measures. It expressed a desire to provide more energy efficiency advice themselves via home energy audits but currently lacks the capacity to do so.

Evidence of innovation and successful delivery models

Act on Energy 'Warmer Homes West Midlands' project has a dedicated team rooted in the communities it serves. It trains volunteers and frontline support staff across the public and third sector on how best to advise and support their vulnerable clients. It gives advice on grants for insulation and solar PV, plus support with heating measures such as repair, service or replacement of systems. Local understanding and skills make a real difference, particularly with the digitally excluded.

3. Heating solutions

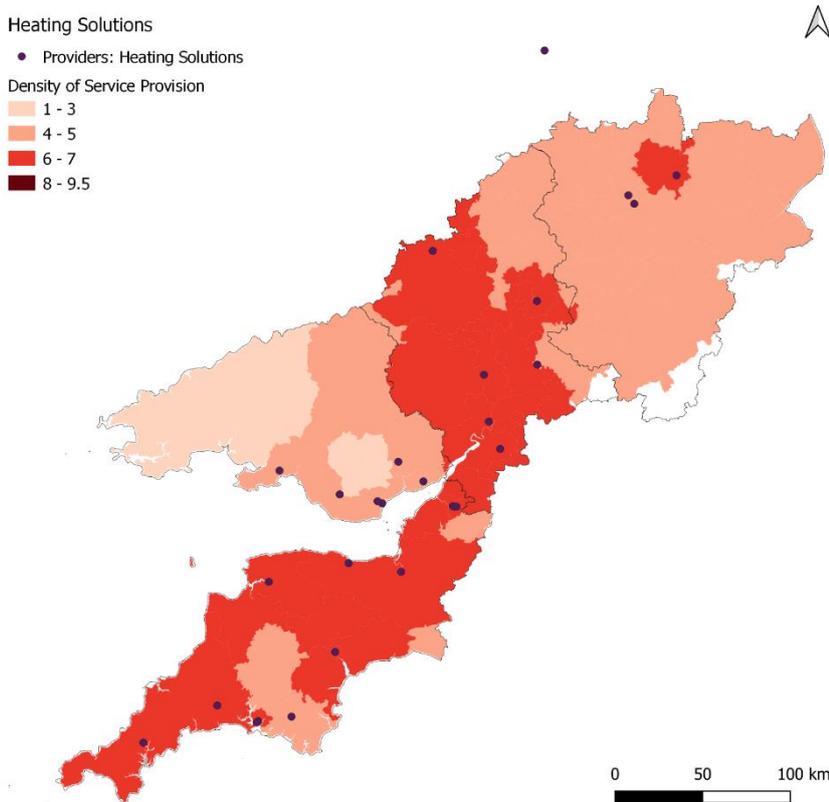
Heating solutions advice and support covers advice relating to the installation of new traditional heating systems such as first-time gas central heating as well as repairing or upgrading fossil fuel boilers. Exeter Community Energy and South East Wales Energy Agency provide heating solutions as a core service. The majority of organisations interviewed signpost or refer for this service.

Figure 27 indicates that areas of South Wales are 'light' on service providers. In South Wales this might be due to lower gas connections. Other areas of South Wales and the East Midlands have 4-5 service providers, along with parts of Devon, Dorset and Somerset.

Current provision

Although not explicitly mentioned in either the survey responses or interviews, funding for new or replacement fossil fuel heating systems is becoming harder to access in England whereas in Wales, traditional boilers are still available under the Nest scheme. ACE and Age Cymru Powys refer clients to Nest to access funding for boilers. South East Wales Energy Agency reported that this is their most in demand service. They also stated that it is hard to come by emergency heating funding for heating system repairs which they previously obtained from British Gas. While it is possible to refer eligible clients to Nest, there is often a significant wait before a repair or replacement can take place.

Figure 27: Survey Respondents that offer Heating Solutions (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Heating Solutions by Local Authority

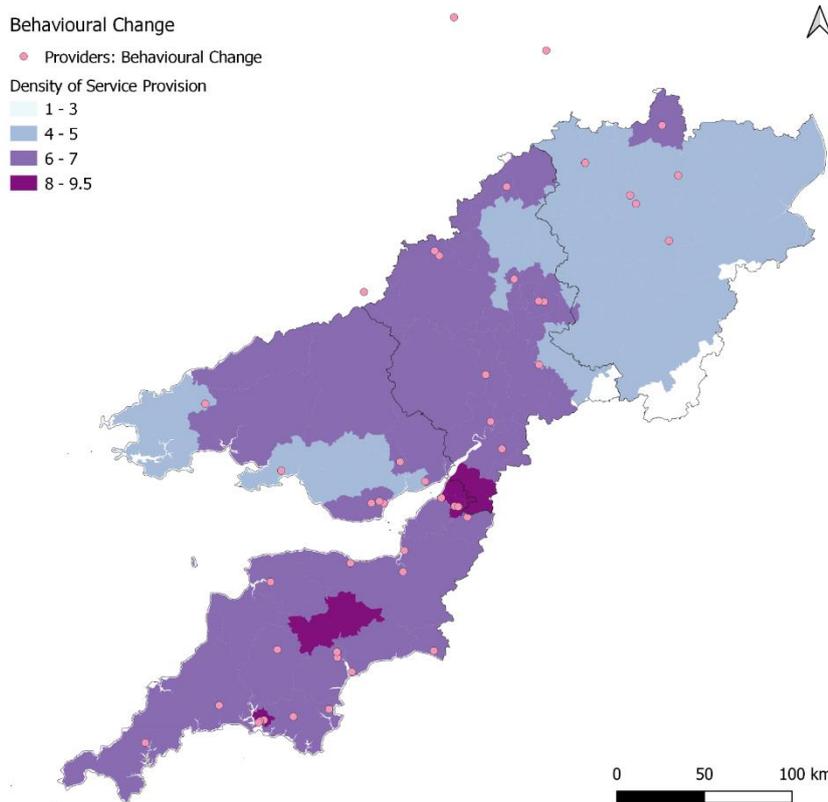


Exeter Community Energy provide heating solutions advice as a core service and refer into LADS and ECO4. Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell reported that they signpost and refer clients to ECO4, LADS and LEAP but have found that it is becoming harder to access funding for gas boilers. In their survey response, they indicated that they would like to refer clients for boiler upgrades and new central heating systems, but they are unaware of an organisation they can refer to. They apply to organisations such as SSAFA for small grants to fund boiler repairs and replacement, but such solutions require research and applications and can be time consuming. As with energy efficiency schemes, they expressed that it is hard to keep up to date with available funding.

4. Behavioural change

Behavioural change advice is the delivery of advice which supports changes in how clients use energy. For example, turning thermostats down by one degree or washing clothes at a lower temperature. The majority of organisations interviewed provide behavioural change advice as a core or minor service. The only organisation currently not providing this advice is Spitfire Services whose work focusses on assisting clients with benefits, debt, housing and employment issues. Overall, there are four or more service providers across all local authorities. Many have at least six providers (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Survey Respondents that offer Behavioural Change (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Behavioural Change by Local Authority



Current provision, demand and gaps

Organisations have different levels of experience and training for staff carrying out behavioural advice. For example, Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell have been running a dedicated energy advice project funded by E.ON for 13 years, while Age Cymru Powys is currently running their first dedicated energy advice project having employed a trained energy advisor. Due to demand, they intend to incorporate energy advice into their future strategy.

Interviews showed how organisations can fill current gaps in service provision. Saltbox - Money Matters provide behavioural change advice as a core service via drop-in advice sessions which are held at 16 food banks in the Stoke-on-Trent area. It is provided alongside fuel vouchers and energy efficiency advice including onward referrals to schemes such as ECO and LADS. Saltbox - Money Matters reported that behavioural change advice is particularly necessary for tenants who may not be able to benefit from energy efficiency schemes:

[W]e discuss the overall... you know, turning the thermostat down, looking at tips on cooking, not using electric heaters, using their actual boiler more efficiently. Those are the ones which we find tenants and clients are able to use and take action themselves and actually make an improvement to their overall energy usage. Saltbox - Money Matters

But gaps in service provision can be hard to overcome. For example, Rural Action Derbyshire provide behavioural change advice to their oil club members via fortnightly email updates. This

advice is therefore reaching oil club members who are online rather than those who are digitally excluded. Telephone behavioural change advice is offered by the South East Wales Energy Agency, but they reported that the majority of clients who seek their assistance are looking for grants for new heating systems or to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

Furthermore, it is challenging to providing behavioural advice to people in crisis who have already reduced their energy usage to a minimum, as explained by ACE²²:

[A] lot of the people coming through the doors are cutting back to the bare bones anyway, and a lot of the time they're actually coming up with suggestions for us as to how we could save money! It's just reinforcing those good habits, but most people are anyway. ACE

Evidence of innovation and successful models of delivery

Exeter Community Energy provide behavioural change advice through their advice line as well as through outreach activities and home visits. A recent innovation is their Community Energy Champions scheme which provides training to both frontline workers and members of the community to enable them to provide energy advice either to clients or friends, family and neighbours. Volunteers receive training from Exeter Community Energy as well as through National Energy Action's accredited courses. Volunteers choose how they would like to deliver advice, be that on an informal basis to friends and neighbours or to the wider community at events and workshops. Exeter Community Energy reported that this project has been particularly good at busting energy myths so that members of the public have access to high quality behavioural change advice.

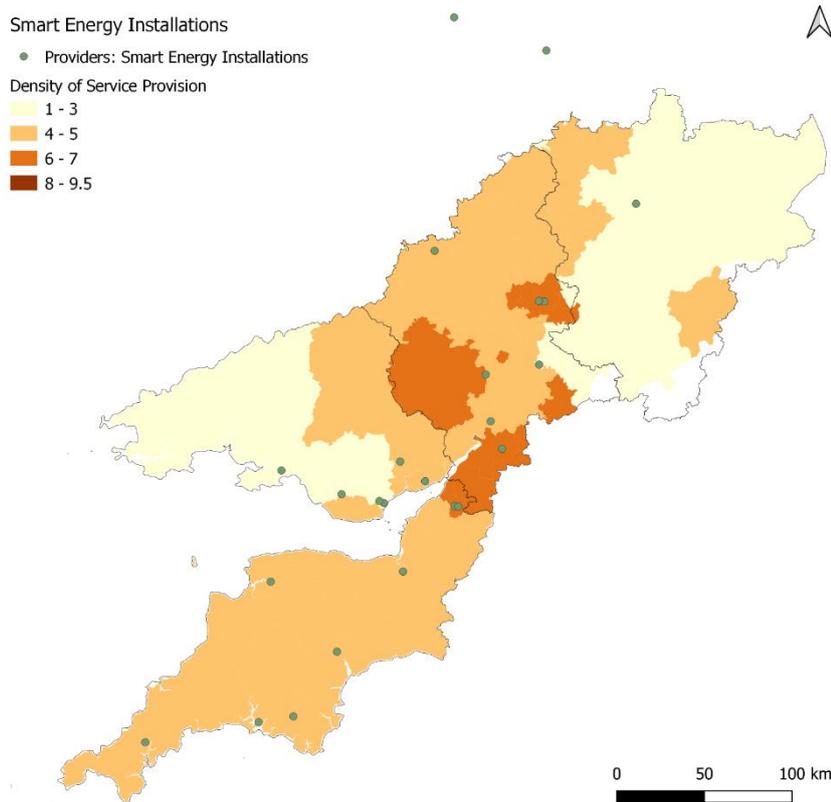
5. Smart energy installations

Smart energy installations advice and support includes advice to facilitate the installation of low carbon technologies such as solar PV and heat pumps as well as smart energy technologies such as smart hot water tanks.

Figure 29 shows six to seven providers in the WECA area and parts of the West Midlands. The West Midlands, the South West and parts of South Wales have coverage of four to five survey respondent providers. Other parts of South Wales and East Midlands have few service providers, indicating a need for enhanced support.

²² Unpublished 2023 CSE research for UKPN supports this comment. In two focus groups, vulnerable consumers said that energy advice wasn't helpful when they'd cut energy use as much as they could.

Figure 29: Survey Respondents that offer Smart Energy Installations (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Smart Energy Installations by Local Authority



Current provision, demand and gaps

Exeter Community Energy's retrofit team includes qualified Retrofit Coordinators and Retrofit Assessors who are able to provide advice and guidance to both able to pay clients and those who are eligible for grant funded schemes. They reported receiving a significant number of general queries about solar panels and heat pumps via their advice line. South East Wales Energy Agency provide smart energy installations advice. They receive some queries from clients who are considering replacing their fossil fuel heating system.

The majority of organisations interviewed reported that they did not have the knowledge or the expertise to deliver smart energy installations advice. Some organisations reported that they would refer to their local energy advice agency for this. However, there is evidence that some organisations are not adequately linked with local authorities or energy advice agencies which can provide in-depth advice on low carbon technologies and smart technologies.

Some organisations interviewed reported that they do not currently receive many enquiries relating to smart energy installations. Conversely, Rural Action Derbyshire recognised that clients in their area, particularly those who are not connected to mains gas or living in hard-to-treat homes, would benefit from smart energy installation advice.

Example of innovation

Midland Heart housing association is working in the East and West Midlands on a [retrofit pilot](#) with British Gas. It has installed external wall insulation, new boilers, air source heat pumps and solar panels. It has worked closely with tenants to make sure that they understand how to make the most of their new additions. The housing provider has helped tenants to check their bills and monitor their usage to see how the changes have affected fuel bills. This information will help Midland Heart to make the best choices going forward. Tenants involved have saved money and are happy with overall results.

Future plans

South East Wales Energy Agency are involved with a state-of-the-art community hub which has solar panels, an air source heat pump and EV charging points. They reported that they want to use the centre to promote low carbon technology. They see a gap for impartial advice on heat pumps and EVs and anticipate providing more advice on these topics going forward.

We want to promote other renewable energy things from the new centre using it as that showpiece – where people can see heat pumps, hear heat pumps, see solar panels, see what they're generating.

South East Wales Energy Agency

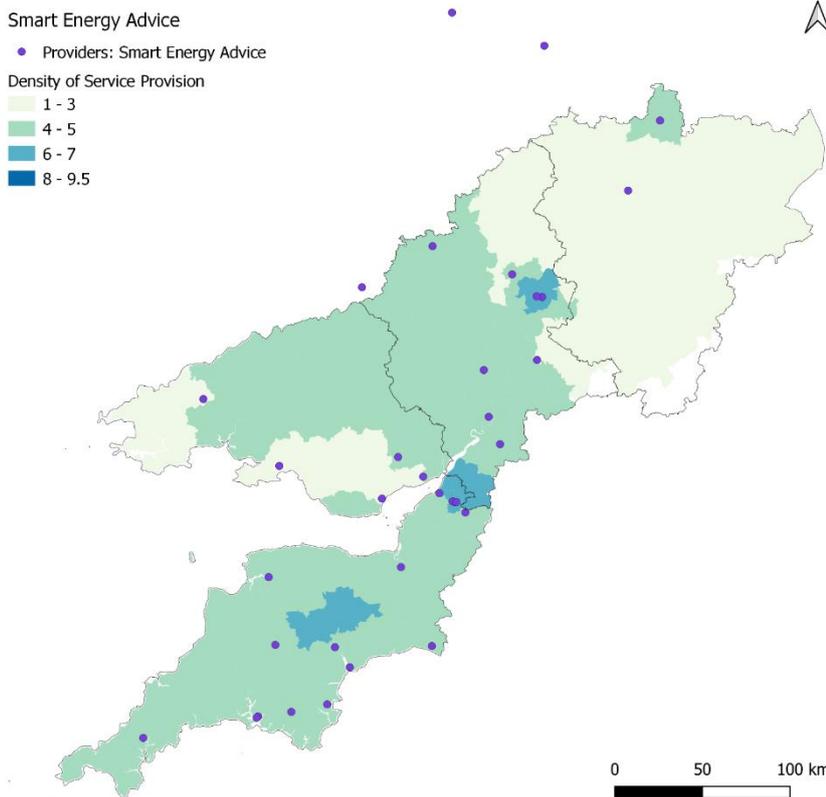
Exeter Community Energy have recently been successful in applying for Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) funding in partnership with other energy advice agencies in Devon and Cornwall. Exeter Community Energy will focus on outreach work including talks in village halls and community centres in an effort to understand the needs of communities. They will work collaboratively with the other agencies to develop services for the middle market - those not eligible for grant funding but who also do not have the resources to fund extensive retrofit projects. Such clients will be offered free introductory retrofit home visits where lower cost measures will be promoted.

6. Smart energy advice

Smart energy advice includes advice on smart meters and smart energy offers such as time-of-use tariffs and smart plugs as well as digital support that will facilitate the uptake and use of smart products and services.

Figure 30 shows four to six providers in the West Midlands and South West, much of South Wales plus Bassetlaw. A few areas (mid-Devon, the WECA area, Birmingham) have 6-7 survey respondent service providers. Other areas in the East Midlands and South Wales only have 1-2 providers, with only two providers in the East Midlands as a whole. Further support in this license area would be useful.

Figure 30: Survey Respondents that offer Smart Energy Advice (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Smart Energy Advice by Local Authority



Current provision, demand and gaps

The majority of organisations interviewed provide smart energy advice, although this mainly related to advice on smart meters or digital support rather than smart energy offers. These were only mentioned by Exeter Community Energy and South East Wales Energy Agency. The latter organisation indicated that it would like to support clients with advice on flexibility moving forwards.

Exeter Community Energy provides an aftercare call programme to all clients who have received measures like solar panels and air source heat pumps under HUGs. Clients will receive an evaluation call from a Retrofit Coordinator to help address any installation issues, help them to switch to a more appropriate tariff or sign up for the Smart Export Guarantee. They will also get an aftercare call later to ensure that they are making the most of their newly installed low carbon technologies.

Many organisations interviewed provide smart meter advice and digital inclusion activities: ACE, Age Cymru Powys, Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell, Bassetlaw Action Centre, Money Matter, Rural Action Derbyshire and South East Wales Energy Agency.

ACE and Saltbox - Money Matters also partner with Good Things Foundation and are a member of their Databank, enabling them to provide SIM cards containing data and minutes to clients in need. Saltbox - Money Matters provides refurbished iPads.

Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell give advice on smart meters and digital support through a dedicated digital literacy project which provides training and lends devices to clients. The organisation anticipates that digital exclusion will continue to be a barrier for their clients. It

stated that more funding to enable connectivity, rather than focusing solely on providing training and devices would be useful.

Rural Action Derbyshire runs the Digital Support Derbyshire project which has created a digital network throughout the county, identifying any gaps in provision, training new volunteer digital champions and supporting community groups with setting up new digital inclusion projects.

Two organisations used to offer more structured digital training to clients but this has been discontinued (Age Cymru Powys, Bassetlaw Action Centre has its own computer suite).

Smart energy innovation

Energy Local offer an innovative service, enabling club members to benefit from locally generated renewable energy. Advisors set up local clubs and provide advice to club members on tariffs and how to make use of the Energy Local dashboard to facilitate demand shifting. All club members must have a smart meter in order to sign up for the various tariffs on offer. Although an internet connection and digital skills are beneficial to be able to utilise the dashboard, Energy Local feel that club members who are digitally excluded can still save money by signing up for their services, particularly if they are making use of energy generated by a solar farm as solar generation tends to follow a predictable pattern. Currently, Energy Local are not running any projects in NGED's area explicitly targeted at vulnerable clients, but they have experience of doing so with previous projects - one in Brixton, South London and another in Corwen, North Wales. [Totnes Renewable Energy Society](#) run the Energy Local Totnes project which enables the trading of renewable energy between generators and consumers at a local level.

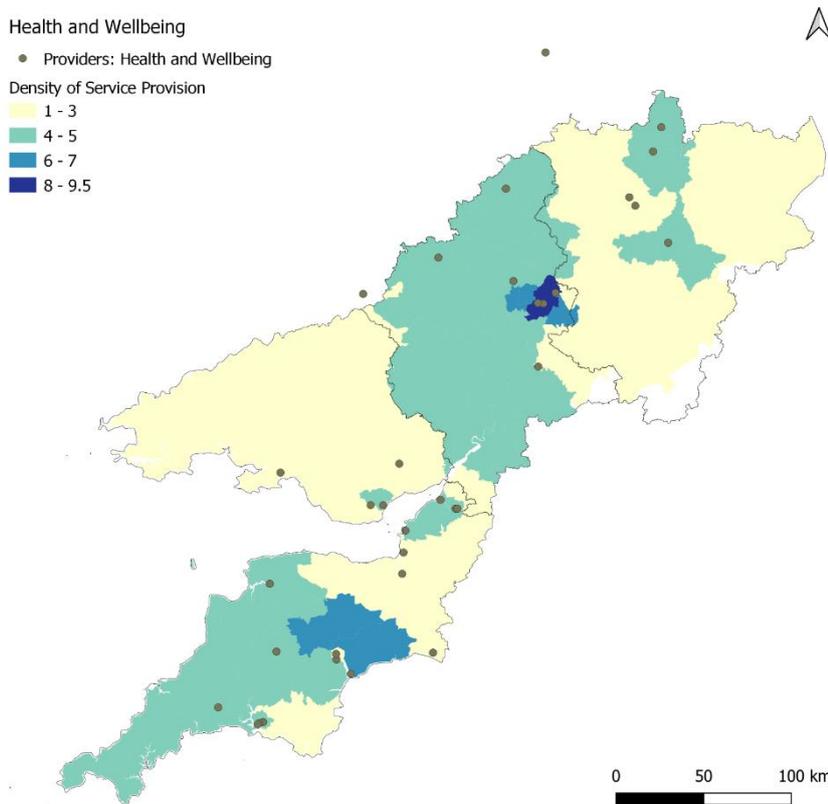
Lightbulb Service has a [Home Gadgets Project](#): where the seven district councils in Leicestershire and Leicestershire County Council are working together on a number of pilot projects looking at how residents can be supported to improve their home environments, maintain independence and wellbeing using smart technology and gadgets. The project will look for smart technology, electronic devices or gadgets that can help anyone living with dementia or awaiting a diagnosis, with a physical, mental or neurological vulnerability to improve their daily lives and overcome barriers.

7. Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing advice relates to non-energy related advice and support for vulnerable people that helps maintain health and wellbeing at home. For example, providing befriending schemes, community transport or help with home repairs and adaptations. Some of the organisations interviewed provide health and wellbeing support as a core service whereas others signpost or refer.

Figure 31 shows the largest number of local authorities with only one to three service providers for services overall and is quite mixed in terms of service provision across license areas.

Figure 31: Survey Respondents that offer Health and Wellbeing (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Health and Wellbeing by Local Authority



Current provision, demand and gaps

Age Cymru Powys run a range of services including a check in and chat service, a community helper service, a footcare service a community transport service and projects with Care and Repair. Both the check in and chat service and the community helper service are delivered by volunteers. Age Cymru Powys reported that clients often initially approach them because they're struggling financially but after "peeling away layers", they find that clients would benefit from their health and wellbeing services as well. A paid for home help service is currently undergoing a feasibility study funded by the local authority.

Age UK Birmingham and Age UK Sandwell also provide several health and wellbeing services including a footcare service, a dementia service and a homecare service.

Evidence of innovation and successful delivery models

Bassetlaw Action Centre run a number of health and wellbeing projects, including community transport schemes designed to reduce isolation. They run a community car scheme delivered by volunteers using their own vehicles, as well as providing a wheelchair accessible electrical vehicle and a minibus used for day trips and lunch clubs. Bassetlaw Action Centre also run a befriending service - one of their most in demand services. Clients were experiencing a significant wait to be paired with volunteers, so clients are now matched up with each other.

Care and Repair Cardiff and Vale Casework service provides support ranging from fixing a water leak to bathroom conversions or replacing a roof. It delivers holistic, problem-led services that are tailored according to individual needs. The Casework service can assist people with sensory impairment to complete works to their homes that helps them maintain their independence e.g. lighting works, loops, flashing doorbells. It also provides expert technical advice and support to older people on repairs, improvements and adaptations; the potential cost of work; provision of schedules of work; undertaking tendering procedures from lists of approved builders; providing clerk of works service, site visits and inspections and offering advice on completion. It provides initial advice to customers by telephone and where required can provide a home visit service if there are barriers to participation in telephone/email or remote meeting support services.

8. Local resilience

Local resilience encompasses crisis support like food banks and warm spaces. For the purposes of this analysis, food services and pantries have also been included within this section.

Figure 32: Survey Respondents that offer Local Resilience (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Local Resilience by Local Authority

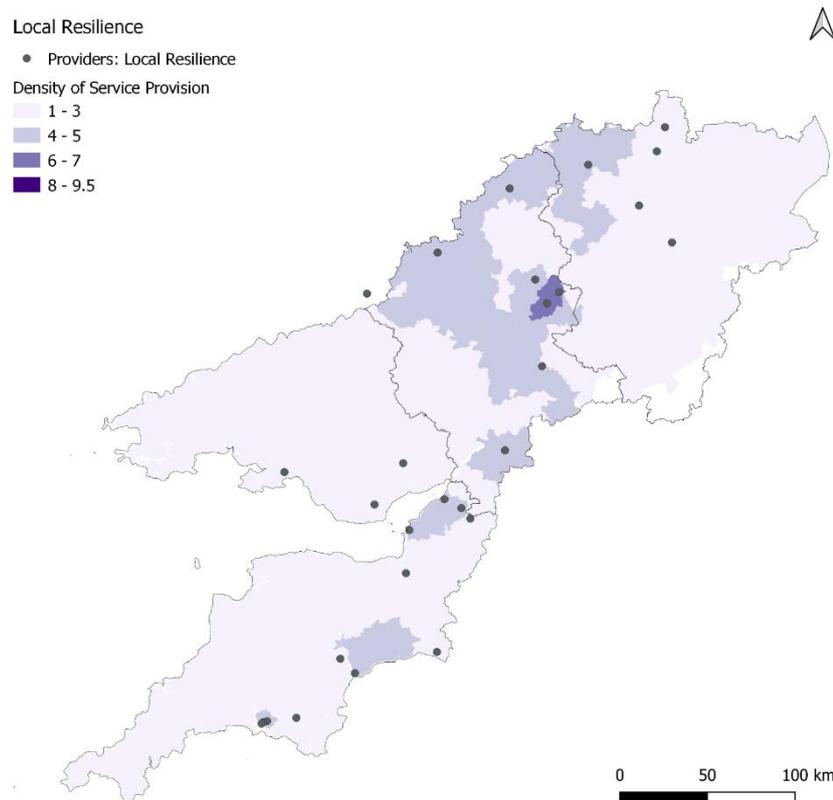


Figure 32 shows the strongest provision in Birmingham, with 4-5 providers in areas of the East Midlands, West Midlands and South West, otherwise there are 1-3 providers only. Improving provision across license areas would help communities respond to economic hardship and severe weather events.

Current provision and demand

Having access to fuel vouchers raised ACE's profile within the city as they began supporting clients from further afield. However, they also expressed a desire to provide longer term support alongside crisis support:

[F]uel vouchers are great, but only if they can be used in a way that means that we're able to add additional support alongside of that. ACE

ACE also run a community pantry, one of the first of its kind in Wales. Clients sign up as pantry members and pay £5 per week, enabling them to access a selection of chilled, frozen and ambient food and unlimited fruit and vegetables. ACE partners with Food Cycle who attend the centre every Monday and cook a three-course vegetarian meal using surplus food. The organisation reported that clients often come to them through crisis hour sessions and go on to become pantry members as well as accessing other services that they offer. They would like to deliver a breakfast club in their centre as there are two large state schools whose pupils would benefit from this service.

ACE and Bassetlaw Action Centre have provided a warm space, the latter provider also offering crisis packs last winter (blankets, flasks). Spitfire Services provide a warm space in their office five days a week from 9am until 5pm. It was stated that some clients, particularly those with mental health issues, visit the office to access this service and for social contact.

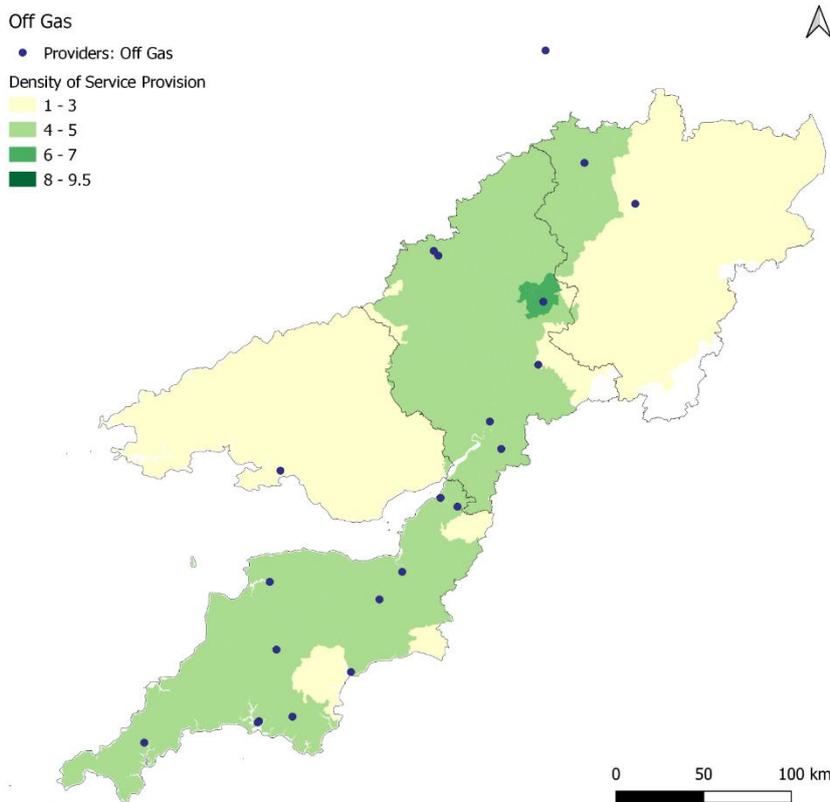
Evidence of innovation and successful delivery models

Rural Action Derbyshire run the Feeding Derbyshire Alliance which provides support to a number of food banks, food pantries, breakfast clubs and after school clubs. The project has been running since 2015 and during the Covid-19 pandemic, they were able to make use of community kitchens and cafes to provide a 'meals on wheels' service for vulnerable people who were shielding and those returning from hospital. Food pantries were developed as a more sustainable alternative to food banks after the pandemic. Clients sign up to become members and are then able to access a variety of food for £5 a week. Rural Action Derbyshire reported that beneficiaries of the pantry have since signed up to become volunteers. They are currently looking to develop their network of food banks and pantries and looking for new ways to source food as they report that surplus food is becoming harder to access.

9. Off-gas

Off-gas encompasses support for off-gas households such as oil buying clubs. Figure 33 shows only one survey respondent in the East Midlands and South Wales, plus some local authorities in the South West (Teignbridge, Mendip, Purbeck). It would be useful to consider this alongside support for smart energy installations.

Figure 33: Survey Respondents that offer Off Gas (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Off Gas by Local Authority



Current provision, demand and gaps

Rural Action Derbyshire run a community oil bulk buying scheme which has been operating since 2011. Those who have access to the internet can register and order oil online. Those who are digitally excluded can phone up to make an order and Rural Action Derbyshire will set up and manage an online account on their behalf.

Bassetlaw Action Centre reported that they used to signpost to an oil buying scheme, but they thought this was no longer available and they were not aware of any other support in the area.

Community Resource in the West Midlands operates in Shropshire, a rural county with just over 40% of households off mains gas. Many use oil to heat their homes, the price of which is extremely high. Community Resource runs a community oil buying club where it negotiates discounts for members and provides one-to-one energy saving advice. It administers the DWP Household Support Fund on behalf of Shropshire Council and runs a Warmer Winter Appeal to raise fund to distribute as grants to vulnerable customers. As a Big Energy Saving Network member, Community Resource offers free one-to-one energy advice sessions via telephone or Zoom. Clients receive a free energy saving pack with an information toolkit.

10. Other services

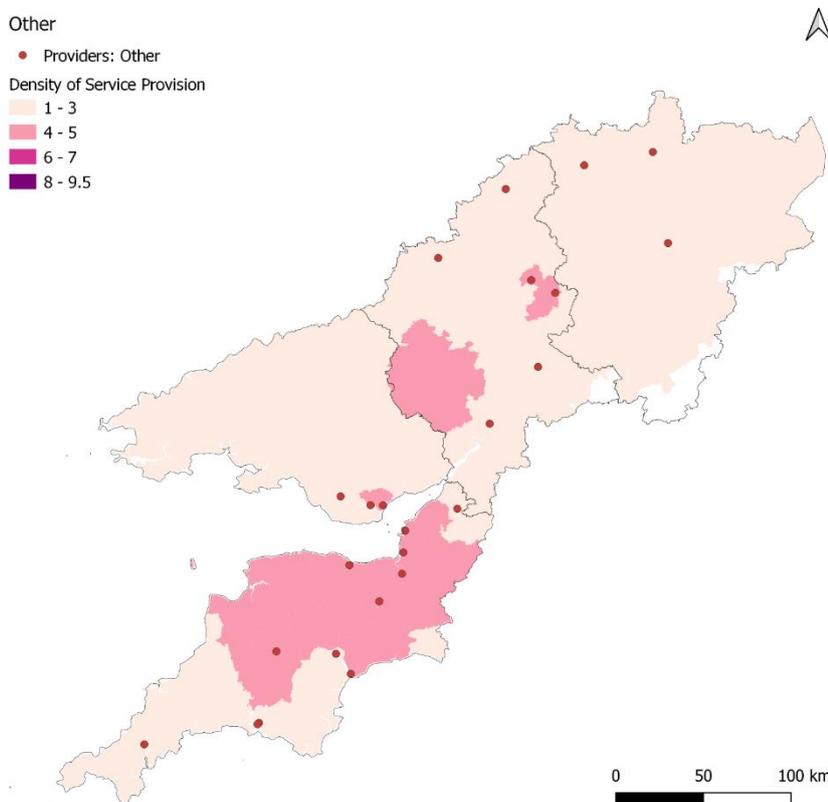
Mainly situated in Devon, Somerset, Cardiff, Shropshire and Birmingham (Figure 34).

Billing and metering

Billing and metering advice was not a service that was explicitly asked about either within the survey or the interviews, but it was mentioned by several interviewees as a service they deliver. Helping clients with reading meters, managing energy accounts and liaising with energy suppliers was a primary activity for Spitfire Services. Both ACE and Exeter Community Energy commented upon long hold times on calls to energy suppliers. Exeter Community Energy suggested that advice agencies should be able to access a dedicated advisor line to better advocate for their clients:

[Y]ou hang on the phone you get cut off you try again and you get cut off, it's just completely wasted time and I feel it'd be much better if there was dedicated contact numbers for advice teams...We should be able to ring someone and get some answers rather than have to be in the queue with millions of other people. Exeter Community Energy

Figure 34: Survey Respondents that offer Other Services (as a core or minor service) with Density of Service Provision for Other Services by Local Authority



Organisations interviewed expressed differing views about supporting clients with tariff switching. For some, it had been a significant aspect of their energy advice offering. Whilst others indicated that they would not want to support clients with switching tariff again due to negative experiences.

Key points

For income maximisation and debt advice, the huge increase in demand for services since March 2020 as led organisations to either develop this as a core service or to establish referral pathways to help clients with this. As a core service, this can increase organisational effectiveness, although benefits applications and supporting clients' appeals is time-consuming. Projects to target very hard-to-reach groups are emerging.

Energy efficiency services can suffer with difficulties accessing resources for enabling work and small measures. Better updating of advice organisations on progress with installations would help to assess client and organisational impacts. There is range of energy efficiency services offered by service providers, with signs of growth in in-depth retrofit advice and coordination. Energy efficiency installations in the private sector is difficult to achieve with low take up by tenants and landlords.

Heating solution services are in high demand but show pockets of low service provision in South Wales, the East Midlands and the South West. Emergency funding for heating repairs and replacement are hard to come by.

Behaviour change is well supported across license areas, with different approaches emerging to reach particular client groups (food bank drop-ins, with tenants). However, rural locations present a challenge in terms of lack of in-person contact or where online information is not accessible to the digitally excluded. Community Energy Champions schemes offer one approach to providing energy behaviour change advice.

Both smart energy installations and smart energy advice were reported as relatively low as a core service by survey respondents which could be enhanced with further support. Organisations serving the East Midlands were least likely to report offering smart energy advice and smart energy installations support. There is a gap particularly in rural areas for smart energy installations advice, particularly for off-gas customers. Most organisations also lack expertise in offering smart energy installation advice themselves and importantly may lack connections with smart energy installation service providers that can help.

Smart energy advice focused on smart meters and digital exclusion; the latter being well supported. Partnerships existed to support clients with connectivity, which was raised as a need alongside that for online support and loan of IT equipment. There is potentially underutilised capacity (digital training expertise, computer suite) in some organisations that have discontinued digital inclusion services. In Derbyshire there is a model for scaling up digital inclusion to county level which could be replicated elsewhere. New innovations like Energy Local have the potential to support vulnerable customers to participate in the smart energy transition. Energy Local are

committed to engaging vulnerable customers, particularly those who are socially and digitally excluded through dedicated projects. However, across NGED's license areas, demand flexibility is a nascent area for advice.

Health and wellbeing services, along with local resilience had the patchiest service provision reported, with only 1-3 survey respondents in large areas of the East Midlands, South Wales and the South West. Not all organisations reported having referral pathways with their local Care and Repair / Home Improvement Agency or Fire, Safety and Rescue service. Health and wellbeing services were interpreted by organisations interviewed in a broader sense, to include health checks and social isolation. Befriending and community transport schemes were oversubscribed. Lack of access to some services was previously mentioned in a rural area, which could result in clients having to travel significant distances.

Local resilience services like the Feeding Derbyshire Alliance has pantries, food clubs and meals on wheels services that build on food / fuel vouchers and food bank referrals. Clients seeking crisis support may become engaged in food and warm space activities, which can lead into further help or volunteering. However, it was noted that surplus food is becoming harder to source.

Provision of off-gas services was low in South Wales and the East Midlands – as noted by Bassetlaw Action Centre the only oil-buying club in their area was online. Off-gas services should be considered alongside smart energy installations, as customers in rural locations could potentially most benefit from smart installations.

A significant part of energy advice work involves supporting vulnerable customers with billing and metering issues. This often involves wasted advisor time in energy supplier phone queues.

The benefit to clients of such a multiplicity of services is that there are different touch points via which they can access further services. However, challenges around centre opening times, digital exclusion and geographic location can hamper advice giving. Whilst the quality of casework has improved, tending towards being more holistic and comprehensive (either directly or via referral), high demand and wait times negatively impact clients' experiences. Moves by organisations to take advice into the community via volunteers or at community venues to extend services is apparent.

The next, penultimate section pulls together findings and analysis of this horizon scan to discuss how NGED could work with or actively support these services to meet its social obligations across its license areas.

Discussion: opportunities emerging from horizon scan results

This section reviews the opportunities for NGED to actively support these services and to work with organisations to contribute to meeting its social obligations and objectives across its licence areas.

Gaps or 'thin spots' in geographical coverage of services or in reaching particular vulnerable customer groups.

The services identified where NGED could increase support were smart energy installations, smart energy advice and local resilience. These services were provided by 32%, 34% and 22% of organisations identified in desk research respectively (n=349). Local resilience is thin across all license areas. The South Wales and East Midlands license areas are the weakest overall for service provision.

In terms of the capabilities lens, there is a gap in the energy capability for smart energy installations and smart energy advice. Recent research found that inequalities could be compounded as flexibility markets become established. An evaluation of the Demand Flexibility Service (DFS)²³ found that households with health conditions, on low income or renters had a slightly worse experience and outcomes compared to other participants. Yet, 80% (4,376) of households with long term health conditions were likely or extremely likely to participate in the DFS again. Providers should therefore try to improve experiences and outcomes.

The Energy Choices Tool and Smart Energy Action Plans can help to give advice organisations up to date impartial information on types of smart technologies, their appropriateness for vulnerable customers, with a structured plan to guide the conversation and communicate options to clients.

On digital tech readiness, the horizon scan found evidence that organisations were actively engaged in digital inclusion projects, with a county-wide model emerging (Rural Action Derbyshire). In fact, there appeared to be opportunity to optimise use of existing resources and expertise on digital inclusion via organisations with computer suites or previous digital inclusion training. Support for connectivity for clients, as well as digital assistance and IT equipment is also needed. A recent House of Lords report on digital exclusion found that it is primarily influenced by age (over 65, aged 34-55) and socio-economic background (low income) with these groups have no home internet access or using it less²⁴. The key methods to support digital inclusion recommended were to increase affordability of connection packages, increase basic digital skills and localise support at digital hubs. A lack of policy support in England is hampering digital

²³ Household engagement with Demand Flexibility Service 2022/23. CSE presentation July 2023

²⁴ House of Lords (2023) Digital Exclusion. Communications and Digital Committee. 3rd Report of Session 2022–23

inclusion. The UK Government has not published a digital inclusion strategy since 2014 nor systematically monitors its progress against objectives (unlike Wales which has updated its strategy).

Further support for local resilience – warm centres and food support - in combination with community transport in rural areas, can provide a life line through which vulnerable customers in crisis can then access further support. The Rural Action Derbyshire county-wide scheme is worth investigating for replication elsewhere.

Referral pathways

The quantitative evidence showed varied referral networks and suggests that organisations are well integrated into referral networks. There are regional differences and therefore opportunities to share learning and extend referrals. Through qualitative research some gaps emerged ranging from those beyond DNO influence (e.g. long waiting times for mental health services, lack of updates on energy efficiency installations) to ones that can be acted on like improving knowledge on energy advice and retrofit schemes. Connecting organisations to advice hubs, with further promotion and training around the PSR would be useful.

The research also found that referral networks alone don't indicate service coverage. Some organisations are growing their capacity to deliver more types of services in house.

The quality and impact of services offered and how this has changed since 2018.

Since 2018, there has been an increase in income maximisation and behaviour change advice, with a decrease in energy efficiency installations and heating solutions support. Smart energy installations and smart energy advice still both are relatively new phenomena.

There is a growing range of services, with examples of highly targeted services available. There has been a change since 2018 driven by the increased complexity of casework towards establishing a single point of contact for vulnerable consumers. This avoids client disengagement and enables organisations to deliver a comprehensive service. Organisations either provide more advice in house or provide a single point of contact service in close partnership with multiple agencies (e.g. Warmer Homes Advice and Money). Supporting the single point of contact approach aligns with NICE guidance²⁵ on the health risks of living in a cold home.

Advice services remain delivered by mainly paid staff and are not heavily volunteer led. The shift to phone and online advice since the pandemic has continued as it offers a viable means to reach some vulnerable customers. Face to face contact / home visits are still available.

A detailed review of practices within the service areas shows variability in terms of quality and impact, but overall the sector offers a wealth of insight and experiences to share. An example of

²⁵ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2015) Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes. NICE guideline ng6 www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng6

innovation is Lightbulb Service's [Home Gadgets Project](#): which is exploring the use of smart technology, electronic devices or gadgets to help anyone living with dementia, a physical, mental or neurological vulnerability to improve their daily lives.

It is likely that survey respondents were amongst the better resourced organisations, having staff capacity to respond or participate in interviews.

Health of the sector

Research found enthusiasm for growth and innovation, but barriers in this crisis context, are significant. The rate of demand for services is outpacing organisational ability to keep up. Pressures on advice staff have increased. Most organisations are susceptible to funding changes, with only one or two funders. Staff numbers are increasing, but not at a rate that can keep up with demand. Funding and staffing challenges are limiting advice sector aspirations for growth.

This is a systemic issue, as fuel prices are predicted to remain elevated until the late 2030's²⁶. A different kind of intervention is required to stem the flow of demand for energy advice services. Government and decision-makers investment in renewables and innovation is essential. Yet, there are structural issues in the energy sector, which DNO advocacy could help to decrease the number of customers vulnerable to unaffordable fuel bills and cold homes.

Consumer trust in smart meters is low. NGED interventions to build consumer trust in smart meters can leverage wider energy sector change like decarbonisation. The smart meter roll-out sits at 57% of homes but nearly half of the remaining homes have concerns about them²⁷. Many clients that CSE's advice team engage with no longer want smart meters as they fear being remotely switched to prepay²⁸.

DNOs can advocate for social tariffs^{29,30} or flexibility services that deliver free energy to meet basic energy needs of low-income households³¹. Appropriate regulation of the smart energy sector and inclusive innovation from industry were raised in a recent Citizens Advice report as proactive actions required to help more people participate in energy flexibility services.³² Pressing for dedicated energy supplier customer service phone numbers for energy advisors would free up meaningful amounts of advisor time, resolve billing issues more effectively and

²⁶ Cornwall Insight (July 2023) <https://www.cornwall-insight.com/press/new-forecast-warns-power-prices-to-remain-elevated-until-late-2030s/>

²⁷ NAO Update on the rollout of smart meters (2023)

²⁸ CSE, consultation response to Ofgem involuntary PPM consultation, July 2023

²⁹ Age UK (2023) Parliamentary Briefing Energy social tariff May 2023

³⁰ Citizens Advice (2023) Fairer, warmer, cheaper: new energy bill support policies to support British households in an age of high prices

³¹ EnergyCloud is trialling the use of surplus renewable energy to heat smart hot water tanks in fuel poor household with a social housing provider in Ireland. <https://www.cluid.ie/medias-centre/energy-cloud/>

³² Citizens Advice (2023) A flexible future. Extending the benefits of energy flexibility to more households. August 2023. Page 14

begin to rebuild customer trust. Raising the lack of UK government policy and practice on digital exclusion could force improvements in this crucial area.

DNOs need to engage in policy and market reforms that will seek to reduce numbers in need of support, not only increase the supply of support.

Conclusions and recommendations

This final section combines findings from the desk research, survey responses and interviews. It draws conclusions based on the research objectives and makes recommendations on how to stimulate and support affordable warmth services across NGED's license areas.

Conclusions

The horizon scan identified 349 organisations working in NGED license areas that are delivering one or more of the nine energy and affordable warmth services to vulnerable customers. Fifty-four survey responses and interviews with 10 service providers yielded further insights into current practice. Table 11 summarises key findings on existing service provision and gaps.

Referrals from health and social care have proportionally increased since 2018, now exceeding referrals from local authorities. Whilst service providers still refer for benefits and debt advice to Citizens Advice or other voluntary sector organisations, due to high demand and waiting lists some organisations are developing these services in house. Referrals to energy advice and energy efficiency schemes has decreased slightly; providers have less connection with these services.

Since 2020, there has been unprecedented demand for energy advice services, with greater incidence of people facing financial hardship, social isolation and poor mental health. Organisations provide casework that is more complex and offer an increased range of services. Despite increases in capacity, organisations are unable to keep up with increased demand.

There is appetite to scale up services. The factors that would most support organisations to do so are additional funding, certainty of funding duration and provision to train up additional staff. Research found that most organisations had only a few funders, making the advice sectors' resilience to changes in funding regimes precarious. This could have negative impacts for vulnerable customers where the scale of service provision in a geographic location is sparse.

Smart energy installations and smart energy advice are new services that have yet to become established, although advice on smart meters is common. Emergent practice in retrofit advice, innovations in smart and low carbon technologies and flexibility services present opportunities for further development.

Local resilience services have low provision across all license areas. There are active and inactive digital inclusion projects which could be increased, given the growing emphasis on accessing public services online. Successful models for county-wide digital inclusion and local resilience services exist.

Table 11: Summary of key findings from analysis on existing service provision and gaps.

	East Midlands	West Midlands	South Wales	South West
Fuel poverty (FP) levels & characteristics	Small area > 15.1% FP in east of license area with few providers	Large areas >15.1%-60.2% FP in west and north east of license area with few providers. Urban areas well resourced.	Central (Ceredigion) > 19.9% FP; east (Powys) 15.1%-19.9% FP with few providers. Low FP areas in the South East.	Pockets of 15.1-19.9% FP scattered in West Somerset, Devon and Cornwall with few providers
EPC bands E-G	Small number of high LSOAs in centre and north east of license area	High number of high LSOAs in west and north east of license area	LSOAs outside the south east	Small number of high LSOAs in West Somerset, Devon and Cornwall
Household PSR eligibility	High across north east quarter of license area	Urban, a few LSOAs in north west	DNO boundary with North Wales, Welsh border	North Cornwall, West Somerset, Devon coast
Service provision – geographic gaps	(Heating solutions); All except income maximisation.	Health and wellbeing (pockets)	All except income maximisation.	(Heating solutions – pockets); Health and wellbeing; Local resilience
How well existing organisations are meeting area needs	Highest no. of providers and PSR eligibility. Mainly local authorities, local resilience fora, housing association, private enterprises and charities. A lot of regional and multiple local authority-scale delivery. Few energy efficiency schemes identified. Potentially low engagement with social tenants. Strong referral networks with health and social care.	Low no. of providers compared to PSR eligibility. Mainly social and private enterprises, local authorities, housing associations, other public sector. Single and multiple local authority scale delivery. Area less likely to serve the dementia, memory or cognitive impairment needs code.	Least no. of providers, lowest PSR eligibility. Mainly charities, social and private enterprises, housing associations. National and single local authority scale delivery. Few energy efficiency schemes identified. Area least likely to serve: benefits recipients, households with children, ethnic minorities, domestic violence survivors, NHS referrals, single parents and pregnant women or household with child aged under 5 needs code. Referral networks with schools and carers.	High no. of providers compared to PSR eligibility. Mainly social enterprises, voluntary organisations, private enterprises, other public sector, local resilience fora. A lot of single local authority scale delivery. Referral networks with schools and carers.

Compared to 2018, in the current energy crisis and energy transition, the advice sector is in 'crisis response' mode focusing on income maximisation and emergency interventions (like food and fuel vouchers). The systemic challenges faced by the advice sector require strategic intervention to reduce the root causes embedded within the energy sector that are exacerbating inequalities and customer vulnerability.

Recommendations

These recommendations are made to NGED to support its ED2 social obligations work to meet the needs of vulnerable customers.

- Assess by LSOA across all license areas for high fuel poverty (LILEE and 10% fuel spend of income after housing cost) and the estimated PSR gap to identify specific areas for intervention, informed by gaps identified in this report. Check service coverage with existing partners and desk research organisations. Establish priority areas for intervention and organisations that can do so.
- Increase awareness of the PSR and support organisations to promote PSR sign ups with resources and training, to reemphasise its importance to staff and its benefits to vulnerable customers. Strengthen referral pathways with Power Up and Affordable Warmth partners, and across each license area to build resilience and improve access to services.
- Promote a single point of contact approach to advice delivery, whether services are delivered in house or via partnerships, to provide a seamless holistic service for clients.
- Tackle the complexity of client support, for example by resourcing reuse initiatives or with direct funds for essential household equipment to reduce time spent grant writing.
- Ensure that referral pathways with Home Improvement Agencies are established. Support access to handyperson services and the installation of small measures, repairs or enabling works which can provide significant benefit to vulnerable clients.
- Identify organisations that can advise and support the installation of low carbon and smart technologies in off-gas areas when these technologies would be effective for customers.
- Increase local resilience service provision to facilitate support in emergency situations. Encourage and trial smart energy advice / installations with organisations already active or seeking to do so.
- Advocate to Ofgem, the UK and Welsh governments and other decision-makers on strategic interventions that would reduce the hardship currently being experienced by vulnerable customers in relation to their fuel bills. This might include questioning and commenting on involuntary PPM installation, social tariffs, energy supplier customer services, private sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards regulation and enforcement or more broadly on lack of action on UK digital exclusion policy.

Appendix: Languages that survey providers offer services in

Table 12 shows the languages that survey respondents offer services in.

Table 12: Survey organisations by languages offered.

Language	Count	%
Services in English only	18	33%
Polish	17	31%
Arabic	15	28%
Other	15	28%
Punjabi	13	24%
Urdu	12	22%
Bengali	11	20%
Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese)	11	20%
Romanian	10	19%
Welsh	10	19%
French	9	17%
Bulgarian	7	13%
Gujarati	7	13%
Hungarian	6	11%
Italian	6	11%
Spanish	6	11%
Portuguese	5	9%

Other languages mentioned included: Ukrainian (two respondents), Hindi, Mirpuri/Kashmiri, Somali, German, Farsi, Amharic, and Tigrigna (all one respondent). Two organisations said they engaged with people in multiple languages, one via Language Line.