

SCIENCE POLICY RESEARCH UNIT

The Energy Café – community action addressing fuel poverty

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Community action on fuel poverty

- 'The Fuel Bill Drop Shop'
 - An investigation in community action on fuel poverty
- Research collaboration
 - Academia and community sector
- Cheshire Lehmann Fund
 - July 2015 – April 2016
 - Final report
- Interviews
 - Community groups who have held an 'energy shop' or 'an energy café'
- Policy Briefing
- Academic paper: Martiskainen, M., Heiskanen, E. & Speciale, G. (2017) Community energy initiatives to alleviate fuel poverty: the material politics of Energy Cafés, *Local Environment*.



The Energy Café



- Community action, often voluntary
- ‘Pop-up shop’, usually held in a public location
- Involving *tea & cake*
- Various routes to access
- Open to everyone
- First and foremost advice on energy bills
 - Switching, energy efficiency measures, behaviour change

The Energy Café

- Energy café volunteers may have to deal with a variety of issues:

“To get to the heart of the problem, you’ve got to be dealing with debt issues, mental health, family violence and the whole way social care is being dismantled ... ”

Interviewee comment

- This requires skills that go beyond energy advice:

” ... To properly deal with that, the advisor is going to have to have quite a broad-based knowledge. We haven’t been able to equip volunteers to advice about these broader issues.” Interviewee comment

- And ideally over a long period of time:

“Energy advice is a bit of a process, you need to be able to do some hand holding over time and even going to do a home visit after the energy café session.” Interviewee comment

- Community groups need a mixture of resources
 - E.g. financial backing, practical skills, soft skills and tacit knowledge

Key findings

- Energy café could act as a triage service
 - Bring together those who need help with the relevant help
 - E.g. community groups, charities, food banks, health authorities and local authorities
- Collaborative working in a trusted way
 - Identify those who most need help
 - Begin with an energy bill and move on to other issues
 - Provide tailored advice and get the right authorities involved
- Community groups could provide a space for fuel poverty work
 - Utilise local knowledge, skills and networks
 - Improve health and wellbeing
 - Aid low carbon transition

*“If you get to someone’s energy bill you are opening up their house.”
Interview comment*

