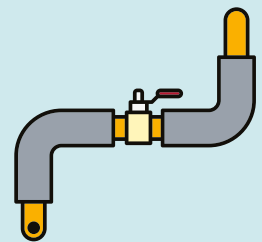
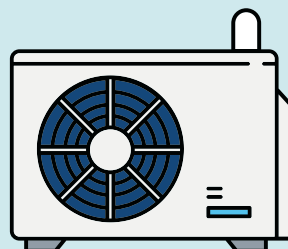
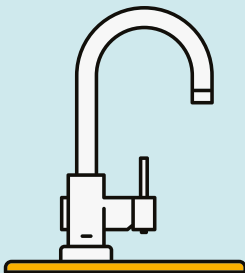
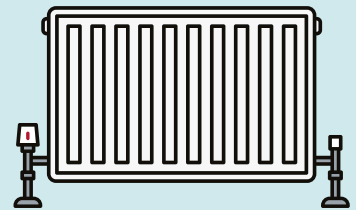
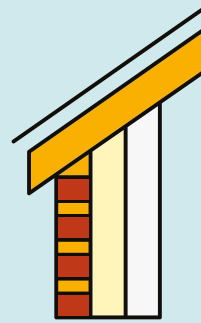
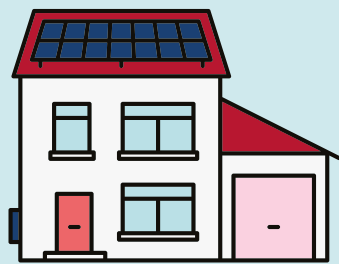


Home Energy Advice North East

LEAD Best Practice Guide

Dedicated local coordinators



Introduction

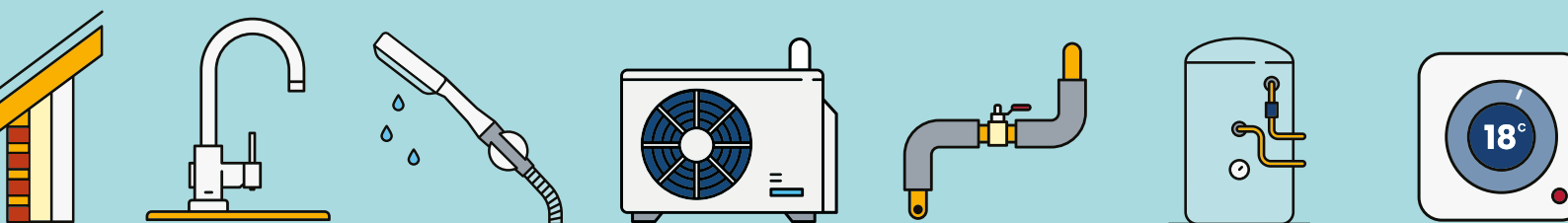
Domestic retrofit is a strategic priority for the North East region and the North East councils have a long history of delivering practical programmes to help people reduce heating and energy use in their homes. This includes supporting residents with energy efficiency and affordability through fuel debt advice, income maximisation of benefits and switching energy tariff.

Although the North East has been one of the most active regions in delivering home energy efficiency measures, it has some of the highest fuel poverty levels in the country due to income levels and remaining poor quality buildings. In the North East **as many as 220,000 households are estimated to be fuel poor** (Gov, 2023).

Scaling up domestic retrofit is a huge economic development opportunity for the North East but residents face multiple barriers including high upfront capital costs, slow return on investment, lack of knowledge, lack of trusted installers or advice and disruption to their homes.

Following a successful allocation of funding from the national Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) programme run by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) in January 2024, the **North East Combined Authority (North East CA)** appointed Energy Saving Trust to deliver its LEAD project, with **Groundwork North East and Cumbria** and **Community Action Northumberland** as local delivery partners.

North East CA's LEAD project has been delivered alongside a One Stop Shop telephone and web advice service funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund; both projects are delivered under the overarching brand Home Energy Advice North East.



Objectives

The overarching objective of the LEAD programme is to trial different approaches to in-person energy advice, using learnings to inform the development of an approach to energy advice provision that could be replicated nationally.

The programme is focused specifically on targeting hard-to-treat properties and/or hard-to-reach residents.

North East CA's LEAD offer includes:

- Free and impartial advice on energy saving home improvements, delivered in the home
- A property report detailing energy saving recommendations, accessible through a QR code
- Face-to-face advice provided at community events

Implementation

Referrals into the service have been generated through a multi-channel marketing campaign, from partners and through advisors at community events.

Clients are offered a home visit in which they receive detailed personalised advice and a free property report with recommended actions. Energy advisors, trained to at least Level 2 in domestic retrofit, provide tailored advice based on home assessments and occupant needs. Ahead of the visit, they review EPC data (if available) and discuss client priorities.

During the visit, advisors inspect key areas such as heating, insulation, and windows, using a questionnaire to guide discussions. Clients receive information on energy use, available services, and potential retrofit options, including funding and grants.

Advisors may assist with grant applications on-site or provide cost estimates via Homewise – a digital advice tool that provides personalised energy efficiency recommendations for homeowners. After the visit, advisors follow up with resources and a check-in call to offer further support.

Common challenges and solutions

Challenge 1: Local knowledge

Local knowledge plays a crucial role in ensuring effective support for both hard-to-reach and hard-to-treat households. By equipping advisors with specialised training on the unique characteristics of housing in their area – such as common energy inefficiencies in older terraced homes – advisors can provide tailored solutions that meet the specific needs of residents.

Community Champion training further enhances this approach by empowering trusted individuals within each local authority area to share accurate information and guidance within their networks, ensuring that vital support reaches those who may not actively seek help themselves.

A dedicated advisor for each local authority area strengthens the close working relationship between advisors and councils, allowing for more efficient referrals and quicker access to available funding and support schemes. By collaborating with local organisations and maintaining a comprehensive database of trusted contractors and grants, advisors can provide targeted assistance, such as securing urgent boiler replacements or resolving energy billing issues. This deep local understanding ensures that vulnerable households receive timely, relevant, and effective interventions.

Case study

A Gateshead resident in crisis

Background

A Gateshead homeowner was without heating or hot water for over three months, resulting in extreme cold conditions and significant mould growth in their property. Additionally, their gas meter was broken, and they were facing financial hardship due to an inability to work following an industrial accident.

Action taken

The advisor conducted a home visit and fully assessed the situation. Central government schemes were closed, but knowledge of local schemes enabled the advisor to still find a solution and they referred the homeowner to the Council Household Support Fund for an urgent boiler replacement.

The advisor contacted the homeowner's energy provider to report the broken gas meter, raise a formal complaint, and request a temporary hold on bills. The advisor also assisted the homeowner in applying for council tax support and recommended they apply for Personal Independence Payment due to their inability to work.

Outcome

Through a coordinated approach and local knowledge, the homeowner received critical support to address their heating crisis, financial hardship, and energy billing issues. The intervention ensured that immediate steps were taken to restore heating by a new boiler and meter being installed which was funded by Gateshead Council Household Support Fund. This protected the resident from energy debt and maximised their income through available welfare support via Citizens Advice Gateshead.

Case study

Client with complex health issues in Northumberland

Background

A retired client with complex health issues was struggling to heat their aging timber park home in rural Northumberland. Their failing LPG boiler worsened their situation. The client was unable to keep warm, impacting their health and well-being.

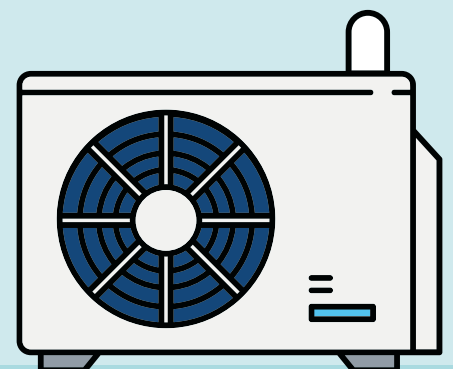
Action taken

With local knowledge of emergency funding, the Community Action Northumberland energy advisor secured temporary repairs to the boiler through the Gas Safe scheme, preventing an immediate crisis. They also referred the client to Citizens Advice for income maximisation support. As a longer-term solution, the advisor supported the client in applying to the local council for the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) for a range of retrofit measures.

A strong working relationship with the local authority's Warmer Homes team allowed the advisor to quickly clarify eligibility concerns. Although the client's previous 12-month income exceeded the threshold, real-time discussions with the council confirmed their current financial hardship, ensuring a successful application.

Outcome

Local authority funding has been approved for an air source heat pump, insulation and solar PV and the client is awaiting installation. Without the advisor's support and relationship with the local authority team, the client may have been deemed ineligible and missed out on these essential measures.



Conclusion

The benefit of having a dedicated local coordinator for energy advice lies in their ability to serve as a crucial point of contact for clients, advisors, and stakeholders.

By providing tailored advice and resources directly to clients, advisors can identify specific challenges, such as inadequate insulation or inefficient heating systems, and recommend practical solutions.

Coordinators can then foster partnerships with local councils, charities, and community organisations, streamlining access to support services and maximising the impact of energy efficiency initiatives across the region.

By providing one-to-one support with residents, dedicated coordinators can also identify gaps or areas for improvement and adapt strategies to meet evolving local needs.



HM Government



north east & yorkshire
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