



Impact Report

April 2022 - March 2023



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Message from our Chief Executive *Rachel Jones*

We've been delivering expert advice on energy efficiency schemes and energy bills (and everything in between) for the past **25 years**.

But never has there been a year like this.

An energy crisis, and ultimately a Cost of Living crisis, all compounded to make this a very difficult year with millions struggling to heat their homes affordably. Even with government intervention, we saw demand rise much faster than anyone could anticipate.

Many were in desperate circumstances with literally no power, no money on the meter and no where else to turn.

Many turned to us who have never before experienced problems paying their energy bills. But helping thousands of people across our region with their energy bill worries was only half our story.

We've been instrumental in our strategic approach to tackling the root causes, working with partnerships at both regional and national level.

And we've been key to delivering warmer homes for people when they've needed it most.

The help we've been able to give is, of course, testament to the very hard work and dedication of our employees, volunteers and trustees. I hope you find this impact report eye opening yet inspiring; heart-breaking but warming and most of all willing to be a proponent of all that we do.

Rachel Jones, CEO



“ A most sincere thank you for all you are doing to support our residents in these most difficult of times.”

Councillor Karen May
Leader of Bromsgrove District
Council

Record demand for **our services**

Our freephone advice line supports people from right across the West Midlands, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. We help people with energy debt and billing issues as well as advice on how to improve their home's energy efficiency and helping people to access grants and further support.

The calls are often long and complex. Many callers are in desperate need of help. We've added extra layers of wellbeing support for all our advisors who are experiencing more demanding and desperate conversations.

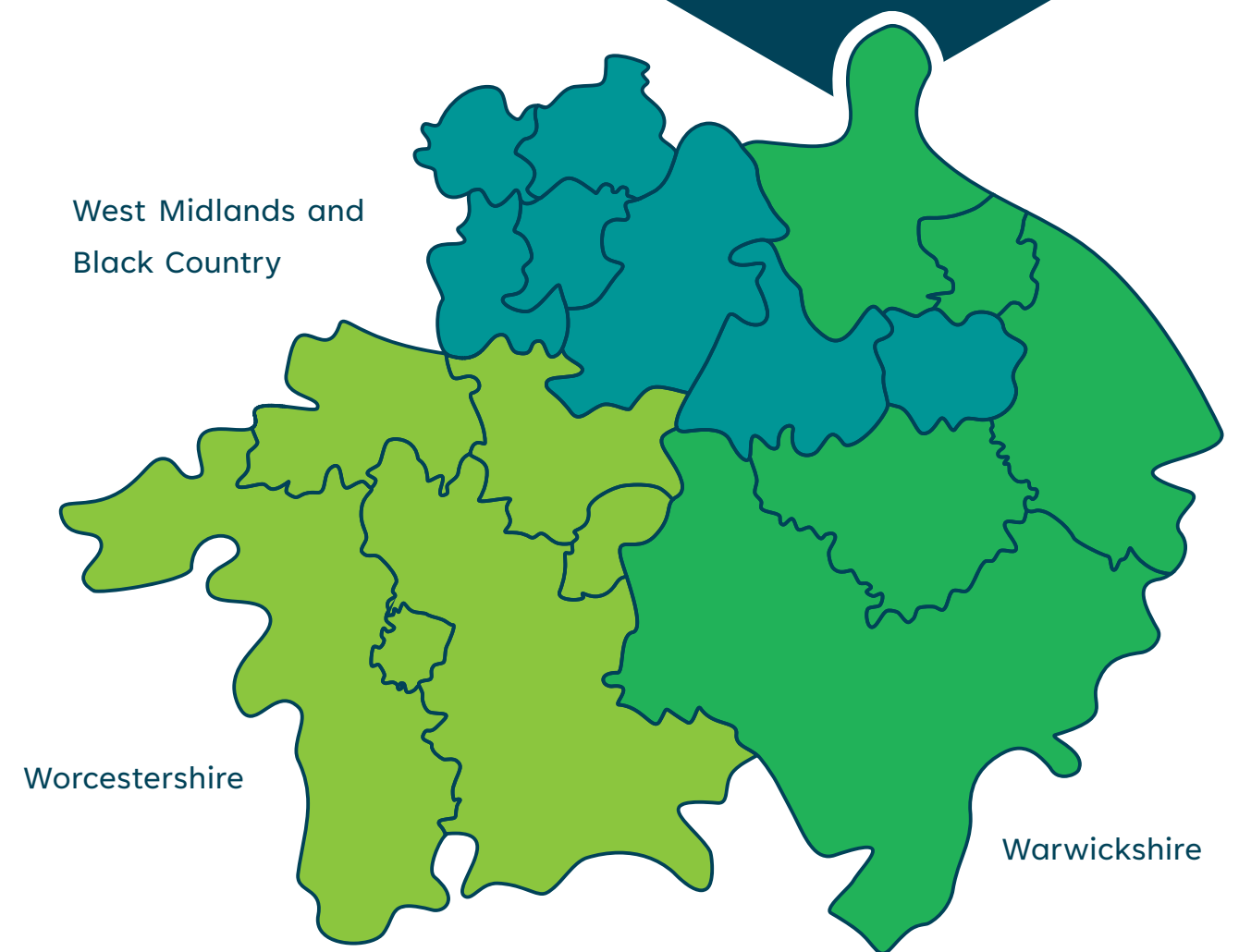


Figure 1: Areas we cover

Our ACT in numbers



over
24,000
households

Overall we've helped more than 24,000 households in the last 12 months – **that's more than double the previous year.**



In Worcestershire we saw a **66%** increase in the number of households we helped.

66% ↑

We've also seen a changing pattern in the type of households we've been supporting – with either energy efficiency schemes or billing and debt advice.

In fact the number of households we've been helping has **doubled** for owner occupiers since the previous year; that means two thirds of our contacts were with owner occupiers.

6,300
↑ 2,635

In Birmingham alone we saw the number of households helped rise to **6,300** (up from 2,635 in the previous year).



Cost of Living and Energy Crisis

Energy price hike was the ubiquitous media headline of the year. But in 2021 a ‘typical’ bill was just £1,271 – and for the preceding decade had been one of relative stability. But prices began to climb in ’21, together with dozens of suppliers leaving the market; fixed rates being pulled and a burgeoning sense of gloom.

Initially Government help was announced in the form of a £200 repayable upfront discount, but when the Energy Price Cap showed a further hike a few months later, a new package of measures was announced – a doubling of the discount to £400 and made non repayable for all households, as well as specific benefit rises.



October 2021

Ofgem Price Cap is increased to **£1,277**.

April 2022

The Ofgem Price Cap increases 54%. Average household’s annual energy bill = **£1,971**.

August 2022

Ofgem announces that the Price Cap will rise to **£3,549** a year from 1 October.

October 2022

Following the mini-Budget, government announces that the Energy Price Guarantee will now only last six months, ending in April 2023.

March 2023

Government announces the Energy Price Guarantee will be kept at £2,500 from April, rather than rising to £3,000.

February 2022

£200 energy bill support loan announced. Russia invades Ukraine, increasing wholesale gas price.

May 2022

Government announces cost of living measures incl. £200 rebate being doubled and made non-repayable.

September 2022

The new Prime Minister announces the Energy Price Guarantee from 1 October to override Ofgem’s Energy Price Cap. It is set at **£2,500** (annually for a typical household).

November 2022

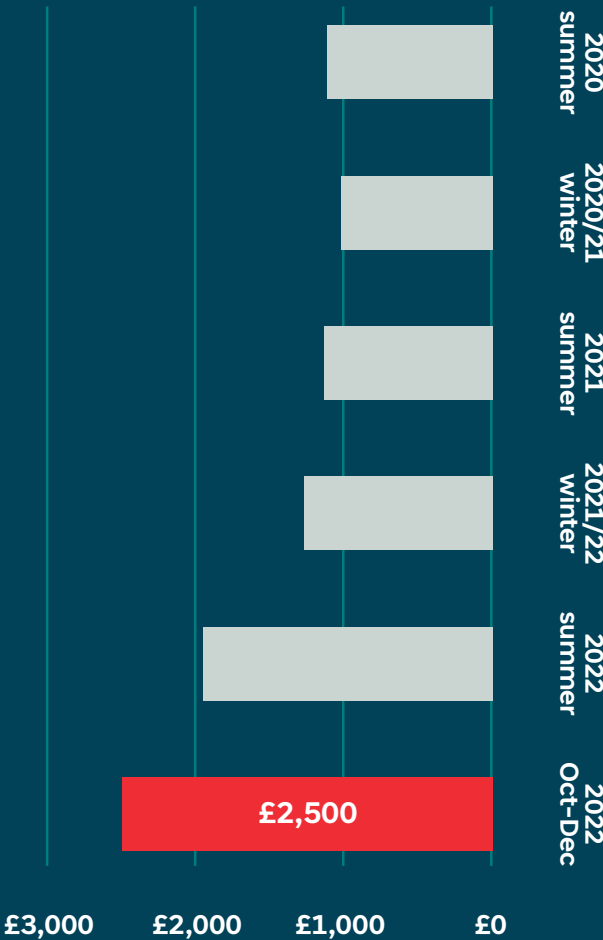
Energy Price Guarantee extended until April 2024, but from April 2023. Also announced that EPG will rise to £3,000 in April 2024.

April 2023

Energy Bills Support Scheme ends. Government offers £200 alternative Fuels Payment for eligible households.

Annual bill for a typical household on a price capped dual-fuel tariff paying by direct debit

Source: Ofgem, 26 August 2022



By September 2022 a new Energy Price Guarantee was announced to replace the price cap. The level of £2,500 for a typical bill was higher still for those on Pre-Payment meters.

The Autumn statement announced a new EPG increase to £3,000 from April 23.

Fury as millions on prepay energy meters plunged into cold and dark

Appeal for ban on forcing people to use prepay meters

With cold and dark homes last year as they ran out of credit

compared with 380,000 in 2021, according to a report published today

If the regulator

to internet connections struggle to top up and are cut off from heating

UK hit by record hike in energy prices

Millions facing 20% increase in energy bills from October, after historic new price cap

Energy firms call for 'new agreement' on household energy bills of £1,400 a year for April

Labour and opposition to demand for 'new' energy bills to be available to local councils

Energy & Environment

With hike in gas and electricity cap coming today, a cheering pledge in article for Mail...

TRUSS: I'LL GET YOU THROUGH THE ENERGY BILL CRISIS

ENERGY CRISIS SPIRALS POWER STRUGGLE

Millions face price rises of up to 40% as more firms could collapse

Food supplies at risk... & Universal Credit blow like pressure on

Energy firms ordered to stop force-fitting prepay meters in Britain's poorest homes

Investigation by forces policy change, as Ofgem orders UK energy firms to stop force-fitting prepay meters in homes and to lobby for a ban on prepay meters in homes

UK'S COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

PAIN IN THE GAS

- Energy bills soar by £700 from TODAY
- Websites in meltdown as punters panic
- Mad Vlad threatens to cut supplies

Energy firms in gas crisis demand end to price cap

Warning that firms are pushing for a cap on energy prices to protect themselves out of business

Leading firms are pushing for a cap on energy prices to protect themselves out of business

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DYING MUM'S PLIGHT Heartbreaking reality of energy bills crisis



Energy bills hit £3,500 with worst yet to come

Warning of double-digit inflation for a year

FEARS ENERGY BILLS WILL HIT SHOCKING £3,850 A YEAR



Energy bills could hit £3,000 a year, pushing millions into fuel poverty, experts warn

Advice and Support

It was an unprecedented year when it came to supporting people to pay their energy bills and debts.

But while paying for energy was at the forefront of everyone's minds, it also brought into sharp focus the attention that energy efficiency has long been the bridesmaid and never the bride.

Britain has some of the leakiest homes in Europe. And the West Midlands has the highest rate of fuel poverty in England.

That combination – and the unenviable title - means we have much to do to tackle the root causes of fuel poverty: a poorly insulated and cold home, low household income and high energy prices.

“

Just wanted to say a big “Thank you” for this payment. It will make the world of difference to me over the coming winter meaning that I will be able to be warm and comfortable.”

– a grateful pensioner

For those on Pre Payment Meters – who have historically paid more for each unit of energy, we helped more than **2,000 households** with Pre Payment vouchers totalling more than **£80,000**.

4,300
payments

over
£80,000
in voucher payments

£1.7m
spent

We made more than **4,300 energy payments** to suppliers totalling more than **£1.7 million**.

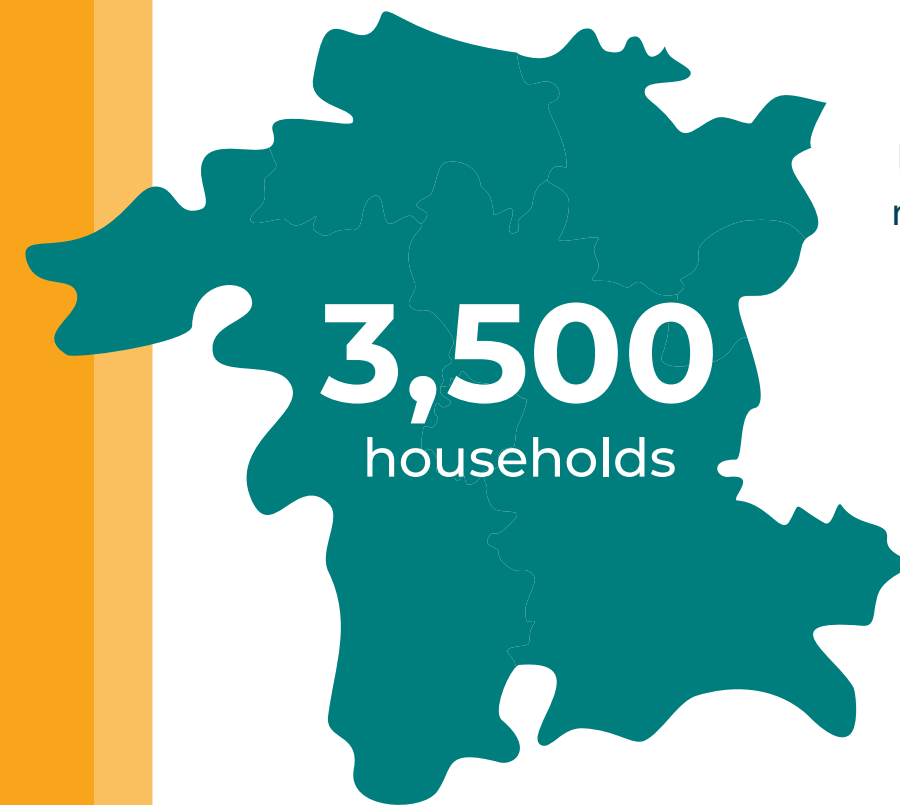




We've worked alongside our Local Authority partners to deliver measures across the region to help make homes warmer and healthier. In fact we work with more than **20 Local Authorities**.

Our long standing expertise has allowed us to access new and innovative funding streams to pass on to the most vulnerable households in our area – and we've become the trusted partner for many Local Authorities.

We're the trusted partners when it comes to delivering the energy element of the government's Household Support Fund for Worcestershire and Solihull.



In Worcestershire – our largest Household Support Fund scheme – we provided more than **3,500 households** with help – whether that's help with current energy bill payments or helping with energy and water debts, the majority of which were families with children.



Through the Solihull Household Support Fund we helped more than **600 households** with payments.

We've attended more than **500 events** – meeting people face to face to give expert energy advice.

over
500
events

We visited more than **1,100** people in their own home to offer advice and support – frequently complex case work.

1,100
home visits



And we supplied nearly **1,000** small measures to households – such as energy efficient light bulbs, radiator foils and heated blankets.

Programmes and partnerships



A key element of our partnerships with Local Authorities is helping to deliver government funded Energy Efficiency programmes.

The **Sustainable Warmth** programme extends right across our region. We work with eligible low income householders to help bring about a warmer, more energy efficient home. Over the last year, around 1,500 homes in the wider West Midlands have been upgraded thanks to the scheme.

We've also supported the **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund** – working with social housing providers to improve homes' energy efficiency ratings. We've worked with two District Council's Wychavon and Stratford upon Avon, and around 150 homes have benefited from a significant upgrade.

Our regional reach has also expanded thanks to working with **Lambeth Council** upgrading their housing stock.

We have strong working relationships with a range of organisations – both locally, regionally and nationally.

Our expertise also expands beyond direct involvement in energy advice work. As the national secretariat lead of the Association of Local Energy Officers (ALEO), we have developed both briefing and training remits to create a collaborative network of more than 300 professional officers.

Our CEO Rachel Jones has been instrumental in leading on energy policy across a range of different strategic working groups. These include the West Midlands Combined Authority 'Greener Together' panel; the Worcestershire Alliance (a newly formed collective of voluntary and community organisations to build the sector alongside statutory agencies) and the Bromsgrove Partnership (a member for **more than 15 years**, Rachel has worked with other partners from across the district to come together to address issues facing residents in a more cohesive way).

Rachel is also **chair of the Association of Local Energy Officers (Midlands)** and provides a regional link to National ALEO and the wider partnership with government. ALEO links to all the LAs across England and Wales to share best practice and address challenges from fuel poverty to delivering net zero.



Moving above and beyond

We've also brought in new and innovative projects such as working with commercial partners like Coventry Building Society.

As part of their community commitments, The Coventry Building Society awarded us **£100,000 to develop and deliver the new Coventry Energy Fund** to local residents struggling with energy bills or needing help with heating solutions.

Our partnership with Heart of England Community Energy has allowed for a complex case worker to be employed across south Warwickshire. This vital role means that very vulnerable people can be given the time and space to work through their energy needs.

We've also started to make in-roads for the Able to Pay market. High energy bills have intensified the demand for people to upgrade their homes to become more efficient and so expanding on our Local Authority work is a natural progression.

By becoming a trusted and valued partner, where people can turn for impartial and qualified advice we will be helping to push the net zero growth plans that much quicker.

“

Your service has been of tremendous value and benefit to me and my participants, and I send grateful thanks for all you have done, and continue to do.”

– Matt



£100,000

for Coventry Energy Fund

Warm and healthy

The impact of unhealthy homes on long term health conditions is well known. Several of our projects focus on breaking the link between cold and damp homes and poor health.

A new scheme led by our Warmer Homes West Midlands team arm called “Guiding you home” – enables us to work alongside NHS staff to address the issues of damp, mould and inadequate heating in people’s homes which often results in a cycle of in-patient stays, discharge and then, re-admittance.

We have a network of referrers who can contact us directly for our support to tackle the issues, where we can combine home visits with access to grant funding and debt advice.



We’ve been piloting the Warmth on Prescription scheme across parts of Worcestershire which means GPs can tap into our case worker expertise. Patients whose long-term health conditions would be made worse by living in a cold and damp home, were eligible for both financial support as well as a home visit by an energy advisor.

Our Keeping Coventry Warm scheme has a public health remit by helping those with long term health conditions by improving home heating systems and installing insulation.

Our team

481%[↑]
more staff

We have a dedicated and talented team who are all focused on making people's lives warmer, healthier and safer. Our employee numbers grew by **42** since pre pandemic levels to support our increased caseload.

Our most recent recruitment has shown that our reach extends beyond the traditional energy and charity agenda; attracting corporate and education professionals.

Our CEO Rachel Jones is a key influencer on collaborative boards and committees across the region, including the Citizens' Panel for the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Worcestershire Alliance.

Not surprisingly she was awarded Development Manager of the Year at the National Energy Efficiency Awards 2022 to complement our Vulnerable Customer Support Award.



Case studies

The story of Dora

Dora met our outreach worker Pat whilst attending her local food bank. She was tearful, anxious, and extremely worried about her situation.

Pat kept in contact by phone over a few weeks, establishing trust and confidence. Pat was able to establish that day to day living was a struggle for Dora. **Her home had been flooded** twice, walls were damp and many cupboards and furniture were ruined and could not be used. Dora was in arrears with her water bill – which hadn't been paid in more than a year and was struggling to top up her electricity and gas meters. She **often went without food** and had reached her limit of food vouchers with her housing association. She was regularly overdrawn and had no money to top up her phone.

Pat immediately sorted out a **Pre-Payment Fuel vouchers** which alleviated the immediate energy crisis and gave Dora some much needed breathing space. Pat also installed some **small measures** around the house to help with energy efficiency. As well as applying for the **Priority Services Register**, Pat also helped Dora apply for Severn Trent's **Big Difference Scheme** for those on low incomes. Pat also signposted available help with their debt advice agencies.



Beattie

During summer 2022, we received a call from a customer, Beattie, in Coventry who had been told about our services at an Age UK event.

She was having issues with her energy supplier who had recently raised her **Direct Debit from £23 to £250 a month**. She was very distressed and getting confused when she had tried talking directly to the supplier.

After speaking initially on the phone, our outreach worker Mel, made a home visit; taking a new meter reading from the **old dial-type meter** and worked out her unit consumption; she could see immediately that the current bill was very high for her usage.

Mel spoke to the supplier who agreed that the readings did appear high and supported Mel's request to an engineer visit free of charge to inspect the meter and if possible, fit a smart meter. The supplier also revised the bill and informed that a refund would be sent out.

Beattie became very emotional because she has underlying health conditions and had been worrying for such a long time about billing and debt. She lives on her own and only receives a state pension.

Mel asked the supplier to ensure that Beattie was placed on the **Priority Services Register** and Mel also explained about the **Warm Home Discount** which could be applied for later. Knowing that Beattie's income was low, Mel also investigated Pension Credit and applied on Beattie's behalf.

A follow up meeting a month later was much more positive. The smart meter had been fitted and Mel made sure that Beattie understood how to read the in-home display and monitor usage. Beattie has also received her refund from the supplier – and was now receiving pension credit.

Beattie now has a higher income and reduced energy bills leaving her feeling much more in control of monitoring her usage. She was so happy and grateful for Mel's support.



Bill and Sue

Bill and Sue – who live in a rural Worcestershire village – were referred to us for help through the pilot **Warmth on Prescription** scheme.

They explained how their main heat source was an oil-fired boiler, but they hadn't been able to afford to have it serviced. They were so worried about energy bills that **they didn't turn their lights on** once it got dark and never used the oven.

Our outreach advisor Susan helped the couple to access help with their energy bills through the Warmth on Prescription scheme. The couple were so grateful to receive **£840** which was split between funds for electricity and oil. Susan also advised and supported their application for help with boiler servicing through the **Household Support Fund**.

“

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude for saying that my debts will be paid. I was really worried that my energy supplier in particular were going to come after their money via a debt collection agency.

”

– a very happy client

Contact Us

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