

# Warm Homes for Oxfordshire

Round-table Discussion on  
Energy Saving and Retrofit

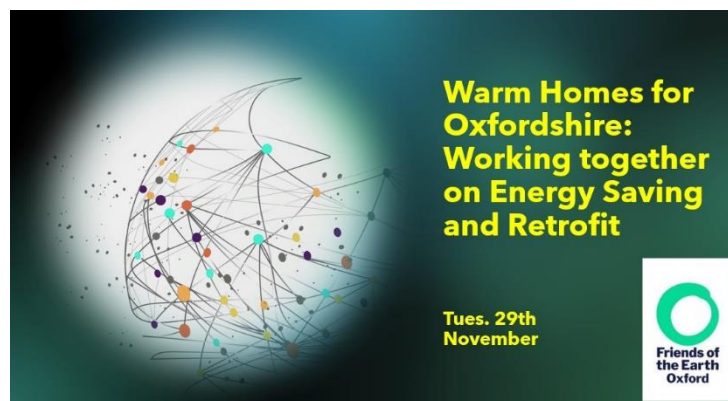
*Meeting Report*

*January 2023*

**United for  
Warm Homes**



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Oxford**



# Meeting the warm homes challenge: Summary and recommendations for action

*17 organisations met on 29th November 2022 for a round-table discussion at County Hall, Oxford, to identify activities across Oxfordshire, common goals, challenges, and areas for collaboration related to home energy efficiency, fuel poverty and retrofitting homes in the county.*

*The Government announced its long-awaited 'It All Adds Up' energy-saving scheme soon after this event. Our discussion on how professional and voluntary groups can work together to ramp up work on these issues was very timely. Tackling the challenges identified here will be important if we are not repeat past errors.*

## **The challenges**

Fuel poverty in Oxfordshire increased by 10% in the space of a single year in 2020 with over 22,000 households affected. Since then energy prices have more than doubled, so that thousands more homes across the county are facing serious energy-related stress. Those homes are also the source of a quarter of our carbon emissions.

There have been national energy-saving programmes since the 1970s but they have failed to deliver the necessary changes. There has been limited take-up and too many homes are still hard-to heat. Keeping people safe and warm must be a first priority: this is the social justice challenge for all groups and agencies working towards net-zero goals.

Reaching those who are not currently engaged, or who may not feel able to act, is a core challenge. It is vital to communicate with the people who most need help, not just by providing information, but by communicating the benefits of acting to save energy. Some support mechanisms exist but it is not clear to many what is available, who is eligible for different schemes, or how to apply for or access that help.

Retrofitting or 'eco-renovation' needs to happen at a much faster pace, but requires attention to quality, skills, materials and costs. There is a shortage of qualified installers in Oxfordshire.

While retrofit is vital, many homes could save an estimated 10 per cent or more of their energy use through tried and tested solutions that are simple and cheap.

**The needs are clear, as are the benefits of action. Action is urgently needed at every level but change on the scale needed to achieve the twin goals of net-zero emissions and minimised fuel poverty will be a massive undertaking. Now is when it needs to happen.**

***Oxford FoE is part of the United for Warm Homes campaign: See Appendix C***

## Making change happen

- 1. Integrating action:** Work on warm homes work links housing professionals, local councils, health and social care workers, builders, and many voluntary bodies who are keen to engage. Health outcomes need to sit alongside the need for major carbon emission reductions. **A county-wide action plan that values and coordinates all the resources available will be a priority if we are to deliver rapid change at scale on the twin goals.**
- 2. Engaging with and empowering those in need:** Better engagement with households experiencing fuel poverty is essential. Many are often not involved with community groups or with the resources to improve their situation. This especially includes those in private rental and social housing. Many Low to Middle Income (LMI) households are struggling to pay the fuel bills, Over half such households live in homes that are EPC 'D' rated<sup>1</sup> or worse but complex eligibility criteria mean that they may find it hard to get assistance, especially as the cost of living crisis unfolds.
- 3. Sharing information:** Community groups need a central resource for good-quality 'oven-ready' information about fuel poverty, home heating and retrofit. Work being done by the Low Carbon Hub (on Energy Champions, see Appendix B) could be the core for such a resource. Councils and other major agencies should ensure a free flow of relevant information and find the best ways to work with voluntary organisations.
- 4. Improving sign-posting:** While sign-posting people to relevant services can be problematic, there are potential models for improving it. Better Housing Better Health, Citizens Advice and Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action (OCVA) are developing integrated advice systems, which provide good templates for how this can be done.
- 5. Developing skills in the built environment:** The new 'green skills' in construction training programme at Witney and Abingdon college is one way forward but this work needs to be expanded rapidly. This will require collaboration between the councils, construction industry bodies and central government. It may be helpful to develop information materials to help local people ask questions of builders etc. about the skills they have.
- 6. Cooperation and collaboration:** There were proposals to build a network to represent community groups and our shared goals. This network could work with councils and could also seek a 'seat at the table' with energy companies that are delivering government-funded schemes, such as Eco+ and the new 'It all adds up' campaign.
- 7. Mapping who is doing what:** The round-table can be the basis for a mapping of the different organisations and agencies involved in warm homes activities in Oxfordshire, listing their respective expertise, and promoting effective collaboration while maximising resources.

For full report and slides see: <https://www.oxfoe.co.uk/warm-homes-for-oxfordshire/>

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<sup>1</sup> EPCs are Energy Performance Certificates: <https://www.gov.uk/buy-sell-your-home/energy-performance-certificates>

# Warm Homes for Oxfordshire

## 1. Introduction

This report summarises the aims and outcomes of a two-and-a-half-hour round-table discussion about home energy efficiency and retrofit in Oxfordshire in November 2022. 24 people from 17 organisations attended the meeting, which was organised by Oxford Friends of the Earth and hosted by Oxfordshire County Council. The organisations included councils, community networks, social enterprises, and local voluntary groups (see Appendix A for a full list).

The aim of the meeting was to highlight the many activities currently underway across the county related to fuel poverty, home energy efficiency and net-zero goals, and to identify common goals, challenges and areas for collaboration.

Since the round-table took place the Government has announced its long-awaited 'It All Adds Up' energy-saving campaign, which intends to help UK households cut their bills this winter. Much of the advice is well-known – there have been energy-saving campaigns since the 1970s. The challenge is to ensure it achieves its aims. For this to happen, local delivery of advice and support by trusted groups will be essential. This report sets out the challenges for delivery and ideas on how professional and voluntary groups can work together for maximum impact and engagement.

## 2. Where are we now?

### 2.1 The national context

*Based on the presentation by Tina Fawcett, University of Oxford's Environmental Change Institute (ECI), Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions (CREDS); see the full slide presentation here <https://www.oxfoe.co.uk/warm-homes-for-oxfordshire/>*

Around one-third of energy used in the UK is in homes, especially for heating and hot water, and most comes from natural gas. Over the last 20 years, energy use per household has fallen thanks to better buildings, boilers, and other improvements. However, lower-income households generally spend more on energy than middle and higher-income households.

Home energy costs have gone up and will continue to go up, despite the Government's current energy price guarantee. Prices could be as much as 116 per cent higher in 2022/2023. The lowest-income households could be facing an increase of £1000 or more, with older people and other vulnerable people on low incomes hit the hardest.

It is unclear how much energy the average household can save without suffering some adverse effects – a 'guesstimate' is 10-20 per cent. Without major investment in energy efficiency people cannot reduce their energy use by half. Thus it is impossible for people to 'save their way' back to 2021 energy bills without very serious adverse impacts, particularly in terms of warmth, leading to potential adverse

health impacts. In general, personal advice about energy saving is more effective than generic advice, but it's more expensive to deliver and to scale up.

## 2.2 Local context and responses

*Based on presentations by Dale Hoyland, Retrofit Team Lead, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Emily Green, Oxford City Council; and others; see slide presentation here:*

<https://www.oxfoe.co.uk/warm-homes-for-oxfordshire/>

Fuel poverty in Oxfordshire increased by 10 per cent in the space of a single year in 2020, with Oxford City more affected than rural areas, and that was before the current crisis. This has serious implications for people's health and increases pressure on the NHS and is happening against the backdrop of the cost of living crisis and the climate and ecological emergency.

**Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)** is working on several schemes to address these issues. The main scheme is providing funds for significant retrofit of more than 300 energy-inefficient owner-occupied and privately-rented homes. It is also working on:

- two Heat Pump Readiness funding bids to move from feasibility to delivery stage,
- a scheme with Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) to meet demand for installers,
- the ECO 4 scheme requiring larger energy providers to fund retrofit and
- Eco+, which is aimed at the least efficient owner-occupied homes.

Organisations in Oxfordshire are encouraged to refer potentially eligible households to OCC: [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/retrofit](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/retrofit).

**Oxford City Council (OxCity)** work on energy saving and retrofit includes the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership with BMW, the University of Oxford and other large organisations, and landlord accreditation for meeting minimal energy efficiency standards. OxCity also works with local organisations to support their initiatives by providing information about funding and other services for struggling households. Finally, a funding bid is in progress for work to improve energy efficiency in 316 council houses.

In addition, the **District Councils** in Oxfordshire have support programmes, and all councils are involved with the Better Housing Better Health initiative. (See Appendix B for more detail on OCC and OxCity initiatives.)

## 2.3 Community and social-enterprise sector initiatives

Most organisations at the round-table were involved with many activities related to energy saving and retrofit. Some are listed here - see Appendices A and B, and the relevant organisations' websites, for a fuller picture.

- **The Low Carbon Hub** manages more than 50 community-owned renewable energy projects across the county. It is also involved with: Cosy Homes Oxfordshire, Energy Solutions Oxford (for small-

and medium-sized enterprises), a schools programme, and ongoing work with the local Low Carbon groups to help them become more resilient (see Appendix B).

- **Low Carbon Oxford North** has developed the Housewarming Guides, designed to help homeowners understand the options and choices for retrofitting their homes.
- **Low Carbon West Oxford** is providing leaflets to all libraries about energy saving; piloting home energy visits; promoting 'Energy Champions'; and has done work on fuel poverty.
- **Better Housing Better Health (BHBH)** is a service funded by OCC working across the county to reduce the number of people in fuel poverty and improve domestic warmth & wellbeing. It is coordinated by the National Energy Foundation but involves many other organisations, and offers advice and home visits.
- **Aspire** is a social enterprise working to support up to 90 frontline workers to access energy advice and fuel poverty training.
- **Sustainable Botley** is surveying homes for retrofit and providing home energy advice with support from Vale of White Horse D.C. (VOWHDC).
- **Sustainable Wantage** is running an innovative 'Draught-Busters Project', and have leafleted every household with advice, funded by VOWHDC.
- **Owned By Oxford** is in the process of setting up the **Barton Community Retrofit Cooperative**, which will provide retrofit services, train local people and provide energy-saving services for Barton residents. They have secured seed funding and are recruiting local builders. Profit from the project will support local outreach and energy advice and resources for self-help approaches, with delivery by Home Energy Advocates (see Appendix B)
- **OCVA** have worked with Better Housing Better Health to deliver advice to community associations.
- **The Oxfordshire Community Foundation** provides grants for those who are most in need, and is now focused primarily on support for the cost of living, with the aim of integrating climate issues into their work.
- **The Community Action Groups** network links many of the voluntary groups active on energy issues across the county through their 'Energy Collaborate' group.

### 3. The challenges

Discussion highlighted a range of challenges. Some can be tackled by well-planned local action, others will need national action and support.

#### 3.1. Making retrofit happen

Change on the scale needed to deliver zero carbon goals and tackle fuel poverty will be a massive undertaking. Scaling up will be difficult because the houses are occupied, which can slow down or prevent the work being done. The inconvenience of even simple measures such as loft insulation is one reason why progress has been slow. If this scaling up is to be successful people will need to want to engage with what is on offer.

Different strategies will be needed for different types of tenure. Much housing stock is managed by housing associations, there is a substantial private rented market including a high level of student

accommodation, and there are of course privately owned homes. Each of these has problems in terms of identifying and accessing properties.

### **Retrofit: quality, skills, materials, costs**

Improving home energy efficiency also means ensuring that there are installers who can do it and do it well. Currently there is a shortage of installers in Oxfordshire. There are also concerns about the quality and cost-effectiveness of retrofit installations. Making sure it is done right, with high-quality materials, is a major obstacle to scaling up. Linked to this are issues around materials in the supply chain and prices being pushed up by demand.

### **Tackling the '10%'**

There is a need focus on innovation and scaling up, but there are also tried and tested solutions that are simple and cheap. The introduction session showed that many homes can save 10% or more of their energy use, but are not doing so, highlighting the need for continued outreach. Promoting these simple measures should not be ignored as part of a package of responses.

## **3.2. Communication and engagement**

One big challenge for this work is reaching people who are not currently engaged or involved, or who may not feel empowered or able (e.g. financially) to address fuel poverty or home energy efficiency. Those most in need are rarely involved in community groups that focus on net-zero goals or similar initiatives. They may not have the time or money to act on the information councils are providing. There is a particular need to reach people on the lowest incomes, and to ensure that everyone is safe and warm – if they are not, 'climate change' and net zero will not be a priority for them.

In addition, many retrofit schemes are aimed primarily at owner-occupiers, fewer at renters, and fewer still at people living in social housing. Private renters, however, are included under the Government's Local Authority Delivery (LAD) and Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) schemes. The challenge is getting landlords to engage, though they ought to be compelled by the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) legislation. Another challenge is persuading tenants to agree to the disruption caused by installation, and addressing tenants' concerns that upgrades would lead to an increase in rent.

### **Reaching those most in need**

It is vital to communicate with the people who most need help, not just by providing information, but by finding a way to communicate the benefits of retrofit, while also working to build trust. Councils and public health bodies have experience helping people in housing associations, and have found that, while money is important, they also need resident buy-in: money *and* engagement is vital.

There are still challenges around identifying households that are most in need of help. EPC data can be used, but this data is often flawed and not always up to date. Eligibility criteria of some government schemes can be quite restrictive. This is particularly true as the cost of living crisis bites: many community groups and councils know who the vulnerable people are in their area, but there will be more people falling into this category as conditions worsen.

There is help available for people experiencing fuel poverty or home energy inefficiency, but understanding what is available, what the eligibility criteria is for different schemes, and how to apply or access the help can be confusing. There are also suggestions that, nationally, low- and middle-income households – not just those on the very lowest incomes – have little support or incentive to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. (See <https://green-alliance.org.uk/publication/locked-out-helping-low-to-middle-income-households-benefit-from-net-zero/>), which calls for the expansion of energy-related schemes to Low to Middle Income (LMI) households– the ‘squeezed middle’. 57% of LMI households live in homes that are EPC ‘D’ rated or worse but complex eligibility criteria mean that they may find it hard to get assistance. A particular scheme or benefit could be a ‘perfect fit’ for a particular household, but matching up people with programmes is a challenge for some of the reasons highlighted in the previous section on engagement. Oxfordshire County and City Councils are taking steps to simplify some of the offerings, for instance through Better Housing, Better Health.

### **Cross-sector cooperation**

Community groups can be a first point of contact and may be more trusted than some statutory agencies, but cannot provide all of the help someone needs. There is a limit to what even well-trained community energy advisers can do on their own. If we are to maximise impact and engagement across the county, we need a well-planned, ongoing communication system to ensure that all advice groups can share information and keep up-to-date.

### **The ‘sign-posting’ issue**

Community-level advisors will often have to ‘sign-post’ those seeking help to another organisation or public body and people may not follow the links. We need to reduce the number of steps people must take before they get the help they need. There are also data protection issues that community groups and volunteers may not be aware of when working with members of the public. Better Housing, Better Health is a good step towards ‘stitching it all together’ and being able to offer a more comprehensive, less fragmented or complex service. (See Appendix B for more information about Better Housing, Better Health.)

### **Towards better health**

Round-table participants discussed the health impacts of fuel poverty and cold homes. These can include increased cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, exacerbated rheumatism and arthritis, depression and dementia. Any strategy will need to look at how ‘warm homes workers’ can work with referrals to health and social care agencies for vulnerable households.

## **3.3. Equity, fairness and justice**

Groups and agencies involved with reaching net-zero goals acknowledge that this must be balanced by the overarching aim of keeping residents safe and warm. This recognises the fact that climate justice is social justice, and one key priority is to achieve social equality. Oxfordshire has significant inequality issues, and support and advice must be fairly available to all households across the county so that inequality of access does not turn into injustice. Working with agencies already engaged in disadvantaged areas is vital.



## 4. Meeting the challenges: next steps

### 4.1. Integrating action and mapping who is doing what

The round-table meeting was well attended by both professionals and voluntary groups. Many new connections were made. It will be important to build on and strengthen these. Work on warm homes links so many organisations: housing professionals, local councils, health and social care workers, builders, and many voluntary bodies who are keen to engage. Health outcomes need to sit alongside the need for major carbon emission reductions. **A county-wide action plan that values and coordinates the resources available will be a priority if we are to deliver rapid change at scale on the twin goals.**

The outcomes of this event, including this report, can be the basis for a ‘mapping’ of the different organisations and agencies involved in warm homes activities in Oxfordshire. For instance, several groups have or are intending to train community energy advice officers or champions. It would be useful to create a directory of all relevant organisations, listing the respective expertise of different groups and agencies, which can help them collaborate effectively where possible, avoid duplication, and maximise their impacts and resources.

### 4.2. Sharing information

Community groups need a central point or resource for good-quality information about fuel poverty, home heating and retrofit, and the many ways it can be addressed. Their volunteers are not experts, so the more good-quality information they can easily get hold of, the better. In particular, they need ‘oven-ready’ project information, for which the research has already been done and they can deliver the project or solution without devoting limited volunteer time to research or building up project components. The work being done by the Low Carbon Hub with the Community Action Groups (CAGs) and others could be the core for such a resource.

It will also be important that the major agencies understand the best ways to work with the engaged voluntary organisations and ensure that there is a free flow of relevant information.

### 4.3. Engaging with and empowering those in need

It is imperative to find ways to engage with the big ‘missing group’ of beneficiaries – the households on low incomes, experiencing fuel poverty, with inefficient homes, who are often not engaged with community groups or with the resources to improve their situation. This also includes renters and people in social and private housing. While there may not be ‘green’ groups in the least advantaged neighbourhoods and areas, there will be other groups working in those areas that have the trust of local people and understand the conditions. Any developing initiative will need to find ways to build cooperation and provide advice.

### 4.4. Improving sign-posting

While sign-posting people to relevant services can be problematic, there are potential models for improving it. OCVA has formed a network of six people who meet monthly with front-line social workers, call handlers, people running day centres, GP practices, and others, to talk about what’s

happening in their locality in relation to people using adult social care. Other organisations such as Citizens Advice and Better Housing, Better Health are also developing integrated advice systems.

#### **4.5. Developing skills in the built environment**

The shortage of skilled professionals is a recognised problem. The new ‘green skills’ in construction training programme at Witney and Abingdon college is one way forward, but this work needs to be expanded rapidly. This will require collaboration between the councils, construction industry bodies and central Government.

It may be helpful to develop materials to help local people appraise the skills and offerings of builders and others offering retrofit services.

#### **4.6. Cooperation and collaboration**

To maximise impact, voluntary sector groups may wish to develop a warm homes network or coalition to represent groups and their shared goals. This network could work with councils and could also seek a ‘seat at the table’ with energy companies that are delivering government-funded schemes, such as Eco+ and the new ‘It all adds up’ programme.

Groups could identify 3 – 5 people from different organisations, who would form a working group to develop a collective strategy. Once a strategy has been developed, the group could seek funding for projects, for skill-building and for coordination and publicity. This could be modelled on the approach of the Zero Carbon Oxford group, which is comprised of more than 40 organisations, including private-sector companies and public bodies.

### **5. National and local action**

There is only so much that can be done at a local level. The fuel crisis has made it clear how our current energy system is not meeting people’s basic needs. The pricing system needs urgent reform alongside a national insulation programme, starting in neighbourhoods where fuel poverty is highest. For more on these issues see Appendix C – United for Warm Homes.

***This report was written by Wendy Knerr and Chris Church for Oxford Friends of the Earth – January 2023. Thanks to Oxfordshire County Council for hosting and all participants for their inputs.***

*This report and the relevant slides and documents are available at:*  
<https://www.oxfoe.co.uk/warm-homes-for-oxfordshire/>



## Appendices

### A. List of participants

- Oxfordshire County Council
- Oxford City Council
- Oxford University ECI / CREDS
- Vale of White Horse DC / South Oxfordshire DC
- Low Carbon Hub
- Aspire
- Oxford Friends of the Earth
- Community First Oxfordshire
- Oxfordshire Community Foundation
- Oxford Council for Voluntary Action
- CAGs network hub
- Barton Community Retrofit Cooperative / Owned by Oxford
- Low Carbon Oxford North
- Low Carbon West Oxford
- Rose Hill and Iffley Low Carbon
- Sustainable Wantage / The Mix
- Sustainable Botley

Apologies were received from:

- Low Carbon East Oxford
- Citizens Advice
- Cosy Homes
- Better Housing, Better Health

### B. Case studies

#### Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)

OCC has several schemes related to energy saving and retrofit of homes. The main scheme is targeting more than 300 owner-occupiers and those in the private rented sector living in energy inefficient (EPC of 'D' or below) homes. It offers wall and loft insulation, heating upgrades such as heat pumps, and solar panels. Around £2 million remains available until the end of March 2023, and OCC hopes to launch a second, larger phase with another 2 years of funding following a successful funding bid.

It is also working on a **Heat Pump Readiness** funding bid, and with the **Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP)** to meet demand for installers.

The **Energy Company Obligation (ECO) 4** scheme requires larger energy providers to fund energy efficiency upgrades for low-income and vulnerable owner-occupied, social and privately rented households. It also includes incentives to attract more installers to get trained to do energy efficiency work.

Finally, **Eco+** is aimed at the least efficient owner-occupied homes, and includes a large public information campaign as well as activities to reduce building and industry energy use by 15 per cent.

As part of their comms and outreach, a range of materials have been produced, including thermometer cards, pull-up banners and public health information – available upon request to front-line organisations in touch with fuel-poor residents (email the Retrofit Team: [retrofit@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:retrofit@oxfordshire.gov.uk)).

For more information, see the presentation slides on the Oxford Friends of the Earth website <https://www.oxfoe.co.uk/warm-homes-for-oxfordshire/>

## **Oxford City Council (OxCity)**

OxCity is working on several initiatives related to energy saving and retrofit, and has submitted bids for several others. **The Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership** (<https://zerocarbonoxford.com/>) brings together BMW, the University of Oxford and other large organisations. One of its aims is to get to net zero in Oxford by 2040, with a particular focus on domestic energy.

OxCity is also working on a programme to ensure accreditation of landlords meeting minimal energy efficiency standards, and to improve energy efficiency in social housing, including a bid to the **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund**, which would fund upgrades to 316 council houses.

OxCity also work with local organisations on engagement events related to the cost of living and to develop support for the **Warm Spaces Network** (places where people can go for free to be warm). It is also active in ensuring that community ladders have information available about funding and other services for households struggling with energy costs.

The District Councils in Oxfordshire also have support programmes. All councils are engaged with the Better Housing Better Health initiative (see below).

## **Better Housing, Better Health**

Better Housing Better Health ([www.bhbh.org.uk](http://www.bhbh.org.uk)) is a service run by the National Energy Foundation to help keep residents warm and well at home and improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

The service works on a preventative approach to health and well-being and provides residents with a single point of contact to get impartial expert advice to help improve the energy efficiency of their home, save money and improve comfort.

## **The Low Carbon Hub**

Members of many of the community groups that comprise the Low Carbon Hub wanted to offer advice about energy saving in their community, but lacked the confidence and information to do it, not to mention the time needed to research and compile information. Working with Community Environment Associates they conducted the first **Energy Champions** training in November 2022, involving 20 people from different Low Carbon groups across the county. The training was designed to ensure the Champions have up-to-date information covering a wide range of issues, including:

- how to do a whole-house retrofit
- what to suggest to someone facing the heat-or-eat-dilemma on a particular day
- advising people on how to check their energy bills
- ensuring people get the support they're entitled to
- ensure heating is working properly
- changing habits
- draught-proofing.

The aim was to cover the breadth of support and ensure the Champions have the information they need at their fingertips, while also providing advice on how to approach conversations. They were provided with various resources, such as checklists and examples of different types of insulation, everything they could need to set up their own stall or discussion event. LCH, with input from Oxfordshire County Council, have developed a full 'Warmer Winter' checklist:

<http://www.lowcarbonhub.org/energy-saving-advice>

The training is a first step towards developing a network through which to feed information as it becomes available, so the Champions always have current information. They were also given some information about campaigning, and about what to suggest to people if they are really struggling. This involves signposting, but it means that every conversation a Champion has results in people going away with at least one positive action they can take, not just sending them to a website.

In addition to training the 20 Energy Champions, the Low Carbon Hub has trained a level 3 energy adviser, who the Champions can turn to for more technical advice.

## **Aspire Oxfordshire**

Aspire Oxfordshire helps empower people to rebuild their lives and futures and realise their potential, by providing person-centred employment, enterprise development, housing and support opportunities. Aspire is piloting various measures between December 2022 and March 2023.

Through enhanced Member status of National Energy Action (NEA, [www.nea.org.uk](http://www.nea.org.uk)), Aspire will support up to 90 front-line workers to access energy advice and training about fuel poverty. It will also establish a personalisation fund to provide personalised, self-help measures.

From January through March 2023, Aspire will develop and share energy-saving resources and guidance documents for front-line workers and clients, tailored to an Oxfordshire context, in partnership with Plymouth Energy Community and NEA.

Aspire will also undertake action research to help monitor, evaluate and contextualise the piloting of these measures, including through developing a partnership with national leading organisations in this field, Ashden (<https://ashden.org/sustainable-towns-cities>) and CLES (<https://cles.org.uk/blog/retrofit-combatting-wealth-extraction/>).

## **Owned By Oxford – Barton Community Retrofit Project**

**Owned By Oxford** is working to launch the **Barton Retrofit Project** to address fuel poverty in Barton, and to reach those who are not currently engaged with improving the efficiency of their homes. In many cases, this is because there is a gap in people's understanding about what retrofitting is, how it might help them and how they can get support to improve their homes and reduce their fuel bills. Another major part of the project is to recruit local builders, carpenters, and other tradespeople from the local area.

The group has already run a couple of events in the community to get people interested, including going to schools and meeting with young mums to understand people's concerns and challenges. It has been a challenge to persuade people to visit community centres at night, for example, because they are so busy. Those who have been most involved are owner-occupiers.

The project currently has two local experts who visit homes and assess where energy is escaping. One major challenge is that they have to visit at 5am and install equipment to see where air is escaping before they can make recommendations.

The project faces many of the same problems as others, as discussed at the round-table meeting: how to engage people who have busy lives and are struggling with cost of living, and trying to generate interest and enthusiasm for addressing environmental issues. The project has learned that abstract language doesn't feel relevant to the people they work with, and lack of trust in professionals coming into their homes is also a big challenge.

For more details about this project, see the slide presentation <https://www.oxfoe.co.uk/warm-homes-for-oxfordshire/> or visit <https://ownedbyoxford.org.uk>.

## **C: United for Warm Homes**

Oxford FoE is a member of United for Warm Homes - a growing movement of community groups and activists from all walks of life campaigning for a common goal: warm homes for all. Other groups are encouraged to join this initiative. United for Warm Homes is calling for:

- Urgent additional financial support to keep people warm.
- A nationwide insulation programme.
- Permanent fixes to our failed energy system.

For more information see: <https://unitedforwarmhomes.uk/>