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## Executive Summary

1. **Warmth for Wellbeing (W4W)** was a short-term (15 month), fuel poverty intervention project funded by British Gas Energy Trust as part of its Healthy Homes programme. Funding for the project (£395,158) was successfully acquired by Citizens Advice (CA) who are the lead partner and have coordinated the project since it began in November 2015. Supported by Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) and Brighton & Hove Clinical Commissioning Group (B&H CCG), the project involves 13 partners from the voluntary and community sectors, including social enterprises, charities and co-operatives.

2. The



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# 1. Introduction

Warmth for Wellbeing (W4W) was a short-term (15 month), pilot fuel poverty intervention project funded by British Gas Energy Trust as part of its Healthy Homes programme. Funding for the project (£395,158) was successfully applied for by the Citizens Advice (CA) who are the lead partner and have coordinated the project since it began in November 2015. Supported by Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) and Brighton & Hove Clinical Commissioning Group (B&H CCG), the project involves 13 partners from the voluntary and community sectors, including social enterprises, charities and co-operatives.

The Universities of Brighton and Sussex were asked to provide an independent evaluation of the project. There is already good evidence of the health and wellbeing benefits that can follow from interventions to make people warmer at home (Maidment et al. 2014; NICE 2015

In the rest of the report we first explain the evaluation methodology before providing an overview of the project design and

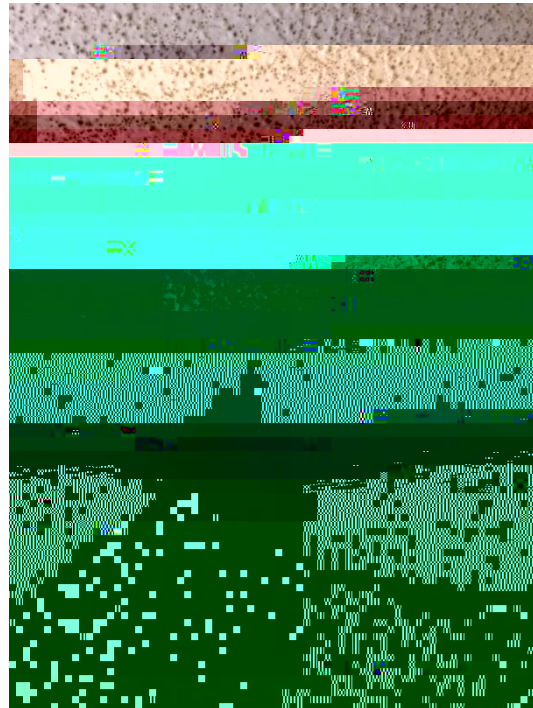
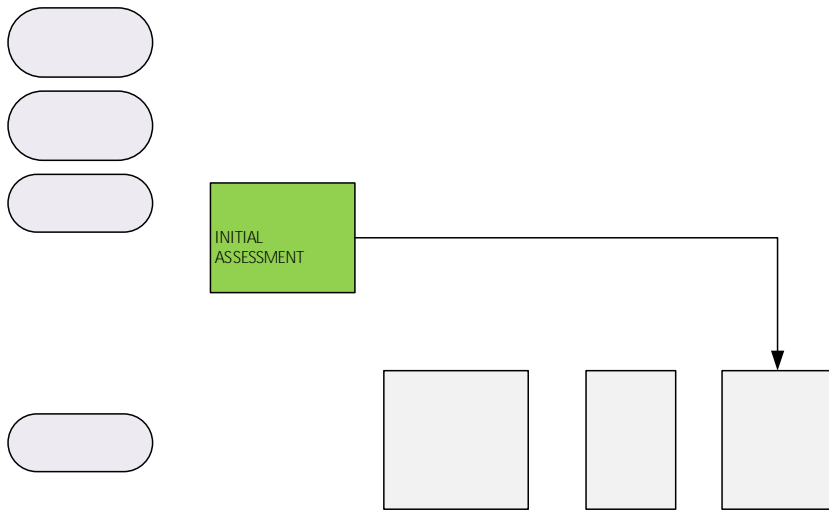






Figure 2



Strategies for identifying potentially cold or fuel poor households included focusing on people with specific health needs and working in partnership with healthcare organisations as well as those already named as partners. Project staff worked with GP surgeries to generate a list of patients categorised according to a risk stratification tool, who were contacted by the W4W project team. Leaflets were distributed to temporary accommodation, local authority service desks, flu vaccination clinics and local hospitals. This was in addition to targeting food banks and other points of contact with people living with poverty.

Building on the experience of partner organisations who offer debt and housing advice, the project encouraged in-depth case work with clients, offering face-to-face advice on several occasions, with follow-up phone calls if necessary, as well as support with forms, making contact with other agencies, phone calls to energy suppliers and energy efficiency adaptations to the home. Hardship payments helped engage households with this process by offering them something tangible early on in the process. Though debt advice was available over the telephone, and through existing drop-

housing fabric, heating systems and energy practices to be addressed **in situ** and in detail, and for people who were housebound to be reached. Clients were offered specific technologies to help with energy efficiency, including LED bulbs that use less energy, and radiator reflectors or draught excluders. They could also get energy monitors which allowed them to track and understand energy use across the household and over time. Visits from BHESCo case workers also resulted in helping people become registered on the Priority Service Register or move from a pre-@ switch from inappropriate energy tariffs, switch providers to get cheaper energy and/or access Warm Home Discounts.

Given the high-level of partnership working, the complexity of fuel poverty itself and the need for correspondingly complex interventions a high level of competency was required in the coordination and management of activities. This was in evidence from the two project coordinators and was a distinct strength of the project. In addition, the project was supported by use of a shared database of clients (ECINS) offering up-to-date information on communications, contacts and referrals. Although not straightforward to implement, the ECINS system benefitted the project by supporting a sense of the client base as shared and affording immediate access to referral information, client history and most recent contacts.





The secondary analysis of data carried out by the two universities was granted ethical approval by the University of York Science, Tier 1 Ethics Panel.

## 4. Most Significant Change stories

The opportunity sample of 25 stories collected from W4W clients describe how fuel poverty and being cold at home become a reality via a range of inter-connected issues - affecting homes, health, families, social lives and financial situations - that often converge around a specific event or time period. W4W partners recognised that these areas of life are fundamentally inter-

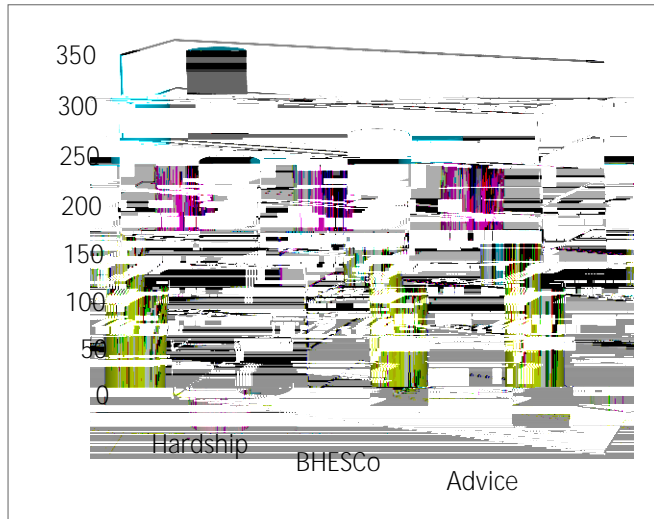
conditions that were creating fuel poverty. These were: relationships with landlords; and relationships with energy supply companies.

Then BHESCo came and visited. They were brilliant! They discovered that there was an unauthorised debt on my meter; not a real debt but an estimated debt and they [energy supply company] were taking £8 every time I charged the card. I was putting loads of money on the card and couldn't order and this was a nightmare. They were able to get that refunded and cancel the debt on the card.

Of equal importance to stabilising the household's energy consumption was the ability to pay

Figure 3 is based on monitoring data showing the number and type of intervention received and offers an indication of the extent to which interventions for the 555 clients supported were used in combination with each other.

Figure 3



It is important to note that not all clients associated the support provided by the W4W with the aim of achieving warmer homes. For a small number, benefits advice, debt advice and housing advice were of such fundamental importance to addressing their immediate needs that these issues dominated their MSC stories. However, the majority of clients recognised these interventions as collectively contributing to the alleviation of fuel poverty and saw the inter-relationship between: homes that are hard to heat; financial difficulties; and consequences for their mental and physical health.

the support from the W4W project gives me the strength to carry on and the help, advice on energy, financial support to service my hot water system, health and benefit entitlement has been invaluable. I can manage my life a lot better than I would without it.

‡ ...-recognised but this role and its significance emerges strongly from the W4W project evaluation. However, it should be noted that advice services are subject to public funding cuts and are rapidly diminishing in range and number.

The following section explores the barriers experienced by clients in more detail.

## 5. Patterns of barriers

There was rarely a single reason why people were experiencing fuel poverty or living in cold homes and this had implications both for the intervention required and the benefits achieved. Barriers to being warm at home had typically accumulated over time, with underlying issues growing in number, range and complexity until they were experienced as insurmountable. This was not simply a question of individual circumstance or perception; the issues involved would be experienced by anyone as bureaucratically, technically and materially complicated. Recent reports have emphasised the contribution of low incomes and hard-to-heat homes (Hills report, 2012). However, the conditions creating fuel poverty also include, the physical fabric and condition of the home (e.g. single glazing, solid wall construction), heating systems and technologies (fan and storage heaters, lack of gas), unstable as well as low incomes (including those resulting from benefits sanctions or cuts), and inappropriate tariffs and practices that led to high energy use. These were all evidenced in the evaluation (Figure 4).

People who are housebound or have mobility issues due to disability or chronic illness often have higher energy needs and are more affected by poor quality housing. For example people over 65 are estimated to spend more than 85% of their time in the home and this rises to 90% for those aged over 85 (House of Lords 2005). Many make economies on heating: in one study over a third were found not to be heating their bedroom, bathroom or living room to save money (Age Concern and Help The Aged 2009), though older people are also diverse, and may have different needs and coping strategies (Day 2015). Disabled people may also have higher energy needs (Snell et al 2015).

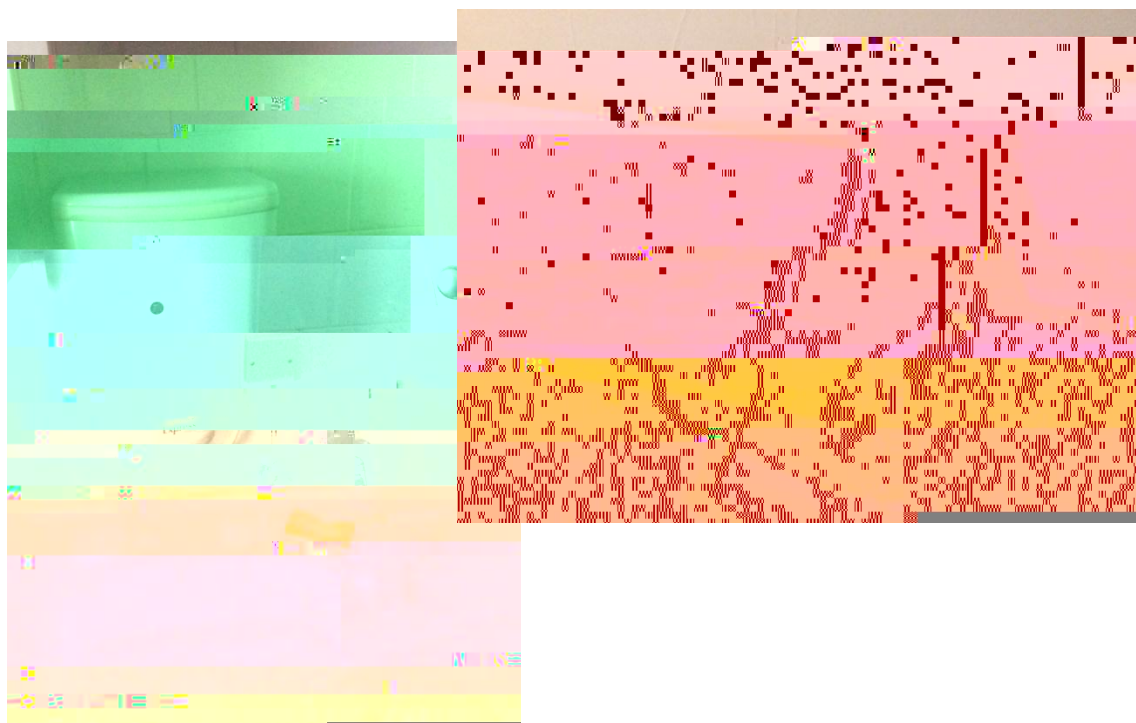






Figure 5

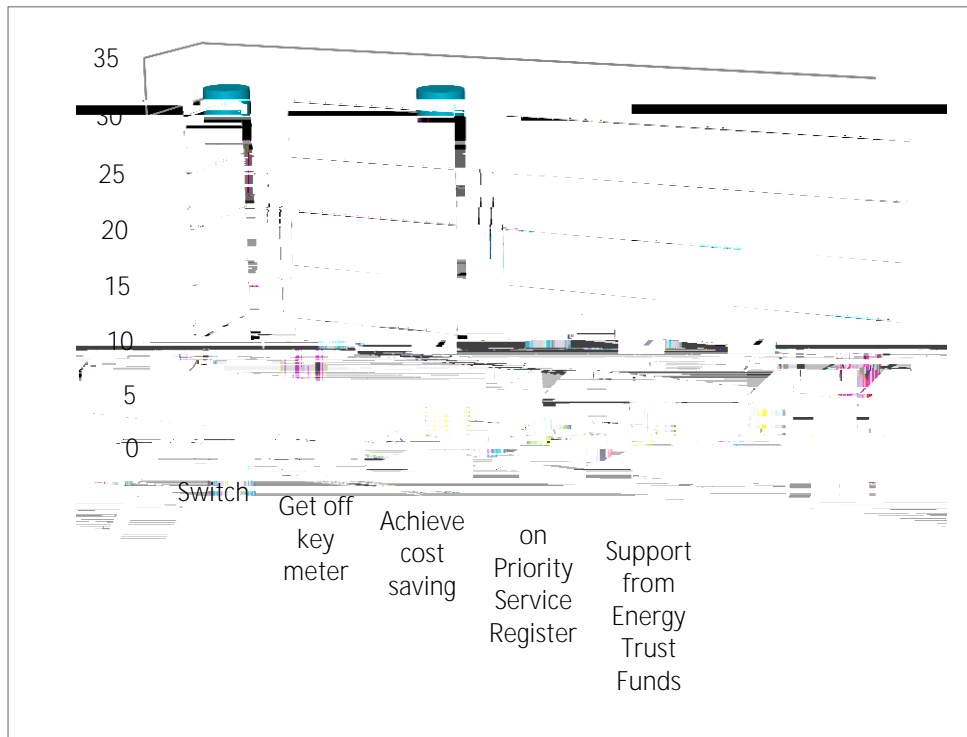
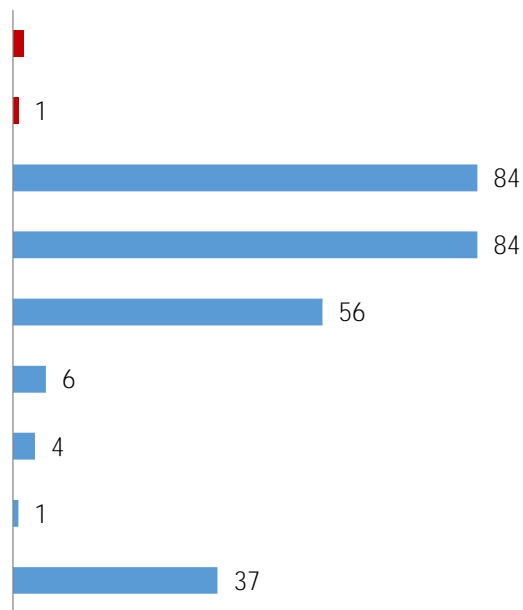


Figure 6



Among the W4W clients were people living in homes with very poor physical fabric, for example with cold, damp and mould covered walls which BHESCo workers sought to record (see Figures 7 and 8). Such mould is accepted as being capable of both causing and aggravating respiratory illness. Housing tenure was itself an indicator of fuel poverty with people living in private rental, council and social housing reporting poorly fitting windows and doors, along with long waits to see improvements. The link between private rented housing and increased incidence of fuel

Housing tenure holds implications for the implementation of hard measures required to address fuel poverty as these have to be negotiated with Landlords. Without their co-operation or the capacity to contractually oblige them to support fuel poverty actions there will always be a limit to what can be achieved. W4W clients were encouraged to use the energy assessment reports written by BHESCo to begin a negotiation with Landlords about property maintenance and repairs. BHESCo themselves were cautious not to raise issues with Landlords directly because, in many cases, clients were concerned this would be perceived negatively by their Landlord and affect the stability of their tenure. This constitutes clear evidence that speaking out against conditions that create fuel poverty is problematic for those affected and advocacy is therefore required.

It could be assumed that social landlords would be easier to influence than private landlords with respect to the implementation of hard measures to improve hard-to-heat homes. However, as

However, whereas social housing tenants are not necessarily vulnerable, people accepted as homeless by the Council and assigned temporary accommodation are, which increases the level of concern felt when fuel poverty is identified in these properties.



People frequently talked of not knowing that there were better tariffs available from energy suppliers before receiving advice from W4W on this and still lacking time, energy and belief in their ability to switch supplier (see also Lorenc et al 2013).

keep their homes warm. Many people telling their stories as part of the evaluation had first come into contact with the project at a food bank, and the majority of referrals came from debt advice organisations. More than 330 were in receipt of housing benefit. Though these broader problems could not be fixed by W4W alone, successful interventions around the fabric of the home, energy systems and use as well as debt could create the conditions for other problems to be addressed by clients and local services.





## 7. Challenges and future development

We have identified two key issues for the future development of the project. The first is around

government which see the City Council having to respond to a 30% cut in its net budget over the period 2015/16 to 2019/20.

The systemic and political pressures facing Local Authorities are considerable. Nonetheless, in the face of identified fuel poverty we would argue that persistent barriers to change have to be addressed and more analysis and public discussion is required to identify exactly where problems lie and what alternative solutions exist. This is particularly pressing in the case of temporary accommodation where hard-to-heat homes exacerbate the vulnerability of recently homeless individuals and families.

Moving back to questions of identification, the experience of families with young children (<5) was not a strong theme in the MSC stories, and this group made up a smaller proportion of those in the project (around 10%) than estimated in national level discussions of fuel poverty (suggested to be 20% in Hills Report 2012). One possible response would be to trial advice and/or referral through Chi





people about their daily practices of living, whilst avoiding some of the pr



the W4W project it was this combination that enabled people living in fuel poverty to make progress toward overcoming barriers to being warm at home, particularly when offered alongside the equally specialist and supportive **debt advice services** offered by this project. Overall, the project team and coordinators should be commended for their excellent work in designing and delivering an effective intervention in this troubling and complex area.

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