

ALlenergy Overview 2022

Argyll, Lomond and the Islands Energy Agency (ALlenergy) is a sustainable energy charity based in Argyll and Bute, Scotland. ALlenergy currently has a team of 12 working on a range of projects in three areas: Affordable Warmth; Education and Skills Development; and Local Energy.

ALlenergy's aims are:

- To help people with fuel poverty and energy efficiency issues
- To encourage community renewables and local energy economy
- To reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change.

Affordable Warmth Advice Service –funded by Energy Redress Scheme, Robertson Trust, Argyll & Bute Council, Bank of Scotland, Smart Energy GB, Big Energy Saving Network, SSE Renewables, various donations.

In the face of the ongoing energy price crisis, our focus this last year has had to be very much on meeting the demand for fuel poverty advice and assistance. We had an incredibly busy period last winter, demand has stayed relentless through the summer and the coming winter will almost certainly be even worse.

We continue to prioritise urgent cases, and aim to provide rapid financial assistance and crisis interventions wherever needed – alongside providing a range of advice and referrals to address longer term resilience to fuel poverty.

Among all the factors which make fuel poverty so serious here, particularly crucial is the lack of access to mains gas across most of the north west of Scotland. Electric heating can be 3-4 times as expensive per kWh than gas. Add to that the cold wet weather, energy inefficient housing, elderly demographics, and typically low average incomes, and we have a perfect storm of fuel poverty. Whilst the recent UK Government announcement means that the situation is slightly better than it could have been, we are still in a very serious situation and one which affects rural Scotland particularly badly, with our widespread dependence on expensive electric heating. This is a fact that the UK government simply does not seem to recognise.

Many people will not have experienced the full effects of the April 54% price rise yet as they have kept their heating off over the summer. The new price rise (to an average household cost of £2,500 across the UK) is equivalent to a further 26.8% rise in energy costs. The cumulative effect of these two price rises will hit people hard when (if) they turn on their heating this autumn. Many people will not be able to afford it and many people will be very cold this winter.

As energy costs in our area are particularly high (for reasons noted above), the average annual energy cost here is likely to be closer to £4,500 than £2,500, and fuel poverty is now likely to affect the majority (>50%) of our households.

Our advisors are therefore very much at risk of being overwhelmed with clients this coming winter. As ever, we aim to offer advice and assistance to any individual who is struggling to pay their energy bills. Many clients come to us direct, as we are well known. We also receive large numbers of referrals from other frontline workers passing clients to us, with whom they have been working on a variety of other issues. This is an extremely effective way for us to engage with hard-to-reach individuals who may otherwise be reluctant to ask for help for a range of different reasons. To encourage this, we deliver online presentations to other charities and organisations working with vulnerable groups, introducing the issue of fuel poverty and what we can do to help.

We have continued to access crisis payments for clients from various sources. These include: prepayment meter vouchers and bulk fuel deliveries from the Fuel Bank Foundation; energy debt

relief and ongoing cost payments from the Scottish Government Home Heating Support Fund; free appliances (cookers fridges, freezers, washing machines) from the Glasspool Trust; help with debt and ongoing costs from the Argyll and Bute Council Flexible Fund; and we are a partner in the Argyll & Bute Flexible Food Fund which provides cash interventions alongside money advice (from Bute Advice Centre) and energy advice from ourselves. We continue to refer to Scottish Government home insulation and heating replacement schemes through Home Energy Scotland, and to provide a range of advice topics to improve each client's energy awareness and resilience to fuel poverty.

Community Energy for Energy Solidarity (CEES), funded by Horizon 2020.

Working with 10 partners from Portugal, France, Belgium, Croatia and UK, this 3-year European project identifies and analyses successful community energy initiatives to tackle fuel poverty in different countries, and creates a toolkit for replication. ALenergy is both a successful practice (reporting on the achievements of the Affordable Warmth Team) and a work package leader.

The project partners' successful practices plus selected external case studies, have contributed to a draft toolkit which will then form the foundation for a final, web based version to be created and disseminated later in the project. Through investigating different funding methods for tackling energy poverty, the project may also help us to diversify our own funding methods.

We continue to promote and disseminate our good practice activities and achievements across the network and learn from others; and we will take part in a formal evaluation exercise of partners' good practices led by our academic partner, the University of Birmingham.

Consumer Comfort Choice (funded by Scottish Government CARES, and Centrica's Energy for Tomorrow grant.

Across much of rural Scotland, mains gas is unavailable, and many households use electric storage heaters, which can be difficult to control and expensive to run – contributing to the issue of fuel poverty. However, they effectively provide a network of distributed energy storage units which may be controlled via smart control technology, providing greater comfort and control, a more efficient distribution system and reduced costs. Working with technical partner Connected Response, we seek to install smart controls in 90-100 households with storage heaters in Oban and monitor the resulting improvements in energy bills and household comfort.

Oban CCC project is currently paused due to issues with the energy price crisis which have delayed the roll out of smart meters and prevented people from switching suppliers and we are exploring alternative solutions.

ALenergy's Education and Skills Development Programme - Funded by Scottish Power Renewables, Beinn an Tuirc Community Benefit Fund 'Regional Tranche'.

This project encourages and facilitates young people to pursue local careers in STEM subjects and the renewable energy sector, providing events, workshops and careers advice in schools and communities, particularly in the areas of Mid Argyll and Kintyre.

The project makes first contact with young people during their transition from P7 to S1, with activity stands at transition events followed by energy and climate change related workshops, and careers activities delivered in the secondary schools in Campbeltown, Tarbert and Lochgilphead. After a period of remote delivery during the pandemic we are delighted to be back to face to face activities – both in schools and at local community events.

Following the success of last year's film 'STEM Journeys in Argyll' which showcased four STEM professionals working in the Argyll & Bute area, highlighting the range career paths open to young people as well as raising awareness of the opportunities for STEM roles in the area, this year we are working on a new film 'A Day in Industry' – following a selection of pupils' work experience placements in local STEM-related workplaces. S4-6 applicants were able to put into practice a range of employability skills in a bid to spend hands-on time in the workplace, finding out at first-hand what the company does and how STEM skills are integrated into the work of its staff. This film is very close to completion and shall be launched this autumn.