

ALlenergy Overview 2023



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 16 working on a range of projects in Affordable Warmth/Alleviation of Fuel Poverty; 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 – over the past year, funders have included Energy Redress Scheme, Robertson Trust, Argyll & Bute Council, Highland Council, Bank of Scotland, Smart Energy GB, Big Energy Saving Network, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Energy Action Scotland / William Grant Foundation, Scottish Government's Investing in Communities Fund, Argyll & Bute Community Led Local Development Fund, SSE Renewables (Tangy), various donations.

In response to the energy price crisis and the increasing number of households struggling to afford to adequately heat their homes, we have further expanded our affordable warmth activities.

Our service offers a range of energy advice topics to raise awareness, increase resilience and reduce the risk of fuel poverty going forwards, alongside crisis interventions, referrals for insulation and heating replacement schemes, support with complex issues and dealing with energy companies and the ombudsman. We offer a mix of home visits, face-to-face advice at events and telephone sessions. We also deliver free training events, for frontline workers that support vulnerable or disadvantaged people, to help them to recognise and refer fuel-poor households. 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 variety of reasons. We also receive a large number of direct enquiries.

Our clients are typically vulnerable to fuel poverty for reasons such as low income, poor health/disability, and reliance on high-cost heating. Many have no access to gas, often using electric storage heaters on expensive electric tariffs. Many are self-restricting or in debt to suppliers.

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; 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 prioritise urgent cases, and aim to provide rapid financial assistance and crisis interventions wherever needed – alongside providing the 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 much of the area. Electric heating can be 3-4 times as expensive per kWh than gas. We also have cold wet weather, energy inefficient housing, elderly demographics, and typically low average incomes. Detailed recent statistics are not yet available, but fuel poverty is now thought to affect over 50% (the majority) of households across northwest Scotland.

Our advisors were overwhelmed with clients last winter and are likely to be again as soon as the weather cools down, after a slight easing in client numbers over the summer months. We endeavour

to offer advice and assistance to any individual who is struggling to pay their energy bills. In very busy periods, there may be waiting times and we aim to prioritise the most needful clients.

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, compares and analyses successful community energy initiatives to tackle fuel poverty in different countries, and creates a toolkit for replication. 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 feed data into 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. Charging may be controlled via smart control technology, providing greater comfort and control, less energy waste 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. This innovative project has recently restarted after a pause due to issues with the energy price crisis which delayed the roll out of smart meters and prevented people from switching suppliers.

ALenergy's Education and Skills Development Programme

Funded by Scottish Power Renewables, Beinn an Tuirc Community Benefit Fund 'Regional Tranche'. This local economic development 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 events followed by energy and climate change-related classroom workshops, and careers activities delivered in the three secondary schools in Campbeltown, Tarbert and Lochgilphead. In the summer, each year, the ALenergy education officers also run stands for the whole community at the main Agricultural Shows in the area: Kintyre, Mid Argyll and Islay.

In recent years, ALenergy has created a series of three short films in 2021, 2022 and 2023 showcasing the diversity of careers opportunities in STEM related local businesses. The first, 'STEM Journeys in Argyll' 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. The 2022 film 'A Day in Industry 2022' followed a selection of pupils' work experience group placements organised by ALenergy in local STEM-related workplaces. S4-6 applicants 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. Building on these, 'A Day in Industry 2023' filmed 10 successful applicants from school years S4-6 in individual work experience placements with 7 local STEM employers: Ardern Yacht Centre, Argyll Pharmacy, DM Fabrications, Forestry and Land Scotland, Kintyre Gin, Midton Acrylics, Renewable Parts). These films can be seen at <https://www.alienergy.org.uk/education-training-skills/> along with further information on all ALenergy's education-related activities.

Going forward, education officers are now focussing on organising a major local careers event, MAKSTEMFest in early 2024. This follows preparatory work and planning carried out for a previous event which was due to take place in spring 2020, which sadly had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the pandemic. Education Officers are delighted and excited to now be returning to this.