



Action for Warm Homes  
NORTHERN IRELAND

supported by



February 2019

# NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the 14th Edition of the NEA Northern Ireland Newsletter!

Whilst Northern Ireland has dominated the discussions around the EU, the current status of the Northern Ireland Executive remains unchanged and this absence of local government has meant vital strategies including the Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Strategy continue to remain in limbo to the detriment of local communities in need.

It is therefore not surprising that after a very cold prolonged winter in 2018, our excess winter deaths statistics for 2017-18 showed that 1,500 Excess Winter Deaths had occurred. This is an increase of 130% on the 2015-16 figures (640) and represents an increasingly upward trend in concerns for NEA. The World Health Organisation (WHO) attributes 30% of all Excess Winter Deaths to the effects of living in a cold damp home. This provides further evidence for the need to call for, and implement, a fit for purpose Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Whilst the absence of a fully functioning Executive continues to thwart much needed progress, we have continued to work with public sector representatives, academia and key agencies to tackle fuel poverty across Northern Ireland. Notably our continued partnership with the Public Health Agency has helped us continue to deliver key support and energy efficiency measures for households via the 'Northern Exposure' programme as featured below. Our campaigning role continued with the introduction and launch in Northern Ireland of our Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) Campaign in November 2018.

In our previous newsletter we reported and welcomed the further extension of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) until March 2020. This programme targets £9M for energy efficiency and fuel poverty prevention measures and never has the NISEP been more relevant. The NISEP is currently undergoing a review and we have provided extensive input throughout this process. Our Energy Justice Campaign emphatically calls for the retention of the programme until such times as a suitable alternative initiative for the fuel poor is in place.

The Local Council elections on 2nd May will provide us all with the opportunity to highlight the effects of fuel poverty in circa 160,000 households across NI and the necessary action required to address this issue. As Chair and secretariat to the Fuel Poverty Coalition (FPC), we have strengthened our commitment to the coalition Manifesto for Warmth and look forward to cross party engagement throughout the forthcoming mandate.

We would also encourage stakeholders and individuals to register your support for the Fuel Poverty Coalition via [www.fuelpovertyni.org](http://www.fuelpovertyni.org) and use the available resources to garner support both strategically and directly for householders. We have updated and reissued our excellent Fuel Poverty Action Guide which is available to **download** or hard copies are available from our office.

And finally we would like to thank you all for your support for our campaigns and initiatives and look forward to continuing to work with you to take action for warm homes.

Warm regards

Pat Austin  
Director, NEA NI

# What's inside this edition?

Northern Exposure Celebrates 10th Birthday .....	<b>3</b>
Shocking Rise in Excess Winter Deaths .....	<b>5</b>
Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition Update.....	<b>6</b>
Energy in the Home.....	<b>7</b>
Energy Efficiency on the Road – From Ballywalter to Limavady.....	<b>8</b>
NEA/City & Guilds Level 3 Award in Energy Awareness 6281-01 .....	<b>9</b>
National Energy Action Training Courses .....	<b>10</b>
The Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) Campaign.....	<b>11</b>
Fuel Poverty Awareness Day – Friday 15 February 2019 .....	<b>12</b>
Consumer Vulnerability Working Group – The Utility Regulator.....	<b>13</b>
Highlight Changes to Pension Credit for Mixed Age Couples – Age NI .....	<b>14</b>
Do you need Welfare Reform advice? .....	<b>15</b>
Contact Us   Useful Contacts.....	<b>16</b>

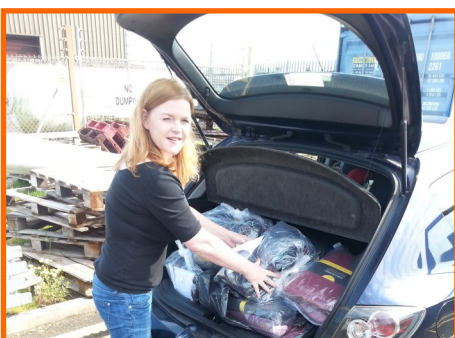
# Northern Exposure Celebrates 10th Birthday

In what is an uncertain environment for those persons within our communities most vulnerable to the slightest variance in their personal circumstances e.g. health, low incomes, increasing energy costs, the Northern Exposure Project, now in its 10th year, continues to develop to respond to ever changing needs e.g. delivering training to Clanmil Housing Association Housing Officers and in conjunction with The Consumer Council, delivering joint sessions to their various tenant participation groups both established and new. Funded by the Public Health Agency (PHA), the project was designed and initiated to tackle the high levels of fuel poverty within Belfast. We work directly with health and housing professionals, support services, community and voluntary stakeholders to inform strategic development, advocate for clients, enhance delivery capabilities and bring affordable warmth, energy efficiency solutions and appropriate 'wraparound' support services to those most in need.

Notable milestones over the lifetime of the project have included NEA, Ulster University, Public Health Agency (2013) publishing; Alleviating Fuel Poverty in North and West Belfast, Northern Ireland. Critically the report highlighted that tackling fuel poverty needs to be seen not as a cost but as an investment in the future health and wellbeing of particularly the vulnerable in our society. The research informed the implementation of the jointly delivered community based project, Achieving Affordable Warmth across the Whiterock, Westrock and Mount Vernon areas of Belfast. The Achieving Affordable Warmth project not only trained local volunteers/enablers in energy efficiency but also in effective survey completion. Numerous households successfully received improvements including home heating systems and insulation measures. All received energy efficiency information packs including LED bulbs. Due to this broad intervention, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) also agreed to improve the cavity wall insulation in several homes throughout the areas and led to a comprehensive evaluation being undertaken by the PHA Health Intelligence Unit.



More recently, the Northern Exposure project has been working with the Belfast Breathing Better Respiratory team in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSC). Working with the Consultant Nurse, Belfast Strategic Partnership and Belfast Trust Health Improvement Team, a formalised referral mechanism was implemented between NEA NI and the respiratory team for householders affected by COPD and other respiratory problems. The full respiratory team received training in order to identify clients in need. Householders receive advice, advocacy, energy improvements; home safety checks and a



keep warm pack. The project was further augmented by establishing a partnership with the former Citizens Advice Belfast service to facilitate a benefit entitlement service which has subsequently raised thousands of pounds of additional income for a number of households. The Warmth at Home aims are in line with the NICE NG6 guidance to improve health and well-being for respiratory patients in greater Belfast. Successful outcomes have seen many households getting energy efficiency measures installed and benefit entitlement increased. The Belfast Breathing Better project won the Belfast Trust Chairman's award for partnerships in 2016.

# Northern Exposure Cont'd

The programme over the years has continued to build on its strongly developed links with the BHSCT Respiratory (through the 'Warmth at Home' project) and Connected Community Care teams through education/awareness raising sessions and the subsequent implementation of bespoke referral pathways with those teams who work directly with clients whose underlying medical conditions are compounded by the effects of living in cold homes.



To further the Project aims, develop relevant partnerships and working arrangements with those agencies identified through the NICE NG6 guidelines for the mutual benefit of clients and shared clients, we were delighted, when new members representing Belfast City Council's Affordable Warmth and Home Safety Teams, Bryson's Safer Homes Team and Clanmil Housing Association's Energy and Environmental Team accepted invitation to sit on the programme's steering group.

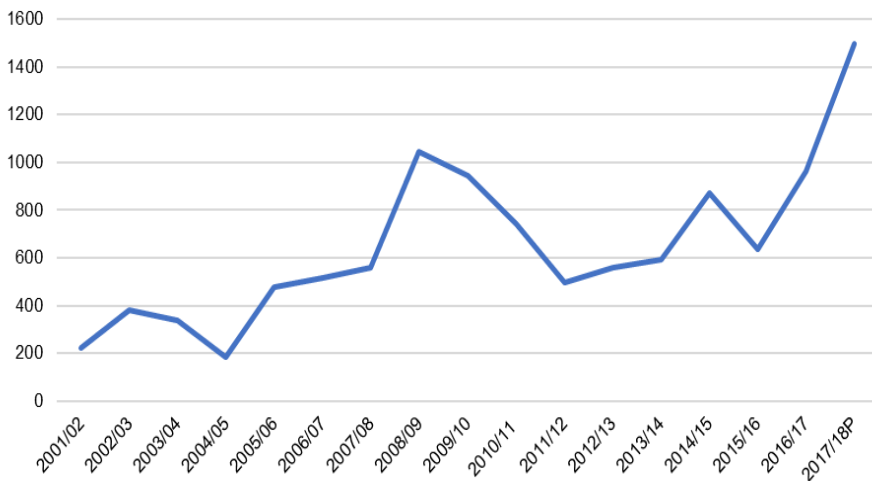
Raising awareness and education of the impacts of living in cold damp housing continue to underpin our core activity of ensuring clients access the measures available under the affordable warmth scheme and the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy programme. However, increasingly clients present with complex needs and this conversely has both necessitated and facilitated joint working with appropriate Voluntary and Community sector organisations to ensure that all, of a client's needs, are met. The benefits of this 'joined up' working approach was evidenced recently to realise positive outcomes for a client. Our thanks is extended to Age NI and Advice NI for their assistance in developing the solutions and undertaking the necessary actions required to provide much needed alleviation of the individuals circumstances.

The programme remains committed to delivering the best service possible. Northern Exposure reaches circa 2,000 householders each year via referrals, community talks and stakeholder engagement. Hundreds of households are referred each year for a range of grants and other initiatives. We would particularly welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how our service could compliment yours if you work in housing and support services or are a primary/secondary health and social care provider or a faith or a community and voluntary sector service provider.



# Shocking Rise in Excess Winter Deaths

**Excess Winter Mortality Northern Ireland 2001-18**



The 2017-18 Excess Winter Deaths statistics released by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in December show an increase of 130% since 2015-16. The total number of excess winter deaths for 2017-18 were 1,500.

These figures are the highest since the major flu epidemic in 1989. Over 500 of these deaths will be directly attributable to living in a cold damp home. The majority will have multiple hospital and GP visits behind them.

The method used to calculate excess winter deaths defines the winter period as December to March and compares the number of deaths that occurred in this winter period with the average number of non-winter deaths occurring in the preceding August to November and the following April to July (NISRA).

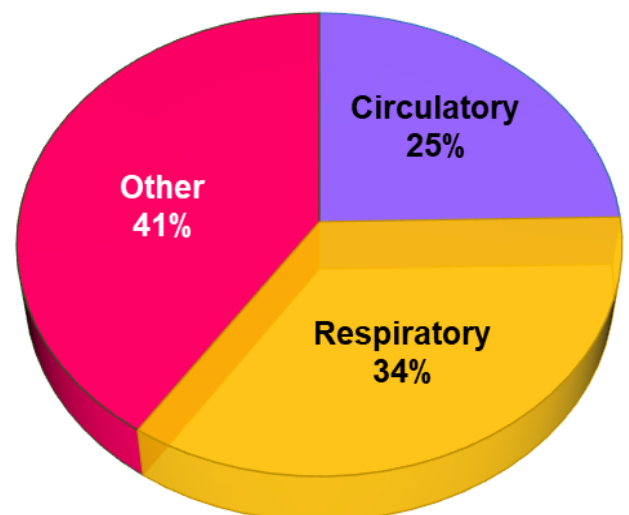
Rising energy prices, welfare cuts and stagnant wages are causing people to struggle more and more during the winter months. Additional support is needed to ensure that the most vulnerable are supported.

On top of these preventable deaths, we know that many more will have suffered the preventable health impacts of living in a cold and damp home, as well as resorting to harmful or distressing coping strategies.

Several variables affect these figures, the strongest correlation is between temperature and respiratory deaths.

NEA distributed a **briefing** to all elected representatives in Northern Ireland and we are working with Belfast City Council Community Planning Team on a number of these issues presented.

**Cause of Death 2017-18**





# Energy Efficiency in the Home

## Getting the most from the Energy we use

National Energy Action (NEA) NI, supported by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is offering a [FREE](#) two hour interactive workshop on energy efficiency in the home for community groups throughout Northern Ireland.

The following topics are included:

- Energy and where we use it
- Energy efficient heating
- Controls on the central heating system
- Energy efficient lighting and appliances
- Keeping the heat where it is needed – reducing heat loss
- Comparing and switching energy suppliers



These workshops are focused on making energy efficiency come alive for those who attend!

For further information and for booking please contact Nichola MacDougall by phone on 028 9023 9909 or via email: [Nichola.MacDougall@nea.org.uk](mailto:Nichola.MacDougall@nea.org.uk)



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Northern Ireland

These workshops are supported by the

**Housing**  
Executive



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# Energy Efficiency on the Road — From Ballywalter to Limavady

National Energy Action (NEA), supported by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, deliver Energy in the Home workshops for community groups throughout Northern Ireland.

In the last six months, there has been an increase in demand for these free two hour interactive workshops on energy efficiency in the home.

NEA has had requests throughout Northern Ireland from Ballywalter to Limavady!

20 workshops have been delivered since October 2018 to over 300 participants.

There has been great participation and feedback from those in attendance.

- “I found the information on energy saving round the home and switching very helpful.”
- “How to save electric and how to keep your heat last longer.”
- “Advice on thermostats and newer types of light bulbs.”
- “Advice on how to check for best energy prices and changing companies.”



Thank you to The Consumer Council who assisted in the delivery of some workshops as part of their Switch and Save campaign.

# NEA/City & Guilds Level 3 Award in Energy Awareness 6281-01

In the last six months, NEA has delivered **three** NEA/City and Guilds Energy Awareness Courses to 25 individuals. Organisations such as firmus energy, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and Bryson FutureSkills continue to recognise the benefits of this training for their staff as it enhances their understanding of fuel poverty and energy efficiency issues, which in turn, provides a better service to their customers.

This three-day course leading to the NEA/City & Guilds 6281-01 Level 3 Award in Energy Awareness has been running for 27 years, reaching more than 26,000 people. This remains NEA's most popular course for energy efficiency advisers. NEA NI will be running an open access Level 3 Award in Energy Awareness 6281-01, in July and October 2019.

## Open Access Training Dates

\*This course can also be delivered in-house to organisations wishing to train a group of staff. Please note that course and exam dates are provisional and may change depending on demand. Further details and updates will be sent to those booked onto a course and final confirmations are usually sent out approximately two weeks prior the course start date.

Location	Course Dates			Exam Dates
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	
2019	Mon	Tues	Wed	Tues
Belfast	1st July	2nd July	3rd July	9th July
Belfast	7th Oct	8th Oct	9th Oct	15 Oct

This course is designed for people who wish to gain or further their knowledge of domestic energy efficiency and in particular is aimed at those who are in a position to provide energy advice. Course participants come from a range of organisations including energy companies, local councils, voluntary organisations, and housing associations.

## Pre-requisite

No prior knowledge of the subject is required, however, as this is a Level 3 qualification, delegates will require basic literacy and numeracy skills. The course will include written activities as well as calculating fuel bills; calculating running costs of electrical appliances and converting temperatures using simple formulas which will be provided. **The course runs for 3 days plus a one-day examination.**

## Course outline

NEA's Energy Awareness Course will enable participants to advise clients on a range of issues including:

- The efficiency and appropriate use of heating and hot water systems and the functions of the controls;
- Interpret domestic fuel cost data using reference materials;
- Advise clients on how to record gas and electricity consumption and work out costs;
- Inform clients of ways of paying for gas and electricity;
- Identify the potential to improve energy efficiency in a range of dwellings; and
- Advise clients on how to avoid condensation and how to take remedial action where condensation dampness exists.

For further information about the training, costs and venue please contact Nichola MacDougall, Training Officer on 028 9023 9909.



Action for Warm Homes



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# Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) Campaign



## #WarmSafeHomes

In November NEA launched its Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) Campaign to raise awareness of the issue of fuel poverty and its increased risk to health and safety.

Across Northern Ireland, fuel poverty is blighting the lives of over 160,000 households – that's one in four households affected. Furthermore, the most recent statistics revealed 1,500 excess winter deaths in 2017-18. The World Health Organisation (WHO) attributes 30% of these deaths to living in a cold home, which means that you are almost 10 times more likely to die from a cold home than you are in a road traffic accident.

The WASH Campaign has been raising awareness amongst both politicians and members of the public of the problem of fuel poverty and the action needed to be taken at a policy level; as well as the help and support available locally for those struggling to heat their homes. The campaign has provided opportunities to learn more about fuel poverty and the help and assistance that is available from third sector organisations, energy suppliers, and government schemes across Northern Ireland. The campaign culminated with Fuel Poverty Awareness Day on Friday 15th February 2019.

Part of the campaign included an awards scheme for statutory and voluntary organisations to provide events or initiatives relevant to the campaign. In Northern Ireland, Clanmil Housing Association provided a community information event in Belfast with a range of energy stakeholders in attendance with advice and information.

Fuel Poverty Awareness Day this year was marked on Friday 15th February across the UK and beyond. NI was no exception and the hashtag [#fuelpovertyawarenessday](#) was again trending on Twitter. We would like to express our gratitude for the online support across all sectors from utility companies, to fellow charities, to individuals and politicians. Our political champion Councillor Brian Heading (SDLP) once again assisted with getting Belfast City Hall lit up for the occasion.

With the very challenging current political events dominating the headlines, it is important for our message not to be lost in the constant commotion. Therefore, Fuel Poverty Awareness Day reinvigorates the message that everyone deserves to live in a warm dry home.



Left to right: Alex Maskey MLA, Tony Giffen Clanmil Group Director of Assets, Clare McCarty Clanmil Group Chief Executive and Bernadine McCabe Clanmil Energy and Environmental Officer

# Fuel Poverty Awareness Day

## 15 February 2019





# Utility Regulator — Consumer Vulnerability Working Group

The Utility Regulator (UR) has continually held a range of strategic fora with consumer interest stakeholders for a number of years. This has intensified since the initial Consumer Protection Strategy was launched in 2016 replacing the Social Action Plan. The Consumer Protection Strategy, has now been operational since 2016 which has meant many projects are fully implemented whilst others in progress.

This momentum has led to the inception of the newly formed Consumer Vulnerability Working Group. The UR took the decision that a Consumer Vulnerability Working Group (CVWG) should be established. This decision was part of the Review of Northern Ireland Electricity Networks (NIE) and Northern Ireland Water's Care Registers.

The CVWG, chaired by the Consumer Council, will provide the *consumer voice* in respect of how the Care Registers work and how broader utilities' services are provided by utility companies. Items can be added to the CVWG remit in line with the UR's new Consumer Protection Programme (due to launch in April 2019), in response to emerging issues raised by consumer groups or industry or in response to emerging research on best practice for consumer protection.

Following the review of Utility Companies' current protections for consumers, the Group will also provide the consumer voice in how the help and support for consumers is shaped and delivered, holding to account those with responsibility for providing support to consumers in vulnerable circumstances. A range of stakeholders representing the advice sector, health sector, older people, debt advice and fuel poverty now form the working group and will be meeting regularly.



The Utility Regulator with Sinead Dynan, The Consumer Council and Chair of the Consumer Vulnerability Working Group (CVWG) and stakeholders from Advice NI, Public Health Agency (PHA), Christians Against Poverty, The Commissioner for Older People NI (COPNI) and National Energy Action (NEA) NI.

# Highlight Changes to Pension Credit for Mixed Age Couples

**Brenda Kearns, Head of Advice & Advocacy, Age NI said:**

“Pension Credit is an income-related benefit to give you some extra money in retirement. If you’re on a low income or struggling to make ends meet, claiming Pension Credit could help. It comes in two parts and you may be eligible for one or both parts.

“New changes to who can claim Pension Credit will be introduced on 15th May 2019 in Northern Ireland. Before then, when a couple makes a claim, only one of them must have reached pension age. However, after 15th May, in all new claims, both members of the couple will have to reach pension age before a claim can be made. This could have a huge impact on older couples, with some of the poorest pensioners paying a hefty price for having a younger partner.

“The important thing is that up until 15th May, mixed aged couples can still apply for pension credit, and if they qualify they will remain on it, provided their circumstances don’t change. After that, they will have to claim Universal Credit instead, which has stricter qualifying rules.

“If you think you might be eligible for Pension Credit, we would encourage you to please contact Age NI for a free benefits check. Our Advice and Advocacy Service offers free, independent and confidential advice on a range of issues, including benefits.

Call 0808 808 7575 or for more information visit [www.ageni.org](http://www.ageni.org).”



*Image courtesy of Age NI*

# Do you need Welfare Reform Advice?



Help is available face-to-face or over the phone from your local Independent Advice Centre.

To find your local centre or to speak to an adviser, call our free independent Welfare Changes Helpline. Open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm

Freephone

**0808 802 0020**

or email [welfarechanges@adviceni.net](mailto:welfarechanges@adviceni.net)

# Contact Us

## National Energy Action (NEA NI)

1 College House  
Citylink Business Park  
Albert Street  
Belfast  
County Antrim  
BT12 4HQ



Tel: 028 9023 9909



Email: [Northern.Ireland@nea.org.uk](mailto:Northern.Ireland@nea.org.uk)



*Action for Warm Homes*  
Northern Ireland



**Pat Austin**  
**Lucy Cochrane**  
**Nichola MacDougall**  
**Hugh McVeigh**  
**Stephanie Ward**

Director  
Policy & Campaigns Officer  
Training Officer  
Project Coordinator  
Business Support Officer

**NEA NI Trustee**

Noel Rice

**NEA NI Advisory Group**

David Crothers  
Mimi McAlinden  
Douglas McIlldoon

# Useful Contacts

### Age NI:

080 8808 7575

### Engage with Age:

028 9073 5696

### Welfare Reform

**Helpline:**

0808 802 0020

### Advice NI:

028 9064 5919

### Consumer Council NI:

080 0121 6022

### NIE Networks

**Customer**

**Helpline:**

0345 764 3643

### Bryson Energy:

080 0142 2865

### Housing Rights Service:

028 9024 5640

### Volunteer Now:

028 9023 2020

### Northern Ireland Water:

0345 744 0088