



## 1.0 Introduction

This note outlines discussions had at the third West Midlands Greener Together Forum on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022, where the topic discussed focused on addressing fuel poverty. The Forum brought together speakers from Local Authorities involved in tackling fuel poverty;

- **Matthew Eccles, Affordable Warmth Delivery Manager, West Midlands Combined Authority** – leads on the Sustainable Warmth Competition and Warm Homes Saves Lives programme.
- **Helen Langley, Senior Agency Support & Development Officer, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council** – manages retrofit programmes within Dudley and creates materials for the Dudley Energy Advice Line (DEAL).
- **Bret Willers, Head of Climate Change and Sustainability, Coventry City Council** – leads the climate change programme of work at Coventry City Council which includes the adoption of retrofit and energy efficient zero carbon technologies for homes and businesses.

Please see the presentations from the meeting [here](#) and the Forum Terms of Reference [here](#).

## 2.0 Forum Logistics

### 2.1 Creating an Advisory Board for the Forum

We have held three sessions in 2022 for the Forum, covering tree planting, retrofit and fuel poverty. To ensure that the Forum is diverse, and action focused, we are inviting representatives from the business, faith, youth, and climate activist communities to shape future Forum meetings. The Board meetings will be transparent with feedback provided to Forum meetings. The plan is for the Board to meet for the first time at the end of January 2023; it will meet for 1-2 hours, online, every other month. The Combined Authority are contacting relevant organisations and groups to invite a representative to join the Board.

- 2.5 Receive the monthly West Midlands Combined Authority Energy and Environment newsletter by registering [via this link](#).

## 3.0 Tackling Fuel Poverty

The following points outline the questions/ issues raised during the most recent Forum meeting (in italics) and the responses provided below.

- 3.1 *It is important to share what is happening locally, but the WMCA do not have enough funding to fulfil plans. The WMCA needs to lead a campaign to demand funds from government to meet retrofit plans.*

The WMCA is currently negotiating a Trailblazer Devolution Deal (TDD) with government, which will redefine the powers of the WMCA across the region. Net Zero is a key part of the ask, and funding for retrofit work will be part of the TDD to fund whole neighbourhood projects rather than through single measures. There are also asks to work towards creating an organisation that can support end-to-end customer journey support through retrofitting.



3.2 *Concerns on current retrofit schemes not being successful and fuel poverty advice only being shared online which means those digitally excluded are not accessing the information.*

- Each local authority has their own advice services to support people with fuel poverty advice. For example, Dudley Council have their Dudley Energy Advice Line for people to call and [Warmer Homes West Midlands](#), delivered by Act on Energy, have phone services, and visit people in their homes .
- [SHAP shared this video](#) on the success of the Warmer Homes West Midlands scheme, and have recently received an [additional £1 million in funding](#) by the Energy Savings Trust through Ofgem’s Energy Redress Scheme to continue to support people in the region.
- [Groundworks Green Doctors programme](#), sees energy efficiency experts visit people in their homes and has referral from front line services

3.3 *If warm spaces are successful could there be something similar for working? A free coworking space for those working from home.*

This would be something each Local Authority, who are managing the warm home centres, would need to decide.

3.4 *Can the WMCA have a policy for all new builds to be energy efficient?*

The WMCA do have a [Zero Carbon Homes Charter](#) which is aimed at developers, housebuilders and other stakeholders involved in delivering housing within the region. [The Routemap](#) is an action plan setting out how we will achieve the principles set within the Charter. However more work is needed to create a mandate.

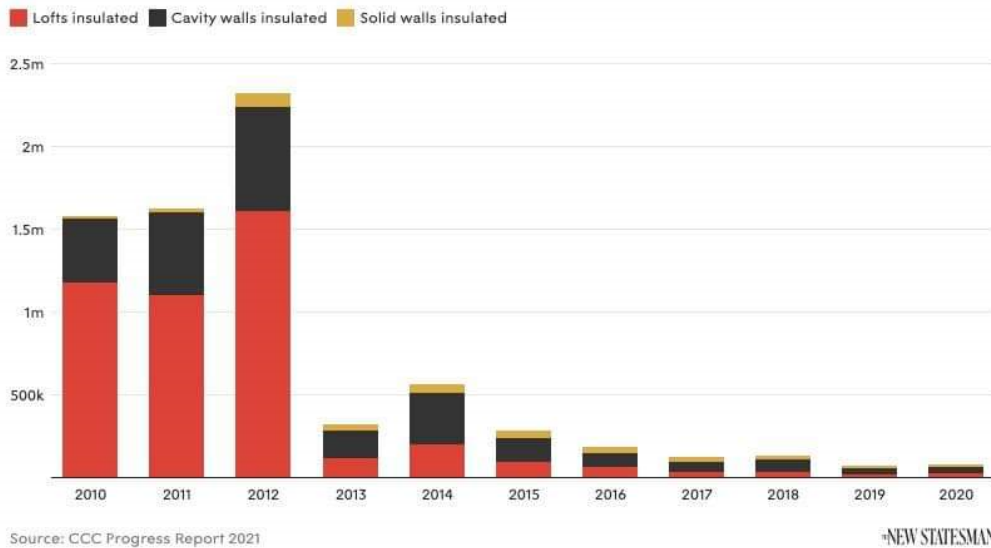
3.5 *Is there a way of identifying who is most at risk of fuel poverty and is there a map showing areas people are suffering to target support?*

Friends of the Earth have mapped areas across the UK where people are in fuel poverty (<https://mapst.ac/foe/fuel-poverty#6.18/53/-2.75>) and Matthew Eccles, in his presentation, shared that the WMCA area scores the worst for fuel poverty amongst all counties with 20.1% in fuel poverty compared to the English average of 13.2%. Coupled with the second highest percentage of properties in the lower EPC bands (Energy Performance Certificates) tells us why people in the region are struggling.

There is also a strong correlation between the funding available for home retrofit schemes and the uptake. A question was asked on if there is anything to show the uptake of retrofit schemes since 2012, and this graph shows the decline in insulation since the funding cuts.

## UK home insulation is at a fraction of its 2012 level

Home insulation measures carried out per year in Great Britain



### 3.6 Difficult to access current funding and schemes

Current schemes are oversubscribed, and services are seeing people who wouldn't usually access their services requiring help. [Dudley Energy Advice Line](#) has seen a 20% increase in people accessing their advice line, with 3,000 people supported in 2021/22.

[Groundworks Green Doctors programme](#), see's energy efficiency experts visit people in their homes and has referral from front line services. They have seen a huge increase in people wanting to access the service.

### 3.7 Needs to have easy access to good information on retrofit and energy efficiency

Dudley Council do have advice clinics to support people throughout the year, as well as 40 warm home hubs. However, it was mentioned that these spaces need to be where the community go rather than expecting people to visit new places.

Energy champions programme at Dudley Council is a 2-hour course – challenge that this is not enough time to truly train people to be knowledgeable on energy efficiency.

The WMCA, through the Warm Home Saves Lives programme, will share good practice across the region on community-led schemes that are supporting people in fuel poverty. The WMCA have begun a film series where we are following homeowners who are in the process of, or have already completed, retrofitting their homes. These videos are shared to support people in seeing the true impact of retrofitting your homes. The first video of Harriet and Chris Martin's home can be [viewed here](#).

## 4.0 Community Updates

4.1 Footsteps Tread Lightly Conference is being held on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> November at the Al Hijrah Masjid in Small Heath. The conference theme is 'Energy price crisis how affects faith communities and action being taken'. The event is free, please register to help plan for numbers:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/tread-lightly-2022-tickets-458320778787>

Footsteps have also launched an Energy Champion programme which is a faith community response to the energy crisis by helping people to reduce energy use, pay fuel bills and keep warm and healthy. Find out more on the programme; <https://footstepsenergychamps.org.uk/>

**This briefing note will be shared with the WMCA's Energy and Environment Board, which is next meeting on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022.**