



# Multi-agency approach to resolve fuel debt

## The story

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The Home Energy Advice and Retrofit Team was contacted by a Social Link Carer. The carer was concerned about an elderly gentleman who was long-term sick, in fuel debt, and struggling to pay their energy bills.

The building was a leasehold top-floor flat that was located on the coast, approximately a mile away from the nearest urban centre of Skegness.

This case was considered 'hard-to-reach' as the resident was often in hospital, making home visits impractical and communication difficult. The resident also had no access to the internet and had lost their phone early in the case referral.

The flat was a typical D-rated property. As is typical of the area, the flat was powered by electrically, and for an elderly resident on a fixed income it proved challenging to keep safe, warm, and well.

## Opportunities

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The elderly resident was increasingly unable to pay for their increased heating costs. The property was all electric and the resident was on a fixed income, including benefits and pension payments. They were getting sick more regularly and accumulating fuel debt while in hospital.

The opportunity was available to reduce or clear the resident's debt, find additional short-term funding for their bills, and improve their long-term financial well-being via income maximisation.



## Project highlights

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- Fuel debt of £500 cleared
- £100 of fuel vouchers delivered to the resident
- Supported resident to find a part-time job
- Overcame challenges around lack of internet access, limited phone access, and caution with disclosing financial information

## Approach

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The team wanted to overcome the challenge of reaching and supporting the resident as they were sent to the hospital for a few months shortly after being referred. They managed to reach the resident via a different mobile number as they had lost their phone while in hospital, and they struggled to answer the landline in time.

The team referred the resident to several charities and services which they were eligible to be assisted under, however, the resident was unable to keep track of different organisations. The team adapted to this by setting up regular calls on a set time and day every two weeks. They then worked through services one by one. The resident was suspicious of callers who may have required financial details, including Citizens Advice. To be able to provide in-person advice and confirm the legitimacy and safety of financial details being shared was important to reassure the resident.

## Outcomes

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The key achievements of this intervention were as follows:

- The resident's fuel debt of £500 was cleared by the British Gas Energy Trust,
- £100 of fuel vouchers were delivered to the resident by the National Energy Action and National Energy Foundation alongside additional energy saving advice,
- Citizens Advice also assisted with income maximisation and assisted the resident in finding a part-time childcare job in their local community which would ensure their long-term financial resiliency.

The team learned to adjust their referrals and potential avenues of solutions to the amount of information that the resident was able to handle. In addition, by having an in-person presence with Citizens Advice, the resident was reassured by the authenticity of partner organisations and assisted with processing grants and advice services.

## Stages

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The stages of this intervention were:

- 1) Information gathering from partner services, including the social care worker who referred the resident.
- 2) Setting up routine calls with the resident.
- 3) Fortnightly check-in calls.
- 4) Having a summary call

Find out more about the Local Energy Advice Demonstrator projects in the Midlands.

