

Respondent 16

Are you involved with services or schemes for low income communities to help them reduce their energy consumption?

Yeah I've got staff which deliver some of those services.

So what kind of services do you offer, is it mostly sort of demand side reduction, or is it kind of renewable generation projects.

Well, if we turn first of all to domestic, I guess, in terms of residents, the most applicable one is we've got an energy advice service, and that's a sort of telephone based, website based service. And as the name suggests, energy advice is the component part of that. The other part is around trying to maximise government incentives or discount, warm homes discount, um, only particular residents are eligible for that. And obviously around the demand side reduction then, insulation schemes, boiler replacement schemes where funding allows, and obviously the horizons changed over many years in terms of national incentives, so following this where we've been able to identify funding nationally, CERT and CESC schemes, funding around where properties aren't on gas, so there's some gas infill and there's a project at the moment where certain properties don't have gas supplies and there's a gas pipe closed, and those projects look at that.

Ok, so does the advice service try and focus on changing communities behaviours, and domestic behaviours, how they go about practises that use energy to try and reduce that, or does that not really factor into it?

Um, yes I guess it is at more of an individual level in terms of that service, so its working one to one with residents or tenants. Also for us in Newcastle fuel poverty, and recognising some residents can't afford to adequately heat the home, the fuel debt side, energy advice side, I guess there's a behavioural change element to that, but sometimes I think its about making the property warmer, reducing the energy costs, or increasing income.

And how about the Big Community Switch, I've looked at that on your website, what does that involve?

So that was a project we had several years ago, so that was a collective switching scheme, so I assume your familiar with the principle of collective switching, it was a scheme that was run by the LGA, so the Local Government Association, so they recognised that there were many authorities that were looking at these schemes and there was some benefit of aggregating volume and demand, so we let a contract, a company called I Choose won that, and they ran the collective switch so residents were able to apply to express an interest, the sort of demand was put in a pot and aggregated up to national level suppliers who bid for those contracts, and were able to offer a reduced, or better tariff. So there's some good savings in individual level on that, unfortunately the numbers weren't as high as I hoped, so trying to encourage local residents to take part in that the numbers were quite low compared to what I thought. But the residents that did do the switching, the savings were significant, at a property level.

Why do you think there's was low participation?

We were quite limited in the resources we had, um, to push it, but also again, I think there's still a confusion between different tariffs, some people have never switched as a group nationally, people who are still on the old monopoly suppliers, so what we're doing to try and encourage residents to

test their energy deal, so the switching scheme that contracts ended, and what we've now replaced it with is an individual tailored scheme, so we've got the platform, so you'll be familiar with USwitch and all the familiar switching schemes that are out there, so we've got a platform which directs residents to site which is funded by ourselves, but we've got a platform with a switching platform which puts all the details in in an individual level, and it then generates a range of potential suppliers, so not collective switching, but still encouraging.

Do you think that businesses have more of an incentive to switch, or there more aware of getting a cheaper deal than residents?

Um, well what we're doing on business is sort of changing, Ill give you some background on that. Historically we haven't really been able to tailor individual energy advice to business in terms of my service, we've just been able to give general over the telephone advice, we did try and do a small amount of collective switching scheme, there was a business element to that, but you'll be aware the business tariffs are very different and quite complex in their abilities, and quite different to the standard domestic tariff, so it required a very different approach, but were about to kick off a European funded project which were going to deliver business energy support on, which will be targeted at SME businesses, and we'll deliver that with Newcastle as the lead authority, but it'll be a project that stretches down to the border with Durham, and we'll be going out and visiting businesses to do tailored energy audits, and you would expect advice, guidance. Um, potential fund that we could apply for that would install energy saving measures.

Would that be a free service then?

Yes the audits and everything's funded from the European grant, the match funding will be a percentage that the business themselves would have to bring, because its 50% or 30% funded. Potentially could apply for LED lighting or efficient-ness of the plant. So that will be a much better offering we can make, and hopefully in the next couple of months that will be operating.

Oh brilliant. Um, so what about the Shared Energy Scheme with Northumbria University?

That was something we did for a district heating schemes, so we did a piece of work going back a few years now, which looked across the city for district heating schemes and whether they are feasible, a civic scheme, which was the civic centre, Northumbria, Newcastle university, that's sort of part of the city, because demand is quite high the demands if you like because obviously it's a densely populated part of the usability. So that was early feasibility, there's other district heating schemes and there's potential that that will be revisited but that was part of the city-wide plan that took place. District heating across the city, we've got district heating schemes um and we've been keen to maximise the benefits of those if you like, but as part of this work were also keen to look for new opportunities for district heating. Historically there's one in the Byker part of the city, Byker ward, there was a district heating scheme put in when it was built in the 60's. So obviously as they've become more popular we've got a CHP unit that generates power.

Ok, yes because I know the NHS Foundation Trust power their whole RVI and the Freeman hospital with CHP, and I think theyre almost self-sufficient which is amazing.

Yeah, well with being a hospital they'll obviously have the need for it. So what were trying to do is use the heat but through a sales contract sell the power because we cant use the power on site.

Ok, and how about, do you know anything about solar panels and PV systems on council buildings? And what capacity you've got, and do you sell this electricity?

In total roughly we've got thousand systems on domestic properties, and we've got about 50 bigger systems on public buildings, communal blocks and stuff like that, Civic Centre, schools, of those systems, most of them all the powers used on site, because the demands generally bigger than the size of the roof that we have available. Um, some of them do spill into the grid and there's an agreement, but for the majority the powers used on site. The benefit of them, most of them were put in when the Feed-in-Tariff was much higher, contracts.

And are you looking to expand that?

I think probably at the moment we've done a thousand and 50 or so systems, were probably not going to do much more in the short term because the feed in tariff has reduced dramatically in terms of the incentives. Costs have come up. What we'll do now is probably going to be done or reviewed as part of re-roofing works, that would be the opportune times to do it, because that would be the lower scaffolding costs. But yeah there's still a desire if you like to do further ones, but its just economics. We're starting to look at batteries, to help with PV. But as I say for most of ours were not really limited with how much power were limited by roof space. As an urban authority we haven't really gone down the route of ground mounted arrays because we haven't got the space. So its more integrated roof space, batteries might be able to store some of that, particularly when there's different charging patterns on the grid.

The Newcastle Climate Change Partnership, what does that involve?

We've got city-wide strategies and targets, not something the authority can just deliver again, s we've recognised those with a number of stakeholders and partnerships and partnership meetings. We're looking at the format of that now, because we did a lot of work up to 2020, national targets, but were starting to look past that now, and its trying to think what's the best format or group partnership going forward, still recognising the city-wide targets, so it'll be again engaging the likes of the universities, the NHS, the big stakeholders in the city, to come together.

And then how about in council buildings, do you provide training to staff to try to reduce their energy usage, change their practises throughout the day?

Um, so yeah there's staff awareness campaigns, we've also got a capital funding if you like which installs energy saving if the business case stacks up, so we've been doing quite a lot of LED switch out lately, lighting, um, prior to that we did building management systems, and more high efficient motors. Some of that's funded nationally by the Fund Salec, funded by a government, but they administer an interest free energy saving loan scheme, for local authorities, higher education, so were able to access that.