

Strategy

2024-28

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Centre for Sustainable Energy

We're a charity supporting people and organisations across the UK to tackle the climate emergency and end the suffering caused by cold homes.

We do this by sharing our knowledge, practical experience and policy insights.

For over 45 years, we've supported people to take effective action on energy in their homes.

We help communities and local councils to understand energy issues, set priorities, and put plans into action.

Our research and analysis focus on making the energy system green, smart and fair.

At a glance

Our vision

CSE's vision is a world where sustainability is second nature, carbon emissions have been cut to safe levels and fuel poverty has been replaced by energy justice.

Our mission

Our mission is to support people and organisations across the UK to tackle the climate emergency and end the suffering caused by cold homes.

High-level objectives	Methods	Work programmes
1 No one suffers a cold home. 2 Everyone empowered to take action on energy and support net zero. 3 Every building zero carbon and liveable. 4 Places shaped for sustainable energy 5 A green, smart and fair energy system that works for everyone.	- Empowering individuals. - Supporting others to act. - Building understanding and sharing learning. - Testing and demonstrating new ideas. - Making tools and models to inform and accelerate action. - Delivering services. - Actively engaging in public debate on climate action. - Influencing policy, regulation and programme design.	1 Supporting people in fuel poverty and vulnerable circumstances. 2 Housing energy retrofit. 3 Local authority support and action for net zero. 4 Community Action on Energy. 5 Future generations. 6 Fairness in the energy system.

Principles

People and technology ❀ Big picture and next step detail ❀ Breaking new ground
 ❀ Local roots matter ❀ Openness and candid advice ❀ Tackling causes as well as symptoms ❀ Energy justice as a prerequisite

Introduction

The way we produce and use energy needs to change rapidly if we are to cut carbon emissions and curb the worst impacts of climate change. We owe it to current and future generations to take action now to rapidly reduce emissions.

At the same time, energy costs are soaring and many people in the UK can't afford to heat their homes, impacting their health and wellbeing. This is unacceptable. Every person has a fundamental right to meet their basic energy needs and stay comfortably warm in winter.

At the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE), all our work is dedicated to tackling these dual challenges of cutting carbon emissions and helping those struggling with their energy needs. Together they are what we mean by 'sustainable energy'.

This organisational strategy outlines our vision and high-level objectives i.e. the long-term goals we are striving to achieve through our work.

It describes our values and principles – the qualities that we demonstrate and our beliefs – which underpin how we work.

And it sets out the methods we use to effect change – the types of work we conduct and the way that it delivers impact – i.e. our 'theory of change'.

Over the next three to five years, our efforts will be concentrated on six work programmes. Each one is chosen to build on our track record, skills, and expertise, and aligned with CSE's strengths. Work programmes represent the areas where we are best placed to actively contribute and drive change towards delivery of our vision and high-level objectives. Our work programmes are:

- 1 Supporting people in fuel poverty and vulnerable circumstances.**
- 2 Housing energy retrofit.**
- 3 Local authority support and action for net zero.**
- 4 Community action on energy.**
- 5 Future generations.**
- 6 Fairness in the energy system.**

The output of our six work programmes is how we achieve our five high-level objectives. These are:

- 1 No one suffers a cold home.**
- 2 Everyone empowered to take action on energy and support net zero.**
- 3 Every building zero carbon and liveable.**
- 4 Places shaped for sustainable energy.**
- 5 A green, smart and fair energy system that works for everyone.**

For each work programme, this strategy document outlines the impact we are trying to achieve, why CSE is uniquely placed to deliver this programme, and the activities we want to undertake (funding permitting).

And after that we take a look at our operations and systems in which we continue to invest with a focus on maintaining staff wellbeing, productivity and CSE's positive culture. We want all our people to have the resources and support they need to excel and develop in their roles, and that our operations are fit for purpose for a modern charity.

Vision and high-level objectives

CSE's vision is a world where sustainability is second nature, carbon emissions have been cut to safe levels and fuel poverty has been replaced by energy justice. To reach this ultimate end goal, we are working towards delivery of five high-level objectives:

1 No one suffers a cold home

We want everyone to live in a healthy home while also being able to afford their energy bills. This means tackling the root causes of fuel poverty including: addressing poor housing energy standards; improving energy literacy, financial capabilities and incomes; and challenging the energy market failures and poor supplier practices which result in high bills.

2 Everyone empowered to take action on energy and support net zero

The net zero transition requires meaningful involvement and consent that builds trust and empowers action from everyone in society – as consumers, citizens and members of communities. Success requires all of us to understand our options and adjust our individual and collective behaviours. This means making different choices in what we buy and invest in, giving consent for changes to the buildings and landscapes where we live and work and accepting the need for technology and energy system transition.

3 Every building zero carbon and liveable

We need massive growth in the scale and rate of energy retrofit for our existing buildings and all new buildings need to be designed and built to zero carbon standards. Retrofit and new build design also needs to deliver buildings which are 'liveable' i.e. comfortable to live in through the year – including providing controllability for occupants, avoiding overheating in summer, ensuring insulation measures don't inadvertently impact on the structural integrity of the building and respecting the aesthetic value of our built heritage.

4 Places shaped for sustainable energy

Changes are required to our local landscapes and communities and nowhere gets an opt out from having to find solutions to deliver net zero. But planning for net zero should recognise that places are different (the people, infrastructure, geography, capacity to act) and that the solutions will vary. Achieving transformative change demands inclusive processes that engage a wide range of people providing them with a meaningful voice and a genuine stake in shaping the resulting plans.

5 A green, smart and fair energy system that works for everyone

Our transition to a decarbonised energy system must have inclusivity and fairness at its heart: not least to secure and maintain public support. That means policies, regulations, market rules, and programmes which distribute their costs and benefits fairly, and energy products and services that enable everyone, even the most vulnerable, to participate.

Methods

CSE seeks to achieve societal change. Our mission is to support people and organisations across the UK to tackle the climate emergency and end the suffering caused by cold homes. We do this by sharing our knowledge, practical experience and policy insights.

In practical terms, we use a range of approaches and methods to effect change. These provide different, but connected, ways for us to achieve impact and influence.

Empowering individuals

By providing information, advice and advocacy, we directly support individual households to make changes to their homes and energy use. We improve their understanding and capacity to act, helping them make the best choices about their energy usage and improvements to their homes. We also help address peoples' immediate, urgent energy needs (for example providing emergency fuel vouchers, fixing broken heating systems, dealing with energy debt, billing and supplier issues) but always within the context of wider advice and support that puts an emphasis on increasing understanding, capacity and long-term resilience.

Supporting others to act

Supporting motivated individuals and groups to engage others and take action within their communities, businesses or organisations not only cultivates change at a grassroots level but also magnifies the direct impact we can achieve. By sharing CSE's experiences and knowledge, designing and facilitating processes that bring people together, enabling peer-to-peer learning, and creating a shared sense of purpose, we help others to deliver more effective sustainable energy action. It means we reach far more people than we could possibly achieve alone.

Building understanding and sharing learning

Our research and analysis reveals the reality of people's lived experience of the current energy system. It informs the design of new policy and builds understanding of what's needed to create a greener, smarter and fairer future energy system. This includes exploring and evidencing consumer experiences, analysing the impacts and effectiveness of local and national policies and programmes and making recommendations – sometimes co-created with partners and stakeholders – to improve policy and practice. By openly publishing and disseminating the findings of our research and analysis – and highlighting our learnings directly to policy makers and practitioners – we contribute to improving future energy policy, system design and programme delivery.

Testing and demonstrating new ideas

Recognising that part of our role as a charity is to break new ground, we aim to go beyond simply evidencing the need for change and making recommendations for others to act. By using new tools, methods and techniques in the delivery of our work, and bringing forward new programmes, schemes and ventures, we aim to catalyse change directly, and test and demonstrate the effectiveness of taking new approaches. For example pioneering new services for the home energy retrofit market or trialling innovative tools to help advisors and households navigate smart energy offers.

Making tools and models to inform and accelerate action

Developing and freely sharing our analytical tools and models provides others with easier access and understanding of data, enabling better insights and decision making. During the course of our work we develop analytical tools and models designed to support local projects and programmes through to the development of new national policy. These include complex data analysis, modelling scenarios and producing visualisations. We share these tools and models freely to help others improve efficiency, target their limited resources effectively and reduce the cost and time of action. Decent tools and models make actions clearer to evidence, more likely to happen and more appropriate and effective when they do.

Delivering services

Working with a range of different funders and partners, we design and deliver services where they are closely aligned with our charitable purpose, high-level objectives and work programme areas. Efficient service delivery allows us to scale up, expand our reach and magnify our impact. Examples include: area-specific fuel poverty and energy advice telephone and outreach services delivered on behalf of local authorities or energy companies; community energy grant and support services designed to build community networks and capacity to deliver local energy projects; and data analysis and software service contracts for government or the energy sector.

Actively engaging in public debate on climate action

By encouraging and actively participating in public debate on climate action, we improve public understanding both of the low carbon transition and also of the need to address fuel poverty and the principle of fairness in this transition. Our work provides practical and research evidence which can help inform public engagement strategies and campaigns on climate action and inclusion. Meanwhile, we bring extensive expertise in communicating with all types of people and communities on energy issues.

Influencing policy, regulation and programme design

Drawing on our direct access to peoples' lived experiences of the energy market, our insights from working with communities and local actors across the UK and our research and analysis, we directly engage with national policy makers and the energy regulator to highlight what is and isn't working in the energy market. And we make recommendations for systemic improvement. Better policy, regulation, market rules and delivery programmes lead to more effective action by individuals and organisations. To effect change, we actively engage with individual policy makers, partners and stakeholder networks and also respond to government consultations. Our policy influence work also provides context for our local and community work and enables us to respond quickly to new policies and national initiatives.

Principles

Our principles underpin our work and describe our beliefs and the qualities that drive the way we work.

People and technology

Reaching net zero requires a wholesale adoption of renewable technology – from the large and centralised generation like windfarms, through community-scale schemes like heat networks, all the way down to heat pumps, solar panels and batteries in our homes. This more variable and decentralised energy infrastructure in turn needs a smarter, flexible energy system, that rewards reducing and shifting demand as needed, and makes more use of energy storage. But people’s acceptance, understanding and use of this new technology will ultimately determine the speed of change. We need understanding of behavioural, social and cultural factors and effective engagement and communication to unlock technology change.

Big picture and next step detail

High level analysis and understanding the big picture is important to set a direction and frame the need for action. But we also aim to be pragmatic, finding next-step solutions to make progress today – for example helping the people who call our advice line to meet their immediate energy needs, or local councils to deliver local schemes today. Ultimately, we aim to help people develop their sense of agency and to demonstrate how near-term steps can lead to further action and commitment to secure longer-term change.

Breaking new ground

As a charity, our role is to regularly review the work we are doing and to focus our limited resources where we can make the most difference. This includes where we have significant experience or can add value (e.g. addressing the needs caused by energy market failure) or working in areas that are breaking new ground. Where other organisations – be they commercial, public or third sector – are now providing effective services we have previously delivered or encouraged, we move on to address the next barrier or challenge. We recognise that mainstreaming is a mark of success, and that progress will not simply be achieved through our own work alone but rather through the collective efforts of many.

Local roots matter

We believe that home energy advice, retrofit schemes and community energy initiatives are best delivered by people with knowledge of the area they are serving and embedded in local

networks familiar to and trusted by local people. This is why we look to work with, support and develop the skills of local partners as opposed to competing with them. It's why we focus our own direct advice and retrofit work in geographical areas where we have strong familiarity, experience and local connections.

Openness and candid advice

Sharing our methods, data, knowledge and practical experience freely with others – through our website and free, accessible published tools and resources – enables others to build on our work and create their own positive impact. By openly sharing the results of our research and being candid about what we have found works and what doesn't, we help others take more effective action.

Tackling causes as well as symptoms

Focusing on causes more than symptoms creates more lasting change. Tackling fuel poverty and cutting carbon emissions requires a focus on tackling their underlying causes. Helping people insulate their homes, lobbying for more investment in retrofit, building people's financial capabilities and capacity to navigate the energy market helps to insulate them from future price rises. Though fuel vouchers have become a short-term tool to ease economic hardship, their impact is inevitably limited. And it's why we focus on real solutions to reduce carbon and highlight the limitations of the concept of carbon offsetting.

Energy justice as a prerequisite

We believe a sense of fairness and shared purpose is a prerequisite of the transition to net zero. The costs and benefits of changing our energy system need to be shared fairly – we use the term 'energy justice'. This spans both 'distributional justice' (who emits, who pays, who benefits, who suffers from failure) and 'procedural justice' (who's involved and how in discussions and decisions about what happens and why).

Work programmes

- Support for people in fuel poverty and vulnerable circumstances.....▶
- Housing energy retrofit▶
- Local authority support and action for net zero▶
- Community action on energy.....▶
- Future generations▶
- Fairness in the energy system.....▶

Support for people in fuel poverty and vulnerable circumstances



This work programme revolves around providing direct and indirect advice and support for people in fuel poverty or in vulnerable circumstances. It aims to improve their wellbeing and energy literacy, and raise their awareness of the actions they can take and support available. And it advocates for fair energy policies and for programmes that address fuel poverty and enhance the energy efficiency standards of the homes of more disadvantaged people.

CSE distinguishes itself in this work area by delivering advice services that provide the comprehensive support needed to achieve affordable warmth. We collaborate with local partners to maximise our impact on people's wellbeing and warmth.

We will continue to focus our activities on our core local area (West of England, Wiltshire, Swindon and Somerset), expanding our geographical coverage when we are filling gaps in services that don't currently exist or introducing new services like smart energy advice. We won't seek to compete where other locally embedded organisations are already delivering strong and effective solutions, but will look to support them to develop their own smart energy capabilities.

CSE's expertise lies in energy advice provision. By maintaining our focus on energy-related issues, we can provide more effective and impactful assistance to the people we support. We will therefore not look to broaden our remit for example by providing financial or health advice, instead building referral partnerships with specialists in such areas.

Planned activity

Over the next five years we will aim to:

- Continue to directly support fuel poor households and people in vulnerable circumstances through advice projects and protect them from being left behind as the UK transitions to net zero. This will involve supporting people to reduce energy consumption (through behavioural changes and home improvements), better understand energy bills, improve their financial capabilities (through help accessing benefits, grants and discounts), reduce damp and mould, and stay warm and healthy in their homes. We will prioritise interventions that have a long-term impact on improving people's homes, finances and health and wellbeing.
- Prioritise continued delivery of freephone and digital advice services in the West of England, Wiltshire, Swindon and Somerset, and increase local outreach activity (events, surgeries, home visits) in these areas with the aim of making our services easier to access for those typically excluded from the energy system.
- Cement our reputation as a leader in impartial smart energy advice tailored to people in fuel poverty and vulnerable circumstances, helping them to understand, engage and

benefits from the rapidly-changing energy system. We will look to grow the geographic coverage of smart energy support to minimise gaps in service, including supporting other local energy advice providers to develop their own smart energy advice capabilities.

- Explore opportunities to address the root causes of fuel poverty, e.g. go back to those who received fuel vouchers and offer advice on preventative measures and more complex energy advice topics.
- Deliver more support to people with little or no experience paying heating bills in the UK, including younger people, the recently bereaved, refugees and asylum seekers moving into permanent accommodation, and those moving into rented accommodation for the first time.
- Raise awareness of the growing number of people living in cold homes and highlight the support we provide and difference it makes to people's health and wellbeing.
- Advocate for public health authorities and local councils to fund fuel poverty services, and for government support to tackle the misery of cold homes.
- Advocate for improved energy supplier practice, better regulation in the energy market and more access for fuel poor and people in vulnerable circumstances to access the benefits of the net zero transition (e.g. flexibility services and low carbon technologies). To facilitate this, explore how suitably qualified and experienced energy advice organisations such as CSE could be formally recognised by Ofgem as trusted intermediaries with energy suppliers.
- Champion affordable energy bills and influence improvements to key policies and programmes related to building energy efficiency, low carbon technologies, tariffs (e.g. changes to standing charges, social tariffs, smart tariffs), support schemes (e.g. Warm Homes Discount) and potential changes to fuel poverty definitions.

Housing energy retrofit



This work programme focuses on helping to make people's homes affordable, liveable and low carbon. This means making sure they are thermally efficient, adequately ventilated, provide a healthy living environment and use a heating technology that's low carbon. To do this we will continue to lead by example through the delivery of high-quality people-centred retrofit programmes and services which empower and support people to make good long-term decisions about their homes.

CSE distinguishes itself in this work programme area by providing impartial retrofit advice and support that's both people and property focused.

As a charity, CSE will not become a direct installer of energy efficiency measures, instead continuing to refer people to installer partners and others that we've screened and are confident provide good quality, cost-effective installations.

Planned activity

Over the next five years we will aim to:

- Continue to act and build our reputation as an impartial and independent advisor giving people transparent and unbiased advice on retrofit.
- Develop our capabilities to give high quality smart energy advice which enables people to optimise their retrofit strategies. This will include covering tariffs, energy behaviours, energy efficiency, low carbon technologies, battery storage and home charging of electric vehicles.
- Build public trust for retrofit by using our communications and policy work to debunk myths and challenge misleading information.
- Expand and further develop our Futureproof service for private householders, to give the information and confidence people need to undertake retrofit work, including improving our communication and promotion of the service to drive take up.
- Provide up-to-date advice and guidance on the evolving economics of heat pumps. With changes in the cost ratio of gas and electricity, heat pumps can now often compete with gas boilers without an increase in energy running costs.
- Build on our experience delivering Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) and Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) schemes to deliver the new Warm Homes funding for local authorities and social housing providers by continuing to offer a high quality, professional and householder centric approach.
- Continue to develop our work with community groups and local actors to develop their capability to deliver community-based retrofit advice.

- Explore opportunities to provide retrofit advice services to the private rented sector and new home buyers, potentially through estate and letting agents including with the aim of ensuring regulatory tests, such as airtightness, are correctly measured.
- Encourage and support others to expand their services or join the retrofit industry, and work with key partners to upskill and reskill the existing workforce to increase numbers of qualified and competent installers.
- Develop new programmes to attract, engage and support young people into the retrofit workforce, addressing the lack of qualified tradespeople. We will do this by partnering with education centres to help promote training and green skills.
- Work with stakeholders across the region to ensure there is a collaborative and coordinated approach to retrofitting our homes.
- Work with the electricity networks to understand the reality of local network data and constraints and identify solutions to enable scaling of heat pumps.
- Test the effectiveness of emerging technologies that need further demonstration and evaluation e.g. apps and infrared heating.
- Design retrofit programmes to take account of future opportunities and people's needs so they can benefit from new offers emerging from a future smarter energy system.

The key themes of our future retrofit work are **collaboration**, **inclusion** and **acceleration**.

Collaboration needs to happen internally and externally. We will build this into projects to increase our reach and develop the capacity of others to support the delivery of retrofit. Cross-team working, as well as supporting and working with Retrofit West CIC and local community groups will be key components of our work.

We need to make sure that both our services and the retrofit sector itself are **inclusive**. We will aim to develop projects that reach marginalised households, based on their demographics, competencies or incomes. We will work to bring diversity to the retrofit supply chain by promoting green building careers in schools.

We urgently need to **accelerate** retrofit, particularly focussing on upgrading heating systems from gas to clean heat i.e. heat pumps or heat networks. This means ensuring our general advice and retrofit staff have the latest technical knowledge.

Local authority support and action for net zero



This work programme focuses on supporting local authorities of all types and sizes on their path to net zero – regardless of how far they’ve already progressed. It aims to drive forward energy-related net zero goals in a timely, socially just and locally resonant way. To do this it provides local authority officers with access to the knowledge, tools, data and expertise required to make informed decisions and identify clear actions that meet their goals. We understand the barriers and gaps local authorities are facing, and offer tailored advice and services to suit their circumstances making it easier and cheaper for them to plan and act.

Local authorities are vital to achieving net zero in the UK through their activities in key areas such as housing, transport and energy generation and use, and the role they play in developing sustainable policies, overseeing local infrastructure and fostering community engagement.

CSE distinguishes itself in this work programme by offering a flexible, transparent and cross-disciplinary approach that supports local planning and action for decarbonisation in the context of a just energy transition. Our approach is grounded in having a wealth of experience in helping to deliver impactful local area energy planning and action whilst advocating for wider system change to foster a more supportive and enabling net zero environment.

We are not an engineering company; our expertise is in higher-level planning and modelling, not detailed design for specific building or technology installations. We provide local authorities with a wide range of services, which can be expanded to offer more holistic comprehensive support through working partnerships with other specialists, such as in waste management, transport, engineering, and business case development.

Planned activity

1. The delivery of services to accelerate decarbonisation of heat and power.

We will strengthen our position as a leader in the provision of low-cost tools and state of the art analysis and modelling for the purposes of local decarbonisation planning. This spans Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP), heat decarbonisation analyses, energy master-planning, heat network analysis, rooftop solar PV assessment, and local carbon foot-printing. We will use our tools and resources to help local authorities establish a solid evidence base from which policies, strategies and action plans can be confidently articulated and implemented. Specifically we will:

- Support different types of local authorities regardless of how far they’ve progressed, providing clear tailored upfront guidance on the options available to plan and mobilise

for action on decarbonisation.

- Promote and use our modelling and analysis tools in local area studies to maximise impact and to identify options for their improvement through client feedback, market needs and partnerships with others.
- Selectively deliver impactful LAEP-related work including heat mapping and modelling, zero carbon energy resource assessments, heat network studies and stakeholder engagement.
- Build innovative new modelling and analysis tools that are low cost for users, accessible, collaborative and encourage a standardised approach, e.g. through open sourcing and use of open data.
- Offer support to local authorities around the role of zoning coordinator, including strategic support, local data collection, zone designation and heat network analysis.
- Enable more local authorities to participate and support their communities to benefit from demand flexibility services , such as local promotion and engagement with tenants through a local authority's role as a social landlord and property owner.

2. Building the capability and capacity of local authorities and their communities to act.

We will continue in our role as a leader on place-shaping for sustainable energy through facilitating meaningful and impactful engagement within and between stakeholders at all levels. We will apply tried and tested methods to communicate both technical and non-technical concepts, create spaces for innovation, provide capacity building, learning and upskilling and support the development of robust local delivery structures that enable town, district and county council level authorities to develop successful local heat and power projects that can contribute to delivery of the government's Local Power Plan. Specifically we will:

- Support local authorities to develop and deliver robust and tailored engagement processes and programmes that build interest in, and consent to, local decarbonisation initiatives.
- Work with local authorities and regional actors to identify and develop opportunities for cross-sectoral governance and delivery partnerships that capitalise on and maximise existing resources.
- Create open-source digital products that enable local authorities quick and simple access to data and tools to help them engage local stakeholders, identify technical opportunities and understand next step actions.
- Research, develop and advocate for new approaches to identifying and addressing challenges with local authority capacity and capabilities to deliver local decarbonisation programmes.
- Inspire and empower local authority officers to take action in their areas by highlighting

examples of best practice from across the UK, with a focus on areas such as behaviour change, communications, financing and governance.

- Develop low-cost, “off-the-shelf” resources and toolkits that can be utilised and adapted by local authority officers in their areas. For example, stakeholder engagement resources, facilitation packs and training plans.

3. Improving local governance and influencing the policy landscape around decarbonisation.

CSE has extensive experience in informing and advising on energy and climate planning policy which encompasses neighbourhood planning, Local Plans and national planning policy. Our focus going forward will be to support local authorities in contributing to and benefiting from the introduction of Regional Energy Strategic Planning (RESP) and the wider Centralised Energy Strategy Plan being developed by the National System Operator. Specifically we will:

- Build on and expand our Future Energy Landscapes programme, locally and nationally, to instigate and nurture consent for local community energy projects and widen engagement in the planning system.
- Influence and improve the LAEP planning process, how this interacts with RESP planning and the impact on the SSEP, ensuring that place-based understanding informs and shapes whole energy system planning whilst allowing inclusive governance at each planning stage.
- Support local authorities strategically in maximising benefits from the Local Power Plan, such as ensuring effective collaboration with communities (e.g. parish councils, neighbourhood planning groups, climate action groups), demonstrating good end-use of funds and advising on local enabling policies around social value.
- Make it easier for local authorities to evaluate their zero carbon energy resources through open data, national mapping and consistently applied standard methodologies, for example by advocating for a publicly accessible national dataset of technical renewable energy potential, to accelerate local plan making and support community energy project development.
- Create more dynamic planning tools (in partnership with others) which aim to support policy development, encourage consistency in methodologies, and provide easier options for the monitoring and evaluation of policy impacts.
- Influence and support the establishment of strategic authorities and their planning powers in terms of their role in achieving the transition to net zero, including implementing the Local Power Plan and Warm Homes Plan.

Community Action on Energy



This work programme focuses on enabling communities to be at the forefront of designing and delivering community-based action on energy and ensuring everyone is able to contribute to and benefit from changes to the energy system. The programme seeks to enhance the capacity, strength and influence of individuals, groups and organisations to make positive changes around energy use, energy assets and energy governance at the community level.

CSE has been pioneering community action on energy for over 45 years. We take a holistic approach to energy system transformation recognising the power that is created by bringing communities together with other enabling actors (planners, distribution system operators, local authorities, investors and supply chains). We recognise that for many communities it isn't about sustainable energy; it's about building resilience and creating healthier, more prosperous and better places to live.

Communities are bodies around which people develop a sense of belonging or identity, where they share knowledge and seek support. They may form around a place (a neighbourhood or street), around an activity (art or sport), or around an attribute (faith or ethnicity).

We work with and support individuals and organisation of all shapes and sizes who want to take action on energy at the community level. Examples of this include: improving future-proofing community buildings; increasing awareness of climate change; place based sustainability plans; supporting fuel-poor households with expert advice on energy; and developing community-owned energy assets. Our work in this programme is focused on empowering others to act. We will always seek to develop and strengthen community scale capacity; rather than directly delivering community energy projects ourselves. Our work is based on social and technical research theory and evidence, and we do not promote one specific model, technology or organisation in our community empowerment activity. We're interested in understanding why it works, as well as what works.

Planned activity

Over the next five years we will aim to:

1. Equip community stakeholders with the knowledge, capabilities and tools they need to take informed, effective and inclusive action on local energy challenges and opportunities. To do this we will:
 - Deliver inclusive training and capacity-building for community stakeholders to improve their knowledge and understanding , around engagement and communications, energy system challenges and opportunities, fuel poverty, building retrofit and climate change.
 - Provide community stakeholders with specialist expertise that helps to inform and

shape their energy plans and activities.

- Design and deliver well targeted and accessible community-based grant and investment schemes which provide appropriate finance and guidance for community-based action on energy, especially in areas of high deprivation.
 - Work with communities to develop, document and deliver inclusive deliberative approaches to local energy planning and place-shaping.
 - Work with communities to co-develop data-led approaches and other useful tools for community-led action on energy.
2. Expand the roll out of proven, community-scale approaches and innovations required to address energy system challenges and support a Just Transition. To do this we will:
- Advocate for, and facilitate, innovation, peer learning and relationship building between community stakeholders to share best practice and promote approaches which are consistent with Just Transition principles.
 - Build and strengthen connections between community energy pioneers delivering effective and inclusive community action on energy, and funders and decision makers.
3. Shape the policy and practice of energy stakeholders, funders, and local regional and national government, towards greater support for, and investment in, community-led action on energy which addresses local needs and priorities. To do this we will:
- Undertake robust research and project evaluations, to reveal (and share) new evidence and insights on effective community-based action on energy that supports community needs and priorities and Just Transition principles.
 - Facilitate connections and learning opportunities between community actors, community energy pioneers and funders and policy makers.

Outcomes

Near term outcomes that result from our work will include:

- More community stakeholders with the knowledge, confidence and capabilities they need to identify and act on local energy challenges and opportunities.
- More community organisations, particularly in areas of high deprivation, with investment and guidance to deliver effective action on energy in their communities.
- More communities have well-informed community energy and climate plans and priority setting that reflect local needs and priorities.
- Data, data-informed tools and services are being used by community actors to explore

local energy issues and inform opportunities for action.

- The community sector is better connected and able to work together, both locally and nationally, to pioneer and scale impactful local action on energy.
- Energy stakeholders, funders, and local regional and national government are better connected with community energy actors, and more aware of the opportunities and benefits presented by community-led approaches to addressing energy challenges and opportunities.

As a result of our work, we want to see:

- More, and more diverse, community actors taking informed, effective, and inclusive action on local energy challenges and opportunities.
- More funded resource to expand proven, community-scale approaches to tackling energy system challenges and opportunities which support the meeting of Just Transition ambitions.
- Greater community ownership or governance of energy assets and an expansion of proven community energy business models.
- The policy and practice of energy stakeholders, funders, and local, regional and national government is actively supportive of community-led action on energy which addresses local needs and priorities and is consistent with Just Transition principles.

Future generations



This work programme focuses on ensuring young people of all backgrounds feel inspired and able to play a meaningful role in catalysing and delivering the transition to a more sustainable and fairer energy system. We will do this by building upon the portfolio of existing youth-specific work CSE delivers with a specific focus on how we integrate young people's energy, views and desires ('young people' defined as those between five and 25), through our work with schools, community organisations and energy partners, and into CSE's work as a whole.

CSE distinguishes itself in this work programme area through our unique ability to engage with a broad spectrum of young individuals to actively shape a fair and sustainable energy future, leveraging a collaborative approach with schools, communities, and energy partners to integrate youth perspectives into real-world energy solutions.

CSE is not aiming to become an education service delivery lead for projects indefinitely, e.g. school delivery work should have a theory of change that builds us out and trains others to deliver. We instead aim to provide a catalyst and example of best practice, where appropriate.

Planned activity

Over the next five years we will aim to:

- Develop and sustain priority youth projects like Bright Green Future and other school-based and wider youth engagement initiatives that actively involve young people, particularly those aged five to 25, in net zero initiatives and energy-related decision-making processes.
- Provide young people with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to participate in decision-making and become advocates for a fair transition to net zero.
- Deliver projects which address gaps in climate and energy education provision and look for opportunities to influence the curriculum to ensure that young people receive the knowledge and education they need on these crucial topics.
- Develop and support home energy literacy programmes for young people renting or paying energy bills for the first time to provide them with the practical skills to engage with the energy market.
- Create pathways and guidance for young people to pursue careers that align with and contribute to the net zero transition, with a focus on addressing the challenges faced by young individuals starting out with limited resources and specifically linking into the housing energy retrofit work programme.

- Champion the role of young people in ensuring an inclusive energy transition, recognising that young people are not only directly affected by issues like fuel poverty but also have the potential to influence positive change in this regard.
- Incorporate youth voices into our own processes and governance, ensuring that young people have a meaningful way to contribute to the organisation's strategic and operational decisions. E.g. through the Youth Advisory Board.
- Acknowledge the emotional distress and psychological impacts of climate change on young people, such as eco-anxiety, and create supportive spaces for them to address these concerns and channel their anxiety into positive action.
- Promote equity and inclusion by providing opportunities for young people who have been disadvantaged or overlooked, to participate in the energy transition, contribute to creating a more sustainable future, and address issues like fuel poverty which have outsized impacts on young individuals and families.
- Leverage CSE's position as a connection point between educational institutions, the energy system, and civil society to create opportunities for young people.
- Conduct research and provide educational resources related to the net zero transition and energy justice.
- Build resilience in the energy transition through actively engaging young people, recognising that their involvement can bring fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to the challenges at hand but also recognizing the importance of not burdening them with solving climate change on their own.

Fairness in the energy system



This work programme focuses on achieving fairness in the energy system. This means we are actively working towards a low carbon energy system that is demonstrably fair, delivers environmental and societal value in partnership with people, ensures equitable distribution of system benefits and costs and allows all to meet their basic energy needs at costs they can afford.

CSE distinguishes itself in this work programme through our fuel poverty research reputation, expertise in distributional impact analysis and our strong relationships with organisations at the heart of the energy system transition. This enables us to run high-impact, innovative research projects and support industry, government and community action.

Through provision of direct support to households and communities, CSE also has good insight into justice issues and can see and test the impacts of new policies, interventions and market offerings on a variety of social groups.

CSE is not focused on conducting pure academic research or theoretically defining the concept of a socially just transition. Instead, we are focused on developing analysis tools, testing and evaluating approaches and developing policy recommendations that will drive change. Since 2018 CSE has been doing research with industry, policy makers and regulators – and providing support to consumers – on participation and fairness in the energy transition. We are recognised as an expert independent voice in this space and are uniquely placed to monitor how new technologies and solutions are being accessed by different consumer groups, which people are benefiting, and who is being left behind.

Planned activity

Through our work with people and communities we understand how the transition to a low carbon system is taking shape, entrenching existing inequalities and creating new ones. We act on those insights. We deliver advice and support to households that not only meets immediate needs, but builds the capabilities to ensure people can participate in the evolving system and access its benefits.

We empower local communities to become agents of change, actively building a fairer energy system. We support them to innovate in community ownership of renewable generation and demand management. We help them achieve recognition for their necessary role in facilitating the transition. We provide research and tools to industry, government and regulators that improves their understanding of the capabilities that households and communities need to access and benefit from the changing energy system.

We support government and industry in monitoring the uptake and impacts of new energy products and services. We help them analyse how differences are distributed across household type and location. We will hold them to account for inequalities in access or benefits.

Over the next five years we aim to:

- Understand and communicate issues around the equitable distribution of transition benefits and costs. This will be grounded in continued monitoring of new policies, services and technologies, and refinement of core analytical tools like the CSE smart energy capabilities lens. This will help us to analyse who is bearing the cost of the low carbon transition, who has access to and benefits from changes, and how inequalities are distributed across the population. Through better understanding what works for who, we can identify, shape and test effective solutions.
- Support and influence the standardisation and roll out of smart energy and low carbon technology advice. Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) are key partners in this work, as they are required to provide low carbon technology support alongside fuel poverty support, and they are piloting different approaches. CSE is well placed to ensure lessons are shared, terminology is standardised and advice becomes widely available and accessible. This will build on our existing flexibility and smart energy advice tools and trials.
- Support the development of a market for low carbon products and services that work for a diverse range of households and communities. We will help industry to identify and support households in vulnerable circumstances. We will continue to support the development of appropriate regulation and good industry practice. We will challenge the focus on individual household owned technology and high energy consumers and seek to demonstrate the viability of other more inclusive approaches. Building on our years of smart energy advice, customer research and market monitoring around domestic flexibility, we will continue to champion inclusion and fairness as demand management moves into the mainstream.
- Provide research and stakeholder engagement for pilots and trials of new technologies and market arrangements. Research will include participatory research with groups creating change in their communities, social research with households and communities about their experiences of new products and services, and co-design with innovators bringing new products and services to market. Engagement will include supporting a wider diversity of community groups to act on energy as well as facilitating local government to build socially embedded local energy systems.
- Demonstrate and communicate meter injustices. Smart metering is fundamental to the future energy system. Whilst issues with legacy meters and prepayment rates are known, there are other metering injustices that need to be better understood and resolved, and more work to be done to understand who is affected.
- Work with others to lobby for a national communications campaign which explains the low carbon transition and what it means for people and communities. We will support and provide content to this effort, based on our experience and expertise in communicating with all types of people and communities on energy.

CSE's operations and systems

CSE has made considerable investment in improving its systems and support functions in recent years, including expanding the Finance and Operations team considerably since 2021. We now have dedicated in-house finance, human resources, training and IT expertise and stronger administrative support. And, we have worked to ensure staff have clear guidance on who to approach and how to get help and answers to queries.

We have expanded our development and communications staff teams, invested in a new website, with a lower carbon footprint and more modern, effective user architecture (2023) and developed and launched a fresh new brand (2024).

As the staff team has grown, effective internal communication has also become even more imperative. Our Employee Voice group provides a clear route for staff to raise questions, suggestions and make responses to management proposals and we communicate new information through a range of routes - our monthly What's Happening newsletter, bi-weekly staff meetings, quarterly briefings from the Senior Leadership Team and lunchtime briefings about our projects and work programmes.

Our aim is to improve our processes and systems, or introduce new ones that:

- Provide consistent and effective support across the staff teams and work programme areas.
- Are streamlined, quicker to use, accessible and therefore more efficient.
- Provide staff with clarity on procedures.
- Provide managers with information on resource allocation, performance and progress against targets (project, team, work programme and organisational).
- Support staff in their ability to perform in their roles, maintain their wellbeing and develop professionally.
- Maintain CSE's positive and supportive working culture and embed an ethos of equity, diversity and inclusion across all CSE's work and within our workforce.

