

Rural Communities Energy Support Network: Final evaluation report

July 2024

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Executive Summary

This report presents the final evaluation results of the two-year Rural Communities Energy Support Network (RESN) project (September 2022-August 2024), delivered by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) and funded by the Energy Redress Fund. It includes findings on project activities for the period February 2023-April 2024.¹

The aims of the project were:

1. To train and support community-based advisors in the rural counties of Somerset and Wiltshire to deliver basic energy advice.
2. To increase reach to rural residents via community-based advisors and frontline staff skilled in essential energy issues whilst continuing to provide client in-depth support via referrals to the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE).
3. To explore the efficacy of developing a rural advice network to meet consumer demand for energy advice.

High level summary of RESN activities September 2022-May 2024²

	Outcome	Target
	492 home visits	240
	3484 households reached at events	1740
	1447 face to face advice sessions	1195
	2836 telephone advice calls	2440
	107 training sessions provided	70
	666 frontline workers trained	300
	Over £25,000 of Community Fund grants given to 11 organisations	NA

¹ An interim evaluation report (June 2023) reported on project activities for September 2022-16 February 2023.

² The summary does not cover the whole project outcomes, as the RESN ends August 2024.

Evaluation aims

The evaluation had three aims:

1. To assess the community-based training.
2. To explore the effectiveness of community-based advice and its impact for community-based advisors and their organisations.
3. To find out about clients' experiences and outcomes of community-based advice.

This final evaluation also tentatively explores the effectiveness of the RESN approach to meet consumer demand for energy advice.

Evaluation approach

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach using quantitative and qualitative data. It gathered feedback from multiple stakeholders (community-based advisors, clients, partner organisations and CSE staff) to obtain a range of perspectives on the project. Multiple data collection methods were used, including training registrations, online surveys, workshop sessions, interviews, and project reporting data.

Community-based advisor training

Between 17 February 2023 and 30 April 2024, 64 training sessions were delivered, covering 14 different advice topics. 188 community-based advisors registered for one or more online training sessions; 59% of advisors (n=111) registered for one session³.

The evaluation found that 87% of community-based advisors (n=32) agreed with positive statements about training experiences in survey responses. Areas on which advisors reported having less confidence was knowing whom to ask if they had a query and how to make a referral to CSE. Lack of time for training was also raised, particularly for the Retrofit basics course, the topic advisors felt least confident advising on.

The effectiveness of community-based advice

Energy Essentials was the most popular training, received by 71% of survey respondents (n=15). 85% of advisors (n=17) reported that they were able to use the training to deliver advice. Advisors engaged with vulnerable groups (elderly, low-income households, carers, young people) as well as the general public interested in self-funded retrofit. They engaged with clients via home visits, face to face appointments and drop ins, by phone and email. Most advisors described serving small communities.

³ 188 advisors registered for online training sessions. 478 advisors were trained via bespoke face to face training in their organisations. The total number of advisors trained was 666.

Survey respondents reported many positive outcomes from attending training, for their personal and organisational skills and development, as well as positive impacts for their clients.

Three areas highlighted where advisors considered that energy advice had had limited impact for clients related to health improvements, anxiety about bills, and being able to make ends meet. These are complex issues beyond a simple fix.

Client experiences

Based on very limited survey responses from nine clients, three quarters reported that they were likely to take action within a month of receiving advice and that their energy issue was mainly or partly resolved. All clients were satisfied with the advice received and found it easy to understand.

Conclusions

This final evaluation of the Rural Community Energy Support Network found from a post-training survey that the training provided was positively received by 87% of survey respondents (n=32). Following training, community-based advisors were confident in delivering basic energy advice across all topics except for Retrofit, for which more time was needed.

Based on evidence from a community-based advisor feedback survey with 21 survey respondents and workshops with 11 network members, most advisors (85%, n=17) used training received to provide energy advice. After training, advisors delivered more energy advice compared to prior to training when they focused on topics indirectly related to energy (e.g. emergency support, debt). 41% of respondents (n=7) offered advice five or more times a month. Advisors were able to reach vulnerable households across all tenures. This suggests that an aim of the RESN – to reach rural residents with essential energy advice – was being achieved.

Only 29% of advisors (n=6) that responded to the survey made referrals to CSE for casework. Those that did found it easy to do and useful. Workshop participants had limited experience of making referrals as they predominantly engaged in light touch one-off informal advice conversations.

Advisors reported positive impacts for clients, themselves and their organisations from participating in the RESN. Survey respondents disagreed that advice had helped their clients with their health, anxiety about bills, and being able to make ends meet. This was supported by client feedback which reported positive outcomes from receiving advice but disagreed that advice reduced their anxiety about bills. They also disagreed that advice helped them to keep their home warm.

From advisor feedback, interviews with four partner organisations and five CSE staff, valued components of the RESN were identified to take forwards (training, forum meetings, resources, CSE support and the community fund). CSE and partner organisations both noted partnership challenges regarding expectations on advice giving and delivery. Other aspects which emerged that need further consideration to improve the effectiveness of the RESN included:

understanding and clarification of what it means to be part of the network; assessing trainee capacity and intent to deliver advice; developing partnerships with clear remit and recompense that aligns with project targets; streamlining data collection for comprehensive, effective reporting and insightful evaluation.

Recommendations

These general recommendations based on the evaluation findings are given for consideration. Further suggestions on training, practical resources and information are given in the Conclusions section.

- Consult the network to find out what people want and need. Clarify what it means to be part of the network and what is expected of training participants and network members. Develop a sense of 'network' accordingly.
- Continue the community fund. Include community fund applicant support in future work. Share case studies of what community organisations have used grants for.
- Proactively assess how much community-based advisors are likely to use the training to give advice. This could involve having pre- and post-training conversations with managers to determine organisational aspirations, staff capacity and further support requirements.
- Partner selectively with advice-focused organisations rather than network organisations.
- Develop mutually beneficial partnerships recompensed using a pricing structure that aligns with project delivery, for instance number of clients referred. Build in flexibility so that partners can respond to local emergent needs for energy advice.
- Bring partner organisations together to build the network. Provide updates on RESN activities in a form which best meets network members' needs. Give information about CSE services to network organisations so they can signpost organisations to support.
- Simplify data gathering and evaluation feedback. Have interviews and a regular (e.g. quarterly) feedback survey rather than multiple surveys and reporting forms.
- Engage more with health service staff, social prescribers, children's centres, and schools with training and referral information to reach vulnerable people.
- Involve CSE's retrofit team more to support advisor knowledge of retrofit and renewables for self-financing and low-income households.
- To increase referrals, create a simple handout for network members and a video explaining how advisors can refer and clients can self-refer. Include 'RESN' as an option on the referral form and ask advisors to select it to track referrals from the network to increase client evaluation feedback. Integrate referral information into partner agreements.
- Assess whether feedback from community-based advisor clients is required. If so, offer incentives for both clients and community-based advisors; obtain feedback at events and drop ins directly; use the referral form to identify RESN referrals. Use case studies or other methods to capture client outcomes and impact.

Introduction

Due to the ongoing cost-of-living and energy crises, the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) Household Energy Services team gave advice to nearly 16,500 clients, dealing with 32,800 enquiries between April 2023 and March 2024 – a 17% increase in clients and 27% increase in enquiries respectively compared to the same period the previous year. The Rural Communities Energy Support Network (RESN) project, funded by Energy Redress Fund for two years (September 2022–August 2024), is a response to this amplified demand for energy advice. The RESN supports local community-based advisors (CBAs) to provide basic energy advice via training and mentoring. By working with partner organisations in Somerset and Wiltshire, CSE aims to:

- Increase local service providers' capacity to offer basic energy advice.
- Reach new clients in a community setting.
- Focus CSE Somerset and Wiltshire advisor time on complex casework, for which community-based advisors can make client referrals.

The project sought to provide 4,350 vulnerable households with energy advice (by CSE and partner organisations), train 300 staff and volunteers, and give ongoing support to trained community-based advisors.

This final evaluation report of the RESN project covers the period March 2023–April 2024. It builds on findings from an interim evaluation, summarised below.

Interim evaluation (September 2022–February 2023)

This evaluation captured learning from initial project training and advisor activities. It made the following key recommendations:

- Improve training provided: adjustments to content and times, ascertaining advisors' knowledge prior to training, and focusing on practical tips.
- Extend training provision: training volunteers, contacting youth organisations and improving geographic reach.
- Create a support pathway offering steps for advisor support, increased CSE involvement in cases and highlighting trainees.
- Improve provision of resources, such a list of trusted traders, CSE factsheets, and feedback forms.
- Learning opportunities: increase opportunities for advisor Q&A, troubleshooting, and peer learning.
- Client feedback: investigate new methods of client feedback, such as paper forms, direct contact at events, and improved data linking in advisor referrals.

Aims of the evaluation

The aims of the evaluation are:

1. To assess the community-based training: content; delivery and process; community-based advisor confidence in offering energy advice.
2. To explore the effectiveness of community-based advice, CBA experiences and outcomes:
 - a) CBA views on advice support; other support or resource requirements; impact of giving advice for CBAs, their clients and their organisations; means to improve training, referrals pathways and support.
 - b) Partner organisation and CSE staff views on the effectiveness of the energy support network.
3. To find out about clients' experiences and outcomes of community-based advice: ease of engagement with the service; experiences of the advice process including if referred onto CSE for casework; impact of the advice; means to improve the service.

This final evaluation report is structured as follows:

- **Evaluation approach** – Briefly describes the overall evaluation approach of the project, followed by the evaluation methodology, data collection and analysis processes for this interim report.
- **Community-based advisor training** – Presents the results and analysis from CBA post-training feedback surveys of advisors' views on training.
- **The effectiveness of community-based advice** – Summarises and analyses advisor survey responses about their experiences of the project overall.
- **Client experiences** – Shares findings from client survey responses about their experiences of receiving energy advice and its impact on their lives.
- **RESN as an approach to providing energy advice and support** – Shares insights from CBAs, partner organisations and CSE staff on the effectiveness of the RESN.
- **Conclusions and Recommendations** – This final section draws conclusions from the research. It makes recommendations on how to improve future project activities.

Evaluation approach

Overall approach

The overall evaluation approach for the Rural Community Energy Support Network project is summarised in Figure 1. It used a multi-modal methodology to gather views from different stakeholder groups – community-based advisors, their clients, partner organisations and CSE staff. The evaluation data sources included:

- Eventbrite training registration data
- Community fund summary information
- Online surveys
- Workshop sessions
- Interviews

Evaluation activities for the project as a whole occurred in two stages: February 2023 and February-April 2024 for the interim and final evaluation reports respectively. The timeline for final evaluation report activities is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Evaluation activities and timeline by stakeholders for March 2023-April 2024

Training	CBA experiences	Client experiences	Partner organisation experiences	CSE staff experiences
CBA post-training online survey	Workshop sessions (April 2024)	Online survey (May 2024)	Interviews (May 2024)	Interviews (May 2024)
Training registration data	Online survey (May 2024)			
(March 2023-April 2024)	Community fund summary			

Final evaluation data collection

Table 1 shows a summary of the methods used to collect data for this final evaluation. The objective was to understand training uptake and utility, advisor experiences following training, and client experiences based on the support they received. Interviews with partner organisations and CSE staff explored the effectiveness of the energy support network and how to improve it.

Table 1: Summary of data collection for the final evaluation

Aim	Method	Number of responses	Details
Gather feedback on training	Survey in SmartSurvey	37 responses covering 64 sessions	11 question survey taking less than 5 mins to complete automatically sent via email after each training session.
Determine uptake of training	Eventbrite registration data	449 registrations	
Gather advisor experiences	Workshop sessions	11 CBAs from 6 organisations engaged	In person feedback sessions as part of CBA forum meetings in Wiltshire and Somerset in April 2024. The sessions were recorded and notes made.
	Survey in SmartSurvey	21 responses	Link was emailed in late May 2024 to 182 advisors from more than 50 organisations that had participated in online training. The survey was open for just over two weeks. The survey included a prize draw for a £25 One4All voucher as an incentive.
Gather client experiences	Paper survey distributed to advisors. Identical survey in SmartSurvey	8 full responses, 1 partial	Paper survey (with link to an identical online survey) distributed by CBAs and by HES advisors at outreach events September 2023-June 2024. No incentive was offered.
Partner organisations' views	Interview	Senior staff from 4 organisations	Interviews used a topic guide, were conducted via Zoom and recorded. Notes were made in Excel.
CSE staff views	Interview	5 interviews involving staff across all project roles	As for Partner organisations.

Data analysis

Analysis of survey responses was conducted in MS Excel. Data was cleaned and checked for duplicates before analysis. Partial responses were only included if the question omitted was not essential to analysis (e.g. regarding communication method for further contact). Survey question responses were summarised using text, tables or charts to address the aims of the evaluation.

Workshop sessions were recorded with informed consent, and notes were collated based on a workshop structure. Findings were synthesized along with CBA feedback survey responses to yield a richer understanding of CBAs' views of the RESN.

Interviews were recorded with informed consent, notes made, and quotes extracted. Notes were analysed using light touch thematic analysis in MS Excel, based on interview topic guide questions. Analysis was also informed by workshop session notes.

Comments in surveys and interviews were formatted as quotes, assigning pseudonyms.

Limitations of data collection and analysis

Very few client survey responses were obtained. All survey responses were made online; no paper forms were returned. Paper surveys with stamped addressed envelopes were used to avoid low client feedback due to digital exclusion. Therefore, the conclusions which can be drawn about the quality of CBA advice, the outcomes and impacts for clients are extremely limited.

The CBA feedback survey response rate was 12% (21 responses from 182 CBA online training participants). Conclusions drawn are limited as feedback was obtained from a small number of respondents. Survey responses were anonymous, so it was impossible to determine whether a particular organisation or county was predominantly represented in responses. Nearly half the survey respondents worked for large community or voluntary sector organisations, which may bias results. These employees have more time to respond to work-related surveys and may be more likely to have provided energy advice. It is also likely that the most engaged CBAs would reply to the survey.

The Energy Support Network Teams channel was not significantly used during the evaluation report period (it had nine posts, most initiated by CSE staff). Data from this source was not included in the evaluation.

Community-based advisor training

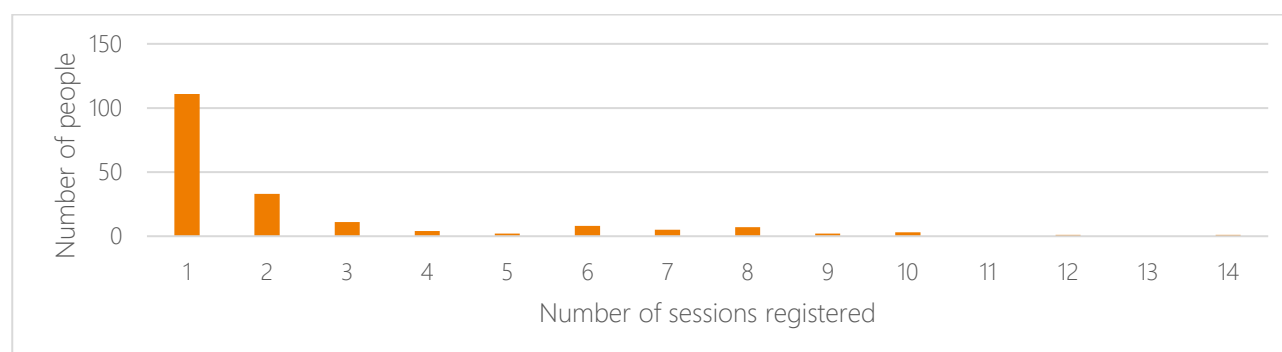
Between 17 February 2023 and 30 April 2024, 64 training sessions were delivered, covering 14 different advice topics. There were 449 registrations across all these events.

In total, 37 post-training survey responses were received from community-based advisors. The number of responses to survey questions varied for text-based answers only.

Training provided

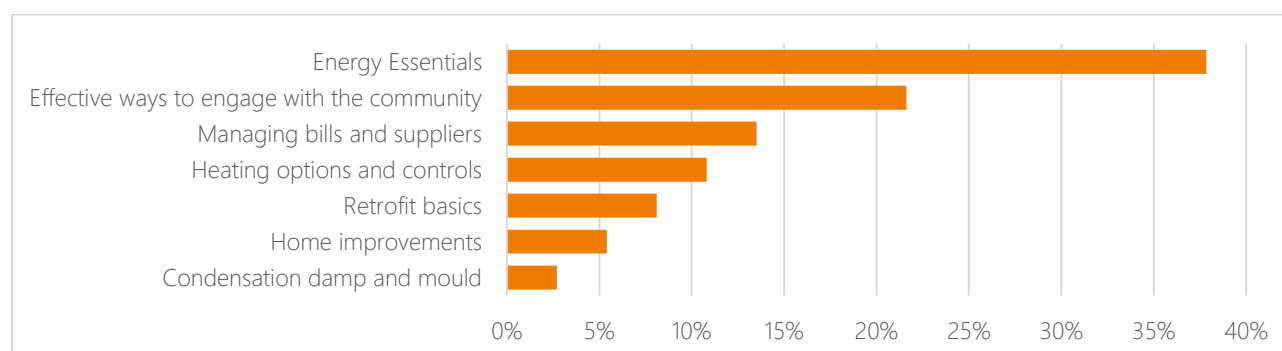
Eventbrite training registration data was used to identify whether community-based advisors registered for single or multiple training sessions. Figure 2 shows that 188 community-based advisors registered for one or more training sessions.⁴ The majority of people (59%, n=111) registered for just one session. Of the 77 training participants who registered for the remaining 338 training sessions, five participants attended ten or more trainings each. However, training registration does not indicate training attendance, which was not recorded.

Figure 2: The number of registrants registering for each number of sessions



From anonymous post-training survey responses, the number of respondents that attended each training topic is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents that attended each training topic (n=37)



⁴ This included if a community-based advisor registered for the same training on different dates.

Table 2 shows the number of sessions offered on each training topic. Energy Essentials was the topic with the most training sessions (12), whilst 'Energy efficiency for your community building' and 'How to run a workshop' had only a single training session. Funding for client information sessions were one off events for each county.

Table 2: Number of sessions offered per training topic

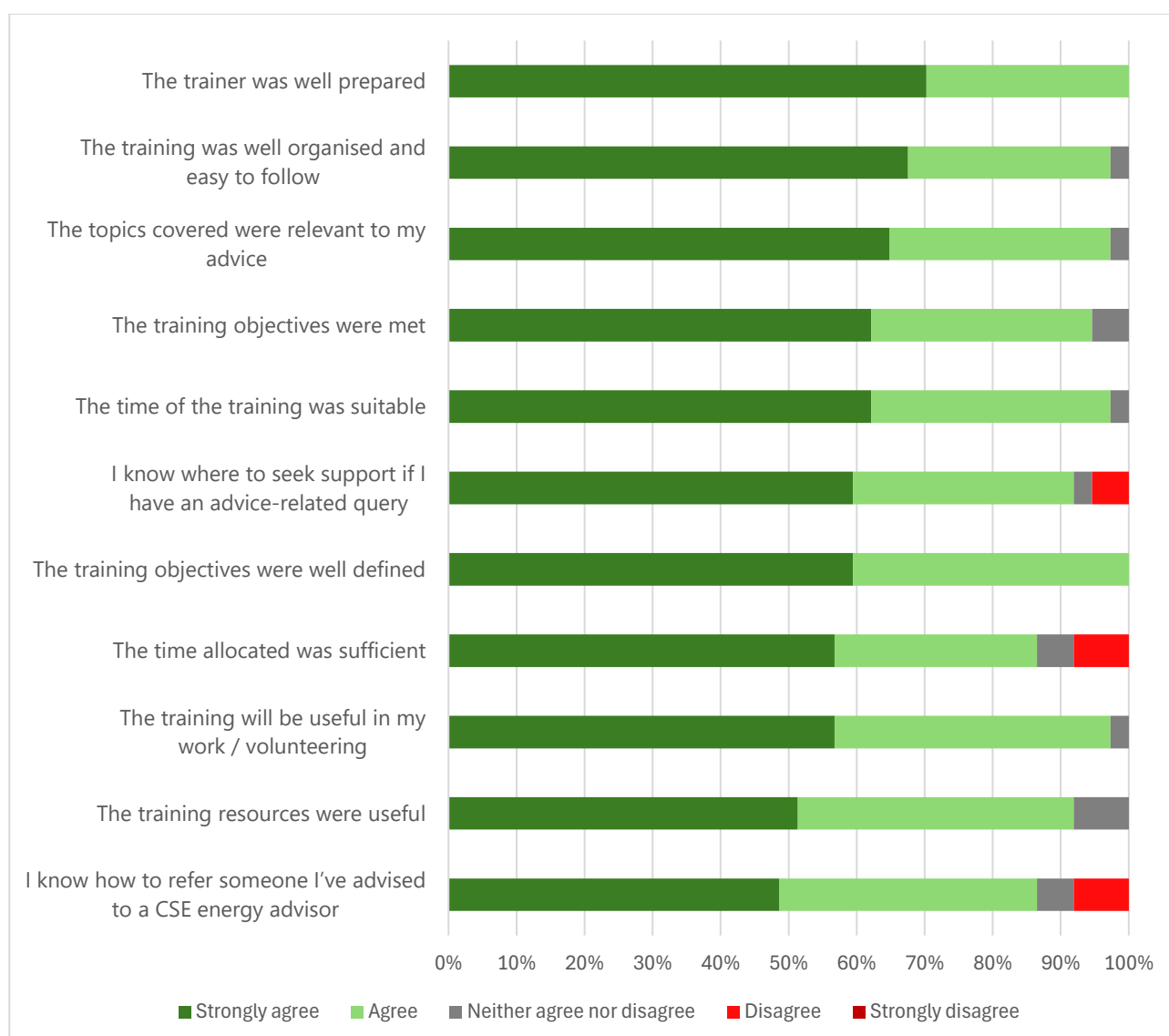
Training topic	Number of sessions offered
Energy Essentials	12
Condensation, Damp and Mould	8
Managing bills and energy suppliers	8
Heating options and controls	8
Effective ways to engage service users and the community	6
DIY Draughtproofing	5
Home improvements	5
Home Improvements and Draughtproofing	4
Effective ways to engage your community	2
Retrofit basics for households	2
Energy efficiency for your community building	1
How to run a workshop	1
RESN - Funding for clients information session (Somerset)	1
RESN - Funding for clients information session (Wiltshire)	1

The greatest attendance at training events was in the Spring and Winter (35%, n=13) and 32% (n=12). There was an even split between those attending training in the morning and afternoon.

Experiences of energy advice training

Figure 4Error! Reference source not found. shows survey respondents' experiences of the training session they attended. In general, respondents had very positive views of the training received, with at least 87% (n=32) strongly agreeing or agreeing with positive statements about the training. No respondents strongly disagreed with any of the statements.

Figure 4: Respondents' experiences with energy advice training (n=37)



Some respondents gave indications of improvements to the training sessions:

"All very insightful, had good myth busting."

Retrofit basics training was felt to be too much information in a short time:

"Split retrofit and renewable energy – a bit overwhelmed by the amount of information."

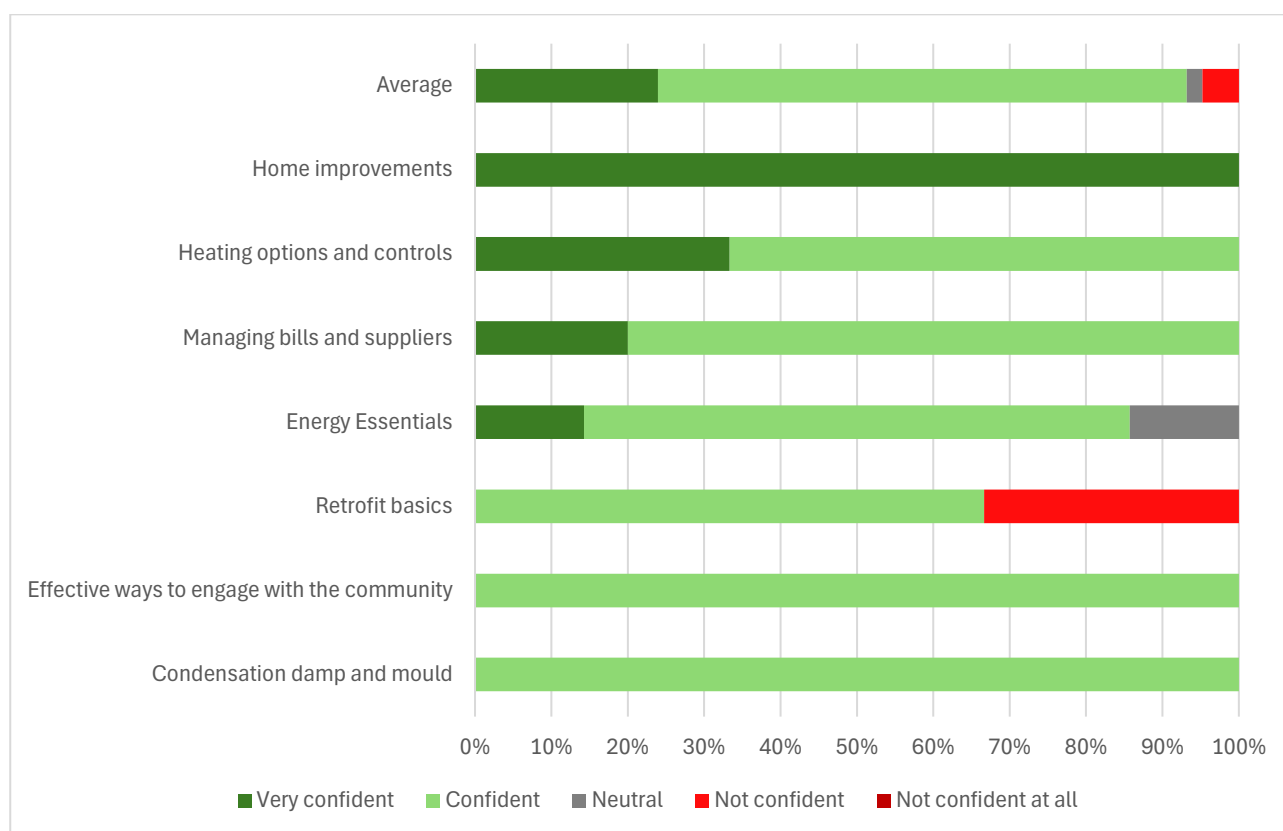
Participants in the 'Managing bills and suppliers' training mentioned that they would have liked the information delivered passed to them after the session:

"I would like to receive the information in printed form, so the bits I haven't retained I can look up."

Respondents were also asked to comment on their confidence in delivering basic energy advice following training (Figure 5). Most respondents felt confident across different topics. Retrofit

basics was the only topic with respondents reporting a lack of confidence in delivering advice after the session.

Figure 5: How confident respondents felt delivering energy advice after training (n=36)



Advisors asked for more information on the following topics:

- Finding contractors for those who self-fund energy efficiency measures.
- The financial help available for those in fuel poverty.
- Which appliances are best for different applications (e.g. air fryers, ovens).
- Infrared heaters.

Two topics came up as confusing:

- In Energy Essentials training, one respondent remarked it was unclear if finding out if a home had gas or electric heating would impact the advice they gave.
- In Retrofit basics, it was unclear to a respondent whether the infrared heating discussed was referring solely to patio heaters or not.

When asked what they most enjoyed about the training, many positive responses were received with respondents commenting on the friendliness, expertise and clarity of the trainers; the utility and clarity of the information received; the tailoring of the session to participants; the ability to ask questions.

Respondents made some suggestions to improve the training. These were:

- Increase time for the training.
- Improve provision of follow up information – e.g. email participants the relevant CSE leaflets.
- Increase interaction – for example via a quiz.

Respondents were given the opportunity to share anything else, such as the needs of their organisation. A few participants shared that they were in the early stages of getting established and that the training had been very helpful. One was interested in additional support for a potential CHEESE⁵ franchise, a thermal imaging survey service.

Two thirds of respondents were unsure if they would attend another training session (67%, n=24); 31% of participants (n=11) said they would attend another session; one participant (2%) said they would not. Most respondents reported that they would recommend the training to other agencies (92%) (n=33).

Discussion and summary

Overall, respondents viewed the training provided positively, with most respondents indicating the training was useful, enjoyable and impactful. There were some issues identified, though these were only in the minority of cases. These issues were the length of training and the knowledge of how to refer to CSE. Significantly, one training stood out as less useful and impactful – Retrofit basics – which needed more time.

Recommendations for training

- Revisit the Retrofit basics training to make it more accessible, separating out retrofit from renewables.
- Review how to share information about making referrals to CSE. Consider a simple handout.
- Provide further information on trusted traders for self-fund retrofit, financial help for those in fuel poverty, appliances and infrared heaters.

⁵ [Cold Homes Energy Efficiency Survey Experts \(CHEESE\) Project](#)

The effectiveness of community-based advice

Evidence from multiple sources was used to assess the effectiveness of community-based advice and its impact for advisors and their organisations. Data was drawn from:

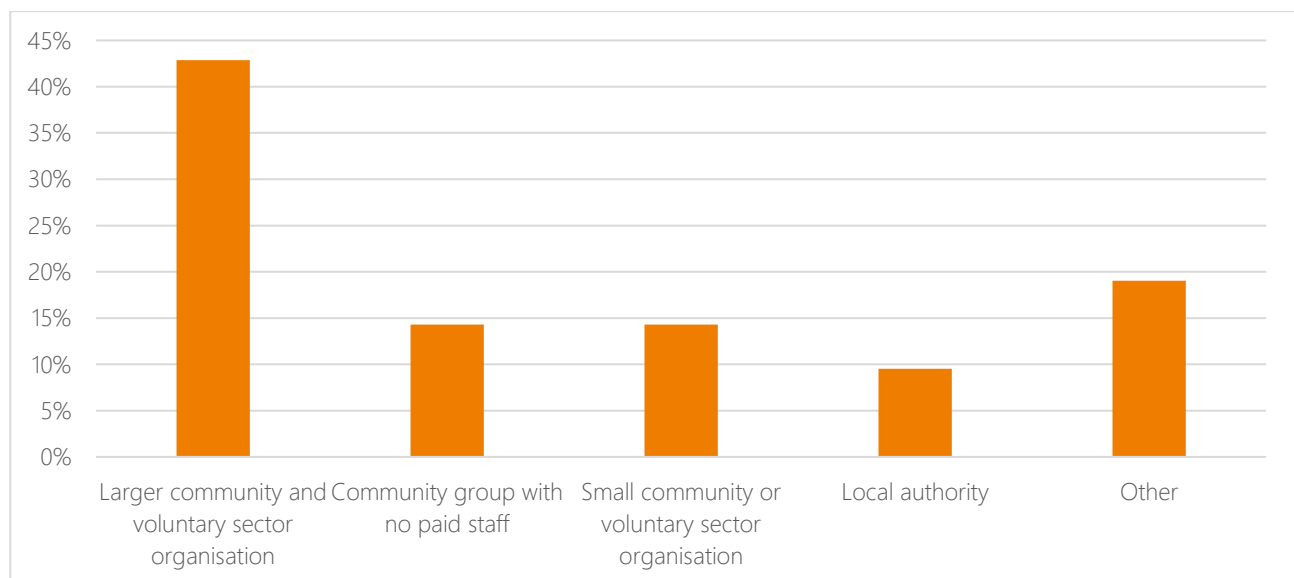
- A CBA online survey.
- Workshop sessions at two CBA forum meetings.

Twenty-one CBA feedback survey responses were received, a response rate of 12%. Eleven CBAs from six organisations attended workshop sessions during Wiltshire and Somerset RESN forum meetings.

Community-based advisors' experiences of the RESN

Figure 6 shows the different types of organisations that employed respondents to the community-based advisor survey.

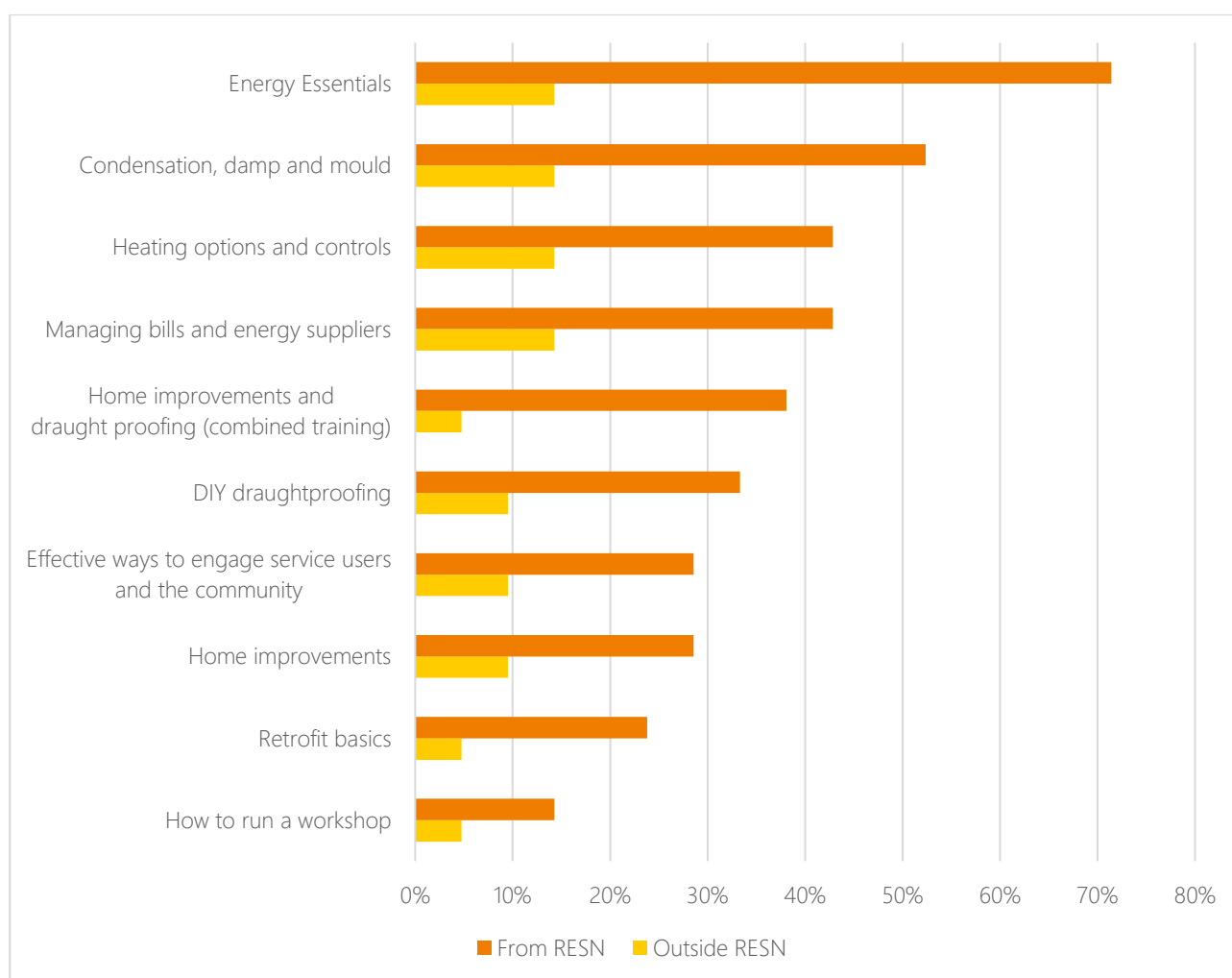
Figure 6: Type of organisation of CBA respondents (n=21)



The other types of organisations included credit unions, housing associations and community interest organisations.

The training that respondents had received, and whether this was under RESN or as part of other initiatives, is shown in Figure 7. Energy Essentials was the most common training received, with 'How to run a workshop' the least common. Training received correlates with the number of training sessions delivered on each topic (Table 1).

Figure 7: Training received by CBA respondents (n=21)



For CBAs that responded to the feedback survey, 85% (n=17) felt they were able to use the training to deliver advice. Of those who said they had not been able to use the training to give advice, two respondents (67%) remarked that their organisation was awaiting funding. The remaining respondent said they had not used the training directly but had used it to support their colleagues who were delivering advice.

Providing energy advice

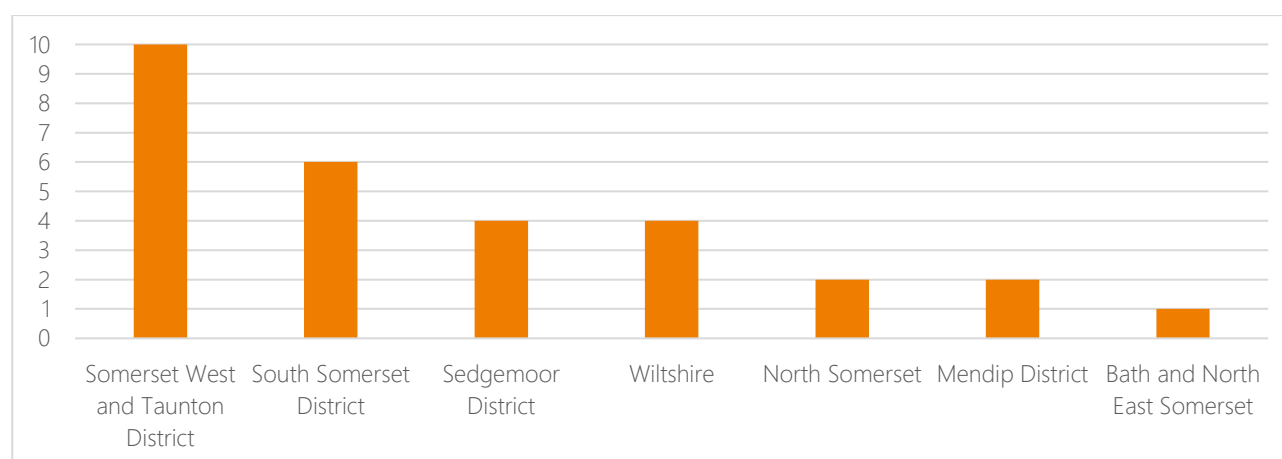
Respondents had offered energy advice through many methods. Nearly two thirds of CBA respondents used email (62% of CBAs, n=13), followed by advice over the phone and at home visits (both 33% of CBA respondents, n=7). Video conferencing was rarely used (one respondent, 5%).

Respondents stated that communication method most often used was home visits (29%, n=6), which was also the most often used communication method found for the same reporting period in 2022-23. This suggests that whilst more respondents use email to provide advice, home visits were the most often used method of communication with clients.

It was found that more than half of respondents (59%, n=10) shared advice less than five times a month. 23% of respondents (n=4) shared advice between 5 and 15 times a month, and 18% between 16 and 25 times a month (n=3). No respondents reporting sharing advice 16-25 times a month for the same period on 2022-23, yet the percentage of respondents that shared advice less than five times a month had increased by 13%.

Respondents were asked to give the main town/village areas and local authorities where they offered advice. The geographic areas where respondents provided advice are shown in Figure 8. Three respondents (8%) gave administrative districts directly, the rest of the respondents named specific towns they provided advice in. This suggests that the majority of respondents were focused on delivering advice within smaller communities. Two local authority areas (North Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset) are outside of the RESN project, indicating that some CBA organisations operate across multiple local authorities.

Figure 8: How many respondents are providing advice in each administrative region (n=17)

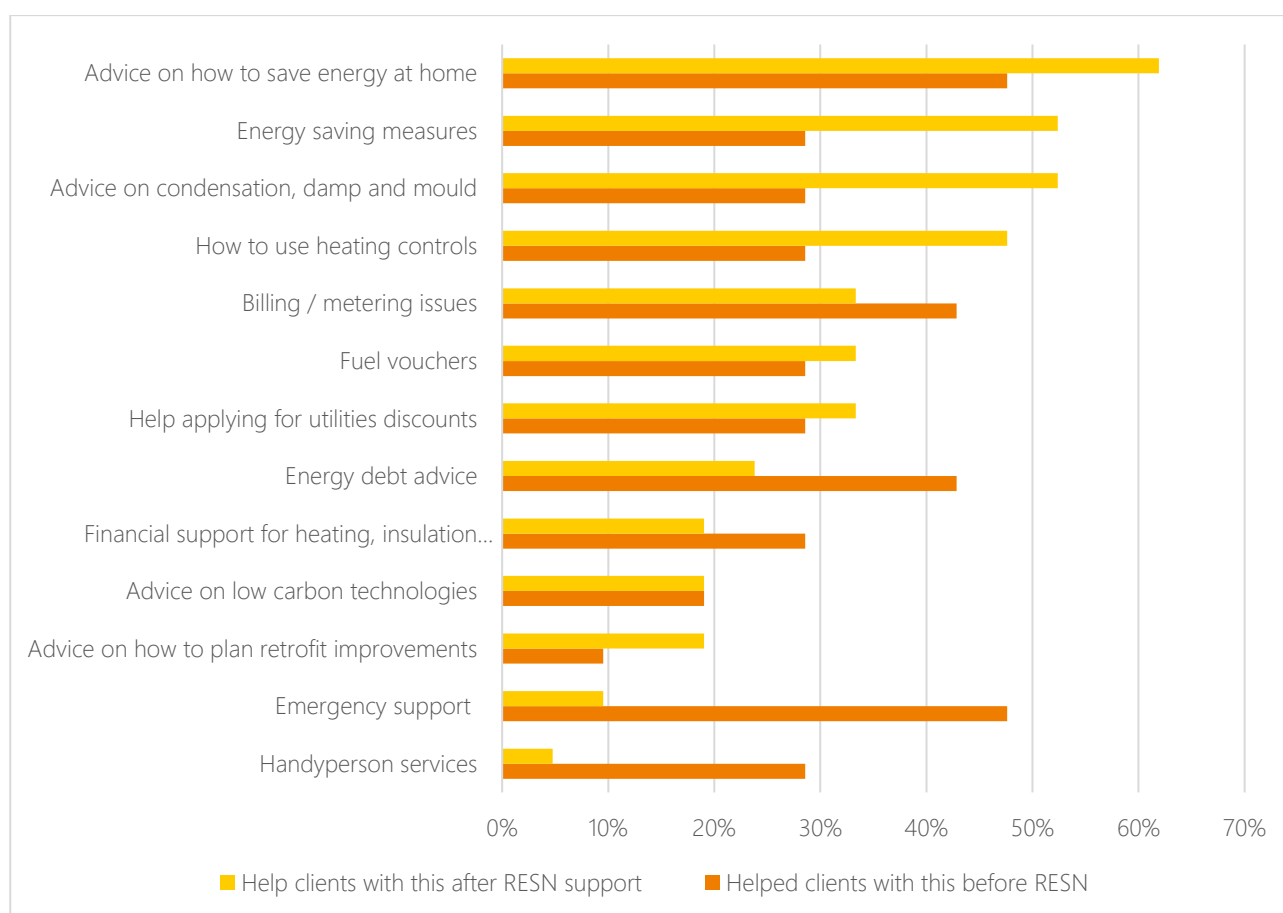


The clients that advisors work with

Advisors were asked to provide feedback on the clients that they work with. The most common groups that were targeted were the elderly and those on low incomes. Several respondents also work with those who rent or are in social housing. Some respondents also highlighted their work with care leavers, young people and those with young children.

Advisors were asked what energy-related issues their clients encountered, and how they respond to these issues after receiving training (Figure 9). Before training, CBAs focused more on emergency and financial support, billing and metering, energy debt and information on trusted handypersons. After training, there was greater emphasis on energy saving, damp and mould, and heating controls.

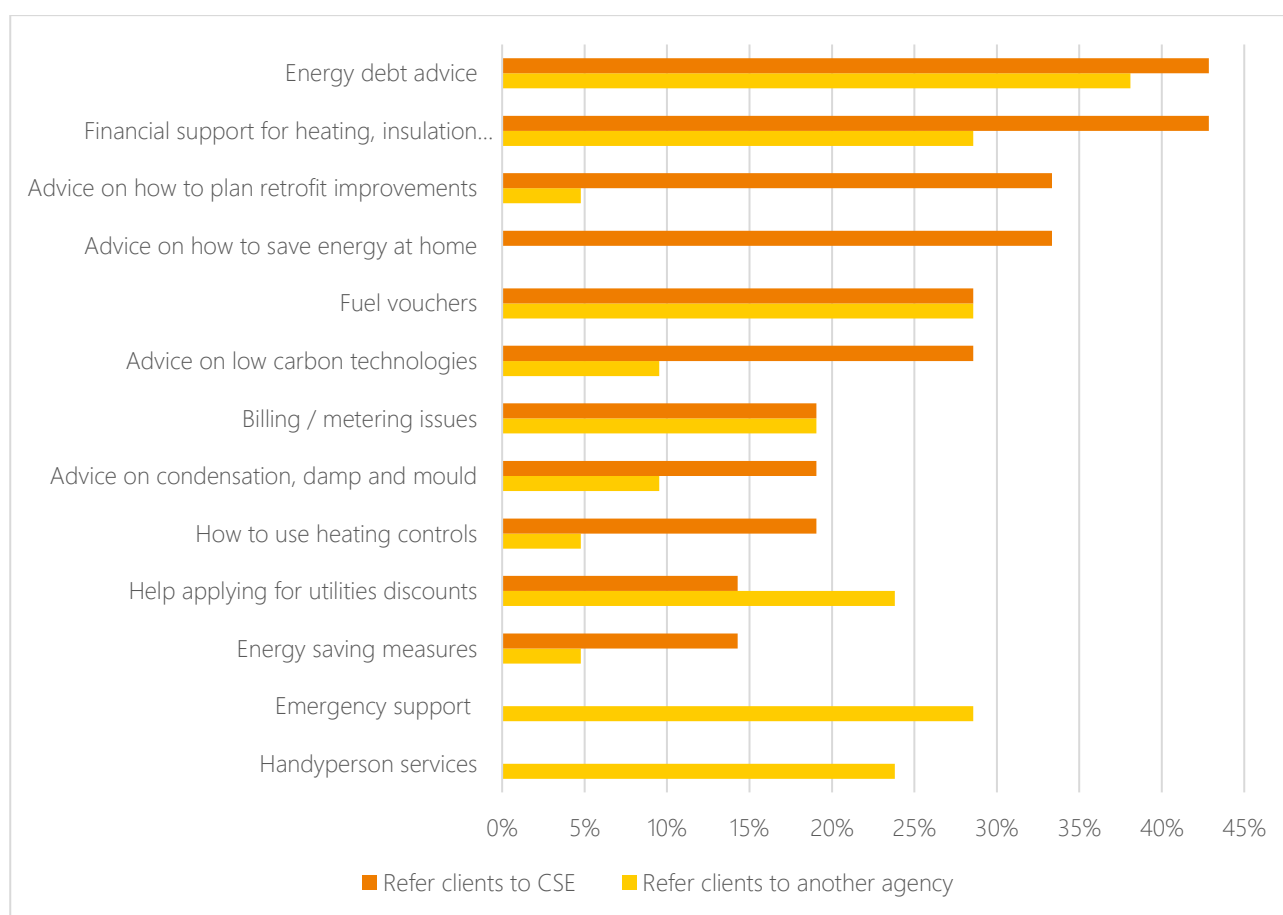
Figure 9: Advice respondents gave before and after RESN support (n=21)



When detailed casework is needed, CBAs are encouraged to refer their clients. Figure 10 shows where respondents refer their clients to for different advice. Respondents indicated that energy debt advice, energy efficiency grants, advice on retrofit and low carbon technologies were the main reasons for referrals to CSE. CBAs referred to other organisations for emergency support and trusted handypersons.

When CBAs were asked about energy issues that they did not know where to refer people to for support, respondents mentioned bespoke retrofit and technical advice on home improvements and how to escalate action on grid constraints for community scale solutions. No suggestions were made on how to improve training.

Figure 10: Where CBAs refer clients to for casework or further support (n=21)



Advisor reflections on providing advice and challenges encountered

At workshops, CBAs shared that the shock of energy price rises had driven people who'd not normally approach them for help – like low to average income households not overly motivated by energy or climate issues – to seek advice. CBAs were highly motivated to learn how to reach out effectively to those that needed help but might not ask for it. Approaches shared included:

- Having unofficial conversations with people at existing events, to build up trust. In one village, some CBAs encountered 'outsider mentality' even though they'd been a resident for 20 years.
- Engaging via social prescribers and schools (information for all families in schools).

One advisor reflected that after a year of offering advice, there were now tangible outcomes. They received indirect feedback about energy issues from a network of companions that did home visits, some of whom had attended Energy Essentials training. They were the 'person to go to' if companions had an energy-related query.

A CBA shared success in providing thermal imaging surveys in homes and schools:

“Pupils looked at the lights. There were high energy light bulbs still in three of the lights in the library. The door was wide open and the underfloor heating was on. The kids put the camera on the floor and it was 28 degrees. They learnt quite a lot. So besides using a thermal imaging camera in peoples’ houses you can use it as an educational tool in schools.” Wiltshire CBA

CBAs mentioned challenges in offering energy advice. They lacked grants information, for both low-income and self-financing households, to support local people’s retrofit journey. Grant information wasn’t available to CBAs due to the complicated, changing landscape of financial support for energy efficiency improvements. Referrals to CSE are encouraged for this support.

Challenges around framing energy conversations was raised. Advisors avoided terms like ‘climate change’, ‘energy’ or ‘fuel poverty’. They used fun, practical activities like ‘cake for less’ which explored low energy cooking to engage with people.

Engaging carers proved to be a real challenge, as this group experience multiple barriers to participation in the energy system. Health issues, debt increases, and complex situations generally made it more difficult for people to engage with CBAs:

“I’ve got carers...they’re so busy looking after the patient...they haven’t got time to think about how damp and cold the house is. They’re just keeping so-and-so alive. In winter they can’t go out to a Warm Space. By the time they’ve put them in the car....can’t do that. The client doesn’t want another stranger in their home.” Somerset CBA

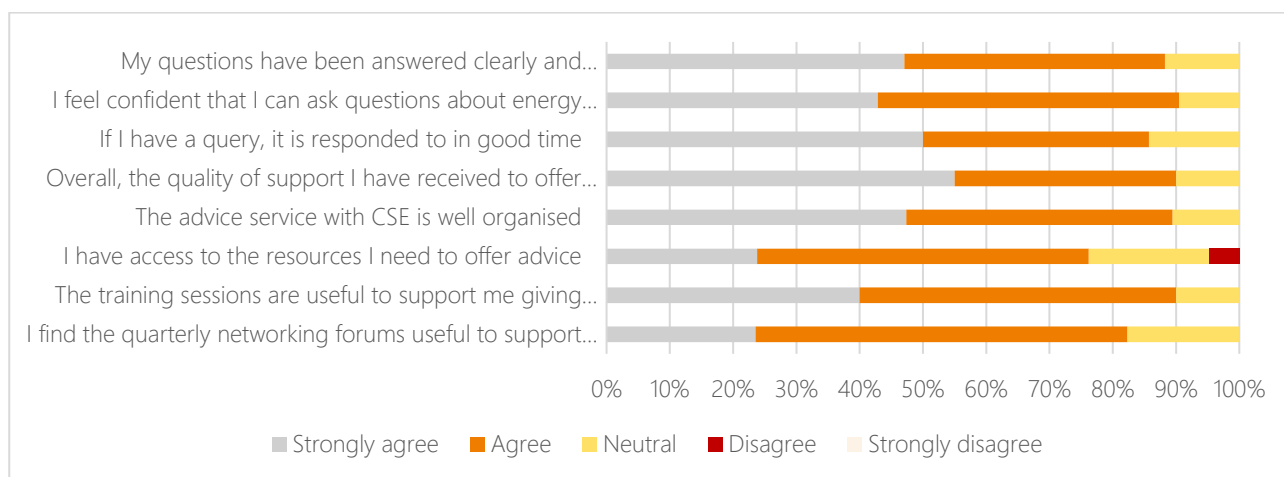
Whilst they could offer energy advice, CBAs recognised that it was a complex area and that there was a lot to learn. Some CBAs expressed frustration at their lack of wider knowledge about the benefits system, legal challenges or rights. They signposted clients to appropriate services for these.

For parish councils overwhelmed with demands on their time, packaged delivery of an event on energy and financial support that they didn’t have to organise was the preferred option. For some CBAs, it was unclear to what extent CSE could support co-delivery of an event.

Advice support

From survey responses, almost all advisors agreed or strongly agreed that the support offered by CSE had been helpful (ranging from 76% to 90%, n=16-19) (Figure 11). A minority of advisors (10% to 19%, n=2-4) were neutral. The support premise with the least agreement (66%, n=14) was ‘I have access to the resources I need to offer advice’.

Figure 11: CBA views on advice support provided (n=21)



CBA comments on the support received praised the CSE team's friendliness and supportive attitudes. Others raised the limited time they had to give advice at this time, but that they hoped to better apply the support in future.

Survey respondents and workshop participants suggested information, practical resources and further training that would help them to offer energy advice:

Practical resources

- A checklist of what to ask about and consider, for different tenures.
- Easy games highlighting cost and usage of different electrical items (Energy Bingo).
- More case studies on energy efficiency improvements.
- A route map or referral decision tree with what help is available and from where. (This can help to manage client expectations on the support that CBAs can offer).
- Samples of insulation materials.

Information

- Grants information including eligibility requirements.
- A leaflet summarising the support available from CSE with contact details for clients.
- Energy comparisons e.g. cost to boil a kettle compared to use of a coffee machine.
- Priority Services Register, its benefits and how people can sign up themselves.
- Multi-language fact sheets and leaflets.
- Details of CSE support for co-delivery or delivery of workshops and events.
- A video on how CBAs can refer and clients can self-refer to CSE.
- Heat pump myth busting to counter misinformation.
- Signpost to impartial information e.g. environmental impact of electric vehicles versus internal combustion engine cars.
- A local directory of TrustMark providers to support people in their retrofit journey. (This is provided by TrustMark via a postcode search facility on its website.)

Training

- Thermal imaging.
- Futureproof retrofit training.
- Retrofit for traditional buildings.

- Communication, framing and tailoring language.
- Basic debt advice.

Referral process

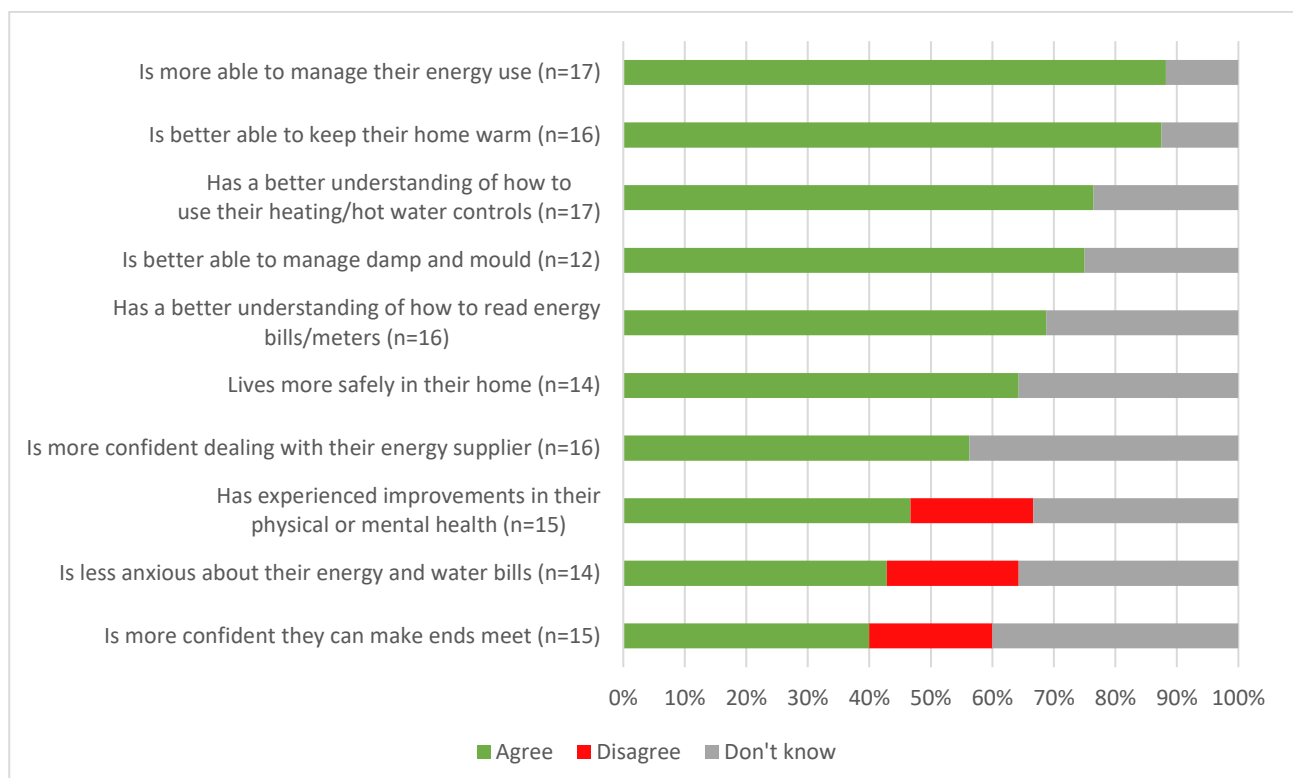
From survey responses, 29% of respondents had referred a client to CSE for in depth support, 5% had not (n=21). Of those who had referred to CSE, all found it very easy or easy to refer. All CBAs that had referred to CSE found it very useful or useful. One respondent commented that the waiting list for clients posed a barrier to referring to CSE.

CBA participants in workshop sessions had little knowledge or experience of making referrals. They suggested that providing training to carer support organisations and children's social care workers that do home visits would help to reach people most in need.

The impact of offering energy advice

In the survey, advisors were asked to comment on how energy advice has affected their clients' lives by agreeing or disagreeing with statements starting 'Your client...' The results of this are shown in Figure 12. Respondents could mark a statement as not applicable to their clients, therefore n= for each statement refers to the number of respondents who felt that that statement was relevant to their clients. CBAs disagreed that advice had helped their clients with their physical or mental health, anxiety about energy and water bills, and being able to make ends meet, likely due to the cost-of-living crisis.

Figure 12: How energy advice had affected clients' lives. The client...



Advisors were asked what outcomes they believed they had received personally, and what outcomes their organisation had experienced from the training. These results are shown in Figure 13 and Figure 14, respectively. In general, respondents noted several outcomes for both them and their organisation. In particular, increased personal and organisational knowledge was a common outcome reported.

As an additional personal outcome, CBAs reported that the training came in useful in their personal lives – either improving their own homes or helping friends. Three advisors selected all six options (excluding ‘other’) for personal outcomes and four selected none.

At an organisational level, one respondent commented that a stronger connection with CSE resulted in CSE staff participating in an event they organised. One advisor selected seven options (excluding ‘other’) for organisational outcomes, and two selected none.

Figure 13: Personal outcomes respondents experienced (n=21)

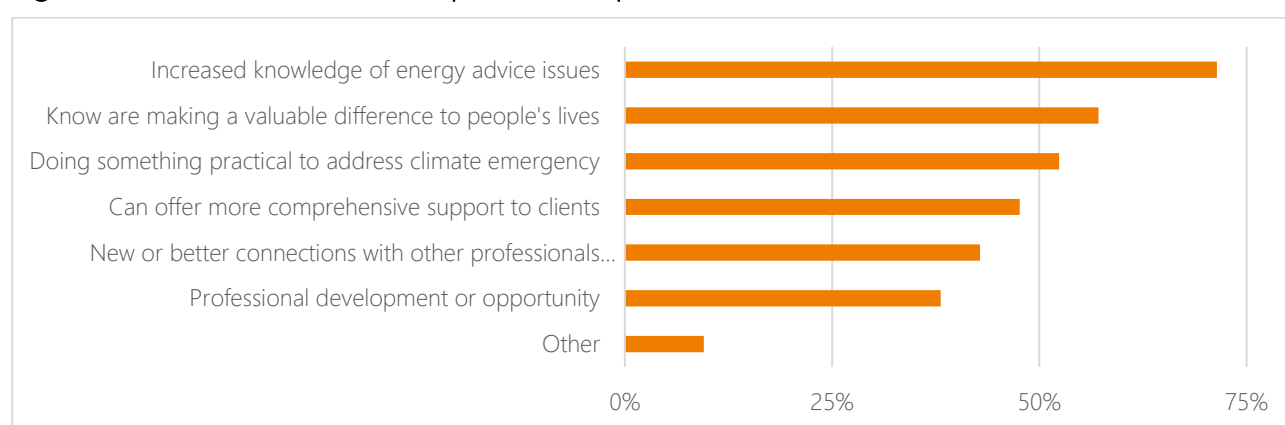
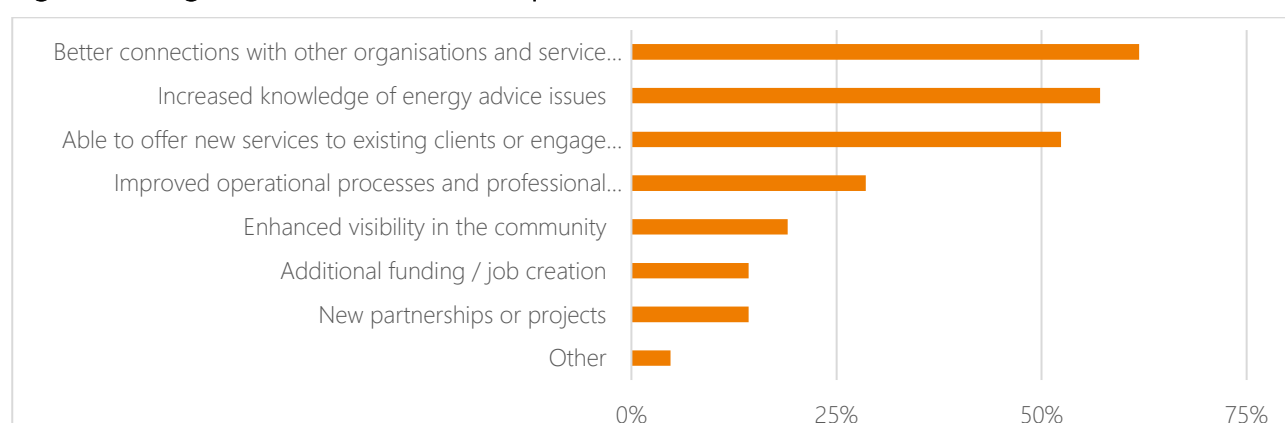


Figure 14: Organisational outcomes respondents observed (n=21)



Discussion and summary

Overall, CBAs felt capable of delivering advice and this advice was delivered across the full range of locations the RESN programme intended to support (Somerset and Wiltshire). Survey respondents saw many positive outcomes from attending the training, in terms of their personal and organisational skills and development, as well as positive impacts for their clients.

Respondents highlighted three areas where energy advice delivered had had limited impact on improving their clients' lives. These areas related to health and finances are more intractable and difficult to impact with advice alone. It may reflect wider cost of living or debt problems experienced by clients, or that clients did not share changes in health issues with CBAs.

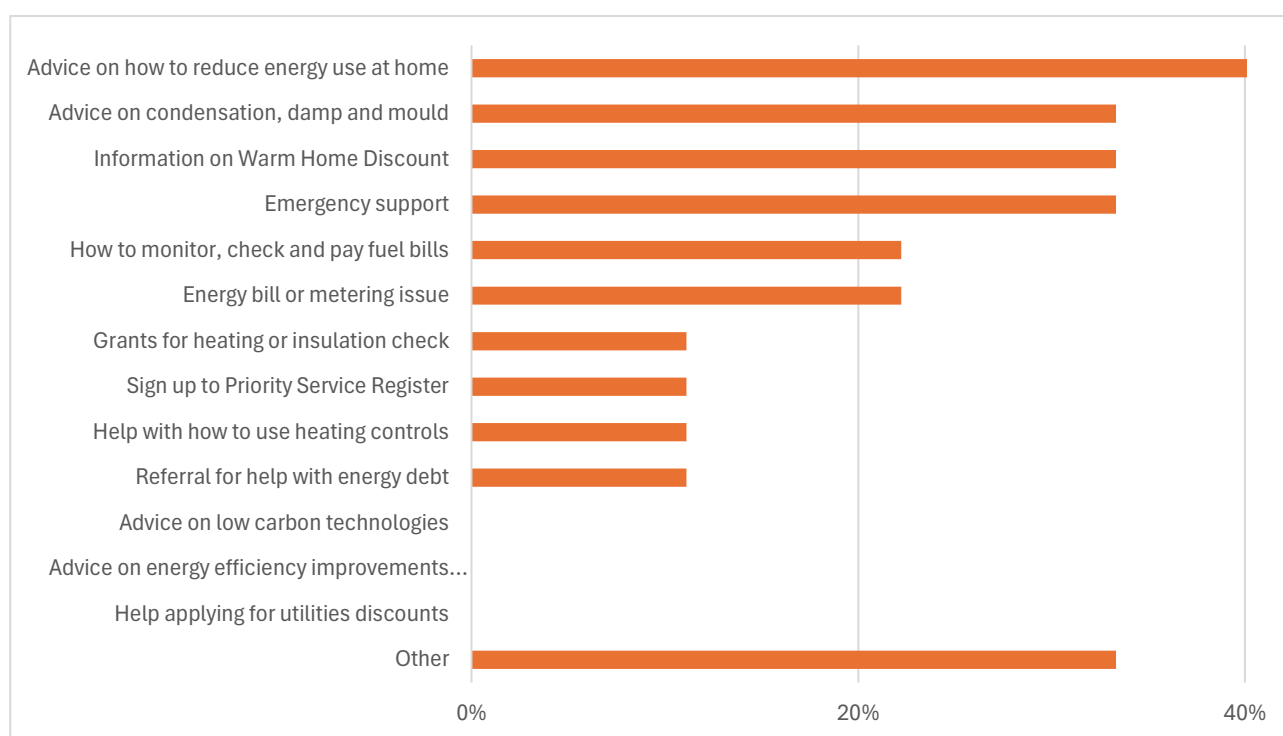
Recommendations

- Consider developing additional practical resources and information for advisors' use – such as games, a route map outlining help available, grants information, and a video or other resource to support referrals.
- Provide training on new topics like thermal imaging and traditional buildings.
- Integrate aspects of empathetic support and communication into training, so advisors can alleviate client anxiety and concerns.

Client experiences

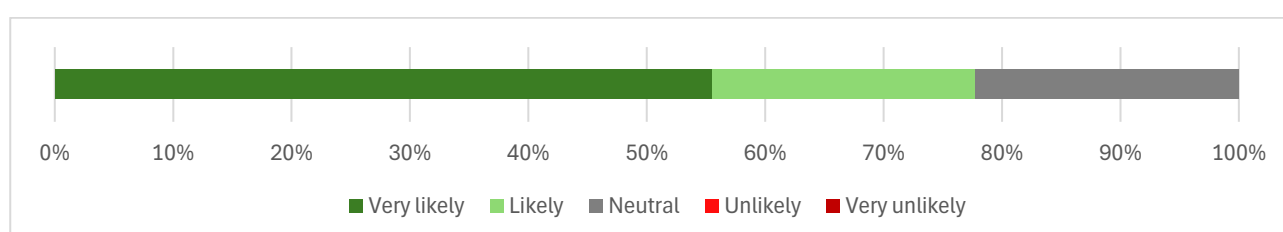
Between September 2023 to March 2024, eight complete and one partial client survey responses were received. Figure 15 shows the support respondents received. The most common support topics (33% of respondents, n=3) were advice on how to reduce energy use at home; condensation, damp and mould; information on the Warm Home Discount; emergency support. No respondents received support on low carbon technologies, energy efficiency improvements, or help applying for utilities discounts. Those that indicated they had received other support and gave details all remarked they had received thermal imaging surveys.

Figure 15: Advice and support received by client respondents (n=9)



All client respondents reported that they were very satisfied (67%, n=6) or satisfied (33%, n=3) with the advice they received. They also found understanding the advice very easy (44%, n=4) or easy (56%) (n=5). Respondents stated that they were likely to implement the advice they had received within a month, as shown in Figure 16.

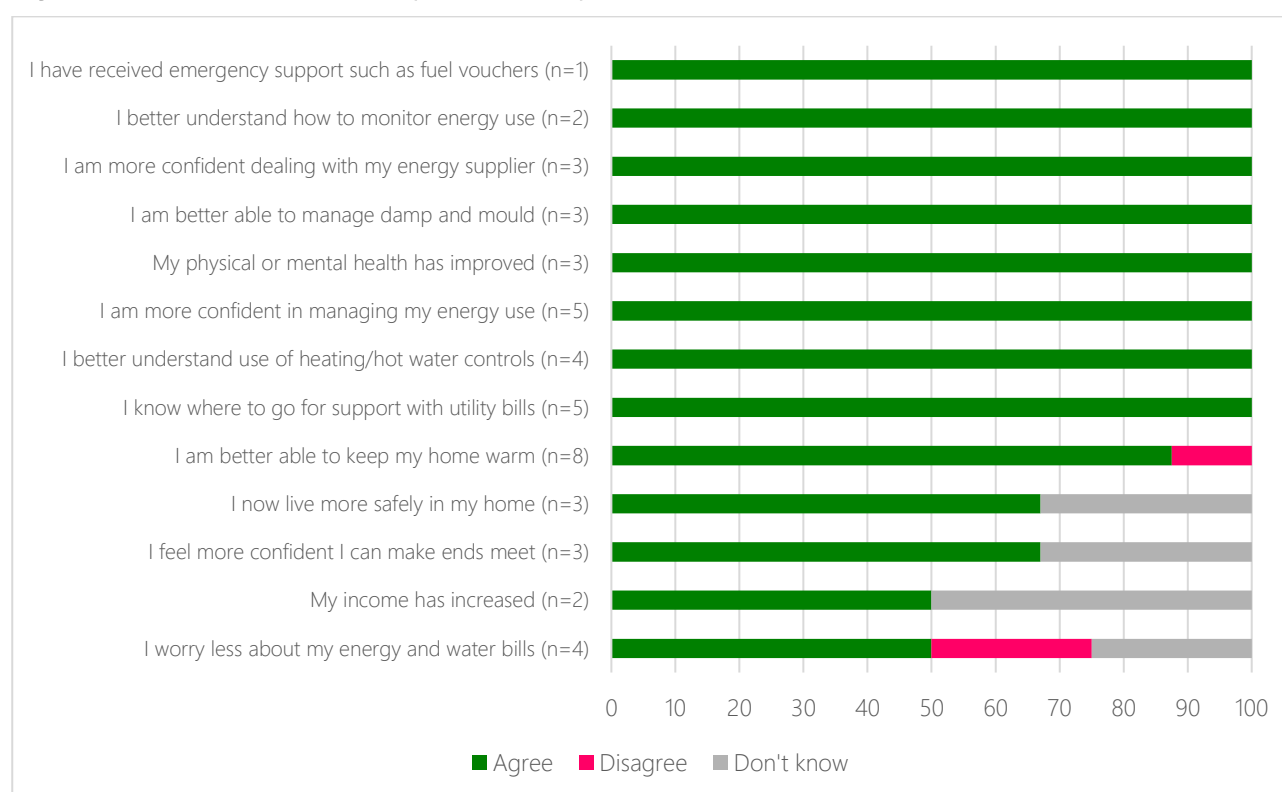
Figure 16: How likely were client respondents to take actions to reduce or manage their energy use at home in the next month (n=9)



Just over three quarters of respondents (78%, n=7) felt that the advice had mostly resolved their issue; 22% (n=2) felt that it was partially resolved. However, no respondents selected that their issue had been fully resolved.⁶

Respondents gave their views on the outcomes they experienced due to the advice they received (Figure 17). In general, where the outcome was relevant to the advice they received, most felt the advice had improved their outcome. Some respondents stated that the advice received hadn't enabled them to keep their home warm, nor helped them to worry less about energy and water bills. It is unclear if this is due to wider issues (e.g. advice being unable to improve the ability of the respondents to pay their bills).

Figure 17: Outcomes client respondents experienced as a result of the advice received



Challenges with obtaining client feedback

In workshop sessions, CBAs discussed the challenges of obtaining client feedback. Most CBAs had one-off informal conversations with people, for example at an event or a weekly advice stall. They did not record contact details. CBAs perceived that the public were generally resistant to giving feedback unless they'd received a specific service. Asking for feedback could put people off seeking advice. CBAs considered that establishing a trusted relationship was most important. When more in-depth tailored advice was provided, such as a thermal imaging survey, paper feedback forms were left with clients. Feedback via events or drop ins tended to be easier to obtain.

⁶ The options for this question were Completely / Mostly / Partly / Only slightly resolved, and Not resolved. Framing the question with mainly positive options is likely to positively bias responses.

CBAs suggested incentives like a quarterly prize draw for clients and an incentive for CBAs to obtain feedback. Unless CSE receives a referral, it has no access to contact details of clients.

Discussion and summary

Based on very limited direct feedback from nine clients, three quarters reported they'd had a productive experience – they were likely to take action within a month of receiving advice and that their energy issue was mainly or partly resolved. Clients also experienced positive outcomes, except in relation to anxiety about bills and being able to keep warm.

The challenges in obtaining client feedback hampers:

- A viable assessment of the impact of the RESN for clients.
- Better understanding of the quality of advice that CBAs are delivering and what further support might be needed.

Recommendations

CSE should assess whether feedback from CBA clients is required. If so:

- Offer incentives for both clients and CBAs.
- Obtain feedback at events and drop ins directly, as well as indirectly via CBAs.
- Add RESN to the CSE referral form so CSE can track referrals from the network and to enable contact of clients referred for casework for evaluation purposes.
- Use case studies or other methods to capture client outcomes and impact.

RESN as an approach to providing energy advice and support

This section explores partner organisation and CSE staff views on the RESN and the efficacy of developing a rural advice network to meet consumer demand for energy advice. Evidence is drawn from CBA feedback surveys, interviews with partner organisations and CSE staff. Interviews were conducted with senior staff from four partner organisations (two county-wide network organisations; two delivery partners) and five CSE staff (lead advisors for both Wiltshire and Somerset; training administrator, community fund co-ordinator, project manager).

Changes in CSE RESN delivery since April 2023

The RESN adopted new types of support in April 2023.

- A small community fund grant scheme for CBA organisations was launched to support advice giving. Grants of up to £5,000 could be used for staffing events, venue hire, information, or advice resources.
- Some training options were repackaged and shortened to make them more accessible. Some sessions were delivered in person. A video of each training session was made available for trainees to view on SharePoint.
- People that attended training and community groups in Somerset and Wiltshire could opt into joining the network, rather than needing to join the network to receive training. A fortnightly email newsletter was circulated.
- Lead energy advisors in each county offered a weekly half-hour online mentoring drop in for any CBAs that had questions.
- Quarterly in-person forums arranged in Somerset and Wiltshire, to increase networking opportunities for organisations, as well as cover current information and updates.

Community-based advisor views of the RESN

CBA survey respondents reported that the aspects of the RESN that had been most useful to them were the training, forum meetings and information resources. The opportunity to network, have conversations about retrofit and access to support from CSE advisors were also valued:

“I know I have a lot to learn and I want that. I am pleased to have found a supporting organisation that will help me to help other people and that I can refer them to, and at the same time help with climate change.” CBA

CBAs gave no comments about activities and resources that were less useful.

When asked to suggest ways in which the RESN could be made more diverse or accessible to professionals, respondents mentioned making the network easier to find out about and join. They also suggested recording training sessions to help with scheduling other work⁷.

Partner organisation opinions on the RESN

The activities and roles of partner organisations in the RESN are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of partner organisations interviewed

Organisation pseudonym	Activities	Role in RESN
Network-1	County-wide Voluntary and Community Sector support, representation and communications	Marketing
Network-2	County-wide Voluntary and Community Sector support, representation and communications	Marketing
Delivery-1	Home Improvement Agency which changed focus to retrofit delivery in 2023	Events
Delivery-2	County-wide network of advisors that work in small communities, including social prescribers. Support organisations. Talking Café events.	Network of CBAs

The role of the two network organisations had been to promote RESN activities and identify contacts in locations in need of support. The two delivery organisations were both in Somerset. The remit of one organisation (Delivery-1) changed significantly from being a Home Improvement Agency to delivering retrofit. At the same time, funding for adaptations changed county-wide from being means-tested to loan-based. This organisation gave retrofit presentations at RESN events and referred clients to CSE for retrofit support:

In contrast, partner organisation Delivery-2 played a significant role in RESN via a network of existing community-based advisors. Delivery-2, as the organisation with the most significant reach in its county, provided monthly reporting updates to CSE on CBA advice activities.

Successful aspects of the RESN for partner organisations

Partner organisation interviewees reflected that, overall, the **concept and delivery** of RESN had been solid, well thought out and well-resourced. Partners had not been asked to deliver too much. Activities had fitted in with existing workload.

Network organisations reported having a **positive working relationship** with CSE with regular check-in.

⁷ Recordings of training sessions were available to training participants on the SharePoint.

A network organisation interviewee thought that the **quality of resources, training and outreach** was a strength to build on. They described **network opportunities** and their belief that, with time, connections with a county social inclusion network, social prescribers and children's centres could be developed. The interviewee also stated that **small community grants** were valuable to support community-based advice giving:

"Community groups benefit from small funding, easy to apply for. People are pushed for time. This has been growing due to funding cuts. What gets squeezed is people's time to research something e.g. read a paper or listen to a podcast. This can extend the reach of training." Network-2

Aspects of the RESN that didn't work as well for partner organisations

In interviews, staff from partner organisations made a number of observations of what hadn't worked so well in the RESN. Firstly, there was **no sense of being part of a network**. They didn't know which other partner organisations were involved. A project meeting with all partner organisations and sharing the location of CBA activities could have facilitated greater buy in to the RESN by partner organisations. The Network-1 interviewee noted that they lacked feedback about advice activities 'in their patch' and whether local organisations' expectations had been met by RESN activities.

Similarly, two organisations (Delivery-2 and Network-2) stated that **wider regional networking and knowledge** hadn't been part of the RESN:

"For me it would be invaluable to have an insider view of what's happening [across the sector], what aspirations are, to have regular check ins around that and to help to shape that." Network-2

Secondly, staff from partner organisations described that **unclarified or differing expectations** of their role and involvement in the RESN was a challenge. A network organisation interviewee related that they were unsure if they were doing enough for the funding they received:

"Are we giving you what you were hoping for and enough of what you were hoping for? And if not, what more could we do?" Network-1

They suggested that revisiting the partnership agreement at the start of and during the project would have been useful.

Expectations on the modus operandi and roles played by Delivery-2 staff and CSE were quite different, based on interviews with staff from both organisations. CSE expected that there would be:

- CBAs with minimum training of Energy Essentials in all five districts.
- One champion CBA for each district who had completed further RESN energy trainings and could support other advisors.

- A central lead advisor, who had completed all training and coordinated with district champions. This could include proactive organisation and delivery of events (or co-delivery with CSE).

Whilst these roles happened, their purpose for Delivery-2 was reporting outcomes back to CSE. There was not a co-ordinated approach to wider energy activity that CSE had assumed would be part of the partnership. Delivery-2 saw this as separate to RESN. Meanwhile, these differing expectations created friction for Delivery-2 staff:

“That lack of clarity lead to some staff feeling externally rather than internally directed, so there was an element of friction between CSE staff on the ground and our staff in terms of different understandings and expectations of the project. At times it probably didn't feel like a partnership or a collaboration.”
Delivery-2

A third challenge raised by the Delivery-2 interviewee was **a mismatch between advisor depth of engagement with clients and the focus of RESN**. Its advisors tended to have in depth contact with clients, rather than offering light touch advice to many people. This was perceived to run counter to CSE's 'numbers focused' reporting requirements for the RESN:

“CSE was more worried about the numbers than the impact, high targets to reach. Ultimately, what we were delivering was high level numbers of people we'd touched. We felt that there was potential to do a bit more on actual impact to find out how that advice had landed. It did very much feel like volumes of interactions...better to do a presentation with twenty people in a support group than do an intervention with a person in a 1:1. and that's probably not where our staff lean in their day-to-day work.” Delivery-2

This is a point not only for CSE to contemplate but also Energy Redress. Do high target number application requirements serve the complex casework needs of many energy consumers?

Another challenge raised by two organisations was the **need for flexible partnerships which could respond to emergent local needs**. The Delivery-2 and Network-2 interviewees suggested that a co-production approach with community organisations could benefit the RESN:

“The offer to groups needs to be really tailored these days to make sure it lands. I think you can only do that by co-producing ...to understand what is people's capacity to access this information? How do they want information to be delivered? How can we ensure that we're meeting people's needs and their aspirations for their spot? What's their capacity? What can we deliver to different audiences?” Network-2

CSE staff reflections on the RESN

RESN in Somerset and Wiltshire

In interviews and at workshops, CSE staff reflected on the differences in delivery across the two counties. In Somerset, there was more engagement, as a county-wide network of community-based advisors was already established and there was full time outreach-focused CSE advisor support. Wiltshire lacked a community-based advice network and had a 0.5FTE CSE advisor whose focus was split between casework and outreach. Both counties had other CSE advice projects operating alongside RESN. These were coordinated by a senior project manager in Somerset, whilst in Wiltshire different project managers negotiated on project delivery. This suggests that at county level, outreach-focused roles in the RESN and clear coordination of CSE advice projects supports network development.

Successful aspects of the RESN for CSE

Staff interviewed stated that the **community fund** had been a useful addition to the RESN. For April 2023-March 2024, nine grants had been awarded to community groups of just under £26,000. Applicants used grants for advice events, information (thermometer cards, printing) and to purchase thermal imaging cameras. It was reported that community groups needed a lot of hand holding to make applications, for instance, they were unsure what they could use funding for and how to budget for energy saving resources (e.g. LED light bulbs, draught proofing). CSE staff created an excel tool to support funding applications with tabs for different types of projects, in which community groups could change the numbers and get a budget.

Forum meetings were considered important to support the capacity of frontline service staff, although attendance had been limited, with three to eight attendees per meeting.

Community outreach was valued by staff as an effective means to build connections, trust and confidence with CBAs and residents.

Aspects of the RESN that didn't work so well from a CSE perspective

Training attendance was generally low, with five or fewer trainees per session. The frequency of repetition of each training session (1-5 times a year) was thought to contribute to this.

Advisors reported that the **weekly online mentoring sessions** were poorly attended, although helpful when people did. People emailed if they had a question. Staff thought that time could be better spent proactively contacting network members.

Broader networking between RESN participants had proved elusive. Three factors played a role in this: the online platform used, participants' priorities and diversity of the network.

- The SharePoint (as with the Teams channel) was not greatly accessed by CBAs. The SharePoint contained training videos (which training participants could watch online), plus

training and advice resources. Other platforms (e.g. Slack, Trello) were not used due to lack of network member familiarity with them.

- On participants' priorities, CSE staff commented that frontline workers were too busy to engage in networks. For community groups, it wasn't their job.
- Staff reported that it was hard to find commonality between over 400 network members.

Staff questioned the time commitment required for network development and facilitation, particularly if it had limited use for participants. However, they also said that the RESN was not as collaborative as they'd hoped.

Limited feedback from CBAs on their energy advice activities and also from CBAs' clients hindered CSE understanding on the location, extent and quality of advice across the network. Obtaining client feedback was included as a requisite for community fund grant recipients:

"People are not interested in evidencing our outcomes; they are only interested in evidencing their own. It's easier if you work with an organisation like [Delivery-2] which has to evidence everything. But when you're working with other organisations that are not going to be delivering energy advice and might have the odd conversation its really difficult to get them to feedback."

CSE advisor

Network member confusion resulted due to overlapping CSE activities. For instance, CBAs were unclear of the remit of the RESN, and other CSE advice projects and outreach projects.

A key aspect of the RESN of staff concern was **less CBA use of the training to give advice than expected**. Staff noted that CBAs were time pressured and had other workload and priorities (e.g. hospital discharge staff). A CSE advisor suggested that conversations with a manager before and after delivering a presentation to its staff could identify organisational aspirations, how much staff would be able to take on offering energy advice, and additional training or support needs. There needs to be clarity from CSE on what it needs from participants in return for training, and what it means to be a member of the network.

Staff thought that **partnerships hadn't really worked** in the ways envisaged, either due to a shift in activities of the organisation, lack of leadership, or differing expectations. For instance, an advisor tried to organise co-delivery of events with a partner, but CBAs thought that delivering events was beyond their remit. Partners need a clear contractual remit, potentially being paid in a different way, such as with a pricing structure based on amount of advice given, number of events or number of contacts provided (for network organisations. Alternatively, payment could be for resources and activities that support project delivery (as for Community Fund grants). This would help CSE to identify gaps in advice provision and where to direct support.

Discussion and summary

CBAs and partner organisations valued the training, forum meetings, resources and CSE support available via the RESN. The community fund was useful to enable community groups to provide advice locally.

CSE and partner organisations both recognised that difficulties had arisen regarding expectations on advice giving and delivery. This may partly be due to the experimental nature of the project in its first two years.

Interviews identified key aspects of the RESN which require further consideration to increase the effectiveness of the network:

- **The network** - Understand what people want from a network. Clarify what it means to be part of the network. Develop a sense of 'network' accordingly.
- **Advice delivery** - Identify the capacity and commitment of trainees to deliver basic energy advice and make referrals.
- **Partnerships** - Develop mutually beneficial partnerships recompensed using a pricing structure that aligns with project delivery.
- **Data collection** - Build CBA and client feedback into community fund and partnership agreements whilst streamlining data collection for reporting and evaluation.

Recommendations

The following are based on partner organisation and CSE staff suggestions:

- Consult more at the start to determine what people want and need.
- Present training as a package or progressive course, just available in Winter and Spring with fewer training repeats. Offer in person and online training.
- Factor community fund applicant support into future work. Share case studies of what community organisations have used grants for.
- Make a realistic assessment of how much CBAs are likely to use the training to give advice. This could involve taking a more structured approach in delivering training to organisations, with pre- and post-training conversations with managers to determine aspirations, staff capacity and further support requirements. It could also involve partnering with advice-focused organisations rather than network organisations.
- Develop flexible partnerships that can respond to local emergent needs for energy advice.
- Provide network organisations with information about CSE services across the county to signpost organisations to support.
- Simplify data gathering and evaluation feedback. Have interviews and a regular (e.g. quarterly) feedback survey rather than training feedback, CBA feedback and the reporting outcomes form. Gather broader information about CBAs' help in general (e.g. how many people attend a memory café) to assess potential ripple effect.

- Engage more with health service staff – an under-utilised resource with access to vulnerable people.
- Involve CSE's retrofit team to support CBA knowledge of retrofit and renewables for self-financing and low-income households.

Conclusions and recommendations

This final section draws conclusions based on research findings from surveys, workshops, interviews and project activity data to address the aims of the evaluation. Recommendations are made on how to improve the effectiveness of the RESN in future.

Conclusions

In its second year, the RESN has continued to train and resource CBAs to deliver energy advice and outreach in rural communities where residents have less access to support. CBAs have also engaged with groups like carers who have little time to seek advice. Post-pandemic, CBAs are well placed to offer home visits, which are returning as an effective means to reach the most vulnerable people in communities. Community fund grants have enabled local organisations' advice activities including services like thermal imaging in homes and schools.

Assessment of the community-based training

Overall, the training provided was positively received by 37 survey respondents in a post-training survey. Following training, CBAs were confident in delivering basic energy advice across all topics except for Retrofit, for which more time was needed. Areas for improvement noted for training were the length of training and knowledge of how to refer to CSE.

The effectiveness of community-based advice and its impact for community-based advisors and their organisations

Conclusions are based on evidence from a community-based advisor feedback survey with 21 survey respondents and workshops with 11 network members. Nearly half the survey respondents worked for large community or voluntary sector organisations. This may bias results, as employees of large organisations have more time to respond to work-related surveys and may be more likely to have given energy advice. Wiltshire was less represented in survey responses, which correlates with RESN activities overall.

Results suggest that most advisors use training received to provide energy advice by email, phone and homes visits. After training, advisors delivered more energy advice compared to prior to training when they focused on topics indirectly related to energy (e.g. emergency support, debt). 41% of respondents (n=7) offered advice five or more times a month. Advisors were able to reach vulnerable households across all tenures. This suggests that an aim of the RESN – to reach rural residents with essential energy advice – was being achieved.

Relatively few advisors that responded to the survey made referrals to CSE for casework (29%, n=6). Those that did found it easy to do and useful. Workshop participants had limited experience of making referrals as they predominantly engaged in light touch one-off informal advice conversations.

Advisors reported positive impacts for clients, themselves and their organisations from participating in the RESN. Survey respondents disagreed that advice had helped their clients with their health, anxiety about bills, and being able to make ends meet – all complex areas with multiple influences which advice alone may not be enough to remedy.

Clients' experiences and outcomes of community-based advice

Limited evidence from nine survey responses found that all clients were satisfied with the advice received and found it easy to understand. The advice had mostly or partly resolved their energy issue. Clients reported positive outcomes but, as with feedback from advisors, disagreed that advice reduced their anxiety about bills. They also disagreed that advice helped them to keep their home warm.

The effectiveness of the RESN approach to meet consumer demand for energy advice

Findings from advisor feedback, interviews with partner organisations and CSE staff identified valued components of the RESN to take forwards (training, forum meetings, resources, CSE support and the community fund).

CSE and partner organisations both noted partnership challenges regarding expectations on advice giving and delivery. Other aspects which emerged that need further consideration to improve the effectiveness of the RESN include: understanding and clarification of what it means to be part of the network; assessing trainee capacity and intent to deliver advice; developing partnerships with clear remit and recompense that aligns with project targets; streamlining data collection for comprehensive, effective reporting and insightful evaluation.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are made to CSE to consider for future RESN development:

General points

- Consult the network to find out what people want and need. Clarify what it means to be part of the network and what is expected of training participants and network members. Develop a sense of 'network' accordingly.
- Continue the community fund. Include community fund applicant support in future work. Share case studies of what community organisations have used grants for.
- Proactively assess how much community-based advisors are likely to use the training to give advice. This could involve having pre- and post-training conversations with managers to determine organisational aspirations, staff capacity and further support requirements. Partner selectively with advice-focused organisations rather than network organisations.
- Develop mutually beneficial partnerships recompensed using a pricing structure that aligns with project delivery. Build in flexibility so that partners can respond to local emergent needs for energy advice.

- Bring partner organisations together to build the network. Provide updates on RESN activities in a form that meets network members' needs. Give information about CSE services to network organisations so they can signpost organisations to support.
- Simplify data gathering and evaluation feedback. Have interviews and a regular (e.g. quarterly) feedback survey rather than multiple surveys and reporting form.
- Engage more with health service staff, social prescribers, children's centres, and schools with training and referral information to reach vulnerable people.
- Involve CSE's retrofit team more to support advisor knowledge of retrofit and renewables for self-financing and low-income households.
- To increase referrals, create a simple handout for trainees and a video explaining how advisors can refer and clients can self-refer. Include 'RESN' as an option on the referral form and ask advisors to select it to track referrals from the network to increase client evaluation feedback. Integrate referral information into partner agreements.
- Assess whether feedback from community-based advisor clients is required. If so, offer incentives for both clients and CBAs; obtain feedback at events and drop ins directly; use the referral form to identify RESN referrals. Use case studies or other methods to capture client outcomes and impact.

Training

- Create a progressive training package repeated twice yearly in Winter and Spring. Offer in person and online training. Record trainee attendance to identify keen energy champions.
- Simplify the Retrofit basics training, separating out retrofit from renewables.
- Consider developing other training in thermal imaging; futureproof retrofit; retrofit for traditional buildings; communication skills; basic energy debt advice.

Practical resources

- A checklist of what to ask about and consider, for different tenures.
- A route map with what help is available and from where.
- Energy games and case studies on energy efficiency improvements.
- Samples of insulation materials.

Information

- Grants information including eligibility requirements.
- A leaflet summarising the support available from CSE with contact details for clients.
- Energy activity comparisons; Priority Services Register information; multi-language fact sheets and leaflets; thermometer cards.
- Information on CSE support for co-delivery or delivery of workshops and events.
- Signpost to impartial information and myth busting, e.g. heat pumps, comparison of electric vehicles and internal combustion engine cars.
- Further information on trusted traders for self-funded retrofit.