



Switched On

A qualitative review of energy advice for young people

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SHUSU

**SUSTAINABLE HOUSING
& URBAN STUDIES UNIT**

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- Provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- Improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

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1. Introduction

The Switched On project involved the delivery of free energy advice to young people aged 16–25 in the form of workshops, one-to-one individualised advice sessions and advice via text messaging. Young adults are a demographic group recognised to be at risk of fuel poverty, and evaluations such as this review are key in ensuring that future energy advice provisions maximise their potential positive impact in addressing this issue. This report was produced by the Sustainable Housing and Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU), a research team based at the University of Salford, in order to evaluate the delivery of the project.

Switched On commenced operation in March 2020 during the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Constraints relating to the pandemic, including the closure of offices and the moving of education provision online, led to the postponement of the start of project delivery from March to August. This had an impact on the delivery of the service, as well as on the current evaluation. The extent and exact nature of this impact are explored at various points throughout the current report.

This report begins by laying out the context of fuel poverty (Chapter 2), defining the term and what it represents, providing statistics of the scale of the issue

in the United Kingdom, examining its potential impact in terms of both physical and mental health and exploring the available interventions for addressing the issue.

We then provide an overview of the Switched On project, describing its scope and methods of delivery (Chapter 3). From here, we outline the research methods employed for our study (Chapter 4). Included next is a summary of the main findings (Chapter 5), with each of the identified themes supplemented by supporting quotes from the research participants. The report finishes (Chapter 6) with a summary of the main conclusions drawn from the generated findings, as well as a list of the main implications for the future delivery of energy advice provisions targeted at young people.

This report is designed to address the following issues:

- to highlight evidence of the potential positive impact of the Switched On project on service users;
- to identify barriers faced in the delivery of the Switched On project;
- to distil the implications for the future delivery of energy advice provision aimed towards young people; and
- to develop a toolkit of research methods to be utilised in future evaluations of energy advice provision.



2. Context

2.1 Fuel poverty in the UK

Defining the issue

Fuel poverty is an issue that has received increasing attention in the UK over the last few decades. First described in a paper by Bradshaw and Hutton (1983), it was defined as 'the inability to afford adequate warmth at home'. Crucially, fuel poverty is not merely an aspect of wider poverty but is an important issue in and of itself. Later definitions incorporated the issue of fuel costs, especially in relation to the energy efficiency of homes. For example, a house that is poorly insulated with empty wall cavities and single-glazed windows will cost more to heat than a well-insulated property (Boardman, 2012). The interaction between the energy efficiency of a home and the household income may then lead individuals to find themselves in a situation where they are unable to afford the energy needed to sufficiently heat their home, and this is broadly the modern definition of fuel poverty.

The UK government currently uses the 'Low Income Low Energy Efficiency' (LILEE) indicator, which defines a household as being in fuel poverty if:

- The home energy efficiency rating is low (defined as band D or below on the Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency Rating) (HM Government, 2015) and
- Its disposable income (after fuel and other housing costs) falls below the poverty line (ONS, 2017).

Using this definition, the latest data shows that in 2019 3.18 million (13.4%) households in England were living in fuel poverty (DBEIS, 2021).

The physical condition of homes, especially in terms of their energy efficiency, is perhaps the biggest single factor that contributes to fuel poverty. Unfortunately, yet predictably, it is people with lower incomes who are more likely to be living in poorly insulated properties (Milne and Boardman, 2000). The energy efficiency of a home is largely determined by the efficiency of the equipment in that home; items such as boilers, radiators, fires, cookers, washing machines and refrigerators are expensive purchases that people on lower incomes may struggle to upgrade and those in rented accommodation may not have the right to replace (Boardman, 2012). In the UK, private rented homes in particular tend to have poor energy efficiency, and there seems to be little incentive for landlords to make improvements (Ambrose, 2015). Vulnerable people, who are more likely to live in private rented housing than any other form of accommodation, may, therefore, be unable to effectively lobby for improvements from landlords and can often live in excessively cold or damp conditions (Ambrose, 2015).

Fuel poverty has been described as a complex problem, however, involving factors beyond energy efficiency and income (Baker et al., 2018). While government interventions typically focus on insulation and energy costs, individuals living in fuel poverty may have related needs that are not being addressed. A lack of literacy and numeracy skills, mental or physical health difficulties, chronic debt, problems with addiction and other individual characteristics can all contribute to difficulties with managing household fuel usage and energy bills. Owing to the significant role that they play, these kinds of vulnerabilities should also be at the centre of fuel poverty intervention strategies (Baker et al., 2018). In recent years there has been increasing interest in fuel poverty at an international level. In this international context, the issue is commonly referred to as 'energy poverty' and involves both universal concerns and challenges and country-specific factors. Consequently, the nature of experiences of the issue, as well as the manner in which it is addressed, differs across climates, cultures and built environments (Bouzarovski et al., 2012; Howden-Chapman et al., 2012; Bouzarovski, 2018; Castaño-Rosa et al., 2020).

Young adults are one of many demographic groups at particular risk of fuel poverty. Young people who are in charge of their first household often have low wages and will have little experience of managing energy use and bills. They are more likely than other groups to be living in cheap, private rented properties, which may be fuel-inefficient, poorly insulated, cold and damp (Butler and Sherriff, 2017). A recent study of young adults' experiences of fuel poverty in Greater Manchester found that young tenants were affected by housing insecurity, which was seen as a barrier to making improvements in the home. Damp and mould were common and were cited as a source of stress. Moreover, tenants' relationships with their landlords or housing agencies – the owners of the properties, who were responsible for maintenance – tended to be poor, while owners' attitudes towards maintenance of the properties were seen as inadequate.

Household energy bills were described as being more difficult to manage than other bills, largely because they were variable. Prepayment meters were seen as being easier to manage than monthly bills. However, many tenants described having to go without gas or electricity for periods of time when they could not afford to top up the meter. Despite these difficulties, the young adults in this study described ways of coping and tended to have a positive outlook on the situation. Crucially, they did not see themselves as vulnerable. The study authors noted that fuel poverty interventions designed for young people

should recognise this positive attitude and be based on empowerment rather than seeing service users as vulnerable (Butler and Sherriff, 2017).

Living with fuel poverty

Perhaps the most immediate negative impact of living in fuel poverty relates to financial difficulties. People living in poverty describe often needing to prioritise some financial responsibilities over others. For example, one parent described having to default on payments of other bills to make sure that there would be enough money left to heat their home and cook food for their children. Such experiences were described as stressful, especially in relation to worries about getting into debt or running out of credit on prepayment meters. Fears around such issues are intrinsically related to other financial responsibilities, such as food shopping, rent or mortgage payments and other household bills. In some instances, families may have to go without other commodities, such as food, clothing or transport; conversely, prioritising other responsibilities could mean going without adequate heating or other energy needs. Transport poverty in particular has been shown to be positively correlated with fuel poverty, which is largely due to regional differences; areas that are less well connected to transport systems also tend to have lower domestic energy efficiency (Martiskainen et al., 2021).

Consequently, living in cold or damp conditions can have serious impacts on mental and physical health. Young people living in colder homes in the UK are more likely to suffer from respiratory conditions and mental health conditions, while excess winter deaths are three times higher in cold houses in comparison with warm houses (Marmot and Bell, 2012). Children appear to be especially vulnerable to the risks of inadequately heated homes, with infants living in fuel poverty at an increased risk of being underweight (Liddell and Morris, 2010). Studies consistently suggest that living in cold and/or damp conditions has a negative impact on mental health, leading to issues including stress, stigma and social isolation, as well as anxiety and depression. Living with a caregiver who is experiencing stress is a risk factor for a number of adverse childhood outcomes, including, for example, obesity (Jang et al., 2019), dental problems (Chouchene et al., 2021), emotional and behavioural difficulties (Bakoula et al., 2009) and asthma (Deng et al., 2018).

Few studies have provided in-depth accounts of the experiences and emotions of people living in fuel poverty. One such study, which explored the emotional factors related to fuel poverty, found that the stigma of living in a fuel-poor home with problems such as damp, mould and cold temperatures could present an added barrier to overcoming such issues. Individuals can be reluctant to seek support from social networks such as family and friends and from official sources such as landlords and local authorities (Longhurst and Hargreaves, 2019). Social relationships and fuel poverty have also been shown to have a complex relationship. People with fewer positive social relationships are also less able to gain support

in dealing with fuel poverty. Furthermore, experiencing improvements in factors relating to fuel poverty tends to lead to more positive social relations (Middlemiss et al., 2019).

2.2 Fuel poverty interventions

Policy

In 2015 the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) published a fuel poverty strategy for England, which described the government's plans to tackle fuel poverty via three broad means (DBEIS, 2015). First, energy companies are required to 'promote measures which improve the ability of low income, fuel-poor and vulnerable households to heat their homes' as part of the Energy Company Obligation (Ofgem, 2021). In practice, this means measures such as replacing or upgrading inefficient heating systems. Second, the Warm Home Discount involves payments of £140 per year towards the energy bills of the poorest two million British households. The third main part of the strategy is known as 'Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards': a legal obligation on landlords to ensure their rented properties meet a minimum standard of energy efficiency.

The Committee on Fuel Poverty, an independent advisory committee to the DBEIS, reported on the progress of the fuel poverty strategy in their 2020 annual report (Blakemore, 2020). It was concluded that the government could be doing more within the policy to assist citizens struggling most with fuel poverty. In particular, the committee recommended that the government focus more on increasing energy efficiency and direct payments towards energy bills. The committee also acknowledged the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of both the extra pressure it has put on government resources and the impact that it has had on those most in need. It highlighted the link between cold, damp homes and respiratory illnesses, including susceptibility to viruses such as COVID-19 (Blakemore, 2020).

Internationally, the COVID-19 pandemic has had implications for energy availability and costs (Mastropietro, 2020; Nagaj, 2020) and has interrupted coping mechanisms through which people find comfortable spaces outside the home (Baker et al., 2020).

Retrofit

Besides financial and policy interventions, there are a range of practical solutions that may be employed to address fuel poverty. As one study has noted, interventions have tended to focus on energy bills, but evidence suggests that an increased focus on home improvements leads to improved health and wellbeing (Baker et al., 2020). Home improvements for warmth, commonly referred to as retrofit, typically include roof or wall cavity insulation, double glazing or the installation, replacement or upgrading of central heating systems.

They can also include small-scale improvements, such as the removal of mould, and large-scale projects, such as the demolition of poor-quality housing (Thomson et al., 2013).

Such alterations, when applied to existing homes, are broadly known as retrofitting. Evidence shows that retrofitting to improve warmth is generally effective, with the most significant improvements seen in those individuals living in the worst conditions or those suffering from associated health problems (Thomson et al., 2013). Furthermore, evaluations of retrofitting schemes have found that residents tend to report positive feelings and health improvements (Sherriff et al., 2018) and that communications between organisers and residents are a key aspect in predicting resident satisfaction (Sherriff and Swan, 2016). Although improvements in energy efficiency and other interventions can be highly effective (Liddell and Guiney, 2015), paradoxically, the people who have the greatest need for improvements also tend to have the least agency to achieve them (Middlemiss and Gillard, 2015).

A randomised controlled trial undertaken in 2000–2001 in North-East England assessed the impact of an energy efficiency package on health and wellbeing factors. The specific interventions received were tailored to the households' individual needs and typically consisted of improved heating and insulation equipment. Energy efficiency in the homes receiving the interventions was improved, and average temperatures were raised by one degree Celsius. Residents reported satisfaction with the improvements, and a measure of social functioning showed improvements, although no improvements in physical health were found (Heyman et al., 2011). A Welsh scheme to fit external wall insulation was assessed in terms of its impact on carbon emissions and fuel poverty (Atkinson et al., 2016). While carbon emissions fell following installation, suggesting less fuel use and lower bills, the impact was not great enough to bring residents out of fuel poverty.

Although quantitative studies such as these may find little evidence of improvements, qualitative methods have identified that such measures can have a profound impact on subjective wellbeing. One study used focus groups to explore the experiences of low-income British families who were recipients of energy efficiency interventions (Grey et al., 2017). Participants had received insulation and heating system upgrades, after which they reported improvements in their mood and mental health, noting that their homes were now noticeably warmer, their energy bills were lower and they felt more comfortable welcoming family and friends into their homes.

The assessment also revealed some useful critiques on the manner in which the intervention was delivered. For example, many participants felt that the communication between organisers and recipients could have been better (Grey et al., 2017). It is noteworthy that although such interventions can have benefits for addressing fuel poverty, as well as physical and mental health, their implementation can be a stressful experience (Sherriff,

Lomas and Swan, 2020; Lomas et al., 2021). Evidence such as this demonstrates the importance of qualitative as well as quantitative assessment of fuel poverty interventions. By listening to participants' experiences, lessons can be learned for future schemes and a fuller picture of the impact of the intervention can be developed.

Energy advice

It is important to note that social and health interventions generally, whether for fuel poverty or other issues, often work best as part of a multifaceted package (e.g. Weber et al., 2002; Skjøl-Årki et al., 2018; Koenders et al., 2021). It may be the case that government-funded schemes are available for home improvements, help with energy bills and help with dealing with landlords and energy companies, but people might not always be aware of these services or how to access them. It has been noted that projects that provide assistance to individuals living in fuel poverty can be complex and time-consuming and are best conducted by existing organisations with the relevant training, expertise and capacity (Sherriff, 2016).

One such project involved the delivery of energy advice and support to almost 200 households at risk of fuel poverty in the Outer Hebrides (Sherriff, Lawler, et al., 2020). The service providers were able to assist householders in applying for financial support and material improvements, which not only led to health and wellbeing improvements but also allowed people to stay in homes that they had previously considered leaving. Delivery of energy advice is a potential mechanism for bringing these and other services together. Moreover, rather than framing service users as vulnerable people, energy advisers can help to empower people to bring themselves out of fuel poverty and improve their own physical and mental wellbeing.

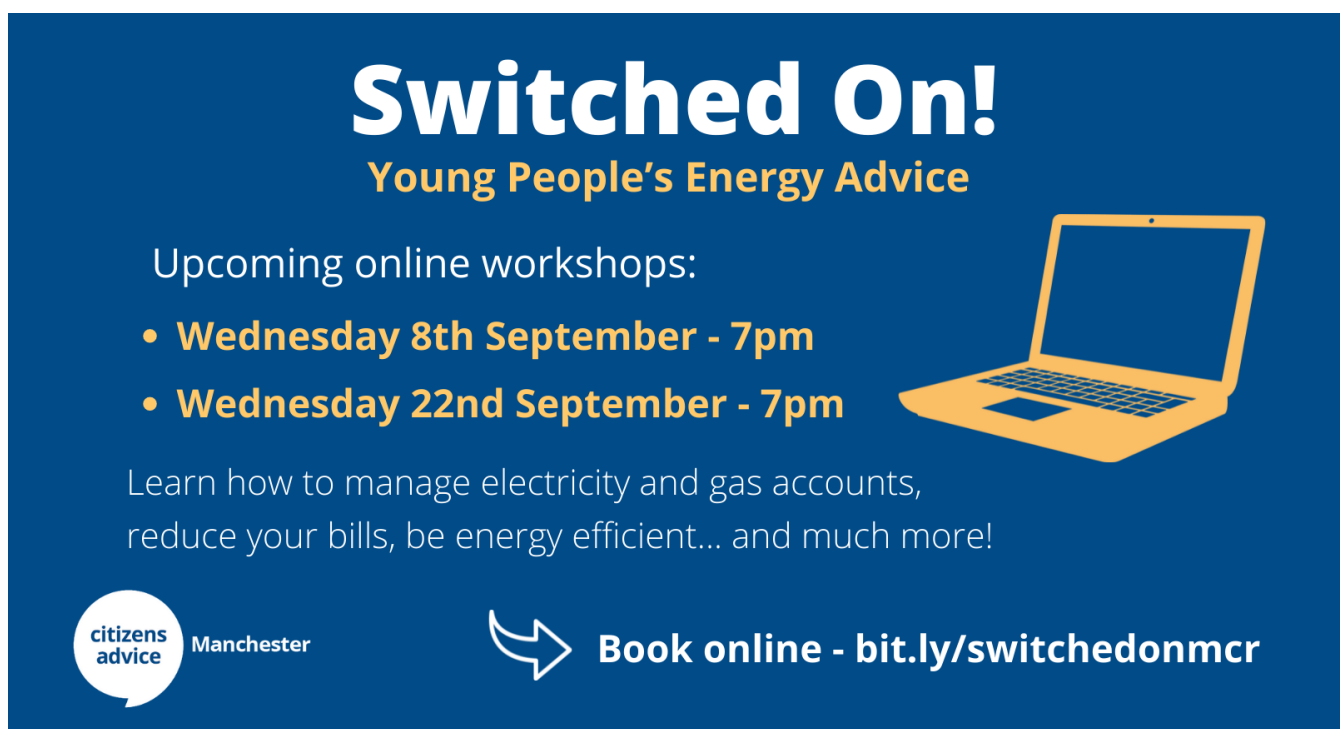
The issues around fuel poverty are likely to be complex, and so advisers can not only signpost service users to existing schemes that are designed to alleviate fuel poverty but also discuss issues such as income maximisation and debt consolidation. They can provide practical advice on how to save energy at home and how to better understand how energy meters and billing work. They can also deal with energy companies to ensure that service users are on the correct tariff and may be able to act as a mediator between service users and various organisations (Butler, 2020). Energy advice as an intervention for alleviating fuel poverty has been described as underexplored and undervalued, but recent studies have suggested that it can be seen as an essential component that brings advice and assistance on multiple aspects of energy-related issues together (Butler, 2020). Energy advice has been delivered in the form of home visits by community organisations and charities to good effect (Fischer et al., 2014; Reeves, 2016), but during and beyond the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic some services may need to adapt to remote working.

3. The ‘Switched On’ project

Citizens Advice Manchester is the Manchester branch of a national charitable organisation that provides free advice and information to individuals on a range of topics including housing, legal rights, consumer rights and welfare. Citizens Advice Manchester has staff trained to advise on issues related to energy and fuel poverty and recently began a scheme to offer energy advice to young people aged 16–25.

The rationale for a tailored scheme was that young people are likely to be at risk of fuel poverty, but they are unlikely to engage with the services Citizens Advice Manchester currently provides. The Switched On project aimed to identify young people who were at risk of fuel poverty and reach out to them with free workshops, one-to-one individualised advice sessions and advice via text messaging. Recruitment for the scheme was conducted through a multi-platform social media presence and via partner organisations that are likely to be in touch with young people at risk of fuel poverty, such as students, single parents, care leavers and people with a history of or a potential for being homeless.

Switched On commenced operation on 23rd March 2020. On 3rd April 2020, the service was postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions. It was restarted on 3rd August 2020 and completed at the end of November 2021. A total of 47 sessions were offered during the lifetime of the project, a mixture of face-to-face sessions, online workshops with partners, and online open access sessions. Some seven virtual workshops and eight sessions with partner organisations went ahead. A range of challenges meant that other sessions did not go ahead as planned. These challenges including technical difficulties, low turnout, and people attending who did not qualify for support within the remit of Switched On. These sessions were re-organised so that people could receive advice in different ways. The reach of some of the workshops was lower than expected at first, but these were recorded and were therefore seen by more people as the project progressed. The team also provided advice in other ways, including one-to-one support and advice via telephone to service users.




Switched On!
Young People's Energy Advice

Upcoming online workshops:

- **Wednesday 8th September - 7pm**
- **Wednesday 22nd September - 7pm**

Learn how to manage electricity and gas accounts, reduce your bills, be energy efficient... and much more!

 **Manchester**


 **Book online - bit.ly/switchedonmcr**

Figure 1 Promotional image from the Switched On project

4. Our research

4.1 Approach

The aim of this evaluation was to describe the services provided and assess the extent to which they were able to meet the aims of the project. The SHUSU team at the University of Salford were recruited to conduct an independent evaluation. It was decided that a mixed-methods evaluation with multiple data sources would be an appropriate approach. The research team planned to collect data from both service providers and service users via the following research methodologies.

From the beginning of the evaluation in June 2021 to the end in October 2021, the research team, via the service providers and their partner organisations, attempted to recruit service users to take part in the evaluation. Despite some promising leads, no service users agreed to be interviewed, no workshop observations or focus groups were held and only two service users completed surveys – far too small a number for any meaningful data analysis. Potential reasons for this lack of engagement are discussed later on in this report. The only usable data available for this analysis therefore comes from the service provider interviews.

We present a summary of our toolkit of methods here to document our research design and, we hope, provide some resources for others to refer to and develop. In this spirit, we provide our intended topic guides for interviews and focus groups as appendices.

4.2 Survey of service users

An online survey was designed using the online survey platform Jisc Online Surveys. The survey (**see Appendix A for the full survey**) contained four sections: demographics; questions about energy needs; a standard service evaluation questionnaire (Nguyen et al., 1983); and a standard health-related quality of life questionnaire (Herdman et al., 2011). The aims of the survey were to describe the sample of service users in terms of their needs and motivations for using the service and their views of the usefulness and acceptability of the service and to assess the impact of the service on their living situations and health. As an incentive, each survey respondent was entered into a draw for a prize of £50 worth of shopping vouchers.

4.3 Interviews with service users

The service user interviews (**see Appendix B for the interview questions**) were designed to follow on from the survey to collect more detailed descriptions of the service users' experiences of the service. In particular, the researchers planned to discuss how the service users came to be involved with the service, what they thought of the experience, any particular strengths or limitations of the service and, especially, the impact of the service on their lives. Each interviewee was offered £10 in cash as a payment for their time.

4.4 Workshop observations and focus groups

Observations of workshops were planned in order to assess the interactions of service users within the workshops. Workshops were to be attended either in person or electronically by a member of the research team, who would take notes focusing on the contributions of service users to any discussion, any questions asked and any evidence of impact. The same researcher would then host a focus group (**see Appendix C for the focus group guide**) with all consenting service users immediately after the workshop to facilitate a group discussion on the content and impact of the workshop in the context of the service users' own needs and situations. All focus group participants were offered £10 in cash as a reimbursement for their time commitment.

4.5 Interviews with service providers

Interviews were planned with three service providers: the two Citizens Advice Manchester staff members who were involved in the delivery of the service and one supervising manager. It was decided to conduct interviews at two time points: the first round in June 2021, when the SHUSU team began their evaluation, and the second round in September and October 2021, when both the evaluation and the service were close to completion. The providers were not offered any incentives or paid for their time. The interviews were semi-structured and broadly followed an interview guide (**see Appendix B for the interview questions**), which allowed for some deviation should any unexpected, yet relevant, topics arise as part of the interview.

Two interviews were held with each of the three service providers (six interviews in total) across the five months of the evaluation period. There was a gap of around three months between the first and second rounds of interviews. The three providers are referred to in this report as Provider 1, Provider 2 and Manager. Providers 1 and 2 were the two Citizens Advice Manchester staff members who were responsible for delivering the service, while the Manager was involved in setting up and supervising the project. The six interviews and their participants are listed below in **Table 1**.

As a group, the three participants are referred to here as ‘the service providers’ or just ‘the providers’. One researcher conducted all six interviews via video conferencing, and the interviews tended to last around 50 minutes. The interviews were video recorded; the video recordings were converted to audio files and trimmed using Audacity (an open-source digital audio editor) and were transcribed by a professional transcription service on behalf of the University of Salford. The researcher analysed the transcripts using thematic analysis – a

qualitative data analysis technique whereby sections of dialogue are given short descriptions known as codes, which are then categorised into a collection of relevant themes, which form a description of the dialogue as a whole. In an iterative process involving the two other researchers, eight themes were identified in this analysis, as shown in **Figure 2**.

Table 1 Interviews and participants

Interview Number	Participant
1	Provider 1
2	Provider 2
3	Manager
4	Provider 2
5	Provider 1
6	Manager

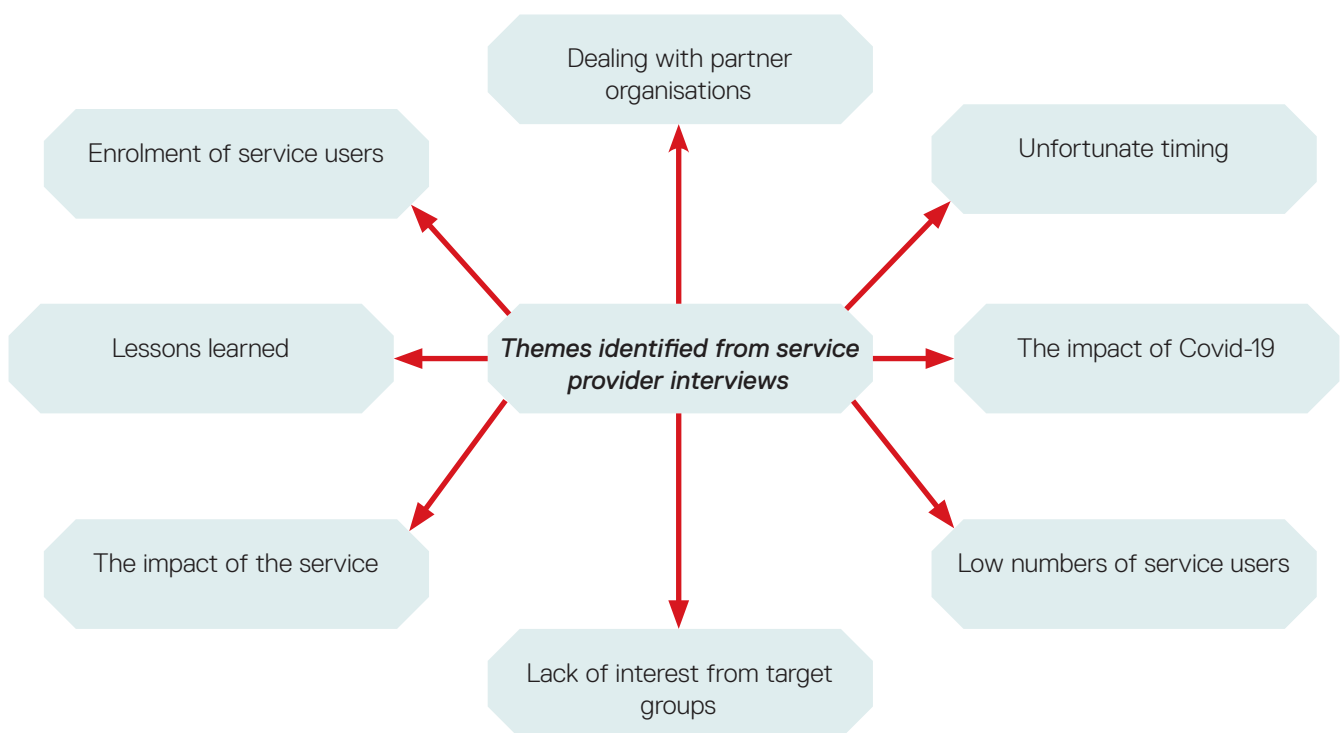


Figure 2 Thematic map of eight themes from provider interviews

5. Findings

In this chapter, we present the findings of the study and use quotations from the interviews to illustrate and substantiate the points. The qualitative interviews were analysed thematically to provide a structured account of the providers' reflections on the impact of Switched On, the delivery of the project and the challenges faced in the process. Our findings are presented here as eight themes.

Theme 1: Enrolment of service users

The target population for the Switched On project was young people aged 16–25. People at this age are often starting to live independently and may be responsible for paying bills for the first time in their lives. Enrolling young people into the service was one of the first challenges of the project – identifying the best methods for reaching people in this age group, especially those who would benefit most from the service. The main strategy employed here was to recruit via existing organisations and services for particular groups of young people, such as students, care leavers and those in touch with organisations that support young people in various difficult situations. This was felt by the providers to be a useful way to reach young people generally, as well as specific demographics.

I think we use those target groups, if nothing else, to just give a bit more focus to how we might approach the project. It wasn't that we wouldn't work with people exclusively outside of those groups; it was more just about looking and saying, right, we know that this is a space where people are predominantly 16 to 25, so that's a good way to focus our energy. (Interview 6)

The recruitment process therefore led to the majority of service users being from demographic groups who tended to have complex needs and were living in some difficult situations. This was advantageous for the project because it meant the service was targeted at those who stood to benefit most significantly. However, this also presented problems around communication. The providers found that it was often quite difficult to keep in touch with some service users, even those who were clearly in need and were benefiting from their support.

It is a very difficult thing to contact them, even when you're trying to settle things that are working for them. It took me several weeks just to get [service user] to – because he had to speak to [energy supplier] to get his direct debit set up to be able to then get the trust fund. It took two or three weeks for me to contact him and just get him to answer the phone or even call [energy supplier]. As much as he wanted the help, he was working, and he's doing other things, and... I don't think they want to engage with the suppliers after everything they've been through. (Interview 5)

The providers described using multiple methods of recruitment, with varying degrees of success. As well as recruiting via other organisations (see Theme 2), the providers used multiple social media platforms and posters in shop windows in Manchester city centre to advertise the service and attract young people. The general approach taken on social media was to attempt to post attention-grabbing content. Even if not immediately related to energy, such posts were utilised as a 'way in' to talking about related issues. This seemed to lead to some interest among the target audience. At least one service user was reported to have been successfully recruited via the poster campaign, and some social media platforms seemed to work better than others. TikTok, which is especially popular with young people, seemed to generate the most interactions. While many people saw the content and may have benefited from the advice provided in the videos, this did not, however, necessarily translate into recruitment of service users.

I spend quite a bit of time, maybe even one day a week, making TikTok videos as well. We're aware that TikTok is a buzzing platform for young people... I tried to make some more entertaining videos using videos of people's pets – whether it was colleagues' pets or my sister's pet – and try and put some kind of energy theme into that. It takes quite a while to do the videos... some of them get 700/800 views. Then, some the next week would just get 150 views. (Interview 2)

Theme 2: Dealing with partner organisations

Most of the recruitment of service users was conducted through various partner organisations. These tended to be local charities and not-for-profit organisations with an interest in and remit for the welfare of young people living in difficult situations. Their clients tended to include care leavers, asylum seekers, young people living in poverty, young people with additional needs and young people at risk of homelessness. The providers had spent some time contacting such groups but reflected that most of the time there was either a lack of interest or no response at all.

A lot of the time, if someone [an organisation] does respond, they'll say, oh yes, I'll pass that on to the relevant department, and then we don't hear anything back after that, or we don't find out where the information has been passed on to... a lot of [the time] it's just no response... after that, it would be the kind of scenario where they say they'll pass on our details or pass on the project information to a different team internally, and then we don't hear back. (Interview 4)

When potential partner organisations did show an interest, this often did not lead to any recruitment of service users. Sometimes, interested organisations simply stopped

communicating with the Switched On service providers. When explanations were given, the providers reported that this often seemed to be due to a lack of time or resources in organisations or that energy advice was not a priority at that time. Although the provision of energy advice was seen as being important, organisations were sometimes overwhelmed with more urgent difficulties and did not manage to find the time to organise advice sessions.

When you're dealing with agencies who are working with young people like that, a lot of their time is just taken up firefighting and managing the day-to-day and supporting those people who are coming to them at that point in crisis and with some other dilemma that they're trying to face. (Interview 6)

The providers reported that most of the success they had had with recruiting via partner organisations had come from such organisations making the first move. Some organisations had heard about the project and apparently felt that this filled a need that they had already identified. When the motivation was there already, the relationship tended to be a fruitful one.

Most of the ones we are in contact with, though, are ones that... they saw a need for this and reached out to us. We did try for a while with [partner organisation] and got nowhere, and then, all of a sudden, they wanted to talk to us. It was the same with [partner organisation] as well; they just suddenly reached out. (Interview 5)

Theme 3: Unfortunate timing

The service providers spoke a lot about the difficulties caused by unfortunate timing within the project, and this was a theme that came up often in the interviews. There was a sense that forces beyond the control of the project prevented the team from delivering the service in the way they would have wanted to. A large part of this was due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this was such a significant issue that it formed its own theme in the current analysis, but other issues around the unfortunate timing of the project were also seen as problematic. One factor was something referred to as 'the summer lull'. This is the phenomenon whereby, due to warmer weather and longer days in the summer months, energy usage and energy bills are consistently lower in the UK and people are less interested in issues pertaining to energy use and fuel poverty. This was something that was known about prior to the project, and the providers expected some form of lull in the summer months. However, with pandemic restrictions easing off for the summer, this created an extended quiet period for the project.

It's always quite hard to persuade people to get energy advice when they're in that phase of the year where they've turned their heating off, they don't use the lights a lot because there's a lot of natural daylight coming into the house, and so they're not really thinking about their bills quite as much. (Interview 6)

Energy Efficient Cooking - Tip #2

Only boil as much water as you need.



#SwitchedOnMCR

Figure 3 Energy advice communicated as part of the Switched On project

Another issue around timing related to the presence of students in the Manchester area. While students will typically tend to go home for the summer months, this was compounded by the pandemic. Many students were off campus for around a full year, and, while the universities themselves could have made useful partners to the project in terms of the recruitment of service users, our interviewees found that university staff were less interested in engaging with the service due to higher priorities. Again, when the pandemic restrictions were easing off during the summer months, most students were living at home anyway.

With so much uncertainty surrounding students in Manchester, it's only up until recently that the universities themselves and the communities connected with that... they've only just started contacting and reaching back to us about the workshop and moving on. They're now looking at this year, September, towards the end of our project, where we could advise them... it's kind of the reason why we've had such a low turnout for providing advice and finding out more from them what they need. (Interview 1)

Towards the end of the project, around October 2021, the cost of energy in the UK was set to increase substantially due to a combination of increased wholesale prices internationally and the UK government raising the spending cap for households (Reuters, 2021). This was exactly the kind of issue the Switched On service was set up to provide advice and support with, but the timing here was again unfortunate – it came around just as the service was coming to an end. There was a concern that people living in fuel poverty would be even worse off with the higher energy prices, and the providers hoped that they would be able to reach higher numbers of people due to increased urgency, but by the end of October 2021 this had not translated into higher numbers of service users.

We're trying to use that, basically, to try and reach out to people, to say, "Look, things aren't going to be as cheap as they once were. There are going to be difficulties, and you're going to need all the advice and help you can get with that, so this is what you need to come to." So, with that approach we're thinking there will be a little bit more of a pick-up because there will be much more need and urgency to get it in the next two months as quickly as possible. (Interview 5)

Theme 4: The impact of COVID-19

As mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions in the UK had a profound impact on the project. It came around just as the project was getting started and led to a postponement of several months.

Unluckily, the project started on the day we went into lockdown for the pandemic, so we have been very restricted as to what interaction we can make. (Interview 1)

Even when the project restarted, the impact of the pandemic was evident in many aspects of the project. It had affected the operations of partner organisations and the availability of potential service users, and the providers had to change many of their ways of operating and methods of recruitment. The providers discussed their new strategies in the interviews in a generally positive way. They felt they had been able to quickly adapt to an increased use of technology and remote working. Unfortunately, however, the lack of face-to-face contact with service users sometimes had a negative impact on delivery.

We would have been able to just go along to, say, Wednesday evening youth group and do something there. I think it's just affected our ability to do things in a more relaxed setting and a bit more informally with young people. It's not about learning in a formal learning setting; we just want it to be a fun workshop where you just happen to learn some stuff that you can take away with you. (Interview 3)

Although the one-to-one individualised advice seemed to work well by telephone, the workshops, which were a central part of this project in terms of delivery, were negatively impacted by restrictions. Since fully face-to-face workshops were impossible during most of the project, the providers tried different strategies for delivering the service remotely. One strategy employed was making the workshops fully online using video conferencing, where every attendee was in their own home. This seemed to work quite well but suffered from problems around digital exclusion and digital exhaustion. Another strategy was for the providers to present remotely from the office, projecting onto a screen or laptop in a room that the service users attended physically. These events were typically hosted by one of the partner organisations for their clients. Although this overcame some digital barriers for the service users, there were difficulties in presenting in this way. The providers reported that it was difficult to have a genuine conversation in this way and felt that it led to a lack of involvement on the part of service users.

We found it very hard to engage with the young people during [workshops delivered remotely]. We found it difficult to hear them. It was difficult to take their information and... controlling the workshop, that you would [be able to do] if you were in the room. So, being able to get them to engage physically, like writing everything down, get them to talk to each other, move about more, that interaction and engagement was very difficult in that setting. (Interview 1)

The providers felt that, although some organisations, such as Citizens Advice Manchester, were well equipped to deal with the changes, the operations of some other organisations suffered due to issues such as a reliance on face-to-face working or a lack of IT equipment and digital familiarity. It may have been the case, our interviewees believed, that smaller, charitable organisations with fewer

resources were especially vulnerable to the changes, and this was often the case with partner organisations, which led to more difficulties in the recruitment of service users.

Whereas with other organisations, especially around Manchester, they're a lot smaller, and I know they've not acclimatised in the same manner. Either it's funding or what equipment they have and so on, so I can only assume as well that that's another factor in who we've been able to reach out to. (Interview 1)

The pandemic, especially in terms of the move over to working from home, also had a major impact on potential service users. The target population for the project was young people who were most in need of energy advice, which meant that these were people with low incomes and probably little in the way of IT equipment. A common phrase used by providers in the interviews was 'digital exclusion', meaning that there is a section of society with low incomes who are effectively excluded from some forms of communication (Gallistl et al., 2020). They may not own a computer or have access to the internet at home. If they have internet at home, it may be slow, and if they have equipment, it may be outdated without devices such as a webcam and microphone.

Unfortunately again, the people we are trying to reach are people who potentially are digitally excluded. They don't have access to the technology they need. They don't have access to the Wi-Fi and broadband speeds that they would need to be on an hour-long digital workshop. (Interview 6)

Even amongst those young people who were not digitally excluded, another phenomenon that the providers reported was digital exhaustion. This was the situation where potential service users were tired of working and learning from home; they had perhaps been sitting at their desks all day, and this caused an apparent lack of enthusiasm for joining another digital environment in their free time. This was potentially something that became more of a problem the longer people were living under pandemic restrictions. The providers reported that digital exhaustion was possibly one of the major reasons why they were unable to attract their target audience.

We started to realise, okay, we might be in this lockdown for a bit longer, and we're calling it digital exhaustion. People are just fed up of screens. They're fed up of online meetings and virtual classrooms and things like that; especially young people, if they're in a learning environment in the daytime and doing things online, they don't want to join an online workshop later in the day. That's something that I think was our biggest hindrance. (Interview 2)

Theme 5: Low numbers of service users

The overarching theme of the interviews was arguably the issue of general low numbers of service users across the project. Due to the multiple factors discussed in the current findings, there was a strong feeling that the project had not been able to reach as many service users as it had aimed to. The providers had tried several methods of recruitment, but there seemed to be a lack of interest among key demographics and potential partner organisations. The service providers felt that there was a target population who would benefit from the service and would be likely to engage but that these people potentially had higher priorities, as well as various barriers to their engagement.

I'm still not happy that we're reaching as many people as I'd like to be. You can always do better, but actually it's not much different now than it was when we were still living under COVID restrictions. I think maybe part of that is because people are so busy, the age group that we are addressing is the age group of people who are returning to university and college or are now seeking to get jobs or get back into work. (Interview 4)

One major barrier to engaging with service users was the living situations of students. Manchester's student population had been planned to be a key beneficiary of the project, but the combination of the pandemic and unfortunate timing meant that they were less likely (than in other years) to be living independently during the active



phase of the project. Since they were largely living with family, they would be likely to have a reduced level of interest in the subject matter.

With the pandemic, we have struggled speaking to students because most of them cancelled their rental agreements and they've moved back home... so they've not needed the energy advice... (Interview 1)

In terms of the WhatsApp service, the numbers of users were also very low. As of mid-October 2021, only one person had been provided with advice and/or support via the WhatsApp branch of the service. The providers had hoped that this platform would suit many of their target service users due to its text-based format, the anonymity it provides, the casual nature of text-based communication and the fact that it requires little effort on the part of the service user. Unfortunately, however, this did not translate into a popular service.

We've had probably an average of about one message a week or less through that platform, which is disappointing, and most of those messages have been irrelevant to the project, so people have found the number somewhere and have messaged through looking for advice on something else. (Interview 4)

Theme 6: Lack of interest from target groups

The providers had some thoughts on possible reasons for the lack of interest among potential service users. Aside from issues related to timing, such as the pandemic, it was suspected that there was also a general lack of enthusiasm for this kind of service amongst young people. One piece of evidence supporting this view is that a similar project hosted by an energy supply company prior to the COVID-19 pandemic also experienced a lack of enthusiasm amongst young people.

[Regional energy company] were very interested in how this project would turn out, because they themselves ran one a year or two ago. They found it very difficult to find young people to get engaged with it, so they were interested in what we were doing and whether it would pick up, because they had exactly the same problems we're having, that lack of engagement from young people. (Interview 5)

With regard to students in particular, it was suggested that one reason why they may not have been engaging with the service (aside from them living off campus) was that many student houses are now rented with an all-in-one bill paying system organised by landlords. Effectively, this means the tenants have no energy bills. So, although they are still paying for the energy they use, those costs are hidden amongst the other household bills.

[Students] tend to do the all-in-one packages now, where you pay for your broadband, your energy, your water. It's all in one payment, and it's the same for everyone in the household. A lot of landlord agreements now have that in place... so they don't worry about what they use... (Interview 5)

One provider suggested that a possible reason for the lack of engagement could be that young people are simply already getting energy-related advice and support from other sources. This may be especially true of target demographics such as care leavers, who may already be being supported by an organisation with the ability to deal with those needs themselves.

It's possible that a lot of the people who might benefit from our service are actually getting that advice and support from other organisations [such as] care leavers support organisations... they're able to tell someone how to switch their supplier, or they're able to tell someone how to be a bit more energy-efficient, that sort of thing. (Interview 4)

In much the same way that partner organisations that approached the service themselves were the more motivated ones, this was also seen amongst service users. This was especially evident in the one-to-one advice sessions, where a provider delivered an individual service tailored to the client's needs. Typically, young people who were in need of specific support with their energy bills came to that branch of the service. Often at this stage they were behind on payments and were in urgent need of help. This difficult situation was the source of a high level of motivation.



It's people who really do need the help that seem to be the ones that are engaging with us more... because once they moved they didn't know how to run their energy bills, and that's what led off them contacting us, because they saw that there was a need, a serious need, to get the advice that we were providing. (Interview 5)

Theme 7: The impact of the service

Despite the disappointingly low numbers of service users, the providers felt that the service had managed to make a real impact upon the lives of the people they had supported. In terms of the workshops, partner organisations that acted as hosts reacted positively and tended to book additional sessions, having seen one being delivered.

They've definitely enjoyed the first workshops we've done, and they've come back to us, [partner organisation], once we'd delivered one, they wanted to do a second one as well. (Interview 1)

Although there was a lack of direct feedback from service users, those who attended workshops usually seemed to engage with the subject matter. The providers described enthusiasm and some interesting discussions with the service users, which suggests that they were keen to learn and that the advice would be of real benefit to them.

It has certainly been an eye-opener for most just to make them aware how much they have to engage with this subject. I mean, it's just measuring – like on the end of all our initial contact with young people we've spoken to there does seem to be enthusiasm for it once it's finished to keep in – like engagement with what they've learned. (Interview 5)

With regard to the service users who attended one-to-one sessions, it was possible for the providers to see the tangible impact that their support was having. These clients typically had urgent and/or complex problems, which the service was able to help with. For example, one young man had apparently been trying to raise an issue with his energy supplier without success, and even the ombudsman had been unable to help. Fortunately, the Switched On service was able to deal with the problem.

There was another one who had reached out... he'd had a massive issue with his meters not being registered on the databases... it's a very complicated issue that I've seen before. So, we have a special team as part of our consumer service... they're very good at putting their foot down on the suppliers and getting these complicated issues done... he'd been around the houses to the suppliers, the energy ombudsman and couldn't get it sorted... he'd seen a poster [Provider 2] had put up. We managed to get that sorted for him. (Interview 5)

One particularly concerning issue was reported multiple times by service users and was discussed by all three providers. Care leavers in the region are ostensibly

supported by a company (not named here) with responsibility for managing the practical aspects of their first move into independent living. The company is supposed to make sure that issues such as the energy supply are under control and that the care leaver is able to understand and manage the situation. Unfortunately, this was apparently not occurring, and a number of care leavers reported being left to get into debt with their energy suppliers. The service users were highly critical of the company, which they felt had neglected their responsibilities.

There's a company called [not named here], who pretty much run it here and a few other locations in the North West. As part of their contract, they have to offer support to the young person once they turn 18 to be able to actually set up their energy bills, and we've found that they haven't done that. So, there's been five or six cases on our project and... a year or two later the energy supplier gets in contact with them, and it's like, "Right, here's £2,000, £3,000, £5,000 bill"... and it's causing all this trouble for the young people. (Interview 5)

This was seen as seriously worrying by the providers, who reported that it is something that they intend to bring to the attention of the local authority. As part of Citizens Advice Manchester, the providers had a wider duty to mitigate practices that may be harmful to their service users. So, this service can potentially have a wider impact beyond its immediate clients.

We're also here to advocate for change in terms of policies and practices which impact on people's lives... as we had more than one or two cases coming through that were connected to [not named here], our ears pricked up. If we can gather evidence, then we can present a case to the Council that something needs to be done about using them as a provider. (Interview 6)

Theme 8: Lessons learned

Finally, the providers discussed their thoughts on what lessons had come out of the project and what could be done differently in the future in order to maximise the impact of this and related projects. There was agreement that the service had potentially been useful and had demonstrated some real impact but that the number of service users reached had been disappointing. Ideas for improvements and recommendations tended to focus on recruitment strategies.

Lesson 1: Start in the summer

In practical terms, suggestions were made around the timing of the project. It was felt that starting during the quieter summer months would be a useful way to ease into the service.

My feeling is you would start the project probably in around June/July rather than at the start of the year, so where you're building up that project you've got maybe six weeks to establish yourself, to start making some contacts, to get out and build a name for the project. Then, as you are just getting up and running, that's when people are really starting to think about it; that would be the ideal. (Interview 6)

Lesson 2: Need policy changes

The providers emphasised that while advice and support are needed, they would also like to see changes in policy and practice at regional and national levels to prevent young people from getting into difficulty in the first place. Alongside the criticisms of an unnamed regional company with responsibility for care leavers, the providers suggested that landlords need to do more to prevent tenants from falling into fuel poverty. This could include steps around insulation, efficient heating systems and ensuring tenants understand and are able to deal with their energy supply.

I think this project is a great example of where we're trying to help people who are already having issues... actually, there needs to be more restriction and more legislation around landlords and the way in which young people get into housing contracts and that they can end up in unpleasant situations because they haven't understood what they signed up for or just because there aren't enough rules around what landlords are able to do. (Interview 2)

Lesson 3: Use a triage system

During this project, the team found itself developing different strategies, or branches, in response to the challenges of the pandemic. If they were to run the project again, assuming no major disruptions, it was suggested that all those available branches could still be employed as options, so that service users could choose à la carte the branch that suited them best.

it's been "this is what we offer" and then "this is what we offer", and it's just a build-up of that service, whereas if we were to start again now it would be having all of them up and running from the beginning and then delivering those avenues at once and going, "Look, this is what the whole stuff is", and then promoting it and going that way. I think that would have been much more useful in engaging with people... (Interview 5)

Lesson 4: Target groups may need extra support to receive advice/support

A final lesson that was touched on by the providers was the fact that young people living in fuel poverty may have reduced capacity to realise what kind of support they need and access it. Generally, people's priorities in life follow a predictable hierarchy: the most important needs are those that keep us alive, such as food, shelter and warmth. If these are taken care of then people can start to organise their lives and deal with more complex issues (Maslow, 1943). So, if someone is living in severe poverty

without consistent access to food and warmth, they are more likely to struggle with other aspects of their lives, which unfortunately may include organising household bills. The providers had been interested in exploring the potential for young people to be motivated to reduce their energy use due to environmental concerns; this may well be true of young people in higher income groups, but the users of this service tended to be those most in need and consistently cited their major concerns around saving money. Based on this, a lesson for the future would be to bear in mind that these young people may need extra support just to get involved in the service in the first place.

I think it's just one of those things that people almost focus on the other things first, so energy takes a bit of a back seat, whereas from our perspective we know that obviously if that's one of those core needs, your home is warm and you can eat hot food when you need to... then you can start thinking about actually how do you manage... It enables your brain to function a little bit more openly, I think, when you're well fed and comfortable... I think sometimes young people and particularly some of the target groups for the project maybe have so many other things going on that actually the energy bill just takes a bit of a back seat. (Interview 6)



6. Conclusions

Through our qualitative research, the service providers were able to give some insight into the impact of the project on their service users. Notwithstanding the limitations of the fieldwork described above, these insights enable us to form a picture of the impact of the project and to provide some recommendations on future work in this area.

It is worth noting that our study was limited by a lack of engagement on the part of service users, who we intended to reach through their activities in the Switched On project. As discussed above, this was not a problem unique to the research element, and this also reflected the experiences of Citizens Advice Manchester in their efforts to reach and engage with young people. It was hoped that service users would consent to take part in observations, focus groups and interviews and to complete surveys. Unfortunately, only two service users completed surveys, and none consented to take part in the other forms of evaluation. Partner organisations were also asked if they would like to be interviewed, but this opportunity was also declined. A limitation of this evaluation, therefore, was that the only data available came from the service providers. Although the service provider interviews generated a substantial amount of rich data, it must be acknowledged that this data is entirely from the perspective of the providers and that the voices of the service users are not fully accounted for.

Workshop attendees typically engaged well and seemed to be interested in the content. This suggests that they were learning and would personally benefit from the workshops, especially since they tended to be from demographic groups that are likely to be struggling with high fuel costs as a proportion of income. The providers were also able to support their service users who received one-to-one telephone conversations and text messages by helping to deal with complex situations. Often, this involved stepping in to deal directly with energy suppliers, the ombudsman and third-party organisations to solve problems with service provision and manage payment and debt problems. Direct feedback from these service users would have been valuable, but this was not forthcoming. The absence of any negative feedback or complaints from service users suggests that the advice and support provided was, at the very least, satisfactory.

While there is evidence of some positive impact on the service users, the total number of young people who took part in the project was seen as disappointing. There were difficulties throughout the project in terms of attracting people to use the service, and several reasons for this were discussed by the providers. Perhaps the biggest single issue was the COVID-19 pandemic and its related restrictions. The UK government's instructions for some businesses to cease trading and for people to stay in their homes except for essential reasons, colloquially known as lockdown, were introduced just as the project was beginning. It is impossible to know how the project would have developed without the pandemic, but the impact of COVID-19 seems to have been substantial. Many students moved back to their parents' homes and therefore were no longer responsible for energy bills. Those students who remained on campus, as well as school and college pupils, were required to join lectures remotely via video conferencing and may have experienced digital exhaustion, meaning that they were not motivated to engage with other services delivered remotely.

The restrictions meant the providers had to abandon their plans to deliver face-to-face advice sessions and one-to-one support, and they quickly set up remote alternatives using telephone and video conferencing. Although they were able to do this, the remote formats may not have suited many of their target groups, especially those with limited access to the appropriate technology.

It was interesting to note that a local organisation had attempted a similar project a few years earlier with comparable results. They suffered from a lack of engagement on the part of young people, but during a time prior to COVID. This suggests that a project like this, whose aim was to target young people for energy-related advice and support, could struggle to enrol large numbers of service users even in normal times. This was a challenge that the providers were aware of prior to the project and was part of the rationale: young people were known to be less likely to engage in such programmes, and so may have benefited from a targeted intervention. The evidence suggests that more may need to be done to enrol substantial numbers of young people, even in the absence of pandemics.

While there is evidence that this project had a positive impact on its service users, the providers acknowledged that young people would benefit from wider systemic changes in terms of energy and housing legislation to prevent them from becoming fuel poor. Advice and support were seen as ideally part of a multi-pronged strategy including greater responsibilities for landlords, energy companies and organisations involved in the welfare of vulnerable groups such as care leavers. While these ambitions were beyond the scope of this project, a number of practical implications are suggested here for any future energy advice and support programmes aimed towards young people:

1. Future initiatives can build on the advice and support model used in the current context. Although the number of users reached was seen as disappointing, there is evidence that the advice and support delivered to the service users was well received and useful, and this is to some extent a measure of success. Furthermore, there is nothing in the current findings to suggest that major changes would be needed in terms of either the content or the fundamental strategy of delivery. This point notwithstanding, we would suggest that any approaches taken are reviewed periodically to ensure the maximum beneficial impact is achieved.
2. It would be beneficial for multiple stakeholders to collaborate throughout the design and preparation stages of future projects, including representation from target demographic groups, as well as organisations involved in their welfare. This would potentially have the benefits of anticipating any hidden needs of target groups, giving young people a sense of ownership of the project and providing built-in avenues for recruitment.
3. In order to prepare for the busier winter months, it would be useful for such projects to commence in the late summer or early autumn.
4. There is an opportunity to improve the reach and impact of energy advice provisions for young people by making closer connections with other services, including advice workshops and individualised support. These could be made available to potential service users and delivered through a triage-type system to identify the most appropriate services for any particular individual.
5. It is important that appropriate accommodations are in place to meet additional needs, including translations of materials into foreign languages; information presented in ways that can be understood by people with a low cognitive age; and involvement of an appropriate adult, such as a support worker or parent. Young people from the vulnerable groups identified in this project (such as care leavers and young people at risk of homelessness) are likely to have significant additional needs. They may have a history of childhood trauma and may have neurodevelopmental disorders and/or mental illnesses that may not necessarily have been diagnosed.

Furthermore, young migrants and asylum seekers may struggle to understand English. Some young people may benefit from long-term ongoing support, and this should be provided where funding is available.

As evidenced in Chapter 2, the Switched On project, as well as this study, was situated within a wider policy and research agenda concerned with the relationships between poverty, health, energy and housing. It provided evidence on how to engage with young people, as well as the nature of their housing and energy challenges. By virtue of its timing, it contributed to a growing body of literature on experiences of energy and housing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a role for social researchers and organisations such as Citizens Advice to better understand how these challenges will impact the lives of young people as we move out of the pandemic. If, for example, many jobs and courses continue to involve online and remote working and learning, what does this mean for, on the one hand, the outgoings of young people on home energy and communications technologies and, on the other hand, a sense of digital exhaustion? Does it mean that young people are less likely to move away and live independently and therefore have less direct involvement in household finances? Such trends could significantly change the relationship young people have with their energy bills.

The notion of digital exclusion is of note, as it is often thought to relate primarily to older age groups. Whilst young people may be digitally literate, they may not have access to sufficient storage and mobile data to maximise their use of apps. In a crowded digital space, how do we best understand how to reach and connect with young people on issues, such as energy, that seem unexciting and are often not perceived to be a problem until the young person finds themselves cut off or in substantial debt? Is it, alternatively, the case that young people are increasingly relying on YouTube and similar services to seek guidance?

Finally, this research highlights the need to contextualise energy advice within energy and housing policy in a broader sense. Rather than simply relying on behaviour change, advice is most valuable when it can empower individuals to seek material improvements to their living conditions. This is where organisations such as Citizens Advice can take on an advocacy role and help young people engage with landlords and energy companies, but such activities are most effective in the context of strong regulations. As the need for decarbonisation receives increasing media and policy attention, it is important not to forget the financial challenges faced by young people and to provide effective support to those who would otherwise struggle to make their homes more energy-efficient.

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A Survey Questions

Q1 Please indicate below that you understand the research and consent to take part. If you are under 18 or prefer not to take part, please leave now.

I understand what participation entails, how my data will be collected, stored and used, and that my identity will be anonymised in any reports and publications arising from the research. I confirm that I am at least 18 years of age and I consent to taking part in this research study.

Q2 Please give your current age in years

Q3 Which of the following best describes your gender?

- 1 Male
- 2 Female
- 3 Prefer to self-describe (please add text below)
- 4 Prefer not to say

Q4 Please select your highest level of qualification

- 1 GCSE/O-Level/CSE
- 2 Vocational qualifications (=NVQ1+2)
- 3 A-Level or equivalent (=NVQ3)
- 4 Bachelor,Âs degree or equivalent (=NVQ4)
- 5 Masters/PhD or equivalent
- 6 No formal qualifications
- 7 Other (please describe below)

Q5 Please select your employment status

- 1 Employed full time
- 2 Employed part time or casual
- 3 Self-employed
- 4 Student
- 5 Unemployed
- 6 Unable to work
- 7 Other (please specify below)

Q6 Please select your approximate weekly income

- 1 Less than £100
- 2 £100-£199
- 3 £200-£299
- 4 £300-£399
- 5 £400-£499
- 6 £500 or more
- 7 Prefer not to say

Q7 Please select your ethnicity

- 1 White - English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- 2 White - Irish
- 3 White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller

- 4 White - Any other White background
- 5 Mixed - White and Black Caribbean
- 6 Mixed - White and Black African
- 7 Mixed - White and Asian
- 8 Mixed - Any other Mixed / multiple ethnic background
- 9 Asian/Asian British - Indian
- 10 Asian/Asian British - Pakistani
- 11 Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi
- 12 Asian/Asian British - Chinese
- 13 Asian/Asian British - Any other Asian background
- 14 Black - African
- 15 Black - Caribbean
- 16 Black - Any other Black / African / Caribbean background
- 17 Arab
- 18 Any other ethnic group
- 19 Prefer not to say

Q8 Do you have a physical, developmental or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Prefer not to say

If you selected yes, please name your condition(s) or illness(es) here

Q9 What is your current living situation?

- 1 Live with parents or guardians
- 2 Rent privately (alone or in a house share)
- 3 Home owner
- 4 Student accommodation (Halls)
- 5 Social housing
- 6 In care
- 7 Other

Q10 Please indicate which Switched On services you took part in

- 1 One-to-one advice session
- 2 Group workshop
- 3 SMS/WhatsApp advice
- 4 Other

Q11 Which, if any, of the following apply to you?

- 1 Student
- 2 Care leaver
- 3 Young carer
- 4 Previously homeless or at risk of homelessness
- 5 Private tenant (renting)
- 6 Single parent
- 7 None of the above

Q12 If you were put in touch with Switched On by another organisation, please state which one here. If you contacted them yourself, please select 'none of the above'

- 1 We Mind The Gap
- 2 Greater Manchester Youth Network
- 3 Sure Start
- 4 Shelter
- 5 Tenants Voice
- 6 Leaving Care Service
- 7 Princes Trust
- 8 Manchester Settlement
- 9 Manchester Mind
- 10 Other organisation (please specify below)
- 11 I contacted them myself

Q13 How do you pay your energy bills?

- 1 Bills included in rent
- 2 Through a bill paying service (e.g. Glide, Split the Bills)
- 3 I manage the accounts myself
- 4 I am not responsible for them (e.g. parents manage them)
- 5 Other

Q13_b If you pay your own bills, do you...

- 1 Pay monthly
- 2 Use a prepayment meter
- 3 Other
- 4 (I don't pay)

Q14 If you pay your own energy bills as combined gas and electric - please give the approximate total monthly cost here (leave blank if this does not apply to you)

Q15 Gas

Q16 Electric

Q17 How important are each of the following to you?

(Options: Not important at all, Not very important, Neutral, Quite important, Very important)

- Q17_1 Reducing energy costs to avoid getting into financial trouble/debt
- Q17_2 Reducing energy costs to spend your money on something else
- Q17_3 Reducing your energy usage to help the environment
- Q17_4 Improving the indoor environment of my home to improve my health

Q18 To what extent do the following issues apply to your home?

(Options: Never, sometimes, often, always, don't know)

- Q18_1 Too cold
- Q18_2 Problems with damp or condensation?
- Q18_3 Evidence of mould
- Q18_4 Problems with the heating system or controls

Q19 In relation to your energy bills and accounts, which of the following have you done, or do you plan to do following your participation in the Switched On project? (tick all that apply)

- 1 Set up an energy account
- 2 Find and check a bill or statement
- 3 Switch supplier or tariff
- 4 Read energy meters or give meter readings to your supplier
- 5 Look into getting a smart meter installed
- 6 Apply for the Warm Home Discount or Priority Services Register
- 7 Something else like this (provide details below)
- 8 Nothing like this

Q20 In relation to your energy use at home, which of the following have you done, or do you plan to do following your participation in the Switched On project? (tick all that apply)

- 1 Using kitchen appliances less
- 2 Using less water in the bathroom
- 3 Using entertainment devices (TV, computer, games console, etc.) less
- 4 Using central heating less
- 5 Using a fire less
- 6 Keeping windows closed
- 7 Acquiring some kind of insulation (e.g. double glazing, thicker curtains, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, etc.)
- 8 Something else like this (please describe below)
- 9 Nothing like this

Q21 How would you rate the quality of service you have received?

- 1 Poor
- 2 Fair
- 3 Good
- 4 Excellent

Q22 Did you get the kind of service you wanted?

- 1 No, definitely not
- 2 No, not really
- 3 Yes, generally
- 4 Yes, definitely

Q23 To what extent has our program met your needs?

- 1 None of my needs have been met
- 2 Only a few of my needs have been met
- 3 Most of my needs have been met
- 4 All or almost all of my needs have been met

Q24 If a friend were in need of similar help, would you recommend our program to them?

- 1 No, definitely not
- 2 No, I don't think so
- 3 Yes, I think so
- 4 Yes, definitely

Q25 How satisfied are you with the amount of help you have received?

- 1 Quite dissatisfied
- 2 Indifferently or mildly dissatisfied
- 3 Mostly satisfied
- 4 Very satisfied

Q26 Have the services you received helped you to deal more effectively with your problems?

- 1 No, they seemed to make things worse
- 2 No, they really didn't help
- 3 Yes, they helped somewhat
- 4 Yes, they helped a great deal

Q27 In an overall, general sense, how satisfied are you with the service you have received?

- 1 Quite dissatisfied
- 2 Indifferently or mildly dissatisfied
- 3 Mostly satisfied
- 4 Very satisfied

Q28 If you were to seek help again, would you come back to our program?

- 1 No, definitely not
- 2 No, I don't think so
- 3 Yes, I think so
- 4 Yes, definitely

Q29 Mobility

- 1 I have no problems in walking about
- 2 I have slight problems in walking about
- 3 I have moderate problems in walking about
- 4 I have severe problems in walking about
- 5 I am unable to walk about

Q30 Self-care

- 1 I have no problems washing or dressing myself
- 2 I have slight problems washing or dressing myself
- 3 I have moderate problems washing or dressing myself
- 4 I have severe problems washing or dressing myself
- 5 I am unable to wash or dress myself

Q31 Usual activities (e.g. work, study, housework, family or leisure activities)

- 1 I have no problems doing my usual activities
- 2 I have slight problems doing my usual activities
- 3 I have moderate problems doing my usual activities
- 4 I have severe problems doing my usual activities
- 5 I am unable to do my usual activities

Q32 Pain / discomfort

- 1 I have no pain or discomfort
- 2 I have slight pain or discomfort
- 3 I have moderate pain or discomfort
- 4 I have severe pain or discomfort
- 5 I have extreme pain or discomfort

Q33 Anxiety / depression

- 1 I am not anxious or depressed
- 2 I am slightly anxious or depressed
- 3 I am moderately anxious or depressed
- 4 I am severely anxious or depressed
- 5 I am extremely anxious or depressed

Q34 On a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being the best health you can imagine, and 0 being the worst health you can imagine, how would you rate your own health today?**Q35 Finally, if there is anything you would like to add about the Switched On service, please do so here:****Q36 We would like to invite you to take part in an interview to discuss these matters further. The interview would last between 30 minutes and 1 hour - it can be done by video call or phone call, and you would receive £10. If you would like to take part in the interview, please select yes:**

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Q37 If you would like to be entered into our prize draw to win £50 of shopping vouchers, please select yes:

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

Q38 If you answered yes to either of these questions, please give your email address here

B Interview questions

The following questions were prepared for the delivery of service user interviews.

- Can you tell me about how you first got in touch with the service?
 - Do (or did) you struggle to pay your bills?
 - Why do you think that is (or was)?
 - Do (or did) you have a particular problem with energy costs or is this (or was this) part of a wider problem?
- Did you attend a one-to-one advice session, a group workshop, both, or something else?
- Can you describe your needs in terms of paying for energy at home?
 - Do (or did) you struggle to pay your bills?
 - Why do you think that is (or was)?
 - Do (or did) you have a particular problem with energy costs or is this (or was this) part of a wider problem?
- Can you describe what happened at the Switched On (session/workshop...)?
 - What information, if any, was new to you?
- Was the service helpful?
 - How?
- What, if anything, have you done in follow up to the session?
 - Are there specific ways in which you have responded?
 - Were you able to make changes based on what you learned at Switched On?
 - Can you tell me about some of those changes?
 - Did you face challenges in making those changes? Were there changes you were unable to make and if so why was this?
- In following up the session did you approach any particular people or organisations?
 - landlord, energy company, other advice provider, friends or family
 - how was this experience?
- What, if any, additional / follow up support would help you to respond to what you learned?
 - In the survey, we asked if you had anything else to add – you said - can you elaborate on that please?
 - In the survey, you said that you have (condition/disability), is that related to why you used the service?
 - In the survey, you said that you are (care leaver/at risk of homelessness/single parent), is that related to why you used the service?
 - In the survey, you said that (reducing costs/saving money/the environment/damp and mould) were important to you, can you explain that please?
 - In the survey, you said you had (set up and energy account/using appliances less/switched energy supplier...) since using the service, can you tell me a bit more about that please?
 - In the survey, you said you (liked/didn't like the service/thought it was helpful/unhelpful or anything similar to this...), can you explain that please?
- If possible, refer to participant's survey responses and ask questions about particulars, for example:
 - Do you think it was worthwhile?
 - Would you change anything about the service?
 - What would you say to someone in the same position you were in before you used the service?
- What did you think about the way the service was delivered?
 - Do you think it was worthwhile?
 - Would you change anything about the service?
 - What would you say to someone in the same position you were in before you used the service?
- How, if at all, would you say the training has affect your confidence in dealing with energy use and your energy company?
- Apart from advice on energy usage and bills, what would do you think could be done to help people who are struggling with their energy bills?
 - E.g. by landlords, Citizens' Advice, energy companies, the government...
- Do you have any thoughts on the survey and interview process that we (the University) have done?
 - Were there any problems with the survey or the way we contacted you?

C Focus group guide

The following questions were prepared for focus groups with service users.

- So you're all here because of your links with [host organisation – unless it was hosted by CAM], can you tell me about them and how you came to be involved with this event through them?
- What are your first impressions of the Switched On service?
 - Did you enjoy the session?
- Was the session useful?
 - Which bits?
 - Did anything surprise you?
- How relevant is this kind of thing to your own situations?
- What kinds of things might you do differently at home now that you've heard this?
- Do any of you have problems at home like damp, cold temperatures, mould?
 - What about your equipment – boilers, radiators? Do you know if you have insulation?
 - Will you look into getting any repairs or new equipment now?
 - Do you think your landlords/housing service/local authority will get that sorted? [if applicable]
- Has anyone had any problems with landlords or housing associations?
- What about energy companies?
- So what did you all think about the actual session today – was it interesting? Are you glad you came?
 - Is there anything else you'd like to know about home energy that wasn't covered here?
- Does anyone have any other thoughts – anything we've not covered?

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