

The Northern Fells Village Agents are friendly local contacts who will help people of all ages, particularly more vulnerable residents, to obtain assistance and advice from a wide range of organisations and services.

They operate as part of the Northern Fells Group covering the parishes of Caste Sowerby, Ireby with Uldale, Mungrisedale, Sebergham & Welton, and Westward & Rosley in North Allerdale and Eden.

Background

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria ran energy awareness workshops as part of the FREE (Future of Rural Energy in Europe) Rural Energy Advice Programme, and Citizens Advice Energy Best Deal Campaign.

Workshops were aimed at front line staff and volunteers, such as the Northern Fells Village Agents, to support their work with residents in rural communities. This included raising awareness of Fuel Poverty, energy efficiency, and how to reduce energy costs.

The Project

Northern Fells Village Agents attended an Energy Awareness workshop in February 2012 led by ACT. The workshop highlighted the main causes of Fuel Poverty (High Fuel Costs, Energy Inefficient Homes, Low Incomes), how to address these factors, and further advice and support available both nationally and locally to implement these solutions.

This also included 'Energy Best Deal' advice on how to switch energy supplier, tariff, or payment method, all of which can help to reduce energy costs.

After the workshop, Village Agents met to discuss how they would pass on what they had learned to local residents, particularly those most in need. It was decided that incorporating this information into existing local Village Agents events and visiting residents in their homes, were the most effective way to do this.



Energy Awareness Event led by ACT

What has been achieved?

Information and Services Days, and Health and Wellbeing Days were organised to include information on switching energy suppliers and energy efficiency, such as better insulated homes. The Village Agents Benefits Advisor was also on hand to provide support.

Village Agents visited residents' homes to discuss their circumstances in confidence and provide specific support appropriate to their needs. In one case a Village Agent was able to support 3 elderly siblings living in the same property to contact their electricity provider and discuss getting a better deal.

They had been on the same tariff and paying by cheque for 27 years. Their electricity provider offered an online deal which would save around £30 a month but this wasn't possible as they didn't have internet access.

After mentioning they would switch supplier, an alternative tariff was found, and payment by direct debit, saving around £25 a month.



Village Agents Information Event at Millhouse Village Hall



Village Agent Philippa Groves with local oil syndicate customers Ted and Angela Roper

They also joined the local oil buying group to help reduce the cost of their heating oil. Details of how the Village Agents set up these oil buying groups can be found in ACT's Case Study: *Northern Fells Group Oil Buying Syndicates*

The Learning

Village Agents can identify if a resident may be experiencing or at risk of Fuel Poverty, and the potential solutions available to them. Their trusted relationship with residents at a local level, provides greater opportunities, particularly for more vulnerable residents, to support action to reduce their energy costs.

Many residents have been supported to reduce their fuel bills by joining the oil buying groups, switching supplier / tariff / payment method, and accessing insulation schemes to make their home more efficient.

Older residents are hesitant to change supplier, particularly if they have been with them for a number of years, and are less likely to make online arrangements. Many, however, will trust their Village Agent to look for them, accept support to contact suppliers direct, and discuss other energy issues.

Contact Details

For more information about the Northern Fells Group Village Agents contact Anne Burgess, Village Agent Coordinator on Tel: 016973 49741 or Email: anneburgess52@googlemail.com

Contact ACT for more information about our work on Fuel Poverty and Energy Tel: 01228 817 224 Email: info@cumbriaaction.org.uk

Citizen's Advice Energy Best Deal information can be found here: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/fsfl_projects_energybestdeal



FREE was a three year (2010 - 2013) rural energy advisory programme, aimed at off-grid communities across England, targeted at helping people in fuel poverty. The programme brought practical independent advice and information to residents regarding fuel choices, energy efficient technologies, and carbon reduction measures. It helped individual households to focus on reducing their fuel consumption and fuel costs, and also encouraged local communities to work together to promote best practice in energy efficiency and carbon reduction.



ACT champions community and rural issues

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