

## Case study: Tackling fuel poverty in rural Warwickshire



### Background

With the significant rises in fuel prices announced in 2013, Warwickshire Rural Housing Association (WRHA) was concerned about the impact on its residents. Government fuel poverty statistics (DECC 2009) suggests that rural households tend to pay more for their heating than their urban counterparts and that fuel poverty rates are higher in rural areas than urban places.

WRHA was also looking for robust data to help make longer term decisions about which heating systems to install in its properties.



Late in 2013 WRHA joined the Knowledge Exchange Partnership at De Montfort University to conduct a unique energy monitoring project. The project aim is to help residents make best use of their energy usage within their homes now and in the future, saving money and raising vulnerable residents out of fuel poverty.

### Project

WRHA recruited 20 of its 500 resident households to take part in the project. Each household completed a survey outlining their motivation for taking part, their understanding of their current heating system and their attitudes towards the amount they were paying for their heating bills.

They also had a two small sensors installed in their homes, measuring energy consumption, the temperature within the property and the humidity levels. These monitors allow WRHA to see how and when they use energy and how it affects the building.



## Findings

The survey results revealed that half of residents considered their energy bills too high, presenting some difficult choices on how they spend their money.



Resident Mrs Rachel Booth of Shipston said: “When we moved in three years ago we set our heating to the winter setting and our electricity bill was over £1000. We have adjusted the settings and our bills are lower now, but we struggle to get the house warm some days.

“I got involved with the study to help me make the most of the heating system I’ve got and to minimise my bills.”

In order to share the results of the project with all residents, to raise the broader issue of energy efficiency and share generic advice, WRHA has set up a facebook page and promoted the page and the project via the residents’ newsletter.

## Next steps

This project is very much a work in progress, with real time data being provided to WRHA’s property team. Initial data is showing wide variation in the temperature in residents’ homes, some being kept at very low levels, which could be an indicator of fuel poverty.

Over the coming months WRHA will work with residents to ensure that those residents experiencing fuel poverty are able to learn from those with more temperate homes. Using the data from the volunteer households, a package of advice will be prepared for all residents.