



HOW TO DEVELOP A RESILIENCE HUB

Our community in Bristol is working to make homes and community hubs more energy efficient to make sure we're prepared for rising energy costs and more extreme weather. This guide outlines the steps we took and our learnings along the way as we turned our community buildings at Felix Road Adventure Playground and Easton Community Centre into Resilience Hubs - comfortable, safe spaces where people can go when it's too hot or too cold, and a hub of trusted information to make sure energy support and skills reach everyone in our community.

With energy costs rising and weather becoming more extreme and unpredictable, using energy more effectively is key to healthier, more affordable homes and buildings.

As the need for warm, safe spaces and support in our community has grown due to the cost of living crisis, community centres and other free, accessible hubs are struggling to remain open because of rising expenses. To respond to these challenges, we explored ways to reduce our own buildings' running costs while also assisting residents in using energy more efficiently in their homes.

Eastside People Power is a grassroots energy skills and information project run by Eastside Community Trust, supported by Bristol Energy Network. It is part of the Community Climate Action Project coordinated by Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership, funded by the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund.

Improving the energy performance of our buildings

Our first step was to identify where heat loss was occurring at our community centre and explore potential energy-saving measures. By doing this, we aimed to enhance the comfort of the space during winter, which is particularly vital for residents struggling with heating bills who need a warm place to go during the day. Additionally, the money saved on energy bills could be redirected towards funding community activities.

A thermal imaging survey showed us where cold draughts were entering our buildings and heat was leaking out. The report identified low-cost energy saving opportunities, as well as ongoing maintenance and deep retrofit measures that would require additional funding.

We started with quick wins that could be done by our own team or with a small amount of funding so we could begin reducing our energy bills and improve building comfort immediately. These measures will vary in different buildings but could include things like filling in gaps and cracks in the building fabric and replacing window and door seals.

From there we've continued on to more costly deep retrofit work as funding becomes available. Installing additional loft insulation and new double glazed windows while also working to improve the reliability and efficiency of our ground source heat pump and training staff to use heating controls effectively have all helped to improve the comfort of our building while reducing our energy bills.



Community buildings as hubs of energy, advice and learning

Community hubs serve as trusted sources of information for individuals from diverse backgrounds and provide a point of access to share energy skills and knowledge with people who might not otherwise have access to this information /or feel a sense of agency.

Here are some of the ways we've used our buildings to get energy information out to our community with support from Bristol Energy Network:

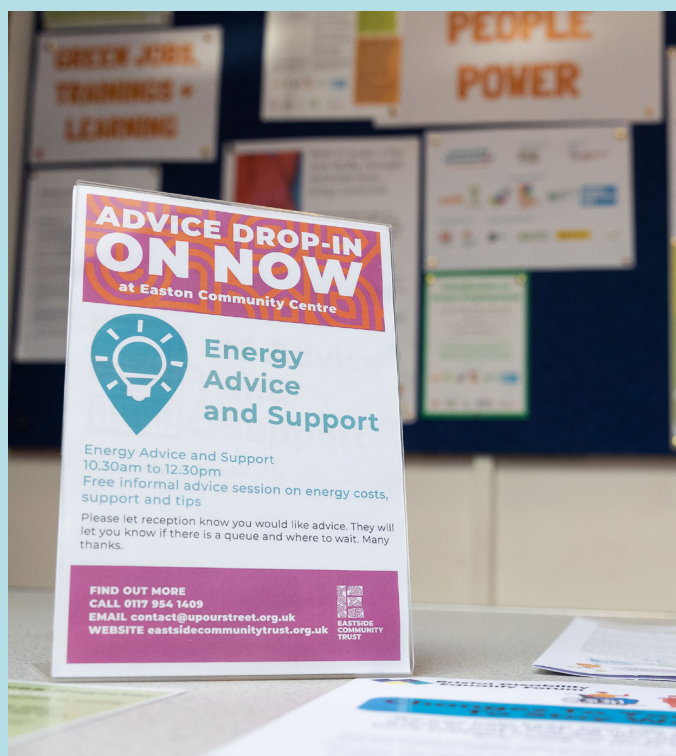
- Training up reception and engagement staff to provide basic energy information and signposting
- Hosting public events where residents can receive advice on their energy bills, learn simple tips to reduce their energy use and practical skills to draught proof their homes
- Setting up an Energy Nook in the foyer of the community centre with regularly updated information on energy events and support, funding and job opportunities, and a binder of binder with energy, ventilation and money-saving tips
- Signs to encourage behaviour change like only boiling what you need when making teas in the staff kitchen
- Running drop-in DIY draught-proofing workshops and advice sessions with groups meeting regularly in our spaces

Training up Energy Champions and local leaders who spoke some of the most common languages in our area allowed us to reach Somali, Arabic, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu speakers who meet regularly in our spaces.

Finding solutions that work

As you begin developing a plan for your building, be sure to spend time with your team thinking about how and when your building is used to find solutions that work in real life, not just on paper. For example, reception staff at the community centre started every day comfortable and warm but soon after the building opened could feel blasts of cold air and heat seeping out as people came and went through the front door. Installing a secondary door in the entry way made a significant improvement to keep the building cosy throughout the day and reduced the loss of precious heat that the centre was paying for.

For a more in-depth guide to develop and deliver an energy strategy for a community building, see the Energy Retrofit Guidance for Community Buildings resource developed in partnership with Bristol Energy Network.



Getting Ready for Winter annual events

Getting Ready for Winter events have become an autumn tradition at our community centre when temperatures begin to drop. These events feature activities such as a winter coat giveaway, DIY draught-proofing skills workshop, energy advice drop-in, and knowledge sharing from residents who have completed deep retrofits in their homes. By grouping various forms of support together in one space, we can meet people where they're at, ensuring that no one leaves empty-handed—whether they are well-resourced homeowners, tenants of private or social housing, or individuals experiencing homelessness in a nearby park.

Partnering with Bristol Energy Network to deliver the project allowed us to focus on our areas of strength – community engagement and communications – with more specific energy advice and technical expertise coming from trusted partners.

Hubs as spaces for hands-on learning and demonstrating energy saving actions

The skills needed to do basic draught proofing on community buildings are essentially the same as those needed at home, done on a larger scale. We saw this as an opportunity to offer “real life” draught proofing workshops in our buildings that would teach residents skills and build their confidence to make changes at home while helping us complete some of the recommended actions from our building's energy report.

After a briefing with a skilled supervisor, keen DIYers and volunteers were sent around the building in small groups to identify issues and discuss potential solutions before starting to tackle the jobs. With the supervisor checking their progress and offering support, participants had the chance to try things like replacing window seals and installing draught excluding door brushes in real life, working through common challenges they might encounter at home.

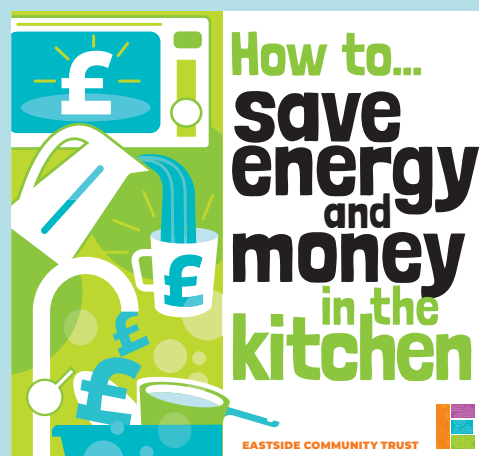
Communications

There is a wealth of accessible information and energy advice that is freely available through organisations like Bristol Energy Network, Centre for Sustainable Energy and Energy Saving Trust. We share many of these printed and online resources through our own social media, community magazine, e-newsletter and at our community hubs and events.

Additionally, we have used these resources to create our own materials tailored specifically for our community and key issues affecting our residents. They include images of local people and places so people can see themselves taking action at home.

These materials include:

- Regular features in Up Our Street, our community magazine, with energy-saving tips, project updates, ways to get involved and signposting.
- Social media campaigns and reminders, with simple tips and links to videos.
- Getting Ready for Winter webpage – including links to resources, videos and guidance
- “How to” films - breaking down basic draught-proofing techniques into simple easy to follow steps
- Slot on local radio station BCfm sharing energy saving tips and advice
- Accessible “How to save money” pocket guides with accompanying multilingual films



Our series of “How to save money” printed pocket guides and accompanying short films provides practical tips on how to use energy more efficiently at home to lower energy bills. They were developed based on feedback from our energy champions with more images and less text, and films translated into the most common local languages. The series includes ways to use less energy in the kitchen, tips for ongoing maintenance, and ways to keep the heat in and draughts out that can be used by both renters and homeowners, and people from different skill and income levels.

Top tips

- Lead with cost savings and improved comfort when making the case for energy efficiency
- Involve your whole team in gathering data, sharing information and changing behaviour
- Change needs to be supported from the top. Get management, trustees or board members involved from the beginning and make the case for the time and money involved.
- Talk about what you're doing to help people understand why changes are being made in your building, whilst also planting seeds for actions they can take at home
- Meet people where they're at, starting with simple, practical steps that provide immediate benefits and can be done by anyone, whether or not they own their home
- While the changes will ultimately happen in people's homes, it can be helpful and more fun to learn the skills together as a community
- You don't need to reinvent the wheel when sharing information about energy, but don't be afraid to make it yours. Including images of local people and place, and addressing issues that are particularly common in your area can make standard energy resources feel real and relatable.
- When making changes to your building, consider the full spectrum of extreme weather events, including hotter summers and heavier rainfall, to make it more resilient in the long run.

I've seen that strip, and then you're looking at it at home and thinking – but how? Doing it together on an actual door makes me feel like I can go home and do it myself now.

Warm Home Champion



What's next for us

As summers become hotter, residents – especially those living in flats and high rises – are finding it more challenging to stay healthy and comfortable in the heat. Alongside our work to help keep our community warm in winter, we have begun exploring the role our hubs can play to share information on how to stay cool and provide spaces where people can take refuge from the heat. Our first steps include hanging awning and increasing tree cover to create shade, learning from residents' experiences living in hotter climates and offering free drinking water to anyone who visits our sites. We have also begun assessing the capacity of the air source heat pump at Felix Road Adventure Playground to act as an air conditioning unit in extreme heat, with more activities planned to keep our community healthy and informed as we face new challenges.

Useful links

- Eastside People Power project page eastsidecommunitytrust.org.uk/project/climate-action
- BEN project page bristolenergynetwork.org.uk
- Bristol Climate and Nature partnership project page bristolclimatenature.org/projects/community-climate-action
- CSE resources page cse.org.uk/resources

Eastside Community Trust is a charity (1081691) and a company (04023294).