



COMMUNITY ENERGY AWARDS - 2024 FINALISTS

Community Energy Campaigning Organisation of the Year

1	The Co-operative Party
2	Bristol Energy Cooperative (BEC)
3	BHESCo
4	National Energy Action

1. The Co-operative Party

The Co-operative Party, known for its strong advocacy for cooperative principles and community-driven solutions, embarked on a groundbreaking campaign over the past few years to promote community energy. This campaign sought to create “a million new owners of energy” by pushing for a significant expansion of the community energy sector.

With the 2024 General Election providing a pivotal moment, the Co-operative Party leveraged its long-standing relationship with the Labour Party to elevate community energy as a key focus of Labour’s future energy policies. The primary goal of the campaign was to inspire widespread public support for community energy and to ensure the Labour Party committed to it as a central element of its energy strategy for Great Britain.

The Co-operative Party utilised its vast membership base to build grassroots support for community energy. Through events, online campaigns, and direct engagement, members were encouraged to champion community energy at both the local and national levels. One standout achievement was securing the signatures of over 500 Co-operative councillors on a letter to the previous government, advocating for increased commitment to community energy.

Online campaigning was central to the Party’s strategy. The Local Power for Local People campaign reached over 7,000 supporters, and toolkits were provided to help individuals write to their local councils and newspapers, amplifying the message further. Additionally, the introduction of the **Local Power Locator** (<https://party.coop/locator>) allowed individuals to find community energy schemes near them and engage their MPs on the issue, driving direct local and national action.

A key victory of the campaign was securing a Labour Party commitment to invest £3.3 billion in community energy through councils and local energy groups. This financial pledge represented a significant win for the Co-operative Party and its partners, marking the largest commitment to community energy in British history.

Since Labour's victory in the 2024 General Election, community energy has been enshrined in the founding statement of GB Energy, Britain's new publicly owned energy company. Although the journey to fully delivering on these promises is just beginning, the Co-operative Party's efforts have already positioned community energy as a key part of the future energy landscape.

The Co-operative Party's campaign to create "A Million Owners of Energy" is a landmark example of how grassroots campaigning and political influence can drive significant policy change. Through strategic use of its membership, collaborations with organisations like Community Energy England, and a sophisticated online presence, the Party succeeded in bringing community energy to the forefront of the Labour Party's energy strategy.

As a finalist for the Community Energy Campaigning Organisation of the Year, the Co-operative Party's efforts have not only helped shape national policy but also laid the groundwork for a transformative shift in how energy is produced, owned, and managed in Britain. The £3.3 billion Labour commitment to community energy, and its inclusion in the founding principles of GB Energy, is a testament to the power of coordinated, community-driven advocacy.

2. Bristol Energy Cooperative (BEC)

Bristol Energy Cooperative (BEC), one of the UK's longest-standing community energy cooperatives, has been a powerful force in advocating for investment and support for community energy. Faced with significant challenges, from limited government backing to complex legal and financial barriers, BEC has remained steadfast in championing the benefits of community-owned energy. This case study details BEC's campaign efforts throughout 2023-24 and its role in driving policy change during a pivotal General Election year.

In the lead-up to COP28, BEC launched an awareness campaign to showcase community energy as a local solution to the global climate crisis. A poll by Ipsos Mori revealed only 1% of British adults were familiar with the concept of community energy. BEC leveraged these findings, issuing a press release and creating a digital poster designed by local artist Zoe Power. The poster, downloadable from BEC's website, saw more than 300 downloads, and the campaign reached thousands through social media and partner communications, significantly raising awareness.

BEC has long nurtured relationships with local authorities and policy bodies. It has contributed to Bristol City Council's Net Zero plans, participated in consultations such as the Bristol City Leap partnership, and collaborated with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) to ensure community energy remained a priority. BEC's advocacy resulted in community energy being prominently featured in WECA's new report, *Scaling Investment for Climate and Nature*, which acknowledges the critical role of community energy in achieving regional Net Zero goals.

In response to the Conservative government's minimal investment in community energy (announced as £10 million in the 2023 King's Speech), BEC issued an open letter calling for greater financial support and a transition away from fossil fuels. Co-signed by other co-ops and supported by CEE, the letter garnered media attention and was referenced across several sector publications. BEC's

co-founder, Andy O'Brien, also joined the national Solar Taskforce, advocating for community energy to play a role in the government's solar energy ambitions.

As the 2024 General Election approached, BEC ran a consistent social media campaign, amplifying the issue of community energy and analysing party manifesto pledges. The cooperative worked closely with CEE, participating in public advocacy efforts, including protests at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. BEC also engaged directly with Labour's Secretary of State for Energy Security in Bristol, pushing for strong community energy policies.

BEC continuously highlights its achievements, including its portfolio of 20 solar and battery projects, with a capacity of 12 megawatts, enough to power 3,500 homes. BEC's story has been featured in videos, news outlets, and on platforms such as Sky News and co-op party campaigns, demonstrating how community energy can benefit local communities and contribute to Net Zero goals.

3. BHESCo

In 2024, BHESCo took full advantage of the UK General Election, a critical moment to engage political candidates on the importance of community energy. The organisation's primary objective was to pressure candidates to commit to policies that would support the sector if elected. Understanding that climate change and energy security were prominent issues, BHESCo crafted a strategic communications campaign to amplify the voice of the community energy sector and demonstrate its potential contribution to the UK's climate goals.

The centrepiece of this effort was a video campaign that directly posed the question to political candidates: "Why should the community energy sector vote for you?". This video, featuring various BHESCo team members, was shared across social media, tagging candidates in the Brighton and Hove area, such as Peter Kyle and Sian Berry. The video garnered 634 views on Twitter, with a notable response from Green Party candidate Sian Berry, who replied with her own video, viewed 375 times.

In addition to the video, BHESCo raised other pressing issues during the election campaign, such as home insulation policies and the repeal of the onshore wind ban, which were integral to community energy's success. The combination of targeted content and direct engagement with political figures underscored BHESCo's role as a powerful advocate for local energy solutions.

Throughout the election campaign and beyond, BHESCo strengthened its advocacy by partnering with like-minded organisations. It shared and amplified content from stakeholders such as Community Energy England, the Greater South East Net Zero Hub, and the End Fuel Poverty Coalition. These alliances allowed BHESCo to broaden its reach and present a united front on the critical issues facing the community energy sector.

Post-election, BHESCo continued its proactive approach by reaching out to newly elected Members of Parliament in Brighton and Hove, urging them to support community energy initiatives in Parliament. They also corresponded with the Labour-led Brighton and Hove City Council, with council leader Bella Sankey responding positively to future collaboration. As a result, BHESCo now sits on

several key steering groups, including a Fuel Poverty Steering Committee and the Climate Change Working Group, further enhancing its influence on local energy policy.

BHESCo's communication efforts extend beyond political engagement, with a constant stream of content aimed at educating and informing the public about community energy. During a six-month campaign to raise £550,000 in investment for new energy projects, BHESCo partnered with the ethical investment platform Ethex. Their robust communication strategy, which included social media, videos, and events, attracted 75% new investors, demonstrating the organisation's ability to resonate with a broad audience. The fundraising page attracted an average of 601 weekly views, highlighting the campaign's effectiveness in building awareness and trust in the community energy sector.

Furthermore, BHESCo leverages its local media presence to advocate for energy solutions. Regularly contacted by outlets such as The Argus and Heart FM, BHESCo has provided commentary on major energy news, from energy price hikes to changes in government policy. Their appearance on ITV Meridian News to discuss domestic energy efficiency illustrates their ability to engage both local and regional audiences effectively.

BHESCo's founder and CEO, Kayla Ente MBE, continues to inspire the next generation by speaking at schools and universities about careers in sustainability. By sharing their knowledge and experience, BHESCo plays an important role in cultivating future leaders in the renewable energy sector.

BHESCo is also active in national policy discussions, contributing to the government's 'Barriers to Community Energy' consultation with a 14-page response. This extensive document outlined critical improvements needed to support community energy, including increasing funding and revisiting planning policies for onshore wind. This advocacy demonstrates BHESCo's commitment to shaping the future of the sector at both the local and national levels.

Through innovative communication strategies, political engagement, and grassroots mobilisation, BHESCo has demonstrated how community energy can play a vital role in achieving the UK's net-zero targets. Their work continues to inspire and empower communities across Brighton, Hove, and beyond, driving real change in the fight against climate change.

4. National Energy Action

In the winter of 2023, National Energy Action (NEA) launched "Operation Warmth," a six-week Christmas campaign to raise awareness and funds for those suffering from fuel poverty. The goal was to raise £5,000 in unrestricted funds to provide vulnerable individuals with energy efficiency advice, income maximisation, and crisis support during the coldest months of the year.

The campaign sought to engage both new and existing donors through emotive messaging, highlighting the urgent need for support over the winter. The £5,000 target was set due to the campaign's short duration and its first-time nature, running alongside two other winter fundraising efforts. By focusing on real-life stories, the campaign also informed NEA's future donor strategies.

NEA used emotionally-driven messaging across multiple platforms, including social media, targeted emails, and newsletters. The goal was to resonate with a broad audience and create awareness about the reality of fuel poverty during Christmas. To ensure consistency, the campaign's branding and messaging were coordinated between NEA's fundraising and communication teams.

Internal collaboration between NEA's departments was key, with fundraising, communications, and project teams working together to create a campaign based on real-life case studies. These stories helped deepen engagement and demonstrate the tangible impact of NEA's work.

A multi-channel social media strategy amplified the campaign, with paid ads on Facebook and YouTube reaching over 34,000 people. Organic posts expanded the reach further, resulting in a total of 64,000 individuals engaging with the campaign. A modest budget of £343.93 yielded impressive results in clicks and engagement.

Operation Warmth successfully engaged both existing and new donors, raising £9,191.67—nearly double its target—with over 30% of contributions coming from first-time donors. The campaign achieved widespread visibility, sparking online discussions and increasing awareness of fuel poverty.

The campaign enhanced NEA's advocacy for community energy, gaining media recognition from figures like Martin Lewis and reaching new audiences. The influx of new donors has paved the way for sustained long-term support, positioning NEA for continued success in addressing fuel poverty.

Operation Warmth exceeded its fundraising target and expanded NEA's donor base, showcasing the power of emotive storytelling and strategic media use. The campaign not only provided immediate financial support but also strengthened NEA's long-term advocacy and engagement efforts.

Supportive Local Authority

1	Torbay Council
2	Essex County Council
3	City of York Council
4	West of England Mayoral Combined Authority

1. Torbay Council

Torbay's support for community energy projects began with climate conversations, in which the council invited local grassroots energy organisations, such as ECOE, to contribute their expertise. These discussions helped shape the Torbay Net Zero Document, and laid the groundwork for a Climate Action Plan that began in 2022, further amplified by the Greener Way for Our Bay (GWFOB) Action Plan launched in November 2023.

The GWFOB action plan is a comprehensive framework outlining actions to be delivered through 2027 and into the future, guiding Torbay towards its carbon-neutral goal by 2050. ECOE played a key role in helping shape this plan, with a particular focus on decarbonisation of homes—an area where ECOE's award-winning energy advice services have been pivotal. The council's plan covers high-impact priorities such as improving energy efficiency in 63,000 homes.

Torbay's collaborative approach, reflected in its meaningful engagements with community energy organisations, ensures that energy efficiency, retrofitting, and low-carbon heating systems are integral components of both current and future housing strategies. This planning ensures that Torbay's housing stock becomes greener, more energy-efficient, and that vulnerable communities are prioritised.

Torbay Council has maintained strong, ongoing engagement with ECOE since 2022, a relationship that has grown through strategic involvement in climate policy development and energy advice initiatives. Key areas of collaboration include; Multi-agency funding proposals, such as the Lottery's Climate Action Fund, focusing on energy efficiency programmes and training frontline workers from housing, social care, and welfare departments to integrate energy advice into their daily work.

This engagement has been instrumental in enabling ECOE to deliver its services more effectively and widely.

Torbay Council and ECOE have shared expertise widely, promoting community energy advice across multiple sectors. The Torbay Advice and Information Network, a collaborative platform, has been crucial in integrating energy advice into council referral systems, ensuring that residents benefit from ECOE's energy expertise when seeking welfare and benefits advice.

The council's facilitation of the Torbay Climate Partnership, established in 2021, has brought together public, private, community, and voluntary sectors to work towards a carbon-neutral Torbay. This platform has enabled shared learning, driving collaborative solutions, and raised ambitions for climate action.

Torbay Council's commitment to community energy projects and sustainability demonstrates the vital role local authorities can play in addressing climate change at the grassroots level. By fostering partnerships with ECOE and other stakeholders, providing funding support, and embedding energy advice across multiple sectors, Torbay Council has actively contributed to a cleaner, greener future for its residents. Their work stands as a model of effective local governance in community energy

initiatives, showcasing how strategic planning and meaningful collaboration can help achieve Net Zero goals and deliver tangible benefits for the community.

2. Essex County Council

In 2023, Essex County Council (ECC) won the prestigious ‘Most Supportive Local Authority’ award, cementing its position as a leader in promoting community energy. Over the past year, ECC has upheld and further strengthened its commitment to the community energy sector by implementing a strategic and multifaceted approach. Through meaningful partnerships, robust policy advocacy, financial support, and practical assistance, ECC has driven innovation and sustainability in Essex’s local energy landscape.

One of ECC’s most effective strategies has been its deep engagement with community energy groups across the county. By leading a network that unites representatives from various organisations, ECC fosters a ‘community of practice.’ This network allows groups to exchange knowledge, share resources, and collaborate on best practices. Through expert-led presentations and interactive Q&A sessions, ECC empowers community groups to grow and succeed in their local initiatives.

This network, initially launched as part of Community Energy South’s Pathways programme, has seen significant growth in the past year, both in membership and impact. One standout addition to this network is Basildon 20-30, which is composed of members aged 20-30 and is likely the first youth-led community energy group in the UK. This achievement underscores ECC’s ability to cultivate diverse and innovative energy solutions that engage a wide demographic, especially the younger generation.

Additionally, ECC provides support to over 25 community energy and climate action groups, guiding them through ‘powering-up’ and ‘powering-down’ initiatives, helping them launch renewable energy projects, and enabling energy-saving measures across the county.

ECC has been pivotal in offering hands-on assistance to community energy groups, providing the necessary resources to ensure their success. A notable example is the Jaywick Community Energy Group, which has set its sights on developing solar energy projects for local buildings. To further support Jaywick, ECC helped establish the Jaywick Energy Hub, a community resource offering guidance on energy efficiency, available funding, and retrofit grants for homes.

ECC also played a crucial role in supporting the Harlow Community Energy Project. By connecting the group with key stakeholders and facilitating its incorporation as a community benefit society, ECC helped secure funding opportunities and drive local energy initiatives. Moreover, ECC has consistently raised awareness of grants, funding, and financing options through social media and communications, ensuring groups have access to critical resources for their energy ventures.

As a partner with Community Energy South, ECC has gone a step further by providing templates and guidance on becoming incorporated as community-benefit societies, a structure that unlocks more opportunities for funding and project development.

ECC's collaboration with district councils has been another major factor in advancing community energy. A notable success is its partnership with Uttlesford District Council, which has resulted in the early development of a district-wide community energy group. This umbrella organisation will support the six new groups that have formed in the past year. By advocating for and guiding the establishment of this district-wide initiative, ECC has proven its ability to mobilise multiple stakeholders and align local priorities with wider energy goals.

In addition to advocacy and practical support, ECC has provided financial backing to several community energy projects. One of the key projects supported by ECC is the Littlebury Energy Project, which secured a £40,000 feasibility study for a heat network thanks to ECC's intervention. ECC also collaborated with the Tollesbury Climate Partnership on the Tollesbury School initiative, an exemplary project that reflects how local authorities can lead by example in the community energy sector.

Through financial support, expertise, and capacity building, ECC has enabled these groups to take tangible steps toward clean energy solutions that benefit local communities.

Essex County Council's holistic approach to supporting community energy initiatives has made it a model for other local authorities. From policy influence and financial support to meaningful engagement and partnerships, ECC has shown that local governments can play a transformative role in driving the community energy movement.

3. City of York Council

The City of York Council has been a cornerstone of support for York Community Energy (YCE) and Solar for Schools (SfS), playing a pivotal role in advancing community energy initiatives and promoting sustainability in York. Their multifaceted support, spanning political leadership and operational facilitation, has been integral to fostering local energy projects, aligning with regional decarbonisation strategies, and ensuring the successful delivery of key initiatives that empower local communities.

The City of York Council has not only endorsed community energy efforts but also integrated them into broader policy frameworks, reinforcing their long-term commitment to local sustainability and decarbonisation. Community Energy has been embedded into both the York and North Yorkshire Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) and the York Climate Change Strategy. These plans outline community energy as a critical component of local energy transformation and establish YCE as a core delivery partner. This strategic positioning ensures that community energy initiatives remain central to York's efforts to achieve carbon neutrality, both in policy and practice.

The Council's role in supporting Solar for Schools (SfS) highlights its commitment to advancing renewable energy at the grassroots level. By reviewing contractual arrangements and recommending participation to schools under its jurisdiction, the City of York Council facilitated the development of a contractual framework that has allowed a pipeline of schools to install solar arrays. The collaboration has not only delivered tangible environmental benefits, but also demonstrated the value of partnerships between the public sector and community-driven initiatives.

This collaboration laid the foundation for a trusted partnership between YCE and the Council. Council officers and political leaders have further helped to promote these successes, showcasing the significant role schools can play in the city's wider sustainability goals.

The City of York Council has played a crucial role in enabling YCE's community-owned renewable energy projects. Specifically, the Council has facilitated access to Council-owned properties, allowing YCE to investigate them as potential sites for community rooftop solar arrays. This partnership is supported by YCE's Community Energy Fund, with a shared goal of expanding local energy generation through solar power.

This collaboration between YCE and the Council underscores the city's innovative approach to sustainability, where public assets serve as platforms for community-led energy production, contributing to a more resilient and decentralised energy grid.

York Community Energy's expertise in energy advice and housing decarbonisation has also been recognised and incorporated into the Council's efforts to decarbonise the city's housing stock. The Council has not only provided financial backing through various grants for vulnerable households but also invited YCE to co-lead a £3.5 million Innovate UK project to develop a retrofit 'One-Stop-Shop'. This project, running until November 2025, aims to design a seamless customer journey for homeowners looking to decarbonize their properties—from outreach and assessment to the actual retrofit works.

The Council's involvement in this initiative highlights their proactive stance on tackling climate change and improving housing energy efficiency, further demonstrating their leadership in driving decarbonisation in collaboration with trusted community partners.

Recognising the importance of collaboration in accelerating the energy transition, the City of York Council has organised numerous events to foster stakeholder engagement. These have included a 'hackathon' following the development of the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP), a Green Business Forum, and activities through the relaunched York Climate Commission. These forums have brought together public, private, and community stakeholders, encouraging cross-sectoral collaboration to identify new opportunities for community energy generation.

Support for YCE has been consistent across political groups within the City of York Council, reflecting a broad consensus on the importance of community energy. Councillors have taken proactive steps to ensure that political candidates across the spectrum appreciate the value of community energy, both as a movement and as a local partner in delivering decarbonisation policies. This political

advocacy has been instrumental in maintaining momentum for community energy initiatives, ensuring they are integrated into future policy directions.

Special recognition is warranted for the Decarbonisation Team within the City of York Council, led by Shaun Gibbons, along with team members Issy and Louisa. Their proactive engagement and willingness to collaborate with YCE have been essential to the success of multiple initiatives. By facilitating connections across Council departments and maintaining regular communication, the Decarbonisation Team has exemplified what it means to be a trusted partner to local energy innovators.

The City of York Council's commitment to community energy, sustainability, and collaboration has set a benchmark for local authorities across the UK. Their holistic approach—encompassing policy integration, hands-on support for solar and retrofit projects, and fostering cross-sector collaboration—demonstrates how local governments can drive real change in the transition to a low-carbon future. Through their ongoing partnership with York Community Energy and Solar for Schools, the Council is ensuring that York's communities are empowered to take control of their energy future, making a tangible contribution to the city's decarbonisation goals.

4. West of England Mayoral Combined Authority

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (WECA), established in 2017, represents the regions of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City, and South Gloucestershire. Under the leadership of Mayor Dan Norris, elected in 2022, the authority has prioritised tackling the climate and ecological crises. WECA's commitment to addressing these challenges is outlined in its Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan, developed with input from key stakeholders following its climate and ecological emergency declaration in 2022. The strategy envisions a bold ambition: to lead the West of England towards net-zero emissions and nature recovery by 2030.

A key pillar of WECA's strategic plan is the Net Zero Energy priority, which focuses on decarbonising energy systems and boosting local renewable energy generation. This initiative actively encourages community involvement, recognizing that community-focused energy projects are essential to unlocking the region's renewable energy potential. The authority's approach emphasises leadership, collaboration across sectors, and ensuring a fair transition to a green economy, leaving no one behind.

WECA's strategy is built around short, medium, and long-term actions that prioritise the empowerment of local communities in achieving energy transition goals.

- Short-term actions include the provision of grant funding through the Local Energy Scheme, which supports local energy projects.
- Medium-term actions (2024-28) involve developing a Community Energy Strategy for the region, incorporating financial and support mechanisms. This phase will foster community

involvement in net-zero energy initiatives and expand career and skills opportunities within the green sector.

- Long-term vision (2028-30) aims to establish the West of England as a national Community Energy Hub, targeting the generation of 10% of local renewable energy through community-led projects.

In its first two years of implementing the Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan, WEMCA has worked to bolster the community energy sector through direct support, meaningful engagement, and funding. A total of £2.7 million in grants has been allocated to 12 community energy projects, ranging from the construction of wind turbines to solar panel installations on community buildings.

WECA has adopted a consultative approach in engaging with the community energy sector. Through regular meetings with local authorities and community organisations, the authority tailors its funding opportunities to meet the specific needs of project developers and local communities. This collaborative dialogue ensures that the decarbonization goals are aligned with the interests of those working on the ground.

The authority also engages actively with Community Energy England members, such as Bristol Energy Cooperative, Bristol Energy Network, and Bath & West Community Energy, to support their projects. This engagement includes providing guidance, advice, and practical support, including access to related programs like the Green Skills projects and the South West Net Zero Hub, which offers additional funding and resources.

Recognising the financial challenges community energy projects often face, WECA has established multiple funding streams. These include the Combined Authority's Investment Fund, the Green Recovery Fund, and European funding sources. These funds help de-risk feasibility stages, pilot new business models, and provide capital for energy generation projects.

To further support community energy initiatives, WECA has developed a web-based Toolkit for communities seeking to launch energy projects. This resource, along with a new Community Energy Open Data Portal, provides practical tools for project planning and execution. The portal, set to launch by the end of 2024, will offer data visualisation tools that showcase the impact and benefits of community energy in the region.

WECA is committed to sharing its expertise and learning across the community energy sector. The authority regularly participates in regional energy events, including the Bristol Energy Network annual conference, and works closely with the Wessex Community Energy Network to facilitate knowledge sharing. The authority's involvement in Community Energy Fortnight 2023 also showcased local projects via a social media campaign, highlighting the region's progress and encouraging broader participation.

Through its forward-thinking policy and planning support, the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority is actively shaping the future of community energy. By providing substantial financial backing, fostering collaboration, and ensuring community energy is central to its net-zero ambitions,

WECA is not only leading the region toward a sustainable future but also serving as a model for other local authorities across the UK. Its approach underscores the importance of community-driven renewable energy initiatives in achieving regional and national climate goals, with a focus on equitable, long-term impact.

Community Engagement and Inclusion Award

1	ECOE
2	East Durham Community Development Trust Ltd
3	Repowering London

1. ECOE

Exeter Community Energy (ECO) initiative has set a strategic approach to address energy efficiency and fuel poverty at a grassroots level through sustained community engagement. Their focus on energy inclusion is deeply rooted in understanding the local community's needs, especially vulnerable populations facing multiple deprivations. ECO's model aims to build lasting partnerships with community organisations, the health and welfare sectors, housing agencies, and various social care networks, thereby creating a robust support system.

ECO's strategy involves targeting communities marked by high deprivation, low energy efficiency (homes rated EPC D or below), areas lacking gas connections, and regions with dense rental housing. This targeted approach is informed by data from local councils and resources like the National Grid's Social Indicator Mapping, indices of multiple deprivation, and reports on cold homes. This research informs the setup of drop-in clinics, such as at food banks, community centres, churches, and libraries in areas with the highest need, bringing support directly to communities.

The formation of a dedicated community engagement team, led by a team leader, has been instrumental in ensuring sustained outreach efforts. This team organises a variety of events and community talks and runs energy advice cafes and workshops. ECO's inclusion strategy further

extends to specialised engagement for families and younger people through interactive resources, including thermal imaging demonstrations and educational cooking classes.

ECOE's engagement has resulted in widespread impact, reflected by their active presence at over 589 events and 4,457 direct interactions through clinics, events, and their helpline. Their commitment to addressing energy needs has yielded significant referrals, with 2,864 new referral inquiries from partner organisations. ECOE's direct services have included 1,592 home visits and over 4,263 client interactions, covering essential areas like debt and benefits, aftercare, and long-term energy management support.

ECOE partnered with six Devon Primary Care Networks (PCNs) to address fuel poverty's impact on patients with chronic respiratory illnesses. This programme, reaching 352 patients, has helped alleviate approximately £109,475 in costs by providing home assessments, energy-saving installations, and personalised advice.

As part of the #GreenFootballWeekend, ECOE educated over 8,000 football fans on energy efficiency and climate action.

ECOE has also conducted community walkabouts, participated in tenant events, and held cost-of-living roadshows to foster direct conversations on energy saving.

Volunteers are integral to ECOE's outreach. The Community Energy Champions Programme, overseen by the Energy Champion Manager, provides training to local volunteers who support ECOE's energy-saving mission. These volunteers attend a two-day training session, participate in NEA webinars, and receive mentorship from ECOE staff.

ECOE's achievements underscore the importance of data-driven, community-centric strategies to tackle pressing issues like fuel poverty. By focusing on inclusion, proactive partnerships, and the strength of local volunteer networks, ECOE has built a resilient model that empowers communities to take control of their energy needs, promotes financial stability, and contributes meaningfully to environmental sustainability.

2. East Durham Community Development Trust Ltd

East Durham Trust (EDT) is a non-profit organisation committed to tackling poverty, social isolation, and inequality in East Durham, one of the UK's most disadvantaged areas. Over 75% of residents in East Durham live in the most deprived areas nationwide. By working closely with these communities, East Durham Trust has implemented impactful programmes aimed at enhancing economic resilience, reducing social isolation, and fostering inclusive community energy projects.

In response to widespread financial hardship, EDT has developed a range of economic support services designed to provide immediate and lasting relief to residents struggling with debt, benefits access, and the rising cost of living. Their financial advice services offer free debt management and

budgeting guidance, empowering individuals and families to regain control over their finances. Additionally, EDT's food bank delivers emergency food parcels to those in crisis, ensuring essential needs are met. By equipping residents with practical tools and knowledge, EDT promotes long-term economic resilience and reduces the financial burden on struggling families.

Isolation and mental well-being are primary social issues EDT addresses, especially among vulnerable groups such as the elderly, unemployed, and individuals with disabilities. To combat loneliness and isolation, EDT created the Crisis Response Team, a volunteer-led initiative that provides befriending services and regular human contact to those at risk of social isolation. These social support programs not only provide immediate relief from loneliness but also build lasting connections that enhance overall well-being across the community.

To foster a sense of belonging and connection, EDT operates community hubs and outreach programmes where residents can access resources, participate in workshops, and attend community events. These safe spaces promote social cohesion, enabling residents from diverse backgrounds to come together, share experiences, and build a stronger, more inclusive community. Through these hubs, EDT creates opportunities for engagement and collaboration, which are essential in building a united and resilient community.

The PowerED project exemplifies EDT's collaborative and inclusive approach to renewable energy solutions. This initiative brings together local residents, community groups, and regional partners in identifying and delivering energy solutions tailored to the community's needs. Through PowerED, residents played a key role in defining their energy requirements, resulting in solutions that reduce carbon emissions and address fuel poverty. By embedding co-design and community ownership into the project, EDT fosters a culture of local leadership in sustainable practices and strengthens the community's resilience against economic and environmental challenges.

The Energising East Durham programme builds on EDT's previous successes, focusing on training local residents as energy champions who offer peer-to-peer support, energy advice, and advocacy.

Central to EDT's success is its unwavering commitment to community collaboration. Each project is shaped by local voices, ensuring that solutions meet the unique needs of East Durham's residents. EDT's partnerships with local authorities, energy providers, and national organisations amplify its impact, but its true strength lies in mobilising the community itself. Through this engagement, EDT has achieved measurable outcomes, including improvements in energy efficiency, reductions in carbon emissions, and significant alleviation of fuel poverty. The community's empowerment to manage its energy resources strengthens resilience and reinforces a sense of collective ownership over East Durham's energy future.

3. Repowering London

Repowering London, a pioneering community energy organisation, has consistently championed inclusive and innovative approaches to community energy. Established in Brixton, Repowering London was the first organisation in the UK to implement a community energy project on urban

social housing, setting a transformative example for integrating renewable energy into urban communities. Over recent years, Repowering London has further strengthened its commitment to inclusivity and accessibility. By creating paid roles for Community Leads with local ties outside the climate sector and establishing youth training programs for those not in education, employment, or training (NEET), Repowering London is building a foundation for sustainable careers in green industries.

In 2024, Repowering London introduced two significant initiatives aimed at engaging broader audiences in community energy: the Cooperative Membership Research Project and the Creative Energy Clubs. Each initiative reflects the organisation's dedication to reaching underrepresented communities, diversifying cooperative membership, and creatively engaging Londoners with the potential of community energy.

The UK's community energy sector has traditionally struggled with diversity, as shown by a 2020 Co-operatives UK survey. The survey of 502 community share investors revealed that 73% were university educated, 92% were White, and 62% were over the age of 55, reflecting the limited reach of community energy and the co-operative sector across different socio-economic and ethnic groups. Recognizing that community energy should drive social and cultural change as part of a just energy transition, Repowering London embarked on a research project to address these disparities and expand cooperative participation.

In collaboration with the Centre for Sustainable Energy and King's College London, Repowering London launched a participatory research project within two community energy cooperatives in North Kensington and Newham. Key to this project were two community researchers who worked alongside locally recruited co-designers from communities underrepresented in the cooperative sector. A total of 22 co-designers contributed to the research, sharing their insights to co-design more inclusive cooperative membership and share options.

This collaboration resulted in the development of a toolkit titled "A Participatory Toolkit for Inclusive Community Energy Co-operatives." The toolkit includes actionable strategies and tools for other co-operatives and stakeholders to create inclusive membership offers and promote diversity in the community energy sector. It has been made freely available on the Repowering London website, reflecting the organisation's commitment to sharing knowledge and fostering inclusivity across the broader cooperative landscape.

The toolkit's co-designers have since joined their local cooperatives as volunteers, contributing their voices and perspectives to ongoing community energy initiatives in North Kensington and Newham. Their involvement is a testament to the project's success in not only broadening cooperative membership but also cultivating grassroots leaders who will help advance community-led energy solutions in London.

To expand community engagement further, Repowering London has also explored the power of creativity to bring new audiences into the fold of community energy. Through a series of Creative Energy Clubs, Repowering London has run art workshops that make learning about community

energy accessible, enjoyable, and inclusive. In September 2024, Repowering London took these workshops to a new level by hosting a two-day Creative Energy Exhibition. Designed to serve as a “third space” outside of work or home, the exhibition created an open, welcoming environment for people to come together, exchange ideas, and reimagine community energy.

The exhibition’s opening night drew an enthusiastic crowd of approximately 150 attendees, including community members, sector colleagues, local government representatives, and activists. The event was an interactive, collaborative success, encouraging attendees to envision the potential of community energy and its role in creating sustainable urban communities.

Repowering London’s efforts have made substantial strides in bringing diversity, accessibility, and creativity into community energy. All of their activities showcase the organisation’s commitment to inclusive, community-driven energy solutions that address the needs and aspirations of a broader population.

Fuel poverty Action Award

1	Energise Barnsley
2	Heart of England Community Energy
3	CREW Energy
4	National Energy Action

1. Energise Barnsley

Energise Barnsley is a community benefit society dedicated to sustainable energy solutions and fuel poverty alleviation. Founded in 2013 by Andy Heald, the society operates in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, a region historically known for coal production. Energise Barnsley’s mission is centred on reducing carbon emissions and supporting a just energy transition. Through the installation of renewable technologies like solar PV, battery storage, and heat pumps, the organisation enables residents—especially those in fuel poverty—to reduce their energy expenses. All installations are provided at no cost to the residents, removing financial barriers to accessing clean energy.

Energise Barnsley’s approach involves extensive collaboration with local government and housing associations. In particular, partnerships with Barnsley Council, Age UK, and Berneslai Homes have been instrumental in delivering renewable energy to low-income households.

Key initiatives include:

- Energise Barnsley has installed solar PV systems on 321 social housing units, batteries on 143 homes, and heat pumps in 40 homes. This allows households to harness and store renewable energy, reducing dependency on the grid. On average, solar-equipped homes reduce electricity bills by 30%, and those with battery or heat pump additions see savings of up to 60%.
- In response to technological advancements, Energise Barnsley can now install solar PV systems on East-West facing roofs, significantly expanding the pool of homes eligible for renewable installations. This has enabled the society to target an additional 1,000 homes over the next 18 months, with surveys already underway on the first 200 units and half of the required funding raised.
- Energise Barnsley prioritises resident understanding of renewable systems, from using 'free' solar energy at optimal times to reducing overall energy consumption. Through Barnsley Council and Berneslai Homes, liaison officers meet with residents to address individual concerns, whether related to health, installation disruption, or utility.
- Energise Barnsley established a community fund to provide alternative assistance. This fund supports various local initiatives, such as energy-efficient lighting upgrades in social clubs, solar installations on community buildings, street clean-up projects, and even funding for food banks.

Energise Barnsley's efforts have yielded notable results, benefiting both individual residents and the broader community in energy cost reduction, environmental benefits from transitioning hundreds of homes to solar energy, and social good from the community fund.

Energise Barnsley's vision extends well into the future, with ambitious goals to expand its impact. In the coming 18 months, it aims to add solar PV systems to 1,000 additional homes. The society's commitment to a just energy transition will likely continue to guide its work, addressing fuel poverty while advancing environmental sustainability in Barnsley.

Through practical installations, partnerships, and community education, Energise Barnsley not only reduces energy costs and carbon emissions but also creates a support network that addresses the broader needs of Barnsley's residents.

2. Heart of England Community Energy

Heart of England Community Energy Ltd. (HECE) is a not-for-profit community enterprise that operates a 15 MW solar array near Stratford-upon-Avon. Since its establishment in 2016, HECE has harnessed renewable energy to generate approximately 13.5 million kWh of green electricity annually from its 60,000 solar panels, helping power the local community with sustainable energy. Notably, HECE reinvests its surplus income into the Heart of England region, with a focus on addressing fuel poverty, combating social deprivation, and supporting environmental sustainability across South Warwickshire.

One of HECE's standout initiatives is its collaboration with Act on Energy (AoE), a local energy advice charity dedicated to supporting households facing rising energy costs. HECE has provided over

£70,000 in funding to pilot AoE's "Complex Case Worker" initiative, a program designed to deliver personalised, hands-on assistance to vulnerable community members. This pilot programme offers free, independent energy advice to individuals disproportionately affected by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, focusing on energy efficiency and resource accessibility to create meaningful and long-term financial relief.

The Complex Case Worker initiative aims to provide one-to-one, tailored support to individuals facing multifaceted energy-related challenges. This includes guidance on energy-saving practices, personalised home visits, and access to essential grants. HECE's funding has enabled AoE to prioritise households with the most complex cases, especially those where multiple vulnerabilities converge, such as health-related issues and economic hardship.

The programme's impact has far exceeded initial expectations. Over the last two years, it has achieved the following outcomes:

- 723 households received assistance, surpassing the original target of 400.
- Over 250 individuals benefited from personalised home visits, where tailored advice and support were provided on-site.
- A cumulative £226,541 in savings and income gains were achieved for participants through energy efficiency measures and grants.
- 467 individuals received thorough support via phone and web, providing them with continuous assistance in managing energy-related challenges.
- 410 households received small grant measures, including draught-proofing, energy-efficient lighting, fuel debt support, and boiler servicing.

The Complex Case Worker initiative has not only helped individuals meet their immediate energy needs but also empowered them with knowledge and tools for reducing long-term costs. By securing grants, improving housing conditions, and providing crucial energy-saving tips, HECE and AoE have enabled beneficiaries to build a more sustainable and comfortable lifestyle. The initiative has demonstrated a clear need for ongoing support of this nature, inspiring both Stratford and Warwick District Councils to commit funding for two additional outreach workers for the next financial year.

Beyond financial relief, the program has gathered valuable data and insights that validate the demand for personalised energy support. These findings have catalysed district-wide collaboration, setting a precedent for similar programmes. Local authorities are now poised to sustain and expand the project, committing to a coordinated approach through at least spring 2025. The foundation laid by HECE's funding has thus become a springboard for continued support and resources throughout the community.

Following the success of the Complex Case Worker initiative, HECE remains steadfast in its commitment to alleviating fuel poverty and supporting vulnerable households. Currently, HECE has allocated £15,000 in hardship funding to Citizens Advice South Warwickshire (CASW) for 2023. This funding aids vulnerable individuals with essential needs, from food vouchers to school uniforms and energy bills, addressing both immediate and practical needs.

Heart of England Community Energy Ltd. exemplifies how community-focused renewable energy projects can drive social change. Through its collaboration with AoE and ongoing support for CASW, HECE has impacted hundreds of lives, providing financial relief, promoting energy efficiency, and addressing fuel poverty head-on. HECE's model underscores the potential of community energy enterprises not only to promote sustainability but also to foster resilience and social equity within their regions.

3. CREW Energy

In South West London, fuel poverty remains a pressing issue, especially in boroughs like Wandsworth, Merton, Kingston, and Richmond, which combine high living costs, significant deprivation hotspots, and hard-to-heat homes. Many households, especially those in private and social rented housing (where up to 36% of households in Wandsworth are privately rented), face mounting energy bills. Recent data estimates that over 38,000 households across these boroughs experience fuel poverty, a number likely to increase given the doubling of energy costs.

In response, the South West London Energy Advice Partnership (SWLEAP)—in collaboration with SGN, Habitats and Heritage, and Crew Energy—delivers targeted support to alleviate fuel poverty. This case study outlines the innovative approaches, impacts, and ongoing commitment of SWLEAP to improve energy efficiency, reduce household expenses, and support vulnerable residents in South West London.

SWLEAP's service model centres on providing comprehensive, accessible energy advice and resources. Services include:

- Energy advisors visit homes to conduct in-depth energy assessments, install simple efficiency measures (e.g., radiator reflectors), and assess bills for potential savings.
- A free telephone advice line connects residents to tailored energy advice.
- Advisors provide in-person support at community events, collaborating with local service providers to reach vulnerable populations.

These interventions help residents understand their energy options, reduce consumption, and increase financial resilience. SWLEAP's energy-saving initiatives include installing equipment, offering emergency fuel vouchers, and helping households join the Priority Services Register for vulnerable energy consumers. In cases of severe financial need, advisors help residents access government and council grants and discount schemes to further alleviate household expenses.

In 2023-24, SWLEAP delivered:

- 1,200+ energy-saving interventions saving £1.03 million in total.
- 3850 "warm packs" to vulnerable households, each containing LEDs, radiator foils, and draught excluders.
- 314 home energy visits and 490 telephone advice calls helping residents save over 900 tonnes of CO₂ annually.

SWLEAP identified several homes with inflated Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings, a problem that disqualifies some homes from energy-saving schemes like ECO4. To address this, SWLEAP reassesses ratings and refers eligible cases for insulation and other efficiency measures through partners like SELCE.

Recognising that fuel poverty disproportionately affects minority ethnic groups, SWLEAP prioritises outreach to underrepresented communities, often collaborating with local Muslim and Afro-Caribbean charities, Gujarati centres, and English as an Additional Language groups. Advisors provide services in multiple languages, including Urdu, Punjabi, French, and Italian, ensuring cultural and linguistic barriers do not prevent access to support.

In 2024, SWLEAP launched HEAT in Hackney, aiming to reach an additional 1,000 residents with 90 home visits, funded by UKPN and Hackney Council. This initiative, bolstered by £18,000 in funding, represents an expansion of SWLEAP's services to meet rising demand and reach more deprived areas.

SWLEAP actively collaborates with local councils, community energy groups, and organisations across London to share insights and best practices. Recently, SWLEAP provided mentorship and energy adviser training to organisations like Transition Town Ilford, Transition Town Kingston, and Croydon Community Energy, contributing to the growth of community-led energy initiatives.

By continuously evolving to meet local needs, expanding partnerships, and sharing knowledge with other organisations, SWLEAP has created a model of impactful, community-centred energy support that is adaptable to other urban areas facing similar challenges.

4. National Energy Action

National Energy Action (NEA) serves as the primary national charity dedicated to tackling fuel poverty across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. With the rising energy costs exacerbating the cost-of-living crisis, NEA has committed to ensuring that every household can afford to live in a warm, dry, and healthy home. The latest data from NEA indicates that, as of last winter, 6.5 million households in the UK were experiencing fuel poverty—a two-million increase since the onset of the energy crisis in 2021.

To combat these challenges, NEA collaborates with government entities, the energy sector, health services, local authorities, and other agencies, creating initiatives designed to address both the causes and impacts of fuel poverty. Key actions include:

- NEA campaigns for policies that prioritise the needs of fuel-poor households, advocating for more investment in domestic energy efficiency.
- Through rigorous research, NEA identifies the root causes and extent of fuel poverty and develops policies to address these issues.

- By developing national qualifications in energy advice, NEA ensures high standards in delivering energy efficiency support.
- NEA provides dedicated advice and assistance to individuals facing fuel poverty and debt, particularly through its flagship Warm and Safe Homes (WASH) advice service.

A core focus of NEA's mission is "Tackling the Worst First," aiming to prioritise assistance for those in the most challenging conditions, along with ensuring consistent and effective support for vulnerable groups.

Through initiatives like the WASH advice service, NEA has significantly enhanced the lives of individuals and families affected by fuel poverty:

- Last year, nearly half of WASH clients reported an improved ability to keep their homes warm. The proportion of clients who struggled to maintain warmth in their homes was almost halved, with a fourfold increase in clients who could heat their homes comfortably.
- A third of clients experienced reduced anxiety regarding energy bills, and a fifth saw improvements in their financial situation. NEA's support, including income maximisation and welfare support, secured an additional £4.38 million for fuel-poor households in 2023-2024.
- WASH assistance contributed to a reduction in food rationing for clients, with a 20% decrease in those who cut back on food essentials. Additionally, 60% of clients reported improved knowledge on maintaining warmth affordably, and around 33% noted physical and mental health improvements, which they directly attributed to NEA's support.
- NEA's direct financial support, including crisis funds, fuel debt relief, and energy efficiency measures, collectively provided clients with over £4.6 million in immediate financial benefits.

By integrating tailored support and services, NEA lifted 12% of clients out of fuel poverty altogether and helped households achieve greater financial resilience through WASH's support packages, direct financial aid, and practical advice.

National Energy Action's holistic approach to tackling fuel poverty showcases a commitment to improving the lives of those most vulnerable to high energy costs and inadequate heating. NEA has successfully empowered countless individuals and families across the UK. By continuing to advocate for policy change, share best practices, and adapt to emerging challenges, NEA exemplifies resilience and dedication in the ongoing fight against fuel poverty.

CE organisation of the year (L)

1	ECOЕ
2	Bristol Energy Network
3	Brighton Energy Co-op
4	Energise Sussex Coast/Energise South Society

1. ECOЕ

Since 2020, ECOЕ has expanded from a small team of six to a dynamic organisation comprising a 32-member Fuel Poverty Team and a nine-member Retrofit Team. To support this growth, ECOЕ restructured its operations, appointing a dedicated management team that includes roles for Project Management, Operations, Community Engagement, and Retrofit Management. A stronger administrative foundation with support teams in HR, Learning and Development, and Communications has allowed ECOЕ to scale its services effectively. This enhanced structure has enabled the organisation to deliver focused services to vulnerable residents, positioning ECOЕ to serve the community more efficiently and to expand into new areas of support and energy advice.

ECOЕ has seen remarkable financial growth, with turnover rising from £153,676 in 2019-2020 to £994,804.29 in 2023-2024. This growth reflects the success of expanded services, funding partnerships, and innovative projects, with ECOЕ Advice alone generating a turnover of £908,784. The organisation’s efforts have also yielded tangible benefits for residents, with the total savings on energy costs for residents increasing by 67% to £2.72 million in the last year. This success underlines ECOЕ’s commitment to addressing fuel poverty and supporting sustainable energy solutions in the community.

ECOЕ’s retrofit efforts were highlighted by the launch of the Paid-For Retrofit Advice Service, offering comprehensive assessments and whole-house retrofit plans to help residents create low-carbon homes. This new income stream is critical for ECOЕ’s future sustainability, as it reduces reliance on grant funding. Additionally, ECOЕ’s collaboration with the Devon Energy Group Consortium to implement the Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) project led to significant outreach, including engagement with 421 households and 89 free home retrofit visits. ECOЕ also supported the Home Upgrade Grant round 2 (HUG2) project, reinforcing its leadership in energy efficiency.

In addressing fuel poverty, ECOЕ has implemented innovative programmes supported by significant partnerships. The Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP) fully funded an increase in home visits, enabling ECOЕ to provide practical energy-saving solutions like air fryers, heated airers, fuel vouchers, and essential home appliances. ECOЕ’s projects with local councils and Primary Care

Networks (PCNs) have focused on residents vulnerable to fuel poverty, including respiratory patients in Mid Devon, Teignbridge, and Torbay. These targeted efforts have improved the well-being of residents by making energy-efficient solutions more accessible.

A notable addition this year was the rollout of a HIVE Smart Thermostat Package, provided free to eligible households, made possible through support from the British Gas Energy Trust. This service has proven especially valuable, as it supports households in managing their energy use and costs more efficiently.

ECOЕ has leveraged innovative funding approaches and collaborations to increase its community impact. The Devon County Council's Household Support Fund enabled ECOЕ to establish an Energy Efficiency Fund, which has provided £80,000 in the past year and a further £200,000 in 2023-2024 for essential energy measures. This flexible fund allows ECOЕ to respond swiftly to community needs, helping residents improve their homes with insulation, boiler repairs, and other necessary interventions.

Partnerships have played a significant role in ECOЕ's approach, including a new alliance with Cornerstone Housing to address issues of damp and mould and the formation of a debt advice partnership with CHАТ. The most significant funding development came through a £992,000 grant from Wales and West Utilities, designated for sustainable project development and opening an energy advice centre in Exeter called PULSE EXETER, scheduled for October 2024. This new centre aims to engage a wider audience and facilitate educational activities on energy efficiency and climate change.

ECOЕ's commitment to renewable energy is demonstrated by its management of 10 community-owned solar sites, which collectively prevented approximately 61.7 tons of CO₂ emissions this year by generating 363,192 kWh of power. ECOЕ has further expanded its renewable energy initiatives by exploring partnerships for three new rooftop PV sites, aiming to increase its renewable energy capacity through an upcoming share offer.

ECOЕ's Healthy Homes for Wellbeing initiative has made a substantial difference in tackling fuel poverty. This year, the initiative reached over 30,597 homes, providing comprehensive energy advice and helping vulnerable residents cut their energy costs by 67%, amounting to £2.72 million in savings. This achievement showcases ECOЕ's effectiveness in using community-centric strategies to improve residents' quality of life through sustainable energy solutions.

The ECOЕ Community Fund has distributed £36,381 in grants since 2017, supporting 38 local organisations. In 2023, £9,549 was awarded to four groups working on energy efficiency and sustainability. Projects ranged from insulating a community centre to installing energy-efficient heating systems in a nursery, showcasing ECOЕ's commitment to supporting local organisations that align with its sustainability goals.

Exeter Community Energy's growth from a small team to a major regional player in energy advice and fuel poverty initiatives exemplifies a community-driven approach to sustainability and social impact.

Through strategic restructuring, innovative partnerships, and continuous community engagement, ECOE has achieved significant milestones, including increased turnover, impactful energy-saving solutions, and a broadened service portfolio.

2. Bristol Energy Network

Bristol Energy Network (BEN) is a member-led organisation dedicated to empowering communities in Bristol and its surrounding areas in pursuit of a sustainable, clean, and equitable energy future. Since its founding over a decade ago, BEN has developed a trusted presence in the community, serving as a bridge between grassroots initiatives and policymakers while actively working to alleviate fuel poverty and promote inclusive energy transitions. Central to BEN's mission is the commitment to Just Transition (JT), which addresses the intersection of climate action and social equity. Through innovative programmes and strategic collaborations, BEN's efforts have evolved into a model of community-led action toward achieving Bristol's net-zero goals.

BEN's key initiatives and impact include the Warm Up Skill Up programme. This initiative focuses on training local individuals as Energy Champions to enhance home energy efficiency through practical, cost-effective techniques. This programme provides participants with essential skills in energy-saving and retrofit methods through personalised workshops on topics such as ventilation, insulation, and renewable energy. These sessions equip Energy Champions to implement changes in their homes and communities, addressing specific energy issues identified during individual home energy assessments.

The programme's impact is evident in its expansion: having reached over 35 homes initially, it is now set to include up to 90 new participants as part of the Mission Net Zero project, an Innovate UK-funded initiative in Bristol. This project aims to directly reduce household energy bills, improve living conditions, and foster health benefits for the participants. Through BEN's strategic partnership with Eastside Community Trust, Warm Up Skill Up has reached diverse community members, building a foundation for knowledge-sharing and creating a ripple effect of energy awareness and savings within the community.

BEN's Sustainable Innovative Financial Foundations for Turbines (SIFFFT) initiative provides a pathway for local communities to engage in renewable energy production. This model, created in collaboration with Community Power Solutions Ltd., is based on the successful deployment of the Ambition Lawrence Weston onshore wind turbine, demonstrating BEN's capacity to guide and support community-owned energy ventures. Through this project, BEN secured £1.5 million from the West of England Combined Authority's Green Recovery Fund, intended to replicate this model across the region and ensure that the profits and benefits of renewable energy are reinvested into the communities themselves.

By helping local groups develop governance models, generate planning support, and liaise with councils, BEN enables communities to take active ownership of renewable energy projects. The SIFFFT project contributes to energy equity and fosters a sense of local ownership over renewable resources. As regulatory frameworks evolve, BEN's groundwork in community-owned wind projects

could establish a replicable template for similar initiatives, fostering a localised, sustainable energy infrastructure.

BEN's impact on Bristol's communities is multifaceted, encompassing direct support for individuals facing fuel poverty through initiatives like the Energy Help Desk, as well as broader community energy projects. By training Energy Champions and hosting over 72 community events, workshops, and meetings, BEN has engaged over 1,200 local residents in practical energy-saving strategies. This direct engagement contributes to improved living conditions and reduced energy costs for families across the region, making the benefits of a sustainable energy transition accessible to those most in need.

Moreover, BEN's efforts to listen to community priorities and relay them to policymakers have influenced local, regional, and national initiatives aimed at supporting a just energy transition. By advocating for community-driven priorities, BEN not only supports local needs but also helps shape the broader framework necessary to achieve a fair and inclusive transition to net zero.

BEN has scaled its operations, expanding from a small team to a more robust staff of seven, increasing its capacity to deliver on an ambitious agenda. This growth has been accompanied by internal improvements, such as diversity and inclusion training through the Black Seeds Network and fuel poverty training with NEA, ensuring that BEN's team is equipped to address the complex needs of Bristol's communities. Enhanced digital resources, including a new website and the Energy Academy platform, streamline BEN's outreach and enable users to access energy-saving information and resources efficiently.

Bristol Energy Network has emerged as a leading force in Bristol's energy transition, driven by a commitment to Just Transition principles and community empowerment. As the organisation continues to grow and evolve, its efforts serve as a model for other cities and regions seeking to achieve a sustainable, just, and community-centred approach to energy.

3. Brighton Energy Co-op

Brighton Energy Co-op (BEC) exemplifies a forward-thinking, community-focused organisation that has made significant strides in sustainability education, renewable energy projects, and community engagement. Since its inception, BEC has been dedicated to delivering impactful energy projects and services to the Brighton and Hove area and beyond.

One of BEC's hallmark contributions is its development of a comprehensive energy and carbon footprint workshop tailored for schools, launched in Spring 2024. Developed in close partnership with the Brighton & Hove City Council's environmental education officer, this free workshop and teaching kit offer valuable resources to educators, aligning with curriculum goals while fostering climate awareness and energy literacy. After piloting at three schools, BEC rolled out the programme citywide during Community Energy Fortnight 2024. The project's success is evident, with over 30 workshops booked in the 2024-25 academic year, underscoring the demand and relevance of energy education.

Additionally, BEC introduced the Energy Sparks programme to the city in 2021, promoting it as a platform to help schools monitor and reduce their energy consumption. In 2023, BEC took its support further by offering grants to local solar schools, covering subscriptions to Energy Sparks and making energy education accessible to a broader range of schools. By funding this programme through its Community Fund—sustained by a 2% allocation from BEC’s annual revenue—BEC effectively provides schools with tools to achieve substantial carbon and cost savings, laying the groundwork for future environmentally responsible generations.

BEC has been instrumental in bringing large-scale community energy projects to commercial infrastructure. In February 2024, the organisation introduced a groundbreaking 320 kW solar photovoltaic (PV) system at Newhaven Port, comprising 570 panels. This installation marks a significant step in integrating renewable energy into the port’s infrastructure, setting a precedent for sustainable port operations.

Recognising shifts in the investment landscape, BEC launched the BEC Bond in response to a slow-down in traditional community energy share offerings. With a fixed 6.5% return over five years, the BEC Bond raised £700,000 in just one month, demonstrating the community’s confidence in BEC’s mission and financial viability. This approach was so successful that it inspired other local organisations, such as Brighton and Hove Energy Services Co-operative (BHESCO), to adopt similar bond offerings.

BEC has expanded from three to six employees since 2020, adding skilled team members to meet growing project demands. The team’s experience is diverse, ranging from recent retirees with extensive expertise to young professionals, reflecting BEC’s commitment to leveraging a broad spectrum of knowledge for the organisation’s growth. For instance, BEC’s operations and maintenance lead has not only developed a robust annual maintenance protocol but also shares his expertise with other community energy groups, contributing to the broader sector’s skill development.

Brighton Energy Co-op’s achievements exemplify excellence in community energy innovation, sustainability education, and community engagement. Through a strategic mix of initiatives, BEC has made an indelible impact on the Brighton and Hove community and beyond.

4. Energise Sussex Coast/Energise South Society

Since 2017, Energise Sussex Coast (ESC) has seen transformative growth, tripling its staff and increasing income five-fold. This growth has enabled ESC to expand its services and execute a wide range of impactful projects to address energy poverty, increase renewable energy adoption, and foster sustainable community initiatives in East Sussex and beyond.

Key initiatives and achievements include comprehensive retrofit services involving training and certification for both Retrofit Coordinators and Assessors, training programmes to educate and empower community energy champions. ESC have successfully trained 46 champions and 26

volunteers who reached over 800 residents through local events and workshops.

Other initiatives include:

- ESC holds regular workshops focused on solar power, heat pumps, and insulation, educating local communities on sustainable solutions.
- ESC completed an innovative solar retrofit for a 36-flat sheltered housing block, helping residents reduce energy costs by up to 50%.
- ESC expanded its solar sites to 13, with installations totaling over 1MW of solar capacity.
- A unique microgrid project was launched, over-sizing solar installations on a bowling club roof to supply five nearby sites, demonstrating efficient energy sharing.
- ESC developed a 6.5 MW community-owned solar farm, with all surplus funds reinvested into local retrofits and community initiatives. This project is projected to save 1,432 tons of CO₂ and power 2,532 homes annually.
- The society has designed a replicable solar town model, currently being piloted in a historic rural town.
- ESC joined forces with local residents to address prevalent mould and damp issues in social housing. By partnering with social landlords, ESC is delivering systemic solutions to tackle energy inefficiency and poor housing conditions.

The organisation's energy advice helpline received over 7,800 calls in the past year, providing assistance to vulnerable clients struggling with high energy costs. A total of 2,284 energy advice appointments were held, with 97.5% of clients finding the service helpful.

ESC's support led to a total financial benefit of over £172,130 for clients. Through partnerships, they accessed an additional £2,016,240 in financial benefits for clients, enabling significant energy savings for around 1,000 households.

ESC has a unique practice of "gifting" projects to other community groups when direct development is not feasible. This approach has fostered strong collaborations across the sector, enabling broader impact and knowledge sharing. Gifted projects include a 250 kWp solar PV installation on a college roof, transferred to Brighton Energy Co-op, and a 94-school solar installation project that saved schools £750,000 last year alone.

ESC's solar portfolio currently spans 9 sites with 15 solar roofs, generating an annual 515,655 kWh, equivalent to powering 4,445 homes per year over the projected 25-year lifetime. Annual cost savings from these installations are approximately £81,680, with a projected lifetime saving of £6.2 million. The current projects have saved 2,836 tons of CO₂ to date, with plans to significantly increase these numbers with additional installations. Through the community solar farm, ESC anticipates a community benefit fund of £50,000-100,000 annually, designated for continued local retrofitting efforts.

ESC has fostered a highly cohesive and dedicated team, with a strong retention rate. A recent visioning day allowed team members to collaboratively develop a five-year strategy, emphasising "energising communities" and advocating for improved housing energy standards. This collaborative approach has led to successful grant applications, notably securing Redress funding from the Energy Saving Trust to expand and scale impactful projects.

Energise Sussex Coast is a pioneering force in community energy, demonstrating how localised initiatives can have a profound impact on energy sustainability, cost savings, and quality of life for vulnerable populations. ESC has built a replicable model that not only benefits East Sussex but serves as an inspiration for community energy groups across the UK.

Advancing Innovation Award

1	<u>Cepro & Bristol Energy Cooperative</u>
2	<u>Plymouth Energy Community</u>
3	<u>Westmill Solar Co-operative & MECISE (Mobilising European Citizens to Invest in Sustainable Energy)</u>

1. Cepro & Bristol Energy Cooperative

Cepro, a pioneer in community energy technology, partnered with Bristol Energy Cooperative (BEC), a community benefit society, to advance residential community microgrids. Over the past five years, their collaborative efforts have developed a model for sustainable housing that integrates renewable energy sources, energy storage, and community ownership.

The core concept behind Cepro and BEC's community microgrids lies in creating privately owned energy systems that connect homes, solar power generation, and battery storage within a single grid connection. This "behind-the-meter" setup facilitates community ownership and financing, allowing third-party investment in energy assets while enabling cost-effective, sustainable housing solutions without increasing homeowner mortgage costs. These community microgrids support the UK's ambition to achieve net-zero housing by making sustainable living accessible and affordable.

The Hazelmead and Water Lilies projects demonstrate the scale of Cepro and BEC's achievement, with a combined 88 homes, 333 kWp of rooftop solar power, and 2000 kWh of battery storage. With the largest operational housing microgrids in mainland UK, these projects highlight the scalability and impact of community-driven energy solutions.

The success of these community microgrids can be attributed to extensive collaboration across multiple sectors. Cepro and BEC worked with various partners, including community housing developers Bright Green Futures, Bridport Cohousing, and Bournemouth Churches Housing Association. The local installation was handled by teams from Ecocetera, Sungift Solar, and

GREdwards, while ConnectIT provided multi-utility solutions for private wire network delivery. Funding and support were also essential to the project's success, with contributions from Low Carbon Dorset and the West of England Combined Authority.

This collaboration reflects the commitment to address community energy needs in a way that fosters community agency in the transition to net-zero energy systems. By aligning the interests and expertise of developers, installers, utility providers, and financial supporters, Cepro and BEC were able to bring a complex energy infrastructure project to life.

Cepro's microgrids integrate advanced software and hardware solutions designed to optimise energy consumption and mitigate key challenges in the energy sector. By combining solar generation, battery storage, and demand-responsive electric vehicle charging, Cepro's solution reduces grid capacity requirements by 60% based on the National Grid's After Diversity Maximum Demand (ADMD) standards. This reduction is critical, given the grid import capacity constraints facing new housing developments across the UK.

A distinguishing feature of Cepro's approach is its demand-response capability, allowing the system to adapt energy usage based on real-time grid demands and availability of renewable energy. This optimisation addresses not only immediate energy needs but also supports long-term sustainability by reducing dependency on the main grid.

Cepro's community microgrids represent a pioneering approach in sustainable housing development. By combining community ownership with innovative energy solutions, Cepro and BEC have set a new standard for residential energy systems. The success of Hazelmead and Water Lilies demonstrates a viable model for achieving net-zero housing, highlighting the potential for future developments across the UK and beyond.

In addition to reducing carbon emissions and energy costs for residents, these projects serve as a template for addressing housing-related energy challenges at scale. This work significantly contributes to the UK's net-zero housing objectives and provides valuable insights for policymakers, developers, and communities aiming to integrate sustainable energy systems into residential developments.

2. Plymouth Energy Community

The Far South West Consortium LEAD Project represents an innovative approach to delivering retrofit advice services across Devon and Cornwall. Initiated in Autumn 2023, the project is led by Plymouth Energy Community (PEC) and backed by a consortium of South West community energy organisations, including Community Energy Plus, Exeter Community Energy, South Dartmoor Community Energy, Tamar Energy Community, and 361 Energy. Supported by funding from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and managed by the South West Net Zero Hub, the project seeks to address a key challenge: providing accessible, tailored retrofit advice to households, particularly those in traditional homes and less confident navigating online resources.

Between November 2023 and March 2025, the consortium will support:

- 10,850 people engaged at a community level, fostering trust and retrofit literacy.
- 1,256 households receiving impartial, in-home advice visits tailored to each householder's unique needs and goals.
- 239 households investing in detailed, technical whole-house plan reports, with many also receiving follow-up support from Retrofit Coordinators.

The project introduces an innovative model of collaboration, transforming how community energy groups work together and with regional funders. Central to this is a non-hierarchical organisation structure where accountability is decentralised, allowing consortium members to maintain local ownership while contributing to shared goals.

The Far SW LEAD project has successfully leveraged the hyper-local knowledge and trusted reputation of community energy groups, positioning them as the ideal entities to deliver retrofit advice. These groups, familiar with regional housing challenges, local contractors, and funding schemes, can provide personalised, practical guidance that national initiatives might lack. The consortium's innovative structure provides the following advantages:

The Far SW LEAD project exemplifies a robust, innovative model of regional collaboration in retrofit advice services, offering a roadmap for similar initiatives across the UK. By integrating continuous feedback, pooled resources, and local accountability, the project not only aims to expand retrofit service delivery but also establishes a sustainable collaborative framework. This model has the potential to greatly impact regional retrofit service delivery, aligning with national goals to improve energy efficiency, lower household emissions, and support the UK's journey to net-zero.

The Far South West Consortium LEAD Project showcases a progressive model for delivering retrofit advice through deep-rooted collaboration among community energy groups. With its strong emphasis on decentralisation, continuous improvement, and inclusivity, the project has created a replicable and resilient model that supports sustainable retrofitting solutions across the South West. This consortium-led approach stands as a pioneering example of how regional collaboration can drive meaningful change in energy efficiency services, enhancing both community empowerment and environmental impact.

3. Westmill Solar Co-operative & MECISE (Mobilising European Citizens to Invest in Sustainable Energy)

Westmill Solar Co-operative, an Oxfordshire-based community energy co-operative with over 1,600 members, has achieved a milestone in renewable energy by securing a £5 million, 10-year loan, facilitating the first investment by the cross-border MECISE (Mobilising European Citizens to Invest in Sustainable Energy) fund. This achievement marks the beginning of a pioneering approach for funding and expanding community-owned renewable energy across Europe.

As one of the first community-owned solar farms in the UK, and originally the largest of its kind globally, Westmill Solar has consistently been at the forefront of community energy initiatives. Since its founding, the co-operative has not only generated renewable energy but also championed models for citizen-led control over energy production, encouraging communities to take active roles in the transition to renewable energy.

MECISE was established as a novel financial initiative to support community energy projects that often require high upfront investments. These projects have historically faced funding challenges, as risk-averse investors may hesitate until projects are more financially stable. MECISE, born out of REScoop.eu (the European federation of community energy co-operatives), aims to address this funding gap by offering early-stage, risk-sharing investments and facilitating collaboration between community energy co-operatives and municipalities.

Through MECISE, community co-operatives across Europe—including Westmill Solar and partners in Spain, France, and Belgium—gain access to financial support that minimises risk, promotes knowledge sharing, and fosters a new economic model for renewable energy co-operatives.

Westmill Solar's loan, finalised on October 1, 2024, marked the first funding project of MECISE. This loan refinances an earlier loan, a necessary adjustment as previous public sector lenders reduced their direct investments in renewable energy. The secured loan not only supports Westmill Solar's existing operations but sets a framework for additional community energy investments throughout Europe.

The loan involved collaboration with several key co-operatives from the UK: Westmill Wind Farm Co-operative, Energy Prospects Co-operative, and Boyndie Wind Farm Co-operative. Each contributed resources, demonstrating a model for mutual support among UK-based community energy co-operatives and establishing a precedent for future MECISE funding collaborations.

The creation of MECISE represents a turning point for community energy co-operatives across Europe. It not only provides a sustainable funding solution but also encourages cross-border collaboration. Through its membership with REScoop.eu, MECISE enables community energy co-operatives to share expertise, which strengthens operational efficiency and builds technical know-how among its members.

Westmill Solar's involvement has demonstrated the potential of this model to scale across Europe, enabling community energy co-operatives to become significant players in the renewable energy sector. The partnership model with seven different co-operatives demonstrates the potential of collective action to overcome financing challenges and to influence the broader energy market toward sustainable practices.

By setting a precedent in cooperative finance for renewable energy, Westmill Solar has helped to shape an innovative, resilient funding model that other community energy co-operatives can replicate.

Collaboration in community energy award

1	RenewEV and Bath and West Community Energy
2	Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig (DEG)
3	Community Energy South

1. RenewEV and Bath and West Community Energy

RenewEV, a renewable engineering consultancy based in Wiltshire, has prioritised Community Energy as a core component of its business model since its inception. A significant partnership with Bath & West Community Energy (BWCE) has been instrumental in achieving their goal. Since 2021, BWCE has not only been a key client but also a shareholder, illustrating the close-knit relationship and mutual investment in community energy initiatives. This collaboration has led to substantial success, evidenced by the development of a 2MWp rooftop solar capacity and a promising pipeline of ground-mount solar PV and wind projects in the works.

RenewEV’s relationship with BWCE has proven to be a model for community-centred renewable energy, establishing a replicable framework for working with other Community Energy organisations across the UK. Through a flexible and collaborative approach, RenewEV has supported numerous projects, enabling local energy groups to access the expertise needed to navigate each phase of project development successfully.

By establishing a scalable, adaptable model, RenewEV and BWCE’s partnership has built a robust pipeline of projects and expanded their reach across various UK communities. The model has since been adapted for use with other Community Energy organisations, effectively widening the impact of RenewEV’s innovative approaches in renewable energy.

One standout example of their success in breaking down barriers is in the school sector, where RenewEV and BWCE have implemented solar PV systems. By developing an efficient process for obtaining Department for Education approval, they achieved a rapid turnaround—at one point, securing approval in just 48 hours. This breakthrough has streamlined the implementation of renewable projects in the educational sector, making it more accessible and less bureaucratic for schools to adopt sustainable energy solutions.

The RenewEV and BWCE collaboration has not only achieved notable successes but has also fostered knowledge-sharing across the Community Energy sector. RenewEV has actively shared insights from their work with BWCE with other community groups and through the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) they manage. By disseminating their approach and lessons learned, they have encouraged

other Community Energy groups to adopt similar methods, fostering a network of empowered local energy projects.

The partnership between RenewEV and Bath & West Community Energy stands as a testament to the power of collaboration in achieving ambitious community energy goals. Their success highlights the transformative potential of strategic partnerships in renewable energy, paving the way for a future where communities have greater control over their energy resources.

2. Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig (DEG)

Since its inception in 2017, Cyd Ynni has represented a transformative, community-driven approach to renewable energy in north-west Wales. Spearheaded by DEG (Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig), this collaborative project unites nine community groups—including Ynni Anafon, Ynni Ogwen, Ynni Padarn Peris, and others—across Welsh-speaking communities with deep-rooted industrial histories. These areas face modern challenges such as depopulation, low income, and fuel poverty, which the energy crisis has only intensified. Through Cyd Ynni, DEG has coordinated community efforts to build renewable energy resilience, reduce reliance on external providers, and enable community-owned energy projects.

Initially funded by the National Lottery with £247,000 and bolstered by an additional £188,000 from the Welsh Government Energy Service in 2023, Cyd Ynni highlights the power of local collaboration to meet sustainability goals and address energy poverty. DEG's leadership, combined with the collective expertise of the participating groups, has enabled technical assessments, funding support, and project management, fostering a successful and replicable model for renewable energy development in Wales.

Five community halls in the Cyd Ynni network now benefit from reduced energy costs thanks to solar installations. DEG facilitated comprehensive building assessments, collaborated with hall committees, and provided contractor negotiation, project funding, and grant writing services. Collectively, these halls secured £39,000 in grants, along with decarbonization reports valued at an additional £10,000. This initiative not only reduces energy costs but also empowers community spaces to support local energy goals and sustainable practices.

Cyd Ynni has catalysed £113,000 in funding over six months to support renewable energy initiatives across the region. This has enabled projects like Ynni Anafon to reinvest £80,000 into new community energy projects that Cyd Ynni identified. For example, £10,000 has been allocated as seed funding for a new energy group in Llanfairfechan, while £30,000 supports Ynni Twrog's innovative community solar and battery initiative, which aggregates 13 buildings to provide 136kW of solar power to local enterprises. This initiative represents a stepping stone toward a Community Energy Service Company (CESCo) model that will strengthen energy resilience and potentially create two new local jobs. Future plans also include integrating hydro and heat network projects in partnership with Gwynedd Council and Energy Local, further expanding local energy resources.

Cyd Ynni has positioned itself as an influential voice in local and national energy planning discussions, participating actively in Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) across Gwynedd. By advocating for increased solar capacity by 2035, Cyd Ynni is shaping a sustainable energy future for Wales. DEG's involvement ensures that the successful community energy models established through Cyd Ynni inform broader policy initiatives, facilitating replication of these models across Wales.

Cyd Ynni exemplifies how community collaboration and dedicated support can address energy poverty and create sustainable energy solutions. Cyd Ynni's success story serves as a blueprint for other Welsh communities and advocates for the expansion of community-led renewable energy initiatives across the UK.

3. Community Energy South

This case study highlights the impactful collaboration between UK Power Networks (UKPN) and Community Energy South (CES) in their joint mission to advance community-driven energy solutions in the South East of England. This partnership, known as the "Leaving No One Behind" initiative, has enabled CES to mobilise and support 22 community energy groups, reaching an estimated 20,000 homes with essential energy-saving advice and support. Through a pledge of £1 million by UKPN, CES and its community partners are addressing energy inequality by ensuring both low-income and middle-income households can actively participate in the transition to Net Zero, regardless of financial status or vulnerability.

The collaboration is intended to support community groups in scaling up Net Zero programmes by funding local jobs and creating a network of trained "energy champions" who deliver tailored energy guidance, expand community engagement by providing accessible, in-home energy advice to households, empowering them to reduce their carbon footprint and maximise energy savings and enable inclusivity in the Net Zero transition, ensuring vulnerable households receive personalised support and are not left behind in the shift towards sustainable energy.

The £1 million funding from UKPN has been pivotal, allowing CES to extend its reach and offer financial backing to 22 local groups. Notably, the partnership has enabled CES to create new jobs within these communities, employing "energy champions" who serve as on-the-ground resources for families navigating energy challenges. For many groups, this is the first time they have had the resources to employ paid staff, a key enabler in expanding the depth and scope of their outreach.

Through this funding, CES has been able to conduct over 1,200 personalised home visits, where energy champions offer customised guidance on topics ranging from income maximisation and scam awareness to behavioural changes for energy efficiency and PV solar installation advice. This personalised, in-home support has proven highly effective in engaging communities and empowering individuals to make informed energy decisions.

The ability to employ local energy champions represents a major shift, enabling CES to attract skilled individuals from within the communities they serve. This has allowed groups to expand their

activities at a faster pace, engage more households, and deliver consistent, high-quality advice that is tailored to community-specific needs.

The partnership between UKPN and CES has demonstrated that a collaborative, well-resourced approach can dramatically amplify the impact of community energy groups. By providing funding, job opportunities, training, and a robust support network, UKPN and CES have laid the groundwork for a more inclusive and accessible transition to Net Zero, reaching households across demographics and empowering local communities to lead the charge in sustainable energy practices. This partnership stands as a model of innovation, inclusivity, and impactful community engagement in the energy sector.

Progress in Expansion Award

1	Shropshire & Telford Community Energy
2	ECO-E
3	Croydon Community Energy
4	Bristol Energy Cooperative

1. Shropshire & Telford Community Energy

Shropshire & Telford Community Energy (STCE) is a Community Benefit Society, formally established in March 2022 after two years of extensive planning. The organisation aims to advance community-owned renewable energy in rural Shropshire, generating clean power and investing in local sustainability projects. STCE’s commitment to addressing climate change while enhancing community resilience has positioned it as one of the largest rural community energy groups in the UK.

In the summer of 2023, STCE launched its first share offer, successfully raising £300,000 from 120 community investors. This funding enabled STCE to acquire Twemlows, a 10MW solar farm in North Shropshire, which generates enough electricity to power approximately 3,400 homes annually. The acquisition marked a significant milestone, making STCE one of the UK’s largest community energy groups, especially among rural regions outside major urban centres like Bristol, London, and Brighton.

The Twemlows solar farm boasts an annual turnover of £1.65 million, contributing substantially to STCE's financial stability and providing a foundation for future projects. As part of this acquisition, STCE partnered with Community Energy Together (CET), a collaborative initiative that arranges senior loans for community energy projects. STCE's Treasurer became a Director of CET, ensuring the organisation's active role in supporting other CET members. Collectively, the five CET groups now operate 36MW of community-owned solar capacity, increasing the community-owned solar energy footprint in the UK by 20%.

STCE's vision includes a plan to reduce debt from the Twemlows purchase through a second share offer scheduled for 2025. By 2028, once short-term loans are repaid, the community fund derived from Twemlows' surpluses is expected to grow significantly, enabling even greater support for local sustainability initiatives.

Parallel to the Twemlows project, STCE has been working on the Bishop's Castle Heat & Wind initiative, funded in part by Power to Change's Next Generation grant programme. The project's primary goal is to establish a renewable heating network combined with wind energy, centred around the installation of a 1MW wind turbine on the edge of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Achieving planning permission has been a notable hurdle, but in August 2023, STCE received authorisation to submit a full planning application.

In November 2023, STCE gained national visibility when the project was featured on Channel 4's Great Climate Fight. This exposure helped boost public interest and support for the project. In early 2024, the project received a further £100,000 grant from the Community Energy Fund, reinforcing its financial base and enabling STCE to advance toward implementation. Lightfoot Enterprises, a local environmental charity in Bishop's Castle, has been a key partner in this initiative, providing expertise and community engagement to further the project's success.

STCE has become a powerful advocate for sustainability in rural Shropshire. Looking ahead, STCE's upcoming share offer and expanding project portfolio reflect its commitment to a sustainable, community-centred approach to energy. Through determination and strategic partnerships, STCE is set to continue leading the way in rural community energy initiatives, demonstrating that rural regions can be hubs of innovation in the transition to a low-carbon future.

2. Exeter Community Energy (ECOE)

In 2023, ECOE demonstrated substantial achievements in scaling its services, particularly focused on local carbon reduction and community energy support. To address increasing needs in energy advice and fuel poverty alleviation, ECOE launched several initiatives, expanded its team, and restructured its organisation to support its growth and improve impact.

ECOE introduced a Retrofit Advice and Coordination Service and established new Energy Advice partnerships to meet community needs. ECOE's Advice Team expanded from six members in 2020 to 41 staff in 2023, including a specialised retrofit team, with plans to open a flagship energy hub—PULSE Exeter—in October 2024.

Strategic alliances, such as with Devon Energy Group for the Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) project and 1energy on the Exeter Heat Network, unlocked significant funding and expanded ECOE's capacity for outreach. Additional funding from Wales and West Utilities and Primary Care Networks enabled targeted support for at-risk populations, particularly during the energy crisis.

ECOE's turnover has significantly increased, with all services generating £994,804 in 2023-2024, compared to £153,676 in 2019-2020. Revenue from advice services alone rose from £92,000 to £908,784, reflecting the growth in energy advice demand and ECOE's enhanced capacity.

ECOE focused on launching a Paid-For Retrofit Advice Service to provide customised retrofit plans. With over 200 inquiries and 30 assessments completed to date, this service has shown potential for further community engagement. Additionally, ECOE played a key role in the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2) and LEAD projects, which aim to improve energy efficiency in local homes through retrofit education, assessments, and home visits.

ECOE established new connections with architects, real estate agents, and sustainability advocates, building a strong network of 35 key stakeholders who help spread awareness of retrofit benefits. Community engagement was further strengthened with the Healthy Homes project, which, under the supervision of a newly appointed Community Engagement Manager, collaborated with local authorities to target low-income households. ECOE also reached out to sports fans at #GreenFootball Weekend, connecting with approximately 8,000 attendees to promote sustainable energy use.

ECOE also leads learning initiatives within the LEAD programme and manages two sub-groups focused on retrofit services. Locally, ECOE collaborates on multi-agency projects to pilot new outreach models, such as partnerships with East Devon's Financial Resilience Group to establish an Energy Efficient Fund for at-risk households, and a groundbreaking Primary Care Network trial that identifies vulnerable patients in need of home energy assessments.

In 2023, ECOE exemplified what it means to drive impactful, sustainable growth in the community energy sector. ECOE has not only expanded its service range but also established itself as a cornerstone of energy efficiency and fuel poverty reduction in the region. ECOE's continued dedication to learning and collaboration ensures that it remains at the forefront of community-focused energy solutions, setting an inspiring precedent for similar organisations nationwide.

3. Croydon Community Energy

Croydon is home to approximately 390,000 residents from diverse cultural backgrounds. Despite this vibrant community, the borough has experienced significant setbacks due to persistent fiscal mismanagement by successive Council administrations. One particularly pressing issue is fuel poverty: Trust for London data reveals that Croydon has higher-than-average fuel poverty rates compared to other parts of London, leaving many households unable to afford adequate heating.

In 2019, Croydon Council declared a climate emergency, acknowledging the need to mitigate environmental impacts. The Croydon Climate Crisis Commission Report proposed several recommendations to address this crisis, including an ambitious target to increase renewable energy generation by 10% annually. Yet, more than five years later, the Council's response remains insufficient, with residents left uncertain about any tangible progress towards climate action. Within this challenging landscape, Croydon Community Energy (CCE) emerged, driven by local citizens motivated to take climate action into their own hands.

Founded three years ago by a group of dedicated residents from various professional backgrounds, Croydon Community Energy (CCE) set out to transform the local energy landscape.

In late 2022, CCE won £20,000 through the School for Social Entrepreneurs Changemakers programme, enabling the organisation to expand and strengthen its operational capacity. An additional £1,000 in 2024 funded a strategic planning day facilitated by an external consultant, which proved instrumental in defining CCE's long-term goals and actions.

In 2024, CCE successfully acquired £40,000 from the Government's Community Energy Fund to initiate its first solar projects, with a public share offer planned for later in the year.

CCE has steadily expanded its membership from 0 to 47 and now boasts a diverse board, two volunteer managers, and over 50 active volunteers. The organisation successfully organised Croydon's Sharing Spaces event, reaching over 200 residents in an area marked by deprivation. Additionally, funding from Ashden and Kasuma Trust has allowed CCE to train six volunteers as certified energy advisors, facilitating free energy advice sessions across various local venues.

In 2024, CCE finalised the feasibility reports for four selected public sites, confirming all were suitable for solar installations. CCE collaborated with consultants from Our Community Enterprise CIC to issue tenders for installers, execute letters of authority, and sign memorandums of understanding with project partners. CCE's share offer, supported by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, is set to be launched in the coming months. Croydon West MP Sarah Jones, whose constituency includes the initial project sites, has shown enthusiastic support for the initiative. All four solar installations are scheduled for completion by the summer of 2025.

Croydon Community Energy is an example of the power of grassroots organisations to drive sustainable change in communities facing economic and environmental challenges. By prioritising local ownership and engaging residents, CCE has laid a strong foundation for long-term resilience and sustainability in Croydon. As CCE moves forward with its projects, it has the potential to not only alleviate energy poverty but also serve as a model for community energy initiatives across the UK, proving that even in difficult circumstances, local action can create meaningful impact.

4. Bristol Energy Cooperative

During a challenging period for community energy, Bristol Energy Cooperative (BEC) demonstrated exceptional resilience and innovation, expanding its operations with four new major projects despite a lack of political support and limited funding.

The initiatives include:

- In partnership with CEPRO, BEC launched an innovative microgrid within a local housing development, advancing decentralised energy management.
- 1-Megawatt Solar Array on The Bottle Yard Studios: As the largest community-owned rooftop array of its kind in the UK, this solar array spans over 2,300 photovoltaic (PV) panels, generating enough electricity to power 250 homes annually.
- The iconic Bristol Beacon building, now home to a solar rooftop array, won the Regen Award for Community Energy Initiative in 2024, marking a significant achievement in renewable energy integration.
- Battery Storage Project at Feeder Road: This community-driven initiative, resulting in a battery capable of delivering 30MWh of power to the grid, was a vital addition to Bristol's energy landscape.

Through these projects, BEC not only expanded its energy capacity but also sustainably increased its local presence. The coop enhanced its organisational capacity, adding three staff members – a deputy operations manager, a project developer, and a communications manager – to support further growth and outreach.

One standout achievement, the battery storage project on Feeder Road, not only reduced reliance on polluting power sources but generated £20,000 in community benefit. This funding has been directed toward local projects such as Barton Heat, which promotes sustainable practices and energy cost reduction in Barton Hill. Plans include a feasibility study for a renewables-powered heat network, addressing both energy efficiency and the cost-of-living crisis in the area.

BEC encountered and overcame multiple hurdles during the development of its projects. A prime example is The Bottle Yard 2 (TBY2) Solar Array. Initially, funding for a 283kW solar array on the roof of this Bristol City Council-owned building was uncertain. BEC stepped in, not only securing the funding but also expanding the project scope. By tripling the planned capacity to a 1MW array, BEC maximised both energy generation and carbon savings, making TBY2 its largest solar project to date.

Despite political and financial challenges, Bristol Energy Cooperative has strategically and sustainably scaled its operations from 2022 to 2024. By growing its project portfolio, expanding community support, and overcoming development challenges, BEC has set an example in community-led energy transformation.

CE organisation of the year (S/M)

1	Energise South Downs
2	The C.H.E.E.S.E. Project CIC
3	Derbyshire Dales Community Energy Ltd

1. Energise South Downs

Energise South Downs (ESD) is a Community Benefit Society founded in July 2022 with the mission of transforming the South Downs and surrounding areas into a sustainable, net-zero region through community-led renewable energy initiatives.

With a growing list of impactful projects and a robust community outreach strategy, ESD is on the cusp of launching a share offer for its first four renewable energy generation projects, reinforcing its role as a regional leader in sustainable development.

Key accomplishments include:

- After a feasibility study and business case by ESD, Hampshire County Council implemented a 105 kW solar PV installation at a local county school. This project saves 70,427 kWh of electricity annually, translating to financial savings of £6,338 and a reduction of 18.8 tonnes of carbon emissions in the first year alone.
- ESD’s feasibility study for three leisure centres resulted in Alton Sports Centre receiving grant funding from Sport England’s £60 million Swimming Pool Support Fund, paving the way for solar and battery storage installations.
- ESD initiated The Petersfield School’s solar project with a successful £25,000 grant application, culminating in a 110 kW installation that now supplies up to one-third of the school’s energy. The school is currently advancing to the third phase of its solar initiative.
- In collaboration with Community Energy South, ESD developed an accredited Carbon Literacy course now available to communities, local authorities, and organisations, spreading crucial knowledge about carbon reduction.

Since its establishment in July 2022, ESD has achieved several significant milestones:

- ESD launched with a core team, actively networking within the community and building partnerships with local authorities and national Community Energy groups.
- Through feasibility studies, community forums, and stakeholder engagement, ESD promoted renewable energy solutions across the South Downs, setting the foundation for upcoming generation projects.

- Securing funding and infrastructure for a permanent team, ESD scaled operations to reach a broader audience, with expanded programs and workshops that engage communities in planning for a renewable energy future.

Energise South Downs is a model of community-led renewable energy adoption, combining local investment, education, and stakeholder collaboration to achieve substantial carbon reduction and economic benefits. ESD's dedication to sustainability is paving the way for a greener, more resilient South Downs.

2. The C.H.E.E.S.E. Project CIC

For over a decade, The CHEESE Project CIC has been dedicated to making homes across Bristol warmer, healthier, and more energy-efficient at an affordable cost. By providing detailed Heatview® thermal imaging surveys, the project has helped over 1,000 households lower heating costs, reduce carbon emissions, and take significant steps toward home retrofitting. Through partnerships, subsidised services, and innovative technology, The CHEESE Project continues to tackle energy inefficiency in homes across the Bristol area.

The CHEESE Project has left a lasting impact on the local community:

- In the past year alone, CHEESE Project conducted 278 thermal imaging surveys. The majority were heavily subsidised through a partnership with Retrofit West CIC, and many surveys were entirely free for low-income households through grant funding.
- The project's success is underscored by over 50 five-star reviews on TrustPilot, a testament to the trust and value CHEESE brings to its community.
- CHEESE has also had a positive impact on local employment by contracting and training seven Bristol-based thermal surveyors, all of whom received free training. This not only supports local jobs but also ensures that surveyors have specialised expertise tailored to the community's unique needs.

The CHEESE Project's forward-looking approach has fueled its growth and adaptability:

- In 2023, CHEESE implemented a CPD-standard online training platform, enabling streamlined, scalable training for surveyors. This development not only enhances the quality and consistency of surveys but also ensures CHEESE can meet increasing demand.
- To support planned expansion, CHEESE developed an Android version of its proprietary Heatview® software. This move allows surveyors to use more affordable, durable smartphones, further reducing the operational costs of each survey and broadening CHEESE's potential reach.
- The development of a sophisticated booking and customer relationship management (CRM) system enhances efficiency and responsiveness, ensuring that customers have a smooth experience from scheduling to receiving survey reports.

The CHEESE Project's work doesn't end with individual households; it extends to clusters of homes and community partnerships for broader impact: Last winter, surveyor Rob Bennington conducted a comprehensive Heatview® analysis on twelve neighbouring homes from the 1960s and 70s on Henbury Hill. This initiative provided detailed thermal findings, revealing common issues and recommending low-cost retrofit solutions.

CHEESE is developing a growing archive of survey data, which will serve as a valuable resource for researchers studying UK housing performance. CHEESE is currently in talks with several universities to explore collaborations that will make use of this data for further insights into sustainable housing and energy efficiency.

The CHEESE Project CIC has become a vital player in Bristol's journey toward warmer, healthier, and more sustainable homes. With a unique service model, strong community partnerships, and a focus on both individual and community impact, CHEESE not only supports low-cost improvements but also encourages larger retrofit investments over time. Through continued innovation, partnerships, and targeted strategies like cluster-based retrofitting, CHEESE is poised to expand its influence, driving a meaningful shift toward energy-efficient homes and resilient communities in Bristol and beyond.

3. Derbyshire Dales Community Energy Ltd

Derbyshire has become England's leader in community energy projects, with 19 active groups across the county. This case study explores the transformative power of community energy in Cromford Mill, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Darley Bridge Mill, where renewable energy projects are repurposing historical industrial heritage for a sustainable future.

One of the most prominent examples of community-driven renewable energy in the area is Cromford Mill. Once powered by water, Cromford Mill now operates a new hydroelectric system featuring a 4.8-meter water wheel, a 15 kW hydro turbine, and a water-source heating system that uses the original watercourse. This system generates up to 25% of the site's electricity, significantly reducing Cromford Mill's carbon footprint and energy expenses—a crucial development in light of rising energy costs since 2022.

The Cromford hydro scheme also serves as an educational resource, showcasing renewable energy's potential to local schools, visitors, and residents. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Cromford Mill exemplifies how cultural heritage can intersect with environmental stewardship, engaging the community and fostering climate resilience.

Another transformative initiative involves Darley Bridge Mill, where the newly formed Darley Community Energy Ltd. has secured £40,000 in Community Energy Funding (CEF) to conduct a feasibility study for an Archimedes Screw installation. This 50 kW system would harness the weir at Darley Abbey to generate electricity, potentially connecting it to local businesses and the mill

through a private wire, creating a self-sustaining local energy ecosystem. The project aims to provide renewable energy, stimulate local economic growth, and further embed community energy in the area’s socio-economic fabric.

The Derbyshire Dales has expanded its renewable energy footprint through solar projects. A notable success is the installation of the county’s first community-owned solar power system at Twiggs Stores in Matlock. With 165 solar panels generating 57 kW and an estimated annual output of 47,000 kWh, this installation provides enough energy to power 18 homes each year. This collaboration between DDCE and the Big Solar Co-op exemplifies local businesses embracing renewable energy, reducing costs, and addressing climate challenges.

Expanding beyond rooftops, DDCE has initiated another feasibility study for community-owned solar car park canopies in Matlock and Bakewell, strategic locations on the edge of the Peak District National Park. These sites draw approximately 14 million cars annually, a number growing by 11% each year, increasing demand for sustainable energy and infrastructure. Solar car park canopies would generate electricity for nearby businesses and public institutions, supply power to electric vehicle (EV) chargers, and contribute new revenue streams, supporting local councils and the broader Derbyshire Dales economy.

The DDCE community energy initiatives represent a profound shift in how historical sites can contribute to a sustainable future. These projects embody "Learning to Last from the Past," where heritage, environmental stewardship, and community empowerment converge to create a model for sustainable development.

Sector Support

1	Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig (DEG)
2	Younity
3	Community Energy South

1. Datblygiadau Egni Gwledig (DEG)

DEG is at the forefront of community energy development in Wales, supporting grassroots projects through mentorship, training, and extensive technical guidance. As a central pillar of Wales’s community energy landscape, DEG prioritises capacity building, resource sharing, and collaboration, with a mission to create a resilient network of community energy organisations throughout the

region.

DEG's strategy is grounded in comprehensive support for both emerging and established community energy groups. Through its Cyd Ynni consortium, DEG has fostered a culture of mentorship by offering one-on-one guidance to new energy groups, covering all aspects of project development, from securing funding to managing the technical demands of renewable energy systems. For instance, DEG provides practical assistance to community groups by conducting energy assessments, negotiating with solar panel contractors, and advising on grant applications. This hands-on approach has allowed community groups to bypass common start-up hurdles and gain traction in renewable energy deployment.

Cyd Ynni has also enabled DEG to connect communities with relevant experts through its extensive network, creating a platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration that has proven invaluable to local groups.

A core component of DEG's work is to generate green jobs and train local talent in the renewable energy sector. The Prosiect Sero Net Gwynedd, a collaboration with partners such as Adra, Ynni Llŷn, and Partneriaeth Ogwen, illustrates DEG's commitment to skill-building. As part of this project, DEG has overseen the training and employment of five local individuals since 2024, with programmes ranging from basic Energy Assessor qualifications to specialised Retrofit Assessor certifications. Many participants entered without previous experience, showcasing DEG's ability to recognise potential and foster new career paths in the green economy.

Through its structured training pathway, DEG empowers staff to advance within the sector at their own pace, building a sustainable workforce of local experts dedicated to achieving Net Zero goals. Additionally, DEG's commitment to fair employment practices, exemplified by its Living Wage certification, reflects its dedication to creating stable, well-compensated jobs that uplift the local economy.

DEG's approach is highly collaborative, working closely with other community energy groups and fostering a shared learning environment. A prime example is its collaboration with Ynni Llŷn, which created four jobs specifically for Welsh speakers after DEG facilitated climate assemblies through the GwyrddNi initiative. DEG's active involvement—through board membership and volunteer recruitment—strengthened Ynni Llŷn's organisational capacity, enabling it to recruit, train, and retain skilled energy professionals within the community.

Through Cyd Ynni, DEG has successfully built a coalition of nine community energy organisations across North-West Wales. This partnership encourages regular exchange of ideas, addresses mutual challenges, and fosters project collaborations, such as installing solar energy systems in community buildings. DEG's facilitation has enabled community groups to collectively draw down £113,000 in renewable energy funding and reinvest £80,000 into additional local projects, benefiting the communities involved and promoting regional energy resilience.

As a participant in national initiatives like Resource Efficiency Wales and Sustainable Communities Wales, DEG has contributed to larger capacity-building projects aimed at enhancing the national energy sector's resilience. DEG's participation in projects like Interreg ECCO with The Green Valleys exemplifies its commitment to cross-border learning, exchanging expertise with partners across Europe to collectively advance sustainable energy practices.

DEG is also an active member of key advocacy and policy organisations, including Community Energy Wales, REScoop in Europe, and Climate Cymru. These memberships enable DEG to not only learn from other leaders in community energy but also to influence policy on a national level. DEG's participation in Gwynedd's Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) underscores its role in shaping local and regional energy strategies. By sharing its insights, DEG actively contributes to Wales' path toward a sustainable energy future.

DEG's influence also extends through its ongoing support for organisations like YnNi LLŷn, YnNi Lleu, YnNi Teg, and YnNi Newydd. Through partnerships and continuous involvement in national forums, such as the National Energy Action forum, DEG ensures that its insights and experiences contribute to the wider discourse on energy resilience and fuel poverty alleviation.

DEG's comprehensive approach to community energy has proven to be an invaluable asset to Wales, transforming local communities by empowering them to achieve self-sufficiency through renewable energy. Through extensive mentorship, local job creation, policy advocacy, and collaboration, DEG has set a precedent for sustainable energy development rooted in local empowerment and economic resilience.

With its proactive approach to capacity building and collaborative leadership, DEG is well-positioned to continue shaping Wales's community energy landscape, ensuring that the benefits of sustainable energy reach communities across the nation. DEG is not only contributing to the current energy sector but also laying the foundations for a robust, resilient, and community-driven energy future in Wales.

2. Yunity

Yunity was founded in 2019 as a joint venture between The Midcounties Co-operative and Octopus Energy, with the vision of supporting a just, community-driven energy transition in the UK. The collaboration combined the co-operative social values of Midcounties with the innovative, customer-centric energy approach of Octopus, creating a unique platform for promoting and expanding community-owned renewable energy. Yunity's mission is clear: to make community energy an integral part of the UK's green energy revolution, providing consistent support to grassroots organisations as they navigate the complexities of the energy sector.

Yunity has become a vital partner for community energy groups across the UK by offering Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) that ensure fair market prices for the power they generate. This approach benefits over 270 community groups, translating to 63,000 homes powered by community-generated energy, and representing 37% of the UK's community energy sector. Yunity's comprehensive services extend beyond competitive pricing, as it actively provides professional development resources. Through workshops, seminars, and conferences, Yunity educates energy groups on structuring PPAs to maximise their financial viability and expand their community benefit funds, reinforcing the sustainability of these grassroots efforts.

A significant challenge for community energy projects is limited volunteer resources and skills, as identified in Community Energy England's 2023 State of the Sector report. Responding to this, Yunity launched Community Energy Connect, a platform designed to link skilled volunteers with community groups that need technical, financial, or marketing expertise. Currently, the platform has

over 200 members, and it has led to impactful collaborations, including the creation of a new group in Barnet. Yunity further expanded this initiative by partnering with corporate environmental agencies like Arup and Ricardo to onboard employees as volunteers, offering “Lunch and Learn” sessions to promote corporate skill-sharing. By aligning skilled professionals with community energy groups, Yunity is bridging the resource gap and driving community empowerment through skill-building.

Yunity supports community groups not only through PPAs but also through targeted funding. The Powering Communities Fund, Yunity’s grant initiative, has distributed £65,000 across 21 groups, enabling projects like youth training workshops focused on green jobs and community engagement. The fund provides grants up to £3,750, assisting groups in expanding their reach and social impact. Complementing this is the Kickstart Loan Fund, a £1.5 million financing initiative aimed at larger projects. In 2022, this fund helped Bristol Energy Co-operative develop the UK’s largest community-owned solar rooftop installation, transforming a film studio with 2,380 solar panels and generating 1 megawatt of renewable power.

As a voice for community energy, Yunity actively engages with policymakers and leaders. In September 2024, Yunity’s Director, Michaela Cryar, was invited to the Labour Party Conference, where she joined a panel to discuss the inclusion of community energy in Labour’s Local Power Plan. Her advocacy emphasised cooperative solutions to pressing energy issues, promoting community energy as a sustainable tool in the fight against energy poverty. This platform helped solidify Yunity’s role as a leading force in shaping the conversation around community energy policy and cooperative solutions.

Yunity has become an essential player in the UK’s community energy sector, driving progress through practical support, strategic funding, professional development, and advocacy. Its model—grounded in cooperative values and innovative energy practices—has demonstrated the potential for community-owned renewables to address social challenges, elevate local economies, and contribute to a just energy transition. By actively working to expand access and resources, Yunity exemplifies how dedicated support can empower communities to become active participants in the green energy revolution, ensuring that no group is left behind.

3. Community Energy South

Community Energy South (CES) is dedicated to empowering community energy initiatives across the UK. Their mission is to support community energy groups and build meaningful partnerships with local authorities, aiming to make net-zero ambitions a reality through community-based solutions.

CES strives to ensure that each District, Borough, and Unitary Authority benefits from a well-supported community energy group capable of delivering impactful net zero services. Their programmes enable communities to acquire the skills necessary for effective partnership with local authorities in implementing net-zero strategies. This commitment to capacity building is reflected in ongoing work with 12 Local Authority partners, where they support 48 community energy groups with training, mentoring, and resources.

One of the organisation’s exemplary initiatives is their work with Central Bedfordshire, a Unitary Authority that had limited community energy infrastructure. CES collaborated with local Climate and Energy Officers to establish three new community energy groups—River Ivel Community Energy

(RICE), Buzz Community Energy, and Greensands CBS. Each group received extensive training in governance, business planning, marketing, and technical skills related to renewable energy projects.

CES’s capacity-building initiatives focus on both immediate impact and long-term sustainability. They have designed and implemented several programmes to bolster professional skills in the community energy sector and to facilitate community-led climate action.

With funding from the National Lottery, CES has launched this programme to create 36 jobs, 100 voluntary positions, and provide £1.2 million in support to 11 community energy groups. This investment allows groups to expand their operational capabilities, deliver energy advice, and develop renewable energy projects.

In partnership with UK Power Networks, this program provides £1 million in funding to 22 community energy groups, aiming to deliver low-carbon home energy advice to 20,000 households. CES supplements this funding with mentoring and training, strengthening groups’ service offerings and operational resilience.

Recognising the importance of climate awareness, CES developed a bespoke Climate Literacy programme. Over 200 participants have received Climate Literacy Accreditation, equipping them with the knowledge to support and advocate for community energy.

CES has been instrumental in a regional review of the community energy sector, coordinated with the Greater South East Net Zero Hub. Their CEO, Ollie Pendered, now sits on the board, strengthening CES’s influence and ability to drive meaningful collaboration in the community energy sector.

Community Energy South’s work is a testament to the power of community-driven approaches to net zero. Through skill sharing, professional development, and collaborative initiatives, CES has created a robust foundation for a thriving community energy sector in the UK. As they continue to build capacity, they remain committed to fostering strong partnerships, sharing expertise, and supporting the community energy groups that are essential to achieving a sustainable, net-zero future.

Community Energy Champion

1	<u>Dave Green, Shropshire and Telford Community Energy</u>
2	<u>Eva Goudouneix, Repowering London</u>
3	<u>Kate Meakin, Energise Sussex Coast</u>
4	<u>Andy O-Brien, Bristol Energy Cooperative</u>

1. Dave Green, Shropshire and Telford Community Energy

With nearly two decades of dedicated service in community energy, Dave has significantly impacted the sector, particularly within Shropshire and Telford.

Since 2005, Dave Green has been a stalwart in the field of community energy, specialising in energy advice, assessment, and training. His journey began as an energy officer for the award-winning Household Energy Service in Bishop's Castle, where he served until 2010. From 2015 to 2017, he contributed as a director of Shrewsbury Hydro, and he currently holds the position of development manager at Sharenergy. His role involves overseeing various community energy projects, including the recent Oswaldtwistle Solar Meadow, a 2MW solar farm operated by PROSPECTS Community Energy Ltd.

In 2020, Dave was instrumental in establishing STCE, which began as a working group aiming to advance community energy initiatives in the region. Over the following four years, he played a pivotal role in navigating the group through essential milestones, including its registration as a Community Benefit Society with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) in 2022. His leadership was crucial in the execution of STCE's inaugural share offer, which was part of the broader 'Community Energy Together' (CET) initiative in 2023. This share offer successfully raised nearly £300,000 from 120 investors, facilitating the acquisition of The Twemlow's Solar Farms near Whitchurch, Shropshire.

Dave serves as a vital link between STCE and the Community Energy Together initiative, where he sits on both boards. His involvement has been invaluable to other CET members, including community energy groups from Kent, Yealm, Wight, and Gower, collectively contributing to a 20% increase in community-owned solar resources in the UK through a unified share offer. His commitment to collaboration and knowledge sharing has significantly inspired fellow community energy societies.

Dave is recognised for his willingness to share expertise, attending national and local meetings, presenting at webinars, and assisting in the creation of knowledge-sharing and legal documents. His engagement with grassroots events raises awareness of community energy and its benefits for local communities.

Dave's contributions extend beyond existing projects; he is also a driving force behind the Bishops Castle Heat and Wind Network project. Utilising funding from Power to Change's Next Generation grant scheme, he has guided the project's development, which aims to submit a planning application for a 1MW wind turbine in October 2024 on the outskirts of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This initiative has garnered media attention, including features on Channel 4's Great Climate Fight. Furthermore, Dave led STCE, in partnership with Lightfoot Enterprises, in securing a remarkable £100,000 from the Community Energy Fund to further advance this project.

Dave Green exemplifies the spirit of community energy through his dedication, collaboration, and impactful initiatives. His efforts have not only transformed local energy landscapes but also inspired a network of community energy societies across the UK. Dave's ethos of 'getting stuff done' in an inclusive and energetic manner has left a lasting legacy in the community energy sector.

2. Eva Goudouneix, Repowering London

Eva Goudouneix is a seasoned community organiser and social innovator who has been instrumental in fostering a diverse and inclusive community energy sector. Her career has been marked by a steadfast commitment to amplifying the voices of those typically marginalised in discussions about energy and environmental sustainability. Through her various roles, she has consistently sought to broaden the understanding and participation in community energy, engaging diverse groups beyond the traditional stakeholders.

As the Community Engagement Programme Manager at Repowering London, Eva has successfully managed eight community energy cooperatives across London. She has developed a comprehensive community engagement strategy that focuses on inclusivity, ensuring that all Londoners have the opportunity to participate in community energy initiatives. Her approach is characterised by a deep understanding of the community's needs and an ability to inspire and motivate others.

In the summer of 2023, Eva initiated the Summer School of Power and Organising, a two-week course designed to empower Lambeth residents. The programme welcomed ten participants who engaged in learning about community leadership, energy rights, and digital skills. Eva's innovative volunteer programme allowed participants to explore issues that mattered to them, positioning them as potential changemakers in their communities. This immersive experience was tailored to foster skills in community organising, cooperation, and the nuances of the energy system.

Recognising the importance of creativity in community engagement, Eva spearheaded the development of the Creative Energy Club (CEC). This initiative employs art and creativity to make community energy discussions more accessible and engaging, particularly for families and young people. By testing various formats of CECs, Eva has successfully drawn diverse community members into conversations about energy, fostering a sense of ownership and connection to community energy projects.

Eva led a participatory research project with the Centre for Sustainable Energy, aimed at enhancing the inclusivity of community energy cooperative membership. Through co-design workshops, she gathered insights from community members to identify barriers and potential solutions for broader participation. This project not only elevated community voices but also informed the development of more accessible community energy models.

Eva Goudouneix's work in the community energy sector is a testament to her unwavering commitment to inclusivity, education, and empowerment. Her innovative programmes and initiatives have not only broadened participation in community energy but have also inspired a new generation of community leaders.

3. Kate Meakin, Energise Sussex Coast

When Kate joined ESC, the organisation was on the verge of launching a challenging four-year Interreg project involving international partnerships. This project aimed to enhance community energy initiatives but came at a time when the organisation's leadership was facing significant stress. The CEO suffered heart failure in 2019, creating uncertainty for ESC as it had no public funding to fall back on. Recognising the challenges ahead, Kate stepped into a crucial role, leveraging her experience and dedication to steer ESC through this turbulent period.

Key achievements and innovations include:

Under Kate's leadership, the Interreg project was managed exceptionally well, culminating in a Regiostars award. Two of ESC's community energy activities were featured in the project's final report, highlighting the success of Kate's management skills.

Despite the added pressures, Kate took the initiative to write successful funding bids, securing vital grants, including a three-year grant from the National Lottery and five years of funding from the British Gas Energy Trust. This funding enabled ESC to deliver impactful results for fuel-poor residents, leading to a visit from Centrica's senior management team to see the outcomes of Kate's work firsthand.

Kate played a pivotal role in establishing a new community benefit society, Energise South, where she served as a founding voluntary director. Through her leadership, £450,000 was raised for solar PV installations on nine community buildings, schools, and businesses across the South East.

Kate's leadership style is characterised by her emotional intelligence, compassion, and commitment to her team. Her approach not only fosters a positive working environment but also retains staff, as no one has left ESC since she took charge. Kate's dedication to nurturing talent is evident in her recruitment process, where she seeks exceptional individuals and inspires them to excel.

With no additional funding, Kate has taken a bold step by recruiting an architect and technical specialist to establish a Retrofit team, preparing ESC to launch its retrofit services. Her recent success in securing a winning bid from the Redress Fund will provide two years of funding for this initiative, partnering with People Powered Retrofit and piloting the Fairer Warmth App.

Furthermore, Kate and her co-directors are poised to raise shares to develop a community solar farm capable of powering 2,500 homes annually. These initiatives align perfectly with the founding vision of ESC to combat energy injustice and fuel poverty through local green energy and energy-saving schemes.

Kate Meakin's influence on Energise Sussex Coast is nothing short of transformative. Her blend of strategic vision, innovative leadership, and passionate community engagement has not only ensured the sustainability of ESC but has also significantly enhanced the quality of life for countless residents facing energy poverty. Without her, the achievements of ESC would not have been remotely possible.

4. Andy O'Brien, Bristol Energy Cooperative

Andy O'Brien, co-founder of Bristol Energy Coop (BEC) and a pivotal figure in the community energy sector, has made significant contributions to advancing clean energy initiatives in the UK. His leadership has not only propelled BEC to become one of the largest community energy cooperatives in England but has also inspired a movement towards sustainable energy practices in local communities. As he transitions from his operational role in 2024, Andy's legacy and ongoing influence in the energy sector remain profound.

Since its establishment in 2011, Andy has played a crucial role in developing BEC from its inception to its current standing. Under his guidance, the cooperative has secured a remarkable portfolio of 22

clean energy projects. This achievement not only reflects Andy's commitment but also signifies the cooperative's growing influence in the clean energy landscape.

In 2024, as Andy steps back from day-to-day operations, he leaves behind a robust foundation for BEC. He has strategically built a capable team, including the recent appointment of a new CEO, ensuring the coop's sustainability and continued growth. This transition exemplifies Andy's foresight and dedication to empowering the organisation beyond his leadership.

Andy's commitment to community engagement has been instrumental in BEC's success. His leadership in establishing initiatives such as the solar farm in Lawrence Weston serves as a testament to his ability to mobilise local support for renewable energy projects. This solar farm not only provided clean energy but also galvanised community members to advocate for additional renewable projects, such as a community-owned wind turbine.

Moreover, Andy has been a staunch advocate for local residents, exemplified by his support for a campaign against two polluting power plants. This activism culminated in the construction of a community-owned battery storage plant in Lawrence Hill in partnership with Thrive Renewables. The project generates community benefits that fund local initiatives, including a feasibility study for a green energy heat network at the Barton Hill estate.

Andy O'Brien's relentless optimism and commitment to community energy have inspired countless individuals and organisations. His ability to motivate others and attract skilled professionals to BEC has created a dynamic and diverse team capable of addressing the challenges of the energy sector. By cultivating a strong organisational culture, Andy has ensured that his team is well-equipped to carry forward BEC's mission.

His visionary approach has not only driven BEC's growth but also inspired other community energy initiatives. Andy's mentorship has provided emerging leaders with the tools and confidence to pursue their own projects, fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation within the community energy sector.

Andy O'Brien's significant contributions to Bristol Energy Coop and the community energy sector at large have set a remarkable standard for leadership and engagement. His impact is evident in the robust projects developed under his guidance, the empowered team he is leaving behind, and the inspired communities he has mobilised towards clean energy solutions. As he transitions to focus on broader Net Zero policy initiatives, Andy's legacy will undoubtedly continue to influence and inspire future generations of community energy advocates.