

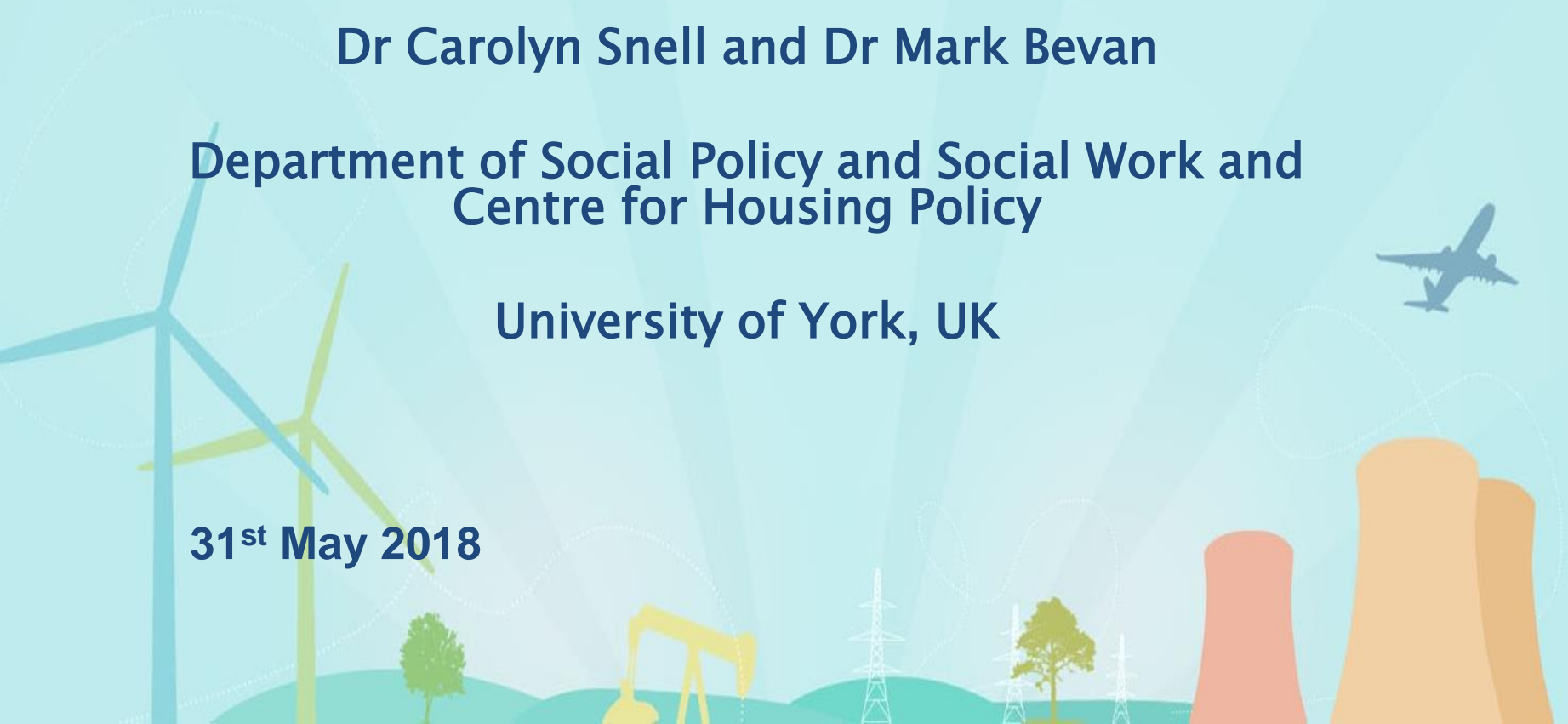
Disabled people, fuel poverty, and energy efficiency policy

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Overview

- Background – disabled people and energy
- Project methodology
- Energy needs of disabled people
- How our respondents engage with energy efficiency measures
- Conclusions

Background: Energy efficiency as the main policy response to fuel poverty in the UK

- Climate change commitments encourage a focus on free energy efficiency measures
- Typical measures include: solid wall insulation, cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, new boilers, draft proofing
- Priority is given vulnerable groups, disabled people being one of these. Measures are usually free to these households.
- In England measures are paid for through energy bills (Energy Company Obligation)

The project has investigated whether this policy agenda has helped disabled people and low income families

Methodology

Conceptual review linking energy justice with social policy literature (e.g. disability studies and child poverty literature)

Gillard, R., Snell, C.J. and Bevan, M.A. (2017) Advancing an energy justice perspective of fuel poverty: Household vulnerability and domestic retrofit policy in the United Kingdom *Energy Research and Social Science* p53–61

Qualitative interviews:

- National policy makers about policy development (n=17)
- Stakeholders involved in policy implementation across 4 UK nations (n=60)
- Householders who are disabled/have young children (n=48)

- Today's presentation focuses on how disabled people engage with these energy efficiency measures, and whether they meet their needs

Energy and disability – from health literature

Complex, different, and fluctuating needs:

- **Need for higher temperatures**

- Some chronic conditions reduce the amount of heat that is generated, others lead to poor heat conservation (e.g. parkinsons/stroke)
- Some health conditions require higher heating regimes– e.g. some respiratory diseases require 21 degrees in order to prevent health from deteriorating

- **Need for longer periods of warmth**

- Where a person spends longer in the home they will be required to heat their home for longer if they are to keep their home at a healthy temperature.

- **Additional energy needs: running equipment**

Energy and disability – examples from household interviews

Warmth for health:

‘I have a degenerative disease in my spine so when I get cold my bones get really sore’
(UKERC H14)

Risks associated with loss of energy supply:

‘I’ve arranged with the [provider] that my electric doesn’t go off at all even though I pay through a top up meter, it’s not meant to go off at all but it does...I have a daughter that’s on a feeding machine...she’s fed every night for 12 hours’
(UKERC H2)

How people find out about free energy efficiency measures

Interview data suggested four main ways that disabled people engaged with information about energy efficiency support:

1. Pro actively seeking out information e.g. via google/approaching advice services, ringing energy company
2. Responding to campaigns (e.g. leaflets, tv adverts, cold calls)
3. Via social and familial networks (offline and online)
4. Via support agencies and referrals – e.g. when an agency conducts a broader entitlement check to a variety of benefits

These different forms of engagement produced very different experiences

Responding to campaigns (e.g. leaflets, tv adverts, cold calls)

Households cynical about why it is being offered and whether it is really free

Households cynical about eligibility criteria – ‘its not for me’ /‘what’s the catch’

Households reluctant to come forward if it feels like it will be a waste of time

Via support agencies and referrals – e.g. when an agency conducts a broader entitlement check to a variety of benefits

Only positive experiences reported, high levels of trust and understanding about why the measures are free

Proactively seeking out information e.g. via google/approaching advice services

Multiple households described this as a ‘minefield’

Low levels of trust in anything offered by private sector expressed

More positive experiences of advice services – e.g. CAB

Via social and familial networks (offline and online)

Where friends and family have had measures successfully installed or who have knowledge about energy efficiency this encourages action

Social media groups enable households to explore options and entitlement in a trusted environment

Trust in the sector

I know they can't lie to you but they can certainly make it confusing for people like myself'...we all know how business works' [H38]

'The perception I have if I were to go to my energy provider...I have a feeling there would be a cost attached to it...you hear so much on the news about how much money they're making...that they've ripped off with this and that...energy company is the last place I'd go' [H37]

'I rang [large energy company] for a bit of advice and quote on a boiler...but most of it was goobledegook to me, it just went over my head' [H25]

Deciding to undergo installations

In addition to issues of trust other factors influenced whether a household went ahead with a measure:

- Households wanted to minimise disruption to:
 - Energy routines – especially where energy was essential to meeting householder’s specific needs
 - Medical routines– households with specific routines needed more planning, time and notice

Where this was unclear or they did not trust the information provided they did not proceed
- Overcoming prohibitive administrative requirements
 - High burden of proof and the ability to provide this
 - Burden of liaising with (multiple) scheme providers and installers
- The need for additional support and recognition
 - Recognition of the above factors
 - Support to overcome prohibitive physical requirements – e.g. clearing lofts
 - Need for flexibility – e.g. fluctuating conditions

Experiences of installations

‘I would have preferred face to face...someone coming out, going over it...disruption, that was my concern’ H36 (parent of disabled child who declined loft insulation as she didn’t trust that it wouldn’t be disruptive)

Because I have a disabled child they needed to give me half an hour’s notice before they arrive at my door because I could be giving her medication or she could be on the nebuliser’ (H2 adult of disabled child)

‘the wife helped out [with the installers] as well because at the time I was on really strong painkillers and I found everything slightly confusing.

The installation was great, all the guys doing it were friendly, very respectful towards me and my needs, they just cracked on with it’ (H7).

‘I was severely anemic...at the time I was trying to sort this out...I’d barely got the energy to get out of bed let alone fight with people over stupid things’ (H22)

	The most positive experiences
Information	Clear, accurate, consistent, provided early on
Assessment	In person (home visit), same point of contact, personalised to needs
Installation	Is flexible to household needs, provides additional physical help if necessary, installers are aware of household needs
Aftercare	Provides swift resolutions to problems that have arisen, household can return to original point of contact

From an installer/supplier perspective

Do disabled customers represent hassle and a loss of profit?

‘How do you actually deal with all those issues in terms of ‘I don’t want my install today as I have a hospital appointment’

“A vanilla customer journey approach doesn’t work well for these groups”

Conclusions

- Highly varied, fluctuating needs
- Households in our dataset were very risk adverse, this was compounded by high levels of mistrust in the sector
- Installations appear to be most successful when:
 - Communication is clear and consistent (ideally via a single point of contact and in person)
 - They recognise specific needs and tailor the installation process accordingly
- It is questionable whether the private sector funded approach that emphasises low cost installations suits the needs of the most vulnerable

Thanks

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For people seeking out information – ‘it’s a minefield’

- Respondents repeatedly described the process of search for support as ‘a minefield’ [H39, H38], finding it difficult to know where to go and which sources to trust.

‘I wouldn’t know which direction to go...surely there’s some information out there for people who are on benefits...you’d think one would tie in with the other just to let you know what’s available to you’ [H7].

- Google was mentioned as the most common place to seek information,
- Citizen’s Advice was highlighted as a trusted source of information on numerous occasions
- Government websites were generally regarded positively,
- There was particular skepticism about the private sector when compared to charities and the public sector:

For people responding to campaigns

- Includes households typically responding to a generic leaflet, advert, or cold caller
- Some households in this position regarded this information with cynicism and doubts about eligibility:
- *a lot of people like myself out there that are not eligible for half of the stuff because they're still on a low income but not as low as people who don't work'* [H3]
- Whereas if eligibility is clear from the outset household are more likely to proceed
- A lack of confidence in the information and support offered was also evident:

'these folk that phone you up and promise you the earth and when you get it its different...you're inundated with phone calls [referring to private companies offering works]...The government have set up an outfit [to give advice] but to me they're not very good...I don't think they give the right advice' [H10]

For people with social and familial networks

Some households accessed schemes as a result of ‘word of mouth’

- [Family and friends were regarded as trusted and valuable sources of information,
- where someone had technical knowledge about energy efficiency, or first-hand experience of measures

Online social networks were also described as playing an important role in raising households’ awareness about energy efficiency measures.

- Several respondents reported being in facebook groups for people on benefits, disabled people, and parents of disabled children [H27, H33, H36].
- These groups provided informal information about what schemes existed, potential eligibility, and how to apply. The information shared within these forums was regarded as positive (and by implication trustworthy).

For people who go through entitlement checks

These households were typically those who were given entitlement checks as part of a broader set of state delivered benefit checks or were directly approached as a result of their specific circumstances:

‘My husband was on the brew [unemployed, attending employment bureau] at the time, he wasn’t working,....it’s the benefits place. They were able to tell us that we were entitled so we got all that [cavity wall and loft insulation] for nothing’ [H4].

The experiences of these households were almost entirely positive, with households reporting high levels of trust in the organisations involved, and surprise about the degree of support offered.

Energy concerns of low income families

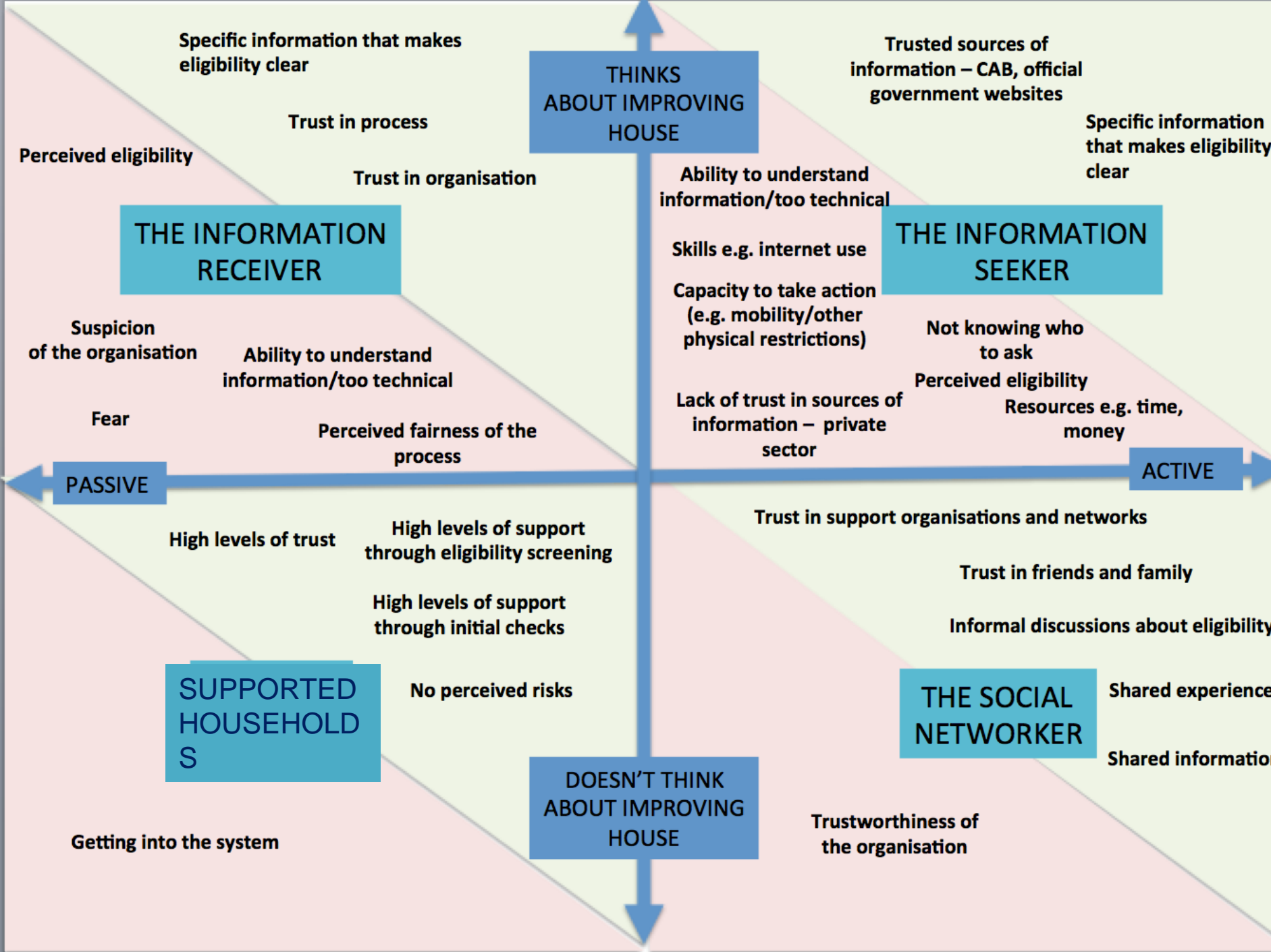
- Interviewees also described the additional energy costs associated with having children, ranging from increased washing and drying, to adolescents' energy use
- Having children made them conscious about housing conditions and more prepared to seek help (e.g. by moving house, asking for energy efficiency measures or other benefits): *'You've got to keep the little ones warm, it's not just a case of putting another jumper on'* (H38).
- Most respondents with children described strict heating routines that maximised children's warmth
 - heating the home according to the presence/absence of children in the home,
 - around school hours,
 - or for not resident parents, visiting days
- Some households also described practices undertaken to minimise energy spent cooking or washing (H6).

What do those in the industry think about energy behaviours

Majority of scheme providers report that households regularly demonstrated...

- inefficient energy consumption behaviour,
- a lack of knowledge about the cost of different energy services;

...suggesting that both could be changed through exposure to information and advice in tandem with retrofit measures.



Specific information that makes eligibility clear

Trusted sources of information – CAB, official government websites

Specific information that makes eligibility clear

THINKS ABOUT IMPROVING HOUSE

Trust in process

Perceived eligibility

Trust in organisation

Ability to understand information/too technical

THE INFORMATION RECEIVER

THE INFORMATION SEEKER

Skills e.g. internet use

Capacity to take action (e.g. mobility/other physical restrictions)

Not knowing who to ask

Suspicion of the organisation

Ability to understand information/too technical

Perceived eligibility

Resources e.g. time, money

Fear

Perceived fairness of the process

Lack of trust in sources of information – private sector

PASSIVE

ACTIVE

High levels of trust

High levels of support through eligibility screening

Trust in support organisations and networks

Trust in friends and family

SUPPORTED HOUSEHOLDS

High levels of support through initial checks

Informal discussions about eligibility

No perceived risks

THE SOCIAL NETWORKER

Shared experience

Shared information

DOESN'T THINK ABOUT IMPROVING HOUSE

Trustworthiness of the organisation

Getting into the system

Gaps in knowledge/research questions

Gaps:

- Focus is typically on older people, other groups are under represented in both policy and research
- Little work that combines the energy justice/fuel poverty justice framework with disability and child poverty literature

Project research questions:

- How have the needs of disabled people and low income families with children been recognised and incorporated into energy efficiency policy decisions across the UK?
- What are the effects of energy efficiency policies on these groups?

Methodology

- Development of Walker and Day's 2012 fuel poverty and justice framework (using concepts of distribution, procedure and recognition) to consider the specific needs of disabled people and children. This has guided subsequent research questions.
- Quantitative analysis of national fuel poverty statistics where possible
- Qualitative interviews
 - National policy makers about policy development (n=17)
 - Stakeholders involved in policy implementation across 4 UK nations (n=60)
 - Householders who are disabled/have young children (n=48) who have engaged with energy efficiency schemes

What does the literature say about engagement with energy efficiency?

Misaligned information and marketing

- a lack of knowledge about what energy efficiency measures are available, how they are installed, the impact of measures, and their wider benefits
- low consumer confidence in the energy industry
- where friends, family or neighbours have had positive experiences of measures being installed, this encourages other households to undergo work
- There is evidence to suggest that there is a mismatch between how households use energy, and the promotion and provision of retrofit measures

- ***Things that are off putting – Disruption, hassle, and mess***

- ***Things that are off putting – Cost***

But nothing specifically on vulnerable groups

Barriers to installing energy efficiency measures

In very general terms, the following factors acted as barriers for disabled people:

- Concerns about damage and mess to the home
- A lack of trust in information given by the installer or a lack of information to make an informed judgement
- Prohibitive upfront costs and hidden costs (e.g. redecoration), or perceptions about hidden costs
- Prohibitive administrative requirements – e.g. completing paperwork, providing proof of eligibility – interviewee reported being unable to complete paperwork due to medication
- Prohibitive physical requirements – e.g. being unable to clear loft space
- Disruption to household/medical related routines
- Disruption to equipment/having to move aids
- Disruption to energy supply (for households with energy dependent medical equipment) – e.g. daughter on nebuliser
- Managing a fluctuating condition – e.g. not being able to manage an installation on the booked date
- Loss of space – for aids and equipment

Pathways to Justice in Energy Domestic Energy Efficiency Policy

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