

Bristol Energy Network meeting – 3 February 2016

Notes from Open Space sessions & feedback

1. Community Outreach

Most participants felt that engagement was a huge issue when it comes to energy matters. "It's hard to make energy sexy" We had a discussion about what has worked in the past and new ways of engaging communities. The question, "what would work in your own neighbourhood?" was posed to try to make it more solution-focused and encourage participants to take off their work hats and respond as community-members.

Most participants felt that a neighbourhood/community event approach where the members (of the community) had some involvement in planning and responsibility for the event. There was some acknowledgement that this was not easy but if a minority of people in the community were involved then this would encourage a larger majority.

Fuel-poverty was a huge concern and most participants felt that people were more likely to get involved if they could save money off their energy bills.

Some participants came up with an idea for an arts project. An idea for a city-wide arts/creativity engagement project came up and some of the participants decided that they would like to collaborate and make this happen.

2. BEN: 'Being the Network'

Website: content, purpose, access:

- Means of sharing learning between groups – so that they know what each other are doing
- For internal comms across BEN and groups
- More sophisticated activity mapping to show what's happening and where – and to show the gaps (so that they can be filled)
- Easy access to basic information for new groups setting up and wanting to engage

Support:

- See above – sharing learning
- Access to business sponsorship (match-making?)
- Volunteer pool from champions has been useful

Newsletters

- Easier layout with headlines and click downs to access full story – long mails get filed in the 'to read later' box...
- Include requests for help and support – peer-peer

Meetings

- Quarterly is good but maybe not enough to build and maintain momentum
- Maybe quarterly big meetings with monthly meet-ups in between
- Should set a regular slot each month / quarter (eg 2nd Wednesday)
- Can BEN piggy-back on other events and have a break-out corner?

- Maybe working groups too with interests in particular themes?
- Invite new interesting speakers (from within or beyond Bristol) to draw people in

What Else...?

- How does BEN represent groups to BCC, business and elsewhere?
- How do members see their relationship with BEN: contributors, consumers??
- BEN's role to connect groups and form relationships
- Groups need to support BEN if they want to keep it going
- Where does the BCSfE sit?
- Need to clearly define the purpose of BEN – collective of activity? Place for mutual support? Co-ordinating role? Should be a clear mission statement.
- Can we work with food people, lots going on there and people relate better to food!

3. Energy Champions/ working with volunteers

What worked?

- Acting as a broker between volunteer and organisation. Successful examples include Bristol Energy Co-operative, and Bristol Green Doors.
- Energy Champions who became embedded in a member group, were still interested in hearing about events and opportunities from other groups.
- Bristol Energy Co-operative had a dedicated volunteer co-ordinator, who took time to meet individual volunteers and had regular meetings with them.
- The training provided was great

What didn't work?

- External problems experienced by Friends of the Earth for Schools Run on Sun project – an issue with the council's commitment to the programme, and with changes to Feed-In-Tariff
- Keeping volunteers interested needs constant attention, whereas workload can be variable.
- 'Over-Newslettering' frequency and quantity of email newsletters can mean people ignore them. Is it possible to rationalise / combine them?

What's next – how to keep involved?

- Member groups to have a named volunteer co-ordinator.
- Explore options to attend Voscur volunteer manager group and training courses. (*Kate Thomas*)
- Encourage member groups to advertise opportunities using the Do-it website. This allows the volunteer to use a number of search criteria, including location, time, interest etc.
- Volunteers, and volunteer-coordinators would welcome mentoring opportunities.
- Suggestion of promoting a 'volunteering month' as a short (1-2 month) tangible project to raise profile of volunteers, opportunities amongst BEN member groups
- Place-based member groups to be provided with a list of Energy Champions in their area, member group to contact them and gauge interest in volunteering.
- Explore using internships – Ambition Lawrence Weston are doing / looking at this

FEEDBACK ON MEETING

Window – What insight have you gained?

- Learned more about the various groups, like CHEESE (Cold Homes Energy Efficiency Survey Experts) and Bristol Energy
- More about Bristol City Council's energy efficiency offerings
- Learning re Bristol Energy, DECC current plans, hospital district (?) heating network
- I need support as a new volunteer co-ordinator and I know who to contact for support. Was v useful to be asked to reflect on my experience as an Energy Champion volunteer.
- What BCC Energy Services are doing
- Learned what CHOICE and CHEESE are
- There are lots of energetic, passionate people out there
- More on Community Energy Fund
- To use art/ creativity in engaging community

Wish – what would you have liked more of from today's meeting? What would you like next time?

- A timer to change between tables to discuss other options more thoroughly
- Name badges?
- A panel specifically for fuel poverty and social inequality that brings both practitioners and researchers together (there are a lot of them!)
- Even more new members
- Can we have a table for arts and engagement at the next meeting!
- Training and upskilling – refurb of social housing?
- Table on campaigning
- Regular get togethers just like this and to work in partnership with all of you!

Star – what worked well?

- Good opportunity to find out whose there and talk to them
- Fluid workshops
- Interactivity
- Casualness
- Well organised and chaired
- Good location. Lots of useful connections
- Good networking and workshops
- Very good time management
- Great clear actions to take forward: city-wide steering groups using ARTS for engagement – my dream outcome
- Made BEN contact for residents group
- Format
- Lots of mingling – v participative
- Good chairing – it ran on time!
- I got stuff out of the meeting I didn't even know I needed! 1. Support as volunteer coordinator 2. Steering group