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Abstract Title: How might citizen engagement impact energy policy design? An examination of fuel poverty policy in England

Abstract Text:

The concept of fuel poverty emerged in England following the oil crisis in 1973-1974, although it was not officially recognised by Government until 1997. Initially, statistically defined as a household that would need to spend more than 10% of its income to maintain an adequate heating regime, a recent review has redefined a fuel poor household as those that

- Have required fuel costs that are above average (the national median level) and
- Were they to spend that amount they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line

The identification of fuel poor households has proven challenging, with estimates in England suggesting that less than 25% of fuel poverty reduction expenditure is being spent on fuel poor homes. This is attributed to the inaccuracy of utilising proxy-indicators to identify households for intervention. This paper explores a possible solution to the identification challenge. Utilising a three-stage approach, we examine how citizen engagement alters our understanding of the concept and impacts upon the picture of fuel poverty in England. Initially outlining the spatial analysis of fuel poverty and poverty distribution in England which drove our identification of focus group venues, we subsequently present a citizen described, social-practice picture of fuel poverty before finally defining the first citizen defined and weighted model of fuel poverty in England. This work highlights the importance of understanding social as well as technical drivers of relative poverty concepts and demonstrates how this could improve the efficiency and accuracy of wider forms of policy design.