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**OLDER PEOPLE AND THEIR
WINTER WARMTH BEHAVIOURS:**

understanding the contextual dynamics

Older people and their winter warmth behaviours: understanding the contextual dynamics

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a qualitative research project that sought to generate new insights about how contemporary older people in the UK respond to the advent of winter cold and why they choose to manage their winter warmth in the ways they do. Rather than starting with specific policy framings, it took a deliberately open approach, talking with older people about how exactly they kept warm during winter and the various contextual factors influencing these choices. The rationale was that by taking this approach to understanding the ways in which our participants thought it best to deal with winter cold, we might generate fresh insights into where the most effective points of future intervention may be, and where such interventions need to be sensitive to the personal logics and beliefs underpinning the winter warmth choices that older people currently make. In this respect, our interests cut across issues of both sustainable domestic energy use and the wider winter welfare of older people.

The participants in our study were 21 households in the Birmingham area. We recruited households in 2 categories: one being more affluent, and the other being on relatively low incomes. The aim was to draw out the extent to which winter warmth practices were common across the generational cohort irrespective of wealth and to reveal the times when income levels continued to make significant impacts. Each household was visited at home twice for a long semi-structured interview, once at the start of the winter in late 2008 and once towards the end of winter in early 2009. Participants were also asked to complete a photo diary for a few days during a cold period, documenting their warmth-related practices.

We found that most of these older households felt that warmth was crucial to their wellbeing and tended to think they needed more warmth as they got older, especially if suffering from chronic health conditions. Most households thought that central heating was a good thing and a technological advance to be embraced as part of modern living, though there was not total agreement on this. Although sometimes nostalgic about heating practices in the past, there was no appetite for returning to previous, more laborious, ways of keeping warm. Heating routines tended to be quite well established and subject to little variation though thermostats might be turned up in colder weather. Thermostat settings were most often around 20°C, but some low income households had ambient

temperatures significantly lower than this. It was common for households to have the central heating off for periods during the day and overnight, and many preferred unheated bedrooms. Overall, there was a significant diversity in routines and all people tended to think they were doing the sensible thing for themselves, given their circumstances.

Central heating aside, participants employed a variety of other techniques to keep warm in the house. Supplementary gas and electric fires were commonly used as well as more mobile objects such as hot water bottles and sometimes rugs. However many were conscious of such things as hot water bottles and blankets being old fashioned and making them seem 'old' and so they either avoided them or used more modern versions. Clothing was also used to keep warmer indoors during winter. Interviewees wore thicker clothes during winter and adding extra clothes was often the first thing they would do if cold. Overall participants retained a concern with personal appearance and style, but some low income households were wearing several layers of clothing indoors in order to stay warm. Concern with appearance and comfort also extended to nightwear, and to clothes worn out of doors, where some were reluctant to wear hats for example. Our participants spent a significant amount of time out of doors during winter, unless it was especially icy, and so their warmth experiences in a variety of places should also be taken account of in future policy.

Lower income households were spending significantly less on energy bills than their more affluent counterparts. This was partly explained by smaller residences. The more affluent households were not particularly worried about their ability to cope with rising fuel costs, but some had still started to cut back on their energy use for these reasons. More of the low income households were cutting back on heating, but some carried on using as much as they would like, preferring to cut back on other things if necessary. Most participants did not see any benefit in changing their energy supplier regularly and many did not know how to compare prices especially as internet usage was low.

It was common, especially in the more affluent households, for heating to be turned up when other people visited, as part of being a 'good host'. Even though they sometimes felt cold when visiting other people's homes, interviewees said they would not ask for more heat, as they considered it rude – instead they would sometimes wear extra clothing if they thought they were going to a cold house. Generally, home heating techniques were not discussed much between peers as these topics were considered both

mundane and potentially sensitive. However, sometimes tips and information were passed between friends and through social networks, including how to get subsidised insulation, and friends occasionally gave each other warmth-related devices. These were often especially trusted sources.

Participants did not readily identify themselves as typical older people. Rather they commonly emphasised the diversity in their generation. However they did see themselves as collectively different in their lifestyles from younger people. In this sense, they and their peers were thought to be better equipped in many ways to deal with harder times, including higher energy bills, as they had home economy skills which younger people lacked and they also had less sense of entitlement.

Some interventions aimed at improving older person winter welfare seemed to have been quite successful, notably subsidised home insulation, which most of our respondents had benefited from and the winter fuel payment which was universally welcomed. However, it was noted that contractors would not deal with harder to insulate homes or with lofts that needed clearing and so some people missed out on the benefits of these schemes. Less was known about grants for upgrading systems. Advice on matters such as how to dress to keep warm was generally unwelcome and often considered to be patronising and to pander to negative stereotypes of older people. Advice on more technical matters such as how to run a heating system most efficiently would be welcomed by some, and interviewees suggested instigating a system checking service. Otherwise, the best help was thought to be financial, but through lower energy prices and higher pensions rather than specific targeted benefits.

Generally households did not expect to make many changes in the future to their heating practices although the lower income households would often have liked to use more heating if they felt financially able. Changing health circumstances would be the most likely factor to change their behaviours. With regard to environmental agendas, interviewees were often concerned about climate change and wider environmental issues but did not make any significant association between this and their personal heating practices. Most would not feel inclined to use less heating for such reasons. However the generational tendency to economy, even among the more affluent households, meant that they were often already adopting relatively sustainable consumption habits.

At the end of the report we have sought to draw out some headline findings from this research. Firstly, we consider the extent to which older people could or need to be encouraged into more sustainable consumption practices. Whilst older people continue to be relatively economical in their consumption overall, and though they also believe younger generations to be comparatively profligate, they remain disinclined to connect their heating behaviours to any wider environmental agenda and indeed reducing ambient temperature is perhaps not something that should be encouraged in this age group. Some sensitivity will clearly be required if we seek to engage them in sustainability agendas. Secondly, many older people do not perceive themselves to be similar to a wider generational cohort of other 'older people' and they also feel they manage their home heating in a way that is entirely sensible for them on an individual basis. This suggests that any campaign to help ensure they pass through this period without problems in future should be carefully devised since there is a limited sense of identification with media representations of vulnerable older people, despite some actually experiencing difficulties. Thirdly, initiatives to tackle fuel poverty by improving energy efficiency may need to be more thorough and prepared to deal with more diverse situations. Future developments should consider allocating resources for such more complex situations to avoid vulnerable households being passed over. Fourthly, we discuss how social networks could be effectively mobilised to encourage both sustainable winter behaviours and wider social wellbeing. This has the potential to be a quite effective route, but care must be taken to use this route in an acceptable way.

1. PROJECT RATIONALE AND AIMS

The Rationale

Promoting sustainable behaviours

Whilst it is imperative that we facilitate more environmentally sustainable ways of living, any future initiatives will need to be sensitive to the changing ways in which different groups of people are already inclined to live. In the context of a globally ageing population, one especially important group to understand in this respect is that of older people. Yet how groups of older people are inclined, able or empowered to adopt more sustainable practices is a subject we know relatively little about (Wright and Lund, 2000). How the demands of ageing intersect with the demands of living sustainably is an area requiring further exploration and one important topic within this agenda is that of thermal management. Whilst wider populations are encouraged to use less energy in their homes and thereby reduce their carbon emissions (Boardman, 2007), how concerns over sustainable heating behaviours intersect with the experiences and issues associated with ageing has not, to the best of our knowledge, yet received any sustained attention.

The argument for addressing this gap is lent further weight when we acknowledge that older people, when taken as a whole, are increasingly wealthy in this country. (Brewer *et al.*, 2007). They are therefore in a position to be significant consumers of resources, goods and services. Marketing literature has only recently begun to apprehend the opportunities associated with understanding the consumption preferences of current older cohorts (Metz and Underwood, 2005) because an ingrained ageism holds older people to be both unappealing role models and

insignificant consumers (Szmigin and Carrigan, 2001). The sustainable consumption literature lags even further behind this position, though some recent initiatives have started to explore how sheltered housing could be a key site for promoting more sustainable practices (GAP, 2008) and what the most effective ways of making this connection in the future may be (DEFRA, 2009). The relative lack of work on the sustainability of older household habits is notable given that a growing group of wealthy older people could be increasingly inclined to use resources in quite unsustainable ways.

Ensuring winter wellbeing

Where the domestic thermal management behaviours of older people has rather come to the fore is with respect to fuel poverty. This is with good reason, since it is estimated that about 1.5 million pensioner households in the UK live in fuel poverty (Help the Aged, 2008). This situation is of great concern as it is closely connected to the excess winter deaths we see among older people each year (ONS, 2006). The drivers of fuel poverty among older people are commonly understood to be low incomes, high energy costs, and hard to heat homes. Yet, whilst the importance of alleviating fuel poverty is not in question, these debates are currently framed in ways that can be quite limiting. First, the fact that fuel poverty is overwhelmingly the dominant representation of older people with respect to home energy use is itself partly a reflection of the wider representation of older people as uniformly needy and infirm and, in this way, alternative lifestyles and consumption habits are overlooked. Second, approaches to understanding fuel poverty that concentrate on technical and economic deficits, commonly construct older people as passive recipients of management advice.

A notable minority of fuel poverty studies have started to suggest the important role of culture in explaining older people's energy use, where older people seem to resist the best intentions of government strategy by, for example, choosing to remain in large family homes, keeping windows open at night, believing that central heating is unhealthy, or feeling they can endure the cold better as a result of past experiences (Harrington *et al.*, 2005; Wright, 2004; Armstrong *et al.*, 2006). These findings point to some significant issues, but the focus on 'problem' behaviours results in a missed opportunity for engaging more fully with wider behavioural repertoires and contexts. In particular, neither successful thermal management practices nor those with alternative outcomes to being cold are given any attention. Thus, this research has not made many links with the above issues of sustainability – a link that is important and complex, as sustainability is compromised not only by wealthy households using heat indiscriminately, but also by those who are in fuel poverty due to inefficient heating systems (Boardman, 2007).

sought a more general picture of how various factors influenced the ways in which this group felt they should respond to the seasonal cold, before seeing where this left us in terms of future agendas.

The Aims

This research sought to incorporate these two agendas – of sustainable domestic consumption and older person winter wellbeing - within a single framework. The starting contention was that both of these could usefully be enriched by a more contextually sensitive understanding of how and why groups of older people now deal with the winter cold in the ways they do. Our belief was that a close consideration of this process would make for a much richer sense of how various dynamics interpenetrated during this time and this could, in turn, show us where the most positive future interventions could be made. Stepping slightly back from more immediate policy framings, we

2. STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

This study employed in-depth qualitative methods with a total of 21 households in the Birmingham area. The qualitative data collection was by means of two extended semi-structured interviews with each household, and a photo diary exercise that lasted for a short period of days, between the two interviews. In total, we spent over 50 hours talking about their winter management practices with our participants. The first interview took place towards the start of the winter and the second at the end of this period.

This approach was chosen in preference to alternatives such as survey methodology for a number of reasons. This was, firstly, because we wanted to gain fresh insights into how these households were managing their winter warmth, and the reasons for their choices, in the context of their everyday lives. Exploring the many issues involved and the meanings and reasoning behind routines built up over a number of years takes some time, and also the building of a certain amount of trust and rapport. Secondly, we wanted the households to reflect on the routines they had established, how these had come about, and to consider the rationale behind relatively mundane things like thermostat adjustment, the use of hot water bottles, and their winter clothing decisions. These are things that people don't often reflect upon and hence we needed a method that allowed us to return to the subject more than once as it can sometimes be difficult to recall and describe such everyday behaviours that people often do without thinking. Thirdly, these were sometimes quite personal issues that required some degree of empathy to be established between the researcher and the respondent.

Such an approach meant that we necessarily worked with a relatively small sample. Correspondingly we have not claimed to be representative of the wider population and we cannot test for significant differences between groups. What we do have though, and what we feel is very valuable in this area of research, are insights into how households in different economic circumstances are now managing their warmth, how and why these practices have come about, and how they are entirely sensible for the people involved in view of their circumstances and the various social pressures associated with their lives. We know of little other research that has taken such a holistic approach to how the winter is experienced by groups of older people today.

We recruited in the Birmingham urban area, stretching from Meriden and Sutton Coldfield in the east to Halesowen in the west. All participants were aged over 70 as we felt that below this age people may not be experiencing some of the physical aspects of ageing that were important to consider. Our sample of households is detailed below. The main division of the sample was into two broad groups: the first being relatively affluent, and the second being on low incomes. The affluent group were selected as having a gross income of at least £35,000 if a couple, or £25,000 if single. Originally the low income group were recruited as people who were in receipt of pension credit through either the guarantee element or savings credit. However, we were also well aware that many pensioners who are entitled to pension credit do not claim it, hence some of those on the lowest incomes are not in fact in receipt of this benefit. We therefore widened our criteria to include any who were on a weekly income of not more than £200 as a couple or £135 as a single person.

Some of our participants were well below this. Most households did not like to talk about exact income, and indeed many did not know their exact income. Correspondingly we cannot give income figures for the separate households, beyond their being in these categories. However, we have made every effort to ensure that we can talk about the effects of income in comparative perspective.

Beyond this specification of the two groups, we deliberately recruited a mix of single and couple households, with the singles covering both genders, various housing types, and ages. Details with respect to these criteria and others are also given in table 1. Our aim was to get a spread of people in a variety of situations in order to get some sense of where these factors had impacts and to ensure we had the opportunity to explore a diversity of personal circumstances within each of the two income groups.

The first round of Interviews took place between December 9th and 19th 2008, apart from two which took place on January 14th 2009. Participants were visited in their own home and interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. Couples were interviewed together. Interviews were taped with written consent. Topics covered in the first interview included the house and how they came to live there; their main heating system and routines; their bills and how they felt about them; other heating appliances and objects; warmth at night; clothing during the day and night; general winter activities; and outdoor activity and clothing during winter. We also asked them to look forward to the rest of that winter and talk about how they were planning to deal with it.

At the end of the first interview, participants were left with a notebook, pen and disposable camera.

Using these tools, they were invited to complete a diary over 4 consecutive days selected at their convenience but ideally during a cold spell, taking photographs if they were willing. The aim was to document things they did that were to do with warmth, or which affected their warmth in any way, or where their warmth came to their attention. Not all participants completed this exercise, but more than half did. Envelopes were provided for the diaries and cameras to be posted back to the researchers. Photographs were then developed and used as prompts for further discussion in the second interview along with the material from the diaries. The aim of this part of the research was to encourage participants to talk us through the reasons why they engaged in behaviours that might otherwise have seemed inconsequential to them and therefore not worthy of discussion with us.

The second round of interviews took place between March 3rd and 19th 2009. By the second interview, participants knew us better and they had also had some time to reflect on our discussion topics. Again, they were visited at home for an interview of a similar length to the first. This time topics included how they had managed warmth during the past winter; any particular circumstances such as periods of illness or house guests; ongoing bills and budgeting; any changes they might make in the shorter and longer term; how they responded, or might respond, to various kinds of intervention; and their wider thoughts on environmental sustainability and whether they ever connected this topic to their home heating behaviours. We also discussed their diaries and photographs, if they had completed the diary activity.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and our analysis was thematic, using Atlas Ti software

which aids categorisation and retrieval of transcript sections. Through this analysis, we were looking for themes in the discussion that related to an analytical framework that was built up from both the interests we had at the outset of the study and from ideas that emerged through the process of conducting the interviews and reading the transcripts. The aim was to provide a detailed sense of how they were living through the winter period and the factors that emerged as most important in terms of dictating the choices they made in this regard. In this respect, we were interested in much more than just immediate concerns associated with wealth, but also wider social norms and beliefs associated with how they felt they should deal with winter cold, how respondents felt that other older people managed the winter, and why they thought they did so in this way.

The following sections discuss our findings in relation to these themes. There are ten empirical chapters in total where the findings gradually move from a detailed overview of their current practices towards a more sensitive description of certain cultural factors that emerged as worthy of particular consideration in this study. Our analysis finishes with some discussion of how our participants imagined their winter behaviours will develop as they move forward from this point and where they felt future interventions should best be made. At the end of the report, we reflect more broadly on what can be taken away from this exercise and how these findings can be used to inform future policy.

Some examples of pictures taken as part of the photo-diary exercise





3. OUR PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES

Table 1:

People	Income	Age	Health issues of note	House / flat type, size and rooms	When house built	Housing tenure
Mrs Carlton	Higher income	90	Arthritis.	Bungalow: 3 bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bathroom and conservatory / 'sun lounge'.	1938	Owner occupier
Mr and Mrs Corbert	Higher income	80s	no	House, 3 bedrooms, large open plan living room, study, kitchen, bathroom.	1964	Owner occupier
David Hastings and Carol Lynch	Higher income	David 77, Carol 76	no	House, semi detached, 4 beds, bathroom, dining room, lounge, kitchen.	1950s	Owner occupier
Don and Jean Bonnington	Higher income	Around 80	She has severe Crohn's disease, part of bowel removed, ongoing problems. He has some knee issues, needing surgery.	Flat, ground floor, 3 bedrooms, large lounge, dining room, kitchen, bathroom.	1950s	Owner occupier
James Farnham	Higher income	71	no	Bungalow 5 rooms. 2 bedrooms.	1970s	Owner occupier
Clive and Shirley West	Higher income	78	None now; he had bad pleurisy a couple of years ago.	Flat 7 rooms. 2 bedrooms. Ground floor flat of communal building.	2002	Owner occupier
Norma Hart	Higher income	74	Some mobility issues. Previous cancer on leg.	House 7 rooms. 3 Bedroom detached house.	1950	Owner occupier
Pauline Peters	Higher income	81	Cancer previously.	House 7 rooms. 3 Bedroom semi.	1985	Owner occupier
John Turner	Higher income	83	Cancer. A fall. Heart problem and angina.	House 7 rooms. Built himself. Detached.	1956	Owner occupier
Julia Carter	Higher income	70	Nothing to speak of.	8 rooms. 3 Bedroom detached house. 3 to 4 main rooms downstairs.	1983	Owner occupier
Mrs Wright	Lower income	73	Back pain and some arthritis which affects heating.	4 rooms. One bedroom. Small first floor flat.	1975	Owner occupier
Mr and Mrs Spence	Lower income	75	None to speak of.	4 room council bungalow. 1 bedroom. Detached and part of an estate.	1960s	Social rented

	Heating system	Insulation (roof, wall)	Double glazing	Bills (gas, electric, combined)	How pay bills	Fuel schemes/ special tariff
	Storage heaters (3) on economy 7, plus uses gas fire and extra appliances.	Thin insulation in loft. No cavity walls so cannot insulate.	Fully double glazed	Gas £103, electricity £79 (she thinks) for autumn 3 months Sept – December. Expects over £400 for winter bills.	Every 3 months, not direct debit	Economy 7
	Gas central heating, separate hot water tank.	Loft insulation probably thin; have cavity wall insulation.	Fully double glazed	Gas £108 per month, electricity not sure.	Monthly direct debit	None
	Gas central heating, separate hot water tank.	Thick loft insulation and cavity wall insulation.	Fully double glazed	£100 per month combined but currently in arrears.	Monthly direct debit	None
	Gas central heating, combi boiler.	Building is insulated but they have no roof and no cavity walls on their flat.	Fully double glazed	£50 gas £32 electric per month, approx. recently went up about £20 combined. Are in credit.	Monthly direct debit	None
	Gas central heating.	Thin loft insulation only; cannot insulate walls.	Yes	£64 month gas (electric through landlord, £50 a quarter average).	Monthly direct debit. Electric is not direct debit	None
	Gas central heating.	New building, insulated. No loft to flat.	Yes	£64 month (gas and electric).	Monthly direct debit	None
	Gas central heating.	Recent thick loft insulation and cavity wall insulation.	Yes	£100 month (gas and electric combined).	Direct debit	None
	Gas central heating.	Loft insulation, not sure how thick; cavity wall insulation.	Part	£97 month (gas and electric combined).	Direct debit	Previously staywarm, now says it has changed to 'energy' but is not clear if it is still a flat rate scheme
	Gas central heating.	Thin loft insulation; cavity wall insulation.	Part	£110 month (gas and electric).	Direct debit	None
	Gas central heating (system replaced 5 years ago) Not combi.	Thick loft insulation and cavity wall insulation.	Yes	£64 month, then went up to £100. combined.	Direct debit	None
	Two electric storage heaters.	Recent thick loft insulation; no cavity wall insulation.	Yes	£120 for the last winter quarter; about £60 for the summer quarters, electric only.	Direct debit	Economy 7
	Gas heating, but some sort of blow air system, rather than radiators.	Thin insulation in the loft.	Yes	£9 a month for gas but about £100 in arrears. Don't know about electric.	Direct debit	Not known

Mrs Lovett	Lower income	75	Severe anaemia which affects the heating. Also under active thyroid. Circulation problems. Osteoporosis.	7 rooms. Semi detached house. 3 beds upstairs.	1970s	Owner occupier	
Barbara Cooke	Lower income	77	None to speak of.	7 rooms. Semi detached. 3 beds upstairs.	1950s	Owner occupier	
Mr Page (and wife not interviewed)	Lower income	Him 76, wife in 70s unspecified	He had heart bypass; wife is diabetic and has back problems.	Terraced house, 2 beds, 2 reception rooms, kitchen, bathroom, downstairs shower room.	1920s	Owner occupier	
Mr Kearns	Lower income	72	Big heart attack in previous year, and on medication. Bad knees due to car crash some years ago.	Flat: 1 bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom.	Doesn't know. probably 60s/70s	Social rented	
Mr and Mrs Simpson	Lower income	He 74, she 72	He has osteoarthritis and recovering from prostate cancer. Also gets bad chilblains.	Detached house, 4 bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen with breakfasting area, lounge, dining room, utility room.	1930s	Owner occupier	
Joan Cooper	Lower income	79	Arthritis, quite severe. Limited in walking.	3 bedrooms, 2 rooms downstairs, kitchen, bathroom.	1955	Owner occupier	
Kathleen Taylor	Lower income	78	Some arthritis, thyroid problem, borderline diabetic.	Bungalow, 1 bedroom, 1 living room, 1 smaller dining room / study, kitchen, bathroom.	Don't know, probably 1950s/60s	Social rented	
Mr and Mrs Spicer	Lower income	He 78, she 74	She has under active thyroid. He has heart rhythm irregularities and is on beta blockers.	Flat, 1 st floor, 1 bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom.	Not sure, probably 1950s	Social rented	
Mr Michaels	Lower income	70	Spondylosis – bone problem.	Ground floor flat - 1 bedroom, lounge, kitchen and bathroom.	Not sure, 50s / 60s	Social rented	

Gas central heating. Condensation boiler.	Thick loft insulation and cavity wall insulation.	Yes	£55 a month combined.	Payment card at post office	Eon / age concern tariff for people on benefits
Combi boiler gas central heating.	Loft insulation, not sure how thick, and cavity wall insulation.	Yes	£30 month gas, not sure about electric.	Monthly direct debit	None that aware of
None. Gas fire in one room downstairs.	Thick loft insulation. No cavity walls so no insulation there.	Fully double glazed	£56 per month gas and electric combined.	Monthly direct debit	None
Storage heaters on economy 7; additional electric fixed wall heater.	Thinks it has loft insulation, doesn't know about the walls.	Double glazed all round	£55-60 every 3 months, electric only.	Every 3 months, not direct debit	Economy 7 for storage heaters
Gas central heating, boiler dates back to 1977. Also one open fire and a gas fire.	Partial loft insulation only. No cavity walls so no cavity wall insulation.	None	About £130 a month in total, combined.	3 monthly direct debit, variable	Essentials, British Gas – lowest tariff. Found it hard to get this
Gas central heating, quite new boiler. Probably not a combi boiler, not entirely clear.	Thick loft insulation and cavity walls where it was possible.	Double glazed all round	About £67 a month, not sure if this is gas only or including electricity.	Monthly, probably direct debit but not clear	Staywarm, i.e. flat rate scheme
Gas central heating, quite new combi boiler.	Thinks the loft is insulated, not sure about the walls.	Double glazed	Thinks it is £20 per month gas and £8 or £18 electric.	Monthly direct debit	Not that aware of
Gas central heating, new combi boiler.	Loft insulated, not sure about walls.	Fully double glazed	He is not sure, thinks £20-30 per month for gas, electric is separate.	Monthly direct debit	Not that knows of
Gas central heating, combi boiler.	Loft is insulated, he is not sure about the walls.	Not double glazed	£35 gas £10 electric per month.	Monthly direct debit	Not that knows of

The research design and all instruments including interview schedules, consent forms and participant briefings have passed ethical scrutiny by the University of Birmingham. Pseudonyms have been assigned to all participants in all parts of this report.

4. AGEING, HEALTH AND WARMTH

The importance of heat for health

Almost all our interviewees expressed a belief that maintaining personal warmth was vital for health, and especially so when older. It was also felt to be very important for comfort – many said that the experience of cold was something that made people ‘miserable’. Due to it being so essential, several households said that they would cut back on most other things before cutting back on heating, though this was not the case for all. In general, most believed that a good heating system was necessary for good health. Only one household was an exception to this: Mr and Mrs Spence claimed to like their ambient temperature rather low and thought that, as a result of living in quite cold conditions without central heating, they were healthier, as central heating could ‘breed germs’. However, unlike the findings of some previous research (Wright 2004; Armstrong *et al.*, 2006), this was an uncommon view in our study. This may be because of the different samples involved, or it may indicate changing attitudes among older cohorts. Good ventilation and fresh air was often considered to be important too, with potential implications for temperatures and heating needs at times (see section 6). The general view was that feeling sufficiently warm was an essential condition when you are older and participants believed themselves quite willing to make several sacrifices to ensure they kept themselves at the right temperatures.

How does ageing affect the need for warmth?

Many of our participants agreed that they feel the cold more as they get older. This was partly because of reduced activity levels, they thought,

but it was also partly just a natural physical change. Several people described how the ‘blood gets thinner’ with age. There was majority agreement on this, but not total – a couple of households felt that the need for warmth hadn’t in fact changed as they had got older. For those that did think they felt colder in recent years, the age at which this started to happen was identified at around late 50s / 60 onwards. There was also a feeling that women tended to feel colder than men. Some health issues also affected the need for warmth, and in common with the wider over 70 age group, many of the participants did suffer from one or more chronic complaints. Arthritis affected quite a few, and meant they were particularly careful not to get cold. In some cases, this challenge was a driving factor in their heat consumption:

Int So do you think that the way that you keep warm has it changed as you have gotten older, has it changed in recent years?

F Oh yes, well because of my arthritis. Because of being cold yes, I mean I wouldn’t have dreamt of having all this heating on or anything like that [previously].

[Joan Cooper, 79, lower income, Interview 1]

Other health issues that affected the need for heat included thyroid problems, poor circulation, anaemia, recovery from heart attack, and medication for heart irregularities. Some people specifically wore more clothes because of these physical issues, and / or used supplementary appliances as a further means of keeping warm enough (see section 6). More specific episodes of illness might affect warmth practice, but during this study few people experienced any illness, so comments were only in general terms. Overall, interviewees felt that older people who were significantly ill, and especially those who were quite immobile, needed their ambient temperature to be kept quite high. There were

several anecdotes about people they knew who they believed to be in this situation and whose houses were very hot – but they understood why and agreed with the principle. All this fed into a wider recognition of diversity in ageing discussed more fully elsewhere in this report.

Detecting temperature change

There was a strong overall agreement that participants could quite easily sense when temperatures changed, or when the temperature was too low for them. Most of them relied on their own physical sense as a prompt to take action in some way – hands, feet, and various parts of the body they thought were sensitive gauges:

M I have a good nose, my nose goes, if it stops below 70 my nose goes cold, it's a very good indicator, believe you me. As soon as the room goes below 70 my nose goes cold.

[John Turner, 83, higher income, Interview 2]

Some people kept thermometers indoors, but many didn't. Those that did largely checked them 'out of interest'. One or two households would check the thermometer quite regularly to make sure the temperature was in the required range, but still on balance would tend to be led by how they physically felt. Indeed technologies such as the home thermometer largely missed the point because adjustment was about what was 'right for them' in terms of their specificity as an individual. Only one woman, Kathleen Taylor, said that she would put the heating thermostat up on the basis of the temperature gauge card supplied by her energy provider, to keep it in the recommended zone on the card, if it had dropped below.

Weather forecasts had a greater influence on their personal warmth behaviour at home. A number of participants from both income groups reported how they would amend their heating

and behaviour in response to such forecasts. This could include adjusting the thermostat if a particularly cold spell was predicted or, more commonly, altering plans to travel any distance. Participants were often quite keen on the televised weather.

Summary points

- Most felt they needed higher ambient temperatures as they got older in order to keep comfortably warm.
- Various health conditions, especially arthritis, thyroid and circulatory issues, were perceived to increase the need for external heating.
- No-one felt they had any impaired ability to detect temperature change. Thermometers were used by some, but most would go by their own feeling to decide how much heating they needed.
- Weather forecasts were more effective in influencing behavioural changes.

5. HOME HEATING SYSTEMS

Diverse practices

Our study revealed how there was significant diversity with regard to the amount of heating generated by central heating systems. Some from the more affluent group were quite proud to describe how the thermostat was set to keep the entire home at exactly the warm temperature they would like throughout the whole winter. However, other homes, more often among the low income households, used heating in a very minimal way and this was sometimes justified as being because they did not like to get too warm.

For those with gas central heating, it was common practice to have it on for two distinct periods each day – once in the morning usually for two or three hours, and the other starting around late afternoon and extending through the evening. In the morning, it was often set by timer to come on before members of the household would wake up, but some people preferred to turn it on manually when they got up as part of their morning routine. In the evening, again some had it on timer to turn off at some point during the evening, perhaps meaning they needed a supplementary heater if they stayed up later, whereas others turned it off manually when they went to bed. A few households had the heating on continuously during the day as a routine. Notably this included some from both the higher income and lower income groups. The majority, though, had a quite long period during the day when the central heating was not on. During these times, some said that they were mostly out of the house, whilst others might put it on for an hour or so if they were cold. It was more common to use other heating appliances and clothing to keep warm during these times.

Households with electric storage heaters found the timings less easy to control, so had less flexibility about the hours it was putting out heat or not. A few households had the main source of heating on very little. One low income household (Mr and Mrs Spence) for example had a blow air system which they only put on very occasionally when they felt like it. Another used only a gas fire downstairs that they tended not to put on until late afternoon.

Regarding the heating of different rooms, several households across both income groups heated the whole home. Quite common though was the practice of having the heating lower in rooms that were little used, such as spare bedrooms, by means of thermostatic radiators. Several did not heat the kitchen, or did not have a radiator in the kitchen, as they felt that cooking activities kept this warm enough. A few did not heat their own bedroom at all, or barely, either because they had no heating there, or more commonly because they preferred it that way:

- M The bathroom which is has got under floor heating which comes on with the central heating. And that is the only room upstairs that has heating coming on in it and the bedroom, we have always thought bedrooms don't need heating.
- F Yes I can't sleep when it is too hot so...
- M So we are quite...
- F Happy with it no heating.
- M We are happy with it.

[David Hastings and Carol Lynch, 77 and 76, higher income, Interview 1].

Thermostat setting

Most of those with central heating had a wall mounted thermostat to set the overall ambient temperature. The most popular setting for this was around 20, with some as low as 15 and some going up to 24. It's important to note though that the number on the thermostat may not correspond accurately to the temperature

in Celsius though presumably this is what it is intended to represent. Also, all the participants habitually thought in Fahrenheit and so did not necessarily relate to the thermostat setting as an actual temperature setting. Some said that they had the temperature at around 70°F, sometimes 75, but they were commonly quite imprecise about the Celsius setting to which this might correspond.

Whilst some of the households tended to leave the thermostat alone, it was fairly usual to turn it up a little on 'cold days' or at points when they were personally just feeling colder. A few households would adjust it regularly day to day, depending on the weather. One or two adjusted it throughout the day, perhaps relating to it as a power setting rather than a temperature setting – for example one man (Mr Michaels, lower income) would set it to 30 every morning when getting up, then back down to 20 when he was warm enough, and then turn it right down to the lowest setting if he got too hot. It was also common practice by households to turn the thermostat down a few degrees if going out, so that the house would remain warm but less fuel would be used. In this sense, most of the participants were setting the temperature according to 'how they felt' rather than any rule or recommendation, and thought this was the best way. Such personal sense of what worked for them could be preferred over official advice:

- Int so you normally put it at 20?
 F Yes.
 Int And is that normally enough, would you ever be a bit chilly or..?
 F Oh yes, yes I would never put it more.
 Int No.
 F But my daughter said you are supposed to have it at 21, mum, she said it was on the telly this morning, that was like a week ago. I said well I didn't hear it and I said it is quite enough what I have got it at.

Int If you feel warm enough at 20.

F Yes.

[Kathleen Taylor, 78, lower income, Interview 1]

Yet some of the low income households without thermostats clearly had their homes routinely at quite low temperatures. In one household, the Simpsons, at the time of visiting the warmest room was at 12-13°C and other rooms below 10°C (measured by a thermometer card from Age Concern). This household were on a low income and had a large, hard to heat house and a very old central heating system. A couple of other low income households was also noticeably chilly at the time of visiting, around 15°C, but not quite at this extreme.

Well established habits

In view of the observed diversity of home heating practices, it was interesting to note how the level of day-to-day anxiety about whether they were heating their homes in the best way they could was relatively low across the groups. There was a sense in which participants, even those under financial constraint, felt they were all coping with their circumstances as best they could. In this way, interviewees did not especially compare their own circumstances with other older people regarding the amount they used their heating systems and whether they were doing the right thing personally. Because they often assumed that everyone was simply doing what was 'best for them', most felt they were coping reasonably well in view of their individual circumstances. That is not to say however that all households felt their circumstances were ideal: some would certainly have done things differently if they felt able to (see section 8).

Our participants then were often relatively 'set in their ways' with respect to how they managed

their domestic heating. This was something they were themselves quite willing to recognise. Once habits, in terms of 'what works for me', were established they would then often continue relatively untroubled, although as will be detailed more fully in section 10, adjustments were sometimes made when others came to visit.

- F Yes, I mean I talk to my friend who doesn't have the central heating on and will be cold and is religious that she won't light her, she has an open fire, she won't light her fire until 4 o'clock in the afternoon or things like this, and she will be really cold all day. Well I can't exist like that, I have got to feel, I have got to be warm all day. I mean some people are warm blooded and some people are cold blooded aren't they?

[Julia Carter, 70, higher income, Interview 2]

Participants were all well aware that they had their own peculiarities in this respect and this fed directly into the ways in which they conceptualised the wider place and importance of central heating in the contemporary home. They were all quite aware that it would be used in a variety of ways according to individual circumstances, and had internalised particular sets of arguments that justified their behaviours to themselves. Those who for economic reasons used their heating little sometimes (though not always) subsequently believed themselves to be the kind of person who would prefer to go without. Equally those who used their central heating a great deal would rationalise this as being about fully embracing progress and maintaining an appropriately warm home. Both sets believed their practices to be healthier. In both instances, such rationalisations were seemingly used to allow them to maintain a degree of personal pride with regard to their home heating behaviour.

- F I think I use mine in a very efficient way and a way in which it suits me.

[Mrs Lovett, 75, lower income, Interview 2]

Central heating as progress

Central heating was universally welcomed as a beneficial new technological development. Even those who did not have central heating thought so. Though our participants frequently talked nostalgically, and in some detail, about previous ways of heating their homes they had experienced earlier in their lives, they did not want to return to similar circumstances. Whilst there were perceived benefits to how things worked previously, such as being together around central fireplaces and more varied thermal experiences, it was universally deemed important to move with the times in this regard.

- F God forbid anybody has to go back to anything like that.

Mrs Lovett, 75, lower income, Interview 2]

- F Well I think that if people can have comforts they should go for it.

[Mr and Mrs Corbert, 80s, higher income, Interview 2]

All except one of our participants said they prized the experience of being in close control of when they were warm at home. Indeed, for a number of participants, supplying themselves with significant amounts of ambient heat was framed as a personal 'treat' for which they were willing potentially to forgo other luxuries. Interestingly this was amongst wealthier participants as well as lower income ones, suggesting that this way of understanding central heating may be in part an outcome of their past experiences.

Summary points

- There was significant diversity in terms of how ambient heat was managed at home through the main heating system. This was both in terms of the hours and zones of heating and the temperature settings.
- Despite this evident diversity, there were

generally low levels of routine anxiety about the ways in which heating was managed, except for those in more extreme situations.

- Nevertheless, the coldest houses were all in the low income group; however not all low income households were cold.
- Routine practices of managing the ways in which their central heating system or storage heaters worked were generally well established. Few amendments were reactively made to these routines and, when they were, this was generally in response to physiologically felt temperature changes.
- Varied personal usage of home heating was largely justified in terms of being an individual who is doing the appropriate thing 'for them'.
- The arrival of central heating was almost universally understood as a 'good thing' for society. Even though they sometimes felt nostalgic about previous practices, it was deemed much better to move with the times.

6. OTHER TECHNIQUES FOR MANAGING WARMTH

Whilst this report has so far detailed how participants could, in some senses, be relatively 'fixed' with regard to the ways in which they managed their home heating system, this did not mean they were entirely passive in the ways they passed through periods of winter cold. Rather, other techniques were often used to supplement the main heating system and maintain the desired level of personal warmth. All except one respondent, for example, were in possession of other appliances they deployed to 'fine tune' the temperature within their rooms, or supplement the main system.

M Yes we have got a, I have got an electric fire in the airing cupboard that I have brought out on occasions, you know when it has been really bitter cold you know. It is just a bar heater.

Int And where would you use that?

M We would use it in the living room or perhaps in the bedroom.

[Mr & Mrs Spicer, 78 & 74, lower income, Interview 1]

M Yes you just plug it in and it does take the chill off the room. Its quite nice.

[Mr Page, 76, lower income, Interview 2]

These items included electric fires, convection heaters, wall mounted heaters, and 'living flame' gas fires. These items were understood in quite different terms from the central heating system with regard to the form and character of the heat they provided. For both the affluent and the less affluent groups there was clear evidence of a residual attachment to the localised 'fire', expressed by a liking for living flame devices or electric heaters, especially those that had some kind of flame effect. This was firstly because they nostalgically recalled previous practices of sitting around the hearth and so such devices more

effectively connoted a sense of the 'cosy' that central heating was unable to provide. Though some were almost embarrassed about this practice because they felt it to be a somewhat illogical practice in view of their current access to central heating, they still remained attached to this sense of proximity to localised heat. In this way, warmth was not only about a physical condition, but also a feeling of cosiness and being near something akin to an open fire.

F Yes it does but it is not a real form of heating. It is more for effect. But it is nice and cosy to have a few flames in the grate really. But I think we use it visually more than anything that is true.

[Clive & Shirley West, 78, higher income, Interview 2]

A second way in which other technologies such as these were valued was in terms of the immediacy of their effects. That is, they were felt to respond much more quickly in terms of dealing with perceived temperature drops that made participants want to 'take the chill off.' As such, if they were available, these were often drawn upon much more frequently than the central heating in response to an immediate sense of cold during the day, though they could subsequently be left on for periods that potentially made such decisions quite economically inefficient.

Clothing

Whilst the widespread adoption of central heating means it could be quite possible to wear the same clothing all year round at home, participants reported that they certainly wore more daytime clothes at home during winter. Women often switched from wearing dresses to trousers, for example, and some participants, though not all, adopted thicker underwear. Wearing extra clothes was one of the most usual ways of adapting to winter cold. More of the lower income households were wearing more clothes, and indeed those in the two or three coldest

homes were sometimes wearing several layers in the home.

Int And you look like you have couple of layers on there?

F I have got a thermal vest on, thermal vest and I have got this sweater now normally.

Int That is a woollen sweater isn't it?

F Yes and then I have got this fleece on, now yesterday I had another layer on because it was freezing in this house yesterday.

[Mrs Simpson, 72, lower income, Interview 1]

As well as needing to be practical about clothing by adapting to the season, there were also self-presentation issues to contend with as participants also wanted to ensure they appeared smart and stylish in their own terms. One man who didn't alter his indoor clothing seasonally, for example, explained how this was because he wanted to ensure he stayed sufficiently 'smart' through being seen to wear a shirt and tie. This was part of making sure he was demonstrably 'on top of things' after the death of his wife which feeds into issues of successful ageing discussed below.

M Funnily enough the last two years I have watched what clothing I have put on. I'll layer rather than putting on a thick woolly jumper and vest and I will watch what I wear. Though I am still a bit old fashioned with the tweeds and that.

[John Turner, 83, higher income, Interview 1]

'Cosiness' was also an attribute that clothing possessed and this went some way to explaining how, when asked what would be the first thing they would do if they felt cold, the general response was that they would amend their clothing by putting on a cardigan or other similar item. Many interviewees had particular, allocated items near to hand for exactly this purpose. This was something that most participants said they were in the habit of doing, irrespective of their level of wealth and despite how higher levels

of affluence might encourage them to be more cavalier about their heating at home. Indeed many had particular, allocated items near to hand for exactly this purpose.

Other warming devices

Further devices and warming objects were also in evidence across the board and these were discussed in a variety of interesting ways. Hot water bottles, blankets and other warming objects were positively described by some, and in some households such things were often used during the day for both warmth and comfort. Again, this was across both higher income and lower income households.

M If it was in the evening and we were watching or having supper or watching television we would probably use the blankets.

[Mr and Mrs Corbert, 80s, higher income, Interview 1]

However, there was also evidence of participants feeling that such items carried connotations that were negatively linked to the idea of being an 'old person'. This was something they were not always comfortable about. Some could be quite defiant about using them, even though these connotations were noted, but for others, particular items were unacceptably 'old fashioned' and would not be used, or only in private. However there was still a significant amount of usage of these items, suggesting a certain practicality with regard to both being economical and maintaining comfort.

F Well I think it's funny. I am getting an old lady but I do find the hot water bottle so comforting now.

[Julia Carter, 70, higher income, Interview 1]

M I wouldn't dream of having a blanket.

Int Why wouldn't you dream of it?

M Why, the house is warm enough. No, no, no, only old ladies would do that.

[Norma Hart, 74, higher income]

Interestingly, some individuals had adopted newer versions of some of these objects, by, for example, embracing fleecy throws and microwavable heat packs rather than woollen blankets and hot water bottles. In some instances, such as with heat packs, they seemed more convenient, and safer, but they also served the same functions without being so 'old-fashioned'. This made them more acceptable in some instances because it meant participants could benefit from the warmth without suffering from the perceived stigma.

Windows and Curtains

Across the board, some form of window opening was done during the day, throughout the whole winter. This was most commonly done in the bedroom for a short period of roughly half an hour after dressing, and it also took place in the kitchen when preparing food - though there were households that were doing significantly more ventilation than this. Opening windows during winter was often recognised as a potentially wasteful and counterproductive act – especially in view of the widespread and relatively uniform use of central heating across the house. In this sense, this behaviour was to some extent a relic of past practices that made less sense now as home heating systems had moved on. Nevertheless this concern was outweighed by the perceived importance of releasing smells and stuffiness. This was to avoid the situation of having a home that was unpleasant to others or seemed like the house of an 'old person' – which again had bad connotations. It was very important to participants to demonstrate that they were still able to present a clean and well ordered home - keeping it well aired was a significant part of this.

M. Well you need to freshen the place up now and again, don't you? The other thing is that I am more conscious of that because I live on my own now.

[James Farnham, 71, higher income, Interview 1]

M As I say our family is very tight and very close, the daughter comes down every day, grandson comes down every day and I think a bit of fresh air benefits everybody, I think its nice to breathe fresh air.

Int So you want to keep the house aired so it's not unpleasant for other people, is that what you are saying?

M Oh yes I would hate people to come in and say, you know, sniff, sniff, you know, or come in and say to someone else later on phew it don't half smell in there. I couldn't bear that.

[Mr Page, 76, lower income, Interview 1]

The window area was also recognised as a source of cold, when not being used for ventilation, and correspondingly there were also management practices related to this. Quite a few households, especially low income ones, used their curtains in order to minimise heat loss. Some used different types of curtains during winter that were thicker and so more effective in this respect. Drawing curtains earlier was partly about preventing others looking in during dark nights and partly about making the home feel cosy. Nevertheless the rationale of retaining warmth played a significant part for many, to the extent that some would draw them before dark, if they felt cold.

F Oh yes, as soon as it starts getting miserable out there, I draw all the curtains, every curtain in the house.

Int What do you mean by getting miserable?

F You know sort of coming up to 4 and its cold and I can feel the temperature dropping and it does make my house warmer without a doubt

[Mrs Lovett, 75, lower income, interview 1]

Summary points

- There were many ways of achieving winter comfort and personal warmth in addition to the main heating system. These included extra heating appliances, clothing and mobile objects that participants employed in a responsive way throughout the day.

- These were used by both the higher and lower income groups, but some lower income households were using these techniques significantly more, especially the addition of extra clothing.
- Use by both groups was partly because these techniques fulfilled a variety of functions, especially providing cosiness or heat to specific parts of the body.
- Nevertheless there was some degree of ambivalence about certain objects and practices that could connote a sense of being old fashioned, and more modern versions were sometimes preferred.
- Windows were subject to a variety of activities that were sometimes contradictory in terms of keeping homes warm. They were commonly opened in the morning as a means of keeping an appropriately 'fresh' house. Yet different forms of winter curtain use were also seen as sensible behaviour to keep the heat in.

7. DURING THE WINTER NIGHTS

Heating at night

Most of our households did not have a heating system running overnight. Many of them had the central heating timer set so the heating came on shortly before they got up and most bedrooms were therefore unheated whilst sleeping. Those with storage heaters felt they had less control and that these devices would tend to start producing heat sometimes too early in the morning. Two of the more affluent households had the central heating running all night, controlled by the thermostat, so the night-time temperature in the house was the same as, or broadly similar to, the day-time temperature. One of the low income households, where the wife had a thyroid problem and therefore often felt cold, did the same.

Clothing at night

Many participants changed their nightwear for the winter to a warmer style. Several women changed from a nightdress to pyjamas. A lot of households went no further than this, but some did have other, extra clothes available. Mr and Mrs Page, for example, who had no heating upstairs, often wore dressing gowns in bed and she also used a bed jacket. Some who had health issues added extras such as a thermal vest, or a cardigan when sitting up in bed. People were divided on bedsocks: some found them useful, especially people with poorer circulation, but others said they never needed them, and several said they would not be able to use them because they irritated the skin. As in the daytime, self-presentation was still an issue for most people, as was comfort in terms of style and fabric of nightclothes. No-one was prepared to wear any head covering at night and indeed the idea was deemed quite offensive.

Wearing any kind of night cap was seen as connoting extreme infirmity and extreme old fashioned-ness. Bedsocks were seen by some in a similar light, though not as extreme. In line with this sentiment, previous campaigns that have advised older people to wear such extra clothing if cold in bed were routinely denounced as inappropriate and patronising.

Int So anything on your head when you are in bed in the winter?

F No, no, no, that's a definite no.

Int Tell me why?

F I could never imagine any of my friends. .. a whisky as a night cap, yes. That's the only night cap I would have.

Int Because you think times have changed or we shouldn't be doing that kind of thing?

F No, that's sort of Scrooge in Charles Dickens and all that isn't it?

Int Okay, so we have moved on from that?

F Oh yes!

[Mrs Lovett, 75, lower income, Interview 1]

Other aids to keeping warm at night

More or less everyone used a thicker duvet and/or extra covers during the winter. For many of them, this was enough. Electric blankets were also popular though, and a number of people used hot water bottles, though usually not keeping them in the bed all night. Those sleeping alone were more inclined to use such extras. Some people were suspicious about electric blankets though, feeling they could be unsafe, and several would not use hot water bottles for fear of them bursting or leaking. One or two people had heat packs that could be heated in the microwave, which they found more convenient and safer.

Going to bed early

A few households would go to bed early during cold times, as a way of keeping warm without spending extra on heat. For the most fuel poor household, the Simpsons, this was very

necessary. Others, however, said they had much more of an established sleeping routine and could not use this as a technique. Being in bed though could involve watching TV or reading, as well as just sleeping, and so it could be a comfortable warm place to spend time, whilst at the same time averting the need to put the heating on for longer.

F So most of our day is spent here [in the kitchen] except when we are out of the house and then when we have had our meal and it is very cold it is too cold to sit in the lounge. So we go to bed about 8 or 8.30pm.

M That is the latest, 8.30.

F And we have an electric blanket in the bed. And we go to bed and read or watch television at least there we are warm. If we sat in the lounge or down here,

M Oh it is freezing.

F The heat goes off after 8 o'clock we only have it on for a few hours at night.

[Mr&Mrs Simpson, 74 & 72, lower income, Interview 1].

Windows at night

A few households, though they were the minority, routinely had their bedroom window open at night right into autumn and winter and, in one case, all winter. The reason for this was generally given as relating to the tangible benefit of sleeping with some fresh air circulating. More common, however, was the practice of airing the bedroom in the morning after getting up, for reasons discussed more fully in the previous section.

Int Yes, so you said up until about 6 weeks ago there you probably had still had the windows open?

F Well yes we did.

M Yes until this cold spell we opened them.

F Only opened a little bit.

Int But it was open all night that way?

F Yes.

Int So right up until Autumn and?

M Yes right up until we got into the end of October.

Int So why do you think it is important to let the air in at night?

F Don't really know why.

M I think we feel better, you don't feel fugged up in the morning, you know, like dozy,

[David and Carol, 77 & 76, higher income, Interview 1]

Summary points

- Most households had the heating turned off completely at night and so were sleeping in unheated rooms; they used thicker or extra covers to keep warm.
- Most wore thicker bedclothes and some used extra clothing such as bedsocks or vests. No-one would consider wearing a head covering in bed.
- Some people also liked to use hot water bottles, heat packs or electric blankets, especially those sleeping alone.
- A minority of households went to bed earlier than in summer as a way of keeping warm without needing the heating.
- A few people liked to have bedroom windows open even in quite cold conditions, as they were convinced of the benefits of 'fresh' air.

8. MONEY MATTERS

Attitude to incomes in general

Most of the more affluent households felt they were comfortably off – the word ‘comfortable’ was used a lot in a way that explicitly linked thermal and financial comfort. Of the lower income group, some felt strongly that the state pension is very poor. Others however said they felt quite lucky as older people now, and having lived through much harder times in the past, did not consider themselves to be badly off.

F Because there is so much going for old folks now.

M Oh yes.

F Years ago my mother and father never got anything. So it annoys me some of the moaning that goes on, alright I suppose there are people in different circumstances.

Int Yes.

F and everybody deserve a social life but there are a lot of them that are complaining.

[Mr and Mrs Spence, 75, lower income, Interview 1]

Several said they felt lucky or privileged to get the benefits that they do. It was also noticeable that some that had applied for benefits – including pension credit and Warm Front – had been very surprised to find they could get them, despite their income being extremely low. It seemed that there are still quite low expectations in terms of financial entitlement among many in this regard and a lack of knowledge about what kind of help and subsidies might be available to help them through winter, without necessarily having to be in destitution. Besides, they often had established patterns of behaviour that meant they perceived themselves to be ‘doing alright’ as discussed in section 4.

There was, however, quite a lot of discussion of pride around the subject of claiming benefits. Some felt that they and others of their generation did not like to ask for help, either from friends

and relatives or from the state. Some also found the forms for claiming benefits such as pension credit intrusive and did not make claims that they probably could have, because of a combination of pride and distaste for revealing personal details about finances, living arrangements and so on.

Energy bills

The amounts that individual households were spending on energy bills are detailed in table 1. As the table shows, there was a great deal of variation in the amount households were spending on energy consumption. Overall, there is a noticeable difference between the more affluent and less affluent households – the more affluent were commonly spending around £100 per month on energy bills, whilst the lower income households were often below two thirds of this. House size would affect this – the lower income households were generally in smaller houses, especially those in social housing, where older couples or single people are generally moved on into smaller housing units so that they are not ‘under-occupying’. Many of the owner-occupiers we interviewed had chosen to stay on in larger homes.

In terms of how they thought about their bills, there was quite a difference between the more affluent households and the more constrained ones. Whilst all were aware that their fuel bills would be high after the very cold winter and fuel price increases, many of the affluent households related that they were not too worried about this, and that they had few worries about being able to pay them. Certainly for many, it had not changed their consumption patterns:

M But I sort of keep my eye on it, if we spend some more fuel, what the hell?

[John Turner, 83, higher income, Interview 2]

F [using several heat sources] kept the house warm, as I was saying my bills are going to be atrocious I think but still, never mind.

[Mrs Carlton, 90, higher income, Interview 2]

One or two of the affluent households were more conscious though and one or two had been motivated by perceived fuel price rises to start finding ways to economise, though this was not really as a result of serious constraint or worry about paying. Rather this was linked to a general sense of the importance of 'economising' and being frugal since this would allow them to do other things with their money. They also felt, now they were retired, they had the time and ability to reflect and adjust accordingly and so they were well positioned to respond in various ways.

The less affluent households, on the other hand, were mostly much more conscious about fuel costs, and more likely to be actively trying to keep costs down. The overall level of worry about costs was also higher. For several, costs were clearly an important constraint on heating usage:

M Well I have got it down now to around about, for the gas and electric I have got it down to about £56 a month, which is very good. I am quite happy with that. I know my daughters, because they have got gas central heating and whatever else it's considerably more for them, but by looking after it, we are doing all right.

[Mr Page, 76, lower income, Interview 1]

Having said that, others among the lower income households had decided not to worry about their fuel bills and felt it was important to use what they needed. Put differently, their heating needs came first and they felt they should respond to them irrespective of any other concerns. Some had savings that they took solace from knowing would cover them if necessary and so they felt able to manage, whilst one or two others just

took a more fatalistic attitude:

Int Uh huh, so what do you think of those bills, are they ...?

M Well you know it is not a case of what you think you have got to pay them. You know if it is £200.00 a month, you have got to pay it...if it is £10.00 a month you have got to pay it, so, there is no point in worrying about it.

[Mr Michaels, 70, lower income, Interview 1]

Two of the low income households also received help from their children, or their children had said that they would help pay the fuel bills if necessary. This was another buffer that enabled them to worry less. This practice was in the minority, however, it should be stressed.

Changing practices in response to fuel price increases

Increasing bills had quite an interesting effect for some in the affluent group. Norma Hart no longer had her heating on 24 hours – her new insulation had allowed her to make this change without feeling colder in the house. Another respondent had also stopped having it on constant, and had instigated additional other new practices such as going to bed earlier, using a hot water bottle when sitting in the evenings, and wearing an extra layer of clothes. This was a new consciousness:

F Yes. In fact just lately I am apt to cook a meal for two days and then pop it in the microwave.

Int Right, okay so you have got something for the next day?

F So I am saving on energy.

Int Yes I suppose so.

F Yes so I have always got a hot meal for two days you know.

Int Was that part of your thinking, the energy saving?

F Yes the energy saving.

Int You are getting into it this year, its good.

F Oh definitely. Never done it before but I am now.

[Julia Carter, 70, higher income, Interview 2]

Another household (David and Carol) was also

becoming much more careful in several ways, such as turning lights off more, turning the heating off when going out, lowering the temperature of the hot water and wearing more clothes. Interestingly, having realised that they could do this without any significant hardship, they said they would not go back to previous habits even if prices subsequently came down:

Int If the prices go down do you think, would you change the heating times again and have it on another hour?

M No I don't think we would.

F No because we don't really need it really, that is still waste.

Int You have just actually got used to, you were wasting and this has made you realise?

F Yes.

M We were wasting because it was cheap. Now it is expensive we have altered our psychology in it.

[David and Carol, 77 & 76, higher income, Interview 2]

For these households, from some points of view the price increases therefore had a positive effect since they instigated behavioural changes which meant they used less energy without suffering much hardship.

Among the lower income households, several had cut back as well, but, for these, this was to a degree that was not positive for them. Some who were already fairly limited in their heating consumption had felt the need to cut down more:

M Our main concern at the moment, because of the cost of the heating we need to keep it at a manageable level. So I mean even some nights we don't have the fire full on, we just leave it at a level we find comfortable and if it gets a bit more chilly we sometimes just put a dressing gown on, and, if we had the money, it wouldn't be so bad you could just turn it up and not worry about it, you know. But you can't you've got to...

Int Live within your means?

M Live within our means, I do believe that.

[Mr Page, 76, lower income, Interview 1]

There was no doubt that the lower income households felt the price rises more acutely, but

some others had chosen to cut down in other ways in order to be able to keep their heating somewhere closer to their ideal. For others though, their overall budgeting was already quite careful so there was little further room for manoeuvre. The Simpsons, for example, living on a low income in a large house with an inefficient system, were driven by high fuel prices to have their house dangerously cold and to take quite extreme measures such as wearing multiple layers of thick clothing and going to bed very early in order to keep warm through the coldest part of the day. Evidently this was something they would rather not have done although, as discussed elsewhere in this report, these practices could also be retrospectively rationalised with reference to a variety of justifying accounts.

What would happen if prices rose or fell?

If prices rose, several households across both the income groups said that they would economise in other ways in order to meet fuel bills that would result from roughly similar level of consumption to their current usage. Suggested economies would be made on eating out, socialising, drinking, holidays and so on. It should be noted that economising on socialising such as going to clubs could leave some of the households quite isolated. Others said that they would be likely to use less heating, and this was again from both the affluent and low income groups. These households might consider wearing more clothes, turning thermostats down, and changing their use of the house so they spent time in fewer rooms. One household said they may consider moving to a smaller place, if bills stayed high.

If bills were lower, the higher income groups would, on the whole, not change their consumption. One said that she might use a bit more heating

and leave the doors between rooms open so that moving around was more comfortable. Surprisingly, many of the low income households also said that they would not use more than they currently do, despite some of them being already quite careful. Some, and notably some with some health issues, would, however.

Int imagine you know if prices went right down again next week, would you start to use more or do you think you would stick to what you are doing now?

M Oh definitely.

Int So you would actually, in an ideal situation you would use more than you do now?

M Ideal situation we would use more, because obviously the thing that worries me more than anything is the wife is diabetic

[Mr Page, 76, lower income, Interview 1]

Such remarks illustrate that some low income households were living with less ambient heat than they thought optimal for their health.

Economising in general

Many of our participant households practiced wider forms of economising in various ways, and most felt that they were quite good at it because of skills acquired when they were younger. Common practices were cooking meals from relatively basic ingredients, cooking enough for more than one meal at a time, using leftovers, shopping around for the best buys and making good use of offers such as multiple buy savings. Shopping around was generally not just for food but also applied to other goods and sometimes services. Most of the participants expressed a dislike of buying on credit and of debt as a more general concept. In this sense, participants actually felt more able to withstand financial hardship and rising bills than others – i.e. although they might not be in a position to economise on heating, they were much better and more skilled at being frugal in other ways. One of the higher income households was being frugal in a way which involved being quite careful

with domestic heating, because they wanted to leave as much money as possible to their son. For this reason, rather than because of limited income, they made a number of daily economies and were quite restrained in their spending. A secondary reason for this household was for environmental reasons: in order not to waste resources.

Energy suppliers, tariffs and supplier switching

It was mentioned among the more affluent households that estimated bills tended to overestimate usage and therefore charge more highly than they otherwise should. Some households had also found that this year they were asked to increase their direct debit by quite large amounts, despite being already quite a lot in credit – in one case, £500 in credit. Some households had managed to have this increase changed after complaining.

Of the low income households, two were on special guaranteed low tariffs. One had been put on this by her energy supplier, due to her claiming specific benefits. One other, the Simpsons, had been put onto the low tariff only after several attempts, and after telling the energy supplier that they could not pay the latest 3 month bill.

In terms of whether participants switched supplier to get better deals, only a minority of households – about 3 or 4 – had done this in the past. One or two checked online, but even these would not be willing to change very often – perhaps once a year. Overall, most people considered changing supplier to be a hassle, and not something they would be prepared to go through if unconvinced of making significant savings.

Int So you have stayed with Scottish Power did you say for a long time then?

- F Yes I have
- Int How long have you been with them?
- F Oh it's several years, it's probably 6, 7, 8, years.
- Int And would you switch to save money, or is it difficult to tell?
- F It's difficult because I have heard so many reports of people having bad, lots of problems in switching and then if you do switch, by the time you have switched, you know you're just as bad off. I don't know whether it's a good thing to keep switching or not. Its just such a hassle.

[Julia Carter, 70, higher income, Interview 2]

Many of our households believed quite strongly that there was no real benefit to be had from switching supplier. This was because the comparative price of different packages was perceived to change often and so what seemed like the best deal at one time would not stay so for long. Some also thought that good deals were used to draw people in but that charges often went up again once you were committed. Participants also thought that information about better deals than competitors could be deliberately misleading. This doubt about the actual financial benefits was the major obstacle to these households switching supplier as a way of saving money.

Another significant obstacle related to the means by which they felt they could compare prices. In common with many older people, several of our participant households, including all but one of the low income households, claimed to be computer illiterate with no idea of how to use the internet. Price comparison websites were therefore of no interest or use to them. Several participants thought that this was the only way to compare prices and so, without this, they had no means of finding out which supplier was the cheapest. Two or three however did know of phone numbers they could phone for help with price comparison. Two had got numbers from magazines aimed at older people ('Yours' and 'HeyDay') and one

interviewee referred to an energy advice line he intended to call for this purpose.

Those that did use the internet were also quite averse to giving away financial details through these means, distrusting even 'secure' sites, which could be a further obstacle to actual switching. Some just found the information and the comparisons confusing.

- Int Would you ever check again to see if anybody else is cheaper?
- F You want to, but it's all so jumbled up isn't it, you don't know whether you are right or wrong.

[Kathleen Taylor, 78, lower income, Interview 2]

Summary points

- All participants were conscious of rising fuel costs and high bills. However, most of the affluent households were not worried about their ability to cope, whilst the low income ones were, on the whole, more mindful of being stretched.
- Some of the affluent households had been motivated to find ways to save energy as a result of price increases, and found they could do so quite happily.
- More of the low income households were cutting back on fuel consumption to degrees with which they were not entirely comfortable.
- Most participants from both income groups would cope with higher prices by cutting back on other expenses. In fact, they felt they were relatively skilled in this regard.
- Many were sceptical about the benefits of switching energy supplier and also felt this process was both confusing and a hassle. Most did not use the internet, and several would not have known how they could compare prices otherwise.

9. WARMTH OUT OF THE HOUSE

Going out of doors

One of the arguments for this research was that it may be useful to think more holistically about how older individuals and households kept warm during winter. One way of doing so was by thinking about their warmth not only at home, but in their everyday lives more generally since the extent to which people were out of the house clearly had significant impacts on their need for heating and energy consumption at home and their more general experience. Many, if not most, of the households were out of the house quite a lot during winter, undertaking a great variety of other activities, including shopping and visiting friends, but also voluntary work, educational classes, swimming, dog walking, golf, looking after grandchildren, eating out, social clubs, and church activities. Some liked to make sure they were out of the house a lot, and some made sure they got quite a lot of exercise as part of a wider belief in the importance of 'staying active' seen across both income groups. In common with many older people, however, many of our participants were fairly reluctant to go out much at night.

When going outdoors, they universally wore extra, warm clothing during winter. There was quite a difference here though between those that had cars and those that did not. Those with cars did not feel the need to wrap up quite so much, and the cold was less of an issue for them. These individuals were mostly from the affluent households, but some of the low income households also ran cars. One affluent respondent, for instance, who, though still inclined to vary his clothing to a significant degree during winter, proudly related how, because he

had only to shuttle between his home, his club and his car, he didn't actually need to wear any outdoor clothing at all.

Those that relied on public transport however, mainly buses, were much more inclined to wear more outdoor clothes. Indeed waiting at bus stops could be a distinct problem in terms of keeping warm.

F In the winter the worst time is waiting for buses, it's a nightmare, because the number X route which serves XXX is supposed to be every 12 minutes but ... I do tend to dress really warmly to counteract the cold outside.

Int So you don't mind having lots and lots of layers on?

F No, no that's the best way to do it actually.

[Mrs Wright, 73, lower income, Interview 1]

Thick coats were generally worn, and most wore gloves, though not some of the car drivers. Scarves were also common. Individuals were divided on hats, however. Many did not like to wear them. This was especially so for women. A common concern was that hats did not look good and were especially detrimental to their hairstyling. Indeed this commonplace concern for appearance was enough to make many people hat averse, even when it was evidently cold outside.

M I don't wear a hat except in really cold conditions like we had last week that is the only time I will wear, I have got a woolly hat.

Int Right.

M But you don't wear a hat at anytime do you?

F No.

M It would spoil your hair wouldn't it?

F Yes.

[David and Carol, 77 & 76, higher income, Interview 1]

Hats were thought to be old fashioned and unbecoming by some men. Often they had trouble finding an appropriate style that was

neither 'too young' nor 'too old' in terms of their wider social connotations of various head coverings and the respondent's own ideas about appropriate ageing.

Whilst cold weather was a concern for people going outdoors, a much more significant concern across the board was ice. This was the case whether walking or driving. Very cold weather therefore was apt to keep these households indoors, even to the point of not going into the garden, for fear of falling. Many kept stocks of food in the house in winter so that they could tide over several such days, if necessary. Social clubs also tended to be cancelled during cold weather, presumably to deter people from taking risks in cold and icy conditions and so some individuals could end up feeling quite isolated.

Other indoor places

Warmth could also be an issue in other indoor environments to those of our respondent homes, of course. Public places such as shops were mostly thought to be warm, though varying – churches were noted as often cold. One or two of the lower income participants, who were also living alone, liked to spend time in public places that were also warm. One said he specifically used visiting other people as a means to be in a warm environment without having to spend money on his own heating, though he clearly also liked the social element. Talking, in passing, about warmth when out of the house together was often seen to be a relatively common form of bonding between older people. One lower income respondent who personally seldom felt cold related how she had felt forced to lie and say she was also cold when talking on the bus with other older people. Not to do so, she felt would have been to run against the accepted form of conversation and so she had to comply with the perceived rules of the situation.

Other participants described how the animated discussion that surrounded one of their friends getting a cold and how their peers connected this to their thermal experience on a recent shopping trip and the effects of air conditioning in certain department stores they walked through. Certainly winter temperatures in places outside the home was a topic our participants had some interest in and which had some bearing on whether and when they would go to certain places, though, as will be related in the next section, there were only certain ways in which it could be discussed.

Int And what about keeping warm in places other than your home in winter, has that changed as you have got older?

F Yes I have found certain places, we had a, my art group we had a Christmas meal at XXXX Nurseries and it was very cold, a few people said its far too cold in here and this is important you see if places are, they try to get your bookings and the heating's not good and you know, unsatisfactory that for older clients isn't it.

Int So do you make preparations for that kind of possibility?

F You tend to wear something, a few layers, you know you find your friends all have a few layers on

[Mrs Lovett, 75, lower income, Interview 1]

Summary points

- Most participants spent a considerable amount of time out of their own homes during winter, in both indoor and outdoor environments and engaged in a variety of activities.
- They dressed warmly for going outdoors during this time, but appearance and style were also important considerations affecting their dress choices.
- Those without cars were more exposed to cold outdoors and the iciness of conditions outside was much more significant than temperature in terms of whether they changed their behaviours.

- Public venues were also not always thought to be warm enough, though some were welcomingly warm. Certainly this issue was a concern in terms of deciding where they went and when.
- It was commonplace for older people to talk together about the thermal conditions they experienced outside the house and indeed this kind of discussion could be quite animated.

10. THE ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Ways of thermal hosting

Social networks, in terms of friends and family that respondent households belonged to played a significant role in terms of how participants heated their homes, how their practices developed, and whether they might potentially make changes in the future. With regard to domestic heating practices, it was quite commonly the case that homes were heated in relatively unusual ways when other people were visiting. This was for a number of reasons that participants were well able to discuss. The most important of these was related to being seen to be a good host. Because participants were themselves well aware of the pleasures and importance of a warmer ambient environment as they aged and because, as discussed in section 4, they were often well aware that other older individuals would have different degrees of thermal sensitivity to themselves, it was generally considered better to make the house warmer for guests.

F Well it's a bit embarrassing to say, you know you walk into a cold house and it's not very nice when you have got a complete stranger walking into a colder house. I would rather have had the house warm for you to come into.

[Julia Carter, 70, higher income, Interview 2]

This was also connected to the symbolic connotations of the hearth and the ways in which participants had experience of people coming and sitting together around discrete sources of heat during social occasions earlier in their lives. Indeed in several instances, their 'living flame' or 'flame effect' fires would also be turned on in preparation for the visits of others. In addition, there was also some discussion of how visits from others meant longer periods of sitting than was otherwise usually experienced and how this

meant people would need more ambient warmth because they were not generating it themselves through movement. Central heating was also used much more when people came to stay.

These features and senses of 'appropriate' forms of 'thermal hosting' were more prevalent amongst the more affluent half of our participants. Though they were still there, they were less common amongst the less affluent group. Potentially as a consequence of their more limited financial means, participants from this group were more likely to say that visitors should rather 'take them as they are.' This built upon the ways in which circumstances may be retrospectively justified in ways that allowed participants to keep their pride in tact.

M Thinking about it now we don't realise the fact that it may be cold to other people. I don't know how you find it just now, but I mean we find it fine because I have got a jumper on as well so I find it quite warm in here.

[Mr and Mrs Page, 76, lower income, Interview 2]

Another factor supporting these hosting practices was an anxiety about whether they were being suitably hospitable when those visiting them were generally assumed to be unlikely to request any change in their thermal conditions. Indeed, if they were to do so, this would be experienced as quite an embarrassment.

F They always say how warm it is. And we have it so that they have to take their coats off, that's the first thing they have to do, so that's quite nice really, isn't it?

[Don and Jean Bonnington, 80, higher income, Interview 2]

As the above respondent tellingly puts it, it was nice when visitors have to take their coats off. By expressing it in these terms she was taking pride in the fact that guests would be required to do this because she had made such a good job of making sure the house was already sufficiently warm for them.

Visiting the homes of others

Certainly it was rare that participants might ask for a change of temperature when they visited the homes of others. When it was done, this was often in subtle ways, and mostly in the homes of family members. To do so more forcefully would seem impolite and a potential insult to the host. Indeed some participants described how they would deliberately pack extra clothing when visiting others in order to ensure they never needed to request extra heating when they were there. One even had a special pair of thicker trousers made for exactly this purpose.

F I mean you might go and stand by the oven because the dinner is in the oven and it is quite warm there. But they don't notice because they are young and they are busy doing whatever they are doing.

[Mrs Lovett, 75, lower income, Interview 2]

Int You said about bringing extra things when you stayed at friends?

F Oh yes but you have to do it in a very sort of circumspect way, you can't,

Int You don't want to let them know that you are wearing your?

F No, they think that you always dress like that...

Int Yes. You don't want to hurt anyone's feelings I suppose?

F No, oh you can't, you can't...

[Norma Hart, 74, higher income, interview 2]

This practice related to a much broader nervousness about talking about home heating with others. This was distinctly different to how thermal conditions out of the house were much more easily latched onto. This was a sensitive subject because it related to at least three serious issues. Firstly there were concerns about successful ageing which meant that participants could be quite sensitive about others potentially interfering in ways that suggested they could no longer care for themselves effectively. Related to this were money matters and that heating advice

and discussion could also be taken either to indicate that friends of acquaintances could not afford certain levels of ambient heat or that they were too mean to supply it. Thirdly were health issues where participants were sensitive to the possibility of their peers having particular physical conditions that required specific kinds of thermal environment and that these problems might be sad to talk about because they were directly connected to the inevitable declines associated with getting older. When talking about home heating, there were cases when people would be prepared to point out the cold, normally if it was a very good friend, but this was largely to bring the friends attention to the fact that their house was cold and how might not be good for them. Having said that, there were instances when even pairs of good friends were unaware of how exactly the other generally managed the heating at home. This was because they preferred to avoid the subject and, in this case, be more cheerful when they were together by talking about 'more joyful' things.

F I don't know I have never really asked people about it. Even Norma I don't know what she does to keep warm

[Barbara Cook, 77, lower income, interview 2]

Talking about how to cope

There were cases, though, where people did talk about heating related issues with family and friends and this could have significant benefits. One evident benefit was the passing on of details for subsidised insulation – some people had got phone numbers from friends. Sometimes tips also got passed between friends, or friends and relatives might give people useful warmth related aids. These tips were often much more trusted than less personal forms of advice or information and such gifts were generally very welcome. But generally this was not what they did and, if

it were to be done, it was in a deliberately light hearted manner, at least at the start, to be sure they did not offend.

Int So would you have got [a halogen heater] otherwise if he hadn't told you?

F No because I had never heard of them. But he went to some market somewhere he loved markets really. That is where he got it for me.

[Mrs Wright, 73, lower income, interview 2]

M They bought me a pair of thermal socks and it is the first time I have tried them. Thermal socks and they are good.

Int: Yes who bought you those?

M: Oh a chap at one of my clubs you know. Quite thoughtful.

[John Turner, 83, higher income, interview 1]

Yet, having said that home heat could often be a sensitive subject, it was certainly not the case that they were uninterested in this topic. Indeed there was plenty of what could be described as home heating 'gossip' with regards to the ways in which other people they knew kept warm during winter and whether they were adopting the right techniques for doing so. As such, it may be possible that future discussions of warmth related issues, if sensitively done, could be very welcome by promoting them through such social networks including clubs and church groups, though they wouldn't have necessarily been talking about these matters beforehand.

Family members could also have a useful role to play. Some participants did talk about home heating matters in detail with members of their family and they greatly appreciated this input. However, this often took place in a relatively superficial way where relatives would just check with them that 'they were alright,' if at all. This was partly because of the sensitivities discussed above. At times though, it was also because some participants still liked to position themselves within the family as the ones who

care for others, rather than those who were in some way the dependents. As such they saw their role as making sure others were managing and to offer help and advice if necessary. This could implicitly preclude sons and daughters from doing the same for them.

M I have been a very proud man during my life, I have made sure that everything I have done I have been responsible for and I feel responsible for my family even now, I feel that I am the head of the family and if anyone has got problems, if they need me I am there for them. I don't intrude on them, never have done, but if they are in trouble, if they didn't come to me first then I would feel hurt, but they all do, even down to the smallest one there.

Int So does that mean that you don't like to be the one who asks for help, is that?

M Yes, to be honest, yes.

[Mr and Mrs Page, 76, lower income, interview 2]

Summary points

- Most participants managed their home heating differently when other people came to visit. This was for a number of reasons that all related in some way to an idea of hospitality.
- Many participants expressed anxiety about asking for particular thermal conditions when visiting the homes of others. This was also connected to a sense of appropriate hosting and how they did not want to demonstrate that their host had fallen short on these counts.
- More generally, there was a strong sense in which home heating was a sensitive topic for discussion and this was for a number of reasons.
- Yet this is certainly not to say that they would not like to discuss these matters more, if this was appropriately done.

11. GENERATIONAL NORMS

In this project we were especially interested in the extent to which participants felt they were reproducing wider norms that were perceived to be shared right across their generational cohort. Here our findings were mixed. Their generation was understood as internally diverse, yet also distinctly different from younger cohorts.

Were they older people?

- F Well I don't know, I can only know myself I have never asked people this so I don't really know. You know I don't really know if it is just me because I don't seem as if I have altered inside of myself since I have been younger.

[Barbara Cook, 77, lower income, interview 1]

Broadly speaking, our participants were reluctant to subscribe to the identity of an 'old person.' This was partly explained by how they felt they had not personally changed since the times when they were younger, but it was also related to how the idea of being an old person was also clearly perceived as having a certain stigma attached to it. This was most strikingly evident by the persistent use of the collective 'they' when we raised issues of how older people, more generally, were managing during winter. They were not associating themselves with this category of person – there was almost no mention of a collective 'we' in their responses.

- F Yes. It must be very worrying actually for people that are in that situation, because I mean heat for the elderly is very important and I think that if they are worried as well because they think oh well I best turn it down because it's going to be so expensive, I mean it must be very difficult for some.

[Don and Jean Bonnington, 80s, higher income, interview 2]

This was, without doubt, influenced by media representations of how older people behave

during winter to which many of our participants had clearly been exposed. This representation seemed to be linked to television reporting of older person difficulties and wider questions of fuel poverty. Our participants understood this reporting to depict older people as passive victims without the skills to cope with these periods or the resources to do so. Our participants were determined not to identify themselves with this image. Indeed this kind of representation could sometimes elicit quite disdainful comments about the 'silly' ways in which such people must be managing their winter.

- F Because then you see when sometimes they show you on the telly, and they are sitting there freezing with 2 little bars of an electric fire. Well that is not good it don't even circulate 2 little bars.

[Mr and Mrs Spence, 75, lower income, interview 2]

There was also a general feeling that older people were often patronisingly positioned as people who needed care, rather than independent individuals who may actually know better than others how best to manage their own affairs.

- M Well there's an image been created isn't there that old people are sitting there freezing you know, now I don't know anybody that is. I don't have anybody in my circle of friends, as I said I swim every day and the people that I swim with at that time of day are all roughly in the same age group, I mean some are 90 and some are 56, you know but semi retired or retired or whatever, and you hear people complaining about the cold and the changes and how much it has gone up, but it's not a big worry for the people that I know. I don't know of anybody that really struggles.

[James Farnham, 71, higher income, interview 1]

Another reason why they did not personally identify with the figure of the 'older person' was linked to an explicit recognition that they had relatively little contact with a diversity of people of similar ages. As a consequence of retirement and the various processes of ageing, a more contained and limited social experience meant that participants were often at pains to

emphasise that they could really only talk about 'their friends' or the few people that they knew in their clubs. They felt they had little personal access to the wider experience of older people in society and so they were not in a good position to either speak for or connect themselves with the concept of such a group. As such, only one or two of our participants said they were probably typical of how older people were, in general, managing their winters and there were many presented versions of how they imagined older people, more generally, to be managing. Some emphasised how older people were probably doing quite well as a result of benefiting from new government allowances. Others said that some older people were foolish and likely to spend this same money on alcoholic drinks or cigarettes that were seen to be frivolous. Yet others, in the absence of evidence from their own direct experience, mobilised the media representation of the 'struggling' older person who perhaps lived in 'another part of town' and who was to be pitied because of their situation.

This limited personal experience of how the wider generational cohort might be living translated most strikingly into how some people believed particular domestic heating practices to be unthinkable, whilst others were actually living out exactly these practices in the same city or even neighbourhood. This was most apparent with regard to central heating where some said it was unthinkable how 'people' today could go without it, whilst others nearby in our study were clearly continuing to do exactly that.

Acknowledging the diversity of older people

The clear mental separation between our participants and an idea of the wider generational norm was also bound up with the recognition of

diversity discussed elsewhere in section 4. There were many anecdotes about how other people they knew managed their personal warmth quite differently. This only served to reinforce the idea of generational diversity. One respondent, for example, was able to give a very full description of the various home heating practices that were employed by the other people living in the retirement bungalows surrounding his own, together with some speculation about the various health and personal reasons for these behaviours.

M Oh I think we use less, you know our road has a good Indian population, very nice people, but they all use, from experience of just popping in, they all use a lot more heat. A lot more heating that we do.

[Mr and Mrs Corbett, 80s, higher income, interview 2]

M And I am trying to think there is some people down that I have to pass when I am driving out and going down this road turn left the last bungalow on the right hand side there if you go down the end of all these windows will be wide open. And I go past at quarter to eight in the morning and they are open then.

[James Farnham, 71, higher income, interview 2]

As exemplified in the above quotes, when we talked of 'common sense' winter behaviours, a frequent way of framing their response was in terms of the right 'common sense for me' and, in this way, common sense was not really that common. Rather it was an outcome of a person's circumstances that meant certain behaviours would be appropriate for them. It was therefore understood as a relatively private matter where those people they knew were presumed to have a reason for adopting the behaviours they did. Though they didn't always talk about these matters and though 'older people' in the abstract could sometimes be seen as quite foolish, their acquaintances were assumed to be doing what was right for them, or at least this was assumed to be the case in the absence of more information.

- F But I do like my dressing gown when I come down in the morning I have a nice warm dressing gown on you know, I have got a silky one that I wear but even in the summer I usually put the ordinary one on, I just think it is your own common sense really that tells you what you want to do isn't it?

[Joan Cooper, 79, lower income, interview 2]

Contrast with younger generations

Whilst the idea of shared generational conventions often did not make sense to our participants in view of the perceived diversity of thermal management behaviours among their peers, when participants were asked about the comparative behaviours of younger people, they were much more at ease about discussing generational difference. Despite not easily identifying with being an 'older person' themselves, they were certainly distinctly different in various ways to 'younger' people with regard to their warmth related behaviours during winter.

- M They think they know best. Well I suppose my children know what I know because they come here and they see. But I think as far as the economy and you know doing the wrapping up and drawing the curtains and you know and they just think it is peculiar, don't they really?...I think people of our generation are more economical in their thinking.

[David and Carol, 77 & 76, higher income, interview 2]

Younger people were generally deemed to enjoy a more self-indulgent lifestyle. As such, they were seen to lack the ability to respond to their warmth needs other than by turning up the heater. On one hand, younger people were understood as able to cope with a variety of temperatures, and to be physically more able to withstand cold – as evidenced by how little clothing they were sometimes seen to wear outdoors. However, extravagant or unthinking use of heating at home among younger people was more commonly perceived to relate to a culture of entitlement and a lack of willingness or ability to adapt in terms of

clothing and other techniques.

- M Yes they want everything, everything is modern now. I don't think they make the effort that we do. They don't have to use the hands, they don't make things with their hands now. They don't use the tools that we use, they don't keep warm in that respect whereas we had to, I'll go out and I'll dig the garden and I'll fork the lawn and I'll make everything right for the lawn, I'll do it myself. They'll get the mechanical stuff in.

[Mr and Mrs Page, 76, lower income, interview 2]

Younger people were generally thought of as lacking in the mindset or skills to cope with personal hardships and so, in this regard, participants felt they would cope better with rising fuel prices or unexpected economic hardship than younger people. Several people talked about the war or about relatively impoverished childhoods and how this had instilled an aptitude for economy. Where their generation was felt to have some commonality was in terms of being less wasteful and having skills that, though they might not be using them now, could certainly be drawn upon in times of future hardship. Indeed, some of the lower income participants felt that their generally coping well with fuel bills was due to an ability to economise in other areas. In the excerpt below, Norma Hart describes a practice she learnt from her mother and which she was quite proud to suggest younger people would never think of doing:

- F Occasionally if I come down in the morning and its cold I put the gas on, put the jets on just to warm the kitchen up because the heating isn't really good in the kitchen for the simple reason that if you are in the kitchen you are cooking and you can't have it too hot anyway.

Int Because it gets hot very easily when you?

F Yes, it makes its own heat in the kitchen.

Int Right, what do you mean by putting the gas jets on, on the hob?

F Ha, ha, ha, ah you see you weren't born before the war and in the war time were you, no!

[Norma Hart, 74, higher income, interview 1]

Yet whilst interviewees talked freely to us about how younger people seldom thought about shutting doors at home, how they were probably not able to light a fire, or how they were sometimes oblivious to the benefits of curtains in retaining warmth, they did not appear to talk to the younger people themselves much about these matters. The commonplace notion here was that younger people should also be allowed to do their own thing, even though it could be frustrating and even mystifying to see. This reticence was partly attributable to the way in which bringing the subject up would recuperate ideas of participants belonging to the stereotype of a frugal and cautious older person with which they did not necessarily want to associate themselves.

winter adaptation, though there was some reticence about telling them of this.

Summary points

- Participants did not identify with the idea of an 'older person' in general or with regard to winter warmth and they did not identify with a perceived media image of a passive victim who needs state support and has maladjusted personal warming techniques.
- Rather they recognised a diversity of practices amongst their peers where it was important to understand how various people were probably doing what is 'best for them' in view of participants' own relatively limited knowledge about the personal health and financial means of their peers.
- Their generation, though, was still seen as holding economising skills in various ways that would stand them in good stead in the event of hardship or increased difficulty in terms of future home heating.
- Younger people were generally understood as different in this regard. They could be short sighted and lacking in skills in terms of

12. USEFUL INTERVENTIONS

Subsidised loft insulation and system upgrades

Subsidised (free) loft insulation appeared to be a relatively successful and welcome intervention. Several of our participating households had recently had their lofts insulated for free, either for the first time or, more commonly, to increase the thickness of existing insulation. Some had also had cavity wall insulation, also free, though there were more that wished for it but found their building was unsuitable. Those that had insulation were universally very pleased with the result, finding the house to be warmer and heating consumption to be lower.

F Well strangely enough in the past when the winter starts to come I put the central heating on the 24hr clock, but since I've had the roof done, I haven't needed to do that, so it's been on and gone off at 9 o'clock in the normal way. So even though the winter was worse than what we've ever had for a long time, I didn't seem to use as much, I didn't have it on as much as I normally do.

Int Right that's good.

F I was very pleased with that. And as it had only been done about 3 weeks before the weather pulled in it was quite a novelty for me to think oh its nice and warm upstairs.

[Norma Hart, 74, higher income, Interview 2]

As table 1 shows, most of the households did have insulation of some kind. One or two did not have the thicker loft insulation, so did not meet current recommendations in this respect. Despite free insulation schemes having penetrated the overall group fairly well, how individuals had heard about them was, in fact, very disparate. One person had got an insulating company's phone number from a van parked in the street, and did not know beforehand that the insulation could be fitted free, although 81 and on a low income. Another had received a leaflet through the door; one had been phoned but not sure by whom; one had a company come to the door;

one had got it through their energy supplier (British Gas) and yet another had been offered it by her local council (Walsall) who contacted her. So, although overall the schemes seemed to be effective, there certainly appeared to be scope for consolidating awareness raising efforts and having more clarity regarding who could or should be approached. Having said that, our later consultation with practitioners working in this area pointed out that this situation of diverse ways of hearing about the schemes may be seen as illustrating the success of a multi-strand awareness raising approach.

Awareness of more extensive grants for further work such as the upgrading of heating systems was much lower. One interviewee recently had a whole new system installed, paid for by a Warm Front grant, topped up with a further grant from Birmingham City Council. She was extremely pleased with it, it should be said. Another man in the more affluent group had applied for a Warm Front grant but only been granted £300. Others though had little knowledge of available help and even less knowledge about who would be eligible. Several had friends who they thought might benefit from such schemes even if not themselves, but no-one other than the two mentioned here knew how to find out about them.

A few other problems arose regarding Warm Front and insulation schemes. A couple of households could not have insulation put in the loft because they had things stored there which they were unable to move. Current services seemingly do not supply any help with clearing and preparing the loft and so more isolated individuals without family and friends prepared to help were effectively unable to take up these offers. This occurred both in both owner occupier and social renting circumstances

Int What about the loft, have you had the loft -?

F No, it was insulated but that was the thin stuff and he had a look and said we can't do up there either, you would have to get all that stuff down. Well how can I get it down, I can't do it, its too heavy, I mean there's a dolls house up there, there's an empty water tank and lots of books. I used to make a lot of toys for charity with fur, I have got two big huge bags of that, well I can't get all those down. I just can't do it.

Int Yes I can see that that would be a problem.

F Yes, so I haven't had that done either, well I did apply.

[Mrs Carlton, 90, higher income, Interview 1].

Another woman, on a very low income, was not able to have her cavity walls filled as she lived in a flat and, for technical reasons, the work would have to entail filling a block of 4 connected flats. The other residents, being younger, were not eligible for subsidy and would have had to pay and they did not want to do so.

A further couple of households had only partial loft insulation done. This was because their lofts were configured in such a way that access to some parts was not straightforward, though by no means impossible – for example, one had partial panels that needed to be removed to give full access to large parts of it. Another person said that contractors had refused loft insulation to houses in his development because they had some kind of 'vents', and yet another told how a friend of hers could not have insulation because her loft was on 'three different levels'. These people felt that the subsidised schemes resulted in contractors 'cherry picking' the easy jobs and not dealing with any situations that were a bit more tricky or unique. The household with the loft panels had only 50% of their loft insulated as a result, and this was the household in most severe fuel poverty and with by far the coldest house – the Simpsons. Their boiler was also over 30 years old and very inefficient. Having had the partial insulation originally about 6 years

ago under a Warm Front grant, they had been told 3 years ago that they would not be eligible for further significant work because much of their allocation had already been spent. Overall, despite their situation being quite severe, they did not seem to have benefited enormously from Warm Front.

F Yes well you see in the loft area it is sectioned off for storage. It was all done when we bought the house, so behind these panels where this, this little room is sectioned off, it is over the bedrooms. So they would have to take off the panels to get above these other bedrooms which they didn't do.

M If you notice the design of the house it has got you know a funny,

F A gable at the front.

Int Yes it has got a sort of, but can a person get into those sections?

F Yes you can.

Int But they can't get insulation rolls in or something?

F Oh yes they can.

M But they don't want to know.

[Mr & Mrs Simpson, 74 & 72, lower income, Interview 1]

Winter Fuel Allowance

All the households knew that they got the winter fuel allowance, and most mentioned that they had also had three cold weather payments this winter. The more affluent households welcomed the extra money, but they didn't necessarily spend it on heating. Getting these allowances didn't change their heating related practices – it was extra money into the overall household coffers.

Int Did having the winter fuel allowance change the way in which you think about or use your heating?

M No it didn't change my way of heating but it helps.

Int Helps just because its money?

M That's right, it helps. Oh yes it helps.

Int So did you spend it on other things that were winter based?

M Well you see I automatically pay by direct debit, so I don't feed that money in, it goes into the bank and it gets spent. It goes on Christmas to be honest.

[John Turner, 83, higher income, Interview 2].

The affluent households did nevertheless think the allowance was a good thing, and especially that the non-means tested nature (of at least the lowest level of payment) was as it should be. They did not perceive themselves to be indulged in this way, even though they could afford heating well enough and they didn't actually use this money to supply themselves with additional heat.

Among the households on more limited means, many more did think of it as being specifically for heating, and the allowance did directly allow them to use more. This year, in particular, it provided a buffer against the general fuel prices rises.

F Now we get the £200, well this year it was £250 towards the heating I think that is wonderful.

Int So you think of that as for the heating?

F Oh yes.

Int You don't use it for other things?

F Never. I think oh its cold, I will turn it up a bit and think who cares because we have got that money come through.

[Mrs Wright, 73, lower income, Interview 2]

F and also thanks to the Government they have taken away the stress and strain I mean the £200 winter payment and I have had three lots of £25.00 for the low temperatures.

Int Oh right.

F So the pensions write to me and it is wonderful. Goes Into my account along with my state pension and my benefits and that really takes a lot of stress out of keeping warm.

Int Yes so you do use the winter fuel allowance directly for?

F Well yes I think it does go Into not worrying really,

[Mrs Lovett, 75, lower income, Interview 2]

Some of the less affluent households were not quite so clear in their allocation of the money to heating bills, as again it went into the general bill budget. Yet, being on lower incomes, they said it meant that they did not have to cut back so much on other things such as socialising in

order to pay for the heating, which is what would have happened otherwise. Others though were managing heating quite carefully, and would clearly have been in trouble in this area without the allowance – this was especially true for some of the low income owner occupiers who had larger houses and / or older systems that made heating the home comparatively expensive.

Advice

Across the whole set of Interviewees, disparate pieces of advice on warmth and energy saving were noted as having been received. For example, one person remembered that she should turn her thermostat down one degree to save money, though wasn't sure where the message came from; others had received leaflets on insulation, draught exclusion and energy saving; one had been sent card temperature gauges by her energy supplier and another had got something similar from Age Concern. Some had been sent energy saving light bulbs but again they were unsure from whom. The sources of formal advice were clearly very varied, when known: charities, local authorities and energy suppliers were all noted as having contributed useful things. Two or three interviewees also found magazines aimed at older people to be useful sources of advice and tips on all kinds of matters, including energy saving and switching energy suppliers: one had noted a phone number to enquire about fuel price comparisons, from such a source. Magazines mentioned included 'Yours' (a free magazine for over 50s), Saga and Heyday. It was single female interviewees who seemed to engage with these more. So a variety of sources were clearly in evidence and they had variable degrees of penetration.

Information was also passed more informally between people through social networks (see

section 10). Phone numbers to obtain free insulation had often been passed on in this way, and other information about available grants, applying for benefits and so forth would often be shared at clubs, such as church clubs or other social clubs. Whilst it seemed that people often didn't talk much about their precise warmth practices and routines, there were examples of isolated tips being passed on by friends. Correspondingly these were often the most trusted and the most likely to be acted upon. Family and friends would often be where people turned if they wanted advice or help with anything heating-related. Though they were quite determined to emphasize their own independence, and they were also eager not to 'put upon' other people, this was often perceived to be the most sensible way of getting reliable and trusted information.

Most interviewees were not receptive to the idea of being given 'official' advice on keeping warm. Indeed, some found this quite offensive. Often they felt they knew well enough how to manage things

Int What about in terms of the winter warmth in the house, has anybody ever given you advice about that?

F Who, anybody?

Int Anybody yes?

F No, no, no.

Int So nothing from, you've never read any leaflets or?

F Well what could they tell me?

Int I don't know

F Well Neither do I.

[Norma Hart, 74, higher income, Interview 2]

Int Has anybody ever given you advice about how to keep warm and how to manage the warmth?

M No I think its just using your own initiative. You don't need advice.

Int Don't need advice.

M No. Commonsense.

[Mr Michaels, 70, lower income, Interview 2]

The general opinion in this regard was therefore that this kind of formal advice was only potentially useful for people who were very old or frail, perhaps mentally deteriorated, and at the point where they had trouble looking after themselves, which none of our participants felt included themselves. This was despite the fact that they were by no means all in perfect health, and many were over 80. Particularly disliked was advice that was clearly framed as being for 'old people', covering matters such as how to dress. In the exchange below, the participant was talking about advice on wearing a head covering in bed if very cold:

F I saw that leaflet from XXX or somebody and I thought oh no, you are really putting people in little boxes here. All my friends, never, ever would they do anything like that.

Int What do you mean by putting people in boxes, just assuming that - ?

F That you know you are old, you are unwell and it's a cold winter and this is what you should be doing, put your little woolly hat on, no, no, no I am sure 99% of people would fight that, especially women.

Int Why especially women?

F Because we are aware of how we look and how we feel about ourselves. No, no, the government have got their wires crossed completely there, whoever devised that, they should be shot at dawn.

[Mrs Lovett, 75, lower income, Interview 2].

Another comment that had caused offence was also related to advice on wearing extra clothing

F Which is what one of the powers that be in Whitehall suggested when somebody was saying old people are going to be cold, well tell them to put another jumper on, which I thought was a bit harsh. I bet he never does.

[Mr and Mrs Corbert, 80s, higher income, Interview 2]

The problem with such clothing-related advice seems twofold: on the one hand it is perceived

as uncaring in that it could seem to be shrugging off the issue of people not being able to afford to keep warm without such measures, and on the other hand it offends a sense of dignity and an ongoing interest in self presentation that older people have as much as younger people.

What many would, in fact, find useful was advice on more technical matters. Some people thought it would be helpful to know how to use their heating system the most efficiently – for example, is it more efficient to have a boiler constantly ticking over or better for it to be off sometimes but then have to reheat again when switched on? Should thermostats ideally be kept at one setting or adjusted often up and down? Information on such matters would have been welcomed by many and, if kept to this kind of technical framing, not deemed inappropriate or patronising. Advice on energy saving if framed in a similar way might also be welcomed by some.

What was perhaps most needed was clearer advice on the availability of grants for improvements to heating systems, including the eligibility criteria, and where to apply for them. Although, as noted, information regarding insulation seemed haphazard in how it got to people, practically all of them had managed to achieve good insulation or at least attempt to. However, there was a much greater lack of understanding around further infrastructural improvements and upgrades that might be provided or subsidised.

What potential interventions would help most?

Apart from advice, we had some discussion with interviewees about what other kinds of structured help would potentially be the most useful. Three people, all single women, suggested a (hopefully

subsidised) service that would come and check heating systems, to make sure they were running well, and perhaps bleed radiators etc. As it was, they felt some relied on (male) relatives or friends for such things, but this wasn't possible for everyone. Whilst they were not necessarily expecting this always to involve subsidised repairs, they were certainly keen to have checks that then allowed them to think about what was best for them to do next in their own time.

Other than raised awareness of grants that could be applied for, the best form of other help was considered to be financial, in one form or another. Everyone thought that fuel costs should come down in response to falling oil prices. Several thought that state pensions should be higher. Existing heating-related benefits were thought to be an excellent policy, essential even, but not necessarily in need of being raised. In fact, there was, if anything, a lack of support for merely giving out more money in specific benefits – other than through raising the state pension – because some people might waste them.

Responsibility for older person winter welfare

In line with this opinion on benefits, a high proportion of our households thought that the primary responsibility for older people keeping warm rested with the individual, assuming they were capable. This was not only among the affluent households: many of those on lower incomes felt the same. Comments showed people to be against a 'nanny state' and against the relatively patronising idea that older people were unable to manage themselves when they had already been doing this successfully for a number of years.

- Int Whose responsibility is it to help older people keep warm in winter?
- F I don't know, I think a lot of it is your own. Is that in terms of money or, because common sense prevails doesn't it really?
- M As long as you have got all your senses about you
- F Oh yes if people are not quite, then yes.
- M Then you should make it your own choice and you should use your own initiative. I mean we are becoming a Nanny state, you can say what you like, we are almost at a Nanny state and
- F What does that mean?
- M Well the government are telling you how to do this, how to do that, what you mustn't do, what you must do.
- F Oh they are a pain in the neck.
- M I think if you have got your senses about you, you should make your own decisions.

[Mr and Mrs Spence, 75, lower income, Interview 2]

On the whole, though, the state was seen as responsible to the extent of providing a safety net for people who could not cope completely on their own initiative, by means of benefits and social services. So, to some extent, state help was thought desirable, but not to the extent of people being told how to spend money and what practices to adopt. Again, some members of both the more and less affluent groups were of the view that the state should not be expected to keep paying out indiscriminately or limitlessly. Overall there was quite a lot of gratitude for benefits received, such as the winter heating allowance, cold weather payments, council tax benefit, attendance allowance and so on.

There was less satisfaction though with the state pension level which, in this regard, was seen as something rather separate from more specific payments and benefits. Here the government was not thought to be generous. Improving pension provision was one way of helping older people that participants would approve of; pensions were seen as an entitlement rather than charity or a welfare hand-out. Money coming through

the pension also allowed individuals to spend it as they wished, thus retaining their autonomy.

Some interviewees also thought that families had a responsibility to make sure older relations were OK. This was despite the ways in which participants seemed to prefer to display concern for others. However, not all agreed with this, especially those who did not have family nearby. Generally friends were not thought to be responsible as such, though they might be a good source of social support and advice. Most would not like to ask friends for concrete help with heating or warmth related matters, and they especially did not want to do so with regard to financial matters.

Summary points

- Most participants had subsidised insulation and this had been very successful. However, the means by which people heard about schemes for free insulation were disparate.
- Some people could not take up insulation offers, although they would like to, because of having things in their loft they could not move themselves. In this way, some of the households that needed it most, missed out on help.
- There was a perception that insulation contractors were 'cherry picking' and not attending to houses that were more difficult in any way. Again, this could lead to households in most need of help not receiving it.
- Far fewer knew about grants for more substantial work and there was especially confusion over eligibility criteria for such schemes and where to apply.
- All welcomed the winter fuel allowance and, for some low income households, it

directly allowed extra heating to be used, or prevented severe cutbacks on other areas of expenditure.

- Most did not appear to be on any special tariffs, or to be aware of lower tariffs for lower income households (see section 8).
- Advice on technical matters and on using systems effectively was welcome, but advice on wider matters such as how to dress for cold weather was very unwelcome.
- Most thought that older individuals were largely responsible for their own welfare, unless too impaired. Heating allowances were in the main thought to be already adequate, but participants felt low incomes could be boosted by improving the pension level.

13. FUTURES

Finally, we asked our interviewees to look forward to the future. We were interested in what changes they thought they might make to their warmth related systems and practices, and why. We also wanted them to reflect a little on environmentally related issues, and asked whether this might ever be a driver of any behaviour change for them.

Will they make any changes?

Looking forward to the next winter or two, on the whole little change was envisaged. This finding was consistent with the ways in which participants generally thought they were already doing what 'was best for them' as discussed earlier. A few households were planning some minor changes such as some draught exclusion, and one or two were considering switching supplier (see section 8 for more on switching). Looking forward further than this, for most households their health was felt to be likely to be the main driver of any change. Some envisaged potential greater heating use if they became less well or less active / mobile. Others said they might move house, to smaller places or in order to be on one level. Other than that, they would see themselves continuing as they are.

Future sustainability

In a general sense, there was a fair degree of environmental concern across the two income groups. When asked about environmental sustainability, interviewees often talked about climate change or global warming; the image of polar bears on melting icebergs was one that had stuck in many people's heads. Most participants accepted climate change as a fact and several anecdotally noted that winters now were generally not as cold as they used to be.

However, for one interviewee, the cold winter they had just been through put a question mark over global warming as a phenomenon; another claimed not to believe in anthropogenic climate change at all.

In terms of putting environmental consciousness into practice, a lot of people talked about doing recycling and many used energy saving light bulbs, as well as being conscious in turning off lights and not leaving appliances on standby. However, although the connection with energy was there in terms of this particular blend of domestic changes to behaviour, the connection between home heating and climate change was substantially weaker. Several Interviewees said they had never thought of heating in these terms:

- F We recycle, but do we think of that
- Int Do you connect that to the gas and electric ever or is that separate?
- F It's separate I would think. I suppose its quite a selfish attitude really, that you like to be warm and cosy

[Clive and Shirley West, 78, higher income, Interview 2]

On the whole, heating appeared to be the last thing that many people would compromise on in order to live more sustainably. Health and comfort were universally deemed far more important, as described at the start of the report.

- F Being green is very good, being cold is very bad and I think if choice, push comes to shove then I'm going to be warm,

[Norma Hart, 74, higher income, Interview 2]

- F I mean well I wouldn't put the oven on just for to warm up a pizza, I'd wait until I'd got something else in.

Int Right, okay.

- F I mean I might be a bit mean that way. But I mean I wouldn't go short of heating.

[Pauline Peters, 81, higher income, Interview 2]

More than one interviewee said they would ideally like to have solar panels or perhaps a wind turbine, but they knew they would be unlikely to do this in practice. This was partly because of not knowing enough about the practicalities, but also because, at their age, they would not see a return on their investment. For several households, mostly less well off ones but not exclusively so, energy saving and indeed economising on resources generally was already an issue for financial reasons and as such, they did not feel there was great scope for doing more. These households were perhaps in many ways already engaged in practices that might be considered good for sustainability, albeit not for that primary reason. There was an issue of lack of knowledge though – they didn't really know what more they could do, rather than being sure that there was no scope for them to be more sustainable. A similar point could also be made with regard to economising in general since participants from both groups believed it important to be generally frugal and careful with how they used energy at home. Yet this was never really connected to wider policy imperatives on carbon emissions reduction.

This was largely an issue of personal thresholds – there were some relatively easy actions that most people were prepared to take for environmental reasons; other economies were made more by the less well off households but mainly driven by finances rather than sustainability. Heating was one thing that most households would not be prepared to compromise on unless driven by very difficult economic circumstances. From a welfare point of view, this is perhaps a good thing; however as discussed in section 8, some of the more affluent households had started to find that they could make cutbacks on energy consumption fairly painlessly.

There was also an issue for some of feeling quite powerless in the face of global environmental problems. Several said that they thought they couldn't personally make much difference – though this was sometimes perhaps something of a rationalisation to justify current levels of inactivity. An important issue to crop up in one interview with a low income man was leadership: he felt that international and UK leaders needed to set a clearer example.

M No because you get these Gordon Browns who are using aeroplanes every other day. That's not doing the environment any good, you know.

Int No, no.

M So if they're not bothered why should I bother? Simple, you know..... I think that if the governments of the world were shown to be doing something positive then I think Joe Bloggs in the street would try and do likewise. But it's when they're not bothering, you know.

[Mr Michaels, 70, lower income, Interview 2].

Summary points

- There was a reasonable level of general concern for the wider environment with regards to climate change.
- Most participants recycled and many took some measures to save energy and economise more generally at home.
- Yet this was more about being sensible than sustainable. The connection with heating use was also not strong and most would not be prepared to use less heating for these reasons.
- Low income participants were often already fairly stringent with their resource use, but the driver for this was economic rather than environmental.
- Most did not envisage much change to their heating regimes in the future, unless illness changed their requirements.

14. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This qualitative project worked with older households of different levels of affluence over one winter as a means of providing a detailed examination of how the contexts through which older people now live shape the various practices they have developed to manage their thermal comfort during this time. Whilst our conclusions must be therefore understood as limited in their generalisability due to the relatively small sample size, such a detailed approach still provides various valuable insights into the processes that influence these winter behaviours and how these behaviours are the outcome of various circumstances and factors. We start this conclusion by detailing the findings of this study with regards to four important factors.

Financial matters

In this study, we purposefully worked with both lower income households and the more affluent, in order to consider the differences between these two and to explore some issues related to sustainability consumption, especially among the more affluent group who might be in a position to be quite profligate. We found that financial resources do have a distinct influence on the practices of thermal management that households employed, but that the differences between the higher and lower income groups were not always clear cut.

Whilst in general the lower income households were more likely to be using their heating relatively sparingly, several of the lower income households used heating as they wished and claimed to worry about it little. There was, however, an element of after-the-fact rationalisation among some of the low income households – that they used little

heat because they just preferred to be colder, and were used to it. Lower income households were also more likely to adopt practices such as wearing substantial additional clothing indoors.

Meanwhile quite a few of the higher income households were actually quite sparing with their heating and they adopted practices specifically to save on fuel consumption. Whilst the higher income households were in a position to use more heating and most did indeed use as much as they would wish, it was not the case that they were particularly profligate or excessive. Most had a system they felt worked for them without being unduly wasteful. Yet recent higher prices had also led some to find they could make economies without really finding them arduous or severely affecting their comfort.

Housing infrastructures

As the table of participant households shows, the amount spent on bills varied greatly between households and this was largely due to the different sizes of dwellings they were heating. The low income household in the most difficulty were living in a large, hard to heat home with poor insulation and were thus spending a lot of money for a low level of warmth. Those in smaller, well insulated dwellings had much lower expenditure and were able to maintain a good level of comfort at a reasonable cost. For this reason, many of the lower income households did not feel so constrained, notably those in social housing that was well insulated and with newer systems. It was not the case though that all social housing was so advantaged – there was considerable difference in this respect between different housing providers.

Why people lived where they did though was the result of significant decisions. Some had

deliberately downsized as they got older but others had stayed in larger homes they were attached to. Those in social housing had generally either requested this themselves or been encouraged to move into a smaller unit as they became older.

Other elements of the infrastructure that were important were the heating system and insulation. Most of our participants had central heating and the view that central heating is either old fashioned or unhealthy, found in some previous studies, was uncommon. Rather, most thought it both a requirement and benefit of modern life. Some degree of insulation was almost universal and most had benefited from subsidised schemes for older people. However, various forms of advice, especially technical advice might yet be helpful though these would need to be communicated in a sensitive way in order for older people to receive this advice and be willing to accept it.

Physical changes

The role of physiological ageing is interesting. In wider studies and public discourses, older people are generally assumed to be quite 'vulnerable', without this being clearly explained. In this study, we found that our participants did generally feel that age made a difference to their thermal comfort needs and techniques. Physically, they felt that getting older was accompanied by a greater sensitivity to cold and thus a tendency to prefer higher ambient temperatures. This could be exacerbated by specific conditions that tended to come with ageing as well, such as arthritis, heart problems and so on.

Being older could also mean being less physically active and spending less time out of the house which could then, in turn, contribute to a greater

need for heating within the home. However, we also found that these households and individuals were quite active and, going by these, it should not be assumed that older, retired people are largely to be found sitting indoors in their own homes, even in winter. A theory that older people find it harder to sense temperature change and to realise when they are cold was also not one our participants were in agreement with. Rather, our participants felt quite able to sense when temperatures had dropped and when they needed to do something about their warmth. As such, they did not feel themselves to be particularly vulnerable. Rather they were being sensible and they were doing what they needed to do to get through the winter successfully.

Cultures of ageing

Cultures of appropriate ageing clearly shaped the thermal management practices we examined in this study. There was a strong overall sense that our participants did not like to be associated with externally imposed ideas of being an 'old person', and they were quite resistant to practices that would make them appear so. The specifics of these varied. For example, some people would avoid hot water bottles for this reason, whilst others used them enthusiastically. However, the sense that people wanted not to be 'old-fashioned' or to be seen as 'fuddy duddy' was quite strong. Yet they were often quite ready to use newer warmth related technologies and some had incorporated more modern versions of old familiar things.

Cultures of self presentation were also quite strong and were an important influence on how people would dress for cold weather, both in and out of doors, and significantly, the extent to which they would follow certain kinds of advice in this area. Personal preference in terms of style

inevitably varied, but the important point is that these concerns were very much there and they should not be overlooked. Generally, advice on how to dress for cold weather was unwelcome.

These important cultural issues also extended to their social networks. It was not common practice to talk about warmth related practices in much detail with their peers; however there were some instances where this did happen, where tips might be passed on, useful objects given as presents, and information on available grants and schemes might also be exchanged. There were also cultures of hospitality and of being a good host that were relevant. Most people, especially the more affluent households, were concerned to present a warm home for visitors and would often turn up the heat or warm certain rooms more to this end. Being a guest in the houses of others meant to most that you should not comment on the temperature, which would be rude, and participants would rather use surreptitious techniques to stay warm in these circumstances. These practices might make people believe that the houses of others are generally warm which might, in turn, mean they could become reluctant to talk about the comparative cold in their own home, or even be oblivious to the hardships that were actually being faced by the peers once they had left them.

Lessons from this research

After conducting the research for this project, we organised a policy and practitioner workshop in early September 2009. The purpose of this afternoon was to discuss our initial project findings and to identify the most important and pertinent messages to take from the study. This event was attended by members of central government, academics, and other representatives of the private, public and voluntary sectors. As a result

of these discussions, we would like to highlight a number of key issues that should be taken account of in terms of what this project tells us about the scope for useful future intervention:

- **Whilst there is scope for promoting sustainable domestic consumption among older people, attempts to mobilise them to these ends must be sensitively done.** One the one hand, many of our participants were evidently quite frugal with their heating, whether they needed to be so or not, and they were also often deploying skills that made them comparatively energy efficient. They were also clear that younger generations often had much more profligate attitudes, though they could be reticent about communicating this to them for fear of recuperating particular ideas about older people being overly careful and cautious. Yet there were also times when participants were much less economical with their heating and indeed they did not connect their heating behaviours in any meaningful way to any wider sustainability agenda. Furthermore, they were also of the view that it was too important to stay warm for them to scrimp on their home heating in any way, if they felt they needed it. As such there does seem to be some scope for connecting older person domestic energy use to this wider agenda since older people may have a more careful approach to using resources. There were also indications of some environmental concern more generally, with carbon footprints being raised, as well as some concern over the ethics surrounding the global impacts of over consumption, especially from churchgoers. Any initiatives to increase environmental concern and

sustainable consumption among older people, however, need to bear in mind the particular needs of this group since some older people should specifically not be encouraged to turn down their thermostats, for health reasons. Initiatives should also bear in mind the scale of the challenge in terms of reaching this group and helping them both to connect with these issue and be willing to talk about their stance on these matters.

- **Initiatives to tackle fuel poverty by improving energy efficiency should be more thorough and prepared to deal with more diverse situations.** Currently the structuring of programmes to insulate homes does not provide for contractors to take extra time for more difficult buildings or for households to have help with clearing lofts. As a consequence, some of the more isolated households that do not have friends and family to help with such things are being missed by these initiatives. Future developments should consider allocating resources for these more complex situations to avoid vulnerable households being overlooked. The current combining within intervention programmes of targets on carbon emission reduction with targets on vulnerable households reached, may be exacerbating the problem by encouraging contractors to prefer to treat 'easy' vulnerable households to reach both targets more cheaply.
- **Marketing and health promotion should be more considered when targeting older people with winter warmth messages.** What was clearly the case in our study was that our participants rarely connected

their own experience to wider common representations of older people having difficulty in the winter as a result of being needy and passive and perhaps unable to figure out a sensible strategy. Such representations may have been effective in promoting wider public sympathy, but they may also have the indirect effect of encouraging current groups of older people, such as those in our study, to shut down to various winter messages aimed at them. One problem is the implicit and sometimes explicit framing of older people and their situations within such campaigns, with images of old fashioned clothing, heating apparatus and other implements that many older people do not relate to, even though some may be having certain difficulties themselves. Another issue is that older people may not particularly self identify as being part of an older person cohort. It may be more effective to target messages to people in particular situations rather than singling out age per se as defining vulnerability and / or to raise awareness of ageing and heating issues among the general population as older people particularly value advice and tips from friends and family. Using particular media outlets that are more popular with older people or even aimed at older people can potentially work, but the framing, language and imagery of the message needs to be very carefully considered.

- **Social networks could be effectively mobilised to encourage both sustainable winter behaviours and wider social wellbeing, but care must be taken to do this in an acceptable way.** On the one hand, this study would suggest these channels were exactly those through which

information and advice might be most effectively distributed. Our participants were more trusting of information, tips and advice that came through these channels and they were also quite keen to hear about how other people managed and how they could potentially do so better themselves. Yet, on the other hand, this study also revealed significant sensitivities around the ways in which people would talk about home heating together and under what circumstances this might happen. In this respect, imperatives of presenting an appropriately warm home and being an appropriate guest could mean that these potentially very useful discussions may never take place. What may be needed are ways way of promoting a more open discussion of how things could work better at home in a way that older people do not find uncomfortable. One of our workshop participants talked about the possibility of staging energy quizzes at the social clubs where older people meet. It was also noted that Warm Zones now has community network workers with the aim of penetrating such social networks for more effective promotion of interventions. Such initiatives illustrate some encouraging ways forward that may have some success.

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NOTES



The photos used in the design of this report were taken from the diary component of the project.



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