



Jim Gillon, Energy Services Manager, Gateshead Council, with Cllr John McElroy, at Gateshead's Energy Centre.

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Psychologists encourage Gateshead households to expand use of innovative heat networks

Experts in consumer behaviour and behaviour change from Northumbria University are working with Gateshead residents to understand how households are using heat networks, in a bid to expand their use across the borough.

[Gateshead Council](#) already runs a successful [District Energy Network](#) which serves 350 domestic customers and several public and council buildings.

However, it has the ambition to deliver a heat network to reach 7,500 homes over the next five years, with a longer-term aim of reaching 15,000 homes.

Heat networks form an important part of the government's plan to reduce carbon and cut heating bills for customers. They distribute heat from a central source to multiple buildings, avoiding the need for individual boilers or electric heaters in every building. This means they can reduce the use of fossil fuels for heating homes.

The council needs to significantly increase awareness of heat networks among Gateshead residents to meet its expansion target and help people to understand and embrace the use of this new heating system which operates in a vastly different way to gas.

It joined forces with researchers from Northumbria's [Department of Psychology](#) to submit a bid to Innovate UK's [Fast Followers](#) competition, which provided a £6 million fund to drive forward key net zero projects across the country and overcome non-technical barriers to projects, such as citizen engagement or procurement issues.

The joint bid on how to engage Gateshead residents with zero carbon heat was awarded more than £270,000.

Northumbria researchers will work with the council and local residents over the next two years to understand the barriers and facilitators to consumer engagement with heat networks. The evidence gathered will help to develop new ways to encourage residents to connect their homes to heat networks.

[Michael Smith](#), Associate Professor in Psychology, said: "We are excited to be working with Gateshead Council to help achieve their ambition to heat 15,000 homes through heat networks.

"Engaging consumers and understanding how to support residents to change their energy use behaviours will be integral to successfully achieving this ambition.

"This funding from Innovate UK will enable us to support Gateshead Council with this important engagement work as they look to accelerate progress towards the aim of achieving net zero."

It is hoped that the findings from Northumbria's research will be adopted by other local authorities who are keen to encourage their residents to adopt more sustainable ways to heat their homes.

Councillor John McElroy, cabinet member for the environment and transport at Gateshead Council, said: "This funding is vital as we look to expand our heat network. Working with innovative technology, it's so important that we explain how it works, to help people in Gateshead to benefit from our heat network."

The project is also intended to support local and regional economic development strategies, by creating conditions for skills and jobs growth in heat networks, and supporting the North East of England as the UK's High Potential Opportunity for Heat Networks, to attract overseas investment.

Councillor McElroy added: "We also want to ensure that we have the skills required to keep the network growing. We want our work on heat networks to benefit the people of Gateshead as customers, but also to help create good quality jobs for people in the green economy."

The joint bid from Gateshead Council and Northumbria University was one of just 21 successful awards to receive funding from the Fast Followers competition.

Mike Biddle, Executive Director for Net Zero at Innovate UK, said: "Innovate UK's Net Zero Living Programme aims to transform our towns, cities and communities through removing barriers to adoption and creating demand for new Net Zero technologies.

"This cohort of Fast Followers winners demonstrate innovative ideas that are designed at grass roots level specifically to overcome their particular barriers and sometimes unique challenges. Seeing the range of projects is inspiring and, as well as running their individual initiatives, the local authorities will share best-practice allowing others to capitalise on proven solutions."

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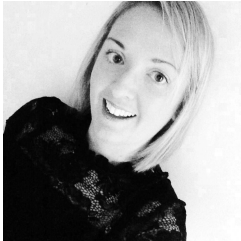
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