Energy use, energy services – a basic need? – essential and necessary? - a matter of justice? – a matter of governance – a state responsibility?

for whom, on what terms and why?

A …… what theoretical reasoning can say

B ……. what citizens think and see as normal

C ……. what discourses circulate in the media

D …… what is hardwired into infrastructures and their organisation

A …… what theoretical reasoning can say

energy use to provide energy services is wrapped up in the basic capabilities that enable well being. There are multiple energy services that potentially contribute to multiple capabilities.

B ……. what citizens think and see as normal

C ……. what discourses circulate in the media

D …… what is hardwired into infrastructures and their organisation

A …… what theoretical reasoning can say

B ……. what citizens think and see as normal

processes of public deliberation about what constitutes a minimally decent life in the UK show that multiple energy dependent devices, uses and services are seen as part of that life. There are some reasoned grounds for variation by demographic and household characteristics; and there is also evidence of change over time.

C ……. what discourses circulate in the media

D …… what is hardwired into infrastructures and their organisation

A …… what theoretical reasoning can say

B ……. what citizens think and see as normal

C ……. what discourses circulate in the media

dominant media discourses (i) equate the *need* for energy with the *demand* for energy, at a national scale and (ii) focus on the affordability of energy for households so that people are able to use energy in ways that are ordinary and normal. A less prevalent discourse focuses on how energy services are particularly essential for those that are vulnerable to their loss or insufficiency.

D …… what is hardwired into infrastructures and their organisation

A …… what theoretical reasoning can say

B ……. what citizens think and see as normal

C ……. what discourses circulate in the media

D …… what is hardwired into infrastructures and their organisation

Ideas, principles and standards related to the need for energy and energy services can be found in many different aspects of hard and soft infrastructure in the UK. These ideas and principles have changed considerably over time. Contemporary arrangements and expectations carry both the legacy of historic versions, along with the politics of the current day.

What are the implications of these findings for policy and practice?

- Fuel poverty policy and practice
- Energy demand reduction and carbon mitigation policy

Provisional and being developed…

Implications … for fuel poverty policy and practice

1. The principle of strong fuel poverty policy

Media discourses in the UK support rather than critique the idea that those in fuel poverty need help and protection by the state to achieve essential energy services (heating in particular) – this reporting *could* be quite different, and is distinct from other areas of reporting on contemporary social and welfare policy (C)

Evidence of this (strengthening) policy imperative is found across different aspects of contemporary hard and soft infrastructural arrangements… but with some gaps and contradictions (D)

Implications … for fuel poverty policy and practice

2. Fuel poverty definitions in the UK

The old and new definitions in the UK require calculation of the cost of the energy that households 'need' to consume. But needed for what and to what level?

All of the significant discussion of this question has related to *heating* – the cost of energy needed to heat rooms to a specified temperature. The judgement of 'specified temperature' is an expert one, based on health.

But 44% of the energy cost included in the fuel poverty calculations is *other than heating* – lighting, water heating, other appliances etc… This significant proportion is rarely discussed or debated. The 'necessary level' for these energy services appears to be determined by calculations based on patterns of normal/average use; and these levels also appear to change over time …..

Including these non-heating elements of necessary energy use is supported in various ways by our results:

- Capabilities thinking identifies a range of ways in which energy use and services can support basic capabilities and functionings - not *just* energy for warmth and its relation to health (A)

- Public deliberation on what constitutes a minimally decent life recognises that spending on heating is important, but also spending on other energy dependent objects and services - and shows that what is necessary in this respect can change over time (C)

The non-heating elements of the fuel poverty definition are important therefore, **BUT** there is scope for putting them on a more robust foundation, including the basis on which they might change over time

Implications … for fuel poverty policy and practice

3. Energy poverty definitions and problems more generally

Capability thinking provides a general framework through which, in any one setting, the relationship can be established between (i) what is valued as core aspects of well-being and (ii) the contribution to these aspects of well-being that is necessarily related to access to energy services

We should not, following this logic, expect energy poverty definitions or problems to be the same from setting to setting

We can, following this logic, position access to energy services as a matter of justice

Sometimes there may be an alternative route to well being that is less dependent on energy services

Implications … for demand reduction and carbon mitigation

1. Impacts of DR and CM policies

Media discourses emphasise the energy related essential needs of both ordinary and vulnerable households – and therefore are alert to what government policies mean for the ability of households to sustain these needs and avoid 'harm' (C)

Changes in infrastructural arrangements e.g. towards distributed generation, local grids, demand response, electric cars raise questions about what new or old ideas and meanings related to needs and justice they will embody (D)

Implications … for demand reduction and carbon mitigation

2. Rising Norms and Expectations

Increasing expectations of what makes up a minimally decent life could play into rising expectations of energy use (B). It is demand well *above* this threshold though, that should be the focus of policy attention

Rising norms and expectations become embedded in infrastructure and the standards to which these are constructed and managed. Once embedded they are hard to reverse (D)

Implications … for demand reduction and carbon mitigation

3. Constraints on demand reduction policy

Media reporting (C) tightly bounds the possibilities of demand reduction policy by:

- equating need with demand, and demand with progress and growth
- seeing what is ordinary and normal as what should be affordable
- seeing only efficiency as a legitimate demand side response
- challenging anyone who suggests other ways of reducing energy use invoking moral narratives related to the vulnerable and poor
- emphasising freedoms and rights for people to live as they see fit