



Evaluation Report

The benefits of Primary Care Trust Funding to help secure heating and insulation measures for vulnerable families in Cornwall

Alec Rice

Fuel Poverty Projects Manager

Community Energy Plus

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Background

Fuel poverty is defined broadly as a situation where a household spends more than 10% of its income on fuel costs. Whilst this definition is undergoing review by the Government it is used in this report as it applied at the time of funding and figures and statics quoted will relate to this. Four main factors affect whether a family is suffering fuel poverty:

- The energy efficiency of the property
- Household income
- The cost of energy
- How a household uses energy

This last factor is often omitted from fuel poverty considerations but is an area where significant savings and improvements can be made.

Fuel Poverty is a serious issue within Cornwall due to the lack of homes connected to the gas supply grid, the large amount of solid wall properties, hard to treat properties, large numbers of older properties, households on low incomes and a large number of privately rented accommodations.

In 2010, the number of fuel poor households in the UK was estimated at around 4.75 million, representing approximately 19 per cent of all UK households. DECC 2012.

Since this time we have seen energy prices rise and NEA, the national fuel poverty charity, estimate that the number of households in the UK in fuel poverty in 2011 was 7 million representing 27.2% (England = 5million households, 24.7%). <http://www.nea.org.uk/media/press-pack/fuel-poverty-by-region>

Grants have been available to householders for a number of years but often do not cover the full costs of works. A prime example of this is the Warm Front grant that provides a grant towards heating and insulation measures. It has been estimated that failure to take up the grant once a householder is asked for a 'client contribution' is in the region of 90%.

"Data on those who do not proceed with grant assistance is not recorded by region or local authority area, but we can advise that since June 2005, 6,076 households have withdrawn from the scheme and a further 14,326 households (as at October 2008) have put their application on hold". Joan Ruddock. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090402/text/90402w0018.htm>

As the grant is aimed at vulnerable householders who are on benefits it is perhaps not surprising that there is low take up of the grant once a client contribution is requested as it is unlikely that these clients have savings or disposable income to contribute.

Warm Front applications in Cornwall for year 2011/12 totalled 977 with 476 households assisted. Value of Warm Front grants was £1,636,781. There are more requests for Warm Front grants in Cornwall than any other area in the South West.

Action

Fuel poverty acts as a barrier to work as cold homes can exacerbate ill health, leading to shorter life expectancy or suffering poorer health for longer. In this regard the NHS Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust were keen to address this issue working alongside Community Energy Plus to help increase the number of households suitably insulated and with adequate heating systems.

In 2010/11 NHS Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust started to provide funding to Community Energy Plus for capital measures to provide Warm Front 'Top Up's to address the client contributions needed to install heating in homes of vulnerable households where an adequate heating system did not exist or was not working. Installs continued until June 2012.

No. of Installs	Funding Total	Warm Front Grants	Total
54	£40,000	276,000.00	£316,009.14

The undoubted success of this project was that for an average £740.74 per household it brought in an extra £5111.11 of grant in to Cornwall.

The problem of low take ups was virtually eliminated with only 4 households not proceeding (6.9%).

Applications	Proceeded	Withdrew
58	54	4

Installations were mostly oil boilers, which highlights the rural issues in Cornwall with approximately 60% of households of the gas grid network.

Oil	Gas	LPG	Warm Air (gas)
35	15	3	1

Referrals came from a variety of sources and include:

Cornwall Council – Private Sector Housing

Welfare Visiting Officer

West Cornwall Care & Repair

Kernow Positive Support

Chapter 1

District nurse

Adult Social Services

Energy Saving Trust advice centre

Private plumber

Community Energy Plus liaised directly with Eaga partnership/Carillion (managing agents of Warm Front) to ensure a faster and smoother installation process. This also enabled a named point of contact to facilitate data sharing and resolve queries quickly. Community Energy Plus also requested that Carillion inform them of any applications that required a client contribution.

The partnership working achieved positive results as can be observed in the comments from clients:

"your explanation has cleared a lot of worry"

"You referred her for a Warm Front top up and she wanted to say a big thank you as she now as heating!" From Welfare Visiting Officer.

"Many thanks for your help"

"I would like to thank your charity for their kindness in enabling me to take up the Warm Front grant, which I would not have been able to do without their help and assistance. Your support is very much appreciated".

"I thank you very much"

"Thank you once again for your help. This is needed and I'm very grateful for it".

"I'd like to thank you for all your concern about keeping warm. It would be lovely to feel warm all over the bungalow as it does seem to me, we are having colder and longer winters. As I'm nearly seventy and my joints feel it and scars from previous operations seem to hold the cold".

"I can further confirm that the property does not have any form of central heating installed at present, but with the possibility that this may now happen the benefits to me personally would be so re-warding and comforting as I suffer from arthritis. Because of this I had a major operation to my hip, approximately eighteen months ago, which involved a total hip replacement and prior to this I also had an operation to my left knee which in both instances was due to the arthritis I have".

"Just to acknowledge receipt of your letter and extend my personal thanks to you. This contribution will mean so much to me personally. It still seems a little un-believable that I may yet have my home centrally heated".

"Thank you very much for your help".

"Many, many thanks".

"Thank you for helping us through this".

"I suffer from a condition called fibromyalgia which is made worse by cold, damp conditions. I do not have any heating in my home so having heating will be extremely beneficial to me".

"I just wanted to drop you a line to say thank you so much for all your help in securing the grant towards our new heating system. It's been a difficult winter for everybody and I hadn't realised just how important being warm enough is".

"Thank you for your help so far".

"Many thanks for your help and support".

"We really appreciate your help".

"Thank you for your help".

Many of the comments make reference to various health issues within the households helped and many suffered more than one ailment. These included:

Anaemic
 Angina
 Arthritis
 Asthmatic
 Atrial Fibrillation
 Bipolar Disorder
 Chronic back pain
 Chronic Pulmonary Obstruction
 Diabetes
 Heart Attack
 Heart condition (SVT)
 Hiatus Hernia
 High Blood Pressure
 Hip Operations
 Hip replacement Osteo-arthritis
 HIV+
 Hypertension
 Long Term mobility problems
 Pulmonary Fibrosis
 Polymyalgia
 Registered blind
 Spinocerebellar ataxia
 Spondylitis of upper & lower spine
 Tachycardia
 Thoracic-lumbar scoliosis

Insulation measures were also included and aimed at the 'Super Priority Group' (SPG) *appendices*.

No. of households	No. of measures	Ave SAP before	Ave SAP after
254	290	46	56

SAP has been adopted by government as part of the UK national standard for calculating the energy performance of buildings. SAP ratings are expressed on a scale of 1 to 100 - the higher the number, the better the rating. http://www.nihe.gov.uk/what_is_a_sap

The average SAP rating means an average improvement increase from band E to band D.

SPG were targeted by Community Energy Plus via a comprehensive Cornwall wide marketing campaign that included leaflets targeted at SPG's press, radio, billboard and transport advertising. Help and advice were provided by trained energy advisors and a Freephone number provided for queries. Training was also available to frontline staff to understand fuel poverty issues and the importance of ensuring clients have a warm, dry home. This enabled front line staff to be able to refer clients directly.

Conclusion

The funding from NHS Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Primary Care Trust has enabled 54 households to benefit from heating that did not have an adequate heating system before. Alongside this 254 homes have received at least one insulation measure ensuring that the heat stays in the home and reduces the amount of heat needed to bring the property up to the recommended temperature levels (21°C in living rooms, 18°C other rooms).

The return on investment in bringing heating grants into the county that otherwise would not have happened is impressive. Community Energy Plus through the Cornwall Fuel Poverty Task Group, of which NHS PCT is represented, enabled installations for the most part to be given to local heating installers. This has the added bonus of benefits to the local economy.

Many of the households that received measures had occupants with health issues, in some cases multiple health issues, and a warmer home will have undoubted positive benefits to health. A well-insulated home with a modern central heating system will help to keep energy bills down and maximise disposable income for the occupants.

Advice to clients on their home energy management was made available and the scheme highlighted this free service should clients need to use it in future.

The scheme was well received by clients, as is evidenced by the comments received, and positively embraced by other agencies, which has served to enable them to work in partnership for the benefit of clients. This has also helped agencies and organisations to understand more about the roles of each other and the support that they offer. This can only help in referring clients to the right agency for the support they need in future.

Many factors contribute to Cornwall's fuel poverty issues such as 'hard to treat' homes, lack of gas grid connection, rurality, coastal exposure, low incomes, large number of privately rented properties and an elderly population. A scheme of this kind was undoubtedly needed and has made a significant impact to the lives of hundreds of people to improve their wellbeing and home comfort that otherwise would have not happened.