

£400,000 to help those in fuel poverty

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A major project to help households in Orkney to heat their homes affordably is about to get under way after a partnership led by local charity THAW Orkney secured almost £400,000 from the British Gas Energy Trust.

The Affordable Warmth Partnership – involving THAW Orkney, Orkney Care & Repair and Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau - will see the creation of a project team to help folk through the often confusing world of energy efficiency programmes. Advice will also be provided on energy saving, energy switching and income maximisation.

The team will be made up of three THAW Orkney employees, along with the creation of new posts at Orkney CAB and Orkney Care & Repair. Recruitment will start this week.

THAW Orkney chairman Peter Rickard said: "The fuel poverty figures for Orkney are currently 58% according to the Scottish House Condition Survey, rising to 82% for pensioner households and THAW Orkney came to the conclusion that there was a need for a project to co-ordinate help for those that need it the most. These are often the people who miss out on help because it is reliant on having internet access or on filling out complex forms. Basically, by providing a hand-holding service through the process, our aim is to ensure that more people who really need help get it."

Mr Rickard said that the award of the funding from the British Gas Energy Trust, which will allow a 12-month project in the first instance, was very welcome, but the hard work was just starting.

"Myself and the other trustees, Mike Cooper of Care & Repair, Erik Firth of CAB Orkney and Robert Leslie of Orkney Housing Association Ltd, have been working towards this for some time, so we allowed ourselves about five minutes to celebrate the funding award, and then quickly moved on to the work of planning for recruitment and finding office space. We intend to have our Affordable Warmth project staff, consisting of a manager, officer and administrator, based on the main street in Kirkwall. It is also planned to have the CAB support worker in that same building, to allow the team to work together closely," he said.

The project aims to help at all levels of lifting folk out of fuel poverty, from energy and money advice, reducing fuel costs, to actually making houses more energy efficient.

Orkney CAB manager Ali Gunn said: "We are only too aware of the need for free, confidential and impartial advice, as our staff and volunteers are at full capacity and demand is growing. For that reason as much as any, we welcome the opportunity to create this additional Affordable Warmth project post aimed specifically at helping folk with their energy issues."

Orkney Care & Repair manager Mike Cooper explained that the fifth Affordable Warmth project post would be based within his office at OHAL in Victoria Street.

Mr Cooper said: "Of our £399,776 funding, £175,000 is allocated to for installation costs of energy saving measures, property and heating repairs. We intend to use these monies as 'gap fillers' when other programme grants are exhausted, for example when a client contribution is needed to complete an installation and the householder is unable to pay. The person based at Care & Repair will be a technical support officer for this part of the project."

It is planned that following recruitment to the five posts and any initial training the team undertake that the service will be up and running and accepting the first referral in December of this year.