



# *Annual Review 2020*

**‘To work for households in all Orkney communities to reduce levels of fuel poverty and achieve affordable warmth’**

# Chair's Report

At the 2019 AGM we welcomed Lindsey Johnson as our new manager. We hoped she'd have a 'long, happy and bright future at THAW.' She was unfamiliar with the energy sector, and fuel poverty, but learnt quickly and was an extremely good manager. Life always brings changes though and, in July 2020, following an offer of employment elsewhere, she resigned. We were sorry about this but understood and wish her well in her new career.

The gap between her leaving date and a new appointment was problematic. Fortunately, THAW's Vice Chair, Imogen Sawyer, was able and willing to assist and became Interim Manager. We are grateful to Imogen. Her help enabled the organisation to function efficiently. It provided communications and negotiation with partners and funders and reassurance to staff and the Board,

Our new manager, Mr Robert Leslie, has extensive knowledge of energy issues and fuel poverty and he has been active in this field for the past ten years. He was a founder member of THAW and previous Chair. We hope he will have a 'long, happy and bright future at THAW.'

In 2019 and 2020, because of the previous groundwork, Lindsey's management, hard working staff and Trustees, THAW grew and developed.

**Money Advice and Welfare Rights services** were developed. Training for the staff was also offered to the Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau (OCAB) staff. However, without an FCA Licence only Level 1 money advice can be given. To overcome this an informal agreement with OCAB evolved but a more formal agreement is needed, and THAW continues to explore solutions with the OCAB.

**The ReFLEX Orkney (Responsive Flexibility) project** aims to create a 'smart energy island'. Discussions with ReFLEX on how we would provide initial support, handholding and aftercare to support vulnerable people had commenced but were halted because of Covid-19. We hope these will resume in the near future.

During 2019 - 2020 Warmworks bid for and won the contact to be the managing agent for the **Home Energy Efficiency Programmes for Scotland: Area-Based Scheme (HEEPS: ABS)** in Orkney. In 2019 there had been informal discussions on possible partnership working. However, staff changes, Covid-19, increased workload has affected this. Both organisations aim to alleviate the same problem and already there is co-operation between us. THAW hopes this will developed with more formal relations and partnership working evolving.

In July 2019 the **ESF WellBeing project** finished. However, we were later notified some of the funding might need repaid. Evidence was gathered and a full breakdown of costs submitted to OIC. THAW calculated £21,141.98 was owed. This was paid on 31st March and we hoped this concluded the matter. However, in August 2020, more evidence was requested. While not THAW's responsibility THAW continues. to assist OIC as much as it can and hopes, eventually, that matter is concluded to everyone's satisfaction.

By March 2020 it was evident that **Covid-19** was a pandemic and when lockdown was announced all home visits, projects and installation work stopped. Board meetings, and meetings arranged with OIC and NHS Orkney were cancelled.

Teams meetings were set up, the manager did an impressive job of supporting staff, attracting funding, communicating with partners and funders. The Increased hardship in the community was evidenced by an increased number of electricity vouchers and requests for help.

The staff responded to the situation and adapted to the new way of working and we owe them our thanks for their efforts in difficult circumstances. When lockdown eased THAW had in place policies and procedures to ensure, as far as is possible, the safety of the staff and THAW's clients. Funders began to resume their projects and liaised with THAW about when work could begin again.

The future looks as if it will be busy. Covid-19 brought increased need for assistance and there are potential funding streams to be applied for. We have to plan for ABC4. We will continue working in partnership with ReFLEX, Warmworks, OCAB, NHS Orkney, OIC, Orkney Foodbank and many others.

My thanks go to our many funders and partners without whom THAW could not function.

Also huge thanks to the staff and board members for their hard work and dedication.

The staff have worked tirelessly under difficult circumstances. I also welcome the new staff and hope their time with THAW will be long, advantageous and enjoyable.

At the 2019 AGM I gave warning that my period as Chair of THAW would end in 2020. Covid-19 has delayed this a little but for constitutional and personal reasons it can be delayed no longer.

My term of office has had challenges, but it has been made much easier because of the staff and the Board. THAW's Trustee Board have been a pleasure to work with. The Trustees are participative, compassionate and able. They give their time willingly and bring with them good judgement that has helped THAW grow and continue its services. I am sure THAW has the capacity to continue the good and successful work started in 2014. I wish THAW all success in the future.



**Janice Annal, THAW Orkney Chair**

## Where our clients are from

The majority of our clients are resident in Kirkwall, however the effect of the Covid-19 crisis has been felt by households in all areas.



# Service Provision and Statistics: A Partnership Approach

## British Gas Energy Trust Wellbeing and Warmth Orkney

The British Gas Energy Trust was the first ever funder of THAW Orkney, allowing the first staff team to be appointed after a successful bid secured £399,766. Securing a full year of funding this time – just under £180,000 - has been crucial to the core Warmth and Wellbeing work carried out by the staff team.

Not only has it supported these core services, but also allowed the continuation of several other projects, including the ABC project, the continuation of electricity voucher schemes, and the ongoing distribution of Cosy Homes Packs.

Inevitably, the Covid-19 Lockdown period saw a significant increase in the number of people accessing our service for various support, including our core services and in addition the emergency funding we have been allocated for emergency electricity vouchers through the Wellbeing Fund, Community Resilience Fund, and OIC Resilience Fund.

As an example, in total we supported 185 clients during the first quarter from April to June 2020. We have seen a significant increase in the number of clients needing support with income maximisation and benefit support and envisage that this support need will continue to rise as we move to the recovery and renewal phase.

We have seen a decrease in the need for debt management support and along with our partners at the CAB feel this is conducive of the current climate as debtors are not being contacted. However, this is unlikely to continue and we envisage a greater need for this support as we go forward.

We have continued to work well in partnership with many local organisations to make sure as many as clients as possible know how to access our services, this has included the Orkney Covid-19 support hub that was set up specifically to support people in the shielded group stay safe and well. We bid successfully for additional funds for emergency electricity vouchers for vulnerable households and issued 272 vouchers to the value of £11605.00 in the first quarter.

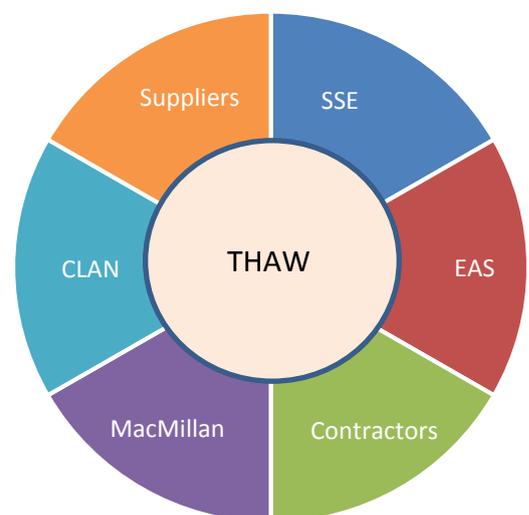
Our Welfare Officer has been working with people to ensure they have the information and support required to access and claim the support they are entitled to. THAW staff have recorded clients that would like a home visit once restrictions are eased and will contact them to arrange appropriate times to visit and carry out home assessments. We have continued to work with partners at a strategic level to plan a coordinated approach to support vulnerable households as we move into the recovery and renewal phase.

## Aiming Beyond Cancer

THAW Orkney were yet again able to assist households with a cancer diagnosis through referrals made by **MacMillan** and **CLAN Cancer Support** services. Funded by **Scottish and Southern Electric** and coordinated between the Orkney Islands and The Western Isles by **Energy Action Scotland**, and following a home visit by THAW, a new heating system and white goods were installed for those eligible.

The project commenced in September 2019, the final totals will be **32 heating systems and 33 white goods** being completed. However, this project was put on hold from mid- March 2020 by Energy Action Scotland due to the Coronavirus crisis as these clients were particularly vulnerable, and 20 installations are currently awaiting completion.

A huge **thank you** also to the **local contractors and suppliers** who went the extra mile to install the heating systems and white goods within the tight deadlines in which we had to operate.



# Service Provision and Statistics: A Partnership Approach

## Electricity Vouchers

THAW Orkney, working with **The Orkney Foodbank** and funded by **Warmworks**, has continued to assist a further **213 client households** with support to enable the heating and lighting to remain on.

During Covid-19, THAW secured funding to provide assistance specifically for people who had been affected by the crisis and issued 159 vouchers. Many of these clients received further assistance from the organisation.

In addition, The Orkney Foodbank requested that THAW administer their electricity fund during the crisis. A total of 53 vouchers were issued to clients who would normally have attended the Foodbank for assistance.

## Home Visits and Energy Cafés

As part of the proactive approach of THAW, whenever possible, we provide the services in a place that best suits our clients, although home visits and energy cafés have been on hold since the Covid-19 lockdown of March 2020. Prior to that, we undertook public drop-in Energy Cafés across Orkney Mainland and islands - in Stromness, Birsay, Sanday, St Margaret's Hope and Burray. THAW staff have given talks and presentations at CLAN and Age Scotland Orkney, and in addition, have been involved in the Community-Led Support initiative, hosting the Peedie Blether events at the THAW office.

## A New Client Household Support Service

In order to provide an enhanced bespoke in-home support service for our clients, THAW Orkney has embarked on further expansion of its service provision to include a Community Support Officer (CSO). Funded by the **Robertson Trust** and **NHS Orkney**, the CSO has been working with more vulnerable clients to provide support tailored to their specific needs and has assisted 29 clients since taking up the post in September 2019.

## Cosy Home Packs

THAW Orkney continues to provide the Cosy Home Packs (CHPs), which have proved very effective in assisting those households in fuel poverty. Despite funding issues, **123 CHPs** have been distributed this year.

Items currently in the pack include thermal socks, hat, gloves and for the kiddies this year we had a monkey wheat bag warmer.



## Fuel Poverty

Around **17%** of householders who have approached THAW for assistance are not experiencing fuel poverty. However, the majority of our clients who are dealing with fuel poverty, are experiencing levels so high – over 40% - there is not a definition except that anything above 20% is considered **'extreme'**.

The current Scottish Government's definition of fuel poverty is: *'A household is in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, it would be required to spend more than 10% of its income on all household fuel use. If over 20% of income is required, then this is termed as being in extreme fuel poverty.'*

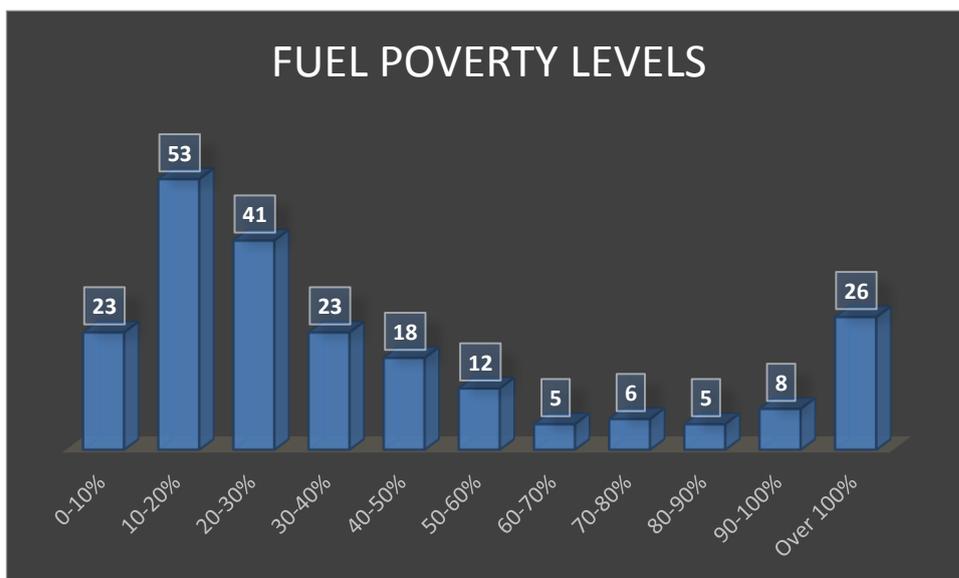
The *Scottish Household Condition Survey 2016-18* highlights **30%** of Orkney households are in fuel poverty (25% national average) and **22%** are in extreme fuel poverty (12% national average)

However, these figures are based on the new fuel poverty definition: 'A household is in fuel poverty if the household's fuel costs (necessary to meet the requisite temperature and amount of hours as well as other reasonable fuel needs) are more than 10% of the household's adjusted net income and after deducting these fuel costs, benefits received for a care need or disability, childcare costs, the household's remaining income is not enough to maintain an acceptable standard of living.' (Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019)

It is worth noting that although the new definition has reduced the percentage of households in fuel poverty by nearly half, from 57% to 30%, the extreme fuel poverty only came down by 1%, from 23% under the old definition to 22% under the new definition.

From all of the householders advised by THAW under the old definition:

- **3 in 4 householders** (76%) are experiencing **extreme fuel poverty**
- **1 in 3 households** (29%) are experiencing **40%+ fuel poverty** (ie needing to spend more than £4 from every £10 of their income on fuel)



The **BGET Wellbeing and Warmth** funding allowed the purchase of a new AdvicePro database, and the table above shows the fuel poverty levels of clients recorded on this system from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020.

## Case Studies and Comments on our services:

**Client A** is part of a couple living in social rented housing whose benefit changes had resulted in reduced income which meant he had been referred to Foodbank by CAB, who were assisting with benefits. Client was suffering from sudden drop in income and did not like asking for help advising at the Foodbank that he had found himself in a very dark place.

As part of THAW's community partnership work we provide a Support Worker at the local Trussell Trust Foodbank. This partnership works well with clients who are being referred to the Foodbank for a food parcel this means they are also supported by THAW with an electricity voucher, income maximisation checks, budgeting support, mental health support along with general energy advice. This client did not initially engage, but as we knew of the vulnerability, we used all available sources until client built up confidence to communicate with us.

Usually we would visit in the home but due to Covid-19 all communication was done remotely, although we delivered the cosy home pack and spoke with client at a distance at the doorstep.

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*"I cannot thank you enough for the cosy home pack yesterday. It was the first time we haven't been cramped up in cold all day and could sleep soundly in warmth. I don't think you will ever truly know how much your help meant for us. It was so nice to sit in a room where we weren't dreading moving due to the cold. My wife could breathe better for not being cold all day. Thank you all so much and thank you for taking the time out of your Easter Monday to deliver the pack. Thank you!"*

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### Project Outcomes

- Supported by 2 x £50 electricity vouchers
- Cosy Home Pack provided which made a huge difference to client
- Benefit check – client made aware of Scottish Welfare Fund also and offered to apply for them if needed
- General energy awareness guidance provided

**Client B:** Phoned client to go over tariff information. Explained the different customer ratings were CAB ratings not ours. Discussed the customer service from SSE and that sometimes it was better to consider that when contemplating switching. [The client] explained that they didn't have the accurate split of usage from SSE so it was split the easiest way although that would impact how much the savings would be. Client thanked me for all the help, information and kindness she has received. Assured client she could email me if she needed any more support. NFA, case closed.

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*"THAW is a brilliant service that helped us out a lot. I felt a lot less stressed having support to manage my electricity account. I would recommend THAW. A big thank you."*

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# Governance and Staffing 2019-20

## THAW Orkney Staffing

Gill Couper-Swanney, Facilities and Administration Officer

Lorraine Campbell, Welfare Support Officer

Michelle Koster, Development and Support Officer *(until June 2020)*

Linsey Drever, Development and Support Officer *(from September 2019)*

Suzy Fraser, Community Support Officer *(from September 2019)*

Stacy Johnston, Senior Development and Support Officer *(until July 2020)*

Craig Nisbet, Community Support Officer/Development and Support Officer  
*(from August 2020)*

Jonathan Ford, Development and Support Officer *(from August 2020)*

Caroline Atkinson *(from August 2020)*

Lindsey Johnson, Manager *(from July 2019-August 2020)*

Robert Leslie, Manager *(from September 2020)*

## Trustees

Janice Annal *(Chair)*

Caroline Butterfield *(Treasurer)*

Erik Firth *(resigned 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020)*

Ian Garman *(resigned 25<sup>th</sup> May 2020)*

Mark Hull

Adele Lidderdale

Imogen Sawyer *(Vice Chair, resigned 21<sup>st</sup> July 2020)*

John Ross Scott

Doreen Sinclair *(resigned 28<sup>th</sup> August 2020)*

Rhoda Walker

*(Lindsey Johnson – Secretary)*

## Thank You:

**Our grateful thanks to all those who have contributed to THAW Orkney this year without whom we would not have achieved so much:**

- **The British Gas Energy Trust / Charis Charitable Trust**
- **Orkney Islands Council**
- **Energy Action Scotland**
- **Foundation Scotland**
- **Corra Foundation**
- **Hunter Foundation**
- **NHS Orkney**
- **The Robertson Trust**
- **Orkney Housing Association Ltd**
- **Orkney Renewable Energy Forum**
- **Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau**
- **Warm Homes Fund / Orkney Islands Council**
- **Scottish and Southern Electric / Energy Action Scotland**
- **Warmworks**
- **Laura Watts** who kindly donated the royalties from her book '**Energy at the End of The World: An Orkney Islands Saga**'
- **And Individuals** who have generously made **personal donations** to further THAW's work of tackling fuel poverty and social and financial inclusion

## Organisations we have partnered during 2019-20



## Further information:

Further copies of this report can be obtained from THAW's website:  
<http://www.thaworkney.co.uk/>

THAW can be contacted via email at:  
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