

Arun District Council

REPORT TO:	Housing and Wellbeing Committee – 25 January 2023
SUBJECT:	Home Energy Advisor Role
LEAD OFFICER:	Karl Roberts – Director of Growth Nat Slade – Group Head of Technical Services
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor Jacky Pendleton
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION: The role of a Home Energy Advisor supports the Council Vision priority of delivering the right homes in the right places and the aim of maximising opportunities to improve the energy efficiency of homes in the district. The Vision document states that one of the ways that the Council will do so is to improve the energy efficiency of homes across all tenures.	
DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT: The Directorate has a Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency Strategy 2020-2025 and the Council is part of West Sussex Affordable Warmth Partnership and adopted the Framework for Action on 17 November 2021. Both documents aim to support and empower residents to improve household energy efficiency, reduce their energy costs and increase income.	
FINANCIAL SUMMARY: At an extraordinary meeting of the Housing and Wellbeing Committee held on 3 November 2022, members recommended to Policy and Finance Committee, also held on the same day, the approval of a virement of £180,000 to fund certain cost of living crisis initiatives that were detailed within the report, and if there were any monies outstanding that it came back to the Housing and Wellbeing Committee for a decision on spending. £40,000 of this funding remains unallocated and this report recommends to members that this is utilised to fund a part time, 22 Hours, Home Energy Advisor post, at salary scale 6 at a cost of £21,890 per annum. The post would be employed by the Council, on a one year fixed term contract and be part of the Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team. The remaining budget would be to support residents with minor repairs and energy efficiency measures.	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To outline the importance of a Home Energy Advisor role if employed by the Council and to propose using £40,000 of unallocated funds to finance this role and using the remaining budget to support residents with minor repairs and energy efficiency measures.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.2. That committee agree to use the £40,000 unallocated budget for cost-of-living initiatives to:
 - 1.2.1. Recruit a Home Energy Advisor to be part of the Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team, part time (22 hours), on a one-year fixed term contract, at an annual cost of £21,890.
 - 1.2.2. Utilise the remaining budget to support the most vulnerable residents with minor repairs and energy efficiency measures and give the Group Head of Technical Services the delegated authority to determine the criteria for this assistance.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1. At an extraordinary meeting of the Housing and Wellbeing Committee held on 3 November 2022, members recommended to Policy and Finance Committee, also held on the same day, the approval of a virement of £180,000 to fund certain cost of living crisis initiatives detailed within the report and if there were any monies outstanding that it came back to the Housing and Wellbeing Committee for a decision on spending.
- 2.2. £40,000 of this funding remains unallocated and this report recommends to members that this is utilised to fund a one year fixed term contract, part time, 22 hours, Home Energy Advisor post which would be employed by the Council on salary scale 6, at an annual cost of £21,890 and be part of the Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team. The remaining budget would be utilised to support residents with minor repairs and energy efficiency measures
- 2.3. At a time when residents are struggling with fuel bills and the cost of living this post would provide direct support and advise through home visits to help vulnerable people on low incomes to stay warm and make savings where possible on their fuel bills. The service will be provided to owner occupiers, private rented sector tenants and council tenants but targeted at the most vulnerable and in need.

3. DETAIL

- 3.1. Fuel poverty is a complex public health issue in the widest sense. It affects people's ability to keep warm, which in turn impacts upon their physical health and worry about money has been shown to negatively impact upon mental health and emotional wellbeing. Evidence shows it is linked to reduced educational attainment in young people and can lead to increased health and social care intervention in the elderly and vulnerable.
- 3.2. Reducing fuel poverty can improve many aspects in people's lives, including enabling them to keep as warm as they need to, which will help maintain their health and wellbeing. There is also the potential to release some extra household income to spend on essentials such as healthy food.

- 3.3. From figures provided by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, it was estimated in 2021 that there were 3.2 million households living in fuel poverty. The impact of the current cost of living crisis is estimated to have increased this to 7 million households. This is predicted to rise again to 8.6million households when the current package of support for households end in April 2023.
- 3.4. The Institute of Health Equity 2022 report Fuel Poverty Cold Homes and Health Inequalities in the UK estimates the number to be much higher and that by January 2023 66% of 18million households in the UK will be in fuel poverty.
- 3.5. The latest figures we have for fuel poverty in Arun is based on 2020 data, this shows that that as a district 8.7% of households are fuel poor against an average of 8.2% for West Sussex and a national average of 13.2%.
- 3.6. There are pockets of extreme fuel poverty within the district identified at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA)

Lower Super Output Area	Ward	Number of Households	Number of Households in Fuel Poverty	Proportion of Households Fuel Poor
Arun009C	Brookfield	554	97	17.5%
Arun016A	Pevensey	551	95	17.2%
Arun016C	Pevensey	563	95	16.9%
Arun017E	Marine	1068	167	15.6%
Arun011D	River	1047	160	15.3%

- 3.7. At the 17 November 2021 Environment Committee members agreed to adopt the West Sussex Fuel Poverty Framework for action 2021-26.
- 3.8. The framework aims to support and empower residents to improve household energy efficiency, reduce their energy costs and increase income. In addition to identify and support residents in the greatest need and at most risk of living in a cold home. Those most vulnerable to fuel poverty are those on low incomes, young families, those with disabilities and minority ethnic groups.
- 3.9. The Council's Energy Efficiency Officer and West Sussex Fuel Poverty Co-ordinator work closely together to ensure residents are aware of the single point of contact service provided by the Citizens Advice for telephone enquiries and support, sign posting to grants and funding that is available to residents and providing training to front line workers to help them support their customers.
- 3.10. However, one gap in the service that has been identified is the availability of home visits to provide energy efficiency and fuel poverty advice. A visit to a household enables the Advisor to better understand the resident's situation and offer targeted support, providing a holistic approach and signposting to other services as illustrated by the case studies provided in Appendix 1 to this report.

This is particularly effective at supporting those with higher needs as many lack the confidence and resilience needed to interact with existing web or telephone based support.

- 3.11. The proposal is for the Council to appoint a part time, 22 hours, Home Energy Advisor for a one year fixed term contract on salary scale 6, at an annual cost of £21,890 and be part of the Private Sector Housing and Public Health Team. They would triage telephone calls, and using criteria to identify the most vulnerable and in need, undertake visits to residents within their home.
- 3.12. To ensure that the service is provided to the most vulnerable residents, referrals would be made via front line professionals such as Citizen's Advice, AgeUK, GPs, Housing staff etc and assessments undertaken to ensure they are eligible in terms of their household income being under £31,000 or in receipt of means tested benefits for example.
- 3.13. The Wellbeing Team at the Council was previously able to offer this post through external funding however, it ceased December 2021.
- 3.14. Based on this experience of the role it is anticipated that approximately 180 home visits per year will take place with a range of different advice given. From previous analysis of the visits undertaken by the Home Energy Advisor, 75% of home visits should potentially save residents £200 or more per annum through behaviour change, use of installed measures and through guidance from the Home Energy Advisor regarding the best energy tariffs and access to a range of grants.
- 3.15. Where energy efficiency retrofitting takes place the Home Energy Advisor can help residents understand new technologies such as heat pumps and new heating controls. This will help with customer acceptance and uptake of measures. All this support will ultimately help improve health and wellbeing chances and reduce residents' energy bills and in turn carbon emissions. This will also have a direct impact on improving the housing stock, reducing potential condensation and the growth of damp and mould.
- 3.16. Provided within Appendix 1 of this report are some cases studies from the Arun Wellbeing Team, to help illustrate some actual situations that the Home Energy Advisors were involved with and the outcomes that were achieved.
- 3.17. By providing direct support within the home and assisting residents to make those behaviour changes, savings can be recognised for the long term, rather than providing a short-term fix of money to pay off bills for example.
- 3.18. The service provided by the Home Energy Advisor would be tenure neutral and therefore visits could be made to owner occupiers, private rented sector tenants or Council Housing tenants.
- 3.19. In view of this there would be support for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Strategy and Council tenants will be offered home visits.

Summary of Objectives – Home Energy Advisor Role

- 3.20. To support households by providing tailor made home energy advice and guidance to improve the health and wellbeing for those in fuel poverty.
- 3.21. The service will give priority based on the following criteria:
 - Those who live in areas of deprivation
 - Identified areas with high levels of fuel poverty
 - Disadvantaged areas and off gas rural areas
 - Those vulnerable to fuel poverty through lack of income, energy inefficient housing or health needs.
- 3.22. Identify ways and support residents to reduce fuel bills by providing information on tariffs and supplier options
- 3.23. Improve residents' understanding of affordable warmth by promoting better understanding of how to control and use heating, hot water and appliances.
- 3.24. Enabling residents to access additional funding through external and Council administered grants and discounts by promoting awareness of these schemes and checking eligibility.
- 3.25. Encourage residents to engage with their landlord, if renting, to improve or install adequate heating and insulation.
- 3.26. Improve residents' understanding of affordable warmth and enable behavioural change and relevant self-help.

Summary

- 3.27. The employment of a Home Energy Advisor by the Council will provide a much-needed service to vulnerable residents of Arun at a time, due to the current energy crisis, when this role is needed now more than ever.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1. Consultation with internal Council departments, West Sussex Fuel Poverty Co-ordinator and Citizens Advice.

5. OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- 5.1. The provision of home visits to support residents with fuel poverty and energy efficiency has been identified as a key gap in service provision within Arun.
- 5.2. The Housing and Wellbeing Committee at their 3 November 2022 meeting rejected the option for this service to be delivered by the Citizen's advice service.

6. COMMENTS BY THE INTERIM GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 6.1. The cost of employing a Home Energy Advisor, part time (22 hours), on a one-year fixed term contract, at an annual cost of £21,890 is within the £40,000 initially allocated for the role. I have no further comment to make.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1. A gap in the service that has been identified is the availability of home visits to provide energy efficiency and fuel poverty advice, therefore the risk of not providing this service is that we will be unable to assist vulnerable people in fuel poverty in the district.

8. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER

- 8.1. None

9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 9.1. The recruitment of a member of staff to fulfil this role on a one-year fixed term basis, part time 22 hours and on salary scale 6.

10. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT

- 10.1. Homes visits undertaken will be the subject of existing risk assessment that are in place.

11. PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT

- 11.1. The Home Energy Advisor will provide positive education and effect behavioural change in our Council tenants as well as potentially identifying issues that can be referred to the Housing Team, which will have a positive impact on improving the Council Housing stock.

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE

- 12.1. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and the provision of this role and service does not affect disproportionately one or more of the nine characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010.

13. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE

13.1. This role will provide vital information and support to help residents improve the energy efficiency of their homes, and in turn reducing emissions produced within the wider district and so helping reduce Arun's impact on the environment. Using Anthesis' scatter tool (with the most up to date data for 2019) it can be seen that residential buildings make up 34.7% (or 269,915 tCO₂e) of the total emissions produced by Arun (as a district) which is the largest single source. Therefore providing help and assistance to our residents will be essential in our fight against climate change.

14. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

14.1. None

15. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

15.1. None

16. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

16.1. None

CONTACT OFFICER:

Name: Louise Crane

Job Title: Principal Environmental Health Officer

Contact Number: 01903 737669

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Appendix 1 – Home Energy Advisor Case Studies

Equality Impact Assessment

APPENDIX 1

Case Study 1 - Mrs G

Background

Mrs G contacted the Wellbeing Home Service after being made aware of the service by her nurse. Mrs G is 79 years old, has mobility issues following a stroke several years ago, has macular degeneration with limited vision, and she is registered as blind. She does not leave the house due to her condition but does get some support from family who live nearby.

After initial discussions on the phone, where she felt she needed support understanding her energy bills, a home visit was booked. During the visit she stated she doesn't use her gas cooker as she is scared to, due to her mobility issues. She is also struggling to wash herself and cannot use the bath. She is concerned about her bills as she finds them hard to read.

Home Energy Advisor contacted her energy provider to add her to the priority service register and request large print bills. A referral was also made to 4SIGHT to help with the issues she raised and to help reduce her social isolation. A referral was also made to Adult Social Care for an Occupation Therapist referral for aids and adaptations.

Intervention

- 2 Home visits and several follow up phone calls
- Contact with her energy provider – organised large print bills
- 5 LED energy saving light bulbs fitted in the property and advice about moving the furniture.
- Information given and contact made with 4Sight
- Referral to Adult Social Services
- Helped to access the Warm Home Discount rebate of £140

SHORT TERM	LONG TERM
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Client now registered for priority services register• Registered for large print bills• Standard bulbs replaced with LED's – money saving• Accessed the Warm Home Discount rebate £140	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessments to be done by occupational and sensory services team• Aware of local clubs support for those with macular degeneration and social isolation

Many of the Home Energy Advisor visits start with a simple reason for getting in contact such as 'needing help understanding bills better', but there are often other complex needs that also need supporting. This case helps to highlight the important role in being able to visit householder in their home, make the necessary referral to other agencies to really understand and assist with the other issue involved with householders facing fuel poverty.

Case Study 2 - Mr and Mrs H

Background

Mr and Mrs H stopped by a market stand the Home Energy Advisors were running as an awareness raising event. At the home visit it transpired they had no heating apart from stand-alone plug-in electric and one expensive electric flame-effect fire mounted on the wall. They were both pensioners with disabilities and had care of three of their grandchildren one of whom also had a long-term condition.

They were paying via pay as you go and generally unaware of their situation as they were so busy with day-to-day coping with their grandchildren. They were living in a small bungalow.

Intervention

Supported to fill in a form for npower Health Through Warmth. This is a charitable trust which provides heating for those with health conditions. The Home Energy Advisor also wrote a covering letter.

There was no gas provision to the property therefore this had to be organised. The Home Energy Advisor put Mr and Mrs H in contact with Yorkshire Energy Solutions, they were very helpful in directing the operation to get the gas pipes laid up outside the house and up the garden path to the road. They qualified for this scheme by being low income and by living in an area counted as deprived.

Interestingly, the form proved an eye-opener for them about their financial situation, as it requested very detailed income and expenditure. The Home Energy Advisor felt the financial awareness course they had attended was useful in terms of giving guidance on this and they were able to agree a different approach to catalogue spending.

Outcome

Npower decided to pay the full amount for the gas system to be fitted, which was good as it meant it didn't take too much time and the Home Energy Advisor didn't have to look for other funding. Yorkshire Energy Solutions efficiently oversaw the laying of all the exterior pipework. The Home Energy Advisor monitored the situation and who was coming and when via communicating with the client. The feedback from the family was excellent.

SHORT TERM	LONG TERM
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New energy efficient heating system/boiler. £2k. This was all grant funded.• Gas pipework laid outside – value c. £11k.• Higher comfort levels, lower cost, better health	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Money saving on heating bills/or ability to keep warmer at home• Home Energy Visit to help support further with reducing energy costs• Increase to value of home through having central heating.

Case Study 3 - Mrs M

Background

Mrs M dropped into Bognor Regis Town Hall to get some assistance with her energy bills and she was 'self disconnecting' due to having no spare money each week. She had a pre-payment meter and did not put the heating on and would try not to use her lights or electrical appliances. A friend of hers had recommended getting support from the Home Energy Advisor. A home visit was booked, and the client was visited to see what support could be offered.

Intervention

During the visit it was evident the client was finding things very hard to deal with. Her home was very cold. Although not currently taking medication she had a long history of mental health problems including depression and said she needed help. When the Home Energy Advisor suggested that she contact her GP she said she did not have credit on her phone and therefore could not get an appointment in the morning with her GP. She said she found it very hard to get out of bed in the morning and go to the GP. The Home Energy Advisor made a call to her GP to get her an appointment booked for later that day.

The client was facing eviction from her part owned property, due to rent arrears. She showed the Home Energy Advisor the letter and disclosed the other debt she had. A referral was made over the phone to Christians against Poverty for debt support, the earliest appointment they had was 12 weeks away. Mrs M kept this appointment, but the Home Energy Advisor told the client to book an appointment to see the Council's Housing Options team as well.

The Home Energy Advisor also referred the client to Arun Money advisor as a priority as her eviction letter said they would be applying to the courts immediately. The advisor contacted her social landlord to hold off the eviction and later found the client had wrongly been charged for the bedroom tax – she was in fact owed £3000. He worked with her to create a budget plan and she is now managing her finances.

Outcome

The client is now taking medication to manage her depression, she no longer faces the risk of eviction and feels confident managing her bills going forward.

SHORT TERM	LONG TERM
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Apply for the Warm Home discount £140• Wellbeing Home fund topped up her electric £100 and gas £100• Higher comfort levels, reducing the health impact of not heating her home and being able to cook meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No longer at risk of losing her home• Support from GP managing her depression• Managing debt and improved budgeting skills

Case Study 4 - Mr R

Background

Mr R was referred to the Wellbeing Home service via Age UK. He had no working heating system and was very concerned. As he had a health condition it seemed urgent that he received a visit from the Home Energy Advisor to work out how they could help him. Arun currently has a scheme called Safe and Warm Homes Grants to assist low income home-owners access an energy efficient heating system so they don't suffer the negative effects of fuel poverty.

Mr R was living with an acquired head injury which affected his mobility and cognitive ability, and he was kind enough to make the Home Energy Advisor aware of this on their first visit, which we decided would be most appropriate to be a joint visit. He also informed us that he has a life limiting condition. The Home Energy Advisor ensured that all information was given to him appropriately in a way which was clear for him to understand for example writing down for him on his calendar the timings of engineer visits.

Intervention

- Home visits – 3 in total
- Forms filled, quotes obtained, visits booked with regular check-ins from the Home Energy Advisor
- Referral to Occupational Health for further help needed
- Engineer chosen and new heating system installed
- Repeat visit from engineer at Home Energy Advisor request to ensure client understood how it worked
- Final visit from Home Energy Advisor to ensure client was happy and helped him find an appropriate energy supplies and get on the priority service register.
- Potential links made with Client support group to go and give a talk there in the future

Outcome

SHORT TERM	LONG TERM
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Client has new gas boiler installed, he now has heating and hot water• £3,500 worth of ADC grant funding for replacement boiler• Has had contact with further services to check suitability of building• Save money of bills, no longer using expensive plug-in electric heater	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce the risk of negative consequences of living in a cold home, including physical and mental health conditions• Other needs discussed with external agency• Improve thermal comfort of home• Aware of the other support service available to him should he wish to engage• On priority support register to ensure energy supply is constant.