

## **Beat the Cold Briefing Note from the Deputy Leader (Community and Regulatory Services) Councillor B G Peters**

Beat the Cold provide a single point-of-contact service, providing energy and affordable warmth solutions for our residents. Through a combined approach of upgrading homes and changing resident behaviour, the service will provide an effective support process that assists residents to understand the complex and often confusing world of advice, grants, financial assistance and working with installers.

### **Energy Advice Service**

The telephone advice service is capped at £4000 and delivers a freephone telephone advice service to residents providing advice for fuel poverty and energy advice. Where demand becomes higher than the number of staff available to take calls, an answerphone service is provided and will be responded to within 1 working day. This is an automatic service flagging up any answerphone messages to management, so that they can be re-distributed and acted on promptly. Residents can also access the service via the website and email.

All advice given will be a reactive response to the presenting problem on a case by case basis; establishing any further support requirements through an exploration of the described situational circumstances. Advice and assistance will be provided in the following areas:

#### Changing Resident Behaviour:

- Fuel Bills: giving advice on current best deals, discounts, prices and provider
- Fuel Debt: advice on resolving debt and any financial assistance that may be available to reduce or settle fuel debt and prevent future arrears
- Advice on making the best use of heating systems, available government support such as winter fuel payments and grants that can fund energy improvement efficiencies in the home
- Preventing crisis, encouraging self-sufficiency, reducing fuel poverty and improving health through signposting to appropriate partner agencies

#### Upgrade Homes:

- Affordable warmth measures
- Renewable technologies
- Directing to appropriate agencies for alternative upgrades

### **Offer extra advice and support to vulnerable residents; ensuring information and advice is easily accessible**

We have agreed for additional home visits to be made available for vulnerable tenants on a case by case basis, subject to budget being available. Support for vulnerable households will also include negotiating fuel debt, tariffs and switch-overs with fuel companies. Referrals to available grants and discount schemes, benefit checks, home energy use advice and explaining how to reduce fuel costs through the right use of equipment.

The advice and support provided through the service is intended to improve the health and wellbeing, financial inclusion and service accessibility for clients.

Based on previous data, it is likely that up to 30 home visits will be required, I have asked the officers to submit a revenue bid for additional funding through the climate change budget to support this piece of work.

### **Promotion**

The service also includes promotion of the brand with relevant partner agencies and stakeholders to assist with targeted campaigns and engaging with the most disadvantaged households. Activities include:

- Engaging with 'key' organisations and agencies; identifying and establishing relationships with the 'right' person within these organisations and agencies and introducing the service with the intention of generating support for our promotions
- Establishing an understanding of how East Staffordshire Borough Council and Beat the Cold can support other agencies and how these agencies, their communities and members would like to be supported by the service
- working closely with home care practitioners, other caring agencies and primary health care professionals; supporting these organisations in their visits to the homes of vulnerable residents. We will also seek to work with hospital discharge staff to ensure that patients are not discharged to a cold home which could increase the possibility of readmission.

### **Identify and advise on ECO or similar projects**

Beat the cold will:

- Combine offers between CSCO (Carbon Savings, Community Obligation) and CERO (Carbon Emissions Reduction Obligations) funders, Able-to-Pay offers and other appropriate schemes that will secure opportunities in the delivery of affordable warmth measures.
- Frequently review these proposals to establish any new offers for households
- Keep an up to date record of chosen installers and ensure that their details and any other appropriate information collected during background checks, references and quality assurance methods are maintained.
- There will be a briefing of advice line staff on a regular basis (daily/weekly) to ensure that their knowledge of current offers and relevant advice is up-to-date.
- East Staffordshire Borough Council and Beat the Cold will support home owners throughout the installation process and any concerns that may arise; addressing these concerns directly with the relevant installer.
- Work with those utilities that are obligated under the ECO (Energy Company Obligation) to maximise investment within the borough of East Staffordshire.
- Keep up-to-date with new developments, changes in policy and best practice examples at a national, regional and local level in regards to home energy efficiency. Use this information to advise and support the Council in their programmes and partnerships to ensure that inward investment into the district is maximised.

- Additional projects: Where there is the capacity, funding and available resources to, partners will present and review opportunities to deliver additional projects within the District that meet the objectives of this agreement. The terms and costs specific to each additional project will be agreed by partners as the need arises.

### **Other Districts**

All other Staffordshire districts (excluding Cannock) have the same service, operated in the same way and have an average 30 home visits per year with additional visits agreed on a case by case basis subject to funding.

This topic will be discussed fortnightly at my 1 to 1 with the responsible officers