

Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire Action for Affordable Warmth Partnership

Annual report April 2009 – March 2010

Introduction from Di Billingham, the new Chair of the Affordable Warmth Partnership

During this busy year I took over the role of Chair of the Affordable Warmth Partnership from Kaye Welfare. Those of you who know Kaye will understand my trepidation as she will be a hard act to follow. It is due to Kaye's energy and enthusiasm that the partnership has such a good reputation in achieving results and influencing key decision makers. An example of this is the inclusion of NI187 indicator -Tackling Fuel Poverty - as a priority for the Gloucestershire Environment Partnership. This acknowledges the vital contribution fuel poverty issues will play in tackling climate change effectively.

Another success for the partnership has been the achievement of the Local Area Agreement stretch target for number of measures installed via the Warm and Well scheme, which achieved the full reward grant. The next year will be challenging due to the pressure on public finances that will impact on all our organisations. At this time it is crucial that we work in partnership to find the most effective and efficient solutions to continue to reduce fuel poverty. I am confident that we have the track record and skills to meet the challenges ahead.

Diana Billingham, Chairperson
Public Health, NHSG

Background

Fuel poverty occurs when a household needs to spend over 10% of income to achieve adequate warmth for health and comfort. NEA's fuel poverty figures for 2009 show a UK average of 17.9% of households in fuel poverty (18.7% of households in the SW). In 2003 these figures were 5.9% of UK households in fuel poverty (6.5% of households in the SW). There are currently over 5 million households across the UK in fuel poverty.

SWEA claims that every 1% rise in fuel costs forces 40,000 additional households into fuel poverty. With the ongoing steep rises in fuel prices, the problem of fuel poverty looks set to get worse.

We have just experienced another cold winter, exacerbating the problem of fuel poverty further. In 2009 the final report on 'Excess Winter Mortality' was produced by the Gloucestershire Health, Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Affordable Warmth Partnership adopted certain recommendations from this document in its end of year report last year. Its findings underline the importance of warm, healthy housing for the over 60s in cold weather in order to avoid potentially life-threatening health problems.

Levels of excess winter mortality are higher in Britain than many other European countries, including those with lower winter temperatures such as in Scandinavia. People over 60 are most at risk during the winter period, with the highest levels of excess winter mortality in the over 85 age band. Based on data for the winter of 2005/6, the SW region has the second highest level of excess winter mortality in England. (The rate in Gloucestershire is lower than in the SW region as a whole. On average, in the years 2004-8, there were 278 excess deaths in Gloucestershire).

There is little change in the number of deaths from most causes between the summer and winter, with the notable exception of respiratory disease (+41% in winter) and circulatory disease (+32% in winter). The main cause of excess winter mortality is therefore not hypothermia, but respiratory and circulatory problems such as asthma, influenza, bronchitis, pneumonia, heart conditions and mental health problems. These conditions are exacerbated by cold and damp housing conditions.

The housing condition surveys from the six district councils in Gloucestershire suggest there are significant housing issues to be overcome to ensure that people can enjoy affordable warmth. The average SAP rating for the county of Gloucestershire is 55, below the government's recommended minimum of 65, and there are significant variations within the districts. The Forest of Dean has the lowest SAP average of 46, and Tewkesbury enjoys the highest average of SAP 62. All the districts' averages fall significantly below SWEA's suggested SAP of 72 to 'fuel poverty proof' a household.

The main focus for the Affordable Warmth Partnership during 2009/10 was the effective delivery of the first year of the NI187 plan, which is one of the priorities in the Joint Strategic Commissioning Plan for Gloucestershire Environment Partnership. This can be downloaded at <http://www.glosep.org.uk/docs>. By 2011, the aim is to achieve a 1% reduction of vulnerable people living in homes with SAP less than 35, and a 1% improvement in the number of vulnerable people living in homes with SAP greater than 65. A large number of organizations, schemes and projects have contributed to realizing the aims and objectives of the NI 187 delivery plan, including the ESTAC, Warm and Well, the Energy Ambassadors project, RIEP and Target 2050. Further details about these and other projects and organizations can be found in this year's annual report.

Action for Affordable Warmth, established in October 2001, is working hard to meet the challenges of fuel poverty in Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire. The multi-agency Partnership continues to implement the Affordable Warmth Strategy by deepening links with key agencies through the Gloucestershire Conference and the Joint Strategic Commissioning Plans <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=98465>. The partnership has contributed to the development of the partnership plans for each of the thematic partnerships particularly for Gloucestershire Environment Partnership and Gloucestershire Health and Community Wellbeing Partnership. The Partnership has met at quarterly during 2009/10 with attendance from, amongst others; local authorities, NHS Gloucestershire, Pension Service, Care & Repair, SWEA, NEA, EAGA plc, Primary Care Trusts, Citizens Advice Bureau, Gloucestershire Rural Community Council and Age Concern Gloucestershire.

The Partnership invites and encourages all organisations interested in improving affordable warmth and reducing fuel poverty in Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire to attend these open meetings. For more details contact the Vice-Chair of the group, Debbie Hewitt: debbie.hewitt@stroud.gov.uk. For further details

and access to relevant reports and information, please see the Affordable Warmth Partnership website www.swea.co.uk/affordablewarmth

The Partnership members continue to work to raise awareness of affordable warmth issues through presentations to key agencies, public exhibitions, staff training sessions and press releases. This report provides a breakdown of key areas of activity and projects for 2009/10 across the Partnership.

Focus for Partnership Activity March 2009 - April 2010

During the year the Partnership has concentrated on various themes concerning Affordable Warmth. These meetings have been relevant and informative.

- May 09 – Reducing fuel poverty among vulnerable households
- July 09 – National Energy Action's Work in the SW
- Nov 09 - Joint partnership working, how can we be more effective?
- March 10 – Working with community partners to involve hard to reach groups

Details of all meetings, presentations and additional relevant information can be found on the newly updated Affordable Warmth website:

www.swea.co.uk/affordablewarmth

Projects and schemes 2009/2010

The following is a list of the projects whose activities are directly related to the reduction of fuel poverty in Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire:

Gloucestershire Warm and Well – 09/10

It has been another very successful year for the Gloucestershire Warm and Well scheme. During 09/10 the scheme improved the energy efficiency of 5,374 properties, installing 6,257 measures throughout the 7 local authority areas. The local authorities in Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire made more than £1.2million available to householders in the form of grants to improve heating and insulation and, together with fuel supplier funding, almost £3.5 million worth of measures were installed. Gloucestershire Warm and Well continues to work closely with local authorities, NHS Gloucestershire and members of the Affordable Warmth Partnership as well as other community groups.

As well as having access to grants and offering energy efficiency advice to all householders, the scheme now offers clients the option of being referred onto some of its relevant partner organisations such as Village Agents, Age Concern and the Fire Service. Its new signposting service involves a partnership referral form and completing the form can further assist the client in moving out of fuel poverty and into a more comfortable and manageable lifestyle.

Further progress has been made throughout the year in a bid to maximise referrals into the scheme, and on February 1st of this year the Gloucestershire Warm and Well website went live. As well as being able to find out more information about the scheme itself, clients can access the schemes literature and an online application form.

www.warmandwell.co.uk

All of the above have contributed to the Gloucestershire Local Area Agreement stretch target being met within the first quarter of 2009/10.

Warm Front – EAGA

Warm Front has undergone a number of changes over the last year. April 2009 saw the grant maxima increased from £2,700 up to £3,500. The income threshold for Tax Credits was increased from £15,460 up to £16,040 and in September 2009, private rented tenants could receive boiler repairs and replacements, subject to the landlord's permission.

The overall spend for the year in Gloucestershire was £3,113,432 and for South Gloucestershire was £1,554,954. There were 2,439 qualifying referrals in Gloucestershire, with an additional 1,461 in South Gloucestershire. Measures installed consisted of 248 cavity walls insulated for Gloucestershire and 181 in South Gloucestershire. Households assisted with loft insulation in Gloucestershire were 425 and 252 South Gloucestershire. Heating systems consisting of gas, oil and electric, new and replacements were in Gloucestershire 807 and for South Gloucestershire 374.

The Warm Front team carried out training with the call centre energy advisors to update and refresh their skills on using Portal. This is the electronic system for recording Warm Front applications direct and can be used to monitor and report on referrals.

Social Housing and SHARE

The Social Housing Action to Reduce Energy Consumption forum (SHARE) was originally set up as a European Project in 2006, established within an overarching aim of increasing the sustainability of energy use, reducing associated carbon emissions, reducing the risk of uncomfortable temperatures and unaffordable fuel bills in social housing.

The Gloucestershire forum has been maintained and meets quarterly to share experiences and good practice among social housing providers and other stakeholders. Themes for 09/10 have included the installation of renewable heating technologies in social housing and addressing Fuel poverty issues with social housing tenants. The forum often welcomes a guest speaker and was addressed in February 2010 by Dr Verne from the South West Public Health Observatory on the evidence linking ill health and excess winter mortality with fuel poverty.

The forum continues to share good practice with the 7 other partners in the European consortium. For more information and future meeting dates see http://www.swea.co.uk/proj_SHAREnm.shtml

Energy Ambassadors project



Jon Clarke with some of the newly trained Energy Ambassadors from the health service

Funded by Intelligent Energy Europe and NHS Gloucestershire, Energy Ambassadors aims to develop a sustainable solution to address the issue of fuel poverty and related ill health in households with low incomes. The project is focusing on facilitating the training of front line health and social care professionals to help them to deliver energy advice to their clients. The emphasis of this process is on improving the living circumstances of clients by helping them to understand how their energy use can impact on their health and financial circumstances and to increase referrals into the Warm & Well scheme.

The project began training with professionals in February and by the beginning of March, 65 professionals had passed through the short course. These have included Older Adults Nurses, Mental Health Support Workers, Occupational Therapists, Benefits' Advisors and Village and Community Agents.

Severn Wye Energy Agency is monitoring referrals into the Gloucestershire Warm & Well scheme and interventions made by Energy Ambassadors to evaluate the impact of the Energy Ambassadors project.

Throughout 2010/11 the project will continue to develop with a particular focus on professionals working in the areas of the County with the highest health inequalities, aiming to increase uptake of Warm & Well energy efficiency measures in households and areas most vulnerable to fuel poverty.

The partnership has worked closely with SWEA to maximise the training opportunities for front-line NHS staff via the Energy Ambassadors Training.

Stroud District Council

Target 2050, RIEP and PAYS

The 22 Target 2050 properties continue to install retro-fit energy measures and renewable technologies to reduce their carbon emissions, save energy and reduce fuel poverty.

The installer network is growing, both for energy efficiency installers and renewable technology installers, and this has played a vital role in helping Stroud to deliver retro-fit measures in its 5 RIEP funded properties, as well as those participating in the PAYS pilot scheme. Stroud is one of 4 Gloucestershire councils taking part in the RIEP scheme, as well as councils in South Glos and Wiltshire.

The ***PAYS scheme (Pay as You Save)*** is an exciting ground breaking national pilot. Stroud District Council has been awarded £500,000 by DECC to distribute in the form of interest-free loans to 50+ homeowners to install energy efficiency measures and/or renewable heating systems in their homes. 20 loans were successfully approved in the financial year 09/10, and 30+ will be awarded in the financial year 2010-11. The successful implementation of this scheme within a limited timescale has been largely due to the solid foundations and lessons learned during the Target 2050 project, including more than 180 homeowners who had already received in-depth and prioritized energy surveys of their home and were ready to go when the loans became available.

S2S (Solid to Sustainable)

This project has now closed in Frampton after a very successful year. Stroud District Council's social (council) housing and private housing departments, working in partnership with E-ON, installed 26 ground source heat pumps in council properties and 9 heat pumps in privately owned homes in Frampton. 3 GSHP were installed fully funded by CERT for private residents who were particularly vulnerable. Other householders only had a small and manageable contribution to pay due to CERT, LCBP and council grant support.

6 air to air heat pumps, 2 solar thermal systems and 1 biomass system were also installed into private properties as part of the S2S project

We will be evaluating the scheme carefully and have learned a lot during the first phase of the S2S project. We hope to move on to another off-gas area in the Stroud District to work in a similar partnership in the near future.

South Gloucestershire Council

South Glos has continued to be active on many fronts to promote energy efficiency and warmer homes in the wider community. Articles have been written for various publications and events undertaken have been numerous and diverse, including

energy workshops in schools, work with local libraries to promote energy monitors, stands at family fun days and attending flu jab clinics.

Advice and Awareness Raising

The Pension Service

The Admin function for DWP/ Local Pension Service (Gloucestershire) is now centralized in Bristol. This means that there is no longer a local facility to arrange visits to its customers or to respond to partner requests. For members of the partnership who look to maximize income for their clients and can identify a benefit need, a referral form may be used to arrange a visit from the Pension Service. (The referral form can be found on the Affordable Warmth website www.swea.co.uk/affordablewarmth. The fax and e-mail details are included on this form).

The process has been changed in the name of efficiencies and streamlining, but the Pension Service is aware that the new process may cause some initial problems. If any partners need assistance with the new procedures, please contact Kayla Needham directly on 01452 701032.

Care & Repair

As a home improvement agency, C&R carry out home fire safety checks and security checks and arrange the installation of measures where funding is available. The agency coordinates small "fast track" adaptations of handrails and other necessary modifications. It runs a gardening and handyperson scheme, as well as "Helping Hands" to help with housework, shopping laundry etc.

C&R play a vital role in project managing larger adaptations through disabled facilities grants and clients' own funding to adapt houses to suit client needs.

Care & Repair's commitment to advise on energy efficiency runs alongside their other services and compliments them.

C&R is constantly searching for funding streams to provide heating and insulation for clients on limited means via the utility companies, Warm & Well, Warm Front and the local authorities. It also help to access charity funding for clients on limited means who are in need, but not eligible for, a grant. Advice and help is also offered to clients who are able and willing to pay for their measures.

Citizens Advice Bureau

For the 2009/10 Financial year the Cheltenham, Cirencester and Tewkesbury CAB has continued to see a rise in the four main enquiry areas of debt, welfare benefits, employment and housing, with the most significant increases over the issue of debt. This trend is not unique to Gloucestershire and local figures mirror those of Citizens Advice Bureaux nationally.

Many of the debt cases include utility debts, reflecting the inability to meet rising fuel bills, a result of the long hard winter and the effects of the recession. In an attempt

to address this issue the CAB has been developing its capacity to give 'Financial Capability Advice' and will be delivering sessions across East Gloucestershire in the coming months. Financial Capability training not only includes budgeting and how to make the best use of income, but also how to maximise that income and make it go further.

To achieve this, the CAB actively promotes energy conservation, insulation and turning off appliances when not in use. Advisors look at the cheapest and best energy provider for the client, and have already delivered four sessions of a national programme called Energy Best Deal which encourages shopping around for cheap fuel and advice on how to change suppliers with minimum hassle.

It is a common scenario for the CAB to come across households and individuals who are turning off heating and going cold because they cannot afford their heating costs. This is frequently the case among the elderly who are fearful of getting into debt and do not always understand the help available, but it also affects young families. It is a sad fact in the UK in 2010 that the CAB are seeing increasing numbers of people falling into fuel poverty

Focus for the Partnership in the forthcoming year 2010/11

The AW Partnership will have the delivery of NI 187 Action Plan in Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire as its underlying focus. We will also be discussing the Sub-regional housing strategy and general funding issues during our meetings in 2010/11

Further information and links:

[Affordable Warmth Partnership](#)

[Gloucestershire Environment Partnership](#)

[Gloucestershire Health and Community Wellbeing Partnership](#)

[Gloucestershire Conference](#)