

# Action for Affordable Warmth Partnership

Notes from Steering Group Meeting  
20<sup>th</sup> February 2004  
Cheltenham Borough Council offices

**Present:** Lisa Jones (S. Glos. Council), Maggie Cornock (Stroud Care & Repair), Kaye Welfare (SWEA), Graham Simmonds (S. Glos. PCT), Barbara Piranty (Glos. Rural Community Council), Sarah Giff (SWEA), Evelyn Nightingale (Pension Service), Phillip Bennett (Cotswold & Vale PCT), Linda Shepherd (Age Concern Gloucestershire), Andrew Banfield (Cheltenham, Cirencester & Tewkesbury CAB), representative from Forest of Dean CAB (outreach).

**Apologies:** Sue Wild (Chelt. & Tewks PCT), Ian Anderson (Glos. County NHS LSP Manager), Mike Redman (Cheltenham BC), Peter Massey and Louise Twinam (NEA), Jessica Howell (Tewkesbury Borough Council), Lynfa Vater (South Glos. Social Services).

**1. Welcome and introduction** - representatives from Age Concern and CABx were welcomed to the Partnership meeting for the first time, along with speaker Eddie Lumley and his assistant from Alpine Environments.

**2. Minutes of last meeting held December 2003** - agreed correct. The fuel poverty maps are now on the Gloucestershire MAIDeN (Multi Agency Information Database for Neighbourhoods) website. South Gloucestershire are also planning to set up a MAIDeN system.

**3. Health impacts of poor housing: Eddie Lumley, Alpine Environments -**

“Half of all Europeans will suffer with allergies by 2015”. This headline appeared in the Guardian recently. Allergies and the link with poor indoor air quality are becoming a hot topic. UK children have the third highest incidence of asthma in the world and 9 bn working days are lost per annum in the EU due to asthma. 80% of asthma cases are said to be caused by allergies. Asthma is estimated to cost the NHS £2bn pa. The UK is particularly badly hit, but why? Outdoor air pollution has been found not to be as big a trigger as indoor air pollution. House dust mites (HDM) are the major trigger - they are breeding at fast rates because of the way our homes are so centrally heated and so moist (due to poor ventilation).

Alpine Environments are involved in projects with various NHS trusts to treat the homes of asthma sufferers to remove HDM and other allergens. (The company is so-called because HDM cannot survive in an alpine environment due to the low relative humidity). Their home treatment includes an anti-static cleaning which removes dust completely, then soft furnishings particularly in bedrooms are steam cleaned to remove and denature the HDM allergen. Mattresses are then sealed to prevent HDM re-entering to lay fresh eggs, starting the cycle over again. Normal pillows are replaced with HDM-proof pillows and heat recovery positive pressure ventilation systems are installed to ensure an adequate rate of air change.

Alpine Environments have worked with PCTs around the UK to deliver home air quality improvements, often in conjunction with Sure Start and Health Action Zone funding.

**4. Working with CABx** - Andrew Banfield from Cheltenham, Cirencester and Tewkesbury CAB outlined the main structure and areas of work at CABx are involved with. CAB is a national operation but with local branches which are run as charities with LA grant funding. Chelt & Tewkes CAB has 4 F/T and 12 P/T staff and 106 volunteers, who are trained as advice workers over a 9 - 12 month course. Advice workers are certified and give advice on English civil law, including:

- Benefits checks and appeals against decisions
- Housing advice
- Employment advice
- Tribunal representation
- Consumer advice
- School appeals support
- Nationality and immigration advice

The CAB can often see 200 clients per day, it's a free service at the point of delivery and they give a lot of telephone-based advice. CAB is a case working organisation rather than a signposting organisation. They are externally audited by Government. Each branch also feeds back into the regional organisation, then to NACAB, the effects of legislation (both positive and negative) through a reporting structure. There have been reports produced on the effects of fuel utility market deregulation on the fuel poor and on vulnerable client groups.

KW asked AB how the training is structured and whether there is any opportunity to provide briefings on local tools for tackling fuel poverty as part of the training? This isn't possible in the basic training programme but briefings at monthly meetings with volunteer advisors would be suitable as these are often part-training sessions too.

There is a basic list of questions that new clients are asked when they first come to CAB - is this an opportunity, after briefing staff and volunteers, to incorporate a fuel poverty type question, and trigger assistance via Warm and Well etc?

In the Forest of Dean there is a CAB outreach service. In September, there is an "advice week" nationally and local CABx organise their own activities. Is this an opportunity to work in partnership on advice provision? In Cirencester in the autumn a benefits take up campaign will be held in conjunction with Cotswold DC - perhaps an opportunity to link in to this event via Gary Packer at Cotswold DC?

The **Community Legal Services Partnership** is a national scheme; Community Legal Services replaced the "legal aid board". CABx has been contracted to provide an advice service for welfare rights and debt as part of this service. The Partnerships consist of local authorities, local solicitors and other advice providers (Age Concern, North Bristol Advice Centre for example).

**Actions:**

- Investigate local Community Legal Services Partnerships and possible link ups
- Cirencester Autumn benefit take up campaign - discuss options for involvement with Gary Packer and Andrew Banfield

- Discuss with CAB contacts the possibility of being involved in briefings for volunteers / paid staff, and incorporating fuel poverty question into initial client assessment

#### **5. Round up of activities / update from partners -**

- Sarah Giff reported that “Active, Warm and Well” training sessions are starting in the West Glos. PCT area
- 24<sup>th</sup> March 2004 is the date for the next round of Boiling Benefits Roadshows with the Pension Service and Gloucestershire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (although none planned in FoD area)
- The CHEAP (Country Homes Energy Action Plan) project is underway in Cotswold and Stroud areas, supported by funding from the Energy Saving Trust’s Innovations Programme, and the project worker is Paul Sheridan (SWEA)
- The Government’s main tool in tackling fuel poverty, the Warm Front grant, is under review to assess how / whether the grant is effectively targeting fuel poverty; this is one of a number of recent reviews preceding the re-tendering of the managing agent contracts (Warm Front in SW England is presently managed by Eaga Partnership Ltd)
- Barbara Piranty mentioned the Rural Community Council’s information days in conjunction with Age Concern, the Glos. EEAC is also involved

#### **Action:**

- Encourage Age Concern representatives to attend Partnership meetings
- Look at ways to target smaller communities via Parish Councils

**Next meeting:** 21<sup>st</sup> May 2004 at Severn Wye Energy Agency, Mitcheldean.