

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 14 APRIL 2015

ANGUS HEAT PROJECT 2015 / 2016 IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SCARF

REPORT BY HEAD OF PLANNING AND PLACE

ABSTRACT

This report summarises the success from the review of Angus HEAT (Home Energy Advice Team) Project 2014/15 and seeks approval of the provision of funding to continue this service to the residents of Angus for 2015/16.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) authorises the Head of Planning and Place (in consultation with the Head of Legal and Democratic Services) to procure the delivery of services in support of the HEAT (Home Energy Advice Team) Project 2015/16 for a further 1 year, with the option to extend for a further 12 months (at the Council's option);
- (ii) approves an exemption under Financial Regulation 16.24.10(G) for the direct award of a contract for this service to SCARF; and
- (iii) approves the allocation of funding totalling £81,277.72 for Angus HEAT Project 15/16, split 50/50 between the Housing Revenue Account and the Affordable Housing Revenue Account, as set out in section 6 of this report.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/COPORATE PLAN

2.1 This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016:

- We have improved the health and wellbeing of our people and inequalities are reduced.
- Individuals are supported in their own communities with good quality services.
- Our communities are developed in a sustainable manner.
- Our natural and built environment is protected and enjoyed.
- Our carbon footprint is reduced.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Fuel poverty in Angus continues to be a major issue and has remained high on the Council's agenda since it produced its initial Fuel Poverty Strategy in 2004. However, mainly due to the dramatic rises in fuel costs over the last few years and with impending welfare cuts, we continue to see fuel poverty levels rise, which brings increased challenges to ensure we minimise the impact on the most vulnerable households in Angus.

3.2 The Government has set a target of eliminating fuel poverty by 2016 so far as reasonably practicable. To meet the increasing challenges of contributing to the achievement of this target, we need to not only consolidate our work but build upon the successes it has established.

- 3.3 In 2013, we were successful in a bid for grant funding of approximately £70,000 from The Big Lottery and its Support and Connect Fund. This enabled us to set up Angus HEAT Project which operated as a complementary service to the services already provided by SCARF (Save Cash And Reduce Fuel) as the Energy Saving Scotland Advice Centre. SCARF already had Service Level Agreements for HEAT projects with other Local Authorities such as Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Perth and Kinross.
- 3.4 This project offered all households in Angus (including Council tenants) free advice and assistance via telephone and e-mail, but crucially, mainly through face-to-face advice. The project highlighted the link between fuel poverty and energy use to householders, and promoted the benefits of adopting energy-efficient behaviour.
- 3.5 The project involved two dedicated officers employed and managed by SCARF, to give all Angus householders advice and assistance regarding fuel debt, fuel tariffs, how to reduce fuel bills, energy advice measures, availability of grants/funding and help to resolve individual debts regarding energy suppliers. The project was aimed at having an inclusive community approach to all areas within Angus offering the same service regardless of age, benefits status or income.
- 3.6 Angus HEAT has proved to be a valuable and well used service during its first year. Bringing clear benefits to fuel poor households, the proposal also brings clear benefits to the Council, assisting its desire to meet its obligation to tackle fuel poverty as detailed in Angus Council's Fuel Poverty Strategy and a major aim in the Local Housing Strategy. Angus HEAT has also enabled the officers to train Angus Council Housing staff on aspects of energy efficiency as well as potential to visit local schools and other organisations to educate about fuel poverty.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 During 2014, SCARF has received 255 enquiries through Angus HEAT with the highest number coming from Arbroath with 50 enquiries. They have surpassed their yearly target for home visits in Angus (140) by approximately 20%. Going forward, if they continued with the current staffing level, they would be looking to achieve a target of 350 home visits. Of the people they have spoken to, 102 were happy to discuss income and fuel spend in the property and 55 of these customers would be classed as in fuel poverty.
- 4.2 Through telephone advice and home visits SCARF has provided 1348 pieces of advice including:-
- General energy efficiency improvements and lifestyle changes;
 - Demonstrating efficient use and control of heating in the home;
 - Reducing impact of condensation and dampness;
 - Providing advice on financial assistance including income maximisation, social tariff checks and access to any other funding streams available to reduce fuel poverty.
- 4.3 Their client interactions have also led to 159 referrals to other agencies for further advice or maintenance works/measures to be completed such as Angus Care & Repair, Home Energy Scotland and Welfare Rights. As around half of the clients are Council housing tenants, a substantial number of the referrals have been to the Council, which has been valuable in identifying effective improvements that can then be made to Council properties for those individual customers to make their homes more comfortable and energy efficient.

5. PROPOSALS

- 5.1 The Angus HEAT project is funded until the 31st March 2015 when The Big Lottery grant runs out. Due to the success of this project and the potential customer base still requiring advice and assistance, we are keen to keep the project running to maximise the benefits.
- 5.2 This proposal sets out to demonstrate the continued requirement for direct energy advice to help tackle the increasing problem of Fuel Poverty. A strong emphasis is placed on SCARF working with our social housing and community group partners to deliver Affordable Warmth for all. The most vulnerable households in our society are often the ones who have the least access to support, and this proposal to extent the Angus HEAT Project would deliver continued direct support through the retention of the two skilled and trained energy advisors.

- 5.3 SCARF and Angus Council have enjoyed a positive working relationship and are looking to build on this partnership as we move forward in 2015/16 and beyond. By engaging with SCARF, the Council has the opportunity to continue to partner a long established organisation with more than 27 years' experience working in the fuel poverty arena, helping to deliver change on an individual level and influencing policy both locally and nationally.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The proposed cost for the continuation of Angus HEAT Project from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 is £81,277.72. This includes two HEAT Energy Advisors, travel and subsistence, administrative support, support service costs and marketing and local promotion of service.
- 6.2 Last years figures showed that there was an approximate 50/50 split between local authority and private sector properties benefiting from the Angus HEAT scheme. It is therefore proposed that the funding be split equally between current resources in the Housing Revenue Account and current resources in the Affordable Housing Revenue Account. If approved, £40,638.86 will be met from each funding source.

NOTE: No background papers, as detailed by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

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