

Chichester District Council

Cabinet

5 September 2023

Energy Advice Service Funding

1. Contacts

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2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the allocation of £60,000 from general fund reserves to fund the Energy Advice Service delivered by Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice(ACCA) for up to 3 years at £20,000 per annum with an annual review built in.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The ACCA Home Energy Advice Service is a one-stop shop for all energy related queries for residents in West Sussex. It seeks to support the most vulnerable in our communities who are in fuel poverty and ensure they are on the correct energy tariffs, reduce their energy bills and maximise their income. It provides light-touch and specialist energy advice through telephone and video. It supports the co-ordination of energy services across West Sussex and is available to all professionals to refer into. Since its introduction in January 2021 it has reached over 3,000 households. Previous to this service being delivered we had an inhouse Home Energy Advice Service funded by Wellbeing funding however, when the worker resigned there was only a small residual of the funding left which was passed to ACCA to deliver the service on our behalf until the funding ran out.
- 3.2 The report in the Appendix suggests there were 4,842 households in Chichester in fuel poverty in 2020 and this has likely increased over the last 3 years. This is the 3rd highest in West Sussex. With the end of the Energy Bill Support Scheme the levels of fuel poverty are expected to rise even further. ACCA undertook a cost of living survey with Arun and Chichester residents in early 2023 and 93% of respondents stated they were most worried about their energy bills and 79% had significantly reduced their energy use.
- 3.3 The service has been funded by West Sussex County Council since April 2023 and employs 2.5 full time equivalent (FTE) posts. With no abatement to the energy price rises it is predicted that demand for the service is going to continue to increase and there is a concern that the current service will not meet the demand and residents will

be left with long wait times before getting support. This funding if agreed it will support options 2 or 3 in the Appendix depending on what other funding is achieved and will enhance the Home Energy Advice service as a whole and fund support exclusively for Chichester residents. The table below shows data from April 1 until end of July 2023 and reports 592 clients were supported during this period.

Reason for support	2023- 24	2023- 24	2023- 24	2023- 24	
	Q1	Q1	Q1	Q2	Total
	April	May	June	July	Total
Fuel (gas, electricity, oil, coal etc.)	114	81	116	112	385
Energy company obligation (ECO)	6	7	5	7	21
Energy efficiency measures (non-ECO)	4	4	1	4	13
Heating systems installation and servicing	1		2		3
Practical Energy efficiency Advice	21	27	17	13	78
Fuel debts	27	24	29	20	92
Total	173	143	170	156	592

4. Outcomes to be achieved

4.1 There are a number of positive outcomes for Chichester residents as outlined below:

- Energy debts can be written off for the most in need and whilst numbers are low Currently at 1 in the last 6 months this is likely to increase and will be life changing For those involved.
- Increase in those supported to maximise income and gained through hardship Schemes, since April 2023 over 70 clients have been supported in this way.
- Wellbeing improvements as residents no longer have to choose between heating Or eating.
- Increased number of installations of simple energy efficiency measures which in turn will support decarbonisation and the climate change agenda.
- A more co-ordinated energy advice delivery across the district.
- More frontline workers and professionals trained to recognise fuel poverty and answer simple energy related queries.
- More virtual and home visits being delivered to residents who are extremely vulnerable.

5. Proposal

5.1 That Cabinet approve the allocation of £60,000 from reserves to support the Energy Advice Service delivered by ACCA for up to 3 years. An annual review to be built in to ensure value for money and to take into account any internal changes to services.

6. Alternatives that have been considered

- 6.1 Do not agree the funding, this could risk vulnerable residents with no support or having to wait for a long period before support and advice is available.
- 6.2 Provide our own energy advice service, which would require time to put in place, be more expensive and require specialist staff.

7. Resource and Legal Implications

- 7.1 There are no significant resource or legal implications except the funding of the service. Any contract monitoring would be completed by the Communities team within existing resource.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The Supporting You and Social Prescribing services have been consulted, all rate the service highly and to date since January 2023 they have made over 600 referrals to this service.
- 8.2 Other West Sussex District and Boroughs have been consulted and despite support for the service 3 have been unable to identify funding sources to commit to this service in the current financial year. The remaining 3 are still exploring their options.

9. Community impact and corporate risks

9.1 Without a core Home Energy service available to the most in need Chichester residents, we risk vulnerable residents having to make the decision on whether to eat or heat their home. Cold, dark homes increase people's risk of premature death, putting further pressure on our local health and wellbeing services and the NHS. Tackling Fuel Poverty is clearly important as part of the response to the cost of living crisis and this bespoke service is essential to the wellbeing of our residents.

9.2 By having an annual review built in this reduces the financial risk to CDC as we can withdraw the funding should we feel the service is not delivering on outcomes or value for money.

10. Other implications

	Yes	No
Crime & Disorder: .		x
Climate Change and Biodiversity: Part of the service is to signpost residents to more energy efficient products and look at reducing carbon emissions.	x	
Human Rights and Equality Impact: Positive impact in supporting vulnerable people.	x	
Safeguarding and Early Help: Positive impact in identification and referral of issues if identified.	x	

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR):		X
Health and Wellbeing Support to maximise income and help with energy bills will improve residents mental and physical wellbeing.	X	

11. Appendices
SPOC – report

12. Background Papers

None