

Issues, Options and Business case for a full-time Home Energy Conservation Officer – 2-year fixed term

Existing Work Streams:

- Chichester Warm Homes Initiative - £228k of funding is currently available through the Chichester Warm Homes Initiative to help those households in fuel poverty with cold, inefficient homes. Applications for the funding are primarily by referral from the p/t Energy Visiting Advisor alongside their principal role of supporting those in fuel poverty. This post is funded by wellbeing with a primary focus on improving health outcomes.
- Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Funding (LAD) was secured to improve 300 homes and a second successful consortium bid has secured additional funding to improve a further 900 homes. Current funding is allocated on a first come first served basis across the consortium area which covers 17 local authorities across the south and south east. A dedicated officer to deal with this area of work would enable more effective resident engagement and increased targeted promotion to ensure as many Chichester residents' and landlords are encouraged and supported to access the funding as possible. Additional funding opportunities have been confirmed by the Government up until March 2023; however staff resources will be required to produce bids and deliver projects.
- The Government has launched the first wave of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and has appealed for housing providers to work in partnership with local authorities to bid for funds to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. Early indications suggest there are likely to be several further phases of funding and therefore it will be necessary to promote these opportunities to registered providers and work collaboratively with them as required to write and place bids.
- Low Carbon Chichester (LCC) funding from Linden via Homes England (c.250k). This is in the existing Climate Change Action Plan – it does not necessarily need to be used in the domestic sector, but it will not cover salary costs or skills training. There has been slow progress in accessing the Low Carbon Chichester Fund due to legal changes within Linden Homes.

Issue:

- The Council has committed to an area-wide target to reduce carbon by 10% (approximately 64,500 tonnes per year) year on year until 2025. To date the reductions achieved through government and local schemes have been in the double and treble figures leaving a huge gap to fill in the coming years. The Council has been successful in bidding for two rounds of government funding with more monies being available later this year and also in coming years.

However the main issue has been recruiting householders and landlords to participate.

- The most recent property condition survey undertaken in March 2020 estimated that 12,107 dwellings in the private sector stock had un-insulated cavity walls and 7,232 homes had less than 100mm of loft insulations. Furthermore 6,535 of homes were estimated to have an Energy Performance Rating below 'E', which is the lowest standard. The survey also showed that 12% of all private sector properties had a serious health and safety, with 9% of those being attributable to an Excess Cold hazard.
- Delivery of energy efficiency and low carbon measures across the district's housing stock has been limited in recent years due to the lack of funding available. However now that government funding has been considerably increased more effective promotion is required to maximise our resident reach. The Energy Visiting Officer based in the Wellbeing Team is part-time and funded by health, with a focus on improving health outcomes, rather than increasing the energy efficiency of the district's stock.
- The Government has announced there will be additional funding streams available later this year running up until March 2023. The successful delivery of new schemes requires highly effective resident engagement. Furthermore if we wish to consider bidding for new funding streams to be spent solely in Chichester, officer expertise and time is required to both work up the bids and promote the schemes.
- Funding for the Chichester Warm Homes Initiative (£228,000) has already been approved by full Council as part of the Housing Standards Financial Assistance and Enforcement Policy with the aim of reducing fuel poverty and excess cold hazards as a priority. This assistance ideally needs to be promoted along with the government schemes to encourage greater take-up and enable funding to be blended.
- There is currently no single point of contact and representative at the West Sussex Affordable Warmth Partnership where funding opportunities, new technologies and delivery barriers are discussed.
- Despite recent funding sources being available for energy efficiency and low carbon measures the main barrier to successful delivery has been the lack of resident/landlord awareness which has seen application numbers remain low.

Options

- The challenge for CDC when trying to deliver external funding to as many Chichester residents as possible is the lack of a dedicated Home Energy Conservation post in the Housing team to tackle domestic energy efficiency given the capital funds currently available for works. The officer would provide valuable resident engagement to increase grant take-up along with the knowledge and skills to influence landlords with low performing properties. A primary focus would be the large rural estate landlords as well as our social housing providers.

- A full-time post would cost c.£40k and would need longer than 1 year to adequately pilot the post. All aspects of domestic energy conservation to be covered, not just fuel poverty / health. Housing's view is that the role should have a focus on working with landlords with larger portfolios and the rural estates as well as delivery of successful funding bids through the development of promotional campaigns. This should include face to face dialogue with residents and attendance at parish council meetings and resident groups and would enable CDC to raise awareness of available funding, answer resident concerns and identify barriers to delivery.
- Try to combine CDC specific funding (Warm Homes Initiative and Low Carbon Chichester) to simplify administration and work with all available funding streams according to best fit for a project.
- Further option of a skills fund being delivered by Economic Development Service through the Grants and Concessions Scheme or through the Sussex Sustainable Business Partnership.
- External funding has been successfully obtained to train a member of CDC staff to project manage retrofit installations including undertaking whole house surveys prior to installs for the non-able to pay market. Once this service becomes operational there is the option to explore expanding this service if there is demand.

Preferred Officer Option:

- Recruitment of a new Home Energy Efficiency Officer post (full-time) on a 2 year fixed term contract as part of a pilot project. This would be a Grade D/E post (subject to evaluation) at a cost of £34,138-£41,950 (including NI and pension costs) along with an annual car allowance of £1,239 plus expenses.

Details of the post:

- The post holder will be expected to have a thorough understanding and technical knowledge of domestic energy efficiency and low carbon technologies. The officer will be innovative, possess enthusiasm and drive to bring about improvements in the residential sector through the use of education, advice and promoting grant funding.
- This additional resource will increase the capacity to raise resident awareness and engagement, maximising the take-up of grant funding wherever possible. The officer would also focus on working with registered providers and large estate landlords, assisting them to take full advantage of any future funding opportunities.

The main priorities for the post to achieve are:

- Develop a promotional strategy to increase the uptake of grant funding schemes and renewable energy sources.

- Increase resident confidence and trust of eco schemes and the installation of low carbon measures through education, support and advice and by interacting with residents at parish council meetings, local organisations, and volunteer and community groups. This will help to identify delivery barriers and ensure solutions are quickly found and implemented.
- Develop a strategy for residents who are deemed 'hard to reach' i.e. unaware of schemes, how to apply for them, lack confidence in selecting contractors and unable to prepare their homes for works to be done.
- Build relationships with landlords including rural estate landlords and social housing providers to increase awareness of funding available to themselves and their tenants. Provide support and work collaboratively with housing providers to develop and place bids for funding. Engage with private sector landlords to promote the benefits of such improvements.
- Evaluate the benefits of developing a formal partnership with Warmer Sussex who provide retro-fitting services for the able to pay market. By promoting their services it may provide the opportunity for CDC to utilise their accredited list of installers for the low income market.