

Appendix 2 – Extension of the Warm & Well Borders project by 12 months and the establishment of a Fuel Poverty Intervention Fund

1. Proposal to fund a 12 month extension to the Warm & Well Borders Scheme

The latest housing condition survey (2016-18) showed 29% of Scottish Borders households were in fuel poverty, with 15% living in extreme fuel poverty. This is in comparison with 25% of households in Scotland in fuel poverty and 11% extreme fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is exacerbated by a number of specific factors affecting properties and households in the Scottish Borders, including: a larger proportion of dwellings built before 1945, the rurality of the Scottish Borders meaning more dwellings are off gas, a larger percentage of older households and a low wage economy. The links between fuel poverty and wellbeing are also well known, fuel poverty can have a severe effect on cold related ill health and personal wellbeing, particularly amongst vulnerable households, and people on low incomes. We also know that a large number of households in the Scottish Borders fall into these categories, and that many of them live in older, hard to treat properties, which are difficult to insulate.

Scottish Borders Council secured two years of funding to the amount of £551,000, from National Grid's Warm Homes Fund to deliver the Warm and Well Borders Scheme. The scheme is a multi-agency approach to reducing fuel poverty, improving energy efficiency of homes, and improving the health and well-being of the most vulnerable households in the Borders. Warm and Well Borders targets vulnerable groups to provide support and advocacy, and to tackle fuel poverty.

The proposed 12 month extension of the Warm and Well Borders Scheme will be delivered through a partnership between Scottish Borders Council and three local Citizens Advice Bureaus but will also work closely with Home Energy Scotland, Changeworks health and social care teams and community health organisations.

To date the scheme has been successful in helping those in fuel poverty access additional support. Between April 2020 and June 2021 365 households have been supported with £562,000 of financial savings and benefits realised.

The current scheme employs 6 FTE across Changeworks and 3 Citizens Advice Bureaus across the Borders offering energy advice and income maximisation. The current project is due to conclude in February 2022.

Recommendation:

The current funder, National Grid's Warm Homes Fund, has confirmed that at this time there is no scope to fund an extension to the project, however project partners and the Borders Home Energy Forum have recognised there would be significant benefit in continuing the project.

Extending the project, on reduced FTE, would ensure the current levels of support could be maintained. Officers are therefore recommending that £60k be allocated to continue the project in partnership with CAB, which offers the best "cost vs return" ratio. CAB can offer income maximisation advice and can identify if fuel poverty is an issue. In these circumstances CAB will also make a referral to Home Energy Scotland & Changeworks who can then offer the client energy advice, further referral to EES:ABS or Warmer Homes Scotland scheme (or indeed to SBC to access the proposed Fuel Poverty Intervention Fund).

Summary of Benefits:

- Extension would secure the FTE that were recruited and trained by CAB. These staff have had bespoke training and development invested in them and are already delivering across the region and supporting those most at need.

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- The CAB model costs £5,000 per month to staff and manage. The scheme could be extended for 12 months at a cost of £60,000. Based on run rate achieved to date, this could see a potential additional £250,000+ savings realised and 150+ households in fuel poverty assisted.
- The proposed extension would dovetail with the current funding expiry date. There would be no development, training or recruitment required. This offers a seamless extension to the scheme, jobs and service levels are maintained.
- There is a rigorous reporting structure in place that can be maintained to allow the continued success of the scheme to be tracked and monitored. In addition, to bring this funding award into line with participatory budgeting and evaluate the effectiveness of the approaches adopted, feedback will be actively sought from those being supported on how the assistance is working and how they can/should be supported in the longer term.