

## **Fuel poverty case study: Cornwall**

### **Overview of fuel poverty in Cornwall**

In Cornwall we have found that working in partnership has been vital in tackling fuel poverty. The Cornwall Sustainable Energy Partnership (CSEP) together with the eight Cornish councils and other partners has had very positive effects in reducing fuel poverty throughout Cornwall.

Fuel poverty occurs when households are unable to heat their homes adequately without spending a disproportionate amount of income on fuel.

Evidence has shown that Cornwall suffers from the worst fuel poverty in the south west and furthermore the rate of excess winter deaths in Cornwall is significantly higher than in England and Wales.

It appears likely that the contributory factors to fuel poverty in the county are:

- the high number of older, detached properties
- hard to treat properties
- lack of mains gas in large parts of the county
- large numbers of privately rented accommodation
- households on low income

North Cornwall District Council (NCDC) has already implemented a fuel poverty and energy efficiency strategy for dealing with the North Cornwall area while the Cornwall Energy Partnership is currently working on a Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency Action Plan for the whole of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

### **Tackling fuel poverty in Cornwall**

In 1995, the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority made a grant of £300,000 available to district councils so that central heating and insulation measures could be installed in selected homes where children were suffering from asthma. A study showed that asthma symptoms improved dramatically as a result of the work, and children had less time off school (an average of 0.6 days over the following three months, compared to 4.1 days for the same period before the measures).

#### **'Home Health'**

Following on from the above work, CSEP developed a programme referred to as 'Home Health' whereby householders in areas that have been identified as having high levels of social deprivation are offered free energy efficiency measures. Such measures include cavity wall insulation, loft insulation and in some cases free central heating systems and condensing boilers. Free 'energy efficient' compact fluorescent light bulbs are also provided. The measures are part funded by utility companies as part of the Energy Efficiency Commitment imposed upon them by the UK Government, with the balance coming from local authorities and/or regeneration schemes such as Neighbourhood Renewal and the Single Regeneration Budget.

The success of the scheme has relied heavily upon working with the community in holding awareness raising events and using trusted organisations or individuals to provide recommendations or referrals. An important role is provided by the health authority and referrals from medical GPs play a key role in helping many of the most vulnerable to come forward for assistance. This is particularly important as it has been recognised that the most vulnerable are usually the least likely to come forward for help.

To provide further support to the scheme the county council, in 2003, negotiated funding with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). This was part of a 'local public service agreement' to fund the management of expanding the Home Health projects and tackling key areas around the county. The funding was directed toward achieving specific targets over a three-year period. Success in attaining the targets is linked to reward funding from the ODPM and this will be focused on tackling fuel poverty in Cornwall.

As an incentive to encourage take-up of insulation installations a holistic package was devised so that other services could be offered to the poor and vulnerable. These included free home security checks, advice on government benefits, and referrals to charities. In the period up to March 2005, there were a large number of referrals to charities associated with helping the elderly, the young, and those with disabilities. In this way we could ensure that insulation was installed where the household may not have requested it if it was the only measure on offer. The package gave the scheme greater credibility due to the range of organisations and charities involved. The package also offered less disruption to the residents and was a more joined-up and efficient way for partners to deliver competing projects. It also created an opportunity for the team to give fuel poverty training to other service providers and to set up cross-referral networks.

### **Renewal funding for energy efficiency**

Along side the above scheme a consortium bid was submitted to the South West Housing Board on behalf of NCDC and four of the other Cornish district councils by CSEP. North Cornwall District Council had already been running an innovative and successful zero interest loan scheme to fund energy efficiency improvements for several years (funded by the Energy Savings Trust HEC Action programme). The funding from the consortium bid enabled further loan schemes to be developed and aimed at those particularly in fuel poverty. NCDC has been able to assist homeowners and landlords with tenants in fuel poverty to install energy efficient central heating. All authorities have contributed through the renewal funding and officer time to finding ways of reducing fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency within the county.

### **Local authorities have carried out mail outs**

Mail outs from some of the authorities have been successful in publicising installation of insulation measures and the various loans and grants that may be available. Some have sent out newsletters and other authorities have sent mail outs through the benefits sections. These will be continued in the future.

### **District roadshows**

Two Local Authorities have undertaken Road Shows with varied success and with the assistance of CEP. Schemes have been publicised and residents given an opportunity to discuss any issues.

## **Training of frontline staff**

At least one local authority has organised training to brief any staff from the various partners involved. Staff targeted are those who are likely to visit the homes of the poor and vulnerable so that they can inform and advise these residents of what is available and who to contact for more information and financial assistance. More training of staff is planned for the future in combination with partnership organisations.

## **Aims and objectives**

The overall aim is:

- to reduce and prevent physical and mental ill health and early deaths caused by fuel poverty and reduce health inequalities and promote wellbeing throughout Cornwall

In order to achieve this our objectives are and have been:

- to gather precise and relevant data to enable accurate targeting of resources to those most in need
- to provide the residents of Cornwall with energy efficient and decent dwellings with fuel costs that are affordable
- to provide residents with accessible, reliable, accurate and easily understood advice and information about energy efficiency and affordable warmth
- to encourage landlords to install affordable heating, insulation and other measures to help remove their tenants from fuel poverty

## **Methodology**

The partnership is continually looking at the most effective methodologies for tackling fuel poverty in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and so this is an ever changing subject open to new suggestions and new technologies.

'The Energy Strategy for Cornwall' launched in July 2004 contains actions agreed by the partners:

- creating a Geographical Information Systems (GIS) map based database on levels of fuel poverty and energy efficiency of the housing stock within Cornwall
- consultation responses to the Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency Action Plan (FPEEAP) are being collated. Some of the local authorities have already used the document to assist targeting and development of new Home Health projects
- targeting is essential so all partners are tasked to identify priority areas for action
- the Home Health programme continues to be rolled out to other parts of Cornwall and further work is being developed to progress 'Home Health Plus' for private rented sector housing
- CSEP submitted a proposal for allocation of LPSA1 and this reward funding will be used to develop new Home Health projects across Cornwall from 2006 onwards

- technical solutions are being reviewed with regard to hard to treat properties in Cornwall, ie, those off-gas, solid-walled and 'Cornish units'. Cornwall has been selected as one of five key areas to pilot a new Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Pathfinder project. The project will involve the installation of renewable energy and low carbon technologies as a method of reducing fuel poverty in hard to treat homes
- development is underway of a set of indicators for measuring progress on the action plan and linking these with existing performance measures used in the county
- a new Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA2) now known as Local Area Agreements (LAAs) stretch target has been submitted for consideration relating to renewable energy and if successful will have considerable bearing on improving fuel poverty in the future, bearing in mind the rising energy costs and increased dependency on expensive imported fuels

## **Outcomes**

Cornwall is well on the way to:

- meeting targets set by the UK Government for reducing fuel poverty
- reducing and preventing physical and mental ill health and early deaths caused by fuel poverty and reducing health inequalities and promoting well being
- improving energy efficiency in domestic properties and tackling fuel poverty whilst making substantial carbon savings
- gathering precise and relevant data to enable accurate targeting of resources to those most in need
- providing the residents of Cornwall with energy efficient and decent dwellings with fuel costs that are affordable
- providing residents with accessible, reliable, accurate and easily understood advice and information about energy efficiency and affordable warmth
- helping remove residents from fuel poverty
- developing and investigating renewable and sustainable technologies to provide affordable heating for residents in Cornwall

A key achievement is the development of a sustainable energy strategy for Cornwall.

## **Knock on effects**

The knock on effects are already being experienced eg, a major insulation company (Miller Pattison) has opened a depot in Cornwall and recruited locally as a result of the work generated by the Home Health projects. Other opportunities likely for local people eg, more plumbers and electricians will be required, there will be job creation in all the energy fields, local training of workforce, creation of business opportunities and local employment opportunities etc.

## **Projects that will have positive effects on fuel poverty in Cornwall, now and in the future**

### **Sustainable and renewable energy technologies**

These are already being advanced in the county for example 'Air Source Heat Pumps'. Community Energy Plus (CEP) is partnering with Carrick District Council, Carrick Housing and Kensa Engineering on a pre-Pathfinder pilot project to retrofit air source heat pumps in five off-gas homes in Carrick District. A remote control monitoring system in one of the homes will provide valuable data that will be used to inform the Cornwall Pathfinder projects.

### **Local Area Agreement (LAA) stretch target**

CSEP is developing a second generation [Local Public Service Agreement](#) target to increase the take-up of renewable energy measures in homes. The target is currently being considered by Cornwall's five Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). Renewable energies are likely to be more affordable in the future due to costs of other fuels escalating.

### **Promotion of renewable energy technologies in buildings**

#### **Positive learning points**

We have found that working in distinct geographic communities ie, whole villages and towns is useful and very productive:

- mapping based on latest deprivation and housing statistics has assisted targeting of measures to those most in need
- press releases have generated responses as have face-to-face contact. Weekend launch events have proved very popular and providing these occur within the zoned area may increase take-up
- repetition and follow-up calls or visits to residents are invaluable
- residents need to be familiar with the organisations involved and as CEP is becoming better known in the districts and their contact details more readily available people are becoming more trusting and wanting to know more
- the community outreach function has been of greatest value for accessing 'hard to reach' households
- consortium meetings help project development – information and ideas exchange between all partners
- residents like to see a quick and efficient response to their enquiries and generally we have been able to do this

## Contact details

**Name** Joanna Harrison  
**Address** Cornwall County Council, New County Hall, Truro  
**Telephone** 01872 323406  
**Email** [beacon@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:beacon@cornwall.gov.uk)  
**Website** [www.cornwall.gov.uk/beacon](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/beacon)