



# THAW Orkney Annual Review 2024

*SCIO SC045272*

**‘To work for households in all Orkney communities  
to reduce levels of fuel poverty and achieve  
affordable warmth’**

## Chair's Report

Welcome to the latest Annual Review from THAW Orkney.

The year 2023/24 has again been a busy year for THAW Orkney and its staff. The ongoing cost of living crisis has meant our staff have been supporting many clients struggling with the impact of both the energy crisis and increased costs of everyday items. We were successful in securing additional outreach funding from Advice UK in addition to our continuing core funding which meant we could work towards improving our links with households in the isles.

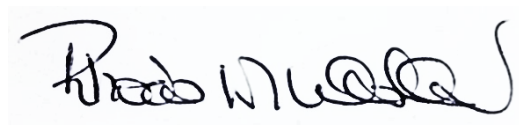
At the time of writing, we are in September 2024 and are delighted to have secured additional National Lottery and Cost of Living funding to supplement our team over the winter. THAW has also taken on administration of the Cash-First fund and a new Orkney-Wide referral platform within the Orkney Money Matters partnership which aims to provide improved access to advice and financial support in our community.

Despite the very welcome funding boosts our staff remain our biggest asset and a huge thank you must go to them from myself and the Board for everything they have achieved over the last months.

So, the headlines for the year 2023/24 are:

- THAW has provided support, including access to energy advice and financial gains, to 652 households, a 44% increase on last year.
- THAW's clients gained financial support totalling £277,107, a 157% increase on last year.

I hope you enjoy the Annual Review and the information collated in it and can use it to aid decision making in whatever remit you hold.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rhoda Walker', written in a cursive style.

Rhoda Walker

## Our Team

THAW Orkney as a charity has people at its heart. Every staff and board member brings their own passions and creativity to the team, but care and equity is central to all our work. Our staff members will always do their best to support everyone. We wanted to take this opportunity to thank the staff and highlight some of their personal achievements this year.

### Fraser Cheyne, Energy Support Adviser (from July 2024)

As our newest member of staff, Fraser has been using his skills in outreach to pick up several loose ends and is already making in-roads with wider events and isles connections.

### Leslie Sinclair, Business Support Officer (from June 2024)

As an itinerant letter writer, Leslie has easily found his place checking reports, policies and procedures across the organisation. He has already magnanimously taken the reins of the legendary staff handbook.

### Ellie Lott, Energy Support Adviser (from April 2024)

Always smiling, Ellie ensures the office has a dose of Kiwi sunshine, whilst also quietly picking up important fixes that need sorted. She is one of the very few that successfully keeps her caseload levels tightly managed.

### Kendall Pyke, HR Adviser (from February 2024)

As our remote adviser for all things HR, Kendall ensures we are keeping staffing and policies up to date. Major successes include ensuring contracts are being issued correctly!

### Carolyn Tunbridge, Facilities and Administration Officer (from February 2024)

As our part-time bookkeeper, Carolyn keeps the finances under control; typically, she is so efficient that she is often asking for additional duties even on half days.

### Dorothy O'Donnell, Energy Support Adviser & Business Support Lead

It is always a joy to hear Dot slowly, calmly, even pleasantly, take apart a patronising adviser from an energy supplier. Both staff and clients are very happy to have Dot in their arsenal, with her skills porting very effectively onto dealing with phone and broadband contracts.

### Ewan Mansley, Energy Support Adviser & Team Lead

Now our longest running ESA, Ewan's dulcet tones can keep almost everyone calm whilst simultaneously suggesting more constructive pathways of travel; quite a knack. He has been impressively juggling caseload whilst also onboarding and supporting several new ESA team members.

### Michael Butler, Innovation and Development Lead

Michael is always on the cusp of, but not quite, making everything work smoothly so that he has less to do. Successes include several successful funding bids and pushing progress towards many of the strategy goals.

We'd also like to take the opportunity to thank staff members who left us at the end of this year. These multi-talented Energy Support team members include **Cathy Laing**, **Jonathan Ford** and **Margaret Jones** who will be missed by staff and clients alike; their contributions have been key to support over the past year. **Gill Couper-Swanney**, our FAO until November 2023, receives thanks for her long service at THAW.

Finally, we need to thank our fantastic board who have worked tirelessly this year to ensure that THAW not only continues to support our clients but grows towards a more sustainable future. Thanks goes to the management team - **Rhoda Walker**, **Caroline Butterfield** and **Gerry O'Brien**, who led the organisation from June 2022, with much gratitude to Gerry who stepped down following long service. As always huge appreciation for Caroline Butterfield who stepped back into the treasurer position at the last minute.

## Our clients

As described above, our focus is on care and equity, so our clients are first and foremost people within our community that need help, whatever their situation, demographic or personality. We do not want to leave anyone behind and wish to treat everyone with the same respect. However, we also know that some of our clients will be left behind, whether for economic, social or logistical reasons; this section aims to explore which intersections of identity are most at risk of fuel poverty.

Please note that the statistics provided below are for THAW clients, so will be only showing details for people who have reached out to THAW for support or been at THAW outreach events; it is therefore likely to be more focussed on households struggling the most.

### Overall trends

	Last year (22/23)	This year (23/24)	Change
Average fuel poverty level (including underheating within the calculation)	55%	50%	5% reduction
Proportion in extreme fuel poverty (>20%)	81%	73%	8% reduction
Proportion with no income after fuel (>90%)	14%	16%	2% increase

Number of households supported	454	652	44% increase
Proportion of support for isles clients	8%	13%	5% Increase

In general, trends have improved over the last year, in part due to the use of the price cap as well as improvements to income for some clients. THAW benefited from stable funding and staffing during the year, as well as significant amounts of funding available to support clients, which is reflected in the positive figures. Although it is positive that we have had increased capacity, it is also a sign of increased demand. Support funds are likely to become more restricted in 24/25 with the closing of the Home Heating Support Fund and finish of funds at the end of the LACER project in March 2024.

### Geographical trends

Geographical distribution is similar to last year, with most of our clients resident in Kirkwall due to our location, the larger population size and the presence of a high concentration of social housing. Overall fuel poverty levels for our clients have slightly reduced this year, with average levels at 50%, but still higher levels found in the South isles. We have significantly increased our support in the North Isles; this was facilitated by our outreach officer Jonathan Ford through the Advice in Accessible Settings project.

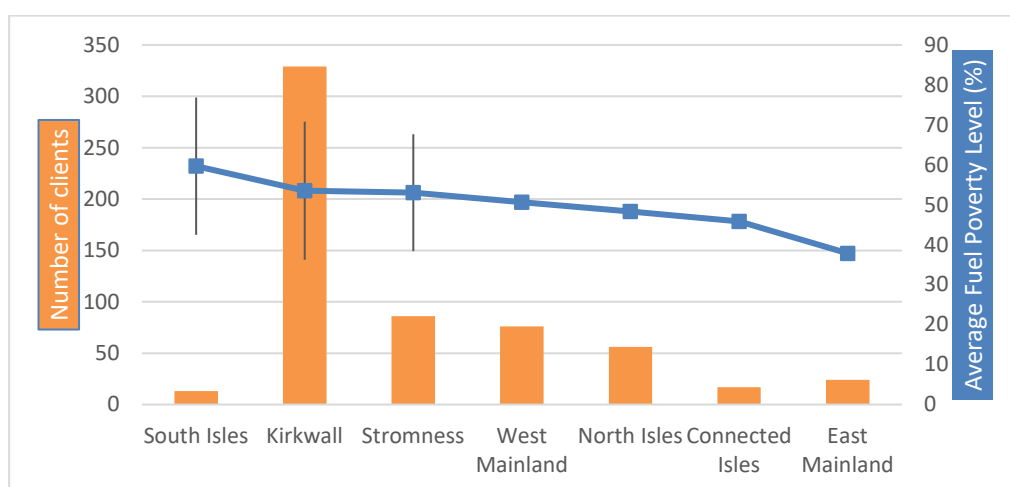


Figure 1: Fuel poverty levels and number of clients by area (tax year 23/24)

## Tenancy and employment trends

We have had a reduction in the proportion of social housing tenants (from 75% to 64%), correlating with a higher proportion of support for homeowners. Average fuel poverty levels continue to be highest for tenants in emergency accommodation and private tenancies, with significantly lower levels for OHAL tenants who benefit from newer housing stock.

Our clients continue primarily to be on benefits or not working (42%), but we also see 27% of our clients are in-work or self-employed; of these, half are part-time.

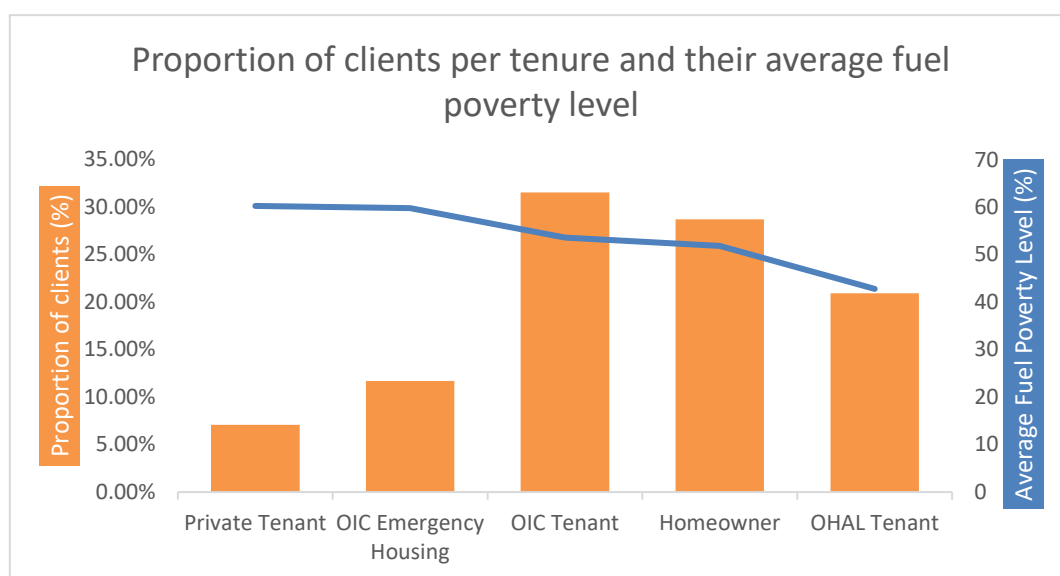


Figure 2: Number of clients per tenure and their average fuel poverty level (tax year 23/24)

## Client Feedback

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*"Thank you so much for all your hard work on my behalf - next time you are out we can look at the new heater in lounge that I said was too expensive to run – now [I'll] be able to use it this winter if necessary - cannot imagine being warm in winter it has been so long since I could afford heating"*

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*"[Your] support made a huge difference and a very positive impact"*

*"Thank you very much for your support and understanding"*

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## Service Provision and Funding: A Partnership Approach

### British Gas Energy Trust

The British Gas Energy Trust provided funding from 2022-2024 and THAW have also successfully secured funding for 2024-2026. The stability from BGET funding has ensured that core funds were available for administration and Energy Support Advisers; this year the project primarily supported Cathy Laing and Ewan Mansley as ESAs. The project works with Orkney CAB to provide a benefits adviser to support clients. It also funds energy efficiency measures, efficient household appliances, emergency heating sources and a small number of larger energy efficiency measures.

### Robertson Trust

The Robertson Trust have continued to provide funding to THAW up until July 2024; we have since received notice that our application for continuing funds has been accepted for another 3 years. Margaret Jones continued in this valuable role over 2023/24, supporting some of our most vulnerable clients. The fund continues to provide support for clients with additional mental and physical health needs. Work continues with partners in NHS and other health-related third sector organisations to join up support for all clients; again this work continues to link with projects through both Energy Action Scotland (EAS) and Advice UK.

### Orkney Money Matters

From January 2023 until March 2024, we received funding from the LACER fund via the Orkney Money Matters project, which employed 2 ESAs. Dorothy O'Donnell and Ewan Mansley filled these roles until Oct 2023, when Ewan moved across to BGET-funded work and Michael Butler started work on innovation and development. The project focussed on emergency financial support, including energy vouchers, crisis grants and other 'cash-first' support required during an emergency. It complemented longer-term support provided by several partner organisations, including CAB, Blide Trust and the Scottish Welfare Fund. The OMM project provided £75k for energy vouchers and £25k for a 'Flexible fund' to support access to national schemes through repairs or funds for energy efficiency measures. Most vouchers and efficiency measures were installed during this tax year, resulting in significant support for clients.

From May 2024 the Orkney Money Matters partnership continues through matched funding from Scottish Government Cash-first, Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund and the National Lottery (see below). These funds have supported implementation of a joint cash-first pathway and referral system (Cash-first), outreach staffing (all funds) as well as staff training in EPC/Retrofit Assessment and thermal imaging (Lottery).

### Advice in Accessible Settings

The Advice UK funded Advice in Accessible Settings project provided a part-time Energy Support Officer from July 2023 to support outreach to the isles and more remote communities on Orkney mainland. This built upon outreach work developed during spring and summer 2023 for an exhibition and connected events around the links between sustainable development and energy support. The AiAS project developed links with community groups in collaboration with a part-time Orkney CAB adviser, particularly in terms of attendance at local events and working with Wellbeing Coordinators. This work continues in partnership with outreach within the Orkney Money Matters project.

### Live Well

The Energy Action Scotland funded 'Live Well' project extended the Aiming Beyond Cancer project from previous years to help 19 households with a life-limiting condition access energy efficient white goods.

### National Lottery

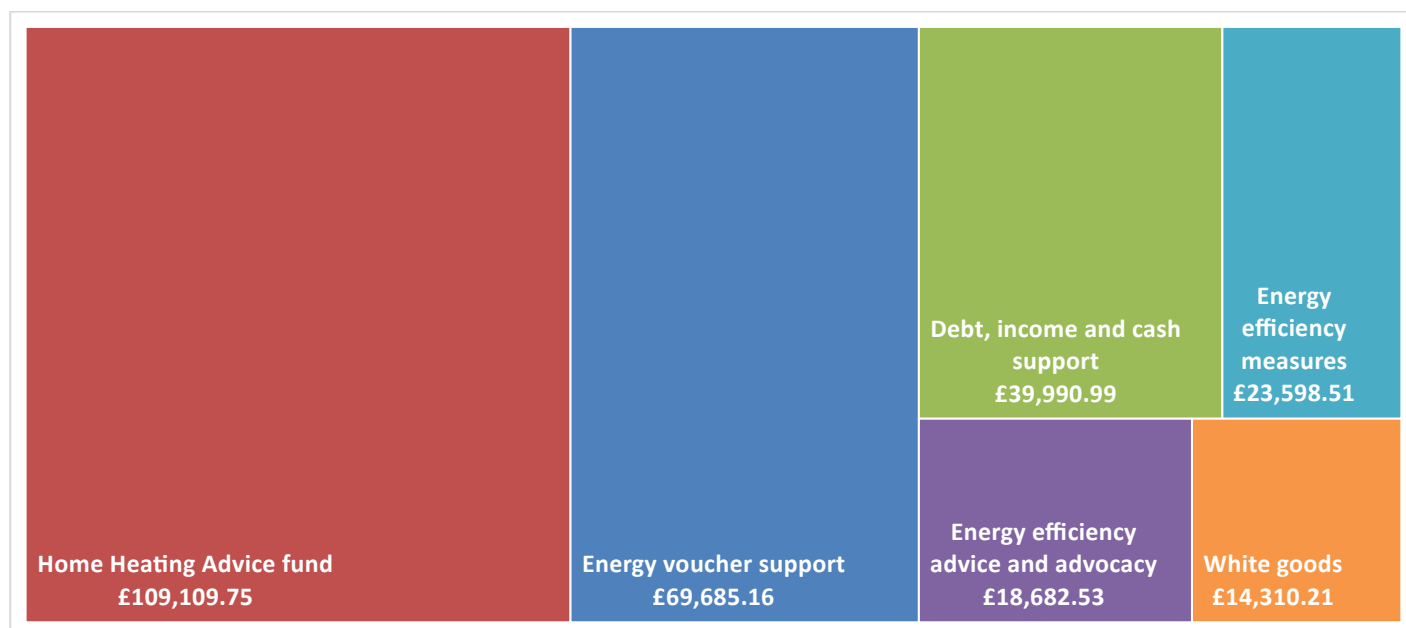
At the end of 2023/24 we received notice that our National Lottery bid for 2024/25 had been successful. This project will be focussing on outreach to the isles and supporting wider access to support.

## Financial and energy efficiency support

### Overall trends

	Last year (22/23)	This year (23/24)	Change
Total financial gains	£107,706	£277,107	157% increase
Total direct cash support (energy)	£83,000	£178,794	215% increase
Total direct cash support (other)	£8,237	£39,991	486% increase
Energy efficiency support (installs & advice)	£10,292	£42,281	411% increase

Overall support has increased substantially since last year. However, this is primarily due to several funds which are no longer available, meaning financial support is likely to be much more restricted in 2024/25.



The graphic above outlines the amount of financial support provided by THAW Orkney staff between April 2023 and March 2024. Total support for the period was £277,107, with more than £220k of direct financial support. This year saw an increase in the level of cash support (almost £40k), which included £26,163 to reduce energy debts. It is also notable that there was a significant increase in energy efficiency installations, primarily used for gap-filling measures not available on national schemes (e.g. air-air heat pumps) or provision of repairs to support access to these schemes.

The majority of energy financial support was provided through the following funds:

- Home Heating Support Fund (previously the Home Heating Advice Fund, now closed) - £109k
- Orkney Money Matters Flexible Energy Fund (administered by THAW, now closed) - £64,947
- Fuelbank Foundation vouchers - £16,481
- British Gas Energy Trust vouchers - £10,271

The Home Heat Support Fund and Orkney Money Matters fund allowed THAW to assist clients with vouchers and energy debt relief for all meter and fuel types (e.g. Oil or solid fuel). This flexibility significantly lessened the impact of continuing high energy costs for many of our households, both by supporting the clearance of energy debts and providing vouchers for continuing usage costs.

Along with the increase in cash support, THAW also significantly increased practical energy efficiency support, primarily through a proportion of Orkney Money Matters funds being available for repairs and upgrades that supported gap-filling of the national schemes, providing £14,567. In addition, energy efficiency advice reduced household costs by at least £13.5k in the year, as well as over £5k from challenging bills.

THAW Orkney continues to provide the Cosy Home Packs (CHPs), which have proved very effective as emergency measures for households in fuel poverty. This year we have distributed 176 thermal items, 108 LED bulbs and 64 plug-in heaters. Additional support has been available for white goods and cooking appliances as part of the BGET project, EAS Live Well project as well as the THAW cosy home pack fund, which to year-end had provided £14,310 of goods.

## Home Visits and Outreach Sessions

### Overall trends

	Last year (22/23)	This year (23/24)	Change
Energy efficiency surveys (desktop)	348	394	13% Increase
Home visits	164	307	87% increase

With the team stability this year, home visits and outreach sessions have continued to increase. The team have continued to participate in events in the isles and across Orkney mainland, in addition being involved at the larger agricultural shows in the county and at school wellbeing fairs. This included being picked by the winning team at the KGS Young Philanthropy Institute event.

The Advice in Accessible Settings project has been very successful in focussing capacity on supporting access for households in the isles. Although this has resulted in an increased proportion of North Isles clients, the work continues in the coming year to ensure better access for south isles, connected isles and more remote areas of mainland. This is being coordinated with the Orkney Money Matters project to ensure access to emergency as well as long term advice.



# Strategy: Achieving affordable warmth in Orkney

For THAW Orkney, and many other Third Sector agencies in Orkney, the cost of living crisis has caused greater pressures on households and staff. Even with the energy price cap reducing energy costs, many have been forced to choose between heating or eating. High energy usage locally, particularly for those with electric heating, continues to mean that future increases in tariff rate will increase strain on households as we come into winter 2024.

Managing energy usage in the home is one way that households in Orkney will be able to survive this winter without adequate levels of support from elsewhere, including statutory services and the Third Sector. THAW Orkney is looking to how we can ensure local households are more resilient in the face of energy tariff fluctuations as well as changes in income.

The picture last year was bleak; fortunately, the price cap and multiple options for direct cash support over the winter lessened the blow for our clients over winter 2023/24. However, as can be seen in our statistics, we have supported a larger number of households and are finding that a greater proportion are needing to use most of their income to keep adequately warm.

THAW's purpose is to reduce levels of fuel poverty and achieve affordable warmth across all Orkney communities. As mapped to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (right), we have been developing partnerships to ensure inclusive planning and implementation of affordable, 'sustainable warmth' interventions in partnership with households and communities. In other words, we want to support everyone to access improved housing whilst increasing household and community ownership and control of energy assets.

## Priorities and actions

Our priorities to reach these goals were set out in our draft strategy, produced in summer 2023.

THAW have already made progress on many of these priorities, which included:

1. Planning and Inclusion
2. (Digital) Infrastructures
3. Retrofit (and rebuild) pathways
4. Funding and incomes
5. Energy generation, distribution and control
6. Capacity and skills

THAW Orkney's charitable **purpose** is:

***"To work for households in all Orkney communities to reduce levels of fuel poverty and achieve affordable warmth."***

With this purpose in mind THAW's **goals** are to:

*Develop **partnerships** and processes to ensure fair planning and implementation*

*In partnership with **all households and community organisations***

*To achieve **affordable, sustainable warmth***



Reduce energy inequalities, including health, gender and geographical inequities, by engaging clients in system change



Provide access to energy advocacy for all via effective, accountable & inclusive institutions



Strengthen the means of implementation and partnerships



End energy poverty in all its forms in Orkney\*



Ensure high-quality inclusive and equitable energy efficiency education



Increasing community design and ownership of energy generation/usage



Ensure access to affordable, resilient, sustainable and modern energy for all



Build resilient energy support infrastructure, promoting inclusive & sustainable innovation



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts through our work to combat fuel poverty\*\*

\* This includes food poverty (SDG2), access to water and sanitation (SDG6) and digital poverty (SDG17), as well as inter-relation with health and wellbeing (SDG3) and decent work (SDG8), through partnership work.

\*\* This includes responsible consumption and production (SDG12) and protection of biodiversity (SDG14/15) where relevant.

The Orkney Money Matters partnership is being administered by THAW, to ensure that support and advice **infrastructures** are in place for wider cash-first support. These infrastructures have specifically required improved measurement of Food Insecurity as well as allowing evidencing of multiple other household insecurities. The partnership has therefore also focused on ensuring **inclusion** of multiple household situations within the support pathways. This complements and links with our Advice in Accessible Settings project, that is working closely with anchor and statutory organisations to improve **planning** and interventions around poverty, especially in more remote areas.

Staff have been trained in Domestic Energy Assessment with initial training on thermal imaging this year, to develop **capacity and skills** in preparation for a PAS-2035 orientated retrofit pathway. There have been ongoing discussions with housing providers around options to **plan, retrofit** and **rebuild** more affordable housing locally.

**Funding** stability has also been supported through Orkney Money Matters, with the employment of an Innovation and Development Lead to ensure consistent funding and reporting, as well as the development of a cash-first pathway based on Minimum Income levels, which will feed into advocacy around improving **income** levels.

We have also worked on specific cases involving energy **storage and generation** technologies where other support would not be suitable. However, it is likely that alternative methods for energy distribution and control will become an integral part of a wider **retrofit pathway** which is aiming to be developed during the next year. Similarly, potential social innovations around community wealth building and alternative value systems may provide methods to locally lock in financial support that is currently being passed on to energy suppliers and other debtors.

# Governance and Staffing

## THAW Orkney Staffing

### Previous team members (2023/24)

Jonathan Ford, Energy Support Officer (*until April 2024*)

Cathy Laing, Energy Support Adviser (*until April 2024*)

Margaret Jones, Energy Support Adviser (*until August 2024*)

### Current team members

Fraser Cheyne, Energy Support Adviser (*from July 2024*)

Leslie Sinclair, Business Support Officer (*from June 2024*)

Ellie Lott, Energy Support Adviser (*from April 2024*)

Kendall Pyke, HR Adviser (*from Feb 2024*)

Carolyn Tunbridge, Facilities and Administration Officer (*from Feb 2024*)

Ewan Mansley, Energy Support Adviser

Dorothy O'Donnell, Energy Support Adviser

Michael Butler, Innovation and Development Lead

## Trustees

### Previous Trustees (2023/24)

Gerry O'Brien (*Treasurer, until July 2024*)

### Current Trustees

Rhoda Walker (*Chair*)

Adele Lidderdale (*Vice Chair*)

Caroline Butterfield (*Treasurer*)

Janice Annal

Mark Hull

Pat Law

Imogen Sawyer

John Ross Scott

## **Acknowledgements**

**Our grateful thanks to all those who have contributed to THAW Orkney this year without whom we would not have achieved so much:**

**Advice UK**

**British Gas Energy Trust / Charis Charitable Trust**

**Orkney Islands Council**

**Energy Action Scotland**

**The Robertson Trust**

**Orkney Housing Association Ltd**

**Orkney Renewable Energy Ltd**

**Orkney Television Enterprises Ltd**

**Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau**

**Students at Kirkwall Grammar School**

**Scottish and Southern Electric / Energy Action Scotland**

**Warmworks**

**And Individuals who have generously made personal donations to further THAW's work of tackling fuel poverty and social and financial inclusion**

## Organisations we have partnered during 2023-24



### Further information:

Further copies of this review can be obtained from THAW's website:

<https://thaworkney.co.uk/news-%26-reports>

THAW can be contacted via email at:

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