



THAW Orkney

Annual Review 2025

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 2024/25 has again been a busy year for THAW Orkney and its staff, with client numbers continuing to increase. Although household costs have shown signs of levelling out during the year, our staff continue to support clients struggling after several years of national instability.

The year has been challenging, with THAW leading key innovations within the Orkney Money Matters partnership, such as development of Cash-First funds, a joint referral pathway and data sharing protocols, as well as needing to prepare for more in-depth property assessments and upgrade pathways.

We have been successful, in addition to continuing core funding, in securing additional funding from SSEN for improving property upgrades in the isles over the 2025/26 period, which will build upon work completed in 2024/25. At the time of writing, in October 2025, we are also delighted to have again secured Cost of Living funding to continue to provide direct financial support for clients' energy over the winter.

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 2024/25 are:

- THAW has provided support, including access to energy advice and financial gains, to 577 households, a 3% increase on last year.
- THAW's clients gained financial support totalling £173,719, a 33% decrease 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.



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.

Jack Scott-Monkman, Business Support Officer and Lead (from September 2025)

The latest addition to the team, Jack only started as the ink was drying on this report. Self-professing to love being very organised, he is already an extremely welcome support for office administration.

Will Black, Energy Support Adviser (from September 2025)

Only starting a few weeks before Jack, Will has been honing his skills with energy awareness training and already bringing his experience of property management to support the SSEN project.

Amy Gudgeon, Energy Support Officer (from August 2025)

As our ESO, Amy is already helping the ESA team to keep on top of administrative work as well as providing a friendly contact for clients.

Lucy Dorman, Energy Support Adviser (from March 2025)

As our newest fully-trained ESA Lucy has been gradually (in her part-time role) been picking up cases from the team and making steadfast headway.

Fraser Cheyne, Energy Support Adviser (from July 2024)

Fraser continues to be our contact on the isles, not only supporting outreach through the AiAS project, but also supporting clients with repairs and upgrades through SSEN.

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. As the primary administrator of Cash-first she has done an amazing job keeping everyone happy.

Kendall Pyke, HR Adviser (from February 2024)

As our remote adviser for all things HR, Kendal ensures we are keeping staffing and policies up to date.

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

As our part-time bookkeeper, Carolyn keeps the finances under control; she is so efficient we keep a list of additional duties to keep her busy.

Ewan Mansley, Energy Support Adviser & Team Lead

Our longest running ESA, Ewan's dulcet tones can keep almost everyone calm, quite a knack. He continues to impressively juggle new ESA team members, office administration and his own caseload.

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 this year include successfully completing several strategy goals along with funding for future work.

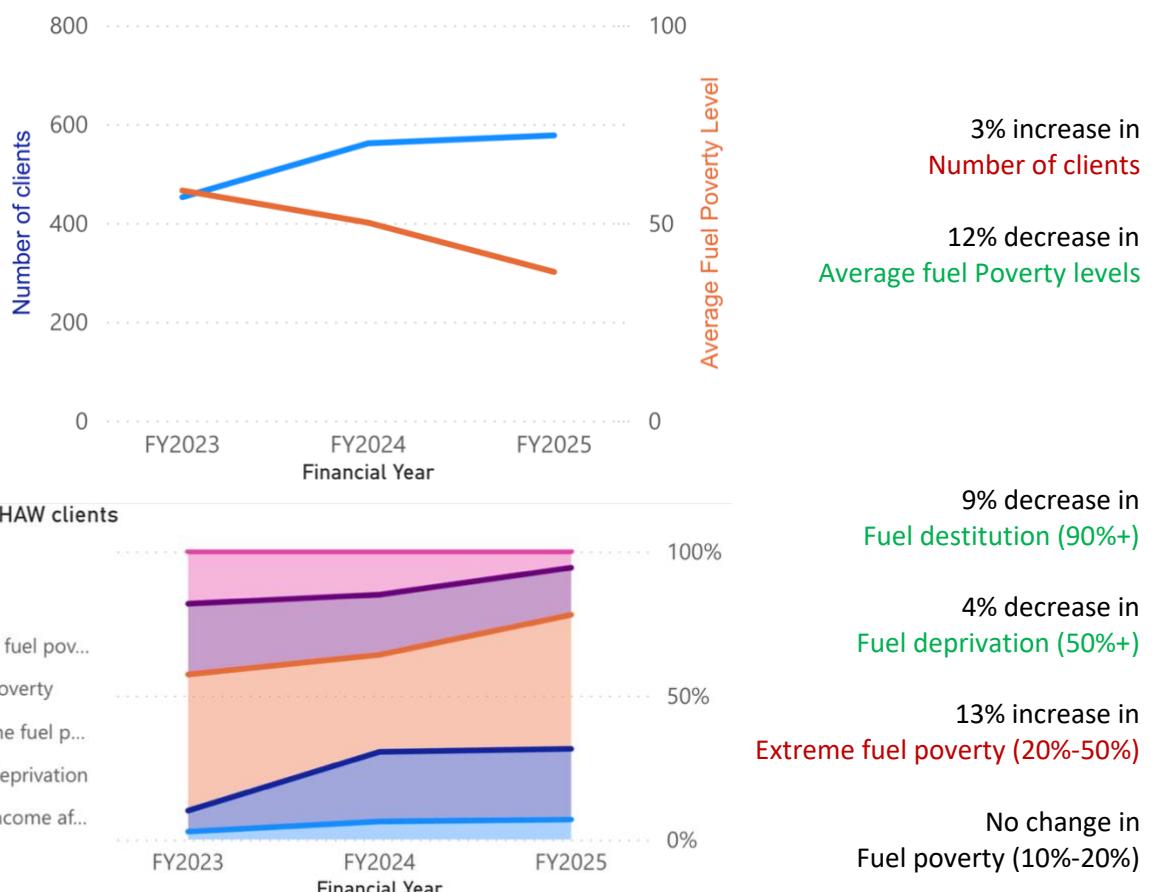
We'd like to take the opportunity to thank staff who left us this year. Our amazing ESA and Business Support Lead **Dorothy O'Donnell** will be sorely missed by all. Without **Leslie Sinclair**, we will sadly no longer be on the pulse of local and national news. Both **Laura Hutton** and **Jonathan Ford** made a massive impact supporting the office this winter. Finally, we want to thank our board, especially the management team **Rhoda Walker** and **Caroline Butterfield**, who all work tirelessly to ensure THAW has a sustainable future.

Our clients

As described above, our focus is on care and equity, so our clients are first and foremost; this section aims to show trends in fuel poverty and explore which demographics are currently most at risk.

Please note that the statistics provided below are for THAW clients, so will only show details for households who are likely to be struggling the most. Also note that we have refined our statistical methods this year, which has slightly changed the values given in last year's annual review for comparison between years.

Overall trends



In general, trends have improved over the last two years, in part due to the price cap as well as fewer

economic shocks. Fuel poverty levels for our clients have reduced again this year (from 46% to 35%); this is more likely to be caused by macro-economic effects (see figure, below) than local action, although it may also be affected by the significant number of clients supported through the cash-first project, which focussed on households in financial insecurity rather than those with energy issues, thus reducing client numbers focussing on only energy support. This effect is likely to continue into 25/26 due to the finish of the cash-first project in October.

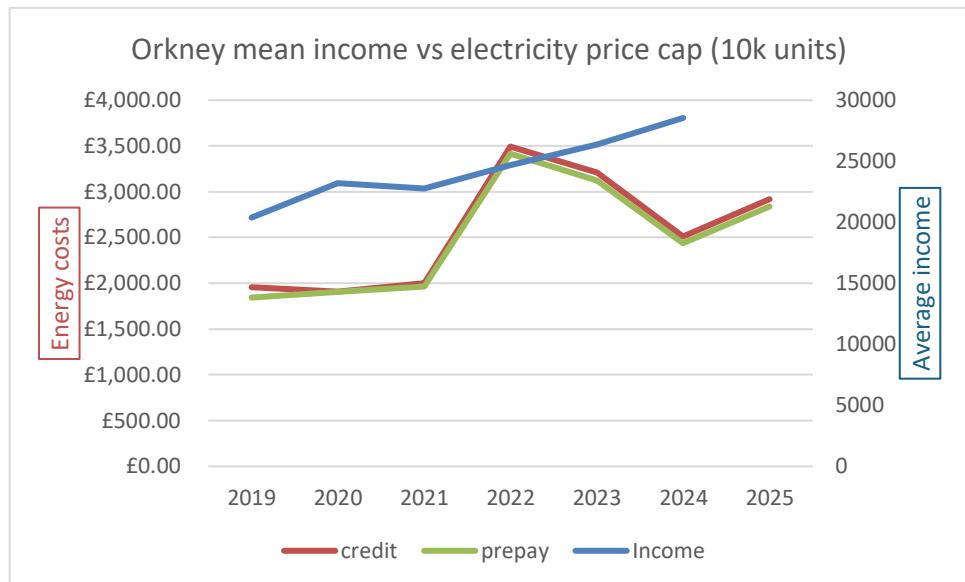


Figure 1: Orkney incomes vs electricity tariff (Thanks to Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association for price updates and ONS for income data)

THAW has continued to benefit from stable funding and staffing this year, which is reflected in the positive figures for client support. Although it is positive that we have helped more clients, this is also a sign of continuing increased demand and has also impacted on our ability to provide support, as seen later in the section on financial and energy support. As such our referrals continued to increase into spring and summer, which is unprecedented and has contributed to a growing waiting list due to our limited staff capacity.

Overall, more clients have moved into less extreme situations of fuel poverty, with reductions in the number of households needing to use more than 50% of their income on fuel. Geographical distribution is similar to last year, with most clients resident in Kirkwall and the number of clients in the Isles continuing to increase.

Work on the Orkney Money Matters Cash-first project has uncovered a significant level of debt for clients facing financial insecurity. Debt appears to be a growing issue for many households, which is closely related to cases of long-term persistent poverty, where households have become reliant upon foodbank and other support services to provide essentials and have few, if any, options for further income maximisation.

Similarly, initial work on the 25/26 SSEN repair and upgrade project uncovered a significant number of clients with major repair issues in the outer isles that have only been able to access support through extended outreach activities; this is likely true for other disparate areas of mainland and the connected isles.

Geographical trends

Geographical distribution is similar to last year, with most clients resident in Kirkwall, due to our office location, a larger population size and high concentration of social housing. Overall fuel poverty levels for our clients have slightly reduced this year, but with higher levels found in Stromness, which is seen across the last 3 years. Note, fuel poverty levels for the isles can vary over the long term due to smaller client numbers.

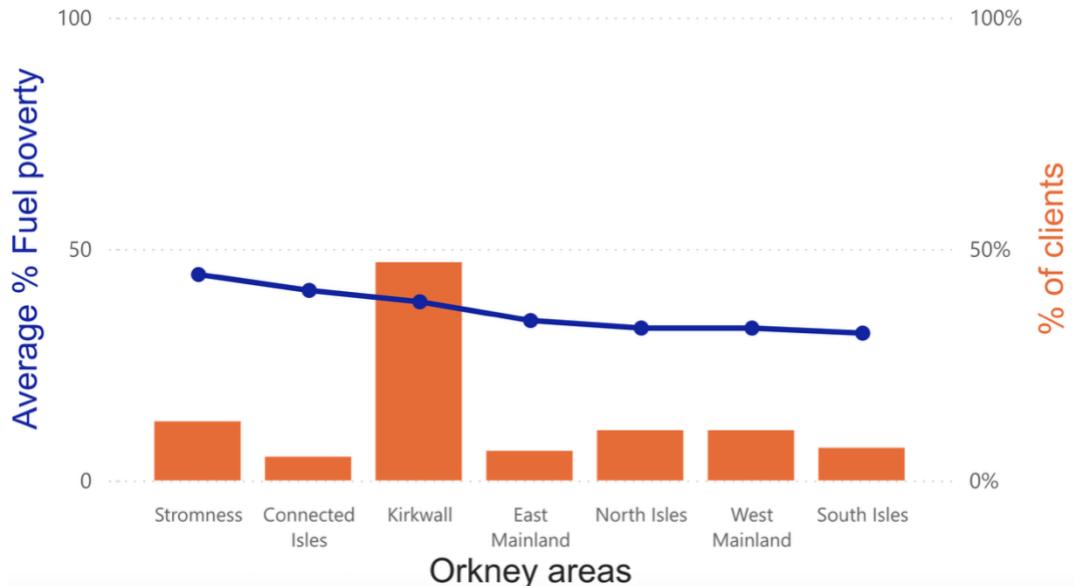


Figure 2: Fuel poverty levels and number of clients by area (tax year 24/25)

Tenancy and employment trends

Our proportion of social housing tenants has remained broadly similar with a slightly higher proportion of support for private rentals. Average fuel poverty levels continue to be highest for tenants in emergency accommodation and private tenancies, although the level for private tenancies has increased since last year.

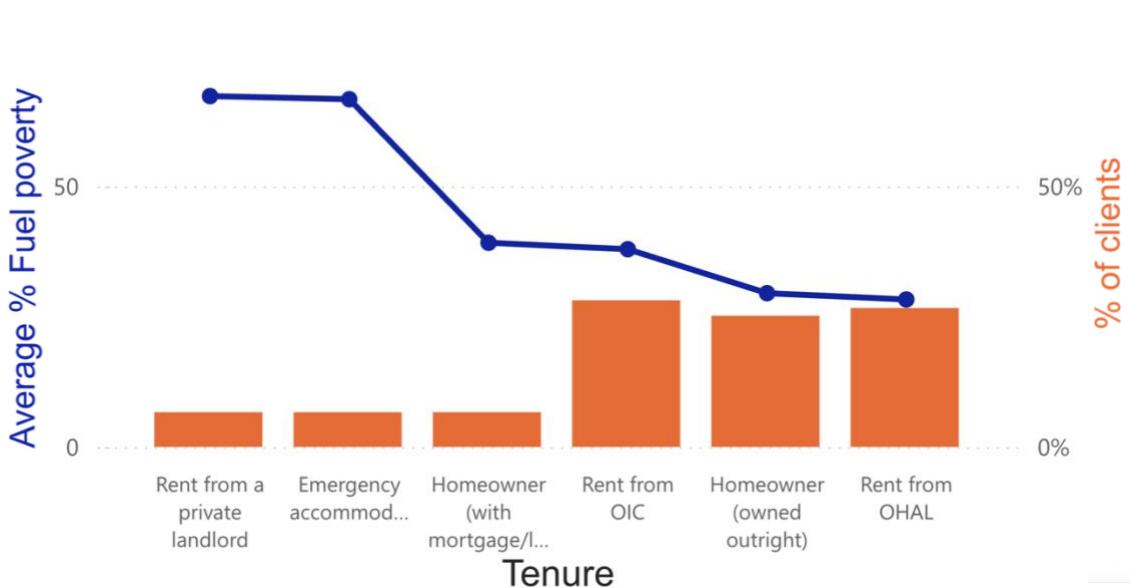


Figure 3: Average fuel poverty levels and percentage of clients by tenure

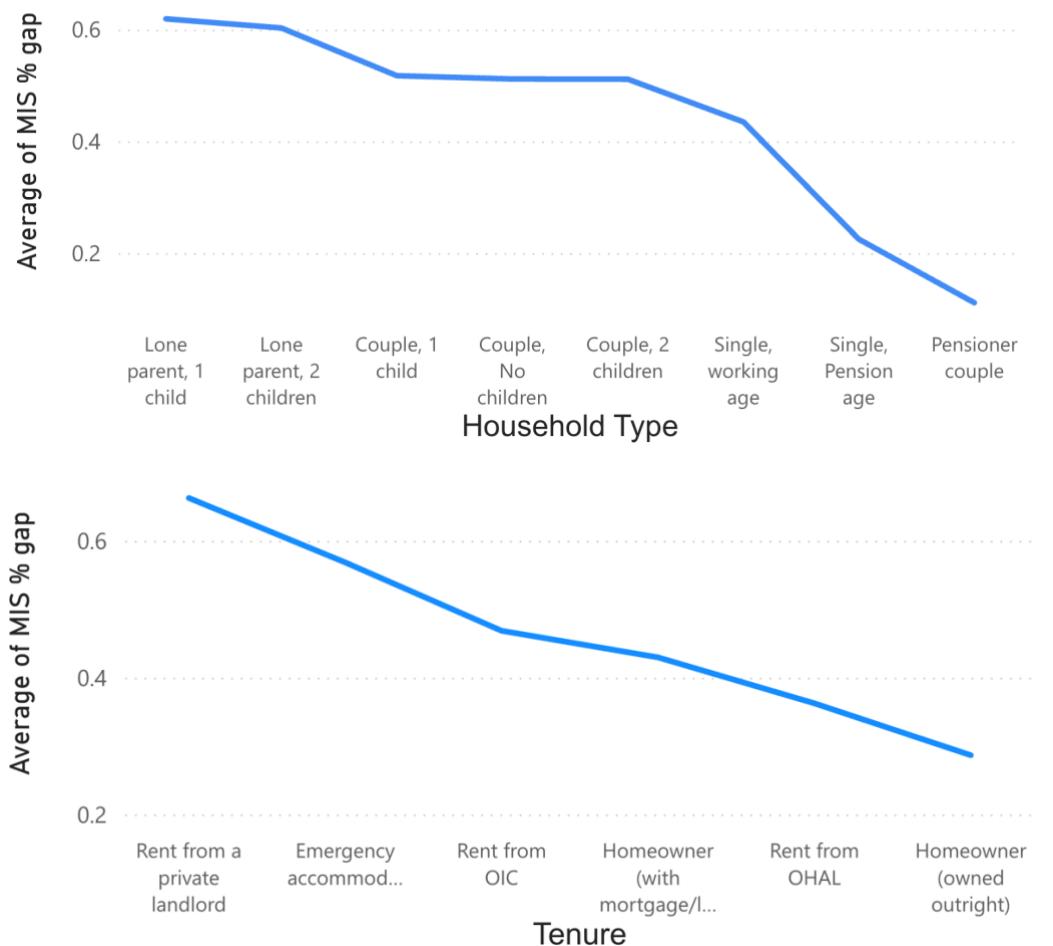
The proportion of our clients on benefits or not working has noticeably increased this year (42% to 51%), which has resulted in a reduction in proportion of clients in-work or self-employed (34% to 28%); of these, slightly more than half are in part-time work.

Minimum Income gap

Minimum income gaps tell us how much a household is missing, in terms of disposable income, to reach a minimum standard of living. The graphs below show a two-year snapshot as there is insufficient data at present to provide an annual update.

As suggested in last year's statistical annex, lone parent families (62% of minimum income missing), couples (51%), closely followed by single person households (43%) show the greatest shortfall from minimum income standard.

Tenure follows the trend shown above, but with more shortfall for social housing and less for homeowners.



"Your service was so easy to deal with, everyone that I have spoken with has been great support to me and given me excellent advice, I know I would not of survived the winter without them"

"It's extremely hard to ask for help as I'm proud and unused to reaching out but it was easy and I felt very supported"

Service Provision and Funding: A Partnership Approach

British Gas Energy Trust

The British Gas Energy Trust continue to provide core funding for the 2024-2026 period. The stability from BGET funding ensures that funds are available for administration and Energy Support Advisers; this year the project primarily supported Dorothy O'Donnell and Ewan Mansley as ESAs. The project works with Orkney CAB to provide a benefits adviser to support clients.

It also funded energy efficiency measures, household appliances, emergency heating sources and a small number of larger energy efficiency measures.

Robertson Trust

The Robertson Trust will continue to provide funding to THAW from Oct 2025 until Oct 2028, with funding to start at the end of the Orkney Money Matters Cash-first fund. This funding will focus on collaborating with other services, such as partners in schools, NHS, health-related third sector organisations and community groups to join up support for all clients, which continues work developed through the Advice in Accessible Settings and Cash-first projects.

Orkney Money Matters (Cash-first)

The Scottish Government funded cash-first project focussed on developing a support pathway for financial insecurity, in particular providing direct cash support for clients facing food insecurity. Working with core delivery partners, Orkney Foodbank and Orkney CAB, THAW developed a pathway, joint triage and online referral system which was in place by December 2024. The project then continued to refine the systems, add additional partners as well as provide frontline crisis support. The OMM project provided £45k in direct cash support in the 24/25 as well as funding 1 ESA to administer the project.

The work was matched funded through the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund and the National Lottery (see below) to support 1 additional ESA, with more focus on outreach to the isles.

National Lottery

In 2024/25 the National Lottery provided match funding for energy support staff as well as additional funds for training in property assessment. The project focussed on outreach to the isles and supporting wider access to support, which will be continued through Robertson Trust funding in 25/26.

Advice in Accessible Settings

The Advice UK funded Advice in Accessible Settings project continues to provide funding for a part-time Energy Support Adviser to support outreach to the isles and more remote communities on Orkney mainland. This work continues in partnership with outreach within the Orkney Money Matters project.

Trussell Trust

Trussell Trust funds were secured to work with Orkney Foodbank on improving access to energy advice for Foodbank clients. Following other projects, this work also supports working to improve access on the isles.

Live Well

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

SSEN Distribution

THAW secured funding from SSEN to develop a repair and upgrade pathway during 2025/26. This work includes £200k for repair and upgrade works, focussing upon facilitating works required to access or gap-fill energy efficiency improvements. The project will fund several part-time roles including an ESA and installation coordinator, as well as specialist property assessment and design roles.

Financial and energy efficiency support



The graphic above outlines the amount of financial support provided by THAW Orkney staff between April 2024 and March 2025. Total support for the period was £210,241, with more than £108k of direct financial support, including an increase in the level of cash support (to £59k). Most energy financial support was provided through the following funds:

- Fuelbank Foundation vouchers - £13,742
- British Gas Energy Trust vouchers - £7,693
- THAW Charis vouchers - £7,448
- HACT Fuel fund - £7,105
- Warm Homes Discount - £5,700

Overall trends

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Annual change
Energy vouchers	£107,968	£164,640	£49,471	-70%
Income, Cash, Debt support	£23,531	£59,099	£59,337	1%
Energy savings/advocacy	£23,417	£19,445	£71,916	270%
Efficiency items	£8,205	£24,211	£11,007	-55%
Property upgrades	£3,132	£14,567	£18,511	27%
Grand Total	£166,253	£281,692	£210,241	-25%

Overall financial support has reduced since last year. As predicted in the 2023/24 review, this has mainly been driven by several client support funds no longer being available, meaning energy voucher and debt support was much more restricted this year. However, this has been balanced by increased financial outcomes due to advice/advocacy and property upgrades, meaning totals were still more than 2022/23.

We continue to provide the Cosy Home Packs (CHPs), which provide emergency efficiency measures for households in fuel poverty. Although this has been impacted by a reduction in the number of home visits this year we still distributed 213 thermal and energy efficiency items, including 24 plug-in heaters. Support continues to be 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 provided £11,007 of goods. Support has also been reduced this year by a limit in funds available from the Live Well project.

Almost all financial outcomes have been impacted by the Orkney Money Matters cash-first project, which shifted support from energy vouchers, food parcels and provision of essentials items to direct cash payments and individual purchases. Even though this could not make up for the overall reduction in financial support for energy available since last year, it has meant that cash and debt interventions stayed roughly similar. As mentioned in the section on our clients, this work has highlighted the increasing levels of debt facing those in financial insecurity.

Funds for property upgrades increased during this year, although there was a drop in funds following the end of the LACER project, work was continued through support from the Islands Cost Crisis Fund. Securing SSEN funds for 25/26 will mean a significant increase next year.

Also noticeable is the doubling in energy savings, compensation and corrected billing through energy advice and advocacy with energy suppliers. There has been a noticeable increase in work with energy suppliers with the coming RTS meter (e.g. THTC) switch-off, which is likely to have uncovered more billing and advocacy issues; these are also likely to be the main reason for the continuing high numbers of households contacting THAW over the last year.

Home Visits and Outreach Sessions

Overall trends

	Last year (23/24)	This year (24/25)	Change
Energy efficiency surveys (desktop)	396	393	1% decrease
Home visits	309	210	32% decrease

Home visits and energy efficiency surveys have seen a reduction relative to the previous year due to significant impacts on staff capacity from high client numbers, administration of the OMM cash-first project and preparations for the SSEN repair and upgrade project. This trend is likely to continue into 2025/26 at least until September 2025 when the cash-first project is completed and vacancies on the team are filled.

Outreach sessions have continued throughout the year, with the team participating in events on the isles and across Orkney mainland. The Advice in Accessible Settings project continues to provide capacity 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 continues to cause pressures on households and staff. High energy usage locally, particularly for those with electric heating, continues to mean that future increases in electricity tariffs will increase strain on households. The unnaturally subsidised cost of oil and gas creates a situation where households are debating returning to oil boilers to save costs when heat pumps are coming to the end of life.

Although fuel poverty statistics seem to be looking more positive in 2024/25, there continue to be large numbers of households needing energy support and these (slight) improvements to day-to-day costs may be hiding the impact of longer-term issues, such as property condition and financial debt.

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 work to bring statutory partners, such as the Community Planning Partnership, together with households who understand the practicalities of living with limited resources. Outcomes of this planning must then be linked with practical implementation that tackles the underlying issues for all households.

Priorities and actions

Our priorities are currently being redrafted in collaboration with the Orkney Partnership and group of clients with lived experience towards creating an Orkney Fuel Poverty Action Plan.

THAW has made progress on many of our previous 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:



* This includes food poverty (SDG2), access to water and sanitation (SDG6) and digital poverty (SDG17), as well as interrelation 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.

Planning and inclusion

We have begun work on embedding *open participation* into our planning processes through initial work getting feedback from clients on future needs. This has coincided with improving processes for internal *evidence* collection and demographic, towards *intersectional*, analysis that highlights socio-economic inequalities and will feed into *action plans*. Although we do *advocate for change* locally for our clients, there is still more work needed to link this up with regional and national initiatives for change

(Digital) Infrastructures

We have developed joint digital infrastructure for *referrals*, with *shared data* protocols through Orkney Money Matters. However, the commercial system is currently inadequate for our future needs and could benefit from improvement. In particular, traditional organisational data controller governance is in place which does not support client control nor allow for more flexible community-controlled sharing of data. Changing governance and ensuring that THAW is not a primary data controller are keys to long-term sustainability and a focus of future work.

Internal digital improvements continue, but a plan for future needs will need to take into account outcomes from inclusion and planning work.

Retrofit (and rebuild) pathways

Although this work is directed towards improving energy efficiency (via retrofit), the need for insulation and heating is secondary to repairs and refit for many of our clients' properties. Therefore, development of improved *property assessment* and *training* has focussed on fabric condition and uncovering failures in current insulation or heating installations. Funding secured provides *gap-filling* of measures not included in local and national energy efficiency funding pathways, such as air-air heat pumps, replacement double glazing or property repairs. A low cost *alternative for unviable properties* has been developed, although this is still to be trialled and requires additional work on ownership and maintenance models. All of these are working towards an inclusive pathway for improvements.

Funding and incomes

Although successful for ensuring *core funding* continues into 25/26, we still have a funding gap for 26/27 which will require additional bids to ensure there are no gaps in service. We have *flexible funds* available to support clients, although these typically continue to be restricted by funders. This has included a trial to provide cash support to clients based on *Minimum Income Standard* through the OMM cash-first project, which is to be used to evidence need at a national level. Wider *financial innovations* and *low-cost transport* work is still to be explored, but will be shaped by current redrafting of an action plan.

Energy generation, distribution and control

THAW have been working closely with suppliers, OFGEM, the Local Authority and MSP to ensure that *smart meter installations* and the RTS switch-off does not unduly impact vulnerable clients. This work, and the SSEN project focus on repair, has taken precedence over establishing better options for *household control*, *off-grid heating* and *community infrastructure*. However, these methods are likely to become a focus for future project work.

Capacity and skills

A focus on *internal staff development*, including the onboarding of condition surveying and upgrade design processes into the repair pathway, has not allowed capacity for development of *external training* options. However, a focus of some funding on collaborative work with other organisations should ensure resource will become available to focus on external education.

As part of the SSEN project initial discussions have taken place with *local contractor training* bodies as well as improving internal lists for construction *supply chain management*. Engagement with contractors will be a focus for this project in 2025/26. This has also included discussions with *universities* over architectural modelling and detailing for difficult to treat properties.

Governance and Staffing

THAW Orkney Staffing

Previous team members (2024/25)

Jonathan Ford, Energy Support Officer (*Oct 2024 – Feb 2025*)

Leslie Sinclair, Business Support Officer (*until March 2025*)

Laura Hutton, Business Support Officer (*until May 2025*)

Dorothy O'Donnell, Energy Support Adviser/Business Lead (*until Aug 2025*)

Current team members

Jack Scott-Monkman Business Support Officer/Lead (*from Sept 2025*)

Will Black, Energy Support Adviser (*from September 2025*)

Amy Gudgeon, Energy Support Officer (*from August 2025*)

Lucy Dorman, Energy Support Adviser (*from April 2025*)

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

Ellie Lott, Energy Support Adviser

Kendall Pyke, HR Adviser

Carolyne Tunbridge, Facilities and Administration Officer

Ewan Mansley, Energy Support Adviser

Michael Butler, Innovation and Development Lead

Trustees

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

Energy Action Scotland

Orkney Housing Association Ltd

Orkney Islands Council

Orkney Renewable Energy Ltd

Orkney Television Enterprises Ltd

Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau

Students at Kirkwall Grammar School

Scottish and Southern Energy Networks Distribution

The National Lottery

The Robertson Trust

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 2024-25



Further information:

Further copies of this review can be obtained from THAW's website:
<https://thaworkney.co.uk/updates>

THAW can be contacted via email at:
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