



Annual Review 2023

THAW Orkney 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 2022/23 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 very welcome additional funding from BGET and Orkney Money Matters which meant we could increase our staffing levels and address the needs of those who had waited patiently in our waiting list as per the annual report presented last year.

At time of writing, we are in October 2023 and are delighted to have secured additional BGET funding to supplement our team further over the winter. We also have new partnership arrangements through Orkney Money Matters which supports an Orkney Wide partnership approach to supporting those in need in our community.

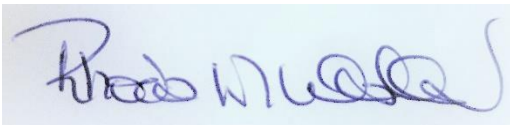
Despite the very welcome funding boosts our staff remain our biggest asset and a huge thank you must go to them from myself and the Board for everything they have achieved over the last months.

Our activity in summary is as below:-

So, the headlines over the last 18 months are:

- THAW has helped 454 clients in the year to 31/3/23 and 285 clients over the 6 months to 30/9/23, providing energy advice and access to the financial gains noted below.
- In the year to 31/3/23, THAW's clients gained financial totalling £107,706.
- in the 6 months to 30/9/23, THAW's clients gained financial support totalling £89,696.

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 further, detailed statistical report is available upon request.



Rhoda Walker

THAW Orkney

Our Team

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

Gill Couper-Swanney, Facilities and Administration Officer

A cat-lover, with an interest in ancient Egypt and a strange adoration of spreadsheets, Gill is our longest serving staff member. She helped to keep THAW running in 2022/23 through a tumultuous period for funding and staff changes, as well as providing keen insights and support during development of the new structure over summer 2022.

Michael Butler, Energy Support Advisor/Innovation and Development Lead

Once dubbed 'The Professor' in jest by a previous manager due to his inclination to over-think things, Michael is in competition with Gill for the longest serving staff member but loses out due to a brief sabbatical to Community Energy Scotland. A team member in 2017-19, he came back to work on the Homelessness project in 2021 and never quite managed to leave. Successes include drafting our current strategy and several successful funding bids, as well as being a fountain of knowledge for clients, Board and staff alike.

Cathy Laing, Energy Support Advisor (from October 2022)

As one of our first new team members this year, Cathy hit the ground running and has not stopped since. With cheerful disposition, empathetic nature, and razor-sharp organisation skills, it is often quite difficult to stop her once she gets going, but we continue to try. Funded via BGET throughout, she has helped to keep THAW on an even keel.

Margaret Jones, Energy Support Advisor (from October 2022)

As someone always out to explore new ways of thinking, ever ready to question conventional wisdom, Margaret keeps everyone on their toes, including herself. As our Robertsons ESA she continues to ensure we are linking up with important services around health and wellbeing.

Ewan Mansley, Energy Support Advisor (from February 2023)

Our first Orkney Money Matters ESA, who only moved to Orkney relatively recently, Ewan's dulcet tones can keep almost everyone calm whilst simultaneously suggesting more constructive pathways of travel; quite a knack. As another keen proponent of quality improvement, many of the staff are happy that he is typically the first adopter/guinea pig for anything new.

Dorothy O'Donnell, Energy Support Advisor (from March 2023)

As our last, but certainly not least, member of staff, it is always a joy to hear Dot slowly, calmly, even pleasantly, take apart a patronising advisor from an energy supplier when they are trying to take a client for a ride. Both staff and clients are very happy to have Dot in their arsenal.

We'd also like to take the opportunity to thank staff members that left us this year. These multi-talented Energy Support Advisor team members include Jonathan Ford, Caroline Atkinson and Craig Nisbet who are sorely missed by staff and clients alike. Robert Leslie, our manager until June 2022, receives boundless thanks for helping to stabilise the ship after difficulties early in the year and continues to cheer-lead THAW from afar.

Finally, we have 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. In particular, thanks must go to the management team - Rhoda Walker, Caroline Butterfield and Gerry O'Brien, who led the organisation from June 2022. It was with their leadership and continuing support that the organisation has continued to grow and flourish throughout the challenges faced.

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 only show details for people who have reached out to THAW for support or been at THAW outreach events. Although this will give an indication of the situation across the population of Orkney, it is likely to be more focused on those households struggling the most.

Also note that the data shown is for the 2022/23 financial year. Methods for data collection were updated during autumn 2022; therefore, some data is only available for about 6 months of that financial year. Where this small sample size has potentially caused distortion, additional statistics are provided from data analysed up to September 2023; any data not relating to the previous year is highlighted in *italics*. All other data is supported by the longer-term analysis.

The majority of our clients are resident in Kirkwall which is likely due to our location, the larger population size and the presence of a high concentration of social housing. The cost-of-living crisis has increased fuel poverty levels for our clients in all areas of Orkney, with average levels at 54%, and significantly higher levels found in the isles.

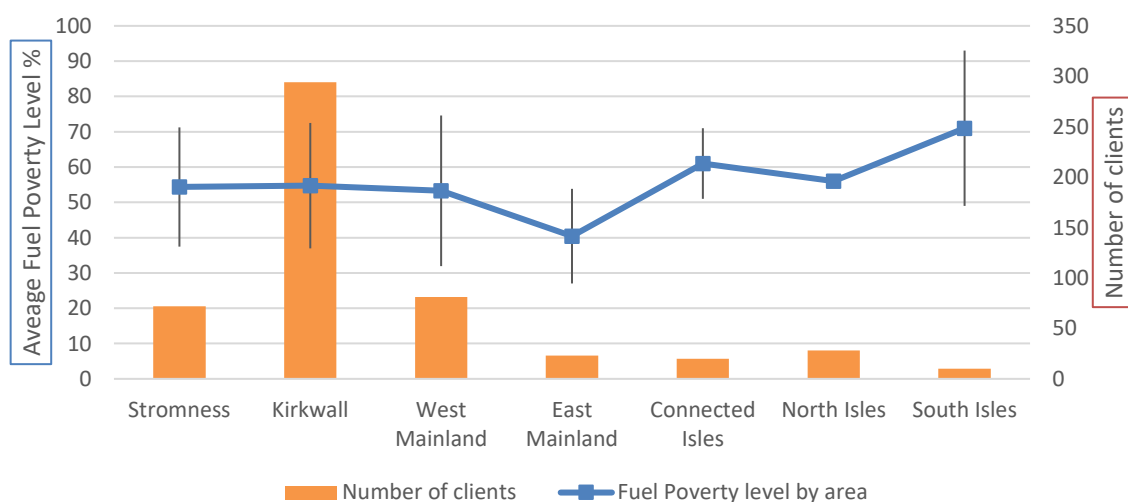


Figure 1: Fuel poverty levels and number of clients by area (tax year 22/23)

Almost 75% of our clients are social housing tenants with almost half in OIC properties. Average fuel poverty levels are understandably highest for tenants in emergency accommodation (about 65%) but are significantly less for OHAL tenants (about 45%) who benefit from newer housing stock. Data up to *September 2023* (as shown in the graph below) shows that homeowners, private tenants and OIC tenants all average about 55%.

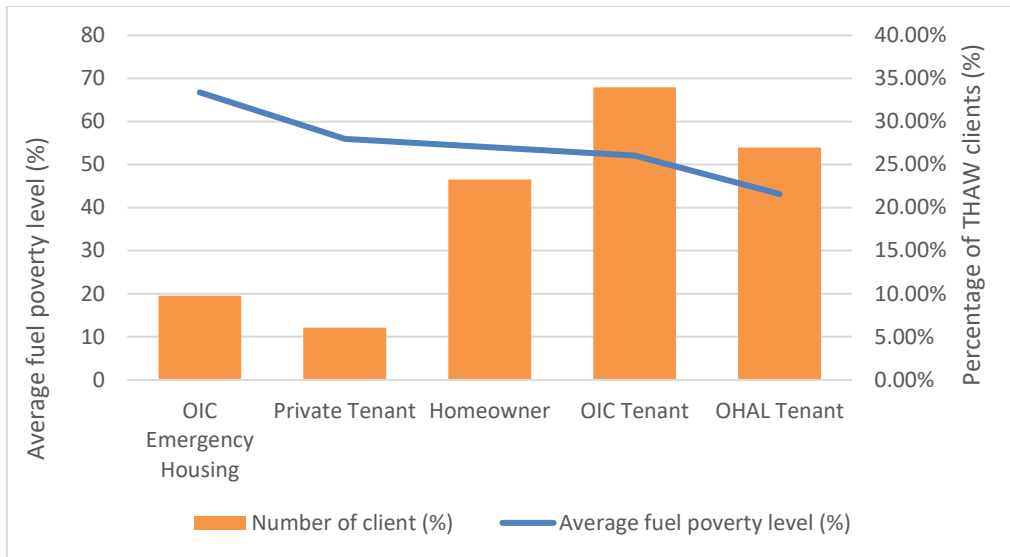


Figure 2: Percentage of clients by tenure and their average fuel poverty level (Apr 22 - Sept 23)

Data up to September 2023 shows that fuel poverty is mainly driven by income with a very strong correlation between low-income levels and higher levels of fuel poverty, and a clear reduction in fuel poverty where income is above £2500/month. This is slightly higher than the Minimum Income Standard, which is around £2000/month for most working age households. Based on these figures, almost all households would be removed from the most extreme levels of fuel poverty (30%+) if they received slightly more than MIS.

Finally, out of all our assessed clients, **89%** (dropping to 81% up to Sept 23) were found to be in **extreme fuel poverty** (i.e., >20% of income used on fuel). A **quarter** of our clients (rising to a third up to Sept 23) would be required to use **more than half of their income** on fuel to keep warm, whilst just under **1 in 6** of our clients would need to spend **all or more than their income** to keep warm.

Client Feedback

"I can't thank you enough, if I could, I would give you a big hug, you don't know the relief and weight that has been taken off my shoulders, and not being afraid to put the heating on, I am so appreciative of what you and your staff have done for me, I am sat here with tears in my eyes, and that's a hard thing for me to say, thank you and all the staff at THAW"

"I can't thank you enough, this extra money means I can pay my bills and not needing to worry has given me a new lease of life."

Service Provision, Funding and Statistics: A Partnership Approach

British Gas Energy Trust

We are deeply indebted to the British Gas Energy Trust (BGET), which has provided core funding to THAW for its energy and money advice services up to 30 June 2022 and again from October 2022 to March 2024. This enabled us to recruit 2 Energy Support Advisors from October 2022, bringing Jonathan Ford back into the fold alongside Cathy Laing joining the team in October 2022. The project works in collaboration with Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau, who provide a benefits advisor to support clients.

Through this project, funding has also been available to supply electricity vouchers and Energy Efficiency Measures, including microwaves, slow cookers, air fryers and countertop freezers, alongside Emergency Heating Sources in the form of oil filled radiators. Finally, the project also included initial funding for upgrading properties with small numbers of electric showers, instantaneous hot-water systems and quantum heaters. This was a service that was extended by the flexible fund in the Orkney Money Matters project (below).

We extend our thanks also to BGET for helping us to run drop-in sessions in Kirkwall Post Office and for arranging a visit from Ashley Comley, Chief Executive from Rhondda Cynon Taff, through its Knowledge Management programme, to share insights in running a fuel poverty service in rural areas.

Robertson Trust

The Robertson Trust has continued to provide funding to THAW up until 2024. Margaret Jones joined the team in 2022 to continue this valuable role with our most vulnerable clients. As our longest running continuous funder we are extremely grateful to the Robertson Trust for continuing to support us through what was a tumultuous year for our staff and organisation; indeed, it was only because of this fund that we were able to support our most vulnerable clients during the summer/autumn of 2022 until funded again by BGET in October 2022. 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.

Orkney Money Matters

From January 2023, we received funding from the LACER fund via the Orkney Money Matters (OMM) project, which employed 2 new Energy Support Advisors (ESAs): Ewan Mansley from February 2023 and Dorothy O'Donnell from March 2023, with funds continuing until March 2024. This brought our team up to 4 full-time equivalent ESAs. The project focusses on providing emergency financial support, including energy vouchers, crisis grants and other 'cash-first' support required during an emergency situation. It aims to complement longer-term support provided by several partner organisations, including Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau, Blide Trust and the Scottish Welfare Fund.

The OMM project also provided a £75k cash fund for energy vouchers, which as described below has provided support for gap-filling energy support. Finally, £25k of cash funds were ear-marked for a 'Flexible fund' which could be used to gap-fill energy efficiency measures that were unavailable through national or local schemes or other measures that were needed for access to these schemes. Although no measures were implemented during the period to 31 March 2023, the flexibility of the fund promises to support a significant number of clients over the following year who have been held back from energy efficiency upgrades due to lacking finance for repairs or other measures.

Advice in Accessible Settings (AiAS)

The Advice UK fund for advice in accessible settings has provided funds from July 2023 to support outreach to the isles and more remote communities on Orkney mainland. Although not within the 2022/23 tax year, it builds upon outreach work developed during that year for a travelling exhibition with connected events that started in April 2023 and continued into the summer. The AiAS project employs 0.5 FTE ESA to develop further outreach materials with community groups in collaboration with a 0.5FTE advisor employed by Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau, who can provide money and debt advice, and complement the support given through the Orkney Money Matters project.

Financial Support, including Fuel Vouchers

The amount of financial support provided to clients by THAW Orkney staff between April 2022 and March 2023 has been significant. Direct financial support for the period totalled **£107,706**, including more than **£83k** of direct cash support for energy. This year also saw an increase in cash support, with almost £7.5k on a trial fresh food voucher which was subsequently taken in-house by Foodbank. Support with supplier issues and reducing energy use saved clients almost £7K, whilst another £6.5k of energy efficiency items were provided.

The majority of energy voucher support (**£37k**) was provided through several voucher schemes for electric prepayment meters:

- BGET Auriga vouchers **£12.4k**
- Fuelbank Foundation **£9.7k**
- Orkney Foodbank for their clients **£7.6k**
- OIC Charis vouchers **£7k**

THAW Orkney continued to administer electricity funding for Orkney Foodbank. A total of 198 vouchers amounting to £7.6k were issued to clients who were referred by the Foodbank. This arrangement ended in April 2023 when the Foodbank took the administration of electricity vouchers in-house. We would like to extend an enormous “Thank You” to the owners and staff of Papdale Stores for their assistance in enabling us to provide electricity vouchers to clients on pre-payment meters since the beginning of the COVID Pandemic.

The **Fuel Bank Heatfund** enabled us to assist clients whose main heating source was not electric, such as oil or solid fuel, with over **£4k of awards** funded to clients.

More recently, funding received in March 2023 through **Orkney Money Matters** allows THAW to assist clients with vouchers and energy debt relief for all meter and fuel types (e.g. oil or solid fuel). This flexibility has already made a big impact, with more than **£2.6k** provided within the first month.

The **Home Heating Advice Fund** has continued to provide the biggest relief to clients who are struggling to heat their properties, also with support for all fuel and meter types. It has enabled staff to assist 41 clients with **£37,590 of support**, in many cases writing off significant debt and leaving clients with several hundred pounds of ‘breathing space’.

In the first half of this current financial year, THAW have provided **£89,686** of financial gains to clients, of which **£61,665** has been distributed in energy support, for both pre-payment and credit meter clients.

Home Visits and Outreach Sessions

Home visits and Outreach sessions resumed in earnest, once our first new team members completed their energy advice qualifications and training in December 2022. The team have since participated in events in Westray, Stronsay, Stromness and Kirkwall, in addition to being involved at the larger agricultural shows in the county and at school wellbeing fairs.

The Money in Your Pocket training in collaboration with Right There was held in the THAW offices in June 2022, aimed at encouraging life skills for young people, including money and energy awareness, but open to all clients. The energy awareness materials have since been used for outreach to other groups, such as Clan and SWIs.

Cosy Home Packs

THAW Orkney continues to provide Cosy Home Packs (CHPs), which have proved very effective in assisting households in fuel poverty. **52 CHPs** have been distributed this year. Additional support is available for white goods and cooking appliances as part of the current BGET project, which by 31 March 2023 had provided **£1,300 of goods**. This continues developments from a previous BGET-funded Homelessness project.

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 both client households and staff. The fluctuating “price cap” is confusing for many whilst the high costs of tariffs, even with the cap, has forced many to choose between heating or eating. Relatively speaking, the cap has benefited Orkney, in that North Scotland tariffs are now closer to those in other parts of the country. In other words, due to our previously high tariff rates, the increases in Orkney have been less than in other parts. However, the high energy usage locally means that any increase in tariff rate increases the strain on households.

Our clients continue primarily to be on benefits or not working (50%), but we continue to see that almost a third of our clients are “working poor”. 20% of clients are in part-time work or are self-employed, with possibly more than one job, whilst 12% are fully employed but still struggle month to month. Income levels have not kept up with inflation whilst costs have increased; in other words, incomes are not currently covering most of our clients’ basic needs.

From subjective comparison of the last two winters, government energy bill support in winter 2022/23 did provide security for those on very low incomes who were already underheating; we had a much lower demand for support than in previous years. However, it is likely that the 2023/24 winter will be much more difficult for households since government assistance with energy bills looks unlikely to be continued.

Managing energy usage in the home is one way that households in Orkney could look 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 fluctuations as well as changes in income.

The picture is bleak. As described above, more than 80% of our clients are in extreme fuel poverty, with 1 in 6 required to use all of their income in order to keep adequately warm; not surprisingly, 60% of our clients are underheating their homes.

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, we aim to develop 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 of energy assets.










This will be difficult, since assets, technology and skills in energy, and related digital innovations, are seldom controlled by households, communities, or charitable organisations, with common resources being continually eroded by an economic system built on private expropriation of resources. However, we can only enact change if we believe it is possible, so we have developed a draft strategy, which continues to evolve, to assess where we need to go.

Appendix 1: THAW Orkney Key Priorities

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:

<p><i>Develop partnerships and processes to ensure fair planning and implementation</i></p>		<p>Reduce energy inequalities, including health, gender and geographical inequities, by engaging clients in system change</p>
		<p>Provide access to energy advocacy for all via effective, accountable & inclusive institutions</p>
		<p>Strengthen the means of implementation and partnerships</p>
<p><i>In partnership with all households and community organisations</i></p>		<p>End energy poverty in all its forms in Orkney*</p>
		<p>Ensure high-quality inclusive and equitable energy efficiency education</p>
		<p>Increasing community design and ownership of energy generation/usage</p>
<p>To achieve affordable, sustainable warmth</p>		<p>Ensure access to affordable, resilient, sustainable and modern energy for all</p>
		<p>Build resilient energy support infrastructure, promoting inclusive & sustainable innovation</p>
		<p>Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts through our work to combat fuel poverty**</p>

* 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.

Appendix 2: THAW Orkney Draft Fuel Strategy

Our draft strategy is based upon staff and client experiences and has highlighted 6 key areas to achieve this purpose:

1. Planning and Inclusion

There is currently no single local evidence base on household insecurities, whilst community planning around fuel poverty is distributed between multiple partnership working groups and community groups. The OIC Fuel Poverty strategy is currently being drafted, but as a main provider of support for households in fuel poverty across Orkney, in tandem with more localised support from community groups, THAW will lead on where we are and where we need to go to create equitable basic services around housing.

2. (Digital) Infrastructures

Digital infrastructure, as well as comparative offline infrastructure for those situations where digital is inappropriate, can support many of the needs for combatting fuel poverty. This includes supporting data for planning and monitoring as well as creating digital support and access for those that are digitally literate. Digital innovations, such as Charis energy vouchers, have meant we can support clients instantaneously when in need and avoid long support lead times. Finally, improvements to our internal digital systems have the opportunity to reduce administrative burdens for our staff.

3. Retrofit (and rebuild) pathways

THAW has successfully trialled a Flexible Fund, which attempts to remove financial barriers of property repair from clients' ability to access energy efficiency upgrades, as well as fill gaps in current service. For example, even with national and local upgrade schemes, retrofit upgrades are often piecemeal and do not treat the whole house or significant structural problems. They also often do not include all measures that would be required to reduce energy costs and improve wellbeing (e.g. changing tariffs or installing ventilation). Future iterations of the Flexible Fund aims to overcome some of these issues. Some properties would require very high repair costs even before retrofitting, with a client's situation being better suited to a new build. THAW has been working with development trusts and building contractors on options for low cost, high efficiency modular housing that can be installed at any remote location. These would need to be supported by innovative housing contracts and financing that allow rent or purchase based upon a community's and household's needs.

4. Funding and incomes

As an organisation we have struggled with losing funding and related lack of capacity. Our clients face similar challenges, both from inadequate income to cover basic needs, but also from sudden changes in circumstances that leave them without security. This year, we have focussed more on developing our next plans and how these can be fitted to future funding bids as well as support the wider third sector in Orkney. Much more work needs to be done to secure funds for March 2024 onwards, but we continue to build a portfolio of work that needs to be completed.

This includes more methods to provide better incomes for our clients. As seen in our statistics, incomes are not meeting minimum standards and, without increasing them, clients will not be able to achieve affordable warmth. To this end, we will continue to work with Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau and wider partners as part of Orkney Money Matters to call for increases to income support and, if necessary, local pilots to fill gaps in income support.

5. Energy generation, distribution and control

There continues to be the elephant in the room locally that we have such high fuel poverty levels in an 'energy innovation' county. Innovation in household generation, control and heating systems, with control placed firmly in the hands of clients rather than energy companies, could provide a method to shift innovation in a more socially positive direction. Having worked with energy monitoring and control of heating systems for many years, THAW has been exploring options for upgrading energy controls within properties, particularly in conjunction with household or local generation. This would be part of retrofit and rebuild pathways, in particular the option for robust and simple control systems within property circuits that

allow bypassing of the grid connection where feasible.

6. Capacity and skills

None of the work above, especially inclusion of a wider voice within planning, would be possible without increasing public energy literacy as well as building up capacity for specialist skills, including digital development, thermal imaging, retrofit coordination, energy control systems, building fabric assessments in traditional buildings, quality control systems, financing systems as well as new methods and accreditations for construction. Therefore, we aim to support public as well as industry up-skilling.

Governance and Staffing 2022-23

THAW Orkney Staffing

Gill Couper-Swanney, Facilities and Administration Officer

Michael Butler, Energy Support Advisor/Strategic Development

Jonathan Ford, Energy Support Advisor (*until March 2023*)

Cathy Laing, Energy Support Advisor (*from September 2022*)

Margaret Jones, Energy Support Advisor (*from October 2022*)

Ewan Mansley, Energy Support Advisor (*from February 2023*)

Dorothy O'Donnell, Energy Support Advisor (*from March 2023*)

Trustees

Rhoda Walker (*Chair*)

Adele Lidderdale (*Vice Chair*)

Caroline Butterfield (*Treasurer*)

Janice Annal

Gerry O'Brien

Mark Hull

Pat Law

Imogen Sawyer

John Ross Scott

Thank You:

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

- **British Gas Energy Trust / Charis Charitable Trust**
- **Orkney Islands Council**
- **Energy Action Scotland**
- **The Robertson Trust**
- **Orkney Housing Association Ltd**
- **Orkney Renewable Energy Forum**
- **Orkney Renewable Energy Ltd**
- **Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau**
- **Papdale Stores**
- **Students at Kirkwall Grammar School**
- **The Trading Post, St. Margaret's Hope**
- **Warm Homes Fund / Orkney Islands Council**
- **Scottish and Southern Electric / Energy Action Scotland**
- **Warmworks**
- **Laura Watts** who kindly donated the royalties from her book '**Energy at the End of The World: An Orkney Islands Saga**'
- And **Individuals** who have generously made **personal donations** to further THAW Orkney's work of tackling fuel poverty and social and financial inclusion

Organisations we have partnered during 2022-23



Further information:

Further copies of this review, and a more comprehensive, statistical report can be obtained from THAW's website:
<http://www.thaworkney.co.uk>

THAW can be contacted via email
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