



Annual Review 2021

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

Chair's Report

The year 2020/21 saw life as we know it on every level change with a bang and the Board needs to extend a huge thank you to the manager and his team of staff for how they responded to the change, and the resulting significant impact on the population of Orkney, that was/is COVID- 19.

COVID also managed to have a significant impact on funders and THAW, along with many other organisations, has seen the impact on available funding become more restrictive. However once again we want to record our thanks to Robert Leslie and his team for how they coped with the reduced budgets, reduced hours, furlough and loads of uncertainty about job security – all while continuing to deliver an amazing service to our clients.

I would like to pay tribute to the changes to the Board we saw during 2020 – Erik Firth, Ian Garman and Doreen Sinclair all resigned, and we thank them for the work they did during their time with THAW. Pat Law joined us as did Gerry O'Brien – they are both very welcome members and Gerry's background and expertise in all things finance is of significant benefit to us. A particular thanks goes to Janice Annal, who stepped down as our Chair following the last AGM and left big shoes to fill.

In terms of our service delivery:

BGET

The Wellbeing and Warmth project ran to 31st March and allowed our staff team to cope with the aforementioned significant impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown, with a huge increase in demand for support across all services.

Money Advice and Welfare Rights services were developed and training for the staff was extended to the Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau (OCAB) staff.

The ReFLEX Orkney (Responsive Flexibility) project aims to create a 'smart energy island'. Part of this is domestic batteries and smart heating systems. While work by THAW staff was halted during the early lockdown, installations of energy monitors is intended to raise awareness with THAW clients of their usage and help them manage it more efficiently.

Warmworks secured the contract as agent for what is now the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area-based Scheme (**EES: ABS**) in Orkney. The Scottish Government provides this funding to local authorities, including OIC, to develop and deliver energy efficiency programmes (mainly solid wall insulation) in areas with high levels of fuel poverty and we continue to develop a partnership approach to supporting clients through ongoing work with them including joint publicity on how to make homes warmer, greener and more efficient.

European Social Fund WellBeing project finished in early 2019 but late in 2019, OIC notified us that THAW might need to repay some of the funds and that further evidence was requested. This is still an ongoing issue we are liaising with OIC on to try and resolve.

Future Working:

THAW Orkney had a staff team of seven – four on 35 hours a week, and three on 28 hours a week - as the major increase in demand during the pandemic lockdown was being dealt with during the 2020-21 financial year, when we received £155,897.36 funding from the British Gas Energy Trust (BGET).

However, due to funding constraints within BGET itself, we were only able to bid for £85,800 for the year to 31 March 2022. With a number of staff moving on to other posts in the first half of 2021, this has seen a reduced team of four – one on 35 hours, two on 28 hours, and one on 21 hours – employed under BGET for this financial year, with our entire reserves used to enhance the bid.

We have also secured £100,500 (£33,500 per year for 3 years) from The Robertson Trust for our Community Support role, to address the needs of those with mental health needs and learning difficulties.

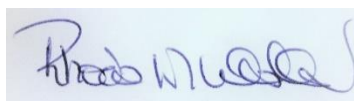
However, with the expectation of a similarly high level of demand for services in the coming winter, there is a real risk that the reduced staff team and hours means demand will overwhelm ability to deliver the service to a similar level as 2020-21. We are actively pursuing further funding as well as examining our core function in terms of service delivery to make sure we can prioritise our responses.

The future looks as if it will be busy. As is clear from the statistics already mentioned COVID-19 brought increased need for assistance. There are potential funding streams to be applied for and we have been asked to plan for ABC5, we will continue to work in partnership with ReFLEX, Warmworks, OCAB, NHS Orkney, OIC, Orkney Foodbank and many others.

Our thanks go to our funders and partners without whom THAW Orkney could not function.

Also huge thanks to the staff and board members for their hard work and dedication, and thanks to Lorraine Campbell, Linsey Drever and Suzy Fraser, who moved on from THAW Orkney during 2021.

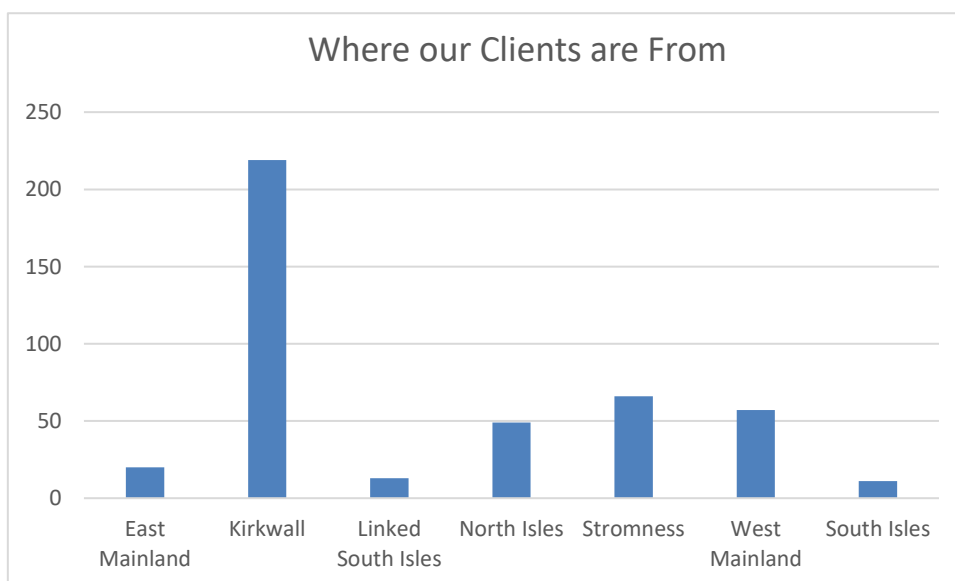
We hope that we are in a more positive place when we have next year's AGM and that we have been able to secure the funding required to deliver such essential services to those in fuel poverty throughout the islands.



Rhoda Walker,
THAW Orkney Chair

Where our clients are from

The majority of our clients are resident in Kirkwall as it keeps expanding. However, the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic has continued to cause issues in all areas of Orkney, and we have clients throughout the islands.



Service Provision and Statistics: A Partnership Approach

British Gas Energy Trust – Supporting Communities at Risk Programme

The British Gas Energy Trust was the first ever funder of THAW Orkney, allowing the first staff team to be appointed after a successful bid secured £399,766. Securing 12 months of funding under the Supporting Communities at Risk (SCARP) programme has been critical to the survival of THAW Orkney.

Not only has it supported these core service, but also allowed the continuation of several other projects, including the continuation of electricity voucher schemes, and the ongoing distribution of Cosy Homes Packs, although rising costs of content of this service is also an issue.

Our Welfare Support Officer continued to work with people to ensure they have the information and support required to access and claim the support they are entitle to. Prior to her departure in April 2021, she had assisted 12 clients to successfully apply for over £45,300 in unclaimed benefits.

Robertson Trust – Community Support

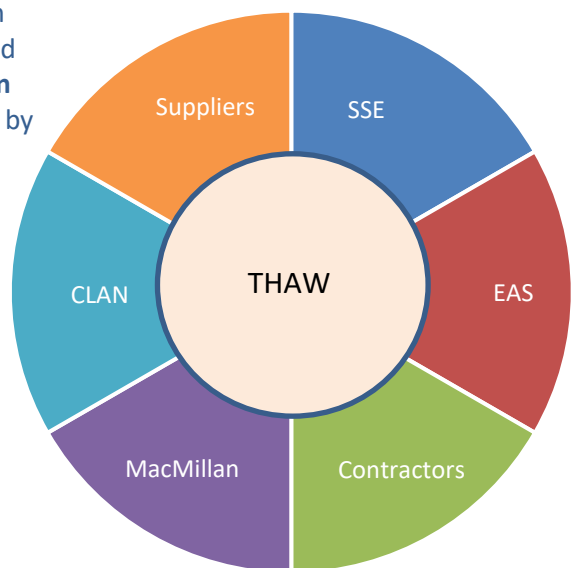
In order to provide an enhanced bespoke service for our clients, in 2019 THAW Orkney embarked on further expansion of its service provision to include a Community Support Officer (CSO), funded by the **Robertson Trust**. The CSO in post went on maternity leave and has subsequently moved on. A new member of staff was recruited to continue the work and has assisted 52 vulnerable clients with their needs. Additional funding will support this role until 2024.

Aiming Beyond Cancer

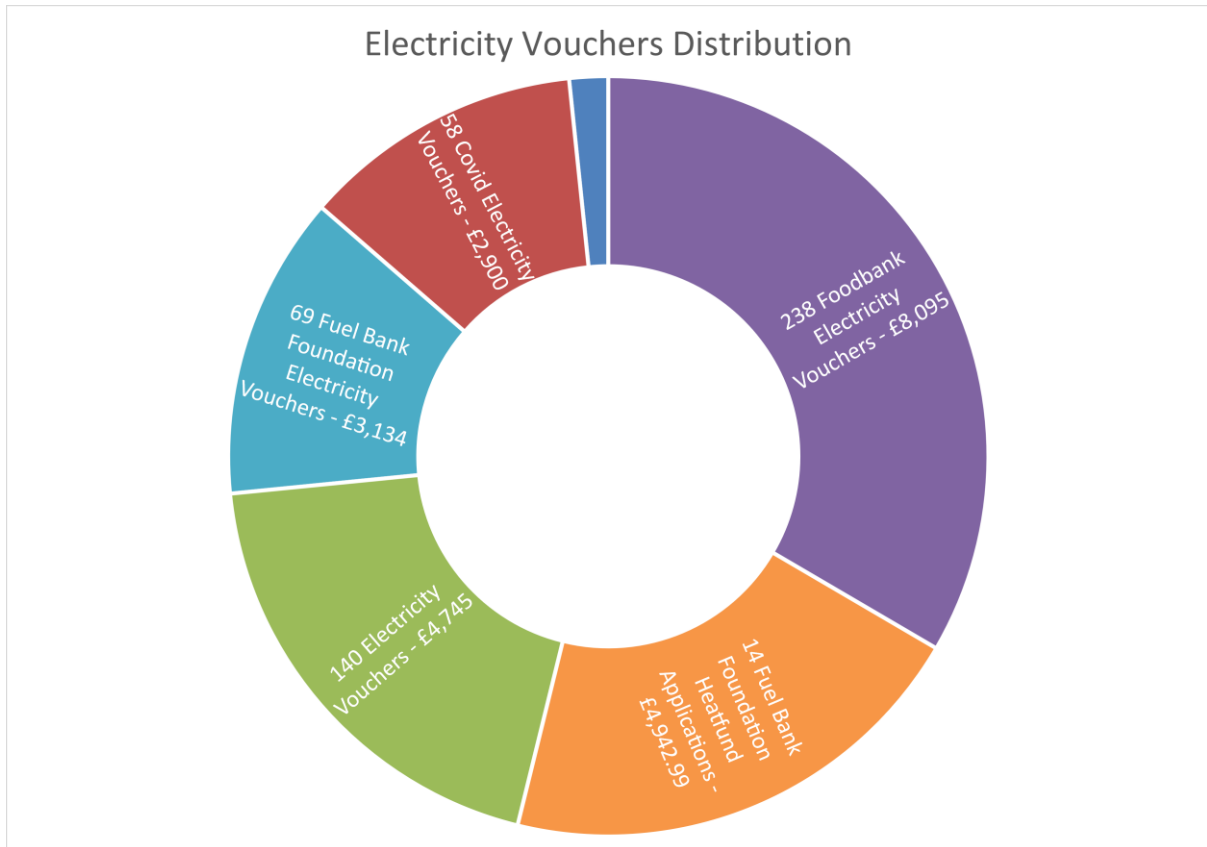
Once again, THAW Orkney was able to assist households with an active cancer diagnosis through referrals made by **Macmillan** and **CLAN Cancer Support** services. Funded by **Scottish and Southern Electric** and coordinated between Orkney and the Western Isles by **Energy Action Scotland**, and following a home visit by THAW, a new heating system and white goods were installed for those eligible.

Despite the challenges still present due to the pandemic, the project commenced in September 2020, with the installation of **19 heating systems and 20 white goods** being completed. At this point, we were also able to complete the postponed installations from the previous year.

As ever, a huge **thank you** goes to the **local contractors and suppliers** who went the extra mile to install the heating systems and white goods.



Electricity Vouchers



The above chart outlines the number of electricity vouchers issued by THAW Orkney staff between August 2020 and July 2021.

Two additional fuel support schemes were launched in the early part of 2021.

The Fuel Bank Foundation made available vouchers for clients with pre-payment meters at £49 per voucher in the winter and £30 in the summer. The Fuel Bank Heatfund enabled us to assist clients whose main heating source was not electric, therefore supplying oil or solid fuel.

THAW Orkney continued to administer electricity funding for Orkney Foodbank. A total of 238 vouchers were issued to clients who were referred to the Foodbank by other agencies. With our relationships with electricity suppliers, we were able to assist those with credit meters as well, a service previously unavailable.

In addition, the Scottish Government launched a £4 million Home Heating Support Fund that was administered in Orkney by THAW Orkney staff during March 2021. This enabled staff to assist 41 clients with £24,774 of support, in many cases writing off significant debt and leaving clients with several hundred pounds of 'breathing space'.

Home Visits During the Pandemic

Home visits and energy cafés have been on hold since the Covid-19 lockdown of March 2020, although with the installation of energy monitors, in partnership with Community Energy Scotland, some visits are recommencing. While the THAW office generally remains closed to the public, limited Clients who require additional support have been visiting for face-to-face assistance.

Cosy Home Packs

THAW Orkney continues to provide the Cosy Home Packs (CHPs), which have proved very effective in assisting those households in fuel poverty. **79 CHPs** have been distributed this year.



Achieving affordable warmth in Orkney

To say 2020-21 has been a different year would be an understatement. A global pandemic has seen the landscape of almost every aspect of life change, and the much-heralded 'new normal' at the moment feels like a very fluid concept.

For THAW Orkney, and many other Third Sector agencies in Orkney, the fluidity has been unsettling for staff and clients alike. Old certainties have gone and as I write this the upheaval in the UK electricity market appears to be heralding a winter of further high demand for the services of organisations such as ourselves.

The main factors around whether folk can achieve affordable warmth in their homes are the cost of the energy source they have access to, the energy efficiency of the property that they are heating, the income level of the household, and how the energy is used by the household – 'human behaviour'.

Alongside the increasing electricity prices, changes to UK regulations around energy efficiency installations and removal of Scottish Government support for certain types of heating replacements have added complexity to a landscape that was already difficult to navigate for folk trying to achieve that affordable warmth.

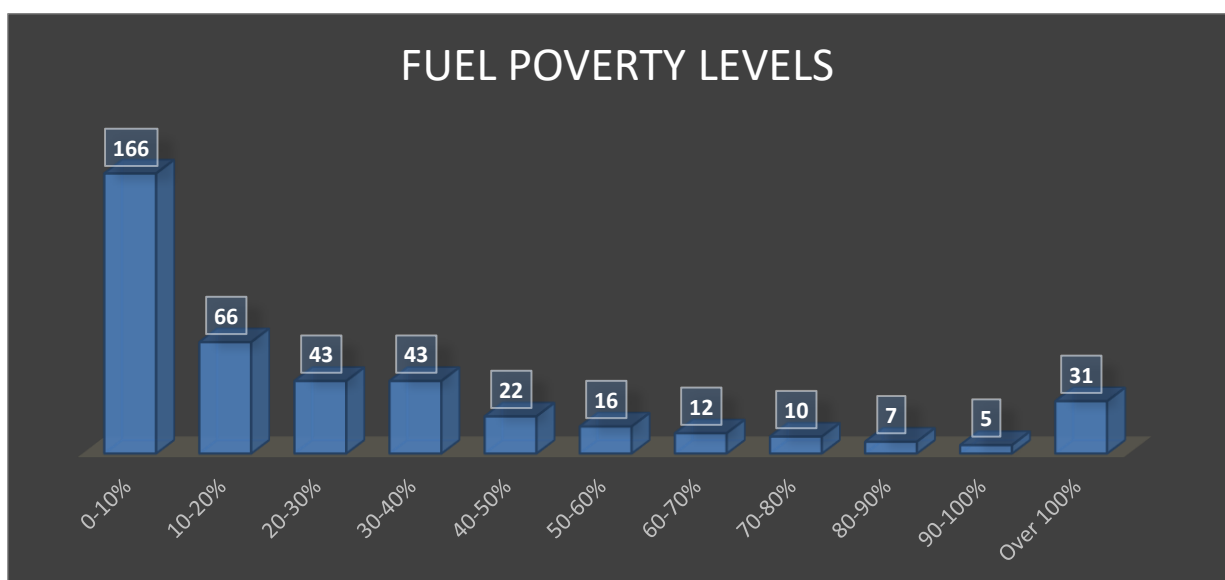
Income levels have not increased at the same rate as energy prices have risen, and certain types of income and employment support that were brought in during the pandemic are also set to disappear or be reduced.

In the face of all that, managing energy usage in the home is possibly the only way that many households in Orkney are going to be able to survive this winter without adequate levels of support from elsewhere, including statutory services and the Third Sector.

As one energy advice colleague commented to me as we discussed the situation that we face in supporting folk through this uncertain period, 'it is pretty grim that we are helping people ration energy due to high costs in the 21st century', and especially when you consider that Orkney produces more electricity annually from renewable generation than we use as a community.

Having said that, as long as we have funding to provide the services that we do, THAW Orkney will be on hand to help folk towards the ultimate goal of an affordably warm and healthy home.

Robert Leslie
THAW Orkney Manager



The table above shows the fuel poverty levels of clients recorded on this system from 1st August 2020 to 31st July 2021. Although 39% of householders who have approached THAW Orkney for assistance this year would be classed as being at risk of fuel poverty rather than being fuel poor, the severity of the issue among those households unable to achieve affordable warmth is stark, with 7% experiencing over 100% fuel poverty.

Case Studies and Comments on our services:

Client A is a male 57-year-old in receipt of Personal Independence Payment. Previous client to THAW who was struggling with his heating costs. Due to his medical condition client needs to wash his bedding every day, his condition also makes him feel very cold. Being mindful for his energy use client bulk cooks once a week so that he only has to warm food up each day. Client has engaged with THAW on many occasions and has received benefit checks and energy advice as is struggling with his heating costs. Due to his medical condition client needs to wash his bedding every day, his condition also makes him feel very cold. Being mindful for his energy use client bulk cooks once a week so that he only has to warm food up each day. Client has engaged with THAW on many occasions and has received benefit checks and energy advice.

Project Outcomes

- Client received THAW energy vouchers to the value of £70.00
- Client received Fuel Bank Heat fund delivery of oil to the value of £480.27
- Client received Home Heating Advice Fund grant to the value of £358.00

"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"

Client B is a single working-age male in receipt of Universal Credit, who had recently lost his job. Initial contact with client was by mobile phone call where we arranged to meet in the office adhering to social distancing at client's request. During this office visit we carried out a full fuel poverty assessment, resulting in the client being over 100% fuel poor. A telephone call to DWP was made with the client to request an increase Universal Credit payments and a PIP application form. Emergency electricity vouchers were provided and Cosy Home Pack containing energy efficiency items was given to the client. The Client has been extremely grateful for the additional gain he has received. The case is ongoing as client is eligible for full grant funding through Government to ensure he obtains maximum measures and the best options available for his home.

Project Outcomes

- Electricity vouchers
- Warm Home Discount
- PIP – Daily Living and PIP mobility
- HEEPS: ABS (Home Energy Efficiency Programmes for Scotland Area-Based Scheme)
- Disabled adaptations and items obtained through Occupational Health
- Client's mental health improved with award of income from PIP and not worrying now about energy efficiency improvements required for the home

"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."

Governance and Staffing 2019-20

THAW Orkney Staffing

Gill Couper-Swanney, Facilities and Administration Officer

Lorraine Campbell, Welfare Support Officer (*until April 2021*)

Linsey Drever, Development and Support Officer (*until July 2021*)

Suzy Fraser, Community Support Officer (*until May 2021*)

Craig Nisbet, Community Support Officer/Development and Support Officer
(*from August 2020*)

Jonathan Ford, Development and Support Officer (*from August 2020*)

Caroline Atkinson, Development and Support Officer (*from August 2020*)

Robert Leslie, Manager (*from September 2020*)

Trustees

Rhoda Walker (*Chair from September 2020*)

Adele Lidderdale (*Vice Chair from September 2020*)

Caroline Butterfield (*Treasurer*)

Janice Annal

Gerry O'Brien (*from February 2021*)

Mark Hull

Pat Law (*from September 2020*)

Imogen Sawyer

John Ross Scott

(*Robert Leslie – Secretary*)

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
- Foundation Scotland
- Corra Foundation
- Hunter Foundation
- NHS Orkney
- The Robertson Trust
- Orkney Housing Association Ltd
- Orkney Renewable Energy Forum
- Orkney Renewable Energy Ltd
- Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau
- Warm Homes Fund / Orkney Islands Council
- Scottish and Southern Electric / Energy Action Scotland
- Warmworks
- Blue Door
- **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's work of tackling fuel poverty and social and financial inclusion

Organisations we have partnered during 2020-21



Further information:

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

<http://www.thaworkney.co.uk/>

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