



HOUSING FUNDING AGREEMENTS 2024/25

Report by Depute Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to inform the Comhairle of the proposed Funding Agreement with The Energy Advisory Service (TEAS) for 2024/25.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 In the past, the Comhairle has supported a number of partner agencies, through the use of grant funding, in order to support the delivery of the Local Housing Strategy (LHS). Following the decision taken in 2023 by Western Isles Foyer to cease operating, there is now only one Housing related Funding Agreement in place with a partner agency. This is with TEAS, which is delivered by Tighean Innes Gall.
- 2.2 TEAS provides a wide range of energy efficiency and Fuel Poverty advice, assisting individual households and community groups.
- 2.2 The performance of TEAS is monitored on a regular basis, and it has demonstrated satisfactory performance during 2023/24. Key performance impacts in 2023/24 for TEAS include securing £282,000 of funding from a range of funding bodies, which provided funding to employ 5.5FTE members of staff within TIG.
- 2.3 Assessment of TEAS performance is positive, with it making an important contribution to Comhairle LHS priorities. Financial provision is in place for the continuation of Funding Agreement in 2024/25.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle approve the continuation of Housing Grant Funding for The Energy Advisory Service in 2024/25 to the sum of £39,000.**

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Appendix:	None
Background Papers:	None

IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	Cost to Comhairle in 2024/25: £39k from Local Housing Strategy Budget.
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	Deliver the aims and objectives of the Outer Hebrides Local Housing Strategy, in relation to Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency.
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 In the past the Comhairle provided financial grant support to a range of partner agencies, in order to help support the delivery of the LHS.
- 5.2 Over time, as operational funding for this type of support came under pressure, and as strategic goals changed, the number of partner agencies receiving this funding has reduced. TEAS is currently the only Housing partner organisation now receiving financial support from the Comhairle.
- 5.3 The most recent change was with regards to the Western Isles Foyer. In spring 2023 the Management Committee of the Foyer took the decision to cease operating. This was primarily due to the on-going challenges in securing funding, but also in relation to the changing operating environment.
- 5.4 The Comhairle had supported the Foyer since its inception in 2005, with funding provided by Housing Services and Education and Children's Services.

THE ENERGY ADVISORY SERVICE: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- 6.1 TEAS has had a very busy and productive year in 2023/24 and has reported the following key achievements.
- 6.2 With the current energy crisis, the demand for the service is higher than ever and this is directly reflected in the number of clients assisted, which remains higher than in previous years. In 2023/24 TEAS helped 1,483 clients throughout the Western Isles with enquiries ranging from basic energy advice to more in-depth energy support. TEAS also attended 22 community engagement events and school workshops, which provide an informal space to allow householders to find out about the services they offer.
- 6.3 In 2023/2024 TEAS were able to lever in £282,345 of funding to the island from a range of funding bodies, which provided funding to employ 5.5FTE members of staff, with the Comhairle funding acting as essential match funding for many of these funding applications.
- 6.4 TEAS also secured £60,578 worth of grant support for prepayment vouchers, as well as vouchers for credit meters and coal which has been essential this winter. In doing so TEAS was able to support 370 fuel poor homes throughout the Western Isles by providing 1,053 energy vouchers.

- 6.5 TEAS also report that they are seeing more complex cases, which are exacerbated by the difficulties in dealing with utility companies. TEAS referred 342 householders to the local network of support agencies, including the Financial Inclusion team, Macmillan Benefits, Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) and Home Energy Scotland.
- 6.6 TEAS also report a change in clients coming to the service looking for financial assistance to help to pay heating bills. TEAS are seeing many households approaching them who have not used the service previously, with a substantial increase in working householders requiring the service for financial assistance due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- 6.7 TEAS has used the Home Heat Support Fund (HHSF) to assist householders in this situation. To date TEAS has submitted 64 applications securing a client financial gain of £52,826.91. This funding goes directly to the householder's utility company, whether it be for coal, oil, gas or electric and provides direct support to enable householders to heat their homes. TEAS are currently awaiting the outcome of 2 further applications for the HHSF. In addition, this scheme has also helped households manage payments going forward as well as ensuring £11,928.66 worth of debt has been written off. Through Warm Home Discount applications, TEAS has achieved a further £3,900 of client financial gain and, through negotiations with utility companies and other support agencies, secured a further £8,243.68 CFG for householders.
- 6.8 TEAS have also installed small energy efficiency measures in 178 homes. This includes 374 LED lightbulbs, 17 chimney balloons, 140 radiator panels, 8 boiler services, 43 slow cookers and 96 air fryers.
- 6.9 TEAS continue to work with householders who have issues with meter changes and in 2023-24 had a successful project working with SSE, facilitating 100-meter changes throughout the Western Isles providing a client financial gain of £61,507.18 for 60 clients.
- 6.10 Through funding of £18,100 from Outer Hebrides CLLD LAG, TEAS were able to support 42 vulnerable householders with new kitchen appliances. 40 of these homes had individuals with medical conditions many of whom were dependent on the appliance that TEAS replaced. This project was run through local support organisations who referred clients into the project. This worked well and ensured all the funding was allocated in a few weeks with a request for further funding also being met by CLLD LAG. This project was extremely valuable to many vulnerable households and is one which TEAS wish to be able to carry out again if funding allows.
- 6.11 In total TEAS have had a client financial gain of £205,155.77, where the majority of the money has gone directly to utility bills at a time that has seen the highest increase in bills. This has made a substantial difference to many homes in the area and evidences the importance of the TEAS team.
- 6.12 TEAS has made a significant contribution throughout 2023/24 in tackling the energy needs of local community.

COMHAIRLE FUNDING SUPPORT

- 7.1 The proposed financial support for TEAS in 2023/24 is £39,000.
- 7.2 Financial provision is in place, in the LHS Revenue budget, for the continuation of this funding in 2023/24.

CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Comhairle provides financial support to The Energy Advisory Service to help address fuel poverty and energy efficient issues.