



HOUSING FUNDING AGREEMENTS 2025/26

Report by Chief Planning Officer

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to seek approval of the proposed Funding Agreement with The Energy Advisory Service (TEAS) for 2025/26.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Comhairle has historically provided grant funding to a number of partner agencies 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 Innse Gall.
- 2.2 TEAS provides a wide range of energy efficiency and fuel poverty advice, assisting individual households and community groups.
- 2.3 The performance of TEAS is monitored on a regular basis, and it has demonstrated satisfactory performance during 2024/25. Key performance impacts in 2024/25 for TEAS include securing £329,000 of funding from a range of funding bodies, which through the employment of 5.5 FTE members of staff within TIG has enabled a range of support to households as further detailed at section 6 of the report.
- 2.4 Assessment of TEAS performance is positive, with it making an important contribution to the Comhairle's Local Housing Strategy priorities. Financial provision is available from within the Housing Strategy budget for the continuation of the Funding Agreement in 2025/26.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle approve the continuation of Housing Grant Funding for The Energy Advisory Service in 2025/26 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 2025/26: £39k from Local Housing Strategy Budget. |
| Legal | None |
| Staffing | None |
| Assets and Property | None |
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| Strategic Implications | Implications/None |
| Risk | None |
| Equalities | None |
| Corporate Strategy | Delivery of 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 The Energy Advisory Service (TEAS) is an arm of Tighean Innse Gall (TIG), the local Housing Agency. TEAS was established in the early 1990s to provide energy and fuel poverty advice to households throughout the Outer Hebrides.
- 5.2 The Comhairle has provided support funding for TEAS for many years, and this has enabled TEAS to support the Comhairle in the delivery of the Local Housing Strategy in relation to the Comhairle's fuel poverty and energy efficiency strategic objectives.
- 5.3 TEAS continues to provide an excellent service to the community. A summary of the main tasks undertaken by TEAS during 2024/25 is set out at Section 6 of this Report.

THE ENERGY ADVISORY SERVICE: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- 6.1 In 2024/2025 TEAS levered in an additional £329,027 of funding to the islands from a range of funding bodies. This provided employment for 5.5FTE members of staff, with Comhairle funding acting as essential match funding for funding applications to enable the service to continue.
- 6.2 In 2024/25, TEAS helped 1,191 clients throughout the Western Isles, with these enquiries ranging from basic energy advice to more in-depth energy support. TEAS also secured £67,494 worth of grant support for prepayment vouchers as well as vouchers for credit meters and other forms of heating. In doing so TEAS was able to provide vital support to 448 fuel poor homes across the Western Isles by providing 1,344 energy vouchers, which also enabled TEAS to engage further with householders allowing them to discuss other issues they are facing and enable continued support.
- 6.3 As in previous years, TEAS are seeing more complex cases coming through, which are exacerbated by the difficulties householders are having dealing with utility companies and the impending Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS) switch off. In these cases, the network of support agencies including the Comhairle's Financial Inclusion team, Macmillan Benefits, Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) and Home Energy Scotland has been vitally important. TEAS referred 395 householders to these services as well as utility companies and other support agencies in 24/25 and received a further 246 referrals from support organisations. This is evidence of the effectiveness of the networks which TEAS has built over the years.

- 6.4 TEAS also installed small energy efficient measures in 131 homes. These included LED lightbulbs, chimney balloons, radiator panels, slow cookers and air fryers, to a total value of £10,271. These small measures can make a substantial difference to household energy use and efficiency.
- 6.5 TEAS continued to work with householders experiencing issues with meter changes, which has become a pressing issue due to the RTS switch off scheduled for June 2025. Staff have spent a large amount of time raising awareness of this to government and elsewhere, including a meeting with the chair of OFGEM alongside other likeminded organisations with the same concerns. TIG has met with 9 MSPs to highlight the RTS switch off issues that island households face, particularly as it is now very unlikely all homes will not be changed over by June 2025. TEAS has worked directly with households in terms of meter change requirements and are currently engaged with 58 households who require support with meter changes, alongside an additional 158 homes who require other assistance in dealing with utility companies. TEAS has seen this increase in the last quarter of 24/25 and are anticipating this will increase further in 25/26.
- 6.6 Through funding of £9,254 from Outer Hebrides Community Led Local Development (OHCLLD), TEAS was able to support 17 vulnerable young families with new kitchen appliances. All these homes had young children / people struggling with the cost of living and who did not have the disposable income to replace essential appliances, leading to dangerous appliances being in use. This project was run with local support organisations who referred clients into the project. This worked extremely 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 will be seeking further funding for in the coming year. Through the project TEAS was able to replace 22 broken / damaged appliances ensuring homes are now safer as well as reducing costs through installing energy efficient appliances.
- 6.7 In total, TEAS has provided homes in the Western Isles with a client financial gain of £175,639, where the majority of the money has gone directly to utility bills at a time of significant energy price increases. This has made a substantial difference to many homes in the Western Isles and evidences the importance of the small TEAS team. These figures exclude CFG from signposting to other agencies for new heating systems and insulation measures, as well as the financial savings householders make from the small energy measures which make a substantial difference to annual bills.
- 6.8 TEAS have attended 54 community engagement events and school workshops, which provide an informal space to allow householders to find out about the services they offer.
- 6.9 It has been another challenging year for TEAS, with the energy crisis having a substantial impact on local homes and increasing demand for the service. This has been exacerbated this year due to the loss of the Winter Fuel Payment and also the Home Heat Support Fund through the Fuel Insecurity funding. As there has been reduced support for the extremely high demand faced, TEAS continues to look at further options to support homes across the Western Isles. TEAS reports they 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.
- 6.10 In 2024/25 TIG were able to publish the 'Affordable Warmth at Home' report and the findings of this has been helpful to raise the profile of fuel poverty in the Western Isles. Households estimated to be at the highest risk of fuel poverty are (rate shown in brackets):
- those on annual incomes of less than £16,500 (97%)
 - households with someone with a disability (81%)
 - prepayment meter users (81%)
 - social renters (80%)
 - single pensioners (65%)

- families with children (56%)

Meanwhile analysis of dwelling characteristics reveals higher risk of fuel poverty for people living in homes:

- built before 1919 and between 1950 and 1991 (52%)
- rated for council tax band A and B (58%)
- with only electric heating (62%)
- affected by damp or mould (56%)

COMHAIRLE FUNDING SUPPORT

- 7.1 The proposed financial support for TEAS in 2025/26 is £39,000.
- 7.2 Financial provision is in place, within the LHS Revenue budget, for the continuation of this funding in 2025/26.

CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The Comhairle provides financial support to The Energy Advisory Service to help address fuel poverty and energy efficient issues. TEAS provides a vital service to the community and demand for its services remains strong, with tangible benefits to local households due to the information and advice being provided.