



# Annual Review 2009-10

## Reducing the incidence of cold-related illness and fuel poverty in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire

### From the Chair of Beat the Cold

**Peter Massey**

2009-10 saw the coldest winter for many years as Beat the Cold entered our second decade as a registered charity.

With 4,400 clients requesting help and advice, we have continued to deliver and develop solutions to the long running problems of poor energy efficiency and fuel poverty in and, increasingly, beyond North Staffordshire.

The severe weather probably contributed to the continued high demand for 'Emergency Warmth'. Both local Primary Care Trusts maintained their funding with some new funding in Staffordshire and from npower Health Through Warmth. Speedy solutions were found in many cases, including for a client whose boiler was condemned as he was about to be discharged from hospital just days before Christmas. With the help of the Warm Zone and other partners 'Emergency Warmth' enabled him to be home and warm for Christmas.

Our combination of security measures, Home Fire Risk Checks (as part of the Staffordshire Fire and Rescue 'Reaching Out' programme) and energy advice gave a superb service to households in Stoke. 96% of respondents surveyed would recommend this service to other households.

The experience gained in Derrington, the first low carbon community in Stafford Borough, working with individual households and taking part in community events, informed our work in Penside ward in the Borough, which began later in the year.

This was the final year of operation for 'Warm Up Moorlands Villages'. Over three years, working parish by parish this unique

initiative provided insulation measures, heating improvements and energy advice to 820 households in villages and remote communities in the Staffordshire Moorlands.

During the year we experienced a significant increase in the number of contacts because of fuel debt; another indication of growing numbers of North Staffordshire households facing the health, financial and other problems caused by living in cold, damp homes.

Our response was more intensive work through energy advice home visits made possible in Stoke-on-Trent by funding through Area Based Grant. The charity continued to work with the City Council towards Affordable Warmth Strategy implementation and participated actively in the Warm Zone Steering Group.

Overall, indications are that the effects of poverty, deprivation and poor health will sadly be with us for many years and the need for Beat the Cold is greater than ever. We remain a leader and innovator in this field with an established credibility and respect not just locally but throughout the country.

Financial support is crucial to tackling these needs and through 2009-10 the trustees responded quickly to opportunities to obtain funding, building on long established high levels of shared commitment and trust with partners. The trustees will continue to explore different ways to use, develop and finance our skills and services.

With appropriate changes in our Constitution, Beat the Cold intends to continue to respond positively to requests from further afield and to develop work both to eliminate fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions. All our advice staff obtained the new NEA/City & Guilds qualification 'Renewable Energy in the Home' and the trustees fully support them in their positive and highly professional approach to these challenging areas of work.



I extend my personal thanks to funders and partners and to the staff and trustees for all their dedication, enthusiasm and plain hard work throughout the year.



### Safe and Warm at Home

*'Beat the Cold lent me two heaters when I had no heating, thank you. Also, the smoke alarms are very useful.'*

*'Gave me advice on security, very good.'*

*'Fitted safety chain on door and mirror on the wall. Very good, pleased with it.'*

*'Your energy advisor rang my gas/ electricity provider and got my standing charges reduced per month. I was over £300 in credit and they hadn't informed me.'*

These comments from three clients of the project show clearly how linking funding and activities gives a better service to households in Stoke-on-Trent

Funding from:

- o the Home Office for simple security measures,
- o Fire & Rescue for Home Fire Risk Checks,
- o Stoke-on-Trent City Council for energy advice,
- o NHS Stoke-on-Trent for 'Emergency Warmth'.

Officers from the Safer City Partnership, the Inspector and PCSO's at Tunstall Neighbourhood Policing Unit, Impact Officers, chairs from Residents Associations and colleagues in other voluntary agencies helped us to target parts of the City. Our technicians installed simple security measures free of charge and conducted Home Fire Risk Checks. They gave simple energy advice and arranged for an Adviser to visit where residents had complicated issues.

273 households had measures installed. Others had HFRC's and advice but did not need measures. 103 returned a questionnaire. Before our visit, 71% were 'very' or 'fairly worried' about their home being broken into. Afterwards, this dropped to 17%. Where we fitted smoke alarms, 97% felt safer at home. 98% of those receiving energy advice found it 'very informative' or 'informative'.

*'Your representative was very professional and had a good understanding with older people and had a friendly attitude.'*

*'Everyone should be able to benefit from this excellent service offered in all towns.'*

*'It was a big help as my husband has health problems and is no longer able to do DIY jobs.'*

(A detailed report is available from Beat the Cold)

### Information, advice and referral

North Staffordshire PCT funded the service in Newcastle and the Moorlands and we ran an energy

advice service for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. Stoke City Council maintained their support for our energy advice service. These included community events, training and briefings to share our expertise and to help us reach as great a proportion of vulnerable households as possible. We extended the service, on a smaller scale, to Stafford Borough. In 2010-11 we will be undertaking a pilot project for the County Council in Stafford and Cannock.

We allocate one, two, or, rarely, three issues and tasks to each contact.

Issue	09-10	08-09
Accommodation	1,061	414
Bills / debt	87	215
Benefits	55	54
Disability – mental	20	15
Disability – physical	86	96
Energy advice	2,783	3,202
Fuel company	505	968
Grant schemes	996	1,062
Health	170	129
Other	19	43
Renewables	45	n/a
Warm Front excess payment	14	n/a
Task	09-10	08-09
Gave advice	953	1,379
Gave information	1,955	2,421
Received information	2	8
Referred to other agency	838	897
Arrange emergency visit	85	58
Mediation / negotiation	50	52
Advocacy	11	0
Home advice visit	1,113	375
Event	09-10	08-09
Briefing and training	9	8
Carers	1	3
Display (staffed)	27	27
Hospital	4	7
Lunch Club / Day Centre	18	3
Neighbourhood Forum	0	9
Senior Citizens	11	19
Sheltered Housing	2	0
Other	13	22

### Emergency Warmth

This service makes a practical difference where a vulnerable household is at risk following failure of their heating and/or hot water system. We loan heaters immediately and arrange a prompt contractor to visit, as required. This project kept people at risk of

severe ill health comfortable in their own homes - 273 households (187 from Stoke and 86 from North Staffs). Measures ranged from the loan of heaters, through small repairs to substantial improvements.

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### Potteries Access to Warmth

As the North Staffordshire Warm Zone changes emphasis from 'lower cost, higher numbers' activity around loft and cavity wall insulation to 'higher cost, lower numbers', Beat the Cold recognises that it will have to go out to find a higher proportion of the clients for PAW.

Households in the City aged over 60 who are owner-occupiers or private tenants, can request a full energy advice visit to complement the doorstep survey offered by the Zone. PAW encourages householders to commit to measures or benefit checks offered by the Zone.

Our staff are increasingly asked to negotiate over fuel debt and billing problems, regularly coming across households more than £800 in debt. They are also switching households onto social tariffs, with a typical annual saving of between £100 and £300.

### Kirkup Walk

Stoke-on-Trent City Council asked Beat the Cold to offer advice and support to residents in Kirkup Walk as they replaced storage heaters with new gas central heating. Our advisor helped residents to move to better tariffs, to use the new systems effectively and economically and with a variety of difficulties. Some of the residents were very frail and needed repeat visits if they were to cope with the changes. 45 households took part.

### City-wide fuel switching

Peter's practical recommendations after this pilot project influenced the design of the subsequent City-wide scheme. Beat the Cold worked closely with the Warm Zone to tender jointly for the support role in this new project and were pleased when the proposal was accepted. Having a Domestic Energy Assessor on our staff is vital to this work.

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### Making connections

Our Chief Officer contributes to a number of local, regional and national organisations and forums. Among the commitments during the year were:

- o Emergency Care Network Board representing the third sector;
- o National Right to Fuel Campaign committee;
- o North Staffordshire Warm Zone steering group;
- o Staffordshire NI7 monitoring group, helping to make Staffordshire an 'Environment for a Thriving Third Sector';
- o Stoke-on-Trent Affordable Warmth Strategy working group;

- o Stoke-on-Trent Local Strategic Partnership Board
- o Voluntary Sector Chief Officers Group.

### 'Pathway to Healthy Homes'

*'Beat the Cold were an invaluable partner; providing us with guidance on the process, expertise on energy efficiency measures and help in bringing other partners on board.'*

*Tracy Hall QN,  
Community Matron and  
joint clinical champion for  
COPD, Stoke-on-Trent  
Community Health  
Services.*



NEA asked Beat the Cold to work with them on their report for the Strategic Health Authority – an Investing for Health project to develop commissioner collaboration – on reducing Excess Winter Deaths. Understanding the commissioning process at the PCTs was time consuming and complicated. Our local knowledge was useful.

Out of four pilot referral projects in the West Midlands, Beat the Cold ran two, one with each PCT. The SHA toolkit was disseminated across the region.

### Staffordshire County Council and Fire & Rescue

Beat the Cold produced a feasibility study on integrating Home Fire Risk Checks, energy audits, and an insulation scheme, that could work across each district in the County. In 2010-11 we are training Firefighters and putting the scheme into action.

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### Derrington – Way Ahead

Jules, from Beat the Cold, conducted home energy advice visits for 15% of the households in the village, taking them through Carbon Footprinting, an Energy Performance Report, advice and information. This first low carbon community in Stafford Borough, has an enthusiastic group of residents working to make the community more sustainable.

We also took part in events, including a Local Food Festival, film nights and a celebratory tea dance. Carbon savings came from: home insulation; installing a new efficient boiler through the Boiler Scrappage scheme; not replacing a car; turning off unused lights and appliances; local purchasing; greater recycling; using the cycle route into Stafford; and other practical changes in behaviour. Even in this comparatively affluent village, nine residents qualified for the Priority Service Register at their fuel company; four switched to a social tariff.

(A detailed report is available from Beat the Cold.)

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## Warm up Moorlands Villages

By the end of this year, this project had assisted over 820 households, the majority of which were classed as 'vulnerable'. We arranged the insulation of 360 lofts and 330 cavity walls, referred households to the handyman service and 60 for a benefit check.

Until the last few months, all the households were from the smaller villages and remote areas of the Staffordshire Moorlands. This 'area-based scheme'

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## Partnerships

During the year, partner organisations vital to our 'cross-cutting' work included:

- Age Concern North Staffs
- Approach
- Aspire Housing
- Beth Johnson HA, Staying Put
- Cheadle & District Home Link
- Citizens Advice Bureaux
- Derrington – Way Ahead
- Disability Solutions
- Eaga partnership
- Ebico
- Eon
- Heatex Quality Insulation
- Home Start
- National Right to Fuel Campaign
- NEA – the national energy action charity
- Newcastle Borough Council
- Newcastle CVS
- North Staffs Carers Association
- North Staffs Furniture Mine
- North Staffs Racial Equality Council
- npower (including Health Through Warmth)
- Orbit Care & Repair
- Pension Service
- Primary Care Trusts - North Staffs and Stoke
- Revival (Home Improvement Agency)
- SCIO
- Stafford Borough Council
- Staffordshire County Council
- Staffordshire Fire and Rescue
- Staffordshire Moorlands CVS
- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council, incl Housing Strategy and Adult Social Care
- Sustainable Staffordshire
- The Stroke Association
- Sure Start
- Voluntary Action Stoke-on-Trent
- WRVS

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## The organisation

Beat the Cold is an unincorporated association and is registered as a charity, number 1076957. A copy of the 'Trustees' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2010 is available from the office.

### Trustees

Lesley Bentley	Vice Chair
Judith Boulton	Treasurer
Allan Clews	
Barbara Limer	
Peter Massey	Chair

### Staff

Our staff during the year were:

David Asling	Security Technician
Martin Chadwick	Chief Officer
Jules Hill	Home visitor / Adviser
Peter Lovell	Home visitor / Adviser
Brian Shenton	Security Technician
Rosie Thorpe	Admin Assistant / Adviser
Gavin Webb	Project Officer
Sarah Whalley	Work experience / Advisor
Gill Wilshaw	Services and Operations Manager

Cliff Dyer acted for us as surveyor and advisor, and Trevor Durber as advisor. We also thank: Peter Seaman, our accountant; Trevor Watkins, our auditor; David Lowe, consultant; and Michaela Fyson, volunteer.

was tailored to the area. Each home received a promotional leaflet and a thermometer card. These cards have parish directories on the reverse, promoting local groups, services and initiatives at the most 'grass roots' level possible.

Parish by parish we offered insulation at a low price, or free of charge, and promoted the FAB benefit checking service, the handyman service and Warm Front.

Support from SMDC, the contractor and, in the first year, from DEFRA, was vital.

Beat the Cold

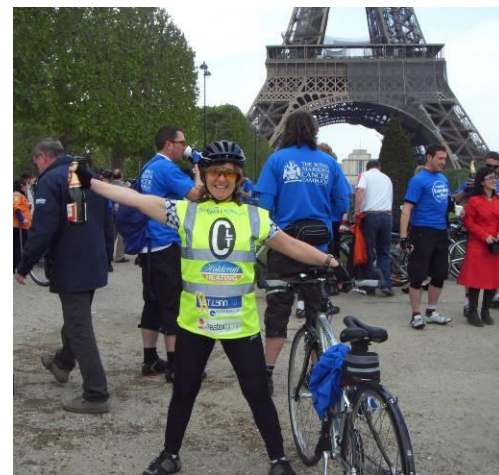
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*Gill celebrates at the end of her sponsored cycle ride from London to Paris. She raised £1,700 for 'Emergency Warmth' clients*