



## Annual Review 2010-11

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### From the Chair

This has been an interesting year for Beat the Cold, maintaining our service to fuel poor households.

Working in a new climate of contracts rather than grants has proved challenging with ever increasing demands for efficiency and cost saving. Beat the Cold does not have any 'back office' staff – every member of staff is involved in providing the service. This fits well with the Government's strategy of reducing unnecessary activity.

Decisions taken by the new government to address the current fiscal situation have created uncertainty for many third sector organisations, including Beat the Cold. Despite this, the demand from local people for the work of Beat the Cold continues unabated.

The trustees have actively investigated collaborative working. This bore fruit with winning a contract in partnership with Marches Energy Agency for energy advice work in Tamworth. This successful pilot shows our ability to work across the region and we are developing partnerships with other service providers.

The desperation caused by fuel poverty cannot be underestimated. Inability to heat a home adequately results in poor health, social isolation and loss of independence.

I have the greatest admiration for the staff of Beat the Cold, who have worked so hard to enable us to continue. I commend my fellow trustees, whose guidance and due diligence have helped the agency weather the storm and continue its good work.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to Peter Massey, who was the Chair from the inception of the charity in 1999. His expertise and vision has resulted in the organisation that is Beat the Cold today.

**Lesley Bentley**

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### About our new Chair

Lesley brings a wealth of experience to our organisation. She has successfully managed a Home Improvement Agency for over 20 years and is well equipped to work in the changing climate where organisations must help more people but with fewer resources.



Besides being Chair of Beat the Cold, Lesley is a trustee of the national charity Foundations Independent Living Trust, whose mission is to help people live with dignity in their own homes.

Lesley is a founder trustee of Beat the Cold.

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### Our Vision

Beat the Cold will be:

- an efficient, flexible and trusted organisation, able to deliver front line services that reduce the ill health, deaths and misery suffered by vulnerable households because of fuel poverty;
- an organisation that promotes sustainability and renewable energy;
- an organisation that can share and market its expertise in reaching members of society who rarely engage.

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### Energy Advice and Support

Energy advice is most effective delivered face-to-face in the home. This was increasingly our experience during the year.

Clients need to find bills and letters; advisers can check bills against meter readings; heating controls can be set, and the householders shown how to do this for themselves. When an adviser contacts a fuel company to negotiate over an error, or a debt, one of the first questions they are asked is: 'Is the customer with you?'

## In Stoke-on-Trent

997 households benefitted from the final year of **'Potteries Access to Warmth'** which was aimed primarily at households in the private sector aged 60+. An analysis of 1,560 clients (over more than this year) showed that our support included:

- 17.5% - negotiation with fuel company and/or placed on a Social Tariff. A Social Tariff offered between £100 and £300 a year off fuel bills.
- 19.5% - accessed a grant to make their home warmer.
- 30% - helped to improve their accommodation.

*With extensive support from one of our advisers, a household had fuel debt of £950 written off, after they agreed (and kept to) a payment plan for the fuel they used over 12 months.*

Closing the **Energy Advice Service in Stoke**, which we ran for the City Council, was one of the early cuts made by the authority.

North Staffs Warm Zone and Beat the Cold jointly deliver advice and support to vulnerable tenants of the City Council as part of the **City-wide Fuel Switching Project**. Households have old storage heaters removed, to be replaced with modern gas central heating. This involves two visits to the households. As well as the savings that resulted from a modern heating system, our advisers helped the householders to switch to dual fuel tariffs, to look for the best deals and to apply for a Social Tariff or Warm Home Discount.

## In Staffordshire

Through the **Staffordshire Cares: Community Wellbeing Fund**, we extended our work into Cannock Chase and parts of Stafford Borough. Information events in Cannock Town Centre, Rugeley Library and Cannock Library generated a lot of interest. As well as households in touch with us at events and by telephone, 46 received a home energy advice visit.

45 households switched to a Social Tariff; 9 applied for free insulation measures; 7 applied to Warm Front for heating improvement. 22 households, previously unaware of the service, were interested in the Home Improvement Agencies, particularly the County-wide Handyperson Service.

## In Stafford

We continued to work with funding from **Stafford Borough Council**, attending events, giving advice by telephone and making home energy advice visits.

## In Newcastle and the Moorlands

Events we attended ranged from a 'flu jab' day at the surgery in Hartington to multi-agency days to promote sustainability and financial inclusion in the Roebuck Centre, Newcastle. **NHS North Staffs** support our work across the area and **SMDC** in the Moorlands.

Rural fuel poverty can be severe – houses with the lowest SAP ratings we have seen – out in the rural uplands of the Staffordshire Moorlands. Poor repair, solid walls, distance from the gas main can make houses hard to heat. Such homes can be isolated and costly to find and improve.

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

The following tables summarise our activity.

| Issue                 | 10-11 | 09-10 |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| Accommodation         | 920   | 1,061 |
| Bills / debt          | 397   | 87    |
| Benefits              | 40    | 55    |
| Disability – mental   | 14    | 20    |
| Disability – physical | 49    | 86    |
| Energy advice         | 2,027 | 2,783 |
| Fuel company          | 645   | 505   |
| Grant schemes         | 715   | 996   |
| Health                | 113   | 170   |
| Other                 | 7     | 19    |
| Renewables            | 74    | 45    |

| Task                     | 10-11 | 09-10 |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| Gave advice              | 731   | 953   |
| Gave information         | 1,039 | 1,955 |
| Received information     | 1     | 2     |
| Referred to other agency | 804   | 838   |
| Arranged emergency visit | 55    | 85    |
| Mediation / negotiation  | 27    | 50    |
| Advocacy                 | 11    | 11    |
| Home advice visit        | 675   | 1,113 |

| Event                   | 10-11 | 09-10 |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|
| Briefing and training   | 16    | 9     |
| Carers                  | 1     | 1     |
| Display (staffed)       | 72    | 27    |
| Hospital                | 1     | 4     |
| Lunch Club / Day Centre | 12    | 18    |
| Neighbourhood Forum     | 2     | 0     |
| Senior Citizens         | 2     | 11    |
| Sheltered Housing       | 1     | 2     |
| Other                   | 1     | 13    |

Figures do not include: work in Derby; work for the County Council unless we made a referral.

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## Emergency Warmth

For some vulnerable households, losing heating and hot water poses an immediate risk to health. This service makes a practical difference. We loan heaters immediately and arrange for an engineer to visit promptly. Our contractors have often responded with a visit the same day or the next day. They have our authority to make a repair at the first visit, if the job is comparatively small.

Demand is increasing and other sources of support are decreasing. Even where we can only meet part of the cost of a repair, our clients appreciate that we offer a trusted contractor, who will not over charge.

Over the year, Emergency Warmth supported 194 households (122 for NHS Stoke-on-Trent and 72 for NHS North Staffs). In North Staffordshire, funding from npower Health Through Warmth helped us to offer additional assistance to many of the households. Across the entire project, we worked in partnership with Revival, the Home Improvement Agency.

Examples of our support included:

*Single parent on a low income whose child suffered from severe asthma – after the central heating failed they borrowed our heaters until Warm Front could effect a repair.*

*A patient with coronary heart disease, who could be discharged from hospital when we organised a repair to a failing heating system.*

*A patient recovering from chemo-therapy who had no heating at home until we organised a repair.*

A comment on Emergency Warmth, from Nigel Bennett, Head of Public Health Governance at NHS Stoke-on-Trent:

*'A single intervention can effectively generate savings equivalent to a whole year's running costs.'*

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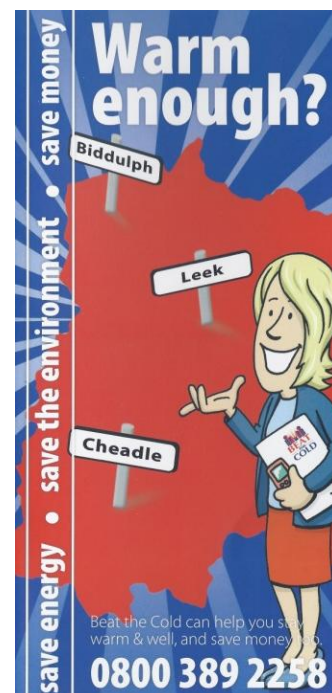
## Penkside Project

Working with the Education Officer at 'Science for Sustainability' at Keele University, our adviser helped over 100 children at two primary schools in Stafford to become Energy Detectives. It was part of a project to promote affordable warmth and reduce carbon emissions in one of the more disadvantaged parts of Stafford.

Our adviser conducted 47 home energy advice visits, which all included carbon-footprinting, an energy audit, detailed advice. Our support went

much further, helping households: to have insulation fitted; to switch to cheaper tariffs for gas and electricity; to negotiate with fuel companies over billing errors; to have minor property repairs; and to check benefits. In one case, we negotiated with the bailiff and the fuel company over arrears, maintaining a supply of fuel and sorting out an affordable payment plan.

*From 19 returned questionnaires, 16 households found the advice 'very informative' and 2 'informative' – a 95% positive response.*



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## Home Fire Risk Checks

During the year, Staffordshire Fire & Rescue stopped using voluntary agencies to conduct these home visits. We had found the practical connection between warmer homes and safer homes a great way of working and were sorry to see our involvement end. Staff continue to make referrals to F&R when we come across households at risk. Our technician then worked with F&R in Derby, through Orbit Home Improvement Agency, doing similar work for them.

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## Fire fighters and energy efficiency

The agency trained firefighters at Fire Stations across the County in assessing the needs of vulnerable households. The fire fighters were then able to complete an energy audit and make referrals to Beat the Cold for insulation and advice. As the project progressed, we found that the firefighters were coming across only a few homes where insulation was required. The value of the project lay in the number of households advised to switch to a Social Tariff, to apply for the Priority Service Register at their fuel company and to use practical services available to older people.

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## Connections

The Chief Officer at Beat the Cold contributes to a number of local, national and regional forums, bringing our experience of 'grass roots' work with fuel poor households to strategy and planning.

Among his commitments were:

- North Staffordshire Emergency Care Network Board;
- North Staffs Warm Zone Steering Group;
- Strategy group at the County Council – ‘An Environment for a Thriving Third Sector’;
- Stoke-on-Trent Local Strategic Partnership board;
- Stoke-on-Trent Voluntary Sector Chief Officers Group;
- National Right to Fuel Campaign committee member.

## Partnerships

During the year, many partner organisations were vital to our ‘cross-cutting’ work. We are grateful to the considerable number of colleagues who work with us to support households vulnerable to high fuel bills, poor energy efficiency, low income and poor health.

Among the partners were:

- Age UK North Staffs;
- Approach;
- Aspire Housing;
- Brighter Futures;
- Citizens Advice Bureaux;
- Disability Solutions;
- Ebico;
- E.ON;
- Heatex Quality Insulation;
- Home Start;
- Keele University;
- NEA;
- Newcastle CVS;
- NHS Stoke-on-Trent;
- NHS North Staffordshire;
- North Staffs Carers Association;
- North Staffs Furniture Mine;
- Npower Health Through Warmth;
- Orbit Care & Repair;
- Pension Service;
- Revival (Home Improvement Agency);
- SCIO;
- Stafford and District Voluntary Services
- Stafford Borough Council;
- Staffordshire County Council;
- Staffordshire Fire & Rescue;
- Staffordshire Moorlands CVS;
- SMDC
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- Sustainable Staffordshire;
- Voluntary Action Stoke-on-Trent

## Details of the charity

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 2011 is available from the office.

### Trustees

|                                      |            |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Lesley Bentley                       | Chair      |
| Judith Boulton                       | Treasurer  |
| Allan Clews                          | Vice Chair |
| Michaela Fyson (appointed 5 October) |            |
| Barbara Limer (retired 5 October)    |            |
| Peter Massey                         |            |

### Staff

|                 |                             |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Martin Chadwick | Chief Officer               |
| Jules Hill      | Energy Adviser              |
| Peter Lovell    | Energy Adviser & DEA        |
| Brian Shenton   | Security Technician         |
| Rosie Thorpe    | Energy Adviser / Admin      |
| Gavin Webb      | Energy Adviser              |
| Gill Wilshaw    | Services and Operations Mgr |

Cliff Dyer acted for us as surveyor and adviser, and Trevor Durber as an adviser. Two medical students in Year Two at Keele University School of Medicine came on placement.

We thank: Peter Seaman, our accountant; Trevor Watkins, independent examiner; and David Lowe, consultant.

### Contact us:

Beat the Cold  
The Bridge Centre, Birches Head Road  
STOKE-ON-TRENT ST2 8DD

Tel: 01782 683813  
Hotline: 0800 3892258  
Email: [enquiries@beatcold.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@beatcold.org.uk)

Home Energy Advice Tamworth:  
0800 043 2815 or 01782 683796



Our new, up to date web site, funded by the Big Lottery Fund and maintained by Freeman Press:

[www.beatcold.org.uk](http://www.beatcold.org.uk)

- News and comment from the agency
- Events listing
- Details of how we can help
- Advice and information – local to each area
- and we’re on Twitter - @beatcold