



Project Counter Attack

Blackpool Affordable Warmth Partnership

May 2009

Hazel Merridew – Project Manager



The project was developed and led from the initiation stage by Hazel and the innovative approach to partnership working was recognised with an 'Outstanding Service' award in November 2008

Project Background

- The Project commenced following a successful funding bid to The ScottishPower Energy People Trust by two of the Affordable Warmth partners, Blackpool Council and NHS Blackpool.
- This was in response to issues raised whilst formulating the Affordable Warmth Strategy relating to the assumed 'under claiming ' of assistance with thermal comfort measures and grants.
- As Blackpool has high levels of poor health, large numbers of non-decent housing stock, twice the national average of Incapacity Benefit claimants and was ranked 16th on the Index of Multi Deprivation (now 12th) it was inexplicable why vulnerable residents seemed not to be accessing services designed to help them.
- Blackpool has twice the national average of private sector rented accommodation, often associated with poor levels of thermal comfort, and many of those vulnerable residents were tenants in this type of housing.



Project Aims

The main aim of the project was to define and understand the barriers preventing vulnerable residents from achieving affordable warmth and additionally:

- To instigate remedial actions where appropriate
- To increase uptake of existing thermal improvement measures



Research Findings

We visited 1139 households in total and identified barriers preventing take up of existing measures, as follows:

- Unaware of all or some services/grants = 342
- Ineligible-for a variety of reasons = 251
- Other miscellaneous reasons (predominantly Social Landlord properties) =186
- Landlord dispute (repairs)=138
- Perception that not entitled =79
- Transient-intending to move =45
- Property Condition unsuitable =19
- Negative Image of schemes =14
- Landlord Refuses permission =6

What We Did

- Created an outreach service visiting clients in their own homes and assessing their needs
- Increased the uptake of thermal improvements e.g. directly referred into Warm Front, Home Insulation Schemes and other energy efficiency measures
- Created firm links between related services e.g. property disrepair linking into grants, housing enforcement services, housing applications and rent bond scheme
- Promoted and actively referred into health improvement preventative services e.g. Health Trainers programmes, Condition Management Courses, Exercise on prescription
- Reduced fuel poverty by conducting income maximisation reviews and providing an accredited benefits applications service
- Directly linked clients into Third Sector services and associated practical financial assistance

How We Did It

- Forged firm links with a variety of Statutory, Community and Third Sector organisations to obtain referrals e.g. Health Visitors, Hospital Clinics/Discharge Teams, Social Workers, Mental Health professionals, DWP Visiting Officers and Age Concern outreach services
- Publicised via 'Road Shows', publications and presentations to Community/Professional groups
- Provided posters and surveys for self referrals via GP Surgeries and Pharmacies-by far the most successful targeting of those not engaged with other services
- Provided links via Social Housing Landlords, Housing Departments and Housing Enforcement authorities



Remedial Measures

Remedial actions were taken with 74 % of the 1139 households visited i.e. 844 and involved 'active' referral to a wide range of services and measures across the Statutory, Voluntary and Community sectors.

Many households required multiple actions resulting in a total of 1112 measures/services commissioned and delivered.

Remedial Measures continued

A total of 623 referrals (excl. income maximisation) were made as follows:

- 60 to Warm Front for heating related grants
- 46 for Energy Efficiency measures-home insulation, draught proofing etc.
- 68 to Winter Warmth Campaign for 'emergency' remedial heating issues
- 28 to Home Owner's Advice for priority/essential works grants and advice
- 68 to Care and Repair Home Improvement Agency for priority/essential works grants, disabled facilities grants and 'Seashore' home security inspection
- 38 to Housing Enforcement officers for issues with private rented accommodation-we often undertook joint visits in addition to this
- 107 to other Council departments-for issues relating to any council service e.g Environmental Health, Social Services, Housing/Homelessness services
- 24 to a Community Falls Matron service for those age 65+ with a history of falling
- 1 to education grants relating to uniform provision/ school bus fares
- 69 to Voluntary Organisations for any issues relating to their services

Remedial Measures *continued*

- 114 Others- to a range of organisations including Energywatch, Uswitch, Social Tariff schemes, Health Trainers, Condition Management (Expert Patient) Programmes, Health On Prescription(GP) , Fire Service, Dept. for Work & Pensions, ACAS, Legal Services
- * an additional barrier was created following supply of portable heaters to cover emergency heating breakdown which meant clients faced significantly increased energy bills due to the high cost of running this type of appliance. A tactical solution was devised and implemented, working in partnership with Blackpool Ladies Sick Poor Association (the Project Manager was an existing member of their Executive) to issue food vouchers allowing redirection of household funds to defray increased fuel costs .

Income Maximisation

- **Income Maximisation**

In addition to the main research & assessment interviews, over a period of 15 months, the project completed 489 secondary interviews. This activity usually required a further home visit to complete benefits application forms on behalf of vulnerable clients. The financial outcome achieved as a result is:

£1.1 million of additional annual income for vulnerable householders, mainly elderly and relating to ill health and low income benefits and allowances.

** The final figure now stands at £1.25 million*

Financial Outcomes

Financial outcomes to the 844 households achieved over a two year period to December 2008 include:

- £ 211,800 of thermal improvements to homes
- £42,024 of emergency remedial action where heating and hot water supply compromised
- £ 1,450 of charitable funds obtained to defray emergency heating energy costs
- £ 1.1million of additional annual income achieved from benefits and health related allowance applications made on behalf of project clients over a 15 month period.

Additionally circa 4,000 energy saving light bulbs were distributed to project research participants

Recommendations

Recommendations to overcome the barriers identified fall into two main categories :

- Identifying and implementing local measures/ solutions
- Highlighting and publicising wider issues.

Taking into account other related research the findings suggest a review of policy/service delivery is necessary specifically in the following areas:

Recommendations continued

Eligibility criteria for national and local affordable warmth measures/grants (too many excluded)

- **Value of grants available (insufficient to cover costs)**
- **Availability of local measures/grants to assist residents achieve/maintain decent homes (reducing budgets)**
- **Security of tenure /enforcement action for Private Rented Sector (retaliatory evictions)**
- **Outreach to assess and deliver services direct to vulnerable households (assisting the incapable)**
- **Incentives for improvement works in Private Rented Sector (e.g. expansion of energy efficiency tax breaks)**
- **Partnership working between all sectors to identify and eradicate gaps in service provision (avoiding duplication and bridging gaps)**

Implementation of local recommendations

- **Bid for continuance funding to support service development, improvement and delivery with consideration being given to mainstreaming. This aim is supported by potential partnership funding from NHS Blackpool, The ScottishPower Energy People Trust and Blackpool Council the original project funding providers. (bid outline prepared)**
- **Maintain and distribute fact sheet containing all current measures/schemes available to all advice agencies, health and social care outreach workers across the borough. (Commenced distribution)**
- **Raising general awareness of measures amongst vulnerable residents via inclusion of a fact sheet with Council Tax Benefit awards, Housing Allowance awards, Housing Application packs, Rent Bond applications, with Flu Immunisation letters etc.**
- **Advertise measures via electronic displays in Council Customer First Centre, NHS Accident & Emergency, Cardiac, Chest, Orthopaedic and Diabetes clinics. (Commenced)**

Implementation continued

Display posters and surveys in GP Surgeries to best reach target audience

- Continue outreach service for vulnerable residents to maximise income and provide energy efficiency advice including switching domestic fuel supply to social tariffs.
- Continue provision of Home Improvement Grants, Winter Warmth Campaign remedial measures and Excess Warm Front payments tailored to allow greater discretionary application e.g. sliding scale of contribution for those on low income but no benefits and completion of small works that currently prevent installation of warmth measures e.g. patch pointing, eradication of small scale damp penetration .(under consideration)
- Review current services to consider new Landlord Accreditation scheme, linking payment of Housing Allowance to property condition and enhancing Rent Bond scheme to include advance rent payments widening access to decent rented property.
- Investigate and produce cost analysis to provide boiler replacements for vulnerable households where existing systems working but continually breaking down and/or very energy inefficient.



Wider Issues

Recommendations which cannot be implemented at a local level will be highlighted appropriately at regional/national fora e.g. National Energy Action Conference, Carbon Action Network Annual Conference, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Additionally the End Project Report including recommendations will be published on several national web sites and distributed to a number of organisations.



Conclusion

Blackpool Affordable Warmth Partnership welcome any enquiries relating to the project.

Contacts should be directed to Head of Neighbourhood Improvement via Blackpool Council Customer First Centre.

Tel: 01253 477477
web access via CAN