

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

6 October 2008

Joint Report of the Director of Health and Housing and Cabinet Member for Housing

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 USE OF HEATSEEKERS SCHEME IN TONBRIDGE & MALLING

Summary

This report introduces the 'Heatseekers' scheme, which the Council is seeking to investigate further. This report details what the scheme involves and the potential benefits to residents in the borough.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This report informs Members of a new initiative called Heatseekers due to be launched in October 2008. Heatseekers involves a thermal image survey of homes in a target area which provides an analysis of the thermal efficiency of each home. A team of surveyors will call door to door and householders will be able to see:

- a thermal image of their property; and
- details of how they can reduce their carbon emissions and potentially save on energy costs.

The scheme offers discounted priced insulation measures (cavity wall and loft insulation) using Carbon Energy Reduction Target (CERT) funding and interested householders will be able to arrange for an appointment for measures to be installed at the time of the visit.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 There are various funding regimes to help home owners make their homes warmer, healthier and more energy efficient. These include the government funded Warm Front grant, the CERT discount scheme and the Council's Warm Homes Assistance grant.

1.2.2 The Warm Front grants are for people in receipt of certain benefits to provide insulation and heating improvements.

- 1.2.3 Carbon Energy Reduction Target (CERT) funding available through utility company schemes provides discounted price insulation measures. The CERT scheme places a legal obligation on utility companies to achieve targets for promoting reductions in carbon emissions. Utility companies offer practical help including funding energy efficiency measures and advice on how to reduce fuel bills. Assistance is directed in part at “fuel poor” households, those over 70 years of age or in receipt of an income or disability related benefit. Forty per cent of carbon saving measures must be directed to these priority group households. Typically this would include free cavity wall insulation and loft insulation where required. For the remaining sixty per cent, discounted prices for efficient heating and efficient insulation are provided to the ‘able to pay’ i.e. all other households.
- 1.2.4 As well as running energy efficiency measures schemes directly, utility companies allocate CERT funding to insulation installers who market their own discount insulation schemes to customers.
- 1.2.5 The Council’s Warm Homes Assistance grant provides energy efficiency measures to the following key groups, which under the House Condition Survey (2006) were identified as being susceptible to fuel poverty:
- properties constructed pre1919 and in Council Tax Bands A to D; or
 - where the applicant is over 55 years of age; or
 - where the household is vulnerable i.e. in receipt of an income or disability related benefit.
- 1.2.6 Our current Housing Assistance policy requires applicants to investigate other available forms of funding first such as Warm Front and CERT.
- 1.2.7 To date the Council’s Warm Homes Assistance scheme has been very successful. However, it is recognised that energy efficiency measures need to be delivered on a large scale to borough residents to ensure local and Government targets to reduce carbon emissions and to reduce fuel poverty are met.
- 1.2.8 The Government recently announced a £910 million commitment to help households improve the energy efficiency of their homes and hence reduce energy bills. Around £560 million of this will add to the existing energy efficiency programme CERT.

1.3 Heatseekers scheme

- 1.3.1 We have recently been contacted by insulation installers Mark Group who have developed an innovative CERT funded initiative called Heatseekers.
- 1.3.2 The Heatseeker scheme has been developed by an insulation installer called Mark Group. Mark Group works closely with five of the six main utility providers, and installs approximately one in three CERT funded insulation measures. The

scheme is managed by the Energy Savings Partnership (ESP), a project management company specialising in managing energy efficiency schemes.

- 1.3.3 Heatseekers has been devised to offer a visual aid to householders to encourage the take up of insulation measures and is available to both 'able to pay' and priority groups in the owner occupied and private rented sectors.
- 1.3.4 A thermal survey is undertaken over an agreed target area allowing analysis of the thermal efficiency of each home.
- 1.3.5 Mark Group have been allocated significant CERT funding for the Heatseekers initiative over the next three years, and the scheme offers a fixed discount price for loft and cavity wall insulation over this period.
- 1.3.6 Mark Group will carry out the Heatseeker insulation installations. They have invested in significant supporting resources, for example insulation material, to meet the increased demand for installations generated through the scheme.
- 1.3.7 Mark Group is seeking Council endorsement to encourage householder take up of the scheme. This endorsement is in the form of allowing Mark Group use of the Council's logo on their literature, regarding the scheme. This use of the logo would be in accordance with the Council's guidelines regarding size, colour etc. Council endorsement is sought to give re-assurance to householders that they are dealing with a reputable company.
- 1.3.8 Mark Group has approached other selected authorities in Kent, for example Ashford, Dover and Sevenoaks, with a view to endorsing the scheme in their area.

1.4 Survey Process

- 1.4.1 ESP carry out a mail out letter to residents in the target area to explain the scheme and confirm:
 - the Heatseeker vehicle will be under taking a thermal survey; and
 - surveyors will be calling door to door where properties would benefit from insulation, with a personalised thermal image of each home, offering insulation advice.

The letter will give a free phone number, which residents can call if they do not wish to receive a visit. The Council's Community Safety Team has confirmed this approach is acceptable and will not breach the "cold calling control zone" initiative.

- 1.4.2 ESP will also contact the Police, resident groups and neighbourhood watch to ensure they are aware of the scheme and its purpose.
- 1.4.3 The vehicle works between October and March at night, typically surveying 3,000 to 5,000 properties per night. The survey will identify homes which have no

insulation and/or fall below a fixed Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating, used for calculating energy efficiency in housing.

- 1.4.4 Where householders are interested the surveyors can carry out a survey and provide a quotation for insulation works. Installation dates can be booked at the time, and work will be undertaken within a three week timescale.
- 1.4.5 The scheme will only be used to promote loft and cavity wall insulation measures.

1.5 'Able to Pay' Group

- 1.5.1 The initiative is able to offer the following discounted prices for loft and cavity wall insulation using CERT funding. This offers value for money and is comparable to other discount schemes:

Typical 3 bed property	Loft Insulation	Cavity wall insulation
Attached property	£189	£149
Detached property	£195	£169

- 1.5.2 Installing loft insulation and cavity wall insulation offers approximately £155 and £120 energy cost savings per annum respectively on a typical property.

1.6 Priority group

- 1.6.1 The scheme will offer free loft insulation and cavity wall insulation installation using CERT funding to priority group applicants. These include applicants over 70 years of age **or** applicants in receipt of one of the following income or disability related benefits:

- Income support;
- Housing Benefit;
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance;
- Disability Living Allowance;
- Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit(which must include constant attendance allowance);
- War Disablement Pension (which must include the mobility supplement or constant attendance allowance);
- Pension Credit;
- Disabled Persons Tax Credit;
- Child Tax Credit (where income is £15,592 or less); and

- Working Tax Credit (where income is £15,592 or less)

1.7 Benefit to residents in the borough

- 1.7.1 Heatseekers will be able to deliver a high profile, high volume initiative that could make a real difference to the energy efficiency of homes in the borough.
- 1.7.2 The scheme offers free insulation to priority groups and low cost discount insulation through a reputable installer to others.
- 1.7.3 With the Government's recent announcement of further funding to the CERT energy efficiency programme, the Heatseekers scheme will raise awareness regarding reducing carbon emissions, and allow residents further opportunity to access and benefit from available CERT funding.
- 1.7.4 The Council will have access to the thermal imaging information gathered by the Heatseeker vehicle via the Energy Savings Partnership website. The information will include:
- number of properties surveyed;
 - percentage requiring insulation;
 - number of insulation measures delivered;
 - thermal image of each property showing the financial and Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) savings to the home owner; and
 - a running total of financial and CO₂ savings across the target area.
- 1.7.5 If the Council was to progress the scheme, it is proposed to initially target an area in Tonbridge in order to gauge response to and effectiveness of the scheme. If the pilot is successful the scheme could then be extended further.
- 1.7.6 Mark Group has set up a focus group, where householder views on the scheme and its implementation have been sought. Feedback from this group was determined to be favourable and hence the reason why Mark Group are progressing the scheme.
- 1.7.7 In line with standard procedure, before the Council can endorse the scheme, Officers will need to undertake the necessary checks to ensure that the company is reputable and one the Council wish to support. In addition we also feel it would be beneficial to await the response to and outputs of the scheme in other local authority areas prior to launching the scheme in Tonbridge & Malling.

1.8 Conclusions

- 1.8.1 The Heatseekers initiative appears to be an innovative way of targeting installation of home insulation to a large number of residents. It could prove an extremely useful tool in our efforts to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty across the borough. Once Officers are satisfied that appropriate checks have been made and the initial results are available from other local authority areas and it seems a viable scheme a further report will be brought to this Board.

Background papers:

contact: Hazel Skinner

Nil

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