

Thank you for inviting me to speak at the Community Planning Group

My name is Jackie Westerman and I am the Home Energy Efficiency Project Officer for Argyll & Bute Council.

I have been in post for just over 1 year.

My role is to promote and administer the scheme but most importantly to promote.

My biggest challenge is to make people believe that there are free grants available!

Since 1st July 2022 spend to date in Argyll & Bute is £1.35m and we have insulated more than 180 households in this years' programme alone.

The premise of the Scheme is to contribute towards the Scottish Governments target of net-zero emissions by 2040, by retro-fitting insulation measures to homes, however more recently Fuel Poverty has become the main issue. We work hard to ensure that both issues are addressed.

The scheme is called the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme (ABS for short) – all Local Authorities in Scotland can make an application to the Scottish Government for funding for the Scheme.

The Councils Scheme differs to other Councils as we do not own our own stock so we work on a house-by-house basis. This gives us an advantage as we are contacted by householders who want to take part of their own accord and we have a Contractor engaged on a rolling basis.

Councils with their own stock will carry out programmes of street or blocks at one time and can find problems with householder engagement and engaging contractors on a project-by-project basis so some Councils decide not to take part at all, however the programme budget is over £2m in this financial year and I feel that it is important that this amount of funding is appropriated in Argyll and Bute.

I am particularly keen that geography should be no barrier to householders applying and to having works carried out timeously.

The Councils Home Energy Efficiency Team work in partnership with Home Energy Scotland who take referrals on our behalf and then guide the customer to the correct scheme, as there are several different schemes in Scotland, for heating, solar, wind etc. The ABS Scheme is for insulation, to retrofit homes that have poor Energy Performance ratings to improve their energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty.

Insulation is the bedrock of energy efficiency in the home.

The Programme open to homeowners and private rented tenants, Argyll & Bute Council gained special permission to open up the Scheme to a wider audience due to our unique geographical issues, and by extending the “fuel poor” criteria.

Grants amounts are not means tested but depend on house type and personal circumstances and start at £8,500 for a flat up to £13,000 for a detached property.

There is also an additional grant of £5k for households assessed to be Extreme Fuel Poor.

Repairs grants are offered at 10% of basic grant if works are required to facilitate measures.

In addition we offer a redecoration grant of £750 for internal wall insulation, and we have a modest contingency fund from which we can assist applicants if we need to get them “over the line”

The insulation type depends on the type of property and is determined by survey.

The Scheme offers, External Wall Insulation, Internal Wall Insulation, Cavity Wall Insulation, Loft and Underfloor Insulation and Room in Roof insulation.

It's normal that the grant will cover all works however for larger houses or complex cases a personal contribution is sometimes required.

We are passionate about signposting other departments within the Council, for example we have referred many customers for a Welfare Rights referral as there is currently £120bn unclaimed in benefits in the UK, and are working closely with the Public Sector Housing Grants Team.

I am keen to talk to as many people as possible about the scheme and I would be pleased to attend any events or meetings to further promote the scheme.