

## Point and Sandwick Energy Support Unit How-to Guide



This guide offers more detailed information and advice for those who may be interested in adopting or adapting the initiative in their local area.

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<b>Title</b>	The Point and Sandwick Energy Support Unit
<b>Organisation</b>	Western Isles Council
<b>Category</b>	Promising Practice
<b>Poverty Impact</b>	Mitigation
<b>Introduction to the Project</b>	
<p>Energy Support Unit (ESU) based in Point and Sandwick area is designed to support those in the community most vulnerable to the fuel hikes. ESU is designed and delivered confidentially by Muirneag Consulting and financed by income from Point and Sandwick Trust's (PST) community wind farm. The scheme includes direct cash support in the form of payments to fuel accounts via the PST Fuel Hardship Fund, signposting householders to further support available and help navigating fuel payment systems. Householders, ranging from pensioners, single adults and families have been supported by the ESU to assess the impact rising fuel costs for heating and cooking needs has had on their bills.</p>	

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### Initial Idea

#### Who had the initial idea?

Stewart Wilson and Iain (Dan) Morrison conceived the project and proposed their plans to Point and Sandwick Trust.

#### How did the idea for the project come about?

The idea came about due to the increasing challenges posed by the cost-of-living crisis. Stewart Wilson and Iain (Dan) Morrison had worked with Point and Sandwick Trust through a previous organisation. They built on this experience when developing the Energy Support Unit to give people immediate support.

#### Did you draw on any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice you had seen elsewhere to inform your plans?

*If so, please add details to the box below.*

- We drew on our local knowledge and access to the Point & Sandwick data regarding fuel poverty.
- We also considered the local project previously undertaken by Tighean Innse Gall - Gluasad Comhla (see Reshaping health services and fuel poverty in the Outer Hebrides: Final report of the Gluasad Còmhlha (Moving Together) project — University of Huddersfield Research Portal)
- We considered the approach taken by others for lived experience data ('Research into the lived experience of fuel poverty in Scotland' Sept 2020 IPSOS Mori & Alembic research).
- We also considered Warm Home Discount as an effective form of Fuel Poverty relief A Changeworks report for Citizens Advice Scotland, March 2020 and the Dept of Energy & Climate Change /CSE report 'Affordable warmth & health impact evaluation toolkit', March 2016.
- The rural fuel poverty reports relating to the Scottish Fuel Poverty definition from HIE and the Fuel Poverty Strategy.
- Reviewed national and regional data provided in the Scottish House Condition Survey 2019 (published Dec 2020).

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<b>Who was involved in developing the initial idea of the project?</b>	
Stewart Wilson and Iain (Dan) Morrison	
<b>Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?</b>	
No.	
<b>What funding was used, if any, to support the development of the initial idea of the project?</b>	
The development of the project was funded by Stewart Wilson and Iain (Dan) Morrison at own risk before Point and Sandwick Trust approved the idea	
<b>What in-kind resources were needed when developing the initial idea of the project?</b>	
Facilities	Very Little. This was done at risk working from a home base and the project proposal submitted thereafter.
Equipment	Very Little. This was done at risk working from a home base and the project proposal submitted thereafter.
Local Knowledge	Stewart Wilson and Iain (Dan) Morrison are residents in the area and have years of experience in the industry.
Food and Drink	N/A
<b>What, if any, barriers did you have to overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?</b>	
A barrier in developing the project that was overcome was duplication. Stewart Wilson and Iain (Dan) Morrison were conscious to not duplicate previous work that had been done by other organisations. Rather than compete with other organisations they wanted to complement them and offer a service that was unique to what was already out there.	

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### **What, if anything, was helpful when developing the initial idea of the project?**

Close interaction with the board was helpful when developing the project. Numerous sessions with the Point and Sandwick Trust manager, its board and sub group took place when developing the project. The early scrutiny from the Trust to develop aims was helpful towards the success of the project. This built a team relationship between the board and the Energy Support Unit which makes tackling difficulties when they arise more efficient.

### **What was the timeline between the initial idea and the start of the project?**

Work to develop the project began in September 2022 before the project was launched in December 2022.

### **Who made the decision to introduce the project?**

Point and Sandwick Trust

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### Early Development of the Project

Did you run a pilot project or carry out a feasibility study?

No

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### Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

**Is there a referral process? If yes, how does the referral process work (self-referral, referred by other agencies, identified from an existing database)**

There is a multifaceted referral process. These referrals include online/digital forums, social media, telephone, and external agencies such as the council, DWP, carers network, and poverty inclusion team.

**How are potential clients made aware of the project?**

Potential clients are made aware through social media, digital/online forums, and external agencies such as the council, DWP, carers network, and poverty inclusion team.

**How do you keep in touch with service users? Do your service users have a preferred method of contact?**

There are several stages of contact with service users. There is the initial contact, then evidence of their finances (bank statements and utility bills etc). This can be done via WhatsApp, email, or handed in depending on the client's needs.

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### Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in delivering the project? *If so, please describe below.*

No

Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in managing the project or project governance? *If so, please describe below.*

No

Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in any other aspect of the project? *If so, please describe below.*

Indirectly service users with lived experience of poverty are involved in the project. Case studies are regularly used to improve the project and issues that arise from particular cases are raised at meetings with the board once a month.

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### Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

<b>Who is responsible for managing the project?</b>
Stewart Wilson and Iain (Dan) Morrison
<b>Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project? <i>If not please describe the manager's wider roles and responsibilities.</i></b>
Iain (Dan) Morrison and Stewart Wilson are responsible for the delivery and management of the project. Their wider roles and responsibilities include visiting homes, building rapport with clients, gathering information on clients' fuel situation, paperwork, admin work, determining how fuel poor households are using their methodology, and much more.
<b>Is there a Project Steering Group? <i>If yes, who is involved in this and how does it work.</i></b>
Point and Sandwick Trust are the Project Steering Group. The trust manager, board, and sub-groups are involved in this and oversee areas such as the budget, direction, timescale, and scope of the project.
<b>If there is no Steering Group, what governance arrangements are in place to review strategy and performance?</b>
Not applicable.

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### Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

**Is the project part of a wider anti-poverty strategy? *If so, please give details.***

The project follows the local authority's anti-poverty and fuel poverty strategy to ensure the local authority can use the intelligence gathered by the project for the benefit of the community.

The Scottish Government anti-poverty strategy.

Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy, Fuel Poverty Strategy 2021.

**Is the project part of any other strategy? *If so, please give details.***

Not applicable

**Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment. *If so, please give details.***

Not applicable

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### Funding

#### Who funds the project? *Please give details.*

Point and Sandwick Trust. The Trust is a Scottish social enterprise that promotes and funds community projects in the villages of Point and Sandwick on the Isle of Lewis, and the wider Western Isles. The Trust built and operates the UK's biggest community wind farm, Beinn Ghrideag, one of the most successful income generators in the Western Isles. The income generated from the wind farm operated by Point and Sandwick Trust funds the Energy Support Unit.

#### How much does the project cost?

- One hundred thousand pounds capital (£100,000). This budget has been spent and a further one hundred thousand pounds has been allocated.
- Around five hundred thousand pounds (£500,000) available for the project.
- On average, eligible households receive a one-thousand-pound (£1,000) grant payment, with a maximum award possible being £1,500.

#### Is future funding based on pre-agreed outcomes or outputs being delivered?

We have set notional year 1 targets and while not strictly tied to targets these will inform the review and determine how the project goes forward.

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### Staffing and Resources

<b>Which partners are involved in delivering the project (local authorities, organisations, community groups, etc.)?</b>	
Task force membership is drawn from elected members, third sector partners, Police Scotland, NHS Tayside, PKAV's, Citizens Advice, Growbiz, supported by council officers. Expert advice is provided by Professor John McKendrick of the Scottish Poverty & Inequality Research Unit.	
<b>Which paid staff are involved in delivering the project?</b>	
The Taskforce membership totals around 20 people who give their time voluntarily.	
<b>Are volunteers involved in delivering the project? <i>Please describe their role and their contribution.</i></b>	
Not yet.	
<b>What in-kind resources do you need to deliver your project?</b>	
<b>Facilities</b>	Free office space
<b>Equipment</b>	Access to photocopier
<b>Local Knowledge</b>	N.A.
<b>Food and Drink</b>	N.A.
<b>For each of the in-kind resources listed above, who provides it?</b>	
<b>Facilities</b>	Provided by the Trust
<b>Equipment</b>	Provided by the Trust (and close relationship to the admin staff)
<b>Local Knowledge</b>	N.A.
<b>Food and Drink</b>	N.A.

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**Did you have to buy or develop new IT systems, software (databases, apps) or technology to deliver your project? *Please describe below.***

Stewart Wilson developed a methodology online to deliver the project with clients. In order to gather information on income, household makeup, property type, running costs, and housing costs etc, as well as work out the fuel poverty definition, an up-to-date online model IT system had to be developed. The system determines how fuel poor a household is in terms of the Scottish definition, allowing ESU to respond with a monetary intervention.

**Was additional staff training required to deliver your project? *If so, please describe.***

No.

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### Monitoring and Evaluation

<b>What information, if any, do you collect about your project?</b>	
<b>Number of users</b>	160+
<b>Profile of users</b>	Extremely fuel poor (No specific target populations identified)
<b>Experience of users</b>	Feedback is collected on service users' experiences with the project
<b>Anything else</b>	N/A
<b>How often is data collected? Who collects the data?</b>	
Data is collected with each client referral and each client contact. This is done by the Muirneag staff member making contact. The data analysis is then checked by another staff member before being approved and logged for informing the output dashboard.	
<b>Do you have baseline data on what things were like before the start of the project or before users started the project? <i>Please describe the type of baseline data that you have.</i></b>	
Not per se – but there is some general FP data re FP in the area and from Scottish House Condition Survey. The project also has access to the Point & Sandwick Trust data held from a previous project tackling fuel poverty	
<b>Do you produce an annual report? <i>Please provide details of what this includes.</i></b>	
Plans to but has not yet as the year ends in Oct 2023 (case study completed summer 2023)..	
<b>In what ways, if at all, do you use the data that you collect to adapt the service that you provide?</b>	
Feedback from clients is always taken on board and brought forward at meetings to improve the project	

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**Have you employed an external organisation to formally evaluate your project? *If yes, please provide details.***

No, due to cost

**Do you intend to employ an external organisation to evaluate the service that you provide in the future? *If yes, please provide details.***

Not at present – the PST board will expect a detailed report and will scrutinise the outputs and outcomes achieved.

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### Reach and Impact

#### What difference has the project made?

- Allowed people to power and heat their homes.
- Prevented individuals from going into debt.
- Reduced energy rationing and given people the confidence to switch on.
- Improved mental health outcomes regarding energy stress.
- Reached in-work people as well as those in receipt of benefits.

#### How do you know this? What evidence demonstrates impact (metrics, interviews, feedback)?

Statistics and feedback.

#### To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?

The aims of the project have been achieved. Over 160 individuals have been provided with an average of £1000 towards their energy bills, making a significant bridge in the gap to afford their bills.

#### How, if at all, have conditions changed since the project was introduced?

- Yes, conditions have changed. While there has always been a need to reduce fuel poverty, the cost-of-living crisis has pushed a new cohort of individuals into fuel poverty. Service users and the public are also confused and unsure about bills and numbers and are in need of advice.
- When the project was shaped it was expected service users would be within the 10% to 20% fuel poverty category. However, the cost-of-living crisis has pushed more people into fuel poverty and service users are within the 20 plus percent extremely fuel poor category. Support from the government is disappearing and the need for this service is high.

#### If yes, has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand? *Please describe and explain below.*

Yes. The project has exceeded the expected budget of £100,000 provided by Point and Sandwick Trust and has granted around £160,000 to service users.

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**Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes? *If so, whether positive or negative, please describe.***

- ESU come across clients in debt who qualify for their assistance. However, they were in the process of a utility loan potentially writing off their debt. If the energy support unit paid these clients a grant towards their bills that potentially clears their debt or alleviates it, utility companies would walk away. In turn, ESU let the utility companies deal with the clients and come to a conclusion before ESU intervenes.
- Providing grants to clients on prepayment meters is also a challenge. For example, if a service user is entitled to a £1000 grant, this grant has to be broken down into several payments through tokens and RTI codes rather than the service users receiving the grant in full.

**In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling child poverty? *If so, please describe in what ways.***

Yes. Poverty refers to a state in which people or communities lack the financial resources and essentials to meet the minimum standard of living. This project reaches people from all categories including in work people, pensioners, and families etc who are experiencing fuel poverty. Most service users who receive a grant fall under the 'extremely fuel poor' category and are lacking the money and resources to meet their fuel costs. The grant customers receive can bring them out of debt or cover rising bills which they previously couldn't afford to do without this support. Therefore, this project is having an impact on tackling poverty for those experiencing it.

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### Learning from Experience

<b>What is working well?</b>
The project has been successful in achieving its aims in a short space of time. In particular, the face-to-face contact and trust gained with service users has been key to making this project work well.
<b>What, if anything, is working less well?</b>
Despite the years of experience off both Stewart Wilson and Iain (Dan) Morrison, the project requires significant amounts of time, and it can take a long time to build trust with service users and receive the documents needed to make a payment.
<b>What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners? For example, is there anything that you would do differently?</b>
The fundamental point for other practitioners is that face to face and in-home contact is crucial, particularly in rural areas. When dealing with sensitive information regarding bank statements, bank details, savings, and debt etc trust is very important. Therefore, face to face contact is crucial to gaining trust, particularly with elderly clients who may not have high levels of technological literacy.
<b>What plans do you have to develop or expand the project in the future?</b>
ESU plans to develop the range of project in the future around ill health and health inequalities.
<b>How easily do you think your project could be replicated in another setting?</b>
Replication of the approach taken by this project in rural areas where there is an income source such as a wind farm or hydro scheme etc could definitely be implemented.

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