

£10 Million Warm Zone Fuel Programme Underway in North Staffordshire

Tens of thousands of homes throughout North Staffordshire can look forward to a much warmer future with the launch of the Warm Zone programme within Stoke on Trent and Newcastle under Lyme - and, if they qualify, it won't cost them a penny.

The programme, which will see up to £10 million invested in combating fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency, is now underway and a team of assessors are now on the streets to determine how best to help local people.

Over the next two years the team will visit around 73,000 homes and expect that around 35% of them will benefit from free cavity wall, loft and other insulation work as well as benefits and energy efficiency advice.

The North Staffordshire Warm Zone is a public/private partnership between the two local Councils, Scottish Power, National Grid and Warm Zones Limited. Scottish Power expects to contribute around £5.6 million with other finance coming from National Grid and the two Councils.

Nearly 4,000 homes in the Longton South area of Stoke on Trent are the first to be visited by the Warm Zone team whilst over a thousand more will be covered by Beat the Cold, an organisation which is working in partnership with the programme. Work will start in Newcastle under Lyme in the Cross Heath Ward in early February.

The assessors, who will be in Warm Zone uniforms and carry identity cards, will ask householders a series of questions on their doorsteps after which the data collected will be assessed to determine whether or not they qualify for the free measures. A surveyor will then visit a few weeks later and all being well, arrange for the necessary work to be carried out.

Tracy Hine, Director of the Warm Zone, says the programme will bring immense benefits to the area: "We expect tens of thousands of people will benefit from free measures making their homes much warmer and more comfortable whilst at the same time cutting their fuel bills," she said.

There will also be major benefits to the local economy and environment. "The Zone has already recruited 30 local people and will help sustain many more jobs. We also expect to cut the emissions of carbon into the environment by around half a million tonnes over the next two years making the area a healthier place in which to live," said Tracy.

Assistant Director of Housing Services in Stoke on Trent, Alan Slater, said the programme will bring immense benefits: "We have been working hard to create a Warm Zone project in North Staffordshire for nearly a year and I'm delighted that within weeks, our residents will start to enjoy the benefits it will bring. Stoke on Trent City Council is committed to helping cut fuel bills, tackle energy efficiency issues and make life better."

And Alan Hudson, Newcastle's Corporate Director of Community Services, agreed the benefits will be tremendous: "It's not just about cutting bills and putting more money into people's pockets - it's also about improving health as people live in warmer, more comfortable homes and taking a large step towards meeting all our targets to cut emissions and benefit the environment."

Scottish Power's Energy Efficiency Commitment Manager, Walter French said the company was delighted to be working in Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead Warm Zones and seeing the success in improving the lives of thousands of people. "We very much look forward to seeing the same success in North Staffordshire over the next two years," he said.