

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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NEW SCHEME TO HELP RESIDENTS MAKE THEIR HOMES MORE ENERGY EFFICIENT

There's great news for residents as Wokingham Borough Council prepares to launch a new scheme aimed at helping some of their most vulnerable residents lower their utility bills and help tackle the climate emergency by making their homes more energy efficient.

The new GHG LAD2 scheme, which stands for Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery Phase 2, is being delivered in cooperation with the Greater South East Energy Hub (GSEEH) and enables eligible residents to apply for free grants of up to £10,000 towards renewable energy and insulation upgrades to their properties.

It will join the council's existing Help to Heat scheme which launched last year and has already helped over 877 local households install over 1,000 free, or heavily subsidised, insulation measures in their homes.

"With energy prices continuing to soar, more and more of our local residents are finding it a struggle to pay their bills, and the situation is only going to get worse as winter sets in and heating comes on." Said Cllr Gregor Murray, executive member for resident services, communications and emissions. "We're committed to tackling fuel poverty in the borough, which is why schemes like Help to Heat and GHG LAD2 are so important and allow us to get support to those most in need.

"Many people don't realise how simple improvements to their home, such as installing good insulation, can have a massive impact in reducing the amount of energy they use every year. They also don't realise how making small changes to the ways they go about their day to day lives can also help reduce energy usage and costs, such as installing an energy efficient shower head, switching over to LED bulbs or simply by turning their heating thermostat down by one degree.

"Whilst some of these changes might only save a few pounds a year, together they can save households a significant amount. Cumulatively they could also have a massive impact on the borough's carbon footprint helping contribute towards a carbon net zero borough to benefit all."

The GHG LAD2 grant scheme is expected to launch in the winter and, in the coming months, the council will be writing directly to several homes across the borough who they believe may be eligible and telling them how to register their interest or apply. Those who have not received a letter, but believe they may qualify, will also be able to apply after the scheme has launched. Further information will also be published on the Council website www.wokingham.gov.uk and promoted via social media.

Improvements funded by GHG LAD2 grants could include loft insulation, solid or cavity wall installation, upgrades to renewable energy heat pump heating system or the installation of solar panels to generate free electricity. All works would be subject to a property survey and discussion on appropriate upgrades with the councils' contractor appointed to manage the scheme.

To qualify for GHG LAD2 grant, residents will need to have a household income of below £30,000 per year and live in a property with an energy performance certificate (EPC) rating of D, E, F or G, indicating that their property has high energy bills and poor energy efficiency. Properties with an EPC rating of D may be subject to additional caps on total spend with details to be confirmed when the scheme launches.

Types of housing may also be taken into account as many improvements are not suitable, or available for flats, maisonettes or other properties which are leasehold rather than freehold.

Alongside this the council's Help to Heat scheme, which allows a wide range of eligible residents the opportunity to have their homes insulated for free or very low cost, remains open to new applications. Information about this scheme can be found on the Council website www.wokingham.gov.uk by searching for Help to Heat.

Cllr Murray continued: "There's been some negative press about the Green Homes Grant recently, with complaints about the national scheme being complex to navigate along with a lack of clarity over what was included. We ourselves found the pilot phase harder than expected to roll out and, due to the limited funding available, were unable to help all the households which submitted an interest in the scheme.

"However, it proved a great opportunity to learn far more about the local properties most in need of improvement, the types of work required and how best to increase sign up to new schemes. It also helped us better understand and evidence local demand for initiatives like this, supporting us in applying for new funding grants so we can help even larger numbers of residents improve their homes.

"It's this knowledge base that has helped see such a massive uptake of the current Help to Heat scheme, as well as helping us with the process of procuring contractors to help us roll out the GHG LAD2 effectively as we move into the Winter months and demand could be high"

Alongside this the council will also be launching wider campaigns to raise awareness of all support available to help residents over the winter months.

Where residents are struggling to pay their bills, information on the support available can be found on the Local Support Hub page of the council website <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/local-support-hub/>, which also provides links to advice and support for areas such as health, employment, families and homes.

Advice and support are also available by contacting the Citizens Advice One Front Door service at <https://citizensadvicewokingham.org.uk/coronavirus/> or by calling them on 0808 278 7958.

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Notes to editors:

1. For more information contact Cllr Gregor Murray, executive member for resident services, communications and emissions, on gregor.murray@wokingham.gov.uk