

4. ENERGY EFFICIENCY SHOW HOME

Officer responsible Corporate Services Manager	Author Dr Leonid Itskovich
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The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the results of the operation of the Energy Efficiency Show Home to date and options for the continuation of this service in 2002/03.

BACKGROUND

The Christchurch Energy Efficiency Show Home and Energy Advisory Service has been operating since mid February 2000, in accordance with the Council decision of 25 February 1999 and for the purpose of fulfilling the following Corporate Environmental Policy statements:

- **Conservation of Energy:** *the Council will follow energy strategies which minimise energy consumption, select sustainable energy supplies and minimise impacts on the environment.*
- **Education and Public Awareness:** *the Council will promote an awareness within the community of environmental matters as they affect the City.*

The Energy Efficiency Show Home at 10 Leander Street, Papanui, is open to the public for 10 months of the year (February-November). As there is a relatively low number of visitors over the summer holiday period, it is closed in December-January. The Show Home is open 6 days a week (including weekends and public holidays) from 11 am to 6 pm.

During these hours, the Show Home is attended by one of the part-time Energy Advisers who work on a roster basis to fill all the hours required, and (on weekdays, during normal business hours) by the Council's Clean Air Programme Administrator who has an office at the Show Home. From the Show Home, this team provides the Energy Advisory Service to city residents.

OPERATIONAL ISSUES

At the Show Home, visitors can see and learn about various means of making their home warmer and healthier, and can discuss with the Energy Adviser their home heating needs. Limited feedback available shows that the Energy Advisory Service team have built a reputation for the Show Home as a place where one can receive unbiased, professional and practical advice regarding all aspects of affordable home heating and insulation, clean air, water conservation, renewable energy sources, energy efficient lighting and appliances, as well as the Council's Warmer Homes and Helping Hand for Heating programmes and any other insulation programmes taking place in Christchurch.

On Wednesdays the Show Home is closed to the public. This day is used for hosting energy-related seminars and meetings for various groups such as the University, Polytechnic, school students, solar society, etc. The Energy Advisers also use this day to hold regular work co-ordination seminars with industry representatives, EECA and BRANZ.

Since its official opening in February 2000, nearly 10,000 people have visited the Show Home. The flow of visitors is rather irregular with a peak immediately after a first frost in autumn, then a steady flow of visitors during winter months and reducing numbers in spring. Pensioners and low income householders make up more than 50% of visitors. A noticeable number of visitors were coming from Canterbury towns and even from the North Island.

No formal survey has been conducted so far to quantify the effectiveness of the Show Home that would show a percentage of visitors taking practical steps as a result of a visit. According to some available feedback from the industry and a sharply increased flow of inquiries, a substantial number of people do act after getting advice from the Show Home. This relates especially to under-floor insulation and double glazing. The cost of the operation of the Energy Advisory Service and maintenance of the Show Home equated so far to around \$10 per visitor, which can be considered as a more effective investment towards the cleaning of the city's air and creating healthier living conditions in people's homes than the \$500-\$1000 incentives available from the Council's clean air and energy efficiency programmes. Another important point is that the Show Home provides service to all the city's citizens while the incentive/assistance programmes address only a limited (eligible) sector of the community.

Comments written in the visitors' book reflect general customer satisfaction with the service. Some examples are: *"Useful to see all methods installed", "Learnt a lot", "Clear advice", "Very knowledgeable staff", "Fine initiative by Council", "Excellent advice may have saved us a small fortune", "Great idea for those on a limited budget and hopefully helps environment", "Very impressed with Council's efforts to minimise heating costs and well explained by your staff member, many thanks"*.

It is planned to install at the Show Home, in addition to the existing energy efficiency displays, other sustainable eco-home features for demonstration such as solar panels on the roof, a grey water collection system, water saving irrigation systems, etc. These sustainable features back onto an excellent example of the natural environment waterway development at the rear of the Show Home, which attracts numerous positive comments from visitors.

BUDGETING ISSUES

Currently, the Clean Air Programme Administrator supports the Energy Advisory team by being available approximately 16 hours a week to provide the energy advisory service to the public. This occurs concurrent with his primary role of programme administrator. However, it is expected that from 1 July 2002 ECan will start their own clean air incentive/assistance scheme. It was resolved at the April 2001 Council meeting that *"the Warmer Homes programme be continued until June 2002 to ensure a smooth transition to the Environment Canterbury programme"*. Thus, the operation of the City Council's Warmer Homes assistance programme would stop and the Programme Administrator position would cease by 30 June 2002. The Programme Administrator's departure will mean that in order to stay within budget there would need to be a reduction of 16 hours/week in opening hours. To maintain the existing hours it would be necessary to increase budget by \$13,000 per year.

There are three options as to how to address this issue:

- (a) Reduce the Show Home operating hours from the current 48 hours a week to 32 hours and close it on Wednesdays.
- (b) Maintain the current level of the service and increase the budget provision for 2002/03 and future years by \$13,000.
- (c) Maintain the current level of the service and operate the Show Home in the 2002/03 financial year until the current budget is exhausted.

Discussion

Option (a) would enable us to keep the service within the current budget. However, it would require a reduction in the number of days that the home would be open for the public to 4-5 per week, a reduction in operating hours from the current 7 hours a day and removal from the schedule of the special "seminar" day on Wednesdays. The latter would restrict access to the Show Home for groups of school and University students and community groups as a lone Energy Adviser on duty cannot simultaneously pay attention to the group and visits from the general public. Our experience has showed that the current operating hours provide an optimum coverage for people from all sectors of the community (working families, senior citizens, students, etc), and it is clear that longer operating hours are not necessary. However, a reduction of hours would restrict access to the service for some groups of people who currently benefit from the service. This would reduce the service outcome which is progress towards cleaner heating and better energy efficiency in the city and through that to healthier living conditions for some of our most disadvantaged citizens.

Option (b) would better serve to promote and meet the objectives of the Council's policy statements referred to earlier in this report. Public awareness and interest in energy efficiency has gained momentum and is on a rise, many people are willing to make changes and there is a demand for clear guidance on how best to do it. This is largely due to the Council's active role in energy efficiency issues, rising electricity prices, clean air and public health issues, promotion campaigns by EECA and other factors. A reduction in the availability of Energy Advisory service now would result in limiting access by the people of Christchurch to competent and cost effective guidance on these issues which affect them very directly. However, option (b) would require extra funding of \$13,000 per annum.

Option (c) would enable us to maintain the level of the service through the winter 2002 while keeping it within the current budget. This would also provide us with an opportunity to seek (in September 2002) extra funding for an extended operation of the Show Home from EECA's Energy Saver Fund or, if our bid is unsuccessful, the service would cease in December 2002.

Recommendation: That option (c) be adopted.

**Chair's
Recommendation:** For discussion.