

Cllr Jim Millard: Hello and welcome back to Talk Richmond, with me, your host Jim Millard. Over the course of this series, we're going to be focusing on the cost of living crisis and the support available in the borough to help us all see out the financial storm. We will be covering everything from support with energy bills and making a home more energy efficient, to support getting food and how you can help your local community. If there's anything you want to hear about, please do e-mail us on [talk@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:talk@richmond.gov.uk). But today we'll be talking about something that I know is at the forefront of everyone's minds at the moment and that is heating our homes over colder months. To discuss this, I am very pleased to be joined by Giles Read, Managing Director of Thinking Works, which is a not-for-profit company helping to tackle fuel poverty and create a sustainable and more energy efficient future. So, without further ado, welcome Giles to Talk Richmond.

Giles Read: Thanks very much, Jim.

Cllr Millard: Nice to see you, and thanks for coming. Can you tell us a bit more about Thinking Works and the work you do in the community?

Giles: Sure so, Thinking Works - we are an award-winning, not-for-profit company and we've been working supporting Richmond residents since 2012 and we've supported over 3,000 households and helped households access over £1,000,000 in grant funded heating and insulation works. What we specialise in is helping households that are vulnerable and at risk of fuel poverty. Basically, to give them the as much help as possible so that they can stay warm and well for less.

Cllr Millard: Fantastic, and what are your top tips to help reduce energy costs and stay warm?

Giles: Yeah, this is a huge area, Jim and I think in presentations that I give there's a lot that people can look at. Certainly, we take calls every day and people will say to us things like: "OK I need to save money, the bills are going through the roof. Should I be unplugging everything at the walls? Turning everything off in the evening?" and those things do help but in terms of real cost savings, it's important to follow what I call the golden rule. The golden rule basically is that if it gets hot, those are the things that you need to be looking at. To put this into some context, so over the summer and we have people calling in saying, "well, I'm using the fan, should I stop using the fan? It's a hot day. Is it costing me a lot of money?" So, a fan, your average fan uses about 50 watts. It's not a huge amount of energy when we bear it in mind to something like a kettle which uses 3000 watts. So, a fan, because it's just spinning a motor, you're looking at about 50 watts. As soon as you add a heating element to that fan and turn it into a fan heater. We're talking more like 2000 or 3000 watts for that. So a fan with no heating element: 50 watts. A fan with the heating element: 2000 to 3000 watts. And so, this is an important thing to have in your mind when you're looking at areas to save, and I kind of break it down into then looking at what are these key areas where things are getting hot. The caveat to the golden rule is that there is also the cooling side to this. That things like your fridge and freezer and, if you have it, air conditioning are also expensive as well. But if we're looking at areas where you're heating, obviously the primary one is your actual heating that's on there - what can we do to lower that? Some people listening to this may have heard there's been some publicity around at the moment – and I know that the government are going to do more with this – about changing the flow temperature, the temperature of the actual boiler itself, particularly on a combination boiler to make it more efficient. Online, there are tips there because often we find that people's heating systems just aren't set at the most efficient settings for them to run at the at the best savings. So, it's well worth auditing that and looking to see what the flow temperature is. Anything over around 60 degrees on your boiler is too much and you can turn that down safely, remaining warm but also saving money. And that's sort of one tip. There's many within heating. If you've got individual controls on your radiators - these are called thermostatic radiator

valves - we would always say turn those down in rooms that you're not in. Make sure ones downstairs are up quite high because heat rises so that can generate heat that's then picked up in higher floors and bedrooms can be kept lower. And again it is checking thermostat settings.

I should say when looking at all of these tips, a very, very important thing with them all is the realisation that it certainly is not a one size fits all circumstance. When we're supporting people, it could be a lone individual in a 1-bed studio or we could be helping a family of six in a detached bungalow. So, the energy advice for those different circumstances is wildly different. For those listening the key thing that I would say is experimentation and taking into consideration aspects of your own individual life. That can include vulnerabilities and other things that will make some of the tips that I say today not suitable for certain households and that's have very important thing to bear in mind. But within that, it shouldn't hold you back from trying things. So, as I say within heating, we can look at heating controls. We can also then look at the next stage, looking at washing and drying of clothes. How can we save some money there? Again, looking at this, the golden rule of heat versus just a motor going round. What I do at home, I don't have a tumble dryer. At the end of the wash, I take the load out and put it in a basket. I put half the load back into the washing machine and do an extra spin cycle. And why do I split the load? The reason being is because if you have less washing in there, as it's being moved around in the drum, more moisture is removed from that washing and it's very cheap to run an extra spin cycle. The average tumble dryer is around 2000 watts. It's using a really, really large amount of energy to get your clothes warm. If you can, get a lot of that moisture out by splitting the load and doing 2 extra spin cycles. So, after I've done my first spin cycle, those clothes that have now had a lot of the moisture gone, they go up onto a clothes rack and then the second lot goes in. You're then saving on the tumble dryer time. Connected to that is that I have three, no I have 4 clothes horses that I use and I move around. I live in a small mid terrace house, but the sun starts at the front of the house, moves to the back in the afternoon. I move the washing depending on where the sun is so that it can get these solar gains and free heating.

Looking at another area: cooking. Another huge area at the moment that people looking at and I'm sure Jim, you will have had the word of the moment: the air fryer. Is it good? Is it a myth? We've certainly found and to put this down, is to just really look at the science behind it when we cut out the comments on it. The average air fryer is about 1000 watts. The average oven is about 2000 watts but the average air fryer is really small and an oven is big. So what I've found and from speaking to people using the air fryer is that they are a brilliant way to save if you're cooking for a small number of people. For one or two people an air fryer can be very, very efficient and it can have some good savings. But once you're starting to cook for a large family, this is where the oven does come into its own. It's a larger heating space, but you can obviously cook a lot more in it. If you have to run your air fryer two or three times to cook the same meal. We're looking at that 1000 watts. If you only need to use it once to cook your meal in 1000 watts rather than 2000 watts, it's half the price. But if you're having to run it twice, then it's looking at the same or three times. It's then going to be more. So again, it depends on your circumstances.

I myself have been experimenting to see just what I can cook on one gas hob top. So, I've been doing pasta where I put an egg in with the pasta, so I can have a nice boiled egg with the pasta that can go there. With a steamer top on there with some vegetables, spinach and other things in there that I can then mix in with the pasta at the end. And this has got down to a pasta dish for three costing around 2 pence to cook because it's just on that one gas ring. Whereas it's something that you could very easily have the eggs boiling in one, you've got your pasta in another and then your vegetables

being cooked on another hob again. So, there are there are ways to do this and again it's about trying things and I'm a big fan of the of experimentation.

And other areas - sorry Jim, I could go on for a long time on this but it is well worth covering - when we've looked at washing clothes, but we've also got to look at washing ourselves. Where I live before, when I was renting, we had an electric shower Jim and it was called the Triton 9000. And it wasn't called that as a fun name. I was called the Triton 9000 because it uses 9000 watts.

Cllr Millard: Wow.

Giles: I think it's just worth - I've kind of talked a lot about the watts thing and I think it's important to explain what that means. When you're paying for a unit of energy which under the energy air price guarantee is 34p for the electric - that's 34 pence for 1000 watts for one hour. So, if you're running 9000 watts it's 9 x 34 for an hour. So, you're looking at the best part of £3.00 an hour for running your shower if it's an electric one. So any minutes that you're shaving off that, you're saving. And even with gas, it's still expensive, so the amount of time that you're spending in there. It's a really key area that I think people don't often think about enough as where they can make savings there. Similarly with the bath. Does a bath need to be full? Average bath: 80 litres of water. That is a huge volume of water to get warm or hot in in many cases. Can you shave 10 centimetres, 20 centimetres off the depth of the bath? I certainly think you certainly can, and those things do really make some very large savings across the year because it's a very large amount of water that that you're heating.

The last one really to look at is lighting and it's really, really important to say to change your lights to LEDs and there is really no reason for any light now to not be an LED. Again to put this into some context, I was round at a friend's and they'd had an extension done and there was a lovely new kitchen. There were 10 halogen spotlights in the top each 150 watts so there's 500 watts burning away. Now those can be replaced for five-watt LEDs that will give off exactly the same level of light. So, you can drop it from 500 watts to 50 watts just by changing them and LEDs are very affordable now. You can get them from supermarkets and hardware stores. So, they're a very short payback period on LEDs - I'm a big, big fan of those.

And the last one really to look at is this cooling side of it. So, your fridge and freezer does use quite a bit of energy to keep things cold. Now the main thing to know with this is that your freezer in particular is much, much more efficient when it's full. And the reason being is that for instance, if you have an empty or slightly empty freezer, the freezer is trying to cool the air in that freezer, which is harder than if it's, for instance, frozen. A bottle of water which is turned into a block of ice, and that they can then keep that freezer cooler for longer and it means the thermostat clicks on less. Your fridge and freezer are not running all the time there, they're thermostatic. They come on periodically to keep your fridge and freezer down at the temperatures that you've selected. So, this means if you have things in there that can hold on to that cold better than air - which solids are good for that - then you are going to get better efficiencies and your thermostat will come on less. So for instance, in all fairness the freezer is very rarely anything but overflowing, but if your freezer is there and it isn't full to the brim and there aren't drawers that are a bit empty, you can just fill bottles of water, put them into the freezer and they will become blocks of ice and they will keep that freezer cooler and the thermostat will come on less. So a very good way to save. So those are sort of the key areas.

There are other areas as well, particularly in Richmond, there's quite a lot of old housing stock and it's very drafty. I am a fan of trusting your fingers with this. You can go around feeling the edges of windows, doors, fireplaces, keyholes. Anywhere where you think that it's feeling a bit cold. Trust

your fingers. Hold them near and if you feel draft there you can put in temporary things that could block that air flow. The reason I say it's temporary is that a house has to have this this good balance between being heated and being ventilated. It has to breathe. So, anything that you put on during the winter to block ventilation should be considered to take off during the summer. The house will need that to breathe. But certainly, for short periods of time, and it is important to work out where some of these drafts are coming from and sometimes they aren't things that can be blocked that cause enormous air flow. I've covered a lot of ground, Jim, but I think that that broadly, in a short space of time, that hopefully gives some areas to look at.

Cllr Millard: It does. I mean, there's some fascinating ideas there. Brilliant. I'm think I'm going to be doing that. Just, you know, if anyone was listening and they think, "well, you know, there was a lot of info there about watts and thermostatic radiator valves and how do I set it" and all this sort of thing, can you tell us a bit more about your Winter Warmth Home Visiting programme in the borough?

Giles: Sure. So, we're commissioned to Public Health in Richmond to support any households at risk of fuel poverty. So, it may not be for all the listeners, but I will sort of explain where anybody listening can go for some fantastic help and more information on what I have said but to access our service for people who are 65 or over or have a a long-term condition or disability, or have a low income. We can we can visit them in the home and essentially go through everything that I've said the team is extremely experienced, they all have at least nine years' experience of home visiting and we've worked in the borough since 2012 and would go around room by room and giving this advice one-to-one with individuals and in some cases if people would like that over the phone we do it over the phone as well. And can also give specific advice by e-mail. And for anyone who doesn't fit into the category of being vulnerable and we should all be doing everything we can do to save, and the Greater London Authority has just launched an energy advice service. That the Energy Saving Trust are running, and we can also share a link for that and that's open to anybody regardless of circumstance and has really, really fantastic tool which looks room by room and gives you these sorts of tips room by room of what to look at and is online and can be used as an energy calculator. So, there are some fantastic resources out there Jim that I think everyone should be looking at to find ways to save.

Cllr Millard: That sounds fantastic, and I'm aware you know that as well as measures to save money in the home, there's also support available to help people with energy bills. Both some national schemes and local schemes you've touched on already. But could you talk a little bit more about that?

Giles: Yes, that's fine. I'll sort of briefly go through the national support and then the local support. One thing I would definitely say is that as an organisation Thinking Works provides its services for five boroughs in SW London. So, it's Richmond and the neighbouring boroughs of Wandsworth, Sutton, Merton and Kingston but in Richmond there is, I would say, greater support for people than in any of the other boroughs in terms of bill support. So I will spent a bit of time going through what that local support is and how people can find out more information, but it's worth knowing that on a national level, we are all getting £400 off of our bill and this isn't money, and this is important to stress that, people often wonder whether that money is going to their accounts. It isn't. It's coming off of bills or being given to people in the means of the voucher. But that's £400 for everybody. In addition to that, there is more support depending on your circumstances. If people receive a means tested benefit so that could be guaranteed pension credit or Universal Credit. There's a further £650 on top of that 400 if you were of pensionable age 66 or over in September of this year. And then you

would get a further £300 on top of that and if you have a disability and and receive personal independence payments or disability living allowance, you get another 150 on top of that. So, there are these different elements. And it is complex to navigate Jim. I will certainly say that and for anybody who wants more information, and I would certainly say to contact us or to contact the Greater London Authority's energy advice service to navigate through it because in addition to that there are things like the Warm Home Discount which is a further £150 off of people's bills. If they again are vulnerable. So, there's that.

But I think it's also important to say what there is then locally within Richmond that differs from this. So, for all of those areas that have spoken about are national and anybody across the country can access those, but for those within the borough, and there are things for instance, there's the Household Support Fund, which is a monetary payment, and this fund is for vulnerable households and you do have to evidence low income or debt and crisis but it's £300 for a household with one or more adults, it's up to £500 for households with a child, with one child, and up to £600 for households with two or more children. Which is a great level of support and that can differ from from borough to borough and you can get help applying for that through Citizens Advice Richmond or through Richmond AID. And there are details on Richmond Council's website. You just need to put in into a search engine, Richmond Household Support Fund and all the details are there. And in addition to that Richmond has launched a fuel support scheme for pensioners and they'll be making a £100 one off payment to pensioners in receipt of council tax reduction that will be done automatically. You don't need to apply for that. The Council is using its own data and to make those payments.

And it's not open yet, but it will be opening from January. So, this is one for your listeners to pencil in the diary because in January 23 there'll be a Richmond fuel grant. So, this comes from the Council, it's a £170 fuel bill payment and this is not in money, it will be going against the bills and again you need to demonstrate low income or hardship. But there's an application form that will be available via Richmond Council's website and this will open in January 2023 and in addition to all of these, there's also fantastic support schemes through local charities there's the Hampton Fund. So, if you are in Hampton and surrounding areas, you can apply for bill support and that can be in the region of several 100 pounds. There's an online application form or a paper form. And if you put into your search engine Hampton Fund, there's all the information there and you can call them directly about that. There is also the Barnes Fund. So, Hampton's is serving the area around Hampton, the Barnes Fund is very similar provision, but around the Barnes area. So those cover those bases as well. And in addition to all of that, the Council also has crisis grants through its Local Assistance Scheme. And for those who, for instance may be refugees and have just come to the country and don't have recourse to public funds yet, there is also a hardship fund that the Council has and details of all of these are on the Richmond Council website and you can also get support applying for any of these through organisations like Citizens Advice and through Richmond AID.

Cllr Millard: That's fantastic. And this sort of comes back to something you talked about earlier talking about. Talking about drying clothes in the house. All this sort of stuff. If people are trying to heat the house less, just aware how that we talked about ventilation when you're adding moisture to the air, you've got to be very careful about condensation. Cold walls can create condensation and mould. We're all very aware of that side of things. Are there any grants available for insulation and heating works and that sort of thing to sort of take a fabric first approach to sort of resolving some of these issues?

Giles: Yes, and again in Richmond there is better provision than in other boroughs. And so, for example, Richmond has its own in-house Coldbusters grant, which they don't have anywhere else,

which now is concentrating on a boiler and heating works. But if the person has a means tested or disability benefit and they've got a boiler that's over 15 years old or one that's intermittently working, and they want to look at that and see if we can get a grant to replace it. That can be a grant of up to £6,000 to replace boilers and heating systems that run on gas, and because it's a scheme that's run via the Council, we actually as Thinking Works manage that grant so it makes it a very smooth process because we can help take people through the entire process and hand hold them through that. And there is also the Green Homes Grant, local authority delivery scheme, and this is for insulation predominantly. It can cover non fossil fuel heating works like heat pumps. But so far, we've mostly seen because as you say, Jim, that they're taking a fabric first approach which is one where they want to do the insulation first because what's the point in putting in a fabulous new heating system if there's no wall or loft or floor installation? All of that that lovely heat is just going to fly out of the property so that scheme is looking at things like wall installation for solid walls. Traditionally everyone had sort of thought, OK, it's just if you've got a cavity. So, what do we do when like in a borough like Richmond where the majority of the housing stock is solid brick, so it doesn't have this cavity gap that can be filled with insulation. What do we do with these properties? But we now have the the technology to insulate a solid brick home and the local authority delivery, the local scheme Green Homes Grant has grants of up to £10,000 to look at that as well as traditional things like loft insulation and they're also look at floor insulation and ventilation, and other aspects of that as well and we have a dedicated grants team so that if anybody wants to apply and for that one you do need to have a residual household income under £20,000 and the energy rating of your home has to be D or worse to apply. And our grants team will take people through the whole process and if you want anything checked we can look at that as well.

Cllr Millard: Fantastic. And when you say residual income, that's after housing costs, I believe, isn't it?

Giles: It is and there are further deductions. So, the 20,000 is after tax and National Insurance and then after housing costs, which could be mortgage and it is open to private renters. So, it could be your rent as well. And it is after the cost of your Council Tax. So, navigating that and working out the deductions is something that we can help you with as well and we can send you sort of examples so that you can kind of see if you're in the ballpark of that.

Cllr Millard: Fantastic. And as we were talking about, we touched on the condensation issue. It's not just our homes. We need to be thinking about. We need to stay warm for our own health as well. How can a cold home impact your health?

Giles: This this the difficult, sort of, conundrum is probably the wrong word in this, but it is the difficult problem that we're trying to solve when you have a situation. Heating systems can be running at £1.80 an hour and at that kind of price, the only real way to make large savings from heating perspective is then lowering the time that you're heating or lowering the temperature of the house. And although that long term can have issues for the home, a home can still be less warm than a person, and this is the key bit and you may have heard the phrase that we're looking at, heat human, which is this phrase now the safe temperature, normal temperature that we should all be is 37 degrees. Now if we can be at that temperature the home can be a different one but it's very important that the person is at that, and I know that there are health conditions out there. That mean that people feel that the cold more some sometimes the advice is certainly not going to work for everyone. But as an example, Jim, so in our home we have the thermostat set at 17 degrees, which is under the recommended, but myself and the family where thermal underlayers, I'm wearing a heated gilet that can use a battery pack to warm it if need be. And I regularly wear a hat in the home. So, my body temperature is absolutely fine and I'm at a healthy temperature, but the

home is cooler than it probably normally would be. But again, I'm experimenting with that and seeing how that that goes. It's not sort of a hard and fast rule. It's what I'm trying at the moment and it's working, but this is something that can change, but it is essential that the body is at 37 degrees, otherwise you do make yourself vulnerable for viruses and infections to come in. And so, we don't want to be recommending that people deny themselves heat only so that they are ill and finding themselves in a GP surgery or in the hospital. But I do believe that there are ways that through wearing layers and through looking at efficiencies through heating systems that we can genuinely make savings on our heating bills without impacting on health.

Cllr Millard: So very important, and it's fascinating talking to you. I can see that you're home and every aspect of your life is a sort of laboratory for experimenting with what you can achieve. So, anything that is being recommended here by Giles, he's tried it on himself first, right?

Giles: 100% I have no I have a golden rule and that's for me., it's my own personal rule, Jim, is that I've never asked anybody to do something I don't do myself or have not tried myself. Because and I say this to the team as well. I just couldn't face myself; you know I try and cycle everywhere that I can and these sorts of things and try and embody a kind of sustainable life as much as possible. And try and be as less hypocritical as I can be though I'm sure I stumble on many points and but certainly I think the key thing to say is it is about experimentation. And it's to move away from I guess thinking it has to be that I mean, you know friends will come round I'm wearing a hat in the house and that kind of. they might look at you a bit askance doing that, but for me, why not? Why not?

Cllr Millard: Absolutely. I'm with you. You know I'm the same. I've just got an E bike I'm traveling about in that. Saving a lot of money on fuel. Not using my car, saving the environment, saving the air quality. But I think the sound of a heated gilet sounds good because at this time of the year, going out on my bike. I might try that.

And you know, we're talking about the difficulty of heating your home and getting the balance right with cost. Where can people go in the borough if they want to keep warm?

Giles: So, there's this really fantastic thing that the borough has made sure that every library in the borough is now warm space and what a warm space is, is it's one where that anyone can come and really just keep warm and if you're worried about bills. What we're seeing in local libraries is for instance families coming after school to spend a couple of hours and reading books in the library for instance to spend a couple of hours keeping warm where they haven't got the heating on, but they can be kept warm and well in that space and to find where things are, there's a a web page called [www.warmwelcome.uk](http://www.warmwelcome.uk) which is a really fantastic website. The reason that I like it is because it doesn't just show you the the locations of the warm spaces in the borough, it shows you what facilities are available there, whether there is for instance a cafe or access to food or toilets. And facilities for anybody with a disability. But it also shows you where warm spaces are in neighbouring boroughs. So, for instance, if you have somebody who is on the border of Kingston or Hounslow, you can then see whether or not there's a warm space that's near you in a neighbouring borough and what facilities are there. So those are fantastic. But we, we've got great, great organisations like the Vineyard Community Centre has opened its doors as a warm space and all the timings that those that are open are again online at this [www.warmwelcome.uk](http://www.warmwelcome.uk) website where you just you put in your postcode or address, and it gives you all of the warm spaces around you.

Cllr Millard: Indeed. And we've also got I think [www.richmondgov.uk/warm\\_spaces](http://www.richmondgov.uk/warm_spaces) with the directory of warm spaces in the borough as well.

Giles: Yeah.

Cllr Millard: So, flag that one up. That's fantastic Giles. There's a lot of information there, which is very, very valuable to people. Is there anything else you want to add as we come to the end of this fantastic podcast?

Giles: I realise that I have bombarded your poor listeners with a lot of information and so I would say that for many they will be wondering where they can find out more and so certainly I'd say that if you think you're eligible for our service, do contact us at Thinking Works. If you just want general advice, do look at the Greater London Authority's Energy Saving Service. There's a brilliant household calculator there. Also, I am hoping to put on some public talks that will be done over the web that people can come to and even if they can't, I'm hoping to record these and make them available so that some of this information can be accessed, and then I can do it with a with a slide show as well. So, watch this space for that as well.

Cllr Millard: Absolutely fantastic. Listen, thanks so much Giles, for coming to speak to us on Talk Richmond.

Giles: Thanks very much, Jim.

Cllr Millard: It's been a real pleasure, incredibly helpful to hear about the the range of support out there to make sure you and your home stay warm so you can stay well over the colder months and I'm sure all our listeners really appreciate that. Please check the show notes for links to Thinking Works, their winter warmth free assessment and all the contact details we were talking about there. We've also included links to the Richmond Council Cost of Living Hub, which includes details of all the support available in the borough, as well as a link to our warm spaces directory. If you have any questions or concerns, please e-mail [talk@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:talk@richmond.gov.uk) and we will do our very best to answer them. And please share this episode with any friends or family who think may find it useful. There's a lot of information that people will be able to use. Let's get it out there. Let's spread the word. If you do listen to this on a service that allows you to leave a review, I would be very pleased if you'd help to spread the word in that way. Five stars is always welcome and will give me a nice warm feeling. I had to. I had to. Had to go for that one. Thanks once again. I'm Jim Millard. Thanks for listening.