

Cllr Jim Millard: Hello and welcome back to Talk Richmond with me, your host Jim Millard. Today we'll be looking at the steps we can all take to reduce our energy bills and stay warm over the colder months. To discuss how we can do this by making our homes more energy efficient, I'm delighted to be joined by Susan Chappell. Susan is the project coordinator at the South West London Energy Advice Partnership, or SWLEAP for short. SWLEAP is a partnership between Habitats and Heritage and Crew Energy, and it provides free energy advice across the London Boroughs of Richmond, Wandsworth and Merton to anyone in fuel poverty. So, without further ado, I want to give a very warm welcome to Susan. Welcome to talk Richmond.

Susan Chappell: Thank you very much. Thanks for having me. You've done a very good introduction there as to what we do and I think obviously we're concentrating on Richmond today and really what we're here to do is to support anybody in the borough who is struggling with bills and it's more people than you would think unfortunately. It isn't just the obvious candidates. Everybody, I think all of us are thinking very carefully about when we put our heating on. I think that's something that's new, something we haven't really experienced before and so I want to make clear that really anybody who is struggling can come to us and we can offer advice and support. And sometimes it's just knowing that somebody is there, that somebody's listening and that somebody is understanding that we really are all in this together. So what is it that we do? Well, we can do a number of things. We do a lot of outreach and we're very happy – I'm very happy to go out to anybody across the borough to give more information about the service to help you help your clients, if you're a voluntary sector organisation, you're a community group, church, whatever it might be. But we also do free home energy visits and I think that's probably what I'd like to concentrate on most today, if that's OK? And that's where one or two of our trained, Level 3 trained advisors will go out and they will analyse your energy usage. That's your heating system, your insulation, your lighting and your behaviours. Because we can – by changing behaviours, we can change our bills. And then we can install at no cost – and this is really important for people – we don't charge for anything, at all, ever, full stop. No ifs, no buts. And we will put those in for you there and then if we don't have the equipment then we will come back and fix it to later date. Some people prefer to put it in themselves, of course that's absolutely fine. And then we are conscious that there are still people who, for whatever reason, because they're isolating or just because they don't feel comfortable having people in their homes, we offer a telephone energy advice service and there you'll speak to one of our trained advisors. They will give you all of that information. And if they feel that it's necessary for you to have a visit, then that can be arranged as well. Then we do the group workshops and they can be really effective tool particularly for some of those groups where possibly they don't go on the Internet, they don't engage as much with the Council and with voluntary sector organisations and we can go out and speak to them in small groups in an environment that they feel safe and secure in. And I think that's really, really effective. And of course, we're very lucky that we've been invited along to a number of Richmond-run events, which is great. And I think the final thing I wanted to say is we accept all tenures. So it doesn't matter whether you own your house, you privately rent, you're in social housing. Whatever it is, we are happy to go out, provided you pay your electricity bill yourself. Then you can come to us.

Cllr Millard: Fantastic. That's really wonderful. And you know it's amazing work that you're doing, hugely valued and I'm very, very pleased that the Council is supporting you to do this. I just wondered if – you mentioned that you will install things. I wonder if you could tell us a bit more about what that might be.

Susan: Absolutely, it is the smaller items. So, although we look at everything and – of course, I think we may come on to that a bit later – that we will look to see if people need large help with larger

things and there's things like Green Homes Grant and so on that the Council is promoting. But what we're talking about is LED light bulbs primarily. So, we can put in as many light bulbs as you need. Now as we come on to in a bit, a light bulb can save you – an LED light bulb compared to an incandescent or halogen, can save you between 85 and 90% on each bulb, which is huge, it's a huge saving and it really makes a difference both to your bills and obviously to the environment. But some people don't put them in because they are more expensive.

Cllr Millard: Hmm.

Susan: And if you're struggling, why would you take a working light bulb out and put an energy efficient one in if it is this awful thing of heating or eating? So we will put those in. We'll also put in radiator foil, which is special foil that goes behind your radiators on external walls and that helps to radiate the heat into the house and it reduces your bills, but it also makes you feel warmer. And then the third thing that we put in on a regular basis is draft excluder. So we'll put that round windows, round doors and that can be something that makes a huge difference because you know, as I know that if you've got a draft, it automatically makes you feel colder. It's like when you're outside and there's wind, it makes you feel colder. So this really, not only does it improve the environmental impact that you'll have in, but it does actually help you feel warm. And I've got some in my house. Have also got the radiator foils. I've got LED throughout and it really has helped to reduce our bills. And then there are other things that we put in as well, like chimney balloons and cylinders for tanks. But to be honest with you, we do those less frequently. So the three that I mentioned are the three that we do on a regular basis.

Cllr Millard: Yeah, yeah. It sounds like it's a perfect idea to have a home visit or a telephone consultation to find out what specifically in your home are the things that you need. And I wondered if, you've already got a huge amount of experience of this, Susan, how can residents as a general question, how can they reduce costs and stay warm as the weather gets colder?

Susan: Yeah, I think let's start with the staying warm. Obviously the first thing you need to think about is what temperature? So, the government I think was something actually this morning on Radio 4, it is really important that people do stay warm, and 18 degrees is really the minimum that you should have your temperature set at during the day if you're in the house. The government say between 18 and 21. Personally I like mine around 19. It really does depend. I mean there is, there is a degree of obviously wearing the appropriate clothes so. You know, not going around in shorts and a t-shirt in in mid-November, but what we want to do is make people warm. And one of the things that we find when we go out to people's homes is – particularly if they're in rented accommodation – they don't always understand exactly how their thermostat, their timer and boiler controls work. So that's the one of the things that we'll look at and there is no one-size-fits-all. So we'll check what their thermostat is set at and help them to understand why they should set it between 18 and 21. We'll also look at their timer and make sure they're using that appropriately so that it comes on before they get up in the morning, it doesn't stay on all day. We'll check the settings on their boiler. You may have heard in the news about so-called boiler flow to make sure that that's set at the optimum temperature. I'm not going to say here now because what we will do is make sure that we look at individual ones. So, whether you've whatever make you've got, there's a lot of useful information on YouTube, which I will admit I have used from time to time and then we will set that for them and show them how we've set it. We can take photographs so that we can demonstrate that visually after the event because we send a report to everybody. But just to put it in context, for every 1 degree you turn your thermostat down, you can save £145.00 a year. And those figures are from the Energy Savings Trust, so it's huge.

Cllr Millard: Wow.

Susan: So, if you were to turn your temperature down from 23 to 20, which is still a nice temperature, you're going to be saving – your maths is probably better than mine, but just over £400, which is a really significant amount of money. The same with turning your boiler flow down. That can save you money. And we also check hot water as well to make sure that you've got it at the right temperature. So basically, very simply, if you put your hand under the tap and it's so hot that it's burning and you have to use the mixer tap, you probably got it set too high. But we do make sure that we're very careful about checking the individual circumstances because – particularly if somebody's been given advice by a doctor – we would never obviously tell them to do anything else. So that's the first thing. Second thing I mentioned before is putting in radiator foil. Making sure that the thermostats work on radiators, highlighting that particularly again in rented accommodation. If it's not happening. Making sure where possible – and again, we live in the real world – there isn't anything blocking the radiators and that could be furniture. And also, that people are not putting clothes on the radiator because not only does that block the heat but it also allows moisture and condensation which can cause mould that we've seen recently. Some of the horrific effects that can have, obviously something that we look for when we're out and about. So those are the main things in terms of keeping warm as well as, as I say, the draft proofing and silly little things like having rugs on the floor in the rooms where you're living. You know, carpets. Making sure that there is some protection between you and the floor. Those are smaller ones. And again, we can recommend things like thermal curtains. But I'm aware that there is a cost involved in those, but just closing your curtains at night make a real difference. Just keep that heat in, make sure that you tuck your curtains behind your radiator so that the radiator, you're not blocking the radiators heat with your curtains, which may look very nice, but if you're trying to save money is not quite so effective. So it's just things like that really. It's just sensible things and sometimes just reminding people or even actually just saying to them, “do you know what you're doing brilliantly. You're doing brilliantly. You're doing everything that you possibly can”. And of course, as we save money, we're also helping the environment because we reducing our emissions and that is something that we record. The amount of emissions that we're saving in terms of CO2. So, it's important for us.

Cllr Millard: Yes, that's very important. I was going to come on to that. You know as well as saving money and reducing costs, making homes easier to heat, we are presumably also making them more energy efficient. And there are environmental benefits to that.

Susan: There are and I was very struck. It was before COVID. We can remember before COVID I went to a Council-run function and it was 49.3% of all of the emissions in this borough come from our homes. So we really do need to try and reduce those. I'm going to be honest with you. I think that for the majority of people that we visit right at this moment, it is pounds, shillings and pence that matter. But you know, we always stressed to them that you're actually helping the environment as well as yourself, which is fantastic. It's kind of win-win thing.

Cllr Millard: Exactly.

Susan: So, whether you have a great passion for it, as I do, and I know you do, or you just want to save money, you're actually going to be doing your bit anyway. So, you know it's great and it's something that we can try and encourage people to do.

Cllr Millard: Well said. Yes, yes, indeed.

Susan: Things you might not think about when you're washing. Turn to 30 degrees. All of the detergents now are designed to be used at 30 degrees. And yeah, I do that now and hopefully

nobody has noticed a deterioration in anything. So it's about £34 a year just from doing that. Don't use the tumble dryer, and that's one of my biggest *bête noires*. It's so easy, isn't it? Just to put it in the tumble dryer, but if you can, if you've got somewhere where you can hang clothes, not over a radiator, then do. That's about £70 a year that you can save on that and I should say that all of the figures I'm giving you come from the Energy Savings Trust. We don't just sort of make them up. Umm. And if you can swap a bath for a shower, it's about £20 a year per person and try not to spend more than 4 minutes in a shower. Believe me it is doable and that's about £95 per person per year so it's quite significant. If you're boiling a kettle, boil the amount of water that you want. It sounds silly, but it's amazing how many of us just stick the kettle under the tap and don't really think about it. But that's gonna save you £13 a year. And then one of the things I think that we're all really guilty of – I know I am – is leaving things on standby. So when you finish charging your phone, your laptop, when you go to bed at night, if you can turn your television off. It's about £65 a year. So all of these things you know sort of really do add up and they're the sort of things that we do. And I said about behaviours, is we kind of gently encourage people to make the changes that they feel comfortable making. You don't have to do it all the time. You don't have to feel guilty if you don't do it. Believe me, we don't all do it all the time, but every little helps and it really it just helps you with your bills. But it will also, as we were saying earlier, it's really gonna help the environment because actually why not keep the money for yourself, spend it on something you want rather than giving it to an energy company. So you know, that's the way I look at it. If I can cut my bills, then that's great. For me, it's great for the environment. And you know, I'm doing my bit to help.

Cllr Millard: Yes, exactly. And you, you're empowering residents with the information. So they have the information they need to choose.

Susan: Yeah, choose what they want to do. Choose how they do it, when they do it, but if they need help doing it, we're here to help them. I think that's probably my message.

Cllr Millard: And are you aware – as well as the measures we can take – what support is out there nationally to help with this energy costs?

Susan: Yeah, there is. There is a lot of support, hopefully everybody is aware of the £400 that's been given to literally everybody in 67 pounds and 66 pence. But what I would like to take the opportunity to say is that's great for those of us like me who pay by direct debit or get a quarterly bill. Please, if there's anybody out there on a prepayment meter, please, if that envelope comes from your energy provider, please open it, because in it maybe some vouchers. And those vouchers, you need to take them along to a post office or your pay point, and you need to actually redeem those. And we are hearing stories, unfortunately, of people who haven't opened that envelope and therefore aren't benefiting. So please, this is a real plea to everybody, if you know anybody who's on a prepayment meter, please do get them to have a look at that envelope and go along and claim it. And we're here to help if anybody struggling with that. Just so that you know the final expiry date for these is 30th June 2023.

Cllr Millard: Right. OK. Yes.

Susan: We're talking about £400, which is a significant amount of money for anybody. So you know please if you put that prepayment meter, I encourage you to make sure that you're looking for that.

Cllr Millard: Mmmm.

Susan: But for the rest of people, I mean, there are all sorts of things out there. There's a cost of living payment of £650. Now that should have been issued automatically in July and November, and

that's for anybody on a series of things like Universal Credit, JSA, ESA, income support, pension credit, child tax credit, working tax credit, and these are separate from any benefit you might get. So again, if you think you should have got that and you're listening to this now, please do get in contact with us and we can help you through that process. People with long term disabilities and health problems could get a further £150, and then Armed Forces Independence payment and War Pension Mobility Supplements. So again quite a few people. If you think you might be eligible, please do get in contact and we'll try and help you. So there's all of those things and they are really important. And of course there's the ongoing ones of the Winter Fuel Payment, which is paid this year around about now and can be anything between £150 and £300. And then one that we come across a lot is the Warm Home Discount. And there's certain criteria. And again, that's one of the ones that we always check for, but that's £150 which comes from your gas, from your electricity supplier. Then there's obviously there's the £150 rebate that the Council tax have for people that on band A to D Council tax have been getting. So, you know, there's a lot out there. So if you think you might be entitled to any of those, then please do get in contact because whilst there is a government website and it is actually very clear to follow, you have to be able to go online. And then you have to be able to activate that, and that's something that we do find that there are a number of people who struggle, quite honestly, to go online and do that sort of thing. So possibly they won't be listening to this, but if you know someone in that position, then please do get in contact because we really would love to help.

Cllr Millard: Absolutely. There's lots of help. It's fantastic you're helping people with that. We've got access in all our libraries, community centres. I was just at the Castelnau Centre the other day in Barnes, where they've got computers you can get in there, get online and find out. You can access the Council's Cost of Living hub as well, which has a lot of information about how you can tackle cost of living. But so that's fantastic information. Thank you, Susan. And in addition to those things, what do you know what grants are available locally in Richmond upon Thames in addition?

Susan: I'm going to say I think I do because I know it's in the process of updating, but I'll be honest, I'd have been online recently and what I think there is, is the £170 Local Fuel Grant. And that, I'm told, opens in January 2023. So we will be working with our advisors to make sure that they know about that. And then there's the Household Support Grant. So for pensioners, the government is provided the Council with a household support grant, which assists local residents with the rising cost of fuel. So part of this funding has been used to provide a one-off £100 payment to pensioners in receipt of Council tax reduction and that's really important. So that was paid in September. So again, if you haven't got that, then obviously contact the Council. And then what I was really pleased to see actually is that you working very closely with Richmond Aid and the Citizens Advice Bureau to help people through the process. And we are very keen if there's anybody that just has energy related issues and they can come to us as well to take perhaps some of the pressure off there, but we're also constantly working with local providers such as Hampton Fund who offer fuel grants. Richmond Parish Lands, who will help people with various things. Of course, there's the furniture scheme. Richmond Furniture Scheme, who can provide people with furniture and things like that. And so there are lots of people out there that really want to help you. And part of the way that we were set up is partnership is really big in our name. And so we really do work with all those partner groups and we are keen to do that even more as we move forward and kind of grow the service to react to the kind of overwhelming need that there is at the moment.

Cllr Millard: And for those residents who listen to this and think this is absolutely fantastic work and think "actually, I want to help" because I know a lot of our listeners do. We've got a fantastic volunteering spirit in Richmond. There's so many of our residents help each other. We're a borough

that looks after each other and I love that about where I live and where I work. So for those residents who want to help, how can they get involved in the work that you do?

Susan: Well, it's very simple. They can contact me susan@habitatsandheritage.org.uk and we would love to hear from them. We've actually had a few people come through recently and we're really keen to have people work with us. We've been involved with volunteers for quite a while now and one of the things that we offer is total flexibility. So we don't ask you to commit to a particular number of days. We don't ask you to commit to a particular day of the week. All we ask is that you let us know when you're available and you can go out with one of our trained advisors to people's homes. You can get involved with the events that we do. You can get involved in any way that you want and as flexibly as you want, and we really would love to hear from people. We do full training. We do it online. We also do face to face training for the visits. We've got a wonderful team of advisors and volunteers and yeah, we would love to have more people working right across Richmond Borough. It would be fantastic. So yeah, if anybody's interested, please contact me.

Cllr Millard: And that is a fantastic note on which to leave. Our time is sadly up, but it's been fantastic as always, Susan, you are a hive of fantastic information. Giving it to people. It's so important the work you're doing and it's been brilliant to have you on to come and talk. So thanks for joining us to Talk Richmond.

Susan: Thank you.

Cllr Millard: SWLEAP are a fantastic organisation and I think we'll all be doing these things to make our homes more energy efficient so we can stay warm this winter, save money and help the environment all at the same time. It's a win, win, win.

Please check the show notes for links to SWLEAP and how you can get support or get involved. We also have included links to the Richmond cost of Living Hub, which includes details of all the support available. In the borough, as always, if you have any questions, concerns or comments, anything you'd like us to look at on the show, e-mail talk@richmond.gov.uk and we'll do our very best to answer them. And please share this episode with any friends or family if you think it would be of help to them. As always, do. Please feel free to leave a review. Five stars is always welcome. Would give me a good feeling and avoid me being left out in the cold. Boom, boom. There you go. End on a really cheesy pun. As always, it's been a great pleasure. I'm Jim Millard. Thanks for listening.