

## **Flick of a switch is a game-changer**

For many people, flicking the switch to turn on the heating when temperatures take a dip is a normal everyday occurrence.

But for newly-qualified nurse Claire, from Bayston Hill, it's been literally life-changing.

Claire had lived in her house with nothing but a log burner to heat the property for eight years – enduring three particularly difficult winters when temperatures fell to around minus 15C.

“I was sleeping under multiple blankets and duvets, in several dressing gowns, and with my dog, Rufus, on the bed for extra warmth when it was at its worst.

“It's very hard work trying to keep a log burner going, and just affording the fuel was difficult enough alongside meeting my mortgage payments. I was also putting myself through a nursing degree so I had a limited income at the time.

“My parents kept insisting that Rufus and I should go and stay with them, but I was determined we should stay at home.”

Claire was in the last few months of her degree when a family member mentioned the Warmer Homes Shropshire initiative.

Managed by Shropshire Council, the project offers grants for eligible households across the county, and it's open to homeowners, as well as private tenants and their landlords.

Grants are available over the next two years to more than 300 households who don't currently have central heating. The £4,500 installation cost is covered by the scheme, and installing a new gas central heating system could save a household as much as £350 per year.

“I contacted Keep Shropshire Warm to find out if I qualified as a single-person household, and the team was absolutely wonderful,” said Claire.

“I explained my situation and they said I was definitely eligible, and so the process started straight away.”

Claire didn't have a gas supply at her property, so the Warmer Homes team arranged to connect her house to the mains supply.

“Everything was done in stages and I had a say in every decision that was made – it's not just a one-size-fits-all approach either: the system was designed specifically to suit my house and needs, and to fit around my furniture just as I wanted.

“Throughout the process, everyone has been so polite, helpful and supportive, and the standard and quality of the work and of the actual system equipment and the radiators has been amazing.”

Before the new system, Claire's electricity direct debit alone was £100 per month – now her gas and electricity combined are substantially below that.

“When the work was finished, I was so overwhelmed. I would never have been able to afford a new heating system like this without the Warmer Homes scheme,” she said.

“It’s so wonderful to have a warm house – just being able to come home from work and flick on a switch is life-changing. I no longer have to clear out a log burner, chop wood and keep refuelling it through the night.

“Trying to keep the house warm through the next day was always difficult, but now the heating comes on before I’ve even got out of bed in the morning which is incredible. It may seem just completely normal for most people, but for me, this is a game-changer.

“To anyone who may be nervous about applying for the grant, don’t be. It was an easy process and you should go for it.

“As I came to the end of my nursing degree, I was a little bit nervous that I would be over the grant threshold once I started earning, and I was worried I might end up with a bill for the work that had been done so far.

“I needn’t have worried though – the team was quick to reassure me that I was still eligible for the scheme and the work was all completed as we’d agreed. In fact, I was waiting throughout the process as I was sure that at some point a bill would arrive, but it didn’t which is of course wonderful!

“There are people in this area who are probably putting up with inadequate heating systems or even no heating at all, and they shouldn’t be suffering. This scheme could be the solution they’re looking for and I can’t praise it highly enough.”

To find out more visit [www.shropshiregov.uk/warmer-homes-shropshire](http://www.shropshiregov.uk/warmer-homes-shropshire) or call 0333 202 4481. You can also call the team at Keep Shropshire Warm on 0800 112 3743.