

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015/2016 REPORT NO.

ACTION TO BE TAKEN UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

PORTFOLIO DECISION OF:

Cabinet Member for Economic
Regeneration & Business Development

Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for
Housing and Housing Regeneration

Cabinet Member for Public Health and
Sport

REPORT OF:

Director - Regeneration &
Environment

Contact officer and telephone number: Liam Preston 020 8379 5760

E mail: liam.preston@enfield.gov.uk

Agenda – Part:

KD Num: 4164

**Subject: Fuel Poverty Strategy &
Action Plan**

Wards: All

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 There are 12,927 households in fuel poverty in Enfield. This is the 6th highest total in London & the 37th highest total in England. The Fuel Poverty Strategy & Action Plan has been developed to help bring together organisations from across Enfield to help tackle the issue in the borough.
- 1.2 The report recommends that the portfolio holders approve the Fuel Poverty Strategy & Action Plan.
- 1.3 The strategy and action plan have been produced with support from National Energy Action and in consultation with key stakeholders from across the borough.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the portfolio holders approve 'Warmer Homes', the Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 12,927 households in Enfield suffered from fuel poverty in 2013. This is the 6th highest total in London & the 37th highest total in England. The Department for Energy and Climate Change's (DECC) national fuel poverty strategy (March, 2015) and the National Institute for Care Excellence (NICE) guidance on excess winter deaths and morbidity (March, 2015), have both highlighted the need for local authorities to act.
- 3.2 The national fuel poverty strategy included a statutory national fuel poverty target which requires as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable to be improved to Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) band C by 2030. From 2016, the Energy Efficiency Regulations for the Private Rented Sector will prevent landlords from refusing reasonable requests from tenants for energy efficiency improvements. From 2018, landlords will be unable to let properties with an EPC rating below band E. Local authorities have responsibility for enforcing the energy efficiency regulations and the national fuel poverty strategy highlights local authorities as a key delivery partner. Both documents present Enfield Council with an opportunity to improve the standard of housing in the borough whilst also tackling fuel poverty.
- 3.3 It is widely acknowledged that fuel poverty has serious implications for health. It makes many illnesses, such as Asthma, Bronchitis, Arthritis and Rheumatism worse. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that fuel poverty interventions can save money for health and social care providers. Fuel poverty also has a negative impact on Enfield's environment, as inefficient homes emit more carbon, increasing the size of the borough's carbon footprint. It impacts the local economy too, as unnecessarily high energy bills limit the amount of disposable income available to be spent on Enfield's high streets.
- 3.4 Alleviating fuel poverty in Enfield will contribute to reducing child poverty in the borough, as reduced fuel bills will increase disposable income for many vulnerable families. Early indications suggest that the new national definition of child poverty will include a focus on household debt, preserving the link between fuel poverty and child poverty at national level.
- 3.5 The process of developing the Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan began in July 2014 when Enfield became part of the Community Action Partnership (CAP). The CAP is a national programme of work being delivered by National Energy Action (NEA), a leading fuel poverty charity, and British Gas, who fund NEA's work. As part of the CAP, Enfield Council developed a Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan. The consultation process began with two workshops held in November 2014 and January 2015 at the Civic Centre. Both workshops included a wide range of representatives from external organisations and internal council teams. The output from the workshops provided the basis for both the Strategy and Action Plan.

- 3.6 If the Strategy & Action Plan is approved by the portfolio holders the document will be formally designed and published.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Sustainability Service considered tackling fuel poverty without a formal strategy or action plan. However, two large recent funding applications – British Gas Energy Trust & DECC's Central Heating Fund - have both required a demonstration of adherence to the aims of the National Fuel Poverty Strategy and/or the NICE guidance on excess winter deaths and morbidity. It is reasonable to presume that this trend will continue. The NICE guidance on Excess Winter Deaths and Morbidity explicitly states that Local Authorities should have a Fuel Poverty Strategy and the National Fuel Poverty Strategy is clear that Local Authorities are a key delivery partner. Without a strategy and action plan it will be more difficult to demonstrate Enfield's compliance, which could negatively impact the chances of attracting external funding.
- 4.2 The Sustainability Service also considered limiting Enfield Council's involvement to the provision of support to third sector organisations already helping the fuel poor in the borough. However, the effects of fuel poverty are such that this stance was considered to be inconsistent with the Council's aims. Furthermore, as a housing provider and the enforcement body for housing standards within the borough, taking minimal action would have made it difficult for the Council to comply with the Private Rented Sector Energy Efficiency Regulations (2015) and for the borough to comply with the national fuel poverty target. The problem requires a central body to co-ordinate efforts to tackle fuel poverty in Enfield; this role is one for which the Council is well suited.

5. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Fuel poverty is a significant issue for Enfield, 12,927 households were affected in 2013. These figures were released in May 2015 and they indicated that fuel poverty had increased by 28.28% since 2012. As those on low incomes are subjected to ever greater financial pressure over the coming years, fuel poverty in the borough is likely to continue getting worse unless action is taken.
- 5.2 Tackling fuel poverty in Enfield will contribute towards the Council's efforts to reduce general poverty and will narrow inequality. It also corresponds closely to the Council's aims: fairness for all, growth & sustainability and strong communities.
- 5.3 As a major social housing provider and the body responsible for enforcing housing standards, the Council is an ideal organisation to co-ordinate efforts to tackle fuel poverty in Enfield.

- 5.4 Adopting the Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan will demonstrate the Council's commitment to tackling the issue which will have a positive impact on efforts to attract external funding.

6. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, RESOURCES AND CUSTOMER SERVICES, AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS

6.1 Financial Implications

- 6.1.1 The strategy includes an Action Plan (Appendix 1) which sets out the anticipated sources of funding to achieve each of the actions identified. Individual proposals within the Action Plan will be subject to an appraisal of resource requirement prior to their implementation and correct processes will be followed to ensure that the required funding is in place.
- 6.1.2 Where possible, the plan will be delivered within existing budgetary resources by extending and adapting existing services. However, it indicates that external funding will be sought to deliver the ambitions of the Strategy and these proposals are subject to successful external bids.
- 6.1.3 Any future proposals arising will be subject to separate reports and full financial appraisals.

6.2 Legal Implications

- 6.2.1 The Council has the general power of competence under Section 1(1) of the Localism Act 2011 (Commencement No. 3) Order 2012 (SI2012/411) to do anything that individuals may generally do provided it is not prohibited by legislation. The proposals set out in this report are consistent with the Council's (i) powers under the Localism Act (described above); and (ii) the proper discharge of its functions in accordance with Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.

6.3 Property Implications

- 6.3.1 There will be specific Property Implications for each project where the Council or partner organisations lead on works concerned with improving the energy-efficiency of homes. The property implications will be considered at the outset of each project in the usual manner.

7. KEY RISKS

- 7.1 If the Sustainability Service is unable to appoint an additional Sustainability Officer the service may have insufficient capacity to attract external funding and to deliver the aspects of the Fuel Poverty Action Plan for which the service is responsible. The Fuel Poverty and Energy Retrofit Steering Group may also lack the resources to monitor projects being delivered by other services or external organisations. In the event that such a situation occurs, the Action Plan will be re-evaluated; time scales will be increased;

alternative funding sources will be explored and, where possible, actions will be delivered using existing resources.

- 7.2 If Enfield Council and its external partners are unable to source funding to support fuel poverty work in the borough it may be difficult to deliver many aspects of the Action Plan. This risk is mitigated by the fact that the Council and its partners have applied to multiple funding sources and are not reliant on one bid to fund all aspects of the Action Plan. However, in the event that the majority or all of the applications are unsuccessful, time scales will be re-evaluated and other sources of funding will be sought. Where possible, actions will be delivered using existing resources.
- 7.3 Identification of fuel poor homes is often difficult below lower super output area (LSOA) level. The stigma attached to fuel poverty and/or a lack of awareness about the help available can prevent fuel poor households coming forward to take advantage of support. In the short term, this risk will be mitigated by using multiple data sets relevant to fuel poverty to identify LSOA hotspots. We will also work with our community champions, front line officials and local GPs to identify residents at risk. Long term, we will work with Enfield 2017 to ensure that Enfield Council's internal data and data held by external organisations, such as the CCG and Citizens Advice Bureau, is used more effectively. This will enable us to identify fuel poor households with greater ease.
- 7.4 By publishing a Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan, it is possible that Enfield Council could be seen as solely responsible for the eradication of fuel poverty in Enfield. Tackling fuel poverty is too large a task to be achieved by one organisation alone. Individual Council services will deliver fuel poverty projects, but Enfield Council as a whole must maintain a co-ordinating role. This risk will be mitigated by the Fuel Poverty and Energy Retrofit Steering Group, which will comprise council staff and external partners. The composition of the Steering Group demonstrates the need for partnership working and should ensure that Enfield Council does not assume sole responsibility.

8. IMPACT ON COUNCIL PRIORITIES

8.1 Fairness for All

- 8.1.1 The latest statistics show that 12,927 Enfield households live in fuel poverty, equating to 10.6% of the borough's households. Fuel poverty impacts people of all ages - particularly the vulnerable - and negatively affects health, living standards and access to employment. It is impossible for the Council to achieve fairness for all Enfield's residents if such large numbers cannot afford to heat their homes to an adequate level and are handicapped by poor health caused or made worse by living in cold homes.

8.2 Growth and Sustainability

- 8.2.1 Fuel poverty effects growth in the borough by suppressing the economy. A fuel poor household has a lower marginal propensity to consume as it lacks disposable income, which limits the amount of money available to be spent on Enfield's high streets, particularly in low income areas. The reduced spending power of fuel poor households has a negative effect on the number of potential local employment opportunities. The Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan is one of over 50 projects in the Enfield 2020 Action Plan, a key aim of which is to stimulate growth and support sustainability in Enfield.
- 8.2.2 The negative health effects associated with living in a cold home make it more difficult for householders to find and sustain long term work. Improving living conditions for those suffering from fuel poverty will provide a stable, comfortable base from which some of Enfield's most vulnerable households can improve their living standards, sustain work and maximise their earnings.

8.3 Strong Communities

- 8.3.1 Fuel poverty widens inequality between the affluent and low income parts of the borough. It also has a serious impact on the mental health of those it affects, potentially leading to social isolation, depression and anxiety. Addressing fuel poverty in Enfield will create stronger communities by reducing the social isolation often experienced by fuel poor residents. It will also narrow inequality by improving health and reducing the monthly outgoings of fuel poor households.
- 8.3.2 Without a comfortable, warm place to live, children living in fuel poor households often spend more time outside, potentially increasing the risks of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour. The lack of a warm place to study outside school can negatively impact educational attainment. By tackling fuel poverty, Enfield Council can improve outcomes for children living in fuel poor households. This will strengthen the borough's communities by improving community safety, promoting community cohesion and encouraging aspiration.

9. EQUALITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Eligibility for the majority of fuel poverty projects will primarily be based on income. Therefore, it is possible that elderly and/or BAME residents will benefit disproportionately; indirectly discriminating against fuel poor residents in other demographics or communities. However, an Equality Impact Assessment concluded that the Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan will not have a direct, negative impact on individuals in the protected characteristic groups. Any disproportionate benefits derived by a particular community or demographic will reflect the socio-economic realities of Enfield rather than deliberate discrimination.

10. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The projects comprising the fuel poverty action plan will be monitored by the new Fuel Poverty & Energy Retrofit steering group chaired by the Assistant Director for Economic Development and Sustainability. The group will include internal representatives from the Sustainability Service, Enfield Council Housing, Private Sector Homes, Business & Economic Development, Public Health and the Welfare Benefits Hub. It will also include external representatives from Enfield CCG, Enfield Citizens Advice Bureau and National Energy Action.
- 10.2 The performance of all Enfield Council staff responsible for delivering projects in the fuel poverty action plan will be managed in accordance with the Council's project management framework. The Steering Group will report annually to the Enfield Strategic Partnership and Cabinet. The Sustainability Service will also work with the new performance management hub to create fuel poverty performance indicators.

11. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Health and Safety at work etc. Act 1974 imposes a duty on employers to conduct their undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons not in their employment are not exposed to risks to their health and safety. This duty may extend to contractors and those employed by them, if it can be said that the risks in question arise as part of the conduct of the employers 'undertaking'.

12. PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are clear links between fuel poverty and health. Efforts to reduce fuel poverty in Enfield will have a positive effect on those living in cold homes suffering from or vulnerable to cold related illnesses. Improving the energy efficiency of vulnerable residents' homes represents an opportunity to manage demand. Evidence from the Gentoo project in Sunderland suggests that energy efficiency improvements reduce the frequency with which residents suffering from cold related illnesses need to use health and social care services.
- 12.2 Public Health has been involved with the development of the Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan. The projects in the Action Plan will support various Public Health work-streams such as the efforts to reduce child poverty through the Child Poverty Action Plan and social prescribing.

Background Papers

