



Subject:	Fuel Poverty Update
Date:	8 th November 2016
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department
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Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of report or summary of main Issues
1.1	Members will recall that reports on the Affordable Warmth Scheme were considered at both the June and August Committees.
1.2	At its September meeting, Council agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the People and Communities Committee on the feasibility of amending the terms of reference for the Reference Group on Older People to allow for it to address the issue of fuel poverty or of introducing some other mechanism, given that fuel poverty was not restricted solely to older people.
1.3	This report provides an update to Members on the work the Council currently undertakes to support households suffering from fuel poverty and the steps it is taking through the winter planning group to improve and better co-ordinate this. The report also provides Members with an update on correspondence received from the Department for Communities and recent meetings between the Department and officers delivering the Affordable Warmth Scheme. All relevant correspondence can be found in Appendix 1.
1.4	The report also provides an update to Members on the work the Council and other partners are proposing in relation to the provision of winter warmth packs for vulnerable households in the city.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the contents of this report.
3.0	Main Issues
3.1	<p><u>All Party reference Group on Older People</u></p> <p>The Reference Group met on 21st September to consider the motion referred to in paragraph 1.2 and were updated on the Council discussion on the issue of fuel poverty. Members agreed this is a priority for the Council and is an important issue when considering older people's needs. It was agreed that it continued to be raised at this Committee when considering affordable warmth and fuel poverty issues.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Winter Planning Group For Older People</u></p> <p>The need for a joined up approach to winter planning with older people was raised through priority actions identified by the Greater Belfast Seniors Forum, discussions in Belfast Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership (HASP) steering group and links with the Public Health Agency (PHA) about the distribution of winter warmth packages. The Winter Planning Group (See Appendix 2) was established:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To co-ordinate information to older people before or just as cold period starts-key contacts, keeping warm, avoiding or acting on burst pipes-also making sure key contacts are reachable, explore the expert patient/self-management approach To ensure a joined up approach to fuel poverty and coordinate benefit uptake, encourage a warm zones approach To keep up to date with Emergency planning and build on work from previous years, review any lessons learned and changes needed with older people and a range of contacts.
3.3	<p>At the last meeting it was agreed that there is potential for additional cross referral between the affordable warmth scheme, home safety check scheme, the chronic disease hub, AGE NI First Connect service and National Energy Action. The agencies are working together to consider how this can be achieved.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Affordable Warmth Scheme Update</u></p> <p>The Council's Affordable Warmth team continues to deliver 46 completed surveys to Northern Ireland Housing Executive per month as specified in the current Service Level Agreement between the Council and the Department for Communities (DfC). To date, the scheme has installed 1378 energy efficiency measures in 879 homes in Belfast. The value</p>

	of approvals issued is just under £3.5 million.
3.5	While the scheme is primarily targeted, the Council receives a high number of enquiries and self-referrals. Each self-referral is assessed for eligibility and a triage system is used to prioritise each case. High priority cases are dealt with first i.e. households with broken heating systems or no central heating system at all. The Service Level Agreement states that that no more than 20% of the 46 surveys can be self-referrals. The Affordable Warmth Coordinator recently met with DfC to discuss the possibility of flexibility on this percentage due to an increasing number of high priority cases over the winter months. DfC acknowledged the issue and it was agreed that an increase in the percentage of self-referrals due to the number of high priority cases could be acceptable, provided that any deviations are discussed with the Department. The possibility of increasing the monthly target of 46 was also discussed, the Department will keep the Council informed if extra funding becomes available.
3.6	The affordable warmth co-ordinator works closely with colleagues across the Council. She attends the Winter Planning meetings and will be providing an update on the Affordable Warmth Scheme to the Council's All Party Reference Group on Older People.
3.7	If householders are not eligible for the Affordable Warmth Scheme, they are referred to the NIHE Boiler Replacement Scheme and other energy efficiency grant schemes through National Energy Action. Project officers also offer energy efficiency advice and refer householders to other Council services such as the Home Safety Check Scheme, the 'Be Warm' Fuel Stamp Scheme and other Council Departments where appropriate.
	<u>Other Fuel Poverty Measures</u>
3.8	The home safety team complete 1,200 family home safety checks per year. The Council, in partnership with the PHA and the Trust, delivers the "Home Safety and Repair Service" for people aged 65 and over living in the Belfast City Council area; as part of this scheme a further 500 home safety checks are completed. These home visits give officers an insight into individuals' living conditions and staff are aware of how to identify if anyone is living in fuel poverty (document attached). Because of the link between increased home accidents (e.g. falls and unintentional injury) for those living in cold homes, the regional home safety check form collates information relating to home heating.
3.9	Based on this information the home safety team make referrals to the Affordable Warmth

team and agencies such as Bryson Energy and National Energy Action. The home safety officer sits on the winter planning meetings where fuel poverty is discussed.

Environmental Health Officers, when carrying out their housing duties, come across individuals living in fuel poverty and will also make referrals to the various schemes and agencies listed above.

3.10 Be Warm Fuel Stamp Scheme

Our fuel stamp scheme 'Be Warm', helps householders save for home heating oil, by spreading the cost of their fuel. Residents can buy oil stamps from participating retailers, collect them on a savings card and use the value of the stamps to pay for all or part of your oil when placing an order. The scheme is available throughout Belfast. Stamps can be purchased from 35 retailers and are accepted by 47 Oil Suppliers. To date the scheme has sold £1.5 million worth of stamps.

3.11 Winter Warmth Packs

Each year the Council procures 600 children's winter warm packs on behalf of the Public Health Agency. These packs are distributed by 9 Sure Starts in Belfast to families with young children (under 5) who meet the criteria. An additional £11,000 funding will be spent on older persons' winter packs next month. These packs will be procured by HASP and Age NI and provided to community groups and organisations who will distribute them to individuals who meet the criteria (See Appendix 3).

3.12 The Council also holds a number of packs in reserve. These are used to support vulnerable adults or groups and to assist the Council's response in the event of an exceptional cold spell.

3.13 The criteria to determine eligibility for a pack were agreed previously by Committee. The procedure to be followed for the distribution of packs was recently reviewed by Audit Governance and Risk Services. Both this and the eligibility criteria can be found in Appendix Three.

3.14 Financial & Resource Implications

There are no Financial, Human Resources, Assets and other implications in this report. However it is noted that the reduced funding for the affordable warmth scheme in 2016/17 will require a review of resource.

3.15	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> There are no direct Equality implications.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
4.1	Appendix 1 - Correspondence with the DFC re Affordable Warmth Scheme Appendix 2 - Membership of Winter Planning Group Appendix 3 - Eligibility Criteria for receiving a winter warmth pack.