



Subject:	Update on the Affordable Warmth Scheme
Date:	7 November 2017
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department
Contact Officer:	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
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 be aware that Belfast City Council is engaged in a partnership with the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) in the delivery of the Affordable Warmth Scheme. The scheme aims to address fuel poverty for the most vulnerable households in the city.
1.2	This report provides an update on the scheme based upon further confirmation from DfC on funding for the remainder of the 2017-18 financial year.
1.3	The report also outlines the requests from DfC for councils to consider options such as shared service delivery of the scheme and the potential for councils to contribute financially towards the administration of the scheme.

2.0	Recommendations																		
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of the report and in relation to DfC requests for consideration of a shared service model and the potential for council funding, it is recommended that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Council continues to participate in the delivery of the Affordable Warmth Scheme on the basis of the current 11 council model. 2. The Council confirms the position that all costs associated with the administration of the scheme are provided from within the scheme budget and requests that the DfC increases the levels of funding to councils to ensure adequate staffing levels for effective delivery of the scheme. 																		
3.0	Main report																		
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>As previously brought to committee, correspondence issued from DfC to Councils on 29th March 2017, confirmed the reduction in the number of referrals to 25 per month be provided in Q1 (17-18), reduced from 46 per month in 16-17. The associated funding to councils was also reduced.</p> <p>DfC convened a workshop on 8th June 2017 and confirmed at the meeting that funding of £15.5m was being allocated to the Affordable Warmth Scheme for 17-18. They subsequently confirmed (Appendix 1) that this would result in further changes to the target number of referrals and the associated funding per council. The number of referrals for 17-18 are shown in the table below.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="276 1570 1465 1783"> <thead> <tr> <th>Period</th> <th>Number of Referrals</th> <th>Total Referrals</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>April to June</td> <td>25 per month</td> <td>75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>July to September</td> <td>40 per month</td> <td>120</td> </tr> <tr> <td>October to December</td> <td>40 per month</td> <td>120</td> </tr> <tr> <td>January to March</td> <td>30 per month</td> <td>90</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td></td> <td>405</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>While confirmation of the funding was welcome to allow planning for the full year, the overall funding to each council for 17-18 is £73,305 for the total 405 referrals, over the year is a reduction from the £107,250 per council for 16-17.</p> <p>It should be noted that the level of funding provided is based on a unit cost of £181 per</p>	Period	Number of Referrals	Total Referrals	April to June	25 per month	75	July to September	40 per month	120	October to December	40 per month	120	January to March	30 per month	90	Total		405
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3.5 referral. Following a partnership meeting in June 2017, a Council subgroup was tasked with a review of delivery costs and to establish an average cost per referral from Councils to the NIHE. It was established that although each Council delivers their function differently, the average cost per referral was at least £212 to provide the number of referrals, dealing with all the enquiries and contact we receive and continuing with the level of assistance to vulnerable householders through the scheme. This figure also reflects the impact of additional duties previously carried out by NIHE and are now carried out by councils.

3.6 The reduction in funding has led to a further reduction in staffing over the last 6 months. We have worked closely with both HR and Finance to ensure that we can provide the required level of staffing across the remainder of the year to ensure continuity of service, especially as want to retain trained and experienced staff where possible. However one member has been released (June 17), another has been reduced to part time (Oct 17) and the working patterns changed to ensure that we can provide the service required. Therefore there are currently only 1.5 staff members within the Affordable Warmth team made up of a full time co-ordinator and one part time site staff member. Note that the co-ordinator has taken on additional site duties.

3.7 To assist with the provision of referrals DfC have relaxed the requirement for 80% of referrals to be from the targeted list, which allows us to draw from our substantial list of self-referrals across the city. We continue to triage the referrals to ensure those most in need are referred first.

3.8 However the reduction in staff has meant that the target number of referrals has not been met over recent months.

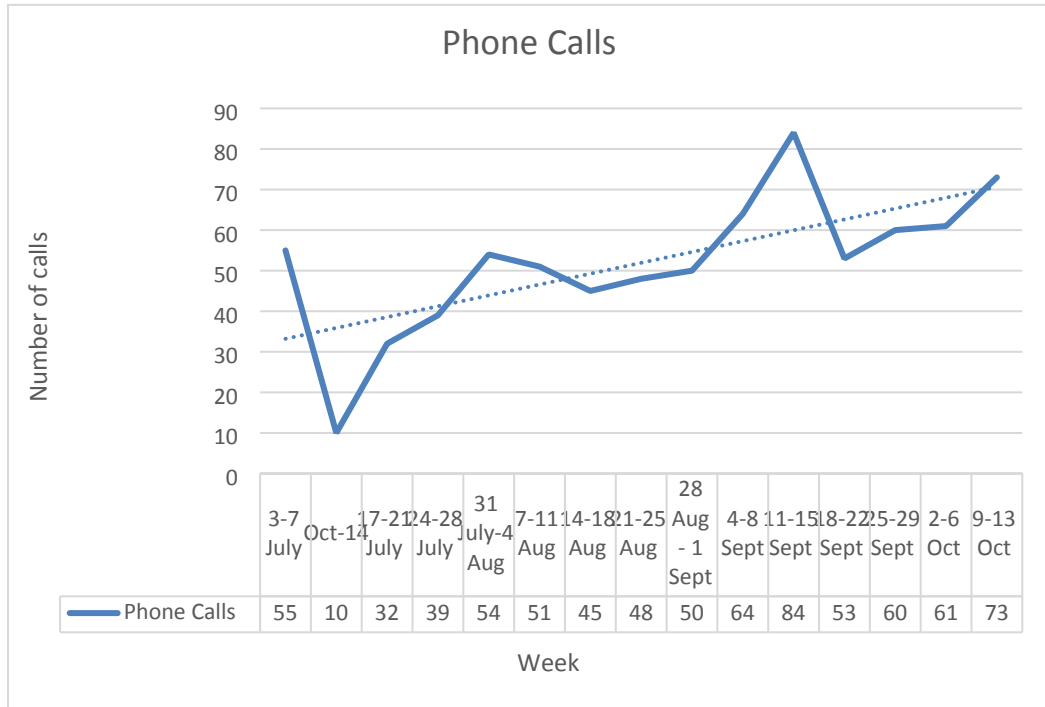
3.9 Table of referrals for 2017-2018

	Target	Actual
April	25	25
May	25	25
June	25	25
July	40	40
August	40	27
September	40	36*
October	40	25

*Note: in official figures 13 surveys from September are included in October as they were transferred on Monday 3rd October.

3.10

This is partly due to the amount of interest that there is in the scheme and the number of phone calls that are received on a daily basis, which have been increasing as we have moved toward the winter months. Figures in relation calls received are shown in the graph below:



3.11

With the reduction in funding for business support resources, the additional calls is impacting on the existing business support teams. Measures are being introduced to assist in streamlines calls to alleviate the situation. This may have a knock on impact on existing service delivery for the wider Building Control Service. Given the interest and number of calls, we are having to manage customer expectations in terms of timeframe for response as we balance this with the ability to carry out site visits.

Future of the scheme

3.12

DfC have confirmed that they will be bidding for further in year funding from the monitoring rounds, but no confirmation of additional funding has been provided at this stage.

The DfC have also confirmed that they are preparing a business case which would propose funding for the scheme of £125m over five years. No confirmation of funding for 2018-2019

<p>3.13</p> <p>3.14</p> <p>3.15</p> <p>3.16</p> <p>3.17</p>	<p>has been received to date.</p> <p>DfC has also asked Councils to consider ways of reducing their costs by reviewing and considering how savings can be made through the different delivery models. These include shared services or by seeking costs from other bodies which benefit from Council's involvement in the Scheme. A shared service model could involve one council coordinating the scheme for a group of councils, with site staff working across council boundaries. There are concerns that while there would be some rationalisation in staffing costs with this approach, there are risks that engagement on a local level may be more difficult. There is potential loss of local accountability and there are would be considerable initial and ongoing engagement required to run a shared service model. In addition many of the added value benefits on a local level built up across the council and other agencies could be lost.</p> <p>DfC have also requested that Councils make a contribution towards Scheme costs. Currently BCC already make contributions to the scheme through absorbing management, office and utility provision and business support costs.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>DfC have confirmed funding of £16,290 per quarter from Q2-Q4 with the possibility of additional funding being provided from future monitoring rounds. The Services HR and finance teams continue to ensure that we optimise our resources to provide the best service delivery and continuity of staffing for the scheme moving forward within the funding constraints.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>There are no equality or good relations issues.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - DfC Note to Councils AWS Q2-Q4 funding 2017/2018</p>