



Subject:	Affordable Warmth Scheme update
Date:	4 June 2019
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services
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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	Belfast City Council has been 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 (AWS) since 2014.
1.2	The scheme aims to address fuel poverty for the most vulnerable households in the city by targeting those households that meet certain criteria, as identified by Ulster University. While it is a targeted scheme, self-referrals are also considered. To qualify for the scheme occupant's income must be below £20,000 (gross).

1.3	<p>The eligibility criteria for the boiler replacement element of the scheme includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have an existing central heating boiler that is at least 15 years old; and • be aged over 65; or • receive Child Benefit for a child under 16 years of age; or • receive DLA. <p>This report provides an update on the scheme including confirmation received from the DfC of the funding allocation for 2019-2020 and the level of referrals to be provided.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>Members are asked to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the contents of the report and consider the chair of committee writing to the Permanent Secretary for DfC raising the inadequacy of the level of funding related to the levels of need being identified through the scheme.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>During 2018-2019:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Service completed 303 referrals to the NIHE. • the total value of approvals granted for the scheme in Belfast was £871,381 • 450 measures were installed • 233 homes were improved within Belfast.
3.2	<p>The scheme continues to receive a high volume of enquiries. While the scheme is primarily targeted, the service received significant number of self-referrals, with 686 households currently on the self-referral holding list.</p>
3.3	<p>Correspondence issued from DfC to Councils on 4th April 2019 , contained in Appendix 1, states that the number of referrals which will be accepted by the NIHE has reduced from 30 per month (18-19) to 18 per month (19-20) for each council area – 216 in total.</p>
3.4	<p>The funding provided to each council to deliver their part of the scheme has also been reduced from £68,780 in 2018–2019 to £41,256 for 2019-2020. The reduction is due to the overall scheme reduction and the increase in average spend for measures per household, which has risen to £4,500, from the original estimated £1,400.</p>

3.5	The overall funding is split equally between the 11 council areas, and no consideration is taken on the variations in number of households waiting to be considered, or the nature of the measures involved.
3.6	The funding being provided is insufficient to fully cover the current salary costs and has led to one member of staff being released. The service currently has only the co-ordinator in post who is carrying out the full range of duties to manage the scheme and provide the referrals through to the NIHE. The Building Control Service also continues to subsidise the administration of the AWS as it handles the significant number of calls about the scheme. This remains in the region of £40,000 per year.
3.7	The team continue to triage the cases, in line with a process agreed with DfC, to ensure that the most vulnerable are helped. The triage should ensure that referrals are made for those most vulnerable, with broken boilers or the elderly but significant numbers of eligible households will not avail of the scheme at this time
3.8	The Building Control Service has been informed by NIHE that the DfC have delayed the issuing of approvals for applications for the Affordable Warmth Scheme. This temporary delay impacts all Councils across Northern Ireland and will affect approximately 900 applications received by the Housing Executive since 31/12/18 and 400 applications received prior to 31/12/18.
3.9	DfC have confirmed that they are seeking a more long term approach to the scheme, over a five year period, with a business case prepared for the consideration of any future minister. It has also commissioned a report from the Department of Finance on the future of the scheme and the final official findings are yet to be released.
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.10	The DfC will provide £41,256 in funding for 2019-2020 which is insufficient to cover current salary costs. This is leading to the loss of an experienced site officer who is being redeployed to another part of the council.
3.11	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no equality, good relations or rural needs issues.

4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 DfC Note to Councils AWS funding 2019/2020