

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 15 September 2016
REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health
PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing
SUBJECT: Halton Affordable Warmth Strategy 2016-2020
WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents the background to a new affordable warmth strategy which outlines Halton's approach to tackle fuel poverty and living in cold homes over the next 5 years. The strategy aims to enable all households in Halton to achieve the heating levels they need to maintain comfort and good health, at an affordable cost. The strategy builds upon a wide range of support that the Council and our partners already provide for households to address fuel poverty and living in cold homes.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the Board approve the Affordable Warmth Strategy and support the implementation of the Action Plan.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Fuel poverty means that households are either unable to heat their homes to an acceptable level to maintain their health and wellbeing or they are spending so much on heating their homes that they do not have enough disposable income to pay for other essential household needs.
- 3.2 4,992 households in Halton, (9.2% of all households) are living in Fuel Poverty. This varies from 4.2% in Birchfield to 14.1% in Appleton.
- 3.3 Living in cold homes can damage the health and wellbeing of all people, from toddlers to older people over 65 years. It can affect both the low income households and households of people with greater heating needs due to ill - health and disability. Fuel poverty widens inequalities as it particularly affects vulnerable groups such as the very young, elderly and income deprived.
- 3.4 Fuel Poverty can be caused by three main factors:
- The energy efficiency of a house which determines the amount of energy required to heat and power the home.
 - Cost of domestic energy.

- Low household income.
- 3.5 People are more likely to be affected by cold homes if they have:
- a heart disease
 - a respiratory condition
 - a mental health condition
 - a disability
 - mobility problems
- 3.6 Fuel Poverty can worsen existing health problems such as chest and heart disease, cause poor mental health, and increase the risk of falls and untimely death.
- 3.7 Fuel poverty comes at a huge cost to health services. The NHS spends about £1.4 billion per year to treat the illnesses caused and worsened by cold homes. However, investing £1 in improving affordable warmth can deliver a 42 pence saving in health costs for the NHS.
- 3.8 The Halton Affordable Warmth Strategy was developed in 2011. We have reviewed and updated the strategy, following a Needs assessment, in collaboration with several agencies who are already working to assist households who are vulnerable to the cold. Together we have agreed on the vision, objectives, required actions and outcomes to further reduce the harms from living in cold homes in Halton.

"Our Vision is: All households in Halton can achieve the heating levels they need to maintain comfort and good health, at an affordable cost".

To achieve this vision, this strategy will address **five main aims**

- Increase awareness, across all sectors and individuals, of the risks associated with fuel poverty and living in cold homes.
- Identify people who are living in cold homes or at risk of fuel poverty.
- Identify and monitor internal and external support that is available to people living in cold homes or at risk of fuel poverty.
- Ensure that people living in cold homes or fuel poverty are able to access available support to address the problem.
- Ensure the health and social care sector takes full account of the issue of fuel poverty when supporting clients.

This strategy is supported by a detailed action plan with realistic time scales and key partners who have agreed to ensure successful implementation of our desired objectives.

3.9 Following an assessment of local need and current provisions and gaps, a set of key recommendations and actions were identified in order to achieve each individual aim of the strategy and ultimately reduce fuel poverty and the risk of living in cold homes for people in Halton. The recommendations are covered in detail in the strategy but are summarised below:

3.9.1 Aim 1: Increase awareness across all sectors and individuals in Halton of the risks associated with fuel poverty and living in cold homes.

To achieve this, we will:

- Ensure that Fuel poverty remains on the agenda of key directorates and agencies in Halton
- Continue work to ensure that affordable warmth remains a part of strategic plans across the borough
- Support our frontline organisations by providing information to disseminate to their clients
- Develop campaigns to increase awareness of fuel poverty and associated harms among people who are vulnerable to the cold, their families, carers and friends
- Work with gas engineering training centres to include fuel poverty in their training
- Continue to disseminate information about external fuel poverty campaigns residents can benefit from

Aim 2: To identify people who are living in cold homes. We will:

- Produce a fuel poverty checklist to facilitate identification and referral for people who may be living in cold homes
- Train our frontline professionals across all sectors to recognise people who may be living in cold homes using the fuel poverty checklist and how to refer them for help
- Make every contact count to reduce fuel poverty: We will work with partner agencies to identify people living in cold homes during home visits and assessment procedures such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the Safe and well visits by the Fire and Rescue Service.

Aim 3: Identify and monitor internal and external support that is available to people living in cold homes or at risk of fuel poverty. We will:

- produce and regularly update a directory of affordable warmth related services within Halton and beyond

- make this directory accessible to all relevant agencies
- work with the 'external funding team' to identify and secure external funding to tackle fuel poverty
- ensure that this information is disseminated to all relevant partners working with people who are vulnerable to the cold.

Aim 4: Provide support for people who are living in cold homes. We will:

- Establish a 'single point of contact' for affordable warmth in Halton
- Support a future housing stock condition survey
- Continue to explore funding opportunities to improve the housing stock and availability of services across the borough
- Ensure the availability of practical financial help such as: Benefit checks and other income maximisation support, budgeting advice and back to work support
- Facilitate the development of data sharing agreements between the range of organisations working in Halton
- Undertake more proactive work to promote better energy deals such as the 'Collective switch'.
- Produce a 'winter check list' for agencies to share with their clients

Aim 5: Ensure the health and social care sector takes full account of the issue of fuel poverty when supporting clients

- Facilitate effective communication and partnership working between Hospital discharge teams, housing providers and organisations who can help clients who are in private rented accommodation
- Facilitate the inclusion of fuel poverty assessment into standard assessment procedures across the Health and Social care sector.
- Explore the potential for referral on schemes such as the 'social prescription scheme'.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The strategy addresses some key issues to reduce the risk of living in cold homes in Halton thereby improving the short and long term health and wellbeing of households in Halton. As such the recommendations will cover a broad scope of policy areas across the council, CCG and health and care partners.

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There may be financial implications in the implementation of recommendations within the strategy which will be assessed and managed within the Strategic Group and through partner agencies for which the implication affects.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

For children, Fuel poverty and living in a cold home can affect normal development, including unhealthy weight gain, worsen health problems like asthma, increasing hospital admissions, reduce educational achievement leading to poorer emotional and mental well-being and reduce the ability to cope with the stress of life. For adolescents and young people, Fuel poverty can lead to poor mental health.

Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People is a priority in Halton. Reducing fuel poverty will help to achieve this goal.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

Reducing fuel poverty and living in cold homes can improve educational achievements for children and young people. This is likely to improve life chances, including employment potentials for people in Halton.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Ensuring the health and wellbeing of the population is key priority. Protecting the health of Halton's population is a statutory responsibility for Public Health and the Council. All issues in this strategy are focused on this priority.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The environment in which we live and the physical infrastructure of our communities has a direct impact on our health and wellbeing. Fuel poverty is greatly impacted by dwellings which are poor in terms of energy efficiency. Improving the energy efficiency of homes in Halton will reduce fuel poverty and living in cold homes.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There are no risks associated with the development and implementation of this strategy

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 This strategy is developed in line with all equality and diversity issues in Halton.

9.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION

To provide a co-ordinated approach to reduce harms from fuel poverty in Halton.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

None.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

15 September 2016.

12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Documents	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Halton Affordable Warmth Strategy 2016-2020	Runcorn Town Hall	Olukemi Adeyemi olukemi.adeyemi@halton.gov.uk
Halton Fuel Poverty Needs Assessment 2015 Summary	Runcorn Town Hall	Olukemi Adeyemi olukemi.adeyemi@halton.gov.uk