

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 31st March 2011

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Adults and Community

SUBJECT: Affordable Warmth Strategy 2011-16

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report introduces the recently developed Affordable Warmth Strategy (Appendix 1). The strategy describes the causes and consequences of and solutions to fuel poverty and relates these specifically to the impact on people in Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board approve the draft Affordable Warmth Strategy attached as Appendix 1.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 This is Halton's first Affordable Warmth Strategy. It's principal aim is to alleviate fuel poverty (where a household must spend more than 10% of its income to maintain a satisfactory heating regime). Fuel poverty is a problem that affects approximately 600,000 households in the North West and 4,900 (12.2%) of households in Halton. Although this figure is lower than the national average of 13.2 per cent it still represents a substantial number of households. Fuel poverty is a problem that has become worse in recent years due to the rise in fuel prices and given the current financial climate it is likely to become an even greater issue for a wider number of households.

3.2 Households in fuel poverty, many of which include vulnerable people, are unable to heat their homes adequately in order to maintain comfort and health. Living in cold homes can lead to an increase in cold related illnesses, affecting quality of life, increasing the risk of hospitalisation and/or dependence on informal carers or care services.

3.3 Since 2000 Halton has directed significant resources towards improving the energy efficiency of private sector housing through the Energy Zone Scheme which provides cavity wall and loft insulation to homeowners at significantly reduced costs. Additionally, in recognition of the health inequalities prevalent in the borough the HEARTH programme was launched in 2005 to install adequate heating in the homes of people with heart and respiratory conditions. Complementing the HEARTH programme, npower Health through Warmth (HtW) operates in Halton as part of the Merseyside HtW programme.

3.4 In addition many eligible residents of Halton have accessed the government Warm Front Scheme which also provides more efficient heating systems and insulation measures. This has been the Government's flag ship scheme for tackling fuel poverty for a number of years but is likely to come to an end in the next 2 years and be replaced by a new Green Deal which is designed to off set the upfront cost of installing energy efficiency measures through households paying back as they make energy savings on their utility bills. The utility companies have also been tasked in recent years with providing funding to make dwellings more energy efficient and demonstrating the carbon savings they have made to the government through the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT). Through this CERT funding the utilities have either contributed to Local Authority schemes or developed their own initiatives, such as Health through Warmth, for providing insulation and heating measures. In 2012 CERT will be replaced by the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) which will focus on the poorest and most vulnerable people and improving hard to treat homes.

3.5 Although these various initiatives have assisted a number of households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes the benefits of a more coordinated approach to tackling fuel poverty has been recognised. In June 2009 Halton successfully bid for support from National Energy Action (NEA) to develop a comprehensive Affordable Warmth Strategy. The NEA consultant together with Energy Projects Plus and local partners, including the voluntary sector, some Registered Social Landlords and the PCT, have been involved in the preparation of the strategy. Two stakeholder events were held and a steering group established.

3.6 The key aims of the Affordable Warmth Strategy are to:

- Raise awareness and understanding of fuel poverty;
- Establish effective referral systems amongst agencies;
- Improve the housing stock so it is affordably warm;
- Maximise incomes and improve access to affordable fuel; and
- Ensure coordination and monitoring of the strategy.

Each aim has a corresponding list of associated actions contained in the Action Plan.

3.7 The Strategy was presented to the Health PPB on 8 March 2011 and it was well received and supported.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 A co-ordinated approach to tackling fuel poverty will have positive impacts on a number of Strategic Partnership and Council strategies and policies, including Halton's Sustainable Community Strategy, Child and Family Poverty Strategy and Halton's Housing Strategy.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 In previous years, the Council has directed resources to the initiatives described in 3.4 above through a contribution from Halton's annual allocation from the Regional Housing Pot. However this funding source has come to an end for 2011 onwards. There is a possibility of continuation funding in the sum of £6,000 for the Health through Warmth programme but funding for physical measures through Energy Zone and HEARTH will not continue into 2011/12.

5.2 Training activities described in the action plan will be funded from a residual £10,000 from Local Public Service Agreement funding, other elements of the Strategy will be delivered within existing resources.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

The provision of affordable warmth will make a dual contribution to the well being of children in Halton through reducing the number of children living in poverty and helping to improve their physical and emotional health.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

Increasing household income and promoting the availability of support are key elements to improving affordable warmth and will contribute to the SCS objective to maximise an individual's potential to increase and manage their income, including access to appropriate, supportive advice services.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Provision of affordable warmth will help to reduce health inequalities and promote the independence of older people and vulnerable groups. In doing so it will help meet the SCS objective to remove barriers that contribute to poor health.

6.4 A Safer Halton

The provision of upgraded heating systems through Warm Front grants or as part of programmed improvements will help to reduce the number of preventable fires in the Borough.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The provision of affordable warmth will have a significant contribution to Halton's environment through reduction of CO2 emissions, thereby helping to tackle climate change and will improve the provision of good quality residential accommodation.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The lack of available funding outlined in 5.1 above could adversely impact upon delivery of the Strategy and action plan. The risk is not so significant as to warrant a full risk assessment.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Implementation of the affordable warmth strategy will help to improve the disposable income of less affluent and vulnerable households.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.