

Report to: **Executive**
Date: **22 July 2008**
Report of: **Executive Members for Social Inclusion & Culture and Housing**
Subject: **Fuel Poverty Strategy Update**
Ward: **All**

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report is intended to provide information on proposals to update the District of Easington Fuel Poverty Strategy and recommends that the updated version set out in Appendix 1 is approved.

2.0 Consultation

1.2 In preparing this report we have consulted with the Council's Head of Housing and Energy Manager, Fuel Poverty Officer, Age Concern, National Energy Action (NEA) and Warm Homes Campaign Steering Group.

3.0 Background

31 The Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2003 established the Government's aspiration for the eradication of Fuel Poverty by 2016 and sits alongside the Home Energy Conservation Act 1997 which sets a national target of a 30% reduction in domestic energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions over the same time period.

3.2 The current District of Easington Fuel Poverty Strategy obtained corporate approval in 2002 and has provided the framework to coordinate activities among the main partners i.e. NEA, Age Concern, Durham County Council Adult & Community Services, Fuel Utilities, Energy Saving Trust and the Council's Housing and Benefits Departments to work with the Warm Homes Campaign to maximize the assistance provided to vulnerable residents within Easington District.

3.3 Some of the achievements since the Fuel Poverty Strategy was launched include:

- Warm Homes Campaign used to communicate with residents within Easington District in order to raise awareness of the help available and maximize referrals to fuel poverty grant schemes for vulnerable residents. The Campaign has 240 local venues providing the main communications framework;
- Over £8 million of external funding has been brought into the District to provide warmer homes for elderly and vulnerable residents. The Warm Front Scheme has installed home insulation and central heating measures in over 12,000 private sector homes, Easington's free over 60's scheme has insulated over 2,500 homes, discounted home insulation measures for 4,000 homes, and low energy light bulbs provided to 25,000 homes;
- Easington is one of the few Local Authorities nationally to hold a whole stock energy database for all 38 000 domestic properties within Easington District which allow us to priorities fuel poverty hot spot areas for assistance;

- A Fuel Poverty Steering Group has been established to oversee the delivery of the strategy; comprising of the main Partners signed up to the Strategy and Chaired by the Executive Member for Social Inclusion and Culture
- 94 'Community Energy Champions' have been trained to be the 'friendly faces' of the Campaign in the local community to maximize the contact with local residents;
- The 'Warm Homes on Prescription Scheme' is the only PCT funded insulation scheme nationally and has been highlighted as example of best practice partnership working by the NHS;
- Many examples of partnership working including training/ briefing sessions for partner organizations, a purpose made fast track referral system, district wide door to door promotions, free energy advice and switching fuel supplier schemes all aimed at maximizing referrals;
- The 2007 Warm Homes Campaign received a national award from the NEA for partnership working to tackle fuel poverty issues presented by John Cummings MP and was short listed for the 2008 Local Government Association awards.

4.0 Position Statement

- 4.1 Since the original strategy was launched there have been a number of changes in the energy supply market with the cost of energy increasing by over 40% with an inevitable knock-on effect of increases in the numbers of households falling into fuel poverty. A wide range of new fuel poverty, energy conservation and carbon management grant regimes have been introduced nationally in an effort to alleviate the impact of these escalating prices, and under the new national performance framework NI 187 (Fuel Poverty) has been established to ensure that all Local Authorities are reporting on the levels of fuel poverty within their areas along with the activities undertaken to reduce fuel poverty.
- 4.2 In order to ensure the Council's key Strategy document for Fuel Poverty is up to date with all current grant schemes and initiatives, Officers from the Council's Housing Service have engaged with the national fuel poverty charity National Energy Action in an exercise to update the strategy. As a result of this exercise the core principles of the strategy remains unchanged but new appendices have been added in order to include all new grant regimes and support mechanisms within the updated Strategy.
- 4.3 The Fuel Poverty Strategy does not make any specific commitment to expenditure in future years that are not already resourced. However there is an opportunity to embed best practice into the new Authority and this work will be fed into the LGR process, for instance through the Housing Workstream. The review of the existing strategy is in line with the Transitional Plan priority of reviewing key Corporate Strategies in the run up to LGR.

5. Implications

5.1 Financial

There are no direct financial implications as the initiatives contained within the Strategy are already funded and there are no new commitments made. The update is intended to ensure that the Council is best placed to maximise opportunities for external funding in the future.

5.2 Legal

There are no direct legal implications.

5.3 Policy

This report seeks to update the Council's existing Fuel Poverty Strategy, and is in line with the District of Easington Housing Strategy 2008 – 2011.

5.4 Local Government Review

This report does not introduce any new commitments for the new Authority post-April 2009, and the good practice currently undertaken by District of Easington Council will be fed into the Housing Workstream as part of the overall LGR transition project.

5.5 Risk

The risk assessment carried out for the original Strategy has been updated as part of the review of the Strategy document itself. The key risk identified is the risk of not being able to maximise future funding opportunities if the Council's approach to Fuel Poverty is not updated.

5.6 Communications

The schemes detailed in the Strategy document will continue to be promoted through Infopoint and the Corporate Website as well as District-wide as part of the ongoing Warm Homes Campaign. It is proposed to re-launch the strategy to all relevant Partner Agencies in July 2008.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Corporate Plan and Priorities

The update of the Council's Fuel Poverty Strategy is in line with the Transitional Plan priority of recognising those services and activities that are exemplars of good practice and of 'managing and monitoring' our existing service priorities. It is also in line with the approved District of Easington Housing Strategy 2008 – 2011.

6.2 Equality and Diversity

The Council's approach to tackling Fuel Poverty, as set out in the Strategy document, is specifically targeted at vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups. The updated version has been referred to the Corporate Equality & Diversity Officer for consideration for an Impact Assessment.

6.3 E-Government

There are no E-Government implications.

6.4 Procurement

There are no Procurement implications.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 That Management Team notes the information provided in the report and considers submitting the updated District of Easington Fuel Poverty Strategy to the Council's Executive for formal approval.

Background Papers

District of Easington Transitional Plan for Local Government Reorganisation (revision 2 June

2008)
District of Easington Housing Strategy 2008-2011
District of Easington Fuel Poverty Strategy 2002
Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2003
Energy Conservation Act 1997

