

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Special Meeting of **Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 11 December 2017 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor E Adam (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors D Bell, L Brown, J Carr, J Clare, R Crute, A Gardner, P Jopling, R Manchester, C Martin, O Milburn, A Patterson, A Simpson, P Sexton, L Taylor and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Mr D Kinch

Also Present:

Councillors D Hall and T Henderson

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors J Clark, P Howell and C Kay.

2 Substitute Members

No notification of substitute members had been received.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members of Interested Parties.

5 Fuel Poverty in County Durham Projects - Overview

The Committee considered the joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided members with details of projects and schemes available in the county to tackle fuel poverty (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Members received a presentation from the Housing and Regeneration Project Manager that focused on the following:-

- Who are the fuel poor
- National and local context
- Map of fuel poverty in County Durham
- Delivery and monitoring
- Fuel poverty programmes
- County Durham Warm Homes Campaign
- Central Heating Fund
- Managing Money Better
- New for 2017/18

The Chairman referred to the fuel poverty map and sought clarification if the fuel poverty in rural areas had changed under the new fuel poverty calculations.

The Housing and Regeneration Project Manager advised Members that under the new calculations the number of properties in fuel poverty had decreased but rural areas had remained the same as properties in these areas use more expensive fuels.

Councillor Jopling referred to properties that had previously never had central heating and asked once the heating system had been installed do we provide support in relation to understanding heating bills and budgeting to pay the resulting bill.

The Housing and Regeneration Project Manager responded that when a new boiler was installed under the scheme, NARA would attend the property to deliver training on how to use the system, this would then be followed up with a further two call backs and a help line for advice and support. British Gas would be the default energy supplier for a period of 28 days with a free home visit as part of the Managing Money Better (MMB) scheme providing the opportunity for the user to switch to an alternative supplier.

Councillor Hall referred to other local authorities providing the opportunity for local users to purchase energy cheaper via setting up their own municipal energy company and sought clarification as to whether this was something Durham County Council had considered.

The Housing and Regeneration Project Manager responded that this may be something that they will look at in the future. However, Livin was currently in the process of looking at offering ESCO in 2018/19 the contract to supply energy to its properties when they become vacant. It is possible that if this project is successful then it would be extended for use by other housing providers in the county.

Councillor Gardner referred to tenants in short term private rented properties who tended to be the most in debt with energy companies and asked was there anything that the authority could do to support these tenants.

The Housing and Regeneration Project Manager responded that they worked with private landlords and provided them with details of grants that were available to the private sector. If tenants in the property were on benefits they may be eligible for a grant which would benefit both the tenant and landlord. Managing Money Better scheme was also available to

tenants in the private housing sector providing advice on fuel debt and switching energy supplier. It was highlighted that the MMB team can also help to get fuel debt written off.

Councillor Clare referred to the £6.5 million awarded to the Local Authority partnership I via the Central Heating Fund and commented that only £1.8 million had been spent in County Durham and asked the Officer to explain what had happened to the remaining £4.7m in funding. He also asked if the Managing Money Better Scheme only offered tariff advice or were they able to advise tenants on various grants available.

The Housing and Regeneration Project Manager responded that the £6.5 million was shared between the nine local authorities in the Warm Up North project and that Durham County Council's share was £1.8m. He continued that reaching residents was a challenge for the service but all £1.8m had been spent. In relation to the Managing Money Better scheme this was managed by the Housing Solutions Service as is the Warm Homes Campaign which provides the opportunity for the Managing Money Better when carrying out home visits to provide advice and support in relation to tariffs and also various grants available via the Warm Homes Campaign.

Councillor Hall referred to it often being difficult to get individuals to accept that a service or product is free and asked if the service had targeted relevant areas of the county with leaflets. He continued by suggesting that members could help promote the various grants and support available if copies of the relevant leaflets were placed in members lockers. The Officer responded that the service did promote the various schemes and that he would be happy to supply members with copies of the relevant leaflets.

The Chairman asked if they used partners such as job centre plus to promote the various schemes. The Officer advised that he thought the service did use JCP however he would check and respond to the member. He continued that the service uses 900 separate local community to promote the Warm Homes Campaign and suggested that if members were aware of any further venues that they contact him directly and any further venues could be added to the mailing list.

Mr Kinch indicated that he lived in a rural area which was unable to get gas so he used oil which he had to order on mass. He continued that the oil companies will not deliver unless the order is above a certain amount with a minimum order costing £500 which had to be paid on order. This meant that he was unable to spread the payments via a direct debit throughout the year and he wondered whether there were any arrangements in the County to bulk buy and thereby reduce the cost.

The Housing and Regeneration Project Manager responded that Community Action Northumberland is an organisation that bulk buy oil to help members get the lowest possible prices for oil via the OilCAN scheme and he continued that the scheme had been promoted via the Warm Homes Campaign however it could be further promoted via the Durham County News.

Councillor Clare asked if Managing Money Better was facilitated by Durham County Council or was it contracted out.

The Housing and Regeneration Project Manager responded that Prince Bishops Community Bank were employed by Durham County Council. The Council promote the

scheme and it is managed by the Housing Solutions Service however it is a member of staff from the Prince Bishops Community Bank who undertake the home visit.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for a very informative presentation.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted.

(ii) That a further progress report be included in the work programme for 2018/19.

6 School Carbon Reduction Programme and other Sustainability Education School Initiatives - Progress

The Committee considered the joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services that provided members with details on the progress of a number of school programmes that engage pupils with outdoor and sustainability learning (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Members received a presentation from the Sustainability Education Development Advisor that focused on the following:-

- School carbon background
- In school support available for Secondary Schools, Academies and Primary Schools
- Energy Portal System
- School energy costs
- School Energy Data for the period 2008-2016
- Energy Performance Contract for schools
- Capital opportunities – Salix
- Renovation for Energy efficient Building (REBUS)
- Other programmes

The Chairman thanked the Officer for a very informative presentation and asked if he could provide some further analysis in relation to schools energy performance so that members could see if the CO2 reductions was a result of more schools leaving service level agreements (SLAs) or a 'real' reduction by schools in CO2 levels and would the programme continue to be viable in the future if schools continue to drop out of SLAs.

The Sustainability Education Development Advisor responded that the CO2 emissions were reducing before the two schools withdrew from the SLAs. However, he would be concerned if more schools withdrew from SLAs for the sustainability of the programme.

Councillor Gardner indicated that LED lighting made a difference and was the data readily available on the savings. He also asked if savings could be made during an evening when electricity costs were lower. (NB. Energy costs for schools depend on the tariff, smaller schools have a standard rate across the day, larger sites have a three band rate (day, peak (4-7.30pm) and night). The Sustainability Education Development Advisor responded that they could provide some data on LED savings which can be significant. He also advised Members that they were not there yet with battery storage but this would be the next big step.

Councillor Patterson asked the Officer to expand on the challenges faced in working with schools.

The Sustainability Education Development Advisor indicated that time tabling in secondary schools was the biggest challenge so they used carousel themed days to get around this. Primary schools were easier to engage and most were working well with the service. They also provided annual training for business managers and caretakers. A small pilot was currently being run in Chester-le-Street schools where they were using energy to teach maths.

Councillor Patterson asked if Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee could receive the report and presentation at a future meeting to make members aware of how much schools could save.

The Sustainability Education Development Advisor commented that he does present information on savings to the School Business Managers Forum.

Councillor Clare asked in relation to the SCRP, it is responsible for delivering financial savings but also for undertaking curriculum work with schools how do these elements of the programme cross over or are they run as two separate/distinct elements of the programme. The Sustainability Education Development Advisor advised members that the SCRP programme had been successful in working with schools to make energy savings whilst making young people financially aware of the cost of energy as well as how to save energy.

The Chairman advised Members to contact the officer if they wanted to view the energy portal.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7 Business Energy Efficiency Project (BEEP) - Overview

The Committee considered the joint report of the Director of Transformation and Partnerships and the Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services that provided members with an overview of the Business Energy Efficiency Project (BEEP) (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Members received a presentation from the Business Energy Efficiency Project Manager that focused on the following:-

- Overview of BEEP
- What BEEP do
- Where they are since the launch in 2016
- Post 2019 and options
- Leading the way

The Chairman commented that small companies should take up the offer as there were no costs to the company in obtaining a package of support.

Councillor Carr sought clarification if the energy partner had been appointed through the competitive tendering process and that there was a need for caution when selecting a partner.

The Business Energy Efficiency Project Manager advised that both legal and procurement had been involved in the selection process and the development of the contract for the energy partner however, it is important to clarify that the council are not purchasing anything, although the contract does contain break clauses including a one in relation to the reputation of the authority.

Mr Kinch asked if the grants were match funded. The Business Energy Efficiency Project Manager advised members that the grants are match funded by the individual business and that the business is informed of the amount of match funding required at the start of the process.

Councillor Crute asked if they referred businesses to alternative schemes if they were unable to help. Members were advised that they worked closely with Business Durham and the FSB and made referrals wherever possible.

Councillor Hall asked if schools could access the project as academies were ran as small businesses.

The Chairman advised that he had had the same discussion and unfortunately the structure excluded schools. The Business Energy Efficiency Project Manager confirmed that schools were excluded from the project.

Councillor Martin referred to the Drum Industrial Estate at Chester-le-Street where he had recently had a meeting with businesses and commented that they were reluctant to participate in EU council funded schemes due to the complexity of the process.

The Business Energy Efficiency Project Manager indicated that they had tried to simplify the process and complete as much of the paperwork as they could on behalf of the individual company. He continued that he hoped once the project had become established the reputation would grow and encourage more take up however businesses were now more aware of the project and the support provided.

Councillor Clare sought clarification on the funding available. The Member was advised that there was £167,000 available but it was an advisory service and that 1,600 to 2,000 small businesses were eligible in the county.

Councillor Clare then indicated that small businesses often don't own the properties. The Business Energy Efficiency Project Manager responded that they work with the occupier with landlord approval. The business bought the kit not the landlord and the kit purchased had to be able to be removed if the occupier left the premises, the structure of the building has to remain untouched. Another requirement of the project is that the business stays in the premises for two years and in County Durham for five years.

The Chairman thanked the Officer for a very informative presentation.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

