

**Environment and
Sustainable Communities
Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

9 March 2020

Fuel Poverty



**Joint Report of Geoff Paul, Interim Corporate Director of
Regeneration and Local Service and John Hewitt, Corporate
Director of Resources**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (ESCOSC) with detail of the project and schemes available in the County to tackle fuel poverty.

Executive summary

- 2 The best long-term solution to tackle fuel poverty is through energy efficiency measures such as home insulation, efficient heating systems, accessing competitive energy tariffs and advice on how to save energy.
- 3 Housing Solutions coordinates the delivery of our corporate Fuel Poverty Strategy overseen by the County Durham Energy and Fuel Poverty Partnership. This is a multi-agency partnership that uses countywide networks to help promote awareness and uptake of the fuel poverty grants and assistance as detailed in this report.
- 4 Latest Government figures show that fuel poverty in County Durham has reduced from 14% in 2016 to 11.8% in 2017. This is due to the promotion, awareness and delivery programmes detailed in this report which resulted in County Durham having the 4th highest uptake nationally of fuel poverty grants.

Recommendations

- 5 That Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to:
 - a) Receive the report and presentation, note its content and comment accordingly.
 - b) A further progress report to be included in the committee's future work programme.

Background

- 6 ESCOSC at its meeting on 12 July 2019 agreed its work programme for the year ahead and included within the work programme was Fuel Poverty. In accordance with that decision arrangements have been made for the Housing Regeneration Project Manager to attend a meeting of the committee and share with members detail of projects and schemes available to tackle fuel poverty.
- 7 The Committee has received several reports in relation to the progress together with the detail of various projects in the county to tackle fuel poverty. The last progress report was received by the committee at its meeting on 16 November 2018 to which members of Economy and Enterprise OSC and Adults, Wellbeing and Health OSC were also invited to attend due to the cross-cutting nature of fuel poverty.
- 8 Fuel poverty is measured using the Low-Income High Cost definition and arises from a household's inability to afford the energy required to power and heat their home to a satisfactory standard necessary for good health. This standard is defined as domestic temperatures of 21°C in the primary living area (living room) and 18°C in the secondary living areas (other occupied rooms).
- 9 The Fuel Poverty Strategy for England 2015-2030 was released in March 2015. Those who live in property rated below band "E" level Energy Performance Certificate rating need to spend on average £1,000 a year more on energy to heat their home compared to a typical home. Through the Energy Act 2013, the government established a new duty to adopt a fuel poverty target. The new fuel poverty target for England sets out an ambition that as many fuel poor homes as reasonably practicable achieve a Band "C" energy efficiency standard by 2030 and this became law in December 2014.

Regional and Local Overview

10. The most recent fuel poverty statistics were released by the Government in 2017 as follows:

- Nationally 10.9% of households are fuel poor
- North East average fuel poverty is 11.9%
- County Durham average is 11.8% (approx. 26,668 households)

Table 1 provides an overview of fuel poverty levels in North East Local Authority areas 2017

Table 1

Local Authority	Proportion of households fuel poor (%)	Ranking
North Tyneside	9.3	1
Northumberland	11.1	2
Gateshead	10.8	3
South Tyneside	11.2	4
Stockton-on-Tees	11.3	5
County Durham	11.8	6
Redcar and Cleveland	12.1	7
Darlington	12.2	8
Hartlepool	12.6	9
Sunderland	12.6	10
Newcastle upon Tyne	13.0	11
Middlesbrough	15.4	12
Source: Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) 2017		

Delivery and Monitoring

11. Co-ordination, promotion and delivery of fuel poverty and energy efficiency programmes to low income residents is a key corporate priority. To this end the County Durham Affordable Warmth Action Plan was agreed by Cabinet in 2015 and has seven key aims to maximise the assistance provided to fuel poor households in County Durham.
12. The action plan is co-ordinated by the County Durham Energy and Fuel Poverty partnership. This partnership brings together a wide range of external organisations (Public Health, AgeUK, Citizens Advice, East Durham Trust, Fire Service etc.) to maximise awareness, credibility and uptake of the fuel poverty intervention programmes and assistance.

Warm Homes Campaign

13. The Warm Homes Campaign is co-ordinated by the Housing Solutions Service. It aims to raise awareness of all energy efficiency and fuel poverty programs to residents living in County Durham and provides help and support with fuel poverty. The network has over 900 local

community venues, community groups and partners who help to raise awareness and uptake of grants to assist with reducing energy bills and maximizing income.

14. In February 2020 the Warm Homes Campaign won the North East Energy Efficient Council of the Year Award for the work in the areas of domestic energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty.

Energy Company Obligation (ECO)

15. Under the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) all energy supply companies are required to provide grant assistance to low income and fuel poor owner occupier and private rented tenants to install domestic energy efficiency measures. The aim of ECO is to reduce energy bills and levels of fuel poverty by installing new energy efficient boilers, central heating, cavity wall insulation and loft insulation.

ECO Phase 3

16. ECO phase 3 extended the eligibility criteria to assist more households. Therefore, in addition to benefit recipients, other households not in receipt of benefit entitlements now qualify ECO grant assistance including the following categories:
 - Households with a total income less than £26,000
 - Households with a cold related illness that could be made worse by living in a cold damp home
17. Since April 2019, 742 households countywide have received an ECO grant for energy efficient gas fired heating boilers along with cavity wall and loft insulation measures. This equates to £1.39m of external funding drawn down into County Durham from the national ECO programme.

Joint Working with Clinical Commissioning Group

18. The qualifying criteria for ECO include households with a cold related illness as defined in the guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE).
19. Joint working has commenced with the Durham and Dales, Easington and Sedgefield Clinical Commissioning Group (DDES) to promote the Warm Homes Campaign to patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) or Asthma.

20. Targeted mail outs are taking place with the Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield GP surgeries. This will involve 41 GP surgeries writing to their patients to promote the assistance available and recommending that patients contact the Housing Solutions Warm Homes Campaign.
21. In January 2020 Dr Jonathan Smith received the national Heat Hero Award from the national fuel poverty charity in Westminster. This was in recognition of the work with 41 GP surgeries to promote the Warm Homes Campaign.

Managing Money Better Service

22. There are currently many competitive gas and electricity tariffs available on the open market which can be very confusing. Research has shown that this can result in households not accessing the cheapest energy tariffs leaving vulnerable residents paying high energy bills, suffering fuel debt and cold homes.
23. The Managing Money Better (MMB) is part of Housing Solutions. It provides free and impartial advice to County Durham residents to access competitive energy tariffs, help switch energy provider, fuel debt write off and energy saving advice.
24. During the period April 2019 to December 2020 MMB carried out 442 home visits to assist residents to save money on their energy bills. This resulted in a combined saving on household energy bills and Warm Homes Discount grants of over £95,000 of which £54,000 was fuel debt write off.

Conclusion

25. Housing Solutions will continue to implement the Fuel Poverty Action Plan to maximise the assistance available to fuel poor households to have warmer healthier homes with lower energy bills.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Homes that are energy efficient have lower carbon emissions.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable