

Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee



1 December 2015

Overview of Fuel Poverty within County Durham

Joint report of Assistant Chief Executive and Corporate Director of Regeneration and Economic Development

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide members of the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of fuel poverty within the County.

Background

- 2 In 2011 a meeting was held involving members from three Overview and Scrutiny Committees due to the cross cutting nature of fuel poverty. At that meeting members were provided with an overview of fuel poverty within County Durham with comments made by members at that meeting feeding into the Authority's response to the Hills Fuel Poverty review.
- 3 Following this overview presentation the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook a review during the 2011/12 municipal year focusing on the development of renewable energy technologies in County Durham. As part of the review, members considered schemes to tackle fuel poverty, including the Government's Green Deal and recommended that the Council's Sustainability and Climate Change Team continues to develop its role to provide advice and assistance to residents, businesses, town and parish councils and community groups/associations to enable them to benefit from Government initiatives/funding opportunities such as the Green Deal launched in January 2013.
- 4 In accordance with this recommendation, arrangements were made for Stuart Timmiss, Head of Planning and Assets, Regeneration and Economic Development, to attend the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 8 April 2013 to provide members with an overview of the Warm Up North initiative a regional Green Deal Partnership involving nine North East local authorities. This overview was then followed by an update to members on the development of the scheme at meetings held on 24 October 2013 and 10 November 2014.
- 5 At the meeting on the 24 October, 2013 it was highlighted to the committee that a member's seminar had been arranged for the 12 February 2014 with the preferred delivery partner, British Gas. The seminar provided an opportunity for members to ask British Gas questions.

- 6 At the meeting of the committee held on the 10 November 2014 members received a further update report on the Warm Up North scheme and it was suggested by members that a further update be provided as part of the refresh of the committee's work programme for 2015/16.
- 7 When considering the quarter 2 performance report at the meeting on 20 January, 2015 members were informed that 143 referrals had been made to the Warm and Healthy Homes scheme with 36 receiving funded central heating measures. Following consideration of the performance information and in acknowledging changes in government legislation members requested that as part of the refresh of the work programme for 2015/16 an overview be provided of fuel poverty within the County.
- 8 Arrangements have therefore been made for Dianne Hedley, Housing Regeneration Manager and Cliff Duff, Housing Regeneration Project Manager, Regeneration and Economic Development to attend the meeting on the 1 December 2015 and deliver a presentation providing members with an overview of fuel poverty within County Durham. A detailed update on the progress of the Warm Up North scheme will be provided to members in 2016. The presentation will focus on:
- National Context
 - Regional and local overview of fuel poverty
 - Delivery and impact of schemes

Background - Fuel Poverty

- 9 Fuel poverty 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).
- 10 Since 2010 a range of new national fuel poverty funding programmes and reporting requirements have been introduced by the government.
- 11 The Fuel Poverty Strategy for England 2015-2030 was released on 3 March 2015. There are over 320,000 fuel poor households in England who live in properties rated below band "E" level EPC rating who 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 set 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.
- 12 On 23 July 2015 the government confirmed that in the light of low take-up and concerns about industry standards there would be no further funding to the Green Deal Finance Company and for Green Deal Home Improvement Funds, which provided financial assistance for those installing qualifying energy efficiency measures in accordance with the criteria of the improvement funds programme. Any existing vouchers

and applications that were applied for by individuals would not be affected.

- 13 Government policies relating to the Energy Company Obligation scheme are however still being supported for this year but the future of the Energy Company Obligation scheme will be discussed as part of a government review of standards, consumer protection and enforcement of energy efficiency schemes, along with collaboration and partnership working between the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the Department of Communities and Local Government.
- 14 The promoting and delivery of available energy efficiency schemes which address improvements in relation to the energy efficiency of private sector housing stock across County Durham has continued, and is a key priority, with actions identified within the Poverty Action Plan agreed by Cabinet on the 21 October 2015.

Recommendations

- 15 It is recommended that the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the content of the report and comment upon the information provided within the presentation.
- 16 That the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive a further update on the progress of the Warm Up North scheme at a future meeting of the Committee.

Background Papers

Report to the Environment and Sustainable Communities OSC on 10 November, 2014 - Warm Up North; Update.

Report to Cabinet on 21 October 2015 - Welfare reform and poverty issues

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – None

Staffing – None

Risk –None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – None

Accommodation – None

Crime and Disorder - None

Human Rights – None

Consultation – None

Procurement – None

Disability Issues – None

Legal Implications – None