

Affordable Warmth Plan: Supporting Amber Valley's more vulnerable residents to stay warm affordably

March 2019

Councillor Foreword

The Council remains committed to working with a wide range of partners to secure investment and help to residents whose lives are affected by the daily struggle to stay warm affordably. The Council is well placed through engagement with partners to identify our residents that need help, but there is so much more that can be done. It is of concern that there has been an increase in the proportion of households estimated to be in fuel poverty based on the latest figures. Whilst the resources at the Council's disposal are limited the Council can continue to support the most vulnerable households through effective partnership working with other organisations. The Council has a very proud track record and has previously received national recognition especially in its collaboration with the NHS and Derbyshire County Council and it is hoped that this work will continue by ensuring that more partners are aware of the risks of the most vulnerable living in cold and unsafe homes. More focus will shift towards ensuring that residents living in the private rented sector are not having to ensure cold and expensive homes to heat.

Councillor Paul Hillier Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Health

Introduction

This document updates the strategy previously approved by Cabinet in 2017. This supports the Council's obligations under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 to report on what is being done to improve energy efficiency in all residential accommodation in its area and to report to the Secretary of State on progress in implementing the measures. This year the Government has changed its approach to reporting on HECA activity and responses to the questionnaire are appended to the Plan.

Ambitions

The Council's ambition to increase access to affordable warmth and tackle fuel poverty should be realistic particularly in the light of the financial challenges faced by the Authority. Within these restrictions the plan over the next two years will be to continue to work with a wide range of partners to ensure that assistance is optimised and targeted to support the residents that need help the most.

This will involve;

- Seeking to maximise financial assistance attracted into the Borough to support low income and vulnerable households
- Building on the relationships with health and social care to identify residents whose health is most at risk through living in a cold home with close collaboration with the Home Improvement Agency

- Delivering the most effective use of financial resources at the Council's disposal
- Supporting residents to access subsidised energy efficiency measures including Energy Company Obligation
- Using a variety of approaches to achieve minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector
- Seeking to optimise the outcomes from the Council's active participation in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Local Authority Energy Partnership and the Derbyshire Healthy Homes Programme
- Working more closely with Derbyshire Districts Citizens Advice to promote energy efficiency

Levels of Fuel Poverty

In delivering the plan the Council works closely with a wide range of organisations from statutory agencies to the voluntary sector. The Council's role is to focus on those households that are in most need whilst providing basic signposting information to households about what help might be available from energy suppliers and insulation/heating contractors. According to the most recently available Government figures (2016) 6,371 (12.4%) households in Amber Valley are in fuel poverty, an increase from 10.1% in 2014. This is of concern and Amber Valley has the highest proportions of the population in fuel poverty of the Derbyshire Districts. <https://observatory.derbyshire.gov.uk/poverty-and-deprivation-fuel-poverty/>

The Government defines fuel poverty using its Low-Income High Costs Indicator, which considers a household to be fuel poor if:

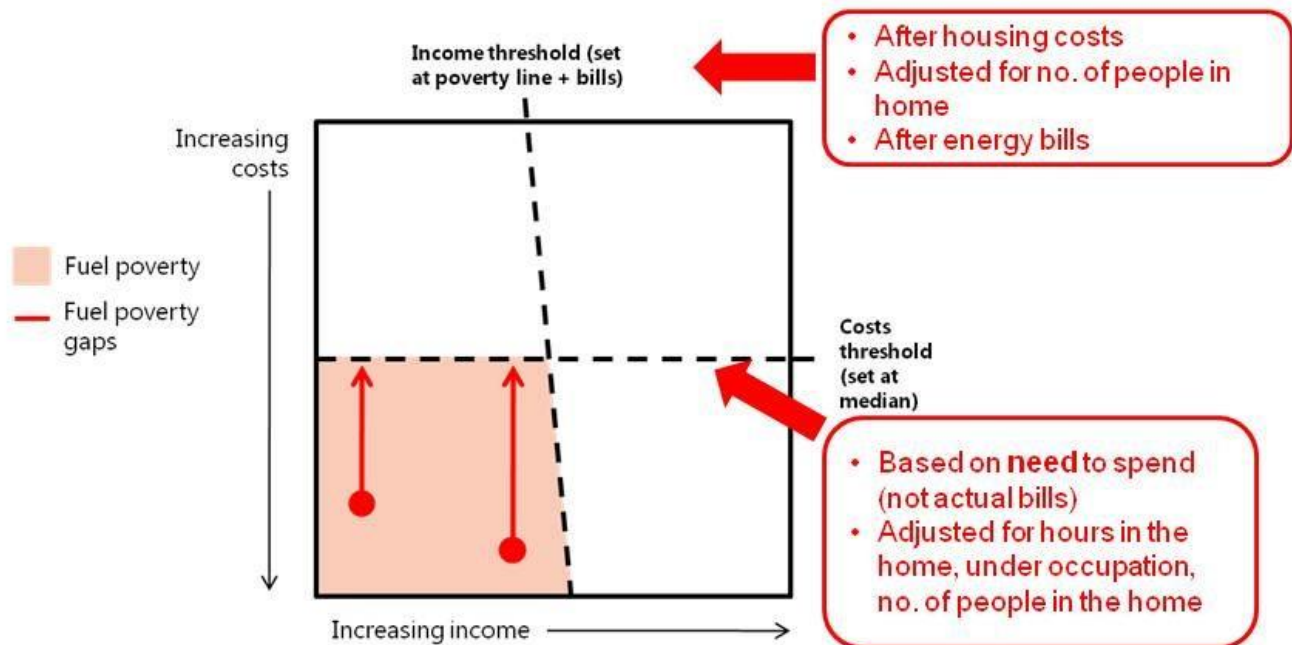
- they have required fuel costs that are above average (the national median level); and
- they to spend that amount, they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line

The fuel poverty status of a household depends on the interaction between three key drivers; household incomes, fuel poverty energy efficiency ratings (FPEER) and required fuel costs. The age of the housing stock is a key driver for levels of fuel poverty.

Low Income High Costs is a *dual* indicator, which allows us to measure not only the *extent* of the problem (how many fuel poor households there are), but also the *depth* of the problem (how badly

affected each fuel poor household is). The depth of fuel poverty is calculated by taking account of the fuel poverty gap. This is a measure of the additional fuel costs (in pounds) faced by fuel poor households to meet the threshold that would make them non-fuel poor.

The Low Income High Costs Indicator



The importance of being able to keep warm to health and wellbeing is understood far more widely. NICE guidance <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng6> was published in 2015 setting out what was expected in terms of the links between health and cold homes. The Borough Council's positive approach to working with NHS providers and commissioners and Derbyshire County Council to identify the most vulnerable households was recognised and rewarded by Government in 2015 with the Council being one of 9 areas awarded specific funding to build on this work.

The Council is receiving more requests for assistance from clients with higher levels of need and with more complex circumstances such as mental health issues. Providing solutions for these residents is often time consuming and costly. The Council has been able to help many of these residents but will need to think creatively to keep up with the growing number of vulnerable low-income fuel poor households that are being brought to the Council's attention.

Delivering in Partnership

The Council does not have the resources to provide the personal energy advice to residents in the home that it has in the past. Organisations like the Derbyshire Districts Citizens Advice Bureau and others give a more active day to day assistance to residents on issues such fuel switching and provision of energy advice. An enabling or facilitating role will allow the Council to focus more on residents who have greater needs. However, it is evident that this work could be better coordinated to improve the access to advice.

In delivering the Government's National Fuel Poverty Strategy [Cutting the Cost of Keeping Warm](#) there is an explicit role for councils to be able to identify and support fuel poor households and the Council's ambitions are detailed in this plan.

Being able to keep warm is closely linked to households' ability to pay and therefore links to services that provide financial advice and support will be essential.

What have we achieved?

- Improved referral mechanisms to ensure that residents with housing needs are referred to Council and partner services
- Worked with organisations to sign post to debt and benefit advice
- Continued to use the external funding from the Southern Derbyshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Department of Energy and Climate Change that was awarded in recognition of our developed partnership working that has already been used to support vulnerable households
- For every £1 invested, the Home Improvement Agency has secured £3 of additional funding
- Supported 22 homes to receive loft, cavity and solid wall insulation
- Continue to use the branding below on the side of commercial vehicles including waste and recycling vehicles.



Energy Company Obligation (ECO)

Through the main delivery partners residents have been able to access ECO funding. The Council has drafted a Statement of Intent but needs to get this published so more residents can access subsidised energy efficiency measures. It aims to do so by 31st March 2019.

Smart Meters

Energy suppliers are required to roll out smart meters to all households by the end of 2020 and the Government has stated that local authorities have an important role in supporting this roll out. Smart meters are intended to increase household awareness of energy consumption. The Council will look to ensure that information is available to help residents to understand what is involved, especially for more vulnerable residents that may have concerns about ensuring that heating controls work effectively after installation.

Minimum Standards in the Private Rented Sector

From April 2018 all residential landlords need to ensure that their properties reach at least an E EPC rating or have installed improvements through subsidies available to pay for them before granting a tenancy to new and existing tenants.

From April 2018 regulations set out the exemption process and the level of financial contribution that a landlord would have to make. Given that residents living in a Band G property are 3 times more likely to be in fuel poverty some targeting of Band F and G properties should result in positive outcomes.

The Council led on a successful county wide bid to secure £17,795 funding for a small, time limited project that will combine the following tasks;

- Improve oversight of consumer protection and addressing of energy efficiency in the private rented sector
- Work with Derbyshire County Council to seek delegated authority for housing authorities to enforce EPC requirements in the private rented sector
- Develop an on-line resource to support tenants, advocates, landlords and agents understand legal duties and responsibilities
- Work with Citizens Advice to deliver sessions of consumer protection and legal advice to advocates and support agencies.
- Use available EPC data to tackle landlords letting out properties that are classified as F & G rated.

It is anticipated that there will be a positive legacy for private tenants in Amber Valley and Derbyshire

Future Activity

Subject to the resources available, the Council will seek through this plan to deliver the following;

Maximise financial assistance attracted into the Borough to support low income and vulnerable households

The Council will work with partners across all sectors to attract financial assistance. Derbyshire County Council has signed a statement of intent that enables eligible residents to access ECO funding. The Council has already spoken to several organisations to establish how it might make the most of the flexible eligibility measures within the next phase of the Energy Company Obligation and will aim to have a statement of intent in place by 31st March 2019 as required by the Business Energy and Industrial Strategy and the ECO2 Amendment Order.

The Council will use the existing relationships that it has built up with GPs, Health and Social Care Commissioners and operational staff in the Borough to support delivery of flexible ECO through the Place

Agenda and continue to deliver the Healthy and Warm (Amber Valley) Programme working closely with the Home Improvement Agency to deliver practical help and assistance.

The Council will seek to identify any opportunities to work with Futures and other social landlords in the Borough to attract investment into the Borough to tackle properties worse than an E SAP rating. The Council will support Futures to bid for funding to increase the number of homes that have access to gas instead of electricity for heating to improve the energy efficiency of homes.

Building on the relationships with health and social care to identify residents whose health is most at risk through living in a cold home

The Council has been a very positive advocate for the role of housing and its impact on the health of its residents and will continue this work through Derbyshire strategic networks and the emerging local 'place based' GP led initiatives to support those with long term conditions. This way those most at risk are supported and there is wider understanding of the contribution of housing as a wider determinant of health.

Supporting residents to access subsidised energy efficiency measures

In addition to Energy Company Obligation the Council will seek to continue relationships with those that are able to provide subsidised work such loft and cavity wall insulation to give to give confidence to residents to take up these measures.

Delivering the most effective use of financial resources at the Council's disposal

The Council will, through its Housing Renewal Policy, set how it will use resources that are at its disposal including its existing capital programme. The Council will work to support the aims of the Better Care Fund by establishing the principle that some of the funding is to help those vulnerable households at risk of admission to hospital and residential care.

The Council has a capital programme made up largely of external funding that the Council has attracted to support its work. Through match funding the Council has been able to make this funding go a lot further and will continue with this approach.

Supporting residents to take up the use of smart meters

The Council recognises that the roll out of smart meters can have a positive impact for many households and will support this where resources allow. The Council's role will be primarily from an enabling role to

provide limited resources to promote their installation. The Council will use existing and new partnerships to spread knowledge of the value of smart meters but does not have the capacity to actively promote their use.

Using a variety of approaches to achieve minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector

The Council will continue to integrate the enforcement of minimum standards with other enforcement work completed by the Housing Team. There are other legislative changes impacting on private landlords all of which are designed to improve standards and the Council will provide suitable material to increase awareness.

Seeking to optimise the outcomes from the Council's active participation in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Local Authority Energy Partnership and the Derbyshire Healthy Homes Programme

The Council is an active member of the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Local Authority Energy Partnership and will continue to support the delivery of the Healthy Homes Programme. The Council will work with the Partnership to maintain and increase investment into Derbyshire. The Council will also work closely with LAEP to support a Derbyshire wide roll out and will, through its statement of intent, look at delegating authority to make declarations to enable LAEP to deliver improvements for its clients.

Case study 1

Sister of Mr B contacted the Home Improvement Agency directly and explained that her brother has mental and physical health needs and was living in his own home without heating and in need of substantial repairs. Mr B had a vision impairment, he was dyslexic and he had a recent major surgery that had reduced his mobility. He was not in receipt of disability benefits and he was finding it difficult to manage at home.

Following a discussion with Mr B's sister the Home Improvement Agency Project Worker suggested that a referral be made to Adult Social Care and Welfare Rights and arranged to visit Mr B to look at his heating needs. Mr B had no heating system and was keeping warm using plug in heaters. Quotes for a new heating system including pipework and radiators in all rooms were sought as this would transform Mr B's living environment enabling him to remain in his own home. Due to Mr B's health needs and financial position he was eligible for funding via the Amber Valley Healthy and Warm Scheme (£2785), funding was also sought from FILT (£750), GASSAFE (£2500) and a client contribution of £500.

With the support of his family Mr B sorted out his welfare benefits and received a back dated payment, his health continues to improve, and he is benefitting from a warm home and instant hot water.

Following a completion visit Mr B commented that the house has been transformed, however he was a little anxious about his heating costs and was directed to available warm discount schemes.

Case study 2

The Home Improvement Agency was contacted by an advocate regarding Mr C who lived alone in a home which was damp, cold and in a very poor condition. The boiler had not been working for over 2 years and Mr C had no heating or hot water. Mr C had been identified as vulnerable.

Initially a referral was made to the Handyvan Service to fit smoke alarms and provide a safe and well check. On arrival the operative smelled gas and contacted the Gas Supplier immediately who turned off the gas supply to the property. The HIA were able to ask a local contractor to visit the property the next day to assess the gas leak and reinstate the gas supply, this was done promptly with the cost being met by GASSAFE (£210).

A tender process was started to obtain quotes to replace the broken boiler and the successful contractor was able to access ECO funding (£980), additional funding was obtained from AV Healthy and Warm Scheme (£1663), GASSAFE (£275) and Healthy Homes (£1600).

Mr C is now getting more support to help with roof repairs and repair of a broken toilet. Mr C has also been assessed for a DFG for a level access shower.

Mr C has needed additional support in using his heating system and he has been encouraged to use the timer rather than switching the system on and off. Mr C commented that the contractors worked well and he has not had the need to use the gas hob for additional heating. Mr C's home is warmer and the damp has receded, improving Mr C's general health and wellbeing.

The following action plan sets out activities that will form the detailed delivery. The Plan provides a framework. The Housing Team business plan will have more specific actions to show how the Plan will be delivered.

Priority	Desired Outcomes	Activities
Identify residents that most need support	The residents that most need help receive support, options and access to keep warm receive assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to work with health and social care commissioners and professionals to raise awareness of significance of affordable warmth and to identify the most vulnerable households Seek to develop improved working relationships with organisations supporting families on low incomes Using and developing existing systems, work with partners to ensure that vulnerable households are referred in the most effective way
Supporting private tenants to improve the standards of the sector	Improved energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver enforcement of minimum standards of energy efficiency in the private rented sector Work with Derbyshire County Council to arrange for delegated authority to enforce Energy Performance Certificates Identify and target enforcement at Band F and G rented properties
Resources are secured to help those in need	Opportunities are maximised to secure direct investment in the Borough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with LAEP to optimise the delivery of the Healthy Homes service in Amber Valley Work to maximise the opportunities through the Energy Company Obligation and Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy Ensure a Statement of Intent is in place by 31st March 2019
Support the Government's roll out of Smart Meters	Meet Government expectations to raise awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide signposting to information for residents about smart meters
Demonstrate outcomes from delivery of the plan	Maintain momentum and sustainability for the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a variety of means to demonstrate the value to the health and wellbeing of the residents of the Borough