



Cabinet 2 December 2009

Revising the St Edmundsbury Fuel Poverty Strategy (Affordable Warmth Strategy) (Dec 09/22)

1. Summary and Reasons for Recommendations

- 1.1 Under the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000, each local authority is required to prepare and publish a strategy setting out its policies for tackling fuel poverty. The Council's first Fuel Poverty Strategy was published in 2002 and required updating to keep up with changing circumstances.
- 1.2 Following consideration of a revised Fuel Poverty (now termed "Affordable Warmth") Strategy by Policy Development Committee in June 2009 (Report A26 refers), a stakeholder consultation was carried out, the findings of which are summarised in Appendix A.
- 1.3 No changes to the draft Strategy considered by Policy Development Committee are proposed. However, the draft action plan has been amended in recognition of comments made by the Committee and the consultees. The revised action plan is presented in Appendix B.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is RECOMMENDED that:-

- (1) the final Strategy, contained in Report A26, incorporating the action plan presented at Appendix B to this report be adopted; and
- (2) any minor typographical, factual and/or grammatical changes to the final Strategy and action plan be agreed by the Head of Environmental Health and Housing Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Bury St Edmunds and Community Safety.

3. Corporate Objectives

3.1 The recommendations meet the following as contained within the Corporate Plan and Vision 2025:-

- (a) Corporate Priorities: *'Improving the safety and well being of the community';
'Securing a sustainable and attractive environment'; and*
- (b) Vision 2025: St Edmundsbury will be a place:
*'reduce avoidable early deaths by providing education and support on health and wellbeing'
'which has a range of affordable housing'
'where measures are in place to allow an ageing population to remain in their own homes for longer'.*

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4. Key Issues
4.1 On 10 June 2009 a draft fuel poverty (Affordable Warmth) strategy was presented to the Policy Development Committee (Paper A26 refers). The Committee recommended that the Strategy undergo external stakeholder consultation prior to consideration by the Cabinet.
4.2 Key organisations, each with a role in supporting key sections of the community that may be affected by the Strategy, were consulted between August and October 2009. The outcomes of the consultation have been considered and changes incorporated into the draft action plan supporting the Strategy.
5. Other Options considered
5.1 An options appraisal was undertaken as part of the review of the Council's existing Fuel Poverty Strategy (Paper A26 refers). However, it is a requirement of the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 that each local authority prepares and publishes a fuel poverty strategy.

6. Community impact <i>(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and diversity issues)</i>
6.1 <u>General</u>
6.1.1 Fuel poverty affects the most vulnerable of our community. St Edmundsbury residents are particularly vulnerable by virtue of:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the relatively high percentage of properties off the mains gas distribution network, leaving those householders having to heat their homes using fuel types prone to price volatility (e.g. oil) or considered to be inefficient or expensive (e.g. electricity); and (b) the relatively high percentage of solid wall properties means that it can be difficult and costly to achieve high levels of thermal efficiency;
6.1.2 There is a strong relationship between fuel poverty, low income and benefit receipt, which is to be expected given that fuel poverty as a measure utilises income.
6.1.3 The Strategy aims to improve the circumstances of those most vulnerable to high home energy bills. It is considered that the consultation exercise has strengthened the Affordable Warmth Strategy and the supporting action plan by utilising the expertise and experience of participating organisations, which work with sections of the local community most affected by the issues contained in the Strategy.
6.2 <u>Diversity and Equality Impact</u> <i>(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)</i>
6.2.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken at the commencement of the review of the current Fuel Poverty Strategy. The draft Affordable Warmth Strategy accords with the principles underpinning the Assessment. It is recognised that the action plan will need to reflect the differing needs of specific households; this will be taken into account where appropriate and as resources allow ensuring that specific initiatives contained in the action plan are effective.
7. Sustainability Impact <i>(including environmental or social impact on the local area or beyond the Borough)</i>
7.1 A Sustainability Impact Appraisal was undertaken at the commencement of the review of the current Fuel Poverty Strategy. The draft Affordable Warmth Strategy accords with the principles underpinning the Assessment. No significant adverse impacts arising from the Assessment were identified.

<p>8.</p> <p>8.1</p> <p>8.2</p> <p>8.3</p> <p>8.4</p>	<p>Consultation</p> <p>The Affordable Warmth Strategy comprises technical information which is used to prepare an action plan to alleviate fuel poverty and improve domestic energy efficiency. Development of the draft Strategy has taken account of national and local best practice.</p> <p>A community-wide consultation process was initially considered; however, it was concluded that a targeted stakeholder consultation was the most appropriate option in order to refine the Strategy and action plan.</p> <p>This included holding a workshop comprising key organisations at which a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis was undertaken. A separate consultation meeting was held with registered social landlords with properties in the Borough. The attendees, along with the list of invitees and outcomes of the consultation are presented in Appendix A.</p> <p>Recommendations arising from the consultation have been incorporated into the action plan (Appendix B).</p>
<p>9.</p> <p>9.1</p> <p>(a)</p> <p>(b)</p> <p>9.2</p> <p>9.3</p>	<p>Resource implications <i>(including asset management implications)</i></p> <p>Work to date to help householders achieve affordable warmth has concentrated on identifying and promoting existing schemes, wherever possible, for example Warm Front for households on certain benefits. The Council is looking for opportunities to work with others to develop effective schemes to support householders achieve affordable warmth whether or not on benefits. This includes:-</p> <p>(a) working with neighbouring local authorities within the Western Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership to reduce the cost of cavity and loft insulation to residents over 60 years old; and</p> <p>(b) working with local authorities and other organisations across Suffolk to develop a Do-It-Yourself insulation grant. This scheme is at its pilot stage.</p> <p>These schemes have been developed using external funding.</p> <p>The Council has historically provided grants to householders based on eligibility to carry out improvements. The current housing grants scheme, approved in April 2009, has been extended to provide higher standards of roof insulation than is currently available through the Warm Front Scheme. The grant scheme targets households on low incomes which would not be eligible under the Warm Front Scheme for energy efficiency measures (Report Z362 to the Policy Development Committee 19 November 2008 refers).</p> <p>The Council allocates an annual budget of £4,000 to promote energy conservation. It is recognised that additional funding would allow more work to deliver enhanced activities to improve domestic energy efficiency and secure affordable levels of warmth in vulnerable households.</p>
<p>10.</p> <p>10.1</p>	<p>Risk Assessment <i>(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)</i></p> <p>Following on from the consultation no change is required to the Risk Assessment presented in Report A26 to the Policy Development Committee.</p>

11. Legal or policy implications

11.1 The Council is obliged to prepare and publish a strategy setting out the authority's policies for tackling fuel poverty as previously mentioned in Paragraph 1.1. In the absence of such a strategic approach, the Council would not be meeting the Corporate Plan objectives stated previously.

Wards affected	All	Portfolio Holder	Bury St Edmunds and Community Safety
Background Papers Report A26 to Policy Development Committee (June 2009) Report Z362 to Policy Development committee (November 2008)		Subject Area Housing	

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APPENDIX A

Outcomes of the consultation and Fuel Poverty Workshop – Summer 2009.

Workshop Attendees

Claire Moore- Warm Front
Jane Ballard- Bury Manager, CAB
Jane Chance- Community Development, St Edmundsbury BC
David Wood- Partnership Manager, Western Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership
Sara Mildmay-White- Portfolio Holder Community, St Edmundsbury BC
Judy Rainer- Adult Wellbeing, Suffolk County Council
Roy Banks- Suffolk Association Local Councils
Ann Parry-Jones, Revenues and Benefit Manager, St Edmundsbury BC
John Lefever- Hastoe Housing Association
John Kilgannon- Babergh District Council
Olive Quinton- Health Improvement Manager Suffolk Coastal DC/NHS

Peter Gudde - Environmental Management Officer, St Edmundsbury BC
Andrew Oswald- Environment Officer, St Edmundsbury BC

Other Invitees

Elaine Aylott- Heading Fuel Poverty/winter warmth for NHS
Sally Hogg- Health Improvement and Partnership Manager, NHS
Ann Hunt- Falls Co-ordinator, NHS
Ian Bradley- Regional Co-ordinator, National Energy Action
Claire Rose- Independence Advisor, Age Concern
Richard Whitehead- Environmental Health, St Edmundsbury BC
Carole Herries- Environmental Health, St Edmundsbury BC
Jessica Arnold- Health Improvement Network, Forest Heath DC
Andrew Ainger- Department of Work and Pensions
Lisa Sims- EON
Claire Grover- Scottish Power
Registered Social Landlords

Workshop – 4th September 2009

After a presentation by Andrew Oswald on setting the scene for Fuel Poverty in the Borough, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis was undertaken of the St Edmundsbury Borough Council Draft Fuel Poverty Action Plan.

The results of the SWOT analysis are listed below:

Strengths

Targeted mail outs using Revenue and Benefit data
- e.g. target single person households by identifying those households who receive the 25% single person Council Tax reduction

Promotion through Community Spirit

Hastoe Housing Association are no longer installing oil heating systems, they have been replaced with renewable energy systems

Good information on fuel poverty in the borough - maps, benefit data etc

Weaknesses

Poor messaging "Free Insulation"

Low return rates for mail outs

Software limitations for accessing client data

Limited resources- run more specific programme e.g. campaign to target private sector landlords

Warm Front - limited in scope, no renewable or solid wall insulation options

Opportunities

Promote/refer to Financial Capability Advice through CAB, SEBC and Homeshield

Look at emerging work in East Suffolk dealing with loft access/clearance

Develop Direct Debit arrangements for oil purchasing through a credit union/RSL (CAB)

Align fuel poverty with Healthy Ambitions and Health Inequalities at strategic level

Reinforce links with agencies supporting the 3 main client groups
- elderly, people with disabilities and low income households

Opportunities for social enterprises in fuel poverty services

Look at ways others are using data sets to target support

Could use a "social marketing" approach

Look at opportunities with retailers

Use networks to lobby central government e.g. poor energy billing causing debt

Use a "warmer zones" approach and still support general enquiries

Use a carrot and stick approach to private rented sector

Private landlord scheme - work with West Suffolk College to target landlords offering student accommodation

Organise training session for all home visitors working at West Suffolk House

Use WSLSP newsletter

Empty Homes Strategy - include energy efficiency pack with information

New groups to work with - Meals on Wheels, Church, Good Neighbour Scheme

Threats

Fuel price fluctuations affecting take-up of support or access to funding

Lack of economies of scale in insulation company/market

Market driven nature of insulation work- might not get to those who need support

Complexity and language for the client- schemes/criteria/limits. Failure to get to those who need support

Lack of single route into support

Lack of take-up because of disclosure of personal finances

Many organisations being involved with 'partnership' working leading to a lack of ownership of client

Time and money

Dilution of priorities/focus

ACTION PLAN 2009 – 2011

Changes that have been made to the Action Plan as a result of the consultation exercise are highlighted in red italic.

Action/Objective	Critical success factor	Target date	Resource/ Budget
1. Establish an effective communication and monitoring/reporting plan	Design the communication plan particularly targeting the most vulnerable sectors. Prioritise areas of greatest need and target initiatives at households/areas most at risk of fuel poverty: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poorly insulated homes, • low incomes • hard to heat homes 	Ongoing	Existing resource
	Continue to produce annual reporting detailing all outputs and outcomes to support project monitoring and promotions	Annually	Existing resource
	<i>Empty Homes Strategy- include energy efficiency pack with information</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Existing resource</i>
2. Raise awareness of fuel poverty	Support community based staff in a position to assist awareness-raising by providing training and information on fuel poverty. It is important to provide feedback to staff so that the importance of their work is recognised.	Ongoing	Existing resource
	<i>Organise a training session for all home visitors working at West Suffolk College</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Existing resource</i>
	Enhance existing mechanisms promoting fuel poverty/affordable warmth issues to St Edmundsbury BC residents. For example continue to support Home Shield, the county wide referral project.	Ongoing	Existing resource
	Host/participate in promotional events on energy efficiency and fuel poverty/affordable warmth	When opportunities are identified	Existing resource

	<p>Work with partners to promote schemes that will assist in achieving the targets identified in this strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Warm Front - improving the heating and energy efficiency of the home and raising income levels - CERT schemes - improving the energy efficiency (SAP rating) of the housing stock 	Ongoing	Existing resource
		Ongoing	Existing resource
3. Provide advice service to residents	<p>Provide information to residents through a range of media on all relevant schemes and service providers through a range of media, e.g. council website, a newsletter and third party newsletters and magazines</p> <p>Promote handy tips guide on energy and related issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - energy saving - money management - accessing grants - energy efficiency measures <p>Work with landlords to promote affordable warmth, relating to the property and the tenants</p> <p><i>Work with West Suffolk College to target landlords offering student accommodation</i></p> <p>Provide advice to residents on maximising households income by referring to other agencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give advice on grants • Energy efficiency measures • Debt relief benefits • Develop a programme of energy efficiency surgeries 	Ongoing	Existing resource
		Ongoing	Existing resource
		Annually at the landlords forum	Existing resource
		January 2010	Existing resource
		Commencing April 2009	Existing resource
4. Ensure residents have access to available services	<p>Provide details to allow householders to access independent information on tariffs and contracts from energy companies</p>	Commencing April 2009	Existing resource

	<p>Promote the advantages of using basic bank accounts</p> <p>Provide information on relevant consumer watchdogs</p>	Commencing April 2009	Existing resource
5. Identify and target fuel poor households	<p>Identify households at risk or in fuel poverty using existing data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Non-gas network map -SEBC House condition survey -Benefit register <p>Bid for project funding through the existing WSLSP fuel poverty group to develop closer links with the NHS to assist in identifying fuel poor households. As part of the project, develop a referral mechanism between the NHS, households and affordable warmth scheme providers</p> <p><i>Go Warm scheme - targeted campaign working on a street by street level. Identify homes in fuel poverty and offer options to improve the thermal efficiency of the property and increase household income through a benefits health check. Based on the 'Warmer Zones' approach</i></p>	<p>Commencing April 2009</p> <p>July 2009</p> <p>January 2010</p>	<p>Existing resource and support of the NEA</p> <p>Potential for project funding through grant applications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scottish Power - WSLSP <p>£20,000</p>
6. Improve the levels of affordable warmth in all house types	<p>Target the most vulnerable households and ensure maximum is spent from annual grant provision</p> <p>Seek funding assistance from external sources to support energy efficiency improvements</p> <p>Investigate new and emerging technological solutions for 'hard to heat' homes- for example air source heat pumps and solar panels</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Existing resource</p> <p>Existing resource</p> <p>Existing resource</p>
7. Develop initiatives to encourage self reliance to improve domestic energy efficiency	<p>Participate in the pilot of the Suffolk Green Homes DIY scheme</p> <p>Identify potential pilot communities.</p> <p>Work with partners to design and test the scheme prior to roll-out across Suffolk</p>	<p>January 2009-April 2011</p> <p>April-June 2009</p> <p>July 2009 -March 2010</p>	Existing resources supported by external funding (part secured)