



AGENDA FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Members of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee are summoned to a meeting, which will be held in on **12 May 2015 at 7.30 pm.**

John Lynch
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Despatched : 1 May 2015

Membership 2014/15

Councillor James Court (Chair)
Councillor Diarmaid Ward (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Gary Doolan
Councillor Gary Heather
Councillor Clare Jeapes
Councillor Caroline Russell
Councillor Nurullah Turan
Councillor Nick Ward

Substitute Members

Councillor Jenny Kay
Councillor Michael O'Sullivan
Councillor Alice Perry
Councillor Rupert Perry
Councillor Paul Smith
Councillor Nick Wayne

Quorum is 4 members of the Sub-Committee



A.	Formal Matters	Pages
1.	Apologies for Absence	
2.	Declarations of Substitute Members	
3.	Declarations of Interest	

If you have a **Disclosable Pecuniary Interest*** in an item of business:

- if it is not yet on the council's register, you **must** declare both the existence and details of it at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent;
- you may **choose** to declare a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest that is already in the register in the interests of openness and transparency.

In both the above cases, you **must** leave the room without participating in discussion of the item.

If you have a **personal** interest in an item of business **and** you intend to speak or vote on the item you **must** declare both the existence and details of it at the start of the meeting or when it becomes apparent but you **may** participate in the discussion and vote on the item.

***(a)Employment, etc** - Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.

(b) Sponsorship - Any payment or other financial benefit in respect of your expenses in carrying out duties as a member, or of your election; including from a trade union.

(c) Contracts - Any current contract for goods, services or works, between you or your partner (or a body in which one of you has a beneficial interest) and the council.

(d) Land - Any beneficial interest in land which is within the council's area.

(e) Licences- Any licence to occupy land in the council's area for a month or longer.

(f) Corporate tenancies - Any tenancy between the council and a body in which you or your partner have a beneficial interest.

(g) Securities - Any beneficial interest in securities of a body which has a place of business or land in the council's area, if the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body or of any one class of its issued share capital.

This applies to **all** members present at the meeting.

4.	Minutes of Previous Meeting	1 - 10
5.	Public Questions	
6.	Chair's Report	
B.	Items for Decision/Discussion	Pages
1.	Air Quality Scrutiny Review - Report Back	11 - 22

2.	Executive Member's Update	Verbal Report
3.	Fuel Poverty Scrutiny Review - Final Report	23 - 40
4.	Community Energy Scrutiny Review - Draft Report	To Follow

C. Urgent non-exempt items (if any)

Any non-exempt items which the Chair agrees should be considered urgent by reason of special circumstances. The reasons for urgency will be agreed by the Chair and recorded in the minutes.

D. Exclusion of press and public

To consider whether, in view of the nature of the remaining items on the agenda, it is likely to involve the disclosure of exempt or confidential information within the terms of the Access to Information Procedure Rules in the Constitution and, if so, whether to exclude the press and public during discussion thereof.

E. Confidential/exempt items

Pages

F. Urgent exempt items (if any)

Any exempt items which the Chair agrees should be considered urgently by reason of special circumstances. The reasons for urgency will be agreed by the Chair and recorded in the minutes.

The next meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee will be on 15 June 2015

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Public Document Pack Agenda Item A4

London Borough of Islington

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 14 April 2015

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 1, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 14 April 2015 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Court (Chair), Ward (Vice-Chair), Heather, Jeapes, Russell and Turan

Councillor James Court in the Chair

62 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**

None.

63 **DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**

None.

64 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)**

None.

65 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS (Item A4)**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee meetings on 5 March 2015 and 16 March 2015 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Officers had provided a written response following Communal Heating points raised at the last meeting. This would be appended to the minutes for information.

66 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A5)**

Questions from members of the public were addressed during the relevant items.

67 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A6)**

None.

68 **COMMUNITY ENERGY - WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B1)**

Gail Scholes, Head of Energy and Robert Purdon, Contracts Manager from Nottingham City Council gave witness evidence.

In the presentation and the discussion which followed, the following points were made:

- Nottingham had a long history in municipal energy. It had a district heating scheme in 1970s and was now one of the more energy sufficient cities with high local generation. There was large scale photovoltaic solar installation with 2,300 homes equipped with solar panels over the last three years. The council paid for, installed and maintained the solar panels and retained the feed-in tariff with the residents getting electricity. The scheme included both social housing and private sector housing.

- Nottingham City Council would be extending the solar panel scheme to 3,000 additional homes from 2015. Once this was complete, 5,300 out of approximately 150,000 homes in the city would have solar panels. Whereas the feed-in tariff for the first 2,300 homes had been secured when it was at the highest rate, the feed-in tariff for the next 3,000 homes would be at the lower rate.
- Nottingham City Council had set up an in-house installation team of accredited installers. This reduced costs and created jobs.
- Most of the homes with solar panels were three bedroom semi-detached houses. Lower income areas were targeted.
- There was a mixed model approach in Nottingham. External wall insulation had been undertaken and residents were encouraged to undertake energy efficiency measures.
- The first solar panel scheme in Nottingham outperformed by £120,000 per year and the additional money went into the council's general fund. Following this scheme, it was decided that more panels should be put on each roof.
- In Nottingham, 12% of the energy demand was met from Combined Heat and Power (CHP) and 3% was met from a waste plant. The district heating scheme included a council office building, offices, a hotel, an apartment block, a concert venue and a biosite. The scheme provided a more secure supply than the national grid would. There were four means of supplying buildings and many were willing to pay a premium for this.
- The district heating scheme was controlled by the council and run as a limited company.
- Most of the day-to-day running of Nottingham's Energy Services Company was undertaken in-house.
- There was a new energy park in Nottingham and planning consent had been given for a 160,000 tonne gasification plant. This could as much as double Nottingham's energy generation capacity.
- Other councils paid Nottingham to take their rubbish and Nottingham had a large commercial waste business. Waste disposal costs were minimal. Emissions were monitored.
- In order to create a cheap energy tariff, the council first set up a switching site and researched the market. The aim was to reduce fuel poverty. Nottingham Council then set up a fully licensed energy company by buying a pre-accredited licensed company. This was quicker to set up than if the council set up the company itself. The council had approved the first year's operating costs of £11 million. The company had to use the national grid and pay transmission and distribution costs as it only had one block with private wire and extending this would be too expensive. The cost model showed that Nottingham's energy company was likely to be one of the cheapest suppliers on the market.
- In response to a question asking how many staff worked on the project, the committee were advised that six managers managed the process.
- In the first year, Nottingham had 50,000 customers, in the second year the figure rose to 150,000 and in the third year it was 250,000.
- Nottingham City Council had found a meter asset provider who would enable the council to rent or pay for the use of smart meters and a smart meter pre-payment system would be put in place.
- Although Nottingham City Council would trigger ECO Energy Company Obligations once it reached the criteria for this, this would provide the local authority with the opportunity to invest.
- Other councils could use Nottingham's white label offer. Nottingham could provide four tariffs and the other council could label and promote them to residents. Nottingham had spent £1.5m on systems to enable this to happen and for other councils to capitalise on the work Nottingham had done. This approach would also

create local jobs e.g. call centres, when the number of residents using this supply reached a certain volume.

- At the moment, Nottingham was undertaking controlled market entry. This meant a small number of customers were being taken on to prove the processes worked. In October 2015, this would be rolled out.
- Nottingham would become the first local authority energy company.
- Nottingham would not sell debts to debt collection agency. The first three stages of debt collection were undertaken by the council and if these were not successful, a debt collection agency would be used, although the council would retain control. A fixed fee would be agreed for each stage and there would be an agreed set of principles.
- Pre-payment smart meters were being installed and those in fuel debt were signposted to advice centres and were helped to manage their debt.
- Switching to the Nottingham supplier saved a typical household £200 per year. The council had a tool on its website so potential customers could see how much they could save by switching.
- Nottingham aimed to treat people fairly and offer them the best possible price.

RESOLVED:

That the evidence be noted.

69

FUEL POVERTY - WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item B2)

Councillor Murray, Executive Member for Housing provided witness evidence.

In the presentation and the discussion which followed, the following points were made:

- Making homes more energy efficient reduced energy costs for residents and this in turn reduced fuel poverty.
- The council undertook cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, reduced the number of F and G rated properties and undertook solid wall insulation. Whereas cavity wall insulation was relatively quick and easy to undertake with minimal disruption to residents, solid wall insulation was harder and caused more disruption.
- The communal heating charges for tenants were designed to make charges fairer. Some blocks were more energy efficient than others and when energy efficiency measures were undertaken in a block, it was fairer for the effect to be on tenants as a whole rather than tenants in that individual block.
- In 2014 the average tenant's heating bill cost £604 and the average leaseholder's heating bill cost £520. This year the cost of gas had decreased so tenants would receive a rebate of approximately £100. This meant overall they would be paying approximately £500. Over the last 10 years, tenants had paid less than the actual cost.
- The amount leaseholders paid was highest if they lived in a small block and lowest if they lived in a large block as their charges were based on the block they lived in as legislation meant their charges could not be pooled.
- In response to a question about the recommendation in the draft fuel poverty scrutiny report which recommended that the council should consider setting energy efficiency standards for its housing and those it paid housing benefit to, Councillor Murray stated that in some cases, affordable housing was found which was not energy efficient and then work was undertaken with landlords to improve the rating. Landlords could be given the opportunity to engage with the council to improve energy efficiency in the first year.
- Most people who were fuel poor lived in D or E rated properties. The council had few F and G properties and the cost of improving these would be substantial. Most F and G homes were in the private rented sector.

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 14 April 2015

- In response to a question from a member of the public, an officer advised that the rebate to tenants would be apportioned according to the amount the tenants paid and paid to the rent account.
- In response to a question from a member of the public about the reason why tenant charges had to be pooled, an officer advised that it was fairer to pool the charges. If it was not possible to undertake energy efficiency measures in all blocks, work was undertaken where it could be and this resulted in a reduction in energy bills for all tenants rather than just those in the blocks where it had been undertaken.
- It was suggested that some blocks were interested in depooling. Depooling could result in an increase in the cost of heating for tenants across the borough.
- If all tenants turned their heating down by 1 or 2°C this would reduce the overall bills.
- A basic level of heat was required in buildings to prevent condensation and other building issues.
- Having smarter controls and thermostats could reduce energy usage.

RESOLVED:

That the evidence be noted.

70 FUEL POVERTY - DRAFT REPORT (Item B3)

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be amended to include the witness evidence from Matilda Allen, Research Fellow, UCL institute of Health Equity and Fiona Daly, Head of Sustainability, Barts Health NHS Trust and the minor changes suggested by members.
- 2) That any further comments be sent to Democratic Services.

71 WORK PROGRAMME (Item B4)

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the work programme be noted.
- 2) That a session on communal heating be added to the work programme for 15 June meeting.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm

CHAIR

Appendix

Questions issues raised by the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny

How are heating costs calculated for tenants and leaseholders?

Tenants and leaseholders both pay for the cost of gas needed to provide communal heating. The council has a different approach to calculating charges to tenants and leaseholders for communal heating. This is because there is a different legal framework for these two groups. Other service charges, such as caretaking, are also calculated differently.

We calculate tenants' service charges on a pooled basis because we consider this to be the fairest and simplest way as all tenants in properties of the same size pay the same charge regardless of which estate they live on.

Legally (1985 Housing Act) the council cannot 'pool' leaseholders' charges so leaseholders' heating charges are calculated by taking the yearly fuel costs of the boiler house that services each leasehold property and dividing this by the number of properties that receive heating from that boiler.

In practice this means that this is almost always a difference between tenant and leaseholder charges for heating. On some estates tenants pay more than leaseholders, on other estates leaseholders pay more than tenants.

There is also a timing difference between the times when tenant and leaseholder charges are set for the coming year. Tenant charges are based on gas usage in the previous year plus an estimate of the change in the cost of gas. Leaseholder charges are based on the actual cost of gas from two years ago plus an estimate of the increase in the cost of gas for the coming year. In the financial year 2014/15 these timing differences mean that tenants with an average charge of £604, are paying more than leaseholders, with an average charge of £520.

In addition, it has cost us less than we thought it would to provide communal heating in 2014/15, and so if at the end of the year there is a significant surplus in the communal heating account we will use this to provide a rebate to tenants. If, as is currently likely, we provide a rebate of around £100 at the end of the year to tenants with communal heating this would bring the average tenant charge to approximately £500.

Even without the rebate, differences between tenant and leaseholder charges would even out in the following years because the tenant heating account is ring-fenced. Whilst leaseholders' charges would be adjusted to reflect any actual increase in the cost of gas in future, tenants' charges would not increase because they paid more in the 2014/15 financial year that would dampen future increases

Why don't we calculate tenants' charges on a block basis like leaseholders?

The council calculates all tenant services charges on a pooled basis. This includes communal heating but also communal electricity and caretaking. The Council considers this to be the fairest and simplest way to calculate charges as all tenants in properties of the same size pay the same charge regardless of which estate they live on.

For communal heating which is much like other service charges, the pooled system means that on some estates tenants pay more than leaseholders for the services they receive but on other estates leaseholders may pay more than tenants. It is not recommended that the council offers tenants the option of de-pooling their heating charge. This goes against the principle of all tenants sharing equally in the cost of services. If tenants' charges were calculated on a block by block basis there would be significant variances in the tenants'

charges with charges on some estates going down and charges on other estates going up. It is likely that estates with lower than average per unit costs of heating would opt to come out of the pool – pushing the price up for those tenants still part of the pool.

Also, to bring tenants and leasehold charges into line would require a total re-working of the way tenants' and leaseholders' service charges are calculated. The administrative cost in calculating tenants' service charges on the same basis as leaseholder charges would be significant because costs would have to be adjusted on a block by block basis for all residents not just 25 percent of properties. Also, leaseholders are currently billed annually for their heating (and other service charges) at the start of the year and many choose to pay monthly by direct debit. We know through previous consultation that tenants prefer to pay their heating costs on a weekly basis.

Why don't we change tenants' heating charges during the year to reflect changes in the cost of gas?

Significant administrative and programming costs would be incurred if tenants' heating charges were adjusted throughout the year. On a quarterly basis we would need to write to all tenants advising them of the changes, programme the income control database, work with the energy team to forecast future energy prices and adjust charges. The estimated cost of this in officer time and mail-outs is £30k - £50k per year, or £10 – £15 per tenant. This would eat into any rebate or reduction in charges. Further, less than 20 percent of tenants pay by direct debit. Other tenants would need to manually adjust any standing orders or other payments which could be an annoyance for what would often be a small change in charges.

Why can't tenants and leaseholders pay for the heating they use?

Giving the option of residents paying for the amount of heating they individually use would require the installation of heat meters.

Installation of heat meters is not a simple process like the installation of an electricity Smart meter. In many cases it would require the significant modification of heating pipework.

In the social housing sector the view of individual heat metering differs between providers. Some other large heat network operators such as Sheffield Council, Nottingham Council and Peabody Housing Association have recently decided to move to individual metering in all properties. Others, such as Aberdeen, are currently committed to maintaining a flat rate charge.

There are a number of potential positives and negatives of individual heat metering, as set out in the table below. The key positive is that some residents would save money because they would use less heating. However, there would be increased costs (installation, billing management, meter repair) which would offset these savings. Based on an annual fixed cost of £135¹ tenants in a two bedroom property would have to reduce their heating usage by more than 20% to see a financial benefit from heat metering. DECC guidance estimates that residents reduce their usage by 20% following installation of heat meters which would mean that, on average, households would not see a saving. Heating costs for certain groups of more vulnerable residents, such as older people and families with small children at home, may increase as a result of heat metering, because usage would not go down but costs

¹ This is made up of £450 for meter installation and a ten year meter lifespan (as advised by DECC), £80 for billing and payment management (as advised by DECC) and £10 for meter servicing. Experience from Sheffield is that installation costs are £550 per unit and experience from Nottingham is that servicing costs are £50 per property per year.

would go up². Fixed costs would increase significantly if meters and controls were installed as a standalone project rather than as part of a system upgrade. In these cases annual fixed costs are estimated at £290 which would mean residents' usage would need to reduce by more than 40% to see a financial saving.

Potential positive	Potential negative
Gives residents more choice over when to have their heating on.	Residents at risk of fuel poverty choose to under-heat their homes causing issues such as ill health and increased risk of condensation in the property.
Some residents' heating costs would reduce because they would only pay for the heating they use, and most people would choose to have their heating on for less than the current 18 hours per day. Estimated reduction in usage is 15 - 30% following metering. (DECC assume 20%).	The annual cost of installing, managing payment and maintaining for individual meters would be approximately £135 per property per year (£45 for installation (1/10 th of the total cost), £80 for managing payment and £10 for maintenance). The assumption is that this would be included in the heat charge –cancelling out the savings from using less heat.
If residents used less heating CO2 emissions would also reduce. Also it may free up capacity in our existing boiler houses – potentially allowing new buildings to be added to existing networks.	The capital cost of installing heat meters is estimated to be £450 per unit, and meters are assumed to have a ten year lifespan. Costs would increase if modifications to controls/pipework were required. The total cost across all unmetered communally-heated properties is estimated to be a minimum of £2m.
	Ongoing maintenance of individual heat meters would be required. Access to carry out this maintenance has proved difficult on the council's two estates with individual heat meters.
	The cost of installing individual heat meters would be rechargeable to leaseholders
	Heating costs for some of the most vulnerable residents, for example the elderly or those with small children at home, may increase as a result of heat metering.

Has the system of estimating future gas prices when setting tenants charges meant that tenants paid more than the actual cost in previous years?

The position has fluctuated over the last ten years. The net position over the last ten years is that tenants receiving communal heating have paid approximately £400k less than the actual cost of the service.

What is the energy efficiency of our communally-heated blocks?

² DECC have carried out research into the heating habits of different groups which estimates hours of heating for different groups, for example people out during the day use their heating for an average of 7 hours whilst those in during the day average at 10 or 16 hours. This does not correlate with our own consultation when the preferred option was for 18 hours of heating even where reduced heating hours would reduce cost.

The average SAP ratings of properties in communally-heated estates are shown in the document attached. However, it should be noted that the average SAP scores are skewed by factors other than the thermal efficiency of the building materials. This is why estates such as Spa Green and King Square are showing a relatively high average SAP even though we know some walls are poorly insulated. Estates like King Square and Spa Green are both comprised of bigger blocks so the majority of flats do not have many external walls; this has a bigger impact on the average SAP for the estate than the actual thermal efficiency of the walls.

So, we do not think that average SAP is a very helpful measure for which estates may need more insulation or increased hours of heating. The council's Energy Team is working to produce an alternative prioritisation list for communally-heated estates that may need special attention.

What are potential improvements/ policy options moving forward?

A. Improving the energy efficiency of communally-heated estates to help tenants feel warmer and reduce gas usage and hence costs.

The council has invested over £100m in improving the energy efficiency of its stock over the past ten years. All cavity walls have now been filled, all F and G-rated boilers have been replaced, some solar panels have been installed, thousands of lofts and flat roofs have been insulated, solid wall insulation has been installed in some street properties are four estates and double glazing has been installed in the majority of our homes.

The council is currently developing an Energy Efficiency Investment Strategy that will prioritise £5m of additional investment in energy efficiency over the next seven years. Examples of this could include more double glazing, external wall insulation and improved heating controls. The evidence base informing this strategy is in development but the principle will be that investment is directed to where it is needed most and where it can have the biggest impact. Scrutiny's suggestions for works to be prioritised under this fund would be welcomed.

B. Giving certain estates extended heating hours and not charging tenants extra for this service

The council is always looking for new ways to make communal heating fairer. We are examining the energy efficiency of our communally-heated blocks and whether, because of poor thermal efficiency, some blocks should receive additional hours of heating at no additional cost. This is moving to a more outcome-based measure of adequate heating – in terms of how warm residents are inside their homes instead of how much heating goes into their properties. Again, we are developing the evidence base for this at the moment but it could mean that moving forward estates, such as Spa Green, will receive additional heating hours and not have to pay more for this service. The fact that we pool tenants' heating charges allows us to consider this as an option, though of course it will not affect leaseholders.

C. Consulting on extending the heating season

Some residents have told us that they feel cold in cooler weather in the summer months and that they would like the heating season to be extended. Following a pilot in 2014, in April '15 we will be consulting residents (with boiler houses with the technical capability to respond to outside temperature), whether they would like to pay more for heating during June and September when the temperature drops.

D. Improving communication with residents on communally-heated estates about responsible use of communal heating systems.

This will include information about how to use heating controls to ensure residents aren't over-heating their homes and aren't opening windows instead of turning heating down. Making the case for this involves educating residents that if everyone used less heating costs would go down for everyone.

E. Reviewing the assumptions around heating and hot water usage and around the 'bedroom weightings' for heating and hot water charges

At the moment tenants just receiving heating from hot water systems are charged 60% of what other tenants receiving heating and hot water pay. This is a historical best estimate based on information at the time. This assumption will be reviewed to a more evidence-based position.

The heating charges for tenants are based on technical estimates of the amount of energy used by each property size in Islington. We have compared this to national averages provided by DECC. Applying these national averages would increase charges for larger properties and reduce charges for smaller properties. This is not recommended because costs would increase for larger households who already may be struggling to make ends meet.

Heating charges for leaseholders are based on the average for a two-bed property, to which 10% percent is added or deducted for each room that the property has above or below this. This will be reviewed to assess whether leaseholder heating charges should be apportioned in the same way as tenants across different property sizes.

F. Getting a better understanding of how tenants may respond to heat metering

There is a lack of robust data predicting how tenants will respond to the installation of heat meters in terms of reducing hours of heating and potentially under-heating their homes. It is recommended that qualitative research is carried out over the summer to ask different groups of residents, such as those in work and those at home during the day, how they would use their heating following the introduction of heat metering.

G. Continually reviewing the benefits of heat metering on a scheme by scheme basis

The benefits of heat metering vary significantly in different situations, for example residents in well insulated blocks are likely to see bigger savings, and savings would go up as the cost of fuel increased because the differential between fixed costs and variable costs would grow. Costs of heat meters may also reduce over time as their use becomes more common, whereas metering would not be recommended in blocks with a construction type that is prone to condensation. It is recommended that the option of

installing heat meters is reviewed on a scheme by scheme basis as new communal heating systems are installed, and that residents are involved in the decision through the major works consultation process. The decision about whether to install meters would be based on the availability of funding, cost of meter installation, likely cost savings for residents, like impact on vulnerable residents, and the ability to protect the building from damp and condensation following meter installation.

H. Changing the policy on compensation following loss of heating service

Compensation is currently applied automatically to tenants' rents account when there has been a loss of communal heating service for three days or more. Tenants do not have to apply for this - the payment is applied automatically. The payment is calculated based on the daily charge for communal heating (e.g. three days loss of heating would result in three days' cost being compensated). It is recommended that the policy is amended to provide compensation following a two day loss of heating and that the compensation is increased in line with the increased cost of electric heating compared to communal heating.

I. Providing more clarity about what happens if the cost of heating has been lower than the amount charged to tenants at the end of the year

The tenant communal heating account is a ring-fenced account. This means that the money that tenants pay in for their heating can only be used to pay for the cost of communal heating. The council is committed to setting heating charges that are affordable to residents and as far as possible are protected from big fluctuations in energy prices. We set charges based on our best estimate of the cost of gas for the coming year. Sometimes, as has happened in 2014/15, gas actually costs less than we thought it would at the beginning of the year and therefore there is a surplus in the communal heating account. Any surpluses at the end of any year will either be refunded to tenants or rolled forward to offset future increases in the cost of gas. In deciding between these options the council will consider whether fuel costs are likely to increase significantly in the coming years and whether the refund would be significant to warrant the administration around this. For example, now (at the end of 2014/15) we know what gas will cost in the coming year and the refund (at around £100 per tenant) is significant. Therefore, we will not look to roll any of the surplus forward into 2015/16 and will refund 100% of the surplus (from 2014/15) back to tenants.



Report of: **Executive Member for Environment & Transport**

Meeting of:	Date	Agenda item	Ward(s)
Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee	12 May 2015		All

Delete as appropriate	Exempt	Non-exempt

SUBJECT: Executive Member's update on the Air Quality Scrutiny review

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 The Regeneration and Employment Review Committee undertook a review of air quality to consider the issues for Islington, our response and the London context.
- 1.2 The Committee agreed a list of recommendations in May 2013. A response to the recommendations was presented in January 2014 and this report details progress on the recommended actions.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note progress against the actions agreed by the Air Quality Scrutiny.

3. Background

- 3.1 Air pollution is a largely invisible problem which means that often people are not aware it is an issue that needs to be addressed. Poor air quality has a range of harmful effects. It can exacerbate existing lung and heart conditions and cause reduced lung function.
- 3.2 Islington declared a whole of borough Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in 2003 for the pollutants Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) and Particulate Matter (PM₁₀). An air quality action plan (AQAP) was produced to reduce concentrations of both pollutants across the borough through Council policy and behaviour change.
- 3.3 Islington had made good progress in delivering the actions in the AQAP but whilst some concentrations had reduced, Islington still exceeded the annual mean objective for NO₂ at the roadside. Islington's local air quality is significantly better than central London authorities and levels are at their highest in the south of the borough along the border with Hackney, Camden and The City of London.

- 3.4 The scrutiny review found that much work has already been done in Islington to reduce pollutant concentrations; however, further measures were required to meet all of the air quality objectives. It was acknowledged that this would be challenging as the primary sources of the air pollution was from outside Islington or was as a result of through traffic. The Council would need to work with other boroughs to tackle this, and need the full co-operation of TfL and the GLA as they are responsible for the major road networks where concentrations are highest, funding streams and the provision of the bus service.
- 3.5 Evidence was taken from a range of experts in the field including Professor Frank Kelly and Dr Gary Fuller from King's College London, Dr Iarla Kilbane-Dawe – atmospheric scientist, Simon Birkett – Clean Air London, Jonathon O'Sullivan - Assistant Director of Public Health and Matthew Pencharz – Mayor of London's Environment Advisor. Officers from the Council's Pollution Projects and Transport and Planning teams also gave evidence, with written submissions received from Client Earth, Lancaster University and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.

4. Response to the Recommendations

- 4.1 Appendix A sets out the recommendations and an update on progress against each area. The Pollution Team in Public Protection leads this area of work and has been very successful in applying for external funding to complete the actions. This has meant that a number of additional projects are now taking place, to focus on engagement with businesses and residents as behaviour change is critical in achieving the actions.
- 4.2 The recommendations of the scrutiny were considered and incorporated into the Islington Air Quality Strategy 2014-17. Progress on the strategy is to be reported at May's meeting of the Executive.

5. Implications

- 5.1 **Financial implications:**
The actions proposed can be funded from existing budgets or external funding in 2015/16. If projects need to extend into future years, further funding may be required.
- 5.2 **Legal Implications:**
The Council is required to meet air quality objectives in order to comply with the requirements of the Environment Act 1985 and also to avoid any financial penalties applied to the UK from the EU.
- 5.3 **Environmental Implications:**
The overall environment will be improved by implementing the recommendations.
- 5.4 **Equality Impact Assessment:**
An EIA was undertaken as part of the adoption of the Air Quality Strategy.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The good progress against recommendations in the report are welcome and that their implementation will have a positive impact on local air quality.

Appendices

- A AQ Scrutiny Update April

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

Corporate Director of Environment and
Regeneration

Received by:

Head of Democratic Services

Date

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Appendix A

Recommendations

- 1. That the Council directly works with the neighbouring boroughs on specific projects to formulate a regional approach to improving air quality and promoting air quality as a health issue to inform residents.**

Islington continues to work with neighbouring boroughs through the Central London Air Quality Cluster Group to find new initiatives to improve air quality as well as sharing experiences to develop best practice.

We remain on the project team for the Mayors Breathe Better Together campaign - the launch for this event took place in January 2015. This project is based on the San Francisco 'Spare the Air campaign' and it aims to alert Londoners of when air quality is expected to be poor, and helping them mobilise into reacting by changing behaviour. Since the launch, there have been two "action days" where alerts and information have been circulated to the public advising them of the health risks, how they can protect themselves and to discourage them to continue polluting activities such as driving and solid fuel burning.

Islington continues to manage the AirText service on behalf of all 33 London boroughs. The service sends alerts to its users who are often the most vulnerable in advance of moderate and high pollution days. This allows users to better prepare themselves for episodes that could adversely impact on their health. Islington has also been responsible for the expansion of this service to include alerts on pollen, UV, temperature information and cold weather. This service is being used for Breathe Better Together messaging.

Throughout 2014 we worked with Camden council and our joint public health team on a project called Air Aware. A personalised service was delivered to some of the most vulnerable residents across the borough in health centres, community centres, children's centres and open air events. Residents were advised of the level of pollution where they live and what actions they can take to reduce emissions and their own personal exposure. The primary recommendation made after this intervention is to continue an information service within GP surgeries and health centres.

We are leading a joint project with Haringey and Hackney Councils to undertake school engagement work at 9 schools across the 3 boroughs. The Islington schools are Ambler, Pakeman and Grafton primary schools, the teaching element has now completed in all 3 of these schools and we are soon to start working with pupils and parents to support them in further actions that will improve local air quality. A celebration event that will include an award ceremony is planned to take place in Finsbury Park in Spring/Summer 2016.

2. That the Council undertakes business engagement to inform businesses of the ways in which they could reduce emissions.

We have completed a programme for business engagement around the Finsbury Park area.

We have been working with colleagues in Hackney and Tower Hamlets to extend the Zero Emissions Network (ZEN) into Islington. So far this has resulted in 75 separate businesses signing up to the scheme and committing to clean air initiatives for their business, these include cycle training, applying for grants to install cycling facilities for staff, using car clubs and cargo bikes, eco-audits, cycle training, electric car trials and joining the London boroughs consolidated deliveries programme.

The council is part of the joint Cleaner Air Better Business programme being coordinated by the Cross River Partnership & further business engagement is scheduled to occur in 2015/16 around the Angel.

3. That the Council lobbies the Mayor to prioritise Islington bus routes when rolling out the retrofitted buses and includes data to show points where emissions were highest.

Councillor Webbe, executive member for the environment and transport wrote to the Mayor in September 2014 regarding the bus garage at Holloway, asking for a commitment to make 50% of the buses at Holloway Garage hybrid by May 2015 but no commitment was given. We continue to lobby the mayor to ensure only the cleanest buses are in service through Islington. The Mayor has announced an Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) which will cover the congestion charging zone. The ULEZ requires that all diesel vehicles travelling within the zone will be of Euro 6 standard, so it is expected that many of the buses travelling through Islington and into the ULEZ will be upgraded.

4. That the Council carries out a feasibility study on implementing a borough wide low emission zone, including costings and presents a report to the Committee by September 2013.

After completion of the Scrutiny, the Mayor took a decision to declare an Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ). This action was revised therefore to consider the cost benefit analysis of extending the ULEZ into Islington. The study found that the cost of installing the required infrastructure for enforcement would not be proportional to the health benefit. The study also identified that Euro 6, diesel fuelled passenger vehicles do not deliver the reduced emissions claimed by manufacturers. As a consequence of these findings, the Executive will receive a report on 15th May which updates the action plan attached to the current Air Quality Strategy.

5. That the Council's policies give greater priority to air quality in instances where air quality and carbon reduction conflict.

The Council continues to ensure energy strategies for new developments are air quality neutral and seek to ensure the best available technology is used for low carbon heat and power.

6. That the Council increase planting of trees and plant species which improve air quality.

All trees improve air pollution, and a number of factors affect how effective they are. Trees with hairy leaves which trap the pollutants that then wash off in the rain are better than non-hairy ones. The larger the total leaf area or canopy the more effective the tree and evergreen trees are more effective than deciduous. The council's current policy results in us planting the largest canopy tree that is suitable for each site.

Further discussions are taking place with Greenspace to establish where planting can be carried out to be most beneficial in protecting pedestrians from traffic emissions.

508 trees were planted in 2013/14. Research has been conducted to identify species that will improve local air quality and we are looking to incorporate the recommendations into the planting policy.

7. That the Council, when replacing its vehicle fleet, sources vehicles with the highest Euro rating available including alternative fuelled vehicles, such as electric vehicles, where possible.

The Council already sources vehicles with the highest Euro rating, including hybrid vehicles where financially viable. Electric vehicles are purchased whenever possible for the operators and the price is comparable.

A feasibility study for the potential for Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) re-fuelling in Islington is underway. This will assess the viability of having a re-fuelling station at the Waste Recycling Centre, if this is possible then we can replace some of our larger fleet vehicles such as refuse trucks with those fuelled by CNG. CNG fuel produces significantly lower emissions than those from diesel.

8. That the Council takes the necessary action to get its bronze membership of the Freight Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS) upgraded to silver and then gold.

Bronze accreditation of the FORS scheme was achieved in 2014. We will soon be applying for SILVER in due course.

9. That the Council includes air quality & FORS membership in procurement criteria.

Having discussed this with our procurement team, the recommendation is to update the environmental impact assessment used within the procurement process to include air quality and FORS membership.

10. That the Council proactively bids for funding for projects that will deliver improved air quality in Islington.

In 2014 funding was secured from Defra to deliver the Clean air at Regents Canal project and Air Aware. Further funding was received from the Mayors Air Quality Fund to deliver the ZEN in Islington and also the Clean air for Finsbury Park Schools programme.

We were also successful in securing from Defra £150K of funding for a green taxi programme This will allow us to install electric charge points at mini-cab offices around the borough and work with local companies to help them to green their fleet.

11. That the Council works with TfL to improve air quality further within the NO2 Focus Areas (Angel to Islington Green, Nag's Head to Archway & at Finsbury Park on the Seven Sisters Road).

A consultation for the changes to both Archway gyratory and Old Street are now complete, both schemes will see a transformation of current pollution hotspots to areas that are desirable for pedestrians and cyclists.

The council is also working with TfL to improve other major gyratories and junctions in Islington including Highbury Corner, King's Cross, Nag's Head and Finsbury Park, and will consider ways to improve the environment at those centres and mitigate against air quality caused by high traffic levels and congestion.

12. That the Council takes the necessary steps to avoid penalties and fines for breaching air quality regulations.

The Scrutiny has confirmed the Council's commitment to reducing pollutant concentrations across the borough using a range of actions. We recognise the importance of working across boundaries and in partnership with other authorities and agencies to find new ways of improving local air quality. We have met the objective limits for PM₁₀ at both roadside and background locations for six years consecutively and the NO₂ objective at background locations for seven years. In 2014 we achieved an annual mean result for NO₂ of 55µg/m³ at the roadside; this level is an increase of just 1µg/m³ from the previous year. The agreed work programme for air quality shows a great commitment to reducing pollutant concentrations across the borough and includes ambitious schemes such as freight consolidation and increasing the number of ultra-low emission vehicles in our own fleet.

13. That the Council prepares a costed report on providing low cost cycle tracks in the borough to link up with the existing cycle network.

The Council has prepared an ambitious programme of new routes and existing route improvements that was outlined in a report to the Council's Executive on 16 July 2014. These improvements form part of a programme that is funded by Transport for London to deliver the Mayor's Vision for Cycling, and include funding for routes to develop the Islington part of a Central London Cycling Grid in Bunhill, Clerkenwell and St Peter's. TfL is also funding a series of Quietways (cycle routes on quiet side roads in London) that connect other parts of Islington to the cycling Grid. As part of this programme the Council is consulting with local residents on the delivery of Quietway route 2, which passes through Angel, up until 17th May 2015. The Council is working with TfL to deliver these cycling improvements as part of a route connecting Bloomsbury to Walthamstow. For other proposed routes, the Council will continue to work with TfL to bring forward funding to accelerate the delivery of these improvements, and work with affected local residents and Islington Cyclists Action Group to develop detailed proposals. The delivery of any improvements will be subject to public consultation.

TfL has begun construction of a North-South cycle superhighway connecting Elephant & Castle to the City of London. The work is programmed to be completed in March 2016. The Council is working with TfL and Camden council to press for this route to be extended to connect to King's Cross through Islington as originally envisaged by TfL. The proposed route will skirt Islington, providing high quality segregated facilities on Farringdon Road, and provide connections to the Central London Cycling Grid. Further, following a positive response to the public consultation on Cycle Superhighway CS1, TfL are expected to press ahead and deliver CS1. This route connects Tottenham to the City passing through the London Boroughs of Islington, Hackney and Haringey. In Islington the route travels along borough boundary roads in Bunhill ward, and along mainly residential streets in Mildmay ward. The route design includes segregated facilities at key locations.

The Council already considers segregated cycle lanes in locations across Islington where it may be appropriate, taking into account overall safety and feasibility. A programme of improvements to cycle infrastructure on local roads has already been costed; the delivery of these improvements is dependent on funding which could come from TfL, or developer contributions (such as section 106 funds or Community Infrastructure Levy). Any proposals that are brought forward will be developed in consultation with affected local residents, and are subject to the outcome of public consultation.

14. That the Council sets up an air quality working group to provide a lead on air quality issues.

A formal group is not considered necessary as this time as work towards improving air quality is imbedded within services and other work streams.

15. That the Council's public health team works with the Air Quality Working Group and reports annually to the Health Scrutiny Committee on public health actions to address air quality issues.

Public Protection has been working closely with the Public Health team and have delivered the Air Aware programme in the community. The final report for this intervention is available on the council's website and can be reported back to the Health scrutiny committee if required.

16. That the Council applies for a Cleaner Air Borough award.

Cleaner Air Borough status will be determined through the progress of actions detailed in the air Quality Strategy. This is to be assessed by the GLA in 2016.

17. That Members receive a report on air quality midway between Air Quality Action Plans to ensure they are updated on the air quality issues in the borough and that this report be published on the Council's website.

The Air Quality Strategy runs from 2014 – 2017. Progress is being reported at the Executive committee in May.

18. That the Council considers establishing a citizen's action network on air quality, to help identify and address specific local air quality problems of concern to Islington's residents.

A team of 17 Air quality Champions have been recruited and are taking action to raise awareness of the cause and effects of poor air quality and working within the community to encourage behaviour change. Campaigns carried out by the champions have included working with local pharmacies to promote AirText to vulnerable groups, producing energy saving information and working with a primary school to promote active travel.

19. That, noting the successful joint Camden and Islington's air quality summit on 21 November 2011 in Camden, there should be a follow-up event in Islington in autumn 2013.

The second Camden and Islington Air Quality summit was held on October 17th at Islington Town Hall, focusing on outdoor air quality. Planning will commence for an autumn 2015 event in June.

20. That the Council encourages and provides support to schools in developing walk-to-school travel plans.

We have a school travel plan officer who is responsible for this task. The pollution team work closely with this officer through the school engagement programme. All schools in the borough have a travel plan that encourages active travel, these are regularly updated. Our school engagement programme also works to change behaviour and aims to ensure that the numbers of children travelling to school by car is decreased by at least 10%. In 2014 we worked with Grafton. Ambler and

Pakeman primary schools, we have also just completed a work programme with Laycock primary school.

21. That the Council encourages residents to make local journeys by walking and cycling through the provision of a safe, convenient and quieter street environment.

Clean air walking routes have been mapped and are available on the councils website. We are planning to produce hard copies of these maps to distribute across the borough. The council is also preparing to bid for funding from TfL to create a "Low Emission Neighbourhood"

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Fuel Poverty Scrutiny Review

REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

London Borough of Islington
May 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fuel Poverty Scrutiny Review

Aim

To explore and understand the impact of fuel poverty on households, existing policies and strategies to alleviate fuel poverty in both the short and long term and the opportunities for Islington to provide assistance and support to the residents.

Evidence

The review ran from October 2014 until May 2015 and evidence was received from a variety of sources:

1. Presentations from Witnesses
William Baker, Head of Fuel Poverty Policy, Citizens Advice
Peter Smith, National Energy Action (NEA)
Matilda Allen, Research Fellow, UCL Institute of Health Equity
Fiona Daly, Head of Sustainability, Barts Health NHS
Gareth Baynham-Hughes – Deputy Director, Fuel Poverty, Department of Energy and Climate Change
Steve Crabb – Head of Vulnerable Customers, British Gas
Councillor Murray – Executive Member for Housing
2. Presentations from Council Officers
John Kolm-Murray, Seasonal Health and Affordable Warmth Co-ordinator
3. Written Evidence
Daniel Alchin, Policy and External Relations Manager, Energy UK

Main Findings

Between 2010 and the first quarter of 2014/15, energy efficiency improvements were made in over 19,600 Islington homes. There was the potential for energy efficiency measures to reduce bills by up to £400 per year. As energy inefficiency contributed to fuel poverty, energy bills fell in line with improvements.

The Seasonal Health Intervention Network (SHINE) had assisted around 8,600 vulnerable residents since December 2010. It targeted those most at risk of cold homes and their associated health problems and worked with professionals across the housing, health, social care and voluntary sector to identify and assist. In addition to addressing high energy bills it also addressed other factors such as the risk of people falling, social isolation and fire risks. SHINE worked with Islington's Citizens Advice Bureau Fit Money project to refer indebted residents for financial capability training.

The health impacts of fuel poverty had been well established. Older people, those suffering from long-term health conditions and low income families with young children were at greatest risk. Cold housing was believed to be the greatest single contributing factor to excess winter deaths and hospital admissions.

Between 2007 and 2012, there were on average 50 excess winter deaths in Islington, with little statistical difference from the England average. Analysis of data from emergency winter hospital admissions from 2008/09 to the Whittington Hospital suggested that there were around 6.6 admissions for each death.

The latest available data showed that electricity debt rose by 66% in real terms between 2003 and 2011 and gas debt rose by 83%. Rising fuel bills meant the proportion of the population in fuel debt increased. People's incomes had grown little in the last 4-5 years and the poor had become poorer. Whilst disconnections for debt were now rare, particularly during the winter, this appeared to be largely due to a growing number of fuel poor households being on prepayment rather than standard meters. These people were at greater risk of self-disconnection and fuel poverty linked health problems.

The 2015 Fuel Poverty Strategy was the first fuel poverty strategy in England since the original in 2001. It removed the target set in 2001 to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016 following a two year evidence based review by Professor John Hills. The current strategy recognised that this target was not going to be met and it was decided that the target and timeframe should be changed. Minimum energy efficiency standards were set which required that no fuel poor households be living in a home below an energy efficiency SAP Band C by 2030, 'where reasonably practicable'. It also proposed a system of mandated referrals from health professionals which permitted them to prescribe energy efficiency improvements in the same way that other health interventions such as medication or operations were prescribed and that this should be consistent across the country.

The Fuel Poverty Strategy put in place the following set of principles: 1) To support the fuel poor with cost effective policies; 2) To prioritise the most severely fuel poor; 3) To reflect vulnerability in policy decisions. It set out a number of challenges, broad policies to reduce fuel poverty and a series of commitments and outcomes. There would be regular reviews on the fuel poverty strategy and the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group would scrutinise progress. Annual statistics would be published.

Citizens Advice supported the principle of setting a target for minimum energy efficiency and a date for this to be achieved as well as the interim targets which had been set. However, Citizens Advice was concerned that as the target was just for fuel poor households, this would help those in fuel poverty but not prevent people from getting into fuel poverty.

In 2016, tenants would have a right to ask their landlord for energy efficiency measures to be installed in their home. By 2018, landlords would not be able to rent out properties with F and G energy efficiency ratings unless they met the exception criteria. Although this would remove the worst homes from the market, most poor households were in SAP Bands C to E.

Britain's nine largest energy suppliers delivered energy efficiency measures to householders via the Energy Company Obligation and the Warm Home Discount (WHD). ECO created a legal obligation on large energy suppliers to improve the energy efficiency of households by the end of 2017. At the end of December 2014, provisional figures showed that obligated suppliers had installed 1,296,441 measures under ECO since the scheme began in January 2013, at a cost of over £1.4bn per annum (as of September 2014). Energy companies had discretion over how to dispense funds. Obligations placed on suppliers resulted in costs which had an impact on consumer bills, including the bills of fuel poor and vulnerable customers. DECC had estimated that suppliers, and, therefore, energy bill payers, were spending over £1.7bn per annum on the ECO and WHD.

Energy UK ran the Home Heat Helpline (HHH) which was a free, not for profit phone line set up to help energy customers who were struggling to pay their fuel bills and keep warm. In the year 2013/14 the helpline offered support and advice to over 70,000 callers. Advisors were trained to give quick, clear information on the grants, benefits and payment schemes that customers might be entitled to as well as basic steps that could be taken to save money on heating bills by making their home more energy efficient.

Britain's six largest energy suppliers had also signed up to Energy UK's Safety Net for Vulnerable Customers. Under the Safety Net, the energy companies pledged to never knowingly disconnect a

vulnerable customer at any time of year, where for reasons of age, health, disability or severe financial insecurity, that customer was unable to safeguard their personal welfare or the personal welfare of other members of the household.

There was no one single resolution to energy debt. Like any debt, it arose circumstantially and was the result of a combination of factors. Where a customer was in debt to their energy supplier, it was also likely that this would not be the only debt they were dealing with. To tackle the impacts of debt and assist individuals a holistic approach to personal finance was essential. Increasingly suppliers worked with third parties including the Money Advice Trust and Step Change to provide customers with appropriate support and train their own staff.

Conclusions

The Fuel Poverty Scrutiny Review concluded that although much work was already being done to address fuel poverty in the borough, further work should be done to co-ordinate work by various groups and offer a more holistic approach to solving the problem of fuel poverty.

Recommendations

- 1. That the council considers setting energy efficiency standards for its housing and those it pays housing benefit to, plus encourages housing associations to work towards the same target.**
- 2. That the council undertakes work to encourage landlords to install energy efficiency measures in their properties. This could involve using environmental health powers to address problems of private landlords not meeting standards, particularly those coming into force in 2018.**
- 3. That the Health and Wellbeing Board be requested to adopt relevant recommendations from the NICE guideline on excess winter deaths, in particular: a) support and maintain the provision of the Seasonal Health Interventions Network (SHINE) and b) ensure greater participation from the health and social care sectors in identifying and addressing cold homes.**
- 4. That the council undertakes steps to ensure that vulnerable people claim their full entitlement of benefits, including the Warm Home Discount.**
- 5. That the council lobbies the government and the Mayor for London for more investment for fuel poverty schemes, particularly in harder to treat housing**
- 6. That the council continues to proactively engage with partners and shares best practice with other authorities.**
- 7. That the council and partners provide and promote services to alleviate energy debt.**

MEMBERSHIP OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

COUNCILLORS - 2014/15

Councillors:

Councillor Court (Chair)
Councillor Diarmaid Ward (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Doolan
Councillor Gantly (until February 2015)
Councillor Heather
Councillor Jeapes
Councillor Russell
Councillor Turan
Councillor Nick Ward

Substitutes:

Councillor Kay
Councillor Michael O'Sullivan
Councillor Alice Perry
Councillor Rupert Perry
Councillor Shaikh
Councillor Smith
Councillor Wayne

Acknowledgements: The Committee would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review.

Officer Support:

Zoe Crane – Democratic Services

John Kolm-Murray, Seasonal Health and Affordable Warmth Co-ordinator

1. Introduction

- 1.1 There were several definitions of fuel poverty. In the past, fuel poverty was defined as the situation whereby a household was required to spend 10% or more of their total household income to maintain an adequate level of warmth. This was known as the 10% definition. In 2004, the Mayor of London defined fuel poverty as the need to spend more than 10% of total household income after housing costs (rent or mortgage and council tax) and this was the definition used by the council. The government had redefined fuel poverty as the situation whereby a household had below 60% of the median income, after housing costs, combined with a fuel bill higher than the median. This was the definition used in the 2015 Fuel Poverty Strategy and was the Low Income High Costs definition.
- 1.2 Approximately 2.28m households in England were in fuel poverty. 255,000 households in London were fuel poor, with approximately 6,600 of these being in Islington. The fuel poverty gap calculated the depth of fuel poverty for each household and in 2012 this figure was £443. More investment was required to address fuel poverty and the Mayor for London recognised this.
- 1.3 According to the 10% definition, fuel poverty in Islington stood at 8.9% in 2012 and according to the Low Income High Costs definition, it stood at 7.4%. This definition did not include people who could not afford to heat their homes and the figures were modelled i.e. reflected the amount they should spend rather than the actual amount they did spend. Without extensive data on incomes it was difficult to estimate levels of fuel poverty according to the 10% After Housing Costs definition. An analysis by the GLA completed in 2012, which took housing costs into account, suggested that six Islington wards were in the worst quintile for fuel poverty in London.
- 1.4 Fuel poverty caused reduced quality of life, poor physical and mental health, debts and/or the forgoing of other essential needs such as food and increased costs to the NHS and social services. Fuel poverty arose as a result of the relationship between energy cost, household income, energy efficiency, heating and power requirements, and household occupancy levels. Less fuel poverty resulted in benefits such as better mental health, attainment and improved air quality as less energy had to be generated. There were now fewer pensioners in fuel poverty and more working age people in fuel poverty than previously.
- 1.5 Islington suffered from a high degree of general deprivation and significant health inequalities. It also had a large and growing private rented sector, the tenure in which fuel poverty was most prevalent. Private rented homes typically were energy inefficient. The council had environmental health powers to address problems of private landlords not meeting standards. Newham Council had done this with problematic Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).
- 1.6 Most Islington homes were defined as hard to treat, meaning that insulation measures were expensive to deliver in homes that were expensive to heat.
- 1.7 Making homes more energy efficient reduced energy costs for residents and this in turn reduced fuel poverty.

2. Findings

Work in Islington

- 2.1 Between 2010 and the first quarter of 2014/15, energy efficiency improvements were made in over 19,600 Islington homes. There was the potential for energy efficiency measures to reduce bills by up to £400 per year. As energy inefficiency contributed to fuel poverty, energy bills fell in line with improvements.
- 2.2 The measures included 3,380 boiler replacements or installations and around 10,500 loft, cavity wall and solid wall insulations. The main barrier to installing solid wall insulations was cost with the average cost per property being £8,000. Also, if there were damp issues in a property, solid wall insulation could make them worse, internal insulations reduced the size of a property and installing them caused disruption to the residents. Solid wall insulation had been undertaken on the Holly Park Estate last year and was funded by Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding and it had also been undertaken in Neptune House. The insulation could save up to £200 on fuel bills for each household. Section 106 agreements had provided funding in the past and would be used in the future. Where there was a mixture of tenures on estates, this could make upgrade work more difficult.
- 2.3 In 2012, the Bunhill Energy Centre started to provide cheaper, greener heat to over 700 homes in the south of the borough. In 2013/14, the council secured over 1,000 payments of £135 to vulnerable residents through the country's first Warm Home Discount referral programme. In 2014/15, the council expected to make energy efficiency improvements to over 2,200 homes. These would include free boiler replacements for low income and vulnerable private tenants and owner-occupiers; external solid wall insulation for more than 300 high rise flats; over 560 boiler upgrades, 800 Energy Doctor in the Home visits to provide in-home advice and install smaller energy efficiency measures; at least 500 more Warm Home Discounts of £140 would be secured and at least 200 Crisis Fuel Payments would be made through the Resident Support Scheme. Environmental Health Officers had taken action on a significant number of excess cold hazards.
- 2.4 The Seasonal Health Intervention Network (SHINE) had assisted almost 8,600 vulnerable residents since December 2010. It targeted those most at risk of cold homes and their associated health problems and worked with professionals across the housing, health, social care and voluntary sector to identify and assist. In addition to addressing high energy bills it also addressed other factors such as the risk of people falling, social isolation and fire risks. SHINE worked with Islington's Citizens Advice Bureau Fit Money project to refer indebted residents for financial capability training.
- 2.5 Islington established an emergency reconnection fund in 2013 through SHINE and had asked the regulator, Ofgem, on a number of occasions to investigate the incidence of self-disconnection and address the problem.
- 2.6 The councils' affordable warmth advisors and members of the Islington Advice Alliance all assisted customers to access debt relief and repayment plans. In 2013/14, advisors secured over £18,000 of debt relief from suppliers' trust funds and it was anticipated that this amount would be exceeded in 2014/15. There were strict criteria for debt relief from supplier's funds and poor budgeting by householders was unlikely to result in debt relief. The council had in place a crisis payment scheme.
- 2.7 Islington was proactive in dealing with fuel poverty. Sharing best practice would help other local authorities reduce fuel poverty.

Health Impacts

- 2.8 The health impacts of fuel poverty had been well established. Older people, those suffering from long-term health conditions and low income families with young children were at greatest risk. Cold housing was believed to be the greatest single contributing factor to excess winter deaths and hospital admissions.
- 2.9 Between 2007 and 2012, there were on average 50 excess winter deaths in Islington, with little statistical difference from the England average. Analysis of data from emergency winter hospital admissions from 2008/09 to the Whittington Hospital suggested that there were around 6.6 admissions for each death.
- 2.10 Fuel poverty could exacerbate dampness in homes and this could have health impacts such as respiratory illness. This was increasingly being recognised by health professionals who had started to refer patients for help where appropriate. The Department of Energy and Climate Change had stated that there were health benefits associated to improving homes.
- 2.11 The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recently published guidance on the health risks associated with cold homes. NICE's guidance recommended that local authorities' health and wellbeing boards should ensure that there was a single point of contact at the health and housing referrals service that provided tailored solutions for people living in cold homes. Health and Wellbeing Boards could also identify fuel poverty as a priority and set up a referral system. This holistic approach, could in the future, utilise existing health care budgets to fund preventative work (including the installation of energy efficiency measures).
- 2.12 Reducing health inequalities was a matter of fairness and social justice. Action on health inequalities required action across all of the social determinants of health and was required to promote sustainability and the fair distribution of health. Reducing health inequalities was vital for the economy and there was a cost associated with inaction.
- 2.13 The Marmot Review, which was undertaken by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, had the following objectives: 1) To give every child the best start in life; 2) To enable all children, young people and adults to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives; 3) To create fair employment and good work for all; 4) To ensure a healthy standard of living for all; 5) To create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities; 6) To strengthen the role and impact of ill-health provision.
- 2.14 The physical impacts of cold, damp and fuel poverty included respiratory problems, circulatory problems and mortality. Visits to GPs for respiratory tract infections increased by up to 19% for every 1 degree drop in temperatures below 5°C. Children living in cold homes were more than twice as likely to suffer respiratory problems than those in warm homes. Children under five years old were at particular risk of developing respiratory conditions from living in cold and damp conditions. One in nine children in Islington suffered from asthma. Deaths from cardiovascular disease in England were 22.9% higher in winter months. Social isolation increased seasonal mortality. Excess winter deaths were almost three times higher in the coldest quarter than in the warmest. The mental health impacts of cold, damp and fuel poverty included anxiety, depression and other mental ill-health. Energy efficiency improvements had been shown to decrease stress, mental illness and improve happiness. Those with bedroom temperatures of 21°C were less likely to experience depression and anxiety than those whose bedrooms were 15°C.
- 2.15 28% of young people who lacked affordable warmth had four or more negative mental health symptoms, compared to 4% of young people who had always lived in warm homes. Young

people were at a vulnerable age and hormones and studying created stress which could be exacerbated by a lack of affordable warmth.

- 2.16 Cold, damp and fuel poverty affected babies' weight gain and development, absence from work, children's educational attainment, emotional wellbeing and resilience and family dietary opportunities and choices which all had health impacts. 4% of households were damp. This varied from 10% in the private rented sector to 2% in owner occupied households. 8% of those in relative poverty had damp homes and 15% of those who lived in private rented homes were also in poverty. 40% of private renters reported experiencing poor insulation or excess cold in the last 12 months. There was increased risk amongst the elderly, children, unemployed and those with long term illnesses or disabilities.
- 2.17 Cold, damp homes contributed to health inequalities. Improving the condition of homes or using other strategies e.g. installing energy efficiency measures to reduce the prevalence of cold and damp homes could improve health and reduce inequalities, as well as having other positive impacts. Homes within the private rented sector could be hard to improve. National regulation of private landlords could help.
- 2.18 Cold homes caused 27,000 excess winter deaths in the UK each year. The usual metric for measuring excess winter deaths, taken as the number or rate of additional deaths in the winter months (December to March) compared to the rest of the year. Comparative figures for the two boroughs were: 2011/12: Tower Hamlets – 20 excess winter deaths, or 5.0%; Islington – 50 excess winter deaths or 14.3% and in 2012/13: Tower Hamlets – 70 excess winter deaths, or 20.9%; Islington – 70 excess winter deaths, or 20.9%.
- 2.19 The cost to the NHS of excess winter deaths was £850m per annum. This figure did not include secondary illnesses such as pneumonia, mental health problems and respiratory disease. For every £1 spent heating homes saved the NHS 42p. The cost to the NHS of a fall and hip replacement was approximately £20,000.
- 2.20 Live Warm, Live Well was a partnership project set up by Barts Health NHS Trust, British Gas and delivery partner Global Action Plan. Its aim was to reduce fuel poverty and health and social inequalities in 250 homes in Tower Hamlets. As part of the project health professionals within the six hospitals in Tower Hamlets were engaged as were GPs within the health community and national support groups within the wider community. In the trial, information was provided to 15,000 patients. 14,000 leaflets had been distributed, 200 posters had been displayed, visual display screens had been used and 10,200 appointment letters had been sent. 43 health professionals and 2 local GPs had been trained. There had been 90 referrals directly through the scheme. There had been a 43% increase in referrals following training. The trial had cost £20,000 and there was currently no funding to expand the scheme.
- 2.21 Cleaner Air for East London was an air quality programme which aimed to reduce community based emissions. 577 packs had been sent to 44 clinicians, patients had been given postcards containing tips, 1,200 patients had been engaged and an engagement video had been created. The project enhanced the value of contracts with £1.32m going back into community projects and fuel poverty was a key project.
- 2.22 There were examples of good work around the UK and a coordinated approach worked best. There was a district heating project in Camden and the local authority and NHS worked together on this. Blackburn and Darwin Council's public health team had undertaken work to address fuel poverty. Councils could encourage public health teams to take steps to address fuel poverty.
- 2.23 In Islington, there were 50 excess winter deaths each year on average between 2007 and 2012. There were approximately seven excess winter emergency hospital admissions per

death. There were high rates of respiratory illness, over 20% fuel poverty (GLA definition). Islington was the 14th most deprived local authority area in England and had mostly older housing stock which was hard to insulate.

- 2.24 In Islington, seasonal health and affordable warmth work was undertaken locally. There was a strong emphasis on year-round work and prevention as well as reaction. The council worked with local teams and organisations to raise cold weather issues and winter outreach work was undertaken with third sector partners. Fuel poverty rarely occurred as an isolated problem. Excess seasonal mortality and morbidity had a number of causes and therefore required a multi-disciplinary approach. Cold weather alerts were disseminated through existing channels and partners.
- 2.25 The Seasonal Health Interventions Network (SHINE) was launched in 2010. It brought together a wide range of interventions and was set up following the harsh winter of 2008/09. The Health Inequalities National Support Team visited in 2009 and produced guidance on reducing seasonal excess deaths and a new Seasonal Health and Affordable Warmth Strategy was published in December 2010.
- 2.26 To date, there had been 8,370 referrals to SHINE. In 2014/15 there had been 2,220 so far. Referrals were received from acute and community teams at the Whittington and UCL hospitals. Public health and NHS Reablement funds supported development. There were escalated referrals for respiratory illness sufferers. The health service was involved in the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme. GP mailing pilots were undertaken in 2014.
- 2.27 The Evidence Hub was a partnership between the local NHS and Islington Council that brought together information held across different organisations into one accessible place. It provided access to evidence, intelligence and data on the current and anticipated needs of the Islington population. Health and social care professionals were often receptive to discussing the wider determinants of health, not just fuel poverty.
- 2.28 There had been almost 38,000 seasonal health interventions to date and there were 132 partner teams across 86 organisations. Approximately £1.3million was being saved on energy bills annually. SHINE had been successful in targeting the right groups. Almost all the clients referred were older, disabled, long-term ill or were low income families with children. The model had been adopted by Hackney, Lewisham, Wandsworth and Norwich. The Locality Multi-Disciplinary Team assessed those in the borough with the most complex needs.
- 2.29 A SHINE-type model could be rolled out across London but would face cross-boundary challenges. SHINE had won awards from National Energy Action, the European Commission, iESE and the Energy Institute. It had also received recognition by the OECD, Energy Action Scotland, HNS/PHE Sustainable Development Unit and the Cabinet Office.
- 2.30 2,400 households had signed up to the Warm Home Discount Campaign since November 2013. This was a government scheme which offered those who met certain criteria and applied for the scheme, £140 off their electricity bill.
- 2.31 Emergency prepayment meter top ups were introduced in 2013. These were a low cost, effective intervention. Those requiring them could be assessed to see how they could be helped in other ways when they were provided with the top ups. Signposting people to services was not effective when dealing with vulnerable people as they were unlikely to contact the service. Therefore this was avoided and people were instead walked through the process.
- 2.32 Forthcoming National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines would strengthen the case of fuel poverty interventions and Islington was influential in the development of these. Including Fuel Poverty in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy

would aid with Fuel Poverty work as would greater integration into care pathways and integrated responses with housing.

National Programmes

- 2.33 Since the demise of the taxpayer-funded Warm Front programme in 2013 all national affordable warmth interventions had been funded through supplier obligations. There was no longer Treasury funding for fuel poverty programmes. The Secretary of State had provided £3m for the Boilers on Prescription pilot scheme which aimed to reduce the health impacts of fuel poverty.
- 2.34 A 2012 analysis by Islington and Westminster councils showed that London only received around a third of the supplier obligation funding that its population warranted.
- 2.35 The Energy Bill Revolution campaign, supported by Islington Council, called for carbon tax revenue to be used to fund energy efficiency improvements for fuel poor homes.
- 2.36 Winter Fuel Payment was a universal benefit to all households with members over the age of 62, which equated to £200 per annum for those aged 62-79 and £300 for those aged 80 or over. Cold Weather Payments were £25 payments to all those on certain means-tested benefits for each seven-day period where the temperature dropped below 0°C. The Warm Home Discount was currently a £140 yearly payment. Pensioners on Pension Credit received the payment automatically (core group) whilst certain others (broader group) had to apply. Suppliers could define eligibility for their broader group and some medium-sized suppliers did not have a broader group. Payment was made directly to suppliers but the number of broader group recipients were limited.
- 2.37 The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) was currently drafting guidance on reducing excess winter deaths and illness through addressing cold homes. The draft guidance suggested that NICE would recommend that Health and Wellbeing Boards commission services similar to Islington SHINE and that a number of stakeholders took action to link affordable warmth and health.
- 2.38 The latest available data showed that electricity debt rose by 66% in real terms between 2003 and 2011 and gas debt rose by 83%. Rising fuel bills meant the proportion of the population in fuel debt increased. People's incomes had grown little in the last 4-5 years and the poor had become poorer. Whilst disconnections for debt were now rare, particularly during the winter, this appeared to be largely due to a growing number of fuel poor households being on prepayment rather than standard meters. These people were at greater risk of self-disconnection and fuel poverty linked health problems.
- 2.39 Existing government policies and funding would end in 2016/17 and future policy and funding decisions would be made by the next government.

The Fuel Poverty Strategy

- 2.40 The 2015 Fuel Poverty Strategy was the first fuel poverty strategy in England since the original in 2001. It removed the target set in 2001 to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016 following a two year evidence based review by Professor John Hills. The current strategy recognised that this target was not going to be met and it was decided that the target and timeframe should be changed. Minimum energy efficiency standards were set which required that no fuel poor households be living in a home below an energy efficiency SAP Band C by 2030, 'where reasonably practicable'. It also proposed a system of mandated referrals from health professionals which permitted them to prescribe energy efficiency improvements in the same

way that other health interventions such as medication or operations were prescribed and that this should be consistent across the country.

- 2.41 The Fuel Poverty Strategy put in place the following set of principles: 1) To support the fuel poor with cost effective policies; 2) To prioritise the most severely fuel poor; 3) To reflect vulnerability in policy decisions. It set out a number of challenges, broad policies to reduce fuel poverty and a series of commitments and outcomes. There would be regular reviews on the fuel poverty strategy and the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group would scrutinise progress. Annual statistics would be published.
- 2.42 Citizens Advice supported the principle of setting a target for minimum energy efficiency and a date for this to be achieved as well as the interim targets which had been set. However, Citizens Advice was concerned that as the target was just for fuel poor households, this would help those in fuel poverty but not prevent people from getting into fuel poverty.
- 2.43 In 2016, tenants would have a right to ask their landlord for energy efficiency measures to be installed in their home. By 2018, landlords would not be able to rent out properties with F and G energy efficiency ratings unless they met the exception criteria. Although this would remove the worst homes from the market, most poor households were in SAP Bands C to E.
- 2.44 Landlords were expected to provide their tenants with an energy efficiency rating for the property. This would advise them what could be done to improve the energy efficiency of the property. The landlord, and not the tenant, was responsible for any work. The average cost of improvements was £1,500. Some landlords did not realise that there was a tax allowance for energy efficiency work. National Energy Action produced guidance for landlords and was doing outreach work.
- 2.45 William Baker, Head of Fuel Poverty Policy, Citizens Advice raised concern that current programmes were not capable of meeting the targets. Suppliers were currently responsible for the delivery and the system was not set up to meet the multiple needs of those in fuel poverty. There were national programmes in Scotland and Wales but there was no longer one in England. Decentralising power to local authorities and registered social landlords could start addressing how the target could be met.

Fuel Supply to Residents

- 2.46 Pre-payment meters were more expensive than direct debit payments but many people were satisfied with them and used them to help them budget. In addition, those in fuel poverty did not always have a bank account or trust banks or energy suppliers. Smart metering could be useful and would collect levels of usage; however, it could also remotely switch people to prepayments.
- 2.47 Energy UK was the trade association for the energy industry. It represented over 80 members made up of generators and gas and electricity suppliers as well as other businesses operating in the energy industry. Together its members generated more than 90 per cent of the UK's total electricity output, supplying more than 26 million homes and investing in 2012 more than £11 billion in the British economy. Energy UK worked with the Council's Seasonal Health & Affordable Warmth (SHAW) team in 2013 to establish a referral mechanism between the Council's SHINE referral scheme and five of GB's largest energy suppliers (British Gas, EON, NPower, Scottish Power and SSE). Via the referral mechanism, the SHINE referral scheme could refer clients to their energy supplier if they believed they might be eligible for the WHD or the PSR. The referral resulted in a call back from the supplier to directly discuss with the customer the support which might be available.

- 2.48 Britain's nine largest energy suppliers delivered energy efficiency measures to householders via the Energy Company Obligation and the Warm Home Discount (WHD). ECO created a legal obligation on large energy suppliers to improve the energy efficiency of households by the end of 2017. At the end of December 2014, provisional figures showed that obligated suppliers had installed 1,296,441 measures under ECO since the scheme began in January 2013, at a cost of over £1.4bn per annum (as of September 2014). Energy companies had discretion over how to dispense funds. Obligations placed on suppliers resulted in costs which had an impact on consumer bills, including the bills of fuel poor and vulnerable customers. DECC had estimated that suppliers, and, therefore, energy bill payers, were spending over £1.7bn per annum on the ECO and WHD.
- 2.49 Between 2011 and 2015, under the WHD, Britain's nine largest energy suppliers would be spending over £1.1billion on direct and indirect support for fuel poor customers, primarily through energy bill rebates. During the winter 2013/14 suppliers provided over 1.8 million customers with a rebate of £135 to help with energy costs, this was over 250,000 rebates beyond their minimum requirement. The rebate was worth £140 for winter 2014/15.
- 2.50 Suppliers provided non-financial support to vulnerable customers under the Industry Initiatives component of the WHD. This included the provision of energy efficiency advice, support for customers in debt (via trust funds) and referrals of eligible customers for other information and help. The latest Ofgem figures showed that another half a million customers received other types of support under the scheme in 2013/14. In total, customers received support worth £291m through WHD in 2013/14, £24m more than the minimum obligation. DECC had announced that WHD would be extended for a further scheme year (April 2015 – March 2016). The additional scheme year would mean suppliers spending £320million over winter 2015/16 to support around 2 million households in or at risk of fuel poverty.
- 2.51 Ofgem's 2013 Retail Market Review (RMR) reforms were introduced to make it simpler and clearer for customers to find the cheapest deal available and save money by switching supplier, by for example introducing:
- A cap on the number of tariffs a supplier could offer (four for each customer).
 - A Tariff Comparison Rate
 - A Tariff Information Label
 - A requirement for suppliers to tell customers about their cheapest tariff on each bill (if they were not already on it) and how much they could save.
- 2.52 In response to some people's reluctance to switch energy providers, industry has responded by completing the switching process in 17 days and making the process easier. It also worked with the regulator, Ofgem, to improve the Debt Assignment Protocol to make it simpler and less time-consuming for prepayment meter customers with a debt to switch supplier.
- 2.53 Domestic electricity and gas suppliers also had licence obligations to maintain a Priority Service Register (PSR) of customers who were of pensionable age, disabled or had a long-term medical condition. The following services were available to customers on their supplier's PSR:
- Supply Interruption Advance Warning. A customer's supply address details were passed on to the appropriate gas transporter and network operator. In the event of a power outage or supply interruption, they would provide advance warnings and offer alternatives, where necessary, to reduce or avoid disruption.
 - Representatives of energy companies visiting a customer's home would be able to identify themselves with a pre-arranged password.
 - Pre-payment meters would be repositioned if the customer found it difficult to use.

- Bills could be redirected to third parties.
 - Quarterly meter readings would be taken where technology allowed.
- 2.54 All gas suppliers offered free annual gas safety checks to customers who owned their own homes, were in receipt of means tested benefits, had asked for and not had a free gas safety check carried out at the premises in the last 12 months and were of pensionable age, disabled or chronically sick, or lived with others, at least one of whom was under five years old. Suppliers actively encouraged eligible customers to take up their PSR options.
- 2.55 Industry continued to work towards improving awareness of the PSR by working with advisers, health workers and social service providers, to encourage eligible customers to register themselves on the PSR.
- 2.56 The Debt Assignment Protocol (DAP) was an industry process through which a prepayment meter customer could switch supplier even if they had a debt, by transferring the debt to their new supplier. The maximum level of debt a consumer was allowed to carry over to the new supplier under the DAP was £500.
- 2.57 Energy suppliers valued trusted referrals as they were keen to help those most in need. Energy efficiency measures and other forms of support could help lower energy bills for customers and keep them warm in winter. However, energy suppliers operated under quite stringent legislative and administrative rules when it came to obligations, how these were delivered and to whom. Therefore the design of any referral service should take into account the limitations of the supplier obligations and other support schemes available.
- 2.58 Energy UK ran the Home Heat Helpline (HHH) which was a free, not for profit phone line set up to help energy customers who were struggling to pay their fuel bills and keep warm. In the year 2013-14 the helpline offered support and advice to over 70,000 callers. Advisors were trained to give quick, clear information on the grants, benefits and payment schemes that customers might be entitled to as well as basic steps that could be taken to save money on heating bills by making their home more energy efficient.
- 2.59 Britain's six largest energy suppliers had also signed up to Energy UK's Safety Net for Vulnerable Customers. Under the Safety Net, the energy companies pledged to never knowingly disconnect a vulnerable customer at any time of year, where for reasons of age, health, disability or severe financial insecurity, that customer was unable to safeguard their personal welfare or the personal welfare of other members of the household.
- 2.60 There was no one single resolution to energy debt. Like any debt, it arose circumstantially and was the result of a combination of factors. Where a customer was in debt to their energy supplier, it was also likely that this would not be the only debt they were dealing with. To tackle the impacts of debt and assist individuals a holistic approach to personal finance was essential. Increasingly suppliers worked with third parties including the Money Advice Trust and Step Change to provide customers with appropriate support and train their own staff.
- 2.61 British Gas had a Vulnerable Customers team which worked to identify and help vulnerable customers. The company undertook energy efficiency measures such as insulating cavity walls and loft space and applicants did not have to be British Gas customers. It also had a specialist debt team which referred people to Step Change Debt Charity, this year British Gas gave £75m to the British Gas Energy Trust and it conducted benefit health checks – on average those helped were entitled to £500 in unclaimed benefits. It worked with partners including GPs and councils which would engage e.g. Islington Council. Approximately 50% of councils did not engage and share data.

2.62 British Gas conducted free gas safety checks, offered a text phone service, large print bills and flagged customers with disabilities and long term conditions. Customer services agents had significant training and this included a four hour training programme on vulnerability which encouraged them to do active listening, to ask follow up questions and refer customers in vulnerable situations to a specialist team.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The Fuel Poverty Scrutiny Review concluded that although much work was already being done to address fuel poverty in the borough, further work should be done to co-ordinate work by various groups and offer a more holistic approach to solving the problem of fuel poverty.

APPENDIX – SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT

SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)
Review: Fuel Poverty
Scrutiny Review Committee: Environment and Regeneration
Director leading the Review: Kevin O’Leary
Lead Officer: John Kolm-Murray
Overall aim: To explore and understand the impact of fuel poverty on households, existing policies and strategies to alleviate this in both the short and long term and the opportunities for Islington to provide assistance and support to our residents.
Objectives of the review: To understand the extent of fuel poverty in Islington and the impact of cold, damp homes on health and wellbeing. To understand the benefits available to Islington residents when addressing fuel poverty and how we deliver them. Exploring how support can be provided to residents by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The council• Central government• Energy suppliers To understand the extent and impact of fuel debt.
Scope of the Review Types of evidence will be assessed by the review: 1. Documentary submissions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview and cost benefit summary of current initiatives• Draft NICE guidance on reducing excess winter deaths through addressing cold homes• DECC Fuel Poverty Strategy 2014 2. It is proposed that witness evidence be taken from: <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. November/December - Local projects and strategy, health impacts LBI Seasonal Health & Affordable Warmth Team (John Kolm-Murray), UCL Institute of Health Equity (Dr Jessica Allen)/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (Prof Paul Wilkinson) and Islington CCGii. December/February - National programmes and strategy, fuel debt National Energy Action (Maria Wardrobe/Peter Smith), Citizens Advice Service

(William Baker) and DECC Fuel Poverty Team (Gareth Baynham-Hughes)

iii. February/March – Suppliers, other landlords

Energy UK (Lawrence Slade/Sofia Gkiousou), EDF/British Gas

**Peabody (Tessa Barraclough), Southern Housing (William Routh), Generation Rent
(Alex Hilton)**

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