

Report of: Executive Member for Environment and Transport

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SUBJECT: Fuel poverty – Executive Member’s response to the Environment & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee’s recommendations

1. Synopsis

- 1.1 The Environment & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee’s report on fuel poverty was received by the Executive on 16th July 2015. The Scrutiny Committee’s recommendations are directed towards several departments of the Council and to the Health & Wellbeing Board. This report summarises the response of these and actions being taken to address the recommendations.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the actions being taken forward to address the recommendations of the Environment & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on fuel poverty.

3. Background

- 3.1 Between October 2014 and May 2015 the Scrutiny Committee explored the impact of fuel poverty on households in the borough, 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 residents.
- 3.2 The Committee concluded that although much work was already being done on fuel poverty, that further work should be done to co-ordinate action by various groups and to offer a more holistic approach to solving the problem of fuel poverty. Recommendations relate to energy efficiency standards in both private and social rented properties, to the role of the health and social care sector, to income maximisation, debt and fuel support, and to the need for greater investment in London housing and in particular harder to insulate housing.

4 Response to the recommendations

4.1 Recommendation 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.

Response: Since the conclusion of the scrutiny, targets have now been set for our own housing stock, which will bring us into line or better than national fuel poverty targets. Our targets are based on the Standard Assessment Procedure, where Band A is the most energy efficient and Band G the least efficient. The evidence suggests that taking homes in Bands D and below to Band C would remove the majority of their occupants from fuel poverty at current energy prices. Subject to funding, we aim to bring most of our own stock to Band D or better by 2022 and all homes to Band C by 2030. Combined with interventions such as the Warm Home Discount, this should lift most of our own tenants out of fuel poverty.

The considerable investment required to improve largely older stock, with the current limited national government support, means that such a long timescale is necessary. Should adequate funding become available we will of course review the timescale.

The limited pool of Islington properties available to privately rent by those on Housing Benefit in Islington means that we could cause problematic shortfalls in stock if we insist upon minimum energy efficiency standards beyond those enforceable as excess cold hazards under the Housing Act 2004. A more successful approach would be to have a consistent approach across London and we will work with other boroughs, London Councils and the Mayor of London to deliver this.

A number of housing associations have provided details of their energy efficiency investment strategies. Details are given below and we will continue to collate information with a view to setting a common Islington standard. We will encourage social landlords in Islington to support a fuel poverty charter containing this standard and offer support to smaller, less well-resourced landlords to develop their plans.

- Family Mosaic aim to have all homes across their stock lifted to SAP 80 (top of Band C), with a minimum permissible standard of SAP 70 (bottom of Band C), by 2020.
- Peabody have an Environmental Sustainability Strategy 2015-2020 that aligns with national fuel poverty targets by raising “the energy efficiency standard of our homes to a minimum of Band C by 2030, where reasonably practicable. We will achieve this through a mixture of refurbishment, installing renewable energy systems and strategic stock disposal.” In October 2015 they advised that they were working on an implementation plan.
- Southern Housing has advised that they are reviewing their plan in light of recent changes to housing finance.
- Circle are likewise reviewing their overall stock targets and will have one set by spring 2016.

4.2 Recommendation 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.

Response: Residential Environmental Health routinely carry out proactive street surveys using intelligence and other data that identifies many hazards, including damp and mould, and excess cold. These two hazards can often be a significant factor contributing to and exacerbating the problem of fuel poverty. Future work with other Council teams including the Public Health Intelligence Team could potentially explore the relationship between the prevalence of fuel poverty and the private rented sector.

Recently some excess cold surveys have been undertaken in F and G rated privately rented accommodation using information from our Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) database. This use of data showed how Environmental Health could facilitate some of their proactive housing interventions to tackle excess cold hazards. Environmental Health and the Seasonal Health & Affordable Warmth Team will develop their data matching further.

This type of work is an example of how Residential Environmental Health could potentially use their powers to help address some of the problems caused by private landlords not meeting standards, particularly those coming into force in 2018. Concerns over the many loopholes in the regulations, and their dependence on a funding stream like the now defunct Green Deal, means that we will prioritise enforcement of standards under the Housing Act 2004.

- 4.3 Recommendation 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.

Response: The Health and Wellbeing Board have advised that, whilst they do not plan to formally adopt the recommendations, they very much welcome the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Public Health guideline on excess winter deaths and morbidity, and the health risks associated with cold homes, and notes how the pioneering work of SHINE in Islington has contributed to shaping this guidance. The 'single point of contact' principle articulated in the NICE guidance is important locally, because many health professionals find it difficult to navigate and refer patients/residents into the range of different housing interventions and advice available, depending on residents' tenure/housing status. The Board therefore supports the important role SHINE plays in this area.

A number of programmes and initiatives are already being delivered in Islington, aligned to the delivery of Islington's Health and Wellbeing Strategy and its three broad strategic priorities, that recognise and encourage greater participation of health and social care staff in identifying and addressing fuel poverty. They include:-

- The "Making Every Contact Count" e-learning programme, which will upskill a wide range of people working in the Council, the NHS and Voluntary and Community Sector to identify needs and signpost into local services, including SHINE.
- Collaborative work between HASS and Islington Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to develop and improve referral pathways between General Practitioners and housing services, which may include, for example, identifying a single point of contact within housing services to co-ordinate actions for tenants with multiple needs.
- Islington's "Links for Living" online directory offers advice, information and support for Islington residents and their carers in order to support healthy, independent lives, including information and signposting to SHINE.
- An NHS-funded post in Residential Environmental Health is establishing and improving links between health organisations and the Council, particularly on housing in the private rented sector, which comprises 27% of households in Islington.
- Family Mosaic is currently delivering a research project 'Health Begins at Home', partly based in Islington. This is high quality research looking at the outcomes and cost-effectiveness of three models of health improvement through housing: usual care (no intervention), signposting by a housing officer, and support from a dedicated health worker based in housing.

Improving health through housing requires joined-up actions in both the health and housing sectors so that health problems are recognised by housing and housing problems are recognised by health services, and residents are supported into appropriate services and interventions.

The Health and Wellbeing Board will maintain oversight of these programmes as they develop, through periodic progress reports on the health and housing work being taken forward in Islington, and through championing a joined up approach across the health and care system.

4.4 **Recommendation 4: That the Council undertakes steps to ensure that vulnerable people claim their full entitlement of benefits, including the Warm Home Discount.**

Response: The Warm Home Discount is a valuable reduction in bills for many low income households, particularly those living in older, hard to insulate homes that have not yet benefited from significant fabric improvements. The Council is the only organisation in the UK to have negotiated a bulk referral programme with the main suppliers and since November 2013 has secured Warm Home Discounts for around 2,400 households. In 2015 we commenced a similar process with Thames Water for their social water tariff. This summer we began working with a number of housing associations to further promote these discounts to their tenants in Islington and we will work with colleagues in Residential Environmental Health to target private sector homes for income maximisation and the Warm Home Discount. SHINE Advisors will also receive advanced training on welfare rights.

Despite cuts, we have retained the funding to maintain our Income Maximisation team which continues to work actively with referred clients, including assessing their likelihood of obtaining employment and maximising their entitlements. The Council also continues to provide the highest level of funding in London to enable the voluntary sector to advise and support clients appropriately including entitlements and changes to welfare benefits.

4.5 **Recommendation 5: That the Council lobbies the Government and the Mayor for London for more investment for fuel poverty reduction schemes, particularly in harder to treat housing**

Response: We recognise that central government schemes to address fuel poverty through housing improvements have been inadequate and that London in particular has lost out due to a number of factors including our high prevalence of older, challenging homes. We have lobbied the Department of Energy & Climate Change, both as the Council and also as members of the association of local energy officers. We maintain that local authorities are best placed to deliver fuel poverty programmes in their areas and, alongside organisations such as Citizens' Advice and National Energy Action, we favour emulation of the scheme operating in Scotland, whereby local authorities are allocated funding for fuel poverty based on need. We further favour an allocation to London that compensates for its historic funding shortfall.

The full details of the next energy supplier obligation post-2017 will not be available until after the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. The Secretary of State for Energy & Climate Change has publicly said that she would like more of it to go towards tackling fuel poverty, though the Conservative manifesto commitment only proposes to deliver 'low-cost' measures, meaning that hard to treat housing may continue to be disadvantaged. We have argued that certain measures should be rated beyond their carbon emissions alone in order to deliver more challenging measures, particularly in smaller properties where carbon savings alone may not be significant. Such a rating would take into account health and social care cost savings.

In advance of the Spending Review we will lobby the Secretary of State on the inadequate level of spend so far on fuel poverty, the particular lack of investment in London and the danger of alignment with a definition of fuel poverty that discriminates against smaller homes, no matter the level of poverty within them. We will also work the Mayor of London's office to reinforce this message.

4.6 **Recommendation 6: That the Council continues to proactively engage with partners and shares best practice with other authorities.**

Response: The Council delivers a significant proportion of its work co-ordinating action and tackling fuel poverty via its Seasonal Health & Affordable Warmth Team. We continually seek to expand the reach of the SHINE programme by recruiting new partners, and this year we have improved our engagement with private sector partners such as National Grid and Thames Water.

The Council's Seasonal Health & Affordable Warmth Team is frequently asked to speak at events on its

work and this is aided by funding from the recent Ashden Award which covers dissemination costs. The team head has this year spoken at the launch of a European fuel poverty project in Paris, at the launch of a similar project to SHINE in Bristol, and to a meeting of South East energy officers, as well as having a stand at the National Energy Action (NEA) conference. This autumn we will also speak at the National Institute for Health & Care Excellence (NICE) conference and an event on fuel poverty and health in the North of England.

The Seasonal Health & Affordable Warmth Team is currently seeking external funding to compile a 'how to' guide for health and social care engagement, using both our own experiences and those of other successful local authorities.

The Council will work with London Councils and the Local Government Association to share the work of SHINE and best practice with other local authorities.

4.7 Recommendation 7: That the Council and partners provide and promote services to alleviate energy debt.

Response: The Council's own affordable warmth advice service takes an active role in alleviating energy debt. In the eighteen months to September advisors secured debt relief of £82,000 from various trust funds. The specialist knowledge and extensive experience of staff means that we have a success rate of over 80% with these cases, higher than many comparable advice providers. We are already actively working with advice agencies such as the CAB, Islington Law Centre and Islington People's Rights on this area.

Going forward we will deliver the following service improvements:

- A training programme for Council and third sector partners on fuel debt relief
- A new HomeSmart education programme on energy and fuel debt prevention
- A renewed fuel debt action plan, joint with other advice agencies, as part of the review of the Seasonal Health & Affordable Warmth Strategy
- In developing a new Islington Energy company we will develop an equitable debt prevention and alleviation strategy

4.8 Recommendation 8: That officers ascertain whether Council void contracts included a requirement to undertake draught insulation in void properties and if they did not, that this be added into future contracts.

Response: Housing have advised that they are currently reviewing our voids standard and that, following this recommendation, draught proofing and secondary glazing will be considered for inclusion within this.

5. Implications

Financial implications:

5.1 None.

Legal Implications:

5.2 The Health and Social Care Act 2012 confers duties on local authorities to improve public health.

Section 12 of the ("the 2012 Act") inserted a new section 2B into the National Health Service Act 2006 ("the 2006 Act") which imposes a duty on each relevant local authority to take such steps as it considers appropriate to improve the health of the people in its area. Section 2B(3) of the NHS Act 2006 provides that such steps include providing services for the prevention, diagnosis or treatment of illness.

The Care Act 2014 requires us to actively seek improvements in aspects of wellbeing such as the suitability of living accommodation, to co-operate with relevant partners such as housing providers and to provide and arrange services that prevent, delay or reduce individuals' or carers' need for care and support.

Environmental Implications

4.3 None identified. Energy efficiency interventions reduce carbon emissions.

Resident Impact Assessment:

4.4 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The Council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The Council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

A Resident Impact Assessment was carried out in October 2015. The main findings are that there are not considered to be any negative impacts on residents with protected characteristics. There is evidence that fuel poverty and its health impacts have a disproportionate impact on older people, people with disabilities, families with young children and people with certain conditions such as sickle cell disease and thalassaemia that are more prevalent amongst certain ethnic groups. Measures to tackle fuel poverty will be of particular benefit to these groups and overall those in disadvantaged economic groups.

Signed by:



13.11.15

Executive Member for Environment and Transport Date

Appendices – none

Background papers: None

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