



Report of: **Corporate Director for Environment and Regeneration**

Meeting of:	Date	Agenda item	Ward(s)
Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee	20-09-2016		All

Delete as appropriate		Non-exempt
-----------------------	--	------------

## **SUBJECT: Report back on fuel poverty scrutiny**

### **1. Synopsis**

1.1 The Environment & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee conducted a review which ran from October 2014 until May 2015 and evidence was received from a variety of sources. The committee's recommendations are directed towards several departments of the council and to the Health & Wellbeing Board. This report summarises actions being taken to address the recommendations.

### **2. Recommendations**

2.1 To note progress against the recommendations made by the committee as of September 2016

### **3. Background**

3.1 Between October 2014 and May 2015 the scrutiny committee explored 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 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.

3.3 It should be noted that a number of significant policy changes have been proposed at national level since the conclusion of the scrutiny, combined with the advent of a new government and new Mayor of London these have altered the landscape somewhat. These are addressed in the progress report.

### **4. Implications**

**4.1 Financial implications:**

The report on the progress on the recommendations set out in Appendix A does not have any financial implications.

**4.2 Legal Implications:**

The report on the progress on the recommendations as set out in Appendix A does not have any specific legal implications.

**4.3 Environmental Implications:**

None identified. Energy efficiency interventions reduce carbon emissions.

**4.4 Resident Impact Assessment:**

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 and reviewed in September 2016. The main findings follow. There are not believed to 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.

**5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

5.1 A number of actions have been taken since the conclusion of the scrutiny and these are detailed in Appendix A. Members are invited to note these actions. With some greater certainty on the direction of government policy on fuel poverty we hope to develop a new fuel poverty strategy for Islington by the end of 2016/17. This will further build on the recommendations of the committee.

**Appendices**

Appendix A: The Committee's Recommendations And Progress

Final report clearance:

**Signed by:**



Kevin O'Leary  
Corporate Director for Environment &  
Regeneration

Date 7 September 2016

**Received by:**

Head of Democratic Services

Date

Report Author: John Kolm-Murray  
Tel: 020 7527 3800  
Fax: 020 7527 2332  
Email: [John.kolm-murray@islington.gov.uk](mailto:John.kolm-murray@islington.gov.uk)

## APPENDIX A: THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROGRESS

**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.

**PROGRESS** – We have a target to bring the majority of council properties up to at least Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) SAP Band D by 2022 and all LBI-managed homes to SAP Band C by 2030. Government proposals to make all social housing in the lowest SAP bands (F and G) automatically eligible for funding from 2017 without residents means testing should assist in meeting this target.

We now have a SAP band rating for all directly-managed Council properties. The main focus over the next 12 months will be updating our asset management software with information relating to recently-completed capital schemes and collecting energy efficiency information in respect of PFI properties.

Over 98% of directly-managed properties are rated band D and above. There are 223 properties at band E and 53 properties in bands F and G.

It is likely that the Housing & Planning Act 2016 will have a material impact on the Council's housing stock through the enforced sale of high-value voids and this may well affect the achievement of any energy efficiency targets.

The setting of a common target for social housing in the borough has been discussed with social landlords however they have been reluctant to set this. However we have received information from several social landlords representing over 9,400 homes in the borough and 73% of these dwellings are already at SAP Band D or above, with 51% at SAP Band C or above. Several landlords expected to have difficulties reaching the 2030 target and this could be a challenge for Partners-managed properties too given funding levels.

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. The matter has been raised with the GLA however they are yet to agree their detailed priorities in light of the very recent appointment of a new Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy.

**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.

**PROGRESS** – Residential Environmental Health are feeding into the Councils corporate big data project which should include allocating resources to explore the relationship between fuel poverty and the private rented sector. This is just one example of how the council is developing data matching further to target poor energy efficiency in the private rented sector.

In preparation of the forthcoming private rented sector energy efficiency regulations Residential Environmental Health are planning to prioritise the improvement of standards under the Housing Act 2004. Two examples of how this can be done is for Residential Environmental Health Officers to be authorised to enforce the Energy Performance certificates legislation and are also currently considering developing grant aid to match fund any improvements required to improve heating and thermal insulation.

As they stand the Private Rented Sector Energy Efficiency Regulations (Domestic) as they stand are very dependent on the now defunct Green Deal as they stipulate that there should be no upfront cost to the landlord. The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will be consulting on amended regulations in 2017 that may instead set a cost cap for landlords. There is some opposition to this amongst the private landlords' lobby and Cllr Webbe wrote to the Energy Minister in August 2016 calling for her to resist this pressure.

The recent Housing & Planning Act allows for local authorities to access Tenancy Deposit Scheme for the first time and free local authority access to Energy Performance Certificate data is also imminent. Combining these two data sets should allow us to more effectively tackle the worst performing privately rented properties.

**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.

**PROGRESS** – The Health and Wellbeing Board 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 support's 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 Contract Count" e-learning programme, which is upskilling a wide range of people working in Islington Council, the NHS and Voluntary and Community Sector to identify needs and signpost into local services, including SHINE.
- Collaborative work between HASS and Islington 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.
- The Seasonal Health & Affordable (SHAW) Team in 2016 co-produced training for health practitioners with the Camden & Islington NHS Foundation Trust Recovery College on the effects of housing on health, both mental and physical, and referral routes to SHINE.

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.

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

**PROGRESS** – By the end of winter 2015/16 Warm Home Discounts had been secured for over 3,300 low income Islington households and we aim to secure at least 800 further discounts over this autumn and winter. In 2015 we commenced a similar process with Thames Water for their social tariff, providing either capped bills (for metered consumers) or discounts of 50% (for unmetered consumers) to those deemed to be in water poverty. From winter 2017/18 the government plans to pay Warm Home Discounts to eligible households automatically through a data matching exercise between the Department for Work & Pensions, HM Revenue & Customs and energy suppliers.

The council's Welfare Rights Team continues to assist residents to secure the benefits they are entitled to and SHINE refers hundreds of residents each year for their services. Advisors working in the SHINE Hub are also receiving advanced benefits training to assist them in helping residents who may be eligible for further social security benefits.

**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

**PROGRESS** – In summer 2016 the government consulted on its new funding arrangement for domestic energy efficiency measures, the Energy Company Obligation – Help to Heat. Regrettably this reduced the funding available through the previous supplier obligation from £800 million to £640 million however the revised programme will be focussed much more on the fuel poor. Several other changes to the scheme are positive: a move away from individualised property scoring to set scores for particular measures should favour some works in harder to treat properties; simplified benefit criteria; an increase in the number of eligible households from 3 million to 4 million across Great Britain; all social housing below SAP Band E to qualify for funding without further means-testing; and allowing suppliers to deliver a proportion of their target through local authority certification of vulnerable households. This could be of considerable benefit to a scheme like SHINE and its Warmth on Prescription element.

On the flipside suppliers will still be able to cherry-pick where they deliver their obligation and their reluctance to work in London is likely to remain. BEIS have made some broad statements about exploring incentives to work in underserved areas but we will continue to lobby them, with the GLA and the Association of Local Energy Officers London (ALEO London) to set a regional obligation for London. The consultation also proposed to retain the solid wall insulation minimum at its current level and we have called for this to be far higher. The nature of the proposed new obligation also means that it will place a greater burden on local authorities to have data on the housing stock in their areas and this is likely to have a significant resource implication if we are to secure significant funding across tenures.

The GLA yet to agree their detailed priorities in light of the very recent appointment of a new Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy but we expect our objectives to be in alignment and will continue to work with them to deliver the best deal for London boroughs such as our own.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** That the council continues to proactively engage with partners and shares best practice with other authorities.

**PROGRESS** – SHINE continues to recruit new partners and this year has seen increased involvement from local mental health services in particular. We are also exploring partnership opportunities with UK Power Networks and National Grid for their engagement with vulnerable power and gas customers. The smart meter rollout also presents an opportunity to reach vulnerable consumers and we have had discussions with Thames Water and energy suppliers to facilitate referrals.

In December 2015 SHINE was among the winners of a cross-European fuel poverty competition run by Ashoka and Schneider Electric and received business development support. Staff have also presented on the work at various conferences and seminars and in September will be giving evidence before the All Party Parliamentary Group on Fuel Poverty & Energy Efficiency.

Council officers have also been discussing the rollout of SHINE to nearby London boroughs and are actively seeking funding from a variety of sources to do so. The advent of a new, overarching energy brand for the Islington energy service is also intended to further raise the profile of SHINE and related activities.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** That the council and partners provide and promote services to alleviate energy debt.

**PROGRESS** – In July 2016 the Affordable Energy Board and Islington Debt Coalition adopted a new Energy & Water Debt Action Plan. This plan seeks to consolidate and improve the approach of the council and partners to energy and water debt. Energy and water debt training sessions have already been run for frontline staff across the council and partner agencies to allow them to better assist indebted clients and a seminar on the subject will be held in September 2016.

The number of debt cases handled by council energy advisors rose by almost 40% between 2014/15 and 2015/16.

**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

**PROGRESS** – Housing voids team contractors now carry out draught proofing to front doors on all properties, unless they are composite uPVC. They also will carry this work out on sash windows where they are particularly bad. Energy and housing officers are exploring other means of improving energy efficiency in void properties.