

Meeting	Cabinet
Date	25 February 2013
Subject	Reference from Council – Fuel Poverty in Barnet
Report of Summary	Cabinet Member for Housing <p>The Council on 6 November 2012 received a Non-Executive Business Item in the name of Councillor Julie Johnson on Fuel Poverty in Barnet. The Business Item requested Cabinet to urgently consider ways it can assist Barnet residents affected by fuel poverty – particularly the elderly and vulnerable. This report outlines current and future measures being undertaken in Barnet to mitigate fuel poverty.</p>
Officer Contributors	Andrew Milne – Acting Head of Environmental Health Dr Laura Fabunmi – Assistant Director Public Health
Status (public or exempt)	Public
Wards Affected	Not Applicable
Key Decision	No
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in	Not applicable
Function of	Executive
Enclosures	None
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1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That Cabinet notes the range of activity and intervention in relation to Fuel Poverty in Barnet as set out in the report below.**
- 1.2 That Cabinet gives consideration to the range of activity undertaken by Barnet and other agencies and determine whether this is appropriate.**

2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS

- 2.1 Provision for mitigation of fuel poverty is contained within Barnet Council's Private Sector Housing Financial Assistance Policy (DPR 1690). This outlines a number of schemes where measures can be put in place to improve the thermal efficiency of dwellings and help to reduce the risk of fuel poverty.
- 2.2 Council, 6 November 2012, Decision Item 16, Non-Executive Business Item in the name of Councillor Julie Johnson. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 31.5 Councillor Julie Johnson requested that her item be referred directly to Cabinet. "RESOLVED - Household energy bills have increased by around £200 in the last two years, and given the imminent onset of the cold weather Council asks Cabinet to urgently consider ways it can assist Barnet residents affected by fuel poverty – particularly the elderly and vulnerable."

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The policy meets the Council's key Corporate Priorities detailed in the Barnet Corporate Plan 2012 – 2013 as follows:-
 - Better Services With Less Money – Ensures that resources are targeted to the poorest and most vulnerable residents and maximised to ensure that more grants are achieved with the same budget constraints leading to reduction in care and health costs.
 - Sharing Opportunities and Responsibilities – Contributes to the independent living of children, young people and adults by delivering the necessary adaptations to meet their needs. Decent Homes offers direct support to our most vulnerable residents. Expenditure on prevention models produce significant cost savings in terms of health and care services.
 - Successful London Suburb – Empty properties detract from the sense of economic, social and environmental well-being in a neighbourhood and bringing them back into use promotes that well-being. Addressing non-decent homes improves and preserves the housing stock within the area.

3.2 One Barnet: A Sustainable Community Strategy for Barnet, 2010 – 2020 has 4 priorities for the Council and its partners over the next 10 years. These are listed below along with the contribution that the grants will make to achieving them:

- A Successful London Suburb
 - Reducing the number of non-decent homes.
 - Preserving the housing stock, improving its energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions.
- Healthier and Independent Living
 - Decent Homes Grants to target vulnerable people living in private sector non-decent homes to bring homes up to the decent homes standard.
 - Winter Well grants target residents with health conditions that are likely to deteriorate as a result of their poor housing conditions.

3.3 Energy Act 2011 introduced Green Deal and the Energy Company Obligation as measures to help reduce carbon emissions and increase energy efficiency of dwellings

4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

4.1 The issues involved in this policy are unlikely to raise significant levels of public concern; the existing grants policy sources external funding to assist with mitigating fuel poverty for vulnerable residents in Barnet.

5. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

5.1 Pursuant to section 149 of the Equality Act, 2010, the council has a public sector to have due regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; advancing equality of opportunity between those with a protected characteristic and those without; promoting good relations between those with a protected characteristic and those without. The, relevant, 'protected characteristics' are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. It also covers marriage and civil partnership with regard to elimination discrimination.

5.2 The grant policies ensure assistance is targeted towards the most vulnerable residents and are decided upon by the application of set criteria.

5.3 Any regulatory activity, aside from the issuing of grants, is carried out in accordance with an agreed Enforcement and Prosecution Policy - which complies with the public sector equality duty set out in paragraph

5.1, above, to ensure the objective application of powers and responsibilities

6. USE OF RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (Finance, Procurement, Performance & Value for Money, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 6.1 All grant activity referred to in this report is provided by external sources.
- 6.2 For the Decent Homes Grants, staffing costs are covered by a 10% top slice from the regional housing pot, targeted funding stream, allocated to the North London Housing Sub Region.
- 6.3 Winter Well grants are administered by the Care & Repair Agency. The Agency is funded by Supporting People and fee-based income.

7. LEGAL ISSUES

- 7.1 The powers and duties to offer grant assistance for private sector housing are contained in The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 and the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002.

8. CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS (Relevant section from the Constitution, Key/Non-Key Decision)

- 8.1 Council's Constitution, Part 3, Responsibility for Executive Functions – Section 3.2 details the responsibilities of individual Cabinet Members. The Cabinet Member for Housing has responsibility for leading on budget and policy formulation and implementation in relation to housing.
- 8.2 Council's Constitution, Council Procedure Rules – rule 31.5 states that “If the Member's Business Item is not dealt with by the end of the meeting, it will be referred to the Cabinet or an appropriate Council Committee or sub-Committee for consideration and any necessary action.”

9. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

9.1 Background

- 9.1.1 For many homes, keeping the home warm is financially difficult and often impossible because of the need to spend more than 10% of

household income on all fuel use including heating the home to an adequate level of warmth. This is known as fuel poverty.

9.2 Current Policy and Existing Measures

Winter Well – Funded by the Department of Health delivered by the Council

- 9.2.1 The Cold Weather Plan for England published in November 2011 sets out a series of clear actions to be taken by the NHS, social care and other public agencies; professionals working with vulnerable people as well as by individuals and local communities to minimise the effects of severe cold weather on health.
- 9.2.2 The Barnet Winter Well Programme is a joint initiative between LBB, Barnet NHS and the voluntary sector (Energise Barnet, CAB and community Barnet). It aims to reduce the impact of cold weather and cold homes on the health of the vulnerable population of Barnet in line with the recommendations of the Cold Weather Plan. The programme focuses on:
- Raising awareness of the effect of cold weather on the health of the population of Barnet, and
 - Providing assistance with heating improvements and insulation for vulnerable people
- 9.2.3 There are various government grants and initiatives that will reduce fuel bills by improving insulation and heating available for owner-occupiers and those in private rented homes who are receiving certain benefits. The winter well programme assists vulnerable people in obtaining these grants and accessing other forms of funding
- 9.2.4 The project commenced in December 2011 with a general awareness raising campaign. This was further boosted by an allocation of funding of £83k in February 2012 as a result of a successful bid to the Department of Health Warmer Homes, Healthy People fund. This provided more financial assistance and allowed closer partnership working with the voluntary sector.
- 9.2.5 Further funding of £83k was obtained following another successful bid to the Department of Health Warmer Homes, Healthy People in November 2012. This has enabled the programme to continue this winter and further embed measures which were put in place last year. Output from the programme thus far includes:
- Winter Well 2011/12 delivered improvements to 26 properties ranging from draught proofing to installation of full central heating.

- Winter Well 2012/13 has so far delivered improvements to 11 properties with a further 9 referrals in the pipeline.
- There have been a total of 356 attendees for the Citizens Advice training sessions primarily giving advice on switching energy providers and the grants that are available.

9.2.6 By addressing better preparation for winter and targeting thermal efficiency of homes, it is anticipated that this will lead to fewer winter deaths and morbidity and thus winter pressures on the NHS and social care services in Barnet.

Decent Homes Grants - Funded by the Mayor of London delivered by Environmental Health.

9.2.7 The Decent Homes standard is the minimum benchmark standard for housing in both the social and private sectors. In Barnet 44,435 homes were non-decent in 2009. (Source: Building Research Establishment).

9.2.8 A home is “decent” if:

- i. It contains no serious (Category 1 HHSRS) hazards
- ii. It is in a reasonable state of repair
- iii. It has reasonably modern facilities and services i.e.
 - a reasonably modern kitchen (20 years old or less) with adequate space and layout;
 - an appropriately located and reasonably modern bathroom (30 years old or less) and toilet;
 - adequate insulation against external noise (where external noise is a problem); and
 - adequate size and layout of common areas for blocks of flats
- iv. It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort i.e. it has efficient heating and insulation

9.2.9 This grant, when applied to eliminating excess cold, tends to deal with the larger items such as replacement boilers or provision of central heating.

9.2.10 Decent homes grants made 15 homes more thermally efficient in 2011-12 and 30 homes so far in 2012-13.

Re: New. - Funded by the GLA, contract monitored by the Council.

9.2.11 This scheme delivered simple cost saving measures such as low energy light bulbs, hot water cylinder jackets, standby switches, radiator panels and TRV controls. It also provides advice, and explores whether clients are receiving the correct level of benefit. Activities undertaken in Barnet are as follows:

Renew 1 2011-12

- 1533 Home energy visits (advice).
- 1183 Homes received easy measures (including but not limited to Low energy bulbs, tap aerators, radiator panels, standby switches and realtime monitors).
- 281 Income maximisation referrals.

Renew 2 to end of November 2012

- 702 Home energy visits (advice).
- 641 Homes received easy measures (including but not limited to Low energy bulbs, tap aerators, radiator panels, standby switches, realtime monitors).
- 99 Income maximisation referrals.

Private Sector Housing Enforcement.

9.2.12 Environmental Health has mandatory powers under the Housing Act 2004 to eliminate “Category 1 Hazards” within residential properties. One of the Category 1 hazards is excess cold. Environmental Health Officers can serve statutory notices to require the owner to put in measures to eliminate excess cold. Typically those measures could include insulation, provision of central heating, double glazing.

- In 2011-12 42 properties in the private rented sector in Barnet were thermally improved through enforcement action by Environmental Health Officers.
- So far in 2012-13 64 properties in the private rented sector in Barnet were thermally improved through enforcement action by Environmental Health Officers.

9.3 Future Measures

Green Deal

9.3.1 The Green Deal is the new Coalition Government initiative that is designed to help businesses and home owners to employ more green technologies in their properties. The idea is simple; install new green technology into the property with no up front costs. The costs are repaid through energy bill over a period of time.

9.3.2 There are a number of important consumer protections which will be embedded into the Green Deal. These include the following prerequisites for all Green Deal plans:

1. The expected financial savings must be equal to or greater than the costs attached to the energy bill, known as “the golden rule” of the Green Deal.

2. The measures must be approved and the claimed bill savings must be those accredited through this process.
3. The measures installed must have been recommended for that property by an accredited, objective adviser who has carried out an assessment.
4. The measures must be installed by an accredited installer.
5. For householders, the Green Deal provider must give appropriate advice within the terms of the Consumer Credit Act and take account of the individual circumstances of the applicant.
6. The Green Deal provider must have consent from the relevant parties, including the express consent of the current energy bill-payer.
7. The presence of a Green Deal must be properly disclosed to subsequent bill payers (e.g. new owners or tenants) alongside energy performance information.
8. Energy suppliers must collect the Green Deal charge and pass it on within the existing regulatory safeguards for collecting energy bill payments – including protections for vulnerable consumers.

9.3.3 Green Deal funding is unlike a conventional loan because if you move out of the property the bill stays with the property where the savings are occurring and not with the bill payer.

9.3.4 As an initial position regarding Green Deal, it is proposed that the Council act as a Green Deal promoter; any enquiries regarding Green Deal received by Environmental Health will be passed to the local Social Enterprise “Energise Barnet” who will guide applicants through the process and will source the best deal from the market. It is possible that the new One Barnet DRS provider may wish to review this and propose a different operating model.

The Energy Companies Obligation (ECO)

9.3.5 The Energy Companies Obligation (ECO) is a government scheme to run parallel with Green Deal, it is designed to reduce the UK’s energy consumption and support those living in fuel poverty by funding energy efficiency improvements worth around £1.3 billion every year.

9.3.6 The ECO Order was made on 4 December 2012 and is now in effect. The ECO will run from January 2013 until March 2015, supporting the installation of energy efficiency measures in low-income households and properties that are harder to treat. It will work

alongside the Green Deal to give consumers new ways of funding energy efficiency improvements in their homes.

9.3.7 The Green Deal and ECO will also help reduce carbon emissions from the UK's domestic building stock, which is essential to meet statutory domestic carbon emission reduction targets by 2050.

9.3.8 It is proposed to operate ECO in the same manner as Green Deal; initially refer residents through Energise Barnet to source available funding.

9.4 Matters for Cabinet Consideration

9.4.1 This report outlines existing and future measures being undertaken in Barnet by the Council and other agencies to mitigate fuel poverty. Cabinet are requested to consider these measures and determine whether any further action is required to assist Barnet residents affected by fuel poverty, particularly the elderly and vulnerable, as requested by the Non-Executive Business Item referred by Council.

10. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

10.2 The Housing Renewal Grants (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2008.

10.3 Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002.

10.4 The Disabled Facilities Grants (Maximum Amounts and Additional Purposes) (England) Order 2008.

10.5 London Borough of Barnet Private Sector Housing Renewal Policy November 2003.

10.6 The Energy Act 2011

10.7 Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should contact Andrew Milne, Acting Head of Environmental Health on 020 8359 7470.

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