

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 18 December 2019
Report Subject	Domestic Energy Programmes
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Protection
Report Author	Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fuel poverty is identified in the current Council Plan as a priority for action. The 2017 private sector stock condition survey estimated that over 20% of Flintshire households are at risk of fuel poverty.

This report summarises the approaches taken by the Council's Domestic Energy Efficiency Programme team to reduce fuel poverty and to improve the quality of life of residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Members note the progress made in delivering domestic energy efficiency programmes to support fuel-poor households in Flintshire.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	Explaining the domestic energy programmes
	<u>Background</u>
1.01	Fuel poverty is identified in the current Council Plan as a priority area for action. Welsh Government define a household as living in fuel poverty if they spend more than 10% of their income on energy costs. If the household spends more than 20% on energy costs they are defined as living in severe fuel poverty. Households are much more likely to be fuel poor if they are living in a home that is not energy efficient (43% for inefficient homes compared to 5% for efficient). The challenge in reducing fuel poverty is considerable due to the number of older homes present in the Welsh housing stock which are expensive to make more efficient.
1.02	Using these definitions, the 2017 private sector stock condition survey commissioned by the Council estimated that 20.7% of Flintshire households were experiencing fuel poverty and 3.4% severe fuel poverty. This was equivalent to the average rates for Wales as a whole at the time. The survey found that fuel poverty tended to be concentrated in lower income and in older households.
1.03	There is considerable evidence to show that the condition of homes has a great effect on the health and well-being of those living in them. Poor quality housing has a significant impact on health and upon the well-being and attainment of children.
1.04	<p>The 2017 survey found that the mix of heating types being used in the County included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas 79% (44,920) • Oil 10% (5,790) • Solid fuel 2% (1,220) • Electricity 8% (4,620) which will include some efficient heating systems but will largely comprise lower efficiency storage heaters. <p>Oil, solid fuel and traditional electrical-based heating systems are more likely to be inefficient and to cost more to run than gas or renewable energy systems; placing lower income households at increased risk of fuel poverty.</p>
	<u>The Domestic Energy Efficiency Programme team</u>
1.05	The Domestic Energy Efficiency Programme team leads the approach to tackling fuel poverty in Flintshire. The team currently comprises five members of staff. The service is not funded by the Council and operates entirely on a fee-earning basis; covering all of its operating costs by charging other organisations and funding bodies for the work that it does.

1.06	<p>In the past five years the Domestic Energy Efficiency Programme team has installed 4,600 energy efficiency measures in 4,000 properties in Flintshire. The total value of this investment was approximately £12m. This is estimated to be collectively saving residents over £1.2m each year. It also estimated that these measures will save over 123,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide during their operational lifetime.</p>
1.07	<p>The team engages with eligible households through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct promotion • Attendance at events • Direct approaches through neighbourhood-based schemes • Referrals from other agencies • Engagement with town and community councils • Close partnership working with Care and Repair North East Wales • Word of mouth <p>Word of mouth is particularly important as the most vulnerable households have tended to be those least likely to approach the team to ask for help. In some cases householders need to be persuaded to accept any help or that they can receive support. Council Members and Town and Community Councillors have a very important role to play in spreading the word about the support available.</p>
1.08	<p>Mrs J was identified by the team as needing support during house calls in her neighbourhood. She is 93 and lives alone. The house lacked an effective heating system, was extremely cold and in generally very poor repair. The Council encouraged Mrs. J to take advantage of the support available and brought together a package of funding including Warm Homes Fund, utility company funding and funding provided by the Council heating contractor through its social value commitments. This has enabled Mrs. J to receive a full heating system at no cost with the works overseen by Council staff who also supported Mrs. J through the process as it was a source of considerable concern to her. Mrs. J said the new heating system “is luxurious with a capital L! I would not have made this Christmas without this help.” The Council has made a number of follow-up visits to Mrs. J since the work was completed to provide further support and to help her to use her new heating system.</p> <p>Mr. B was referred to the team by her Ward Councillor. Mr. B has a number of health concerns, is in his 80s and lives alone. His house had no working heating system and he had no money to repair it. The Council brought together a funding package including utility company funding and its own crisis fund to provide a new heating system. The Council managed the installation process and visited Mr B several times afterwards to offer further support. Mr. B said “The scheme is excellent. It’s made a lot of difference to me. With the onset of winter coming, I feel more secure now that the heating will work.”</p>
1.09	<p>The funding for energy efficiency improvements to properties is extremely complicated and changes on a very frequent basis. Many of the households that the team work with are vulnerable and find accessing funding very challenging. Many households decline badly needed</p>

	<p>improvements to their properties due to the complexity of the application process, the perceived disruption of the works and concerns about managing contractors. The team works closely with these households to build their trust, apply for the correct mix of funding on their behalf (often enabling them to get the home improvements at no cost) and manage the improvement works through a Council appointed contractor. This intensive support process enables even the most vulnerable households to receive home improvements and reduce their risk of poverty and dramatically improve their quality of life.</p>
1.10	<p>The main programmes of work currently being delivered by the team include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extending the mains gas network (in conjunction with Wales and West Utilities) into Ffynnongroyw to enable residents to have the option of more efficient gas heating systems; • supporting the delivery of the Welsh Government Arbed programme tackling fuel poverty in Mostyn and Penyffordd; • improving the energy efficiency of Council houses and managing the gas boiler installation and replacement programme; • delivering the Warm Homes Fund programme 2018-21 in Flintshire; installing £3m of energy efficient heating systems to fuel-poor households; • modernising the heating systems in Clwyd Alyn Housing Association homes in Flintshire; • supporting the Healthy Homes Healthy People programme being delivered by Warm Wales to link the energy programmes into wider programmes of support to meet household needs including health and income maximisation; • providing advice on energy efficiency to households and advise on getting the best prices for energy from suppliers; and • delivering a small crisis fund which funds improvements to the homes of the most vulnerable households where no other funding source can be identified.
1.11	<p>In addition, the team will be using the Welsh Government home loans programme, already operated by the Council, to offer small loans towards new heating systems for fuel-poor households. This package will allow fuel-poor and vulnerable households to receive a new heating system at no cost, with the installation managed by the Council and its appointed contractor and to have seven worry-free years as the system will be managed, maintained and repaired by the Council in addition to the manufacturer's own warranty. The loans will be repaid directly to the Council through national funding for renewable energy and not by the householder themselves.</p>
	<p><u>Future actions</u></p>
1.12	<p>As highlighted above, the funding for energy efficiency improvements is constantly changing and the Council will continue to monitor this and will continue to provide a service to householders that "hides the wiring" and provides seamless support.</p>

1.13	It is expected that there will be increased Welsh Government emphasis on domestic energy efficiency in the future; partly to address fuel poverty but mainly to reduce the carbon emissions from Welsh homes. Welsh Government is expected to release a new fuel poverty strategy early in 2020.
1.14	The Domestic Energy Efficiency Programme team is part of a wider service restructure currently underway. The team will become a Housing Regeneration team which also addresses wider private sector housing condition and which delivers the Welsh Government home loans programme. This restructure will be completed in early 2020.
2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None arising from this report.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	No new risks are identified as arising from this report.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	None required.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	None.

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Niall Waller Enterprise and Regeneration Manager Telephone: 01352 702137 E-mail: niall.waller@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	<p>Arbed – Welsh Government programme to reduce fuel poverty across Wales.</p> <p>Energy Company Obligation (ECO) – utility company funding to reduce fuel poverty.</p>

Fuel poverty – defined by Welsh Government as when a household spend more than 10% of its income on energy.

Warm Homes Fund – National Grid and Community Interest Company, Affordable Warmth Solution (AWS) have established a £150m Warm Homes Fund (WHF) designed to support local authorities, registered social landlords and other organisations working in partnership with them, to address some of the issues affecting fuel poor households. Affordable Warmth Solutions