

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

30 September 2015

REPORT OF FUEL POVERTY PARTNERSHIP

STOCKTON'S FUEL POVERTY PARTNERSHIP, AFFORDABLE WARMTH STRATEGY AND WARM HOMES HEALTHY PEOPLE PROGRAMME

1. Summary

Stockton's Fuel Poverty Partnership has been operational since September 2013 as a stand-alone thematic partnership within the LSP. Fuel Poverty is a cross cutting issue which directly impacts on an estimated 8911 households across Stockton Borough. This report outlines the ambitions of the partnership, highlights the achievements made so far and presents a revised Affordable Warmth Strategy and Action Plan aimed at bringing affordable warmth to many more households.

The 'Warm Homes Healthy People' (WHHP) programme is a key initiative within the Affordable Warmth Action Plan, to be launched on 1 October 2015. WHHP was first delivered in the winter of 2011/12 and is a partnership project providing a range of assistance measures to vulnerable members of the community whose physical and mental health can be made worse by the cold, and who require support for affordable warmth. Interventions are delivered by WHHP providers who receive funding as part of the programme. WHHP has been the subject of a thorough evaluation during the summer of 2015 and subsequently the eligibility criteria of the programme has been revised with the aim of supporting the most vulnerable members of the community and to ensure value for money.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. The Health and Well Being Board note the contents of this report, the work of the Fuel Poverty Partnership, endorse the Affordable Warmth Strategy and Action Plan and the revised Warm Homes Healthy People intervention.

DETAIL

Background

1. Fuel Poverty is a challenging health, social and economic and environmental problem which according to the latest Government statistical release affects 8911 households across Stockton Borough (DECC June 2015), representing 11.1% of total households. The estimated rate of fuel poverty in Stockton is above the England rate of 10.4% but below the regional average for the North East at 11.8%. Stockton's fuel poverty estimate is the lowest in the Tees Valley.

2. Fuel Poverty is inevitably more prevalent amongst households:-

- on a low income
- containing families with children under the age of 16
- containing people with disabilities or suffering from long-term limiting illnesses
- occupied by older people, or under occupied households

The Implications of Fuel Poverty

3. The recognised implications of fuel poverty range from psychological stress, social isolation and causing or exacerbating serious illnesses commonly respiratory or circulatory conditions. Households in fuel poverty have to face a choice between spending money to heat their home adequately and incur debt or rationing fuel and living in cold and possibly damp conditions that are prejudicial to their health.
4. The negative health impacts of living in a cold home are widely recognised in research and a growing number of practical interventions to tackle the issue and promote well-being. Reducing fuel poverty is therefore a key objective within a variety of local plans including Stockton's Health & Well-being Strategy in addition to the Affordable Warmth Strategy being considered here.

Stockton's Fuel Poverty Partnership

5. The new Affordable Warmth Strategy and action plan presented here has been developed and agreed by Stockton's Fuel Poverty Partnership. This is the Partnership's second strategy, reflecting the changing circumstances within Stockton Borough, the contribution of the Partnership since its inception in September 2013, and building on the successes delivered under the original 2014 strategy.
6. Stockton's Fuel Poverty Partnership includes representatives from Public Health, Private Sector Housing, Registered Social Landlords, Private Sector Landlords Representative, Catalyst's Voice Forum, 5 Lamps, Stockton District Advice & Information Centre and GoWarm. The contribution from partners has been generous and the collective knowledge and expertise is invaluable to ensure the Affordable Warmth Strategy and Action Plan continues to progress and achieve positive outcomes. The Partnership has recruited the right representatives to reflect the breadth of the issues to be tackled and partners are taking an active role in setting the Partnership's agenda and delivering meaningful activity.

The Objectives of the Fuel Poverty Partnership

7. The Fuel Poverty Partnership has set a number of objectives targets and developed an action plan to reflect these with an aim of reducing the incidences of fuel poverty. These include priorities such as:-
- ensuring the most vulnerable residents and the most energy inefficient properties are prioritised and targeted
 - ensuring affordable warmth and the trap of fuel poverty is recognised at the highest levels within the Council and partner organisations
 - Supporting householders to gain the lowest possible energy tariffs, reduce social inequalities in energy costs and maximise their income to help pay energy bills
 - Helping householders to reduce their energy consumption, by improved energy efficiency in their homes, and through better energy usage

- Providing interventions to support residents in crisis due to cold homes
- Continually improving the standard, warmth and energy efficiency of all housing

The specific activities aimed at delivering outcomes related to these objectives are the subject of the Action Plan and are commended to Cabinet for endorsement.

The Partnership's Activity to Date

8. Some examples of the important delivery that has taken place under the first Affordable Warmth Strategy in the last 12 months to tackle the Partnership's objectives include:
- A £1m External Wall Insulation programme via the Energy Company Obligation scheme (ECO) to 660 properties in 2014/15 taking the total number of properties improved in the last 3 years to 3253
 - 855 specific interventions delivered through the WHHP programme to support individuals and households to tackle cold homes and promote wellbeing including 111 boiler repairs/replacements through to slips, trips and falls prevention;
 - The Thirteen Group invested in energy efficiency measures in 1196 homes comprising of 2358 specific measures from replacement windows, insulation treatments to the installation of photovoltaic panels;
 - Stockton District Advice and Information Service provided comprehensive support to residents to address debt, fuel debt specifically and promote income maximisation. The service identified £420,294 in previously unclaimed benefit entitlement for WHHP clients alone during the winter of 2014/15;
 - Five Lamps provided advice to residents to help them make informed decisions concerning saving energy and switching energy provider to secure the best value for money tariff.

The Affordable Warmth Strategy

9. The Fuel Poverty Partnership is to be commended for developing and delivering an effective strategy back in 2014 and for following its action plan through to deliver good outcomes, and it has now successfully developed a revised strategy to continually improve the collective approach to delivering affordable warmth. There are 29 projects and actions contained within the attached strategy, partners continue to invest resources to see improvement in peoples properties and lives, and continually seek external funding to progress on this issue.
10. We will continue to monitor progress against the government's fuel poverty Low Income High Cost indicator, how many households in Stockton-on-Tees are suffering without affordable warmth and the performance of domestic housing stock, in assessing how we are performing on fuel poverty. The strategy is presented to Cabinet for endorsement with a report to be provided in 12 months' time detailing performance against the action plan.

Warm Homes Healthy People

11. Warm Homes Healthy People is a partnership project providing help and support to vulnerable members of the community whose physical and mental health can be made

worse by the cold, and who require support for affordable warmth. The project provides a range of assistance measures under the areas of crisis, preventative and resilience interventions.

12. An evaluation into the WHHP project was completed between April-July 2015 by officers from Economic Growth and Development Services (EGDS) and Public Health. The evaluation process included consultation with current providers along with local authorities operating similar schemes from across the UK. The programme delivery processes were evaluated to assess effectiveness over the last four years and to identify areas of future development.
13. The main recommendations following the evaluation are set out below:-
 - Maintain the single-point-of-contact for health and housing referral service for people living in cold homes currently delivered as WHHP.
 - Continue to provide tailored solutions via a single-point-of-contact health and housing referral service for people living in cold homes currently delivered as WHHP.
 - Identify possible changes to the eligibility criteria that would ensure that the WHHP programme targets the most vulnerable people. (Previous programmes of WHHP provided interventions to clients based on a broad eligibility criteria which did not include any evidenced financial or asset assessment).
 - Strengthen the procurement of the providers of these tailored solutions and services to enable further scrutiny and ensure best value for money.
 - Introduce a more robust monitoring system of the providers during the programme.
 - Provide long-term financial stability for the WHHP programme.
 - Strengthen the steering group to establish clearer roles and responsibilities.
 - Increase emphasis on raising awareness of the risk of cold homes to health and well-being and practical advice about how to keep warm at home.

Changes to Eligibility Criteria

14. Following extensive consultation with similar programmes around the UK, colleagues across Stockton-On-Tees and the WHHP Steering group, the proposed new eligibility criteria for 2015/16 will remove the current universal offer for those meeting the basic criteria. The new proposed eligibility criteria includes the introduction of a Two Tier system.
15. To be eligible for Tier 1 support, which includes interventions such as energy tariff and energy debt advice, welfare advice, a handyman service for minor repairs which impact energy efficiency and emergency heating, one of the following statements must apply to the beneficiary;
 - Aged over 75
 - Registered disabled
 - Have a long term illness made worse by the cold
 - Live with a child (under 5) who has a long-term illness made worse by the cold.

Evidence required for the Tier 1 support is in the form of a signed pro-forma with the aim of maintaining access to preventative interventions and ensuring crises are dealt with as quickly as possible.

16. For Tier 2 support, which includes potentially higher cost boiler repairs and replacements, the applicant is required to be in receipt of means tested benefit before becoming eligible and evidence must be provided and recorded before works are undertaken. The full

proposed eligibility criteria can be found attached. Signposting to other possible routes of assistance for those who are ineligible for the WHHP project is included in the process.

17. The evaluation process highlighted the importance of the programme targeting the most vulnerable households. With the introduction of new eligibility criteria, attempts are being made to ensure that essential interventions can still be delivered within a timely manner whilst ensuring that those most in need can access support.
18. The full evaluation document can be attained from paul.taylor@stockton.gov.uk or jenny.cowell@stockton.gov.uk

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

1. There are no financial implications associated with this item.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

2. There are no legal implications associated with this item.

RISK ASSESSMENT

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