

SCRUTINY BOARD (SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES)

INQUIRY INTO FUEL POVERTY

DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A household is in fuel poverty if they cannot afford to heat their home to a comfortable level. For measurement purposes, a fuel-poor household is defined as one which needs to spend more than 10% of household income to achieve a satisfactory heating regime (21 °C in the living room and 18 °C in other occupied rooms).
- 1.2 Fuel poverty impacts on individuals, the community and public services in many different ways. This inquiry sets out to reveal the real social, health, economic and environmental impacts of fuel poverty.
- 1.3 The solution to fuel poverty is to provide households with affordable warmth. However, this may require action on a number of fronts not least by improving the energy efficiency of homes and appliances but also, amongst other things, action to increase incomes, providing access to cheaper fuel and tariff options, money management and debt advice as well as energy advice to effect behavioural change and bring about a reduction in energy consumption.
- 1.4 Local authorities are directly responsible as service providers for the delivery of a range of public services that can impact on fuel poverty. However, the Council also has a role as community leader to champion affordable warmth and move action to tackle fuel poverty up the agenda of a wide range of other stakeholders and partners in the public, private and community sectors. The Scrutiny Board is well placed to take this broader view and encourage the delivery of enhanced services through joint working.
- 1.5 Within the current financial climate, there is also greater emphasis on ensuring that existing resources are being targeted effectively to those in greater need of support. Clarity about particular vulnerable groups, existing funding mechanisms and service delivery will therefore be essential before any gaps in provision can be identified and improvements developed. Any duplication of effort will also need to be addressed through more effective data sharing and partnership working.
- 1.6 There are also national policy drivers within the housing and health agendas that will need to be taken into consideration as part of this Inquiry. In particular, the introduction of the 'Green Deal', the Energy Company Obligation, the Warm Home Discount scheme and proposals within the Health and Social Care Bill 2011 to transfer responsibility for public health and health improvement to local authorities.

1.7 In March 2011, the Government also commissioned an independent review by Professor John Hills of the fuel poverty target and definition. The main objective of this review is to focus the government's resources where they will be most effective in tackling the problems underlying fuel poverty. A call for evidence exercise concluded in June 2011. It is intended that interim findings from the review, based on the analysis conducted, will be published in autumn 2011, with a final report to government no later than January 2012. This timetable should enable the findings from this national review to be considered as part of this Scrutiny Inquiry.

2.0 Scope of the inquiry

2.1 The purpose of the Inquiry is to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:

- The social, health, economic and environmental impacts of fuel poverty
- The scale of fuel poverty in Leeds and those most at risk
- National and local policy drivers aimed at tackling fuel poverty and achieving affordable warmth
- The current commitment of relevant stakeholders within public services, the private sector and community organisations in tackling fuel poverty in the short, medium and long-term
- Identification of existing partnerships, plans and strategies where fuel poverty is not currently explicitly identified as an issue but is implicitly affected by actions taken or not taken.
- Referral networks and existing services aimed at tackling fuel poverty in Leeds
- The relationship between the industry and energy regulator and how local authorities can influence the scale, frequency and targeting of price increases

3.0 Comments of the relevant Director and Executive Member

3.1 In line with Scrutiny Board Procedure Rule 12.4 comments from the Director and Executive Member will be reflected in the final terms of reference.

4.0 Timetable for the inquiry

4.1 The Inquiry will take place over a number of sessions. These sessions will also involve smaller working group meetings or visits with stakeholders, which will provide flexibility for the Board to gather and consider evidence that will aid the discussions during the public Board meetings.

4.2 The length of the Inquiry is subject to change. However it is anticipated that a final report will be produced in April 2012.

5.0 Submission of evidence

5.1 The Board will receive evidence through a combination of formal Board meetings and smaller working group meetings or visits with stakeholders.

5.2 Session one – October 2011

To consider the social, health, economic and environmental impacts of fuel poverty and the scale of fuel poverty in Leeds. In particular:

What sources of local data are available in developing and improving the understanding of local fuel poverty?

Is fuel poverty in Leeds understood well enough to be able to identify those in greater need of support?

5.3 Session two – November 2011

To consider the current commitment of the Council and its partners in eradicating fuel poverty and providing for affordable warmth within their overall objectives and strategic planning process. In particular:

Whether all relevant stakeholders within public services, the private sector and community organisations are involved in tackling fuel poverty? Is their approach co-ordinated within each organisation and between organisations?

How are existing resources being targeted to those in greater need of support? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the various options available, for example, community-based approaches?

Is there any duplication of effort that could be avoided by more effective data sharing and partnership working?

Is a multi-agency referral network in place to identify and refer households for assistance? Do households experience a seamless one-stop-shop service?

5.4 Session three – December 2011

To consider the national policy drivers aimed at tackling fuel poverty and achieving affordable warmth. In particular:

The potential implications of new national policies and programmes including the Green Deal, the Energy Company Obligation and the Warm Home Discount scheme in tackling fuel poverty.

The interim findings arising from the Hills Fuel Poverty Review (anticipated for autumn 2011).

Potential opportunities through the Health and Social Care Bill 2011 for improving the integration of NHS and local authority services in addressing fuel poverty.

5.5 Session four – February 2012

To consider the relationship between the industry and energy regulator and how local authorities can influence the scale, frequency and targeting of price increases.

To consider the final report arising from the Hills Fuel Poverty Review (anticipated for January 2012) and its implications for tackling fuel poverty in Leeds.

5.6 Session four - April 2012

To agree the Board's final report.

6.0 Witnesses

6.1 As fuel poverty cuts across a wide range of services, there are a number of potential participants to this inquiry.

The following witnesses have been identified as possible contributors to the Inquiry:

- Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods
- Executive Member for Neighbourhoods, Housing and Regeneration
- Director of Public Health
- Health Improvement Specialist (Primary Care), NHS Leeds
- Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board
- Representatives from local GP Consortia
- Leeds City Council Locality Managers
- Senior Climate Change Officer, Sustainable Development Unit
- Environmental Health Manager, Environmental Services
- Fuel Poverty Officer, Environment Policy Team
- Representatives from the National Energy Action (NEA) charity
- Director of Care & Repair
- Representatives from the Energy Retail Association
- Representative from Ofgem (Office of the Gas and Electricity Markets)
- Representatives from the Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre
- Consumer representatives

7.0 Equality, Diversity and Cohesion and Integration Issues

7.1 Where appropriate, all terms of reference for work undertaken by the Scrutiny Boards will include:

‘To review how and to what effect consideration has been given to the impact of a service or policy on all equality areas, as set out in the council’s Equality and Diversity scheme and on the Council’s Cohesion and Integration Priorities and Delivery Plan’.

7.2 The objectives of this inquiry particularly reflect the following theme from the council’s Equality and Diversity scheme:
Service Delivery – Leeds City Council provides fair access to services which meet the needs of our diverse communities and individuals.

8.0 Post inquiry report monitoring arrangements

8.1 Following the completion of the Scrutiny inquiry and the publication of the final inquiry report and recommendations, the implementation of the agreed recommendations will be monitored.

8.2 The final inquiry report will include information on the detailed arrangements for how the implementation of recommendations will be monitored.

9.0 Measures of success

9.1 It is important to consider how the Scrutiny Board will deem if their inquiry has been successful in making a difference to local people. Some measures of success may be obvious at the initial stages of an inquiry and can be included in these terms of reference. Other measures of success may become apparent as the inquiry progresses and discussions take place.