

Response from the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods on the Fuel Poverty Scrutiny Inquiry 2012 to be reported back to Scrutiny Board.

(Recommendations 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19 and 20)

1 Background information

- 1.1 The fuel poverty and affordable warmth policy arena is a complex one, cutting across housing, energy, economic development, social care and ultimately impacting on healthcare provision. Fuel poverty therefore needs to be tackled by a range of functions, with housing and energy professionals working to reduce home energy demands; economic development professionals supporting people into work to raise the incomes of the lowest income groups and social care and health care professionals referring vulnerable clients to sources of help.
- 1.2 We therefore welcome this Scrutiny Inquiry report which clearly identifies a need for many services and agencies to work together to tackle this problem and for Members to champion the policy area at multiple boards.
- 1.3 The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods has been identified as the Lead Director on a number of recommendations relating to housing and energy within the Fuel Poverty Scrutiny Report and the following is the formal response to these recommendations.
- 1.4 Recommendations 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 19 and 20 can all be accepted.
- 1.5 The scrutiny recommendations are complementary to the priorities of the Affordable Warmth Strategy (2007-2016), City Priority Plan and Public Health Outcomes Framework.

2 Response to recommendations

Recommendation 5.

That the Director of Public Health in Leeds works closely with the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to develop a clear strategy around fuel poverty data collection before April 2013.

- 2.1 The Scrutiny report recognises the need to ensure that local trends in fuel poverty are monitored effectively to demonstrate progress in tackling fuel poverty, set out in the Public Health Outcomes Framework. This is a complicated request, as fuel poverty is a function of home energy efficiency levels, energy prices, income and a host of other minor factors. Additionally, the impact of fuel poverty on an individual depends to a large extent on their vulnerability, with elderly people, the very young and people with disabilities

being much more at risk of ill health. Whilst there are good fuel poverty statistics available from Government, these are very high level. Scrutiny members were more interested in gathering and manipulating local data in order to target interventions to support most vulnerable people.

- 2.2 Currently, local fuel poverty assessments are based on the last HECA survey conducted in 2009 which Local Authorities are no longer required to undertake, whilst they await details of the successor legislation to the Home Conservation Act 1995. Therefore, the Council has suspended the annual HECA survey and instead is monitoring change using a combination of energy efficiency measures installed, fuel use data and Energy Performance Certificates. The Director of Public Health agrees to work closely with the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to develop a clear strategy around fuel poverty data collection, to include housing/energy data, income data and health factors, before the end of April 2013.

Recommendation 11.

That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods works closely with Voluntary Action Leeds to explore opportunities for delivering training on the hotspots referral scheme more widely across the third sector and in raising the profile of fuel poverty generally.

- 2.3 Over the past two years, Environment and Neighbourhoods has undertaken Hotspots/fuel poverty training for many teams and organisations that regularly come in to contact with vulnerable members of the public, including 24 voluntary sector organisations. The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods agrees to build on this progress by working with Voluntary Action Leeds to organise Hotspots training for additional third sector organisations.

Recommendation 12.

That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods monitors the development of the 'Keeping Warm in Yorkshire and Humber' web based resource tool and assists in promoting it's use once formally launched.

- 2.4 Environment and Neighbourhoods was involved in the original Warm Homes Healthy People funding bid for 'Keeping Warm in Yorkshire and Humber' and has assisted in the design and development of the toolkit. The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods agrees to embed the promotion of 'Keeping Warm in Yorkshire and Humber' in the actions of the Affordable Warmth Partnership and further promote it amongst partner organisations.

Recommendation 13.

In promoting future based schemes aimed at achieving affordable warmth we recommend that the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods works closely with the Head of Communications and Marketing to develop an appropriate framework to assist in encouraging greater take up of such schemes.

- 2.5 The Fuelsavers team in Environment and Neighbourhoods have worked closely with Corporate Communications team (and Yorkshire Energy Services, the contractor) to develop and deliver a communications plan to support Wrap Up Leeds. The communications approach has led to over 5,000 installed measures to date and the effectiveness of different channels is being monitored and will be evaluated at scheme end. The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods agrees to work closely with the Communications Team to use the lessons learnt to help develop a communications framework based on delivery of the Green Deal/ECO. This framework can then be used to co-ordinate the publicity of future domestic energy efficiency and affordable warmth schemes.

Recommendation 14.

That once available the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods reports to the Executive Board and Scrutiny on the final proposal for the Green Deal and ECO schemes and how the Council and its partners intend to promote and deliver these schemes locally.

- 2.6 The Council has engaged closely with DECC to ensure that we are well placed when the Green Deal/ECO are launched in October 2012. As part of this, the Council is acting as the 'anchor authority' to develop a detailed business case for the Leeds City Region to establish a Green Deal/ECO framework and has engaged with the Affordable Warmth Partnership to look at ways of involving local partners in delivery. The Director agrees to present the final proposals to the Executive Board for approval, along with plans to publicise and roll out the Green Deal/ECO in Leeds as soon as is practicable. To ensure that momentum from delivering Wrap Up Leeds is maintained, the Director will undertake a procurement exercise for energy efficiency led regeneration in deprived areas under ECO, to launch in October/November 2012.

Recommendation 15.

That the Council utilises the Energy Performance Certificate data, when made available by Government, to identify specific properties and areas to target with affordable warmth measures and to proactively work with energy suppliers and others to explore provision of grants from existing CERT and CESP and the forthcoming ECO.

- 2.7 The Council has worked hard since the late-90s to develop and update and update a domestic energy database. We have recently combined this database with other Council databases and GIS mapping techniques to identify specific homes, streets and neighbourhoods to target with Wrap Up Leeds and Warmfront promotion. Wrap Up Leeds is also gathering additional data on properties contacted to supplement the energy database. We have also used the evidence to select areas most suitable for CESP funding and are currently working with partners to develop CERT supported initiatives for external wall insulation and narrow-cavity wall insulation.
- 2.8 Government made the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) database available to certain organisations, including local authorities, in June 2012.

Since 2007, almost 120,000 EPC surveys have been undertaken in Leeds and the Council is now in the process of purchasing these records. These will help to target the Green Deal, ECO, RHI or other suitable energy efficiency initiatives in future.

Recommendation 19.

That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods leads on developing a strategy with key partners, including the CAB and Advice Leeds, for undertaking benefit checks on an annual basis accompanied with a service offer for conducting fuel tariff checks.

- 2.9 Over the years, Environment and Neighbourhoods has cooperated with organisations such as Welfare Rights and CAB through the Affordable Warmth Partnership and various projects to provide vulnerable residents with both income maximisation and fuel poverty advice. The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods agrees to work with Welfare Rights, CAB and Advice Leeds to develop a strategy for undertaking annual benefits checks and offering fuel tariff checks.

Recommendation 20.

That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods leads on undertaking a cost-benefit and risk analysis for the Council to bulk purchase domestic heating fuel for householders. The findings of this analysis should be reported back to the Executive Board and Scrutiny for consideration within 3 months of the South Holland documents becoming available.

- 2.10 Environment and Neighbourhoods has recently been in contact with a number of bulk fuel purchase schemes, including South Holland, in order to undertake a comparative analysis of the various proposals. The Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods agrees to develop proposals for a bulk fuel purchase scheme that also delivers energy efficiency improvements to participating households. This will be presented to the Executive Board and Scrutiny Committee within three months of the South Holland documents becoming available or earlier.