

Meeting:	Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Date:	23 January 2007
Subject:	Update on work programme
Key Decision: <i>(Executive-side only)</i>	Not applicable
Responsible Officer:	Paul Najsarek, Director People, Performance and Policy
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr David Ashton, Business Development
Status:	Part I
Encs:	N/A

SECTION 1 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report provides progress on work undertaken since the last meeting on the sub committee. It also outlines proposals for an in-depth review of affordable warmth/fuel poverty.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the sub committee

- 1) Note the work undertaken since the last meeting of the sub committee
- 2) Agree to remove the financial inclusion review from the work programme
- 3) Agree the project proposal for the affordable warmth review, beginning with a meeting to develop a scope for the review
- 4) Identify a chairman and members for the affordable warmth review

SECTION 2 - REPORT

1. **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

A challenge panel was undertaken last summer and the report agreed at the sub committee's last meeting. Cabinet considered the report on 14 December.

2. **Financial inclusion**

At the last meeting of the sub committee, members expressed interest in undertaking a review of financial inclusion. Initially it had appeared that there was scope for undertaking work on further developing advice services such as debt counselling and exploring means of building capacity within the voluntary sector.

Having explored the feasibility of undertaking such a review the sub committee is advised that there is limited scope for carrying out a review. Harrow's benefits service is a four star service (as assessed by the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate). There is limited scope for a review identifying best practice and as such a review would not make best use of scrutiny resources.

Members may, however, wish to explore benefit take-up in the context of the affordable warmth review, as outlined below.

3. **Affordable Warmth**

At the last meeting of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny sub committee, Members indicated that they would like to undertake a review examining fuel poverty. This report provides a summary of the issues to aid members' consideration of the proposal. A detailed briefing has been prepared and is currently with officers to confirm factual accuracy. It will provide an initial overview of the policy context and national drivers relating to affordable warmth as well as an introduction to local arrangements and initiatives.

3.1 **Definition of fuel poverty**

"A fuel poor household is one that cannot afford to keep adequately warm at reasonable cost. The most widely accepted definition of a fuel poor household is one which needs to spend more than 10% of its income on all fuel use and to heat its home to an adequate standard of warmth. This is generally defined as 21°C in the living room and 18°C in the other occupied rooms - the temperatures recommended by the World Health Organisation".¹

In England, the Government is aiming to eradicate fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010 and in other households by 2016. A vulnerable household is one containing children or those who are elderly, sick or disabled.² However, the target looks increasingly challenging; the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) comments that efforts to

1 DTI. (2001). UK fuel poverty strategy. p. 4

2 DTI. (2006). The UK fuel poverty strategy: fourth annual report. p. 6

tackle climate change by reducing carbon dioxide emissions are likely to put further pressure on prices.³

3.2 Rationale for the review

- Request for member input into the means through which services addressing warmth and improving energy efficiency target/direct their services.
- Demographic profile of the borough – high proportion of owner-occupiers, with possibility of becoming asset rich/cash poor in later life.
- Condition of stock – the average SAP rating of private sector housing in the borough is 49,⁴ compared with 63⁵ for council stock.

The review relates to the corporate priority of 'Making Harrow Safe, Sound and Supportive'. It links to priorities identified within the Sustainable Communities Plan.

National initiatives that the review may wish to have regard to include:

- Decent Homes standard – the Government's target for all council stock to reach a certain standard by 2010 (including thermal comfort).
- Housing Health and Safety Ratings System (HHSRS) – the Government's risk assessment procedure for all residential properties. One of the hazards included is excess cold.
- Warm front (the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme) – a package of energy efficiency and heating measures up to the value of £2,700 for private sector residents on certain benefits.
- Joint working between the Department for Work and Pensions and local partners to establish referrals to Warm Front providers.
- Winter Fuel Payments - 11.7m people aged 60 and over received £200, with those over 80 receiving an extra £100 per household.
- 'Keep warm, keep well' campaign – the Department of Health's campaign to prevent excess winter deaths.
- The Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) 1995 – requires local authorities with housing responsibilities to produce an energy conservation report identifying measures to improve the energy efficiency of all residential accommodation in their area.

Local initiatives include:

- Warm Zones (scheme to improve heating systems for those in receipt of certain benefits)
- Warm Front top-up (top-up grant available from the council to supplement the national scheme for those on benefits)
- Affordable warm caseworker
- Energy Advice Centre
- No excuses grant
- Harrow Heating scheme
- Fuel switching scheme

³ Ofgem. (2006). Corporate Strategy and Plan 2006-2011. p. 19

⁴ Source: Dwelling Stock by Tenure and Condition, 2004. ODPM neighbourhood statistics dataset held by the Office of National Statistics.

⁵ Figure for 2004/05 was 63, and 64 for 2005/06. Source: Harrow Council. *Corporate Plan, including Best Value Performance Plan 2006/07*.

- Energy efficiency DVD
- Heating Harrow Greener - installation of solar panels and wind turbines in partnership with Scottish and Southern Energy

3.3 Proposed aims and objectives

To examine the targeting of support for addressing fuel poverty and providing affordable warmth by examining:

- (a) The decision making processes for the targeting of grants and the selection of wards, for example Warm Zones
- (b) The linkages, and thus potential efficiencies, between departments, other organisations and the voluntary sector for promoting and sharing information about affordable warmth initiatives and considering other best practice models elsewhere
- (c) Evaluating existing strategy for affordable warmth.

This will need to be considered in the context of the council's approach to promoting the overall health and wellbeing of the community, of which affordable warmth is one aspect.

3.4 Proposed methodology

Stage 1 – scoping process to be undertaken by the review group, possibly informed by the National Energy Action (NEA) guidance note for Overview and Scrutiny Committees *Fuel Poverty Policies and Progress*, but also the national context and drivers.

Stage 2 – series of briefings and discussion, including, but not limited to:

- Specific affordable warmth and grant initiatives to tackle energy efficiency.
- Housing strategy for affordable warmth (including progress against the Housing Strategy Statement 2002-2007 and in particular initiatives outlined in the HECA report).
- The health and wellbeing agenda (health promotion, health and social care).
- Benefits and benefit take up.
- Identifying models of best practice elsewhere for the sharing information and making links.

Stage 3 – formulation of conclusions and recommendations

3.5 Constraints

The review will need to have regard to:

- The energy efficiency review to be undertaken by Sustainable Development and Enterprise in April 2007.
- The review of the council's Housing Strategy.

3.6 Timescale

For the review to impact on (a) programmes for winter 2007 and (b) the rollout of Warm Streets recommendations need to be completed by Autumn 2007.

4. Resource implications

The review will be undertaken within the confines of existing budget provision for scrutiny.

5. Consultation

In developing the project proposal for affordable warmth, input has been sought from:

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|---------------------|--|
| Urban Living: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Property Services (where responsibility for affordable warmth sits)• Housing Strategy (where responsibility for strategy for all stock sits, regardless of tenure)• Harrow Adapt and Repair team |
| People First: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adult Social Care |
| Primary Care Trust: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health Promotion |
| Voluntary Sector: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age Concern• Citizens Advice Bureau |

6. Options recommended

That financial inclusion be removed from the work programme for 2007/08 and that the sub committee concentrate its efforts on undertaking a review of fuel poverty/affordable warmth, with a view to making recommendations targeted at winter 2007.

SECTION 3 - STATUTORY OFFICER CLEARANCE

Chief Finance Officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Name: Barry Evans Date: 15 December 2006
Monitoring Officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Name: Jill Travers Date: 18 December 2006

SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact:

Heather Smith, Scrutiny Officer, 020 8420 9203, heather.smith@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny sub committee, 28 September 2006, report on Scrutiny Work Programme. Available at:

<http://www.harrow.gov.uk/ccm/content/council-and-democracy/democracy-and-elections/meeting-agendas/agenda-minutes-harrow.en>

IF APPROPRIATE, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES
3.	Manifesto Pledge Reference Number	N/A