

WIRRAL AFFORDABLE WARMTH STRATEGY 2008 – 2010

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members' endorsement of the new Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy for 2008-10 (Appendix 1).

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 The first Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy was launched in 2004 and has resulted in greater collaboration amongst organisations to lift households out of fuel poverty. Key achievements have been made in the following areas:

- The amount invested in Wirral by Warm Front has grown by 30% from £2.15 million in 2003/04 to £2.80 million in 2007/08 . This Government funded initiative provides heating and insulation measures to those households on benefits who are over 60 or who have children under 16. Of the 43 Local Authorities in the North West Wirral has performed consistently well with Warm Front and is third only to Liverpool and Bolton in the number of measures installed and households benefiting in 2007/08.
- npower Health Through Warmth has seen an increase in annual referrals from 32 in 2003 to over 250 in 2007. This scheme brings existing energy efficiency and health schemes together using a referral system for agencies to refer clients with cold and damp related health problems for assistance with insulation, heating, energy efficiency advice and benefit entitlement checks.
- The energy companies have installed insulation into 3000 cavity walls and 3000 lofts in Wirral from 2003 to 2007 through their Energy Efficiency Commitment.

2.2 The Building Research Establishment (BRE) was commissioned by Wirral Council in 2006 to provide estimates of local housing conditions. The report from BRE showed that fuel poverty in the private sector in Wirral decreased from 21.1% in 2002 to 8% in 2006 which is a substantial reduction. Further information on fuel poverty figures at the local level will be provided from Wirral's Private Sector Stock Condition and Home Energy Survey which is nearing completion with the final report due in October 2008. However, there has over the last 12 months been a significant increase in fuel costs and this is likely to again increase the number of people in fuel poverty.

2.3 Fuel Poverty reduction has been brought into the Local Government Performance Framework through new National Indicator 187 which monitors the proportion of households containing someone on means tested benefits that occupy a dwelling with a SAP¹ less than 35 or greater than 65.

¹ SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) is the Government's home energy efficiency rating system, with 1 being least efficient and 100 being most efficient.

- 2.4 A SAP rating of less than 35 means that a property will poorly perform in terms of energy efficiency and will not reach the decent homes standard. People living in such a property are therefore more liable to be in fuel poverty.
- 2.5 A SAP rating of greater than 65 indicates that the property performs well in terms of energy efficiency and people living in such accommodation are unlikely to be in fuel poverty.
- 2.6 The implementation of this strategy is therefore key to Wirral Council's future performance in tackling fuel poverty.

3.0 **WIRRAL AFFORDABLE WARMTH STRATEGY**

- 3.1 The Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy 2008-10 supports the Government's aim of eradicating fuel poverty for vulnerable groups by 2010 and from all groups by 2016. However this may not be achievable as recent reports have suggested there may be as many as 1.2 million vulnerable people still in fuel poverty by 2010.
- 3.2 The major reason for the 2010 target not being reached is the rise in fuel prices, which is outside the Council's control. Indeed, from 2003 to 2008 gas prices have risen by 109% and electricity by 70% and predictions indicate they will continue to rise. With average energy bills for a household rising to £1058 per year, the strategy therefore focuses on actions around increasing the energy efficiency of properties to limit the impact of fuel price rises and to increase household income through wider use of benefit entitlement checks.
- 3.3 The Strategy document has been consulted upon with the Fuel Poverty Forum as well as charities, Members, health organisations, Council Departments, and Energy companies; and reflects the comments received. The Strategy has successfully brought together the Council with many agencies to work to increase affordable warmth. Five key aims have been adopted which align with the Merseyside Affordable Warmth Strategy:
- To raise awareness amongst decision-makers, front-line staff and the general public about healthier, warmer homes and lower fuel bills.
 - To increase collaboration of organisations toward the formation and development of partnerships to achieve affordable warmth.
 - To provide access to clear, appropriate and impartial information and advice related to fuel poverty.
 - To influence national, regional and local policies, regulations and legislation, in order to achieve affordable warmth.
 - To improve the energy efficiency of housing to achieve affordable warmth.
- 3.4 To deliver the aims of the Affordable Warmth Strategy there needs to be a considerable effort at both the local and national level to address fuel poverty through various activities and interventions.
- 3.5 In early 2008, the Government announced measures totalling £2.3billion over three years to tackle fuel poverty and home energy efficiency under the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) programme. Energy suppliers will now be obliged to spend £1.5 billion over the next three years to install home based energy efficiency measures for people on

low incomes, those with disabilities and the over 70s. The CERT programme follows on from the Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) as a legal requirement to meet carbon dioxide (CO₂) savings for domestic customers. Warm Front will also be continuing but with reduced government funding. A priority within the strategy is to ensure as much of CERT and Warm Front Funding as possible is delivered within Wirral.

3.6 In response to further energy price rises, on 1st September 2008 the Government announced an additional £560m of funding from CERT and £350m towards a new Community Energy Savings Programme where Councils and voluntary organisations will carry out house-to-house calls to offer help in areas of high deprivation. The exact details of this Programme are still to be released, however Wirral Council will ensure it partakes in the Programme if provided with the opportunity. Also announced were:

- Additional funding for Warm Front (although no changes to the Warm Front offer).
- An increase in Cold Weather Payments.
- A national advertising campaign to inform the public of the support available and to encourage the comparison of energy suppliers.

3.7 The ability to drive energy efficiency at the local level is largely dependant upon resources. Traditionally there has been no budget available from within the Council for domestic energy efficiency initiatives, with programmes reliant upon both national schemes and funding available through Merseyside Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (EEAC). However Wirral Council has been able to use external monies for schemes such as HMRI as well as government funding from the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The Council will continue to apply for external funding when it becomes available.

3.8 The strategy will be monitored and reported on every 6 months in line with the Housing Strategy reporting timetable. NI 187 will be reported to Government annually.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy will continue to use existing resources and external monies from HMRI, Warm Front and Energy Companies.

5.0 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Fuel poverty is disproportionately suffered by older and vulnerable groups in society, therefore this Strategy will assist in helping these groups.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None

8.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The new Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy aims to reduce fuel poverty and assist those households considered to be most vulnerable and target initiatives effectively to enable accessibility of services and opportunities.

9.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None

10.0 ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Strategy will reduce fuel poverty and therefore impact upon the wider poverty agenda.

11.0 SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Warmer Wirral Project aims to assist everyone through the door knock and home visit approach of the scheme.

12.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

12.1 All wards within the Borough will benefit from the new Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy.

13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 Appendix 1 – Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy 2008-10

14.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1 That members endorse the new Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy.

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