

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## CABINET

12 JANUARY 2012

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b><i>WIRRAL AFFORDABLE WARMTH IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2012-2014</i></b>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	<b><i>ALL</i></b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b><i>ACTING DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION, HOUSING AND PLANNING</i></b>
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	<b><i>COUNCILLOR GEORGE DAVIES</i></b>
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	<b><i>YES</i></b>

### **1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Member's approval of the Wirral Affordable Warmth Implementation Plan 2012-14 (Appendix 1) following a Borough-wide consultation. The Plan is key to delivering the Corporate Priority of "Working with our partners and the private sector to improve energy and resource efficiency to address and tackle fuel poverty" and meeting strategic priorities and targets identified within the Housing Strategy for Wirral.
- 1.2 The plan will also assist the Council in meeting its statutory duty to report on reductions in carbon dioxide emissions from housing under the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995.

### **2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 2.1 That Member's approve the Wirral Affordable Warmth Implementation Plan 2012-14.

### **3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 3.1 Member's approval is sought in order to begin implementation of the Plan and to drive forward activity to reduce fuel poverty in the Borough.

### **4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

#### **4.1 Background**

- 4.1.1 Wirral Council has worked with partners to deliver specific actions to address fuel poverty since 2001 when the first Merseyside Affordable Warmth Strategy was launched. In 2004 Wirral produced its own Strategy, which was subsequently reviewed, updated and re-launched in 2008.

4.1.2 Following Cabinet approval of the new Housing Strategy 2011-2026 and Strategic Housing Plan on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2011 (Minute No. 45 refers), there is a need for the Council to develop a new plan outlining how it will achieve the actions and targets contained within Theme 5 of the Strategic Housing Plan, "Making Homes Warmer". The starting point for this was to review the 2008 Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy, assess its outcomes, identify weaknesses and then work with partners to produce a draft Affordable Warmth Implementation Plan for 2012-14.

4.1.3 The draft Implementation Plan was approved for consultation by Cabinet on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2011 (Minute No. 126 refers).

## 4.2 **Consultation response**

4.2.1 The draft Implementation Plan was drawn together through consultation with the Affordable Warmth Steering Group and the Wirral Fuel Poverty Forum. Following Cabinet approval, a wider consultation was held from 17<sup>th</sup> October 2011 through to 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011. A consultation questionnaire was used to gain views and comments, which was publicised through various channels including the Council's website and intranet and through notifications via formal networks such as the Strategic Housing Partnership and Voluntary Community Action Wirral (VCAW). Whilst responses were limited to this particular consultation process the Plan has been heavily informed by the previous consultation undertaken as part of the development of the Housing Strategy for Wirral and through those views obtained in the development of the draft for publication.

4.2.2 Analysis of consultation responses showed unanimous agreement with the strategic themes of the Plan and none of the respondents felt the need to change any of the themes. All respondents thought the descriptions of what the strategic themes set out to achieve were clear. No respondents thought there were any major gaps or omissions.

4.3.3 In answer to the questions aimed specifically at existing and potential partner organisations which included obtaining agencies views on lead roles and statutory responsibilities with regards to affordable warmth, becoming champions or leads on activities and how they as organisations can contribute to tackling affordable warmth, it is apparent Housing Associations are strong leads in this area and greater linkages between their activity and other partners' activity is needed within the Plan. This has begun to happen through the Fuel Poverty Forum and through specific projects such as the Community Energy Saving Project. However, activities contained within Strategic Theme 5 of the Plan will improve partnership working and ensure Housing associations play an active lead role in delivering services.

4.3.4 Of all the respondents answering as individuals, just under a third struggled in paying to heat their home. Those that responded to the question on what contributing factors affected their ability to meet fuel costs, highlighted the majority of those contributing factors of fuel poverty listed as reasons for their difficulties (i.e. debts, poor heating and insulation).

- 4.3.5 Of those respondents providing general comments, a common issue was around the Council or its partners providing clearer, more accessible information on energy tariffs and changing suppliers. The Council has responded to these concerns as part of “Improve tariff advice service” activity under Strategic Theme 4 of the Plan and a further action to review current information with service/user advocacy services has been added.
- 4.3.6 The final Affordable Warmth Implementation Plan is within Appendix 1. Fuel poverty estimates have been updated within the Plan’s introduction due to a recent release of local data for 2009.

## **5.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 5.1 Fuel poverty contributes to social and health inequalities but is avoidable through targeted intervention. The risks of inaction to reduce fuel poverty are numerous but include more households in fuel debt and general debt, increased health hazards from cold temperatures in homes and will be a contributory factor in excess winter deaths. Inaction could also result in higher numbers of GP visits and hospital admissions (there is a strong relationship between cold temperatures and cardio-vascular and respiratory diseases) and poor childhood health (children living in cold homes are more than twice as likely to suffer from a variety of respiratory problems than children living in warm homes).

## **6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 6.1 There were no other options considered.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 Consultation was undertaken with the Wirral Affordable Warmth Steering Group and the Wirral Fuel Poverty Forum, which both have a good cross-section of Council and non-Council representatives.
- 7.2 Wider consultation took place over a six week period by means of a consultation questionnaire which was publicised amongst all Councillors, members of the Strategic Housing Partnership, colleagues in Public Health, members of VCAW and to Council officers whose work impacts upon fuel poverty or whose roles could assist to identify and refer fuel poor households. The draft Plan and consultation questionnaire was available on the Council’s website.

## **8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

- 8.1 The Affordable Warmth Implementation Plan has been developed to be inclusive of a wide range of stakeholders, voluntary, community and faith organisations and members of the general public.

## **9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

9.1 The various activities within the Plan are either funded from budgets previously allocated or will require assessment of financial need as part of the development process of that particular activity and would be subject to separate Cabinet reports. The current budgets allocated to affordable warmth initiatives in 2011-12 are as follows:

Cosy Homes Insulation Programme - £2.098 million  
Cosy Homes Heating Grants - £0.25 million

9.2 Members will however be aware that Cabinet on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012 agreed, the Cosy Homes insulation programme is to be re-phased over a seven year rather than four year period with the current insulation budget of £2.098 million being re-profiled with a £1 million reduction per year to reflect this.

9.3 All activities are carried out using existing staffing resources. There are no IT requirements or implications for Council assets.

## **10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## **11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 As previously referred to in paragraph 5.1, fuel poverty can contribute to social and health inequalities. The implementation of the Plan will assist in addressing these.

11.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- |                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| (a) Is an EIA required?               | Yes |
| (b) If 'yes', has one been completed? | Yes |

## **12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 The Implementation Plan includes activities to improve the energy efficiency of homes. However fuel poverty reduction activity doesn't automatically lead to reductions in carbon dioxide emissions as fuel poor households often under-consume energy.

## **13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

13.1 There are no planning and community safety implications arising directly from this report, however an activity detailed within the Plan includes exploring the setting of local planning and refurbishment standards to improve the energy efficiency of homes.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Affordable Warmth Implementation Plan

## **REFERENCE MATERIAL**

None.

## **SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Cabinet</b> – “Wirral Affordable Warmth Strategy 2008 – 2010”	<b>16<sup>th</sup> October, 2008</b>
<b>Cabinet</b> – “Draft Wirral Affordable Warmth Implementation Plan 2012-2014”	<b>22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2011</b>