

REPORT TO: **CABINET MEMBER: HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

DATE: 23 DECEMBER 2009

SUBJECT: SEFTON AFFORDABLE WARMTH STRATEGY
REVIEW 2009

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

REPORT OF: MIKE MCSORLEY – HEAD OF REGENERATION
AND TECHNICAL SERVICES

CONTACT OFFICER: MR IAN WELLER – ENERGY MANAGER
0151 934 4221

EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL: NO

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

Seftons Affordable Warmth Strategy has been fully developed since publication in February 2007 and 1st Review in June 2008, led by Sefton's Energy Team and involves key partners from across the health, statutory, community and voluntary sectors. The purpose of this second Annual Review is to reflect upon what has been achieved and to refresh the strategy taking into account any changes in legislation and policies in order to ensure aims, activities and targets continue to be focused in the relevant areas

REASON WHY DECISION REQUIRED:

Development of local policy framework

RECOMMENDATION(S):

It is recommended that:-

Members give approval for Sefton to adopt the strategy review as continuing Council Policy to underpin and expand its ongoing work in tackling fuel poverty.

KEY DECISION: No

FORWARD PLAN: Not appropriate.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: Following expiry of the “call-in” period for the minutes of this meeting.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

None - statutory requirement for local delivery on Affordable Warmth.

IMPLICATIONS:

Budget/Policy Framework: None directly.

Financial: None directly.

Legal: None.

Risk Assessment: Lack of co-ordinated support and help would result in serious health affects to many Sefton residents.

Asset Management: None.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN/VIEWS

Members of the Sefton Affordable Warmth Partnership Group who acted as the steering group to develop the Affordable Warmth Strategy for Sefton 2007 agreed to carry out a review of the strategy to reflect upon the last two years of activities and progress.

Members attended a workshop event in August 2009 to discuss what had been achieved and provided input and suggestions to update the aims and activities as well as setting more focused targets

The Affordable Warmth Partnership Group consists of 14 key representatives across Health, Local Authority, Voluntary and Community sectors.

Sefton Primary Care Trust- Steph Griffiths & Val Frampton
Sefton CVS - Mike Mainwaring
Housing Improvements Section - Steve Terry
Age Concern - Dawn Stewart
Sefton Pensioners Advocacy Centre - Margaret Lambert
Sefton Local Pensions Service - Elaine Waddington
Environmental Protection Department - Bob Hannah
Anchor Staying Put - John Sandiford
Linaker Childrens Centre - Jan Sanders
Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service - Maureen Justice
Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre (ESTAC)
One Vision Housing Association - Geoff McKeating
Health & Social Care - Sharon Lees

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE MONITORING:

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community		✓	
2	Creating Safe Communities	✓		
3	Jobs and Prosperity	✓		
4	Improving Health and Well-Being	✓		
5	Environmental Sustainability	✓		
6	Creating Inclusive Communities	✓		
7	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy	✓		
8	Children and Young People	✓		

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS RELIED UPON IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

1.0 BACKGROUND - WHAT IS FUEL POVERTY

- 1.1 Fuel poverty is defined as the inability to provide sufficient heat and light for a home without spending a disproportionate level of income in doing so. It is broadly accepted that a fuel poor household is one that needs to spend more than 10 per cent of household income to achieve satisfactory heating levels.
- 1.2 Lack of sufficient income combined with thermally inefficient properties means certain households cannot afford to heat their homes to an adequate, safe and comfortable healthy level i.e. '**Affordable Warmth**'. Furthermore, the same lack of income also prevents those households from undertaking the necessary cost-effective improvements to the energy efficiency of their properties to alleviate the problem.
- 1.3 Fuel poverty is an urgent issue because cold homes can kill, harm people's health or damage quality of life. These effects can also impose wider costs on the community. Medical conditions and illnesses such as influenza, heart disease, and strokes are all exacerbated by the cold. Cold homes can also promote the growth of fungi and numbers of house dust mites. The former can damage the fabric of the building, whilst both fungi and dust mite allergens, can lead to respiratory diseases which reduce quality of life by enforced absences from work / school and restrict types of activities and employment.
- 1.4 Whilst all individuals may suffer from cold related illnesses older people, young children, householders who are disabled or householders suffering from long-term illnesses are particularly vulnerable. Social circumstances mean that these groups are more likely to spend longer periods of time in the home.
- 1.5 The blight of fuel poverty has recurring impacts that can increase social exclusion, mental health problems, sickness absence, winter pressures and keep people in a cycle of poverty which reduces housing standards and economic activity. The key aspect is that whilst fuel poverty is not the sole cause of these problems it can be eliminated very easily. Solving the issues of fuel poverty is related to improving the thermal efficiency of properties. Whilst it should be acknowledged that it can be solved by cheap fuel prices or higher incomes these are more expensive options and outside of direct control of the local agencies.

2.0 FUEL POVERTY IN SEFTON

- 2.1 The Sefton private sector housing stock condition survey, conducted in 2007 found that the average household energy costs were £750 p.a. - this is before recent high profile rises in costs and ignores costs incurred by using prepayment meters common in low income households. Figures published nationally by the NEA (national fuel poverty campaigning organisation) highlight that average combined fuel bills now stand far higher at £1,288 by 2009.
- 2.2 The stock condition survey found that 4,211 dwellings represented a category 1 Hazard under the Housing Health Safety Rating System for Excess Cold. A further 11,016 exhibit Excess Cold as a category 2 hazard. This is supported by the Non Decent Homes statistics on thermal efficiency where 7,753 dwellings failed. The survey estimated 10,909 households were considered to be in fuel poverty, representing 11.1% of private sector households. Whilst this is a significant improvement on 2002 survey results (at 19%) this does not take account of major price rises which have a significant impact on bills.

- 2.2 A macro analysis of Sefton Fuel Poverty statistics (March 2003 by CSE/Bristol University) found that 28% of households suffered from fuel poverty (31,893 households) compared to an England average of 23%.
- 2.3 The high scores reflect the combined influences of high levels of deprivation, older housing and inadequate heating systems that are common problems in parts of Sefton. The scale of the problem is represented by the stark statistics of excess winter mortality experienced here in Sefton at an average of 200 deaths p.a. (based on a 5 year average).

3.0 POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 In February 2003 the DTI published the energy white paper 'Our energy future – creating a low carbon economy'. One of its four key goals was to ensure that every home is adequately and affordably heated. This was recognition of the 2001 UK Fuel Poverty Strategy which was brought about after a private members bill received universal support to help eradicate the blight of fuel poverty in the UK.
- 3.2 The UK Strategy aims to eradicate fuel poverty from vulnerable households (described as those over 65, those with disabilities and long term illnesses and homes with young children) by 2010. It also plans to eliminate fuel poverty by 2016 altogether from the UK. However, evidence suggests that despite huge falls in the numbers of people in fuel poverty, now due to ever increasing fuel costs, the improvements are temporary.
- 3.3 Annual progress monitoring on achieving Affordable Warmth has now been included in the statutory Home Energy Conservation Act (1995) reporting to DEFRA.
- 3.4 Local Area Agreement (LAA): The March 2007 Local Area Agreement for Sefton adopted 11 Headline Priorities, with one these target measures being to "Reduce fuel poverty and associated suffering". As a core stretch target there is a £800,000 reward element associated with achieving the target within the time period (this is dependent on the other targets being achieved for a sum total of £8 million reward). The indicator is measured by the number of properties below SAP 35. SAP is the Standard Assessment Procedure which measures energy efficiency of homes, using a scale of 0-100, anything below 35 is considered extremely poor, new builds achieve over 80. Sefton's target was to reduce this to only 10,233 properties by March 2010 (lifting 600 properties above this poor performance level).
- 3.5 Our results to March 2009 show we have achieved this already and even exceeded it as we can report that there only remains 9,217 properties of SAP 35 or below and we are working to reduce this number even further.
- 3.6 In addition National Indicator 187 measures a fuel poverty proxy, which Sefton will be required to report upon annually. It uses the two standards of SAP 35 or below (considered fuel poor) and SAP 65 (considered safe from fuel poverty concerns). However it only measures the housing of those on means tested benefits. The results for last year are:
- ◆ 7.07% households on means tested benefit with a SAP rating below 35
 - ◆ Actual Value 33.77% households on means tested benefit with a SAP rating of 65 or above
 - ◆ Based on 679 households on income related benefits for which SAP assessment has been carried out

4.0 CURRENT WORK ADDRESSING FUEL POVERTY IN SEFTON

- 4.1 Sefton Council has developed many services and projects to tackle fuel poverty. In recent years the Energy Team has assisted many thousands of households to access a wide range of grants, schemes and offers to install measures to make homes warmer and healthier. However, with unstable gas and electricity prices there is still much to do and the list below details just some examples of the focused help available to eradicate fuel poverty in Sefton.
- 4.2 SEARCH –. Sefton Council with the support of Sefton PCT has been awarded mainstream funding to continue its SEARCH (Sefton Energy Action Reaching Cold Homes) programme funded until 2011 (worth approximately £162,000). SEARCH is a home insulation grant referral scheme. During 2008/09 207 grants were issued to households for loft and cavity wall insulation in homes where a member of the household suffers from a cold related illness.
- 4.3 WARM FRONT GRANTS – A national government grant scheme to tackle fuel poverty in England providing a package of heating and insulation measures up to £3,500 available to homeowners and private tenants in receipt of certain benefits/allowances. During the 2008/09 financial year, 2921 households received a Warm Front grant for heating and energy efficiency measures at a total cost of £3,582,129.31.
- 4.4 HEALTH THROUGH WARMTH - This scheme was recently extended until 2011 and 37 households received assistance through this crisis fund to provide heating measures in their homes during 2008/09.
- 4.5 HELP – Home Energy Loans Project offers interest free loans of up to £1,000 for homeowners to install energy efficiency measures in their homes (subject to acceptance).
- 4.6 ENERGY AND WARM HOMES ADVICE - We work in partnership with the *Energy Savings Trust Advice Centre* to provide a referral scheme with a local focus for our residents. The free phone advice line is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm and trained advisors provide free, impartial advice on a wide range of home heating and insulation grants, schemes and offers as well as general energy efficiency advice.
- 4.7 SEFTON FUEL POVERTY OUTREACH SERVICE - With funding from Supporting People, commenced in May 2008 with one Fuel Poverty Support Worker to provide acute demand for outreach and advocacy support to enable undereached residents to be supported in accessing grants and other support to reduce their risks of suffering in fuel poverty. The main function of the role of Affordable Warmth Worker is to provide a home visiting service to assist people to apply for heating and insulation grants to make their homes warmer and healthier. During home visits the AWW frequently identify additional housing and social needs and signpost them accordingly to a wide range of partners and this aspect of the role has worked extremely well helping to enhance the service provided and ultimately assisting the clients to remain living independently in their homes, with physical and fiscal support. After exceeding targets in YR1 by directly assisting 440 vulnerable residents the service was expanded to add an second Support Worker in April 2009 due to demand for service and increasing risks of fuel poverty that exist.
- 4.8 HOUSE WARMER REFERRAL NETWORK - In order to strengthen and increase the referral network, the Affordable Warmth Co-ordinator has developed an ongoing programme of fuel poverty briefing sessions to front line staff across many partner organisations. These sessions are delivered during existing team meetings to make

best use of their available time. Background information on fuel poverty and issues faced in Sefton, together with a summary of the help available to make homes warmer are discussed and staff are fully briefed on how to refer those who need assistance using a range of referral methods including accessing the free phone advice line, e-mail, fax or completing a House Warmer reply paid post card.

5.0 SEFTONS AFFORDABLE WARMTH STRATEGY [SAWS]

5.1 The Affordable Warmth Strategy for Sefton was originally developed and launched in February 2007, following consultation and input from The 'Sefton Affordable Warmth Partnership Group' which is made up of 14 members representing the Health, Local Authority, Voluntary and Community sectors.

6.0 THE SAWS REVIEW DOCUMENT

6.1 The Sefton Affordable Warmth Partnership Group who acted as the steering group to develop the original Affordable Warmth Strategy agreed to carry the annual review of the strategy to reflect upon the years of activities and progress.

6.2 Members, listed above in consultation section, attended a full workshop event in August 2009 to discuss what had been achieved and provided input and suggestions to update the SAWS aims and activities as well as setting more focused targets

6.3 The resulting document [Annex 1 – SAWS REVIEW Final draft] details the progress made within the first two years and sets out aims and activities within the revised action plan. The reviewed strategy's aims, objectives and key tasks are laid out in table format to demonstrate links between the different aims.

6.4 The Year 2 - 2009 review of the SAWS is a positive step and reflects the Partnership Group's commitment to continue to work together to ensure that fuel poverty is eradicated in Sefton by effective identification and referral of those in need of help whilst continually linking with income maximisation and signposting to additional support services.

6.5 There is however, a constant need to involve further organisations in order to ensure that we are raising awareness of the issues at every level and continually developing partnership working to achieve common targets. The need to tackle fuel poverty will only end when all residents across Sefton can afford to heat their homes to a level appropriate to their physical needs.

7.0 STRATEGY REVIEW ADOPTION

7.1 After Cabinet approval the Sefton Affordable Warmth Strategy Review 2009 will be circulated widely to publicise the updated aims, activities and targets.

7.2 Following the publication of this updated strategy it is hoped that many more local organisations will become aware of fuel poverty as an issue that needs to be tackled urgently and join the others who are already committed to supporting and implementing the Sefton Affordable Warmth Strategy review.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Members give approval for Sefton to adopt the strategy review as Council Policy to underpin and expand its ongoing work in tackling fuel poverty.