



<b>Subject:</b>	Fuel Poverty Measures and Cavity Wall Installations
<b>Date:</b>	13 <sup>th</sup> October, 2015
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Trevor Martin, Head of Building Control
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<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of report or summary of main issues</b>
1.1	To update the Committee in relation to some Fuel Poverty measures being undertaken by the Council and in particular the issues arising from the presentation by John Ross of the Southern Regional College on Cavity Wall Installations.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	To note the report.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	The Committee on 11 <sup>th</sup> August 2015 received a presentation by John Ross of the Southern Regional College, together with a representative of the Cavity Wall Installers Association. Mr Ross has been commissioned to write a report in connection with the faulty or incomplete installation of cavity wall insulation on dwellings in Northern Ireland and the detrimental health effects caused. Members, aware of that report, had asked to hear from him in relation to his findings and determine what, if anything the Council might do to assist.
3.2	In his presentation to the Committee he highlighted three key areas, that he felt needed

addressed:

- The inspection and approval of the installation of cavity wall insulation
- The remedial action being taken to remedy the problems of faulty installations.
- The effectiveness of the Energy Performance Certificate Systems

The Members in discussing these issues asked officers to address these in addition to investigating the possibility of European Funding in this area that Council might access.

3.3

**The inspection and commissioning of cavity wall installations.**

This was discussed both at the meeting and subsequently with interested parties. Whilst the installation of cavity wall insulation is a matter within Building Regulations there is no statutory notification of work, no invasive inspection and importantly no fee payable for this class of work. It was decided in drafting the regulation this be a light touch enforcement system with a cursory check by the authorities based on certification from the installer that they have carried out the work to all standards and backed up with a guarantee. There was broad agreement with all interested parties that statutory inspection by council staff would lead to over regulation and would include the charging of fees and thus diverting valuable funding from actual works to alleviate fuel poverty. The better approach is to have a tightened certification system of registered installers backed up with a robust fail safe guarantee system. This approach was endorsed by similar research carried out into this problem in England & Wales by the organisation Zero Carbon Hub.

3.4

**The remedial action being taken to alleviate the problems of faulty installations.**

The Committee enquired regarding the remedial action being undertaken, the extent of commitment of bodies such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) on its properties and whether funding from Europe could be accessed, similar to schemes that have taken place in Great Britain to assist private householders.

3.5

The Head of Building Control met with officials from the NIHE in relation to their ongoing work in this area. They confirmed that they have dealt with the issue in a number of their properties and will continue to fund full cavity wall replacements in their properties on a case by case basis. They have no plans at present for a wider scheme due to funding constraints.

3.6 In relation to European funding the Council's European Unit confirmed there is no funding stream at present however they will continue to monitor the schemes from Europe to see if the Council is in a position to make a bid in the future.

**The effectiveness of the Energy Performance Certificate Systems.**

3.7 Although Energy Performance Certificates are a UK government system, in Northern Ireland they are regulated by the 11 councils under the authority of the Department of Finance & Personnel (DFP). In agreement with all the Councils Belfast City Council, through the Building Control Service, assists, monitors and reports on the performance of the councils to the DFP. The Head of Building Control is meeting the officials from the DFP in respect of a series of Building Regulation issues later this month and has tabled this item for the agenda. He will be discussing the present system of EPCs, reflecting the Committees concerns and looking at suggestions as to how they might be strengthened. As EPCs however are a United Kingdom system then any changes to their nature would have to be agreed across that jurisdiction.

3.8 **Other Fuel Poverty Measures of the Council: Affordable Warmth Scheme**

The Council recently received a letter from DSD as follows:

*As stated in the SLA (Version 2) the Affordable Warmth Scheme is expected to run until 31 March 2017 (further extensions to the Scheme will be subject to sufficient funding being available).*

*It is the Departments intention to provide similar funding to councils for 2016/17 as for 2015/16 (which is £153K). However, 2016/17 is a new comprehensive spending review period and as yet budgets have not been agreed, but we do not anticipate any reduction in funding.*

This means the council should, all things being equal, retain its Affordable Warmth Team who are carrying out great work across the city. Additionally in his meeting with NIHE officials the Head of Building Control discussed the scheme and the problems of it being too process intensive. He has agreed to look at the AWT and the Building Control Service taking on board additional functions that would make changes in the process on validation

	<p>of application and inspection of the works and should go some way to making the scheme more effective. These proposed changes, following discussion with Legal Services on issues in connection with liability, will be brought to Committee for approval in the next few months.</p> <p><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.9 None at present</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>3.10 There are no direct Equality implications.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
4.1	None