



Subject:	Affordable Warmth Scheme Update and Consultation response
Date:	6 th February 2018
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager, ext 2430

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	Members will be aware that Belfast City Council is engaged in a partnership with the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) in the delivery of the Affordable Warmth Scheme (AWS). The scheme aims to address fuel poverty for the most vulnerable households in the city.
1.2	This report provides an update on the scheme and contains a response to a consultation on the scheme issues by the DfC.

2.0	Recommendations																		
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the contents of the report and 2. Agree the contents of the response to the consultation to be submitted to the DfC by 16th February as subject to council ratification in March. 																		
3.0	Main report																		
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>In the report brought in November 2017 members were updated on the progress of the scheme including proposals made by the DfC, the number of referrals provided to the NIHE and the ongoing pressures to deliver the service given the significant amount of self-referrals being made to the scheme. Members agreed that the scheme should continue to be fully funded by the DfC on an 11 council model.</p> <p>3.2 Subsequent to the committee meeting it was agreed at the full Council meeting in December that the council would write to the Head of Fuel Poverty within the DfC requesting an urgent meeting to discuss the funding arrangement for Belfast. This letter was sent on 21st December 2017, but at the time of submitting this report, no response had been received.</p> <p>The current position with the scheme is as follows:</p> <p>3.3 <u>Referrals sent to NIHE 2017-2018</u></p> <p>The target number of referrals for January – March 2018 reduces to 30 per month and the team is endeavouring to process as many referrals as possible during this period. The DfC have confirmed that in order to manage the NIHE budget and ensure no underspend they will take additional referrals from councils that can provide them. It was hoped that this could be discussed with DfC officials at the meeting mentioned above.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="360 1671 970 1975"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Target</th> <th>Actual</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>April</td> <td>25</td> <td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>May</td> <td>25</td> <td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>June</td> <td>25</td> <td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>July</td> <td>40</td> <td>40</td> </tr> <tr> <td>August</td> <td>40</td> <td>27</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Target	Actual	April	25	25	May	25	25	June	25	25	July	40	40	August	40	27
	Target	Actual																	
April	25	25																	
May	25	25																	
June	25	25																	
July	40	40																	
August	40	27																	

September	40	24
October	40	44*
November	40	25
December	40	23

*Note: in official figures 13 surveys from September are included in October as they were transferred on Monday 3rd October.

3.4

The Service has received 1493 calls from July 2017 (on average 52 per week) regarding the scheme and is working to call back those on the backlogged waiting list. When we receive the details from a phone call we assess if the person is likely to be eligible for the scheme, and prioritise their case on the basis of need. The current live cases are collated as follows:

3.5

Number of high priority cases currently being processed (these are mainly those with no heating due to boiler issues): approximately 40 cases. This number fluctuates on a weekly basis based on calls made and prioritised accordingly based on the circumstances including age and health issues.

Number of case confirmed eligible but lower priority (these include new windows, insulation and radiators):_approximately 550.

Number of lower priority cases awaiting call back to determine eligibility: approximately 300

3.6

The need within Belfast is clear due to the number of self-referrals received which are eligible for the scheme. The overall referral targets set are inadequate to meet this need and the associated funding for the AW team means that the reduced level of staff cannot visit the number of properties required to process referrals and cannot return calls in a timely fashion regarding queries.

3.7

As outlined previously, with the reduction in funding for a business support staff member for the team, the additional calls are impacting on the existing business support teams within the Service. Measures have been introduced to assist in streamlines calls to alleviate the situation in the short term, as a stop gap measure. This will have a knock on impact on existing service delivery for the wider Building Control Service. The Service is also compiling the costs absorbed by the council including this business support assistance, in order to document the support that the council currently makes to the running of the scheme.

3.8	<p>Given the interest and number of calls, we are having to manage customer expectations in terms of timeframe for response as we balance this with the ability to carry out site visits. It will be the case that people who are eligible for the scheme will have to wait some time for measures while those in greater need are considered.</p>
3.9	<p>In the absence of confirmation of funding for next year the financial estimates for 2018-2019 include the same funding we have received for this current year. Given the uncertainty we will also have to put staff on notice as we did last year.</p>
3.10	<p>It is hoped that further clarification will be given by the DfC at the next managers meeting which is due to be held in mid-February.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Consultation on Affordable Warmth Scheme</u></p> <p>THE DfC released a consultation document on certain aspects of the scheme with a response date of 18th February. This included four proposals:</p>
3.12	<p><u>Proposal 1</u> The Department proposes that one installer, managing the installation of all measures to the household, becomes the preferred delivery method.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We would welcome any changes that would improve the householder experience and application process, however would need to see more detail on how this delivery method would work in practice. • It has proved difficult for householders to engage with contractors for the range of measures. Additionally the building regulation application process has suffered from multiple or duplicate applications, resulting in additional administration and refunding of fees. <p><u>Proposal 2</u> The Department proposes to raise the income threshold to £23,000 for households with more than one person and reducing it to £18,000 for all single person households.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current threshold for all households is £20,000. • Strongly agree with the increase to £23,000 but strongly disagree with reducing the threshold for single person households. • The experience of the AW team would indicate that there are some multiple

occupancy households that would fall just outside the current £20,000 threshold, including single parent families.

- We would also have concerns that reducing the threshold for single occupancy households could disadvantage more elderly householders.

Proposal 3 The Department proposes that Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Carer's Allowance are removed from the calculation of income for the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

- Strongly agree that these benefits are removed as in many cases they take households over the income threshold and makes them ineligible for the scheme.

Proposal 4 The Department proposes the removal of age-related and disability-related eligibility criteria from the boiler replacement element of the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

- Strongly agree with the removal of these criteria as providing high efficiency boilers is key to addressing the amount spent on fuel and this would assist a wider group of homeowners.
- It is noted that the disability and age related issues should be a consideration where prioritisation of referrals is required.

It should be noted that if these proposals are implemented it is likely that there would be more households eligible for the scheme, increasing the number of self-referrals, and therefore the funding for the scheme would need to reflect this change.

The full proposed response to these proposals is contained in Appendix 2.

Financial & Resource Implications

DfC have indicated that a business case is being prepared which would propose a further five year lifespan for the scheme. However, no formal confirmation of funding has been received for 2018-2019. For planning purposes the financial estimates include £73,000, the same figure received for 2017-2018, to cover salary costs. If formal confirmation of funding is not forthcoming, the Service will be required to follow procedure within the Fixed Term Contract policy and potentially place employees on notice. Further discussions may be required to assess the financial risk if the Council continue to employ staff in order to deliver the service.

3.13

3.14	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> There are no equality or good relations issues.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: DfC consultation document Appendix 2: Belfast City Council response