



Subject:	Affordable Warmth Scheme Resourcing
Date:	23 rd March 2018
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department
Contact Officer:	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager

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	The purpose of this report is to update members of the Strategic Policy and Resources committee on the current position of the Scheme following the proposal from People and Communities committee that the issue of providing additional resourcing of the council Affordable Warmth (AW) team be considered by the SP&R committee.

Performance in relation to current target levels

1.3 Each year the DfC set a target number of referrals to be provided by councils to NIHE and provide a set amount of funding based upon a unit cost per referral, which is used to resource the AW team within the Building Control Service.

1.4 The team has been unable to transfer the targeted number of referrals to NIHE in 2017-2018.

This is due to:

- the reduction of funding from DfC, resulting in the loss of staff with the team now having 1.5 members of staff
- the additional duties taken on from the NIHE where we now carry out financial checks which can involve considerable time to take householders through the process
- the significant volume of self-referrals being made to the scheme.

1.5 This is also despite reallocating internal business support resources (circa 1 FTE) within the Building Control Service as a stop gap measure to help manage the number of phone calls being received. At present the service is covering the costs of these business support staff, management, HR and finance costs and the range of overhead costs for the team, in the region of £40,000.

1.6 Therefore it has been put to the DfC that additional funding is required to recruit additional staff to meet the current target with the assumption that the target for next year will be similar. The increase in unit cost per referrals required was provided to DfC at a recent manager meeting. (an increase from £181 to £290 to cover the costs outlined above)

Referrals					
Month	Target	Actual	Month	Target	Actual
April	25	25	September	40	24
May	25	25	October	40	44
June	25	25	November	40	25
July	40	40	December	40	23
August	40	27	January	30	20
			February	30	21

1.7 **Potential to tackle waiting list**
The Business support staff have been reallocated to deal with the significant number of calls

<p>1.8</p> <p>1.9</p>	<p>being received regarding the scheme, where people are self-referring or being referred by health professionals or elected members. These self-referrals are reviewed based on need, with many being without heating or with heating systems in poor repair, with these being prioritised. There are currently in the region of 600 people on a list awaiting a visit to determine eligibility and provision of financial documentation.</p> <p>In order for this quantity of self-referrals to be taken through the council part of the process in a timely fashion, the AW team would need to have further additional resource to carry out the full site visits. However if the council exceeded the requested number of referrals per month to reduce the waiting list, it is likely that these will not be processed by the NIHE as they are only resourced to meet the target number of referrals. In addition, it is unlikely that the allocation to Belfast from the DfC capital budget for grants would have resources to meet the number of measures that would result from the additional referrals. This could have the effect of raising expectations without possibility of delivery. Therefore confirmation is required from DfC that additional referrals can be made from Belfast. At the meeting with members on 26th February when members raised the issue of additional funding for Belfast, it was confirmed that this would be discussed at future council / DfC workshops that DfC are convening. A workshop is planned for the 27 March 2018.</p> <p>The DfC have not confirmed funding or target number of referrals for 2018-2019 but have written to councils on 13th March to inform them that funding of sufficient scale to allow the AWS to continue in 2018-2019 (Appendix 1). On the basis of this assurance the current team has been extended until the end of quarter 1 2018/19 and we are hopeful that the detailed budget will be provided by DFC at the meeting on the 27 March 2018 to enable the full year position to be considered.</p>
<p>2.0</p>	<p>Recommendations</p>
<p>2.1</p>	<p>Members are reminded that the Committee agreed at its meeting on the 16 February 2018, that no further financial re-allocations would be made until the year end position was considered at the June meeting of the Committee, given that the uncommitted forecast represents less than 0.2% of departmental expenditure.</p>
<p>2.2</p>	<p>Members are also asked to note, that the DFC workshop will take place on the 27 March 2018, when it is hoped that the Council will receive the detail of the DFC commitment for 2018/19.</p>

2.3	In view of the above, it is recommended that a further report on the additional resource requirements is provided to the Committee in April 2018, following the workshop.
3.0	Main report
3.1 3.2 3.3 3.4	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The People and Communities committee are kept updated on the scheme. In the report brought to the People and Communities committee in November 2017 this included efficiency 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>Subsequent to the committee meeting it was agreed at the full Council meeting in December 2017 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.</p> <p>Members from the P&C committee met with the Head of Fuel poverty within the DfC, Martin McDermott on 26th February 2018 where he gave an update on the position of the scheme and potential future implications and where members raised concerns over the future of the scheme and the funding issues.</p> <p>This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No confirmation of funding at that point in time • The proposed creation of a working group to consider future efficiencies within the scheme. • The working group to also look at the current model of equal funding for all councils and the potential to change this to model based on need within council areas. <p>At the P&C committee on 6th March it was proposed that the council provide additional resource to the Affordable Warmth team to process the waiting list of self-referrals either by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-deploying staff from within the council • Providing a job role for a staff member returning from sick leave

- Providing financial resource to allow for the recruitment of additional staff

The matter was referred to the SP&R committee for consideration.

3.5 **Targeted nature of the scheme.**

The scheme is designed to target the most vulnerable households and those most affected by fuel poverty. The University of Ulster (UU) provide streets which the council can visit through door knocking to offer the support of the scheme. Given the quantity of self-referrals to the scheme in Belfast, these self-referrals can be processed as targeted on the basis of being within one of the targeted areas.

3.6 The UU have provided additional lists of addresses in a revision of their algorithm using more up to date data. It is proposed that within Belfast we will continue dealing with the self-referrals as before, using the revised priority matrix for addresses that UU have provided.

Self-referrals

3.7 The Service has received over 1700 calls from July 2017 (on average 52 per week) regarding the scheme. 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 team is finding that approximately half of the referrals that are sent to NIHE involve households which have no heating or intermittent heating, and work to prioritise these cases.

3.8 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.

3.9 It should be noted that in many cases the people that we are working with can be very vulnerable, some in distressing situations. It also takes considerable time for each household to explain the scheme and collate the required documentation. This takes its toll on our staff and they have been provided with support from employee counselling both relating to their own welfare, but also in terms of signposting vulnerable people to other agencies.

3.10 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 considerable time for measures while those in greater need are considered, within the referral target.
3.11	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.
	<u>Finance and Resource Implications</u>
3.12	The DFC workshop is planned for the 27 March 2018 at which it is hoped that the detail of the DFC budget allocation for 2018/19 will be confirmed. It is therefore recommended that a further report is brought to the Committee in April 2018.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u>
3.13	There are no equality or good relations issues.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Letter from Head of Fuel Poverty DfC, 13 th March 2018