



Subject:	Affordable Warmth Scheme update
Date:	9 th June 2020
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Strategic Director, City and 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	Belfast City Council has been 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) since 2014.
1.2	The scheme aims to address fuel poverty for the most vulnerable households in the city by targeting those households that meet certain criteria, as identified by Ulster University by providing home improvement measures such as loft and cavity wall insulation, replacement boilers and new double glazed windows. While it is a targeted scheme, self-referrals are also considered. To qualify for the scheme occupant's income must be below £20,000 (gross).

	<u>COVID-19</u>
1.3	Given the current lockdown requirements, no site visits can currently be carried out. Only a small number of urgent referrals are being sent to NIHE, under a revised protocol.
1.4	The Building Control Service continues to employ the Affordable Warmth Co-ordinator who is dealing with all council work on the scheme. Recruitment of site staff to cover the business as usual 38 referrals is currently on hold pending the return to normal operations.
1.5	For 2020-21, DfC initially only committed to pay for few urgent referrals made, which would have left the council to make up the shortfall, but have laterally agreed that for Quarter 1 DfC have confirmed that they will match the funding provided for Q1 last year (approx. £10,900), which covers the salary for the AWS co-ordinator. Confirmation has been requested that this funding arrangement continue until such times as normal service resumes.
1.6	DfC are considering the funding for the remainder of 2020-2021 and the issue of payment per referral as previously raised by Belfast City Council who have written to the DfC Minister earlier this year requesting a meeting to discuss the funding arrangements.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee are asked to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of the report.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Key Issues & current position</u>
3.1	Following the update report in January, members wrote to the Minister for Communities requesting a meeting to discuss funding for the AWS. This included the move to payment per referral, rather than guaranteed funding for the target number of referrals, and the current equal split of funding amongst the 11 councils.
3.2	In February DfC gave an update on the future of the scheme, the funding arrangements, and the targeted approach (Appendix 1). The main points of the letter are:

1. There is a business case approved through to 2024
2. The department propose to make bids for funding for the AWS

Year	Funding bid
2020-2021	£16M
2021-2022	£16M
2022-2023	£16M
2023-2024	£14.5M

3. 2020-2021
Number of referrals = 456 (38 per month)

No of referrals	Referral rate (£)	Total funding
300	£222.92	£66,876
156	£186.25	£29,055
	TOTAL	£95,931

4. Further work is being carried out by Ulster University on the targeted approach

- 3.3 These targets have been affected by the current lockdown requirements and only a small number of urgent referrals are being made to NIHE. DfC initially confirmed that payments would only be made for referrals provided, which was unacceptable to councils given the significant reduction in referrals numbers.
- 3.4 Following engagement with councils, DfC wrote to councils on 15 May (Appendix 2) with a proposal for funding for Q1 conditioned on the councils provide target referrals once back to normal and continuing to collect information on no-urgent cases.
- 3.5 Officers responded by requesting that this arrangement for Q1 be extended through to end of this year or until things are back to normal, and that a further review of the scheme funding is carried out, including payment per referral.
- 3.6 DfC have responded on 26 May (Appendix 3) confirming that payment for Q1 will be paid imminently and they are looking at funding for the remainder of the year.

3.7	The service will continue to process urgent referrals in consultation with the NIHE and to handle all calls and enquiries regarding the scheme to be in a position to provide increased referrals when the situation returns to normal.
3.8	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>In year funding: The DfC will provide funding for Q1 of approximately £10,900, matching the same quarter for last year, which will cover the current direct staffing costs for the scheme. DfC are considering the funding for the remainder of 2020-2021.</p> <p>Payment per referral: DfC have confirmed that they will carry out a Scheme Review when things return to normal</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.9	There are no equality, good relations or rural needs issues.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 Letter to Councils AWS 14th February 2020</p> <p>Appendix 2 Letter to Councils AWS 15th May 2020</p> <p>Appendix 3 Letter to Councils AWS 26th May 2020</p>