

**From: David Polley**

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**Level 3  
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Our ref:

Date: 26 May 2020

Senior Council Official  
Affordable Warmth Scheme

## **AFFORDABLE WARMTH SCHEME COUNCIL FUNDING AND STAFF RETENTION**

In my letter to all Council Senior Officers and copied to Chief Executives, dated 15 May 2020, I set out a proposed solution to help Councils continue to make emergency referrals (Annex A). While this is a temporary arrangement I appreciate that all Councils have now confirmed their commitment to this as a way to move forward during this unusual time and have also confirmed that they should be in a position to meet an agreed monthly target rate of referrals once current restrictions are lifted. I will therefore ensure the agreed payment will be made as soon as possible.

In response to my letter issued on 15<sup>th</sup> May some Councils have requested commitment to this level of funding for the remainder of this year. I can assure you that the Department is continuing to explore this issue and I am hopeful that funding will be available to deliver the Scheme to full potential once lockdown restrictions are eased. Unfortunately it is not possible at the moment to determine exactly how we will reach full potential, as this is very much dependent on how soon normal Affordable Warmth Scheme processes can be resumed. As lockdown restrictions are eased, the Department will continue to work with the Housing Executive and Councils on the way forward. Discussions will need to take place to agree the number of monthly referrals and identify workaround options for issues like visits and verification of supporting documentation etc. Department Officials will be in touch

with Councils and the Housing Executive to discuss options and agree any proposed temporary changes to the referral process and current Service Level Agreements as soon as possible.

Finally the issue of payment per referral was also been raised. As you are aware this payment model is an integral part of the scheme design approved in August 2019 and as such cannot be amended without a Scheme Review. It is intended that a Review will take place once some semblance of normality has returned. The drivers for this are proposed changes to legislation around the Scheme eligibility threshold and removing the inclusion of disability benefits as assessable income. For now there is no scope to vary the approach of paying Councils under the same flat rate funding model used in this quarter last year.

I hope this response provides some reassurance in these uncertain times. We will be in touch with Councils and the Housing Executive to discuss the practicalities of the referral process in due course and will communicate any change in the above as and when the situation we find ourselves in improves.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Polley', written in a cursive style.

**David Polley**

## ANNEX A



From: David Polley

[David.Polley@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:David.Polley@communities-ni.gov.uk)

Level 3  
Causeway Exchange  
1-7 Bedford Street  
Belfast  
BT2 7EG

Our ref:

Date: 15 May 2020

Senior Council Official  
Affordable Warmth Scheme

### **AFFORDABLE WARMTH SCHEME: COUNCIL FUNDING AND STAFF RETENTION**

Councils have raised the issue of Affordable Warmth payments and retention of Council Affordable Warmth Scheme staff during the COVID-19 crisis. Given the temporary restrictions introduced to protect the health and safety of householders, Council and Housing Executive staff due the crisis, (the cessation of all home visits) and the resulting introduction of emergency referrals only, it will not be possible to fulfil the previously agreed referral profiles of 38 per month per Council.

I am therefore writing to confirm that Councils can be paid the same amount as in 2019/20 Quarter 1 (approximately £10.9k per Council), to ensure that they can continue to refer emergency cases to the Housing Executive. This is conditional on confirmation from yourselves that, you will immediately return to fulfilling the agreed referral profiles as soon activities can return to normal, or if alternative processes are developed.

A further condition of payment is that Councils, as well as making emergency referrals, should also work on non-emergency referrals as far as possible without visits into people homes so that when the lockdown is lifted they will be able to verify the eligibility criteria and make a referral to the Housing Executive.

This funding is subject to future review and may be adjusted depending on the extent to which Council Affordable Warmth Scheme staff are eligible and accepted under the Government's furlough scheme.

I hope this provides some reassurance and allows you to retain Affordable Warmth Scheme staff. I would be grateful if you would indicate by 5pm on Tuesday 19 May 2020 to [avril.hiles@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:avril.hiles@communities-ni.gov.uk) and copy [oliver.mchugh@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:oliver.mchugh@communities-ni.gov.uk) if you are content to agree to this interim payment arrangement.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Polley', written in a cursive style.

**David Polley**  
Director, Housing Supply Policy