



Borough of Telford and Wrekin

Cabinet

Thursday, 5 January 2023

Affordable Warmth Strategy Update

Cabinet Member:	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Housing, Enforcement and Transport	
Lead Director:	Katherine Kynaston - Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure	
Service area:	Housing, Employment & Infrastructure	
Report Author:	Ravi Phull – Housing Strategy & Regeneration Service Delivery Manager	
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Wards Affected:	All Wards	
Key Decision:	Not Key Decision	
Forward Plan:	Not Applicable	
Report considered by:	SMT – 6 December 2022 Business Briefing – 15 December 2022	

1.0 Recommendations for noting:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1.1 Notes the actions undertaken in respect of the Affordable Warmth Strategy.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To provide an update for Cabinet on the work the Council and partners are doing to deliver the Borough's Affordable Warmth Strategy.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 In April 2021 Telford and Wrekin Council produced our Affordable Warmth Strategy.
- 3.2 Since the introduction of the Affordable Warmth Strategy the dramatic rise in energy prices driven by the war in Ukraine has meant a significant change in context with many more households in or threatened with fuel poverty. Between October 2021 and October 2022 domestic gas prices increased by 129% and domestic electricity prices by 66% and while the Government has introduced measures to cap energy bills for a period the future scope of these remains uncertain and further increases are expected in April 2023.
- 3.3 The combined effects of the increasing costs of energy, food, road fuel, rents and other essentials, are having a disproportionate impact on those who can least afford it, including people on low incomes and single parents. In Telford & Wrekin, over a third of households have an estimated annual income below £20,000, almost double the percentage nationally, making them more susceptible to becoming fuel poor.
- 3.4 It is expected that a quarter of people will not turn on their heating this winter.
- 3.5 Scientific research makes clear that cold homes are harmful for their occupants bringing a higher risk of stroke, respiratory infection and falls or other injuries due to people's reduced strength and dexterity in low temperatures. Cold homes can have both short and long-term consequences for a person's health, wellbeing and even their opportunities in life.
- 3.6 Excess cold is directly linked with damp and mould growth in the home, further exacerbating respiratory illness.
- 3.7 The Affordable Warmth Strategy aims to:
- **Reduce the number of fuel poor households***
 - **Improve the health and wellbeing of the most vulnerable people in our community**, by ensuring they live in a warm and comfortable home
 - **Close the gap** targeting those areas of the Borough with the highest levels of fuel poverty and addressing inequalities

** The Government publish fuel poverty data every 2 years. The Strategy was based on 2018 figures however very soon after its adoption a new, national Fuel Poverty Strategy for England "Sustainable Warmth: Protecting Vulnerable Households in England" changed the definition of 'fuel poverty' having the effect of increasing the % in the Borough to 16% of households. Updated figures are due but given the current situation it is anticipated these will show an increase in this %. We know from the growth in calls through our hotline and the circumstances of those seeking support alongside data gathered as part of the Cost of Living Strategy that many more households are facing fuel poverty.*

3.8 An Action Plan was published alongside the strategy providing key areas of focus for delivery. While the landscape has changed drastically since then, our actions have followed the same key themes which remain relevant:

- Raising Energy Awareness & Providing Support
- Improving Energy Efficiency & Raising Standards
- Maximising Household Income & Benefitting the Local Economy

4.0 Summary of Main Proposals

4.1 The following sections provide an update on delivery against the themes in the Strategy and Action Plan and set out additional activities we will be taking to support our residents and businesses. The Action Plan remains live and we will continue to develop new initiatives to support residents and businesses.

5.0 Raising Energy Awareness and Providing Support to households across the Borough

Since the adoption of the Strategy we have:-

5.1 Worked with our partners Marches Energy Agency to develop and embed the **Telford Energy Advice** hot line to provide a single point of contact for all our residents in need of energy advice and support. The advice line provides a streamlined 'one stop shop' providing advice, home visits and referrals to grant funding available for eligible households.



what we achieved in a year

we supported
3,500
people in fuel poverty

of the people we
advised
41%
had health conditions

we partnered
with over
140
organisations

we delivered
more than
360
home visits

5.2 We have also worked with Marches to raise awareness through activities such as promotions, safer stronger events and visits to schools.



5.3 **Training** – recognising the need to ensure that all front line staff are able to identify the signs of fuel poverty and make swift referrals into support and advice we have delivered a training package initially to our health colleagues with plans to roll this out further.

5.4 We continue to develop our **Website** to provide residents with details and contacts for where they can access support.

5.5 Through a bespoke **Communications Plan** we are ensuring our residents are kept informed of all advice and support available to them. Featuring regular case studies, tips and advice with links to the TEA service and Advice Line.



FUNDED INSULATION NOW AVAILABLE

to homeowners in Donnington

in partnership with **Telford & Wrekin Council**

you may be eligible to receive energy saving measures through the **Telford & Wrekin Council** Sustainable Warmth scheme



6.0 Next Steps

- 6.1 To maximise the reach and range of support provided we will be providing **top up funding to the TEA service** until 2024 to ensure our residents are supported through this critical time.
- 6.2 Recognising that residents are increasingly looking for advice on retrofitting but finding a confusing landscape of advice and recommendations, we have partnered with Parity Projects Ltd to launch a **Planbuilder tool for residents in the Borough**. This facility, accessible via our website, allows residents to search for their property by postcode and find out information about the construction of their property. It then suggests what energy improvements can be made to their property, including latest estimate of costs and also what return they will get in terms of savings. This facility will also assist middle income households, who may fall out of scope for Government funding on how to best plan improvements to their homes. Further advice on accessing accredited installers is also available to all residents via the TEA hotline.
- 6.3 As part of our **Cost of Living Strategy**, launched in October, we are putting in place a range of additional measures to support on energy and utility costs including providing energy rebates for those in Band E and above, on low incomes, and gas and electric vouchers for those on pre paid meters, on low incomes, in emergency situations.

7.0 Improving Energy Efficiency and Raising Standards

Since the adoption of the Strategy we have:-

- 7.1 **Attracted in excess of £4m of grant to retrofit homes in a number of our Safer, Stronger Programme areas** with some of the highest levels of fuel poverty and low income across the Borough – including:

Case Study 1

Mr H had External Wall Insulation installed to his property, which he is already seeing the benefit of in reducing his heating bills, but he also has reported an additional benefit during the summer heatwave when his house remained cooler and ‘much more comfortable’.

He’s “delighted” with the installation.

He says the “house feels warmer and retains heat for longer”. He said he “doesn’t need the heating on as high and for not as long of a duration either”



- 7.2 **Local Authority Delivery (LAD2)** – which has been used to retrofit **50** homes in Sutton Hill, with **77** energy efficiency measures, these included external wall insulation, loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, double glazing and solar panels. This programme of works has improved the energy efficiency rating of properties as well as reducing residents' heating bills by up to **£640** a year, and saving up to **600** kilograms of CO₂ emissions each year.

Case Study 2

'I'm getting old so I'm more susceptible to the cold'

'Upstairs it was freezing, its always been cold, it was too cold to take a shower and the bedroom was really cold too'

'With the installations I've had, I'm able to spend more time upstairs as it's a lot warmer now'

'The difference between my house before and after is MASSIVE'



- 7.3 **Local Authority Delivery (LAD3)** – targeting a further 144 properties with a low Energy Performance Rating including households on low incomes in Donnington Ward.
- 7.4 **Home Upgrade Grant (HUG)** – providing funding to address c.100 off gas properties in fuel poverty.
- 7.5 Given the limitations of Government grant, as a Council we are investing further using £400,000 of our **Climate Change** funding to **provide energy efficiency measures for households who fall out of current Government funding criteria**, however are still classed as fuel poor. This funding is earmarked for use in properties within the **Safer Stronger** Programme Areas and will include measures such loft insulation top up, draught proofing and double glazing.
- 7.6 We have also launched our **TWC Emergency Boiler Fund** committing **£70,000** for emergency boiler replacements for low income households with a cold related illness without any form of heating. This pot is used as a last resort where no other form of heating can be installed.

Case Study 3

'It is a lot warmer upstairs and upstairs we don't need to put the heating on as much.'

'My wife has asthma so that was definitely a good benefit of getting the loft insulation done'

'We've got two kids under 5 so they house also needs to be warm for them'
'Living conditions are better, it feels warmer in the house and is better to come home to after being at work all day.'



- 7.7 As part of the cost of living work the Council are piloting **distributing low energy light bulbs** to help those facing fuel poverty. Lighting typically makes up 11% of a household's electricity use and replacement of inefficient halogen or incandescent bulbs will reduce this by 80%. An initial 2000 bulbs will be distributed through Shropshire Fire and Rescue, Wrekin Housing, Telford Crisis Support and Marches Energy Agency. Working with partners means that this support will be targeted and can be fitted directly in people's homes. Should this be successful the Council will invest up to £30,000 of its own climate change funding to scale this up the equivalent of providing a pack of 5 bulbs to an additional 2,600 households as well as connecting recipients to longer-term help through Telford Energy Advice.
- 7.8 We are **ensuring that ECO4 funding is available to ALL vulnerable groups in the Borough** extending the nationally set criteria. We have partnered with MEA to drive take up with onboarding installers and capacity to carry out all eligibility checks to ensure correct households are identified and supported. ECO3 Flex funding brought investment by energy providers of £360,000 to residents in the Borough benefitting vulnerable households by funding heating and insulation measures.
- 7.9 Householders can also use the MEA approved installer list to check the validity of anyone cold calling, offering ECO4 Flex funding. We are also **working with MEA to build on this approved installer list for residents seeking to retrofit their own homes.**

- 7.10 A further £170k of our Climate Change capital funding, has been used to **fit energy efficiency measures to 12 of the Council's temporary accommodation properties**. This project not only improved the energy performance of the properties but led by example in improving our own stock for vulnerable people.
- 7.11 **To further support those living in the private rented sector** the private sector housing team ensure every property inspected during the course of their work meets the minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) for privately rented properties. Where landlords do not engage with informal advice, formal notices are served. Since May 2022 formal action has been taken in relation to **64** properties containing excess cold and damp hazards.
- 7.12 Through our **Safer Stronger** work in excess of **600** properties have been proactively inspected and where needed brought up to the correct energy efficiency standards.
- 7.13 We have undertaken proactive communications regarding damp and mould issues responding to tenant and landlord reports and working with our social landlords to deal with damp and mould growth hazards in rented properties. The cost of living crisis has further exacerbated issues with vulnerable tenants struggling to heat their homes.
- 7.14 We recognise the challenges of the current energy crisis for private landlords as well as tenants and our Tenant & Landlord Coordinator provides a first point of contact for both to seek advice and support.

8.0 Next Steps

- 8.1 **Home Improvement Loans** – launching in early 2023, we will be working in partnership with Just Credit Union to provide low cost loans for low income homeowners to carry out essential home improvements including energy efficiency measures.
- 8.2 We will look to maximise the **Eco Plus grant** for our residents. Currently in consultation phase, Central Government have announced the ECO Plus grant, aimed at households who **are** able to pay, living in council tax bands A, B, C and D.
- Expected to start in April 2023, ECO Plus Grants of up to **£15,000** will be available to fund the installation of:
- Loft Insulation
 - Cavity Wall Insulation
 - Smart Heating Controls
- 8.3 We will continue to **bid for additional Government grant as well as lobbying for this to be significantly extended** to enable support for many more households to retrofit properties in the lowest EPC bands.
- 8.4 Looking to the future we will be bringing forward **Developer Climate Change Guidance** that will add detail to the planning policies in the adopted Telford &

Wrekin Local Plan helping to future proof new homes. This will include, for example, increased energy efficiency measures and designs to maximise solar gain helping to minimise running costs especially during winter periods. This work will also help inform the review of the Local Plan and ensure that planning policies continue to make a positive contribution to addressing climate change and addressing some of the 'building fabric' causes of fuel poverty.

- 8.5 Through **NuPlace**, the Council's wholly owned housing company, we are committed to ensuring that all homes built, or refurbished as part of the Telford & Wrekin Home's initiative, are delivered to a standard which minimises running costs for tenants. This approach is also in accordance with the Council's and Nuplace's low carbon agenda.
- 8.6 As an example, **Southwater Way, completed by Nuplace** in August 2022 within Telford Town Centre, represents the first scheme incorporating both a fabric first approach to energy efficiency and incorporating solar panels and e charging points. This step forward within Nuplace's specification will help reduce fuel bills for our tenants as well as reducing the scheme's carbon footprint. Estimates suggest that solar panels fitted to an average 3 bedroom home at this development could save the household as much as £900 per year in energy bills (compared to a comparable home using fossil fuels, based on projected energy prices for 2022/23) and reduce the building's carbon footprint by more than 400kg of carbon emissions annually – the same amount of CO2 that's emitted by driving 1,900 miles in a diesel car.
- 8.7 **Telford & Wrekin Homes** is all about investing in and protecting our existing housing stock through high quality renovations, with a commitment to refurbish approximately 100 homes borough wide. Works to our first 12 properties were completed in spring 2022 and alongside cosmetic improvements, refurbishment also sought to address issues such as damp, which can lead to health issues. For all future refurbishment works, Telford & Wrekin Homes will be looking to undertake any necessary upgrades to the fabric of the building to ensure the property meets an Energy Performance Rating of C, in accordance with the provisional Minimum Energy Performance of Buildings Bill.

9.0 Maximising Household Income & Benefitting the Local Economy

Since the adoption of the Strategy, we have:

- 9.1 Continued to deliver the Council's Benefits and Financial Welfare service long standing support for residents with a range of national and local benefits and discounts, including **Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction** and Free School Meals, as well as local discretionary schemes such as **Emergency Welfare Assistance** and **Discretionary Housing Payments**. The cost-of-living crisis has seen a significant increase in applications to these discretionary schemes as a direct result of rising energy and food costs and we have committed to increase the funding for **Emergency Welfare Assistance** for the next two years. In addition, since October 2021 we have been distributing the Government funded **Household Support Grant** by providing supermarket shopping **vouchers** in the school holidays to children who would normally receive a free school meal and providing one off supermarket vouchers to our most financially vulnerable

pensioners in the Borough. This scheme will be continued until at least March 2024. Details of the whole range of financial support that is available can be found in the **Cost of Living Strategy** which was approved by Cabinet in October 2022.

- 9.2 We have worked with partners including the Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB), MEA, WHG, Cadent Gas and our Registered Providers to **ensure residents are receiving consistent, up to date advice on all aspects of fuel debt and agencies are signposting or making referrals** to maximise income and benefits including hardship funds.
- 9.3 **Supporting Business** – While the Affordable Warmth Strategy focusses primarily on residents, we recognise the challenges facing business from rising energy prices and the resultant cost inflation. This is leading to rising prices impacting residents' incomes and risking business closures and resultant job losses. We are taking a number of measures to support and build business resilience with more detailed in our Cost of Living Strategy.
- 9.4 Where we are launching new energy grant schemes we are **committed to using local suppliers** wherever possible.
- 9.5 We recognise there is a **skills shortage around retrofit installation** and are working with our local skills providers and to influence the emerging Local Skills Improvement Plans to address this going forward seeking to ensure the Telford £1 continues to be invested locally.
- 9.6 In November we launched our new **Cost of Doing Business microsite** providing details of all the support and advice available for businesses to address the impact of the current economic circumstances. We have also launched an **Eco Grant and Diversification Grant for High Street businesses** with over **15 awards/submissions** since launch in October. In early February working with partners we will be holding a **Showcase Event** open to all businesses including SME and social enterprises to provide further support and advice.

10.0 Alternative Options

- 10.1 The alternative would be to do nothing, which in the current cost of living crisis and rising energy prices, would mean our most vulnerable residents would be most affected driving more into fuel poverty.

11.0 Key Risks

- 11.1 The key risks to the delivery of the strategy and action plan are the ongoing energy crisis and withdrawal and /or lack of Government funding for the retrofit and energy efficiency of properties in the low income housing market to protect the most vulnerable.
- 11.2 Another associated risk is the rapid increase in cost of materials and labour which is making Government funding reach less properties than initially scoped.
- 11.3 A lack of retrofit contractors also adds risk to the delivery of any retrofit project within given timescales.

11.4 The inability of tenants to be able to adequately heat their homes provides risk to health and to successful enforcement against landlords who may attribute hazards to tenant lifestyle.

12.0 Council Priorities

12.1 The strategy detailed in this report supports the following Council priorities:

- Every child, young person, and adult lives well in their community,
- All neighbourhoods are a great place to live,
- A community-focussed, innovative council providing efficient, effective and quality services.

13.0 Financial Implications

13.1 The Capital Programme 2021/22 to 2025/26 contains the allocations detailed in this report, which total over £3m. The HUG2 allocation of £1.947m will be added to the Capital Programme in 2023/24.

14.0 Legal and HR Implications

14.1 The Council has the legal power to undertake and provide funding for the activities set out in this report. Where necessary, legal advice has been provided in relation to certain aspects of the report and will be provided on an ongoing basis. Many of the results of the activities in the report, allow the Council to demonstrate it is meeting its Public Sector Equality Duty to reduce inequalities across the Borough.

14.2 There are no HR implications directly arising from this report.

15.0 Ward Implications

15.1 The Affordable Warmth Strategy affects all wards across the Borough. Many of the schemes targeted at specific wards are set out within the body of the report.

16.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications

16.1 The link between poor housing conditions and poor health outcomes is long established. Housing is often cited as an important social determinant of health, recognising the range of ways in which a lack of housing, or poor quality housing, can negatively affect health and wellbeing. Excess cold affects all age groups in different ways within the home, including the very young, the elderly and the vulnerable. This strategy and the associated action plan are key to provide warm and healthy homes for our most vulnerable residents at the most critical time when this group are most affected by the cost of living crisis.

16.2 Where possible we are trying to engage local contractors to help boost our local economy recovering from the effects of the pandemic and the more recent cost of living crisis.

17.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

17.1 Support and advice to manage energy costs and increase energy efficiency is available to all residents through our free hot line. The focus of the Strategy and many of the specific initiatives is those on low and middle income households who are most affected by changes in the market. The work of this strategy aims to provide the best outcomes for this group of people to provide them with the equal opportunities afforded to people on higher incomes.

18.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications

18.1 The Strategy supports delivery of our climate change and environmental commitments. Through measures to improve the energy efficiency of new and existing homes and support residents reduce the amount of energy they use, we will contribute to a reduction in the Borough's Carbon footprint. A number of actions and programmes identified in this report are funded directly from the Council's Climate Change Fund and as set out in the body of the report are delivering reductions in carbon emissions as well as addressing fuel poverty.

19.0 Background papers

- 1 Telford & Wrekin's Affordable Warmth Strategy 2021-2026
- 2 Telford & Wrekin's Action Plan for Affordable Warmth
- 3 Telford & Wrekin Council Cost of Living Strategy October 2022

20.0 Appendices None.

21.0 Report Signed off

Signed off by	Date sent	Date signed off	Initials
Legal	01/12/2022	01/12/2022	RP
Finance	24/11/2022	28/11/2022	DR