

# Borough of Telford and Wrekin

## SMT Cabinet Reports

Wednesday 10 July 2024

### Affordable Warmth Strategy Update

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<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Richard Overton - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member: Homes & Enforcement
<b>Lead Director:</b>	Katherine Kynaston - Director: Housing, Employment & Infrastructure
<b>Service Area:</b>	Housing, Employment & Infrastructure
<b>Report Author:</b>	Ravi Phull - Housing Strategy & Regeneration Service Delivery Manager
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<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All Wards
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Not Key Decision
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	Not Applicable
<b>Report considered by:</b>	SMT – 14 May 2024 Business Briefing – 23 May 2024

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#### 1.0 Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

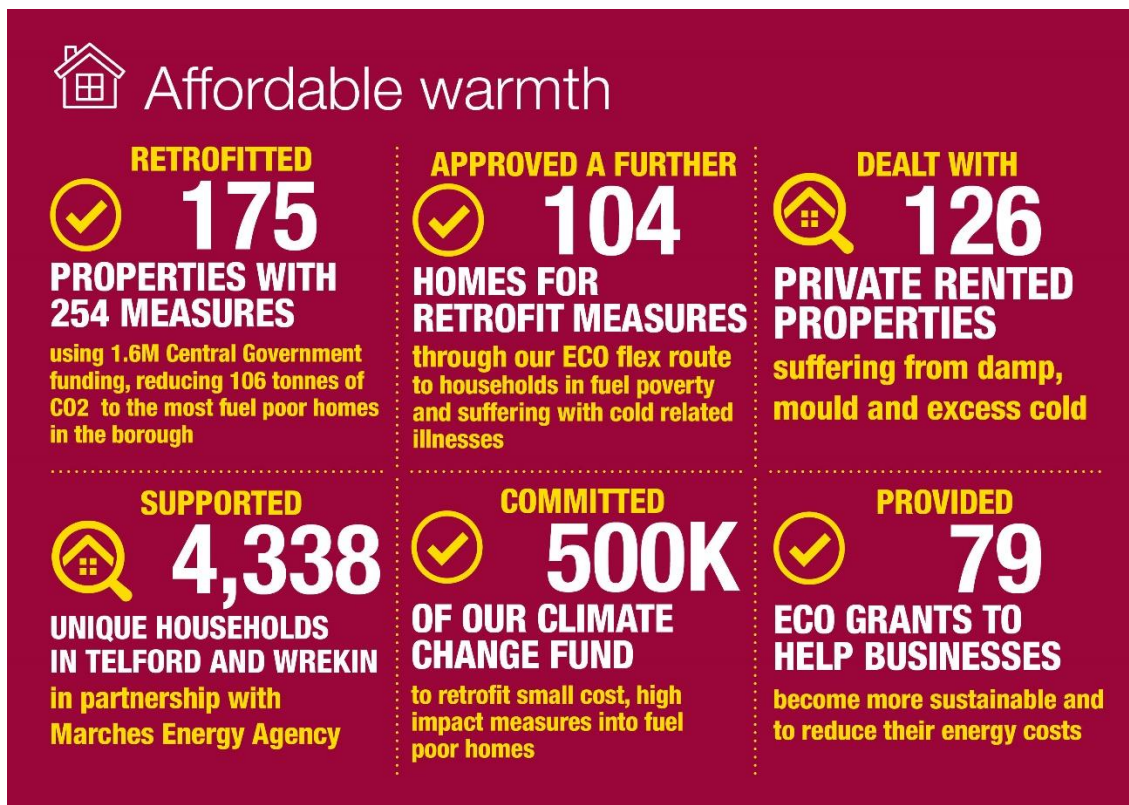
- 1.1 notes the actions undertaken in respect of the Affordable Warmth Strategy
- 1.2 delegates approval to the Director Housing, Employment & Infrastructure and the Director Finance & HR in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member to enter into a consortium with other local authorities to deliver future capital retrofit programmes as set out in the Report.

#### 2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 This report provides an update on the work the Council and partners are doing to deliver the Borough's Affordable Warmth Strategy which aims to address fuel poverty in the borough and improve the health and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

### **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 Telford & Wrekin Council is committed to protect, care and invest to support all our residents to live safe and healthy lives and to address inequalities.
- 3.2 It is widely recognised that being cold at home can cause or worsen health problems and there are also clear links to mental health and social isolation.
- 3.3 Since the council adopted its Affordable Warmth Strategy we have seen a dramatic rise in energy prices and the resultant cost of living crisis has meant many more households in or threatened with fuel poverty with national price caps providing little relief.
- 3.4 The Council's Cost of Living Strategy estimated that locally over a third of households have an estimated annual income below £20,000, almost double the percentage nationally. Latest statistics for Telford and Wrekin show 14.9% or 11,686 of our households are estimated to be in fuel poverty.
- 3.5 In response the council's Affordable Warmth Strategy aims to:
- Reduce the number of fuel poor households in the Borough
  - 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
- 3.6 Over the last 12 months through the actions of the council and partners we have:



#### 4.0 Summary of main proposals

4.1 The following sections provides an update on delivery against the Affordable Warmth Action Plan by theme. The Action Plan remains live with new initiatives being added to support residents and businesses.

#### **Raising Energy Awareness and Providing Support to households across the Borough**

- 4.2 Working in collaboration with Marches Energy Agency (MEA) **the council has supported the development of the Telford Energy Advice (TEA) hot line** as a single point of contact for all in need of energy advice and support including home visits and referrals to grant funding.
- 4.3 The Council's **website provides up to date information about the latest energy advice and grant funding** opportunities with links to the TEA website and hotline.
- 4.4 **Teams across the Council and partners working with vulnerable tenants, are kept fully trained and informed of sources of help** for tenants, landlords and homeowners. Where home inspections are undertaken support and information is offered to tenants and landlords to address energy efficiency and retrofit including sources of funding.

- 4.5 Regular attendance at **public events and community action days continues to raise further awareness** working linked with the Stronger Communities Programme.
- 4.6 In partnership with the Marches Energy Agency the council is supporting the **Future Ready Homes initiative**. This is aimed at the self-funded market many of whom are in fuel poverty but fall outside eligibility criteria for central government funding.
- 4.7 The project will help householders navigate the complex world of retrofit and providing support throughout installation of works to ensure residents are getting the correct advice and quality from contractors.
- 4.8 By working with local businesses the project will also provide training opportunities to develop much needed local retrofit skills.
- 4.9 **The Retrofit Skills Home project** compliments Future Ready Homes providing residents with an opportunity to view measures in a 'show home' with regular open days, webinars, video tours and case studies.
- 4.10 The project will involve college students, apprentices and specialist contractors all working together to refurbish and retrofit two properties learning the skills crucial for the future. Retrofit assessors, thermographers, electricians, plumbers, carpenters and many more will benefit from vital 'real world' experience on site.
- 4.11 With the council's support the **TEA service will expand its service** over the next 12 months. Through links with the Telford Interfaith Council, Age UK and other partners, more targeted advice will be provided to households we know do not access services due to language and cultural barriers, age or digital exclusion.
- 4.12 Recognising that businesses are also impacted by rising costs and that our high streets have seen the impact of reduced consumer spending the council has **supported a number of business grant schemes**. This includes the Marches Energy Grant (MEG) providing free advice, energy assessments and grants to SMEs and community buildings. Up to £100,000 in match funded grant is available to eligible businesses implementing energy efficiency measures through the pilot Business Energy Advice Service fund.
- 4.13 Through the council's **Thrive Telford grant programme and the forthcoming Innovate Telford support for start ups**, we are growing our business support for both large and small businesses. This will help them reduce costs, develop new business opportunities and upskill to address energy security and sustainability.
- 4.14 Through the **Telford & Wrekin Climate Change Partnership** the council is supporting businesses to share best practice addressing energy and wider sustainability challenges through the **Telford Sustainability & Energy Cluster**

#### **Improving Energy Efficiency & Raising Standards**

- 4.15 Since the adoption of the strategy we have **maximised all opportunities to apply for Central Government** funding to retrofit the worst energy performing homes

with over **£1.6m invested in the last 12 months delivering 254 measures, over £45k of savings and delivering a total carbon saving of 107 tonnes of CO2.**

- 4.16 The Council has further used its ability to shape Government rules around households qualifying for ECO4 to maximise those able to access funding for heating systems. With 258 referrals made we have attracted a total install value of over £500k with savings in excess of £88k.
- 4.17 Government funded schemes typically remain limited and targeted at high-cost, fabric first measures which is limiting the number of households benefitting. To address this the **Council are directly investing additional funding targeted to these households increasing the number of residents we can support.**
- 4.18 **Telford & Wrekin Council are the only local authority regionally who offer an Emergency Boiler Fund** 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. We have provided funding to 14 households investing an average of £2k per property
- 4.19 In March the Council launched **Warm & Well Telford, funded by the Council's Climate Change programme.** This is delivering low-cost, high impact measures including heating controls, glazing and external doors and allows applications from households on a higher joint income than national programmes. To date we have received over 50 applications.
- 4.20 **Over the next 12 months the council and partners will be delivering the next phase of the Home Upgrade Grant aimed at low energy efficient off gas properties.**
- 4.21 Central Government have recently announced the Local Authority Retrofit Scheme covering on and off gas properties due to open for bids in 24/25. In light of recent success a consortium bid is planned with Shropshire and Herefordshire Councils.

### **Maximising Household Income & Benefitting the Local Economy**

- 4.22 Through the distribution of **gas and electric vouchers 437 people on low incomes** on pre-paid meters have been supported in an emergency situation, using our locally funded emergency welfare assistance.
- 4.23 Through forums such as our **Financial Welfare Partnership Group**, the Council continues to work 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 and making referrals to maximise income and benefits including hardship funds.
- 4.24 The council is committed to **ensuring the investment of funds benefits local businesses.** The contract for delivery of our HUG2, Warm and Well Telford and Emergency Boiler fund was made to Dodd Group Ltd. They are also engaging with local subcontractors and providing employment and apprenticeship opportunities to local residents.

## **5.0 Alternative Options**

- 5.1 The alternative to the actions set out in the report would be to do nothing, which given the impact of the cost of living crisis and energy prices, would mean many more of our most vulnerable residents would be left in, or driven into, fuel poverty.

## **6.0 Key Risks**

- 6.1 The key risk to the delivery of the action plan is the ongoing impact of rising energy prices which alongside the limited national funding means fewer households may benefit than initially scoped.
- 6.2 The piecemeal national grant programmes and the strict criteria being applied to these by Central Government is affecting delivery, our ability to plan ahead and maximising reach.
- 6.3 A lack of retrofit contractors continues to add risk to the delivery of projects within given timescales.
- 6.4 Fundamentally the inability of tenants to be able to adequately heat their homes brings risks to health. It can also undermine successful enforcement against landlords who may attribute hazards to tenant lifestyle.

## **7.0 Council Priorities**

- 7.1 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.

## **8.0 Financial Implications**

- 8.1 The Capital programme 2024/25 includes indicative allocations of £1.6m to support the HUG2 and Housing Climate Change initiatives detailed in this report.

An allocation of £150k revenue reserve was approved within the On Yourside programme (OYSP) to assist in delivering this programme. The revenue resources within Private Sector Housing was approved within the MTFS 2024-25, with a budgeted use of the OYSP reserves of £40k to support a temporary post and the remainder to support the TEA service in 2024-25. This funding will be fully utilised by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

## **9.0 Legal and HR Implications**

- 9.1 The Homes Energy Conservation Act 1995 (HECA) requires all local authorities in England to provide local energy conservation reports to central government in relation to energy measures they have adopted to improve energy efficiency of residential accommodation. Although it is not a statutory requirement for a local

authority to produce an actual affordable warmth strategy, it is good practice to do so. Such a strategy establishes the importance of tackling fuel poverty, improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions from residential dwellings whilst seeking to tackle fuel poverty through a range of sustainable measures.

9.2 The Council has the legal power to undertake and provide funding for the activities set out in this report. 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.

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

### **10.0 Ward Implications**

10.1 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.

### **11.0 Health, Social and Economic Implications**

11.1 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.

11.2 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.

### **12.0 Equality and Diversity Implications**

12.1 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.

### **13.0 Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

13.1 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.

Affordable Warmth Strategy Update

**14.0 Background Papers - None**

**15.0 Appendices - None**

**16.0 Report Sign Off**

<b>Signed off by</b>	<b>Date sent</b>	<b>Date signed off</b>	<b>Initials</b>
Legal	09/04/2024	12/04/2024	SH
Finance	09/05/2024	16/05/2024	DR & AEM
Director	10/05/2024	12/05/2024	KK