

Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy

Health and Wellbeing Board

Date: 25th October 2017

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Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To inform the Health and Wellbeing Board about the Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy which has been refreshed.
- 1.2 Swindon Borough Council and its partners have, for a number of years, been delivering initiatives to reduce the incidence of fuel poverty in the Swindon area. The first Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy was written in 2007, building on the work of the Wiltshire & Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy 2002. This latest version brings the strategy up to date, providing a snapshot of the current levels and distribution of fuel poverty and describing the planned focus to help those affected over the next two years. The strategy covers both private sector and social housing.
- 1.3 There are strong links between the prevalence of fuel poverty and cold related illnesses and excess winter deaths. The desire to reduce pressure on health services during the winter months is leading to more engagement of the health sector in affordable warmth issues. Action on fuel poverty is likely to lead to reductions in local health spend, GP referrals and hospital admissions due to improved health.
- 1.4 The Affordable Warmth Strategy links to Swindon Borough Council Priority One: improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing, low-carbon economy and Priority Four: help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable children and adults. It also links to the Swindon Health and Wellbeing Strategy Outcome 2: adults and older people in Swindon are living healthier and more independent lives. It contributes to wider Council work in areas such as Ageing Well, Long Term Conditions and Falls Prevention, helping to reduce the pressure on Adult Social Care. There are also clear connections to the Council's responsibilities under the Home Energy Conservation Act.

2. Recommendations

The Board is recommended to:

- 2.1 Discuss and approve the Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy 2017-19 attached at Appendix 1 to the report.
- 2.2 To recommend to Cabinet and the Clinical Commissioning Governing Body that they adopt the Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy for 2017-19.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from David Miles, 01793 463679, dmiles3@swindon.gov.uk.

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3. Detail

What is Affordable Warmth and Fuel Poverty?

- 3.1 Affordable warmth in very simple terms is about being able to keep your home adequately warm without incurring excessive cost. Fuel poverty has a more complicated definition.
- 3.2 A household in fuel poverty used to be defined as needing to spend 10% or more of their income to achieve adequate warmth. This definition was accepted by Government and used to measure the extent of fuel poverty nationally and locally until 2013.
- 3.3 In July 2013, Government announced that a new indicator to measure fuel poverty would be used, based on the recommendations from the Hills Fuel Poverty Review 2012. This new indicator finds a household to be fuel poor if it:
 - 3.3.1 Has an income below the poverty line (including if meeting its required energy bill would push it below the poverty line); and
 - 3.3.2 Has higher than typical energy costs.
- 3.4 So fuel poverty is the overlapping problem of households having a low income and facing the highest energy costs. Fuel poverty is measured based on notional energy bills rather than actual spending, to ensure households who have low energy bills simply because they are deliberately limiting their use of energy at home are not overlooked. High energy prices are a significant contributor to fuel poverty nationally, with poorer households having to spend a larger proportion of their income on heating than more affluent households. Poor energy efficiency standards in existing housing mean that money is spent on heating that leaks out of the home too easily. These factors can lead to homes not being heated adequately and poor health resulting from the cold damp conditions.
- 3.5 The Low Income High Costs indicator measures not only the extent of the problem (how many fuel poverty households there are) but also the depth of the problem (how badly affected each fuel poor household is). It achieves this by taking account of the fuel poverty gap, which is a measure of how much more fuel poor households need to spend to keep warm compared to typical households.

Background

- 3.6 The first Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy was written in 2007, at a time when the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy had targets in place to eradicate fuel poverty in all households by 2016. With these targets missed, the definition of fuel poverty was changed (see 3.3) and a new Fuel Poverty strategy for England was produced in 2015. This gave greater focus on the most fuel poor and emphasised partnership working particularly with the health sector.

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- 3.7 With this change of focus nationally, the Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy was refreshed accordingly and sets out its ambition for local activity over the next two years.

Affordable Warmth Strategy

- 3.8 The Affordable Warmth Strategy outlines:
- 3.8.1 The causes of fuel poverty, which are a combination of the energy efficiency of housing, household income, and energy costs.
 - 3.8.2 The evidence as to whether certain groups are more at risk of fuel poverty.
 - 3.8.3 The consequences of fuel poverty: being unable to afford to heat the home adequately can have a significant impact on health and wellbeing. It can contribute to poor health outcomes, both in terms of mortality (including excess winter deaths) and morbidity (including respiratory and cardiovascular conditions).
 - 3.8.4 The national and local context both in terms of the prevalence of fuel poverty and initiatives that are underway to address this.
 - 3.8.5 What we are going to do in Swindon to address fuel poverty.
- 3.9 Sub-regional fuel poverty statistics from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for 2015 (released in 2017) shows:
- 3.9.1 8,335 fuel poor households in Swindon, around 9.0 per cent of households in the borough.
 - 3.9.2 Levels of fuel poverty at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) across Swindon varies from 2.2 per cent up to 24.0 per cent.
 - 3.9.3 Out of 132 LSOAs in Swindon, 49 had levels of fuel poverty of 10 per cent or more of households.
- 3.10 The strategy sets out a vision and rationale for co-ordinated multi-agency action to ensure all households in the borough live in warm dry homes, free from the fear of fuel debt and poor health.
- 3.11 The aims of the strategy are:
- 3.11.1 To raise awareness of fuel poverty and affordable warmth among all stakeholders.
 - 3.11.2 To encourage and support households to achieve affordable warmth.
 - 3.11.3 To improve access to schemes, financial support and advice related to affordable warmth through improved networks and referral systems.
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3.12 There are five key objectives:

3.12.1 Maintain and improve relationships with agencies, organisations and other interested parties in order to promote affordable warmth and deliver new partnership initiatives.

3.12.2 Provide information on and access into national funding programmes for affordable warmth measures.

3.12.3 Deliver the Swindon Energy Matters gas and electricity tariff comparison and switching service to Swindon residents.

3.12.4 Facilitate take-up of national Warm Home Discount rebates for eligible residents.

3.12.5 Strengthen the health focus of affordable warmth work in Swindon, including establishing a health and housing referral network for health professionals to refer residents into.

3.13 The strategy will be delivered via multi-agency partnership working and engaging with local communities. Local initiatives will be monitored and evaluated for effectiveness.

3.14 This strategy will be implemented through the affordable warmth action plan. The Swindon Affordable Warmth Partnership Group, made up of Swindon Borough Council and local partner organisations, will update and develop the action plan, monitor the strategic objectives of the strategy and report on progress to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 Not to support the Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no direct financial or procurement implications arising from development of the strategy. Planned work as outlined in the action plan is covered by existing budgets or will go through appropriate Swindon Borough Council approval processes. In the longer term helping people achieve affordable warmth may reduce health and social care cost through limiting the health impacts of cold damp housing.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

5.2 No legal or human rights implications have been identified although the strategy vision is that every resident should have the right to live in a warm and dry home.

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All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 The strategy has the potential to reduce health inequalities as there are significant inequalities in fuel poverty with higher prevalence in more deprived areas and within certain groups such as families with children. The strategy also has the potential to improve health, as cold damp housing can exacerbate a range of respiratory and cardiovascular conditions.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A diversity impact assessment (DIA) has been completed for this strategy.

Risk Management

- 5.5 No specific risks have been identified at this stage for this report.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and the Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy 2017-2019.