

Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy

2017 to 2019

***Helping to eradicate fuel poverty
in Swindon***

| Contents | Page |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Introduction | 3 |
| 2. Affordable warmth and fuel poverty | 4 |
| 2.1 Definitions | |
| 2.2 Who does it affect? | |
| 2.3 What are the causes? | |
| 2.4 Effects of cold temperature on health | |
| 3. Where are we now? | 11 |
| 3.1 Nationally | |
| 3.2 The Local Picture | |
| 3.3 Affordable warmth schemes in Swindon | |
| 4. Where do we want to be? | |
| 4.1 Vision, aims and objectives | 19 |
| 5. How are we going to get there? | 20 |
| Annex | |
| NICE Guidance | 22 |

1. Introduction

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.

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.

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.

Swindon Borough Council and its partners will continue to develop co-operative approaches to tackling fuel poverty. Activity will be focussed on the three key aims of this strategy:

- To raise awareness of fuel poverty and affordable warmth among all stakeholders.
- To encourage and support households to achieve affordable warmth.
- To improve access to schemes, financial support and advice related to affordable warmth through improved networks and referral systems.

Coordinated activity to meet these aims will help ensure that all householders in the Swindon area live in warm dry homes, free from the fear of fuel debt and poor health.

2. Affordable Warmth and Fuel Poverty

2.1 Definitions

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.

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.

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:

- Has an income below the poverty line (including if meeting its required energy bill would push it below the poverty line); and
- Has higher than typical energy costs.

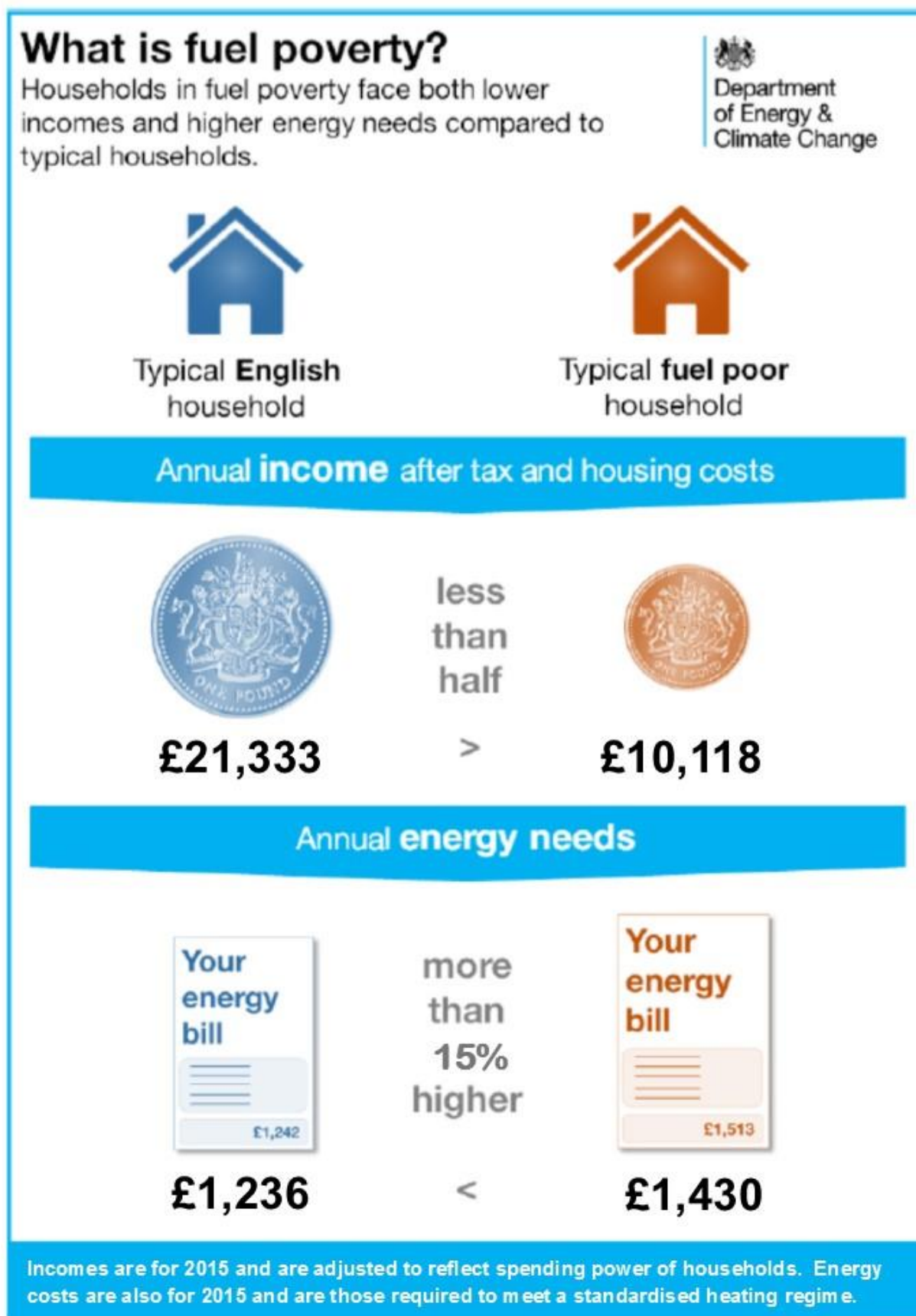
So fuel poverty is the overlapping problem of households having a low income and facing the highest energy costs. Fuel poverty is measured based on notional energy bills rather than actual spending, to ensure households who have low energy bills simply because they are deliberately limiting their use of energy at home are not overlooked.

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.

2.2 Who does it affect?

Figure 1 is adapted from the 2015 Government publication entitled “Cutting the cost of keeping warm – a fuel poverty strategy for England”. It has been updated with data from 2015 (the original figures used 2012 data) to illustrate what the Low Income High Costs indicator tells us about fuel poverty in 2015. While the numbers change over time, the figure reveals the fundamental fuel poverty problem.

Figure 1: The Low Income High Costs indicator – what does it mean?



Figures 2 and 3 summarise some key household characteristics about the fuel poor, taken from the same publication.

Figure 2: What the indicator tells us about who is fuel poor, Part 1

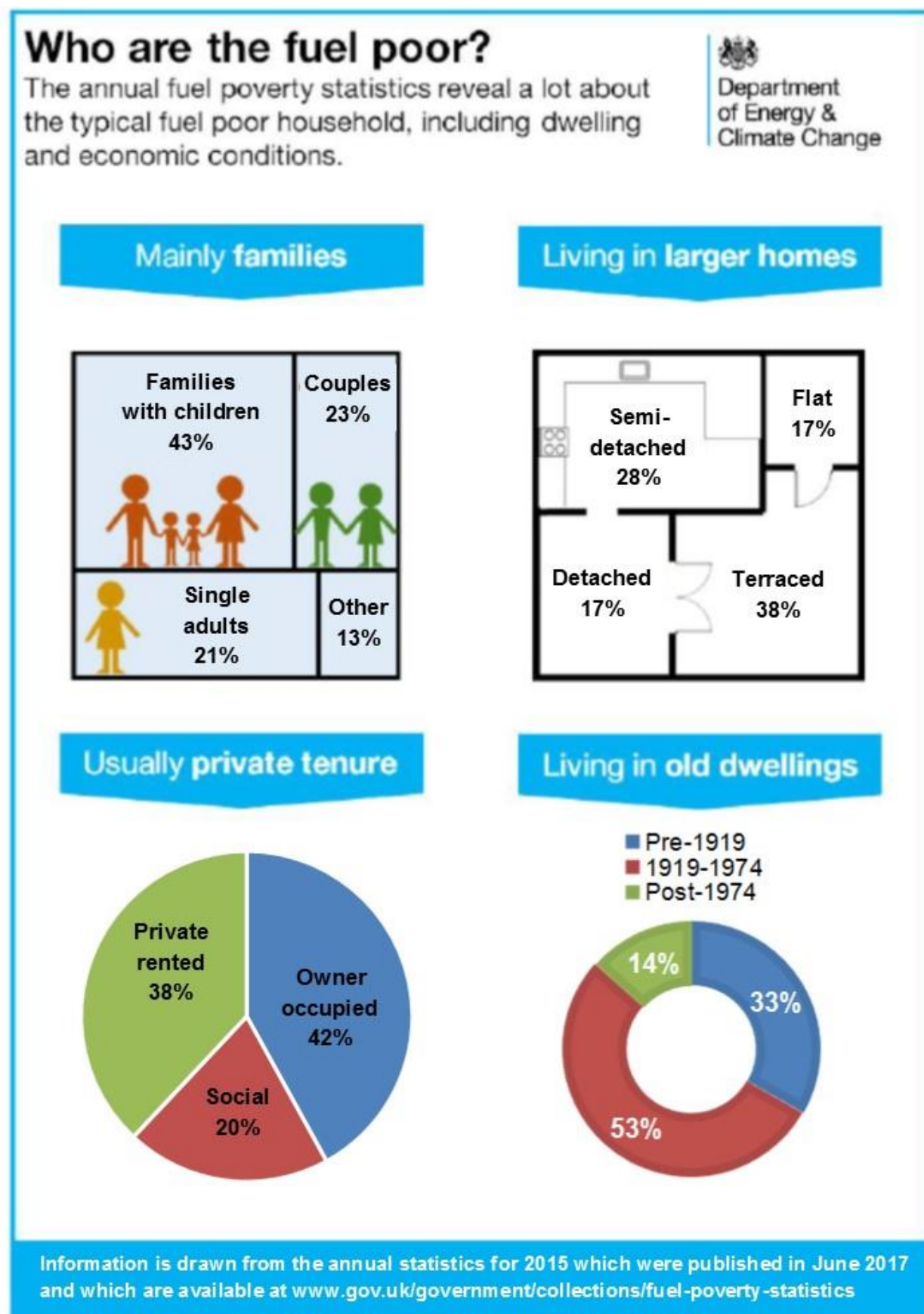
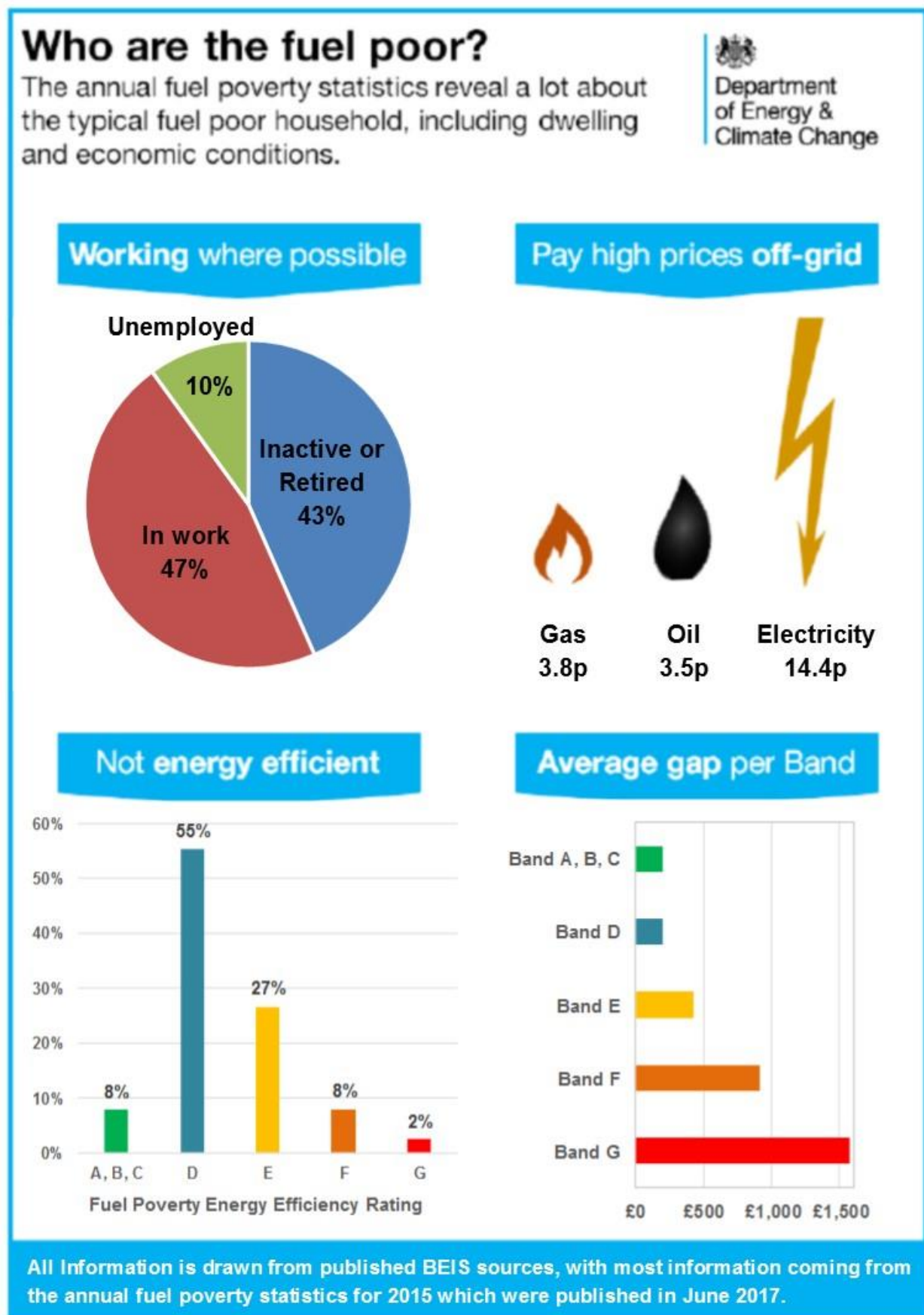


Figure 3: What the indicator tells us about who is fuel poor, Part 2



2.3 What are the causes?

Section 2.2 explained how the Low Income High Costs indicator is now used to measure the extent and the depth of fuel poverty. The energy efficiency of housing, household income, and energy costs are the main causes of fuel poverty.

Energy Efficiency

A house with poor energy efficiency standards will lose heat more easily and therefore will cost more to keep warm. Some houses are easier to improve the energy efficiency of than others, for example houses built after the 1930's can often be improved through the installation of cavity wall and loft insulation which are relatively cheap and easy to install. Houses built before this time may have solid walls which are much more expensive to insulate and the works can be considerably more disruptive. Homes with a non-traditional construction can also be difficult to insulate. The age and type of heating in a property can also affect how energy efficient the home is, with older heating systems costing more to provide the same amount of heat as a new more efficient system.

Household Income

Households with a low income are immediately disadvantaged when it comes to paying energy bills, as they have to allocate more of their total income to cover these costs than a household with a higher income. Difficult choices may have to be made about what to prioritise, for example whether the household should 'heat' or 'eat'?

Energy Costs

Energy prices have risen consistently in recent years and look set to continue this trend. The average household energy bill is now £1,236 (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy 2017), although depending on how energy is paid for households could be paying more or less than this. Paying monthly by direct debit attracts discounts that are not available for paying quarterly or by using a pre-payment meter. Although the number of tariffs that each gas and electricity company can now offer has been reduced in recent years, it can still be a confusing process for customers to compare prices and switch suppliers. Recent figures from Ofgem (2016) show there are around 20 million energy customers in Britain (mainly with large suppliers) on 'standard variable' rate tariffs, the most basic offer from a supplier. They are potentially missing out on significant savings, which could be a sign that households are becoming less engaged in the tariff switching process.

Any of these three factors can result in people being unable to afford to heat their homes adequately, leading to cold, damp conditions. Living in a cold home is not just unpleasant and uncomfortable; it can have a significant impact on health and wellbeing. It can be a particular problem for the old and very young and for people with a disability.

2.4 Effect of cold temperature on health

Under-heating a property can contribute to poor health outcomes, both in terms of mortality (including Excess Winter Deaths) and morbidity (including respiratory and cardiovascular conditions).

Mortality

During the winter of 2015/16 there were over 24,300 excess winter deaths in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics 2016), where 15% more deaths occurred in winter months than in non-winter months. Excess winter deaths are deaths that occur from December to March, and are compared to the average number of deaths during the rest of the year. Very severe weather can substantially add to this death toll. In cold weather, many more people visit GPs and hospitals with a range of cold weather-related health problems. Help The Aged have previously estimated that there are around 8,000 extra deaths for every one degree drop in average temperature.

Although there has been some improvement in the past decades with improving living conditions, mortality in England still does not compare well with the rest of Europe. Other northern European countries perform better than England. For example, Finland – a much colder country – has around half the winter excess death rate of the UK. Likewise, those countries with the greatest excess mortality, such as Spain and Portugal, are also the ones with the mildest winters. This is largely because people in colder countries are better prepared for cold weather, with well-insulated, well-heated, energy-efficient homes and warm outdoor clothing. As the recent Marmot Review Team report *The Health Impacts of Cold Homes and Fuel Poverty* stated: 'Countries which have more energy efficient housing have lower excess winter deaths.'

Around 40% of excess winter deaths are a result of circulatory diseases (including heart attacks and strokes) and about a third due to respiratory illness. Most excess winter deaths are in older people, many of whom will already have underlying health conditions making them vulnerable to the cold.

Whilst there are many factors that determine the excess winter death figures, fuel poverty measures that improve the energy efficiency of the house will reduce some of those factors.

Morbidity

Cold living conditions can cause considerable problems for people with:

- **Cardio-vascular disease.** The cold causes thickening of the blood, which increases blood pressure, which can lead to an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes.
- **Respiratory infections.** Cold homes can be damp, which increases mould growth, which can affect asthma and other respiratory infections. The cold can also lower resistance to respiratory infections, can impair lung function, and can trigger broncho-constriction in asthma and COPD.
- **Musculoskeletal diseases** including arthritis and damaged joints.
- **Mobility problems.** The cold can make arthritis worse and can reduce strength and dexterity, which can result in an increased risk of falls.

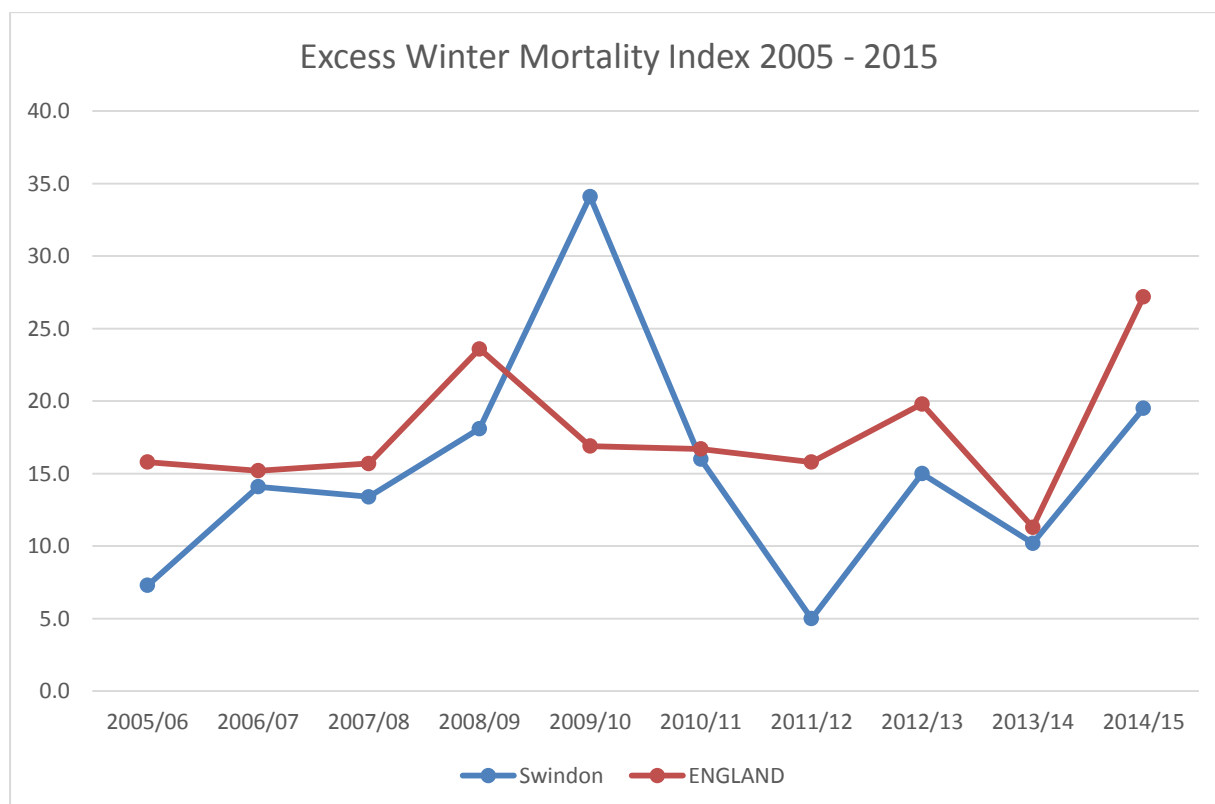
- **Mental health problems** including depression can be made worse by living in a cold damp home.

As well as the mortality and morbidity, households can experience other social issues due to cold homes. People can become isolated by not inviting people round to their cold homes, and children's education can be affected by not being able to concentrate on homework if having to congregate in one heated room.

Excess winter deaths in Swindon

Figure 4 shows the Excess Winter Mortality Index for Swindon and England over the last 10 years, taken from the Office of National Statistics Excess Winter Deaths for local/unitary authorities in England and Wales, 1991/92 to 2014/15. The Excess Winter Mortality Index shows the percentage of extra deaths that occur in the winter months compared to the non-winter months.

Figure 4: Excess Winter Mortality Index 2005-2015



These figures show that apart from one year, the percentage of extra deaths occurring in the winter months in Swindon is lower than the percentage for England.

The Department of Health estimate that indoor cold may account for between 20% and 30% of Excess Winter Deaths. The Hill's Review assumes about 10% of excess winter deaths are due to fuel poverty. The percentage rise in deaths in winter is greater in homes with low energy efficiency ratings.

3. Where are we now?

3.1 Nationally

Government produced a new fuel poverty strategy in 2015 entitled “Cutting the cost of keeping warm – a fuel poverty strategy for England”. The key target for fuel poverty is now as follows:

The fuel poverty target is to ensure that as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable achieve a minimum energy efficiency rating of Band C, by 2030.

In 2015 89.7 per cent of fuel poor homes were in Band E or above; 63.1 per cent of fuel poor homes were in Band D or above; and 7.8 per cent of fuel poor households were in Band C or above.

Interim milestones to keep efforts on track:

- (i) as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable to Band E by 2020 and**
- (ii) as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable to Band D by 2025**

These milestones will ensure support is targeted at those facing the worst fuel poverty. There are also additional indicators of progress that can be obtained from the annual fuel poverty statistics. These key fuel poverty indicators will give a good sense of the effects of fuel poverty schemes and of other factors.

Key fuel poverty indicators:

- **Energy efficiency:** As well as headline figures on Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) ratings and the Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency Rating (FPEER), Government will monitor the installation of specific measures, including:
 - presence of a central heating system in fuel poor households;
 - number of fuel poor households with non-condensing boilers; and
 - number of fuel poor households with loft and cavity wall insulation.
- **Renewables:** Government will monitor the installation of renewable technologies in fuel poor households, so that we can better understand the impact of these technologies on energy requirements. In the short run it may not be possible to measure this accurately, however we will seek to measure installations of renewables in fuel poor homes at the soonest opportunity.
- **Distribution:** It is important to understand the rate of improvement in energy efficiency in fuel poor households in relation to the national average. Government will therefore publish the distribution of households across the different energy efficiency bands for both fuel poor households and all households.
- **Non-gas homes:** Living in a non-gas home is a significant factor in being fuel poor, and these households face some of the highest energy costs. Paying particular attention to the fuel poverty gap for non-gas households, both rural and urban, will help us to understand how their situation is changing.
- **Children in fuel poverty:** There is a link between educational attainment and living in cold homes, so Government will monitor the number of children in fuel poverty and will publish the number of fuel poor households with a child under 16 years.

There is no reliable indicator currently that can be used to measure the link between fuel poverty and health and well-being, but this is being investigated for future use.

Headline figures

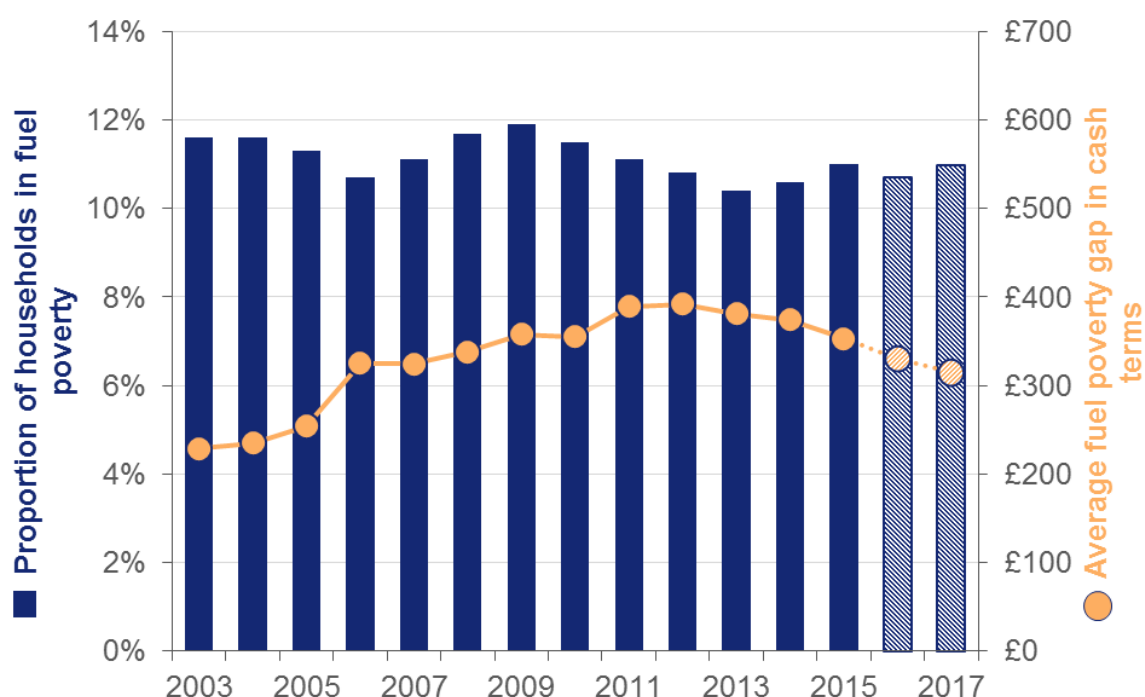
In 2015, the number of households in fuel poverty in England was estimated at around 2.5 million, approximately 11.0 per cent of all English households. This is an increase of 0.4 per cent from 2014.

The **average** fuel poverty gap in 2015 (the amount needed to meet the fuel poverty threshold) fell by 5.6 per cent from 2014 to £353. The **aggregate** fuel poverty gap across all fuel poor households in 2015 also reduced over this period by 0.5 per cent to £884 million.

The figures for 2015 were released in 2017, so it is not possible to have data on the current level of fuel poverty due to the time taken to collate and analyse the data. The average fuel poverty gap is projected to decrease in 2016 and 2017, whereas fuel poverty levels are projected to decrease but then increase in this same period.

Figure 5 shows the level of fuel poverty between 2003 and 2015, taken from the DECC Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report, 2017.

Figure 5: Fuel poverty in England 2003 – 2015, and projected fuel poverty for England 2016 – 2017



3.2 The local picture

Sub-regional fuel poverty statistics are produced by Government to enable fuel poverty to be measured at a local level. Data is made available at local authority level and down to Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level. LSOAs contain relatively low levels of households (typically between 500 and 1,000). Figures for 2015 (released in 2017) estimate there are 8,335 fuel poor households in Swindon, around 9.0 per cent of the households in the borough. This is one of the lower levels of fuel poverty for local authorities in the South West region, reflecting the affordable warmth programmes undertaken in Swindon. It still equates to just under 1 in 10 households in Swindon suffering the effects of fuel poverty, so it is important that the focus is maintained as fuel poverty is fluid and this figure could well rise again without continued action. This compares to the national average of around 11.0 per cent of households in fuel poverty in England, and the regional average of 11.4 per cent of households in the South West.

Whilst the estimates of fuel poverty at local authority level are robust, they are not robust at lower levels. Therefore, although estimates of fuel poverty at LSOA level are provided they should be treated with caution and only used to look at general trends and identify areas of particularly high or low fuel poverty. They should not be used to identify trends over time within an LSOA, or to compare LSOA's with similar fuel poverty levels due to very small sample sizes and consequent instability in estimates at this level.

The level of fuel poverty across Swindon varies considerably with the lowest LSOA level recorded at 2.2 per cent and the highest level recorded at 24.0 per cent. Out of 132 LSOAs in Swindon, 49 had levels of fuel poverty of 10 per cent or more of households.

This is the most accurate measure of the level of fuel poverty at the moment, although the data does have its limitations as the figures provided are two years old by the time they are released (the 2015 figures were released in 2017).

The following two tables (Figures 6 and 7) are compiled to ward level from the LSOA data so the same caution should be exercised when using these tables.

Figure 6 shows the breakdown of fuel poor households in each ward as a percentage of the total fuel poor households in Swindon. Central ward has the highest number of fuel poor households in Swindon with Priory Vale ward the lowest.

Figure 6: Proportion of households in borough that are fuel poor, 2015

| Ward | Total Households | Fuel Poor Households | Proportion of households in borough that are fuel poor |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Priory Vale | 3679 | 95 | 1.14% |
| Ridgeway | 1274 | 104 | 1.25% |
| St Andrews | 4933 | 136 | 1.63% |
| Shaw | 4666 | 153 | 1.84% |
| Lydiard and Freshbrook | 4948 | 199 | 2.39% |
| Wroughton and Wichelstowe | 2934 | 255 | 3.06% |
| St Margaret and South Marston | 4524 | 280 | 3.36% |
| Lawn and Chiseldon | 3390 | 307 | 3.68% |
| Old Town | 3989 | 328 | 3.94% |
| Liden, Eldene and Park South | 3205 | 338 | 4.06% |
| Rodbourne Cheney | 3628 | 386 | 4.63% |
| Haydon Wick | 7306 | 428 | 5.13% |
| Mannington and Western | 5141 | 436 | 5.23% |
| Covingham and Dorcan | 6030 | 454 | 5.45% |
| Blunsdon and Highworth | 5183 | 517 | 6.20% |
| Gorsehill and Pinehurst | 5042 | 649 | 7.79% |
| Penhill and Upper Stratton | 6276 | 683 | 8.19% |
| Walcot and Park North | 6484 | 772 | 9.26% |
| Eastcott | 4571 | 826 | 9.91% |
| Central | 5574 | 989 | 11.87% |

Figure 7 displays the fuel poverty data in a slightly different way, showing fuel poor households as a percentage of the total households in a given ward. In this table Eastcott ward has the highest proportion of fuel poor households per ward, with Priory Vale ward having the lowest.

Figure 7: Proportion of households in ward that are fuel poor, 2015

| Ward | Total Households | Fuel Poor Households | Proportion of households in ward that are fuel poor |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Priory Vale | 3679 | 95 | 2.58% |
| St Andrews | 4933 | 136 | 2.76% |
| Shaw | 4666 | 153 | 3.28% |
| Lydiard and Freshbrook | 4948 | 199 | 4.02% |
| Haydon Wick | 7306 | 428 | 5.86% |
| St Margaret and South Marston | 4524 | 280 | 6.19% |
| Covingham and Dorcan | 6030 | 454 | 7.53% |
| Ridgeway | 1274 | 104 | 8.16% |
| Old Town | 3989 | 328 | 8.22% |
| Mannington and Western | 5141 | 436 | 8.48% |
| Wroughton and Wichelstowe | 2934 | 255 | 8.69% |
| Lawn and Chiseldon | 3390 | 307 | 9.06% |
| Blunsdon and Highworth | 5183 | 517 | 9.97% |
| Liden, Eldene and Park South | 3205 | 338 | 10.55% |
| Rodbourne Cheney | 3628 | 386 | 10.64% |
| Penhill and Upper Stratton | 6276 | 683 | 10.88% |
| Walcot and Park North | 6484 | 772 | 11.91% |
| Gorsehill and Pinehurst | 5042 | 649 | 12.87% |
| Central | 5574 | 989 | 17.74% |
| Eastcott | 4571 | 826 | 18.07% |

3.3 Affordable warmth schemes in Swindon

Schemes available to tackle fuel poverty may be national or local initiatives. The following is a summary of past and present activity to combat fuel poverty in the Swindon area.

Past Initiatives

Previous government schemes have included Warm Front, The Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT), The Energy Company Obligation (ECO), the Green Deal and the Landlords Energy Saving Allowance, all of which have now ended. The schemes had varying levels of success and uptake, and typically focussed on energy saving measures including home insulation and heating improvements.

Notable previous local initiatives include the Safe & Warm programme, a 5 year area-based fuel poverty programme to help residents access schemes for home insulation, heating and income maximisation support along with advice and support for people at risk of falls or fires in the home. Some 17,000 households in total engaged with this scheme generating some 37,000 areas of action. Over £678,000 of insulation measures were installed, over £2.7 million in unclaimed benefit entitlement was identified, and £30,000 in funding for small falls prevention measures and a further 3,500 fire safety measures were provided. Safe & Warm ended in 2014.

Current national schemes

National schemes that are currently available include the following:

Energy Company Obligation 2 Transition Stage (ECO2T)

This scheme will run from April 2017 for 18 months, and has been amended following consultation to refocus the support available to those in fuel poverty and on lower incomes. Although the proportion of funding for the fuel poor has been increased and the eligibility improved to reach more people, the level of funding is still well short of what is required to meet the targets set in the national fuel poverty strategy detailed in Section 6.

On a more positive note, there is scope for local authorities to set their own eligibility criteria for identifying people in (a) fuel poverty, or (b) on a low income and vulnerable to the health effects if living in a cold home. This should allow more opportunity for referring people with health issues or low incomes for possible assistance through the Energy Company Obligation without fulfilling the strict benefit requirement that currently exists. This “Flexible Eligibility” component offers considerable opportunity to deliver on some of the NICE Guidelines on “excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes”, and will be a focus for the affordable warmth work in Swindon over the next few years.

Warm Home Discount

The Warm Home Discount is a rebate of £140 (for 2016/17) on your electricity bill given to eligible customers to reduce their winter fuel bills. To qualify automatically you need to be getting the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit by a certain date that year. Participating suppliers also have a “broader group” that they will offer the Warm Homes Discount to, aimed at households on a low income or in receipt of means-tested benefits. Not all suppliers offer the rebate, and those that do only accept a limited number of applicants.

Winter Fuel Payment

The Winter Fuel Payment is provided to those born before 5th May 1953 regardless of income. A payment of between £100 and £300 is provided each winter to help with heating bills.

Cold Weather Payments

Cold Weather Payments are provided to people in receipt of certain benefits. A payment of £25 is made for each 7 day period of very cold weather between 1st November and the 31st March. It is intended to help with the cost of heating during these extra cold periods.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is a tool that local authorities have to assess potential risks to the wellbeing of residents in their rented accommodation. HHSRS can be used to enforce action in all tenures except local authority owned stock, but is more likely to be used in private rented sector homes, which are typically the least energy efficient and where there are the greatest barriers to encouraging action. Hazards such as damp and mould growth and excess cold are good indicators that the energy efficiency of the dwelling is not sufficient. Excess cold in particular is identified as the most threatening to health and safety.

Current local schemes

Swindon Borough Council provides advice, support and guidance on all matters relating to affordable warmth through its Affordable Warmth Coordinator. This includes help to access schemes for home insulation and heating improvements where they are available. These are likely to be incorporated into a health and housing type of referral network as recommended through the NICE guidelines (see Section 8), that also takes advantage of the Local Authority Flexible Eligibility component of the Energy Company Obligation scheme.

Other local activity includes:

Warm Home Discount events

Regular events are held to assist residents to lodge applications for the Warm Home Discount rebate. In 2016/17 there were 7 events with 353 attendees having applications for the £140 rebate submitted, a potential £49,420 towards people's energy bills.

Swindon Energy Matters

Swindon Energy Matters aims to help all Swindon residents to better manage their fuel bills, providing a comprehensive gas and electricity tariff comparison and switching service backed up by additional support for prepayment customers and those with barriers engagement. This service will be launching in 2017.

Swindon Emergency Assistance Fund

Swindon Borough Council may be able to offer assistance for making direct payments to Energy Companies to apply gas or electricity credit to a customer's account within 24 hours. Help is generally only provided in crisis situations, and there are eligibility criteria and a limit to how many individual applications can be made within a 12 month period. There were 1,028 awards made in 2016/17 for emergency gas or electricity credit.

Surviving Winter Appeal

The scheme, run by the Community Foundation for Wiltshire & Swindon, recycles donated winter fuel payments into hardship grants for eligible people in Wiltshire and Swindon. They are intended for older people on low incomes who are spending more than 10% of their income on fuel during the cold winter months, and who need additional support to heat their homes and eat properly at this time. Applications are only accepted from nominated partner organisations.

Swindon Citizens Advice - Energy Project

This project looks to provide support to people experiencing difficulties with their energy costs or who are at risk of fuel poverty. This could include fuel debt issues including negotiation of affordable payment arrangements and grant applications to Charitable Trusts for arrears and essential household items, as well as advice on tariff choice and monitoring energy use.

Safe and Independent Living (SAIL)

The SAIL programme is a multi-partner initiative where referrals for a range of information, services and support are shared between partner organisations, including Swindon Borough Council, Wiltshire Police, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service, Bobby Van Trust and various partners through the Swindon Advice and Support Centre at Sanford House.

Talking Money – Energy Advice Project

Based in Bristol but covering Swindon, this project offers tailored energy efficiency advice and support to alleviate fuel debt. This includes supporting people with charitable trust applications for energy arrears and essential household items.

4. Where do we want to be?

4.1 Vision, aims and outcomes

Vision

The vision of this affordable warmth strategy is to ensure that all households in the Swindon Borough Council area live in warm dry homes, free from the fear of fuel debt and poor health.

Aims

1. To raise awareness of fuel poverty and affordable warmth among all stakeholders.
2. To encourage and support households to achieve affordable warmth.
3. To improve access to schemes, financial support and advice related to affordable warmth through improved networks and referral systems.

Key Objectives

1. Maintain and improve relationships with agencies, organisations and other interested parties in order to promote affordable warmth and deliver new partnership initiatives.
2. Provide information on and access into national funding programmes for affordable warmth measures.
3. Deliver the Swindon Energy Matters gas and electricity tariff comparison and switching service to Swindon residents.
4. Facilitate take-up of national Warm Home Discount rebates for eligible residents.
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.

An overview of how these objectives will be achieved is set out the next section.

5. How are we going to get there?

A combination of general borough-wide support and specific targeted action is necessary to ensure assistance reaches those most in need, as fuel poverty is not confined to specific easy-to-tackle areas or groups. Planned activity will utilise and build on existing schemes to provide a range of options to meet the aim of achieving affordable warmth.

This strategy has drawn upon recommendations and guidance from HM Government (“Cutting the cost of keeping warm – a fuel poverty strategy for England”), NICE evidence based guidance (NICE NG6 “Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes”, and NICE QS117 “Preventing excess winter deaths and illness associated with cold homes”) in order to produce a strategy which aims to enable Swindon households to achieve affordable warmth.

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.

Objective 1: Maintain and improve relationships with agencies, organisations and other interested parties in order to promote affordable warmth and deliver new partnership initiatives.

- 1.1 Re-establish Affordable Warmth Partnership Group to monitor and review the strategy and action plan.
- 1.2 Work with existing and new partners to develop affordable warmth initiatives.

Objective 2: Provide information on and access into national funding programmes for affordable warmth measures.

- 2.1 Establish an Energy Company Obligation partnership to access affordable warmth measures.
- 2.2 Develop a referral mechanism for the Local Authority Flexible Eligibility route to the Energy Company Obligation.
- 2.3 Provide advice on affordable warmth measures and a direct referral route into appropriate funded schemes.

Objective 3: Deliver the Swindon Energy Matters gas and electricity tariff comparison and switching service to Swindon residents.

- 3.1 Develop marketing campaign to promote Swindon Energy Matters borough-wide.
- 3.2 Work with Swindon Borough Council Housing Team to target support to Council tenants.

Objective 4: Facilitate take-up of national Warm Home Discount rebates for eligible residents.

4.1 Deliver annual programme of awareness raising and sign-up events for both Swindon Borough Council tenants and private sector residents.

4.2 Explore opportunities to extend promotional activity with other social housing landlords.

Objective 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.

5.1 Raise the profile of affordable warmth work as an intervention for reducing pressure on the health sector from cold related illness.

5.2 Establish a health and housing referral network as recommended by NICE NG6 for referring vulnerable residents for affordable warmth assistance.

5.3 Provide training and awareness sessions for health professionals and other key workers on the links between cold housing and health, and how to refer affected people for assistance.

The key steps to achieve these objectives will be set out in more detail in the 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.

Annex: NICE Guidance

NICE guideline NG6

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) released guideline NG6 on “Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes” in 2015 covering reducing the health risks (including preventable deaths) associated with living in a cold home, with the key aim being to improve the health and wellbeing of people vulnerable to the cold. It is for commissioners, managers and health, social care and voluntary sector practitioners who deal with vulnerable people who may have health problems caused, or exacerbated, by living in a cold home. It is also of interest to clinicians and others involved with at-risk groups, housing and energy suppliers.

The guidance aims to meet a range of public health and other goals, including:

- Reducing preventable excess winter death rates.
- Improving health and wellbeing among vulnerable groups.
- Reducing pressure on health and social care services.
- Reducing 'fuel poverty' and the risk of fuel debt or being disconnected from gas and electricity supplies (including self-disconnection).
- Improving the energy efficiency of homes.

There were 12 recommendations made through NG6:

Recommendation 1 - Develop a strategy.

Recommendation 2 - Ensure there is a single point of contact health and housing referral service for people living in cold homes.

Recommendation 3 - Provide tailored solutions via the single point of contact health and housing referral service for people living in cold homes.

Recommendation 4 - Identify people at risk of ill health from living in a cold home.

Recommendation 5 - Make every contact count by assessing the heating needs of people who use primary health and home care services.

Recommendation 6 - Non-health and social care workers who visit people at home should assess their heating needs.

Recommendation 7 - Discharge vulnerable people from health or social care settings to a warm home.

Recommendation 8 - Train health and social care practitioners to help people whose homes may be too cold.

Recommendation 9 - Train housing professionals and faith and voluntary sector workers to help people whose homes may be too cold for their health and wellbeing.

Recommendation 10 - Train heating engineers, meter installers and those providing building insulation to help vulnerable people at home.

Recommendation 11 - Raise awareness among practitioners and the public about how to keep warm at home.

Recommendation 12 - Ensure buildings meet ventilation and other building and trading standards.

This guidance was well received and will help to link the activities of health and housing stakeholders.

NICE quality standard (QS117)

NG6 was followed up in 2016 by quality standard (QS117) “Preventing excess winter deaths and illness associated with cold homes”. NICE quality standards describe high-priority areas for quality improvement in a defined care or service area. Each standard consists of a prioritised set of specific, concise and measurable statements. They draw on existing guidance, which provides an underpinning, comprehensive set of recommendations, and are designed to support the measurement of improvement.

There are 6 quality statements detailed in QS117:

Statement 1 - Local populations who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home are identified through year-round planning by local health and social care commissioners and providers.

Statement 2 - Local health and social care commissioners and providers share data to identify people who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home.

Statement 3 - People who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home receive tailored support with help from a local single point of contact health and housing referral service.

Statement 4 - People who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home are asked at least once a year whether they have difficulty keeping warm at home by their primary or community healthcare or home care practitioners.

Statement 5 - Hospitals, mental health services and social care services identify people who are vulnerable to health problems associated with a cold home as part of the admission process.

Statement 6 - People who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home who will be discharged to their own home from hospital, or a mental health or social care setting have a discharge plan that includes ensuring that their home is warm enough.

This guidance and quality standard will help guide strategy and work on the ground in Swindon over the next few years. In particular, the recommendations linked to health and housing referral networks will be a key focus in Swindon to meet the aims and objectives of this affordable warmth strategy.