

affordable warmth for Birmingham

from aspirations to actions

A strategic vision for the Birmingham Affordable Warmth Partnership

foreword

One in five Birmingham households live below the fuel poverty line. That one statistic alone sets out the scale of the challenge to which we must rise.

But of course, statistics don't tell the individual stories – the children whose studies are disrupted by a home that is too cold, the pensioner struggling to keep up with ever-rising fuel bills. The impacts of fuel poverty on individual wellbeing and the health of our society as a whole are enormous.

The Affordable Warmth Partnership is leading the battle against fuel poverty, bringing together key players from across the city to deliver a sustained attack on the causes and symptoms of warmth inequality.

From providing practical home energy advice to delivering large scale capital investment in housing, we are doing all we can to challenge and break the cycle of fuel poverty.

This plan sets out how we will work together to drive forward the next stage of this vital work - and deliver safe, warmer homes for Birmingham families.

Councillor John Cotton
Cabinet Member Health and Wellbeing



THE BIRMINGHAM AFFORDABLE WARMTH PARTNERSHIP

Context

Fuel poverty is an on-going problem in Birmingham, and therefore to avoid increases in: the number of winter deaths; poor health and poor housing conditions, and increasing carbon dioxide emissions into our environment, different sectors need to combine their experience, skills and knowledge and to focus on delivering actions to stop fuel poverty.

What the partnership is

The Birmingham Affordable Warmth Partnership is an independent partnership which formed, under a multi-agency delivery approach, to agree and deliver actions to provide affordable warmth solutions for those most vulnerable to fuel poverty issues.

Who it is

A core board of members are responsible for presenting the views of key stakeholder organisations involved in providing affordable warmth enablement:

- Gateway to Birmingham Advice Services - specifically representing the city's money advice agencies.
- The Third Sector Assembly - representing wider community & voluntary sector agents that undertake affordable warmth work.
- Warm Zone Community Interest Company – on behalf of National Energy Action.
- Birmingham City Council, including Public Health.

In addition, a number of 'critical friends' will contribute to the partnership's work, including: Birmingham Social Housing Partnership (BSHP); those representing private sector landlords, and those working on anti-poverty agendas to support city residents.

What it aims to do

The Affordable Warmth Partnership will champion, progress and monitor delivery of recommendations set out in this its “Affordable Warmth for Birmingham” strategic vision. Partner agencies within the group have a common goal to bring about better outcomes for the city’s vulnerable households and in particular those identified as either being fuel poor or at risk of being fuel poor.

FUEL POVERTY

Who are the fuel poor?

The longstanding definition of fuel poverty says that any household that spends more than 10% of its income on keeping warm at home is living in fuel poverty. They are fuel poor.

In March 2012 an independent report*, presented by Professor John Hills of the London School of Economics, outlined findings from research that looked at the definition of fuel poverty, targets to reduce the numbers, and the effectiveness of different policy interventions. A key point arising from the report includes that it is clear fuel poverty has been measured in a way that is both flawed and unhelpful.

It was therefore proposed that a new way is adopted nationally to define fuel poverty - one that separates the extent of the issue (the number of people affected) from its depth (how badly people are affected), and demonstrates the impact of Government policies in tackling fuel poverty.

In July 2013 the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change presented to Parliament a policy document called ‘Fuel Poverty: a Framework for Future Action’. This documents the Government’s “bridging” intention to introduce a new Strategy for Fuel Poverty, and one whereby it includes a refreshed way forward for measuring levels of fuel poverty, known as the Low Income High Cost indicator.

The Low Income High Cost indicator will focus on tracking where a home spends above the country-wide average on fuel costs (national median level) and, where spend above the average happens the household is left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

This method of recording fuel poverty levels is complex and actions that will be delivered under Birmingham’s affordable warmth enablement must be mindful of the Government’s current, and any future, focus.

* Full report title: Getting the measure of fuel poverty. Final Report of the Fuel Poverty Review John Hills





Let's talk Birmingham

LET'S TALK BIRMINGHAM

A citywide issue

The national and regional levels of household fuel poverty, as recorded by the Department of Energy and Climate Change, are taken from 2012 data. The Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report 2014 estimates that 2.28 million households in England, approximately 10.4% of all homes, are fuel poor. This statistic is a result of the Department measuring using the new Low Income High Cost indicator.

For Birmingham the figures reported are:

By Measurement Type	Estimated no. of households	Estimated no. of fuel poor households	Proportion of households fuel poor (%)
10%	401,383	73,573	18.3
Low Income High Cost	401,383	80,869	20.1

The Affordable Warmth Partnership however advocate that, given a continual rise in domestic energy prices and with a significant number of the city's homes remaining thermally inefficient, it is likely these figures underestimate the true scale of the problem.

Facts common to local neighbourhoods

It is widely accepted that a combination of factors generate cycles of fuel poverty and these factors can be summarised as being:

- The high price to buy (access) and keep (maintain) domestic energy like gas, electricity or oil.
- More "squeezed incomes" - both for individuals and families, many of who are already on either a low or changeable weekly or monthly income (e.g. benefits, minimum wage or zero hours employment contracts).

- Poorly insulated homes - often defined by particular property and or tenure type.
- Inefficient heating and hot water systems due to age or lack of regular maintenance - making them expensive to run.
- Under occupancy within homes.

For some fuel poor households, and in particular for the city's older population, all of the above factors apply.

HEALTH & WELLBEING FOR ALL

Health inequalities and fuel poverty

It is widely recognised by national and local Public Health and social care functions that thermally inefficient homes will generate health inequalities amongst those that can and those that cannot access, and sustain, affordable heating and hot water supplies.

The primary health risks specifically associated with cold and damp homes are:

- Increased respiratory illness.
- Increased accidents at home.
- Greater levels of mental illness.
- Increased social isolation.
- Adverse effects on people's diet and nutrition.
- Detrimental effects to children's education.

A strategy for better health and wellbeing provides the platform for change.

Birmingham's current Health & Wellbeing Board Strategy has three aims, which are to:

1. Improve the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable adults and children in need.
2. Improve the resilience of our health and care system.
3. Improve the health and wellbeing of our children.

Health gain for vulnerable people is at the heart of the work of the Health & Wellbeing Board, with 'reduced household fuel poverty' a specific measure for the city to deliver against. Improvements in this area will help determine the overall success of the strategy.

The Health & Wellbeing Strategy forms a key reference point for the work of the Affordable Warmth Partnership, because it brings together all of the wide reaching work priorities of the cross sector agencies that are able to make a positive impact on the health of the city's most vulnerable residents.

JOINED UP THINKING FOR JOINED UP ACTIONS

Using the 'single voice' approach that the Birmingham Affordable Warmth Partnership advocates, this strategic vision document highlights the aspirations of city based organisations who are working to support those living with fuel poverty issues and those at risk of becoming fuel poor.

"Affordable Warmth for Birmingham" should be viewed as a summary of the partnership's ambition to eradicate the causes of fuel poverty in the city by championing achievable solutions to provide affordable warmth for all residents.

The Partnership concentrates on championing realistic actions to join up strategic approaches and funding opportunities through health and wellbeing, social care and housing enablement services. It also acknowledges that the city will continue to have limited funds to deliver new actions and therefore will lobby for positive change to be delivered first and foremost amongst agencies already contributing to tackling affordable warmth inequalities.

Where to begin

The 2012 Department of Energy and Climate Change statistics indicate the size of the challenge to effectively reduce fuel poverty in Birmingham.

Therefore the Affordable Warmth Partnership advocates that a long term commitment is applied by public, private and voluntary sector partners so that the city can both realise and sustain meaningful change for vulnerable households.

The initial challenge - to succeed in providing affordable warmth solutions for all - lies in the partnership's ability to better establish and maintain 'real time' knowledge of the scale and effects of local neighbourhood fuel poverty.

Secondly, using the 'real time' knowledge the partnership must also robustly track interventions and progress made - to show the layers of affordable warmth

enablement being delivered by action type, including: what home energy advice is most effective; what Green Deal / Energy Company Obligation and other capital improvement measures are providing best home improvements; what health and social care commissioning delivers, and what the utility companies provide.

These work streams must combine and form a foundation for localised affordable warmth actions that can evolve into targeted outcomes that focus on delivering 'more for less'.



Affordable Warmth Key tasks 1 & 2

AFFORDABLE WARMTH KEY TASK 1 – GET EVERYONE ENGAGED IN AND CONTRIBUTING TO SOLVING THE FUEL POVERTY PROBLEM

Make sure affordable warmth actions are integrated in existing or new city council and partner organisation policies and strategies

The Affordable Warmth Partnership and this “Affordable Warmth for Birmingham” strategic vision advocate the city adopt affordable warmth enablement at the core of its health and social care services.

How this might be achieved

The partnership will:

- Ensure “Affordable Warmth for Birmingham” actions are reflected in principal policy and strategy commitments, both of the City Council and stakeholder organisations that are represented at the partnership board level and throughout the partnership’s network of ‘critical friends’.
- Map activities and ensure “Affordable Warmth for Birmingham” actions compliment the aims and objectives of the other energy saving programmes in the city.
- As appropriate report on the progress of delivering its “Affordable Warmth for Birmingham” actions to relevant forums, for example: to social inclusion programmes such as those led by the Bishop of Birmingham; to the Council’s Overview & Scrutiny framework / other governance routes, to help maintain a high profile for affordable warmth enablement services amongst the Council’s Cabinet and cross political elected members.
- Expand the partnership’s work to develop its ‘Stay Warm Stay Well’ service model, so that it becomes the cornerstone to deliver Birmingham’s affordable warmth enablement and fully compliments other health and wellbeing support for vulnerable households.

AFFORDABLE WARMTH KEY TASK 2 – BETTER UNDERSTAND THE ‘3Ps’ (FACTORS) THAT CAUSE FUEL POVERTY: PEOPLE, PROPERTY AND PRICES

Better identify, analyse and target support for fuel poor individuals and neighbourhoods whilst maintaining a common, cross sector understanding of those who need help to access and maintain affordable warmth

By growing the overall understanding amongst service providers of the negative effects linked to a lack of affordable warmth / cycles of fuel poverty the Partnership believes that social, economic and health outcomes can all be improved for Birmingham’s residents.

How this might be achieved

The partnership will:

- Work with all stakeholders to seek funding to enable a refresh and re-launch of the Birmingham Energy Advice Manual (BEAM) toolkit. To be produced in a practical and sustainable format, relevant to the day to day business needs of those supporting vulnerable households.
- Develop working relationships with the city’s health and social care sector, including those responsible for prevention budgets and those with access to community outreach services. Both providing key links to successfully identifying fuel poor, vulnerable households.
- As and when resource permits, partners will work together to build on past approaches that deliver effective, community or neighbourhood focused affordable warmth advice.
- Conduct actions in a way that helps improve the energy advice sector’s ‘reach’ to deliver energy efficiency advice and measures. i.e. adopting a city wide focus to identify and track those at greatest risk of fuel poverty.
- Maximise the use of all the communication channels available through the Council and its partner organisations.
- Work with local, regional and national organisations or initiatives which can deliver positive affordable warmth actions for the city’s fuel poor households.

Affordable Warmth Key task 3

AFFORDABLE WARMTH KEY TASK 3 – DEVELOP NEW PROGRAMMES, TOGETHER WITH OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS, TO TACKLE FUEL POVERTY

Evaluate existing actions; develop new models to break cycles of fuel poverty; and secure delivery support from key partners including from the city's social care and health teams and housing providers

Fuel poverty remains entrenched, in particular where low income households experience squeezed budgets and for individuals with chronic health conditions. Examples also remain amongst those living in private sector homes, including rental accommodation, where actions are needed to improve thermal inefficiency levels.

How this might be achieved

The partnership will:

- Work with all stakeholders to seek funding to set up and maintain a city wide affordable warmth needs analysis. This needs to be a 'living' tool which can better identify and track: who the city's fuel poor are; where they live; and monitor the condition of the homes they are living in.
- The affordable warmth needs analysis should form the template for developing future, appropriate enablement actions set against available resources.
- Track firstly across the city council's housing stock, and thereafter other social housing, where capital works have improved thermal comfort levels for tenants.
- Pro-actively work alongside private sector landlords to improve the thermal comfort levels for private sector tenants.
- Develop opportunities to deliver more 'Stay Warm Stay Well' / other practical based interventions for vulnerable households.



'Strategy on a Page'

This is the Birmingham Affordable Warmth Partnership's 'strategy on a page' approach to achieving positive change and reducing the cycles of fuel poverty.

The subject areas link with the 3 key, action based, tasks outlined earlier in this strategic vision document:

Subject Areas	Desired Outcomes	Links to Key Tasks	Key Contributors to Achieve Delivery A-Z
Definition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders adopt and act by an appropriate definition of fuel poverty for Birmingham. One which allows change to be measured. 	Key task 3	'Stay Warm Stay Well' delivery partners All Birmingham City Council Directorates: People, Place & Economy Birmingham & Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust Birmingham Energy Savers City based universities Community Health Care Trust Gateway to Birmingham Advice Services Localise West Midlands National Energy Action & Warm Zone Public Health Service beneficiaries Suppliers (Energy & other) The Council led Green Commission
Policy Makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A measurable, collaborative approach to addressing fuel poverty issues. 	Key task 1	
Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More properties to access thermal comfort measures through national / regional / local assistance available. 	Key tasks 1&2	
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved assistance to access and maintain: a) fair energy deals and b) other affordable warmth initiatives for vulnerable households. A common response to fuel poverty. 	Key tasks 1,2&3	
Learning & Developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local energy and money advisors to deliver affordable warmth services to an agreed AWP standard. 	Key task 2	
Vulnerable residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More at risk households prevented from entering fuel poverty. More households in fuel poverty to be taken out of that cycle. Better health outcomes for individuals and families. Improved quality of life / wellbeing for vulnerable residents. Improved capacity to make lifestyle choices by vulnerable residents. 	Key tasks 1,2&3	

PROGRESS MONITORING

Away from this “Affordable Warmth for Birmingham” strategic vision the Partnership intend to publish half and full year progress reports to update interested parties on the progress made against the key tasks and wider strategic outcomes. These reports will also enable the Partnership Board to review its own progress.

To allow sufficient time for the city’s key contributors to initiate change, realistically, the first progress report is anticipated to be published at mid-year 2015/16 - i.e. September 2015, with a year-end picture provided in March 2016.

In the meantime, any stakeholder or interested party that would like to contribute to moving forward the work of the city’s Affordable Warmth Partnership is encouraged to contact the core board of members through its support at:

Housing Strategy, Policy & Commissioning Team
Directorate for People
Birmingham City Council
PO BOX 16533
B2 2GT

Tel: 0121 303 4559
Email: partnershipsteam@birmingham.gov.uk

A CLOSING MESSAGE FROM THE BISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM

In one of the richest nations in the world it is disgraceful that some people are staying in bed all day just to stay warm, some riding the bus to avoid being cold at home and others having to decide between eating and heating.

We may be familiar with Ghandi’s phrase that there is ‘enough for everyone’s need but not for everyone’s greed’ that still needs to be applied in our unequal society. Giving what we can and looking out for our neighbour is at the heart of a cohesive city committed to giving hope and changing lives.

I trust and pray that together we can put faithful love into action and end the scandal of fuel poverty.

**The Right Reverend David Urquhart
Bishop of Birmingham**



Thank you for taking the time to learn about the Affordable Warmth for Birmingham strategic vision: From aspirations to action

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