

**Fuel Poverty in Oxfordshire,
Report of a meeting held on 6 December 2012 and recommendations for the
Health Improvement Board**

Purpose of the meeting

It was agreed that the purpose of the meeting was to

1. Note the current work of a range of organisations through the Warm Homes Healthy People project (WHHP) and the Oxfordshire Affordable Warmth Network (OAWN).
2. Take views on whether there a need to co-ordinate this work further.
3. Assess what more can be done to reduce fuel poverty in Oxfordshire.
4. Inform the Health Improvement Board of work on fuel poverty across the county and agree whether there is a potential role for the Board.

1. Fuel Poverty in Oxfordshire: Current work across the county

Affordable Warmth Network (AWN) and the Warm Homes, Healthy People (WHHP) Project:

a. Funding

Both networks are currently funded into next year but the long term sustainability of the networks is not assured. Funding for AWN is £40K and comes via Cherwell, West and South & Vale District Councils. This is secured until June 2013, beyond that there is currently no commitment in place. The City Council currently do not contribute to the running costs, though funding secured by WHHP has been used to make up a shortfall and provide a service to Oxford City residents

WHHP project is more task and finish and has a number work strands that operate over the winter period only. The project also complements and provides additional resources for the on-going work of the AWN. The project group has received a £152K grant to support the Cold Weather Plan and reduce cold related morbidity and mortality caused by cold housing in Oxfordshire. This money is to be spent by the 31st March 2013. After this the WHHP project will not have operating funds and it is not known whether future grants will be available.

b. Partners

When it was initially funded from Local Area Agreement reward money the AWN included all districts. When the LAA money ran out, all districts except the City Council funded the network to support its core activity. Although Oxford City is not part of the AWN, it is still involved in the work on fuel poverty across the county through the WHHP project and statutory enforcement activity.

Input from Oxfordshire County Council has been reduced recently; this has been exacerbated by various restructures and changes in key personnel both within districts and the county.

c. Current work

The table below provides examples of current work on fuel poverty being delivered by organisations who attended the meeting:

Organisation	Work on Fuel Poverty
Oxford City Council	Housing inspections: assessments of infrastructure such as boilers in rented accommodation, excess cold reports which mean landlords have to take action.
West Oxon DC	Enforcement, information, Home Improvement Agency providing advice, regulations and adaptation
South and Vale DC	Similar statutory function to other districts. Home energy saving promotion.
United Sustainable Energy Agency	Coordinate the Affordable Warmth Network. Home energy conservation, advice line, referrals for insulation schemes, raising awareness of fuel poverty and energy issues, training for workforce and VCS groups, web page with contact information for a range of agencies
Oxfordshire Rural Community Council	Rural Housing Enabler, bulk buying of oil, launching bulk buying of electricity in January, worked with over 500 households to improve energy efficiency. Regular surveys for public consultation
Oxfordshire Waste Partnership	Collective energy switching scheme being proposed, targeting households least likely to switch provider.
Cherwell	Enforcement activity as in other districts. Housing stock assessment. Excess cold hazard features heavily in enforcement work. Provide grants and loans to improve insulation and energy efficiency. Small repairs can include draft proofing properties.
Citizens' Advice Bureaux	Individual advice to clients, of whom the majority have questions about debt, benefits and housing. Collation of some data on enquiries is fed into national picture Financial capability training helping people to get the best deal from their energy supplier.
Oxfordshire Community Foundation	Surviving Winter Campaign - Grants to smaller voluntary groups to make payments to vulnerable people, day sessions for the elderly and other social responses. Money raised by donation of winter fuel payments or from private sector or philanthropic donors.
Age UK	Advice and information services and case work - help the frail, old, younger old people, dementia sufferers, carers access grants, newsletter to 15000 people
NHS Oxfordshire	Electric blanket testing in partnership with Trading Standards, Fire and Rescue and Age UK

d. Housing Condition Survey – agreement on working together

It was agreed that detailed discussions could take place on joint procurement of Housing Condition Surveys by all districts in the county. This was agreed in principle at the meeting as it was clear that this would cut costs for each District Council. A modelling tool could also be used to provide a picture of housing condition that also includes health outcomes and cost-health benefit outcomes via a health impact

assessment. This modelling can be completed instead of a traditional stock condition survey.

Margaret Melling has offered her time to input into and advise on the specifics of the survey should it be commissioned as part of her work for all Districts. It may be that some of the data used is already held and would not need to be purchased. ORCC have also offered to include relevant questions in their regular housing need surveys. The Housing Condition Survey contractor will be contacted so that a meeting can be held in January to discuss details of this joint approach by all districts.

The question of the usefulness of separate data was raised, as surveys need to correspond with household make up. Otherwise vulnerable households in poor quality housing cannot be identified, this is an important indicator.

3. Potential developments that would enhance the current work on fuel poverty

The following issues were identified as areas for development in order to build on current work. They could be taken forward through the AWN / WHHP group.

1. Engagement of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the process of compiling Energy Conservation Reports so they can contribute to the overall picture of fuel poverty in the County.
2. RSLs, advice agencies and organisations working with vulnerable people to sign post to initiatives and opportunities to guard against or alleviate fuel poverty.
3. Shared information to enable advice giving agencies to be up to date – e.g. having the provision of a script or shared information on fuel poverty in Oxfordshire may save duplication. The USEA website will be a basis for this.
4. There is a lot of interest in the use of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) data including at Cherwell, Oxford City and Oxfordshire Waste Partnership where it aided an energy switching programme. EPC is a tool that is used to target those households with low energy ratings. Data produced does have caveats but it can be shared with partners. Individual EPCs are available from www.epcregister.com and might be more useful for individual cases.
5. There is room for a bigger role for primary care within the WHHP project e.g. wider involvement with GPs including data sharing and using flu clinics to help identify people at risk from fuel poverty.
6. Possible opportunities for gathering information through the ‘discharge to assess’ procedures and offering appropriate advice or services.
7. “Cocoon insulation scheme” funding ended in September 2012, although the Green Deal will pick up elements of the scheme it will not do so to the same extent. Joined up approaches to managing this new scheme would be an advantage.
8. Several of the county’s local authorities are working with USEA to establish a Green Deal Provider service that is likely to be a key focus of their energy efficiency and fuel poverty work
9. Communication will be needed around the Green Deal shortly and could be planned jointly and could include districts, OCF and other partners.

10. Several of the county's local authorities are also investigating a joint bulk switching scheme which will aim to reduce fuel prices and help mitigate fuel-poverty.

4. Possible roles of the Health Improvement Board

1. To promote sustainability and wider participation in the work of the Affordable Warmth Network to ensure the work can continue beyond the period currently funded. This may include future bids for Warm Homes Healthy People grants.
2. Monitoring progress on current work and giving it a higher profile through the H&WB. This can be achieved by including relevant indicators in the "basket of indicators for housing and health" but also by setting outcomes for 2013-14 for reduction in fuel poverty in the County.
3. Assisting with surveillance and interpretation of data to ensure efficient and effective targeting of limited resource to the areas / sectors with worst fuel poverty outcomes.

Recommendation:

The Health Improvement Board is asked to agree to take on these roles and ensure that future work on reducing fuel poverty in Oxfordshire is efficient, effective and sustainable.

Appendix: Attendees at the fuel poverty meeting on the 6th December

Name	Organisation
Jackie Wilderspin	PH
Kate King	PH
Sue Johnson	Oxford City
Cynthia Sullivan	South & Vale District Councils
Phil Measures	West Oxfordshire District Council
Jan Deacon	United Sustainable Energy Agency
Tom McCulloch	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
Wayne Lewis	Waste Partnership
Giles Mason	Cherwell District Council
Gill Tishler	Citizens Advice Bureau
Stephanie North	Oxfordshire Community Foundation
Alice Runnicles	Age UK Oxfordshire
Maggie Dent	Oxfordshire PCT
James Martin	Oxfordshire County Council
Margaret Melling	Data lead for the districts
Ian Wright	Oxford City
Apologies	
Paul Wolf	Oxford City
Shelia Farley	Oxford City
Tim Mills	Cherwell District Council
Linda Watson	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
Paul Cann	Age UK
Val Johnston	Oxford City
Rachel Stancliffe	Centre for Sustainable Health Care
Jayne Woodley	Oxfordshire Community Foundation