

Health Improvement Board Briefing - October 2016

Background

This paper has been produced following the HIB request at their last meeting, by the Oxfordshire Affordable Warmth Network (AWN) on behalf of the four district and the city councils that provide its principal funding.

It provides

- discussion of the Fuel Poverty outcome measure, as well as the latest draft figures (please see appendix 1);
- an outline and initial evaluation of outputs from the British Gas Energy Trust funded 'Better Housing, Better Health' project, including information about how this could be supported once current project funding runs out.

Fuel Poverty in Oxfordshire

The fuel poverty indicator for Oxfordshire, based on the recently adopted Low Income, High Cost (LIHC)¹ definition is 9.1% (an increase from 8.7% the previous year), the average across England is around 10.8% ([DECC 2014](#)). This data is also available at district and Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) levels. The lowest level of fuel poverty for an LSOA in Oxfordshire is 1.8% and the highest is 25.5%. The range is much reduced from the previous year's figures (where the ward in Oxford with the highest fuel poverty percentage was in excess of 33% of households in fuel poverty). However, the variance between areas, even neighbouring wards are pronounced, and further build the case for very localised targeting wherever possible.

Oxfordshire local authorities and partners tackle fuel poverty, primarily through the Affordable Warmth Network (AWN) as the county-wide coordinated approach. The county's local authority involvement here shouldn't be understated: they form key members of the Steering Group which govern the day-to-day deliverables, strategic direction, funding bids and fill much of the shortfall in funding provision for energy efficiency improvement (through making available fuel poverty grants, flexible home improvement loans, etc). Core funding for annual running costs is also provided by the four district councils, Oxford City Council and via a grant from Oxfordshire County Council. National Energy Foundation, a local charity, provides the administrative work and expertise in delivering the work of AWN as outlined in an Action Plan. NEF also markets the assistance that is available through outreach, front-line staff training, production and dissemination of content through various media, and coordination of related marketing (for example, council mail-outs to selected residents, and referral routes through key partners, for example GP surgeries). In addition to the input by local authorities, other key partners include Citizens Advice, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group with visiting membership from Oxford Diocese, Oxon Fire and Rescue Service, Age UK, Carers Oxfordshire, Low Carbon Hubs and Oxford Brookes University.

¹ Under the Government's Low Income High Costs (LIHC) indicator, a household is considered to be fuel poor if they have required fuel costs that are above average (the national median level) and were they to spend that amount, they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

The offer to Oxfordshire residents by the AWN includes:

- Sourcing and provision of funds to provide free or reduced loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, solid wall insulation, new boilers; measures to tackle cold and damp.
- Promotion of and signposting to local authority enforcement as appropriate of poor housing conditions to reduce excess cold, damp and mould in the private sector housing.
- Provision of advice around keeping your home warm, through better knowledge and behaviours, including a free helpline around what additional national and local financial help is available.
- Support accessing full benefit entitlements, by referrals to Citizens Advice and AgeUK.
- Development of projects to improve communications between existing and new partners, such as health and social care colleagues.

Revision of Oxfordshire's Fuel Poverty Target Measure

It is recognised that we need to move on from reporting of activity, towards setting a target to aspire to that would contribute to reducing fuel poverty in the county. The government LIHC measure of fuel poverty is influenced by many external factors for which we have no control (such as the market price of energy, level of employment and resulting wages, health vulnerabilities to cold / damp housing conditions). However, our current measure is a proxy that contributes to the alleviation of fuel poverty:- in taking steps to remove cold and damp homes, this will help in preventing or ameliorating the impact on the health and wellbeing of residents. It is currently not possible to guarantee that the residents assisted are in fact fuel poor or that the interventions will entirely lift people out of fuel poverty. However, through the use of various sources of information, expert local knowledge, working with appropriate partners, we are confident that we are targeting our work such that residents *are* likely to be at risk of fuel poverty, and that interventions *are* significant and impactful so as to be able to bring that household out of fuel poverty, hence being our measure for the HIB.

It is suggested that the Network adopts an annual target of:-

1430 residents helped per year, over the next 4 years where building based measures account for 25% of those interventions by the final year.

In light of the limited resources, uncertainty and reliance on the Government's plans for ECO (where a significant proportion of grant funding for building based measures come from , we feel it is realistic to attempt to maintain current levels of activity over the next four years, as long as the current partners are able to fund and resource the AWN. We have included the 25% building based element in order to be aspirational and work towards a more sustainable model of reducing fuel poverty. Over the past two years, the average number of building based measures was 16% of the overall activity. Building based measures rely significantly on the availability of funds.

Better Housing, Better Health (BHBH)

The Oxfordshire AWN was successful in being awarded approximately £200,000 from British Gas Healthy Homes Trust (<http://www.britishgasenergytrust.org.uk/>) to deliver a year-long project to tackle cold homes and health. This project element was called 'Better Housing, Better Health', and includes funding for grants, staff time to provide a single point of contact for health and social care partners and a named case-handler for residents, to assist them through the process, make the award, and a Citizens Advice caseworker for additional capacity for undertaking benefit entitlement checks / switching energy tariff.

BHBH is a pilot health and housing referral scheme provided by the National Energy Foundation in partnership with local authorities across Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group. The scheme aims to reduce pressure on health services and improve health and wellbeing for those living with a cardiovascular disease or respiratory illness (these criteria could be amended for future continuation of the project), who are most at risk from the health impacts of cold homes. Through practical energy efficiency improvements and advice, the scheme aims to:

- Contribute towards the local implementation of the Government's NICE guidelines (NG6: Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes) and fuel poverty strategy, in particular by providing a single-point-of-contact health and housing referral service for people living in cold homes.
- Help to prevent avoidable excess winter deaths. In 2012-13, 510 people died as a result of cold weather across the two counties where our pilot project launched.
- Reduce fuel poverty.

The pilot scheme runs until December 2016 and covers:

- Grants of up to £2,500 (a higher grant would be beneficial in some cases) for energy efficiency measures for owner eligible occupied homes. Measures include insulation, damp works, new heating systems and boilers, draught proofing and replacement external doors or windows. Note that these have already been fully assigned.
- Support with finding installers and facilitating the installation
- Free surveys to identify potential risks to health in owner occupied and privately rented homes where someone has a qualifying medical condition.
- Support with benefits checks, fuel debt mediation and switching energy tariff or supplier, for anyone in need of support, provided by a Citizens Advice caseworker.

The project has achieved great health and wellbeing outcomes as highlighted in the following infographic: Note that the figures below relate to an initial 100 measures installed across 66 Oxfordshire properties this year. The financial savings to the NHS / CCG (and wider society savings) are calculated using [BRE's Housing Health Cost Calculator](#).



Project Funding

This project has been so successful that the initial grant element awarded from British Gas Energy Trust for capital energy-efficiency improvements was allocated within the first few months. There is currently a waiting list now operating for new referrals to the service. In order to continue the momentum, we seek the HIBs assistance in sourcing £700k of funding to run the scheme for another year, which will help at least 200 households. This should achieve annual savings to the CCG in excess of £1million and to wider society of over £2.5million.

Please note that this project could be scaled in a number of different ways:

- Amending the geographical coverage (targeting to LSOA's with high fuel poverty or health inequalities for example)
- Expanding the eligibility criteria, perhaps to include other medical conditions
- Imposing benefits restrictions
- Working with a wider/narrower remit of healthcare professionals
- Increasing/decreasing the maximum grant amount available to each applicant

“Offers and resource”

Range of factsheets produced to complement existing resources

Free cavity wall and loft insulation offered, utilising ECO grants

Community group talks given / events attended

Front-line staff training sessions delivered

Assistance to switch to a cheaper energy tariff provided

Better Housing, Better Health project grant fund awarded

Energy monitors available free-of-charge

Residents directly assisted via Helpline

‘Keeping Kids Cosy’ project launched following successful bid, focussing on families struggling with rising energy bills

“Communication and Promotion”

Community outreach offered

Easy Save booklet and factsheets

Successful funding bid used for additional outreach resources: thermometer cards and banner stands produced

Editorial in Community Care Guide publication to key health venues

Winter Warmth Pharmacy campaign planned

Appraisal and updates of council websites and communications

Easy access to grants, both locally initiated and national

“Community Engagement”

Outreach activity has directly advised over 1000 residents face-to-face so far

Assistance offered for community group thermal imaging projects, targeted towards fuel poor regions

“Partnerships”

New referral sources from health and social care used to target vulnerable residents

Cross referrals between CAB, Age UK and NEF.

Attended roadshow of AgeUK Community Information Network events

Bid to deliver switching tariff events for the Big Energy Saving Network

Service featured in Home Safety Checks undertaken by Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service

Health Improvement Board Briefing update October 2016 meeting

Appendix 1: Health Improvement Partnership Board – Update from Oxon Affordable Warmth Network, Q1/Q2

	Local authority works *	NEF / AWN project elements	Citizens Advice Bureaux	AgeUK Oxfordshire
# HHSRS excess cold resolved	37			
# HHSRS Damp & Mould resolved	70			
# HMO Licence conditions for EPC complied with (Oxford City only)	TBC			
# Boilers installed	16	33		
# More efficient heating system	6	1		
# Loft Insulation	6	TBC		
# Double glazed windows	1	TBC		
# Cavity Wall Insulation	2	TBC		
# Solid Wall Insulation	0	TBC		
# Uptake of benefit			TBC	TBC

* LA data currently only includes Cherwell DC, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire DC and Vale of White Horse DC, and is provisional.