

Update Report on Fuel Poverty and poor Housing Conditions For the Health Improvement Board meeting on the 10th September 2020

1. Summary and recommendations

The Affordable Warmth Network (AWN) is a partnership looking to tackle fuel poverty across the county. It is made up of the Better Housing Better Health (BHBH) project, a warmth and wellbeing helpline for residents, the District Councils, Public Health Oxs and a range of support organisations and charities that refer into BHBH. It is funded through contributions from the District Councils and the County Council.

The AWN last reported to the HIB one year ago, on what it was planning to do over the coming years to tackle Fuel Poverty in Oxfordshire. Progress has been made on some of these ambitions.

The AWN has made significant progress with health and social care partners with a number of these now key referral partners. The Better Housing Better Health (BHBH) freephone advice line is now supporting 568 residents a year, up from 400 last year.

The AWN is looking to continue this growth with support and referrals from the health and social care sector to improve the lowest rated housing stock across the country.

Recommendations

The Health Improvement Board are requested to

- Continue to champion the role housing plays in protecting and maintaining the health of the young, the old and the vulnerable and ensure housing has a place in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- Request the AWN to report next year on referrals from health and social care practitioners to the BHBH service.
- Challenge clinical and health and social care partners to explore opportunities to work more closely with the AWN

2. Progress of AWN since 2019/20

The report to the HIB in 2019 committed to the following action (in italics) and underneath each section is a summary of the work completed against each of those actions.

1. Progress on tackling inequalities

The BHBH service captures some basic inequalities data, such as whether the client is disabled, has a long-term health condition, is in receipt of benefits, has a child under 5 or is over 60 years old.

In 2019/20 the BHBH service recorded that:

- 49% of enquiries were from a service user with a long-term health condition
- Over 100 service users had more than one vulnerability to fuel poverty and cold homes (out of 568).

- 26% of enquiries were from 'off-gas' properties
- 13% of enquiries were from low-income households with young families
- 27% of enquiries were from those over 60 years old

The service continues to target groups who are the most vulnerable to fuel poverty (those on low incomes, single parent families and those in privately rented properties). This year BHBH has carried out some research into which wards across the county would be particularly vulnerable so that specific campaigns can be targeted in these localised areas. BHBH can also access Energy Performance Certificate data in these wards to see which energy efficiency measures would most benefit the housing stock in the areas.

In tandem to this work, BHBH has also identified community hubs in these areas e.g. libraries, community centres, pharmacies, GP surgeries who will be sent information about BHBH and they will be engaged to become referral partners into the service.

- 2. Challenge clinical and health and social care partners to explore opportunities to work more closely with the AWN, with success being demonstrated by an increase in referrals from health and social care practitioners to the BHBH service.*

Referrals from health and social care professionals continue (114 in 2019-20), however there is scope to increase the number of referrals. Last year feedback stated that it needed to be easier to refer into the service.

The 19/20 Winter Warmth campaign focused on the message "housing affects your health" and directed people to a webpage (www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/homerepairs) where health and social care providers could make housing referrals to any of the District Councils or the BHBH services, using a single referral form.

Over the campaign period the web form was looked at 332 times and the web page 1192 times (up to 9th March). A total of 51 emails were referred on to District Councils who support the BHBH service between the 10th January and 6th February.

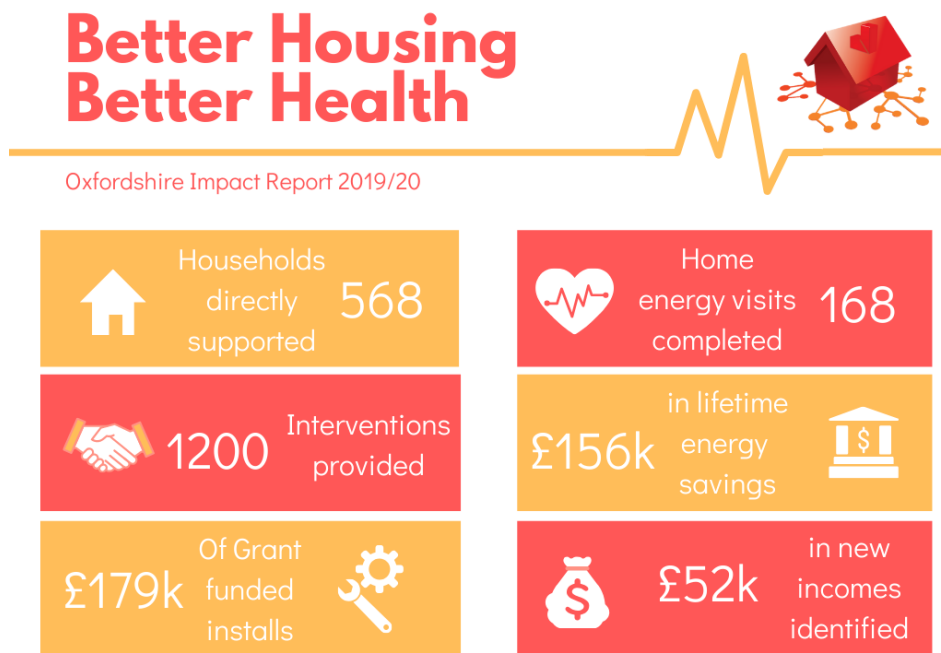
In addition, the BHBH website has since been re-designed with our web referral form front and centre to accommodate this. At the same time BHBH has been applying for an NHS email address to allow information to be passed from the network into the NHS easier. All information has now been submitted and the outcome of this is awaited.

In the last year the CCG Integrated Respiratory Team has been trained on fuel poverty and the BHBH Service. This has enabled referral pathways to be extended to respiratory clinicians, nurses and physiotherapists. Understandably referrals through these sources dried up at the beginning of the pandemic in March but the network will look to re-establish as soon as possible.

Further training will be extended to the primary care networks over the next 6 months or as the pandemic allows. BHBH send out regular digital marketing including newsletters and social media campaigns aiming to engage with local health and social care professionals.

A baseline measure has been taken of the number of referrals for cold homes made by GPs for the period last year. The recorded figure was nil. The intention is to repeat this measure with the aspiration that it is increased.

The Better Housing Better Health free advice phone line in 2019-20 delivered the following outputs -



3. Opportunities

With the recent government announcement of the Green Homes Grant Scheme (to provide vouchers of up to £5k or £10k for energy efficiency improvements to homes) the AWN has been planning on how this can be utilised for the biggest impact to vulnerable groups in Oxfordshire.

The AWN is currently bidding, along with the local councils, to administer the Green Homes Grant low-income scheme across the county. The outcome of this bid should be known by the start of October. If successful it will run alongside the Green Homes Grant Scheme.

4. Conclusions

- The local partnership, AWN, is functional and is delivering positive outcomes for local residents.
- More work needs to be completed to engage more with health and social care practitioners to encourage more referrals
- AWN needs to continue to analyse which groups are using the service most and how to engage with any target groups being left behind

For and on behalf of the Affordable Warmth Network
Alison Vickers, Project Manager, National Energy Foundation, August 2020