

Report to	-	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date	-	20 March 2017
Report of the	-	Executive Director of Business Operations
Subject	-	Fuel Poverty

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

Service Manager: Richard Parker-Harding

Introduction

1. Members requested a report on Fuel Poverty in Rother. The report is being made to this meeting as the Council is required to produce a statutory report on home energy efficiency in the district in March. Marie Jones, the East Sussex Energy Partnership Fuel Poverty Co-Ordinator has been invited to the meeting who can answer questions about fuel poverty in Rother and the actions being taken by the Partnership to reduce fuel poverty in the district.
2. Fuel poverty refers to a household unable to afford an adequate standard of warmth and pay for other energy needs to maintain their health and wellbeing. Households living in homes that are difficult or expensive to heat are likely to be cold and damp. Living continuously in cold conditions can affect the immune system and in extreme cases lead to hypothermia in the very young and old. Cold homes are also likely to be damp due to condensation, resulting in mould growth that exacerbates asthma and chronic respiratory diseases.
3. Living in a cold home is a contributory factor to the number of excess winter deaths (EWD). EWD are the additional deaths that occur in winter months when compared with the non-winter months, due to various factors including:
 - the temperature
 - the level of disease in the population
 - how well equipped people are to cope with the drop in temperature
4. In the last five years an average of over 300 more people each year in East Sussex have died in the winter period compared with the rest of the year, with nearly a third of these deaths believed to occur because of the impact of cold temperatures in the home on vulnerable people (ONS: Public Health England Annual Births and Mortality Extracts).
5. Nine percent of households in Rother are defined as being fuel poor. The Council is required by the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) to produce bi-annual reports until 2027 (Appendix A).
6. The Council's Corporate Plan action 4.3 refers to actions to reduce fuel poverty.

Background

7. Historically, there have been Government grants available to assist households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. Such grants are now only available for short periods of time and normally only households on income related benefits are eligible to apply. These grants are normally funded directly by Energy companies or indirectly through the National Energy Action organisation, who receive income from Energy companies by way of a levy.
8. The Council is a member of the East Sussex Energy Partnership (ESEP), which is led by the Acting Director of Public Health at East Sussex County Council (ESCC) and includes all the district councils and voluntary groups including the Citizens Advice Bureaus. East Sussex County Council Public Health fund a Fuel Poverty Coordinator, employed by Hastings Borough Council. Her work involves:
 - a. engaging with national and local organisations, such as the Community Energy Organisations, Energy Savings Trust and National Energy Action;
 - b. being a point of contact to maintain relevant expertise and knowledge and to disseminate that information;
 - c. monitoring the Winter Home Check service; and
 - d. provide training to the employees of relevant organisations and volunteers.

Appendix B provides additional information on the work of the ESEP.

9. An East Sussex Better Together programme, “Healthy Homes” is underway to tackle fuel poverty in 5 wards in Hastings Borough Council and Central Bexhill. The £627,000 programme is being funded by the Hastings and Rother Clinical Commissioning Group. Additional funding is being sought from the European Union. This programme can provide grants in Central Bexhill to eligible households for thermal insulation and replacement boilers.
10. The Council participates in the work of the partnership although there is not an allocated budget or any staff specifically committed to working on fuel poverty. Environmental Health Officers in the Private Sector Housing Team can take enforcement action using the Housing Act 2004, if properties are determined to have a category 1 or category 2 hazard from excess cold due to inadequate heating or thermal insulation.

Winter Home Check Service

11. The winter home check service is provided by Osborne Energy. They carry out winter warmth home assessment to identify how to keep warm and well and carry out preventative measures including reducing drafts, improving insulation, clearing gutters, lagging pipes, changing pre-payment meters to credit meters, clearing chimneys and emergency repairs or replacement boilers. Replacement boilers can also be provided when funding is available. The service is available to households in receipt of income related benefits.

Rother Energy Switch

12. In the last three years, we have promoted a scheme whereby households can join a community energy switch auction, which facilitates households

changing their energy supplier, to potentially reduce their energy bills. Each year around 200 households participate and can save up to £200 per year.

Future Actions 2017-2019

13. We will participate in the work of the ESEP, as set out in Section C of the draft HECA report (Appendix A). In particular we will continue to train our front-line about fuel poverty, assist residents to get assistance and promote the Winter Home Check Service. We will also promote a community (Rother) energy switch once a year.

Conclusion

14. Fuel poverty is a significant public health issue, as cold and damp homes have a detrimental impact on an individual's health. The Council has statutory responsibilities to produce a bi-annual HECA report and Officers in the Private Sector Housing Team have enforcement powers in relation to properties with inadequate heating and thermal insulation. The Council does not have any staff working directly on fuel poverty or a budget to promote this area of work. It participates with the work of the ESEP and promotes an annual community energy switching scheme.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director of Business Operations

Risk Assessment Statement

While the reduction of fuel poverty in the households of Rother is an important public health objective, the Council's financial position means that unless another area of work was discontinued it cannot fund additional activity in this area.

DRAFT HECA Progress Report

March 2017

Rother District Council

Section A - Introduction

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 requires the Council to publish a progress report on its website, every 2 years until March 2027. The report must also be sent to heca-reports@decc.gsi.gov.uk

The Appendix to the report gives details of Government guidance and national statistics.

The Council recognises that improving home energy efficiencies is an important activity to reduce carbon emissions and reduce the number of households who have to spend too much of their disposable income heating their homes, known as fuel poverty.

Between 2006-2011 the Council promoted and funded energy efficiency measures through two successful schemes:

- 2006-08 “Heatstreets” targeted street scheme in partnership with a major utility company delivering free and discounted cavity and loft insulation to 1,100 homes.
- 2008-11 an East Sussex Energy Partnership district wide scheme improved over 1,000 homes including insulation measures and solar hot water systems.

Since 2011 the Council has not received capital funding to support any new energy efficiency schemes or initiatives.

Section B - Background

Fuel Poverty

3,808 households or 9% of households were fuel poor in 2014, the last statistics published.

Wards	Percentage of fuel poor households	Total households	Number Solid Walled	Number Off Gas	Solid wall %	Off gas %	Index HTT
Battle Town	6.5	2,414	589	329.81	25.6%	14.4%	0.03682
Brede Valley	10.1	2,083	628	413.42	31.6%	20.8%	0.06556
Central	11.2	3,126	2,135	134.00	69.3%	4.3%	0.03010
Collington	6.1	2,229	243	48.24	11.3%	2.2%	0.00253
Crowhurst	16.1	1,060	422	742.93	44.0%	77.5%	0.34090
Darwell	13.3	2,129	1,050	790.50	53.4%	40.2%	0.21431
Eastern Rother	10.9	2,348	720	1,271.45	29.6%	52.2%	0.15440
Ewhurst and Sedlescombe	13.2	1,169	440	377.33	40.8%	35.0%	0.14260
Kewhurst	6.2	2,349	221	0.00	9.4%	0.0%	0.00000
Marsham	6.7	1,870	327	147.18	17.0%	7.7%	0.01308
Old Town	7.0	1,823	310	115.00	17.3%	6.4%	0.01111
Rother Levels	9.1	2,162	685	507.59	32.9%	24.4%	0.08037
Rye	10.8	2,115	1,106	98.84	51.0%	4.6%	0.02326
Sackville	7.4	2,503	1,501	148.30	53.4%	5.3%	0.02817
St Marks	7.0	2,171	207	302.04	9.8%	14.3%	0.01403
St Michaels	6.2	2,253	200	61.19	9.5%	2.9%	0.00276
St Stephens	7.7	2,194	370	0.00	18.7%	0.0%	0.00000
Salehurst	11.1	1,866	567	577.32	31.0%	31.6%	0.09796
Sidley	8.6	2,477	315	107.53	12.7%	4.3%	0.00546
Ticehurst and Etchingham	10.5	1,891	812	617.78	47.2%	35.9%	0.16976

Key: HTT: Hard to Treat property

Reference: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>

Reference: www.ruralfuelpoverty.org.uk

Reference: www.eastsussexinfofigures.org.uk

Section C - Local Energy Efficiency Ambitions and Priorities

Fuel Poverty is an action in our Corporate Plan (2014-2021):

<http://www.rother.gov.uk/corporateplan>

CA4.3 Fuel Poverty

CA4.4 Collective Energy Switching

The Council does not own or manage any housing stock but will support registered social landlords (RSL) in improving the energy efficiency of their stock.

We will participate in local partnerships which aim to improve home energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions and reduce fuel poverty. We are members of the East Sussex Energy Partnership and support Your Energy Sussex (YES) and may become an affiliate member:

www.westsussex.gov.uk/living/in_your_community/energy_saving/your_energy_sussex.aspx

Apart from funding disabled facilities grants, the Council does not itself have any financial resources to devote to HECA or fuel poverty but we aim to keep our residents informed of opportunities to obtain grants etc. and we will signpost residents to reputable advice organisations.

Measures we are taking to result in energy efficient improvements of our residential accommodation

The East Sussex Fuel Poverty Reduction Programme aims to protect individuals and communities from the effects of living in a cold home. It provides practical advice and support to vulnerable people about how to stay warm and well during the winter, and where to get further specialist help.

The Programme is co-ordinated by the East Sussex Energy Partnership (ESEP). The Programme has the following 5 workstreams:

- Train health, housing and social care professionals and VCS workers to help people whose homes maybe too cold for their health and wellbeing;
- Raise awareness among professionals and the public about how to keep warm at home;
- Identify vulnerable people who live in a cold home and refer for help;
- Provide vulnerable people with information and advice in order to maximise income; and
- Winter Home Check service – for eligible vulnerable people provide a home assessment, advice and works.

The programme is funded by ESCC Public Health and benefits from funding from other sources. Funds has been secured from the Department of Energy and Climate Change's Big Energy Saving Network fund, National Energy Action, Citizen Advice's Energy Best Deal fund, Foundations Independent Living Trust, District and Borough Councils and Energy Company Obligation funding via the Your Energy Sussex programme.

Table 1 below describes briefly the projects commissioned with ESCC Public Health's funds. Contract start and end dates (confirmed or expected) are also provided. All service specifications have been co-produced with providers.

	Project	Description	Total Budget	Providers
I	Winter Home Check Service	Home assessment, advice and works for eligible households*	£99,750	Osborne Energy
II	Fuel Poverty and health awareness training	Face to face training for Council, Home Works and STEPS housing support staff	£6,883	National Energy Action
III	Keep warm and well advice for vulnerable households	Home Works and STEPS (services commissioned by ESCC ASC) provide advice to households and refer if required to specialists e.g. Winter Home Check	£30,000 (£10K to each provider)	Southdown Housing, Eastbourne Homes and Family Mosaic
IV	Cold Alert	Cold weather alerts via email, text or voicemail to over 350 households	£4,660	Sussex Air
V	Winter Warmth events	Targeted in fuel poor communities	£15,000	Communities Matter and Energise Sussex Coast
VI	East Sussex Fuel Poverty Co-ordinator And Energy Switching	To enhance benefits and collaborative working between organisations, groups and individuals	TBC	Hastings Borough Council

In addition, an East Sussex Better Together programme, “Healthy Homes” is underway to tackle fuel poverty in 5 wards in Hastings Borough Council and Central Bexhill. The £627,000 programme is being funded by the Hastings and Rother Clinical Commissioning Group. Funding of up to £4000 can be provided to replace boilers in eligible homes.

New Tariffs

We promoted a collective energy switching offer for the third year in 2017.

Private Rented Sector

We will work with private landlords to promote energy efficiency activity via visiting officers and the landlords’ forum. We will use the powers in the Housing Act 2004 to address excess cold hazards, if the need arises.

In 2015/16 twenty properties, where a category 1 or 2 hazard relating to excess cold were removed or reduced due to intervention by the Council. In addition, twenty-two properties, where a category 1 or 2 hazard relating to damp and mould were removed or reduced due to intervention by the Council.

Working with ESCC Trading Standards we report landlords who let accommodation without Energy Performance Certificates.

Measures we are taking to result in significant energy efficiency improvements in new affordable homes

Rother District Council remains committed to increasing the energy efficiency of all new affordable homes. This is currently achieved by imposing on Developers and Registered Providers, a minimum planning policy requirement - that requires all new affordable homes to achieve a minimum sustainable code level three or above.

In future the abolition of the sustainable code standards will instead be incorporated under building regulations. Rother District Council will continue to ensure that developers meet these environmental standards, by enforcing the core requirements to increase energy efficiency within the fabric of the building.

In terms of scheme specific environmental designs. Rother District Council has supported our preferred partner, Hastoe Housing Association in the delivery of an innovative environmental housing scheme, known as 'Passivhaus'. The houses are built using the patented Beattie Passive Construction method that provides a continuous insulation seal around the core of a time framed structure which delivers dramatic cost, time and environmental saving benefits. Hastoe Housing Association has a long standing history of delivering higher than minimum code level standards. Their vision is centred on seeking innovative solutions to housing issues; with a commitment to environmental sustainability primarily in rural communities, where fuel poverty is inherently high.

New Website

A new website has been created by the ESEP: <https://warmeastsussex.org.uk/> which gives advice to the residents of East Sussex about practical measures to take and grants available to make their homes warm.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director of Operations (Head of Paid Service)

East Sussex Fuel Poverty Reduction Pathway

