

<b>Report on</b>	Affordable Warmth Scheme SLA 2023-2024
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	16th March 2023
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Anne Caldwell, Principal Environmental Health Officer

<b>Is this report restricted for confidential business?</b>	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on communications received from the Department for Communities (DfC) on the Affordable Warmth Scheme 2023-2024 and the consideration of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the April 2023 – March 2024 year.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Background</b>
2.1	Members may be aware that officers within Council have been delivering the Affordable Warmth service within the Mid Ulster District Council area on behalf of the Department for Communities (DfC) since 2014.
2.2	The Council work in Partnership with NIHE and Department of Communities to deliver the scheme via a Service Level Agreement (SLA). The Councils role is to identify, assess eligibility and refer to the NIHE any households that would be eligible for the scheme.
2.3	The Affordable Warmth Scheme targets low income households who experience the effects of fuel poverty and energy inefficiency. It is a targeted scheme aimed at those areas where levels of fuel poverty are highest. The scheme is available to home owners, those who have their day / life interest in the house and those who privately rent their home. It is not available for tenants living in the social (Housing Executive or housing association) sector.
2.4	Once eligibility checks have been carried out by Council officers, an onwards referral to the NIHE is made and the NIHE subsequently considers and where eligible, provide grant aid to improve energy efficiency measures within the home. From 1 July 2021 the income threshold for the Affordable Warmth Scheme rose to £23,000 and at the same time Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Carer's Allowance was removed from the calculation of income.

2.5	<p>DfC have recently written to all Councils on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023 to outline their indicative position regarding spending in 2023/24 and with a request to consider, sign and return the Service Level Agreement for the period April 2023 – March 2024.</p> <p>Council's have been advised that a reasonable planning assumption for the Affordable Warmth Scheme is for a capital budget of £16m for 2023/24. On that basis Councils are asked to submit 20 referrals per month for April, May and June 2023 and then a maximum of 20 referrals per month from June 2022 onwards - the SLA allows a +/-5 flexibility in monthly referral numbers and Councils are advised to work with their local Grant Office to make up any shortfall by the end of each quarter.</p>
2.6	<p>DfC have also noted that further correspondence will be issued once the budget for the full 2023/24 year has been confirmed and they have further advised that the Department is drafting an addendum to the current Business Case to allow the Scheme to run from April 2024 – March 2026 and will seek to provide information at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>Previously in June 2023, Members may recall a previous update paper presented to Development committee noting DfC's decision to reduce the maximum referrals on a monthly basis from the previous 30 per month to 20 month and this took effect from June 2022. As Council is remunerated on a payment per referral, the reduction in maximum annual referrals from 360 in 2021-21 to 260 in 2022-23 resulted in an approximate reduction of approx. £20,000 in available annual funding. (minute reference: D097/22)</p> <p>This reduction in numbers of max referrals that can be made has meant monthly referrals at times have had to be prioritised accordingly which has the potential to result in delays for some applicants and the possibility that other applicants will not be referred to NIHE due to the capped limits.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>The reduction of fuel poverty is an element of the Council's Poverty Plan and as such it is important that the Affordable Warmth service is continued to be provided in conjunction with other schemes such as Home Safety, Energy Efficiency Advisory Service (both supported with funding via the Public Health Agency) and also the Council's Fuel Stamp Scheme.</p>
3.2	<p>Where applicants or previous applicants do not meet the entry criteria for the Affordable Warmth scheme, officers will signpost them to other fuel poverty assistance schemes such as the Housing Executive Boiler Replacement Allowance, the Northern Ireland Energy Advice Line and the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme.</p>
3.3	<p>Council currently allocate one full time officer to the Affordable Warmth scheme and expenditure costs are anticipated to be on a full cost recovery basis should Council achieve the capped referral targets per month.</p>

3.4	The current SLA for Members consideration and approval is attached within Appendix B.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b>
	Financial: 2023-2024 Max Affordable Warmth funding £53,500.80 (240 annual referrals - assuming the referral number of 20 per month doesn't change). Grant income and corresponding expenditure has been considered within the existing 23/24 revenue budgets.
	Human: Staff recruitment already in place. May need reviewed in line with appropriate HR processes should funding position change.
	Risk Management: Considered in line with relevant policies and procedures.
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.
	Rural Needs Implications: None anticipated at this juncture.
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	To note the content of this report and to approve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Service Level Agreement between the Department for Communities and Mid Ulster District Council for the Affordable Warmth Scheme for the April 2023 – March 2024 year.</li> </ul>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
6.1	Appendix A: DFC Correspondence received re: Affordable Warmth Scheme Appendix B: Proposed SLA for period April 2023 – March 2024