

Report on	Updated Service Level Agreement in relation to the Affordable Warmth Programme
Date of Meeting	14 th September 2021
Reporting Officer	Fiona McClements

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To update Members on the funding for the Affordable Warmth Scheme and Council's Energy Efficiency Advice Service.
2.0	Background
2.1	The Affordable Warmth Scheme targets low income households who experience the effects of fuel poverty and energy inefficiency.
2.2	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. The Affordable Warmth Scheme provides grant aid to improve energy efficiency measures within the home.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The Affordable Warmth Programme operates under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Councils and the Department for Communities. The SLAs are updated in line with any date changes or programme changes. The current SLA for Members consideration and approval is attached at Appendix 1.
3.2	<p>The Council responsibilities are set out in paragraph 4.2 of the SLA and includes the following:</p> <p>Each local council undertakes to –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ with the consent of the targeted householder, conduct a survey to collate and verify financial information to confirm eligibility for the scheme; ➤ contribute to the objectives and performance indicators (paras 2.3 and 2.4 refer) by maintaining a steady rate of 30 +/- 3 completed first time surveys to their local NIHE Grant Office monthly (equates to approximately 360 per Council annually). Additional referrals will not be accepted without prior agreement with the Department and NIHE;

- pending the outcome of the BCS study (Para 3 refers) and consideration of the way forward in relation to the targeted approach Councils should endeavour to ensure that the number of self-referrals do not exceed 20%. Councils must keep records that will allow an analysis of the origin of self-referrals to be carried out, as and when required;
- apply appropriate discretion regarding accepting self-referrals (*currently referrals which are not from the 'targeted list'*). Local councils must bear in mind that Affordable Warmth is primarily a targeted scheme;
- advise the Department within one month if referral targets cannot be met along with a plan for resolution;
- where the number of referrals may need to be adjusted in year due to budget change or scheme performance, endeavour to meet the new targets in order to maximise the number of households being supported. Where this is not possible the Council must inform the Department;
- highlight urgent cases to the NIHE Grants Manager at the time of referral. An urgent case is defined as a household with no heating system, or central heating which is broken down beyond repair;
- ensure that when an application is received by Building Control that officials arrange for measures to be inspected. Building Control officials will confirm to the NIHE whether the installation is in compliance with the building regulations;
- provide householders participating in the scheme with information regarding energy advice;
- manage and respond to complaints concerning local council staff regarding the Affordable Warmth Scheme;
- where local council officials have completed the survey and referred that survey to the NIHE, direct any query regarding the application to the NIHE to resolve.
- meet with the NIHE and DfC at least quarterly to discuss the progress of the scheme and discuss any areas of concern;
- participate in both the established Senior Officer group (3 meetings per year) and other ad hoc meetings as and when required;
- where the householder agrees, refer their details (name, address, contact number) to the Social Welfare Group (*Make the Call*) for the purposes of conducting a Benefit Entitlement Check with them.
- carry out additional duties such as handholding of householders and qualitative case studies of homes which have received assistance through the Scheme.

3.3	The operation of the interim SLA, which is for 21/22 only will be evaluated in the coming months, along with the findings of a current study of the Affordable Warmth Scheme being carried out by Business Consultancy Services (BCS). The Department for Communities have confirmed their commitment to working with the council representative again in the autumn to develop a longer term SLA for the period 22/23 onwards.
3.4	<p><u>Affordable Warmth- Changes to income threshold.</u></p> <p>DFC have written to Councils to advise that from 1st July 2021 the income threshold for the Affordable Warmth Scheme would rise to £23,000 and at the same time Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Carer's Allowance would be removed from the calculation of income. DFC have also confirmed that the changes do not apply to any applications referred to NIHE prior to 1st July 2021.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: Affordable Warmth funding £78,051, subject to 360 referrals being made From Council to NIHE
	Human: Staff costs included in the funding
	Risk Management: N/a
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/a
	Rural Needs Implications: N/a
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To approve the Service Level Agreement for the end of the financial year 21/22 and to note the changes in the calculation of income thresholds which have taken effect from 1 st July 2021.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix 1 – SLA