

<b>Report on</b>	Affordable Warmth Scheme
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	15th June 2023
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Kieran Gordon, Assistant Director Health, Leisure & Wellbeing
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Leigh Gilmore, Health and Wellbeing Manager

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To update Members on the notification received from the Department of Communities (DfC) on the Affordable Warmth Scheme.
<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 works in Partnership with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and DfC 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 homeowners, 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, provides 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	DfC recently wrote to all Councils on the 27 <sup>th</sup> February 2023 to outline their indicative position regarding spending in 2023/24, that a reasonable planning assumption for the Affordable Warmth Scheme for 2023/24 was a capital budget of £16m and with a request to consider, sign and return the SLA for the period April 2023 – March 2024.
2.6	DfC also noted at this point that further correspondence will be issued once the budget for the full 2023/24 year has been confirmed and they further advised that the Department was 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.

2.7	In March 2023, Members at the Development Committee considered this request and gave approval to sign and return the SLA.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	On the 1 <sup>st</sup> of June 2023 the Director of Housing Supply Policy for DfC wrote to all Council Chief Executives informing them of their position on the Affordable Warmth Scheme (enclosed with Appendix A).
3.2	The reduction of fuel poverty is an element of the Council's Poverty Plan and as such the Affordable Warmth service was an important programme element along with Home Safety, Energy Efficiency Advisory Service (both supported with funding via the Public Health Agency) and also the Council's Fuel Stamp Scheme.
3.3	Where applicants or previous applicants did not meet the entry criteria for the Affordable Warmth scheme, officers signposted 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 all which are under review.
3.4	Council currently allocate one full time officer to the Affordable Warmth scheme and expenditure costs were anticipated to be on a full cost recovery basis should Council achieve the capped referral targets per month.
3.5	The decision to end of targeting signals the end of all Councils involvement in the Affordable Warmth Scheme on the 31 <sup>st</sup> August 2023 with the NIHE taking on sole responsibility.
3.6	Furthermore, Members may recall that this scheme uses a software system that enables the Affordable Warmth Officers to identify addresses on a designated target list, complete and capture survey data, upload survey data to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) via a portal for further processing by NIHE. Since the system development, Mid Ulster District Council have acted as a single point of contact for Tascomi/Idox which ensures a single point of contact for the software provider. Part of this role includes arranging the overall annual payment of the annual support and maintenance costs on behalf of all 10 Councils who use the software – Mid Ulster District Council then seek to claim relevant costs from the other 9 Council's for their financial contribution towards the software system. Previously in March 2023, Members at the Development Committee resolved to approve this arrangement for the period April 2023 – March 2024 based on the correspondence received from DfC as outlined in section 2.5 and 2.6 of this report. Invoices were therefore raised to seek to recoup contributing costs from the other 9 councils. Council officers are currently engaging with the software provider to mitigate any unnecessary risks and expenditure associated with this recent decision by DfC.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<p><b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b></p> <p>Financial: Loss of incoming grant funding to Council in the region of £40k (this may be cost neutral to Council as this scheme was run on a full cost recovery basis).</p>

	Human: Council's Human Resources Department engagement required for consultations with affected staff member(s).
	Risk Management: Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures.
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures.
	Rural Needs Implications: Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures.
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Recommendation(s)</b>
5.1	To note the contents of this report.
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached &amp; References</b>
6.1	Appendix A: Correspondence from the Department of Communities