

<b>Report on</b>	Affordable Warmth Scheme
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> September 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>	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	x

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	To update Members on the ending of Councils involvement with 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 worked in Partnership with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and DfC to deliver the scheme via a Service Level Agreement (SLA). The Councils role was 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 had been carried out by Council officers, an onwards referral to the NIHE was made and the NIHE subsequently considered and where eligible, provided 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	As highlighted to Members at June 2023 Development Committee, 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 and their decision to end all Councils involvement in the Affordable Warmth Scheme on the 31 <sup>st</sup> August 2023 with the NIHE taking on sole responsibility.

	<p>It was therefore resolved by Members at June 2023 Development Committee that DfC and NIHE officials be invited for a meeting for further discussions with Councillors and officers and to understand further the arrangements for the scheme from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023 onwards.</p>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>A meeting took place on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023 with DfC and NIHE and an invite was extended to all Councillors and relevant council officers. All Members in attendance sought assurances that there would be a smooth transition over to this NIHE led programme and the most vulnerable constituents would not be adversely affected by this changeover. In essence it was explained that the scheme is by and large the same minus the involvement of Council officers during the advice/application stage.</p>
3.2	<p>Following the meeting, queries regarding existing waiting lists began to surface and Councils sought clarification. DfC and NIHE had advised that they had sought advice with regards to handover of waiting list by Council and potential GDPR issues around consent (or the absence of) transferring of personal data. The DfC advice was that under current regulations Councils could not share waiting lists with NIHE.</p> <p>As a result, DfC advised that any applicant that was not fully processed by Council officers would now need to restart the application process direct with the NIHE. NIHE advised that all those on waiting lists would need to reapply to their free phone telephone number from the first September 2023.</p>
3.3	<p>All applicants that Council officers have been dealing with have been telephoned and provided with the information below. This information will also be provided to all future applicants who make an enquiry to Council from the 1st of September onwards – additionally this message will be available on the council website:</p> <p><b><i>Following a decision taken by the Department for Communities (DfC) to change the referral process to the Affordable Warmth Scheme via local councils to applications through a single provider Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), please be advised that Mid Ulster District Council are no longer able to accept referrals as council's role in delivering the scheme in partnership with NIHE will end on 31 August 2023.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>All enquiries relating to the scheme can be directed to the NI Energy Advice line from 1 September 2023 by;</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Calling 0800 111 4455 during office hours</i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>emailing <a href="mailto:Nlenergyadvice@nihe.gov.uk">Nlenergyadvice@nihe.gov.uk</a></i></b></li> <li>• <b><i>or visiting The Housing Executive - Community (<a href="http://nihe.gov.uk">nihe.gov.uk</a>)</i></b></li> </ul>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Other Considerations</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Financial, Human Resources &amp; Risk Implications</b>

	<p>Financial: As previously reported within June 2023 Development Committee reports.</p>
	<p>Human: As previously reported within June 2023 Development Committee reports.</p>
	<p>Risk Management: Considered in line with Council Policies and Procedures.</p>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Screening &amp; Impact Assessments</b>
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
<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	N/A