



**Health Partnerships Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**
16th February 2011

**Report from the Director of
Strategy, Partnerships and
Improvement**

For Action

Wards Affected:
ALL

Fuel Poverty and Health Task Group – Final Report

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings and recommendations of the Fuel Poverty and Health Task Group that are being presented to the Health Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee for its endorsement.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Health Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to endorse the Fuel Poverty and Health Task Group's recommendations for them to be passed to the council's Executive and to local NHS trusts for approval.

3.0 Details

- 3.1 The final report of the Fuel Poverty and Health Task Group is attached at appendix 1. The task group was established to look at the effect that fuel poverty has on peoples' health in Brent. It has been demonstrated in various research projects that fuel poverty and its consequences can have a major impact on physical and mental health and well being. There are also specific factors in Brent that led to the selection of this topic, such as the high proportion of housing in the private rented sector (where the proportion of households in fuel poverty is highest), the relative deprivation of the borough, particularly income deprivation and the general health inequalities that exist in Brent
- 3.2 This work was part of a wider scrutiny project in North West London that is looking at the relationship between housing and health inequalities. Funding has been provided by the Centre for Public Scrutiny to support this work, and Brent's report will be used in a tool kit to assist other councils carrying out housing and health inequalities scrutiny reviews. The other boroughs taking part in this work, and their work areas were:

- Health and the Built Environment – Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham
- Fuel Poverty/Energy Efficiency – Brent and Ealing
- Overcrowding – Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster
- Overcrowding and its impact on children's educational – Hillingdon

3.3 In order to carry out their review the Fuel Poverty and Health Task Group:

- Carried out a review of literature and discussions with housing and health providers on the links between fuel poverty and health;
- Reviewed the means (i.e. grants and income maximisation advice) currently available to both residents and landlords to promote energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty, of the various agencies involved, and what the take up of these services are;
- Reviewed fuel poverty and affordable warmth strategies currently in place and best practice examples;
- Discussed fuel poverty and health with local energy agencies;
- Held discussions with housing departments and providers on the actions used to promote energy efficiency in social and council housing, and how private sector households in fuel poverty are targeted and reached;
- Discussed with GPs and local health service providers referrals to advice on fuel poverty and affordable warmth. They also considered hospital admissions data for illnesses connected to cold homes and fuel poverty, including the costs to the health service of these admissions;
- Consulted with residents by carrying out a survey to learn more about the effects of fuel poverty on peoples' health and wellbeing.

3.4 The members of the task group were:

- Councillor Janice Long (chair)
- Councillor Margaret McLennan
- Councillor Wilhelmina Mitchell-Murray
- Councillor Claudia Hector
- Councillor Reg Colwill
- Councillor Michael Adeyeye

3.5 The task group has developed 13 recommendations that it hopes can be endorsed by the Health Partnerships Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The members of the task group are of the view that these recommendations can make a positive contribution to addressing fuel poverty in Brent. The recommendations address the following subject areas:

- advice and information
- improving energy efficiency of the housing stock and reducing fuel bills
- working with landlords; and
- working with the NHS

3.6 The key learning points from the review were:

- There is much work happening in Brent to tackle fuel poverty. Brent is fortunate to have a local charity, Energy Solutions that works on fuel poverty issues in our borough and brings an expertise to this issue.

- Commitment from the health service in Brent to tackle fuel poverty is mixed. There are some very committed individuals who are working extremely hard to give the issue a higher profile. But the local NHS does not regard fuel poverty as a corporate priority.
- As with many issues, especially in the current financial climate, fuel poverty cannot be the responsibility of one organisation – it has to be tackled in a collaborative way by the council, NHS, voluntary sector and private sector. The role of the energy firms could be increasingly important as grant funding (such as Warm Zones) is being cut. Energy firms will be expected to step in and provide funding for carbon reduction and energy efficiency measures in the home, which will help alleviate fuel poverty.
- Income maximisation is key to addressing fuel poverty. Fuel poverty is another facet of general poverty. The importance of giving people (especially the elderly and vulnerable) the means to afford to heat their home cannot be overstated. If people are entitled to benefits but they are not claiming them they need to be given the assistance to do this.

3.7 The task group believes that the key challenges to address fuel poverty are:

- Replacing the funding for fuel poverty mitigation work, as Warm Zone funding has been significantly reduced following the Comprehensive Spending Review. Will funding be replaced by energy companies, and will it be available for fuel poverty mitigation or to reduce carbon emissions from households, as the two are different?
- Ensuring that frontline staff are aware of fuel poverty and any referral network put in place to help signpost people to advice and guidance where needed.
- Getting organisational buy-in to fuel poverty as an issue to ensure support for initiatives to address it from the council, NHS, voluntary and private sector companies in Brent.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 None

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 None

6.0 Diversity Implications

6.1 None

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

7.1 None

Contact Officers:

Andrew Davies
Policy and Performance Officer
Tel – 020 8937 1609
Email – andrew.davies@brent.gov.uk

Phil Newby
Director of Strategy, Partnerships and
Improvement
Tel – 020 8937 1032
Email – phil.newby@brent.gov.uk