

Title of Report: Consultation on Changes to the Affordable Warmth Scheme	Officer Presenting: Director of Health & Community Author: Head of Health & Community Wellbeing
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

1.1 To inform members that the Department for Communities (DfC) has published a consultation paper (Appendix 1) entitled "Changes to the Affordable Warmth Scheme".

2 Background

2.1 The document outlines proposals for changes which were a result of a review of the Scheme following its first full year of operation. The Department has also published an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) screen of the proposals (Appendix 2).

2.2 The consultation period runs from 13 November 2017 to 16 February 2018 and the consultation documents are available at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/changes-affordable-warmth-scheme.

2.3 DfC proposes to hold a number of public consultation events as outlined below:

- Tuesday 21st November, 9.30-12.30 – Burnavon, Cookstown;
- Thursday 23rd November, 9.30-12.30 – NICVA, Belfast;
- Friday 24th November, 9.30-12.30 - Canal Court Hotel, Newry;
- Tuesday 28th November, 9.30-12.30 - Enniskillen Town Hall;
- Thursday 30th November, 9.30-12.30 – City Hotel, Derry/Londonderry;
- Friday 1st December, 9.30-12.30 – The Braid, Ballymena.

2.4 Members will be aware that officers from Health & Community Wellbeing section have been delivering the Affordable Warmth service within the Council area on behalf of the Department for Communities (DfC) since September 2014.

2.5 Council is required to focus primarily on homes within the targeted area as provided by the DfC with a predetermined number of 405 cases to be referred to NIHE during 2017/2018.

- 2.6 The total number of referrals has reduced from 506 in 2016/2017 and 1000 in 2015/2016. The scheme remains very popular and there is a backlog of approximately 700 cases within the district awaiting referral to NIHE for assistance. Emphasis is being given to referring urgent cases to NIHE ahead of other eligible applicants. In addition officers routinely refer applicants to other energy efficiency schemes where applicants are not eligible for assistance from the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 4 main changes are proposed as part of the consultation as outlined below:

3.1.1 The Department proposes that one installer, managing the installation of all measures to the household, becomes the preferred delivery method.

- 3.1.2 The Department proposes to raise the income threshold from £20,000 to £23,000 for households with more than one person and reducing it to £18,000 for all single person households.

3.1.3 The Department proposes that Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Carer's Allowance are removed from the calculation of income for the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

3.1.4 The Department proposes the removal of age-related and disability-related eligibility criteria from the boiler replacement element of the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

- 3.2 It is likely that the proposed amendments to the Affordable Warmth Scheme, possibly with the exception of the single installer element, has the potential to significantly increase the demand for assistance from the scheme. In circumstances where assistance cannot be provided to applicants within the DCSDC area at present due to budget restrictions it is likely that this situation will be exacerbated in the event that the proposals are adopted. This in no way detracts from the desire to reduce fuel poverty across the City and district.

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement and other Implications

- 4.1 At present DfC funding and the number of eligible homes that can be referred to NIHE is allocated equally among the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland. As a result Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) cannot refer cases to NIHE for assistance as quickly as would be desirable.

- 4.2 Each of the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland will obtain £73,305 to plan and manage the Affordable Warmth Scheme for 2017/2018. This translates into a unit cost of £181 per referral to NIHE.
- 4.3 There is no indication from DfC that the amount of funding provided to Councils per case referred to NIHE is likely to increase in 2018-19. The project officers employed to deliver the scheme are currently contracted with Council until 31 March 2018 and the situation will be kept under review.

5 Recommendation

- 5.1 Members note and consider the DfC consultation proposals. A consolidated response can be brought back to Committee in advance of the DfC consultation deadline.
- 5.2 Approve retrospective Member attendance to a suitable consultation event.

Background Papers

Appendix 1: Public Consultation document

Appendix 2: DfC Consultation Paper and Screening Form