

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	6 th Feb 2013
3.	Title:	Fuel Poverty
4.	Directorate:	Resources

5. Summary

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board considered the final report of the Fuel Poverty Review at its meeting on the 11th January 2013. The report is referred to Cabinet for consideration of the recommendations, however, there are some key issues within this report that OSMB wished to draw Cabinet's attention to.

6. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- **That Cabinet receive the report;**
- **That Cabinet's response to the recommendations be fed back to OSMB within two months.**

7. Proposals and details

The issue of Fuel Poverty was high on the agenda for all of the Select Commissions, throughout the last municipal year. The lead for this area of work was therefore taken on by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. On the 16th March the Board approved a three stage approach to their work on Fuel Poverty, as follows:

Phase One (23rd April) – Information seminar open to all Members

Phase Two – work with Area Assemblies teams and other officers on a public involvement exercise around fuel poverty

Phase Three – Using the information obtained in the first two phases, scoping of a focused fuel poverty review.

This approach has now been completed although it should be noted that Phase Two was not implemented as a separate initiative as much of the work had already been completed by some Area Assemblies. As such feed back from how this had worked was incorporated into the Phase Three and recommendations about further work to this end formulated.

Methodology

Information Seminar

The session was extremely successful and well attended. Members received presentations from Catherine Homer, NHS Rotherham; Paul Benson and Paul Maplethorpe. A summary of the issues that came out of this is as follows:

- Awareness raising, communications and education. This related to the level of understanding within the general public of what help is available, how to implement energy efficiency measures, use of new equipment (eg energy efficient boilers) etc. Issues such as training, clear communications approaches and potential work with the Area Assemblies around this were raised.
- Work with the Utility companies. This focused on the availability of their resources to assist with the fuel poverty agenda and how to maximise this for Rotherham.
- Understanding of the forthcoming Green Deal and its potential impact on residents of Rotherham.
- Warm Homes Healthy People. A national funding pot which Rotherham has been successful in bidding to in the past, the need to go bigger and better if and when the funding becomes available for another bidding round.
- Top 3 most Fuel Poor Areas. The need to focus efforts particularly in these areas.

Spotlight Review

The main focus of the review was the forthcoming Green Deal and how the Council can work in partnership with the Utility companies to address fuel poverty in

Rotherham. The overall aim was to find ways to reduce fuel poverty in Rotherham and to access the funding that the Utility Companies have at their disposal to assist with this

As Rotherham has already had most of its Council stock improved with loft and cavity wall insulation, the focus of the discussions was around work still to be done:

- Properties still need to be converted to smart meters
- There is still scope for Solar Panels
- Community Buildings e.g. Parish Councils which could be improved
- External insulation of hard to heat/treat properties
- Non traditional housing e.g. White City

Notes of the discussions that took place at both the Spotlight Review meeting and the Information Seminar, are appended to the final report.

Early findings from the review were discussed informally with Cabinet, soon after the review concluded. As a result some of the action that has since been taken has been incorporated into the final report, for example the establishment of a Green Deal Steering Group.

When the final report was discussed at Overview and Scrutiny Management Board there were a number of issues that it was felt needed to be stressed to Cabinet:

- The need to maintain the impetus gained with this area of work and to continue to prioritise it.
- The fact that fuel poverty is not just about fuel efficiency and physical improvements to housing stock. Although this is important, it should be noted that it is also about low income levels and the fact that many people have to choose between eating and heating.
- For this reason, it is recommended that work on tackling fuel poverty should dovetail with the work of the Welfare Reform group and that the recommendations of the report be considered by them also.

8. Finance

Financial implications arising from the report relate to the potential funding for fuel poverty initiatives.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

None associated with this report.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Fuel poverty is a key policy agenda, and one which is not necessarily being effectively performance managed. The current measure is one of the 29 outcomes within the Council's corporate plan. The Health and Well Being Board are

developing a Warmer Homes Strategy which is the main strategy for dealing with Fuel Poverty in Rotherham.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

The early findings of this report were discussed informally with Cabinet and SLT, at an early stage.

12 Contact

Deborah Fellowes,
Scrutiny Manager
Legal and Democratic Services
Deborah.fellowes@rotherham.gov.uk Tel: 22769