

**South Cambridgeshire District Council Warm Homes Strategy for
Council Homes 2011/12 – 2015/16**

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1. Key Aims

- To identify levels of Fuel Poverty and target assistance to the most vulnerable households
- To raise awareness of the benefits of energy efficiency and provide advice and to encourage the maximum take up and targeting of benefits and energy efficiency grants
- To alleviate the adverse effects on health of inefficiently heated or insulated homes
- To reduce carbon emissions in Council owned homes in the district.

2. Introduction

2.1 The Council owns and manages 5,500 properties in 96 villages. Many of the villages are off-grid, with limited public transport and often limited amenities.

2.2 A recent survey of all tenants in December 2009 showed that we have a significant and growing older population who have high levels of disability. Affordable warmth is crucial to the quality of life of all council tenants.

2.3 The Housing Act 2004 introduced the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to replace the Housing Fitness Standard. It is now recognised that excessive cold and damp in a house constitutes a serious health hazard.

2.4 The Labour government in its 2010 Warm Homes Strategy set out its vision for 2020 for energy management in homes. The Coalition government is currently developing the Green Deal to address these issues.

2.5 The government also expects local authorities to play a key lead role in cutting carbon emissions and they have placed landlords in poll position to lead the way. Currently around 6.5 million tonnes of CO₂ are emitted per annum in Cambridgeshire. With approximately 1.4 million tonnes of this coming from existing housing stock. The Council in 2010/11 aims to achieve 10% reduction in the emission of CO₂ from the Council's operations and publicise the outcome in order to set an example to other organisations.

2.6 The Council is a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration, Cambridge Climate Change Charter. This project provides the Council with a direct delivery route and specific outcomes that will provide an urgently needed catalyst for the transition to low-carbon living in a low carbon economy within the Eastern Region.

2.7 The Warm Homes Strategy as well as helping our tenants save on energy costs will be integral to cutting carbon emissions from the built environment by 29% by 2020 in line with government commitments.

3. What is Fuel Poverty?

3.1 Definition of Fuel Poverty

The Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy 2001 defines a fuel poor household as one,

“which needs to spend more than 10% of its household income to achieve a satisfactory heating regime (21 degrees centigrade in the living room and 18 degrees centigrade in other occupied rooms)”

3.2 Causes of Fuel Poverty

3.2.1 The Rural Services Network undertook a survey into the difficulties rural households will face in keeping warm in winter. The report evidenced fuel poverty in rural locations and linked it to poor health, debt and “hard to treat” rural homes. The hard to treat are those that are off grid and have solid wall construction

3.2.2 There are a number of causes of fuel poverty which result in households not being able to afford sufficient warmth for health and comfort. These include:-

Low Household Income

This can be caused by unemployment, inability to work due to ill health or caring responsibilities or being in receipt of a pension with limited resources. In South Cambridge shire around half of all Council tenants are in receipt of Housing Benefit.

Inefficient heating systems

This includes gas systems with old boilers or limited controls, old storage heating systems and properties with one inefficient gas or electric fire as the sole source of heat for the whole house. In South Cambridgeshire, x% of council tenants have no central heating.

Heating systems with high running costs

While inefficient heating systems can be expensive to run, other forms of heating can be more costly for example on peak electrical heating, liquid petroleum gas (LPG) heaters and oil central heating, due to fluctuations in the oil market.

Poor Quality Housing

Poor quality housing which does not meet the decency standard, with little or no insulation leads to fuel poverty, especially when combined with low income and inefficient heating. In South Cambridgeshire all council homes met the Decent Homes Standard in 2010 so this may be a more significant issue for the private sector.

Ill health / disability resulting in an increased demand for a warm home

Poor housing and low income can worsen existing ill health problems and disability. Families can suffer from various health conditions, including heart and respiratory problems and strokes. The most recent surveys of council tenants in South Cambridgeshire indicate that 50% of households have someone with a long term illness.

Energy Prices

Recent trends have seen a steep increase in the cost of all fuels. Some estimates predict that for every 1% increase in prices another 10,000 households are in Fuel Poverty. This problem is made worse by the fact that costs for prepayment measures are currently higher than direct debit options and the former is often chosen by those on low incomes.

4. Tackling Fuel Poverty – work so far

4.1 South Cambridgeshire District Council records energy usage and thermal comfort, making use of the Elmhurst Streamline system for energy rating of the stock as a whole.

4.2 Individual energy surveys have been undertaken on behalf of the Council as properties have become vacant by Green Heat Ltd. in order to produce Energy Performance Certificates, which have then been incorporated into the Streamline database.

4.3 Funding has been awarded to the Council to retrofit property at Rampton Drift and provide a demonstrator model continuous learning through the retrofit of owner occupied houses at Rampton Drift

4.4 An HCA grant has been awarded for the Gypsy and Travellers site and the refurbishment and retrofitting of a travellers site that is managed by the Council.

4.5 Tenants have been consulted on the direction of the investment for the year 2011/12 and agree that prime focus should be on heating and insulation.

4.6 The Council achieved Decent Homes in December 2010 therefore all properties with the exception of those that have refused permission will have loft insulation, cavity wall insulation (where possible) and double glazing.

4.7 The cost of all energy sources has been rising and the most significant of those is oil. This has been so significant that the Council does not currently install new oil heating and only replaces oil fired boilers where absolutely necessary.

4.8 A project to take advantage of the Feed In Tariff (FIT) commenced in 2010. This aims to complete during 2011 and will include the addition of photovoltaic cells (PVCs) to South Cambridgeshire Hall, PVCs to the

sheltered housing communal buildings and PVCs to at least 10 council homes.

5. Work still needed

5.1 Because of the rural nature of the stock, the Council is keen to explore the effects of alternative energy sources, coupled with increased levels of insulation in order to effectively target resources for those properties that do not have the benefit of readily available gas supplies, and which are more likely to suffer from condensation and fuel poverty. Appendix B list a number of technologies that are available.

5.2 The new challenge is to ensure that tenants have a higher level of thermal comfort in their homes than that of the DHS. Overall the stock condition is good however there is a growing problem of fuel poverty giving rise to a higher incidence and persistence of condensation.

5.3 There is also a high risk of component failure in boilers as there are insufficient resources to replace inefficient and obsolete boilers unless they fail. There is a high failure rate in the combi-boilers which means that when they fail they will leave tenants with no heating or hot water.

5.4 670 of the properties that the Council owns were identified as hardest to treat they have with nine-inch solid walls and oil fired heating. These properties are located throughout the district in 28 villages. A recent survey conducted by the Council 53% (161) said they could only partially refill their oil tank, 22%(65) said they could not afford to buy any oil, 37% (113) said they suffer form condensation in their homes and over half had previously reported it.

5.5 The recent consultation about stock transfer with all tenants also showed that the heating in their homes was very important. Many tenants are reliant on old inefficient electric storage heating. This is cheap to install but difficult for tenants to use and ensure they are on the right tariff

6. Resources

6.1 The primary source of funds comes from the Major Repairs Allowance element of the Councils Housing Revenue Account. This totals around £3 million per year but also needs to pay for all the other improvements to Council homes. The most recent stock condition survey indicates that this is around £12 million per year.

6.2 Further capital resources may be able to be obtained through the appropriate sale of other housing assets. The Asset Utilisation and Sustainability Policy contain further detail on this.

6.3 The Council also needs to be proactive an seeking grant funding where possible and to ensure that advantage is taken of the Feed in Tariff.

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