



NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

FUEL POVERTY STRATEGY

(DRAFT REPORT)

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FUEL POVERTY

It must be clear that our task in preparing a strategy is not to *identify* those individuals within our community living in fuel poverty, but to introduce a framework by which these households can easily access funds, grants, improvement initiatives etc.

North Herts District Council has made a clear commitment to improving the quality of housing within its district. The annual Housing Improvement Programme identifies properties requiring upgrading, schedules when work will take place and ensures that the necessary budget is available for this. The annual progress is documented in a report to central government to ensure that we, as an authority, are actively working to improve living conditions locally.

We must also take a strategic view of housing condition within our district, planning ahead for the next three to five years. We can only do this after consultation with all households, whether their homes are local authority or housing association owned, privately rented or purchased. We undertake a survey of our tenants to find out whether they are satisfied with our service, whether their individual needs have changed etc; it is only once we are in receipt of such facts that we can prioritise and plan for the future.

The development of a Fuel Poverty Strategy will also enable North Herts District Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Home Energy Conservation Act (1995), which requires us to put in place measures to encourage the reduction of energy use in residential premises by 30% within 15 years.

We undertake an annual telephone survey of home owners living within our boundaries, to find out whether they have carried out their own insulation or heating improvements and to see whether they are aware of the financial help which may be available to them via government grants. This strategy, plus accompanying figures relating to improvements to properties within the district, must also be submitted to central government annually to assess (and maintain) progress.

WHAT IS FUEL POVERTY?

The government definition of a household in fuel poverty is one where more than 10% of the disposable income is necessary to keep the house warm.

There are defined 'comfort' levels - 21°C in the living room, 18°C in other occupied rooms - identified by government agencies as being the optimum level for good health, whilst still ensuring energy efficiency for the householder.

Fuel poverty occurs when a household is unable to afford sufficient energy to achieve these 'ideal' temperatures. This can be due to one, or more, of the following:

- ◆ Low household income - whether employed, living on benefit, or receiving only a state pension
- ◆ Inadequate or outdated heating systems - modern heating systems are much more energy efficient, but represent major expenditure
- ◆ Inadequate insulation of windows, doors, roof space etc

The number of households living in fuel poverty nationally has dropped from 5.5 million in 1996, to approximately 4.5 million at present. This still represents, however, a significant proportion of the population and includes almost 10% of all homes in the South East region.

It is also important to remember that the indicator relates to what someone would *need to spend* to keep their home warm, rather than assessing what they actually spend. This is because very often a household will set its own priorities for essential spending often leaving homes inadequately heated.

The following chart shows just how critical the maintenance of a stable temperature within the home is.

21°C	Comfortable temperature
18°C	Some discomfort, especially for more elderly people, or the very young, but no serious health risks
16°C	Discomfort and risk of respiratory disease, bronchitis, etc - asthma in children more apparent
12°C	Risk of cardiovascular problems, strokes, heart attacks etc increases greatly
9°C	Risk of hypothermia

Fuel poverty has a direct bearing on peoples' well being. Living in a cold, damp home will have a detrimental effect on any individuals' health, but when one takes into account that the majority of those living on a reduced income are already elderly, very young, or have some level of physical disability, their vulnerability becomes apparent.

Nationally, more than half of UK households includes someone from these 'higher risk' groups. For example, it is estimated that over 750,000 elderly people are at risk from hypothermia, simply because their homes are inadequately heated or insulated. It is further estimated that the treatment of illnesses brought on by living in a cold home is costing the NHS around £1 billion per year.

The government strategy is to target these 'priority vulnerable groups' in a bid to end fuel poverty for such households by 2010. Only once sufficient progress has been made in this area, will the government move to alleviate the problem in other areas of fuel poverty.

In order to monitor progress, the government intends to publish annual reports setting out the number of households in fuel poverty and identify factors affecting fuel poverty (household income, fuel prices/payment terms and housing stock condition). This should provide a comprehensive picture of progress towards the target and will ensure that government is able to assess whether any change of policy is necessary to meet those targets.

The Council's strategy must be based on the recognition that not only will individual residents benefit from improved health, greater levels of comfort and lower fuel costs, but also that the resulting measures taken should lead to a reduction in the consumption of energy and serve to protect the environment, thereby contributing to environmental sustainability.

ADDRESSING FUEL POVERTY

The strategy must address the following:

- ❑ To increase awareness of the benefits of maintaining a warm home
 - better maintenance of structural condition
 - lower heating costs overall
 - greater comfort for occupants
 - decreasing need for health services
- ❑ To increase awareness not only of the public, but also statutory/voluntary services of the availability of benefits available to assist with heating costs
- ❑ To increase public awareness of grants/financial support primarily aimed at increasing levels of insulation/lowering heating costs in owner occupied housing
- ❑ To promote ways in which householders can easily reduce their use of energy by careful use of appliances
- ❑ To improve housing stock to provide affordable warmth. This is already identified as a priority in the HECA and HIP Strategy documents
- ❑ To encourage partnerships with statutory, voluntary and advisory groups to promote the health benefits of warmer, drier homes to the population as a whole
- ❑ To provide information on all energy efficiency initiatives at housing area offices, reception areas and through other contact points with the public, such as media events, fun days, residents meetings, fairs etc
- ❑ To ensure energy efficiency is kept at the forefront when assembling press releases, council publications (such as the quarterly magazine, Outlook), which are regularly distributed to the widest audience, both owner-occupiers and those living in rented accommodation.
- ❑ To promote the accessibility of suitable housing schemes to those living alone in large accommodation, but with due regard for their wishes to remain in the area, close to friends, support services etc
- ❑ To encourage inclusion of fuel poverty information in relevant literature and promotions
- ❑ To develop initiatives with local energy suppliers, to include wise use of fuel, payment schemes, promotional events etc
- ❑ To develop a corporate approach to implement the strategy and increase awareness of NHDC staff to energy efficiency and fuel poverty objectives

LIVING IN NORTH HERTS

1.1 Population

The 1991 Census showed an overall population of 111,994
- estimated in 1997 to have risen to 114,940.

We have a higher number of older people than the national average
- 34% of our urban households include at least one person of retirement age against the national average of 24%.
Within our northern rural areas, this figure rises to 43% of households

The 1991 Census showed the ethnic make up of our local population to be:

White	105874
Black Caribbean	1167
Black African	84
Black Other	316
Indian	2950
Pakistani	166
Bangladeshi	250
Chinese	229
Other groups;	
Asian	347
Other	611
Persons born in Ireland	1594

1.2 Employment

Major local areas of employment are

Distribution, hotels and restaurants (24%)
Banking/finance/insurance (23%)
Manufacturing (22%)
Public Administration, education and health (19%)
Construction, agriculture, transport and other non-specific trades make up the remaining 12%.

1.3 Unemployment

Unemployment within North Herts District is currently 1.5%, a little above the average for Hertfordshire (1.4%), although well below the East of England figure of 2.4% and the national average of 3.7%.

1.4 Housing

The 1991 Census identified 43,842 households living in permanent buildings;

Owner occupied	28,496
Furnished, privately rented	1,134
Unfurnished, privately rented	1,492
Rented from a job or business	870
Rented from a housing association	1,355
Rented from the local authority	10,495
Households in non-permanent accommodation	344

1999/2000 survey, assessed to national standard for statutory unfitness, shows that North Herts has 2,900 homes judged as being unfit for human habitation

207 individuals presented themselves to the Authority as unintentionally homeless, against the total of 1870 for Hertfordshire as a whole

1.5 Our Tenants

We provide 200 units of temporary accommodation for homeless people and families, 24 elderly person schemes with warden service and a community warden service for around 700 people in their own homes

A Survey of tenants' satisfaction 2000/2001 identified that:

- almost 50% of tenants have some form of long term illness, disability or infirmity
- 50% of tenants are aged 65 or over
- 20% of tenants have someone aged under 16 living with them
- 27% declared an income of £100-159, whereas 23% have a weekly income of £60-69
- Almost 66% of tenants receive state benefit or state/occupational pension as part or all of their household income
- Active claims for housing benefit are 6,215 at April 2001, 12.55% of total property base
- Rent rebate claims at April 2001 totalled 4,453

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1.6 Poverty

Whilst North Hertfordshire is generally regarded as an affluent area, with high levels of employment, the Oughton Ward has been identified as the 13th most deprived out of a total of 200 total in Hertfordshire and will therefore be the major focus of regeneration initiatives. The issue of addressing fuel poverty will form an important part of these plans.

OUR TARGETS

In order to tackle Fuel Poverty within our district, we have set the following targets

TARGET A

We will raise the profile of energy awareness and fuel poverty with our staff and with our external partners

TARGET B

We will ensure that information on the wise use of energy, including funding of improvement works, insulation and heating schemes reaches those people most in need and is presented in a format suitable to their personal situation

TARGET C

We will promote the uptake of initiatives to address fuel poverty for those living in their own, or housing association homes

TARGET D

We will ensure that all tenants living in the authority's own housing can benefit from the fuel poverty initiative, according to their need

TARGET E

We will ensure information on competitive fuel supplies is readily available to our residents

The following pages outline how we aim to achieve these targets;

TARGET A: To raise the profile of energy awareness and fuel poverty with our staff and our external partners

Objective	Tasks to be undertaken	Timescale	Partners	
A1	Assemble a team of officers throughout the authority to be responsible for implementing the strategy	Identify staff whose work will address issues of energy saving, grants, benefits - awards and advice, to form Energy Advisory Officers Group	immediate	All directorates at NHDC
		Notify all staff of formation of this working group	immediate	
A2	Set up a centralised information service to ensure that the authority is always up to date with the latest directives/ initiatives	Identify staff having interest in/holding database of energy information	immediate	Housing services Env health LA21 officers
		Liaise with interested parties to provide a centralised information point and ensure staff are kept up to date	immediate	Housing services Env health
		Publicise existence of database to ensure all areas are aware of the resource	tba	Housing services Env health Public relations LA21 officers
A3	Ensure that affordable warmth is addressed when compiling other strategies/energy saving initiatives	Liaise with and prompt officers in charge of energy/environmental/housing needs/benefits	ongoing	All directorates at NHDC

A4	Work with outside partners to increase energy awareness amongst the public, as well as statutory and voluntary/ support groups	Arrange briefing sessions throughout the district to include as many groups and attendees as possible	by end 2001	All directorates at NHDC Voluntary / health/social groups Home care agencies
		Include information on authority web site	immediate	
		Use existing links with Herts Environmental Forum to increase awareness of fuel poverty issues and means of addressing it	ongoing	
A5	Ensure feedback from briefings is analysed and reported back to national bodies in order to be considered in policy/strategy decisions	Provide formal feedback mechanism to central information service for co-ordinated reporting back to central government, energy providers, welfare groups, housing associations, etc	by end 2001	All Directorates at NHDC Energy welfare groups Housing providers HEF
		Links with Herts Environmental Forum will help form overall picture, through comparison with neighbouring authorities etc	ongoing	
A6	Monitor effectiveness of energy advice given, year on year	Set up monitoring/evaluation scheme alongside centralised information service - linked to the Housing Improvement Programme (HIP) Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) annual submission and Health Improvement Plan (Himp)	by early 2002	Energy Advisory Group HIP group HECA group Himp group LA21 officers

A7	Provide training for members and staff in relation to the issue of fuel poverty	Devise internal training programmes to allow key employees to receive advice on fuel poverty and how it can be addressed	by mid 2002	Energy advisory group All directorates at NHDC HEF/NHDC
		Consider using membership of HEF (Herts Env Forum) to co-ordinate training schemes throughout the area		

TARGET B: To ensure that information on the wise use of energy, funding of improvement works, insulation and heating schemes reaches the people most in need in a format suitable to their personal needs

Objective	Tasks to be undertaken	Timescale	Partners
B1 Identify those households most in need of health and social care support networks	Ensure that the issue of fuel poverty is addressed alongside development work in areas known to have high levels of deprivation and inferior housing stock	ongoing	Energy Advisory/ LA21 officer groups Health/social care workers, home care agencies, benefits agency Voluntary information and library services Age Concern
B2 Establish a referral system to enable frontline workers to assist those believed to be living in poorly heated homes	Design a programme for completion of referral form and its transmission to the relevant agencies. These forms could be used by hospital discharge teams, the Prevention of Admission to Hospital Team, health visitors, housing officers etc	ongoing	All directorates at NHDC Health/social care workers, home care agencies, benefits agency, voluntary information, Support Age Concern

B3	Work in partnership with other statutory, voluntary/community groups to identify initiatives which could be used to provide advice on an individual basis according to the person's needs	Structure information sharing in order that outside agencies receive latest information in format that can be used directly with members of the community and contains updated thresholds/grant eligibility	ongoing	All directorates at NHDC Health/social care workers, home care
		Work with the Herts Environmental Forum to identify initiatives which have worked in other areas of Hertfordshire or which could be co-ordinated throughout the area for maximum impact.		NHDC/HEF
		Include latest information/initiatives on the Authority's website	ongoing	website group
B4	The Authority will ensure that information regarding fuel is provided in a format/venue suitable to all members of the community	Liaise with working group regarding translation of standard documents, reducing folds in literature etc and ensuring that these options are clearly identified for users	ongoing	All directorates at NHDC and NHDC Translation Working Group
		Ensure equal opportunities criteria applies to all posters, documentation, venues for events etc	ongoing	All NHDC directorates external partners
		Ensure that groups representing people with disabilities, elderly persons, care support groups, debt/budget/benefit	ongoing	All NHDC directorates external partners, support networks

advisory organisations are given the opportunity to attend any event, or are identified as needing special arrangements to be made to ensure that those identified most at risk of fuel poverty receive advice

B5	Raise the profile of energy efficiency with local schools	<p>Liaise with primary and secondary school heads to identify joint activities undertaken as part of sustainable environment initiative</p> <p>Include information on authority's website</p> <p>Use links with, and publications issued by, HEF to consolidate our approach in schools</p>	tba	<p>Energy advisory officers LA21(Environmental Sustainability)Officers Group education authority, heads of local schools Website group</p> <p>HEF</p>
B6	Identify venues within district where energy efficiency materials can be accessed by majority of the population, with special regard to our rural areas	<p>Compile a list of health,community, day centres, area housing offices, village halls, libraries, benefits offices, debt/budget advice centres, mobile libraries, farmers markets</p> <p>Include all details on Authority's website</p>	tba	<p>Energy advisory officers, housing officers, parish council representatives, Markets Officer, health & social care workers, DSS, CAB, Age Concern Website Group</p>

TARGET C: To promote the uptake of initiatives to address fuel poverty for those living in their own, or Housing Association homes

Objective	Tasks to be undertaken	Timescale	Partners	
C1	Ensure that fuel poverty is fully addressed within the Home Energy Efficiency Service Implementation programme, literature, policies etc by partnership working	Continue regular liaison with HEES installers to ensure measures are included to address fuel poverty	Ongoing	NHDC Housing Associations
C2	Ensure energy efficiency measures are considered in all renovation, home repair assistance and disabled facility grants	Incorporate suggestions into paperwork accompanying initial grant criteria where possible	by end 2001	NHDC, HEES
		Ensure residents are able to use newly installed controls/systems to benefit most from energy saving measures	by end 2001	NHDC
		Provide households with additional advice on energy saving products, tips etc following completion of grant funded works	ongoing	NHDC
C3	Promote the uptake of HEES grants available to those on low incomes, living in fuel poverty	Liaise with HEES on new initiatives to encourage applications	early 2002	NHDC HEES
		Ensure HEES are involved in affordable warmth referral strategy and have a system		

to refer residents back to the authority who may require additional help

C4	Establish clear standards and future targets for homes managed by housing associations	Liaise with housing associations to agree reasonable standards, taking into account existing age/condition of housing stock -these standards to be updated regularly	by end 2001	Housing Association Liaison Officer Housing associations (20 total) within the district
C5	Establish clear standards and future targets for homes owned and rented out by private landlords	Liaise with estate agents to identify/make contact with private landlords, promoting energy efficiency initiatives, compile database and forward relevant updates as necessary	immediate	Energy advisory officers, estate agencies
C6	Ensure housing associations and private landlords are aware of fuel poverty strategy, energy saving measures, grants available etc	Use existing database of housing associations plus contact list assembled from the above to issue regular newsletters, notice of presentations etc	immediate	Energy advisory officers, estate agents, housing associations
C7	Ensure that the budget is available for the annual updates to owner-occupiers regarding improving the condition of their homes	Energy efficiency must be included as part of the budget review process	ongoing	Energy Advisory, Budget holders, at NHDC, owner occupiers, HEES
		Continue move to 'top-up' awards from HEES with the Council's own budget	ongoing	
		Ensure home owners are aware of initiatives by regular articles in newsletters and via the authority's website	ongoing	Public relations Website group

TARGET D: To ensure that all tenants living in the authority's own housing can benefit from the fuel poverty initiative according to their need

Objective	Tasks to be undertaken	Timescale	Partners	
D1	Ensure that full picture and energy profile for the entire housing stock held by the authority is available, to identify areas of greatest need	A stock profile is being undertaken in late 2001. The results will be analysed and held in centralised information systems to assist in targetting vulnerable areas	ongoing	Housing officers, Stock assessment consultants at NHDC
		Analysis of information gathered will allow authority to use GIS mapping to identify areas of possible fuel poverty	to follow	GIS mapping, housing officers and energy advisory officers at NHDC
D2	Set targets for achievable improvements to our own housing stock	On completion of stock profile, compile a plan with timescales for works to be carried out to achieve those targets within a reasonable period	to follow	Housing officers, planned maintenance energy advisory officers, NHDC
		Monitor progress on these improvements	to follow	Housing Officers, Energy Advisory Officers, NHDC
D3	Make maximum use of available external funding to improve our housing stock	Liaise with HEES installers	by early 2002	Housing officers, external funding sources
		Compile a database of funding groups in order to identify those with whom partnerships could be of mutual benefit	by early 2002	

D4	Maintain the impetus for the improvement of energy efficiency within our own housing stock	Review the existing energy efficiency programme regularly to ensure it is achieving best value/meeting targets	ongoing	Housing services environmental health
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TARGET E: To ensure information on competitive fuel supplies is readily available to our residents

	Objective	Tasks to be undertaken	Timescale	Partners
E1	Identify those fuel suppliers operating within the district	Assemble a database of suppliers, both single fuel and multiple fuel	early 2002	Energy advisory officers
E2	Obtain from those suppliers details of tariffs, payment terms, discount schemes etc	Compile a spreadsheet of tariffs and include in centralised information at NHDC in format suitable to issue to the public	early 2002	Energy advisory officers
		This information to be included on the authority's website	early 2002	Website Group
E3	Ensure that any contractual, tariff or pricing information is available in a variety of formats	Conform to the authority's guidelines on translation, provision in all formats including large print, tape etc and that their availability is publicised	early 2002	Energy advisory officers Equal Access Officer
E4	Fuel suppliers to be encouraged to develop new discount schemes to help those on lower incomes	Make representations to fuel suppliers on behalf of lower income households who, traditionally, have been unable to benefit from scheduled or 'up front' payment plans	early 2002	Energy advisory officers energy suppliers

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HERTS ENVIRONMENTAL FORUM (HEF)

HERTS ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

GO EAST

LUTON BOROUGH COUNCIL) guidelines to producing Affordable
BARKING AND DAGENHAM COUNCIL) Warmth strategy