

To: City Executive Board

Date: 29 January 2015

Report of: Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Title of Report: Fuel Poverty

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present recommendations from the Housing Panel on the City Council's approach to Fuel Poverty.

Key decision? No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Sam Hollick, Chair of the Housing Panel

Executive lead members: Councillor Ed Turner, Executive Member for Finance, Asset Management and Public Health, and Councillor Scott Seamons, Executive Member Housing and Estate Regeneration

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2014-2018

Recommendations: That the City Executive Board:

1. Encourage tenant-facing staff in Direct Services to offer appropriate advice on the use of free electricity.
2. Explores the possibility of buying energy in bulk.

Introduction

1. The Housing Panel received a report and presentation to brief them on the City Council's approach to combatting fuel poverty. The Panel would like to thank Debbie Haynes for providing this briefing and answering questions.

Summary of the discussion

2. The Panel noted that the definition of fuel poverty has changed and that fewer people meet the newer definition. The Panel heard that modelling the 'fuel poverty gap' could help the City Council to target the worst affected residents, and that officers are looking at how this approach could be applied in Oxford.

3. The Panel also noted that energy efficiency is the main component of fuel poverty that the City Council can really affect.
4. The Panel questioned to roll out of solar PVs and suggested that tenant-facing staff in Direct Services could play a role in keeping an eye on installations and advising tenants on the use of free electricity.

Recommendation 1 – That tenant-facing staff in Direct Services are encouraged to offer appropriate advice on the use of free electricity.

5. The Panel questioned whether the City Council has looked at purchasing energy in bulk, citing the example of Tower Hamlets Borough Council, and whether this is within the scope of the new Energy Strategy. The Panel heard that this is something that officers are aware of but that it would be quite complicated to do and would require some additional expertise.

Recommendation 2 – That the City Executive Board explores the possibility of buying energy in bulk.

Further consideration

6. The Panel requested further information about the availability of emergency support, and energy tariffs for vulnerable persons.
7. The Panel also asked to review the latest excess winter deaths figures for Oxford.

Director and Board Member Comments

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List of background papers: None