

Appendix A - Fuel poverty

1. Background

The Council recognises the threat cold or damp homes can pose to vulnerable people, through depression, stroke, heart disease and pneumonia. These can contribute to excess winter deaths.

Affordable warmth is the concept of residents being able to afford to heat their homes at a comfortable temperature. Where this is not the case, the household is likely to be in 'fuel poverty.' Fuel poverty can also affect the health and educational attainment of children. The table below shows the proportion of fuel poor households against the national definition.

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Rutland	13.6%	11.9%	9.3%	10.6%
East Midlands	13.3%	13.2%	10.4%	10.1%
England	11.1%	10.8%	10.4%	10.6%

These figures have been assisted by some relatively mild winters and a gradual improvement in the energy efficiency of homes in Rutland. There was a slight increase in fuel poverty in Rutland according to the Government's model between 2013 and 2014, which was also the case with the Council's four rural neighbouring councils which have a broadly similar range of properties.

The most energy efficiency categories of property in Rutland are homes built in the last ten years or so, followed by social housing. The least energy efficient properties are solid walled properties which are expensive to insulate and heat effectively, particularly in rural areas where many homes may be 'desirable' but are frequently not on gas.

2. Scope of potential initiatives

The Council signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change in 2007, committing the Council to working with partners to address climate change and combat fuel poverty.

National and local policy has to strike a balance between combatting climate change and helping people at risk to keep warm. Improving insulation and the efficiency of heating and household appliances generally help to achieve both objectives. Some Government schemes to promote renewable energy can be focused more on reducing carbon emissions rather than reducing bills for large numbers of consumers.

National initiatives (such as subsidised insulation) are usually funded by the energy companies, who are required to do so by the Government through the energy regulatory system. As a cost to the energy companies, these place upward pressure on energy bills although some customers will also save money due to the energy saving measures. These measures are sometimes targeted at customers on specific benefits, particularly if they may be at risk (e.g. older people).

Local authorities can be involved at a number of levels. Typically these can include:

- a) promoting health and wellbeing and safeguarding;
- b) regulation of minimum standards through private sector housing enforcement and national Building Regulations, including the forthcoming new minimum energy standards for private rented housing (we are no longer permitted to set local planning standards for the energy efficiency of new homes);
- c) completion of the statutory Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) reports every two years, showing progress on domestic energy efficiency (next report due 31 March 2017);
- d) local publicity and advice / visits regarding national schemes, energy saving tips and how to switch to a cheaper fuel supplier (supplementing similar information available nationally);
- e) facilitating local partnerships, awareness and local grant schemes (sometimes assisted with Government funding, or funding from energy companies or trusts).

(a), (b) and (c) are statutory obligations which the Council carries out. The scope for “added value” is mainly with (d) and (e).

3. What support is available locally?

In addition to the national schemes, the Council provides Internet advice and links on many subjects to promote energy efficiency and alleviate fuel poverty. This includes advice on energy saving tips, property assessment, technical matters, switching suppliers and how to keep warm in winter.

The Council does not offer a comprehensive energy advice service, but we are able to provide a basic level of response to telephone, email and reception enquiries. This generally involves signposting the customer to sources of advice such as the Council's website, the Government sponsored national telephone advice line or other schemes or energy providers that may be able to help. Officers are also alert to potential welfare or safeguarding issues where people may be at risk. Occasional training or promotional initiatives are also held. Housing associations can also provide advice and energy efficiency improvements for their tenants.

Citizens Advice Rutland can provide advice on dealing with debt but are not specialists on switching suppliers. The Council's new Community Prevention and Wellness Service, which begins on 1 April 2017, will also signpost people to relevant energy services.

The funding and staffing for tackling fuel poverty issues in Rutland is very limited. This means that we are not able to apply for funding for projects such as the former Energy Action for Rutland initiative. There is likely to remain around £11,000 of Government funding remaining for emergency boiler replacements etc. in 2017/18

for people at risk (held by Rutland County Council), but there are no plans at present for any further local funding beyond this.

Through the Places Directorate's Public Protection contract with Peterborough City Council, we are able to respond to public enquiries and energy assessments can be carried out on an exceptional basis where there is, for instance, an enforcement concern. The Council's Planning Policy team, through its strategic housing function, produces the Home Energy Conservation Act statutory reports and liaises with other teams producing relevant strategies, such as Public Health documents and the Child Poverty Strategy and with the Senior Environmental Services Manager.

152 households received Energy Company Obligation measures through national schemes in the period April 2015 to September 2016.

4. Possible questions

- What do Members think of the current arrangements and partnerships?
- What added value do Members believe should be provided locally, in addition to the national arrangements?
- Could things be done differently within the resources available?