

CABINET	Paper No. 10
Meeting date: 6 January 2009	
From: Corporate Director – Adult and Cultural Services	

FUEL POVERTY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ANTI POVERTY STRATEGY

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report summarises work underway to respond to concerns about people at risk from the financial impact of the ‘credit crunch’. Specific proposals are made to develop a fuel poverty action plan with partners in Cumbria. Additionally, within next year’s draft budget, support is proposed to enhance debt advice and credit union activity. It is suggested that this activity could be incorporated within a single plan of activity through which the Council will be better able to respond to public concerns.

2.0 Strategic Planning and Equality Implications

- 2.1** *The headline impact of the initiative described will impact on a number of NI indicators, principally NI187 which is a local LAA target.*
- 2.2** *This report makes no additional proposals for financial support other than that which is proposed in the budget consultation.*
- 2.3** *If Cabinet determined, the sum of actions described could be incorporated into an anti poverty strategy which the full Council would need to approve to be incorporated into the Council’s policy framework. The approach recommended would have a beneficial impact on some of the most vulnerable individuals in Cumbria.*

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

3.1 Cabinet is asked to support the proposal for a fuel poverty action plan and to identify specific actions to advise and inform client groups.

3.2 Cabinet agrees that the various activities in train should be incorporated within a wider Anti Poverty Strategy intended to support individuals, families and communities at risk during the credit crunch.

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 The 'credit crunch' is having widespread effects and all of us are in some way being affected. For some the impact will be a delay in moving house or replacing a car, but for others across Cumbria the impact could be much more severe and include the loss a house and/or job. Many more people are likely to have problems with debt over the next few years: many people will be worrying about bills including paying utility bills.

4.2 It is critical that at such a time clear advice is widely available and that those who are most vulnerable are able to get reliable advice as soon as possible from trusted sources including people in public services they meet from day to day. It is also vital that different responses are recognised as part of a coherent response which the Council and other key partners support.

4.3 The Council at its meeting on 20 November 2008 resolved to:

- Ask the Cabinet to run a good neighbour campaign over the winter to encourage residents to keep an eye out for their neighbours to ensure they have enough food and heat
- Ask the Cabinet to consider providing a hotline number for people to call if they are having problems, or know of people having problems staying warm or getting enough food
- Ask the Cabinet to consider working with the voluntary sector to provide a package of measures to support those who find themselves in difficulty, including advice on benefits entitlement, energy advice, help staying warm and accessing affordable food
- Ask the Chief Executive to write to the Government requesting emergency support this winter for those most affected and vulnerable to spiralling food and energy prices
- Asks Cabinet to campaign on behalf of the Council for fair tariffs for prepayment customers and the introduction of smart meters that display the cash cost of energy used
- Ask Cabinet to report to the Council in February what actions it has taken

4.4 This report outlines some key actions that have taken place to implement this resolution. A specific action plan is proposed to counter concerns over 'fuel poverty' which could be part of a wider

anti poverty strategy. This work is intended to involve a range of partners and include intensified community outreach, building on existing work of directorates.

- 4.5 Actions will be, both, generic and targeted at hard to reach groups

Fuel poverty

- 4.6 Fuel Poverty is a growing national problem with the relative cost of fuel still significantly more expensive than over the last five years. In Cumbria there are specific local circumstances that make this problem worse. Cumbria has a disproportionately high number of low earners. Any hike in fuel prices has a greater impact on these people. We have particular urban communities where a large proportion of the residents are on low wages. We also have more older people on pensions who need to keep warm and again suffer most from extra costs. We have older housing stock which is unlikely to be fuel efficient. Lastly, rural communities by nature of their added distance from services, will have to pay more. Each of these communities have particular needs for support. So for Cumbria fuel poverty is a huge problem.
- 4.7 Fuel Poverty is a new local LAA target. The baseline figure is to be established by 31st March 2009 and a random 20% mailing has been carried out across all 6 districts in Cumbria. Responses are still being analysed and baseline data should be available, by district, by the middle of December 2008. Fuel Poverty is a developing activity which requires a coordinated multi-agency approach by partners in Cumbria. This is coordinated through the Healthier Communities and Older People thematic partnership and discussions are currently taking place by partner agencies. An initial meeting took place in mid-December with main partners with a view to setting up a Fuel Poverty Working Group in the new year. Community engagement is seen as essential element of this coordinated approach which will include energy saving, being prepared for winter conditions and actively managing fuel bills.
- 4.8 The Cumbria Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre provides a free advice line and takes enquiries with regard to fuel poverty. The Advice Centre also makes referrals to 'Warm Front', a government funded initiative to make homes more energy efficient.
- 4.9 Local events are occurring around the county to promote fuel poverty and energy efficiency including the Age Concerns in Cumbria launching their 'Eat and Heat' campaign on 24th November 2008; Carlisle City Council (jointly funded with Cumbria County Council) have arranged a series of 'Keep Warm, Keep Safe' drop-in roadshows in December 2008; and the County Council through the Fire and Rescue Service, with NHS Cumbria, South Lakeland District Council and South Lakeland voluntary sector, have arranged 'Keeping

You Warm and Well' roadshows in Sedbergh and Windermere in December 2008. Cumbria Rural Forum host a County Fuel Poverty event in December 2008. Further events are planned.

- 4.10 An Action Plan is to be developed with partners with short, medium and long-term actions for the next 3 years.

What else can this Council do?

- 4.11 Fuel poverty is part of a wider problem of poverty. This has been exacerbated through the 'credit crunch'. At the last Council the Cabinet Member for Adult Services and Communities, proposed four actions in response to this growing problem
- use existing channels of communication, to make people aware of their entitlements and what they can do to help themselves
 - use Council staff to offer information and advice
 - work with other agencies in Cumbria to help those with or at most risk of debt problems
 - represent our communities to government and make others aware of the problems Cumbrians are suffering from
- 4.12 Each of these activities is aligned to the more specific approach being developed to tackle fuel poverty. Supportive actions will be spread over a wide number of directorates and external players eg NHS Cumbria, Department of Works and Pensions, Registered Social Landlords, Citizens Advice, Age Concern, District Councils
- 4.13 Local outreach through a range of service providers eg children's centres, Cumbria Care etc could be part of a coordinated plan to support residents. Given the anticipated scale of the problems, it may be most appropriate to build activity into a wider anti poverty strategy. It should be possible to prepare such a plan within three months if that was felt useful.

5.0 OPTIONS

- 5.1 Cabinet may chose to agree or not to agree the proposals.

6.0 RESOURCE AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No specific resource implications have been determined at this stage.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 No specific legal implications have been identified at this stage

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The programme is intended to improve the information and advice on fuel poverty, and more generally debt and financial advice to Cumbria's residents.

Jill Stannard
Corporate Director Adult and Cultural Services
12 December 2008

APPENDICES

No Appendices

Electoral Division(s): All

Executive Decision

Yes*	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Key Decision

Yes*	<input type="checkbox"/>
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If a Key Decision, is the proposal published in the current Forward Plan?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No*	N/A*
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Is the decision exempt from call-in on grounds of urgency?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No*
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If exempt from call-in, has the agreement of the Chair of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee been sought or obtained?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No*	N/A*
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Has this matter been considered by Overview and Scrutiny?
If so, give details below.

<input type="checkbox"/>	No*
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Has an environmental or sustainability impact assessment been undertaken?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No*	N/A*
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Has an equality impact assessment been undertaken?

<input type="checkbox"/>	No*	N/A*
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N.B. If an executive decision is made, then a decision cannot be implemented until the expiry of the eighth working day after the date of the meeting – unless the decision is urgent and exempt from call-in and the Head of Member Services and Scrutiny has obtained the necessary approvals.

PREVIOUS RELEVANT COUNCIL OR EXECUTIVE DECISIONS

Council Decision November 2008

CONSIDERATION BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

None. There report is in response to discussion at the November Cabinet

BACKGROUND PAPERS

none

RESPONSIBLE CABINET MEMBER

Councillor Barbara Cannon

REPORT AUTHOR

Contact: Stuart Pate
telephone number: 01539 713601
e-mail address: stuart.pate@cumbriacc.gov.uk