

Response to Request for Information

Reference FOI 01161
Date 04 January 2016

Fuel Poverty

Request:

I am conducting some research into the issue of fuel poverty. It would be hugely helpful if you could provide the following information:

- Any data the authority holds on
 - (i) the prevalence of fuel poverty in the area and
 - (ii) (ii) the characteristics of the households affected
- Details of any local programmes or initiatives intended to address the problem of fuel poverty in the authority (links to relevant web pages would be sufficient)

In response to your request, please find our response below:

1. Any data the authority holds on (i) the prevalence of Fuel Poverty in the area and (ii) the characteristics of the households affected?

When the Government introduced the new Energy Act in 2013, it paved the way for a change to the way that Fuel Poverty in England was calculated. It moved away from the basic calculation of 'Any household that spends over 10% of its disposable income on fuel costs was deemed to be in Fuel Poverty' to a more complicated 'Low Income / High Fuel Costs (LIHC)' definition. Full details of the methodology used to calculate Fuel Poverty from 2013 onwards are contained within Report A - DECC's Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report 2015 (below)

The primary difficulty associated with calculating Fuel Poverty at a local level under the LIHC definition is that neither the Local Authority nor Wolverhampton Homes possess full accurate household income or energy costs data.

The Local Authority therefore remains reliant on reports and statistics published by the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC), National Statistics (GOV.UK) and National Energy Action (NEA) for local Fuel Poverty figures.

Please find below links to the most recent Fuel Poverty reports published by the three organisations listed above:

Report A) DECC – Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics Report (Regional) 2015

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/468011/Fuel_Poverty_Report_2015.pdf

Report B) GOV.UK - 2013 Sub-regional Fuel Poverty Data: Low Income / High Costs Indicator (published May 2015)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2013-sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-low-income-high-costs-indicator>

NB: This report provides Fuel Poverty data for Wolverhampton at Local Authority, Parliamentary Constituency and Lower Super Output Area (LSOA / Neighbourhood) level based on the revised LIHC definition.

Report C) National Energy Action - Fuel Poverty Report 2015

<http://www.nea.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/UK-Fuel-Poverty-Monitor-2015.pdf>

Because of the lack of accurate income and energy billing data mentioned previously, it is impossible to clearly determine the characteristics of the households affected in Wolverhampton.

However, Report A - Chapter 3 (above) outlines the key dwelling and household characteristics related to Fuel Poverty generally across the UK which are likely to be very similar to those affected in Wolverhampton (with the exception of rurally located households without access to a mains gas supply).

The main characteristics of Fuel Poverty relating to dwellings are:

- Low Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) Energy Efficiency Score
- Properties with large floor areas / bedrooms not in use
- Pre 1944 constructed properties
- Properties with either un-insulated or solid walls
- Inefficient heating source
- Private sector dwellings
- Properties with pre-payment meters
- Properties not connected to the gas grid

The main characteristics of Fuel Poverty relating to people are:

- Low income or unemployed
- Lone parents
- Under 25's
- Single elderly
- Families with 5 or more occupants

2. Details of any local programmes or initiatives intended to address the problem of Fuel Poverty.

Since the early 1990's Wolverhampton City Council has continued to prioritise Fuel Poverty and Affordable Warmth related activity and has a proven track record in delivering a wide range of successful programmes and initiatives.

Fuel poverty remains a key focus within the local authorities current Housing Strategy 2013 – 18 and the Sustainability Strategy and Implementation Plan 2013-18.

Historic Schemes:

Warm Front Funding Scheme – Means tested financial support to private sector homes requiring energy efficiency measures or improvements

Health Through Warmth Funding Scheme – Financial support to those living in private sector dwellings with illnesses likely to improve with energy efficiency measures or improvements

Selective Licensing Scheme – Programme to encourage / support private landlords in making their properties for let more energy efficient

Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) – Government driven energy supplier financial support for local authorities to improve loft and cavity wall insulation levels across the social stock

Community Energy Savings Programme (CESP) – Government driven energy supplier financial support for local authorities to improve external wall insulation levels across the solid wall social stock and to install renewable energy (Solar PV) installations where appropriate

Solar Thermal Demonstrator Pilot – Small number of social homes benefitted from solar thermal installations

Eco Village – Two phases of local authority and grant funded improvements bringing back into use previously difficult to let dwellings in the All Saints area with a whole house energy efficiency specification

Big Community Switch – Local Authority led cross tenure collective energy switching initiative

Energy Company Obligation (ECO) – Government driven energy supplier funded cross tenure external wall insulation programme

Current Schemes

Affordable Warmth Assistance Grant – Means tested grant funded assistance to vulnerable private sector households to install energy efficiency measures.

Loft & Cavity Wall Insulation Programme – Following Decent Homes improvements making progress towards 100% loft and cavity wall insulation across the social stock funded through the Energy Company Obligation and Housing Capital

External Wall Insulation Programme – Capital and Energy Company Obligation funded external wall insulation investment targeted at least energy efficient social stock

Thompson Avenue New Build – New build properties with solar PV and other energy efficiency measures included in basic build specification

New Build Specifications – Insistence on meeting thermal and energy efficiency specifications equivalent to former Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4.

Heat Network Regulations 2014 – Work towards the removal of heating 'consumption' charges contained within tenants rents to more appropriate 'pay for what you use' metered systems

Home Energy Visit (HEV) Service – Home Energy Advisor established to offer thermal and energy efficiency inspections, improvements and advice to social sector tenants

Community Switch – On-going individual energy switching service established for social housing tenants

Partnership Working – Local authority and Wolverhampton Homes support to partners promoting Fuel Poverty related initiatives including Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK, West Midlands Fire Service Welfare Rights, MP surgeries and a number of community led groups.

West Midlands Combined Authority – Fuel Poverty Strategy group established to drive and promote joined up Fuel Poverty related programmes and activity