

Swindon Borough Council Equality Impact Assessment – Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy

1 What's it about?

Refer to equality duties

What is the proposal? What outcomes/benefits are you hoping to achieve?

Swindon Borough Council and its partners have for a number of years been delivering initiatives to reduce the incidence of fuel poverty in the Swindon area. The first Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy was written in 2007, building on the work of the Wiltshire & Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy 2002. This latest version brings the strategy up to date, providing a snapshot of the current levels and distribution of fuel poverty and describing the planned focus to help those affected over the next two years.

High energy prices are a significant contributor to fuel poverty nationally, with poorer households having to spend a larger proportion of their income on heating than more affluent households. Poor energy efficiency standards in existing housing mean that money is spent on heating that leaks out of the home too easily. These factors can lead to homes not being heated adequately and poor health resulting from the cold damp conditions.

There are strong links between the prevalence of fuel poverty and cold related illnesses and excess winter deaths. The desire to reduce pressure on health services during the winter months is leading to more engagement of the health sector in affordable warmth issues. Action on fuel poverty is likely to lead to reductions in local health spend, GP referrals and hospital admissions due to improved health.

Sub-regional fuel poverty statistics are produced by Government to enable fuel poverty to be measured at a local level. Figures for 2019 (released in 2021) estimate there are 9,402 fuel poor households in Swindon, around 9.6% per cent of the households in the borough. This is the seventh lowest rate of fuel poverty for local authorities in the South West region, and compares to the national average of around 13.4% of households in fuel poverty in England, and the regional average of 10.6% of households in the South West. Swindon Borough Council has the third lowest level of fuel poverty when compared to its ten statistical neighbouring authorities.

Swindon Borough Council and its partners will continue to develop co-operative approaches to tackling fuel poverty. Activity will be focussed on the three key aims of this strategy:

- To raise awareness of fuel poverty and affordable warmth among all stakeholders.
- To encourage and support households to achieve affordable warmth.
- To improve access to schemes, financial support and advice related to affordable warmth through improved networks and referral systems.

Coordinated activity to meet these aims will help ensure that all householders in the Swindon area live in warm dry homes, free from the fear of fuel debt and poor health.

Who's it for?

It is for all residents and members of the community who experience or are at risk of fuel poverty. Those living in lower income households and vulnerable residents are more likely to be affected and require such support.

How will this proposal meet the equality duties?

Fuel poverty has more pronounced effects on the most vulnerable members of society, in particular those on lower incomes and those with health conditions exacerbated by the colder

temperature. Therefore this strategy naturally aims to provide support to these groups as a means to reduce health inequality. However achieving the key objectives of the strategy will result in more support to achieve affordable warmth for all households, regardless of income or health.

This programme does not exclude residents based on any of the protected characteristics (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity) and is based on need relating to fuel poverty.

What are the barriers to meeting this potential?

There are inevitably some barriers to achieving affordable warmth, including availability of funding to carry out heating and insulation improvements, restrictions on switching energy tariffs if there is an energy debt, as well as the capability of people to engage with the support on offer.

Where possible additional support has been identified to overcome these barriers, such as providing extra support for people with energy debt, or ensuring there are people to speak to rather than just providing web-based support.

However, there will be some barriers such as available funding which may affect what can be done in certain cases.

2 Who's using it?

Refer to equality groups

What data/evidence do you have about who is or could be affected (e.g. equality monitoring, customer feedback, current service use, national/regional/local trends)?

National reporting and guidance on both the prevalence of fuel poverty and the progress towards national targets for reducing fuel poverty is provided annually. National, regional and local trends are identified through these reports. This evidence translates to the local level, and is backed-up by data on the prevalence of fuel poverty down to Lower Super Output Areas. This can help to target fuel poverty activity, but there remains a spread of households in fuel poverty across all household types, tenure, and income groups.

Single parent households are most likely to be fuel poor (28% of households), whereas the largest fuel poverty gap (the amount of money required to be spent on fuel bills to bring someone out of fuel poverty) is experienced by couples over 60 (£289). Households paying for fuel by prepayment are most likely to be in fuel poverty (29% of households) compared to 10% of those paying by Direct Debit. Residents who rent privately are most likely to be fuel poor (26.8%) compared to homeowners (8.2%), but homeowners have the largest fuel poverty gap (£255).

Locally, the Warm & Safe Wiltshire advice service reports that just over 60% of people contacting the service are over 60 years of age, while 67% of households identify as having a health condition.

Monitoring of service use by partners will help to ensure support is reaching those that need it, and partners engaged in delivering the strategy will cover a variety of equality groups.

How can you involve your customers in developing the proposal?

Evaluation and monitoring of certain services will give the opportunity for customers to provide feedback. As many of the services that help to combat fuel poverty are national, there is not always scope for local involvement in determining how those services are provided. Where there is scope for customer involvement, consideration will be given to this.

Who is missing? Do you need to fill any gaps in your data? (pause DIA if necessary)

There may be a lack of equalities monitoring data from some service providers that may cause some difficulties in ascertaining if there are any equality groups who are not utilising this service. A review of the services provided will be undertaken and if any further monitoring is possible this will be undertaken.

3 Impact Refer to dimensions of equality and equality groups

Show consideration of: age, disability, sex, transgender, marriage/civil partnership, maternity/pregnancy, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation
and if appropriate: financial economic status, homelessness, political view

Using the information in parts 1 & 2:

a) Does the proposal create an adverse impact which may affect some groups or individuals? Is it clear what this is? How can this be mitigated or justified?

No adverse impact. A lack of monitoring information in certain areas may make it difficult to show that all groups are accessing the benefits.

What can be done to change this impact?

As no adverse impacts will be created by this policy no action will be required, but further review of the strategy will be required when undertaken to ensure the benefits can be maximised.

b) Does the proposal create benefit for a particular group? Is it clear what this is? Can you maximise the benefits for other groups?

The strategy does not create benefit for any one particular equality group, although those on low incomes or with health conditions and facing fuel poverty may find the assistance particularly beneficial.

Does further consultation need to be done? How will assumptions made in this assessment be tested?

No further consultation is planned, but reviews of the strategy will be undertaken on a regular basis.

4 So what?

Link to business planning process

What changes have you made in the course of this DIA?

This review of the Diversity Impact Assessment has been timely in targeting bids under recent national funding programmes to certain LSOAs and ethnic groups. It has also led to us considering what monitoring data will be produced, so that we better understand which groups are taking advantage of the benefits.

What will you do now and what will be included in future planning? When will this be reviewed?

The fuel poverty work will be implemented according to available resource, with some work already funded and underway. Where resource is not available, this will be included under future planning to investigate opportunities for funding this work. The strategy itself will be subject to

regular review.

How will success be measured?

Success will be measured according to progress towards meeting the objectives detailed in Section 5 of the strategy.

For the record	
Name of person leading this DIA: David Miles	Date completed 27/04/2022
Names of people involved in consideration of impact:	
Name of director signing DIA:	Date signed

Diversity Impact Assessment – an inclusive business planning tool

1. What's it about? refer to equality duties

- What is the proposal? What outcomes/benefits are you hoping to achieve
- Who's it for?
- How will this proposal meet the equality duties?
- What are the barriers to meeting this potential?

2. Who's using it? consider all equality groups

- What data/evidence do you have about who is or could be affected? (e.g. equality monitoring, customer feedback, current service use, national/regional/local trends)?
- How can you involve your customers in developing the proposal?
- Who is missing? Do you need to fill any gaps in your data?

3. Impact consider dimensions and equality groups

Using information in parts 1 & 2:

- a) Does the proposal create an adverse impact which may affect some groups or individuals? How can this be mitigated or justified?
> What can be done to change this impact?
- b) Does the proposal create benefit for particular groups or individuals. Is it clear what this is? Can you maximise the benefits for other groups?
 - Does further consultation need to be done? How will assumptions made in this assessment be tested?

4. So what?

- What changes have made in the course of this DIA?
- What will you do now and what will be included in future planning?
- When will this be reviewed?
- How will success be measured?

Considerations

Our equality duties

1. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
2. Advance equality of opportunity
3. Foster good relations

Equality groups

For the following equality groups: age, disability, sex, transgender, marriage/civil partnership, maternity/pregnancy, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation.

Extended by SBC policy to include: financial economic status, homelessness, political view.

Dimensions of equality

How will the proposal affect Human Rights and life chances of different groups? Consider how the proposal affects

1. Longevity.
2. Physical security.
3. Health.
4. Education.
5. Standard of living.
6. Productive and valued activities.
7. Individual, family and social life.
8. Participation, influence and voice.
9. Identity, expression and self-respect.
10. Legal security.