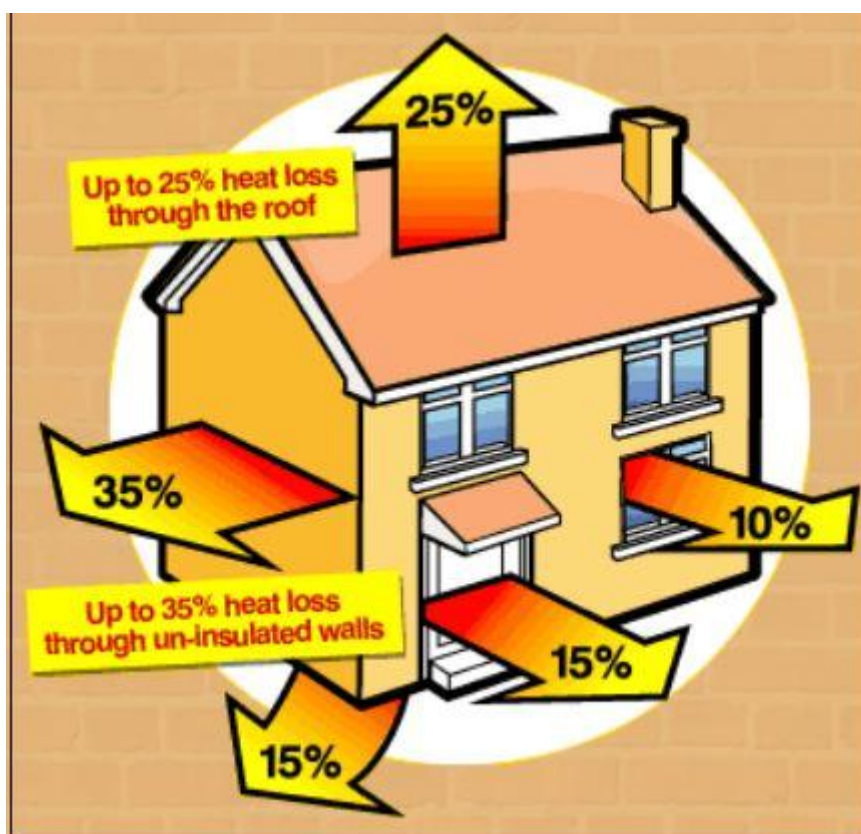


# Affordable Energy Strategy



## **Foreword**

I am pleased to present Maidstone Borough Council's Affordable Warmth Strategy. The strategy describes fuel poverty and the actions the Council will take to support residents and reduce fuel poverty. Living in a cold home has a negative impact on the health of the occupants, can increase the level of absences from school and work and reduce the educational attainment of children. The government released its fuel poverty strategy in March 2015 which indicates local authorities have a key role in addressing the issue.

Fuel poverty affects households with high heating costs and low income. It is not evenly distributed across the borough and is more prevalent in areas of high deprivation and rural areas off mains gas.

The strategy spans a number of themes including the ways that poor home energy efficiency impacts on health inequalities, using the Housing Assistance Policy to support our most vulnerable residents to live in a warm home and helping residents maximise their income.

John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Services.

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## **2 Why should the council have an affordable energy strategy?**

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A household experiences fuel poverty when they cannot afford to heat their home to a comfortable level. The government's new definition of fuel poverty, the low income high cost model, considers a household is fuel poor when it spends more than the UK median on its energy bills and its income is below the poverty line. This definition is less vulnerable to changes in fuel prices and enables better year on year comparisons. It also allows the level of fuel poverty to be quantified.

### **New Definition of Fuel Poverty**

The new indicator finds a household to be fuel poor if:

- Their income is below the poverty line, and
- Their energy costs are higher than is typical for their household type.

Fuel poverty used to be defined as when a household needed to spend 10% of their income to heat their home adequately. Under this definition the level of fuel poverty did fall between 1996 to 2002 due to improvements in domestic insulation supported by Warm Front, compliance with the Decent Homes standard in social housing and targeted income increases via the winter fuel allowance payments. Since 2003 levels of fuel poverty have increased due to large increases in fuel prices compounded by low income increases since 2008. It is important to check the definition of fuel poverty used when viewing statistics and trends.

In March 2015 the government released a new strategy to tackle fuel poverty which supports the need to tackle the three drivers of fuel poverty set out below. It gives the target that no fuel poor household should be living in a home with the lowest levels of energy efficiency on its Energy Performance Certificate by 2030.

Approximately 5000 households in the borough live in fuel poverty. 7.87% households live in fuel poverty, but within the borough levels vary from just 2.2% to 15.2% with the higher levels found in Marden, Yalding, Headcorn and small areas of the High Street, Fant, North and North Shepway wards.

### **Impacts of fuel poverty**

Fuel poverty can lead to the home being kept at a colder temperature than is good for the health of the occupants. Cold homes can affect or exacerbate a wide range of health problems including respiratory and circulatory problems, slow recovery following discharge from hospital and increased risk of poor mental health. Estimates suggest the 10% of excess winter deaths are attributable to fuel poverty.

As well as the negative impact on the health of children, adults and older people fuel poverty also has a negative impact on the educational attainment of children and increases work absence. Excessive money spent on heating the home cannot be spent in the local economy and sometimes leads to homelessness when the household has to prioritise the cost of heating rather than rent or mortgage payments. See background documents for more detail on the impacts of fuel poverty.

## **The Drivers of Fuel Poverty**

The three drivers that determine whether a household is likely to be in fuel poverty are;

- The energy efficiency of the home;
- The cost of heating fuel; and
- The household income.

See background documents for an explanation of the three drivers of fuel poverty.

The relatively low standard of energy efficiency in the older housing stock means that heating a home can be costly, particularly for those on a low income. Fuel poverty is a long standing problem and a raft of interventions will be needed to address the three drivers in a meaningful way.

Reducing fuel poverty will address the key objectives of reducing health inequalities and increasing financial inclusion. Interventions should be planned to address all three drivers of fuel poverty.

## **3 The national context**

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The government released its new fuel poverty strategy, "Cutting the cost of keeping warm; A fuel poverty strategy for England" in March 2015. The vision is to cut bills and increase comfort and well-being in cold, low income, homes. The strategy sets the target to ensure that as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable achieve a minimum energy rating of Band C by 2030. The interim targets are as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable to band D by 2025 and of as many fuel poor homes to band E by 2020. To achieve this many homes will require insulation and heating improvements. The government's strategy suggests tackling the least energy efficient homes, those households with the largest fuel poverty gap, and those housing people who are most vulnerable to the cold, first.

To measure how well fuel poverty is being addressed the government will measure the SAP ratings, home energy efficiency by measuring the presence of a central heating system in fuel poor homes, the number of fuel poor homes with non-condensing (less efficient) boilers and the number of fuel poor households with loft and cavity wall insulation. They also intend to monitor use

of renewable technologies, the distribution of fuel poor households across the country, homes off the mains gas network and children living in fuel poverty.

The government plans to release data in 2015 showing the location of homes that are not on the mains gas line and layering maps with other data sets to include;

- Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level,
- Carbon Saving Community Obligation (CSCO) at LSOA level,
- penetration of energy efficiency measures,
- rural-urban classification census data,
- main heating type and
- benefit claimants

When released, this information should enable organisations to plan interventions. The government also plans to carry out research on the drivers of fuel poverty for park home residents and to make it easier for residents living in park homes to claim the Warm Homes discount in 2015/16.

The fuel poverty strategy recognises the link between cold homes and health. Fuel poverty is an indicator in the Public Health Outcomes Framework for England and the Cold Weather Plan for England emphasises tackling fuel poverty as one of the actions to minimise the health impact of cold weather. The government favours 'warmth on prescription' type approach with referrals from GPs, and a wide range of health professionals, with funding secured from many sources for physical works and strong partnership working.

There are a range of other national and local strategic documents, guidance and legislation which have also been considered in deciding the strategic direction that this document sets. These are listed in the background documents with links for further information. These documents focus on reducing the number of people living in fuel poverty; the health and social impacts of living in cold homes and reducing carbon emissions. They indicate the expected direction of travel for reducing fuel poverty and the impacts associated with it.

## **4 Local context**

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### **Maidstone the place**

Maidstone is an exceptionally green Borough with a number of parks, the largest of which is Mote Park, which is Grade II on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and home to thriving rugby and cricket clubs. There are numerous smaller parks and squares within the town and villages which have benefited from a major playground and sports facility investment programme in recent years. We recognise the importance of maintaining a quality environment for residents including our heritage and conservation areas. The attractive countryside offers high quality landscape and biodiversity and a wide range of informal recreation opportunities.

Maidstone Borough is considered a good place to live and work with high rates of employment, relatively low levels of adults claiming incapacity benefits and a higher proportion of residents who have a degree than the South East average. Larger numbers of people commute into than out of the Borough. The Borough has a very mixed business sector with large numbers of small and medium size businesses with particular strengths in professional services (law and accountancy) and construction. There is a growing media industry led by Maidstone Studios and the Kent Messenger Group. Maidstone has an extensive further education campus (Mid Kent College) and a growing higher education offer with both the University for the Creative Arts and Mid Kent College seeking to increase their range of courses and facilities. Residents living in the Borough have relatively high wages (although many higher earners commute out of the Borough to achieve these). Maidstone came out as the top destination for business in the 2010 Perception Study of locations for business in Kent carried out by Locate in Kent ([www.locateinkent.com](http://www.locateinkent.com))

Maidstone's Local Strategic Partnership has carried out work in 2010 looking at how public money is spent locally. They have identified that £602 million has been spent in Maidstone in 2010 by various bodies including Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Kent Police and the local Primary Care Trust. Just over 35% of the money is spent on health and social well-being, nearly 17% is spent on education and 15% on housing.

**Maidstone Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2020:**

The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is the topmost level of policymaking in the Council. Our SCS was published in April 2009, and it contains the following vision and long term objectives for the Borough agreed with our partners:

**"We want Maidstone Borough to be a vibrant, prosperous 21st century urban and rural community at the heart of Kent, where its distinctive character is enhanced to create a safe, healthy, excellent environment with high quality education and employment where all people can realise their aspirations".**

In Maidstone sustainable communities mean places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. We involve the local community in a range of ways to ensure that people can share their views on housing services and priorities for service development. We already encourage our housing services customers to tell us what they think and suggest how we can do things better, for example through stakeholder meetings, community events (e.g. annual Housing Stakeholders Event) and public consultation events for policy changes e.g. choice based lettings, housing needs review. We keep looking for new ways to improve customer involvement, particularly where there may be communication barriers. It is important that we engage with our residents and customers to ensure our knowledge remains up to date and we can respond to changes in local issues.

### **Housing tenure mix**

Maidstone Borough Council has regularly kept up to date on the levels of housing need in the borough, with the most recent Strategic Housing Needs Survey being reported in March 2010. The supply and demand analysis that sits alongside the SHMA gives helpful information on mismatches between the supply of certain types of homes and the demand for them locally.

The housing market is considered balanced if the local population is adequately accommodated.

Currently about 5.5% of households are classified as inadequately housed. Lone parent households are the household group least likely to live in adequate accommodation, with multiple pensioner households the most likely.

The private rented sector almost doubled from 2005-2010 and therefore the Council needs to engage with this sector while recognising that we have limited influence on the market.

## **5 Our local plans and vision**

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Our vision is for our residents to live in decent homes, enjoy good health and a pleasant environment, with a successful economy that is supported by reliable transport networks. Our Housing Assistance Policy 2013-15 contains 4 priorities including "to promote affordable warmth through improving private sector home energy efficiency". This strategy will be reviewed in 2015 and renewed every 2 years. Our Health Inequalities Action Plan 2014-2020 recognises the importance of tackling fuel poverty and aims to take advantage of government initiatives to reduce fuel poverty.

Under previous housing assistance policies the Council extended and supported the Government's Warmfront Scheme (now ended) to increase the availability of funding to those residents who would have otherwise been marginalised. The Council adopted a Heating and Energy Efficient Grant that in certain prescribed qualifying conditions increased the value of financial assistance available to ensure vulnerable residents had the opportunity to access efficient heating systems and improvements in the thermal efficiency of their homes.

## **6 Fuel Poverty in Maidstone Borough**

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The average level of fuel poverty in the borough is close to the regional and county average. 7.87%, or just under 5000, households in Maidstone borough are in fuel poverty, which is below the Kent average of 8.46%, but slightly above the South East average of 7.79%.



However, when counted at lower super output area (LSOA) the level of fuel poverty varies from 2.2% to 15.2%. There are small urban areas within the High Street, Fant, Shepway North and North wards with high levels of fuel poverty. The much larger rural areas of Stockbury, Huckling, Bicknor, Wormshill, Frinstead, Wichling, Otterden, Hollingbourne, Marden, Yalding, Headcorn, Coxheath and Hunton, Boughton Monchelsea, Nettlestead, West Farleigh, Linton, Chart Sutton, Sutton Valence, Boughton Malherbe and Ulcombe all have more than 10% of the households in fuel poverty. The map in the background documents item 6 shows the levels of fuel poverty in the borough.

Gas is a lower cost fuel and nationally we see higher levels of fuel poverty in areas without access to mains gas. Bicknor, Boughton Malherbe, Grafty Green, Frinsted, Wormshill, Wichling, Huckling, Hawkenbury, Broadstone, Broad Street, Chainhurst, Otham, Stockbury, Ulcombe, Platts Heath, West Farleigh and Bedmorton are off the mains gas service. Parts of Barming, Bredhurst, Broomshill, Kingswood Chart Sutton, Collier Street, Coxheath, East Farleigh, Staplehurst and Wateringbury are also off mains gas.

## **Why do we have more rural fuel poverty?**

Nationally the level of fuel poverty is higher in rural areas than urban areas. Homes in rural areas are more likely to be heated by more expensive fuels like oil rather than mains gas. The English Housing Survey estimates rural homes cost more to heat than the national average as rural homes tend to be larger, with 45% being detached so having more external walls and 25% having solid walls which hold the heat less well than cavity walls. Rural areas are often slightly colder than cities due to higher altitude and greater exposure to wind. Successive government policies to reduce fuel poverty have been taken up more by urban areas with the Campaign to Protect Rural England estimating that rural properties make up 18% of the housing stock yet receive 1% of government funding.

## **7 Aims and outcomes**

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The council aims to help residents address the drivers of fuel poverty by helping them find the information they need to make informed choices and take the action as suits their needs.

### **Aim**

#### **1. To help residents to increase the energy efficiency of their home**

### **Outcomes**

- Residents know where to seek guidance and support
- Residents improve the energy efficiency of their home

It is important to help residents find reliable sources of information on home energy efficiency. Living in an energy efficient home reduces the likelihood of fuel poverty.

## **2. To help residents control the costs of the energy to heat their home**

### **Outcomes**

- Residents know how to seek better deals on their fuel bills
- Residents have lower fuel bills

High fuel prices are an important driver of fuel poverty. Helping residents to seek better deals of their fuel bills and pay less will help them to reduce fuel poverty.

## **3. To help residents increase their household income**

### **Outcomes**

- Residents are supported to find employment
- Residents are supported to apply for all the benefits they are entitled to.

Low income is a key driver of fuel poverty. Helping residents to boost their income, via employment or benefit maximisation, will increase their ability to heat their home to an adequate level.

# **8 Action plan for addressing fuel poverty in Maidstone**

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The action plan below is divided into actions to tackle the three drivers and finishes with some actions that address more than one driver. Each section begins with the actions the council is already taking and then offers a menu of actions that the council could adopt. Some actions will work better if teamed with other actions; for example bringing the cheaper fuel, mains gas, to a residents home without any support to change their boiler and heating system to use gas may not be effective, but add that action to support from a grant to pay for installing heating and the resident will benefit from an effective and affordable heating system.

£50,000 has been allocated towards the Home Energy Efficiency Grant. The grant could be used in a more responsive and flexible way to support new actions to reduce fuel poverty. It could be allocated to one area or funding could be split between several actions. Many actions in the action plan refer to this one £50,000 fund.

## Affordable Energy Action Plan

### 1.1 Current Actions to improve energy efficiency

Aims	Action	Milestones	Resources	Teams involved	Strategic links
1.11 Support Warm Homes call centre and service	Contribute towards funding for Kent wide Warm Homes call centre	Ongoing	£643 for first year (2014). No payment needed for 2015. May be self-funding in future. No staff time	None	Health Inequalities Action Plan Housing Assistance Policy 2013-5 Welfare Reform Agenda
1.12 Sustain referrals to Warm Homes service	Promote Warm Homes scheme to residents via events, website, social media and publications	On-going	Less than 0.1 FTE. Leaflets, banner and packs are provided by KCC	Inclusion Team Communications Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Housing Assistance Policy 2013-5 Welfare Reform Agenda Low emissions strategy
1.13 Improve take up of grants amongst vulnerable households	Provide Home Energy Efficiency Grant Scheme to give a repayable grant to vulnerable households to top up shortfalls in other funding streams. Currently used to top up funding from ECO of Green Deal Cash back schemes	On-going	Less than 0.1 FTE. £50K allocated from Housing Assistance Fund	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Housing Assistance Policy 2013-5 Welfare Reform Agenda
1.14 Reduce health inequalities by tackling homes that worsen poor health	Administer the winter warmth grant. This may require procuring a service or using contractor from the KMSEP service in future	Now until 2017 but may be continued	Up to 0.1 FTE Capital funding provided by KCC.	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team Procurement team	Health Inequalities Action Plan

## 1.2 Possible new action to improve energy efficiency

Aims	Action	Milestones	Resources	Teams involved	Strategic Links
1.21 Make better use of the £50K assigned to the Home Energy Efficiency Grant	Investigate options to re-orientate grant to support more funding streams. This may include procuring contractors to do installations or administration and installation.	Begin when status of Central Heating fund and Warm and Healthy Fund is known.	0.1 FTE Existing capital home improvement budget - £50k	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Housing Assistance Policy 2013-5 Welfare Reform Agenda Low emissions strategy
1.22 Provide Technical Support for people who are able to pay for works	Negotiate with Home Improvement Agency to determine whether they will help 'able to pay' households determine works and find contractors	Begin autumn 2017	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Housing Assistance Policy 2013-5 Low emissions strategy
1.23 Improve the energy efficiency of the private rented stock	Write and follow a communications plan to inform landlords and letting agents of the changes coming and ways to find funding for improvements. Health & Housing Team to give advice to landlords whose rental stock is rated F or G when having other contact.	Begin autumn 2016	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team Communications Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Housing Assistance Policy 2013-5 Low emissions strategy Welfare reform agenda
1.24 Investigate ways to help the households living in homes rated F or G that are not eligible for other support.	Investigate options for helping residents not eligible for other funding streams to access support. Consider whether HEEG should be spent on this priority.	Begin autumn 2016	Less than 0.1 FTE. May result in new action being created to address matter.	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Housing Assistance Policy 2013-5 Low emissions strategy

## 2.1 Current actions to reduce fuel costs

Aims	Action	Milestones	Resources	Teams involved	Strategic links
2.11 Provide a, tenure and payment method neutral, collective switching service to help residents save on their gas and electricity bills	Run the Big Maidstone Switch service	Ongoing Schemes run 3 times a year at dates set by iChoosr. We can opt in for each scheme.	Less than 0.1 FTE concentrated into short time periods. Up to £200 promotional materials for each scheme. Council receives £5.50 for each fuel switched so service broadly breaks even.	Inclusion Team Communications Team ICT Gateway and Contact Centre	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda
2.12 Provide training on home energy efficiency and switching energy supplier to frontline staff, councillors and vulnerable residents	Provide Energy Best Deal courses on contract from Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)	Scheme runs Oct to March each winters if bid successful	Less than 0.1 FTE We receive £300 for each course provided	Inclusion Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda
2.13 Provide information on ways to save money on cost of heating using oil	Located online and local oils clubs. Provided training to rural councillors on oil clubs. Provided information on website.	Completed	Less than 0.1 FTE completed	Inclusion Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda
2.14 Provide information on government schemes to support vulnerable people in winter months	Provided information on the schemes and how to access them on Money Matters website	Update yearly as amounts may increase	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Inclusion Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda
2.15 Help vulnerable households off mains gas get connected to mains gas	Promoted SGN's Help to Heat scheme to rural parish councils	Completed	Less than 0.1 FTE. Completed	Inclusion Team Communications Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda

## 2.2 Possible new actions to reduce fuel costs

Aims	Action	Milestones	Resources	Teams involved	Strategic Links
2.21 Research whether further support needed to help residents source cheaper oil/LPG/Wood	Find out how many households are using oil/LPG/wood as their main heating fuel. Find out how many are in fuel poverty. Determine whether there is a need to provide more help in this area. May lead to new action.	Autumn 2016	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Inclusion Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda Low emissions strategy
2.22 Provide support for residents on searching for cheaper fuel at Gateway	Train volunteers to help residents use our computers to compare the market and switch their electricity or gas supplier. Residents could transfer these skills to comparing market and switching on other products.	Autumn 2015	0.1 FTE Printer for residents to print out information	Inclusion Team Gateway staff Volunteers Housing and Health Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda
2.23 Investigate barriers residents experience to making use of Feed in Tariff (FIT) or Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)	Investigate why residents have not used these schemes so far and why those who have used them chose to	Autumn 2017	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Inclusion Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Low emissions strategy
2.24 Using intelligence gained from above decide what support council will provide to promote take up	Do options analysis, cost out options and provide report for committee on ways to support residents make use of FIT and RHI	Autumn 2016	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Inclusion Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Low emissions strategy
2.25 Investigate whether to promote 'renting your roof' schemes	Do options analysis on strengths, weaknesses and risks to residents and council for promoting such a scheme. Provide report to committee	Autumn 2017	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Inclusion Team Commercial projects team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda Low emissions strategy

2.26 Ensure energy efficiency is embedded in council policies	Support proposed planning policy to include requirement in DM2 for the 'Merton Rule' of 10% of the developments energy to be created by renewable, low carbon or waste for developments of more than 10 homes.	Immediately	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Inclusion Team Planning Policy Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda Low emissions strategy
2.27 Provide information to residents on RHI, FIT and the relevant technologies online and at events	Write website text, design leaflets, and attend events.	Autumn 2017	Less than 0.1 FTE. Simple leaflets	Inclusion Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Low emissions strategy Welfare Reform Agenda
2.28 Promote the SGN's Help to Heat Scheme in the LSOAs where all residents are eligible	Determine areas where residents are eligible for scheme AND scheme is viable as within 23m of the gas main. Inform residents of scheme and other sources of support as bring gas to home will not enable them to use the cheaper fuel without gas appliances e.g. boiler	Ongoing and when other funding streams can support installing gas boilers	0.1 FTE concentrated in one time period	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Low emissions strategy Welfare Reform Agenda
2.29 Promote SGN's Help to Heat Scheme in rural areas with highest level of fuel poverty	Develop communications strategy that promotes the scheme and other relevant schemes in the simplest ways possible. Need different approach as no rural area has all residents eligible due to IMD criteria. Up to 15% residents will be eligible under Fuel Poverty criteria.	Ongoing and when other funding streams can support installing gas boilers	0.1 FTE concentrated in one time period	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Low emissions strategy Welfare Reform Agenda

### 3.1 Current actions to increase household income

Aims	Actions	Milestones	Resources	Teams involved	Strategic links
3.11 Support eligible residents take up benefits	Staff refer residents to pension service, DWP, HMRC and to relevant advice agencies	On-going	3 FTE staff time	Benefit assessors Gateway staff	Welfare reform Agenda
3.12 Support eligible residents to identify benefits to take up	Staff do affordability checks to ensure resident can afford planned tenancy and advise on claiming benefits	On-going	1 FTE	Housing and Inclusion	Welfare reform agenda



### 3.2 Possible new actions to increase household income

Aims	Actions	Milestones	Resources	Teams involved	Strategic links
3.21 Encourage eligible households to claim the benefits they are entitled to	Design and follow a communications plan to provide information on benefits, and reduce stigma in claiming them, to go in out publications and social media	Begin autumn 2015	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Communications team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda
3.22 Encourage hard to reach eligible households to claim the benefits they are entitled to	Attend community events with resources and one to one support to encourage people to discover whether they are eligible for benefits and to claim them. Target at people above working age and owner occupiers as groups most likely not to claim benefits	Begin spring 2016 and ongoing	Less than 0.1 FTE.	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team	Health Inequalities Action Plan Welfare Reform Agenda

#### 4.1 Possible new actions that address more than one driver

Aims	Actions	Milestones	Resources	Teams involved	Strategic Links
4.11 Provide excellent advice on fuel poverty related matters at a one stop shop	Provide a one stop shop at the Gateway to answer questions on understanding fuel bills, comparing the market and switching supplier, choosing energy efficiency works and contractors, signposting the ECO, RHI, FiT, Help to Heat and other sources of support, advice and funding	Begin 2017	Staff and partner time to staff the desk. Space at Gateway, materials to take away, a printer and phoneline to call energy companies	Housing and Inclusion, Health and Housing, Gateway Staff, volunteers, possibly external partners	Health inequalities Action Plan, Low Emissions Strategy Welfare Reform Agenda
4.12 Provide a multi-agency referral system for fuel poverty or to include fuel poverty to help us find the hard to reach residents considering the wider health needs of those in the community	Liaise with partners to determine the appetite to a multi-agency referral system where frontline staff from the council and health and social care agencies can refer a client with a need they cannot address. (For inspiration consider the Thanet Your Home your Health system)	Ongoing through strategy	Less than 0.1 FTE Staff and partners time Possible IT resources	Inclusion Team Housing and Health Team Community Wardens Possibly external partners	Health Inequalities Action Plan Low emissions strategy Welfare Reform Agenda

## 10 Conclusions

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Fuel poverty has a negative impact on approximately 5000 households in the borough. It should be addressed by borough wide services on our website, in our publications and the Big Maidstone Switch and Warm Homes services.

As levels of fuel poverty vary widely within the borough it would be reasonable to target some services to the areas with the highest levels of fuel poverty. Some interventions, including the SGN Help to Heat scheme and the Warm Homes ECO funded boiler service, which partially funds new boilers, are targeted at low income households but these households are unlikely to be able to benefit from them without additional support.

The Home Energy Efficiency Grant was designed to help vulnerable households improve the energy efficiency of their home with no upfront costs. The criteria of the grant could be widened to allow it to be used in conjunction with the Help to Heat scheme and the ECO scheme. The council had planned to ask the ECO contractors to administer the scheme but this has resulted in no take-up. The council could bring the grant administration in house and promote the scheme itself to vulnerable households or re-procure a service where the contractor assists in the administration of the grant and carries out installations.

Guidance from other organisations suggested energy one stop shops are an effective way to help residents tackle a wide range of energy related matters. The council could offer a service for a fixed period to gauge the level of interest and range of topics to include. If a pilot indicated the one stop shop was effective partner organisations could be invited to participate, including Citizens Advice to give benefit take up and billing advice and Warm Homes to give advice on ECO grants.