

AGENDA ITEM No. 3

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: SOCIAL WORK (OPERATIONS AND SERVICES) SUB COMMITTEE	Subject: FUEL POVERTY AWARENESS TRAINING	
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK		
Date: 2 nd MAY 2006	Ref: JD/GF	

1. Purpose of Report / Introduction

The purpose of this report is to inform Committee of the Safe Warm and Well Initiative which has been established to deliver Fuel Poverty and Health Awareness Training to frontline Social Work and NHS staff. The report will cover the evaluation of the first years training.

2. Background

- 2.1. Increasing home energy costs and the numbers of preventable excess winter deaths have ensured that the issue of fuel poverty has received considerable press and media coverage this winter.
- 2.2. For individuals and households, the main negative impact of fuel poverty is its damaging effects on the quality of life and health. The effects are both direct and indirect. Illnesses such as influenza, heart disease and strokes are all exacerbated by cold, and cold homes can also promote the growth of fungi and number of dust mites – often linked to conditions such as asthma.
- 2.3. Less directly, households that have to spend a high proportion of their income on fuel have to compensate in other parts of their family budgets. This can lead to poor diet, or reduced participation in social and leisure activities, both of which can also impact on health and quality of life. These negative effects of fuel poverty can be particularly significant for vulnerable groups. It is recognised that the categories of household most likely to be fuel poor are the elderly, the chronically sick, lone parents, single occupants and those on a restricted income.
- 2.4. As part of a wider strategy to combat fuel poverty within North Lanarkshire for our most vulnerable residents a need has been identified to provide access to energy awareness and fuel poverty training to frontline staff from Social Work, Housing, Money Advice, NHS Lanarkshire and also voluntary and community sector representatives. The targeted staff are those who are most likely to come into contact with households which are experiencing fuel poverty and who work within the worst data zones across North Lanarkshire. Linked to this, the initiative will also target residents who may be at risk of accidents in the home, or may be victims or potential victims of crime and to offer assistance to improve home safety and security through the Council's Safer Homes Project.
- 2.5. Over the past two years the Fuel Poverty and Health Task Group, which is a thematic working group linked to the Health Well Being and Care Corporate Group has developed a Fuel Poverty and Health awareness training programme. The Group

was successful in obtaining Regeneration Funding to deliver the training over a three year period to staff who work in the worst data zone areas.

3. Considerations

- 3.1. The Fuel Poverty and Health task Group has now delivered the first year of Fuel Poverty and Health awareness training. The programme which ran between September 2005 and March 2006 comprised 21 separate briefing sessions. These sessions were attended by 267 frontline staff who were able to learn about the consequences of fuel poverty and its impact on health. Social Work staff were by far the largest group to receive the training with 141 staff attending mainly from Home Support.
- 3.2. As part of the training staff were informed of how to make referrals to appropriate agency programmes using a fast track system. A joint referral mechanism between Social Work, NHS Lanarkshire, the Energy Advice Unit and Safer Homes Project has now been established.
- 3.3. The programme has been delivered in true partnership fashion by 3 trainers from NHS Health promotion supplemented by a pool of 6 volunteer trainers from several council departments including Social Work (3), Housing and Property Services (1), Planning and Environment (1). Two additional trainers have been included from the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre.
- 3.4. The feed back from the trainers, attendees and evaluation questionnaires has so far been extremely positive. Comments have indicated that the training has been **valuable, informative, enjoyable and useful**. In relation to learning outcomes of the 267 participants who attended :
 - **223 (91%)** said that they can now define fuel poverty
 - **214 (88%)** are more aware of link between cold houses and health
 - **216 (89%)** have a wider understanding of home safety and security
 - **225 (92%)** are more aware of sources of help and advice available
 - **225 (92%)** recognised that they will be able to use energy efficiency tips at work and at home
 - **226 (93%)** said that they will be able to refer relevant clients
- 3.5. Since the delivery of the training 15 referrals for assistance or advice have been processed. The level of referrals has been less than expected and plans are in hand to contact all those staff who have participated in the training to be more proactive in referring individuals. However what has emerged is that service users have often been reluctant to be referred and staff are using the information gained through the training to offer service users advice and tips on how to save money through energy efficiency.
- 3.6. Over the next two years a number of sessions will be delivered in each area for frontline staff from each agency. Rather than adopting a scatter gun approach a rolling programme of training has been developed. Previous experience has shown that the training is best delivered over the winter months when fuel poverty issues are more prevalent and at the forefront of people's minds.

4. Financial / Personnel / Legal / Policy Implication

- 4.1. The Fuel Poverty Awareness Training has received funding through the Councils Community Regeneration Fund and has a further two years to run.
- 4.2. The training assists the Council meet its objectives as outlined in the North Lanarkshire Fuel Poverty Statement which it has submitted to the Scottish Executive.
- 4.3. There are no legal or personnel implications for the Department in relation to this activity.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1. It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of the report.



Jim Dickie
Director of Social Work
3 April 2006

For further information on this report please contact Gus Ferguson on telephone 01698 332560