



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Stoke-on-Trent Fuel Poverty Strategy 2023-2028

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1. Foreword

Living in a safe and warm home is a basic living standard that should be enjoyed by all of us. Sadly, too many households within our city fall short of this mark and are unable to afford to heat their home to an adequate temperature.

Moreover, in recent years there has been a national energy crisis caused by a number of factors including the conflict in the Ukraine which has resulted in soaring energy bills. Since the winter period of 2020/21 energy prices have risen from an average of £1,042 to now being £2,100 for a typical household¹.

Living in a cold home can make serious health conditions worse such as bronchitis and asthma. It can have a negative impact on a person's mental wellbeing. A cold home can be detrimental to a child's potential to thrive; it can lead to falling behind at school and experiencing social isolation.

It follows that providing our city's residents with healthy, energy efficient and warm homes is one of the Council's highest priorities.

This 2023-2028 Fuel Poverty Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to address the root causes of fuel poverty to ensure that everyone can stay warm and healthy in their homes.

The Strategy will do this by focussing on the following four key objectives:

1. Helping people to reduce their energy bills
2. Improving domestic building efficiencies to reduce cold related illness
3. Maximising household incomes
4. Increasing renewable energies, to reduce our carbon emissions

Councillor Chris Robinson - Cabinet Member for Housing

Councillor Amjid Wazir - Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Environment and Enforcement

¹ <https://www.nea.org.uk/energy-crisis/>

2. Background

2.1 What is Fuel Poverty?

Fuel Poverty charity National Energy Action estimates there are around 6.6 million households in the UK suffering from fuel poverty. This figure has risen from an estimate of 4.5 million households in October 2021.² Fuel poverty occurs when a household has a low income and cannot afford to keep their home warm at a reasonable cost. This can lead to spiralling debt, the rationing of heating to keep bills down, and in some cases, can be as stark as a family having to decide whether to spend the last of a weekly budget on eating or heating.

The government defines fuel poverty using the Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) indicator³.

When applying the LILEE indicator, a household is considered to be fuel poor if:

- they are living in a property with an energy efficiency rating of band D or below.

And

- when they spend the required amount to heat their home, they are left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

There are 3 key elements that determine whether a household is fuel poor:

1. household income.
2. household energy requirements.
3. fuel prices.

LILEE bases fuel poverty on required energy bills rather than actual spending. This ensures that those households who have low energy bills simply because they actively limit their use of energy at home, for example, by not heating their home are not overlooked.

2.2 Fuel Poverty Statistics

- The highest level of fuel poverty is in the private rented sector with 24.1 per cent of these households being fuel poor.
- 22.5 per cent of fuel poor households live in social housing.

² <https://www.nea.org.uk/what-is-fuel-poverty>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>

- Social housing properties tend to be more energy efficient with 69.5 per cent of social rented homes now rated C or above and as such are not fuel poor.
- Single parent households consistently make up the highest proportion of households in fuel poverty. In 2022, 26.4 per cent of single parent households were fuel poor.
- In 2022, 42.3 per cent of all fuel poor households had one or more dependent children (1.4 million households).
- Properties with uninsulated solid walls had the highest rate of fuel poverty (22.8% of households).
- Households living in properties built before 1919 have the highest share of fuel poverty.
- Households living in converted flats (24.8 per cent of all households) and end-terraces (19.8 per cent) had the highest likelihood of fuel poverty.⁴

2.3 The Local Picture

The government's 2022 sub-regional fuel poverty report lists Stoke-on-Trent as having the 2nd highest proportion of its households living in fuel poverty in England. The city has an estimated 25,696 households or 22.1% of its population living in fuel poverty compared with the West Midlands average of 17.8% and the England average of 13.2%.⁵

2.4 The impact of Covid-19

COVID-19 has been one of the country's worst public health emergencies in recent times. Social distancing measures meant that many people spent more time in homes that were hazardous, cold and damp. Inadequate housing conditions such as overcrowding, also led to increased risk of viral transmission.

Groups in our city who are more likely to live in poor housing are often the same groups who are vulnerable to COVID-19 and other health conditions, including older people, people with existing health conditions, those with lower incomes and people from ethnic minority groups.

2.5 Improving Housing Conditions

Living in a cold, damp home is proven to have significant negative impacts on a person's health and wellbeing. Improving housing quality, both in and outside of the home can be a highly cost-effective means of improving health outcomes, reducing fuel poverty and reducing costs to wider society.

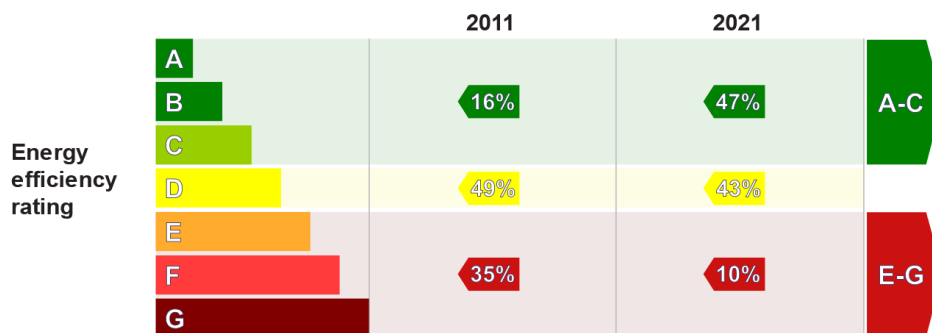
⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-fuel-poverty-statistics-report-2023>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-2022>

The Stoke-on-Trent Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2025 places a priority on the importance of living in a healthy home and environment with outcomes that include improving the energy efficiency of private sector housing stock.⁶

The government’s 2014 fuel poverty target for England set an objective to ensure that as many fuel poor households as reasonably practicable achieve a minimum energy efficiency rating of band C by 2030, with interim targets of band E by 2020, and band D by 2025.

The English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022⁷, found that energy efficiency of English housing has continued to improve. The proportion of A to C rated dwellings increased from 16% in 2011 to 47% in 2021. While the proportion of the least energy efficient dwellings (E to G) decreased from over a third of dwellings (35%) in 2011 to one in ten dwellings (10%) in 2021. This is demonstrated in the diagram below:



2.6 Decarbonisation and Fuel Poverty

To decarbonise homes requires households to reduce their energy demand, primarily through increasing the thermal efficiency of buildings. Significant savings on energy costs can be achieved through retrofitting energy efficiency measures such as cavity wall and loft insulation. Even households living in the worst performing properties with an EPC of G, can save more than a £1600 per year⁸ if they are able to increase the thermal efficiency of their buildings up to an EPC of Band E.

⁶

https://www.stoke.gov.uk/downloads/file/1803/health_and_wellbeing_strategy_2021-25

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-energy/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-energy>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-warmth-protecting-vulnerable-households-in-england>

Energy efficient homes provide more protection when energy prices sharply increase, giving fuel poor households insurance against ever increasing fuel prices.

Fuel poor households are less likely to have high standards of energy efficiency. This means that more money must be spent to get these homes 'net zero ready'. If homes are not energy efficient enough, switching fuel types can result in higher running costs.

The transition to low carbon heating systems such as air source heat pumps will be a gradual one. The costs for these systems in a typical domestic property currently ranges from £7,000 - £14,000. To offset this, the government are providing households with grants up to £5,000 through the Boiler Upgrade Scheme; and the government are providing grant funding for homes without mains gas through the Home Upgrade Grant and for social housing with all fuel types, through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, which will cover the cost of upgrading home energy efficiency and installing low-carbon heat to households who are fuel poor, living in poorly insulated properties.⁹ Where properties are not insulated to a decent level the cost of heating as a result will increase substantially inadvertently increasing fuel poverty. A clear understanding of the impact needs to be reviewed before implementation.

Gas is still four times cheaper than electricity, so from a fuel poverty perspective considered the most useful fuel, however, a concerted effort is required to start mitigating our dependence on imported energy sources. Energy security can be achieved by stepping up our domestic energy portfolio and investing in renewable technologies. Achieving energy security will enhance economic stability and help to alleviate the burden of fuel poverty.

3. What the Council has been doing

3.1 Capital Investment in Council Stock

Over recent years the Council has made significant investments in decent homes programmes across the city. For example, with our own housing stock, we have implemented additional energy efficiency measures, such as external wall insulation and loft insulation, which is proven to be a cost-effective, sustainable and long-term solution to tackling fuel poverty. We have undertaken proactive actions to mitigate risks associated with damp, mould, condensation and disrepair. Our five-year capital investment programme 2023-2028 sets aside £117m to continue modernising the Council's stock. This includes circa £8.8m on central heating systems and £15.07m

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-warmth-protecting-vulnerable-households-in-england>

ringfenced for energy efficiency measures, in order to reduce the cost of heating and tackle the causes of damp, mould and disrepair (a summary of the five year investment plan can be found in Appendix 1 or to read the full report, [click here](#)).

3.2 Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund

In February 2022, we secured £870,000 government funding to deliver the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) which will provide external wall insulation for up to 80 of our Crosswall properties. The benefits to these properties will include: reduced energy consumption, a reduction in fuel bills, reduced carbon emissions and a reduction in fuel poverty.

3.3 Safe and Warm Home Grants

The Council's Private Sector Housing Team deliver Safe and Warm Home Grants providing energy efficiency measures, new heating and repairs and improvements to help keep vulnerable owner occupiers and private tenants safe and warm in their homes. Demand for this scheme has been very high and to recognise this, the budget for 2023/2024 has been increased to £1 million.

3.4 Helping the private sector through ECO schemes

The Council supports maximisation of investment in private sector housing through Energy Company Obligation schemes such as ECO4 and the Great British Insulation Scheme by publishing a Statement of Intent for Flexible Eligibility, increasing the number of eligible residents in the city and supporting installers to provide declarations of eligibility to the scheme administrator Ofgem. The Council has worked with Eon to attract over £1.2M worth of Local Authority Delivery programme funding into the City in 2023/24.

3.5 Warm and welcoming spaces

Over the past year, the Council and its partners have set up over fifty warm and welcoming spaces across the city where people can meet up, socialise and have access to support. These spaces foster a sense of belonging in the community and offer a crucial safety net for those most in need.

The Council also commissions and manages delivery of an energy advice service to provide advice and support for private sector residents in the city who are vulnerable to the cold.

3.6 A summary of our achievements

- 12,272 of the city Council's properties have a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating of C or above. (SAP is the methodology used by the government to assess and compare the energy and environmental performance of dwellings).

- The Council replaces on average 800 inefficient heating systems for its stock per year with A rated boilers.
- An average of 400 loft insulations are completed per year to bring the depth of insulation up to 270mm.
- The city has reduced its own energy consumption by 20% and carbon emissions by 32% thereby ensuring further resources are available to invest in the community through the savings achieved and implementation of measures based on lessons learned.
- The £53m District Heat Network is well under way with 4 kilometres of infrastructure now installed in the University Quarter which should see approximately 45GWh of low-priced energy supplied annually. Plans are underway to see expansion of the scheme across the city with a clear focus on exploiting low carbon energy to be produced locally providing a secure affordable heat outcome for the city.
- By providing affordable sustainable energy, the Council has been able to support warm hubs in its own buildings for those in fuel poverty.
- 95% of Council owned properties benefit from Cavity Wall Insulation.
- The Council is working with Warmfront to identify Council owned properties requiring additional insulation measures funded through the government's ECO 4 scheme. This will result in an estimated further 1788 properties at band C.
- The Council is exploring fitting a device called Endotherm to central heating systems in its properties which could save tenants money on their heating bills (funded through ECO 4).
- The Council is running a trial on 170 of its properties with a device called Switchee which helps to improve energy efficiency, provide early warnings of damp and mould and has the option to communicate directly with tenants through a touchscreen.
- Since 2018, 494 private sector properties have benefitted from first time central heating systems and replacement boilers funded through ECO, Warm Homes Fund and the Council's Safe and Warm Homes programme.
- As at July 2023 the Local Authority Delivery Scheme has delivered energy efficiency measures in 200 privately owned homes including solid wall insulation, loft and cavity wall insulation.
- Since January 2022, 300 incidences of hazards relating to cold have been eradicated in privately rented properties through enforcement action by the Private Sector Housing Team. It is estimated that this has saved the NHS £1,282,025 and society as a whole, £22,939,479.
- The Council funded energy advice service has supported 1600 households with advice and support including income maximisation, managing fuel debt and promoting behavioural change since November 2021.
- Since April 2022 the Household Support Fund has supported over 9000 households with fuel and energy vouchers.

In addition to this, we will continue seeking external funding opportunities to provide large scale retrofit solutions for both our housing stock and the private sector, such as future rounds of the government's LAD scheme and the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. It is worth noting that the cost of retrofit often means, however, that the impact is limited and scale is severely impacted by the need to provide additional match funding.

4. Strategic Objectives

The strategy is set out under the following four Strategic Objectives:

4.1 Strategic Objective One – Help people to reduce their energy bills

Ensuring that people are able to keep warm in their homes is a key Council priority. A home should be warm and comfortable and provide a healthy environment that promotes well-being.

The urgency of fuel poverty has led to requests for the Council to lobby the government to pressure energy companies to reduce fuel prices, to increase targeted investment and to provide more funded initiatives aimed at alleviating the burdens faced by vulnerable households.

Despite energy efficiency improvements to many properties across the city and in the UK, domestic energy consumption is still variable and determined chiefly by the way people use energy in their home. Energy use behaviours are often established as well-rooted habits which are hard to alter (e.g. leaving lights and appliances on, how cooking equipment and cooling equipment is used, or how people charge electronic devices and manage heating and hot water controls). Positive behavioural change is the most effective and cheapest way to reduce energy consumption and CO2 emissions.

Whilst many households are able to access web-based behavioural change information and advice, many older and vulnerable households living at risk of fuel poverty are less likely to access the same services. These households may need additional support but may not be known to local service providers. These householders are considered hard to reach. Identifying and accessing hard to reach households to deliver support can be difficult and resource intensive as they may require multiple visits before access (and trust) is gained and advice that results in effective and efficient use of energy is embedded.

4.1.1 What the Council is doing

The Council continues to work with national and local partner agencies to develop referral pathways into specialist support services when a customer with additional needs has been identified including:

- **Integrated Care Board**

The Council works with the Integrated Care Board to agree priorities for funding for improving private sector housing conditions using the Better Care Fund which includes Safe and Warm Grants and the energy advice service.

- **Beat the Cold**

Beat the Cold support fuel poor households in the city by improving health outcomes and access to energy efficiency improvements.

Support is provided by telephone call or home visits and may include:

- Applying for free or low-cost insulation and other energy efficiency improvements.
- Using heating systems in the best way to reduce cost and waste.
- Paying for fuel – finding the best tariff and switching companies.
- The Warm Home Discount and Priority Service Registers.
- Fuel debt advice and support.
- Help with over-billing.
- Improving energy efficiency.
- Renewables, such as solar panels, solar thermal, heat pumps; and the ways to make them pay.
- Providing emergency heaters.

- **Citizens Advice (Potteries Money Wise):**

The Council commissions the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to provide a City-wide service of housing and debt advice and benefit maximisation.

The CAB have a longstanding commitment to support income maximisation – making sure that poorer people are receiving all the benefits and tax credits that they are entitled to and addressing the underclaiming that affects areas like Stoke-on-Trent in particular.

Potteries Money Wise advisers offer free and confidential advice to help to maximise household income and reduce outgoings.

CAB offer one to one telephone appointments or an in-person appointment at their City Centre office. They can also offer group training to front line staff and community groups.

- **Saltbox (Money Matters):**

Saltbox's Money Matters project provides financial capability, energy, debt and benefits information and advice. They work with people accessing food from Stoke-on-Trent foodbanks. Money matters advisers hold drop-in sessions at the foodbank distribution centres.

- **Groundwork's Green Doctor Project**

Groundwork's Green Doctors help households to stay warm, stay well and save money on their household energy bills. This also helps to reduce carbon emissions.

Among other services, they can identify some of the causes of heat loss in a resident's homes to help tackle damp, mould and condensation issues. Along with this, they offer a range of advice on energy saving actions, energy saving items and grant applications.

- **Midlands Net Zero Hub and Eon**

The Council works closely with the MNZH and Eon in the delivery of the Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LADs) providing grants for a wide range of measures to private homes to improve energy efficiency, tackling fuel poverty and reduce the impact of cold homes.

4.1.2 Support Offer for Stoke-on-Trent City Council Tenants

- **Income Advice Team**

For Stoke-on-Trent City Council tenants who are struggling financially and finding it difficult to pay their rent or bills, the Income Advice Team can help. They offer one to one support on personal budgeting and provide advice if households are affected by Welfare Reform measures such as the Social Sector Size Criteria (Bedroom Tax), Universal Credit or the Benefit Cap. The team will also ensure that the household is receiving the correct benefits and income.

See Appendix 2 for a list of local fuel poverty agencies.

4.2 Strategic Objective Two - Improving domestic building efficiencies to reduce cold related illness

Improving the energy efficiency of homes is a long-term solution to tackling fuel poverty. Schemes that improve the efficiency of the housing stock provide a cost-effective, sustainable and long-term solution to the problem. Improving the energy efficiency of the housing stock not only helps reduce energy consumption, it can generate positive social, environmental and economic benefits.

The government's Sustainable Warmth strategy shows a commitment to delivering sustainable solutions for heating and the reduction of fossil fuels: 'We want the next

generation of fuel poverty policies to focus on upgrading homes with energy efficiency and to ramp up the deployment of low carbon heating solutions throughout the 2020s' ¹⁰. Low carbon heating solutions such as heat pumps will play an important role in achieving net zero targets. This will mean that older, inefficient houses will need retrofit solutions such as external and internal wall insulation to improve their energy efficiency and enable the switch to low carbon heating. Over time, the Council's District Heat Network scheme will contribute to providing a sustainable solution that requires less fabric intervention and more affordable energy.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) 2015 guideline: Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes, provides local authorities, commissioners, managers and health, social care and voluntary practitioners with guidelines to help reduce fuel poverty and improve the energy efficiency of homes.

The NICE recommendations include the following key points:

- Ensure there is a single-point-of-contact health and housing referral service for people living in cold homes.
- Provide tailored solutions via the single- point-of-contact health and housing referral service for people living in cold homes.
- Identify people at risk of ill health from living in a cold home.
- Make every contact count by assessing the heating needs of people who use primary health and home care services.
- Non-health and social care workers who visit people at home should assess their heating needs.
- Discharge vulnerable people from health or social care settings to a warm home.
- Train health and social care practitioners to help people whose homes may be too cold.
- Train housing professionals and faith and voluntary sector workers to help people whose homes may be too cold for their health and wellbeing.
- Raise awareness among practitioners and the public about how to keep warm at home.

Statistics show that nearly 34% of fuel poor households in England are living in private rented accommodation. Moreover, 23% of homes that are rated E, F or G are from the rented sector. The government has set an ambition to improve where practical, through regulation rented homes to EPC Band C by 2030.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-warmth-protecting-vulnerable-households-in-england>

In 2014, the government put in place a statutory fuel poverty target for England: to ensure that as many fuel poor households as reasonably practicable achieve a minimum energy efficiency rating of Band C, by 2030, with interim targets of Band E by 2020, and Band D by 2025.¹¹

The following government backed programmes and schemes are available to increase the energy efficiency of properties with a focus on fuel poor households:

- Energy Company Obligation (ECO3 and ECO4) - is a government energy efficiency scheme in Great Britain designed to tackle fuel poverty and help reduce carbon emissions. Under ECO, medium and larger energy suppliers fund the installation of energy efficiency measures in British households.
- Great British Insulation Scheme (GBIS) - the scheme complements the Energy Company Obligation (ECO4) scheme and is designed to deliver improvements to the least energy-efficient homes in Great Britain to tackle fuel poverty and help reduce energy bills.
- Green Deal - helping to make energy-saving improvements to households and to find the best way to pay for them.
- Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LADS) – a £2 billion scheme to improve the energy efficiency of homes, helping reduce fuel poverty and phase out high carbon fossil fuel heating.
- Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund -Funding to help social housing providers improve the energy efficiency of their properties and switch to clean heat.

4.2.1 What the Council is doing

In addition to the above schemes, the Council delivers the following programme to support our vulnerable fuel poor households:

The Safe and Warm Home grant scheme can be used for:

- Heating improvements.
- First-time gas central heating (this is counter to net-zero targets but currently cheaper than all forms of electric heating inc heat pumps)
- Boiler repair or replacement.
- Additional radiators where required.
- Measures to improve energy efficiency.
- Loft insulation.
- Cavity wall insulation.
- Advice and help to you keep warm and safe.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sustainable-warmth-protecting-vulnerable-households-in-england>

- Measures to help to prevent slips, trips and falls.
- Improvements to lighting.
- Work to rectify dampness in properties.
- Grants of up to £10,000 are available for homeowners (currently under review).

Cold is one of 29 hazards, which also include damp and mould contained within the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The local authority has a duty to act using its powers under the Housing Act 2004 to deal with any category 1 hazards identified in the home and a power to tackle any category 2 hazards.

In addition to this the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) prohibit landlords from letting a residential property with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of F or G. Landlords must ensure that all properties have a valid EPC and that rented properties meet at least an E rating, subject to certain exemptions.

The Council's Private Sector Housing Team will continue to encourage landlords to ensure their properties meet minimum standards and encourage tenants to contact us where properties do not meet minimum statutory requirements in respect of cold, damp, mould or any other hazard under the HHSRS we will not hesitate to use the full range of powers to ensure compliance where this is not the case.

4.3 Strategic Objective Three - Maximising household incomes

Recent data derived from MOSAIC (Experian Ltd) indicates that city household incomes are nearly 30% lower than the national average. In 2023, 36.9% of the city's households had an income below £20,000 per annum compared with 25.7% nationally. It is estimated that just 11.2% of city households have an income above £50,000 per annum compared with more than 26% nationally.

Many low-income households occupy energy inefficient properties that are located in some of the most deprived communities in the city.

Whilst improving the energy efficiency of a property is the most cost effective, sustainable and long-term solution to the problem, reducing household expenditure and maximising incomes can lift households out of fuel poverty and reduce the risk of them falling into fuel poverty.

4.3.1 What the Council is doing

Identifying fuel poverty can be a complex issue that often requires assistance from a range of agencies. For Council tenants, support is provided through the Council's income advice team. If the Council receives referrals of hard to reach households from owner occupiers or from the private rental sector, for example via social services, landlords or an ECO funded installer, it will sign post to its Energy Advice Service who will provide impartial advice on: income, benefits maximisation, access to grants and advice on fuel switching.

4.3.2 Cost of Living Group

The Council has formed a Cost of Living Group. The group, supported by the local voluntary community sector aims to explore effective and practicable approaches to help to mitigate the impacts of cost of living pressures on our residents and businesses.

4.3.3 Financial support

The following financial support is available for eligible householders:

- Winter Fuel Payment (WFP) - available to households in receipt of a state pension.
- Warm home discount scheme (WHD) - this policy discounts £150 from the fuel bills of households where the bill payer is on Pension Credit or from households on a wider range of means test benefits.
- Cost of Living Payments 2023 to 2024 – Individuals may be able to get up to 5 payments to help with the cost of living if they are getting certain benefits or tax credits. Payments will be paid automatically in the same way as benefits or tax credits.
- Energy Company Obligation (ECO) - If a household wishes to make energy improvements to their home or heating system, they may be eligible for the ECO scheme.
- Households struggling with energy costs should contact their supplier. Suppliers must offer affordable payment plans and households can ask for 'emergency credit' if they use a prepay meter and can't top up.

4.4 Strategic Objective Four – To increase renewable energies and reduce our carbon emissions

In the Fuel Poverty Monitor report 2021, the National Energy Agency claims that decarbonising heat is essential for fuel poor households. It is needed to mitigate against climate change and to reduce the level of climate risk for fuel poor households. The direct opportunities for fuel poor households could also be substantial. There are significant financial savings on offer if decarbonisation is done in in the right way.¹²

For privately owned low-income households, the Council have secured funding from Phases 2 and 3 of the Local Authority Delivery Scheme (LADS). Phase 2 completed in September 2022 delivering energy efficiency improvements for 36 homes with an investment of £432,264. For Phase 3 the Council has secured £2.5 million which will

¹² <https://www.nea.org.uk/publications/uk-fuel-poverty-monitor-2020-21/>

deliver energy efficiency measures for up to 250 homes by October 2023. Measures delivered through the scheme include external wall insulation, loft insulation, cavity wall insulation. LADS funding stipulates that installers are fully compliant with the latest industry standards including Trustmark and PAS2035 which are designed to raise the standards of installing energy efficiency measures.

Improving the energy efficiency of newly built homes will be crucial in combatting fuel poverty. Enhanced insulation, efficient heating and renewable energy sources lead to immediate cost savings for households. As referenced in the Council's Energy Strategy, all new developments should be delivered in line with the Building Research Establishment's Home Quality Mark (HQM), which is part of the successful BREEAM family of quality and sustainability standards. Enforcing higher energy efficiency within the planning process will help to create more affordable and environmentally sustainable housing.

The government has acknowledged that the built environment will need to be almost completely decarbonised by 2050, and that achieving this must be through a mix of energy efficiency and a transition to low carbon heat.

The Council has invested almost £6.8m in energy efficiency measures in its own buildings and reduced its consumption by 20%. Lessons learned will be applied through the newly adopted energy strategy in delivering more renewable in the city and allowing greater access to the benefits to communities over time.

The Council's Energy Strategy with 2, 5 and 10-year action plans sets out how the Council can increase renewables capacity at scale and expand the benefits into the community.

4.4.1 Government's Proposed Decarbonisation Activities

The government's 2021 Heat and Building Strategy included the following activities planned for the next decade to decarbonise heat:

Fossil Fuels:

- Phasing out the installation of new natural gas boilers.
- Consulting on whether it is appropriate to end gas grid connections to homes constructed from 2025, in favour of alternative low-carbon heat sources.
- Evaluating and developing options to connect to the DHN where infrastructure exists.
- Potential introduction of regulations to end installation of new fossil fuel heating systems in existing off-gas-grid homes from 2026.

- Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS) - to provide upfront capital grants to support the installation of heat pumps and biomass boilers in homes. Installers can apply on behalf of the owner for:
 - £5000 off the cost and installation of an air source heat pump.
 - £5000 off the cost and installation of a biomass boiler.
 - £6000 off the cost and installation of a ground source heat pump, including water source heat pumps.

Heat Pumps:

- Provide capital grants to households and small businesses to support the installation of air source and ground source heat pumps.
- Increased deployment of hydronic heat pumps, supporting growth from around 35,000 to 600,000 installations.
- The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (2021) to upgrade a significant amount of the social housing stock that is currently below EPC C up to that standard.
- Home Upgrade Grant (2022 to 2025). BEIS plan to introduce this grant in early 2022, which aims to deliver low-carbon heating and energy efficiency upgrades to low income off-gas-grid homes.

Hydrogen:

- Hydrogen Trials - safety and feasibility testing, followed by a neighbourhood trial by 2023, village scale trial by 2025.
- Hy4Heat - a programme exploring the safety and feasibility of using hydrogen for home heating.
- Hydrogen-ready boilers – government is looking to consult on its approach to hydrogen-ready boilers shortly. Most boilers can already accept up to 20% Hydrogen and the gas grid is being adjusted to suit. However, hydrogen is currently more expensive than gas and a risk to fuel poverty.
- Hydrogen blending - engaging with industry and regulators to develop the safety case, technical and cost effectiveness assessments of blending up to 20% hydrogen into the gas network.

Heat Networks:

- The city Council is committed to developing and delivering heat networks and enabling over time connections to domestic properties. The city has access to enormous reserves of renewable heat providing a secure low carbon affordable option that can be developed and delivered.

- Green Heat Network Fund (2022 to 2025) - incentivise the heat network market to adopt low-carbon heat sources and develop low carbon heat networks.
- Heat Network (Metering and Billing) - Regulations that ensure that more heat network customers are metered and billed accurately.
- Heat Networks Market Framework - Heat networks are not currently regulated. A market framework to reach three core outcomes:
 - Consumer protection.
 - Market growth.
 - Decarbonisation of heating networks.

Bioenergy:

- Green Gas Support Scheme (2021 to 2025) - Support investment in UK biomethane industry.
- Boiler Upgrade Scheme (from 2022) - capital grants to households and small businesses to support the installation of biomass boilers. Installations will need to be located in a rural area and not have an existing mains gas Connection.
- The Council may consider biomethane production if domestic food waste and other commercial food waste collection and disposal requirements are aligned with merging government policies around waste.

4.4.2 Who we are working with

- Strategic partners including Stoke-on-Trent College to promote awareness of energy efficient heat solutions. The college has developed an academy to provide specific training and support for implementation.
- National and international supply chain and business to promote energy efficient products and services and sharing of best practice in adoption. This is promoted under the banner 'HotSpot Stoke' and 'Smart City Alliance' and has included collaboration with BEIS, Nordic Heat, The Swedish Energy Agency and Business Sweden.
- 'Unitas', the Council's wholly owned Repairs Company to deliver some measures in private sector homes across the city.
- Local charities including: Beat the Cold, Staffordshire Housing Association Home Improvement Agency, Groundworks, Saltbox and the CAB.

4.4.3 What the Council is doing

- **District heat Network (DHN)**

The Council's District Heating scheme is in progress. The initial phases of the scheme should see approximately 45GWh of low energy supplied annually and reduce carbon by around 10,000 tonnes per year.

We are also trialling heat pumps and integrated energy solutions. Exploring a pilot for mine water geothermal for local delivery of low temperature heat systems for domestic properties. By delivering renewables at scale, the Council is seeking to reduce its own operating costs to ensure investment in services and support for front line activities such as reducing fuel poverty.

- **Refurbishment of Bungalows**

The Council has refurbished 135 bungalows including: replacing UPVC low insulated panels with insulated panels to the front and rear elevations, replacement of composite doors and windows with triple glazing and loft insulation.

- **Crosswall Houses**

The Council completed a pilot of structural wall insulation to 12 properties of this archetype, followed by a successful bid for £870,000 government funding to insulate a further 74 properties in 2020/21 through the SHDF scheme.

- **External Wall Insulation**

External wall insulation has been installed to 3 high rise blocks including replacement windows.

5. Measuring Success, Monitoring and Reporting

In order to identify if the strategy has been successful, the following proposed outcomes will be monitored and measured to review progress:

- Continue to develop initiatives to promote reduced household energy consumption with a focus on older, vulnerable households with limited access to online resources.
- Provide on-going staff training to identify hard-to-reach fuel poverty households and establish clear processes for teams to sign-post to Council teams or local partners.
- Strengthen partnerships with local fuel poverty support organisations including the Fuel Poverty Action Group to streamline access to energy advice and financial support.
- Continue a planned programme of energy efficiency improvements for Council-owned properties.
- Continue to seek externally funded energy efficiency programmes for council properties.

- Direct engagement with Landlords to improve the energy efficiency of properties to EPC C or above.
- Encourage private owners and Landlords to invest or access grant-funded retrofit measures such as insulation and energy efficient systems leading to lower energy consumption and reduced bills.
- Continue to seek externally funded opportunities for the private sector such as LADS.
- Deliver campaigns to promote energy efficiency awareness and Educate residents about the benefits of long-term, cost-effective retrofit measures.
- Continue to offer support to maximising household incomes, including assistance with benefits, grants, and schemes like Winter Fuel Payment and Warm Home Discount.
- Facilitate access to Employment Opportunities to address the root cause of fuel poverty.
- Continue to invest in renewable energy sources such as the District heat Network and promote the use of efficient heating systems to reduce carbon emissions.

5.1 Governance

To ensure that the tracking of progress towards the strategy's objectives is transparent, a clear reporting mechanism will be established to monitor the implementation of the strategy.

There will be a reporting framework created to provide regular strategy updates to the Council's Senior Management Team, Cabinet Members and its partner agencies. The reporting framework will provide progress updates against the strategy's Delivery Plan actions.

Importantly, the strategy will not be static, its objectives and actions will be monitored and re-evaluated to maintain a flexibility and responsiveness to emerging fuel poverty challenges and opportunities.

6. Conclusion

The 2023-2028 Fuel Poverty Strategy aims to address the root causes of fuel poverty in Stoke-on-Trent. It focuses on providing warm, energy efficient homes for the city's residents whilst acknowledging the current challenges that Stoke-on-Trent faces with high levels of fuel poverty.

The strategy has identified key objectives including helping people to reduce their energy bills through positive behavioural change and support for hard to reach households. It aims to improve domestic building efficiencies, particularly in the private rented sector.

Additionally, the strategy focuses on maximising household incomes through various financial support schemes and advice services delivered by our partners.

Overall, the strategy presents a comprehensive approach to tackling fuel poverty that will be achieved with the support of our stakeholders and partners. It places a strong emphasis on the well being and comfort of our residents, as well as environmental sustainability. The strategy clearly demonstrates the Council's commitment to making a positive impact on the lives of those affected by fuel poverty.

Appendix 1

Summary of Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Five-Year Capital Investment Programme

The Five-Year Capital Investment Programme sets out the Council's priorities to deliver a programme of modernisation for its housing stock. This commitment equates to an investment of circa £117m of works over the next five years.

The Investment Programme will focus on providing tenants with "decent homes" that are energy efficient whilst maintaining a positive progression towards decarbonisation targets.

Through the Investment Programme, the Council has committed to undertake proactive actions to mitigate risks associated with damp, mould, condensation and disrepair; it will ensure that statutory compliance and tenant safety requirements are met.

The overall circa £117m investment programme will be split over specific workstreams as shown below:

- Decent Homes
- Remodelling & Extensions
- Energy Efficiency
- Environmental Work
- Apartments, Compliance & Fire Safety
- Garages, Estates & Bungalow Improvements

Furthermore, in line with the government's Clean Growth Strategy, the Council will ensure that its lower energy efficiency rated properties will benefit from additional insulation, heating and 'retrofit' measures to be funded through the Five-Year Investment Programme. It is the Council's aim to ensure that all of its housing stock achieve a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C by 2030.

Over the course of the five-year programme, a total of circa 14,500 properties will benefit from investment work, with a particular focus on decent homes improvements to the Council's circa 3,600 bungalows.

By undertaking this ongoing capital investment in its housing stock, the Council will ensure that it continues to provide safe, compliant, energy efficient and decent homes for its residents across the City.

Appendix 2

Contact details of local Fuel Poverty Agencies:

- Beat the Cold

Telephone: 01782 914915

Freephone: 0800 389 2258

Website: www.beatcold.org.uk

- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

Telephone: 0808 278 7876

Email: advice@snsCab.org.uk

Website: <http://www.snsCab.org.uk/>

- Saltbox

Telephone General: 01782 207200

Money Matters: 01782 470980

Email General: money@Saltbox.org.uk

Website: <https://saltbox.org.uk/contact/>

- Groundwork's Green Doctors

Telephone: 01782 829909

Email: wmgreendoctor@groundwork.org.uk

Website: <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/projects/green-doctor/>