



Campaigning for Warm Homes

Achieving Affordable Warmth

*Guidelines based on an evaluation of Affordable
Warmth Strategies in six local authorities*



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Transco's pipeline system brings low-cost and environmentally friendly gas to over 20 million gas consumers, and touches the lives of millions more at work and play.

Yet for thousands on low incomes who need the fuel most, access to it has been denied to them until now. Through partnerships developed by Transco, national charities such as NEA, local authorities and finance houses, affordable warmth is now a very real prospect for them.

Transco is committed to supporting programmes which provide sustainable developments in both energy efficient technologies and assist in the eradication of fuel poverty. A partnership approach tackles these issues.

This includes helping local authorities to provide affordable warmth strategies that outline their commitment to addressing the social and health problems caused by fuel poverty.

The information and advice which follows will help others to build their own sustainable affordable warmth strategies.

Summary

This report comprises an evaluation of a programme to develop Affordable Warmth Strategies in six local authorities in England. It contains feedback from the lead officers of the local authorities, and other participating organisations with whom NEA worked during the programme.

Why develop an Affordable Warmth Strategy?

Local authorities are required, as part of their HECA obligations, to report on their activities to tackle fuel poverty. An Affordable Warmth Strategy sets out how this can be achieved.

Fuel poverty is a subject which can only be tackled by a multi-disciplinary approach. Cooperation between relevant individuals and agencies ensures that this problem can be overcome.

Inviting a range of agencies to be involved from the outset gives a broader ownership of the strategy.

The format devised for this strategy development was well received and popular with participants.

What are the benefits of an Affordable Warmth Strategy?

Disparate areas of policy and action are brought together.

Affordable Warmth gains recognition as an issue by politicians and funding bodies.

Extra funding can be accessed as the strategy moves into its implementation phase.

Lessons learned from the strategy development process

Strategy development benefits from the input of a range of interested organisations from the outset. This approach develops commitment and raises awareness.

The strategy workshops were valuable as a forum for information exchange, particularly to those participants whose main work is on the periphery of fuel poverty.

Workshops which allow for freedom of expression and encourage input from all participants can be stimulating and develop cooperation.

Briefings on the subject of Affordable Warmth prior to the first workshop would benefit participants unfamiliar with the subject.

The strategy development process involved two workshops. Feedback suggests that more workshops and more time would benefit the process, and that participants would value this.

A significant time commitment is required from the lead officers, particularly in preparing the final strategy document. Potential lead officers should be aware of this.

A published strategy document provides benefits - a focus to work from and a document to demonstrate serious commitment to the strategy.

Holding an official launch for the strategy gains acceptability and political support, but it can be expensive. For maximum attendance invite more people than you can accommodate, and link the event to a council meeting.

Lessons learned about putting the strategy into practice

The strategy document is a useful tool to keep progress 'on track'.

Keep targets and timescales realistic. The process may lose momentum if timescales slip. Local authorities with few or no staff dedicated to this area need to be mindful of demands on time and should be prepared to delegate responsibilities to other organisations.

There may be a time lag before extra funding is drawn in. To implement the strategy staff resources will be needed.

'Success brings success'. Once a strategy begins to be implemented, political support is more likely to be gained, the work portfolio expands and more resources are likely to follow.

Keep all workshop participants informed about the progress and status of the strategy. Make sure that all those who want to be involved and make a contribution are able to do so. Make sure there is a regular reporting mechanism or interest and support may be lost.

Publication and dissemination of the strategy helps generate funding from external agencies.

The elements of the strategy can be monitored regularly and easily if they are used as a working tool. They should also be reviewed completely at regular intervals.

Affordable warmth

Providing affordable warmth to people on low incomes is the objective which underpins NEA's work. NEA was established to develop policies and promote practical action to eliminate the misery of living in cold, damp homes and the anxiety about paying winter fuel bills - circumstances which continue to affect the poorest households in the UK. For NEA, it has always been a priority to emphasise the importance of creating partnerships to tackle the conditions which produce fuel poverty.

The Government is also committed to the eradication of fuel poverty. This is evident from initiatives such as Winter Fuel Payments, increased funding for energy efficiency, recognition of the health consequences of cold, damp housing and the will to put consumer protection at the heart of utility regulation. Even more significantly, the Government in establishing an Inter-Ministerial Group on Fuel Poverty has understood that fuel poverty cannot be tackled in isolation and that a permanent solution to the problem requires coordination across Health, Treasury, Social Security and Environment.

The case for Affordable Warmth has been recognised on a national policy level, but can only be implemented with involvement and cooperation at the local level. This report describes how local authorities, by recognising the scale of the problem, coordinating a strategy and implementing remedial action can move towards the achievement of affordable warmth for all their residents.

This report is a result of the evaluation of the Affordable Warmth Strategies of six local authorities with whom NEA worked to develop the strategies between 1996 and 1999. It is intended to provide help and guidance to other local authorities interested in developing their own strategies, by looking at the process of strategy development, the people involved, and implementation of the elements of the strategy.

It was apparent during the collaboration between NEA, local authority officers and other participating organisations, that some very exciting and stimulating work was taking place. The benefits and problems perceived by the local authority officers, and some of the participating organisations, provide a valuable insight into the best way forward for any authority seeking to develop an Affordable Warmth Strategy.

Background

In 1996 NEA worked with Manchester City Council to develop an Affordable Warmth Strategy for the city. The experience gained from the project was further developed when NEA worked with Luton Borough Council in 1997. The following year Transco supported NEA to organise and deliver four regional seminars to inter-departmental groups of local authority officers interested in developing their own strategies. Seventy-eight individuals from twenty-seven local authorities participated in these seminars, and subsequent support from Transco and the DETR enabled NEA to invite these local authorities to apply for more in-depth support to assist in their strategy development. NEA worked with Ashfield District Council, Birmingham City Council, Derbyshire Dales District Council, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, London Borough of Southwark, Luton Borough Council, Manchester City Council and Wolverhampton Borough Council.

The programme of work, including profiles of the authorities, is detailed in NEA's report *Strategies for Warmth - An NEA programme of work with local authorities*, published by NEA in 1999. Detailed strategy documents are available from Manchester, Wolverhampton, Ashfield, Derbyshire Dales and Luton.

The next stage involved an evaluation of the Affordable Warmth Strategies, in

terms of their development, implementation and ongoing operation. Lessons have been taken from this process and good practice guidance has been formulated as a result. Not all strategies were at the same level of maturity. Six local authorities have participated in this evaluation.

The evaluation

The evaluation involved two phases. The first step was to look at the implementation of an Affordable Warmth Strategy. The local authorities were asked to look at their published strategies and analyse the progress made on the targets and timescales set for the different elements of their strategies. Feedback on this area has of necessity been limited since most of the strategies are at an early stage.

The second part of the evaluation looked at the process of strategy development. This was conducted by semi-structured interviews with local authority lead officers and at least two other workshop participants from each area. The interview technique was piloted with Manchester City Council which had the longest running strategy (launched in 1996). A different set of questions was asked of the lead officer, and of other participating council officers or organisations/individuals. Following modification and clarification, the format was used with the other five authorities. The interviews were also tape recorded, where permitted, to ensure a comprehensive record of each interview.

The results were subsequently analysed to identify both benefits and pitfalls of this method of strategy development.

Interviews were conducted with the lead officers and other workshop participants from Ashfield, Barking and Dagenham, Derbyshire Dales, Luton, Manchester and Wolverhampton. The term 'authorities' refers to the feedback from the local authority lead officer, and 'participants' refers to those workshop participants from other organisations who were interviewed.

The strategy development process

Overall benefits of the strategy development

The most positive aspect of the strategy development process, from the viewpoint of lead officers, has been cooperation and greater awareness of affordable warmth, both from within the authority and from other organisations. The strategies have united people and created a solid foundation on which to build.

Most of the authority officers had some knowledge of the concept of Affordable Warmth but none had carried the subject forward as a strategy prior to NEA's involvement. Those who were working in the area tended to concentrate on particular topics without exploring the whole spectrum of issues raised by Affordable Warmth. The strategy development process helped to bring together areas which were previously worked on in isolation, and to introduce a coordinated approach to the work.

Similarly, all workshop participants interviewed thought one of the main benefits of strategy development was bringing people together, the formation of partnerships and the cooperation of those involved. The other main benefit was raising awareness of issues to consider within the strategy.

The involvement of an external facilitator who approached the authorities to initiate and support the strategy development clearly had a positive impact, and in most cases was seen as a catalyst for collaborative working which had not previously occurred.

All six authorities were generally pleased with the involvement with NEA, as it gave respectability and credibility to their strategy. This external facilitation encouraged more people and organisations to become involved and provided a 'neutral' focus without any political involvement or preconceptions

of the other agencies participating in the workshops. The involvement of independent facilitators also created enthusiasm as they took the initiative and got people working together in the workshops.

The following are some of the comments from lead officers who were asked about the benefits of strategy development:

"The Affordable Warmth Strategy has brought acceptance and recognition of the problem. It is a strategy that can be delivered."

"Corporate ownership. There is a high profile corporate commitment and more people are accessing the strategy."

"The strategy has helped partnerships and funding applications."

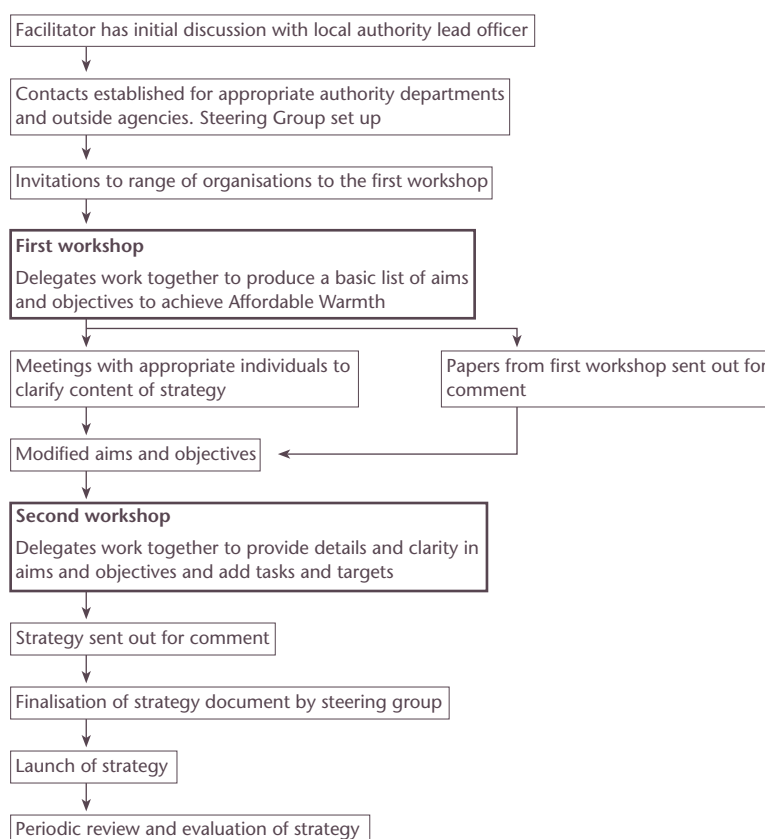
"The focus on Affordable Warmth and fuel poverty. Awareness has increased - we are now working towards solutions - provided resources are available."

The workshops

In setting up workshops make sure that all participants are given the freedom to express their views. Do not set out with rigid sessions and topic headings, but allow the group to develop its own priorities.

The format of the workshop was similar for each authority. The first workshop brought people together for the first

Fig. 1 Development of an Affordable Warmth Strategy



time (see Fig.1 for the development process). Two important elements of the workshops were the range of participants involved, and the freedom with which they were allowed to express their views.

Brainstorming sessions allowed participants to consider the barriers to Affordable Warmth. They were then asked to consider the solutions, and list them. The list of solutions was drawn together and grouped into main areas of interest. The participants chose which interest group to join and groups were asked to develop their main aims and objectives for the strategy in that area. (One participant suggested that this process was simply 're-inventing the wheel'. However, it became apparent that an essential element of this process is allowing each authority to 're-invent its own wheel' - in that way giving true local ownership to ideas and commitment to carrying through the tasks.)

There was generally an interval of some six weeks between the first and second workshops. During this time a steering group met and at the same time, relevant individuals were consulted to produce the basic framework of the strategy document. At the second workshop the interest groups were provided with the 'skeleton' strategy consisting of tables containing the aims and objectives which they had created. They were asked to develop further detail and clarity and to add tasks and targets. They were also asked to discard any ideas or areas which were unrealistic or unworkable. Different local authority departments and organisations committed themselves to carrying out specific tasks and to set timescales.

The sub-groups in the workshops were self-selecting as individuals chose the subject upon which they wanted to concentrate their discussions. An ideal size for the groups was 5 - 6 people, any more and they became unwieldy, any

less and dialogue was less productive. The process worked best when the same individuals attended both workshops. It could be difficult if there was a lack of continuity of participants from the first to the second workshop.

One participant stated,

"The workshops and the excellent facilitation brought a range of rather disparate agencies together - and whilst there were often tensions, everyone was allowed an opportunity to air their feelings on issues in a 'safe' environment. No-one was made to feel small or inconsequential, irrespective of their status."

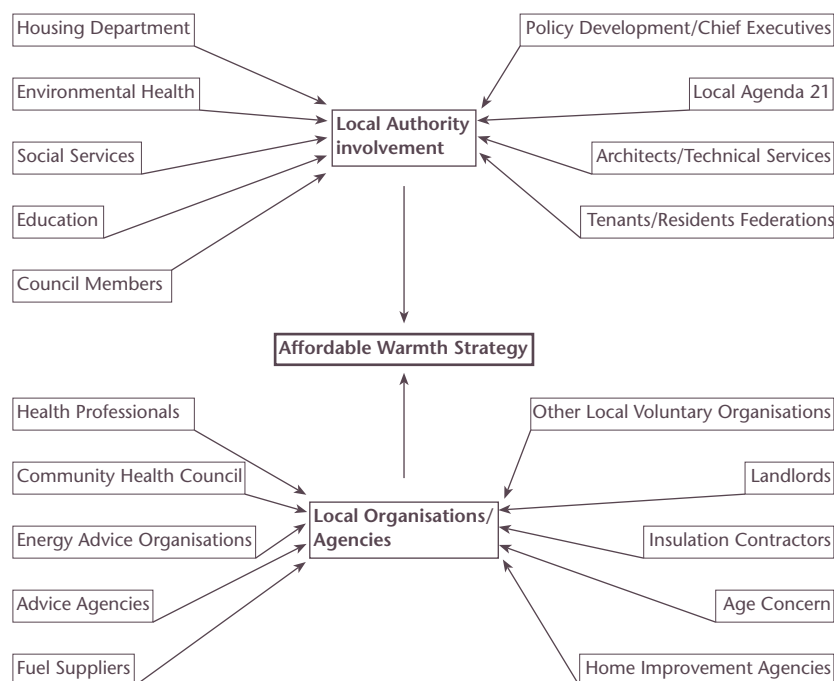
Participants from outside organisations found the workshops particularly useful, commenting that the process was stimulating, raised awareness and brought people from different organisations together in a spirit of cooperation.

Who should attend?

Consider inviting representatives from a wide range of departments and organisations to bring expertise to the strategy and give a sense of common ownership.

The involvement of different organisations in the strategy development process was considered a key to its success. The initial invitation list was prepared in partnership between NEA and lead officers. A range of agencies was invited to attend on the basis that they had significant contributions to make. Important groups to involve are listed in the chart in Fig.2. Not all workshops included all these participants, sometimes because it was difficult to engage the appropriate individuals or agencies or because it was only in retrospect that omissions were identified. One area in particular where it became apparent that representation was valuable was from the health service. The links between cold homes

Fig. 2 Organisations providing input to Affordable Warmth Strategy



and ill health are now well recognised, and useful two-way referral structures can be established between health professionals and other agencies who can help to alleviate fuel poverty.

In some instances differences of opinion arose about the most appropriate point to involve Councillors. Some authorities chose to include them from the outset and they sat on the steering group, but others briefed them about the process to gain official support whilst not including them in the detailed development.

There were suggestions that a more detailed briefing on the issues of fuel poverty and affordable warmth would have been useful prior to the first workshop because some participants were not as knowledgeable as others, and in some cases workshops on these issues were a new experience for them.

There was a general consensus that the strategy developed benefited from the involvement of NEA. It was commonly felt that better planning in establishing the steering group (with wider representation) would have been helpful.

Timetables, briefing and workload

When planning the strategy development make sure that those most closely involved are clear about the demands that will be made on their time, and the support they will need. More time to develop the strategy and more than two workshops were other suggestions.

When asked about negative aspects of the strategy development process, the near unanimous response from lead officers concerned increased workload. In addition there was a general feeling that more time would have been beneficial, particularly in setting up the steering groups and having the process

clearly explained at the outset, along with the requirements and commitments expected from the authority. It might have been helpful if lead officers had been encouraged to contact other authorities with experience or involvement in a similar strategy so that a better understanding of the process could be obtained at the outset. The deadlines had sometimes been tight, leading to pressure on the lead officer.

The lead officers in some cases contributed a great deal of time to development of the strategy document between the workshops, and in some cases would have appreciated more support during this period. The writing of the final strategy document, although prepared to a certain extent by the facilitators, essentially had to be produced by the authority's lead officer, adding to their normal workload. The deadlines were sometimes tight especially if the strategy was submitted to a Council Committee or was being prepared for a launch. There were suggestions that an extra workshop might have helped relieve the pressure on the lead officer.

Many of the other participants commented on timescales and the amount of time allocated to the workshops. Most would have preferred more time for the workshops, with perhaps an additional workshop, as they felt that more could have been achieved by further discussion of certain issues. A shorter gap between the two workshops and a brief evaluation session after the second workshop were also suggested improvements.

Steering groups

During the period of NEA's involvement in the strategy development, the steering group meetings tended to keep the process on track. Again, it was felt

that additional steering group meetings would have been useful. However, it was difficult for the lead officers and other group members to find any more time for separate meetings, due to tight timescales and competing priorities.

The participants who had been involved in the steering groups found the meetings useful and there was initial goodwill and enthusiasm. However, there was a perception that the process began to slow down, and that this might have been remedied through more attention to adequate dissemination of information as the strategy progressed.

Launching the strategy

A formal strategy launch can provide benefits in terms of increased awareness of the issues, and political support. It also establishes the strategy as a valuable and recognised document.

Careful thought should be given to how best to encourage the invited audience to attend a launch. It is always necessary to invite more people than are expected to attend and, if possible, time the launch to coincide with another event to maximise attendance, and attempt to gain local press coverage. One authority for example, timed its launch so that it followed a Housing Committee meeting. Most members of the committee attended and so valuable political support was gained.

Implementation of the Affordable Warmth Strategy

Using the strategy document

Produce a strategy document as a 'glossy' local document which is short, easy to follow and in the public domain. The document can be very useful in a number of ways. It can be used as a reference tool to deliver the strategy, and it can be used to demonstrate the strategic importance of fuel poverty issues, and also to assist fund raising activities.

The following are some of the comments from lead officers who have published strategy documents:

"The Affordable Warmth Strategy keeps work on track and gives a sense of direction to work already being undertaken. We've formed many links as a result of it - we are not treating it as just another glossy document (we are proud of it). We are using it as a resource and we hope everyone else can understand it - so it has provided a direction, a structured means to achieve what we want to do within our authority."

"The Affordable Warmth Strategy document is very useful as members of the energy team are targeted to specific points on the strategy - the document acts as a trigger."

"Having a tangible clear strategy document has helped the authority with funding applications - It's easier to approach potential funding partners now that the strategy as a document is there to galvanise their interest and crystallise the authority's intentions."

Contacts and partnership initiatives

As the strategy moves from planning to implementation there is a need to keep outside agencies involved and informed about its progress.

The evaluation showed that although all lead officers were still very much involved despite time constraints, together with some participants, others have not always been kept up to date.

In most cases meetings of steering groups have continued, but feedback suggests that those people not directly involved in the meetings are not always kept informed of the progress of the strategies. Some of the participants are unsure of their involvement, and progress on the strategies appears to have slowed down since the earlier workshops. Most would appreciate more feedback and would like to become more involved.

The lead officer from one authority admits that it can be more difficult to sustain contact with external agencies than those within the authority. In his advice to authorities who may be planning to develop an Affordable Warmth Strategy, he says "Don't underestimate the importance of other parties. View the initiative as a partnership, allow for their input, recognise their strengths and fields of expertise."

Some participants had however made new contacts and had reinforced existing relationships as a result of the Affordable Warmth workshops. This has led to closer working relationships amongst those groups. One participant felt that if their strategy were to progress then this type of network needed to be strengthened.

Some authorities are formalising the network of organisations who worked together on the Affordable Warmth Strategy. The following are examples of the different ways this has happened.

- **Luton has distributed copies of the strategy, including contact details of all involved, to all workshop participants, all council members and all who undertook special half day**

training sessions (approximately 250 people in total).

- **Luton has also launched a referral network to provide appropriate services to vulnerable members of the community.**
- **In Barking and Dagenham the contact group is expanding as more people wish to be involved in the process. The Steering Group has become oversubscribed.**
- **Derbyshire Dales plans to produce a 'Signpost pack' to assist front line staff from a range of organisations to refer vulnerable groups to specialist services.**
- **Ashfield DC has established the Ashfield Energy Advice Group which is a consortium of organisations. Their work includes a promotional strategy.**

New links are also occurring as a result of the strategy. For example Wolverhampton Borough Council has carried out more work with ethnic minority groups as a result of contacts made during the strategy development process, and has also been contacted by other authorities who are interested in replicating the process.

Participants from other organisations have also listed some of the contacts and benefits from their involvement with the Affordable Warmth Strategy. Examples include :

- **improved links with HEES installers and staff training through an initiative involving the local authority and HEES Installers**
- **stronger links with Care & Repair**
- **links with Social Services and Help the Aged**
- **possible future links with Transco via the Affordable Warmth (heat leasing) scheme**

- **a joint training initiative with the Housing Department and funding for staff training in energy awareness.**

When asked about any areas left out of the strategies the most frequently quoted areas were the lack of collaboration with health services and to a lesser degree Social Services. Private landlords have also been identified as a future group to be invited to participate in strategy development, especially as the New HEES programme of energy efficiency improvements for low-income households will be targeted towards their tenants.

Two of the authorities would recommend that others considering embarking on an Affordable Warmth Strategy should first contact an authority with experience of setting up and progressing such a strategy. They should also consider the resources and commitment needed and not underestimate the importance of other parties and the expertise they can bring to the process. It is also important to realise that the benefits can only materialise if the effort is put in from the start, and sustained in the long term.

Funding opportunities and costs

Finance can be accessed more readily if a strategy is in place. This is the experience of those authorities whose strategies have been in operation for the longest period. Manchester City Council and Luton Borough Council have attracted funding for energy and affordable warmth initiatives.

Having a strategy in place, particularly a formal document, demonstrates to potential funding bodies that a serious programme of work is being undertaken by the authority in partnership with other agencies.

One lead officer pointed out that there may be a time delay between beginning to achieve progress on the strategy, accessing funding and having more resources to progress the work, unless there are adequate staff resources from the start. For example if funding opportunities arise and the authority is not geared up to respond, then the opportunities are lost. In Manchester the authority now has an energy 'team' so progress on the Affordable Warmth Strategy has accelerated considerably in the last 12 - 18 months.

Another authority has successfully obtained sponsorship from the Public Electricity Supplier to provide Affordable Warmth packs. They have also made bids to fund training, with Age Concern as partners, and for additional staff.

In those authorities where strategies are in their infancy it is too early to say whether new funding will be secured. However the strategies have provided opportunities to access a greater range of funding than before, and have given officers confidence when approaching new contacts for funding. The existence of the strategy also provides a focus to progress and build up partnerships made during the strategy development process.

All the authorities have committed considerable staff time to their own Affordable Warmth strategies and have provided some degree of funding. One lead officer pointed out that the staff time to prepare the published document, its production costs and the launch of the strategy should be examined by any authority planning to do this in the future. While the benefits can be manifold, the costs can be considerable. For example the costs for those items outlined amounted to over £8000 for one local authority.

Affordable Warmth Strategy and other policy areas

All the authorities have incorporated their Affordable Warmth Strategy into other contingent policy areas; for example Housing, HECA, LA21, and the Health Action Zone (HAZ). It is also expected to influence, and impact on, many areas of corporate policy.

One lead officer stated "The strategy is listed as an integrated policy now within the authority, and figures strongly in external policy initiatives".

The Affordable Warmth Strategy has had an impact on the policy and strategy work of other organisations. Some examples include:

- **setting up a pilot stage of a new 'Home Maintenance Scheme' aimed at elderly people who are experiencing difficulty looking after their own properties.**
- **advising clients of the availability of grants such as HEES.**
- **providing information to staff who can advise the public on available benefits and grant assistance.**
- **linking a HAZ initiative in partnership with Housing.**
- **incorporating the Affordable Warmth policy into Local Agenda 21 sustainability and quality of life developments. It will also be incorporated in the Authority's HECA commitments and is expected to influence overall housing policy and the role of Environmental Health in future.**
- **Following relevant training, Affordable Warmth will be incorporated throughout the services offered including advice, leafleting, signposting.**

Monitoring and evaluation of the strategy

Do not hesitate to review and modify the content of strategies as new opportunities and areas of work arise, but do not remove areas of work from the strategy simply because there does not appear to be any immediate funding. These were some of the messages from authorities who had had strategies in place for some time.

There were also comments about timescales. One lead officer said 'It was bold of us to include timescales. If there weren't any it would not have been so worthwhile.' As a word of warning though, he added that if timescales were allowed to slip, there was a danger of losing the initiative, confirming that careful setting of realistic targets is important.

The authorities were asked to assess progress with their published strategies and also asked how they plan to assess progress. Because most of the strategies have only recently been launched it is too early to report much progress in terms of targets and timescales in the published documents, and too early for clear and accurate assessments to be drawn.

Three of the authorities who had had their strategies in place for the longest periods were, however, able to analyse their progress in each area. It was seen as a valuable exercise to indicate where progress had been made and to highlight areas where there were difficulties. In one authority the strategy is about to be fully reviewed as it has been in operation for three years.

There are two different aspects of monitoring. The first is to look at the performance in relation to the targets and the timescales set. The second is a holistic approach to review or overhaul of the strategy. Most authorities intended to do this on an annual basis.

For authorities using the strategy as a working document there is an integrated procedure for checking on progress and adding new initiatives as they develop. Aims and objectives, targets and timescales will be achieved or redetermined over time. Many areas of work may be dependent on available funding and, despite initial slow progress, may 'take off' as soon as funding for that element becomes available.

Discrete areas of work within strategies are often monitored individually. For example, Luton Borough Council evaluates the Referral Scheme (targeted to vulnerable members of the community) both quantitatively and qualitatively. All the authorities believe that some areas of work will be easy to monitor, whilst others will require careful evaluation.

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