

Subject: Fuel Poverty in London

Report to: Health and Public Services Committee

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

Date: 6 April 2011

This report will be considered in public

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report proposes that the Committee undertakes scoping work for a potential investigation into fuel poverty in London.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree the scope and terms of reference for an investigation into fuel poverty.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Committee agreed to include scrutiny of fuel poverty in London at its meeting on 17 March 2011 in its 2011/12 work programme.¹
- 3.2 Fuel poverty is defined as a situation where the cost of fuel for heating and domestic needs accounts for over 10 per cent of household income. The Department for Energy and Climate Change defines household fuel use as that needed to 'maintain an adequate level of warmth (usually defined as 21 degrees for the main living area, and 18 degrees for other occupied rooms)'.² As well as fuel for space heating, this definition includes 'spending on water heating, lights and appliance usage and cooking costs.'
- 3.3 Fuel poverty both reduces quality of life and causes premature deaths; in 2006/7, fuel poverty is thought to have been responsible for 2,100 excess deaths in London.³ Furthermore, research on the health effects of fuel poverty show that lack of adequate heating can increase the risk of pneumonia, asthma, arthritis, and accidents at home.⁴
- 3.4 There is a lack of consensus about how many households experience fuel poverty in London, due to different ways of defining household income. Using the government's measure of household income, 10.8% of households in London were judged to be 'fuel poor' in 2008. However, an independent report commissioned by the GLA in the same year – which takes account of London's

¹ Minutes of the Health and Public Services Committee, 17 March 2011. Minutes can be accessed on the London Assembly website here: <http://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=148&MId=4217&Ver=4>

² Annual report on fuel poverty statistics 2010, DECC and National Statistics

³ The London Health Inequalities Strategy, 2010

⁴ WHO (2007) in Fuel poverty and human health: A review of recent evidence, Liddell & Morris, 2010

relatively higher housing costs compared to the rest of England – estimated that the number of households affected was more than double, at approximately 24%.⁵

4. Issues for Consideration

- 4.1 Following this meeting, the Committee would conduct further background research into fuel poverty in London and meet informally with key stakeholders, in order to inform the scope and timetable of a possible review.
- 4.2 The Chair of the Committee, in consultation with party group lead members, would agree the terms of reference for the investigation before the next formal meeting of the Committee.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report:

None

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
List of Background Papers: As listed in the footnotes
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⁵ GLA (2008) Fuel Poverty in London