

# Tackling Fuel Poverty

The Government definition of a fuel poor household is one which needs to spend more than 10% of household income to achieve a satisfactory heating regime (21°C in the living room and 18°C in the other occupied rooms), with those needing to spend in excess of 20% regarded as being in the worst degree of difficulty.



It is important to distinguish between the amount of income actually spent on heating and that needed to be spent. Given the competing pressures on low-income households, many do not spend the amount needed to stay warm.

Fuel poverty is different to simple poverty in that it is caused primarily by a

combination of low income and poor energy efficiency in the home. Low income has an obvious effect on the ability of households to spend enough on keeping warm. However, it is the combination of this with poor energy efficiency that results in fuel poverty.

## Fuel Poverty in England

The Government estimates that 4,372,000 (22.2%) of households in England alone were in fuel poverty in 1996. 69% of total fuel poor households in England are in the owner-occupied sector but as a proportion of housing in a sector, the incidence of fuel poverty is greatest in the private rented sector at 39%. The Government estimates that 30,000 more people die in winter in the UK than would be expected given the average death rate for the year. The over-60s form the vast majority of the excess winter deaths. Excess winter deaths are much higher in the UK than in other countries, such as Scandinavia.

### Tackling Fuel Poverty - Public Sector

Woking Borough Council has the most energy efficient public sector stock in the UK with an average energy efficiency rating of NHER 8. The average annual running cost for all of the authority's housing stock at its current energy efficiency rating is £461, well below the Government's suggested Best Value Performance Indicator for the percentage of authority properties that can be heated to a normal, standard temperature for £10 a week or less. The Council's target is to reduce the average annual running cost still further to £415 a year, which will be achieved when the Council's NHER 9 (SAP 74) target is achieved.



Fuel Poverty is one of the policies covered by the Council's Climate Change Strategy. The Council wants to make heating an affordable commodity for more council tenants and to provide warmer, more comfortable homes with associated benefits for people's health. The Council are endeavouring to limit heating costs to a small percentage of the state pension by 2010/11, broadly as follows:

- 1 bed house/flat** > 10% of the single person state pension;
- 2 bed house/flat** > 10% of the married couple state pension;
- 3 bed house/flat** > 15% of the married couple state pension.

### Tackling Fuel Poverty - Private Sector

A £256,000 grant aided energy conservation scheme financed from the Single Regeneration Budget for Sheerwater and Maybury area of Woking and from the Capital Receipts Initiative for the rest of the Borough was implemented by the Council to top up the Government's Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) to provide full insulation measures. Energy conservation grants were provided to 3,026 households in Woking living in fuel poverty between 1996/97 and 2001/2002. The Council has earmarked £325,000 from the Housing Investment Programme for 2000/01 to 2004/05 to implement a similar scheme in conjunction with the new HEES relaunched as the 'Warm Front Team'.

As part of Woking Borough Council's Climate Change Strategy, consideration will also be given to addressing fuel poverty in private homes by 2010/11.

*The Council acknowledge the valuable contribution of Eaga Partnership Ltd., who manage the Government's HEES.*