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**THE NORTH EAST FUEL POVERTY DECLARATION**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Nick Wallis,  
Sustainable Environment and Climate Change Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Richard Alty, Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration)**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To advise Members of the North East Fuel Poverty Declaration and agree to the Declaration being signed on behalf of the Council.

**Summary**

2. The North East Fuel Poverty Declaration was first published in 2005, by the North East Domestic Energy Forum. It has recently been re-launched by the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) in an attempt to get all of the North East Local Authorities signed up to tackling fuel poverty.
3. Existing strategies and actions in Darlington already meet the commitments being asked in the Fuel Poverty Declaration.

**Recommendation**

4. It is recommended that the Cabinet agree to the North East Fuel Poverty Declaration being signed on behalf of the Council.

**Reasons**

5. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons :-
  - (a) Supports Sustainable Community Strategy
  - (b) Delivery of Climate Change Action Plan, identified as a priority area for action.

**Richard Alty,  
Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration)**

**Background Papers**

North East Fuel Poverty Declaration

Paula Jamieson: Extension 2920

S17 Crime and Disorder	Not applicable
Health and Well Being	Tackling fuel poverty can make a significant positive contribution to the health and wellbeing of vulnerable members of the community.
Sustainability	Tackling fuel poverty will contribute to sustainability agenda through carbon emission reductions.
Diversity	The outcome of this report will not result in discrimination against any particular members of the community
Wards Affected	Tackling fuel poverty may affect all wards.
Groups Affected	Tackling fuel poverty will affect households/groups struggling to meet fuel costs.
Budget and Policy Framework	Tackling fuel poverty accords with the Councils Housing and climate change strategies and the SCS. Budgets exist to tackle fuel poverty and external funding will be sort to supplement this.
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Tackling fuel poverty will contribute to OD:PP objectives of narrowing the gaps in well-being and contributing to a sustainable community.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

#### Fuel Poverty

6. Fuel poverty is defined as a household that cannot afford to keep adequately warm at reasonable cost, more accurately defined as a household that needs to spend more than ten percent of its income on all fuels, in order to heat the home adequately.
7. Cold homes, cold-related illnesses, increased winter deaths, housing in poor repair and high healthcare costs are all visible signs of fuel poverty – a problem that affects more than six million people in the UK.
8. Fuel poverty is a phenomenon that affects all social classes. It is a silent killer, resulting in thousands of extra winter deaths each year. Recent research indicates that for every degree Celsius below the winter average in the UK there are 8,000 extra deaths.
9. The recent rise in fuel prices will exacerbate this already huge problem. Those who are unable to heat their homes adequately will find themselves less and less able to keep warm and therefore stay healthy. An increase in gas and electricity prices of only 1% will result in an additional 40,000 households in fuel poverty.
10. There is a clear commitment by the Government to eradicate fuel poverty in vulnerable households by 2010 and National Energy Action (NEA), the national fuel poverty charity, was established to develop and promote energy efficient strategies and services to tackle the heating and insulation problems of low-income households.

#### North East Fuel Poverty Declaration

11. The North East has the highest level of fuel poverty in England with 29% of the population, or almost one in three, suffering. These households have to choose between the misery of living in a cold, damp home, the anxiety of getting into debt or economising on other essentials such as food and clothing.
12. The North East Fuel Poverty Declaration was first published in 2005, by the North East Domestic Energy Forum. It has recently been re-launched by the Association of North East Councils (ANEC) in an attempt to get all of the North East Local Authorities signed up to tackling fuel poverty. A copy of the declaration is attached as **Appendix 1**.
13. The wording of the NE Fuel Poverty Declaration is similar to the Darlington Declaration on Climate Change, in that it encourages commitment of the highest level from the Local Authorities and other regional organisations involved in the fight against fuel poverty.

#### Fuel Poverty Action in Darlington

14. Fuel Poverty has been identified as a key priority for action in the Darlington Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, both of which have been endorsed by the Council and the Darlington Partnership.

15. Fuel Poverty is closely related to the climate change agenda as making homes more energy efficient will result in long term reductions in CO2 emissions. However, tackling fuel poverty also contributes to achieving wider sustainability goals by improving the quality of life of the most vulnerable members of the community.
16. Darlington Borough Council has actively worked in partnership with the Warm Front Team to promote the uptake of Warm Front Grants within the Borough for several years. The regional Warm Front Team provide data to the Council on the number of referrals to the Warm Front Grant on a monthly basis. The Energy Savings Trust works closely with the Council to promote insulation and boiler/heating replacement schemes to residents.
17. The Council, as part of its annual housing investment programme, has incorporated loft insulation works as part of its internal planned maintenance programme to “top up” existing loft insulation and to provide virgin lofts with appropriate levels of insulation. Officers are also investigating other means of leveraging in additional grant funding to support other energy efficiency measures within council and private housing stock.
18. Darlington has been represented on the regional Fuel Poverty Forums for several years and has been an active member of the Tees Valley Energy Savings group, the remit of which is to promote Energy Efficiency within the Tees Valley.
19. The Darlington Fuel Poverty Action Group was set up in August 2008 and has now met on 3 occasions. Members of the group include the Citizens Advice Bureau, Darlington Association on Disability, Age Concern, PCT and the Council’s Housing Renewal Manager and Sustainable Development Officer. The main objective of the group is to consider how to work in partnership to tackle fuel poverty in Darlington. The group is hoping to fund a new post to help raise awareness among the key vulnerable groups and investigate opportunities for grants to help with tackling fuel poverty.
20. Existing strategies and actions in Darlington therefore already meet the commitments being asked in the Fuel Poverty Declaration.