

Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy

2022 to 2025

***Helping to combat fuel poverty
in Swindon***

Contents	Page
1. Introduction	3
2. Affordable warmth and fuel poverty	4
2.1 Definitions	
2.2 Who does it affect?	
2.3 What are the causes?	
2.4 Effects of cold temperature on health	
3. Where are we now?	12
3.1 Nationally	
3.2 The Local Picture	
3.3 Affordable warmth schemes in Swindon	
4. Where do we want to be?	20
4.1 Vision, aims and objectives	
5. How are we going to get there?	21
Annex: NICE Guidance	23

1. Introduction

Swindon Borough Council and its partners have for a number of years been delivering initiatives to reduce the incidence of fuel poverty in the Swindon area. The first Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy was written in 2007, building on the work of the Wiltshire & Swindon Affordable Warmth Strategy 2002. The strategy and activity has been updated and refreshed over the subsequent years, and this version will run until 2025. It will provide a snapshot of the current levels and distribution of fuel poverty and describing the planned focus to help those affected over the next three years.

High energy prices are a significant contributor to fuel poverty nationally, with poorer households having to spend a larger proportion of their income on heating than more affluent households. Poor energy efficiency standards in existing housing mean that money is spent on heating that leaks out of the home too easily. These factors can lead to homes not being heated adequately and poor health resulting from the cold damp conditions.

There are strong links between the prevalence of fuel poverty and cold related illnesses and excess winter deaths. The desire to reduce pressure on health services during the winter months is a key factor in the engagement of the health sector in affordable warmth issues. Action on fuel poverty is likely to lead to reductions in local health spend, GP referrals and hospital admissions due to improved health. It will also contribute to increasing the wellbeing and happiness of the population.

Swindon Borough Council and its partners continue to develop co-operative approaches to tackling fuel poverty. Activity will be focussed on the three key aims of this strategy:

- To raise awareness of fuel poverty and affordable warmth among all stakeholders.
- To encourage and support households to achieve affordable warmth.
- To improve access to schemes, financial support and advice related to affordable warmth through improved networks and referral systems.

Coordinated activity to meet these aims will help ensure that all householders in the Swindon area live in warm dry homes, free from the fear of fuel debt and poor health.

2. Affordable Warmth and Fuel Poverty

2.1 Definitions

Affordable warmth in very simple terms is about being able to keep your home adequately warm without incurring excessive cost. A household is in fuel poverty if they are on a lower income and are unable to heat their home for a reasonable cost.

The measurement of fuel poverty has changed several times since the first UK fuel poverty strategy in 2001, with the most recent measurement being the Low Income High Costs indicator.

The Low Income High Costs indicator allowed Government to measure not only the extent of the problem (how many fuel poor households there are) but also the depth of the problem (how badly affected each fuel poor household is). It achieved this by taking account of the fuel poverty gap, a measure of how much more fuel poor households need to spend to keep warm compared to typical households.

However, using this relative indicator the total proportion of fuel poor households remained relatively static at 10-12%, or around 2.5 million homes. Following analysis it was found that fluctuations in the average income and average energy bill can change who is considered to be fuel poor, with hundreds of thousands of households being measured as fuel poor or stopping being fuel poor even if their circumstance haven't changed.

Following consultation in 2019 Government updated the measurement of fuel poverty. The updated measure, Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE), finds a household to be in fuel poverty if it:

- Lives in a home that has a fuel poverty 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 (defined as an equivalised disposable income of less than 60% of the national median).

This new measure will continue to show both the extent and severity of fuel poverty through the fuel poverty gap. There is a clear focus on improving the energy efficiency of properties up to Band C, as above this if households are struggling with their energy bills it is unlikely to be because their home needs more insulation.

There is more detail on the measurement of fuel poverty in the new Fuel Poverty strategy for England entitled "Sustainable Warmth – Protecting Vulnerable Households in England" published in February 2021.

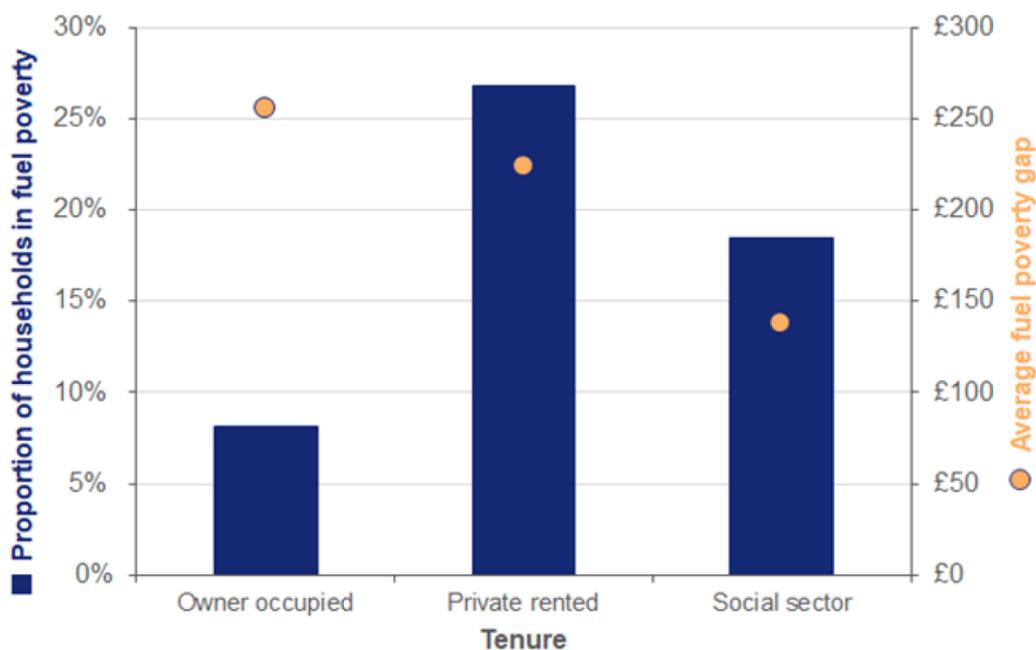
2.2 Who does it affect?

The following figures are taken from the Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics in England 2021 report from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (using data from 2019).

Tenure

Households who live in a property they own have the least likelihood of being fuel poor (8.2%), however they have the largest average fuel poverty gap (£255). Households living in privately rented accommodation are most likely to be fuel poor (26.8%). Despite only 18.8% of all households privately renting their homes, 37.6% of all fuel poor households live in this type of accommodation. Those living in social housing have the lowest average fuel poverty gap (£138).

Figure 1: Tenure and the proportion of households in fuel poverty and the average fuel poverty gap.



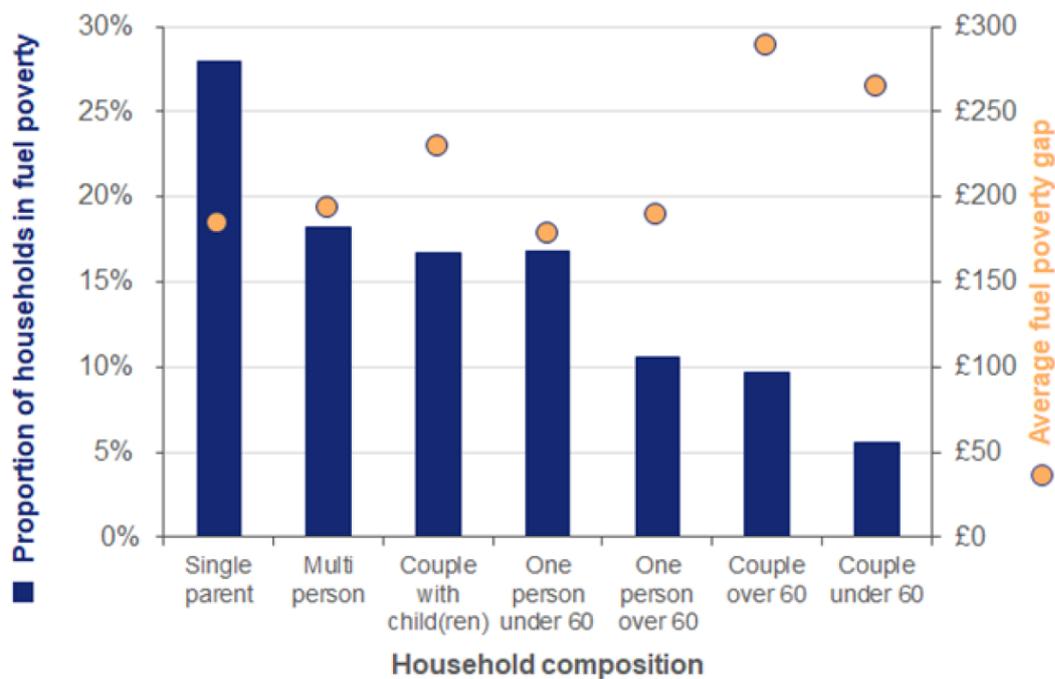
Social housing properties tend to be more energy efficient with two thirds of social rented homes now rated Band C or above and as such are not fuel poor. Of those social housing homes below Band C, more than half were fuel poor due to lower incomes.

Owner occupied and privately rented properties have lower average energy efficiency ratings resulting in higher energy costs and a higher average gap. The average income of owner occupiers is significantly larger than that of private renters and social renters, leading to a lower rate of fuel poverty within this tenure.

Household composition

Single parent households are most likely to be fuel poor (28%), while couples over 60 have the largest average fuel poverty gap (£289). 30.2% of all single parent households in fuel poverty lived in social housing, where the higher energy efficiency of the properties partly explains why the average fuel poverty gap is lower than the national average. 40.3% of all fuel poor households had one or more dependent children.

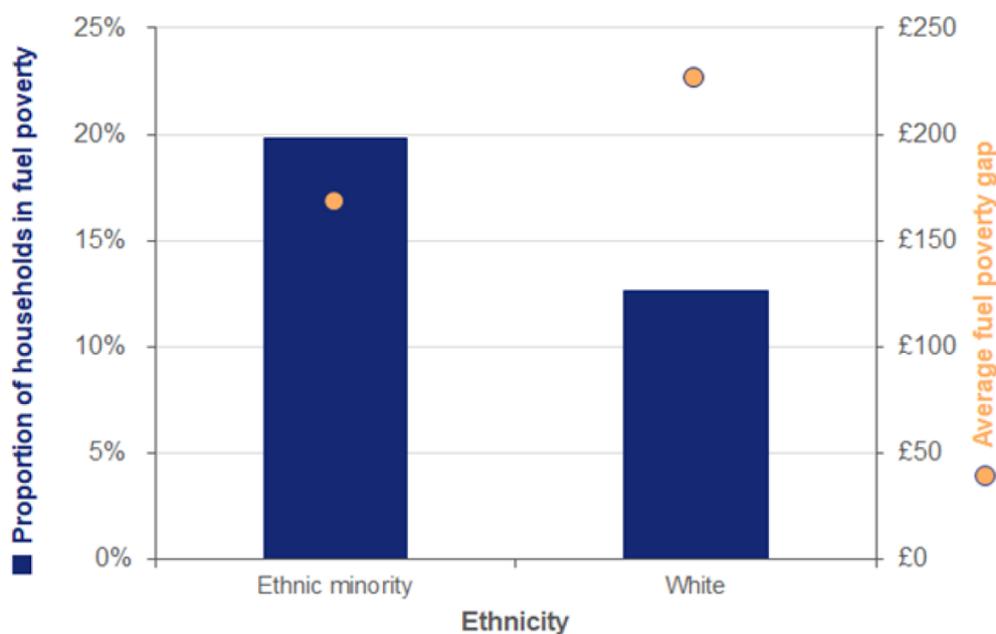
Figure 2: Household composition and the proportion of households in fuel poverty and average fuel poverty gap.



Ethnicity

Ethnic minority households have a higher likelihood of being in fuel poverty, but have a lower average fuel poverty gap than white households. In 2019, the average income for ethnic minority households was generally lower than the income for white households, which partly explains their higher likelihood of fuel poverty. However, ethnic minority households tend to have a higher proportion living in social housing (27% compared to 16% for white households) and tend to live in more energy efficient properties, which may explain their lower average fuel poverty gap.

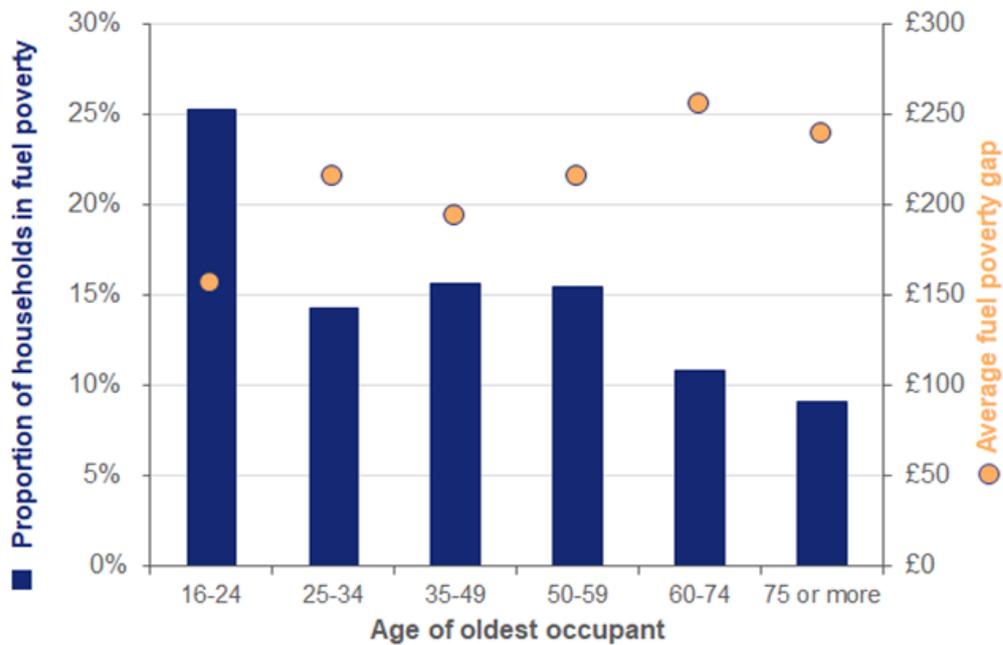
Figure 3: Ethnicity and the proportion of households in fuel poverty and average fuel poverty gap.



Age

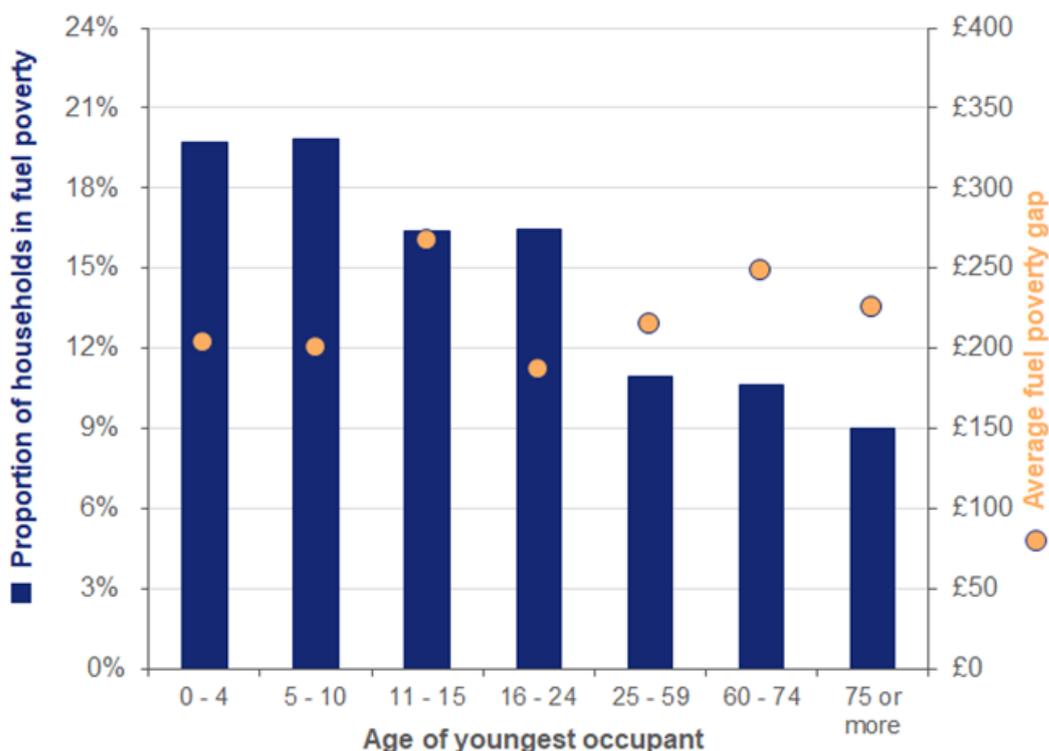
The age of certain members of a household can have an impact on the likelihood of being in fuel poverty. In 2019, 25% of households where the oldest member is aged 16 to 24 years were fuel poor, which is likely to be a result of lower incomes for younger households. Younger households have lower fuel poverty gaps, reflecting lower fuel costs due to smaller homes and the households being less likely to be at home during the day.

Figure 4: Age of oldest occupant and the proportion of households in fuel poverty and average fuel poverty gap.



Households with children aged 10 years or under had the highest prevalence of fuel poverty. This is due to these households having to spread their income across more family members. Households where the youngest occupants were 60 or over have seen a decrease in their likelihood of fuel poverty between 2010 and 2019. The Warm Home Discount (introduced in 2011) and the Winter Fuel Payment (which was introduced in 1997) are likely to have had an effect.

Figure 5: Age of youngest occupant and proportion of households in fuel poverty and average fuel poverty gap.



2.3 What are the causes?

Section 2.1 explained how the Low Income Low Energy Efficiency indicator is now used to measure the extent and the depth of fuel poverty. A household’s fuel poverty status depends on the interaction of three key drivers: the energy efficiency of housing, household income, and energy prices.

Any of these three factors (energy efficiency, household income and energy costs) can result in people being unable to afford to heat their homes adequately, leading to cold, damp conditions. Combining them will make the situation even worse. Living in a cold home is not just unpleasant and uncomfortable; it can have a significant impact on health and wellbeing. It can be a particular problem for the old and very young and for people with a disability.

Energy Efficiency

A house with poor energy efficiency standards will lose heat more easily and therefore will cost more to keep warm. Some houses are easier to improve the energy efficiency of than others, for example houses built after the 1930’s can often be improved through the installation of cavity wall and loft insulation which are relatively cheap and easy to install. Houses built before this time may have solid walls which are much more expensive to insulate and the works can be considerably more disruptive. Homes with a non-traditional construction can also be difficult to insulate. The age and type of heating in a property can

also affect how energy efficient the home is, with older heating systems costing more to provide the same amount of heat as a new more efficient system.

Required fuel costs for the least efficient homes are three times higher than costs for the most efficient homes. The improvement of the energy efficiency of a property can help to remove the household from fuel poverty.

Household Income

Households with a low income are immediately disadvantaged when it comes to paying energy bills, as they have to allocate more of their total income to cover these costs than a household with a higher income. Difficult choices may have to be made about what to prioritise, for example whether the household should 'heat' or 'eat'?

Energy Costs

A default tariff price cap was introduced by Ofgem in 2019, to ensure gas and electricity customers pay a fairer price for their energy and to protect customers against being overcharged. The aim was to help those consumers stuck on default tariffs, who were missing out on bigger savings that could be made by switching to a suppliers best tariff.

Paying monthly by direct debit attracts discounts that are not available for paying quarterly or by using a pre-payment meter. Most households now pay by direct debit (70% gas and 69% electricity) with credit next (16% gas and 17% electricity) and then prepayment (14% gas and 14% electricity). In 2020, credit was the most expensive method of payment at £1,367 (BEIS standard energy consumption), with direct debit the cheapest at £1,229 and prepayment at £1,309.

Energy Bill Crisis (2021 onwards)

Gas market prices passed record highs in October 2021 due to concerns around energy security. As a result household energy bills have risen rapidly and are expected to continue to rise until at least 2023. They reached a record high in October 2021 after the price cap reached an average of £1,277 a year for a dual fuel bill, and the price cap will rise by a further 54% on 1st April 2022. This would be an average dual fuel bill of £1,971 a year. The price cap could rise by a similar percentage again in October 2022 due to ongoing global energy security issues. This has resulted in households having no opportunity to switch tariffs to get a better deal, as the price cap rate is now the cheapest rate for suppliers. Fixed rate tariffs are now more expensive than the price cap rate.

In the report "Crunch Point – Protecting households from record energy bills in the coming months" Citizen's Advice predict annual energy bills could hit £3,000 by October 2022, and despite the government's current support measures, 5 million people will be unable to afford their energy bills when prices rise in April 2022, increasing to 14.5 million people from October 2022.

2.4 Effect of cold temperature on health

Under-heating a property can contribute to poor health outcomes, both in terms of mortality (including Excess Winter Deaths) and morbidity (including respiratory and cardiovascular conditions).

Mortality

During the winter of 2019/20 there were over 28,300 excess winter deaths (excluding Covid-19 related deaths) in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics 2020), equating to 16.8% more deaths occurred in winter months in England than in non-winter months. Excess winter deaths are deaths that occur from December to March, and are compared to the average number of deaths during the rest of the year. Very severe weather can substantially add to this death toll. In cold weather, many more people visit GPs and hospitals with a range of cold weather-related health problems. Help The Aged have previously estimated that there are around 8,000 extra deaths for every one degree drop in average temperature.

Although there has been some improvement in the past decades with improving living conditions, mortality in England still does not compare well with the rest of Europe. Other northern European countries perform better than England. For example, Finland – a much colder country – has around half the winter excess death rate of the UK. Likewise, those countries with the greatest excess mortality, such as Spain and Portugal, are also the ones with the mildest winters. This is largely because people in colder countries are better prepared for cold weather, with well-insulated, well-heated, energy-efficient homes and warm outdoor clothing. As the Marmot Review Team report *The Health Impacts of Cold Homes and Fuel Poverty* (2011) stated: ‘Countries which have more energy efficient housing have lower excess winter deaths.’

In 2019/20 just under 40% of excess winter deaths in England were the result of respiratory diseases, of which chronic lower respiratory diseases and pneumonia accounted for the largest proportions. Circulatory diseases accounted for a further 21%, and Dementia and Alzheimer’s disease just under 15%. Most excess winter deaths are in older people, many of whom will already have underlying health conditions making them vulnerable to the cold.

Whilst there are many factors that determine the excess winter death figures, fuel poverty measures that improve the energy efficiency of the house will reduce some of those factors.

Morbidity

Cold living conditions can cause considerable problems for people with:

- **Cardio-vascular disease.** The cold causes thickening of the blood, which increases blood pressure, which can lead to an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes.
- **Respiratory infections.** Cold homes can be damp, which increases mould growth, which can affect asthma and other respiratory infections. The cold can also lower resistance to respiratory infections, can impair lung function, and can trigger broncho-constriction in asthma and COPD.
- **Musculoskeletal diseases** including arthritis and damaged joints.

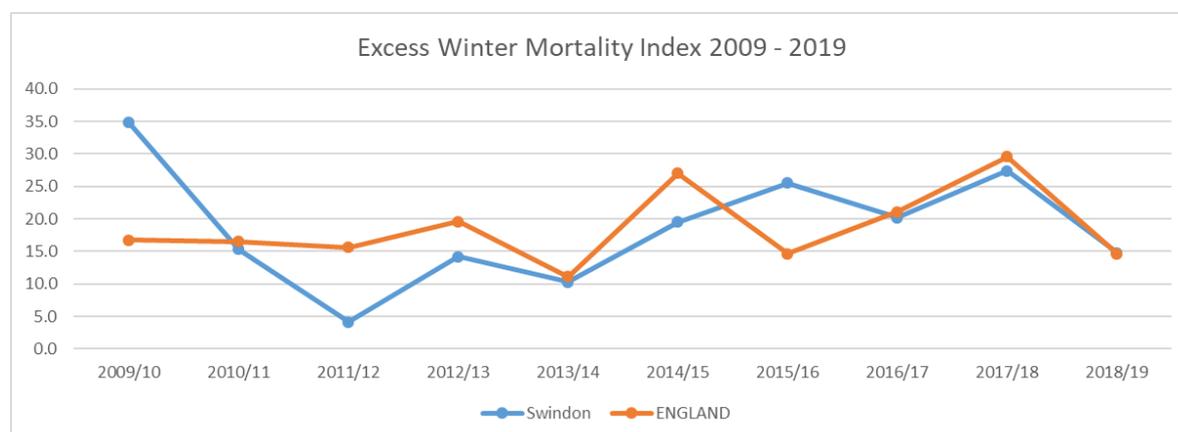
- **Mobility problems.** The cold can make arthritis worse and can reduce strength and dexterity, which can result in an increased risk of falls.
- **Mental health problems** including depression can be made worse by living in a cold damp home.

As well as the mortality and morbidity, households can experience other social issues due to cold homes. People can become isolated by not inviting people round to their cold homes, and children’s education can be affected by not being able to concentrate on homework if having to congregate in one heated room.

Excess winter deaths in Swindon

Figure 6 shows the Excess Winter Mortality Index for Swindon and England over the last 10 years, taken from the Office of National Statistics Excess Winter Deaths for local/unitary authorities in England and Wales. The Excess Winter Mortality Index shows the percentage of extra deaths that occur in the winter months compared to the non-winter months.

Figure 6: Excess Winter Mortality Index 2009-2019



These figures show that most years, the percentage of extra deaths occurring in the winter months in Swindon is lower than the percentage for England.

The Department of Health estimate that indoor cold may account for between 20% and 30% of Excess Winter Deaths. The Hill’s Review assumes about 10% of excess winter deaths are due to fuel poverty. The percentage rise in deaths in winter is greater in homes with low energy efficiency ratings.

3. Where are we now?

3.1 Nationally

Government produced a new fuel poverty strategy in 2021 entitled “Sustainable Warmth – Protecting Vulnerable Households in England”. The key target for fuel poverty is as follows:

The fuel poverty target is to ensure that as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable achieve a minimum energy efficiency rating of Band C, by 2030.

The target has a clear focus on improving the energy efficiency of fuel poor homes. Achieving this will require a range of actions, from wall and loft insulation to the installation or upgrade of central heating systems. This target also ensures fuel poor households won’t get left behind in the transition to higher energy efficiency standards to meet carbon reduction commitments.

Meeting the Band C target, based on the Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency Rating (FPEER) system, is not solely based on the energy efficiency of homes, but also takes into account the impact of schemes that directly affect the cost of energy, such as the Warm Home Discount. These schemes are also important in tackling fuel poverty.

Interim milestones to keep efforts on track:

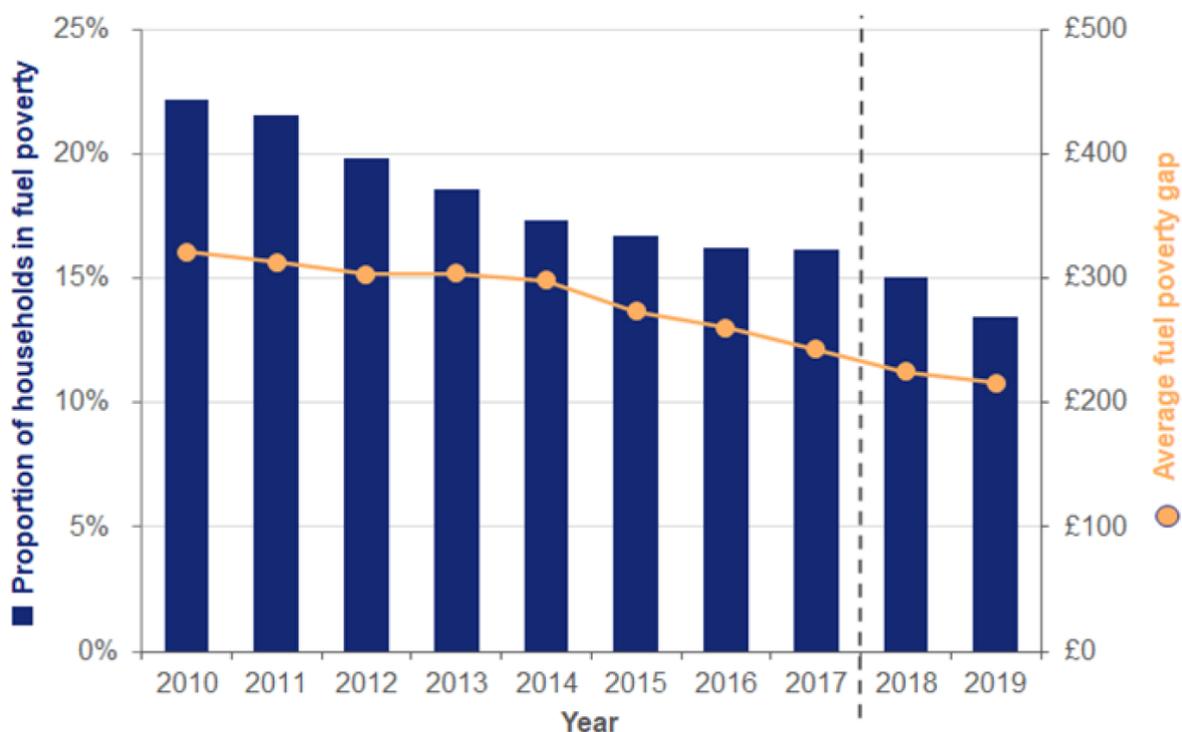
- (i) as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable to Band E by 2020 and**
- (ii) as many fuel poor homes as is reasonably practicable to Band D by 2025**

These interim milestones will ensure support is targeted at those facing the worst fuel poverty first.

Headline figures

In 2019, the number of households in fuel poverty in England was estimated at around 3.18 million, approximately 13.4% of all English households. This is down from 15.0% from 2018 (3.52 million). The average fuel poverty gap (the reduction in fuel costs needed for a household to not be in fuel poverty) was £216, down by 4.0% since 2018 (£225).

Figure 7: Fuel poor households and fuel poverty gap over time



In 2019, further progress was made towards the interim 2020 fuel poverty target, with 97.4% of all low income households living in a property with a fuel poverty energy efficiency rating of band E or better.

Figure 8: Progress against fuel poverty targets

Fuel poverty target	2010 progress (%)	2018 progress (%)	2019 progress
Band E or above by 2020	91.5	97.0	97.4
Band D or above by 2025	64.6	86.8	88.8
Band C or above by 2030	14.6	41.4	47.8

The figures for 2019 were released in 2021, so it is not possible to have data on the current level of fuel poverty due to the time taken to collate and analyse the data. Projections are

available for 2020 and 2021, which show a continued fall in the proportion of households in fuel poverty to 12.5% (3.00 million) and a reduction of the average fuel poverty gap to £200 by 2021. The projections also show 52.4% of all low income households in 2021 will be in a property of Band C or above.

3.2 The local picture

Sub-regional fuel poverty statistics are produced by Government to enable fuel poverty to be measured at a local level. Data is made available at local authority level and down to Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level. LSOAs contain relatively low levels of households (typically between 500 and 1,000).

Figures for 2019 (released in 2021) estimate there are 9,402 fuel poor households in Swindon, around 9.6% per cent of the households in the borough. This is the seventh lowest rate of fuel poverty for local authorities in the South West region, and compares to the national average of around 13.4% of households in fuel poverty in England, and the regional average of 10.6% of households in the South West. Swindon Borough Council has the third lowest level of fuel poverty when compared to its ten statistical neighbouring authorities.

Whilst the estimates of fuel poverty at local authority level are robust, they are not robust at lower levels. Therefore, although estimates of fuel poverty at LSOA level are provided they should be treated with caution and only used to look at general trends and identify areas of particularly high or low fuel poverty. They should not be used to identify trends over time within an LSOA, or to compare LSOA's with similar fuel poverty levels due to very small sample sizes and consequent instability in estimates at this level.

The level of fuel poverty across Swindon varies considerably with the lowest LSOA level recorded at 3.1% and the highest level recorded at 22.6% of households. Out of 132 LSOAs in Swindon, 83 had levels of fuel poverty below the national average for England (10.6% of households).

This is the most accurate measure of the level of fuel poverty at the moment, although the data does have its limitations as the figures provided are two years old by the time they are released (the 2019 figures were released in 2021).

The following two tables (Figures 9 and 10) are compiled to ward level from the LSOA data so the same caution should be exercised when using these tables.

Figure 9 shows the breakdown of fuel poor households in each ward as a percentage of the total fuel poor households in Swindon. Central ward has the highest number of fuel poor households in Swindon with Ridgeway ward the lowest.

Figure 9: Proportion of households in borough that are fuel poor, 2019

Row Labels	Number of households	Number of households in fuel poverty	Proportion of households in borough that are fuel poor
Central	5,840	962	10.2%
Walcot and Park North	6,802	910	9.7%
Gorsehill and Pinehurst	5,289	816	8.7%
Penhill and Upper Stratton	6,588	813	8.6%
Eastcott	4,790	683	7.3%
Mannington and Western	5,406	566	6.0%
Haydon Wick	7,681	520	5.5%
Covingham and Dorcan	6,353	486	5.2%
Blunsdon and Highworth	5,464	485	5.2%
Rodbourne Cheney	3,812	474	5.0%
Old Town	4,192	398	4.2%
Liden, Eldene and Park South	3,376	391	4.2%
St Margaret and South Marston	4,756	353	3.8%
Lawn and Chiseldon	3,571	325	3.5%
Lydiard and Freshbrook	5,203	291	3.1%
Wroughton and Wichelstowe	3,077	257	2.7%
Shaw	4,913	219	2.3%
St Andrews	5,210	201	2.1%
Priory Vale	4,006	160	1.7%
Ridgeway	1,344	92	1.0%
Grand Total	97,673	9,402	100.0%

Figure 10 displays the fuel poverty data in a slightly different way, showing fuel poor households as a percentage of the total households in a given ward. In this table Central ward has the highest proportion of fuel poor households per ward, with St Andrews ward having the lowest.

Figure 10: Proportion of households in ward that are fuel poor, 2019

Ward	Number of households	Number of households in fuel poverty	Proportion of households in ward that are fuel poor
Central	5,840	962	16.5%
Gorsehill and Pinehurst	5,289	816	15.4%
Eastcott	4,790	683	14.3%
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Shaw	4,913	219	4.5%
Priory Vale	4,006	160	4.0%
St Andrews	5,210	201	3.9%
Grand Total	97,673	9,402	

3.3 Affordable warmth schemes in Swindon

Schemes available to tackle fuel poverty may be national or local initiatives. The following is a summary of past and present activity to combat fuel poverty in the Swindon area.

Past Initiatives

Previous government schemes have included Warm Front, The Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT), various phases of the Energy Company Obligation, the Green Deal and the Landlords Energy Saving Allowance, all of which have now ended. The schemes had varying levels of success and uptake, and typically focussed on energy saving measures including home insulation and heating improvements.

Notable previous local initiatives include the Safe & Warm programme, a 5 year area-based fuel poverty programme to help residents access schemes for home insulation, heating and income maximisation support along with advice and support for people at risk of falls or fires in the home. Some 17,000 households in total engaged with this scheme generating some 37,000 areas of action. Over £678,000 of insulation measures were installed, over £2.7 million in unclaimed benefit entitlement was identified, and £30,000 in funding for small falls prevention measures and a further 3,500 fire safety measures were provided. Safe & Warm ended in 2014.

Current national schemes

National schemes that are currently available include the following:

Energy Company Obligation 4 (ECO4)

This scheme will run from April 2022 until March 2026, and provides support to low income, vulnerable and fuel poor households. Although the funding is now focussed on the fuel poor living in the least efficient properties, the level of funding is still well short of what is required to meet the targets set in the national fuel poverty strategy detailed in Section 3.

On a more positive note, there is scope for local authorities to use the flexible eligibility criteria to refer people with health issues or low incomes for possible assistance through the Energy Company Obligation without fulfilling the strict benefit requirement that currently exists. This “Flexible Eligibility” component offers considerable opportunity to deliver on some of the NICE Guidelines on “excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes”, and will be a focus for the affordable warmth work in Swindon over the next few years.

Green Homes Grant – Local Authority Delivery

There are several phases of this support for local authorities to deliver energy efficiency measures and low carbon heating. Some phases are competitive for local authorities to bid into, some are available in specific areas and some for specific tenures of housing. This grant route offers opportunities for Swindon Borough Council to extend activity in this area.

Warm Home Discount

The Warm Home Discount is a rebate of £140 (for 2021/22) on your electricity bill given to eligible customers to reduce their winter fuel bills. To qualify automatically you need to be getting the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit by a certain date that year. Participating suppliers also have a “broader group” that they will offer the Warm Homes Discount to, aimed at households on a low income or in receipt of means-tested benefits. Not all suppliers offer the rebate, and those that do only accept a limited number of applicants.

Winter Fuel Payment

The Winter Fuel Payment is provided to those born before 26th September 1955 (for 2021/22) regardless of income. A payment of between £100 and £300 is provided each winter to help with heating bills.

Cold Weather Payments

Cold Weather Payments are provided to people in receipt of certain benefits. A payment of £25 is made for each 7 day period of very cold weather between 1st November and the 31st March. It is intended to help with the cost of heating during these extra cold periods.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is a tool that local authorities have to assess potential risks to the wellbeing of residents in their rented accommodation. HHSRS can be used to enforce action in all tenures except local authority owned stock, but is more likely to be used in private rented sector homes, which are typically the least energy efficient and where there are the greatest barriers to encouraging action. Hazards such as damp and mould growth and excess cold are good indicators that the energy efficiency of the dwelling is not sufficient. Excess cold in particular is identified as the most threatening to health and safety.

Current local schemes

Warm & Safe Wiltshire

Advice, support and guidance on all matters relating to affordable warmth is provided through the Warm & Safe Wiltshire advice service. This includes help to access schemes for home insulation and heating improvements where they are available, financial support and advice for managing fuel bills, and support to reduce energy use and control heating. Residents can self-refer to the service, while health professionals and key workers can refer clients directly into the service for support.

Warm Home Discount events

Annual campaigns are held to assist residents to lodge applications for the Warm Home Discount rebate. In 2020/21 367 residents had applications lodged for the £140 rebate, a potential £51,380 towards people's energy bills.

Swindon Emergency Assistance Fund

Swindon Borough Council may be able to offer assistance for making direct payments to Energy Companies to apply gas or electricity credit to a customer's account within 24 hours. Help is generally only provided in crisis situations, and there are eligibility criteria and a limit to how many individual applications can be made within a 12 month period. There were 64 awards made in 2020/21 for emergency gas or electricity credit.

Surviving Winter Appeal

The scheme, run by the Community Foundation for Wiltshire & Swindon, recycles donated winter fuel payments into hardship grants for eligible people in Wiltshire and Swindon. They are intended for older people on low incomes who are spending more than 10% of their income on fuel during the cold winter months, and who need additional support to heat their homes and eat properly at this time. Applications are only accepted from nominated partner organisations. In 2020/21 there were 76 Surviving Winter Grants awarded worth £21,051.

Safe and Independent Living (SAIL)

The SAIL programme is a multi-partner initiative where referrals for a range of information, services and support are shared between partner organisations, including Swindon Borough Council, Wiltshire Police, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service, Bobby Van Trust and various partners through the Swindon Advice and Support Centre at Sanford House.

Swindon Energy Champions

This is a small network of local community energy champions based in Swindon, looking to help promote sustainable energy use and energy efficiency initiatives.

4. Where do we want to be?

4.1 Vision, aims and outcomes

Vision

The vision of this affordable warmth strategy is to ensure that all households in the Swindon Borough Council area live in warm dry homes, free from the fear of fuel debt and poor health.

Aims

1. To raise awareness of fuel poverty and affordable warmth among all stakeholders.
2. To encourage and support households to achieve affordable warmth.
3. To improve access to schemes, financial support and advice related to affordable warmth through improved networks and referral systems.

Key Objectives

1. Maintain and improve relationships with agencies, organisations and other interested parties in order to promote affordable warmth and deliver new partnership initiatives.
2. Provide information on, and access into, national and local funding programmes for affordable warmth measures.
3. Provide advice and support for comparing gas and electricity tariffs, switching energy suppliers, managing energy bills, energy debt, and reducing energy use in the home.
4. Facilitate take-up of national Warm Home Discount rebates for eligible residents.
5. Strengthen the health focus of affordable warmth work in Swindon, including the provision of a health and housing referral network for health professionals to refer residents into.

An overview of how these objectives will be achieved is set out the next section.

5. How are we going to get there?

A combination of general borough-wide support and specific targeted action is necessary to ensure assistance reaches those most in need, as fuel poverty is not confined to specific easy-to-tackle areas or groups. Planned activity will utilise and build on existing schemes to provide a range of options to meet the aim of achieving affordable warmth.

This strategy has drawn upon recommendations and guidance from HM Government (“Sustainable Warmth – Protecting Vulnerable Households in England”), NICE evidence based guidance (NICE NG6 “Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes”, and NICE QS117 “Preventing excess winter deaths and illness associated with cold homes”) in order to produce a strategy which aims to enable Swindon households to achieve affordable warmth.

The Affordable Warmth Strategy links to Swindon Borough Council Priority Five: Make Swindon greener and more sustainable and Priority Six: We will make Swindon safer, fairer and healthier. It also links to the Swindon Health and Wellbeing Strategy Outcome 2: Adults and older people in Swindon are living healthier and more independent lives. It contributes to wider Council work in areas such as Ageing Well, Long Term Conditions and Falls Prevention, helping to reduce the pressure on Adult Social Care. There are also clear connections to the Council’s responsibilities under the Home Energy Conservation Act and the Carbon Reduction Strategy.

Objective 1: Maintain and improve relationships with agencies, organisations and other interested parties in order to promote affordable warmth and deliver new partnership initiatives.

- 1.1 Ensure all relevant partners are engaged with, and updated on, developments to the Affordable Warmth Strategy and Action Plan.
- 1.2 Work with existing and new partners to develop affordable warmth initiatives.

Objective 2: Provide information on, and access into, national and local funding programmes for affordable warmth measures.

- 2.1 Ensure referral routes are available into the national Energy Company Obligation scheme, for Swindon residents to access affordable warmth measures.
- 2.2 Maintain an Energy Company Obligation Local Authority Flexible Eligibility scheme for Swindon residents.
- 2.3 Provide advice on affordable warmth measures and a direct referral route into other appropriate funded schemes.

Objective 3: Provide advice and support for comparing gas and electricity tariffs, switching energy suppliers, managing energy bills, energy debt, and reducing energy use in the home.

- 3.1 Develop succession plan for the current energy advice service.
- 3.2 Maximise opportunities to provide advice via specific campaigns through media including social media.

- 3.3 Work with Swindon Borough Council Housing Team to target support to Council tenants.
- 3.4 Develop links with other social housing providers in Swindon to raise awareness of affordable warmth support.

Objective 4: Facilitate take-up of national Warm Home Discount rebates for eligible residents.

- 4.1 Deliver annual programme of awareness raising for Swindon residents (private sector residents and SBC tenants).
- 4.2 Explore opportunities to extend promotional activity with other social housing providers.

Objective 5: Strengthen the health focus of affordable warmth work in Swindon.

- 5.1 Continue to raise the profile of affordable warmth work as an intervention for reducing pressure on the health sector from cold related illness.
- 5.2 Deliver a health and housing referral network, as recommended by NICE NG6, for referring vulnerable residents for affordable warmth assistance.
- 5.3 Provide training and awareness sessions for health professionals and other key workers on the links between cold housing and health, and how to refer affected people for assistance.

The key steps to achieve these objectives will be set out in more detail in the action plan, which will be developed in conjunction with local partner organisations. The action plan will be updated where appropriate, and progress on the Strategy will be reported against annually.

Annex: NICE Guidance

NICE guideline NG6

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) released guideline NG6 on “Excess winter deaths and illness and the health risks associated with cold homes” in 2015 covering reducing the health risks (including preventable deaths) associated with living in a cold home, with the key aim being to improve the health and wellbeing of people vulnerable to the cold. It is for commissioners, managers and health, social care and voluntary sector practitioners who deal with vulnerable people who may have health problems caused, or exacerbated, by living in a cold home. It is also of interest to clinicians and others involved with at-risk groups, housing and energy suppliers.

The guidance aims to meet a range of public health and other goals, including:

- Reducing preventable excess winter death rates.
- Improving health and wellbeing among vulnerable groups.
- Reducing pressure on health and social care services.
- Reducing 'fuel poverty' and the risk of fuel debt or being disconnected from gas and electricity supplies (including self-disconnection).
- Improving the energy efficiency of homes.

There were 12 recommendations made through NG6:

Recommendation 1 - Develop a strategy.

Recommendation 2 - Ensure there is a single point of contact health and housing referral service for people living in cold homes.

Recommendation 3 - Provide tailored solutions via the single point of contact health and housing referral service for people living in cold homes.

Recommendation 4 - Identify people at risk of ill health from living in a cold home.

Recommendation 5 - Make every contact count by assessing the heating needs of people who use primary health and home care services.

Recommendation 6 - Non-health and social care workers who visit people at home should assess their heating needs.

Recommendation 7 - Discharge vulnerable people from health or social care settings to a warm home.

Recommendation 8 - Train health and social care practitioners to help people whose homes may be too cold.

Recommendation 9 - Train housing professionals and faith and voluntary sector workers to help people whose homes may be too cold for their health and wellbeing.

Recommendation 10 - Train heating engineers, meter installers and those providing building insulation to help vulnerable people at home.

Recommendation 11 - Raise awareness among practitioners and the public about how to keep warm at home.

Recommendation 12 - Ensure buildings meet ventilation and other building and trading standards.

This guidance was well received and will help to link the activities of health and housing stakeholders.

NICE quality standard (QS117)

NG6 was followed up in 2016 by quality standard (QS117) “Preventing excess winter deaths and illness associated with cold homes”. NICE quality standards describe high-priority areas for quality improvement in a defined care or service area. Each standard consists of a prioritised set of specific, concise and measurable statements. They draw on existing guidance, which provides an underpinning, comprehensive set of recommendations, and are designed to support the measurement of improvement.

There are 6 quality statements detailed in QS117:

Statement 1 - Local populations who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home are identified through year-round planning by local health and social care commissioners and providers.

Statement 2 - Local health and social care commissioners and providers share data to identify people who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home.

Statement 3 - People who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home receive tailored support with help from a local single point of contact health and housing referral service.

Statement 4 - People who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home are asked at least once a year whether they have difficulty keeping warm at home by their primary or community healthcare or home care practitioners.

Statement 5 - Hospitals, mental health services and social care services identify people who are vulnerable to health problems associated with a cold home as part of the admission process.

Statement 6 - People who are vulnerable to the health problems associated with a cold home who will be discharged to their own home from hospital, or a mental health or social care setting have a discharge plan that includes ensuring that their home is warm enough.

This guidance and quality standard will help guide strategy and work on the ground in Swindon over the next few years. In particular, the recommendations linked to health and housing referral networks will be a key focus in Swindon to meet the aims and objectives of this affordable warmth strategy.