

# FUEL & WATER POVERTY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Submission No. 6 to the Croydon Opportunity and Fairness Commission

Discussion of issues relevant to the Commission's inquiries

## Contents

### Page

2	Fuel Poverty Water Poverty General Issues for Local Authorities
3	Communication issues
4	Specific questions for Croydon Council
5	Croydon Council Carbon and Energy Efficiency Policy and Action

Sean Creighton  
Norbury resident  
February 2015  
sean.creighton1947@btinternet.com

The author was Secretary of the Public Utilities Access Forum 1991-2000, of the Consumer Environment Forum (1997-9), of the Water Saving Trust Steering Group (1997-8), and member of the Oftel Consumer Panel (1999-2001).

He has spent his working, community and politically active life on issues relating to poverty, antipoverty, poor housing and homelessness, housing provision, regeneration, environment, community development and organisation, planning and community/police consultative issues, community engagement and participation, as well as being a historian of aspects of these including Black British History. He has been a Councillor, a member of regeneration boards, an administrator (inc. Committee Secretary) and organiser (e.g. events), a policy researcher and information sharer. He co-ordinates the Croydon Radical and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor networks, reports on developments and events on his two blog sites and in Croydon Citizen. He monitors and shares information in advance on what is under discussion in Council committees on one of his blog sites. He is currently organising several history and cultural events in Croydon.

## Fuel Poverty

15,627 or 11.3% of households in Croydon were identified as being fuel poor in 2010 - increase of 6.2% over estimates for 2009.

There are approximately 146 excess winter deaths each year in Croydon.

In 2011, there were 217 excess hospital admissions for respiratory illnesses that can be linked to living in cold and damp conditions.

(Source: Croydon Council. Home Energy Conservation Act Further Report 2013. January 2013.  
<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/articles/downloadshecareport.pdf>)

1. The government set a target of eradicating fuel poverty in England, as far as reasonably possible, by 2016. It defines fuel poor households as those that need to spend more than 10 percent of their income on home energy (including heating the home to 21 degrees for the main living area, and 18 degrees for other occupied rooms).
2. Large numbers of low income households have to juggle how they meet their various payments: rent, food, clothing, energy, Council tax, transport, etc. One fortnight they may have to concentrate on paying a utility bill rather than rent or Council Tax, and vice-versa the next, so they may often slip into and out of debt, or fall increasingly into deeper debt.

## Water Poverty

3. Water poverty is defined as when households spend 3% or more of their income on water bills. In 2011 it was estimated that there were 4m households in the UK in water poverty (*Vulnerability to Heat Waves and Drought: Adaptation to Climate Change*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation report.) That represents 22.3% of households. On that basis 32,337 of Croydon's 145,010 households could be in water poverty. The water companies are banned by law from disconnecting customers for inability to pay and had to stop using water budget (pre-payment) meters which had led households to self-disconnect.

## General issues for Local Authorities

4. Local authorities need to recognise:
  - that their own different responsibilities can be in conflict with each other. e.g. as income collector and landlord, and tacklers of local social and economic problems;
  - that they are competitors for the limited finances of low income consumers;
  - that their debt collection methods may mean that low income residents are being asked to pay sums above their capability because their total indebtedness, including utility debt, is not taken into account.
  - that the design of their housing stock, the nature of the heating systems, and the approach to repairs, renewal and renovation can all contribute to energy inefficiency and resultant high bills for their low income tenants.
  - that where low income consumers are on energy pre-payment meters the utility companies have the edge over local authorities for payment.
5. Given the multi-faceted relationship between local authorities and the utilities, the conflicts between different local authority roles, and the conflict between local authorities and utilities as income collectors, local authorities should be trying to develop a strategy towards low income residents and utilities which aims:

- to ensure that both their own and utility debt policies and procedures are reasonable to avoid excessive amounts of debt being recovered at any one time by both of them;
- to have energy efficiency measures to reduce fuel bills.

6. Local authorities need to have a context of knowledge and understanding about what the utilities issues are in their areas. This will help with the process of developing policies and projects. Questions that every local authority could ask itself as part of building up that framework are do you:

- have a poverty profile or equivalent;
- know the extent of fuel and water poverty;
- know the range of utility issues adversely affecting local consumers;
- know the energy efficiency of your housing and non-housing building stock;
- have a strategy for reducing fuel and water poverty;
- have an approach to housing repair and renovation that treats the property's problems as a whole, and not through piece-meal solutions to individual problems;
- have an audit of what the various Council Departments are already doing in relation to fuel poverty and energy efficiency;
- have mechanisms for keeping fuel poverty, energy efficiency, water poverty and charging etc issues under review;
- co-ordinate on these issues with other statutory agencies and voluntary organisations;
- have mechanisms for regular liaison with utility companies;
- need to create new mechanisms for developing work on these issues;
- monitor the results of its work on the above matters?

7. The priorities will vary from local authority to local authority e.g. because of differing levels of poverty and low income, and because of regional and area differences in electricity and water company prices, e.g. because of the energy efficiency differences of the property stock.

### **Communication Issues**

8. Households increasingly need to make and receive phone calls and emails relating to their medical, financial, security and other needs. They cannot function with any degree of success in our increasingly complex society without a telephone and internet connection. For many this need is met through mobile phones but there are severe limits such as non-ability to print documents.

9. Public and private run services are developing practices that are dependent on the use of the phone, email and access to the web.

10. More and more organisations' services can only be accessed by the telephone or email or via messages on websites.

11. As advice service provision decreases there is more reliance on telephone help and information lines.

12. As society becomes more fragmented, with fewer people being part of a work-place community, and with reducing household size, more and more people are becoming isolated and therefore potentially vulnerable individuals.

13. There are clear advantages for social welfare organisations to have more of their vulnerable and low-income customers accessible on the telephone, on email and web access. In the past social, education welfare and youth justice workers have spoken of the difficulties they have supporting the substantial number of their clients who were not on the telephone. Their professional effectiveness is limited when their clients are not on the phone. They either have to visit them, with no guarantee they will be in. Or they have to write with the delay that involves in waiting for and possibly not receiving a reply. Less time would be wasted in being able to change or cancel appointments. The increased communication efficiency is likely to have cost benefits for their employers.

### Specific Questions for Croydon Council

14. In relation to the issues outlined above the following questions seek to find out what Croydon Council is doing.

- (1) Does it monitor the application in Croydon of utility companies debt and debt management and disconnections?
- (2) When was the last time it rated the energy efficiency of its building and of the private housing stock?
- (3) What measures did it undertake each financial year since the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 came into operation?
- (4) Which staff are trained in energy rating the properties they have to visit?
- (5) How many properties with low energy ratings have been identified as being lived in by people on low income or with health vulnerabilities, and what steps have been undertaken to assist with energy efficiency measures?
- (6) How many of the households under (5) include children aged 0-5, people with health vulnerabilities, and pensioners aged 75+?
- (7) Does it have a map showing the ranges of energy efficiency rating in different parts of the Borough?
- (8) What energy efficiency measures are contained in the Council's specifications for work to its housing and non-housing properties?
- (9) When it identifies the need for a property to have works such as roof and window repair or renewal, does it automatically undertake an energy rating to identify what additional works could be implemented e.g. to prevent heat trapped by improved windows and doors going straight out an un- or under-insulated roof?
- (10) How many Council owned houses and flats:
  - do not have a heating system serving every room
  - only have partial central heating

and what is the work programme to ensure heating system improvements in Council housing?

- (11) In each of the financial years 2011-12 to 2013/14 what negotiations with energy companies resulted in cheaper fuel supplies for Council buildings including communal heating systems?
- (12) If savings were made under (11) were these ear-marked to fund additional energy efficiency measures in the building stock?
- (13) What is the Council's planning policy with regard to requiring the installation of energy and water efficiency devices in designs for new and converted housing, retail, leisure and employment developments?

- (14) Does it know which of its social service and welfare service clients requiring in-depth support cannot be contacted by telephone or email?
- (15) What is the cost involved in staff having to use other means to contact their clients under (14)?
- (16) Has it ever helped its unphoned clients with the installation of telephones under the discretionary powers to spend money on crime prevention measures contained in the London Local Authorities (No. 2) Act 1990?

### **Croydon Council Carbon and Energy Efficiency Policy and Action**

15. Issues relating to energy efficiency are dealt with in the Council's Carbon Management & Energy Efficiency Programme (CMEEP) 2010-15 (February 2012 - <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/articles/downloads/SummaryCMEEP.pdf>). However the main driver is carbon dioxide emissions reduction.

16. The Council works with Climate Energy Ltd to deliver the "Cold Busters" project to promote energy efficiency and provide the elderly, vulnerable and those on low incomes access to funding for energy efficiency measure. A limited amount of funding is available.

17. Improvements that can be fully funded include:

- loft insulation
- cavity wall insulation
- solid wall insulation
- energy-efficient boilers
- heating controls
- replacement glazing
- draught proofing

18. Improvements that can be partially funded include:

- replacement glazing
- energy efficient doors
- under floor insulation
- flat roof insulation

19. In March 2013 the Department of Energy & Climate Change published *Guidance to English Energy Conservation Authorities issued pursuant to the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995* (Department of Energy and Climate Change. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-english-energy-conservation-authorities-the-home-energy-conservation-act-1995>).

20. In compliance with it the Council published the Home Energy Conservation Act Further Report 2013 (January 2013) (<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/sites/default/files/articles/downloads/hecareport.pdf>). This contained an action plan and the following questions seek to know the progress made.

- (1) What does the Energy Performance Data purchased by the Council in 2013 show?
- (2) What does the compilation of DECC and energy project data in 2013 show?
- (3) What did the 2013 analysis of housing stock and planned investment to determine potential CO2 savings and level of Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding reveal?
- (4) Will the upgrade of lighting in communal areas in the Council's housing stock be completed on schedule in March 2015, and if not when will it be?
- (5) Has the annual target of 200 cavity wall installations from 2013 - 2018) been to date and will it be?

- (6) Will the planned 200 back boiler replacements with high energy boilers be completed by March 2015?
- (7) What has been the outcome of the development of a business case (by May 2013) to support an investment programme of solar panels in social housing?
- (8) What has been the outcome of the May 2014 review to identify ECO areas and households through available data?
- (9) What was the outcome of the May 2014 review to work with private landlords to raise awareness of funding routes and measures for housing?
- (10) When was the framework approved for investing in CO2 reduction projects from Section 106 contributions and allowable solutions through existing governance processes or by setting up a ring fenced community energy fund?
- (11) What does the framework under (10) set out?