

Energy Company Obligation (ECO) Help to Heat Scheme.

Flexible Eligibility Statement of Intent

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Introduction

The Government wishes to see a greater proportion of the energy efficiency measures targeted towards fuel poor households. In 2011 the Government introduced a new definition for fuel poverty, which relates to those with low incomes and high heating costs. In general fuel poverty is targeted at those on specific benefits. However, the Government have realised that there are groups of vulnerable people who may be at risk of fuel poverty and has allowed local councils to identify groups in their local area that could be considered at risk of fuel poverty. These groups may be defined as part of flexible eligibility criteria, which would allow them access to ECO funding if available.

The Government initially introduced flexible eligibility criteria for the ECO: Help to Heat programme April 2017 to September 2018. The ECO3 - 2018 to 2022 has confirmed the role of flexible eligibility, to ensure that Local Authorities can use their local knowledge to target the most vulnerable households in their area.

Blaby District covers an area of urban and rural Leicestershire to the south west of the City of Leicester. Whilst it is a reasonably prosperous district, there are pockets of deprivation and areas where fuel costs are high due to a lack of access to mains gas.

In addition Blaby District has a high percentage of over 65's (20% of population) and this is increasing at an above average rate.

Blaby District Council has recognised that fuel poverty is an issue within the district. Overall the number of people in fuel poverty has been slowly dropping, but over 3,000 homes are estimated to be in fuel poverty

Table 1. Number of households in fuel poverty in Blaby District.

| Year | Number of Households in fuel poverty (Low income High cost (LIHC) indicator) | Percentage |
|------|--|------------|
| 2011 | 4,274 | 11.1% |
| 2012 | 3,795 | 9.6% |
| 2013 | 3,142 | 8.0% |
| 2014 | 2,844 | 7.2% |
| 2015 | 3,973 | 10.0% |
| 2016 | 3,621 | 9.1% |
| 2017 | 2,854 | 7.0% |
| 2018 | 3,433 | 8.4% |

Blaby District Council has had a number of local and county wide projects that have targeted energy efficiency measures in homes, but defining local “vulnerability to fuel poverty” eligibility criteria will help to target further support toward the most vulnerable.

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Eligible households for ECO “Flexible Eligibility”

Under the flexible eligibility scheme up to 25% of funding could be available to support Local Authority designated schemes where residents are defined as eligible through a Statement of Intent. There are two main categories

- a. People living in fuel poverty, in particular those not in receipt of eligible benefits
- b. People living on a low income and vulnerable to the effects of living in a cold home

In addition, a proportion is available to non-fuel poor homes for solid wall insulation in flats or as infill in terraced housing or semi-detached.

Defining groups of people living in fuel poverty; in particular those that are not in receipt of eligible benefits.

The Fuel Poverty Strategy identifies groups who are most at risk of being in fuel poverty. They are:

- Households that are off the gas grid
- Households living in properties built with solid walls (hard to heat)
- Households paying for electricity and gas by pre-payment meter
- Households in privately rented accommodation
- People living in park homes are particularly vulnerable to being in fuel poverty
- People living in very large homes
- Single parent families
- Families with adults out of work

In order to assess households in Fuel Poverty, households will be assessed based on low income and high cost.

Therefore to qualify households should have a remaining disposable income (after paying the rent or mortgage where applicable) as less than the figures shown within Table 1 shown below.

Table 2. Fuel poverty low income composition Table

| Household Composition | Annual Household Income (£) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Adult | £9,300 |
| and 1 Child | £12,200 |
| and 2 Children | £15,000 |
| and 3 Children | £18,000 |
| and 4+ Children | £21,000 |
| | |
| 2 Adults | £15,200 |
| and 1 Child | £18,200 |
| and 2 Children | £21,100 |
| and 3 Children | £24,100 |
| and 4+ Children | £26,800 |

And a home heating points score of 40 points or more as shown in Table 22below:

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Table 3. Home heating score points allocation table

| Question | Response | Score |
|---|--|-------|
| High Heating Costs – How many bedrooms are there in the home? | 1 | 0 |
| | 2 | 15 |
| | 3 | 35 |
| | 4+ | 40 |
| High energy costs – payment method | Direct debit | 0 |
| | Monthly or quarterly standard credit ¹ | 15 |
| | Pre-payment | 35 |
| Fuel Poor - Tenure | Private Rented | 25 |
| | Owner Occupier | 10 |
| | Registered Social Landlord | 0 |
| High Fuel Costs – Does the house use a boiler | Yes | 0 |
| | No | 15 |
| High Fuel Costs – Was the house built before 1976 | Yes | 25 |
| | No | 0 |
| High Fuel Costs – Fuel Type for heating? | Mains Gas | 0 |
| | Electricity | 35 |
| | Other | 15 |
| High Costs and Fuel Poor – Park Home | Yes | 15 |
| | No | 0 |
| Fuel Poor – family make up | Single Adult and one or more dependent children ² | 10 |
| | Two adults and one or more dependent children | 5 |
| | Property is under-occupied home | 30 |
| High Fuel Costs – EPC rating | EPC rating E, F or G | 20 |

¹ Payments made on energy used in preceding period

² Children under 18 are classed as dependant.

Defining people living on low income and vulnerable to the effects of living in cold home.

NICE guidelines on excess winter deaths and the health risks associated with cold homes identify a wide range of people who are vulnerable to the effects of a cold home, including those with heart and lung conditions, older people at risk of falling or those with mental health conditions.

Households will qualify under the eligibility criteria if they are low income and vulnerable to the effects of the cold. Therefore households must have an income below the income **composition table above (see Table 1)** and have an occupant who is vulnerable to the cold as outlined in the guidelines, specifically:

- Recent hospital admissions due to a fall
- Respiratory disease (COPD, asthma)
- Cardiovascular disease (e.g. ischaemic heart disease, cerebrovascular disease)
- Moderate to severe mental illness (e.g. schizophrenia, bipolar disorder)
- Substance misusers
- Dementia
- Neurobiological and related diseases (e.g. fibromyalgia, ME)
- Cancer or terminal or life limiting illness
- Limited mobility
- Haemoglobinopathies (sickle cell disease, thalassaemia)
- Severe learning disabilities
- Autoimmune and immunodeficiency diseases (e.g. lupus, MS, diabetes, HIV)
- Musculoskeletal conditions (e.g. Osteoarthritis, Rheumatoid arthritis)

In these cases either proof of age or for a health condition, a letter from a GP or hospital or a referral through a medical professional will be accepted as proof of meeting the eligibility criteria.

In addition, those identified through the Lightbulb project, as at risk of re-admittance to hospital because of a cold home, will also be included.

Flexible Eligibility for Solid Wall projects including in-fill

Non fuel poor households will be supported to take advantage of “in-fill” projects where the minimum number of vulnerable households is met, in accordance with the guidance, specifically:

- In the same terrace
- In an immediately adjacent building
- In the same building as a household that meets fuel poverty criteria

Governance

The Head of Democratic Services, Scrutiny and Governance, will be responsible for signing “Local Authority Declarations” for households meeting one or more of the above criteria.

Referrals will come through the Blaby Warmer Homes scheme, managed by Harborough Energy; but can also be accepted through First Contact and partner organisations, including GPs.

Agreement for the data of those meeting the eligibility criteria must be obtained in accordance with Data Protection Act 2018. This will be used for evidence, monitoring and reporting and may include:

- Benefits data
- House tenure
- Social prescription
- EPC
- Non gas

The number of ECO Flexible Eligibility funded measures installed and the number of homes improved will be reported by Harborough Energy as part of their monthly report to the Council. This will be split into fuel poor homes and those on a low income and vulnerable to the effects of living in cold homes.

Each eligible household will be asked to sign a self-declaration form when agreeing with the Delivery Partner to go ahead with works, including an agreement to share data with appropriate and named partners, including Blaby District Council.

The Council will audit the process by writing to 1 in 20 applicant households asking for evidence of eligibility at the time of approval and checking this as the application goes ahead. If a resident cannot provide the required evidence this will not affect their eligibility; however a high level of non-compliance will trigger a review of the Flexible Eligibility process.

This Statement of Intent will remain in force during the ECO3 period until 2022, unless reviewed due to a change in legislation. The criteria for eligibility will be reviewed annually.

Signature 

Caroline Harbour - Environmental Health, Housing & Community Services Group
Manager

Date 7/07/21