

# AFFORDABLE WARMTH STRATEGY

## INTRODUCTION

Derbyshire Dales District Council and High Peak Borough Council have worked together with a number of other partners in order to produce this Affordable Warmth Strategy. In the first instance it is considered important that the Strategy is owned by both Councils as it will inform work undertaken under the Housing Act 2004 and the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. However, it is equally important that the Strategy belongs to the various other local agencies and organisations that have helped in its development and/or who are affected by its outcomes, such as the various primary care trusts, citizens' advice bureaux and Derbyshire County Council. For this reason and to demonstrate the commitment of all these bodies to delivering affordable warmth, the Strategy has also been submitted to the Derbyshire Dales and High Peak Local Strategic Partnership for adoption.

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) were introduced as a result of the Local Government Act 2000 to improve quality of life for local people. They are seen by Government as a "Partnership of Partnerships" through which the activity of all partners involved, should be channelled. It provides the framework and the strategic direction for the area.

The Derbyshire Dales and High Peak LSP was established in 2003 and brings together local councils, public services, police, businesses, voluntary groups and residents, to work together to make both the High Peak and Derbyshire Dales a better place to live, work and to visit.

The Derbyshire Dales & High Peak Community Strategy is designed to provide direction for the LSP, and its partners (see Table 1). The Community Strategy is a blueprint for activities that will promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the whole area, and contribute to its continued development over the next three years (2006 –2009).

**Table 1: Local Strategic Partners**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Derbyshire Constabulary, B-Division</li><li>• Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership</li><li>• Peak District Rural Deprivation Forum</li><li>• Derbyshire Rural Community Council</li><li>• Peak District National Park Authority</li><li>• High Peak and Dales Primary Care Trust</li><li>• Tameside and Glossop Primary Care Trust</li><li>• Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire Primary Care Trust</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership</li><li>• Peak District Rural Action Zone</li><li>• Derbyshire County Council</li><li>• Natural England</li><li>• Derbyshire Dales Council for Voluntary Services</li><li>• High Peak Council for Voluntary Service</li><li>• Derbyshire Connexions</li><li>• Derbyshire Dales District Council</li><li>• High Peak Borough Council</li></ul>
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This Affordable Warmth Strategy was informed by previous Strategies adopted by Derbyshire Dales District Council and High Peak Borough Councils and builds on the work undertaken in fulfillment of their action plans. It also links to national and regional policies such as the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy (published 2001), 'Fuel Poverty in England: The Government's Plan for Action' (published 2004) and the Affordable Warmth Action Plan for the East Midlands (published 2004).

## **FUEL POVERTY**

Fuel poverty occurs when a household is unable to afford to heat their home to the level required for health and comfort. The generally accepted definition of a household suffering from fuel poverty is when more than 10% of the household income would need to be spent on heating the house to comfort levels, which the World Health Organisation has suggested should be 21°C in the main living room and 18°C in other occupied rooms.

Fuel poverty can be caused by a number of factors including:

- Low income
- Houses with poor energy efficiency
- Under occupancy
- Fuel prices.

In 2001 the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy estimated that there were approximately 4 million fuel poor households in England. Whilst much work has been done to reduce that figure to an estimated 2 million in 2003, recent fuel price increases mean that the figure is feared to be rising again (UK Fuel Poverty Strategy 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Progress Report 2004).

The groups most at risk from fuel poverty are:

- Older people
- Families with young children
- Long term sick/disabled
- Long term unemployed.

During the winter months, especially December to March, the number of deaths recorded exceeds the average death rate for the rest of the year. This phenomenon is known as excess winter deaths. Between 20,000 and 50,000 excess winter deaths occur each year in the UK (UK Fuel Poverty Strategy 2001). This figure is very high compared to many other European nations, including those that suffer more severe winter conditions than the UK. In part this is due to the poor heating systems and lack of thermal efficiency in British homes which mean that levels of affordable warmth are difficult to maintain when outside temperatures fall.

Cold homes are linked to these high rates of winter deaths, especially amongst older people. Heart attacks and strokes are also exacerbated by the cold. Cold and damp homes are also likely to promote mould and fungal growth and to be linked to conditions such as asthma and bronchitis. Domestic accidents also tend to be more common in cold homes. The annual cost to the NHS of energy inefficient houses is estimated to be as high as £1 billion (UK Fuel Poverty Strategy 2001).

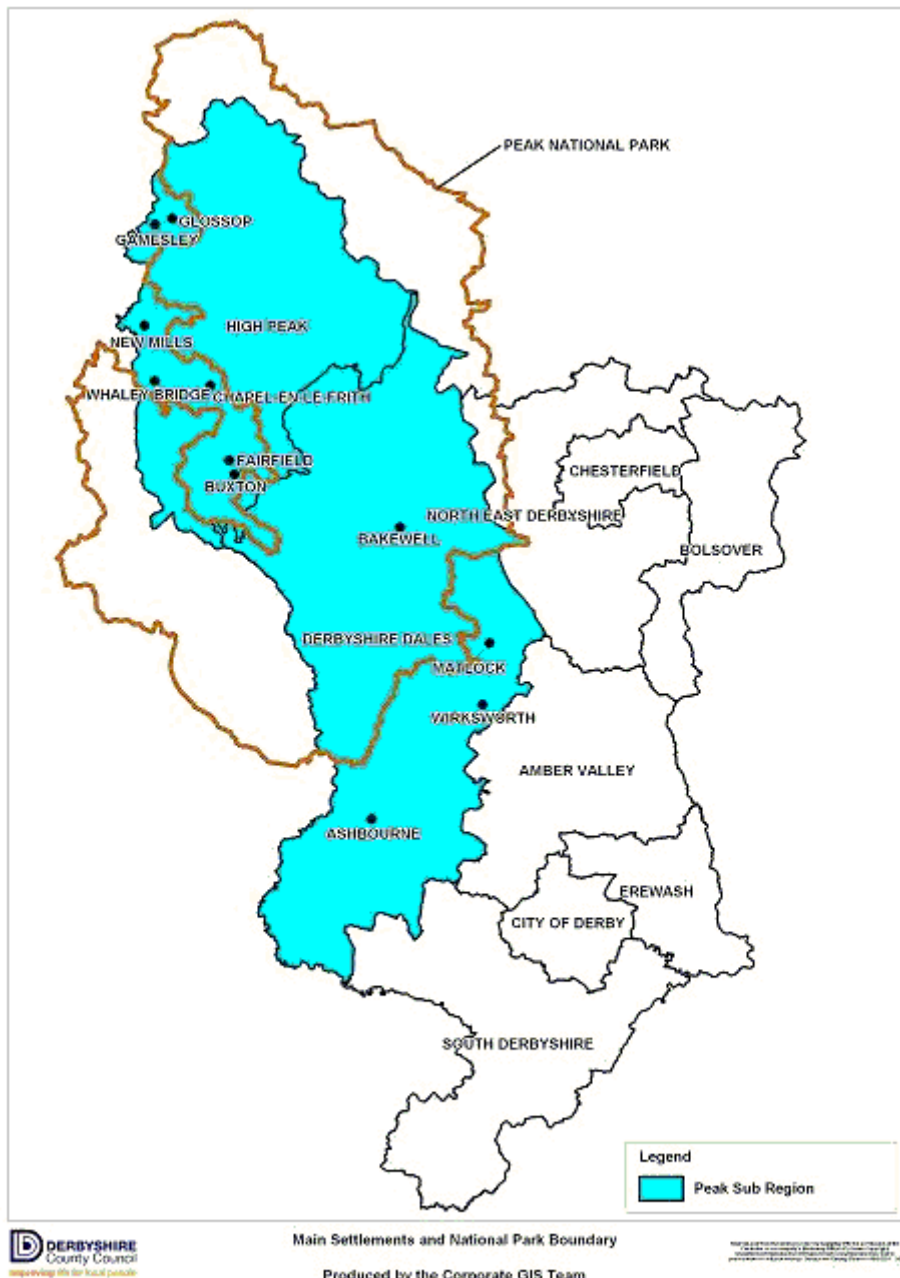
Cold houses can also lead to social exclusion as householders may be unlikely to invite friends home, resulting in an overall decline in quality of life. In some cases householders face a choice between heating their homes adequately or spending their money on other needs, such as a healthy diet. Where children live in cold homes educational attainment can be adversely affected.

## **THE PEAK SUB-REGION**

Derbyshire Dales District Council and High Peak Borough Council are neighbouring local authorities situated in North Derbyshire. Derbyshire Dales is a large rural district covering an area of 800 square kilometres and has a population of 69,700. With a population density of 88 people per square kilometre it is one of the most sparsely populated districts in England. High Peak covers an area of 539 square kilometres and has a population of 90,100, giving a population density of 166 people per square kilometre, although much of the population is concentrated in the towns along the western fringe of the Borough, from Glossop in the north to Buxton in the south.

A map showing the two Council areas is reproduced overleaf:

**Figure 1: Map of Derbyshire Showing Derbyshire Dales and High Peak**



Derbyshire Dales District Council and High Peak Borough Council share many demographic and topographical characteristics. More than half of each Council area falls within the Peak District National Park and these areas in particular contain attractive stone built houses which are often difficult to heat or to insulate by conventional methods. Normal means of improving energy efficiency such as cavity wall insulation can be unsuitable, due solid wall construction and external cladding can be inappropriate due to the conflicting need to preserve the special landscape and valued characteristics of the National Park (Supplementary Planning Guidance Affordable Housing). The lack of a gas network in many of the rural communities also denies many residents what is often the cheapest and most efficient fuel for heating their homes.

Using the figures quoted in the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy it is estimated that there are between 48 and 128 excess winter deaths in the period between December and March each year within the sub-Region.

Much work has already been done to identify areas of fuel poverty in the two Council areas. The joint Housing Stock Condition Survey undertaken in 2003 estimated a total of 5947 dwellings in the Derbyshire Dales where households were considered to be in fuel poverty. This represented a District wide average of 19.8%. These properties were distributed as follows:

**Table 2: Fuel Poverty in Derbyshire Dales**

<b>Survey Area</b>	<b>Dwellings in Fuel Poverty</b>	<b>% Dwellings</b>
Peak District Rural	2129	28.9
Central Corridor	1613	16.3
Southern Rural	1211	21.3
Ashbourne	473	15.2
Peak District Towns	303	14.2
Bakewell	219	11.8

From these figures it can be seen that the areas suffering from both the greatest number of households in fuel poverty and the highest proportion of dwellings with occupants in fuel poverty are the Peak District Rural, Central Corridor and Southern Rural survey areas.

In the High Peak the joint House Condition Survey estimated that 3418 households were in fuel poverty in January 2003. This represented a Borough wide average of 10.4%. These households were distributed as follows:

**Table 3: Fuel Poverty in High Peak**

<b>Survey Area</b>	<b>Dwellings in Fuel Poverty</b>	<b>% Dwellings</b>
Buxton	1211	13.3
Glossop	932	8.3
New Mills	664	14.4
Chapel / Whaley Bridge	461	7.2
Hope Valley	149	10.3

In the Peak Park component of the High Peak the proportion of households estimated to be in fuel poverty stood at 13.0%, slightly above the Borough average.

## **DECENT HOMES STANDARD**

In 2001 the Government launched a new standard for social housing, called the Decent Homes Standard. The stated target was that all social housing should meet this Standard by 2010. In 2004 the Standard was extended to the private housing sector with a target that by 2010 at least 70% of vulnerable households should live in decent homes.

In order to meet the Decent Homes Standard a house must:

- Comply with the current statutory minimum standard for housing
- Be in a reasonable state of repair
- Have reasonably modern facilities and services
- Provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

The joint Housing Stock Condition Survey estimated that there were 6575 homes in the Derbyshire Dales and 7363 in the High Peak that failed the Decent Homes Standard on thermal comfort grounds. Of these 4646 and 1923 respectively were occupied by vulnerable households

In their joint Housing Strategy both Councils have committed to ensuring that these targets are met. One of the main causes of a house failing to meet the Standard is the lack of thermal comfort and this Affordable Warmth Strategy will assist in ensuring that houses in both the social and private sectors are brought up to the Standard.

## **PROVIDING AFFORDABLE WARMTH**

Affordable warmth is the solution to fuel poverty and ensures that residents are able to afford to heat their homes to the level required for comfort and health. The main benefits of affordable warmth are:

- Improved health
- Increased disposable income
- Social inclusion
- Reduced cost to health services
- Reduced pollution.

Many of those in fuel poverty are unaware of the assistance that is available to provide affordable warmth. Equally those agencies that are able to provide help are often unaware where those in fuel poverty are located. Some residents may need assistance to maximise their income or how to access grants and discount schemes. Others may need reassurance that modern heating systems will not increase their fuel bills or advice on fuel suppliers or payment options.

Programmes such as the Government's Warm Front scheme offer grants for insulation and heating of up to £2,700 (or £4,000 if the property has oil-fired heating) to qualifying private households in order to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. Funding is also available from the utility companies under the Energy Efficiency Commitment to improve the energy efficiency of social housing and privately owned homes.

Achieving affordable warmth requires a wide range of initiatives to ensure that all vulnerable households particularly those in rural areas are being helped out of fuel poverty. Achieving this will require a partnership approach and the involvement of the health, housing, social services, voluntary sector and other community agencies, to identify those in need and provide appropriate solutions.

In order to combat fuel poverty in the Peak Sub-Region, Derbyshire Dales District Council and High Peak Borough Council took the decision to develop a joint strategy to set out overall aims and broad objectives to stimulate collective and individual action. Much of the work detailed in the following action plans will be delivered via the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Local Authorities' Energy Partnership together with the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre and other local and regional project partners.

## STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

This Strategy was developed not only by officers from Derbyshire Dales District Council and High Peak Borough Council, but involved a wide range of other organisations. The Strategy itself was co-ordinated by a steering group involving representation from local health services, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, Derbyshire County Council's Welfare Rights Service, and the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre, as well as the two local authorities. Delivery of the aims, objectives and targets contained in the action plans will require the input and commitment of an even greater number and variety of partners.

In order to inform the Strategy a consultation process has been undertaken, co-ordinated by Derbyshire Dales District Council's Consultation and Local Agenda 21 Officer. This consultation involved the following:

- All LSP partners listed in Box 1 above;
- Members of the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Local Authorities' Energy Partnership;
- Parish Councils;
- Members of the Derbyshire Sustainable Development Group;
- Derbyshire Dales Citizens Panel;
- High Peak Citizens' Panel .

Out of this strategy development process an overarching aim emerged, which was then broken down into a number of key aims required to deliver affordable warmth. These are:

**Overall Aim:** To ensure affordable warmth for all residents of the Peak Sub-Region

**Key Aim 1:** Developing partnerships to oversee and deliver the Strategy

**Key Aim 2:** Maximising financial resources for energy efficiency measures

**Key Aim 3:** Maximise personal income and ensure benefit take-up

**Key Aim 4:** Targeting action

**Key Aim 5:** Provide an effective energy advice service

Contained within each of these aims are a number of objectives and targets. These will be reviewed annually to ensure that they remain relevant to the overall aim. In this way it is expected that the Strategy will be a live document, continuing to evolve to reflect changing circumstances.

Progress against the action plans will be monitored by the steering group, who will meet at least 4 times a year and will produce a summary report detailing achievements. This report will inform each of the local authorities' annual report to Government under the terms of the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 and be available to all other partners.

## **CONTACTS**

### **Derbyshire Dales District Council**

Telephone: 01629 761212

Email: [energyadvice@derbyshiredales.gov.uk](mailto:energyadvice@derbyshiredales.gov.uk)

Website: [www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk](http://www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk)

### **High Peak Borough Council**

Telephone: 0845 129 7777

Email: [billp@highpeak.gov.uk](mailto:billp@highpeak.gov.uk)

Website: [www.highpeak.gov.uk](http://www.highpeak.gov.uk)

### **Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Energy Efficiency Advice Centre**

Telephone: 01298 766880

Email: [nott@eeac.net](mailto:nott@eeac.net)

Website: [www.highpeak.gov.uk](http://www.highpeak.gov.uk)