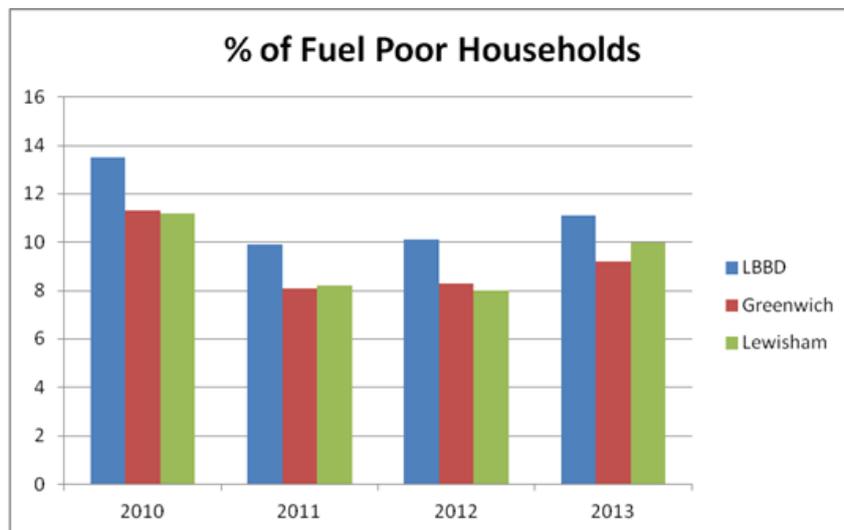


## 5.5 Fuel Poverty

The need for affordable warmth has driven the Council's support for initiatives and voluntary sector efforts to reduce the number of fuel poor households in the borough from 9,000 (and the highest in the capital) in 2009/10 to 7,877 in 2012/13 according to the last statistical release of fuel poverty in 2014.

Fuel poverty has risen slightly in the last few years but at a lesser rate than our comparator boroughs. The rise is largely a reflection of the end of the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target and Community Energy Saving Programme funding streams in 2012 which were widely available for mass insulation to social stock and owner-occupied dwellings:



Source: Department of Energy & Climate Change Fuel Poverty Statistical Release 2013:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2013-sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-low-income-high-costs-indicator>

However, the Council's interventions have prevented that figure from rising still and tackling fuel poverty is to be embedded into the corporate delivery of services in Barking and Dagenham. The Affordable Warmth Steering Group is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the -affordable -warmth initiatives across housing, adult and children's services, public health and the voluntary sector.

Fuel poverty itself is defined as a household that cannot afford to heat its home to an adequate standard of warmth in order to maintain good health and wellbeing and is determined by a myriad of factors including the energy efficiency of a property, the household income, consumption levels, energy costs and heating-related health needs.

In 2014 the Government changed the definition by which local authorities measure the extent of fuel poverty. Previously if a household spent more than 10% of its income on trying to adequately heat a property, the household was considered to be fuel poor. However this has been replaced by the Low Income High Cost indicator, targeting households which have energy costs above the median average for its type and which pushes it below the national poverty line.

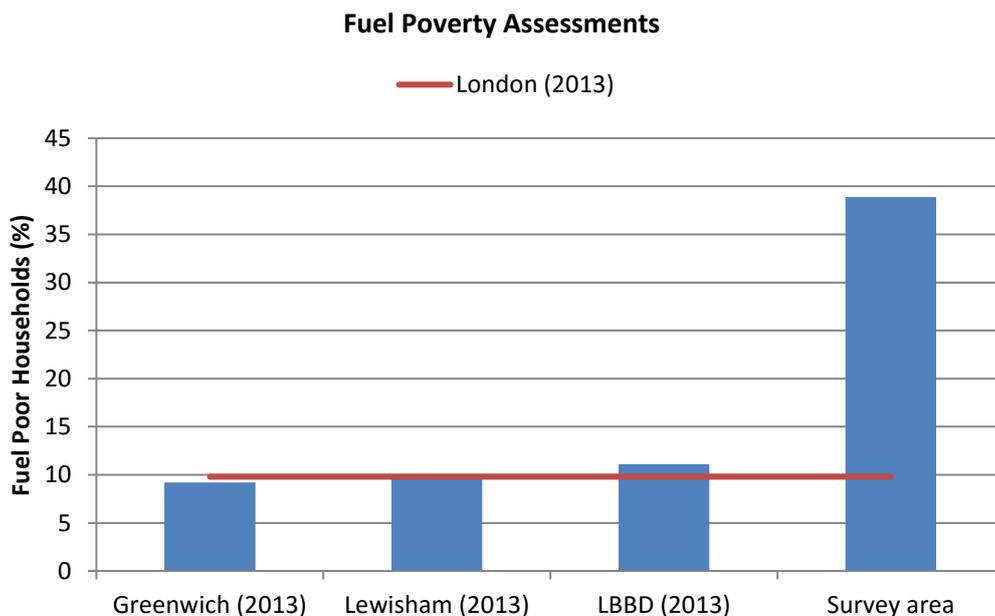
## Tackling fuel poverty 2015/20

### ECO, insulation and retrofitting

Increasing the efficiency of stock continues to be the main driver of the Council in providing affordable warmth. In 2014 Barking and Dagenham utilised Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding from British Gas which insulated 379 hard-to-treat cavity walls on Becontree Heath and 68 solid walls along Upney Lane. 70 flats at Perryman House in Barking received cavity wall insulation and 269 flats on the Ibscott Close estate are due to have insulation replaced by the end of 2016. The Council continues to seek future ECO opportunities before the deadline for completions in 2017.

### Fuel poverty assessments – measuring the extent of

To understand the levels of fuel poverty in Barking and Dagenham, the borough trialled a series of Fuel Poverty Assessments (FPAs) using the new Low Income High Cost indicator on flatted estates known to have failed insulation (old insulation which has crumbled). Ibscott Close, Hollidge Way and parts of Stour and Gosfield Road were assessed door-to-door in December 2014 and fuel poverty levels were at 38% - well above the regional average of 9.8% of households, and the borough's 11.1% level. Significant levels of mould and damp were discovered with 23% not heating their homes adequately. Households were found to be paying £215 a year more than the national average for their fuel bills:



Source for national, London and LBBD data found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2013-sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-low-income-high-costs-indicator>

The Council has a duty to eliminate thermal comfort hazards and in light of the fuel poverty assessment on the Ibscott Close estate instigated cavity wall insulation works. A second phase of these assessments is currently underway in targeted estates in Barking, Dagenham and Marks Gate and is expected to report back by the autumn of 2016.

### **Collective Fuel Switching – access to cheaper prices**

The Council continues to promote energy price support through collective fuel switching with more than 2,000 residents having registered for schemes over the last two years. 11% have switched to a lower fuel tariff with an average fuel saving of £221. The scheme is now being opened up to people on pre-pay meters who generally pay 15% more for their energy than those making monthly or quarterly payments under a fixed or variable contract.

### **Warm Homes, Healthy People Programme**

Providing advice and support to help households overcome personal, structural and mental barriers in keeping their homes warm is an essential ingredient of preventing fuel poverty. In partnership with CVS and the voluntary sector, the borough is rolling-out its fourth Warmer Homes, Healthy People programme to provide emergency support in cold snap Winter periods between October 2015 and March 2016. This includes the opening up of winter warm spaces, referrals to support networks, food parcels and warm packs, debt advice and emergency services through the Intake and MASH teams where vulnerable adults and children are in need of assistance. The scheme has assisted more than five hundred recipients according to previous evaluations of the social impact of the project.

### **Private Rented Sector (PRS) – targeting non-decent stock**

Fuel poor households are more likely to live in energy inefficient properties and in Barking and Dagenham, the private rented sector – which now accounts for 17% of stock - has some of the worst. Private tenants are at greater risk of suffering abnormal levels of fuel poverty due to having lower than average incomes, high numbers of pre-payment meters and badly insulated homes.

Due to concern at the levels of decency found in the PRS, the Council introduced a mandatory licensing of all landlords operative in the borough from September 2014. The private sector housing team will carry out routine inspections to ensure that housing regulations are met and carry out its duty to eliminate Category 1 hazards of excess cold and poor thermal comfort.

The Council is also preparing landlords for the impact of new regulations brought into place by the Energy Act 2011 which from 2016 will allow PRS tenants to request energy efficiency measures be installed. From 2018 the Act also allows for the prosecution of landlords who let properties which are rated energy bands under D.

### **Impact on health inequalities**

Recognising the enhanced role of local authorities in the promotion of public health, the borough is developing its affordable warmth strategy around tackling health inequalities, wellbeing and cold-related illness. There is a particularly strong link between cold-related deaths and lower indoor temperatures. There is evidence from the 2011 Marmot Review into Health Impacts of Cold Homes and Fuel Poverty to

suggest that households unable to adequately warm their homes and living in the coldest areas have a 20% greater risk of dying than those in warmer homes.

According to the Office for National Statistics the excess winter mortality index for 2012/13 was higher in Barking and Dagenham (34.5), than in England (20.1) and London (18.9). This means that in Barking and Dagenham there were 34.5% more deaths during the winter months than during the rest of the year. Fuel poverty and cold homes have a direct impact on seasonal mortality requiring robust and collaborative efforts from the Council, the NHS and the Clinical Commissioning Group. Trials in the north of the country have been very successful in reducing repeat admissions to hospital and reducing fuel poverty which may lead to winter deaths - this is especially true for those suffering from COPD. A boiler prescriptions project targeting patients at high risk is another highly focused intervention. These considerations are an integral part of the affordable warmth strategy's delivery.

### **Recommendations for Commissioners:**

Partners must promote a holistic affordable warmth strategy which seeks to increase thermal comfort and reduce excess winter deaths with insulation programmes where funding permits; mitigating against energy waste by supporting behaviour change and energy efficiency installations; and tackling fuel poverty by ensuring residents have access to some of the lowest tariffs.

To positively encourage residents to examine the cost of their fuel tariffs and support access to lower energy bills through collective fuel switching enterprises.

Partners must prioritise tackling health inequalities associated with fuel poverty through innovative schemes like boiler prescriptions being issued by GPs to highly vulnerable patients and eradicating Category 1 health hazards in private rented properties using the Housing Health Safety Rating System.

To access and bid for funding opportunities which allow for investment in housing stock retrofitting and heating works across all tenures and continue to roll-out fuel poverty assessments.

To engage the voluntary sector in identifying vulnerable households who may benefit from various incentives and initiatives delivered through Warmer Homes, Healthy People style projects inclusive of income maximisation, benefit checks, warm parcels and access to warm centres through winter periods.