

## Full Council

### 26<sup>th</sup> January 2023

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Winter 2022/23 temporary heating for tenants</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	David Watts, Executive Director for Adults, Partnerships and Housing

<b>Key Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Are there public sector equality duty implications?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)? –</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972</b>	

#### List of Appendices

None

#### Standard Operating Procedure

##### 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1. To advise the Council of the introduction of an NNC Standard Operating Procedure for the payment of a goodwill gesture to tenants of the Council, when temporary heaters are left in their property, as a result of a breakdown of their primary heating system this winter (2022/23).

##### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1. It is recognised that during the winter period (the Council has defined this as 1st November to 30th April based upon Met Office 1991-2020 minimum average temperatures data), there is a greater impact upon our tenants if their central heating boiler should break down and isn't repairable for a period of time.
- 2.2. Previously North Northamptonshire Council did not have a procedure for goodwill payments when a central heating boiler breaks down and isn't repairable for a period of time. Instead, the legacy Council policy was followed

where this exists. For example, in the Corby area this amounted to the issuing of two electric heaters and a payment of £2.00 per day (payable from the day after the engineer's initial visit if they were unable to repair the boiler to the date the boiler was then operational or replaced). The New NNC SOP was implemented from 1st December 2022.

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1. It is recommended that the Council notes the implementation of the Standard Operating Procedure for the payment of a goodwill gesture to tenants of the Council, when temporary heaters are left in their property, as a result of a breakdown of their primary heating system this winter (2022/23).

### **4. Report Background**

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- 4.1. At the Full Council meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> September 2022, Councillor Lyn Buckingham moved the following motion: *“North Northamptonshire Council to review the energy efficiency of any temporary heating given to families to help in those conditions where tenants have a boiler failure and face a long wait for repairs or replacement, as the current temporary heating (usually fan heaters) could cost up to 84p per hour to run per heater, over a month this could add £100s per month compared to average heating costs; the motion also asks if heating in these circumstances could be subsidised by the Council in properties where there are children under 5, the elderly and the disabled, who are disproportionately affected by the need and ability to keep warm.”*
- 4.2. The following amendment was then added to the motion: *“and that a report be brought back to the next Council meeting or the meeting after that.”*
- 4.3. This report seeks to provide a response to this motion.

### **5. Issues and Choices**

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- 5.1. In response to the motion for the Council to subsidise the cost of temporary heaters *“in properties where there are children under 5, the elderly and the disabled, who are disproportionately affected by the need and ability to keep warm”* a number of options were considered:
  - 5.1.1. **Continue to Operate under the legacy Council arrangements.** This would result in no changes being made to existing procedures, with the arrangements that were in place in the two former stock holding legacy Council's continuing. This option was not considered any further as it would not result in a consistent approach to all tenants of NNC being established.
  - 5.1.2. **Establish a standard operating procedure to subsidise the temporary heating costs for tenants where there are children under 5, the elderly and the disabled in affected households.** This would

result in the creation of an NNC approach to the support offered to tenants of the Council when their primary heating, usually a central heating boiler, fails and temporary heaters are provided. However, it would be limited to tenants whose household contains certain groups of people only.

5.1.3. **Establish a standard operating procedure to subsidise the temporary heating costs for all tenants in affected households.** This would result in the creation of an NNC approach to the support offered to tenants of the Council when their primary heating, usually a central heating boiler, fails and temporary heaters are provided. It would be available to all tenants of the Council for whom temporary heaters were provided. It was agreed that a universally accessible service to all tenants of NNC should be the option pursued, rather than limit eligibility to properties where there are children under 5, the elderly and the disabled. All households are impacted by the current energy prices therefore, it was deemed important to provide a universal service to all tenants of NNC this winter. In addition, if household qualifying criteria are added to the eligibility of these payments, it would increase the administrative burden on staff, which could require additional resources.

5.2. The Central Heating Boiler Breakdown Gesture of Goodwill Standard Operating Procedure for winter 2022/23 will operate as follows:

5.2.1. In the event of this situation occurring between 1st December 2022 and 30th April 2023, that a payment of £6.00 per day be made, together with the tenant keeping the two new, or PAT tested, heaters issued. The £6 per day equates to two- and three-quarter running hours per heater per day (five and a half hours per day in total), based on current average electricity prices. This represents a trebling of the previous payments made by the legacy Councils.

5.2.2. The payment would commence from the day after the engineer's initial visit, where it is proven the fault is the responsibility of the Council (the cause is not due to tenant misuse, smart meter installation etc.) and will run up to 14 days from this date, or to the date that an operational boiler is once more provided in the property, whichever is the sooner. Should the tenant decline or delay an appointment for the Council to repair or replace the boiler, then the Council will consider ending the goodwill gesture period at this date. It is expected that the boiler would be either repaired or replaced within this 14-day period. Should the tenant find that the Council has not repaired or replaced the boiler within 14 days then any further gesture would be looked at on a case-by-case basis via the Council's complaints process.

5.2.3. The Council appointed engineer will apologise for the inconvenience caused by the boiler breakdown if they are unable to repair the boiler at the first visit. The engineer will then issue the tenant with a card which advises of the next step to be undertaken to repair or replace the boiler. Information on how to claim the goodwill gesture is included on the card. Once the boiler is operational tenants will need to write (email or

letter) to the Housing Property Services team to claim their goodwill gesture. In order to raise a payment on the Council's financial system the tenant will also need to provide their bank details. Tenants are required to claim their gesture of goodwill payment by submitting their claim in writing and fully complete the required form(s) within 28 days of their boiler breakdown being resolved. Tenants are able to claim the gesture of goodwill payment regardless of whether or not they accept the Council's offer of temporary electric heaters.

- 5.3. In response to the motion request for the Council to *“review the energy efficiency of any temporary heating given to families to help in those conditions where tenants have a boiler failure”* this has been given due consideration. Unfortunately, despite extensive research into this matter it has not been possible to obtain an energy efficiency rating for the temporary fan heaters that are provided to tenants by either the Council or the contractor working on behalf of the Council. Consideration has been given to purchasing alternative types of temporary heaters, however it is recognised that any temporary heaters will not be as energy efficient as the central heating boiler it is temporarily replacing. By implementing a goodwill payment gesture that is available to all tenants of the Council should the need arise and ensuring that an efficient boiler repairs and replacement service is in place, the impact of running temporary heaters for tenants will be lessened.

## **6. Next Steps**

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- 6.1. The Central Heating Boiler Breakdown Gesture of Goodwill Standard Operating Procedure was commenced for winter 2022/23 from 01/12/22.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1. Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1. Estimated costs have been based on last winter's figures for temporary heaters provided in the former Kettering area (Corby data was not available due to the contractor not recording this). There were 96 instances of this nature in Kettering. Pro rata for Corby stock it is estimated that this would equal 121 instances. Therefore, a combined approximate total of 217 instances of where temporary electric heaters would need to be left could be expected for the Council this winter. 217 instances multiplied by 14 days (maximum period the gesture of goodwill covers), multiplied by £6, provides an estimated maximum cost to the Council of £18,228 this winter. It should be noted that 14 days is the maximum that the Council could be expected to pay the gesture of goodwill for. It is expected that most breakdowns will be resolved in a shorter timeframe than this. The HRA would fund these costs through the revenue budgets dedicated to heating repairs.
- 7.1.2. In addition, there is the cost of heaters. 217 instances multiplied by two heaters per instance equals 434 multiplied by £6.72 (current purchase price) equals £2,916.48. However, it should be recognised that the Council currently purchases heaters and gifts them to tenants, so this would not be seen as an

additional cost. Whilst consideration has been given to collecting the heaters back in from tenants once they have finished with them, it was deemed uneconomical to do this due to the requirement to complete a Portable Appliance Test (PAT) on each heater prior to reissuing them.

## **7.2. Legal and Governance**

7.2.1. None

## **7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans**

7.3.1. By introducing the Central Heating Boiler Breakdown Gesture of Goodwill Standard Operating Procedure for winter 2022/23 we are supporting the Council's Corporate Plan to create safe and thriving places to live, work and visit as well as creating green, sustainable environment, connected communities and modern public services.

## **7.4. Risk**

7.4.1. The financial risk to the Council has been outlined in section 7.1. An additional risk of supply chain failures in obtaining temporary heaters is also noted, however, this is deemed a low risk. Furthermore, the Central Heating Boiler Breakdown Gesture of Goodwill Standard Operating Procedure for winter 2022/23 will only operate until 30<sup>th</sup> April 2023. It will be reviewed and if necessary amended prior to winter 2023/24 meaning the Council can assess the financial impact of this new approach.

## **7.5. Consultation**

7.5.1. The Central Heating Boiler Breakdown Gesture of Goodwill Standard Operating Procedure for winter 2022/23 was discussed with the Tenants' Advisory Panel who were supportive of it being introduced.

## **7.6. Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel**

7.6.1. This item has not been considered by an Executive Advisory Panel.

## **7.7. Consideration by Scrutiny**

7.7.1. The decision has not been considered by scrutiny as it is proposed to cover the additional costs within the existing HRA revenue budget for heating and does not require any increase to the overall budget.

## **7.8. Equality Implications**

7.8.1. The three aims of the General Equality Duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be considered consider in the Council's decision-making processes, are:

(a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act.

(b) Advance the equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those that do not share it.

(c) Foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those that do not share it.

7.8.2. It is considered that this decision will have a positive impact on a group with a protected characteristic, particularly people who have a disability. The negative impact on disabled people which would be caused by selecting one of the previously discussed alternative options was a primary consideration in discounting those options.

## **7.9. Climate and Environment Impact**

7.9.1. Whilst it is recognised that temporary electric heaters are not as energy efficient as a gas boiler, this is a temporary measure. Whilst the heaters are being used the tenant is not burning gas, therefore there could be an offsetting of carbon.

## **7.10. Community Impact**

7.10.1. This procedure will support those most impacted by the cost of living.

## **7.11. Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.11.1. None identified

## **8. Background Papers**

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8.1 None