

# Warm & Well in North Yorkshire

On a radio interview a few weeks ago I was recently asked the question ‘What impact does living in a cold home have on a person?’ This a difficult question to answer and having only lived in a cold home for a short time, I gave an academic answer about the all-encompassing impact of it. Warm & Well in North Yorkshire recently visited a lady who has been living in a cold home for a much longer time and was able to give a more interesting and emotional answer:

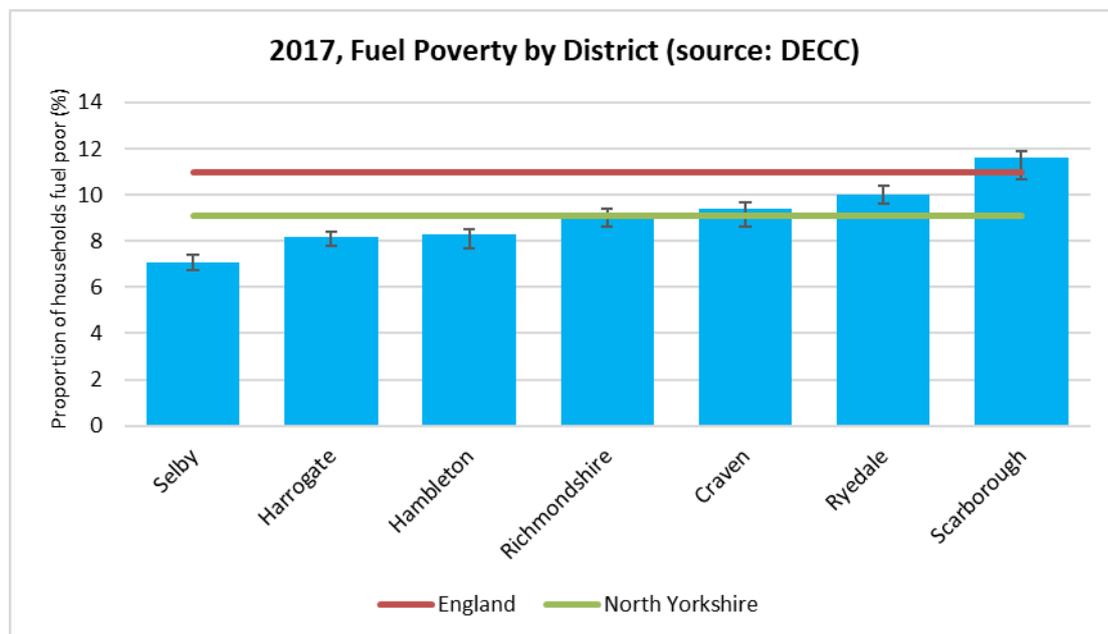
“You feel numb. There aren’t enough words to describe how being cold is affecting you. It’s affecting everything; mentally, physically and psychologically. I felt so on my own.”

This statement gives a clear impression of how being cold damages your mental and physical health, as well as leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Living in a cold home is linked to an increased risk of developing a wide range of health conditions. Resistance to respiratory infections is lowered by colder temperatures and there is increased risk of circulatory problems like stroke and heart attacks.<sup>1</sup> There is also an increased risk of falls and unintentional injury due to the lowering of strength, dexterity and the worsening of conditions like arthritis. We have also seen that living in damp and cold housing is associated with an increase in poor mental health, and that living in a cold home can contribute to social isolation as people become reluctant to invite friends to a cold house and may not be able to afford to go out.<sup>2</sup>

Continuing with the interview theme, I know the next question that I’d be asked would be ‘To what extent is fuel poverty and cold homes a problem for North Yorkshire?’

In 2017, 9.1% of the population of North Yorkshire were living in fuel poverty, which works out at 24,045 households struggling to heat their homes.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Public Health England, Local action on health inequalities: fuel poverty & cold home-related health problems, 2014

<sup>2</sup> Local Authority Cold Homes Toolkit, Citizens Advice, <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Local%20authority%20cold%20homes%20toolkit.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sub-regional-fuel-poverty-data-2019>

Fuel poverty is when a household cannot afford to heat their homes to an adequate level. This is as a result of low income, high energy costs and poor energy efficiency of the home. This often means that a household has to choose between heating and other essential costs like food, or simply live in a home that is so cold it puts their health at risk. Fuel poverty often goes hand-in-hand with other types of deprivation and poverty, as described in the *Director of Public Health Annual Report 2019*, and some areas have a higher concentration of it than others.

The report also shows how fuel poverty can be exacerbated in rural areas. The fact is that rural homes are generally more expensive to heat. This is down to a variety of factors including being off the gas network, usually older properties, often having solid walls and with restrictions placed on development due to living in the National Park areas. This is another challenge that we have to face.

Now that I have outlined the extent of the problem the interviewer would then ask me about the solution and what we are doing to help the population of North Yorkshire living in fuel poverty.

Warm & Well in North Yorkshire is part of the public health strategy to address the inequalities associated with fuel poverty. The aim of Warm & Well in North Yorkshire is to proactively address the causes of cold homes of vulnerable people living in North Yorkshire. We are there to support households who are living in fuel poverty, who are finding their energy bills expensive, or whose heating isn't suitable to meet their needs.

One thing that makes Warm & Well in North Yorkshire so strong is our positive partnership working. We bring together organisations from across the county in order to collaborate and coordinate on addressing fuel poverty and winter health. We work with a wide range of organisations, including home improvement agencies, charities and councils.

Through the North Yorkshire County Council funding we are able to operate a single point of contact operated by Citizens Advice Mid-North Yorkshire, for anyone across North Yorkshire who might be struggling to keep warm at home. The partnership also has funding from British Gas Energy Trust to pay for the help that individuals receive, this is managed by Community First Yorkshire. This means we are able to offer home visits to deliver energy advice and home energy assessments; deliver one-to-one debt advice and run awareness raising sessions in the community. We are also able to pay for energy efficiency measures to be installed in homes, carry out small home repairs and provide match funding to enable access to funding for any larger measures needed.

The partnership has also successfully secured over a million pounds from the Warm Homes Fund to install first time central heating in off-gas homes that can be connected to mains gas and also for homes that are too far from gas mains.

The impact that Warm & Well in North Yorkshire makes can be seen in the personal stories of the people we help. One example of this is Harry.

Harry and his wife live in Scarborough and were advised by a Gas Safe Engineer to replace their old LPG boiler, which was expensive and inefficient. With just their state pension and Attendance Allowance as income, they were very concerned about the high cost of a new boiler so they called the Warm & Well in North Yorkshire helpline.

The Warm & Well in North Yorkshire team arranged a home visit by an energy efficiency specialist. As a result of the visit, Harry and his wife were awarded funding for a new LPG boiler and also swapped their electricity supplier using Scarborough Borough Council's Community Switch scheme, helping them save money on their bills. The couple are very grateful for the help they received through Warm & Well North Yorkshire. As Harry explained, 'I don't need to worry that the boiler will break down next winter.'



Through gathering funding and partnership working, Warm & Well in North Yorkshire has been able to support North Yorkshire County Council in working towards tackling fuel poverty, inequalities and ensuring that everyone has a safe and warm home. If you come across anyone who would benefit from a referral into Warm & Well in North Yorkshire please direct them to [warmandwell.org.uk](https://www.warmandwell.org.uk), or ask them to call 01609 767555.

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