

1. LHS Development & Main Issues

The Local Housing Strategy for Scottish Borders (2012-2017) is nearing implementation and therefore requires to be redrafted and submitted to Scottish Government Ministers in 2016. The current LHS focuses action, investment and partnership on the following four strategic aims:

<p>1. The supply of housing meets the needs of Borders Communities</p>	<p>2. People have better access to good quality, energy efficient homes</p>	<p>3. People are less likely to become homeless and those affected by homelessness have improved access to settled accommodation</p>	<p>4. More people with particular needs and/or requiring support are able to live independently in their own homes.</p>
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To build the new strategy, Scottish Borders Council need to assess whether the previous LHS aims still represent the main housing issues that need to be tackled or whether a refocused set of local priorities will guide action, partnership and investment moving forward. This briefing focuses on housing quality and energy efficiency in Scottish Borders, presenting evidence on the extent and nature of the problem and progress in tackling it since 2012.

2. Housing Quality & Energy Efficiency: What is the nature of the problem in Scottish Borders?

Fuel poverty and extreme fuel poverty is more prevalent across Scottish Borders than is the case nationally

Fuel poverty is a particular issue facing households in Scottish Borders. A household is considered to be in fuel poverty if it spends more than 10% of household income on fuel, and in extreme fuel poverty if it spends more than 20% of income on fuel.

In Scottish Borders, 43% of households are fuel poor in comparison with 36% nationally.

Fuel poverty is exacerbated by a number of factors affecting properties and households in Scottish Borders, including:

- 9% of dwellings in Scottish Borders have an F or G energy efficiency rating;
- 44% of dwellings in Scottish Borders were built before 1945;
- 35% of Scottish Borders dwellings are off the gas grid;
- 4% of dwellings in Scottish Borders are Below Tolerable Standard;
- 75% of dwellings in Scottish Borders have disrepair to critical elements;
- Dwellings in Scottish Borders are more prone to dampness (6%) and condensation (20%) than is the case nationally (4% and 11%, respectively).

In 2010, there were approximately 1,000 long term empty homes in Scottish Borders; a 57% increase since 2008. To this end, the 2012/17 LHS outlined a commitment to reducing this. Activity across the region – initiated through the LHS and Empty Homes Strategy – has reduced the number of long term empty homes in 2014/15 to 976.

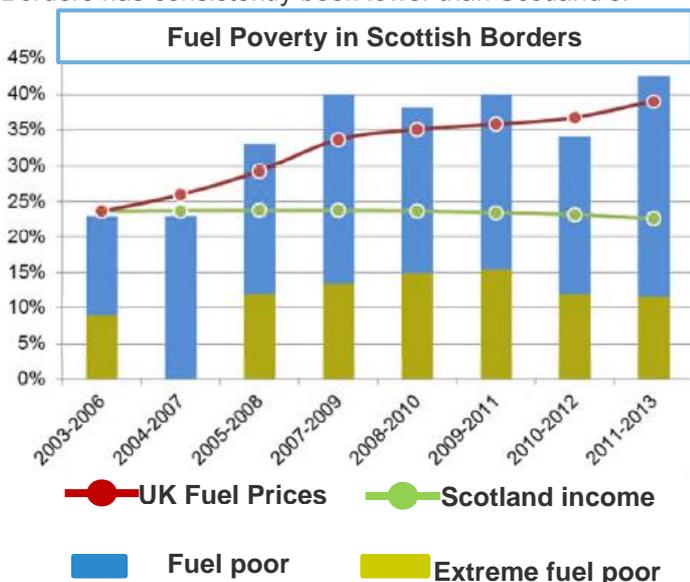
In terms of improving housing quality & energy efficiency, the LHS is required to address the following policy issues:



3. Housing Quality & Energy Efficiency: What is the extent of the problem in Scottish Borders?

Higher proportions of households in Scottish Borders are fuel poor (46%) than in Scotland (36%). This is also the case with extreme fuel poverty which stands at 12% in Scottish Borders and 7% in Scotland. There are three main drivers behind fuel poverty: the cost of fuel, income profiles, and energy efficiency.

Income profiles are comparatively lower in Scottish Borders than in Scotland. Based on the CACI Paycheck data for 2015, the average income for Scottish Borders households is £32,785; approximately 5% lower than the national average (£34,619). Furthermore, over the last two decades, gross weekly pay in Scottish Borders has consistently been lower than Scotland's.



Findings from a report commissioned by Scottish Borders Council in April 2015 also highlighted that areas which were deprived (as per the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) largely also had high levels of fuel poverty.

This report also demonstrated the relationship between cost of fuel and income profiles and fuel poverty. As shown in the graph, as UK fuel prices have risen, and the median Scottish income has fallen, fuel poverty in the Scottish Borders has increased.

A key factor in this fuel poverty profile relates to the 35% of Scottish Borders households who are off the gas grid and must rely on more expensive energy to heat and run their homes (compared to 15% of Scotland).

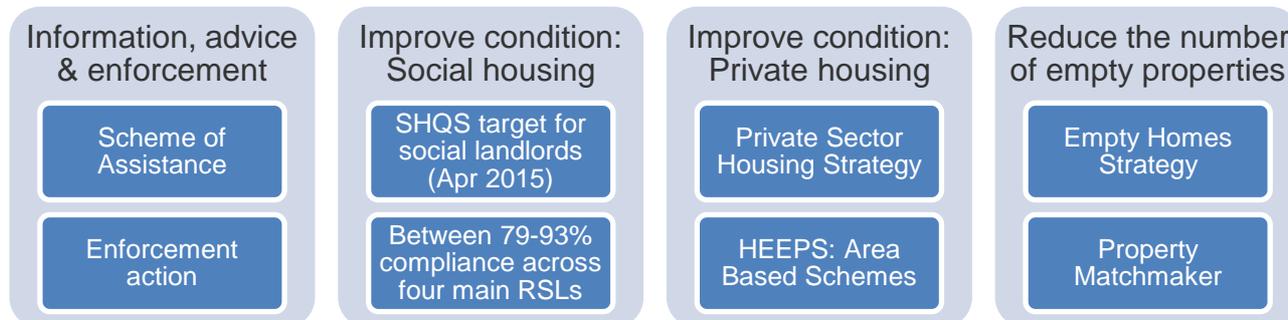
In terms of house condition, the profile in Scottish Borders is generally worse than is the case nationally. In Scottish Borders, 4% of properties are Below Tolerable Standard, which is slightly higher than in Scotland (3%). Whilst the number of properties in serious disrepair is less in Scottish Borders than in Scotland, there are higher incidences locally than nationally of properties with urgent disrepair (42% compared to 38%) and disrepair to critical elements (75% compared to 60%). *It is important to note that these figures have been sourced from the 2011-13 Scottish House Condition Survey, which has a relatively small sample size and, given when it was carried out, does not reflect the impact of SHQS investment in social housing.*

Area	Below Tolerable Standard	Urgent disrepair	Extensive disrepair	Damp
Scottish Borders	4%	42%	7%	6%
Scotland	3%	38%	10%	4%

The comparatively poor condition of private sector housing, the more acute levels of fuel poverty and the specific geographic and socio-economic issues faced by households in Scottish Borders would suggest that a continued agenda on improving housing condition and energy efficiency remains a priority.

4. Housing Quality & Energy Efficiency: LHS response and impact

The implementation of the 2012-2017 Local Housing Strategy has focused on the aim of improving housing quality and energy efficiency in Scottish Borders by delivering the following objectives:



In terms of **information and advice provision**, Scottish Borders' Scheme of Assistance has supported private sector households to carry out repair and maintenance, with assistance prioritised to older and vulnerable households. In 2014/15, the scheme provided grants for 88 adaptations, and advice regarding repairs and maintenance to 23 households. The Council also has a dedicated Enforcement Officer who ensures that landlords are meeting legislative responsibilities. The Officer's annual inspections of private rented sector properties assesses the extent to which the landlord is 'fit and proper'. Since 2012, this process has led to 85 closing or maintenance orders being issued.

The **Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)** was introduced by the Scottish Government in 2004 set a target for all homes rented from social landlords should meet this standard by April 2015. Based on the 2014/15 Annual Return on the Charter, none of the four main RSLs (Scottish Borders HA, Berwickshire HA, Eildon HA and Waverly HA) achieved full compliance by the deadline, nor do they expect all properties to meet the SHQS this financial year. This is primarily due to exemptions and properties in abeyance. One RSL highlighted the difficulty in engaging with owner occupiers and private landlords to contribute towards the cost of meeting the SHQS. The focus will now be on the introduction of the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH).

Improving the condition of private sector housing has been helped through the delivery of the Home Energy Efficiency Programme Scotland: Area Based Schemes (HEEPS: ABS). This programme has successfully delivered over £5.9m of investment in energy efficiency measures for households across Scottish Borders since 2013/14. The 2015/16 HEEPS: ABS programme is currently underway, having been awarded £1.87m.



A review of the energy efficiency schemes in the Scottish Borders was carried out by Changeworks in summer 2015. This review found that over 8,400 measures have been installed across more than 5,800 households since 2009, which have resulted in financial savings of £36.9m. The report emphasised the importance of strong partnerships between the Council and local organisations (including RSLs), and highlighted evidence which shows high levels of customer satisfaction and increased health and wellbeing.

The current LHS made a commitment to the regeneration of the Stonefield, Hawick, including demolition, remodelling and new build, which has historically been a low demand estate. The 2015/15 LHS Progress Report noted that Scottish Borders HA has completed the demolition of long term empty flats in the area, and the next stage of regeneration will begin.

The Council’s Empty Homes Strategy (2012-15) was developed to support the LHS objective to reduce the number of long term empty homes in Scottish Borders. As well as securing funding from the Scottish Government’s Empty Loan Fund (£150,000), developing information and advice materials, setting up an Empty Homes Working Group and engaging with private landlords (including promoting the use of the Deposit Guarantee Scheme), Scottish Borders Council is involved in Property Matchmaker Service. This free service is managed by an (award winning) Empty Homes Officer and enables owners of empty properties to identify potential buyers. This scheme has led to 29 less empty properties.

As well as a commitment within the LHS, the Council developed a Fuel Poverty Delivery Plan (2013-16) to tackle fuel poverty across Scottish Borders. The four aims of the plan reflect those set out within the LHS, including the provision of information and advice and the delivery of programmes to improve energy efficiency. Beyond this, the Council has also sought to build intelligence on fuel poverty and maximise incomes. In terms of the latter, fuel poverty has been recognised within the Tackling Poverty and Achieving Social Justice Strategy, and the Home Energy Advisor works closely with the Welfare Benefits Service and Citizens Advice Bureau.

5. What strategic questions should be considered at the LHS Conference?

The purpose of the LHS conference is to agree the main housing issues that require intervention in Scottish Borders, examine the main issues in detail and generate ideas for action and investment. Key issues for consideration in the Housing Quality & Energy Efficiency Focus Group are:

