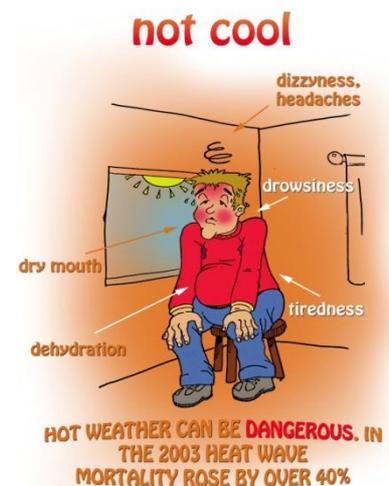


## Adapting to the health impacts of climate change in the London Borough of Islington

The relationship between fuel prices, energy efficiency and poor housing stock has been the subject of great attention in recent years. The concept of ‘fuel poverty’ is also recognised as a major indicator of health inequalities<sup>1</sup>, whereby households face the high costs of keeping warm and other basic energy services. However, risks from heat are given much less attention. In a changing climate we can expect the health effects of heatwaves and hot weather to cause a significant burden on health, affecting some of the most vulnerable people in society most severely.

### Challenge

- The evidence about the risks to health from overheating and heatwaves is extensive and consistent from around the world<sup>2</sup>. Excessive exposure to high temperatures can kill. In 2003 there were 2'000 recorded excess deaths as a result of a ten-day heatwave in August.
- The potential for summertime overheating, especially in the context of expected climate change and urban heat island effects, poses significant risks to public health.
- Higher indoor temperatures can adversely affect indoor air quality through increased concentrations of indoor-sourced pollutants. Air-tight, energy efficient buildings are often vulnerable to overheating and lack of healthy air-change rate, posing risks to health.<sup>3</sup>



Some of the promotional material developed by Islington to communicate heat risk

### Response

- The Heatwave Plan for England sets out suitable actions for the health and social care system to reduce the health risks of heating to people, services and communities. A heat-health alert system operates from 1 June to 15<sup>th</sup> September to warn of the risk of heatwaves.
- Local Health & Resilience Partnerships and Local Resilience Forums have a critical role in preparing and responding to heatwaves at a local level, working closely with Health and Wellbeing Boards on long term strategic planning.
- Including the health risks of overheating in local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) is an important consideration, especially given the observed and expected changes in our climate.

## Adapting to the health impacts of climate change in Islington

The Seasonal Health and Affordable Warmth (SHAW) Team at Islington Council were keen to initiate a programme of work to protect vulnerable people from the impacts of climate change. Staff across Islington’s public health teams and affordable warmth team were aware of the higher risk of local residents from urban heat island effect, coupled with knowledge of vulnerable communities.

<sup>1</sup> [PHE & UCL \(2014\) Health Equity Briefing, September 2014: Fuel poverty and cold home-related health problems](#)

<sup>2</sup> [PHE \(2014\) Heatwave Plan for England – Protecting health and reducing harm from severe heat and heatwaves](#)

<sup>3</sup> Shrubsole, C et al (2014) 100 Unintended consequences of policies to improve the energy efficiency of the UK housing stock, Indoor and Built Environment, Vol 23: 340.

## How the work began:

Islington's strategy for protecting vulnerable people from both heat and cold began as a research initiative with University College London (UCL) and local community groups, which was funded by Defra. This initially involved some temperature modelling work to identify which types of housing and were most vulnerable to heat and cold. The strategy then examined which residents were most vulnerable to these impacts, involving some social research to identify how local residents perceived climate impacts. This helped to understand local perception of the problem. This also increased the teams' understanding of the networks and teams who were in contact with vulnerable residents, such as social care teams; it was clear that the solution would involve getting these staff on board with the issue and be part of the solution.

*"Protecting vulnerable Islington residents from the effects of both cold and hot weather is crucial. The work of the SHAW Team and its network is central to this and the inclusion in our JSNA helps set out the case for action"*

*Julie Billett, Director of Public Health, Camden and Islington*

## Action taken and the results:

- Developing a seasonal health referral network, whereby those providing services from the voluntary or community sector are able to refer service users' details to the SHAW team.
- Working with Groundwork London (who had been advising homes on keeping warm and fuel poverty since 2009) to also advise on heat. Providing 'keep cool' packs with information and equipment to help residents protect their health during hot weather
- Startup of a severe weather broadcast system through the Seasonal Health Interventions Network (SHINE) enabled a level 2 heatwave alert in July 2014 to be broadcast to 132 teams across 86 local organisations via email.
- Telephone check-up service has been implemented to reach vulnerable residents in the event of a level 3 heatwave alert. This has not yet been tested but is ready to go when needed. This activity supports the integration of healthcare services with social care, by working together to assess risks and identify mutually beneficial action for service users. This supports the integration of health and social care under the 2012 Health and Social Care Act.

## From focus on cold to seasonal health:

The SHAW Team overcame a number of challenges in order to make the case for focus the health effects of heat across the borough. Constrained budgets and time limitations were a barrier to action, as was the relative attention given to the planning cycle for heat and cold: summer preparedness receives less time and attention as the winter-related risks are proportionally greater than the summer risks.

Using new language and referring to 'seasonal health' helped to change the thinking around the traditional planning cycle. Profiling the risks of seasonal health in the local JSNA has also been a crucial step to achieving a mandate for this work, broadening the existing section on winter deaths to seasonal health enabled local teams to better-understand the risks associated with heat and design an adequate response. Combining the initiative with affordable warmth and fuel poverty projects was also a critical factor in its success. This work also supported the borough's climate adaptation strategy which was already in place.

## Reproduction of this work outside of Islington:

The model used by Islington is highly replicable across other local authorities. The only exclusivity across Islington was the initial work with Defra on mapping vulnerabilities to climate change and extreme weather.

For more information about the Islington Model please contact [john.kolm-murray@islington.gov.uk](mailto:john.kolm-murray@islington.gov.uk)



## The climate is changing. Are you?

A support service led by the Environment Agency  
[www.gov.uk/government/policies/adapting-to-climate-change](http://www.gov.uk/government/policies/adapting-to-climate-change)