



END FUEL POVERTY BEFORE THE WINTER

COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW SUBMISSION FROM THE END FUEL POVERTY COALITION

21 September 2020

The End Fuel Poverty Coalition is a broad coalition of over 20 anti-poverty, environmental, health and housing campaigners, charities, local authorities, trade unions and consumer organisations. It campaigns to end fuel poverty and thereby improve people's health and quality of life as well as seeking to reduce the cost of living, create jobs and negate carbon emissions in the process.

We welcome the opportunity to set out how the Comprehensive Spending Review could end fuel poverty, an issue which has plagued our country for generations. But now, thanks to innovations in technology, the construction industry and energy supply, it could be all but eradicated within the lifetime of this Parliament.

Evidence from Public Health England¹ shows that fuel poverty puts households more at risk from the worst effects of Covid-19. Therefore, ending fuel poverty is now an urgent public health priority, which can only be solved through economic measures.

The benefits of doing so include a faster transition to a just net zero, the levelling up of the economy and a green stimulus to aid the recovery from lockdown.

On the other hand, with energy use rising as people stay at home more and the predicted income squeeze, it is estimated that the numbers in fuel poverty could soar². The recent National Energy Action / Energy Action Scotland monitor revealed a significant hardship for fuel poor households in the coming winter, as a potent combination of higher energy use resulting from staying at home for longer is mixed with reductions in income.³

¹ Public Health England

https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/documents/Fuel_poverty_health_inequalities.pdf and Sheffield University <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/ppp-online/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/stuck-home-cold-covid-19-fuel-poor.pdf>

² End Fuel Poverty Coalition calculations <http://www.endfuelpoverty.org.uk/hundreds-of-thousands-set-to-be-forced-into-fuel-poverty/>

³ NEA / EAS Fuel Poverty Monitor <https://www.nea.org.uk/media/news/frontline-organisations-warn-of-a-difficult-winter-ahead-for-fuel-poor-households-if-urgent-action-isnt-taken/>



END FUEL POVERTY BEFORE THE WINTER

One in three⁴ British households are already concerned about the health impacts of living in a cold home this winter. And should a second wave of Covid-19 hit during cold weather, the impact could be catastrophic for individuals and our health services.

Cold homes are entirely preventable and five clear actions must be taken to save lives and help address the financial impact of the current crisis.

1) Rapid roll-out of large-scale energy efficiency programmes which would also deliver a green economic stimulus that is shovel ready (e.g. retrofitting of people's homes and improved heating systems). In line with the government's manifesto commitments, we expect to see confirmation of the £9.2 billion investment in building energy efficiency and bring forward £2.8 billion to invest in the next two years which can support 42,500 jobs across the country and help a million households save an average of £400 on their energy bills. 190,000 jobs across a range of trades could be supported to 2030.⁵

2) Urgent delivery of government promises on tackling fuel poverty, such as confirming the extension of Warm Home Discount (ideally to 2026), introduction of the promised Home Upgrade Grants and social housing decarbonisation programme. This also needs to include an extension to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) from April 2022- March 2026 and maintain its key focus on low income and vulnerable households. Government should further ensure that the Shared Property Fund (SPF) helps end cold homes across the UK and plans are introduced to extend and, as suggested by National Energy Action, strengthen the increase to Universal Credit for low income households.⁶

3) This unprecedented level of investment needs to be coupled with large scale training programmes to ensure that work both on the fabric of buildings and on heating systems, whether retrofitting existing buildings or in new construction, is done by people fully trained to the highest existing standards, including for instance PAS 2035, and can be reliably monitored, certified, and guaranteed. New safety requirements, new materials, and new developments (e.g. in heat pumps and heat networks) have proved challenging and without a significant investment in training there is a risk that, as in the past, homes will be built or refurbished to unacceptably low standards.

⁴ NEA / EAS Fuel Poverty Monitor

⁵ Energy Efficiency Infrastructure Group Comprehensive Spending Review Submission

⁶ National Energy Action Comprehensive Spending Review Submission



END FUEL POVERTY BEFORE THE WINTER

4) Immediate steps to improve energy standards in the private rented sector, alongside improved security and affordability for private tenants. We note and welcome the Minister for Energy's commitment⁷ to strengthening the "Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards" (MEES) for those in rented accommodation. However, we also need adequate enforcement of existing measures and we would urge the government to incentivise local authorities to take action, building on the successful pilot programmes in places such as Oxford City Council which show that, through fines, enforcement can be self-sufficient.

5) Fuel Poverty Debt Relief to ensure fewer people will have to choose between heating and eating. We understand the government's commitment⁸ to working with Ofgem and energy firms to offer debt deferral. However, relief must go beyond deferral of payment. Many people will not use the energy they need to keep warm and healthy if it means building up debts for the future which they do not know how they can pay. So a true debt relief programme would enable a "quick fix" to those in extreme fuel poverty this winter while the longer term impact of the other measures outlined above can be realised.

We hope that the plans set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review take the next step to realising an ambitious programme to end fuel poverty.

⁷ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-07/86224>

⁸ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-09-09/87559>