



**Response by the Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty
Coalition to the Northern Ireland Executive Draft
Programme for Government Framework 2016-21**

July 2016



The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21 (PfG) consultation paper.

We commend the Northern Ireland Executive for adopting this outcome based approach, however, its success will depend on establishing the right outcomes, indicators and action plans to support the framework.

About the Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition

The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition (FPC) was launched on the 1st November 2010 in response to the increasing serious levels of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. The Coalition's aim is to drive forward the fuel poverty agenda in Northern Ireland in terms of both policy and practical initiatives.

Currently, the Coalition has a membership base of over 100 organisations from across Northern Ireland; representing businesses, environmental groups, trade unions, the health sector, local councils, consumer groups, housing associations, rural support networks, the voluntary sector, student unions, young persons groups, older persons groups and faith groups.

The Fuel Poverty Coalition believes no-one should have to live in a cold home.

The Cold Hard Facts

- Over 300,000 (42%) households in Northern Ireland live in fuel poverty, the highest proportion of fuel poor households in the UK¹.
- 33,000 households are in extreme fuel poverty, needing to spend more than 25% of their income on all household fuel use².
- 870 deaths in 2014-15 across Northern Ireland were directly attributable to vulnerable people living in cold homes³.
- Around 68% of households in Northern Ireland are reliant on Home Heating Oil to heat their homes; an unregulated fuel in terms of price and vulnerable consumer protection⁴.
- Based on a conservative estimate, Northern Ireland domestic energy consumers have contributed well over £150m to the Treasury over the past 5 years⁵.

¹ Over 300,000 (42%) households in Northern Ireland live in fuel poverty, the highest proportion of fuel poor households in the UK. op. cit. 2. http://www.nhe.gov.uk/northern_ireland_house_condition_survey_main_report_2011.pdf

² 33,000 households are in extreme fuel poverty, needing to spend more than 25% of their income on all household fuel use. University of Ulster, 'Facing Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland' June 2013. Pg. 5. http://uir.ulster.ac.uk/27679/1/AWP1_REPORT_FINAL_TYPESET_COPY.pdf

³ 870 deaths in 2014-2015 across Northern Ireland were directly attributable to vulnerable people living in cold homes. Data taken directly from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency: <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp32.htm> 30% of total figure directly attributable deaths from cold homes as specified by World Health Organisation research

http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/142077/e95004.pdf

⁴ Around 68% of households in Northern Ireland are reliant on Home Heating Oil to heat their homes; an unregulated fuel. Figure as defined by research from the Consumer Council: <http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/energy/home-heating-oil/>

⁵ Based on a conservative estimate, Northern Ireland domestic energy consumers have contributed well over £150m to the Treasury over the past 5 years. "This calculation is based on estimating the VAT derived from domestic electricity and gas sales in NI. This analysis is based on conservative estimates of household energy consumption, does not include VAT derived from the use of supplementary or secondary heating or any contribution from VAT on non regulated fuels such as domestic heating oil which is clearly the predominant fuel for domestic heating in NI".



The Consequences of NOT Addressing Fuel Poverty are Significant:

- More pressure on health and social care services;
- Shocking numbers of cold-related deaths every winter;
- Stress and mental illness through struggling with fuel debt;
- Social exclusion and isolation arise from living in a cold, damp house; and
- Setbacks to children's education when they cannot study properly in their own home.

The recognised benefits of acting to end fuel poverty are:

1. Reduction in bills and energy arrears can increase spending within poorer communities and local economies;
2. Better living conditions and significant positive impacts on health;
3. Increased internal temperatures will lead to fewer premature winter deaths; and
4. Reduction in bills can lead to less stress and better mental health for occupants.

The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition's FIVE KEY PRIORITIES for Action

- Ensure that current and future schemes are effectively targeted at those who need the most support to reduce their heating costs, and any emerging scheme must ensure that the energy justice principles of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) are embedded as a key principle.
- Make energy efficiency an infrastructure priority to resource a well targeted energy efficiency programme, based on a Whole House Solution, to firstly significantly reduce and then eliminate fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.
- Establish a new fuel poverty strategy. Ensuring that all key departments, organisations and individuals are fully engaged in tackling fuel poverty.
- Save lives by implementing the NICE NG6 guidelines on tackling excess winter deaths.
- Regulate the oil industry both in price and protection of vulnerable consumers, ensuring that they have the same safeguards that natural gas and electricity consumers currently have.



The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition Response

The facts and figures above outline the overwhelming problem and invidious nature of fuel poverty. It is a unique and distinct problem and one that requires a range of interventions across the various government departments. We believe that this framework provides us with an opportunity to tackle fuel poverty in all its guises.

We believe that the 14 strategic outcomes are sound but without a strategic outcome relating to energy, the Executive will not meet its vision as described in the consultation. We therefore call for an additional strategic outcome to ensure

‘That our energy policy delivers a Secure, Affordable and Sustainable energy system for all households in Northern Ireland’

Indicators of success would include a number of the 42 existing indicators, as highlighted in the table below, as well as additional indicators which should be included such as **Reduction in Fuel Poverty, Reduction in Excess Winter Deaths, Reduction of Hospital Admissions, Warmer homes, Improved Energy Efficiency, Reduced Energy Bills** and **Reduced Carbon Footprint**.

Programme for Government Outcomes Framework	
Indicators to support that our Energy Policy delivers a Secure, Affordable and Sustainable energy system for all households in Northern Ireland	
2. Reduce health inequality	3. Increase healthy life expectancy
4. Reduce preventable deaths	6. Improve mental health
7. Improve health in pregnancy	8. Improve the supply of suitable housing
11. Improve educational outcomes	12. Reduce educational inequality
15. Improve child development	16. Increase the proportion of people in work
18. Increase the proportion of people working in good jobs	19. Reduce poverty
29. Increase environmental sustainability	37. Improve air quality
42. Increase quality of life for people with disabilities	

Measures used to assess the indicators could be the Fuel Poverty Statistics in the House Condition Survey (NIHE), Excess Winter Deaths (NISRA), the Department for Communities progress on their Affordable Warmth Programme and the Department for the Economy’s progress on their energy efficiency programmes. A benchmarking exercise should take place to measure the impact of energy policy on household bills.



We also would like to see an expansion of Outcome 13 which is that **‘We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.’**

We reiterate one of the Fuel Poverty Coalitions Manifesto calls which is to:

‘Make energy efficiency an infrastructure priority to resource a well targeted energy efficiency programme, based on a Whole House Solution, to firstly significantly reduce and then eliminate fuel poverty in Northern Ireland.’

Also adopted in Scotland, this strategic decision would not only reduce fuel poverty and meet the indicators outlined above, but meet the following economic indicators as outlined in the PfG.

Programme for Government Outcomes Framework	
Indicators that support making Energy Efficiency an Infrastructure Priority	
8. Improve the supply of suitable housing	14. Improve the skills profile of the population
16. Increase the proportion of people in work	17. Reduce economic inactivity
18. Increase the proportion of people working in good jobs	19. Reduce poverty
20. Increase the size of the economy	21. Increased the competitiveness of the economy
22. Increase innovation in our economy	28. Increase the confidence and capability of people and communities
29. Increase environmental sustainability	32. Increase economic opportunities for our most deprived communities
33. Reduce underemployment	34. Improve regional balance of economic prosperity through increased employment

With a diverse membership including businesses, health sector, councils the voluntary and community sectors, the Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition looks forward to engaging with Government to develop the plans envisaged in this outcome based model.

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