



**Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition response to
the National Infrastructure Commission
'Congestion, Capacity, Carbon: Priorities for
National Infrastructure' Consultation on a National
Infrastructure Assessment**

January 2018

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

We established five key priorities one of which is to make energy efficiency an infrastructure priority to resource a well targeted energy efficiency programme to eliminate fuel poverty in Northern Ireland¹. The Coalition also calls for adequate oversight and regulation of the heating oil industry to protect vulnerable consumers, ensuring they have similar safeguards to natural gas and electricity consumers. This is particularly important in Northern Ireland as heating oil is the main fuel source for almost 68% of households who are reliant on this unregulated fuel.

¹ Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition, A Manifesto for Warmth, 2016.

Response

The Fuel Poverty Coalition welcomes the interim National Infrastructure Assessment and has a particular interest in Chapter 4. *‘Eliminating carbon emissions from energy waste’* specifically in relation to reducing emissions from heating.

While Energy in Northern Ireland is devolved, with policy and strategy overseen by the Northern Ireland Department for the Economy (DfE), much of our guidance and traction comes from Westminster. We are therefore pleased to see that the document states that UK government continues to play an important role and specifically cites the interconnected nature of policies markets, systems and infrastructure. Additionally, following the referendum on 23 June 2016, it is evident that Whitehall will play a key role in determining Northern Ireland’s energy relationship with other Member States, including the Republic of Ireland.

The document places a strong emphasis on energy efficiency as key to decarbonising houses and we strongly agree and believe that radically improving the fabric and heating of homes represents the most cost effective long-term solution for tackling high energy bills and helping to eradicate fuel poverty.

Northern Ireland’s current Strategic Energy Framework is well out of date and much needed direction is required for Northern Ireland to be positioned in relation to all things energy.

In particular the following three key areas require urgent attention:

- The lack of a Northern Ireland Executive;
- Brexit, ISEM and impact on Energy prices and connectivity;
- Northern Ireland’s heavy reliance on home heating oil.

Fuel Poverty

Northern Ireland currently has the highest levels of fuel poverty within the UK:

- The most recent figures indicate that 42%² of households are in fuel poverty;
- 33,000 of households are estimated to be in extreme fuel poverty, needing to spend more than 25% of their income on all household fuel use³;
- 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 customer protection⁴;
- Northern Ireland has lower incomes and a higher level of means tested dependency than the rest of UK. Nearly one in five households is in relative poverty and 15% of households are in absolute poverty, the highest group being households with children.

Recommendation

- We call on the UK Government and the National Infrastructure Commission to state clearly that domestic energy efficiency is a key national infrastructure priority which extends to Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition also stresses that the UK Government must take responsibility for fully monetising the benefits of meeting both fuel poverty and carbon reduction commitments. This crucial evidence should be used to support the strong case for central investment to help fund domestic energy efficiency programmes overall and again explicitly state that this extends to Northern Ireland.

Response submitted by:

Lucy Cochrane
Policy & Campaigns Officer
NI Fuel Poverty Coalition
info@fuelpovertyni.org

² Northern Ireland House Condition Survey 2011

³ http://uir.ulster.ac.uk/27679/1/AWP1_REPORT_FINAL_TYPESET_COPY.pdf

⁴ Northern Ireland House Condition Survey 2011. The latest statistics from the 2016 House condition survey are expected in early 2018.