

Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition

A Manifesto for Warmth

Putting an end to the
cost and suffering of
living in a cold damp
home, and creating
economic growth



The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition

The Coalition 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.

Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland

The 2011 Warmer Healthier Homes Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland restated that

"A household is in fuel poverty, if in order to maintain an acceptable level of temperature throughout the home, the occupants would have to spend more than 10% of their income on all household fuel use¹."

The three factors that cause fuel poverty are:

- energy inefficient homes;
- low household income; and
- the price of energy.

The latest House Condition Survey showed that in 2011, 42 per cent of households in Northern Ireland were in fuel poverty. This is one of the highest rates in the UK and Northern Europe².

Research shows the impacts of fuel poverty can damage quality of life and health, as well as impose wider costs on the community, as the likelihood of ill health is increased by living in a cold home.

Current Northern Ireland Executive Fuel Poverty Strategy

In March 2011, the Department for Social Development launched a fuel poverty strategy for Northern Ireland. The Strategy commits itself to a society where fuel poverty is eradicated and everyone can live in a home which is free of cold and damp.

The Strategy identified 4 key areas for action to tackle fuel poverty, these were – targeting of resources, improving energy efficiency, achieving affordable energy and building strong partnerships.

Energy efficiency is a highly effective way to reduce energy bills in Northern Ireland. By increasing energy efficiency thus reducing energy costs in a home, we can raise the average household disposable income by up to £350 per annum³. This is also one of the best ways to support vulnerable constituents, create jobs and significant economic growth, and reduce costs for cold-related hospital admissions and energy imports.

Research carried out by Econometrics highlights that using funds to improve energy efficiency in this way is a sound use of public money and has wide reaching political support⁴. This has also been reinforced by a recent research MLA Panel question carried out by Stratagem and Com Res.

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 UK⁵.
- 33,000 households are in extreme fuel poverty, needing to spend more than 25% of their income on all household fuel use⁶.
- 870 deaths in 2014-2015 across Northern Ireland were directly attributable to vulnerable people living in cold homes⁷.
- 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 protection⁸.
- Based on a conservative estimate, Northern Ireland domestic energy consumers have contributed well over £150m to the Treasury over the past 5 years⁹.

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

- 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.
- 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
- 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 consumers have the same safeguards that natural gas and electricity consumers currently have.

We call on our Northern Ireland Assembly, MLAs, Parties and Candidates to embed our five key priorities into the Programme for Government, ensuring that clear and measureable targets are set for achieving these.

“End Fuel Poverty for all in Northern Ireland”



What difference could this make in your constituency?

The recognised benefits of acting to end fuel poverty in your local area are:

1. Reductions 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;
4. Reductions in bills can lead to less stress and better mental health for occupants;
5. Less damp and mould growth within homes reduces respiratory problems; and
6. Local employment from a more buoyant energy efficiency industry will create more demand for local low and medium-skilled labour.

Conclusion and Next Steps . . .



Please make this a warmer, brighter future for thousands of voters and respond to our Manifesto for Warmth by committing within your own manifestos, to an additional, long term funding stream to radically improve the energy efficiency for fuel poor homes by 2020 and end the suffering caused by fuel poverty within 10 years.

References

1. **"A household is in fuel poverty, if in order to maintain an acceptable level of temperature throughout the home, the occupants would have to spend more than 10% of their income on all household fuel use."** Department for Social Development, 'A New Fuel Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland', March 2011. Pg. 7 <https://www.dsdni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dsd/warmer-healthier-homes.pdf>
2. **The latest House Condition Survey showed that in 2011, 42 per cent of households in Northern Ireland were in fuel poverty. This is one of the highest rates in the UK and Northern Europe.** Northern Ireland Housing Executive, 'House Condition Survey 2011', April 2013. Pg. 10. http://www.nihe.gov.uk/northern_ireland_house_condition_survey_main_report_2011.pdf
3. **By increasing energy efficiency thus reducing energy costs in a home, we can raise the average household disposable income by up to £350 per annum.** Centre for Sustainable Energy report to the UK National Committee on Climate Change, 'Research on fuel poverty', November 2014. Pg. 26, Table 5.1. https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/CCC_FinalReportOnFuelPoverty_Nov20141.pdf
4. **Research carried out by Cambridge Econometrics highlights that using funds to improve energy efficiency in this way is a sound use of public money and has wide reaching political support.** Energy Bill Revolution, Verco, & Cambridge Econometrics report, 'Building the Future: The economic and fiscal impacts of making homes energy efficient', October 2014. <http://www.energybillrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Building-the-Future-The-Economic-and-Fiscal-impacts-of-making-homes-energy-efficient.pdf>
5. **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.nihe.gov.uk/northern_ireland_house_condition_survey_main_report_2011.pdf
6. **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, 'Tackling Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland', June 2013. Pg. 5. http://uir.ulster.ac.uk/27679/1/AWP1_REPORT_FINAL_TYPESET_COPY.pdf
7. **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
8. **Around 68% of households in Northern Ireland are reliant on Home Heating Oil to heat their homes; an unregulated fuel.**
9. Figure as defined by research from the Consumer Council: <http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/energy/home-heating-oil/>
10. **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".

