



Action for Warm Homes

**The Consumer Council's Draft Forward
Work Programme**

February 2017

National Energy Action Northern Ireland (NEA NI), the leading national fuel poverty charity, works to ensure energy is affordable for disadvantaged energy consumers. As such we welcome the opportunity to respond to both the Consumer Council's draft Corporate Strategy and draft Forward Work Programme 2017-2028.

The latest House Condition Survey showed that in 2011, 42 per cent of all households in Northern Ireland were in fuel poverty. This is one of the highest rates in Northern Europe and is significantly higher than England, Scotland and Wales.

Improved insulation and heating standards are seen as the most rational and sustainable means of ensuring affordable warmth. Poor housing standards are responsible for the impaired physical and psychological health of millions of UK households. The links between low indoor temperature and poor health have been well understood for many years. Cold homes increase the likelihood, repetition and the severity of respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses. The links between dampness and mould growth on asthma and allergies are also well known and understood. There is also some evidence that a cold home impacts on poor mental health, low self-esteem, educational performance and social isolation.

With these aspects in mind our organisation campaigns to ensure that every available opportunity is taken to highlight the causes and consequences of fuel poverty and solutions offered as to how we can mitigate and eventually eradicate the problem.

Working with key organisations such as the Consumer Council Northern Ireland (CCNI) is a key aspect of our work and as such we welcome the opportunity to make comment on the Draft Forward Work Programme 2017/2018.

We believe that the role of the CCNI is fundamental for the protection of consumers especially in the energy sector which is becoming more and more complex. CCNI's expertise supports organisation like NEA much information and advice in relation to energy prices, regulation, switching and policy development which has contributed to empowering consumers and communities.

Their role is also crucially important for strategic partnerships. NEA Northern Ireland works closely with CCNI and enjoys an excellent working relationship which will continue through the duration of this draft work programme. As a member of the Fuel Poverty Coalition and NEA's Energy Justice Campaign the CCNI continues to support a wide range of organisations both strategically and operationally which serves to provide a voice for consumers in Northern Ireland.

In response to the key questions posed in the draft work programme, we believe that the projects identified in the document are the right ones and have no objections to the proposed projects.

We commend the CCNI for their work around enhancing knowledge and understanding of energy efficiency and fuel poverty. Indeed the aim to have all CCNI staff trained to the NEA/ City and Guilds Energy Awareness 6281-01 qualification is to be highly praised and will bring great benefits throughout the organisation. We look forward to continuing to extend our partnership work throughout all available outlets with the organisation.

Other project areas which we feel would benefit consumers in Northern Ireland include:

- Involvement and guidance on any work around the new Fuel Poverty Strategy which has been actioned in Programme for Government 2016 – 2021
- A specific piece of working targeting the vulnerable in order to raise awareness around energy efficiency in the home particularly in the Private Rented Sector.
- In the light of the fact that EnergyWise has not progressed, work with key partners to ensure that the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) continues to operate within NIAUR.
- Work with NIAUR and others to shape a new and improved NISEP targeted at the fuel poor in Northern Ireland.
- Work with NEA in 2017/18 to develop consumer rights campaigns based around NEA's National Fuel Poverty Awareness Campaign.

Once again we thank you for the opportunity to respond to you with these comments. We look forward to maintaining and sustaining our working relationship with the CCNI now and into the future.

Ms Pat Austin
Director
National Energy Action NI
66 Upper Church Lane
Belfast
BT1 4QL