GLOBAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

FUEL POVERTY (TARGET, DEFINITION AND STRATEGY) (SCOTLAND) BILL

CALL FOR VIEWS

SUBMISSION FROM TIGHEAN INNSE GALL

1. **Do you agree with the Scottish Government’s proposal to provide for a statutory target to reduce fuel poverty to no more than 5 per cent of Scottish Households by 2040. Please explain your reason why. For example, is the statutory target necessary? Is the target ambitious enough? Is it realistic and achievable?**

Tighean Innse Gall (TIG) believe that the statutory target to reduce fuel poverty to no more than 5% of Scottish Households by 2030 and this is because without targets there would be no focus, ambition for achievement for delivery and adequate scrutiny by the Parliament. The profile for demographic change in the Western Isles towards a more elderly population living in majority owner occupied hard to treat properties demands earlier intervention. Currently there are 6,837 over 65s across the islands, 26% of all residents. By 2030 this will rise to 7,646 (a 5% rise) and by 2040, 7,791 (a further 2% rise) representing 33% of the population. In addition, if action is not taken sooner, the condition of housing stock (which is particularly energy inefficient already) will further deteriorate, making the task significantly costlier and more difficult to achieve and thereby making the later target impossible.

2. **Do you agree with the Scottish Government’s proposals for a revised definition of fuel poverty? Please explain your reasons why. For example, will the new definition ensure that the Scottish Government will focus their efforts on those with the greatest need.**

For the purposes of tackling fuel poverty in Scotland, and, in particular the Western Isles, TIG agree that there should be a revised definition. TIG concur with the expert panel that the introduction of a UK MIS does not in itself achieve Scotland’s ambitions to target those in most need across the country and in particular, we should utilise a Remote and Rural MIS. It is important to calculate how much it costs people to live at a minimum acceptable level in remote rural and islands. Without such an impact assessment on the Western Isles the Scottish government will not meet the litmus test of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. The effect of applying a UK metric, rather than focussing government policy on those with the greatest need, will in the islands remove support from many elderly vulnerable households.

It is true that in remote and rural communities, especially in our islands, incomes are lower; living costs are higher (including all energy costs); and household energy demand is significantly higher. These aspects demand rural and island variance to any Scottish MIS, let alone a UK wide system.
We would be happy to present case studies which demonstrate this to the Parliament at any oral evidence stage.

3. Do you agree with provisions in the Bill requiring the Scottish Government to publish a fuel poverty strategy? Do you also agree with the consultation requirements set out in relation to the strategy? Please explain your reasons why.

We agree with the provisions requiring a Fuel Poverty Strategy to be published and for the need for full consultation.

An Islands Impact Assessment should be carried out as part of the consultation, as required by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, to ensure our rural islands are not negatively impacted by the Bill.

TIG support the commitment to consult with people who are suffering fuel poverty, and this should include residents of the Western Isles.

4. A draft fuel poverty strategy was published alongside the Bill on 27 June. Do you have any views on the extent to which the measures set out in the draft Fuel Poverty Strategy for Scotland 2018 will contribute to meeting the Government's new target? Have lessons been learned from previous initiatives?

Sections 6-9 require the Scottish Government to report to Parliament every five years on: the measures taken to tackle fuel poverty over the previous five years; progress made towards the 2040 target; and the steps Scottish Ministers propose to take over the next five years to meet the 2040 target.

The draft strategy focusses on outcomes and TIG agree that this is the correct approach. Previous initiatives have largely ignored this approach in favour of ‘bean counting’ of measures. Care and Repair Scotland utilise both a quantitative and qualitative reporting system demonstrating changes in peoples lives as a direct result of the intervention. A similar approach could be employed for the strategy.

TIG believe that the strategy is one dimensional in its focus on quantitative measures. Government fuel poverty strategy over the years has failed to support behavioural change. TIG believe a missed element is face to face advice in the home, undertaken by a local, trusted intermediary. To ensure national scheme success, the strategy should encompass this approach and funds should be available to local agencies for this purpose.

5. Do you have any views on the Scottish Government’s reporting requirements to the Scottish Parliament, as set out in the Bill?

TIG believe that the reporting period as outlined in the Bill is sufficient.
TIG believe that there should be annual reporting to Parliament, with an initial set up period of 2 years to establish the full methodology between all relevant agencies. Care and Repair Scotland had an interim period to establish their reporting structure, and now report annually. This system reports to the minister, who can assess performance, and this model, which encompasses qualitative and quantitative data, can be adopted for reporting directly to Parliament.