LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

CALL FOR VIEWS

SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH COMMUNITIES CLIMATE ACTION NETWORK

Scottish Communities Climate Action Network is a network of community organisations taking action on climate change. Our membership includes more than 140 community organisations, such as local charities and development trusts, and ‘associate’ (supporting) organisations.

Several of our members deliver work in their communities to tackle fuel poverty through making home energy advice visits and carrying out outreach work to engage vulnerable groups. For example:

From their high street base on the southside of Glasgow, South Seeds energy team resolve the electricity and gas issues of 500 residents and conduct over 200 home energy audits to identify efficiencies per year. In addition to this, South Seeds has a successful pay-for energy saving handyman service, free for vulnerable residents. While South Seeds service is for everyone, over 70 percent of their clients would be considered fuel poor.

Cosy Kingdom – a partnership service run by Greener Kirkcaldy and St Andrews Environmental Network - makes over 1,200 home energy advice visits per year, across Fife. It offers income maximisation support and help with fuel debt as well as advice on energy efficiency, behaviour change and switching to a better tariff. Cosy Kingdom works closely with the Fife housing associations and is part-funded by Fife Council.

Both services work closely with Home Energy Scotland, making referrals for Warmer Homes Scotland and other schemes.

Very few of the households they work with have previously been in contact with Home Energy Scotland or other national fuel poverty initiatives. Many people in fuel poverty do not actively seek help – this is a particular issue for older people. Most do not know what help is available. Some do not have a telephone, or prefer face-to-face support. Local, community organisations play a key role in bridging these gaps and providing a trusted service to some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

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?

We think that a 2040 target is too distant and 5% of all households in fuel poverty is still too many. The target should be 0% of all households by 2032.
Do you agree with provisions in the Bill requiring the Scottish Government to publish a fuel poverty strategy?

Yes. We agree with the provision to publish a fuel poverty strategy and think that the lived experience of those in fuel poverty should form part of the ongoing consultation work that continues to shape the strategy.

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?

We suggest a review of the impact of previous initiatives to determine which were most effective at actually lifting people out of fuel poverty. The review should include local, community-based fuel poverty initiatives as well as national schemes offered through Home Energy Scotland.

Page 28 discusses “ways in which partnership engagement and HES services could be enhanced or expanded”, including “More use of outreach and in-person approaches, including use of local organisations that vulnerable households are more likely to engage with as a means of identifying needs and providing fuel poverty advice. We will reflect on the outcomes of the HES Homecare pilot to build in a service of intense support for the most vulnerable clients.”

We would like the Strategy to acknowledge, and commit to learning from, the many local fuel poverty advice services which already provide in-person support for vulnerable households. These services are often run by community organisations, including grassroots charities such as South Seeds, Greener Kirkcaldy and St Andrews Environmental Network. They have strong local knowledge and highly trusted reputations in their communities. Their services often have more success in reaching the most vulnerable people in our society than national programmes. It is essential that changes to Home Energy Scotland’s remit do not ‘crowd out’ these local services.

Funding for local, community-led fuel poverty services is often through short-term grants. The draft Strategy mentions the Climate Challenge Fund, which funds short-term projects but not ongoing services. Fuel poverty is a major issue and requires services to be in place for a period of several years – charities working in this field require long-term funding. This is especially important given that the most vulnerable are least likely or able to access support provided through national organisations. Many of our members have provided expert, local and personalised energy advice and support in the past but are no longer funded to do so, leaving many hard to reach households in fuel poverty. We suggest the creation of a new, additional, fund for
place-based community organisations to bid into to provide local fuel poverty advice services. This fund should provide funding over periods of at least 3 years.