



**UK General Election 2017
- Special Report on Fuel Poverty -**

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Making sure that households across the UK can afford a decent standard of living must be the key priority for the UK Government and the opposition parties must hold them to account on delivering a range of policies to achieve it.

High amongst the new UK Government's aims has to be reaching the point where domestic energy is an affordable commodity for all and housing is energy efficient. Living in a warm, dry home is a basic necessity and essential to health and wellbeing. Right now, too many people across the UK are struggling to reach this standard and instead are falling into fuel poverty and so are cold at home and are making impossible choices that mean they go without basics such as food.

It is often stated in policy circles that fuel poverty is a matter devolved to each of the UK nations, but it is important to note that energy policy is a matter reserved to the UK Government. Moreover, the main energy efficiency programme delivered via the energy companies is set by the UK Government. In addition, many social security benefits and other initiatives - such as the Warm Home Discount - that provide essential financial support to people on low incomes are reserved to Westminster.

As the national charity with the mission to eradicate fuel poverty, Energy Action Scotland asked the main parties in Scotland who are standing for election to outline their plans for tackling fuel poverty. In particular, each party was invited to respond to the questions below and their responses form this report.

1. Will your party commit to retaining and improving obligations such as the Warm Home Discount and the Energy Company Obligation in order to tackle fuel poverty?
2. There is a major opportunity with the smart meter rollout to bring about the behaviour change of consumers and to help them manage their energy more wisely in the home. What would your party put in place to ensure this happens?
3. On the impact of cold homes on health, would your party commit to a UK inter-ministerial group to review actions being taken by all four nations and share examples of good practice?
4. What are your party's proposals in relation to the Winter Fuel Payment and the Cold Weather Payment? These are being devolved in future to the Scottish Government however their scope and framework will continue to be set by the UK Government.
5. What else would your party do, in the context of the remit of the UK Parliament, to improve the situation for people living in energy-inefficient cold homes where they can't afford their energy bills to keep warm?

Scottish Conservative Party

The Scottish and UK governments both have a role to play in energy policy, especially in relation to energy efficiency. It is therefore incumbent on both governments to work together on this issue, in partnership with the private sector through obligations and schemes such as the Warm Home Discount and the Energy Company Obligation.

Fuel poverty levels in Scotland, especially in rural areas, are of serious concern. Many of our elderly live in some of the least energy efficient homes and struggle to heat their homes properly. Investing in energy efficiency is the most straightforward way of tackling these unacceptable levels of fuel poverty. With clear knock-on effects on physical and mental health, it seems obvious to us that this should be a policy priority for all levels of government.

We will keep making the case for an additional £1 billion to be invested in energy efficiency measures over the next five years in Scotland, aiming to ensure no one has to live in a hard to heat home by the end of the next decade. We would do this through a truly national infrastructure project, bringing together all levels of government, the private and the third sectors, that would create thousands of jobs, with much of the benefit in some of the most remote parts of Scotland.

In addition to direct capital investment, we want to see a range of loans, land and buildings transaction tax and council tax discounts as well as greater regulatory control backed by incentives across all tenures. We have also pledged to protect universal Winter Fuel Payments for all older people and they will not be subject to means-testing in Scotland.

Our manifesto also makes it clear that we will ensure that smart meters will be offered to every household and business by the end of 2020, giving people control over their energy bills that they have not had before. We will also introduce a safeguard tariff cap that will extend the price protection currently in place for some vulnerable customers to more customers on the poorest value tariffs.

In addition to this, we will commission an independent review into the Cost of Energy, which will be asked to make recommendations as to how we can ensure UK energy costs are as low as possible, while ensuring a reliable supply and allowing us to meet our 2050 carbon reduction objective. Our ambition is that the UK should have the lowest energy costs in Europe, both for households and businesses.

Scottish Green Party

1. Will your party commit to retaining and improving obligations such as the Warm Home Discount and the Energy Company Obligation in order to tackle fuel poverty?

The Scottish Greens recognise the benefits of the Warm Home Discount and Energy Company Obligation schemes as key channels to tackle fuel poverty. However, more must be done. It is clear that since failing to reach the target to eradicate fuel poverty in the last year, Scotland must re-think how we confront this major blight. It is a national scandal that people still live in fuel poverty in 2017. Therefore, the Scottish Greens propose the creation of a National Retrofit Strategy with the aim of ending fuel poverty. This will be a universal scheme, which will offer the most cost-effective energy saving measures such as cavity wall insulation, loft insulation and draught proofing free to everyone regardless of income. Specifically focussed as an area-based scheme, we will offer energy saving measures to every household in each area, starting with those areas with the highest rates of fuel poverty and all homes rated F and G on the EPC scale. We will ensure that every Scottish household has been offered free energy saving measures appropriate to their house type.

2. There is a major opportunity with the smart meter rollout to bring about the behaviour change of consumers and to help them manage their energy more wisely in the home. What would your party put in place to ensure this happens?

The Scottish Greens support the rollout of smart meters in harnessing behaviour change among consumers. We welcome the opportunities, which this technology provides in lowering household energy usage and curtailing the vagaries of estimated billing. However, to make the most of smart meters, the Scottish Greens recommend taking a 'whole-house' approach to co-ordinate better energy efficiency in the home. We propose that fuel poverty and energy efficiency be targeted by linking together the use of smart meters with existing and future programmes, notably furthering the success of the Passivhaus and Energiesprong initiatives.

We are, nevertheless, concerned about the ease of switching suppliers and call on energy companies to make it easier for consumers to take advantage of the best tariffs that suit the needs of individual households. Furthermore, it is of significant concern to us that the most vulnerable of customers are regularly paying extra for their fuel. Consequently, we will address the cost of fuel through tighter regulation of energy utilities to ensure they offer fair pricing structures and genuine social tariffs to all customers.

3. On the impact of cold homes on health, would your party commit to a UK inter-ministerial group to review actions being taken by all four nations and share examples of good practice?

No one should have to live in a hard to heat home. At Westminster, the Scottish Greens will work with cross party colleagues, as we currently do in Holyrood, to recognise what works in creating healthier, warmer and happier households. Already in Scotland we recognise that people have better health outcomes due to living in a warm home. Notwithstanding variations between urban and rural dwellings and different climatic conditions across the country, there are opportunities for a UK-wide intervention to eradicate fuel poverty and raise the living standards of all citizens.

Scottish Green Party

4. What are your party's proposals in relation to the Winter Fuel Payment and the Cold Weather Payment? These are being devolved in future to the Scottish Government however their scope and framework will continue to be set by the UK Government.

The Scottish Greens propose that, under the proposed devolution of powers, if an individual applies for a benefit then they should be considered for all Scottish social security payments and services. We support the automatic payment of benefits, such as the Winter Fuel Payment and Cold Weather Payment, as this ensures that the most vulnerable in our society receive what they are entitled to.

Overall, the Winter Fuel Payment should not be means tested but we are open to discussions on ways to ensure more of this benefit reaches homes in or at risk of fuel poverty. Cold Weather Payments should continue and they should be linked with advice and help for people to access energy efficiency improvements.

5. What else would your party do, in the context of the remit of the UK Parliament, to improve the situation for people living in energy-inefficient cold homes where they can't afford their energy bills to keep warm?

Staying in the European Union is important as it lets us access European funding streams on energy efficiency. We are particularly concerned about moves to dilute or abolish European energy and climate policies after the UK leaves the EU. This will have significant consequences for the most vulnerable of households that are exposed to fuel poverty. Moreover, on a domestic scale, we understand that tackling financial poverty itself is essential to ending fuel poverty. At Holyrood, Green MSP Alison Johnstone won agreement from the Scottish Government to roll out Healthier, Wealthier Children – a highly successful Glasgow NHS project where midwives and health visitors helped families get the benefits they were eligible for but not claiming. At Westminster we will call for further 'income maximisation' projects to help tackle child poverty.

Land use plans which prioritise new housing that is affordable, low-carbon, built on brownfield sites and connected to local services like schools and shops are important. Homes like these help create communities and keep people out of poverty.

At Holyrood, the Greens successfully got energy efficiency marked as a National Infrastructure Priority. Across the UK we will work with colleagues from the other four nations to further this work by instilling greener energy policies that will protect our environment and support our economy.

Scottish Labour Party

1. Will your party commit to retaining and improving obligations such as the Warm Home Discount and the Energy Company Obligation in order to tackle fuel poverty?

Labour is committed to retaining obligations such as the Warm Home Discount and the Energy Company Obligation. A Labour government will also roll out a programme of investment to insulate more homes, helping people manage the cost of energy bills.

2. There is a major opportunity with the smart meter rollout to bring about the behaviour change of consumers and to help them manage their energy more wisely in the home. What would your party put in place to ensure this happens?

We are advocating a completely new approach to energy – one that's about affordability, protecting our environment and community. We believe that this sends out a strong message to consumers about how we should be using energy. We will act where the Tories have failed and make the energy market work for the many. Labour would introduce a cap on energy price rises and keep bills down, and extend democratic social control over our energy so that local people have a say and a stake in their supply.

3. On the impact of cold homes on health, would your party commit to a UK inter-ministerial group to review actions being taken by all four nations and share examples of good practice?

The impact that cold, poorly insulated homes can have on the health and wellbeing of residents, especially the elderly and children, is well established. Labour is committed to ensuring that everyone, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances, has access to a warm, well-insulated home. Labour will pursue constructive inter-governmental relations across all policy areas. Where there are examples of best practice we will seek to work with the devolved administrations to encourage their adoption across the UK.

4. What are your party's proposals in relation to the Winter Fuel Payment and the Cold Weather Payment? These are being devolved in future to the Scottish Government however their scope and framework will continue to be set by the UK Government.

We will guarantee the Winter Fuel Allowance as a universal benefit. The Tory position on this has been utterly hypocritical – they want to protect the Winter Fuel Allowance for all Scottish pensioners but cut it for many South of the border through means testing. Labour will not scrap the Cold Weather Payment.

Scottish Labour Party

5. What else would your party do, in the context of the remit of the UK Parliament, to improve the situation for people living in energy-inefficient cold homes where they can't afford their energy bills to keep warm?

The UK energy system is outdated, expensive and polluting. Labour is determined to make energy costs affordable whilst ensuring we meet our climate change targets and transition to a low carbon economy. Privatisation has failed to provide an energy system that delivers for people or our environment. We also understand that many people don't have time to shop around – they just want reliable and affordable energy. So the next Labour government will:

- Introduce an immediate emergency price cap to ensure that the average dual fuel household energy bill remains below £1,000 per year, while we transition to a fairer system for bill payers
- Take energy back into public ownership to deliver renewable energy, affordability for consumers, and democratic control.

We will do this in the following stages:

- Regaining control of energy supply networks through the alteration of the National and Regional Network Operator license conditions
- Supporting the creation of publicly owned, locally accountable, energy companies and co-operatives to rival existing private energy suppliers, with at least one in every nation or region
- Legislating to permit publicly owned local companies to purchase the regional grid infrastructure, and to ensure that national and regional grid infrastructure is brought into public ownership over time.

On top of an energy system that's unfit for purpose, Scotland is facing a housing crisis. We need more homes, and we need the right homes. A UK Labour government will oversee the largest and most radical housebuilding programme since the war, investing in over a million new homes. This will provide resources to the Scottish government to invest in Scotland's housing stock. We will insulate more homes to help people manage the cost of energy bills, reduce preventable winter deaths, and meet our climate change targets. Labour will consult on new rules to prevent 'rabbit hutch' homes and on new modern standards for building 'zerocarbon' homes. We will improve upon Landlord Energy Efficiency regulations and re-establish the Landlord Energy Saving Allowance to encourage the uptake of energy efficiency measures.

Scottish Liberal Democrat Party

1. Will your party commit to retaining and improving obligations such as the Warm Home Discount and the Energy Company Obligation in order to tackle fuel poverty?

The Warm Home Discount Scheme was introduced by Liberal Democrats in government, moving from a voluntary to a statutory system of support from energy companies for vulnerable households. Similarly, the Energy Company Obligation was introduced by a Liberal Democrat Energy Secretary in 2013, providing funding to improve energy efficiency in hard to heat homes.

At over £1,200 a year, the cost of heating and lighting an average home in the UK is too high – and with a falling exchange rate, costs will rise further. Far too many families cannot afford to heat their home properly.

That is why Liberal Democrats will continue to ensure that energy suppliers meet their social obligations and work to protect their more vulnerable customers in particular, while helping people reduce their energy bills permanently.

We will make saving energy a top infrastructure priority, slashing energy bills and carbon emissions, creating thousands of jobs and helping end the fuel poverty crisis once and for all. We will improve home insulation and encourage small-scale, community and local authority renewable schemes.

2. There is a major opportunity with the smart meter rollout to bring about the behaviour change of consumers and to help them manage their energy more wisely in the home. What would your party put in place to ensure this happens?

Many consumers pay far too much for their energy. That is why Liberal Democrats will support investment in cutting-edge smart grid technology.

Our work will build on the launch of Smart Energy GB, the independent national campaign for the smart meter rollout, by Ed Davey, the Liberal Democrat Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. Research shows that habits are changing among the millions of households that already have smart meters, helping them make considerable savings and avoiding millions of tonnes of emissions.

Smart meters are both the foundation of a smarter energy grid and the stepping stone to more empowered and engaged consumers. They already provide near real time information on energy via displays in the home and enable customers to make informed choices about their energy use. We also recognise that there is real potential in the smart network, with the uptake of microgeneration, to buy and use energy via trading with neighbours and local community energy sources.

Liberal Democrats are committed to a cleaner, smarter energy system. Our roofs should power our washing machines. Our cars should be charged at home. Our homes should be warm without turning the heating on. This is the Liberal Democrat vision for Britain to lead the clean energy revolution.

Scottish Liberal Democrat Party

3. On the impact of cold homes on health, would your party commit to a UK inter-ministerial group to review actions being taken by all four nations and share examples of good practice?

Liberal Democrats have a vision for a strong, federal and United Kingdom. We have a proud record of leading the way on giving greater powers to the nations of the UK and encouraging cooperation and partnership-working between parliaments, assemblies and governments.

The strength of the federal union we want to see is that they could come together to agree action on matters of combined interest. For example, we want the whole of the UK to benefit from the work already being done and which Liberal Democrats will instigate in the next Parliament on tackling cold homes and fuel poverty. We recognise the advantages of working closely together on these matters.

4. What are your party's proposals in relation to the Winter Fuel Payment and the Cold Weather Payment? These are being devolved in future to the Scottish Government however their scope and framework will continue to be set by the UK Government.

Liberal Democrats believe that an important test of a civilised society is the way in which it cares for the elderly.

We will withdraw eligibility for the Winter Fuel Payment from pensioners who pay tax at the higher rate (40%). Money shouldn't be paid to those who do not need it and our policy means that it will only be removed from the wealthiest pensioners – those with annual incomes above around £45,000.

This will help us target those in need on low and middle incomes. For example, unlike the Conservatives we would protect the triple lock on state pensions, ensuring an extra £772 a year will be paid in pensions by 2021.

We will maintain the system of cold weather payments, helping customers on low incomes and in receipt of relevant benefits heat their homes during a cold snap.

5. What else would your party do, in the context of the remit of the UK Parliament, to improve the situation for people living in energy-inefficient cold homes where they can't afford their energy bills to keep warm?

There is a mountain to climb in getting on top of fuel poverty. On the SNP's watch, the worst affected areas in Scotland have up to two thirds of homes suffering fuel poverty. That is not acceptable. We need both of Scotland's governments to urgently work together to tackle the causes of fuel poverty.

We will set up a British Housing and Infrastructure Development Bank to mobilise investment into the low carbon and sustainable infrastructure the UK needs to remain competitive. It will benefit from £5 billion of initial capital and will use public money to attract private investment for these priorities.

We will continue to back new entrants to the energy market, including community and municipal providers, aiming for at least 30% of the household market to be supplied by competitors to the 'Big 6' by 2022.

Scottish Liberal Democrat Party

Liberal Democrats have consistently set the pace on renewables at both the Scottish and UK Parliaments. Following the Tories assault on the sector, driven by ideology and the pursuit of short-sighted savings, we will expand renewable energy, aiming to generate 60% of UK electricity from renewables by 2030, restoring government support for solar PV and onshore wind in appropriate locations. This will help meet climate targets and deliver energy at the least cost.

Liberal Democrats are determined that we live up to our environmental obligations. That is why we will pass five green laws, including a Zero-Carbon Britain Act and a Green Buildings Act, to incorporate existing EU environmental protections and maintain product standards in areas such as energy efficiency. This will also establish a framework for continual improvement.

Scotland will benefit from our passing a new Green Buildings Act, setting new energy efficiency targets, cutting the costs of energy efficiency products by building up the market.

We will also restore the Zero Carbon Standard for new homes which was set by Liberal Democrats in government and abandoned by the Conservatives, increasing the standard steadily and extending it to non-domestic buildings by 2022.

Scottish National Party

1. Will your party commit to retaining and improving obligations such as the Warm Home Discount and the Energy Company Obligation in order to tackle fuel poverty?

The SNP's manifesto commits to a number of measures to tackle fuel poverty, including a new duty on energy companies to set out a clear timetable to reduce the number of people on prepayment meters and to put in place a requirement on energy companies to prioritise the roll-out of smart meters to those households at risk of fuel poverty. We will also seek to work with Ofgem, and to press for new legislation, to ensure that these households are on the lowest energy tariff possible, starting with those eligible for the Cold Weather Payment.

In government in Scotland the SNP have taken action, backed up by significant investment, to improve energy efficiency, keeping homes warm and bills down. [Latest figures show that 97,000 households in Scotland moved out of fuel poverty in 2015.](#) The Scottish Government is also committed to bringing forward a Warm Homes Bill in this Parliament to support our work tackling fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency.

2. There is a major opportunity with the smart meter rollout to bring about the behaviour change of consumers and to help them manage their energy more wisely in the home. What would your party put in place to ensure this happens?

Good information is a critical factor in driving down energy use. Smart meters give consumers the ability to be in control of what they are using and paying. We supported the UK Government's plan to install smart meters for gas and electricity in every home by 2020, and we will hold them to that commitment. We will also press for a duty to be placed on energy companies to prioritise the roll-out of smart meters to those households at risk of fuel poverty.

3. On the impact of cold homes on health, would your party commit to a UK inter-ministerial group to review actions being taken by all four nations and share examples of good practice?

We recognise the detrimental effects that energy inefficient housing can have on people's health. The Scottish Government has a good record on improving energy efficiency in Scotland – with over 1 million energy efficiency measures installed in almost 1 million households across Scotland since 2008. At Westminster, SNP MPs have sought to share Scotland's experience on this issue and others, and we will continue to work with the other nations of the UK to highlight measures being pursued in Scotland which could have a positive impact across the UK.

4. What are your party's proposals in relation to the Winter Fuel Payment and the Cold Weather Payment? These are being devolved in future to the Scottish Government however their scope and framework will continue to be set by the UK Government.

In Scotland, the SNP Scottish Government is committed to tackling fuel poverty and ensuring that everyone in Scotland is able to heat their home. The Winter Fuel Payment is one of the mechanisms for helping achieve that goal. Late last year, the Scottish Government consulted on how best to use the powers being devolved, including Winter Fuel Payments, to better tackle fuel poverty.

The SNP rejects the proposed attack on the Winter Fuel Payment by the Tories. We will protect the Winter Fuel Payment, and extend the eligibility to families with severely disabled children.

Scottish National Party

5. What else would your party do, in the context of the remit of the UK Parliament, to improve the situation for people living in energy-inefficient cold homes where they can't afford their energy bills to keep warm?

There are a number of measures which can be pursued at Westminster to improve energy efficiency. Successive Westminster governments have cost consumers billions of pounds by failing to make the energy market work for families. The time for change is long overdue, and we want bills reduced and fairness and transparency in the system.

SNP MPs will put in place an energy price cap on standard variable tariffs, ensuring a fair deal for customers and energy suppliers.

We will also call on the UK Government to immediately implement the Competition and Markets Authority's recommendations on metering to reduce the costs for households.

1. Will your party commit to retaining and improving obligations such as the Warm Home Discount and the Energy Company Obligation in order to tackle fuel poverty?

We share your objective of reducing or eliminating fuel poverty. But we believe that the current dog's breakfast of itsy-bitsy schemes is the wrong approach. The primary driver of high electricity prices is the plethora of green initiatives. The subsidies, the feed-in tariffs, the renewables obligations, the EU Emissions Trading Scheme, the capacity payments, the carbon price floor. Brexit gives us the opportunity to sweep these away, and to introduce a rational energy policy based on grown up and affordable technologies, in place of the playground technologies represented by renewables.

2. There is a major opportunity with the smart meter rollout to bring about the behaviour change of consumers and to help them manage their energy more wisely in the home. What would your party put in place to ensure this happens?

All the evidence we have seen suggests that the impact of smart meters on domestic consumption is small to start with and zero after the novelty has worn off. Plus there are huge technical issues emerging – not least the problem of changing suppliers. The estimated cost of smart meters is £12 billion nationally, and this massive bill will be passed on, one way and another, to consumers. If you are serious about fuel poverty, you should be vigorously opposing smart meters.

3. On the impact of cold homes on health, would your party commit to a UK inter-ministerial group to review actions being taken by all four nations and share examples of good practice?

As noted above, we know what needs to be done. The issue is making it happen.

4. What are your party's proposals in relation to the Winter Fuel Payment and the Cold Weather Payment? These are being devolved in future to the Scottish Government however their scope and framework will continue to be set by the UK Government.

We have to maintain the winter fuel allowance at least until we can demonstrate that the other policies outlined above have succeeded in their objective of delivering secure and affordable energy.

5. What else would your party do, in the context of the remit of the UK Parliament, to improve the situation for people living in energy-inefficient cold homes where they can't afford their energy bills to keep warm?

We believe that energy pricing is the key, and we currently have no specific proposals on home insulation. But we would look favourably on plans to assist those in poorly insulated homes to install basic insulation.



This report was produced by Energy Action Scotland.

Energy Action Scotland is the national charity working for warm, dry homes.

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