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**NEWS RELEASE**

**EMBARGO TO 00:01 THURSDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2015**

**Minister for Housing and Welfare to Open National Conference on Tackling Fuel Poverty and Providing Affordable Warmth for All**

Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess MSP is expected to highlight the Scottish Government's action to ensure everyone in Scotland can afford to heat their homes when she opens a national conference on fuel poverty today (Nov 12) in Peebles, organised by the national charity Energy Action Scotland.

For many people in Scotland, keeping warm at home at a price that they can afford remains a challenge. In particular, having a low income or being vulnerable due to ill-health, age or the condition of the house they live in can put some people at a real disadvantage.

**Housing and Welfare Minister Margaret Burgess** said: "Tackling inequality is at the heart of the Scottish Government's commitment to creating a fairer country for all and we remain committed to tackling fuel poverty. We have allocated over half a billion pounds since 2009 on a raft of fuel poverty and energy efficiency programmes and this year a record budget of £119 million is being made available for this.

"The new Warmer Homes Scotland scheme, worth up to £224 million over the next 7 years, will help as many as 28,000 Scots heat their homes. Through this scheme, we will deliver the best possible help to thousands of people who are blighted by fuel poverty, struggling to keep their homes warm and pay their energy bills.

"We would urge anyone who is struggling to keep their homes warm to contact the Home Energy Scotland Helpline free on 0808 808 2282 or go to [www.homeenergyscotland.org.uk](http://www.homeenergyscotland.org.uk) to find out what help and support they are eligible for."

The conference is entitled 'Turning up the heat on fuel poverty' and discussions will cover the progress being made to assist people and also what still needs to happen to solve the problem of cold, expensive to heat homes.

**Energy Action Scotland Director, Norman Kerr** said: "Making sure that people can afford the basic right of living in a warm home is our key objective.

"With the target date to end fuel poverty exactly one year away, we are pressing the Scottish Government to set out how this can realistically be achieved.

"We are inviting the Minister and her colleagues in government to tap into the knowledge, practical experience and technical solutions that those working in the fuel poverty field – and indeed people experiencing fuel poverty – can bring forward to end the blight of this problem in Scotland."

A range of agencies, charities and companies from across the country will come together at the two-day conference and its accompanying exhibition to discuss ways of turning cold, damp houses into warm, dry homes.

Among them is conference sponsor, gas distribution company SGN. **David Manning, Director of Stakeholder Relations, SGN** said: “We’re proud to support the work of Energy Action Scotland and to sponsor the conference this year. It’s an opportunity for us to share some of the things we’re doing as a company to help alleviate fuel poverty whether on or off the gas grid.

“We’ll also be highlighting how we’re ‘greening the gas’ to ensure we have security of supplies with lower carbon emissions and making it more affordable for customers, particularly the vulnerable.”

Topics for discussion at the conference include the rollout of smart meters, new energy efficiency grant programmes, and support for consumers on low incomes.

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**For further details contact:**

**For Energy Action Scotland:** Elizabeth Gore, PR Manager on: **0141 226 3064** or email: [e.gore@eas.org.uk](mailto:e.gore@eas.org.uk) **NB on 11, 12, 13 November contact only by mobile: 07764 212 564.**

**For all SGN related media enquiries** please contact the SGN press office on 0845 070 1811.

**For photo/interview opportunities:** Members of the media are welcome to attend or contact as above to arrange in advance/during the event.

Requests in relation to the Minister for Housing and Welfare should be directed to the Scottish Government Press Office.

Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess MSP will open the conference at 9.30am on Thursday 12 November 2015 at Peebles Hydro.

Norman Kerr, Director, Energy Action Scotland will address conference in the opening session (times as for the Minister)

David Manning, Director of Stakeholder Relations, SGN will address conference in the opening session (times as for the Minister)

**Conference Programme details** are at: [www.eas.org.uk](http://www.eas.org.uk)

**The venue is:** Peebles Hydro Hotel, Innerleithen Road, Peebles EH45 8LX

**Background notes:**

1. The Energy Action Scotland Annual Conference and Exhibition runs on Thursday 12 and Friday 13 November 2015 at Peebles Hydro Hotel. **Details at:** [www.eas.org.uk](http://www.eas.org.uk)
2. Energy Action Scotland is the national charity which campaigns for an end to fuel poverty and works to promote warm, dry homes for all in Scotland.

- 3.** Fuel poverty is the inability to afford adequate warmth in the home, defined as needing to pay more than 10 per cent of income on energy costs.
- 4.** The main causes of fuel poverty are poor energy efficiency of the home, high domestic fuel prices and low household income.
- 5.** The official Scottish Government figures show there are 940,000 households in Scotland in fuel poverty ie 39 per cent. Source: Scottish House Conditions Survey 2013.
- 6.** The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 places a statutory duty on the Scottish Government to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that people are not living in fuel poverty in Scotland by November 2016.
- 7.** SGN is sponsoring the Energy Action Scotland Annual Conference 2015. SGN manages the network that distributes natural and green gas to 5.8 million homes and business across Scotland and the south of England. Their pipes deliver gas safely, reliably and efficiently to every one of their customers.  
Whatever time of day or night, anyone who smells gas should dial the National Gas Emergency Number – 0800 111 999\*. Lines are open 365 days a year and calls are free. Find all SGN's press releases and statements on its website – [sgn.co.uk](http://sgn.co.uk). Like them on Facebook and follow them on Twitter: @SGNgas \*All calls are recorded and may be monitored.