

Energy Policy Debate – no Scottish child should live in fuel poverty

A briefing from [Barnardos Scotland](#), [Capability Scotland](#), [Child Poverty Action Group Scotland](#) and [Children in Scotland](#).

Context – fuel poverty in Scotland

The Executive's Scottish Fuel Poverty Statement 2002 defines fuel poverty: "A household is in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, it would be required to spend more than ten per cent of its income (including housing benefit or income support for mortgage interest) on all household fuel use."

Half of low income parents blame the "cold, damp and draughty" nature of their homes for their children's ill health and parents in severe poverty report that it is problems with housing, including damp, that they are least able to protect their children from. Children are particularly vulnerable to respiratory conditions such as asthma, which have been linked to cold and damp homes. Cold homes can increase the time taken to recover from other illnesses. Overcrowding, caused by families having to remain in heated areas of the home can also adversely affect the education of young people. Disabled children are particularly affected, with nearly half of families participating in recent research, living in or at risk of fuel poverty.

The most recent figures from the Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) in 2002 found 286,000 households in fuel poverty in Scotland. In over ten percent of these households there are children. Breakdown of this figure reveals that:

- 10,000 fuel-poor households with children had a poor NHER (energy efficiency) rating
- approximately 5,000 households with children and in fuel poverty had no central heating system
- the number of children living in fuel poverty was approximately 46,000.

The Scottish House Condition Survey estimated that for every 5% rise in average annual fuel price, an estimated 30,000 more households would go into fuel poverty. Gas and electricity prices are both rising.

Action needed

Our organisations are working together to urge the following action on the Scottish Executive:

- 1) introduce a programme to install central heating systems in the 5000 fuel poor households where children currently live without a central heating system. Based on the average cost of £3200, this proposal would require just £1.6 million from a total budget of £97 million for the existing Central Heating programme;
- 2) extend Central Heating Programme eligibility to families with a dependent child under the age of 5 who receive child tax credit paid at a rate which exceeds the family element or are in receipt of income support or income based JSA. These are used as qualifying benefits used as the qualifying benefit for SureStart maternity grant, so are already accepted as a mechanism for identifying those families who require additional financial support with young children. At the same time, families in the same income category with a dependent disabled child under the age of 12 should be included in the programme;
- 3) eligibility for Warm Deal energy efficiency grants should be extended so that all families with a dependent child living in or at risk from fuel poverty are reached; and
- 4) in order to provide longer term solutions to fuel poverty, the scope of the Central Heating Programme should be widened to include micropower measures such as solar panels. These would ensure that systems provide long term sustainable solutions for families currently living in fuel poverty. As well as making people more self sufficient, they would reduce our reliance on fossil fuel systems, ensuring that the Executive's fuel poverty measures also leave a legacy for the environment. Continuing to install central heating systems powered by fossil fuel is no longer radical enough to tackle long term issues and causes of fuel poverty.

Contacts

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