

## Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel - Report on the Scottish Biodiversity Duty 2021-23

### **Biodiversity and the Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel**

#### **About the Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel**

1. The Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel is an advisory non-departmental public body. The Panel was established under [The Fuel Poverty \(Targets, Definition and Strategy\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#). Its role is to provide independent advice to Scottish Ministers on fuel poverty matters; foster co-operation across the fuel poverty landscape, monitor Scottish Ministers' progress towards meeting Scotland's Fuel Poverty Targets and delivering their Fuel Poverty Strategy, and consider the extent to which policies and programmes are addressing the four drivers of fuel poverty.
2. The Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel sets a strategic plan every three years and an annual work plan based on priorities which align with the strategic plan. The Strategic plan sets out how the Panel will deliver its statutory role. The Panel's workplan includes considering particular fuel poverty issues and options for mitigation, as well as being responsive to requests for advice from Ministers
3. The Panel comprises 5 members, appointed by Scottish Ministers and a small Secretariat, employed by the Scottish Government but assigned to the Panel.
4. The Panel Secretariat work on a hybrid basis between St Andrew's House, Edinburgh; Atlantic Quay 5, Glasgow and their homes.

#### **The Biodiversity duty**

5. The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 placed a statutory requirement on all public bodies in Scotland to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their responsibilities. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 placed a further requirement on all public bodies in Scotland to provide a publicly available report, every 3 years, on the actions which they have taken to meet this biodiversity duty.

#### **Actions to protect and enhance biodiversity**

6. The Panel's statutory functions are unlikely to have direct implications for biodiversity. However, it does have a role in considering the extent to which policies and programmes are addressing the four drivers of fuel poverty. This includes "poor energy efficiency of the home", "high energy prices" and "how energy is used in the home". The Panel therefore has an interest in promoting the efficacy of energy efficiency measures to reduce energy consumption whilst maintaining comfortable homes, including the potential of new renewable technologies to create clean and in the long-term cheaper energy, as well as advocating for energy literacy so that

people understand how to use their heating systems in an optimal way to reduce energy consumption while maintaining comfortable homes. This ties in closely with the Scottish Government's net zero ambition, and therefore connects with its biodiversity aspirations too since climate change and biodiversity are inextricably linked.

7. The Panel's contribution to the conservation of biodiversity is therefore in what it does to advise on measures to reduce carbon emissions from Scotland's housing stock – although this needs to be seen in the context that the Panel's primary interest is to see people lifted out of fuel poverty. How the Panel as an organisation, albeit it a very small one with no premises of its own, operates to limit its carbon footprint also connects to biodiversity through its attempts to limit its carbon footprint.

8. The Secretariat staff work on a hybrid basis between Scottish Government buildings and home. When in Scottish Government buildings, the Secretariat observes Scottish Government protocols on net zero reduction, such as on reusable cups and waste disposal. This is also the case when the Panel meets in Scottish Government buildings.

9. The Panel has a policy, included within its standing orders, of a presumption of using public transport to travel to meetings and for using digital resources where possible (i.e., not printing papers). It also aims to minimise any waste from meetings, wherever possible, and uses initiatives such as taking carry cups to avoid unnecessary waste.

### **Mainstreaming Biodiversity**

As the Panel is an advisory body, and its staff are employed by Scottish Government, it has limited direct opportunities to incorporate biodiversity measures into policies, plans or strategies, other than through, as above, its advocacy of household energy efficiency measures, renewable technologies and energy literacy.

### **Nature-based solutions, climate change and biodiversity**

The Panel's role in working to reduce fuel poverty is naturally congruent with environmental protection. In this, the Panel supports the Just Transition of "no detriment" principle – the principle set out in the Scottish Government's Heat in Buildings Strategy that heat transition measures are only taken forward where there is no detrimental impact on fuel poverty rates, unless additional mitigating measures can also be put in place.

### **Workforce development**

The Secretariat are employed by Scottish Government. Staff are encouraged to access Scottish Government opportunities in relation to biodiversity and the natural environment.

### **Research and monitoring**

The Panel has not undertaken any relevant research during this period.

## **Biodiversity highlights and challenges**

The Panel will continue to be open to opportunities to incorporate biodiversity into its work. The next three years will offer both challenges and opportunities to ensure that work to reduce fuel poverty and protect biodiversity are aligned and mutually supportive.

November 2022