



THE SCOTTISH FUEL POVERTY ADVISORY PANEL

Newsletter

MARCH 2026

WELCOME TO OUR SPRING NEWSLETTER

Matt Cole, Chair, Scottish Fuel Poverty Panel

As the first buds begin to appear, it seems winter is finally behind us. There was reason for optimism at the start of the year, following Ofgem's February announcement that energy bills would fall by 7% in April – a small but meaningful saving of £117 a year for a typical household.

More good news came from the [Scottish House Condition Survey](#), which reported that, with reducing energy prices, fuel poverty has fallen to 28.7% (around 732,000 households). That's down from 33.9% in 2023, with 127,000 fewer households facing fuel poverty.

However, the optimism was short-lived. The fallout from events in Iran has unsettled energy markets, and those on variable tariffs are only protected until July. Any sustained impact on wholesale prices between now and May could lead to a sharp rise in bills for millions by the summer.

Meanwhile, for the around 142,000 Scottish households reliant on heating oil, the effects are already being felt, with average costs per litre doubling in a matter of

days. The UK Government has pledged a £4.6m support package for those impacted in Scotland, with the Scottish Government committing a further £5.4m. It is vital that support is targeted at those who are in crisis today or will fall into crisis imminently as a result of the current oil price hike.

More broadly, this underscores the work that still needs to be done if Scotland is to achieve its ambitions of reducing fuel poverty to 15% by 2030. Meeting these targets is highly unlikely without urgent action. In this issue, we highlight the recommendations we have put forward to the Scottish Government to ensure a robust, deliverable fuel poverty plan is in place.

We're also delighted to be introducing two new panel members - Bryan Leask and Dr Olivia Swann – who share our commitment to delivering safe, warm energy-efficient homes for everyone in Scotland, bringing deep expertise and passion to the work ahead.

Read on to learn more and catch up on our latest activity.



NEW PANEL MEMBERS APPOINTED

We're pleased to welcome Bryan Leask and Dr Olivia Swann to the Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel.

Bryan, Chief Executive of Hjaltland Housing Association in Shetland and Chair of the Scottish Rural and Islands Fuel Poverty Action Group, brings extensive experience of rural and island fuel poverty. He also serves on several Scottish Government energy and housing working groups.

Dr Swann, a consultant paediatrician, brings frontline insight into the health impacts of fuel poverty on children. She leads the Homes, Heat and Healthy Kids programme, which uses data to target housing improvements where they can have the greatest impact.

Panel Chair Matthew Cole said: "It's great to welcome our new panel members who offer unique insights into two key areas of fuel poverty concern: rural fuel poverty and the impact of fuel poverty on health. Bryan and Olivia have both witnessed the impact of fuel poverty, particularly in recent years when fuel bills have become unmanageable for many

households. We're also grateful for the contribution of our former panel member, Maggie Corrigan."

"Bryan has seen, time after time, the realities faced by families living in cold homes – the sheer misery of coming home to a freezing property and not being able to run a hot bath or cook a warm meal. Olivia brings a practical, child-centred perspective, with a strong focus on prevention and ensuring children's health is fully considered in actions to tackle fuel poverty."

Scottish Ministers have also confirmed the reappointment of Matthew Cole as Chair until 31 December 2029, alongside Dr Fraser Stewart, Dr Kirsten Jenkins and Mr Alister Steele.



OUR RESPONSE TO THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S PERIODIC REPORT

In September, the Panel met with the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretaries for Housing and for Climate Action and Energy to discuss our response to its report *Tackling Fuel Poverty in Scotland: periodic report 2021–2024*.

[Our response warns that Scotland is highly unlikely to meet its 2030 fuel poverty targets.](#)

Rates have risen sharply since targets were set in 2019, with 34% of households (around 861,000) now in fuel poverty and 19.4% (491,000) in extreme fuel poverty, far above the 2030 targets of 15% and 5%.

We believe fuel poverty targets have not been prioritised at the same strategic level as other statutory targets and we are calling for urgent revision of the current strategy, alongside stronger monitoring and delivery planning.

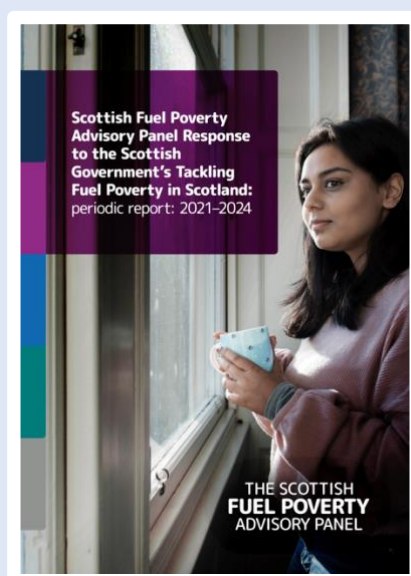
While progress has been made - including improvements in home energy efficiency and income support - much more needs to be done.

Our chair Matt Cole said: “The existing Fuel Poverty Strategy must be revised as a matter of urgency, or Scotland will not only miss its 2030 targets but is also unlikely to meet its 2035 targets. There is also need for a fuel poverty delivery plan that links boosting household income directly to meeting fuel poverty targets, and this delivery plan should be robustly monitored.

“While meeting the 2040 target of just 5% in fuel poverty and 1% in extreme fuel poverty is still possible, it will be a massive challenge requiring a whole new strategic approach. There are far too many people still having to choose between heating their homes and feeding their families.”

The Panel has made a series of recommendations to the Scottish Government urging it to:

- Fulfil its commitment to revising its current Fuel Poverty Strategy by December 2026.
- Accelerate the rate of improvements to make housing stock more energy efficient.
- Increase awareness of how energy is used in homes to reduce waste and make costs clearer, as many households may be on unsuitable tariffs, paying more than necessary without realising it.
- Set a clear vision for the GB energy market, push for reforms that take account of the needs of Scottish consumers, and protect those at risk of fuel poverty.
- Target island and remote rural communities with tailored, co-ordinated action to cut fuel poverty where it hits hardest.



ENERGY ACTION SCOTLAND CONFERENCE

Panel Member Alister Steele was a guest speaker at the Energy Action Scotland Conference, held at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel in Clydebank in November.



The annual conference brought together a wide range of leading policymakers, academics, housing professionals, energy specialists and frontline practitioners, united by a commitment to tackling and ultimately eradicating fuel poverty across Scotland.

Alister delivered a well-received presentation on 'Making Fuel Poverty a Strategic Priority.' It highlighted the urgent need for coordinated, long-term action to address the root causes of fuel poverty, emphasising the importance of embedding it firmly within national and local strategic planning. He explored the social and economic impacts of fuel poverty, underscoring why it must remain at the forefront of public policy discussions.

DELAYS TO LEGISLATION AROUND HEAT DECARBONISATION MUST NOT HOLD BACK FUEL POVERTY PROGRESS

In December we wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Màiri McAllan, raising our concerns about the delay to the introduction of the Building (Heating and Energy Performance) and Heat Networks (Scotland) Bill.

We urged that the delay to the Bill should not be allowed to slow progress on fuel poverty action, and shared our initial thoughts on the draft bill. [You can read the letter in full here.](#)

While we recognise that it's early days, it's not clear to us how the connection will be made between the fuel poverty strategy and the heat decarbonisation strategy proposed in the draft Bill.

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

We have responded to consultations on energy costs and support schemes, calling for reforms that protect households, reduce fuel poverty, and make the energy system fairer for everyone.

Ofgem consultation on energy system cost allocation and recovery review

In response to Ofgem, the Panel has set out its case for reshaping how Great Britain pays for its energy system. Our core principle is simple: energy bills should cover the cost of energy, not broader social or policy costs.

Currently, levies, discounts, efficiency programmes, and gas network decommissioning costs are added to household bills. We believe these should be funded through general taxation instead, making the system fairer, more transparent, and easing pressure on bills.

Standing charges would still cover fixed network costs, and we support a single, nationwide transmission and distribution charge, avoiding postcode disparities and ensuring consistent cost sharing.

Reforms must protect vulnerable households. We propose a flexible energy discount mechanism (“social tariff”) with wider eligibility and stronger support, automatically covering households on means-tested benefits and offering a second pathway for others in need. Support would flex with energy prices and levels of hardship.



Finally, practical delivery is essential. Smarter technology, modernised meters, and better data sharing are essential to make the system work efficiently.

Read our response in full: [Response to Ofgem Consultation on Energy System Cost Allocation and Recovery Review | Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel](#)

Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) consultations on the Warm Home Discount scheme

The Panel responded to two DESNZ consultations focused on the future of the Warm Home Discount (WHD) scheme, currently the most far-reaching mechanism for supporting vulnerable households. While we recognise that the scheme has its

limitations, it remains a vital source of assistance in helping people to heat their homes until a flexible energy discount mechanism (social tariff) is introduced.

We support:

- Automatic eligibility for households in Scotland under the WHD scheme
- Expanding eligibility to include low-income households not receiving means-tested benefits, including those in receipt of Carer's Allowance. This would be a welcome step towards a more flexible energy discount mechanism and would help reduce the fuel poverty gap.

However we do not support the proposal to move the WHD levy from standing charges to the unit rate.

Matt Cole said: "We believe that standing charges should reflect only the fixed costs of maintaining energy infrastructure, including transmission and distribution. As part of a fairer and more sustainable approach, the WHD and ultimately a fully developed, flexible energy discount mechanism (social tariff) should be funded through general taxation, rather than through energy bills."

Read our responses in full:

[Response to DESNZ Consultation on Continuing the Warm Home Discount Scheme | Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel](#)

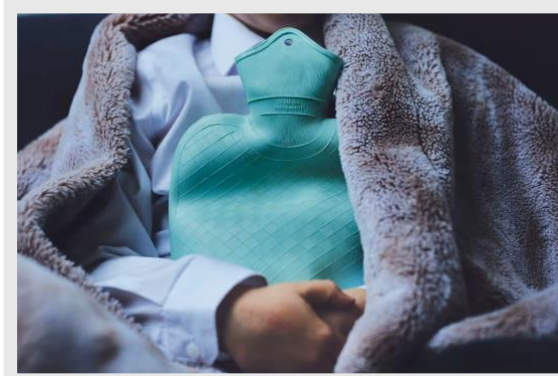
[Response to DESNZ Consultation on Warm Home Discount Cost Recovery | Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel](#)



FUEL POVERTY AND HEALTH – SGSSS INTERNSHIP

From November 2025 - February 2026, the Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel (SFPAP) hosted Vanessa Kleinheinz, a PhD intern as a part of the Scottish Graduate School of Social Sciences (SGSSS) internship scheme. Vanessa joined us from the University of Edinburgh to work on a project focused on understanding the interactions between fuel poverty and public health policy within the Scottish Government. Her report provides vital insights and will help set the groundwork ahead of the Panel's work on the impacts of fuel poverty on health in 2026/2027.

Vanessa's research found that fuel poverty is primarily discussed through a net zero or economic lens. The impacts of fuel poverty on health are often overlooked in that conversation, despite the well-established link. Cold homes increase the risk of contracting respiratory tract infections as well as the development and exacerbation of respiratory conditions, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). It is also known to cause cardiovascular conditions, such as heart attacks and strokes, and increase the likelihood of trips and falls in the house. Fuel poverty has significant impacts on mental health, causing social isolation, depression, and anxiety. As people in fuel poverty often have to choose between heating and eating, they are at greater risk of malnutrition. Young children, older and disabled people, women, and minority ethnic groups are disproportionately at risk of developing health issues as a result of residing in a cold home and experiencing fuel poverty.



The findings demonstrate that there is currently very little interaction between fuel poverty and public health policy. The Fuel Poverty Strategy covers several policy areas, with the focus largely being on net zero and economic factors. Conversely, health has received little attention, with only two out of 55 strategy actions directly addressing health. Energy efficiency measures generally have a direct positive impact on health and are considered effective interventions in addressing fuel poverty-related ill health. However, they can have unintended negative health

impacts that need to be taken into account. For example, these measures can increase indoor exposure to radon and other pollutants since improved wall insulation traps polluted matter inside the house, leading to poor indoor air quality



and posing a significant risk to health. This problem can be mitigated through the installation of mechanical ventilation systems.

The Respiratory Care Action Plan is the only health policy that explicitly mentions fuel poverty as a significant risk factor for respiratory disease and emphasises the importance of

collaboration between the two policy areas to ensure optimal preventative care. The Heart Disease Action Plan does not mention fuel poverty – or poverty broadly – as a risk factor for heart disease. Scotland's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and [Scotland's Diet & Healthy Weight Delivery Plan](#) do not explicitly mention fuel poverty, but they recognise poverty as a driver of poor mental health and a barrier to eating more healthily respectively. Notably, the Fuel Poverty Strategy primarily addresses diet and nutrition through universal free school meals in primary and special schools. The Population Health Framework (PHF) does not refer to fuel poverty but supports the contribution of better housing to health, while Housing to 2040 references fuel poverty explicitly and recognises that adequate housing and living spaces can improve physical and mental health.

What are the implications for policy?

Vanessa drew out four policy implications from her findings:

1. Even though the findings demonstrate the occasional overlap between health and fuel poverty policy, it is necessary to integrate these policy areas more closely with each other and foster collaboration. An intersectional approach should be embedded across all areas to ensure more positive outcomes and support.
2. Health data needs to be used more effectively to improve care and treatment. For example, new cases of fuel poverty-related health conditions should be made attributable to fuel poverty, where possible.

3. Staff might not necessarily be aware of the link between health and fuel poverty due to the current lack of integration between these areas. Thus, it is vital that staff working with those in or at risk of fuel poverty receive training on the interaction between health and fuel poverty.
4. It should not be assumed that everyone will be aware of the health impacts of a cold home and the various ways in which symptoms can present. Awareness campaigns on these topics in accessible and inclusive formats will be necessary to educate the public and practitioners. These campaigns have the potential to be useful even for people who do not experience fuel poverty.

ENHANCING UNDERSTANDING OF FUEL POVERTY IN REMOTE AND RURAL SCOTLAND

There's no better way to understand fuel poverty than by listening to the people living it.

Last year, we collaborated with Allenergy, Scarf and Tighean Innse Gall to hold focus groups in rural and remote areas of Scotland. Sessions took place in Aberdeenshire, Perth and Kinross, Highlands, Argyll and Bute and Na h-Eileanan Siar and brought together a wide cross section of the population including pensioners, young families and working households.

What we heard was stark, with one participant saying the cost of heating is 'like a second mortgage'.

The harsher weather in remote parts of Scotland was seen by many as the biggest challenge they faced, with winter stretching from October to April and even May in some areas. This resulted in higher heating bills all year round without any opportunity to create a buffer in the summer to help pay for the colder months.

One householder said: "It's a nightmare. One day it can be glorious sunshine and the next freezing. You can't plan for it or set your heating for those kinds of extremes of up and down temperatures. Windows need replaced, carpets are thin with no underlay. The heating costs and standing charges are horrendous. Heating costs are far higher in rural places."

Unregulated fuels were another area of concern - with the upfront cost of filling an oil tank or buying coal or LPG described as being too high for someone in fuel poverty to afford, with minimum orders the norm and a lack of supplier competition.

One participant said: “Most families experiencing fuel poverty cannot afford the initial outlay needed for an oil tank to be filled up and don’t get the option to pay over a few months as the first fill has to be paid in advance. This leads to them turning to using portable heaters that are very costly to run.”



The cost-of-living crisis was very much on people’s minds and participants highlighted a lack of help to cover emergency costs. One focus group flagged that there is no way out of debt as participants struggle to pay for what they are using, let alone trying to clear debt as well.

Families may have to choose between heating and eating, and food bank usage is high. One parent said: “I can’t go back to work as childcare costs are so high so I would be working for nothing and not being with my kids. We must rely on my partner’s income alone. We have had to limit ourselves to one meal a day in the past so that our children can eat.”

However, some said they had received some help from local charities, which was lifesaving. Another parent said: “The support I received I feel like it literally saved me. I was in so much debt and with Christmas coming up and my child to take care of I didn’t see a way out but the help I received made me realise that people do care. They helped me so much with a payment to clear my fuel debt and have helped me stay out of debt.”

Read the full report: [Fuel poverty in remote and rural Scotland: focus group analysis | Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel](#)

If you would like to find out more about any of the stories in this newsletter please contact: enquiries@fuelpovertypanel.scot

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