



5. Improve the energy-efficiency of our existing homes.

New houses are designed to meet high insulation standards, but are being built in relatively low numbers. Most of the 'easy' improvements to existing homes – cavity wall and loft insulation, double glazing and replacement of inefficient boilers – have been done already. Housing Associations and Local Authorities have led the way with innovative energy-efficiency measures such as external or internal wall cladding. However the owner-occupied and, in particular, the private rented sectors continually lag behind. We support the aim of the Existing Homes Alliance to improve the energy efficiency of all homes in Scotland to Energy Performance Certificate Band C level by 2025, treating 127,000 houses per year.

6. Use Community Energy projects to benefit local residents.

Such schemes already exist, using renewable sources to generate electricity for the benefit of communities, e.g. creating jobs installing energy-efficiency measures in local homes. One exciting example is the ambitious multi-agency plan developed by the Western Isles Council, centred on Community Energy, with the aim of reducing Fuel Poverty levels to the Scottish average by 2025.

Discussion Points

Suppose there are brothers or sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, "God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!" — if you don't give them the necessities of life? *James 2 v.15-16*

You will always have poor people with you *Matthew 26 v.11*. How can we challenge the perception that Fuel Poverty is an inevitable consequence of living in the Scottish climate?

Putting our Mission where our mouth is. Church buildings and manses are often notoriously energy-inefficient. We need to lead by example – what can you do in your own congregation?

Act local... What kind of Community Energy scheme would work in your community? What role could your church play in promoting it?

More information

Read the Report to the General Assembly 2016, 'Energy Issues and Fuel Poverty'. This is available on the Church of Scotland website or by contacting the Church and Society office.

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The Church of Scotland
Church and Society Council

Energy, Fuel Poverty and Climate Change



Discussion Points

“What good is there in your saying to them, “God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!” — if you don’t give them the necessities of life?” James 2 v.15-16

Energy, Fuel Poverty and Climate Change

The term “fuel poverty” is relatively new, but it relates to issues that have afflicted Scotland for many generations.

A household is in Fuel Poverty if, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, it would be required to spend more than 10% of its income (including Housing Benefit or Income Support for Mortgage Interest) on all household fuel use.

Successive governments have worked to a target of eliminating Fuel Poverty by November 2016. In spite of this ambition, Fuel Poverty in 2015 affected 845,000 homes in Scotland – equivalent to more than one third of all households.

In recent years there has been a trend of rising domestic energy prices, leading to spiralling heating and lighting bills for householders. Over that same time it has become increasingly clear that urgent action is needed to avoid the catastrophic effects from carbon emissions on the earth’s climate. The effects of both of these have been particularly severe on those struggling on limited incomes.

If fuel prices remain high and energy efficiency measures are expensive, are high levels of Fuel Poverty an unavoidable consequence of our efforts to reduce carbon emissions? Energy and Fuel Poverty have many complex relationships.

1. The privatised Domestic Energy Market does not work for the benefit of consumers.

Gas and electricity are provided by commercial organisations whose prime responsibility is to their shareholders. Prices rise rapidly but are sluggish to fall. Complaints against energy suppliers have risen 50% since 2011. The Office of Fair Trading, Ofgem and the Competition and Markets Authority have all been critical of the ‘Big 6’ suppliers who dominate the market.

2. Vulnerable customers and those affected by poverty pay more for their energy.

To get the best deals you need to pay by direct debit and have internet access to price comparison websites. People struggling against poverty often have limited banking facilities or access to the internet so end up paying significantly more for their energy. Many people on limited incomes use prepayment meters to help manage their budget. Yet research by Citizens Advice in 2015 showed that customers using pre-payment meters paid an average of £226 per year more for gas and electricity - an effective surcharge of 22%.

3. People in rural areas are much more likely to experience Fuel Poverty.

50% of households in rural areas experience Fuel Poverty, compared with 32% in urban areas. In the Western Isles the figure rises to 62%. The reasons include lack of access to the natural gas grid, high fuel prices, house types that are hard to insulate and exposure to extreme climates.

4. Cold, damp homes are damaging to physical and mental health.

According to the National Health Forum: “Cold, damp, thermally inefficient houses which people cannot afford to heat sufficiently to protect their health are a peculiarly British public health scandal and an affront to human rights.” Our death rates are significantly higher in winter. According to official figures, 4,060 additional deaths occurred in Scotland in winter 2014/15. Despite colder climates, the higher standards of home insulation in Scandinavian countries mean that they do not experience these ‘Excess Winter Deaths’.

Clearly we need to eliminate the scourge of Fuel Poverty and the systematic unfairness towards the most disadvantaged in our society. Can we do this and still meet our challenging carbon reduction targets? We believe that two key actions will enable this.

