



FRIENDS OF
THE EARTH
SCOTLAND

SEM SPECIAL BRIEFING No.2

HEATING OUR HOMES and NOT THE SKY

The politics of environment and the burden of fuel poverty

Every winter thousands of people die in Scotland because of the weather conditions. A major contributory factor for this is the condition of housing. Energy inefficient houses lead to high fuel bills and cold, damp homes while contributing to Scotland's over-consumption of fossil fuels.

Every winter there is much attention paid to this problem but little of substance is done to deal with it. The furore dies down once the Excess Winter Death Rates are publicised and forgotten about as winter turns to spring. The summer passes with little progress and another devastating winter awaits those unable to heat their homes adequately at an affordable cost. On top of this, Scottish housing contributes around 22% of total CO₂ output. On the latest figures output from the sector was rising, a scenario which compromises our ability to contribute our fair share to UK and international obligations on greenhouse gas emissions.

This year though provides us with an opportunity to make a real difference to those who suffer fuel poverty. With the advent of the Scottish Parliament last year came an opportunity to eradicate the 'scourge' of fuel poverty. The Scottish Labour Party, in its 1999 manifesto for the Scottish Parliamentary elections, pledged to eradicate fuel poverty by 2007 if it were elected. This was a bold and highly laudable promise which undoubtedly swayed many voters' choice of candidates. It would affect some 750,000 households in Scotland suffering from the malaise, go some way to avoiding the many thousands of excess winter deaths each year, and make a substantial impact on our greenhouse gas emissions. The Scottish Liberal Democrats also promised to develop a programme to eradicate fuel poverty if it was elected. In January Wendy Alexander, Minister for



Communities, when announcing the Housing Bill stated that, 'For too long, dampness has been the scourge of Scottish housing.'

Things looked promising, the parties of Government had both made commitments to end fuel poverty, and dampness was a 'scourge' which the Housing Bill looked set to remedy. The Scottish and UK governments have indeed, along with energy regulators, brought about a welcome expansion of investment in housing.

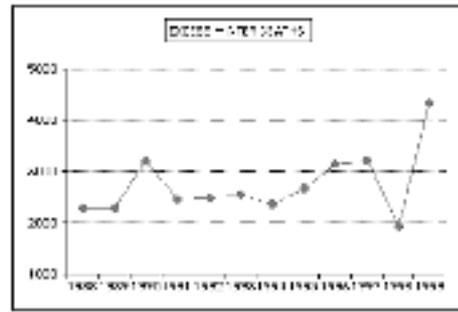
Since coming to power in coalition however, the pledge to end fuel poverty has sadly dropped from the political horizon. Instead we have constant reference to the Warm Deal and are given no commitment to any time-scale for the final eradication of fuel poverty. The maximum potential of the Warm Deal in its current form is extremely limited, as demonstrated by a report from Scottish Homes which is yet to be made public. Current initiatives are not sufficient to end fuel poverty, we need a deadline to be set within which to end this problem. We need the Executive to develop and implement a strategy which meets this deadline.

WHY IS FUEL POVERTY A PROBLEM ?

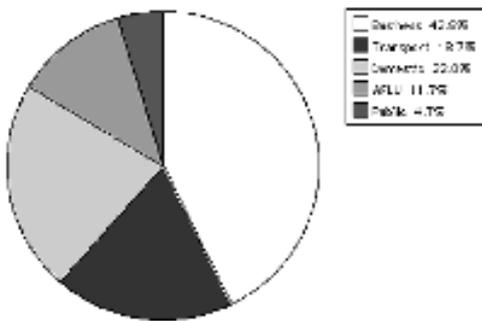
What is the Excess Winter Death rate?

Excess Winter Deaths are calculated by comparing 3rd quarter and 1st quarter deaths. The latest available figures show that for the winter of 1998/99 the excess winter death rate was 4,331. This was the highest figure for a decade.

These rates are far higher than those in colder Scandinavian countries and show that current policies are failing our elderly fuel poor.



UK Carbon Dioxide Emissions 2000



How are fuel poverty and climate linked?

If the Government is serious about its sustainable development policy the domestic sector, which accounts for around 22% of our total CO₂ output, must be tackled (see chart, left).

The latest figures show an increase from the sector in Scotland in the region of 2%.

What are the impacts of fuel poverty?

The health impacts of fuel poverty are myriad. Cold homes tend to be damp, this can lead to dust mites and mould which have strong links to a range of allergic and respiratory conditions, with poor housing linked to asthma and wheeze in children.

Social impacts are various. For example, when a family cannot afford to heat a whole house all activities are cramped. This leads to tensions within the family and has a detrimental effect on children's education as they have no space for homework. When this is combined with days lost from school due to house-related illness, the home environment contributes to educational



Fuel poverty can lead to educational underachievement

underachievement and thereby to social exclusion and cycles of deprivation.

Housing Bill fails to deliver

A major opportunity to tackle energy inefficiency looks likely to be missed. The Executive have presented a consultation on the Housing Bill which has no mention of fuel poverty worth talking of, they seem set to push the Bill forward without tackling energy inefficiency in

any substantial way. The Housing Bill must be made to address the major problem in Scottish housing. Another heating season without substantial policy shifts means another year of suffering and another year of environmental damage.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN PARLIAMENT ?

Parliamentary Petition

The Scottish Warm Homes Campaign lodged a petition, PE-123, asking the Parliament and committees to investigate fuel poverty and energy efficiency and to develop strategies to eradicate the problem.

The petition has now been to three committees and has been well supported.

The Health Committee has agreed to investigate the possibility of GPs prescribing warm homes for those with health problems related to damp cold housing. Malcolm Chisholm MSP, has been appointed as the reporter for the Committee and will make recommendations to it later this year.

The Social Inclusion and Housing Committee has been appointed as the lead committee and has agreed to investigate fuel poverty on return from the summer recess.

The Transport and Environment Committee has expressed support for the petition and will hopefully link in with the Social Inclusion Committee's work.

Many Labour and Liberal Democrat back-benchers have supported the campaign as have many MSPs in the SNP - some in the Conservative Party have also started to show an interest.

Warm Deal

We are awaiting a report on the operation and effectiveness of the Warm Deal from the Executive. It is hoped this will come out during the summer and show the scheme's effect on fuel bills and CO₂ savings.

We are also keen to see the full report, commissioned by the Executive and carried out by Scottish Homes, into the extent and nature of fuel poverty in Scotland. This promises to be

the most comprehensive study yet of the problem and is vital for any proper analysis and strategy development. The Executive however, seem to be reluctant to release the findings. In an answer to a parliamentary question by Robert Brown (Lib Dem) MSP in February, the Executive's response was that work on the analysis was not yet complete. This is despite the fact that a presentation on it was given in November of last year.

Building Regulations

On a brighter note, Sarah Boyack has recently put forward two consultation papers on the building regulations. The regulations as they apply to new buildings seem certain to be strengthened in regard to energy efficiency and to include standards for heating boiler efficiencies.

This is good news for the environment and our future housing stock. In the other consultation, which will hopefully lead to a new Building Act during the lifetime of this Parliament, the question of how and to what extent regulations can be made to bind on existing properties is tackled.



FoE warmly welcome both the opportunity to address this question, and the proposed increased energy efficiency requirements for new buildings.

Left out in the cold

Scotland is, in fact, falling behind England and Wales. The House of Commons passed The Warm Homes Bill on 21st July 2000 which requires the Government to set targets for the eradication of fuel poverty and to develop strategies and identify funds to reach this target. The Bill, supported by all the main parties, has an excellent chance of becoming law by the end of this year. The bad news for households in Scotland is that this relates only to England and Wales and our low-income households will literally be left out in the cold.

WHAT ARE FoE DOING ?

- We are calling for the energy auditing of all housing in Scotland, we believe this could best be done by a move towards sellers' surveys with audits at the point of sale. To this end we intend to publish a report on the potential benefits of this initiative and policy solutions for the perceived barriers to it.
- Seeking to influence to the Housing Bill and have fuel poverty addressed within it.
- Seeking a commitment to a date for the eradication of fuel poverty, and a realistic programme of work to achieve this.
- We are also looking to garner support for our petition PE-123 by the Scottish Warm Homes Campaign. We have joined with Shelter, Age Concern and the Association for the Conservation of Energy to set-up this campaign group focussed on energy efficiency and fuel poverty.

WHAT CAN YOU DO ?

- Write to your MSPs asking if they support a move towards sellers' surveys with energy audits and what they plan to do about it. Labour, SNP and the Liberal Democrats have all supported this in their past campaigns and publications - we need all parties to take up this issue now they have real influence.
- Again, write to your MSP asking them to make representation on your behalf to Wendy Alexander and Frank McAveety that they

include fuel poverty and energy efficiency within the Housing Bill. Send for your copy of the consultation and respond expressing your concerns (tel: 0131 244 7954).

- Write to your MSP asking when fuel poverty will be eradicated by the current initiatives and for their support for public petition PE-123.
- Write to FoE expressing your support for the petition and the campaign. Write to the Public Petitions Committee expressing your support for the above petition. Copy all correspondence to FoE. Get any groups you are involved in to do likewise.
- Ring you local energy advice centre for information of what more you can do to save energy in your home. Phone 0800 512 012 for your local contact.

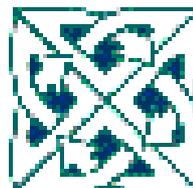
Finding your MSPs

Everyone has one constituency MSP and seven list MSPs.

To identify your local MSPs go to <http://www.Scottish.parliament.uk/msps/msps.html>; or E-mail sp.info@Scottish.parliament.uk; or phone the parliament on 0845 278 1999 (local rate). Alternatively your local library should be able to help.

All MSPs can be contacted at Scottish Parliament, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP or at local constituency offices.

The Ministers responsible for housing are Wendy Alexander MSP, Minister for Communities and Frank McAveety MSP, Deputy Minister - Local Government.



FR IENDS OF
THE EARTH
SCOTLAND

Friends of the Earth Scotland
72 Newhaven Rd, Edinburgh, EH6 5QG
Tel: 0131 554 9977, Fax: 0131 554 8656
E-mail: info@foe-scotland.org.uk
Website: www.foe-scotland.org.uk

August 2000

Campaigning for Environmental Justice
No less than a decent environment;
no more than a fair share of the Earth's resources.

FoE Scotland is a charity (SC003442)



Printed on 100% recycled paper.