



# **Briefing for New Stormont Executive and Assembly 2011**

## **The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition**

The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition was launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2010 in response to the increasing serious levels of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. The Coalition's aim is to drive forward the fuel poverty agenda in Northern Ireland in terms of both policy and practical initiatives.

Currently, the Coalition has a membership base of over 100 organisations from across Northern Ireland; representing businesses, environmental groups, trade unions, the health sector, local councils, consumer groups, housing associations, rural support networks, the voluntary sector, student unions, young persons groups, older persons groups and faith groups.

### **Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland**

Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland is driven by a number of factors – high energy prices, low income and household energy efficiency levels. Academic and medical research clearly shows that living in a cold home can damage quality of life and health, leading to wider costs on the community. The latest official figures<sup>1</sup> show that in 2009, 44 per cent<sup>2</sup> of households (302,000) in Northern Ireland were in fuel poverty - this is three times as high as the level in England, and nearly double the rate in both Scotland and Wales.

Consumers in Northern Ireland face significantly higher energy bills than elsewhere in the UK – spending on £348 more per year on average. The majority of households in Northern Ireland rely on home heating oil to heat their homes (68 per cent of homes overall and 82 per cent in rural areas), and its increasingly price remains a serious issue for many fuel poor households. Over the recent winter period heating oil prices for a 900 litre fill fluctuated by £161 (or 40 per cent). In addition, some households using natural gas have recently experienced increases of 39.1 per cent<sup>3</sup>, and it is expected that electricity prices will also increase in the autumn.

### **Current Northern Ireland Executive Fuel Poverty Strategy**

In March 2011, the Department for Social Development launched a new fuel poverty strategy for Northern Ireland. The Strategy commits itself to a society where fuel poverty is eradicated and everyone can live in a home which is free of cold and damp, but the strategy provides no targets or roadmaps on how this will be achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Government and the Department of Social Development are both currently reviewing the official definition of fuel poverty.

<sup>2</sup> House Conditions Survey 2009. Northern Ireland Housing Executive, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Phoenix Supply Tariff Price Announcement, 21 April 2011.

## **The New Assembly Term.**

The new Assembly term is crucial to ensuring a successful and sustainable response to the fuel poverty crisis that Northern Ireland is experiencing. It is essential that fuel poverty is comprehensively tackled in the short to medium term before energy becomes simply unaffordable for the most vulnerable households in our society.

**The Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition therefore is calling on the newly formed Stormont Executive to support:**

- **The development of a detailed and costed action-plan setting out how and when fuel poverty will be eradicated in Northern Ireland.**
- **The provision of support to all fuel poor households to stay warm until fuel poverty is eradicated.**

In addition, the Coalition is proposing that the new Executive:

1. Establish a Cross Departmental Ministerial Fuel Poverty Task Force with a duty to eradicate Fuel Poverty in Northern Ireland. The new Programme for Government should commit all Government Ministers to incorporate action plans on Fuel Poverty within their Department's overall strategic plans.
2. Examine whether regulation of the oil industry could provide consumers with the necessary confidence that they are paying a fair price for oil and provide fuel poor households with the support and safeguards that natural gas and electricity consumers currently have.
3. Implement a targeted area based insulation retrofitting programme to improve the energy efficiency levels of all households in Fuel Poverty.
4. Develop and encourage energy brokering schemes and implement a system to help make energy bills of all low income households more affordable.
5. Ensure that people eligible for existing benefits claim them, and create a package of advice and support that is available to people in Fuel Poverty.
6. Extend the Winter Fuel Payment to other vulnerable groups, to include children and young people and those with long term health conditions.
7. Develop a database which clearly identifies who is in fuel poverty so that targeted support can be provided.

## Current Membership of the Northern Ireland Fuel Poverty Coalition

Access to Benefits  
Advice NI  
Age NI  
Age Sector Platform  
Anglewise  
Antrim Borough Council  
Ards Borough Council  
Army Families Federation  
Atlantic Philanthropies  
Ballygowan & District Community Association  
Ballymena Borough Council  
Ballymoney Community Resource  
Barnardos  
Belfast City Council  
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust  
Boiler Juice  
Bryson Charitable Group  
Care for the family  
Care NI  
Carers NI  
Causeway Rural & Urban Network  
Chartered Institute of Housing in Northern Ireland  
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health  
Cheapest Oil Ltd  
Christians Against Poverty  
Church Action on Poverty (NI)  
Church of Ireland  
Churches' Community Work Alliance (NI)  
Citizen's Advice Bureau  
Coleraine Borough Council  
Confederation of Community Groups  
Consumer Council  
Contact a Family Northern Ireland  
Cookstown District Council  
COSTA Rural Support Network  
Culmore Area Forum  
Debt Action NI  
Disability Action  
Drumgallon Area Community Association  
EAGA  
East Belfast Mission  
East Down Rural Community Network  
EMBRACE NI  
Engage with Age Friends of the Earth  
Fuel Watch NI  
Gingerbread NI  
Good Morning NI Network  
H & A Mechanical Services Ltd.  
Helm Housing  
Housing Rights Service  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Institute of Directors in Northern Ireland  
Institute of Public Health  
Landlords Association for Northern Ireland  
Long Term Conditions Alliance  
Macmillan Cancer Support  
Mullaghmore & Castlevue Community Association  
Mutual Energy  
National Energy Action  
Newry and Mourne District Council  
Newtownabbey Borough Council  
NI Cancer Fund for Children  
NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)  
North Belfast Senior Citizens Forum Northern  
Investing Health Partnership  
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities  
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action  
Northern Ireland Rural Development Council  
Northern Ireland Youth Forum  
Northern Visions/NvTv  
NUS-USI  
Oaklee Housing Association  
Oil Price NI  
Peninsula Healthy Living Partnership  
Rathlin Development & Community Association  
Rural Community Network  
Sallyswood and Castlestree Association  
Salvation Army  
Save the Children  
Skainos Project  
Society of St. Vincent de Paul  
Solmatix  
Strabane & District Community Network  
Sustainable Northern Ireland  
The Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference  
The Methodist Church in Ireland  
The Presbyterian Church in Ireland  
The Welcome Organisation  
The Workspace Group  
The NI Region of the University of the Third Age  
The Ulster Farmers' Union  
University of Ulster Student's Union  
Waterwise  
Welcome Organisation  
WWF  
YES! to Fairer Votes

**If you want to add your name to the Coalition you can do so via:**

**E-mail:** [info@fuelpovertycoalition.org.uk](mailto:info@fuelpovertycoalition.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.fuelpovertycoalition.org.uk](http://www.fuelpovertycoalition.org.uk)

**You can follow the work of the Coalition via:**

**fuelpovertyni**