



# WARM, SAFE AND HEALTHY AT HOME

## NATIONAL ENERGY ACTION NI'S MANIFESTO FOR HOMES 2024

**Northern Ireland is in the midst of a Fuel Poverty crisis. Over the past 3 years, National Energy Action (NEA)<sup>1</sup> has experienced a significant rise in the number of households seeking emergency support as they can no longer afford to keep their homes warm and safe due to high energy prices and wider cost of living pressures.**

In September 2023, NEA undertook an NI-wide representative survey<sup>2</sup> to assess the impact of energy prices on households. The results found that 41% of NI households were spending at least 10% of their total household expenditure on energy costs and were therefore living in fuel poverty.



The continued pressure on household budgets has led to a rise in detrimental 'coping' mechanisms.

For example, 19% of households told us they went without heating (oil/gas) or electricity because of not being able to afford the costs of energy within the previous 24 months. 1 in 10 households admitted to skipping meals to ensure they had enough money to pay for their energy.

**This means that choosing between heating and eating is very much a reality for around 100,000 homes in Northern Ireland.**

The primary factors which cause fuel poverty are widely agreed to be **low household incomes, high energy costs** and **energy inefficient homes**. As a result, fuel poverty is most common among vulnerable households which includes those with older people, babies and young children, adults with disabilities or long-term health conditions and individuals who are socially isolated.



Fuel poverty can severely affect a person's physical and mental health, and in the most severe cases can contribute to death.

**Urgent action is needed to eradicate fuel poverty in Northern Ireland and ensure that everyone can afford to live in a warm, safe, and healthy home.**

## OUR KEY ACTIONS

**The upcoming General Election provides a vital opportunity for policymakers to address the fuel poverty crisis and ensure vulnerable people are warm, safe and healthy at home.**

**NEA NI is calling on all Northern Ireland candidates and parties to commit to these 3 key actions at Westminster to tackle fuel poverty in Northern Ireland:**

### **1. Work to introduce the Warm Home Discount (WHD) scheme in Northern Ireland.**

The WHD provides for mandatory **social price support to reduce energy bills** for the most vulnerable. Qualifying households in GB receive a £150 discount on their electricity bill between October and March. Each year the scheme supports 2 million homes, helping more than 600,000 poorer pensioners<sup>3</sup>. Currently, vulnerable households in Northern Ireland do not receive this support.

## 2. Make domestic energy efficiency an infrastructure priority.

The quality of housing (including energy efficiency) is directly linked to levels of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. Energy efficiency improvements offer a tried and tested cost-effective approach to both alleviating the hardships on fuel poor households and reducing household carbon emissions<sup>4</sup>.

Greater **investment in energy efficiency programmes** in Northern Ireland are urgently needed, as well as **minimum energy efficiency standards**. Unlike all other parts of these islands, Northern Ireland currently has no statutory fuel poverty targets and no minimum energy efficiency standards. The next Parliament must be proactive about improving the domestic energy efficiency of our homes.

## 3. Ensure a 'Just Transition' towards Net Zero.

The transition to decarbonisation represents a significant change in energy policy in Northern Ireland and will require consumers to change how they heat and power their homes. For example, currently 68% of our households are reliant on domestic home heating oil – significantly more than Great Britain<sup>5</sup>.

This will be a challenging journey for many households as they will be required to learn new skills and adopt new behaviours to make efficient use of emerging technologies. Provisions are needed to support this change and make the transition as simple as possible for energy users. It is imperative that there is **clear information, advice, and support for all**.

Renewable energy generation requires significant upfront investment on the part of a householder. Even where this cost is covered by existing subsidies it is at best part funded, meaning households must find a substantial amount of money upfront to access the low carbon alternatives. This is simply not possible for lower income and vulnerable households.

MPs should play a proactive role in addressing this disadvantage, **securing the provision of grants** to low income and vulnerable homes to enable them to transition to decarbonised heat and power.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information visit: [www.nea.org.uk/northern-ireland](http://www.nea.org.uk/northern-ireland).

<sup>2</sup> Lucid Talk (2023). '[Northern Ireland \(NI\) Attitudinal Poll – National Energy Action Northern Ireland](#)' (Available to download on NEA's website).

<sup>3</sup> David Hough (2016). '[The Warm Home Discount Scheme](#)' Briefing Paper, House of Commons Library.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the benefits of energy efficiency measures see: '[UK Fuel Poverty Monitor 2022-23](#)', NEA, pg. 34-37. (Available to download on NEA's website).

<sup>5</sup> Approx. 4% of households in England, 5% of households in Scotland, and 10% of households in Wales are reliant on home heating oil.