



Consultation on the Department for Communities’ Draft Fuel Poverty Strategy

The early months of 2025 were marked by numerous significant consultations. For NEA NI, the most crucial was the long-awaited consultation on the new draft Fuel Poverty Strategy, launched at the end of 2024.

As members of the Department for Communities (DfC) Fuel Poverty and Just Transition Reference Panel, we were actively engaged in the pre-consultation phase. We also participated in the Department’s series of stakeholder consultation events, ahead of submitting our detailed written response in February.

You can read our NEA NI response [here](#).



In parallel, we collaborated closely with key partners to examine various aspects of the strategy. As Chair of the Fuel Poverty Coalition (FPC), NEA worked with Steering Group members to coordinate a high-level collective response, endorsed by a broad range of organisations.

The FPC response is available [here](#).

Following the close of the consultation, DfC officials presented evidence to the Communities Committee in March, outlining the next steps in the process. We now await the publication of the consultation report and the launch of a further consultation on a new fuel poverty support scheme, which is to be called ‘Warm, Healthy Homes’. NEA will continue to engage closely to ensure that the needs of low-income and vulnerable households remain a priority.

All of NEA NI’s consultation responses can be found on our website by clicking [here](#).

[Launch of our LucidTalk Poll on Fuel Poverty](#)

NEA NI provides the Secretariat for the All-Party Group on Fuel Poverty, Chaired by Andy Allen MBE MLA. At our November meeting we presented the findings of our third [LucidTalk NI Fuel Poverty Attitudinal Poll 2024](#) and also heard from the Utility Regulator regarding their recent lived experience [research on energy hardship](#).

[Fuel Poverty Awareness Day 2024](#)

This year's UK-wide Fuel Poverty Awareness Day (FPAD) took place on Wednesday 27 November 2024. Our key messages were widely shared across social media, with strong support from a broad and diverse range of organisations, highlighting the importance of warm, energy-efficient homes.

In the lead-up to the day, we hosted a photocall in the Great Hall at Stormont, joined by Communities Minister Gordon Lyons MLA, members of the Fuel Poverty Coalition, and MLAs from across all parties.

Thank you to everybody who supported #FuelPovertyAwarenessDay in NI.

Save The Date: The next FPAD will be held on Wednesday 26 November 2025.



Training News

Our in-person training courses, webinars, events and community talks continue to prove extremely popular with excellent feedback as this thank you note shows:

“Can I just thank you for your excellent talk with our over 60s group, Engage. They are still talking about it now... they loved you bringing in stories of going to your own grandmother’s house... they loved the packs, lots of people have benefitted from sorting out their energy suppliers and almost all went home and put their cardboard thermostats in their living rooms. Thank you again for being able to come out and join us for our Monday morning.”

We also continue to deliver City and Guilds Energy Awareness training to our suppliers, most recently, firmus energy participants received their certificates. Congratulations on achieving your awards!



As a proactive company, firmus energy Networks, made a commitment at an early stage to ensure that each and every one of their employees undertakes this specialist training.

We also ran stalls at Queen’s University Belfast Students Union, Ulster University campuses in Magee, Belfast and Coleraine for National Student Money Week, where we provided advice to students on how to keep warm on a budget.

Training dates below for upcoming courses:

- **Changing Energy Related Behaviour**
Wednesday 4 June 2025 (Webinar)
- **Introduction to Domestic Renewable Low Carbon Technologies (Level 2)**
Wednesday 11 and Thursday 12 June 2025
- **NEA/City & Guilds Energy Awareness (Level 3)**
Monday 23 to Wednesday 25 June 2025 (Dates to be confirmed)



We can also provide Energy Efficiency in Home information sessions to community groups throughout Northern Ireland. Please contact Nichola.MacDougall@nea.org.uk for further information.

You can find out more about our training [here](#).



Belfast Warm and Well Project

The Belfast Warm and Well Project aims to help local people struggling to keep their homes warm, by offering advice, practical support, and where appropriate financial assistance to stay warm and well.

As of 31 March 2025, we delivered support to 1095 households across 25 Belfast postcodes. According to early findings based on those inputted assessments:

- 79% of households lived in Social Housing or the Private Rented Sector.
- 44% of households had children under 18.

Other findings include:

- Those who have been/are in fuel debt: 92%
- Those who ran out of gas, electric, oil: 94%
- Reliance on emergency credit factored into weekly budgets: 50%
- Those who regularly borrow from family or friends to buy energy: 42%
- Those with mobility issues: 45%
- Those with a chronic health condition: 59%
- Those with a mental health condition: 72% (a 12% increase on last year)
- Those with a cardiovascular condition: 40%
- Those with a recognised disability: 51%

The Project runs to the end of 30 June 2025.

New Queen's University Belfast Study Shows High Level of Deprivation in NI

Deprivation is higher in Northern Ireland than in regions of England, and in Scotland and Wales, a new study by Queen's University Belfast has revealed. The researchers used 2021 census data from England, Wales and Northern Ireland and 2022 census data from Scotland.

The researchers found that Northern Ireland has the highest level of the most deprived areas in the UK at 25% (the northeast of England has the second highest level at 21%).

Derry City and Strabane, and Belfast – two local authorities in NI, have more deprived areas than any of the other 374 local authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and the rest of Northern Ireland.

The researchers also examined self-reported data on health deprivation by those who responded to the census. They found that health deprivation is particularly high in Northern Ireland with nearly 28% of areas ranked among the most deprived by poor health across the UK (Scotland: 23%, north-east England: 16%).

This comes as no surprise to us working with people affected by fuel poverty. In response to our LucidTalk polling in September 2024, 40% of adults said they were spending more than 10% of their total household expenditure on energy costs, meaning they are fuel poor. One in three NI households reported health and wellbeing impacts from rising energy prices and the cost of living.

£100 one-off payment to pensioners

The snap decision to withdraw the universal aspect of the Winter Fuel Payment, without consultation, caused wide consternation within NEA and the broader Fuel Poverty Coalition movement. In November, the Communities Minister announced a one-off £100 fuel support payment to pensioners no longer eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment – partially mitigating the impact.

While those payments have now been issued, a significant gap remains for an estimated 25,000 older people who do not but should be claiming Pension Credit.

This issue remains a serious concern for NEA. We continue to advocate for additional support for these households in 2025, while also urging older people to check their benefit entitlements – not only for Pension Credit, but also for other benefits such as Attendance Allowance.

You can read our Consultation Response on policy changes to the Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Scheme [here](#).

Helping Northern Ireland
Break Free from Debt
(Guest Article)



Advice NI, a Charity that provides free advice on a range of issues, such as Benefits, Personal and Business Money and Debt advice, HMRC services and products, and the EU Settlement Scheme, has launched a new Debt Advice Awareness campaign.

Advice NI provides free, confidential and tailored debt advice, including budgeting advice and solutions to deal with debt. They also can negotiate with creditors on your behalf. Last year (2023-2024) Advice NI's personal debt service assisted over 3000 clients in managing over £44million of debt, empowering individuals to regain control of their finances.

In the same year, the business debt service supported 138 business owners in resolving £8.3 million of debt, helping small businesses continue trading and contributing to the Northern Ireland economy.

Since the pandemic, Advice NI have seen a change in clients presenting to debt service. They are often coming to them at crisis points and in more complex situations.

This can sometimes limit the solutions offered and make the process longer. Advice NI are trying to encourage members of the public struggling with persistent or overwhelming debt to seek advice earlier.

Organisations can help Advice NI by promoting their new service videos to their constituents/clients and wider network, letting people know their debt services are free and accessible to all.

They have developed some animated explainer videos to help build awareness of the service, break down what debt is, and help alleviate the stigma of what happens during the first debt advice appointment.

You can download the digital assets [here](#).

If you would like hard copies of service flyers please email: comms@adviceni.net

You can look at the budgeting tools [here](#).

If you want to find out more about the Advice NI Referral Portal, a secure, web-based platform that allows external organisations to make direct referrals to our services quickly and easily, download the Referral Portal Expression of Interest Form [here](#).

What does the Utility Regulator Do? **(Guest Article)**



At the Utility Regulator for Northern Ireland, their overarching commitment is to protect the interests of energy and water consumers.

Some of the ways in which they do that are:

- By regulating the tariffs of a number of electricity and gas suppliers. This ensures that the price they charge represents the actual cost of supplying you with electricity or gas.
- By setting the standards of service, through their Codes of Practice, that consumers can expect from their energy and water companies.
- By monitoring and enforcing licence conditions to ensure compliance and that regulated companies provide high levels of service to customers.

Where can I find out more about the Codes of Practice?

The Utility Regulator's Codes of Practice are designed to ensure that gas, electricity and water consumers and, in particular, those that may be in vulnerable circumstances, are protected in their dealings with energy and water companies.

You can find more information about their Codes of Practice, along with all of their other consumer protection work, on their website — www.uregni.gov.uk/consumer-information.

Are you are struggling to pay for your energy?

If you're worried about paying for your electricity or gas, there is help available. As a first step, you should contact your supplier to let them know about your circumstances. They will tell you about the support they can offer you.

There are also several organisations who can provide you with free and independent advice. These include NEA, Advice NI and Consumer Council for Northern Ireland.

Could you benefit from extra support from your energy or water company?

Electricity, gas and water suppliers have customer care registers, which are registers of customers who may need additional support.

Suppliers use these registers to offer a range of free additional services for customers who are of pensionable age, chronically sick, disabled or require help for any other reason. To be added to a customer care register, contact your supplier.

In addition, if you or someone you know relies on electricity for medical equipment in the home, you can join NIE Networks' Medical Customer Care Register to receive extra support during a power cut. Please contact NIE Networks to register.

Do you have a complaint about your energy or water supplier?

If you're unhappy with the service provided by your supplier, in the first instance, you should contact them directly to raise your complaint/query.

If you aren't happy with their response, or if your issue isn't resolved, your next step should be to contact the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland. The Consumer Council has the statutory remit to help consumers with electricity, gas, water and sewerage complaints arising in your home or business.

SAVE THE DATE

NEA NI Reception Event

Wednesday 12 November 2025

Great Hall, Parliament Buildings, Stormont

(An evening event with times TBC)

If you are interested in this event, please use the QR codes or hyperlinks below to sign up to our NEA NI and/or Fuel Poverty Coalition mailing lists, as more information and how to register will be shared closer to the date.



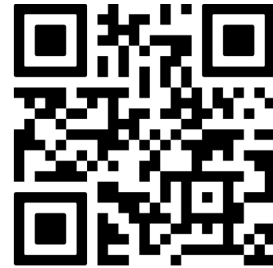
NEA NI



<https://rb.gy/vqifb8>



FPC NI



<https://qrco.de/FPC-NI>

Contact Us

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