

**CHURCH OF SCOTLAND  
CHURCH AND SOCIETY COUNCIL**

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## Official Response

**SUBJECT:** SCOTTISH FUEL POVERTY FORUM  
**REQUESTED BY:**  
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### **Why is the Church of Scotland Interested in Fuel Poverty?**

1. The Church of Scotland is concerned by the continued existence of fuel poverty in Scotland. Homes that are poorly built, poorly insulated and are expensive to heat contribute both towards poverty and to the unnecessary emission of greenhouse gases. The contribution that fuel poverty makes to poverty as whole is likely to grow: rising fuel prices hit the poor more than the rich so this is an ethical concern for the Church. The Church believes that fuel poverty can be reduced through a programme of investment in the energy efficiency of the housing stock, both existing and new. Through this mechanism it should be possible to both reduce fuel poverty; and substantially reduce the waste of fuel that contributes to Scotland's emission of greenhouse gases.

### **Short Term Fix or Long Term Solution?**

2. The Government's recent review of fuel poverty sets out the complexities of the problem and the disturbing increase in fuel poverty in Scotland. This increase has taken place at a time when Scotland has experienced a prolonged period of economic growth with marked increases in personal wealth for many people, so it makes uncomfortable reading. If fuel poverty continues to exist in a land of plenty there is clearly something fundamentally wrong with the housing stock or the distribution of wealth in Scotland or both. The increases in fuel prices experienced in the past two years and likely future increases in fuel costs will do nothing to alleviate this but probably exacerbate the problem.

### **Fuel Poverty and Climate Change**

3. The challenge of poverty sits along side the challenge of climate change and the need to reduce our use of carbon based fuel. The Scottish Government has set an ambitious target to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases by 80% by 2050. The domestic sector is the largest consumer of energy in Scotland so there will have to be a systematic reduction in the use - and waste - of fuel in domestic heating. The Scottish Government proposals on climate change make it clear that we have to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, so the need to reduce emissions from Scotland's housing stock will become more urgent if we are to achieve the greenhouse gas targets. The Scottish Energy Study sets out how difficult this might be, as the following extract demonstrates.

*The domestic sector is the largest consumer of energy. Energy demand for domestic uses in Scotland is greater than the UK average, mainly because of the harsher climate. It also reflects the differences in the condition of Scotland's building stock. For example, evidence suggests that the fraction of Scottish homes without loft insulation is more than twice that in England. Balancing this is the fact that around 30% of dwellings in Scotland are flats (requiring less energy for heating) compared to only 20% in England.*

*Energy consumption in this sector in 2002 rose by around 15% relative to that in 1990. This is dominated by the increased use of gas for heating but also reflects the increased use of electricity for various household goods, entertainment systems, etc. The use of coal was almost half the 1990 figure.<sup>1</sup>*

The report makes it clear that domestic energy consumption in Scotland is rising and that Scotland's housing stock is more poorly insulated than England's. It raises very real concerns about our ability to tackle fuel poverty and climate change.

4. To address these issues will require a very substantial programme of work that could not be achieved in full within the 2016 deadline set out for the current investigation. However if we are to meet the 80% greenhouse gases emissions target by 2050 it will be necessary to start making savings now of at least 3% per annum. This will require the development and implementation of a substantial capital programme – with positive benefits for both fuel poverty and local economic development initiatives.

### **Strategy for Fuel Poverty**

5. To address this issue the Church would endorse the approach developed by the Energy Savings Trust. This involves both changing standards for new build and improving the existing housing stock.

#### *New Build*

6. The Sullivan Report<sup>2</sup> examined the changes required to achieve carbon neutrality in new homes and concluded that it would be possible to move to carbon neutrality in new housing relatively quickly through changes in the building regulations. The Church supports this view and encourages the inquiry to support the move to carbon neutrality as a target for all new build housing.

#### *Existing Housing*

7. Retrofitting existing housing is more complicated but the principle has been well established over a number of years in both public and private sector housing and remains a key activity for energy advice agency network, local authorities and private sector providers. Cavity wall insulation, roof insulation and more efficient heating systems will continue to deliver improvements in energy efficiency. We support the suggestions put forward by the Energy Savings Trust on housing policy to

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<sup>1</sup> *Scottish Energy Study*, Scottish Executive, 2006, page 4.

<sup>2</sup> *A Low Carbon Building Standards Strategy for Scotland (The Sullivan Report)*, SBSA, 2007

- focus on fuel poverty
- direct resources at the worst properties
- consider area based solutions.

Local authorities, energy companies and local companies could work together to target resources at particular areas of need. There are encouraging signs that this can take place but the degree of partnership working within the public sector and with energy companies will have to develop significantly if it is to be really effective.

8. There are also close links between fuel poverty and local area regeneration. Some public sector housing built in the twentieth century is so fuel inefficient that demolition and replacement may be the only option. New housing development in regeneration areas could become a model of fuel efficiency along with innovative projects for district heating or micro-renewables.

### **Can Community Planning Take on this Challenge?**

9. There is a strong case for substantial public investment in such local programmes to both reduce fuel poverty and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It might be worth the Scottish Government undertaking a more detailed analysis of the costs and benefits of such an approach compared to the huge expenditure the UK Government is considering investing in a new generation of nuclear power stations or carbon capture. While both could deliver reductions in carbon emissions it may be the case that locally based fuel poverty partnership schemes around Scotland would also contribute substantially to regeneration and local economic development, including skills training and local business development. This would contrast with centrally driven and large corporate investment associated with nuclear power or carbon capture.

10. The precedent of local training based insulation programmes could be developed to meet this new challenge, centrally led by the Scottish Government but locally delivered through partnership working. The home insulation work of the WISE group and other local programmes are well established and offer practical experience of the costs and benefits of this approach. At a time when the construction industry is facing a downturn in demand and energy prices are rising steeply it might be opportune to explore this issue as a priority. This approach could help give a new direction and clarity of purpose to community planning partnerships as well as making long term inroads into the level of fuel poverty in Scotland.

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