



energy  
**action**  
**SCOTLAND**

**2024**

**MANIFESTO**



## ENERGY ACTION SCOTLAND 2024 MANIFESTO

Energy Action Scotland is Scotland's national fuel poverty charity. It is a membership organisation of housing providers, charities and specialist energy, debt and consumer advice organisations and has been campaigning for an end to cold, damp homes and unaffordable energy for more than 40 years.

Cold, damp homes lead to poor health outcomes and premature death. In 2024, it is neither right nor fair that the most vulnerable people in Scotland are still choosing between heating and eating, unable to wash in hot water, without light and heat.

It is surely an issue of basic human rights that families caring for members with additional medical needs are bearing the cost of that care while unable to increase their income nor reduce their energy consumption.

**Everyone should have an absolute right to live in a good quality energy efficient home, with a right to a fair income that at the very least affords the essentials to enrich lives and a right to affordable energy that enables people to heat and power their homes to protect their health and wellbeing. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century...**

The only way to eliminate fuel poverty is to retrofit housing so it requires less energy, protecting households from changes in the energy market. While this change needs to take place at scale and pace, it is vital that we intervene immediately to protect people this coming winter. The highest levels of recorded additional winter deaths were in 2022/3, after the Covid pandemic, which demonstrates the severity of the crisis still affecting more than 800,000 households in Scotland.

Energy Action Scotland members have spoken. They ask for change that will support and protect people this winter and beyond.

### **1. The Creation of a Social Tariff for Energy**

In 2019 almost 1 in 4 households in Scotland were struggling to achieve the levels of warmth and comfort necessary to maintain their health and wellbeing. Energy costs increased dramatically peaking in 2022/23 at almost triple the cost to 2019/20. Significant government intervention was required to hold many people's costs at double resulting in over 1 in 3 households in fuel poverty. Energy costs have fallen back but remain at around 50% more than in 2019/20. Record numbers were forcibly moved to prepayment in response to mounting debt. Domestic energy debt is at an all-time high. Essential levels of energy are out of reach for almost 2million people in Scotland.

We need a progressive social tariff, to provide a lower cost option to low income vulnerable households across Great Britain. This social tariff should be flexible to support all types of households including those with unavoidably high energy requirements, people living in the worst quality, least energy efficient homes to ensure that essential levels of energy are available to all.

## **2. National Energy Debt Reduction Strategy**

We need a meaningful intervention to support households with unmanageable amounts of energy debt. GB households now have over £3billion of debt to energy suppliers, this is unsustainable and unrepayable. Each household is now paying £27 annually to energy companies to help them reduce the level of the debt owed to them but this repayment is not reducing any households bills. This cannot be right when hundreds of thousands of households have been forced to self disconnect from their energy supply because they simply cannot afford the basic level of energy required to cook hot food, have hot water or heating.

Scotland needs the UK Government to provide a fair and robust response to domestic energy debt. There should be obligations to ensure that all suppliers have a transparent approach to debt management and debt reduction. Support from government will be needed to ensure that there are no risks to the health and wellbeing of those with debt. For many there is simply no way that they can ever repay energy debt living as they do with negative household budgets where there is simply insufficient monies to achieve essential accommodation, food, energy.

## **3. Protection for Unprotected Fuel Poor Households**

Households that do not have direct relationships with regulated energy suppliers are not protected in any way. Households with unregulated fuels including heating oil and lpg face challenges with cashflow due to high cost minimum order requirements and fluctuating prices. We need the UK Government to require those suppliers to provide fair forms of credit and obligations to ensure that vulnerable people have heat during the coldest of winter months.

People living in temporary accommodation, people living in park homes, people living in private rented accommodation often have energy provided to them by a landlord or other property manager. Without a direct relationship eligible households are not be able to access financial support such as Warm Home Discount, nor avail themselves of the protection from the Priority Services Register. These households will not be able to move supplier to receive good customer service or potentially enjoy the benefits of a lower cost fixed tariff. There are no incentives for landlords to provide the lowest cost option to their tenants.

Affordable energy should be within the reach of all households and it is only fair that equal protections are afforded regardless of the nature of the supply of domestic energy to heat and power homes.

Current uncertainty around the impending radio teleswitch service cessation, which affects electric heating systems of 250,000 households in Scotland. This service is due to stop in June 2025 adds to the stress faced by tens of thousands of households in Scotland. Energy companies must be compelled to increase the pace of smart meter roll out to these households, prioritising those households who are at risk of disconnection from supply and households must to suffer from increased costs associated with this loss of service. There is a genuine risk to life in the event of a catastrophic loss of supply. UK Government must ensure that Ofgem, the energy regulator, protects households affected.

#### **4. Disabled/ essential medical needs**

Households with a disabled person or family member with essential medical requirements need equipment to maintain their health and to live in homes that are warmer for much longer than households without these conditions. To protect lives it is only right that they are shielded from high energy costs. During the peak of energy costs in the depth of the cost of living crisis little was provided to help people in these circumstances with the impact of spiralling costs. Some households saw costs rise from already unaffordable annual costs of £4500 to almost £10,000 but had little option but to incur debt or seek support from charities and the general public. This isn't fair and doesn't reflect our obligations within equalities legislation in the UK.

The UK Government should ensure that the National Health Service across the UK provides the resources to enable people to not only have life supporting and enhancing equipment but enable them to use it as necessary without concerns about the affordability to power this equipment.

#### **5. Energy Company Customer Support/ Advice & Third Sector Support**

The level of customer support provided by energy companies is simply inadequate. Customers are not receiving high standards of customer service.<sup>1</sup>

Third sector advice providers are spending time and money (often 30+ minutes per client) attempting to discuss energy debt but specialist support staff and support units are no longer routinely provided. This places the burden on charities that are overwhelmed by current levels of need as well and is underfunded. The third sector advice sector needs significant and structured support to help it provide free, objective and professional support to households. Charities are the most trusted organisations in society with a hugely motivated workforce striving to help people in the most difficult of circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> Independent reviews by Citizens Advice across the 16 biggest suppliers at end December 2023 saw no supplier approaching a high standard. Its 5 point scale had the best performing at 3.8 and lowest at 1.4.