



Website: fuelbankfoundation.org

Fuel Bank Foundation

Room 10,
Wombourne Civic Centre,
Gravel Hill,
Wombourne,
Staffordshire,
WV5 9HA

Matthew@fuelbankfoundation.org

04 April 2025

By Email

Fuel Bank Foundation response to the Review of the Fuel Poverty Strategy.

Dear Fuel Poverty Consultation Team,

At Fuel Bank Foundation, we provide emergency financial support through our network of over 800 partners to people who cannot afford to pre-pay for their energy. Often, they will have used up all their options for support before they are referred to us. This means that when their money runs out, they have no heating, lighting or means to cook hot food. We call this "fuel crisis".

It's at this point that we step in - either with an emergency top-up for their gas or electricity prepayment meter or a delivery of oil or LPG if they are off the gas grid. Both interventions are followed up with advice from us to help them access other forms of support to get back on their feet.

Since our inception (almost ten years ago) we have now helped over two million people so have amassed a significant amount of insight in supporting people who struggle to afford energy.

These are our general comments on the "Review of the Fuel Poverty Strategy for England" consultation:

In essence, we think that the Government's objectives should be to

- Make sure everyone has a good quality home that is inexpensive to heat.
- Make staying warm more affordable.
- Encourage or facilitate crisis support to pay for energy where necessary until the first two objectives are achieved.

Right now, energy is thought about in a very siloed way by Government. Yet, affordable warmth, light and power form part of the foundations for good health and mental wellbeing, success in education and skills development, increased productivity - and so much more. Because so many people cannot afford even a basic amount of heat and power, we spend billions annually across various policy areas - health, education, and welfare - resolving the issues caused by cold homes. We urge the Government to take a more joined-up approach that prioritises long-term prevention and improved outcomes instead of focusing on short-term costs.

We appreciate that many of our recommendations cannot realistically be funded through general in- year taxation. So instead, the Government should consider how to fund long-term programmes through future savings in other policy areas such as education, skills and health.

We must make sure that everyone has a good quality home that is inexpensive to heat. To achieve this, the Government must be more ambitious with their plans to make UK homes more energy efficient and less costly to heat. We must extend this support to more households - and aim higher in our EPC rating standards.

Priority must be given to homes that are the hardest to heat ("worst first approach") - such as all-electric properties in rural areas with low EPC ratings that are not connected to the mains grid or in urban areas where there are too many damp, cold, poorly insulated properties lived in by people on low incomes.

A comprehensive energy efficiency programme to retrofit all existing properties will take years to deliver - we understand that. So, in the meantime, we must also make sure that everyone can easily access crisis support in times of emergency so that no one has to suffer living in a cold, damp and dark home.

We would love to see the Government enabling and facilitating an expansion of data sharing to alleviate fuel poverty. Our clients are amongst the country's poorest, and they simply cannot afford even a basic amount of energy. We must find a way to give targeted financial support to people on the lowest incomes and with the highest energy costs. And, crucially, this should happen automatically, without the need to apply.

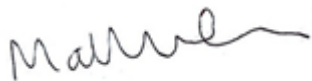
More thought also needs to be given to removing the barriers that prevent people like our clients accessing energy efficiency improvements or, even, advice. Whether that be due to a lack of awareness of what's available, low literacy levels, housing tenure, insufficient tailored support or the need for cash up-front. Policymakers need to include in the design of such schemes those with "lived experience" to ensure that they are accessible to all, otherwise they will continue to not be focussed on the fuel poor.

We think it's essential that the Government continues to work (alone, or in conjunction with other organisations) to improve the evidence base on fuel poverty and develops a means of measuring the link between fuel poverty and health & wellbeing. This might help to convince the Treasury of the merits of "spending to save".

We very much welcomed the recent proposals to remove the high cost to heat threshold in the current Warm Home Discount Regulations. This is because we have a significant amount of evidence to show that living in a well-insulated home does not mean that you have the money needed to top up a prepayment meter so that the heating can be used. Our own analysis shows that, since January 2024, 61.45% of people who came to us for help lived in an A/B or C rated property and so would not have been eligible for the Warm Home Discount, but still very much needed financial support from us to heat their home. We hope that this is recognised and incorporated in the Government's work on measuring fuel poverty going forwards.

Finally, I am grateful for the invitation to participate in Minister Fahnbulleh's Fuel Poverty Strategy working group and look forward to continuing to contribute to the Department's thinking and articulating our clients' needs as this work develops. A new approach to eliminating fuel poverty is needed now, more than ever, and we remain hopeful that this Government has the political will to deliver that.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Cole', with a stylized, flowing script.

Matthew Cole,

CEO, Fuel Bank Foundation.