

Thousands die each year from living in cold homes. This scandal must end

Posted by Bryn Kewley — 27 January 2015 at 5:00pm - 4 Comments



*In this guest blog, Bryn Kewley explains how **Cold Homes Week** – taking place from 2-6 February – aims to put fuel poverty firmly on the political agenda.*

Thousands of people die because they simply can't afford to turn on their heating. Two million children are growing up cold. They face twice the likelihood of contracting respiratory diseases like asthma, are more susceptible to multiple mental health issues and suffer a lower educational attainment than their peers in warmer homes.

Energy bills are causing real hardship with 81% of us worried about them as we head into winter, according to a recent Yougov poll. Surprisingly energy prices in the UK are relatively cheap compared to other European countries. Our high energy bills stem from having one of the worst insulated housing stocks in Europe. We desperately

need to insulate our homes properly to bring down bills and tackle fuel poverty. Energy efficiency is the only long term solution to this crisis.

Fuel poverty is not just about keeping warm, as important as that is, it contributes towards a grinding poverty that forces people to make impossible choices. It's hardest on those who are most vulnerable, children in poor families, people on squeezed incomes who were hit hardest by the recession and the elderly, including those who served our country.

In the news is a story about John from Sunderland who has a serious lung condition made worse by cold, damp conditions. He had to be admitted to hospital 5 times last winter, was very poorly and he and his wife had a terrible Christmas. This year his home was insulated with financial help and so far this winter he's not had to visit the hospital once. "He's much happier in himself because he's not suffering" his wife Margaret said. If that much difference can be made by insulating a home any compassionate society should be willing to help. It's the least we can do.

New research by the prestigious Cambridge Econometrics brings hope. It has found that this a major investment programme in home energy efficiency could not only bring down bills and end fuel poverty, but have much wider benefits. Their work found that households in the UK could save £5billion off their energy bills, £3.20 in growth would be achieved for every £1 invested, gas imports would be cut by a quarter and 108,000 jobs created. In addition the programme would pay for itself within 8 years and then turn into a net revenue generator for the Treasury.

The research also found that as an infrastructure programme it would be rated as delivering 'high' value for money. This opens the door to an entirely new way to fund a far more ambitious energy efficiency programme. The UK Government is planning on spending £100 billion on infrastructure investment over the next 5 years but so far not a penny on retrofitting homes.

We're not the first country to consider a large scale energy efficiency scheme. The German government recently ran an Energy Efficiency Construction and Refurbishment programme which led to lots of private investment and a tax return to the government of more than four times what they spent.

As the general election approaches the Energy Bill Revolution is calling on all political parties to pledge to make home energy efficiency a priority infrastructure investment and to make all low income homes super energy efficient by 2025. It offers the hope of

ending fuel poverty within a decade whilst delivering huge economic returns. No other investment could achieve so much for so many.