**Over Ninety Charities and non-profit organisations call on the Chancellor to introduce discounted energy bills for low-income households**

* **Seven in 10 older people support a social energy tariff for low-income households**
* **One in four older disabled people are living in cold homes**
* **New Fuel Poverty Monitor report which investigates the impact of the energy crisis on fuel poor households recommends the introduction of a new social tariff - a targeted discount energy deal for those at risk of fuel poverty**
* **From April 2023, number of fuel poor households expected to rise to 8.4m across the UK**

In an open letter sent today to the Chancellor[[1]](#endnote-1), Jeremy Hunt MP, over 90 Charities and non-profit organisations across the UK have joined together to call for more targeted support in the form of a social tariff for the energy market to help older and disabled households heat their homes.

New research by Age UK[[2]](#endnote-2) reveals strong support for a social energy tariff amongst the over-60s, with 71 per cent – increasing to 76 per cent of those with a disability – agreeing that a social energy tariff[[3]](#endnote-3) should be available for those who need it most.

NEA estimates that the energy crisis has pushed over 6.7 million UK households into fuel poverty[[4]](#endnote-4), up from 4.5 million in October 2021. A social tariff would support low-income households who face a double burden from the rising cost of bills and paying more for their energy due to the poverty premium.

Age UK, Fair by Design, National Energy Action (NEA) and Scope – are warning today that many older and disabled people, their carers and low-income households are facing an uncertain future as they grapple with unaffordable energy bills. Age UK’s new polling shows that a quarter (24 per cent) of over-60s are living in homes which are colder than they would like them to be, rising to 27 per cent for older people with a disability.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Collectively, they are calling for targeted support to be made available to those who need it most – including those on means-tested benefits, disability benefits and Carer’s Allowance as well as those missing out on welfare support but still struggling with their bills. They are deeply concerned that further price rises and a withdrawal of universal energy support from April 2023, will leave many older and disabled people in a increasingly desperate situation. Demand for the Charities’ services is high and they are being inundated with calls from people in dire need, for example those relying on medical equipment like dialysis machines, who are facing a daily struggle to keep their equipment turned on and stay warm and well.

In addition, National Energy Action and Energy Action Scotland have today released their latest Fuel Poverty Monitor which provides an annual analysis of how the energy crisis has impacted fuel-poor households.[[6]](#endnote-6) Confirming that households living on the lowest incomes, in the least efficient homes and on pre-payment meters, are being hardest hit by energy price increases, the report recommends the Government urgently consults on a mandatory social tariff to begin in April 2024, or sooner if practicable, to provide affordable energy for low-income and vulnerable households; and that the focus of this should be to ensure that the targeting of such a scheme goes beyond just those households that receive means-tested benefits.

From April 2023, the Government’s Energy Bills Support Scheme comes to an end and the support provided by the Energy Price Guarantee will be reduced. Without continued financial support, it is predicted that the numbers of all age fuel poor households will jump to a staggering 8.4 million across the UK.[[7]](#endnote-7)

**Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director at Age UK, said: “**Imagine having to choose between staying warm, feeding your family, or powering essential medical equipment. This is the reality for increasing numbers of older and disabled households across the country.

“Older people are struggling to get by now, and that’s before another energy price increase comes their way in a few months’ time. Many will simply not be able to cope with further price rises and we’re extremely concerned their health and wellbeing will pay the price. There needs to be much more protection for those who have no other means of paying such extortionate energy costs. The Government must introduce a social tariff for the energy market whilst prices are so high, and ensure we never face a crisis like this again.”

**Martin Coppack, Director of Fair By Design, said:** “We need to make sure vulnerable households are protected from future hikes in energy prices. This is why Fair By Design has been calling on the Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to introduce an energy social tariff. This would benefit those in greatest need, who would no longer be faced with the impossible decision of going without essentials such as food just to be able to heat their homes.

“The number of signatories to our joint letter to the Chancellor shows there is broad consensus on what the solution is. We urge the Government to make good on its commitment to work with organisations like ours to consider the best approach for those struggling with their bills.”

**Report author Matt Copeland, head of policy and public affairs at National Energy Action, says:** “For our Fuel Poverty Monitor, we spoke to over a hundred organisations across the UK, directly with our clients and polled the general public. From this it’s clear that the energy crisis is having a profound impact on the poorest and most vulnerable households in society.

“Whether households are heating just one room for just a few hours a week, or rationing the use of their medical equipment, the results are completely unacceptable in modern day society. So far, the UK Government has offered sticking plaster solutions to the crisis.

“What is really needed is structural change to the energy market. We were told time and again that a social tariff is what is needed. Today we come together with hundreds of other organisations to say just that. The UK Government must urgently prioritise work to implement a social tariff as soon as possible.”

**James Taylor, Director of Strategy at disability equality charity Scope, said:** “Astronomical energy bills are pushing disabled people to the brink.

“Our helpline has been inundated with calls from disabled people whose bills have doubled or even quadrupled in a year. Prices will rise again this April but disabled families have nothing left to cut back on. They can't turn off vital, life-saving equipment and budgets can’t stretch any further.

“The Government must introduce a social tariff - a discounted energy rate - for disabled people before it’s too late.”

**Age UK and Scope are also calling on the public to lend their support to help protect older and disabled people from unaffordable energy bills by** [**signing a letter to the Government**](https://campaigns.ageuk.org.uk/page/119790/petition/1?ea.tracking.id=Pressrelease)**.**

**-ENDS-**

**Notes to editors**

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For more information please visit: [www.ageuk.org.uk/itdoesntaddup](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/itdoesntaddup) and [www.nea.org.uk/energyhelp](http://www.nea.org.uk/energyhelp)

1. The full letter can be found at: [https://tinyurl.com/SocialTariffLetter](https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Ftinyurl.com%2FSocialTariffLetter&data=05%7C01%7CAnne-Marie.Doohan%40ageuk.org.uk%7C67a7b15566764596bcef08daf4bb658d%7C143e1d48881647bc83de7c3dac270e2f%7C0%7C0%7C638091382951529773%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=RYCtkDnvBgtJEKg1vCRiBT8VrSSHpo5Ktf3TsrKm1y8%3D&reserved=0) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Online survey conducted by Opinium on behalf of Age UK between 2nd and 9th January 2023. Sample of 1,010 adults aged 60+ living in Great Britain. Weighted to be nationally representative of this group. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. A social tariff is a targeted discount energy deal for qualifying low-income consumers. It is a safety net for eligible households who might be struggling to afford their bills. It is typically below the price of the cheapest available energy tariff and targeted at those living in fuel poverty or on a low income. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. We define households experiencing fuel poverty as households spending more than 10per cent of their after-tax income on energy costs, so as to maintain an adequate standard of warmth. This definition was used to calculate the fuel poverty statistics in England from 2001 to 2011, and continues to be the definition used in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland to calculate their respective fuel poverty statistics. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Online survey conducted by Opinium on behalf of Age UK between 2nd and 9th January 2023. Sample of 1,010 adults aged 60+ living in Great Britain. Weighted to be nationally representative of this group. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The annual Fuel Poverty Monitor, published today, is informed by a Call for Evidence (CfE), which received responses from 119 respondents covering the breadth of the UK. This includes wider engagement with stakeholders through one-on-one meetings and, crucially, the direct experience of people who are living through the crisis, as well as polling of the general public. The report found that:

   * Households living on the lowest incomes, in the least efficient homes are being hardest hit.
   * Households falling into multiple intersecting categories of vulnerability are being disproportionately affected.
   * Households using prepayment meters have faced the biggest challenges accessing support and are at acute risk due to self-disconnection.
   * Organisations across the sector have stepped up support to help households through the crisis, but there are unprecedented capacity challenges to deal with the volume and complexity of cases.
   * The scale of current national support is unprecedented but the hardest-hit require deeper, targeted support.
   * Recognition has grown that we must accelerate a fair and affordable transition to net zero to abate this emergency and avoid future crises.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. National Energy Action and Energy Action Scotland have today released the Fuel Poverty Monitor 2021-22. It is informed by a Call for Evidence (CfE), which received responses from 119 respondents covering the breadth of the UK. This includes wider engagement with stakeholders through one-on-one meetings and, crucially, the direct experience of people who are living through the crisis, as well as polling of the general public. To see the report, please visit <https://www.nea.org.uk/publications/uk-fuel-poverty-monitor-2022-23/> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)