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**New Age UK analysis shows an energy social tariff would have lifted 2.2 million households out of fuel poverty this winter**

**Coalition of Charities calls on the Government to re-commit to the policy as part of a permanent solution for fuel poverty in the UK**

New analysis by Age UK has revealed that 2.2 million households would **not** be living in fuel poverty[[1]](#endnote-2) this winter – a reduction of around 65% - if the Government had implemented an energy social tariff to help the most vulnerable energy users in society[[2]](#endnote-3).

Despite repeated promises from the Government to consult on an energy social tariff they have failed to follow through on this commitment, letting down millions of people in fuel poverty who are still in desperate need of support.

A Coalition of Charities, Age UK, Scope, Fair by Design, Mencap, MND Association and Sense, warn that the cost of living crisis is still adding huge pressures to household finances, with millions facing the dilemma of how they’re going to pay their energy bills this year.

Currently, around one in eight (12%) households in the UK - the equivalent of 3.4m households[[3]](#endnote-4) - are experiencing fuel poverty this winter. Among households in the UK[[4]](#endnote-5):

* Around two in five (38%) households in the lowest fifth of equivalised after-tax household income - the equivalent of 2.2m households - are experiencing fuel poverty this winter. **An energy social tariff would have lifted 1.3m of them out of fuel poverty[[5]](#endnote-6) - a huge reduction of around 60%.**
* Around one in six (16%) older households[[6]](#endnote-7) in the UK - the equivalent of 1.9m older households - are experiencing fuel poverty this winter**. An energy social tariff would have lifted 1.3m of them out of fuel poverty[[7]](#endnote-8) – a reduction of around 65%**
* Around one in seven (15%) households in the UK with someone with a disability or long-term health condition - the equivalent of 2.1m households - are experiencing fuel poverty this winter. **An energy social tariff would have lifted 1.4m of them out of poverty[[8]](#endnote-9) – a reduction of around 66%.**

The Coalition calls on the Government to urgently think again and fund a targeted energy deal, or ‘social tariff’, which markedly discounts energy costs for those of all ages at greatest risk from the cold.

An ‘energy social tariff’ is a discounted energy deal for those on lower incomes and with specific needs. If implemented it would represent a crucial element in ensuring that UK households with vulnerabilities can afford the energy they need to keep warm and well.

The calls come as Marion Fellows MP is due to introduce a 10-Minute Rule Motion in Parliament, requiring Government to consult on an energy social tariff.

The charities say an energy social tariff must automatically enrol eligible households, be mandatory for all suppliers, and complement existing consumer protections. Eligibility should include recipients of income-related means-tested benefits, disability benefits, and Carer’s Allowance. Alongside this, households defined as living in relative poverty or just above the poverty line,[[9]](#endnote-10) identified using new data matching, or proxy criteria, should be eligible too, as well as those missing out on access to the benefits system but still at risk of fuel poverty.

**In order to tackle the prevalence of fuel poverty across the UK, the Charities call for:**

* Implementation of a discounted energy social tariff from 2024/25 to protect the UK’s most vulnerable people from the devastating impacts of fuel poverty.
* Introduction of a progressive funding mechanism which ensures those missing out on the social tariff do not have to bear its costs. This would require the tariff to be directly funded through Government spending.

**Caroline Abrahams CBE, Charity Director at Age UK said*: “****In January 2024 about 3.4 million over 60s reported their home was too cold for most, or all of the time. It’s not acceptable that they are being forced to live in these conditions. We need a permanent solution in the form of an energy social tariff to ensure they never face another winter of unmanageable bills. Energy is a basic essential and it’s time we treated it that way and ensure everyone can afford enough of it to stay fit and well, and to live decently.”*

**Maria Booker, Head of Policy, Fair By Design:***"This research shows what we have been telling Government for some time...a social tariff is urgently needed to make energy affordable for those on the very lowest incomes. It is shocking that the Government is burying its head in the sand when two thirds of fuel poor households could have been spared the misery of a cold home and the anxiety of choosing between heating, food and other essentials. We urge the Government to honour its commitment to consult on a social tariff without delay."*

***Maddy Rose, Mencap’s Policy Specialist said:***“*The Government’s failure to take action leaves huge numbers of disabled people in fuel distress. Despite higher energy use for mobility, health and sensory needs, nearly 40 per cent of respondents to a Mencap survey had kept the heating off despite being cold, while over a quarter reported not switching the lights on to save money. Without an energy social tariff, people with a learning disability will continue to have to make these desperate choices.”*

*“Government must tackle affordability issues and fulfil their promise to protect the most vulnerable in society, once and for all.”*

**Alex Massey, Head of Campaigning, Policy and Public Affairs at MND Association:** *“This research paints a stark picture of the government’s failure to support disabled people this winter. Since the promise of a consultation on targeted energy support, people living with MND have collectively spent £2.5m on their electricity bills for using and maintaining medical and assistive equipment. People are now taking drastic action with their own health and wellbeing – over one-quarter (28%) have reduced their use of this equipment due to the inflated cost of energy. We call on the government to urgently implement an energy social tariff to help the most vulnerable households cope with the high cost of energy.”*

**James Taylor, executive director of strategy at disability equality charity Scope, said:** *“These findings reveal the devastating, real-life consequences of the government’s decision to break its promise to consult on a social tariff. Life costs more when you're disabled. At Scope we’re hearing from disabled people who are going days without food, and relying on candles because they can’t afford to switch the lights on. This can’t wait – the government must act now.”*

**Richard Kramer, Chief Executive of the national disability charity Sense, said:** *“At Sense, we’re hearing horrific accounts of disabled people living in daily fear because they can’t afford their energy bills. People with complex disabilities and their families are skipping meals and turning off their heating in the depths of winter, and shockingly almost one in five households (18 per cent) have told us they’re cutting their use of vital equipment such as ventilators, feeding pumps and electric wheelchairs in a desperate bid to save money.*

*“It’s appalling that two-thirds of these disabled families could easily have been spared that suffering had a social energy tariff been put in place this winter.”*

**-ENDS-**

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**Notes to editors:**

* For more information or to arrange a media briefing, please contact the Age UK press office on 020 303 31430 or email: [media@ageuk.org.uk](mailto:media@ageuk.org.uk)
* Social tariffs are discounted bills for essential services. They are designed to ensure that those who have the least ability to pay are protected against high and increasing bills. Social tariffs have previously existed in the energy sector but were phased out from 2011 when the Government introduced the Warm Home Discount (WHD).

Age UK is urging any older person living on a low income or struggling with their bills to contact Age UK’s free Advice line on 0800 169 65 65 to check they’re receiving all the financial support available. Alternatively, people can visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/money](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/money) or contact their local Age UK for information and advice.

1. We use the fuel stress definition of fuel poverty. Fuel stress is defined as any household spending more than 10% of their household after-tax income on domestic energy. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Age UK analysis of Living Costs & Food Survey 2021-22 [DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-9123-2] using information from Ofgem data portal, Cornwall Insights and Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Age UK analysis of Living Costs & Food Survey 2021-22 [DOI: 10.5255/UKDA-SN-9123-2] using information from Ofgem data portal, Cornwall Insights and Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Communications-wise, Macmillan are showing that a combination of data and insights, a stream of emotive personal stories, and a powerful but simple question draws attention to the issue and rallies support. Their campaign has amassed [13,500 signatories](https://campaigns.macmillan.org.uk/page/129542/subscribe/1?ea.tracking.id=1ru704r9&_gl=1*6d80m2*_ga*MTEyMjM2MjM0OS4xNzAyNjQwMDA0*_ga_2J203BPENT*MTcwMjY0NTM2Ny4yLjEuMTcwMjY0NTM3NS41Mi4wLjA.*_fplc*byUyQlF5OEJ4aW85d2F3RWRGV1JUQU0lMkZqSE5aNWdGekR2Z3Nvd0YxNHAlMkZFS003TWV3QkNsUEJsdkU5WUNZMVRjaGpnanVzUWVXcUpoMkNTNFNMYlNENyUyQmFrJTJCSkRzRWslMkJnUU1Hc21EMmJ2Z0ZpdnhDMVBCbDdnaWJjNzNMTUZ3JTNEJTNE&_ga=2.55221474.873957793.1702640005-1122362349.1702640004) and counting.   [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. With an energy social tariff, around 1.3 households in the UK in the lowest fifth of equivalized after-tax household income would not have been experiencing fuel stress this winter; a reduction of around 60%.    [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. We define older households as households where one or more residents are aged 60 or over. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. With an energy social tariff, around 1.3. older households in the UK would not have been experiencing fuel stress this winter; a reduction of around 65% (i.e. a third of older households in the UK experiencing fuel stress this winter would not have with an energy social tariff in place). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. With an energy social tariff, around 1.4. households in the UK with someone with someone with a disability or long-term health condition would not have been experiencing fuel stress this winter; a reduction of around 66% (i.e. a third of households in the UK with someone with a disability or long-term health condition experiencing fuel stress this winter would not have with an energy social tariff in place). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Households are defined to be living in or just above the poverty line if their equivalised after-tax household income (before housing cost) is below 70% of median income. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)