

# Our recommendations for policy makers



**Drawing on our experiences of commissioning over a quarter of a century's research into all aspects of fuel poverty, we want to leave you, policy makers, with these recommendations.**

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## Homes

- In commissioning research, recognize and reflect the widespread nature of fuel poverty, the differences between housing and spatial contexts and the personal circumstance of occupants, when assessing impacts and solutions.
- Secondary research can play an important role in bringing together studies from different contexts and help form an overall picture of the effectiveness of fuel poverty measures.
- Continue to support the social housing sector in recognition of the vulnerability of occupants and the capacity of housing providers to install and monitor improvements at scale. Whilst the role of the sector in providing a robust dataset on impacts and approaches is invaluable, address the ethical implications of tenants being 'guinea pigs' for untested technologies.
- It is important that housing providers are able, and enabled, to maintain properties and technologies such that the benefits of improvements can endure. The funding regime should reflect this.
- Strong regulation and enforcement, for example through minimum energy efficiency standards, is necessary to drive up standards in the private rented sector. Alongside this, the rights of private tenants, particularly with respect to security of tenure and affordability, need considerable improvement.
- Research should complement more established technical approaches with explorations of the experiences, practices and perceptions of occupants.
- Fabric and technological improvements require much greater financial support than is currently the case. Treasury funding is more equitable than funding through consumers' bills. Revenue funding that facilitates person-centred approaches to accompany capital spend is also important.

## People

- Rely more on interdisciplinary working in seeking to understand the relationship between fuel poverty and general poverty and the advantages and disadvantages of dealing with these conditions together or separately.
- Research to date has focused on supporting those with various forms of disability, from visual impairments to learning disabilities. Building on the strengths and relevance of this work, future research should identify other areas, groups or types of disability and ill health that have hitherto been overlooked.
- Understanding of the demographic composition of the fuel poor has shifted in recent years, and research and policy should ensure that these 'newer' groups, such as low-income households not in receipt of means-tested benefits and young adults, are not overlooked.

## Impacts

- It is essential to acknowledge, and further develop evidence on, the wide range of impacts of fuel poverty, particularly the harmful effects on people's health and wellbeing. The effect of fuel poverty on mental health and wellbeing is notably under-researched.
- The impact of interventions and policies on health and wellbeing is just as important to monitor and evaluate as measuring quantities, such as the number of households taken out of fuel poverty.
- You should design research projects to help identify practical ways of engaging health services in fuel poverty alleviation, particularly through showing how this can have an impact on service delivery metrics.
- Identify opportunities to create synergies between fuel poverty research and other agendas, for example, climate change and sustainability.

## Approaches

- Carry on commissioning research to investigate and facilitate the full range of solutions to fuel poverty and to understand the interplay between social and technical approaches.
- Policy should recognise the potential for initiatives to exclusively target certain demographic groups and those with long term conditions since these can provide the best opportunities to alleviate their fuel poverty.
- Access to financial support is an important part of this picture. Advice, education and consultation with people vulnerable to fuel poverty are also essential components.
- Given the prominence and urgency of action to mitigate and adapt to climate change, it is essential we recognise the potential contribution of renewable technologies to tackling fuel poverty and that we make sure they do not become the preserve of a wealthy minority.
- Make sure you understand the distributional impact of decarbonisation policies and take action to prevent those on low incomes being left behind.

## Concepts

- Studies of local measures add value and show what works. Lessons learnt from initiatives in different spatial and social contexts can potentially show the way for general application across the United Kingdom. More work is needed to bring together these lessons to support the development of effective policy.
- Aim for an appropriate and politically acceptable measure and definition of fuel poverty. This is critical for effective delivery of support and for reducing the incidence of fuel poverty.
- There are opportunities to learn from other national contexts, as our research has started to show, and for bilateral learning to help conceptualise fuel poverty and target resources.
- As other cultures and climates are brought into the debate, terminology becomes important. Terms such as 'energy justice' offer a broader conceptualisation of the issues, albeit potentially at the expense of the familiarity and currency of more established terms.