

Fuel Poverty - when will it end?

The 9th West Midlands HECA Conference

The 9th bi-annual one-day event in the successful HECA Conference series is due to be held on March 24th 2004 at the International Centre in Telford.

It has been estimated that up to 300,000 households in the region could be suffering from the effects of fuel poverty. This is when householders are unable to afford to achieve an acceptable standard of warmth in their home and, according to the Government's definition, need to spend more than 10% of their income to achieve this standard. It is the most immediate consequence of the relatively poor energy efficiency of much of the UK's housing stock, and often results in ill-health and the premature death of older people.

In the West Midlands region the proportion of dwellings that fail to meet the Decent Homes standard in both the private and social housing sectors is higher than the proportion for England as a whole, and over 80% of these homes fail on the thermal comfort criterion.

Against this gloomy background however, the Government have stated that they want to see an end to fuel poverty 'as far as is reasonably practical' by 2016-18.

The key issues:

- What are the causes and cures for fuel poverty?
- What are the quantifiable benefits to society of ending fuel poverty, particularly in terms of health improvement?
- What levels of financial support will be required to significantly reduce fuel poverty and who should be paying?
- How can we deal with the problem of hard-to-treat homes?
- How are we going to measure the impact of fuel poverty eradication programmes?

High profile speakers from Government, Health authorities, research institutions and local authorities will make presentations, contributing to the debate. These will be followed by two in-depth workshops specifically examining the problem of hard-to-treat dwellings and who pays for tackling fuel poverty. The programme will allow plenty of time to speak to exhibitors and meet fellow delegates to discuss the issues.

Graham Jones, the Forum Chair has encouraged all members and their partners to attend. "We are very pleased to have the opportunity of holding our 9th Conference at the International Centre in Telford, and I would urge all interested parties to book their places early to avoid disappointment."

The Conference is free to delegates thanks to sponsorship support from the Borough of Telford & Wrekin and the npower Savings for Life programme.