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Press Release

New public health service must tackle cold homes crisis

Fuel poverty and health campaigners today called on the newly launched Public Health England to address the devastating impact of cold homes on the health of the nation.

Campaigners welcomed the shift in responsibility for public health to local authorities and the opportunity this creates to address a major root cause of health problems in the UK – the woeful levels of insulation in the nation's homes.

Mostly as a result of poor insulation levels, fuel poverty now affects over 5 million households in the UK. Living in cold homes doubles the likelihood of a respiratory illness such as asthma in children and quadruples the risk of mental health problems for teenagers. Fuel poverty is estimated to cost the NHS over £1bn every year.

The Energy Bill Revolution campaign estimates that on average over 7,000 people die every year from living in cold homes. The big freeze that has affected the UK in recent weeks almost certainly means that more people have died because they cannot keep their homes warm.

The Energy Bill Revolution is calling for carbon tax to be used to fund an ambitious energy efficiency programme to super-insulate the homes of the fuel poor. The Government will collect over £60 billion in carbon tax over the next 15 years which is enough to make every fuel poor home highly energy efficient and slash their energy bill by over £300 every year.

Carbon Tax can provide a massive financial boost for Public Health England and local authorities to support the delivery of such a programme. This would help improve the health of some of the UK's most vulnerable citizens, keeping them out of hospital and easing the burden on the NHS.

The Department of Health's new 'Public Health Outcomes Framework for England, 2013-2016' identifies reducing fuel poverty as one of its key indicators for addressing the wider determinants of health. Reducing mortality from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases and excess winter deaths are also identified as indicators against which the whole public health system should deliver improvements. It is vital that local authorities, in partnership with health and well-being boards, prioritise these indicators in local strategies if they are to fulfil their responsibilities to protect the health of their local population.

Jo Butcher, Public Health Adviser for Friends of the Earth, said:

"As energy bills continue to soar and another cold snap hits the UK, millions of fuel poor households face difficult 'heat or eat' choices. It is a national disgrace that so many die each year due to cold, damp and poorly insulated housing. Public Health England must prioritise action to tackle fuel poverty and the Government must use carbon tax to fund a much bigger programme to insulate UK homes. Energy efficiency is commonly perceived to be the domain of the environment sector but I hope the new public health service will demonstrate it has a central role to play. The transfer of public health to local authorities is good news – they are used to managing housing and environmental health issues and are well placed to bring together the range of services that need to be involved in tackling the cold homes crisis."

Jane Landon, Deputy Chief Executive at the National Heart Forum, commented:

"Cold, damp homes are responsible for avoidable deaths and needless health problems for many people in this country. The Government has committed to reducing avoidable mortality and action to tackle fuel poverty and its effects must be a priority to help achieve this. We welcome the establishment of Public Health England. Its role in the delivery of public health nationally and locally and its focus on reducing inequalities is a new opportunity to tackle fuel poverty."

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Notes to Editors:

Energy Bill Revolution, the largest fuel poverty alliance ever assembled, is backed by 120 organisations representing the children's, health, environmental, housing, disability and consumer sectors, businesses, academia, politicians, local councils and the public. The Energy Bill Revolution is asking Government to recycle the substantial funds it receives from carbon tax revenues (an average of £4bn annually over the next 15 years) into energy efficiency programmes to eradicate fuel poverty www.energybillrevolution.org

Robust analysis shows that using carbon tax revenues to make homes highly energy efficient could bring 9 out of 10 homes out of fuel poverty, quadruple carbon savings and create thousands of jobs. Source: Washan, P (2012) Energy Bill Revolution Campaign Report. Camco Advisory Services http://www.energybillrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Energy-Bill-Revolution_full-report.pdf

Over 5 million households are living in fuel poverty. This includes in the UK 1.6 million children living in 930,000 homes in fuel poverty. Source: Guertler, P and Royston, S. Association of the Conservation of Energy (2013) Fact-file: Families and Fuel Poverty. ACE and Energy Bill Revolution <http://www.energybillrevolution.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/ACE-and-EBR-fact-file-2013-02-Families-and-fuel-poverty-final.pdf>

Fuel poverty is projected to get much worse. Professor John Hills of LSE published his independent report on fuel poverty for the Department for Energy and Climate Change last year. He stated "There is no doubt that fuel poverty is a serious national problem – increasing hardship, contributing to winter deaths and other health problems". Professor Hills concluded "improving the housing of those at risk is the most cost-effective way of tackling the problem, cutting energy waste, with large long-term benefits to society as a whole. We need a renewed and ambitious

strategy to do this." Source: Hills, J (2012) Getting the measure of fuel poverty: Final report of the fuel poverty review. London: Crown copyright
<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/news/archives/2012/03/fuelpoverty.aspx>

Last year there were 24,000 excess winter deaths in England and Wales. According to the World Health Organisation around 30% of excess winter deaths can be attributed to cold indoor temperatures - which based on current figures means around 7,200 people died last year due to cold housing in the winter months. Source: Braubach, M et al (2011) Environmental burden of disease associated with inadequate housing. World Health Organisation Europe p.82
http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/142077/e95004.pdf

The health impacts of living in cold homes are considerable, as set out in a landmark report by Professor Sir Michael Marmot (Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at the UCL) in 2011 for Friends of the Earth. They include:

- A variety of respiratory illnesses - adults and children, including double the risk of asthma in children
- Increased risk of heart attack and stroke
- Low weight gain in infants
- A wide range of associated emotional & mental health and well-being issues including quadruple the risk of multiple mental health problems in young people
- Poor diet and nutrition as a result of 'heat or eat' choices
- Falls and accidents
- Worsening of existing health conditions or slow recovery from illness

For further information on the Marmot Review Team report *The Health Impacts of Cold Homes and Fuel Poverty*. Friends of the Earth & The Marmot Review Team visit
<http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/the-health-impacts-of-cold-homes-and-fuel-poverty>

Treating the illnesses caused by cold homes costs the NHS £1.6 billion every year. Source: Age UK (2012) The Cost of Cold: Why we need to protect the health of older people in winter. Age UK
<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/latest-news/archive/cold-homes-cost-nhs-1-point-36-billion/>

For further information on the reduction in fuel poverty budgets see the ACE report 'The impact on the fuel poor of the reduction in fuel poverty budgets in England'
<http://www.ukace.org/2012/11/the-impact-on-the-fuel-poor-of-the-reduction-in-fuel-poverty-budgets-in-england/ACE>. Key findings include:

- The total budget likely to be reaching the fuel poor in England falls from £1.191 billion in 2009 to £879 million in 2013 – a reduction of 26%
- Of the total budget reaching the fuel poor, the energy efficiency budget in England declines from £376 million in 2009 to £209 million in 2013, a reduction of 44%.
- Of this total energy efficiency budget reaching the fuel poor, the number of households in England receiving energy efficiency measures declines from 150,000 households – already just 3.8% of fuel poor households – to 100,000 households, an even smaller 2.6% of households projected by DECC to be fuel poor in 2013. One of the main reasons for this decline is the elimination of the Warm Front programme in 2013, the only centrally funded Government programme to make fuel poor homes more energy efficient.