



## 'Keeping Juice in Yir Hoose' The Tipping Point for Scotland's Fuel Poor

*Scottish National Party Autumn 2009 Conference*

### Overview

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A fringe event on fuel poverty was held by the Centre for Scottish Public Policy (CSPP) at the SNP Autumn 2009 Conference in Inverness. Moderated by Councillor Grant Thomas of Glasgow City Council, 'Keeping Juice in Yir Hoose' took the form of four key presentations on tackling fuel poverty, followed by questions from the floor. Speaking at the event were Alex Neil MSP, Minister for Housing and Communications, Norman Kerr, Director of Energy Action Scotland, Paul Blacklock, Head of Strategy and Corporate Affairs at Calor and Simon Kemp, Business Development Officer for Eaga plc in Scotland.

### Key Speakers

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- **Alex Neil MSP, Minister for Housing and Communications**

Alex Neil MSP, Minister for Housing and Communications opened the discussion by talking about how the SNP government was attempting to meet the challenges of fuel poverty in Scotland. Acknowledging that fuel poverty is often overlooked, he argued, that 'poverty should be tackled in all its guises'.

Comparing energy assistance programmes in Scotland and Norway, the minister highlighted that whereas 20-25 per cent of Scots are affected by fuel poverty, in Norway fuel poverty affects for only 2-3 per cent of the population. According to the Minister the challenges of fuel poverty have to be met in a number of ways from maximizing household income and reducing fuel costs to developing better fuel systems.

Mapping the challenges of the next 10 years the Minister contended that certain groups within society are often overlooked when it comes to fuel poverty. In this respect he pointed to those who are 'asset rich' but 'income poor'. Focusing on the elderly, the Minister argued that older people are often not in a position to remortgage their homes and do not have the necessary funds to perform essential maintenance.

With housing accounting for 29 per cent of energy and 29 per cent of carbon emissions he said that between 2009 and 2020 £16 billion alone would need to be allocated to housing in order to meet the

target of reducing emissions by up to 42 per cent by 2020. With his focus on the elderly the Minister concluded that there was a need for Westminster to keep its promise to increase pension levels in order to allow senior citizens to maintain a general standard of living.

- **Norman Kerr, Director, Energy Action Scotland**

Norman Kerr, Director of Energy Action Scotland argued that with existing housing stock being replaced by 1 per cent per annum, the challenge of combating fuel poverty lay in making existing housing more energy efficient. Kerr maintained that investment by Westminster over the past ten years remained inadequate.

He pointed to the fact that while £1.7 billion was pledged in 2006 this investment has still not been made available in full. Kerr suggested that by the end of 2009 fuel poverty could rise by additional 5-10 per cent increasing to up to 30 per cent.

Highlighting the fact that fuel bills have risen from £600 to £1300 in recent years, Kerr suggested that fuel prices could rise by an additional 60 per cent. Citing countries such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark who unlike Scotland have no need to measure the number of deaths as a result of fuel poverty, Kerr insisted, that Scotland needed to improve living conditions. In this respect he saw a need for the government to play an active role in ensuring Scots maintained healthy living environments.

- **Paul Blacklock, Head of Strategy and Corporate Affairs, Calor**

Adding to the discussion Paul Blacklock, Head of Strategy and Corporate Affairs at Calor stated that one of biggest problems with the fuel poverty debate was that 90 per cent of conversation tended to focus on urban areas, at the expense of rural dwellers. Highlighting reports that E.ON UK (formerly Powergen) projects price hikes of between 25 and 60 per cent, Blacklock contended that that question needed to be asked who is going to pay for Climate Change, Westminster or the consumer.

He suggested that low carbon fuel could deliver at least in the medium term. Part of his argument centred on the need to focus on developing fuel efficient systems, but with the acknowledgement that such moves would not occur over night. In this respect he pointed to the assertion that replacing a household fuel system was more likely to happen when the system broke down.

This Blacklock added is further complicated by the fact that efficient fuel systems require time and planning, a luxury usually not open to a household whose fuel system is in need of replacement. As a result, he concluded that it is not practical, affordable or realistic to rely solely on renewable energy.

- **Simon Kemp, Business Development Manager, Eaga plc**

Simon Kemp, Business Development Manager of Eaga plc in Scotland talked about how Eaga had played its part in contributing to the delivery of sustainable living. He highlighted the benefits of improving the fuel efficiency of existing dwellings through better insulation, arguing that the insulation of 100,000 homes would offset up to 20 million tonnes of carbon.

Kemp argued that although Eaga had played an important role in contributing to sustainable living, the 'biggest worry' for Scotland, he maintained, was that it would not receive a fair amount of funding from Westminster to continue in this endeavour.

**Stephen Meredith**  
**October 2009**