

Rob Roberts MP
Member of Parliament for Delyn



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

RR/KS/LG

Lesley Griffiths MS
Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs
Welsh Parliament,
Cardiff Bay,
Cardiff,
CF99 1SN

3rd February 2021

Dear Minister Griffiths,

Re: Support for Welsh households with their energy bills during Covid-19 pandemic

Sadly, the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions has left wide-ranging and long-lasting impacts on many areas of society and for many individuals. One such area, which has perhaps been overlooked, is the impact of Covid-19 on the levels of fuel poverty, and the ability of households to pay their rising energy bills – whether these are low-income and vulnerable households or households that are new to financial hardship. Consequently, I am writing to you to urge the Welsh Government to ensure there are appropriate resources and support available for all households both immediately, and in the long term.

While the definition and methodology of fuel poverty varies across the UK, it is undisputed that it is a very real and pressing problem which affects families and households in Delyn, Wales and throughout the UK. In 2018, data found that in Wales alone, there are over 155,000 households estimated to be in fuel poverty, which accounts to roughly 12% of households. As research shows that the pandemic has resulted in widespread financial hardship, it is likely that this figure has now risen – as many households which may have been managing before, may now be struggling. Therefore, it is imperative that the right support is accessible and available to households that need it most.

Additionally, research from energy organisations has shown that Covid-19 has significantly impacted household energy bills, as more people are staying at home to either work or for schooling – which will cause a dramatic increase in the consumption, and cost, of bills. Analysis from Uswitch shows that UK consumers could spend an extra £52 million a week in total on energy bills, with households with people working from home spending an extra £16 a month on energy – a total of £195 a year for those on poor-value tariffs. With extreme winter weather expected to continue over the coming weeks and months, it is likely that the impact of both the cold weather and Covid-19 will lead to increased levels of energy rationing and energy debt.



While it is reassuring to see Ofgem and energy providers such as EDF and British Gas giving support to customers, especially to those which are vulnerable or on low income, it is arguably the responsibility of government to tackle fuel poverty and make sure all households are as energy efficient as possible, which will help keep energy bills affordable. Consequently, I am glad to see that the Welsh Government launched a consultation last year to develop a 'Fuel Poverty Action Plan' for 2020- 2035, which set a target to eradicate fuel poverty in Wales by 2035. With Covid-19 increasing the impacts of fuel poverty, I look forward to seeing the full plan published later this month.

Fuel poverty is a multifaceted issue, and there are many different ways to tackle the problem. Whether that is providing direct support to vulnerable households who use prepayment meters such as gifting credit or launching schemes to help households become more energy efficient, there is always more to be done. For instance, I would encourage the Welsh Government to look at a similar initiative to the UK Government's 'Green Homes Grant' – a scheme set up to help improve energy efficiency in homes and create local, 'green' jobs. The Green Homes Grant allows homeowners and landlords to apply for vouchers, which will cover at least two thirds of the cost, to install energy efficient improvements to their home such as insulation or low carbon heating. At present, the scheme is only available to households in England, so it would be brilliant to see a similar scheme in Wales – giving all UK households the same opportunities to become more energy efficient.

Where there are schemes in place in Wales, such as the Warm Homes Programme, it is just as important to make sure these are shared and promoted widely, so as many people as possible can benefit. With the current winter weather, and in some cases extreme weather which has caused subsequent flooding, I would encourage the Welsh Government to ensure all households in Wales are aware of the resources and support available to them, in order to help those that need it most and to help reduce the levels of fuel poverty in Wales.

As we continue to fight coronavirus and restrictions are likely extended, I expect these problems with energy bills will only increase for many households. I urge the Welsh Government to continue to offer support and assistance for households with their energy bills and to provide resources for households to improve their energy efficiency – both in the short and long term. These measures will be needed more than ever going forward – and it is vital that Wales does not fall behind in tackling fuel poverty and the issues which come with it.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Rob Roberts', written over a horizontal line.

Rob Roberts MP
Member of Parliament
Delyn