



Llais Defnyddwyr
Cymru

Gwarchod Buddiannau Defnyddwyr



Consumer Focus
Wales

Wales' Consumer Champion

Keeping warm this winter:

Hearing the voices of children and young people
in tackling fuel poverty in Wales



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

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About us



Children in Wales Plant yng Nghymru

Children in Wales is the national umbrella organisation in Wales, bringing organisations and individuals from all disciplines and sectors together. Its role is to make the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child a reality in Wales. Children in Wales also fights for sustainable quality services for all children and young people, and special attention for children in need, as well as ensuring children and young people have a voice in issues that affect them.

Children in Wales has around 200 organisations in membership, including the major voluntary children's agencies, professional associations, local authorities and health bodies, as well as many smaller community groups. Children in Wales facilitates a variety of forums across Wales and works in partnership with the National Children's Bureau in England and Children in Scotland, and internationally is active in Eurochild and the International Forum for Child welfare.

Llais Defnyddwyr Cymru Consumer Focus Wales

Consumer Focus Wales is a statutory organisation campaigning for a fair deal for consumers.

In advocating for consumers we aim to influence change and shape policy to better reflect the needs of consumers. We do this in an informed way owing to the evidence we gather through research and our unique knowledge of consumer issues.

We have a specific focus on vulnerable consumers, particularly those on low incomes, people with disabilities, people living in rural areas and older people. In addition, we also seek to identify where other consumers may be disproportionately disadvantaged by an issue or policy.

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¹ The PWNW supports practitioners and organisations to promote participation through the involvement of children and young people in their work

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Further copies of this report are available via the Children in Wales website.

To complement this report, a DVD and 10 Top Tips for staying warm have been produced. These can also be accessed on our website (see below).

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Introduction

Context

Latest Government figures show that 32 per cent of children in Wales live in low-income households (less than 60 per cent of the median) after deducting housing costs. This amounts to around 200,000 children, which is almost a third of all children living in Wales².

Statistics for the number of children living in fuel poverty households are less reliable, but it is known that levels have been steadily rising and are twice as high in rural areas compared to urban locations³. Figures from the Welsh Assembly Government show that around 26 per cent of all households in Wales are now in fuel poverty, defined as having to spend 10 per cent or more of their income to maintain an adequately heated home – an increase of 15 per cent from 2004⁴.

At a UK level, official figures released in October 2010 show that the number of fuel-poor families rose to 4.5 million in 2008, which amounts to around one in six of all UK households⁵.

Low-income households living on state benefits or low-wages face particular challenges and barriers in Wales, due to a variety of factors. The inconsistent criteria for accessing the correct social tariffs for the household and the increased cost of fuel accessed through many pre-payment meter schemes have been identified as notable factors.

Fuel poverty has become a greater problem during recent times when the price of oil, coal, gas and electricity has dramatically increased. More than half the population recently surveyed – 54 per cent of people – were worried about paying for their winter energy bills⁶. The risk of householders moving into debt to pay for their fuel costs is also a growing concern.

Not all households in Wales have equal access to fuel since more than one in seven – 16 per cent – of Welsh homes are off the gas network, with many of these consumers living in older, poorly-insulated homes⁷.

Many properties are over 150 years old and difficult to insulate. Consequently, householders have not been able to take advantage of government energy efficiency schemes and allocation of resources to help insulate homes⁸.

Fuel poor homes may not necessarily be the result of families having an inadequate income as the research from rural communities with a large amount of ‘hard to treat’ homes have shown. A recent report by Consumer Focus Wales has also highlighted that households in Wales pay on average £25 more a year for their electricity than other parts of Britain. It tends to be the poorest people who most rely on electricity for their heat⁹.

Impact on children and young people

Children and Young People in Wales are especially vulnerable to the effects of fuel poverty as living in a cold or hard to heat home can have a negative impact on their physical and mental health, education, socialisation and general well-being.

Many low-income households are forced to decide between heating their home or providing their children with a nourishing meal. This has a marked affect on children and young people’s health and educational attainment. They become more prone to infections, colds and accidents. One in 12 children in Britain is more likely to develop diseases such as bronchitis, TB, or asthma, because of bad housing¹⁰.

² HBAI (2009) Households below average income statistics

³ NEA (2009), research

⁴ Welsh Assembly Government (2008) Living in Wales survey

⁵ DECC (2010) – UK Government

⁶ Consumer Focus Wales (2010) Fuel Debt

⁷ National Statistics (2009)

⁸ End Child Poverty Network Cymru/Children in Wales (2009) Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Wales

⁹ Consumer Focus Wales (2010) Welsh Household Electricity Prices

¹⁰ Shelter (2004) Million Children Campaign

Many children may struggle to do their homework in a cold or overcrowded room while other have to live in a single heated room, which increases the risk of other rooms becoming damp, mouldy and unfit to live in. Children can also miss a lot of school, which in time affects their educational attainment. Some children may be at risk of social exclusion given their reluctance to invite friends home after school because of the poor environment.

Rationale for the project

The need for warm homes, improved energy efficiency measures and the detrimental impact fuel poverty has on certain vulnerable groups, notably older people, has been highlighted for many years in policy discussions and campaigns at both a national, local and community level.

Government initiatives in providing winter fuel grants, free insulation etc for older people and some individuals with health needs have proved very effective in reducing the number of deaths from living in an inadequately heated home and contributing to the broader energy efficiency and environmental agenda. Many organisations at a local level have also targeted vulnerable groups through information sharing fairs, and there has also been a range of media awareness campaigns and information packs/leaflets made publically available which target certain age groups.

A number of older people's groups have also been mobilised and utilised as effective advocates for their cause, contributing to the growing evidence base of the impact on vulnerable individuals of living in cold and damp conditions.

It can be argued however that considerably less attention has been given to the needs of families with children and the detrimental impact fuel poverty can have particularly for those households on low incomes.

Equally limited work has been undertaken directly with children and young people, which has sought to capture their thoughts, voices and ideas on fuel poverty and energy efficiency related matters. It is for this purpose, and to contribute to the increasing evidence base that is being developed around fuel poverty solutions, that this project idea was conceived. The project was made possible with funding from Consumer Focus Wales, as part of their particular focus on representing energy consumers.

Central to the project was the need to ensure we sought to capture from children and young people their suggested solutions and recommendations, in addition to providing them with an opportunity to help identify and discuss the challenges many families may face.

To assist the process and to help focus the sessions, responses to potential solutions were categorised into the following three categories:

- Individual activity (what they could do themselves)
- Collective activity (what they and their families could do)
- External activity (this could include the role of schools, health professionals, local government, utility companies and national governments)

What we did

Children in Wales developed and delivered a number of interactive, informative and participatory workshops with a broad range of children and young people on the theme of fuel poverty and warm homes. This included children living in areas of high deprivation and from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.

Groups consulted

Children in Wales approached a host of schools throughout Wales already known to be interested in pursuing a rights based agenda, which included those schools previously known to the researchers. These schools were invited to take part in the project as it was felt they would be most likely to be supportive of hearing their pupil's voices and help facilitate access directly to children and young people. Interest was extremely high and six schools were selected.

The criteria for selection also included:

- A split of lower, top primary and secondary schools
- A mix of rural and urban schools
- A selection of schools from North, Mid and South Wales
- Representation from schools located in Communities First and European Social Fund (ESF) areas
- Schools where there was use of the Welsh language

Using a cross section of schools therefore helped ensure that the children and young people consulted were from different age groups, came from a range of different backgrounds and lived in a spread of rural and urban areas. Consequently, the children and young people that took part lived in a range of different types of houses that were heated by a variety of different fuels.

The evidence gathered from the consultations can therefore be said to reasonably reflect children and young people's knowledge and/or experiences of fuel poverty and their thoughts around energy efficiency matters across Wales today.

We are extremely grateful to the pupils and staff from following schools for agreeing to take part in the project:

- Glynollen Primary School, Swansea (Swansea)
- Markham Primary School, Caerphilly (Caerphilly)
- Queen Elizabeth High School, Carmarthen (Carmarthenshire)
- Builth Wells High School, Builth Wells (Powys)
- Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones, Anglesey (Anglesey/Ynys Mon)
- Hafod Primary School, Swansea (Swansea)

Consultation sessions took place in each school, three of which were filmed for use in the accompanying DVD to this report. Those sessions that were not filmed had photographs taken and were recorded on audio files for use in editing the DVD. Appropriate consent was gained from pupils' parents/carers and findings from all six sessions informed this report.

The consultation process

The consultation sessions lasted around one and a half hours and aimed to achieve the following outcomes. To:

- give children and young people a base level understanding of 'fuel poverty'
- find out their ideas on why some people struggle to keep warm in their homes
- elicit ideas on how to keep warm
- provide some quotes and case studies on what it is like to live in a cold home

- gain children and young people's solutions on how individuals, households and external bodies such as schools and governments can tackle fuel poverty

The methods used to deliver the consultation sessions were consistent with a participation agenda, ie the methods themselves were 'participative', ensuring that participants played an active role, sharing ideas and experiences with each other and the facilitators.

Creative and enjoyable activities were used to make sessions fun and encourage people's participation. Introductory name games were utilised to put people at ease and allow facilitators to become familiar with participants' names and a variety of other activities were used throughout to maintain energy levels and allow children and young people to refocus.

An introductory explanation of fuel poverty and energy efficiency matters was delivered which helped set the scene. This detailed the variety of fuels used to heat a home, the difference in cost between these fuels and the ways people pay for their fuel.

A variety of activities were then used, designed to be fun and challenging while at the same time drawing out participants' ideas and understanding.

While workshops in primary and secondary schools had the same aims, the activities used were altered to suit the different age groups. For example in primary schools, children developed the character of a 'puppet wolf' before giving suggestions as to why 'his' house may be cold and what effect this would have on 'him'. In secondary schools this was achieved through an 'ideas storm' whereby small groups shared ideas and wrote their thoughts on sticky notes as to why some people live in cold homes.

Similarly both primary and secondary groups were asked to come up with top tips for keeping warm. In secondary schools the 'Wall of Ideas' was used whereby a large-scale picture of an unfinished wall was put before the group with each brick being the size of an A5 piece of paper. Participants were each given several blank pieces of A5 paper and were invited to complete the wall by first writing on each 'brick' a top tip for keeping warm before using it to rebuild the wall.

In primary schools, children took turns in taking objects out of a box before saying whether they thought their object would be useful at keeping people warm (for example clothing, food, insulation and money). Children were then given three sticky dots and asked to 'dot vote' the objects they thought would be best at keeping people warm, either placing one dot next to three objects they could not decide between or giving one object all three dots.

At the end of each session, children and young people who felt that they lived in a cold home were invited to stay on for a brief interview with the facilitators. This took the form of an informal conversation and allowed children and young people to relate their individual circumstances without having to go into any detail in front of their peers.

In line with the National Children and Young People's Participation Standards all groups were told how the information gathered would be used, when they would receive feedback and what form this would take.

Perceptions and experience

Children and young people's perceptions of why some people struggle to keep warm

The perception of why some people struggle to keep warm or may experience fuel poverty differed markedly between children in primary schools and those at secondary schools.

Primary age pupils centred their ideas fairly exclusively on issues surrounding people's properties as opposed to householders circumstances, giving suggestions such as:

- There being no insulation
- Lack of double glazed windows
- No heating or existing heating being inadequate
- Houses having big open chimneys
- Poor location of properties
- Old or poor equipment for example boilers, radiators etc
- Property too large for the number of inhabitants

A number of children also felt that big houses or old houses would be difficult to heat.

"It could be built of stone or something"
(Markham Primary School pupil)

"They don't have double glazing windows"
(Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones pupil)

Secondary school pupils also gave lots of ideas about how some houses could be harder to heat than others and came up with ideas such as:

- stone houses having thick walls to heat up and also being difficult to insulate
- some houses having no insulation
- large houses which cost a lot more to heat properly

- older houses being less efficient than newer properties to heat
- a lack of central heating

"My house is freezing. Especially when you go downstairs because of the [floor] tiles" (Queen Elizabeth High School pupil)

"(in an) Old house, you may not have the er, things to actually, warm your house like heating or anything like that, and also (a) big house which the heat might not circulate enough around so you can't warm your house up as much" (Builth Wells High School pupil)

However, the focus of secondary school pupils' discussions centred much more on how people's individual circumstances could lead them to struggle to keep warm.

Money was a very popular reason covering a range of issues such as

- fuel being too expensive
- people not earning enough money
- Individuals having no work or poorly paid jobs
- Other pressing demands on limited families income

It was also felt that those who were disabled, elderly or ill might be particularly vulnerable to the cold in that they may feel the cold more than others but are less likely to be able to work to pay the heating bills. Babies were also seen as vulnerable.

"Not earning enough money on your job" (Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones pupil)

Single parent families were also seen as being particularly vulnerable to being in fuel poverty as the running of the household would be supported by one rather than two incomes.

Secondary school pupils also recognised that those who were in fuel poverty were likely to be experiencing poverty more generally and so would have other priorities competing with any potential money set aside for heating.

It was noticeable how the experiences of children and young people differed between locations. Those from Mid and North Wales clearly had much more personal first hand experience of living in cold homes and in particular had more of an in-depth understanding of how old, large stone houses can be difficult to heat and insulate.

This should come as no surprise as a higher proportion of the housing stock in Mid and North Wales is old, built of stone, often large and spacious compared with town and city locations which have more modern, smaller houses which tend to either have been built with better insulation or are easier to install insulation into retrospectively.

Why people may struggle to keep warm

- They don't have any heating
- Not enough money
- They don't have a fire or are unable to use it because of the cost
- Some houses are colder than others
- Old fashioned ghosts!
- Cracks in walls
- Broken doors and windows
- Big chimney and no fire
- No insulation
- Need thicker windows (double glazing)

Summary of responses from pupils from Glyncollen Primary School

Considering the effects of living in fuel poverty on children and young people

Children and young people from across all ages recognised that being in fuel poverty would have considerable adverse effects on individuals and their families.

In all schools, children and young people stated that they would be very upset by living in a cold home and would feel cold and miserable. They also felt that their health may suffer as a result from a range of illnesses including in the short term coughs, colds, and flu and in the longer term pneumonia, hypothermia, chilblains and even frostbite! One secondary pupil also mentioned that these illnesses may not be limited to the individual but could spread to the wider community.

"Sickness like pneumonia" (Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones pupil)

Secondary pupils also felt that there would be significant secondary impacts as a result of illnesses.

Having to take time off school was seen to be a particular issue that was felt would lead to lower educational attainment, in turn affecting their life chances. This was thought by many young people to be further compounded by not being able to concentrate on homework due to the cold and not being able to concentrate at school because of the low temperature preventing a good night's sleep.

One comment suggested that teachers would be unlikely to relate to a person's lack of performance in school due to living in a cold home as the teacher would be unlikely to know the difficulties a young person in this situation was experiencing. This could result in a pupil getting into trouble in school which in turn could affect their perception of school and making them even less likely to attend.

“Like if you haven’t had enough sleep or something and you’re like lacking concentration for exams or something like that” (Builth Wells High School pupil)

Secondary and primary pupils in all schools also stated that children and young people living in cold homes would perhaps not want to go home after school and may spend increasing amounts of time at their friends’ houses.

Both age groups felt that, as this hospitality could not be reciprocated, it may put a strain on friendships with one child feeling embarrassed or guilty and the other thinking their friend was either taking advantage or not being very friendly. Such friendships were not thought to be likely to last very long and repeated failed friendships may lead to a lack of self worth and support among young people.

“You may be a bit shy to invite your friends over because when they get in they’ll be freezing and they might want to leave early” (Builth Wells High School pupil)

Secondary pupils were also concerned that a young person experiencing fuel poverty may dress differently to their peers, by wearing thicker jumpers or having damp clothing for example. It was thought that this may lead to the person concerned feeling ‘different’ or left out, again influencing their ability to make and sustain friendships, and may even make them susceptible to becoming a target for teasing or bullying.

It was recognised by most schools that families might elect to keep one room warm during winter in which to spend the majority of their time, a point also later noted by pupils when asked what households could do to keep themselves warm.

While one young person felt that through spending more time together families could become closer, the majority of young people felt that having to spend too much time in a confined space would inevitably lead to boredom, feeling crowded and arguments and would create tension in families.

Young people from one school also felt that there would be more arguments in families experiencing fuel poverty as money worries and the stress and anxiety of keeping the house warm took its toll.

“Last winter Mum was really stressed out. She was trying to keep the place warm and the wood wouldn’t come because it was so snowy so we couldn’t light the fire. It was so cold and she was just like ‘It’s so cold’ and all that so I’d suggest (if that happens) you stay out of your parents’ way” (Builth Wells High School pupil)

A pupil from one primary school also said that if children lived in a cold home their parents would have to spend lots of their money on heating and would have less to spend on food, toys, trips out and treats for the children.

The effects on children and young people of living in a cold home were summed up by one young person who said simply that:

‘Home would be a bad place to live.’

How children and young people who are experiencing fuel poverty may feel:

- Feelings of anger
- Upset as the house is too cold
- Wanting to move home
- Embarrassed and guilty and not wanting to invite friends over in winter
- More likely to catch illnesses (pneumonia, hypothermia, etc)
- Family crowded into one heated room, leading to overcrowding and arguments

Summary of responses from Hafod Primary School

Children and young people: personal narratives of living in cold homes

As previously noted, a principal consideration at the onset of this project was to guard against the stigma of poverty and/or living in a cold home. However, the project was keen to capture real life experiences from children and young people who had experienced living in a cold home and wished to share their stories without being publicly identified.

Researchers therefore asked participants to first place themselves on a line depending on whether they liked their houses to be boiling hot to freezing cold. They then repeated the exercise but this time asked pupils to place themselves on the line depending on the actual temperature of their homes in wintertime.

Generally children and young people tended to place themselves towards the centre of the line during the first exercise suggesting, as could be expected, that they preferred their homes to be neither too hot nor too cold, with a minority placing themselves towards the extremes of hot or cold.

During second exercise there remained a majority in each session who grouped again towards the centre; one or two who stated that their homes were far too hot but also a considerable number of children and young people placing themselves towards the 'freezing cold' end suggesting that they felt they lived in a cold home.

While this exercise was not intended to accurately capture the number of children and young people living in cold homes, it did highlight that many had very real personal experiences and were willing to share their experiences with others. However, to protect identities, all quotes have been anonymised.

Outline of what children and young people said:

A number of issues were identified in the separate conversations that took place with a small number of young people.

Almost all identified not being able to get to sleep because of the low temperature in their bedrooms. The lack of heat in their bedroom was either preventing them from sleeping or causing them to intermittently wake up during the course of the night.

One young person recounted their experience of disturbed sleep and the need to go back downstairs to the living area to 'warm up'.

"My house is cold 'cos I don't have any heating in my bedroom. I like having a nice warm drink and sitting on the sofa until I warm up"

Several young people also stated that they regularly got dressed in the morning under the covers because the bedroom was too cold. Persistent low temperatures in many bedrooms during the winter months was not uncommon for some school pupils. Several children also stated that their bedrooms had damp on the walls.

Solutions

“My room, the roof's damp and then, if I just look right from the bed the whole entire walls covered in damp, and I'm there in bed freezing cold”

One young person related a story of her house being so cold that a pipe burst. This led to the flush on her toilet not working and so her family had to scoop up buckets of snow from outside, let them thaw in front of the fire before throwing them down the toilet to flush it.

A primary-aged child told us how his family's boiler broke over Christmas meaning they went without heating for two weeks. Another girl told of how her family went without heating for several weeks during the snow because they could not get a delivery of wood or coal and their house was not on mains gas.

“All of the logs had frozen and melt, like, the ice had melted off them, so they were damp so you couldn't do anything with them, so we just had to put loads of layers of cloths on”

[Researcher: “And how long did you not have heating for?”]

“All Christmas until, about a week before school started”

What can individuals do to keep warm

There was inevitably some overlap between what children and young people thought individuals could do to keep themselves and their home warm and what households could do to keep warm.

The majority of both primary and secondary pupils' suggestions of what individuals could do focused around actions that individuals could take fairly instantly and with minimum outlay or preparation.

For example, additional clothing was a popular choice among all children and young people:

- Wear warmer clothes such as thick jumpers, socks, gloves, scarves and hats
- Wear clothes in several layers

“I always put jumpers and thick socks on and stuff” (Markham Primary School pupil)

An additional suggestion was to ensure that there was supply of blankets in areas where family members were likely to sit for periods of time, for example, when watching television.

Placing clothes at the end of the bed each night was an additional thought from several young people.

“I put the clothes at the end of my bed to keep them warm” (Builth Wells High School pupil)

Primary pupils in particular felt that using electric blankets was a good way of keeping warm, although some young people did raise concerns over the cost of their use.

“Electric blankets, well aren't they going to cost the same to work as heating the house?” (Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones pupil)

Making sure individuals ate hot food and had plenty of warm drinks was also seen by all age groups to be an important way for people to keep warm.

“You can make yourself a nice cup of hot tea or coffee to keep you warm” (Hafod Primary School pupil)

Pupils from two schools suggested changing to a cheaper fuel source could allow people to get more heat for their money.

One person felt that collecting and stockpiling freely available firewood throughout the year would not only be cost free for the family but would also mean that for those people who heat their houses by burning wood would not face shortages of supply in winter when demand is high.

Some pupils felt that individuals could keep themselves warm by taking regular exercise, such as walking or simply moving around, while others suggested that doing DIY could help. Several young people also recommended making alterations to the efficiency of the house in being able to retain heat.

Others suggested making sure all windows were closed and sitting in sunnier parts of the house that were heated by natural resources.

Secondary age young people were able to go further and made suggestions to enable people to alter their individual circumstances to escape fuel poverty. Most ideas centred on increasing income levels and it was suggested that individuals could get a job, change to a higher paid job or take a second job. One pupil suggested marrying someone rich as solution to increasing income levels!

Some pupils thought that where money was in short supply, individuals could ask people they trusted to help out financially.

Making the most of the existing money people already had available by maximising income was also seen as important and there were many ideas put forward to enable this:

- Economising or prioritising spending to enable people to have enough money to heat their homes
- Saving money and putting aside some money each month throughout the year to be able to pay the heating bills in the winter
- Switching energy suppliers could also save some money in the long term

What households and families can do collectively to keep warm

In general, children and young people focused most of their thoughts on the practical measures householders could take within their homes to make it warmer and help protect themselves better against the cold.

Some of the immediate suggestions around eliminating cold and preserving heat included:

- Using thick curtains over windows to keep out the cold
- Using draught excluders or something similar to prevent draughts
- Having thick carpets was a popular suggestions by both primary and secondary school children and young people
- Installing and/or improving insulation
- Staying in the same room together as a family for warmth

“You could get some of them draught things to put under the door” (Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones pupil)

“They (families) can get under a blanket and all cwtch together” (Markham Primary School pupil)

While primary school children used the word 'insulation' generically to mean a variety of different types of solutions to keep warm, secondary school pupils demonstrated a greater understanding of the subject area and discussed different types of insulation such as:

- Loft and attic insulation methods
- Under floor heating
- Cavity wall insulation

All age groups meanwhile suggested the following

- Replacing draughty doors and windows
- Installing double-glazing

"My house is cold – all the heat goes into the attic" (Queen Elizabeth High School pupil)

"Get some people to come and fix the house" (Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones pupil)

Many young people suggested that when these methods of preserving heat throughout the house failed, families could retreat to a single room and concentrate on their efforts on maintaining a level of warmth there.

"Sometimes if you've got a big family...you can get all the things you need in one room and then the body heat of people will heat up the room" (Glyncollen Primary School pupil)

Secondary school pupils were able to give other practical ways that households could improve their situations and escape the worst of being in fuel poverty.

The central theme to their ideas was how households could economise better with the money they had. Many ideas included:

- Prioritising their spending on things they really needed and budgeting better
- Not wasting electricity by leaving appliances on standby or when not in use
- Having a household kitty that everyone, including young people, contributed to
- Being better prepared for the cold winter months

"Be really prepared with wood and blankets, and food" (Builth Wells High School pupil)

There were also suggestions on how households could increase the household income. Primarily, suggestions focused on renting out a section or room in the house.

"Rent the house out, rent a bit of the house" (Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones pupil)

Ways families can keep warm

- Draw Curtains
- Use draft excluders
- Seal all cracks
- Cuddle up together
- More people in single place
- Use duvets to keep warm
- Throws on sofas
- Lay carpets
- Install loft insulation

Summary of responses from Markham Primary School

What can organisations and agencies (Government, schools, utility companies etc) do to help individuals and households keep warm

This section of the consultations was designed to enable children and young people to give some consideration as to how other external stakeholders; agencies and partners could help families in fuel poverty to improve their current situation.

What soon became apparent was that many of the children and young people were not entirely clear as to which agency was responsible for what, and therefore pupils tended to address many of their solutions towards the collective term 'government'.

Overwhelmingly, all age groups of children and young people considered that the principal way the government could help people stay warm and tackle fuel poverty was through financial means.

Discussions and solutions focused on a variety of means of helping people currently struggling on low income and this included:

- Providing access to government loans
- Providing benefits or subsidies to help poorer families pay for their fuel
- Increasing the level of income families in poverty receive for the Government
- Negotiating with energy suppliers to reduce the cost to consumers

"They could lower the price (of fuel) because if people can't afford it they could die of coldness and then that would be because of the people who set the prices" (Glyncollen Primary School pupil)

"Guarantee, sort of like, you can have this much fuel for free and then you gotta pay for this much afterwards" (Builth Wells High School pupil)

Both primary and secondary school children and young people felt that the government also had a role to play in providing families with advice and information on how to stay warm and ways in which to make their homes more energy efficient.

Several young people commented that providing a free service which visited and evaluated the efficiency of people's homes was also a good idea.

"(they could) send somebody round like peoples houses and have them check if it's warm enough and stuff" (Ysgol Syr Thomas Jones)

Alongside this, services should be put in place that assist families with insulating their homes, rather than expecting householders to have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to undertake such tasks themselves.

"You could ask people if they need any help with their houses"(Markham Primary School)

Grants to help install energy efficiency measures such as double glazing, insulation and alternative heating sources were also thought to be a key way the government could help people stay warm and preserve warmth in their home.

Incentivising families to undertake energy efficiency measures could also be considered by providing rewards for householders to make their homes more energy efficient.

Other suggestions of ways governments could help included:

- Helping people find work
- Not wasting money themselves so there is more money available to help families
- Ensuring all new builds are more energy efficient

Secondary school young people also felt that schools had a clear part to play in helping to reduce fuel poverty levels. This could be achieved principally by providing pupils with information and advice around the issue as part of the curriculum.

Teaching all children and young people about fuel poverty and energy efficiency could help ensure that pupils are better informed and then able to cascade this information to the parents and families.

“Schools can give advice on how to keep your house warm” (Hafod Primary School pupil)

Young people also suggested that schools could also be involved in fundraising activity and help redistribute warm clothes and blankets etc. School fairs, for example, could have information and advice tables provided by external agencies as well as provisions to allow families to exchange pre-used goods.

The potential benefits of after-school clubs was identified as providing an opportunity for children to stay in school beyond school hours where they would be able to stay warm for longer during the colder months of the year.

It is worth noting that many primary school pupils particularly struggled to articulate well considered suggestions to this section as very few had a sufficient grasp of many of the concepts used, especially since most had only been introduced to the terms ‘government’, ‘fuel poverty’ and ‘energy efficiency’ that very day.

Nevertheless, providing families with more income, improved information and advice, ways in which they could access services to improve energy efficiency in their home and access to grants and loans were consistent ideas put forward by all age groups.

How organisations (Government, schools, utility companies etc) can help children and families keep warm

- Loan money to families and individuals to help keep them warm
- Charge less money for fuel
- Reduce taxes
- Negotiate oil prices down
- Organise activities in schools to raise money
- Give money to poorer families or contribute to fuel costs
- Charities to give out old clothes
- Lower the cost of radiators and boilers

Summary of answers from Queen Elizabeth High School

Children and young people's three key recommendations

1

Recommendation

Lower fuel prices and support low-income families

Central to children and young people's recommendations to government and outside agencies was the need to reduce the cost of fuel for heating to the consumer. Several ways were suggested including negotiating oil prices down, giving a financial contribution to low-income families, reducing taxes, and providing loans.

2

Recommendation

Help with insulation

The (continued) subsidising of insulation for people's homes was a recommendation which came through very strongly throughout the project.

Children and young people in rural areas were aware that stone built properties were not easy to insulate and separate measures to address this may need to be explored in order to keep rural children and young people warm.

3

Recommendation

Provide children and young people with information and advice on how to keep warm in winter

Information was seen to be a critical factor in keeping families warm. Children and young people felt that advice on energy efficiency measures such as insulation and efficient heating systems was needed and that children and young people should receive information on what measures they as individuals could take to stay warm as well as what households more generally could do. Schools and the government were identified by the pupils as sources of information and advice.

Top 10 tips for children and young people to keep warm

The following 10 top tips were developed by the children and young people during the consultations events. An abridged version has been produced and developed into a poster format that will be made available to all schools in Wales ahead of the winter 2011/12.

1 Wear the right clothes

Wearing thick jumpers, warm socks and slippers around the house means the heating can be on at a lower setting. Wearing a warm coat, hat, gloves and scarf outside and putting these on before setting out will prevent you from getting too cold and needing to warm up again. Putting on lots of thin layers of clothing traps warm air between the layers and is better than one thick layer.

2 Eat hot food and drink warm drinks

Eating hot food and drinking warm drinks effectively provides heating from the inside out and is comforting when feeling cold. Simple ways for you to have something warm inside without being an accomplished cook includes eating porridge for breakfast, having warm milk on cereal, warming up leftovers for lunch and drinking cups of soup or warm squash.

3 Exercise

Sitting still is a sure fire way of getting cold and so exercise is always a top tip to keep you warm as well as fit. Ideas include jogging to the shops rather than walking, running up the stairs when going up for something and doing the housework! If you find it difficult or are not able to move around this way, gentle exercises in a seated position will help maintain the blood circulation and keep the cold at bay.

4 Keep a blanket handy

You will probably spend some time sitting still doing homework, watching TV or playing video games. A good way of keeping warm is to pull a blanket over your knees or shoulders and other parts of your body if you can. Keeping a blanket handy would mean you would be more likely to use it when it really matters.

5 Use a hot water bottle/ electric blanket

A proper night's sleep is important to keep you healthy. Being cold in bed prevents this and makes people feel miserable. While using electricity is an expensive way of heating an entire house, an electric blanket heats just a single area of a bed and is an economical way of staying warm at night when compared to leaving the heating on. Hot water bottles work in a similar way and are portable so you can have them on your lap on the sofa and then take them up to bed with you later. Make sure you use a cover though to help keep the water inside warm

6 Keep doors and windows closed

A simple tip. Making sure all windows and doors are kept shut will prevent expensive heat escaping. When leaving the house making sure that the door is closed as quickly as possible will help keep the heat in. If you have one, use a draught excluder or an old blanket or clothes to keep the cold out and warmth inside.

7 Prepare for winter

A very sensible tip for families as a whole. Putting money aside (if you can) in summer for the winter heating bill means that the cost when it comes is less painful. Prices for solid fuel such as wood, coal and oil are often cheaper in the autumn than in winter, so stocking up early not only makes financial sense but protects from interruptions to supplies due to severe winter weather. You may also be aware of any wood that may be available free of charge locally throughout the year.

8 Look out for government grants

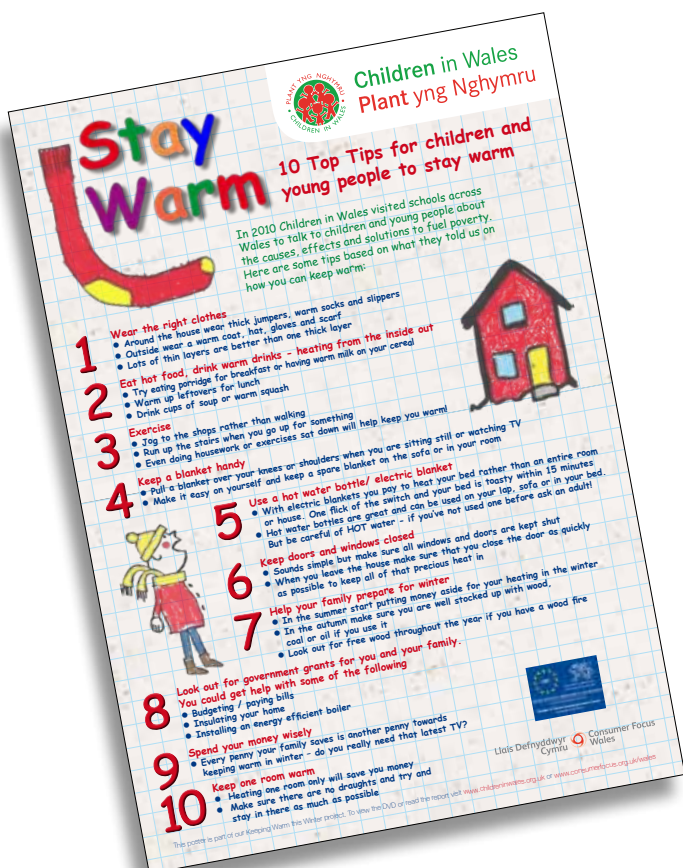
Help is often available for families in a variety of forms including advice on budgeting for bills, advice on making homes more energy efficient, subsidised insulation, and help to install an energy efficient boiler. If you're not sure where to get help, try your local paper or ask a trusted adult or friend for some advice or where you can get help.

9 Spend your money wisely

This is another very sensible tip. Children and young people are well aware of the pressures on them to have the latest phone or clothes, but also need to be concerned that some people may choose to buy these over putting money aside to pay for heating. Remember as well, if you're not using something that requires fuel, turn it off.

10 Keep one room warm

Clearly heating only one room is cheaper than heating a whole house. However while a logical way of cutting down on heating bills and staying warm is to only use one room, you need to consider that spending too much time in one room with your family may lead to tension and stress. Other rooms will need some heating to prevent them from getting damp and mouldy.





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