

COUNTY COUNCIL

23 JUNE 2021

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

QUESTION FROM TANYA TUCKER

At a meeting of full council on 24th March 2021 a motion was submitted and passed on amendment regarding fuel poverty and the inequality of tariffs by payment method to end users. Could this council please tell me what action has been taken and what, if any, progress has been made to address these inequalities and what this council intends to do to keep this issue from being swept under the carpet?"

RESPONSE

I would like to thank Ms Tucker for the follow up question to the previous amended motion.

Many fuel poor households may be in fuel poverty due to the expensive energy tariffs that they are on. Some households might be on expensive tariffs as they have not switched suppliers or energy tariffs which have resulted in them being placed on standard variable tariffs that are high.

Other households may be in debt which has resulted in prepayment meters being installed that have more expensive tariffs.

Energy reforms are taking place to prevent energy suppliers from penalising energy customers who are on prepayment meters and standard energy tariffs should also impact the fuel poor figures.

These prevent energy suppliers from increasing certain energy tariffs above fixed levels. There is currently a price cap for prepayment customers called the Prepayment Safeguard and there is a proposed bill called the Domestic (Tariff Cap) Bill that will tackle standard variable tariffs.

This council appreciates the difficulties some residents experience in terms of fuel poverty and has taken many steps over the years to address this. The Council's **Managing Money Better** service provides free and impartial advice on obtaining a competitive energy tariff and switching energy. Since April 2020, this service has assisted **779** households to save money on their energy bills resulting in over **£63,000** saved on energy bills.

The Council's Warm Homes Campaign aims to raise awareness of energy efficiency and provides fuel poverty programs to residents living in the county to help and support them to reduce levels of fuel poverty.

County Durham has the 6th highest uptake nationally of fuel poverty grants and since April 2020, **1,582** households countywide have received a grant for energy efficient gas fired heating boilers, solid wall insulation, cavity wall and loft insulation measures.

This equates to **£1.85m** of external funding drawn down into County Durham from the national Energy Company Obligation funding programmes.

Whilst energy tariffs fall under the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Joint Partnership will receive a briefing on the background to your question and will consider how we can further support residents who are experiencing fuel poverty.

I would like to assure Ms Tucker and Full Council that I will take an active and personal interest in this particular issue. I have been previously active in issuing fuel vouchers via the County Durham Foodbank system to those in need and challenging the inequality of payment by tariffs.

I urge all members to recommend the Council's **Managing Money Better** service to all residents believed to be suffering from fuel poverty.