

Dear

Thank you for your email of 17 April about the Fuel Poverty Bill. I have been asked to reply.

First of all, I'd like to thank you for writing. We are determined to tackle fuel poverty because everyone should be able to live in decent, warm conditions without facing hardship as a result.

We have tried to tackle the root causes of fuel poverty: incomes have been improved by increasing support for those in poverty and we have introduced and increased Winter Fuel Payments. At a time of rising fuel prices, we have also negotiated an agreement with energy suppliers to increase the amount they are spending on social programmes over the next three years. Already 800,000 customer accounts are benefitting from social tariffs – almost double the number of March 2008.

In addition, following work by OFGEM, the regulator, companies have cut prices for some of the most vulnerable customers, like those on pre-payment meters. OFGEM has proposed legal changes to prevent unfair price discrimination against certain groups of customers.

Above all, though, a one-off improvement to the energy efficiency of a property can mean savings year on year. The Government's Warm Front Scheme insulated a home every six minutes last year, and since 2000 we have helped almost 2 million households through Government programmes.

The challenge of climate change makes insulation even more important, and earlier this year we launched plans for a big expansion in what we do. A Great British Refurb aims to make sure that by 2015, cavity wall and loft insulation are installed in every house in the country that can have it. We also aim to increase the number of hard to treat homes that have solid wall insulation.

With all that we are doing, supporting the bill remains a very inflexible way to tackle fuel poverty, cutting across existing programmes. It calls for measures to be compulsory for the Government, without working out their cost – roughly estimated to be #50 billion – or looking to see if those measures would be the most appropriate ones to take. So because of the specifics of how the bill was drawn up, the Government has to oppose it.

I believe that fuel poverty needs urgent continuing action. Our minister Joan Ruddock is currently conducting a review of fuel poverty policy to examine whether existing measures could be made more effective or new policies introduced.

You can read more about what we're doing ? on fuel poverty, insulation and other measures ? at www.decc.gov.uk.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours

sincerely,

Customer Contact Unit

Defra

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)