



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government Warm Homes Programme

**Cold Weather Resilience Plan for people
at risk of living in a cold home**

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Purpose of this plan

Cold Weather has a significant impact on the health and well-being of people. The Welsh Government is committed to improving the lives of people in Wales and to significantly reduce the negative outcomes which are a consequence of living in a cold home. The purpose of this plan is to set out how the Welsh Government will work with key partners to safeguard vulnerable and lower income households during periods of cold weather.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published quality standards in 2015 about preventing excess winter deaths and illness associated with cold homes. The associated guidance [document \(NG6\)](#) provides a set of comprehensive recommendations on how health commissioners, managers, housing and energy suppliers, health, social care and voluntary sector practitioners can reduce the health risks of people vulnerable to the cold.¹

In 2019 Public Health Wales (PHW) published the report [‘Improving winter health and well-being and reducing winter pressures in Wales. A preventive approach’](#). The report promotes action before the onset of the winter, which can be taken by policy makers, health and care services, third sector organisations and the public to protect themselves and their families before the onset of cold temperatures and adverse weather conditions.

The PHW framework for action contained in the report identifies the activity which can be undertaken to improve winter health. The Welsh Government can support the framework to strengthen preventative actions, specifically by:

- Supporting households living in fuel poverty (particularly those with low income or who are vulnerable to the effects of cold) by providing financial and practical support.
- Increasing the warmth and energy efficiency of homes (alongside home ventilation) among vulnerable households e.g. through advice, financial help, home improvements and building energy efficient new homes.
- Broadening ‘winter planning’ to year-round ‘continuous preventative planning’ that is responsive to seasonal needs and extreme weather events and aims to reduce health inequity.
- Ensuring interventions and initiatives are commissioned/delivered on an ongoing basis, in order to achieve sustainable reductions in demand and utilisation of health and care services during winter.
- Providing/commissioning community based initiatives and projects, such as ambulatory care, on an ongoing basis, in order to reduce demand on hospitals and other health and care services.
- Map and identifying the effectiveness of local and national interventions already in place in Wales, with scaling up of best practice across Wales.
- Continuous preventative planning helps to build resilience in the health system and supports the development of new collaborations and partnerships.

Objectives of the Plan

This cold weather resilience plan has three main objectives, which link to policy goals one and two in the plan [Tackling Fuel Poverty Plan 2021-2035](#). To identify, prioritise and protect vulnerable and low income householders at risk of avoidable ill health caused by living in a cold home.

There are three objectives of this plan:

Objective 1:	To provide advice and support to vulnerable and lower income households to support householders to better prepare for cold weather.
Objective 2:	To help low income householders maintain/improve the energy and thermal efficiency of their homes.
Objective 3:	To work with partners to better co-ordinate advice and support services to vulnerable and lower income households to reduce the risk of avoidable ill health resulting from living in a cold home.

By achieving these objectives we respond specifically to the commitments outlined under Action 4 of the Tackling Fuel Poverty Plan 2021-2035. Ultimately improving winter resilience for people struggling to meet the cost of their domestic fuel needs and at risk of avoidable ill health or premature death from living in a cold home.

Tackling fuel poverty 2021-2035

Cold weather can pose serious public health risks, causing ‘excess’ deaths in winter compared with the rest of the year. This is because cold weather can contribute to hypothermia, falls and injuries, heart attacks, strokes, respiratory diseases and flu, mental health problems, such as depression, and carbon monoxide poisoning from poorly maintained or poorly ventilated boilers, cooking and heating appliances.

In our plan to tackle fuel poverty 2021-2035, vulnerable households are households where the occupants include one or more of the following:

- A person aged 60 and over.
- A dependent child or children under the age of 16.
- A single person aged under 25.
- A person living with a long term illness or who is disabled.²

The specific actions set out in this plan align with Welsh Government’s four policy goals for tackling fuel poverty. These are:

Figure 1: Welsh Government’s Policy Goals

Goal 1: Identify	Proactively identify people who are in, or at risk of being in, fuel poverty to ensure our support will benefit people living on lower incomes.
Goal 2: Prioritise and protect	Worst First – Ensure people in most need receive the most appropriate package of support so they can always continue to heat their homes.
Goal 3: Decarbonise	Fabric First – Improve the thermal and energy efficiency of lower income homes in the owner occupier and private rented sector, reducing energy bills and harmful carbon emissions.
Goal 4: Influence	Use our influence to ensure that the UK Government, Energy Regulator and energy companies consider and meet the needs of people living in Wales.

² Some circulatory conditions require a higher than average temperature to achieve a comfortable level of warmth, leading to higher energy use and cost of heating. Individuals with mental health conditions are likely to find living in a cold home a more distressing experience as it combines physical discomfort with mental anxiety over paying for fuel costs. Cold homes can increase the risk of high blood pressure, heart attacks and pneumonia. They can also lead to social isolation, loss of sleep, stress and mental illness. The risk of developing conditions effected by the cold is higher for people with certain disabilities, the elderly and children.

Current action to support households

Welsh Government

The Welsh Government's Warm Homes Programme offers advice and support to lower income households to improve the thermal comfort and energy efficiency of their homes. Since its inception (and as of the end of March 2021) more than £394m has been invested to improve home energy efficiency through the Warm Homes Programme in Wales, benefitting more than 67,100 homes. Within this more than 160,000 households have received free and impartial advice on how to improve their domestic energy efficiency and reduce their fuel bills.

The Welsh Government's Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) makes Emergency Assistance Payments (EAP) as a non-repayable grant to help with essential costs for people in a crisis situation and in need of immediate financial support. The payment can currently help people experiencing severe financial hardship to meet the cost of food, gas and electricity, boiler repairs and oil and liquid gas purchases.

In November 2018, DAF was further expanded to support people unable to meet the cost of a call out fee for a gas safe engineer and minor repair. Working with key partners including the Energy Savings Trust, Citizens Advice Cymru, National Energy Action and NEC Software Solutions, emergency assistance payments of up to £120 can be authorised, subject to meeting certain eligibility criteria, to meet the cost of repair.

A pilot scheme was introduced in 2020-21 to provide emergency assistance payments of up to £175 to purchase oil and liquefied gas (LG) to off grid households to help with the cost of bulk fuel purchases. On 16 November a Winter Fuel Support Scheme for 2021-22 was announced. This is a £38 million fund to support households with their energy costs. It provides households where one member is in receipt of certain welfare benefits with a one-off payment of £100.

UK Government schemes

Cold Weather payments are available to households in receipt of **certain benefits or the Support for Mortgage Interest scheme**. This provides help to individuals on benefits who are the most vulnerable to the cold: Such as:

- older people in receipt of Pension Credit;
- disabled adults, families with a disabled child or families with a child under 5, who are in receipt of Universal Credit or one of the following legacy benefits:
 - income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
 - income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Income Support.

The payment becomes payable if the average temperature in an area is recorded as, or forecast to be, zero degrees celsius or below for seven consecutive days. The amount payable is £25 for each seven day period of very cold weather occurring during the scheme period of 1 November and 31 March. Estimates published by the Department for Work and Pensions³ for the period November 2020 to March 2021 estimates 223,000 people living in Wales were eligible for payments under the scheme, 87,000 of whom were in receipt of Pension Credit.

The Winter Fuel Payment is a UK Government scheme to assist with the cost of domestic energy during winter. People born on or before 1954 (aged 65 and over) may be eligible for payments valued at between **£100 and £300**. This payment is usually made automatically for eligible beneficiaries who are entitled to State Pension or another benefit (excluding Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Child Benefit or Universal Credit).

Ofgem and the energy suppliers

Ofgem's report on **supporting vulnerable customers** recognised energy as being an essential service, which affects people's comfort and health. As part of their licence conditions, energy suppliers must have and maintain a Priority Services Register (PSR) and provide eligible consumers with certain free support services. Suppliers are required to promote their PSR, proactively identify customers who might benefit from additional support services, and offer to add these customers to the PSR.

Suppliers are also required to support customers in debt or struggling to pay their energy bills. Ofgem requires suppliers to offer certain services for customers who are in payment difficulties, and to take all reasonable steps to determine the customer's ability to pay. The risk of arrears increases during the winter months and can lead to people living in a cold home when temperatures drop because people are in fear of falling into unmanageable debt.

Energy suppliers can offer a Warm Homes Discount to qualifying households. This is a discount of £140 off electricity bills. The payment is a one-off discount applied to electricity bills between October and March. A discount can be applied to the gas bill instead if the supplier provides both gas and electricity to the household.

Around 18% of homes in Wales are not connected to the gas grid⁴. Many of these homes are in rural areas and are often reliant on heating oil, liquid gas and coal for their primary heating sources. Protections offered by Ofgem to on grid homes do not extend to off grid homes. **The Senedd's fifth term Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee enquiry report into fuel poverty** highlighted the need for tailored support in rural communities to address issues relating to fuel poverty.

³ gov.uk/government/statistics/cold-weather-payment-estimates-2020-to-2021

⁴ gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-10/welsh-housing-conditions-survey-energy-efficiency-dwellings-april-2017-march-2018-795.pdf

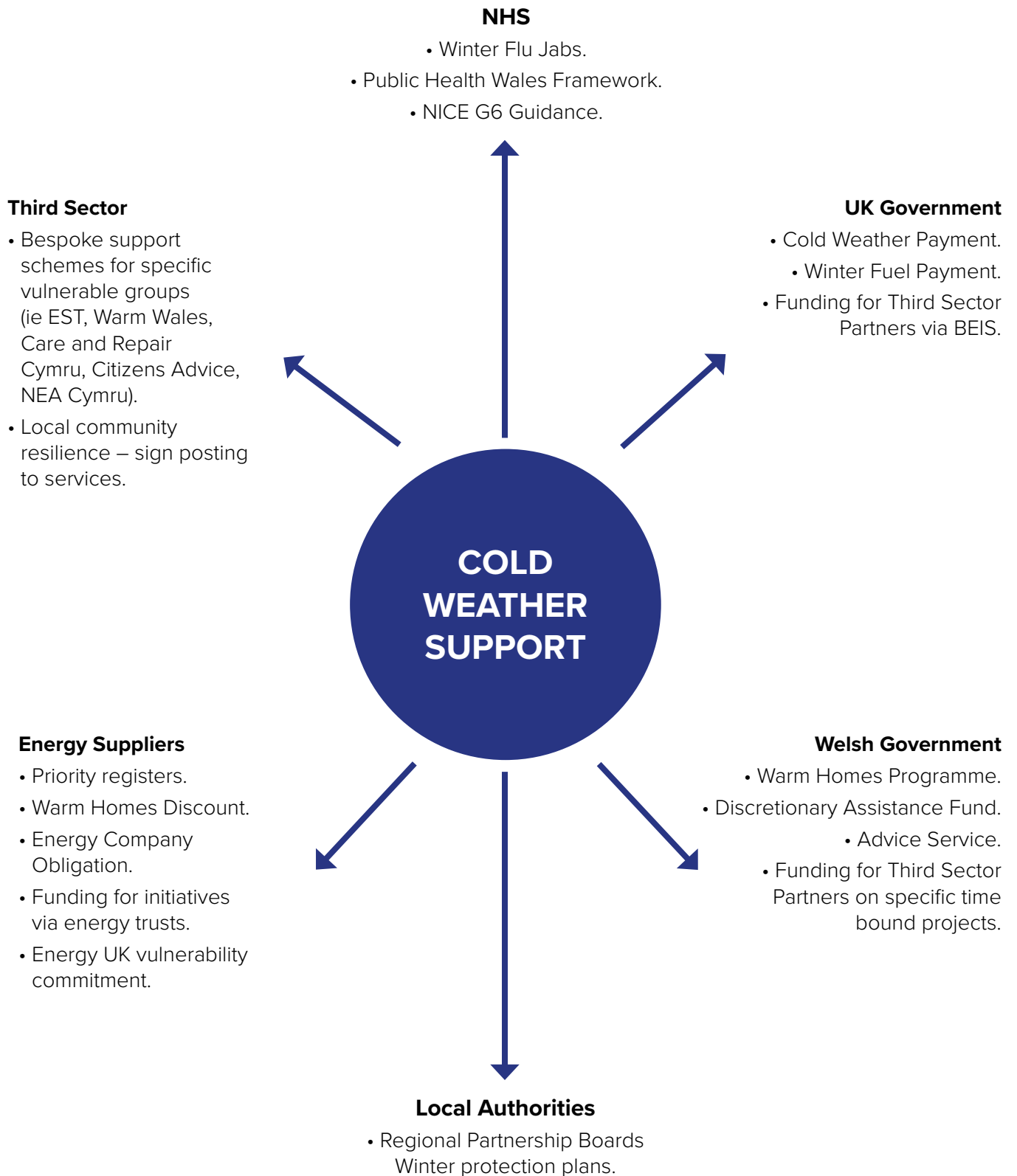
Third Sector partners

The JIGSO, Enabling Multi Agency Information Sharing project co-ordinates information between emergency responders (and others e.g. water companies) so in an emergency situation those individuals can be prioritised. Different organisations have different lists of individuals categorised as needing priority services or in vulnerable circumstances. The JIGSO project aims to bring all this information together so emergency responders know where to target. The information is held via a UPRN (unique property reference number).

The 'Hospital to a Healthier Home (H2HH)' service, originally established as a pilot for winter 2018-19, has been delivered by Care and Repair Cymru and funded by Welsh Government since January 2019. It is a service to facilitate safer and quicker discharges for vulnerable older patients of whom may benefit from home adaptations and implementing solutions rapidly. The service aims to support reductions in delayed transfers of care as well as reduced admission and readmission rates, by having designated caseworkers embedded into the hospital, to attend ward rounds and identify patients who would benefit. There is a need to reflect on the learning from this scheme and potential for extension via the health boards adopting this service locally.

The Money and Pension Service (MaPS) Strategy for Financial Wellbeing published in January 2020 sets out how they will support people to make the most of their money and pensions. One of the five goals of the strategy is to reduce the number of people regularly having to resort to credit to pay for essential bills, including energy bills. The Delivery Plan for Wales will set out the activity that will deliver against this goal. This includes plans to develop guidance for consumers on income maximisation to ensure they are not missing out on any benefits or grants, in relation to insulating homes and ensuring that claiming the right benefits provides access to government grants. The guidance will also focus on ensuring consumers are on the right tariff to get best value from their energy supplier. Additionally, the Delivery Plan sets out how Citizen's Advice will work with essential bills suppliers, including in energy, to improve access to social tariffs and priority services registers. MaPS will share information about Wales based insulation and support programmes in its website guidance on essential bills. They ensure their money guidance resources for third party organisations signpost to the relevant programmes.

Figure 2: Current cold weather support for people in Wales



Action plan

Objective 1:

To provide advice and support to vulnerable and lower income households to support householders to better prepare for cold weather.

Action	How	Who	When
Publicise information about the need to get ready for cold weather periods and the support available to householders.	<p>Prepare and publish marketing material designed to encourage householders to improve their winter preparedness earlier in the year.</p> <p>Provide advice and guidance on actions required to keep warm during the winter months.</p>	<p>Lead: Welsh Government Warm Homes Programme Nest.</p> <p>Support: Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel. Public Health Wales (PHW).</p>	<p>Make use of PHW advice and guidance in 2021.</p> <p>By May 2022 then ongoing.</p>
Deliver effective warm home advice and support services.	<p>Provide advice and support on domestic energy efficiency, delivered under the current Warm Homes Programme, through the Nest scheme and the In-Home Advice Pilot.</p> <p>Seek to expand the advice and support on domestic energy efficiency delivered under the next iteration Warm Homes Programme.</p>	<p>Lead: Nest Scheme Welsh Government.</p>	<p>Pilot until March 2022. Nest until March 2023. Next iteration of Warm Homes Programme from April 2023.</p>
<p>Work with third sector and related agencies to support income maximisation and promote the provision of these services.</p> <p>Identify the extent and reasons people do not claim to improve the campaign.</p>	<p>Ensure households claim benefits and entitlements.</p> <p>Build on the success of the national benefits take up campaign.</p>	<p>Lead: Welsh Government's Single Advice Fund.</p> <p>Support: Third Sector. Registered Social Landlords. Energy Suppliers.</p>	<p>Current and ongoing.</p>
Ensure professionals /practitioners who support people with their money matters as part of their wider role are aware of support available to householders.	Facilitate a virtual event that focusses on guidance and support on energy costs and tariffs and issues faced by vulnerable households in cold weather.	<p>Lead: MaPS Money Guiders Wales Network.</p> <p>Support: Third Sector. Energy Champion.</p>	<p>October 2021.</p>

Action	How	Who	When
Provide help to buy domestic fuel for off grid and rural homes.	<p>Promote and supply emergency assistance payments to help with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bulk purchase oil and liquid gas costs for lower income households. • prepayment meter credit top ups. 	<p>Lead: Welsh Government/DAF.</p> <p>Support: Oil and liquid gas energy companies.</p>	<p>October to March annually.</p> <p>October 2021 onwards.</p>

Objective 2:

To help low income householders maintain/improve the energy and thermal efficiency of their homes.

Action	How	Who	When
Improve access to home energy efficiency measures through the Warm Homes Programme for people at risk of avoidable ill health but not in receipt of means tested benefits.	Continue with the health conditions pilot and integrate it into the Warm Homes Programme, subject to outcome of the public consultation.	<p>Lead: Welsh Government.</p>	<p>Pilot ongoing.</p> <p>March 2023.</p>
Co-ordinate action to secure inward investment for domestic energy efficiency improvements from the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme.	<p>Respond to the UK Government consultation on ECO 4 and support implementation.</p> <p>Establish mechanisms to co-ordinate ECO investment.</p>	<p>Lead: Welsh Government. Third Sector Partners. Local Government.</p> <p>Support: Welsh Government. Local Government. Ofgem/Energy Suppliers.</p>	<p>September 2021.</p> <p>April 2022.</p>
Commission a catalogue of local schemes which target individuals on a low income with health problems for energy efficiency measures.	Identify the relevant schemes which can be accessed by referral partners.	<p>Lead: Welsh Government.</p> <p>Support: Third Sector. Local Authorities. Energy Companies.</p>	<p>March 2022</p>

Action	How	Who	When
Provide support to low income households to make minor repairs to maintain the thermal integrity of their homes.	Emergency Assistance Payments through Welsh Government Discretionary Assistance Fund. Enabling works required for home energy efficiency improvements to be included in the next iteration of the Warm Homes Programme.	Lead: Welsh Government. DAF. Support: Welsh Government/ Warm Homes Programme.	October to March annually. March 2023.
Encourage landlords in the social housing and private rented sector to urge tenants to report maintenance issues.	Welsh Government to request Registered Social Landlords, social landlords and private landlords to prioritise building repairs affecting thermal efficiency.	Lead: Rent Smart Wales. Local Authorities. Private Landlords.	October 2021.

Objective 3:

To work with partners to better co-ordinate advice and support services to vulnerable and lower income households to reduce the risk of avoidable ill health resulting from living in a cold home.

Action	How	Who	When
Refer households in arrears with their energy bills to schemes delivering home energy efficiency improvements to reduce the cost of energy needed to maintain a safe temperature.	Welsh Government to write to energy suppliers. Energy company customer services to refer in to energy efficiency schemes.	Lead: Energy suppliers.	October 2021.
Co-ordinate action between public sector/third sector and energy suppliers to improve cold weather resilience for low income households.	Re-establish the sub-group of the Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel to implement the actions within this plan.	Lead: Welsh Government. Support: Local Government. Health Boards. Third Sector. Energy Suppliers.	September 2021 – annually thereafter.

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