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FAMILIES LIVING IN PRIVATELY RENTED HOMES SHOULD BE BROUGHT IN FROM THE COLD

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People living in privately rented accommodation are suffering from some of the coldest homes and least energy efficient levels of all types of housing, according to the leading independent think tank ResPublica.

Despite fuel poverty and associated health problems often being viewed as a problem for older people, ResPublica has found it affects all ages, from babies in low-income homes to those in retirement.

In a new report, **Out of the Cold: An Agenda for Warm Homes**, ResPublica has set out new ways to allow people at all levels of society to live in energy efficient homes, empowering them to succeed while creating prosperous communities.

The report is supported by all of the three main parties and is referred to as required reading for policymakers:

Tim Yeo MP, Chair of the Energy and Climate Change Select Committee, said:
“ResPublica’s Agenda for Warm Homes succinctly sets out the current issues facing Energy Company Obligation [ECO] and argues for the introduction of a more radical, localised approach as well as the ramping up of incentives and targets.

“It is a bold and ambitious document and is exactly what’s needed in this policy space in order to ensure we capitalise fully on the massive potential for energy efficiency improvements in our homes.”



Lord Teverson, Liberal Democrat Spokesman for Energy and Climate Change in the House of Lords, said:

"ResPublica's Agenda for Warm Homes offers ambitious yet practical solutions to tackle fuel poverty. The recommendations set out in this paper should receive broad support from across the political spectrum. It should be required reading for all policymakers."

Mervyn Kohler, Age UK, said:

"Fixing energy efficiency shortcomings for poor people in cold homes in England is funded by an obligation on energy companies. This report shows that the scheme fails to reach many in fuel poverty, lacks ambition and scale, and is unstable and fitfully implemented: it goes on to recommend fundamental and structural reforms. Beyond that, it points too to privately rented homes, where there are disproportionately more households in fuel poverty than any other sector. Given that cold homes cause illnesses and deaths, it is simply scandalous that the current policies are so weak."

The report calls for increased targeting and help for at risk homes, to help people out of fuel poverty.

Report author, Caroline Julian, says:

"A shocking number of people suffer and die every year due to living in cold and uncomfortable homes. We need to radically rethink how we can better target, deliver and fund energy efficiency measures for vulnerable people and those on low incomes. Our report sets out this thinking, and outlines clear recommendations for how Government can act."

Among the aims set out by ResPublica are:

1. Give citizens the right to not only report, but to enforce, energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector through a local authority led structure which also involves the health sector.



2. Trigger a penalty charge on landlords who repeatedly breach energy efficiency standards in private rented homes.
3. Enable GP practices to benefit from savings made by the NHS when family doctors refer patients needing work to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.
4. A more ambitious Government target to upgrade all properties connected to the gas grid in the private rented sector to a minimum standard of Energy Performance Certificate.
5. More help for those living in rural areas and off the gas grid who continue to suffer from a lack of support, and are often neglected because they are hard-to-treat and geographically hard-to-reach.

ResPublica believes that while suppliers will spend nearly £1 billion a year installing insulation measures in hard-to-treat households and low income areas under their ECO, the current framework, set to run until March 2017, needs to be changed.

The funding pot should be devolved to local administrators, creating an ECO competition for each locality, open to cities, local authorities and housing providers working with community and local organisations.

On funding, ResPublica believes the Government should launch an independent review to explore whether the funding for ECO should be transferred to general taxation.

In addition, city regions and local authorities should lead on integrating health and social care budgets with ECO budgets to fund local initiatives that tackle fuel poverty.

Ms Julian adds:

“Despite Government efforts to combat cold homes, vulnerable people are still slipping through the net. We need to devolve both power and responsibility to communities, local authorities, housing providers and local businesses to



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better target those who are suffering and to enforce the home improvements that are so desperately needed."

Stephen Rennie, Managing Director, Calor Gas Ltd, said:

"Calor has serious long held concerns regarding access to, and the delivery of, properly targeted help and support for fuel poor householders who live off the gas grid and who want to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. In spite of recent scheme changes, it is evident that Government policy continues to disadvantage rural off gas grid householders. Action is needed now to amend energy policy to ensure that the rural fuel poor not only contribute to the cost of delivering energy policy, but actually start to see some benefits."

WM Housing Group said:

"It is clear the challenges of tackling fuel poverty and reducing the impact of climate change remain huge. This paper sets out some innovative and thought-provoking ideas to reshape the approach to delivery using incentives, penalties and clearer lines of accountability than exist at present. None of these will, of course, be a panacea. All, though, offer new ideas and thinking that deserve active consideration."

Notes to the Editor:

For further details or to get an embargoed copy of the report please call Oruj on 07866 685130 or email her on oruj@sogold.co.uk

