

Welsh Government plans would take 135 years to insulate every fuel poor household in Wales” says Lib Dems

The Welsh Liberal Democrats have said they would set aside £1.75bn to insulate homes in Wales. The party has taken aim at the Welsh Government’s energy efficiency improvement scheme arguing it would take 135 years to insulate every fuel poor household in Wales.

Welsh Liberal Democrat leader Jane Dodds MS said: “Unlike Labour, the Welsh Liberal Democrats are focused on delivering robust and practical solutions. That means implementing an emergency nationwide home insulation programme and introducing green upgrades to homes.”

When asked how much money the Welsh Lib Dems would set aside to ensure all homes were properly insulated, the party said it would set aside “£1.75 billion over a five year Senedd term for an accelerated home insulation programme.”

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They said this “would create 10,000 full time equivalent jobs across Wales over 15 years and generate around £2.2bn for the Welsh economy in addition to reducing the £67 million per year spent by the Welsh NHS on conditions caused by poor housing.”

When asked what the party would stop doing in Wales to fund the programme, they said they were committed to “a full spending review post election which would have included revenue and capital with the focus being on climate adaptation and mitigation.”

The party added that the Welsh Government should conduct a rapid review of its warm homes program to look at efficiencies, adding that the government hasn't made any use of its existing borrowing powers.

Ms Dodds took aim at the Welsh Government's Warm Homes scheme, known as Nest, which is designed to provide funding for energy efficiency improvements to low-income households and those living in deprived communities across Wales.

She urged the Welsh Labour Government to "put a rocket under a support scheme for households in fuel poverty" after Lib Dem analysis of Nest found that only a small percentage of households have benefitted from support, adding that it could take the Welsh Government 135 years to insulate every fuel poor household.

The Lib Dems said its analysis of the Nest schemes annual statements revealed that the number of households receiving support under the scheme had declined from 5,500 in 2016/17 to 4,559 in 2020/21.

At the 2016/17 rate, it would take 111.6 years to insulate every household, and at the 2020/21 rate it would take 134.7 years, said the party.

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They also argued that, of those benefitting from home improvements from the scheme in 2020/21, almost 50% were described as not living in fuel poverty, suggesting the scheme is not being targeted effectively.

“Only a tiny fraction of the number of households who are struggling with their fuel bills have been supported by this government,” said the Welsh Lib Dem leader. “If the current rate of progress is maintained it will take the Welsh Labour Government 135 years to insulate every household that is in fuel poverty.”

She said: “The snail’s pace this scheme has advanced at illustrates the Labour’s frightening incompetence when it comes to tackling fuel poverty across Wales, and how their inaction has left Wales extremely vulnerable to the latest price rises.

“Bills will continue to soar and families will continue to suffer unless more support is made available to those in need. Cutting energy bills through improving energy efficiency will not only lessen the burden on household finances, it will be good for the planet and bad for Vladimir Putin too. The Government need to put a rocket under the Welsh Government Warm Homes scheme.”

She added: “We are also pressing the UK government to cancel this year’s energy price rise, introduce a windfall tax on the profits of oil and gas producers and help households to weather the crisis.”

According to Welsh Government estimates, around 614,000 households were in fuel poverty in Wales in April 2022 including 115,000 in extreme fuel poverty.

Responding to the Welsh Lib Dems claims, a Welsh Government spokesperson said: “More than 67,100 lower income households have benefitted from our £394m Warm Homes programme since its launch in 2011.

“We are considering the next phase of the programme, following a consultation earlier this year. This will include supporting those in fuel poverty, decarbonising homes and supporting growth in the housing retrofit and renewables sectors.

“In response to the cost-of-living crisis, we have increased funding for energy efficiency schemes and to support people in fuel poverty and we have provided more than £380m of support directly to households.

“Unfortunately the cost-of-living crisis is continuing to deepen as costs are rising every day and the energy cap will increase gas and electricity bills by 80%. We need to see real help from the UK Government now so people do not face the awful choice between heating and eating this winter.”

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